‘Writing in Tight Spaces’:
Secondary Students Address the Problems and Possibilities of Revising School Writing

Submitted by Lucia Jane Oliver to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

Studies of writing process over the last 40 years have clearly shown that effective revision marks the difference between the skilled and the unskilled writer. Early research also showed that school and college students typically revised little and at superficial levels, so that the scope for improvement of writing was limited. The apparent failure of student writers to revise more substantively has been variously explained. On the one hand it is suggested that adolescent writers may lack the cognitive and metacognitive resources necessary for effective revision (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Kellogg, 2008) and on the other that school models of composition may not adequately support critical reflection or reconceptualisation (Emig, 1971; Sommers, 1980; Yagelski, 1995).

However, there are marked gaps in the evidence base concerning students’ current understanding and practice of revision, particularly at secondary level. There have been few recent school-based studies and almost no examination of adolescent writers’ perspectives on revising school writing. Post-National Curriculum studies in the UK are especially scarce. There is therefore insufficient empirical evidence to determine at what level secondary students now revise their writing or to explain the problems and opportunities they may encounter in the attempt. This is especially important in the context of national concern about standards of attainment in writing and increased policy emphasis on the drafting and revising process.

The current study adopts a case study approach to investigate secondary students’ understandings of the purpose and process of revising school writing, and the criteria by which they evaluate their success. It combines one-to-one observations of writing and post-hoc interviews with analysis of students’ texts over the course of a classroom writing task. The findings suggest that whilst the revisions of writers of different abilities were indeed primarily superficial, students did not necessarily lack the understanding or capacity to revise more effectively. Able writers attributed their limited practice to tightly prescribed assessment requirements and time-controlled writing conditions. They were also hampered by a dichotomous view of the choices available to them which
caused them to set unnecessary parameters on their revising behaviours. These findings have important implications for practice and policy.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Revising matters

Learning to write well is recognised as a long and complex journey, the intermediate stages of which are not yet clearly mapped. We lack understanding of the developmental pathways involved and theoretical perspectives vary. As a consequence, there is little agreement about effective teaching strategies and less still about the steps necessary to secure higher ‘standards’ of attainment or improved ranking in national and international league tables. There is, however, no doubt about the central role that revising plays in the acquisition of writing expertise. By all accounts, learning to write well involves learning to revise well. Indeed, the difference between the revising abilities of skilled and unskilled writers is one of the clearest findings to emerge from writing studies over the last 40 years (Hillocks, 1986; Fitzgerald, 1987; Yagelski, 1995; Sharples, 1999). In a contested field, there has been consistent agreement amongst composition researchers that effective revising marks the difference between the expert and the novice writer.

Defining expertise

The differences between the two groups are conspicuous in several key respects. Early studies found that skilled writers spend longer reflecting on their writing, revise more extensively than less skilled writers and do so at deeper levels (Beach, 1976; Sommers, 1980; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). They also pursue different goals, employ different strategies and evaluate their success against different criteria. In particular, accomplished writers ‘think about their readers more than novices…reorganise and reconceptualise large chunks of text…and make global plans’, whereas novice writers tend to ‘revise at the word and sentence levels…and make local plans’ (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p.372). In other words, experienced writers ‘think bigger’ when they revise. They attend to higher-level considerations, such as meaning, structure, coherence, relevance, and audience needs, whereas inexperienced revisers mostly address surface features such as spelling, punctuation and grammar. Skilled revisers have more
elaborate and effective task-definitions, detect more problem types and have more procedures for fixing them than do novices (Hayes, 2004). Their composing processes are dynamic and recursive, with considerable interplay among the different components of planning, writing, rereading and revising (Flower & Hayes, 1981). By contrast, the processes of less skilled writers are simpler, and their conception of writing linear (Nystrand, 1990). Thus, whilst experts revise their ideas before they are written down, as they are writing and after they have written, novices tend to defer revising until writing has finished. Similarly, experts build and adjust their intentions throughout the composing process, whereas inexperienced writers think most about what comes next and rarely revisit their goals (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Furthermore, skilled writers seek not just to satisfy linguistic and rhetorical goals, but to develop their understanding of the topic as they do so (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). They evaluate their success, therefore, not just in terms of how well they have expressed their ideas, nor even how well they have addressed the reader’s needs, but also in terms of the extent to which they have satisfied intrinsic goals such as self-expression and knowledge gain. They revise to ‘discover’, not just to edit text (Sommers, 1980). In short, skilled writers have a qualitatively different understanding of what it means to revise from that of novices, and quite different conceptualisations of purpose, process and success: ‘they seem to be thinking about things that the younger writers do not consider’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p.19).

These different interpretations of revision can have divergent consequences: whilst skilful revisers are able to make both cognitive and expressive gains, the revisions of inexperienced writers often have a negative impact on text quality (Perl, 1979; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983; Fitzgerald, 1987). Paradoxically, the act of revising appears to consume more time and effort the more expert one becomes (Hayes & Flower, 1986), so much so that it is perceived by some writers to have no obvious end point. Indeed, the testimony of professional authors suggests that revising is so integral to their composing process as to be indistinguishable from it: ‘all my thoughts are second thoughts’ (Huxley, 1960, interview response 2); ‘writing is rewriting’ (Murray, 2001, p.2). The obvious challenge, therefore, for teachers of writing and for policy-makers, is to help
young writers develop the strategies that experts use and to bring about the fundamental shift in understanding that these differences imply.

Policy response

Revision has featured with increasing emphasis in policy recommendations since the 1970s, when seminal research studies, both in the USA and the UK, highlighted the inadequacy of traditional school writing models (Emig, 1971; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod & Rosen, 1975). Early on, the Bullock report noted that opportunities for improvement and development of classroom writing were typically cut short: ‘in much of the writing that takes place in school the pupil’s first attempt is expected to be the finished article; there is not enough encouragement of the idea of a first draft to be followed by a second, more refined version’ (Department for Education and Science [DES], 1975, p.167). Her Majesty’s Inspectorate later stressed the need to align school writing processes with those of adult writers, and to encourage talk about writing and self-evaluation:

‘Few adult writers are satisfied with the first drafts they produce: they redraft to ensure that they have said as well as possible what they mean. The same principle should apply to children’s writing. Constructive discussion of what they have written, of how far they have succeeded and of how they might do better still is of fundamental importance’ (DES, 1984, p.16).

The Kingman Report underlined the more substantive role revision plays in writers’ struggle to make meaning, and welcomed an apparent shift in classroom practice:

‘The use of language to clarify one’s own feelings and thoughts, the kind of fumbling, tentative groping for meaning, is of utmost importance...there is now a welcome tendency in English lessons towards, for example, redrafting, when written work, after discussion, is reworked and improved’ (DES/Welsh Office [WO], 1988, p.33).

When the National Curriculum was introduced in the following year this ‘welcome tendency’ became statutory. Attainment targets for writing specified what pupils should know, understand and be able to do, and central to expectations of writing was ‘an increasing proficiency in re-reading and revising
or redrafting the text, taking into account the needs of the audience’ and ‘a developing ability to reflect on and talk about the writing process’ (DES/Welsh Office, 1989, 17.32). Subsequent specifications for National Curriculum English have continued to emphasise the role of revision and redrafting in school writing process at all Key Stages. By Key Stage 4, 14-16 year olds are expected to use ‘planning, drafting, editing, proofreading and self-evaluation to revise and craft their writing for maximum impact’ (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF]/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2007, p. 90). Furthermore, ‘redrafting should be purposeful, moving beyond proofreading for errors to the reshaping of whole texts or parts of texts’ (p.99). Suggested strategies include ‘self-evaluation using success criteria’ and ‘formal and informal use of peer assessment’ (p.99). This emphasis sits within the broader expectation of a writing curriculum which provides opportunities for students to ‘experiment with language and explore different ways of discovering and shaping their own meanings’ (p.99, my italics).

Policy expectations of writing process also extend beyond the curriculum for English, since all teachers are seen to be teachers of language, and to share responsibility for promoting literacy development (DES, 1975; QCA, 2000). The reciprocal nature of writing and thinking, and the potential of each to advance the other, is seen as fundamental to learning and understanding of all kinds. Writing is redefined in heuristic terms as a means of finding and constructing knowledge, not just recording it. Thus, the National Literacy Strategy encouraged teachers of all subjects to cultivate reading and writing as principal tools for learning:

‘…language enables thought. (It) goes beyond just ‘writing up’ what is learnt… it is in acts of reading and writing that meanings are forged, refined and fixed. Finding the right words, giving shape to an idea, articulating what is meant: this is where language is synonymous with learning’ (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2001, p.15).

Policy therefore asks schools to ensure that all teachers ‘create regular opportunities for pupils to revise their work in class’ and ‘take responsibility for explicitly teaching these skills’ (DCSF, 2008, pp. 97-98).
Attempts to broaden policy concepts of writing are also apparent in America, Australia and New Zealand. In the US, a National Commission on Writing argued the need for a ‘revolution’ in thinking about writing if students were ever to produce more than run-of-the-mill prose or grasp the importance of extended and complex thought: ‘writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning…an act of discovery’ (National Commission on Writing, 2003, pp.13-14). Central to rethinking about writing was the redefining of revision as a mode of inquiry, not just ‘repair’:

‘…the process of drafting and revision (is) one of exploration and discovery, and is nothing like transcribing from pre-recorded tape. The writing process is not one of simply fixing up the mistakes in an early draft, but of finding more and more wrinkles and implications in what one is talking about’ (National Council of Teachers of English, 2004, p.3).

As in England, the US now requires high school teachers as part of a mandated curriculum to ensure that students ‘develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach’ (Common Core State Standard Initiative, 2010).

The shift in policy emphasis from what writers produce to how writers write is supported in the UK by some broad guidance for teachers. In particular, teachers are advised to establish clear purposes and audiences for writing; to ‘model’ writing process to show how writers make choices; to allow time for pupil reflection and redrafting; and to praise attempts to experiment. It is suggested that students play a more prominent role in the evaluation of writing, through shared drafting, peer- and self-assessment, and involvement in the development of success criteria. Teachers are expected to support progress by providing oral feedback throughout the composing process in addition to final marking (DCSF/QCA, 2007). These principles are elaborated in Teaching for Progression: Writing which aims to support effective practice by emphasising ‘what it is that good writers do in terms of the mental strategies that they employ and the behaviours that they exhibit’ (DCSF, 2008, p.4).

At the time of writing, literacy policy in England is in transition. Existing regulations have been disapplied pending the implementation of ‘slimmed down’
orders for English from 2014 (Key Stage 3) and 2015 (Key Stage 4). Whilst revised specifications for writing are substantially reduced in detail, the emphasis on composition process is retained, at least in outline. However, the terms ‘revise’, ‘redraft’, ‘craft’, ‘shape’, ‘explore’, ‘reflect’, ‘self-evaluation’ and ‘peer assessment’ are dropped, and the emphasis on transcription, spelling and grammar increased, suggesting that understanding of effective revision at policy level remains limited (Department for Education [DfE], 2013a, 2013b). The significance attached to the teaching of revision, and the extent to which it should be prioritised, is unclear.

The problem with policy

Across all recent specifications, in fact, there are a number of tensions associated with policy expectations of writing process which impact directly on revising possibilities in the classroom. In particular, there are inherent contradictions within and between representations of the purpose and process of revising and the criteria against which success is judged.

Definitions of purpose are potentially problematic on several fundamental counts. For whom and for what is revising undertaken in the school context? The purposes implied in National Curriculum policy and the purposes exemplified in teacher guidance convey rather different messages. For example, whilst creative and exploratory purposes are emphasised in policy statements, suggested activities in the guidance documentation focus on surface features of text – the technical, linguistic and structural aspects of writing, or strategies for avoiding and detecting ‘errors’ (see DCSF, 2008, pp.100-103). Furthermore, whilst the stated purpose of revising is to improve ‘style, content and structure’ of writing, suggested goals include basic proofreading checks – ‘checking for fluency’ and ‘for the mistakes I commonly make’ (pp. 98-99, 105); only one of the ‘top ten tips’ for good writing refers to content at whole-text level. The prescriptive nature of narrowly-defined text-based tasks effectively precludes the higher-level goals apparently envisaged, rendering revision an exercise in fulfilling requirements. It is the cosmetic function which is foregrounded and the role of revision in the construction of meaning largely eclipsed.
Indeed, the distinction between the purposes of proofreading, editing, revising and redrafting is often unclear in policy frameworks: the terms ‘revise’, ‘redraft’ and ‘edit’ seem to be used interchangeably within and between documents (see DfE, 1995; DfEE, 1999; DCSF/QCA, 2007). Whilst writers and scholars distinguish between final editing and more formative revision, as in ‘rewriting asks the big questions, while editing is just feather dusting’ (Jennings, cited in Murray, 2001, p.249), policy guidance tends to conflate the two. Thus, whilst teachers are advised to teach students ‘the difference between proofreading, editing and revision’, revision is defined simply as the outcome of editing: ‘making the changes…identified at the editing stage’ (DCSF, 2008, pp.98-99).

The failure to differentiate revision from editing limits the scope for improvement to superficial linguistic adjustment. It is telling, therefore, that in the recently revised National Curriculum programmes of study for secondary students, the terms revise and redraft are removed; formative and substantive rewriting is no longer explicitly promoted, only ‘editing’ and ‘proofreading’ (DfE, 2013a, 2013b).

Another potential disparity is between policy expectations of ‘real’ purposes for writing and the specified purposes of ‘school’ writing. Teacher guidance places particular emphasis on helping students adapt their writing to meet the needs of intended readers, suggesting that ‘teachers will need to provide real audiences’ and ‘contexts beyond the classroom’ to support such efforts (DCSF, 2008, p.4). This suggestion presupposes, however, that the expectations of authentic readers and those of teacher-examiners are aligned. Since most school writing tasks are designed to address prescribed assessment criteria rather than real readers, students have to learn to ‘fictionalise’ their audience and prioritise other requirements. Revising to communicate directly with readers and revising for assessment purposes may in fact bear little relation to each other.

Definitions of the composing process are also potentially problematic. How is revising represented in school models of writing and what strategies are students encouraged to adopt? There is a discrepancy between the ‘iterative’ composing process acknowledged as authentic in some policy statements (DfEE, 2000) and the procedural or programmatic approaches implied in others. As Myhill and Jones (2007) observe, for example, the chronological representation of the composing process in successive National Curriculum
documents suggests that revision may be seen as a discrete stage, one which follows planning and drafting and precedes proofreading: as in ‘pupils should be taught to ‘plan, draft, edit, revise, proofread and present a text’ (DfEE, 2001, p.24). It is known, however, that linear representations tend to become ritualised when implemented en masse, and are easily misinterpreted as the accepted model, in spite of evidence that writers adopt diverse composing strategies and no single approach serves all students or all tasks well. Because revision is positioned as a retrospective activity, it appears peripheral to composing itself – an ‘afterthought’ rather than an integrated exploration of possibilities.

Furthermore, since teacher ‘modelling and demonstration’ is identified as ‘the central strategy’ for helping students understand what is involved in drafting and revising (DCSF, 2008, p.5), effective representations of complex processes are dependent on the skill and confidence of teachers who may not be regular writers themselves or have any background in composition theory (see Emig, 1971; Hillocks, 2006; Andrews, 2008a). Over-simplified or carefully rehearsed models of the revising process are potentially misrepresentative and unlikely to illustrate for students ‘the need to revisit the words and the struggle for how best to say things’ (Horner, 2010, p.11). At the same time, the provision of opportunities for students to interact with ‘real writers’ may not be a realistic alternative. The suggestion that students ‘work in sustained and practical ways, with writers where possible, to learn about the art, craft and discipline of writing’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.99) has rarely proved practicable at secondary level where writers-in-schools initiatives have not flourished (Horner, 2010). Consequently classroom models of the composing process may bear little resemblance to the strategies and behaviours good writers employ.

Finally, the criteria against which achievement is judged are perhaps most problematic of all. How is progress in revising skill measured and what kind of thinking process is valued? There is an inherent contradiction between curriculum expectations of writing process and product-focused assessment requirements which has been much discussed, particularly in the context of high stakes testing (see D’Arcy, 2000; Hillocks, 2002; Messenheimer & Packwood, 2002; Applebee & Langer, 2006), but remains unresolved. If the dominant
paradigm for assessing students’ writing is a formalist one, predicated on
written outcomes, success is likely to be defined in narrow linguistic terms.
Thus, whilst National Curriculum policy espouses values associated with critical
and creative processes in writing – ‘experimenting with language, manipulating
form, challenging conventions and reinterpreting ideas’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007,
p.84), the specified measures of success are nevertheless confined to linguistic
techniques: rhetorical devices, grammatical constructions and conventional
forms.

Indeed, the importance attached to monitoring and assessing growth in
students’ writing process appears to have declined in recent years. Early
National Curriculum policy judged it ‘most important’ that account was taken of
the way pupils tackled writing tasks, and of their ability to evaluate and redraft
their writing: ‘those aspects of the targets which relate to the writing process, as
distinct from the product, should be covered by mainly internal assessment – for
example, probing pupils’ ability to reflect upon and discuss the organisation of
their own writing…what they are doing and why’ (DES/WO 1989, 17.61). However, subsequent erosion of teacher assessment and coursework
components in examination syllabuses has marginalised appraisal of process
skills. In effect there is now no formal recognition of writers’ developing
expertise in composition process over time. Consequently, policy statements
about the value of exploratory and reflective processes may seem
disingenuous.

Furthermore, if assessment is based solely on writing produced under timed
conditions, meaningful revision is no longer feasible. As Hillocks (2002) notes,
timed assessments are little more than tests of pre-writing, since they provide
no opportunity to develop texts authentically. Early National Curriculum policy
recognised this anomaly and specified an assessment entitlement which
allowed text development over a longer period, namely the opportunity to
present ‘an extended piece of work that has been planned, drafted, revised and
polished over a period of time’ (DES/WO, 1989, 17.65). However, such
opportunities have lost ground in the drive to improve assessment ‘rigour’.
Current proposals for GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education)
reform look set to eliminate even ‘controlled’ coursework opportunities in favour
of single, terminal examinations, in spite of research evidence that writing expertise cannot be assessed effectively in one sitting (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008).

Standards-based models of assessment have serious limitations in relation to both writing process and product. It is clear that powerful aspects of writing defy measurement, as the Cox Report acknowledged: ‘the best writing is vigorous, committed, honest and interesting. We have not included these qualities in our statements of attainment because they cannot be mapped on to levels’ (DES/WO, 1989, 17.31). If assessment is confined to those aspects of writing which are amenable to grading, such as compliance with technical and genre requirements, or inclusion of particular structural and linguistic features, there is little incentive to experiment or take creative risks in writing in the way that curriculum guidance advocates. It is easy to see how safer, even formulaic, fulfilment of prescribed requirements might come to dominate classroom representations of successful writing, and how stated policy aims, such as involving students in defining success criteria or assessing their own and others’ writing, may be viewed by teachers and students alike as a waste of time.

Assessment design remains a genuine challenge. At a fundamental level, the stage-based assessment model which was developed in the 1990s and continues to dominate policy thinking has no theory of writing development underpinning it: ‘it is as if a testing edifice has been built on a non-existent foundation’ (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p.2). It is particularly ill-equipped to measure progress in revising skill, which is inevitably context dependent and which may proceed in highly idiosyncratic ways. As a consequence, many of the activities and learning targets specified in relation to writing process ‘are streamlined as to be mere shells of the theory and pedagogy’ (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p.68) and may be regarded as tokenistic. Critics argue that standards-based models encourage low-level thinking and formulaic mediocrity, not the critical and creative understanding that policy deems ‘essential’ to students’ progress (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.84).

In conclusion, there are some mixed messages inherent in policy representations of the purpose of revising, how it should be done, and what
counts as success. Questions inevitably arise about the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

**The problem with theory**

Of course the problems of definition and coherence extend far beyond policy. To some extent they reflect an insufficiency of theoretical understanding, and the lack of an agreed model of writing development to underpin curricula, classroom practice or assessment. Indeed, studies regarding development within the writing process are virtually non-existent (Andrews & Smith, 2011). Thus, the extent to which expertise is dependent on cognitive maturation or on good teaching remains unclear (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001). For some theorists, becoming an accomplished writer is age-dependent, proceeding in stages of cognitive development, and may not be fully realised until adulthood (see Kellogg, 2008). For others, opportunity and teaching is all (see Graves, 1981). Whilst expert-novice studies are able to describe skilled revising processes, ‘they do not provide information about the route writers travel as they learn to attain those abilities’ (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p.372). It is evident, however, that the route is not straightforward: the difference between novice and expert revisers is not one of degree only – skilled revisers have qualitatively different conceptions of purpose and a whole different way of interacting with their knowledge (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). To complicate the picture further, much of the cognitive research on revision has proceeded somewhat separately from research in the teaching of writing; thus the intersection between the two ‘is still largely unexplored’ (Allal and Chanquoy, 2004, pp.3-4).

Theoretical models of revision are themselves insufficiently specified. The revising process has been conceptualised largely in terms of problem-solving – the detection and correction of *dissonance* in text or *discrepancies* between intention and outcome, thereby ignoring a significant aspect of skilled revising – the discovery and exploitation of new opportunities during writing; consequently little is understood about the role that discovery plays in initiating revision (Hayes, 2004). Less still is known about the extent to which children do or can engage in revision at this level. Fundamental differences in perspective have
also dogged the field of writing research since its inception, so that linguistic, creative, psychological and sociocultural analyses of revision vary. Disparate methodologies and the insights they have generated have rarely been synthesised, and interdisciplinary approaches are scarce (Beard, Myhill, Riley & Nystrand, 2009). Thus, whilst theorists may agree about the significance of revision, there is much less consensus about what constitutes effective process or how it should be taught.

At the same time, there is a shortage of research evidence, especially recent evidence, to take thinking forward. Throughout its relatively short history, writing research has not attracted the kind of attention or funding that studies of reading have received (Graham & Perin, 2007a), and the teaching of writing has been less discussed nationally (The Office for Standards in Education [OfSTED], 2012). This relative neglect means that promising teaching strategies remain under-researched and ‘a whole compendium of possible approaches has not yet been studied’ (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p.26). The paucity of research evidence with regard to effective pedagogies is felt internationally. For one thing, studies of writing process had ‘largely dried up’ by the end of the 1980s (Durst, 2006). Since then, shifts in thinking have come to challenge the very definition of what it means to ‘write’. Socio-cultural perspectives have reconceptualised the nature of the composing ‘process’ and of ‘authorship’; equally, technological innovations have transformed notions of ‘writing’, ‘text’ and ‘literacy’ (Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Such redefinitions have not, however, been matched by new approaches or new interpretations of what it means to revise. The subject of revision may even seem old hat. In an age of digital and multimodal text development, old ideas about composing may indeed be ‘decomposing’ (Myhill & Locke, 2007). In some ways, the debate has rightly moved on, although arguably not in ways which provide models for teaching writing in the 21st century.

Thus, in a rapidly changing landscape, research on writing process ‘finds itself in something of a rut’ (Durst, 2006, p.98). Hayes (2004) notes the surprising lack of research in methods for teaching the evaluative skills needed to detect problems in text or to recognise opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, ‘there does not seem to be a great deal of interest in it’ (p.17). His conclusion,
that there remains ‘a major gap in our knowledge of how to teach revision’, has
far-reaching implications for future policy and practice (p.17).

For all this, however, some important pedagogic principles are apparent. Whilst
it may not be entirely clear by what mechanisms particular teaching strategies
have an effect (Torrance, 2007), there is no shortage of evidence that targeted
teaching can promote more effective revision. Meta-analyses such as Graham
and Perin (2007a), and reviews of best practice, such as the National Writing
Project & Nagin (2006), suggest we have considerable knowledge of successful
approaches. Teacher-pupil conferencing, procedural facilitation, cognitive
strategy instruction, observation and emulation of experienced writers, peer-
review and collaborative revision, have all been shown to have a positive impact
on students’ engagement and the quality of their finished texts. Some studies
suggest that children as young as eight have the ability to multi-draft and revise
substantively given the right support and opportunity (see Graves, 1981;
Calkins, 1980); that students with learning disabilities can be taught to monitor
and revise texts independently (see Graham’s 2006 meta-analysis); and that
interventions as brief as eight minutes can serve to restructure how older
students mentally represent the nature and function of the revision task (see
Wallace et al., 1996). Some assert, therefore, that it is not the lack of an
adequate knowledge base that has impeded the implementation of successful
strategies so much as a failure to disseminate, and this ‘remains a critical
challenge for serious school reform’ (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006,
pp.2, 5). For whatever reason, promising findings and specific techniques which
help students develop revising expertise have not been used to develop
educational policy (Beard et al., 2009). As a consequence, evidence of
research-based practice remains fragmentary: teachers are either unaware of
the evidence, or they do not put it into practice (Hillocks, 2006).

The problem in practice

What does this mean for learning? Early studies of school writing found that
young writers typically did not revise their texts spontaneously, or did so at
superficial levels only, even at college level (Fitzgerald, 1987). Tellingly, they
also showed that school writing models themselves failed to encourage critical
or reflective practices (Emig, 1971; Britton et al., 1975; Fitzgerald, 1987). Since that time, policy and theory have moved on. How this has impacted on the teaching of revision, however, is far from clear. There is surprisingly little recent research evidence, particularly in the UK and at secondary level, on classroom approaches to revision. Some evidence is available from school inspections, and some from informal classroom observations. Passing evidence can also be gleaned from studies which address broader aspects of school writing. This amounts to the sketchiest of views, from which it is impossible to draw conclusions.

There is, however, no doubt that writing pedagogy is in need of attention. The most recent OfSTED report identifies persistent problems in teaching and learning, including the gap between girls’ and boys’ achievement in writing, and lower standards overall compared with other language skills (OfSTED, 2012). Despite successive policy initiatives, writing performance has lagged an average 20% behind reading at all Key Stages since the mid-1990s (Andrews & Smith, 2011). Too many students ‘still struggle with aspects of writing in their Key Stage 4 course’ and ‘do not write well enough by the age of 16’ (OfSTED, 2012, pp.40, 25). Inspectors note that the teaching of writing at all Key Stages ‘varies too much in quality’ and ‘needs to be more effective’ (pp.40-41). The weaknesses identified concern those features of the writing curriculum which enable purposeful development of texts: too few opportunities for extended writing; too little class time to complete writing; too few creative tasks; too little choice in the topic and too few real audiences and purposes for writing. Specifically, there is ‘too little emphasis on the teaching of editing and redrafting’ (p.26).

Practitioners, on the other hand, have argued for some time that narrowly-conceived curriculum and assessment policy is to blame for ‘mundane’ classroom models (QCA, 2005a; QCA, 2005b), and that criticisms such as those above from an inspection service responsible for policing these frameworks are particularly rich (Bousted, 2012; Rosen, 2012). Teaching has inevitably been shaped by the form of genre theory which underpinned early National Curriculum specifications, and has thus tended to over-emphasise text-type, form and structure at the expense of process (Andrews, 2008b).
Simultaneously, statutory testing has focused classroom attention on a narrow range of skills and techniques in writing and reduced opportunities for creativity (OfSTED, 2012); for many teachers, developing exploratory and reflective approaches to writing whilst at the same time preparing students for standardised tests seems an impossible ask. Indeed, some argue that the standards-based reforms of the 1990s have reduced the teaching of writing in UK schools to a ‘tool kit’ model reminiscent of the 50s: it was as if the process-based paradigm had ‘vanished without trace’ (D’Arcy, 2000, p.3). Similarly in the US, the regressive impact of conservative policy on pedagogy is widely noted: established figures in writing research doubt, in fact, whether there has been any material improvement in students’ experience of school writing since the 1980s (Hillocks, 2006; Applebee 2008).

Certainly, from the fragmentary evidence available, features of current practice appear anachronistic. Whilst it has long been recognised that writing process is recursive and dynamic, classroom approaches seem to be ‘linearised and fossilised’ (Myhill & Locke, 2007, p.7), with axiomatic advocacy of planning before writing and revision after writing, and scant attention paid to understanding of on-line revising process (Myhill & Jones, 2007; Myhill, 2009). This monolithic approach ignores available evidence that no single methodology will be effective with all learners (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). Furthermore, despite early research evidence that expertise depends first and foremost on writers’ awareness, and thus control, of their own composing processes, classroom attention to developing students’ metacognitive awareness ‘has been limited’ (Myhill, 2009). Finally, research defines writing as a goal-driven process which unfolds in line with writers’ intentions. In the classroom, however, ownership of writing development is frequently and often unwittingly usurped; ‘teacher control of the writing process remains a dominant phenomenon, even when the pedagogic goal has been to give more ownership to writers’ (Myhill & Locke, 2007, p.7). Indeed, Hayes (2004) suggests that the predominant model for teaching revision now is the tutorial model, whereby students revise following teacher feedback, even though this method was found to be ineffective in the 1980s (Hillocks, 1986). Arguably, therefore, like aspects of policy and theory, current pedagogy also finds itself in ‘something of a rut’: school writing models have become ‘stale and
rigid’, are out of step with writing in the real world and un-motivating for teachers and students alike (Andrews & Smith, 2011, pp.15-17).

There is now consensus amongst a range of stakeholders that renewal of writing policy and practice is long overdue. In 2005, it was the ‘overwhelming view’ of those consulted about the future of English that the subject needed ‘reinvigorating’, both to improve pupil engagement and to raise standards (QCA, 2005a; 2005b). Subject inspectors observed the ‘clear need to reinvigorate the teaching of writing’ in 2009, and again with more urgency in 2012: ‘a significant initiative is now needed to improve the teaching of writing and to raise standards nationally’ (OfSTED, 2009, p.26; 2012, p.27). Such an initiative, it is advised, should draw on all of the available research to establish effective practices.

**Student response**

Any such review might take as an obvious starting point the perspectives of learners. In the context of stubbornly lower standards compared with reading, and a range of potential sticking points in both policy and practice, what are the messages that students receive about writing and revising in school? How do they interpret them in practice? And what might this tell us about future priorities? In short, does their understanding of what it means to revise school writing enable them to transcend their first attempts in the way that skilled writers can?

So far, these questions remain largely unanswered. There has been ‘surprisingly little investigation of children’s understandings about writing’ (Wray & Medwell, 2006, p.35) and particularly those of adolescent writers. Furthermore, questions about student response are rarely addressed to students themselves: writing is more often examined through classroom observation, teacher-reported data, or analyses of students’ texts (Scherff & Piazza, 2005). Consequently, little is known about young writers’ views about writing (National Literacy Trust [NLT], 2009) and by extension, even less about the impact students’ understandings may have on their writing process. In the UK, only a handful of post-National Curriculum studies specifically address
students’ revising behaviours, and fewer still explore students’ thinking about revising. Thus, we have a poor understanding of the extent to which current expectations empower students in the ways intended, or close down possibilities in the way that critics suggest. Sharples’ (1999) assessment of the impact of taught models is uncompromising. In his view, revising for school purposes is a ritualised process quite separate from the act of writing, a rite performed not by the author but by the teacher, an exercise of ‘un alloyed authority’ which engenders life-long hostility. He has this to say about its effect on attitudes to writing:

‘s o many people have been put off writing by being instructed to revise but not being told how or why…the whole process of revision in the classroom seems designed to sap the child’s motivation, to emphasize that composition can never measure up to an adult’s never-revealed ideal’ (p.104, my italics).

The study which follows seeks to explore what young writers do understand about the how and why of revision, and what their thoughts, feelings and writing behaviours might tell us about instruction.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature search

The following chapter is based on a systematic review of the literature on revision dating from 1970 to the present day. This review included books, articles and on-line resources which addressed theoretical models of revision, writers’ cognitive, social and linguistic processes, pedagogical approaches, educational policy, and pupil perspectives. A search was conducted of library catalogues, electronic databases and relevant government websites for sources of evidence (see Appendix A for search terms used). Literature of potential interest was also followed up from citations and references, and from conference presentations.

A search of the literature on secondary students’ writing and revising processes reveals a number of gaps. The field of composition research is relatively young, and the evidence base uneven in a number of respects. Most studies of revision date back to the 1970s and 80s when serious attention was first devoted to the cognitive and social processes involved and to appropriate pedagogies. After the 80s, studies of writing process generally, and revision specifically, are scarcer. There are therefore fewer current studies of revision from any perspective, and far fewer which address classroom practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the evidence base is fragmented because different disciplines address different aspects from different paradigms, and inter-disciplinary investigations of composition process are rare. There is substantially more data from the field of cognitive psychology than from other disciplines. However, cognitive research has frequently been conducted in non-naturalistic conditions, and is acknowledged to pay little attention to the ‘applied’ findings of instructional research (Allal & Chanquoy, 2004). Whilst such research has prompted a number of intervention studies with children, these often target students with learning disabilities or the primary age group. Far fewer have been conducted in mainstream secondary classrooms. Such studies are also more prevalent in the US or continental Europe than in the UK.
From a pedagogical perspective, much of the evidence on actual classroom practice also emerges from studies conducted in the US, and is not therefore directly applicable to the UK context. Furthermore, the main body of American research focuses on post-secondary rather than high school writing, and on students engaged in first-year college composition courses which have no equivalent in the UK. Very little research addresses the writing processes of UK school students, particularly at secondary level, and post-National Curriculum studies are especially sparse. There is almost no recent evidence concerning secondary students’ perceptions of revision or their revising behaviours.

Consequently, what we know about the way adolescent writers typically review and revise school writing derives largely from studies which are out of date and out of context, or from more impressionistic observations of teachers, school inspectors and visiting writers. In order to explore what students currently understand about revising for school purposes, how they usually go about it and what they might do in optimal circumstances, it is therefore necessary to draw on available findings from a range of contexts. The literature reviewed here is broadly focused for this reason. The chapter is divided into two parts, reflecting the two distinct sources of evidence available. Part A considers theoretical perspectives on revision, and the way in which these are reflected in educational policy. Part B considers the available evidence on classroom practice.
PART A: COMPOSITION THEORY AND PEDAGOGY: A CONTESTED FIELD

The start of the debate

‘Good writing is essentially rewriting. I am positive of this’ (Dahl, cited in Murray, 1982, p.69).

Debate about the nature of composition process began in earnest in the 1970s when the glaring disconnect between authors’ descriptions and textbook representations was first highlighted. Like Roald Dahl, successful writers had long asserted that good writing was the product of reinvention and not the inspired or pre-conceived ‘spillage of words on a page’ that young writers often assumed (QCA, 2005a, p.6). In the words of the poet William Stafford, ‘a writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them’ (Stafford, 1994, p. 231). Whilst the strategies authors employed to transform their ‘shitty first drafts’ into ‘terrific third drafts’ may have been very different, there was consistent agreement amongst them that it was the process of rethinking and revising that made the difference (Lamott, 1995). The rewriting process that writers described was also quite unlike the routine editing or proof-reading that early textbooks advised: it is ‘far more radical…than many non-writers understand’ and ‘almost always…the most exciting, satisfying part of the writing process’ (Murray, 1982, p.72). Writer-educators such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow described the awkward, stumbling, half-baked efforts which marked the start of the writing process as nevertheless ‘exploding’ with possibilities: ‘the act of revision allows the writer to take something that was not and make it something that is’ (Murray, 1982, p.89). Their metaphors of revision were metaphors of promise and transformation: gestation, growing and cooking, fermentation, atomic fission, the ‘transmutation of elements’ (Elbow, 1973, pp. 48, 65). Revision was the tool by which writers ‘see beyond what they know’ (Murray, 1982, p.74) – truly a ‘re- vision’.

By contrast, school representations of revision held much less promise. Until the 1960s and 70s writing pedagogy was influenced by a formalist paradigm of
current-traditional rhetoric which placed little emphasis on writing process and viewed revision as mere correction. As a consequence, there were ‘very few pedagogies…consonant with the kind of process composing actually is’ (Berthoff, 1981, p.21). Early research found nothing transformational or exciting about the revising undertaken by students. It was more like routine housework than Murray’s ‘great adventure of the mind’ (2001, p.3): ‘cleaning-up’, ‘throwing out’, ‘smoothing and polishing’ (Beach, 1976; Sommers, 1980), or worse still, the sorry business of dressing a corpse (Graves, 1983). Students’ own metaphors were of linguistic hygiene, not of reconceptualisation. Indeed, traditional school models were observed to deter good writing: ‘one of the greatest impediments to effective writing is the way writing has been taught by English teachers’ (Murray, 1982, p.112). Critics like Murray argued that revision was taught, if it was taught at all, ‘as punishment…the price you have to pay if you don’t get it right the first time’ (p.121). Otherwise, school writing was rarely allowed to proceed beyond the first attempt: young writers were obliged to make do with ‘half-cooked and unsatisfactory ideas they find lying around in their head,’ and schools rewarded writing that was boring and obvious (Elbow, 1973, p.72). At the time that composition research gained serious attention, it was as if school writing and real writing bore no resemblance.

The need for radical change in school models of revision was signalled in 1971 by Emig’s seminal study of the composing processes of American twelfth-graders. Her somewhat startling conclusion that able 17-year-olds ‘do not pause to contemplate what they have written’ or ‘voluntarily revise school-sponsored writing’ (p.93) not only exposed the failure of school methods to engage students in reflective writing, but more troubling still, to convince them of the value of writing for school purposes at all. Even competent and compliant young writers harboured an ‘inward cynicism and hostility’ to imposed parameters on their writing process (p.93). Emig judged that much of the teaching of composition at secondary level was ‘essentially a neurotic activity’ obsessed with peripherals and offering students little in the way of support for more substantive reformulation or reconceptualisation of their texts (p.99).

Whilst Emig’s conclusions may have seemed more provocative than well-founded at the time (and have subsequently been critiqued, particularly by...
Voss, 1983), her findings were supported by subsequent investigations which focused specifically, and for the first time, on young writers’ revising behaviours. In another landmark US study, Sommers (1980) identified that first-year undergraduates also lacked understanding of the purpose of revision and had not acquired the strategies necessary to improve their writing in more than superficial ways. She observed that student writers, unlike the experienced writers in her sample, revised only at the levels of rewording and error-correction and lacked ‘a sense of the developmental possibilities of revision’ (p.382). Sommers’ critique of educational practice was equally blunt: not only did the prevailing dicta on revising ‘blind our students to what is actually involved in revision. In fact they blind them to what constitutes good writing altogether’ (p.387). Similarly, Perl (1979) concluded that the tendency of teachers to focus on the surface features of college students’ writing was both counterproductive and disempowering: it led to their conception of writing as a ‘cosmetic’ process where concern for correct form superseded the development of ideas, and ‘as a result, the excitement of composing, of constructing and discovering meaning, is cut off almost before it has begun’ (p.334).

These gloomy assessments were not confined to America. Research in England likewise identified the constraints that secondary school models imposed on the writing process: such models were concerned with ‘how people should write, rather than with how they do’ (Britton et al., 1975, p.4). They neglected the kind of writing ‘best adapted to exploration and discovery’ and failed to foster ‘writing that reflects independent thinking’ (p.197). By all accounts, writing pedagogy at this time was fundamentally ill-conceived. Britton et al. concluded that some of the differences between the way fluent writers work, and the way many teachers and composition textbooks advised their pupils to proceed, were irreconcilable. They surmised that new research might inform better practice: ‘it may well be that some of the assumptions implicit in various teaching methods will be challenged when we know more about (the) psychological processes (involved)’ (p.19).
Process theory: a ‘shining moment’?

Greater understanding of the processes involved came about during the 1980s, when cognitive theories of writing process emerged alongside the more romantic claims of so-called ‘expressivists’ such as Elbow and Murray. Cognitive studies supported the view that writing development depended on effective process, but from a different angle. Based in particular on analyses of think-aloud protocols, psychologists described the mental operations involved in writing in terms of problem-solving and information-processing. They located expertise in the management domain, emphasizing the orchestration and control of multiple demands and ‘feedback loops’ rather than the negotiation of personal meaning. At the same time, social interpretations of writing process also gained prominence. Ethnographic and socio-cultural studies directed attention beyond the subjective dimension of writing to the inter-psychological plane. They explained writing process in dialogic terms, as interactively and contextually determined rather than privately. Thus, whilst process theory embraced distinctive and sometimes contentious perspectives, it offered a new discourse about writing, and definitions of revision as creative, cognitive and social behaviour, not just linguistic. On a number of counts, the a-theoretical representations of traditional school instruction were shown to be wholly inadequate.

Revision as recursive

Hayes and Flower’s (1980) influential model of writing identified composition as a hierarchical process, not the linear series of steps advocated by textbooks. Like Perl (1979, 1980) and Sommers (1980), Hayes and Flower observed that writers’ decision-making was ‘recursive’: the processes of planning, translating and reviewing did not occur in order but could interrupt each other at any point. Sub-processes such as revision were not therefore discrete one-off activities but embedded in planning, drafting and redrafting. As such, revision could occur pre-textually – in the mind of the writer before transcription – as much as post-textually or during text production. Concepts of revision as ‘retranscription’ were therefore no longer tenable, since solving problems and revising plans or goals before committing to text was equally feasible and possibly more significant (Witte, 1985). On this basis, Fitzgerald’s (1987) definition came to be widely
accepted: ‘revision means making any changes at any point in the writing process… changes may be made in the writer’s mind before being instantiated in written text, at the time text is first written, and/or after text is first written’ (p.484). In effect, the writer was ‘like a very busy switchboard operator trying to juggle a number of demands on her attention and constraints on what she can do’ (Flower & Hayes, 1980, p.33), not at all like a translator of preconceived ideas or a reviser after the act.

**Revision as substantive**

Studies of novice-expert differences also established that effective revision impacted on the substance of writing, not just its form. Experienced revisers described their primary purpose as creating and shaping their argument (Sommers, 1980). They expected to rework their ideas and make major changes to the content of writing, prioritising the process of ‘thinking…in ink’ over that of ‘rearranging the parts’ (Beach, 1976, p.162). Faigley and Witte (1981) quantified the greater inclination of skilled writers to manipulate meaning: they found that the changes made to text by student writers were overwhelmingly cosmetic, whereas experts made almost three times as many changes to meaning of any kind, and 15 times more changes which affected the sense of the whole. Concepts of revision as primarily stylistic, as focused on the imitation of models or prescribed text features, were therefore misguided. It was clear that effective revision engaged at deep structural levels and played a significant role in the construction of meaning; it delivered improvements over and above linguistic quality.

**Revision as heuristic**

By extension, claims about writing as a process of discovery (Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1978) or as a form of inquiry (Hillocks, 1982) gained authority. Emig (1977) and others argued that because text is amenable to re-scanning and perpetual reconsideration, it allows writers to move progressively beyond their first thoughts in ways that equate with learning itself. Since the possibility of ‘re-envisioning’ made writing as heuristic uniquely powerful, revision was redefined as a tool for learning. Murray (1978) asserted that ‘discovery’ of meaning was the most important function of revision, the process by which writers uncovered what it was they wanted to say through strategies such as experimentation, the
bringing to bear of new information, or attention to emergent patterns. He distinguished between revision that had the potential to ‘reveal’ and revision which addressed problems of translation, identifying ‘internal’ revision as the process by which writers develop meaning for themselves and ‘external’ revision as the process by which they attend to conventions and the needs of their audience. Murray’s and Hillocks’ definitions placed revision not just at the heart of the writing process but ‘at the heart of education’: ‘revision is not simply a part of the writing process, but an essential dynamic of inquiry, the art of moving beyond what we have already thought’ (Hillocks, 1995, pp. xvii, 94). It was on the assumption that writing process, and specifically the act of reviewing and revising writing, had the potential to advance understanding that writing-across-the-curriculum and writing-to-learn initiatives were explored as means of building knowledge in subject areas (see Applebee, 1984; Langer & Applebee, 1987).

Revision as reconceptualisation

Notably, Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987) developmental model of writing explained the process by which skilled writers secure new understanding for themselves. ‘Knowledge-telling’ and ‘knowledge-transforming’ were identified as the strategies employed in immature and mature writing, the former being an essentially linear ‘think-say’ approach and the latter a more reflective process which involves the reorganisation or reworking of thought to meet rhetorical goals. Whereas knowledge-telling was potentially effective as a means of communicating knowledge one already had, knowledge-transforming required the writer to reprocess knowledge and thus to gain ‘vastly greater cognitive benefits from the process of writing itself’ (p.5). It was the dialectic set up between the two problems of topic knowledge and rhetorical presentation that provided the basis for reflective thought and enabled writers at the advanced level to develop understanding and build concepts. Skilled writing process made possible the ‘kind of extended and involved thought that is almost impossible without writing’ (Bereiter, 1980, p.88). At its most effective, ‘epistemic’ writing of this kind represented the culmination of writing development, the point at which writing ceases to be a product of thought and becomes an integral part of thought. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) concluded therefore that the two composing strategies were not just more or less sophisticated ways of
expressing ideas, but wholly different ways of interacting with knowledge. Thus, whilst writers engaged in knowledge-telling might make substantive revisions which improve text quality, such changes serve only to expand upon or alternatively express the same thing. They do not represent the shift of perception or conceptual gain evident in the revisions of skilled writers. By their analysis effective revision was a process of reconceptualisation, not simply the restatement of ideas. Bereiter and Scardamalia’s development model has remained largely unchallenged. Indeed, Kellogg (2008) subsequently added ‘knowledge-crafting’ as the most advanced level in writing development, a process whereby the writer integrates considerations of self, text and reader as writing is shaped and reshaped.

**Revision as writer-specific and task-specific**

Early studies of writers at work also revealed that effective revising strategies differed from writer to writer and task to task. Faigley and Witte (1981) observed that expert writers showed extreme diversity in the way they revised, both between tasks and amongst themselves when engaged in the same task, indicating that both individual preferences and contextual factors play a role in determining revising behaviour. Variables such as the nature and purpose of the writing task, the writer’s familiarity with the subject or audience, the time available, and the conditions under which writing occurred were all influential. These findings suggested that uniform models or prescriptive procedures of any kind were not likely to facilitate effective revision.

Motivational and affective variables such as apprehension, topic interest and self-confidence were also found to impact on revising behaviour (Beach 1976, 1979; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981). Writing was recognised as an emotional process as much as a cognitive one. Beach (1976) observed that writers’ attitudes and intentions determined the depth and extent of revision: writers who were unwilling to be self-critical or who set quotas on the time and effort they would invest in revision prematurely foreclosed the development of their texts and often failed to address concerns beyond mechanics and wording. This suggested that functional beliefs about revision, positive writing identity and a supportive emotional environment were essential pre-requisites.
Revision as collaborative

Social theorists identified writing as an inherently collaborative or dialogic process, rather than a solitary, inner-directed one. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1981) and Geertz (1973), Bruffee (1984) and others argued that the decisions writers make as they consider their texts arise out of the dialogue they have, internally or directly, with members of a shared discourse community, whether that community be the classroom or the wider culture. Writers revise in response to the real or imagined reactions of readers in the same context; they seek out feedback and make use of it. Thus the reader-writer interaction both motivates and determines their remaking of text. By this analysis, reflective thought was a form of social conversation, however much internalised in practice. Since writers’ decision-making was determined by the principles and criteria that applied within a given situation, socio-cultural definitions of the revising process emphasized the sense in which texts were co-reconstructed, as writers drew on the words of others and repopulated them with their own intentions (Bakhtin, 1981). Teachers were seen as significant co-authors of students’ texts since their specifications and suggestions shaped the revisions students made.

Implications for pedagogy

These different interpretations of writing process effectively discredited the kind of revision prescribed in composition textbooks, the ‘cleaning prose of all its linguistic litter’ (Sommers, 1978, cited in Bridwell, 1981, p.96) as little more than an afterthought. They also established the pivotal role revising plays in writing development, thereby ensuring its increased emphasis in educational strategy. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) concluded that traditional school practices defeated their fundamental educational purpose by failing to promote writing which manipulates knowledge, and focusing instead on the externalisation of knowledge already held. Since ‘writing development, in a highly schooled society, is whatever the schools make it to be’, it is impossible to ascertain what children can do, in optimal circumstances, as opposed to what they do do in typical classrooms, without first ‘break(ing) through habitual school writing behaviours’ (Bereiter, 1980, pp.88, 90). New theoretical understanding held the promise of revitalisation: the practice of putting ‘a good manicure on the corpse’
of a composition (Graves, 1983, p.4) might be consigned to history, and exciting possibilities in students’ writing opened up.

Perl (1994) reflected on the formative period following Emig’s study as ‘a shining moment’ in the history of composition studies, albeit a relatively brief one. The growth of academic interest in the behaviour of writers generated a substantial body of research, and a lively debate about effective pedagogies. Revision attracted serious attention from diverse academic disciplines, and from practitioners concerned to identify more effective ways of promoting development. The convergence of interest from researchers and educators appeared to promise productive exchange about how such development might best be achieved. Hairston (1982) anticipated the growing impact of new thinking on the teaching of writing as a Kuhnian ‘paradigm shift’ – the irrevocable replacement of a prescriptive, product-focused model which equated the teaching of editing with the teaching of writing, by a theoretically-based ‘process’ model which teaches ‘strategies for invention and discovery’ and recognises revision as an integral part (p.86). She cautioned, however, that such shifts are rarely tidy or uncontroversial. Faigley (1986) also warned that the apparently powerful impact of new agendas on the teaching of writing should not be assumed to indicate a shared understanding of what such change might mean in practice. Concepts of writing as process, and assumptions about the nature and role of revision, varied from theorist to theorist, and from teacher to teacher. Nevertheless, by the end of the 80s, ‘process’ research as such had more or less ceased. Arguably studies in the field ‘had gone as far as they could go’; having achieved a solid understanding of the general process, composition scholars were keen to explore new aspects (Durst, 2006, pp.81, 98).

Post-process theory: pedagogy lost from view?

The theorising that followed did not so much represent a rejection of the process movement as an attempt to place the writing processes of individuals in context: ‘when…a teacher declares that “process works”, nearly everything remains to be explained about what is happening in his or her classroom’ (Vandenberg, Hum & Clary-Lemon, 2006, p.3). Post-process theorists have sought to unyoke writing process from any generalised notion of ‘good’ writing
or standard procedures, and to direct attention to the complex web of social, cultural, historical and political variables which govern the way in which writing is produced. The emphasis is on ‘differences’ not uniformities. In particular, accounts of writing as social behaviour became prominent; the notion of authorship was reconceived in terms of its collective or distributed nature and its larger societal function, as opposed to individual ‘voice’ or the expression of individuality. The theory and methodology of early process research was called into question not just because it was perceived as ‘context-stripping’, but also because it replicated practices and values which were culturally privileged and failed to account for the way in which power relations determine the kinds of choices writers have. However, whilst some central concepts are shared, post-process theories, like process theories, developed from a range of disciplines, and do not by any means provide a coherent view: some perspectives represent an extension or redefinition of process theory, and others are more dismissive, challenging the idea that any generic writing process exists or can be captured by a ‘big’ theory of any kind (Kent, 1999).

In its many different disciplinary forms, the ‘social turn’ in thinking about writing nevertheless impacted widely. Cognitive models of writing process were elaborated to take better account of dimensions such as audience or collaborators (Hayes, 1996), and constructivist or socio-cognitive theories were developed to explain how cognition and context interact (see Flower, 1994, for example). Socio-linguistic theories located writing within a sociological framework and emphasized the purposes language serves in society and the construction of meaning as a social and cultural phenomenon. Building on Halliday’s (1978) functional theory of language, genre-based theories considered how genres work to order society, and how writing serves as a mode of social action; knowledge about the forms and features of dominant genres was seen as the means by which participation or equal access was assured. In particular, the Sydney School promoted genre knowledge as an entitlement in literacy education (see, for example, Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987). Socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-historical examinations of writing proliferated, addressing issues of identity and language learning in diverse settings and from a range of perspectives, often with a critical emphasis; allied perspectives such as activity theory and discourse theory also emerged (see
Prior, 2006, and Englert, Mariage and Dunsmore, 2006, for summaries of socio-cultural theory in writing research).

At the same time, new technologies and digital media brought about profound changes in social practice, and a ‘visual turn’ in composition theory. As text increasingly occurred alongside graphics, colour, sound and image, the importance of written language in the construction of meaning was reduced. A range of semiotic possibilities were accounted for within the broader framework of ‘new literacies’ (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) or ‘multi-literacies’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In the media age, composers had new choices about how to communicate their ideas: ‘in what mode, in what genre, in what ensembles of modes and genres on what occasions’ (Kress, 2003). Indeed, from the perspective of multimodal design, writing occupies a diminished, even a subsidiary, role (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress & Bezemer, 2009).

Furthermore, with the advent of the hyperlink, written text itself was redefined in ways which undermined traditional assumptions: no longer linear, permanent or single-authored, hypertext is described as multi-linear, fluid and collaborative – changing in shape and meaning as it is appropriated, re-mixed and ‘re-purposed’ by others, or as it crosses from one space into another. As a consequence, the boundary between process and product is collapsed (see Andrews & Smith, 2011). For writers composing hypertext, new choices and new considerations apply. The rhetorical emphasis is on facilitating navigation and attending to the multiple requirements of different audiences. Structural concerns are no longer linear, but multi-directional or ‘rhizomatic’. Content is multi-layered and hierarchically-organised, so that the links among segments have to be considered and no assumptions can be made about readers’ having read previous segments (see MacArthur, 2006).

In this context, concepts of drafting, revising and editing, as conceived in the 80s, appear antiquated. Indeed, as the forms and uses of writing, and the ways in which texts are constructed evolve, the gap between school writing and everyday writing grows wider. So entirely do young writers dissociate their writing outside the classroom from the kind required of them inside that they do not class the former as ‘writing’ at all (Lenhart, Arafah, Smith & Macgill, 2008,
cited in Andrews & Smith, 2011). However, whilst the need to adapt writing pedagogy is evident, questions about the educational impact of new forms of writing have been 'difficult to define and to answer, and the research is quite limited' (MacArthur, 2006, p.260). No new theory of writing development has been proposed in the 2000s to account for writing in the digital age, at least not until the framework suggested recently by Andrews and Smith (2011).

In fact, the focus on pedagogy has been much less evident in post-process theory generally. Political and social concerns have come to dominate current composition study, ‘often to the exclusion of all aspects of pedagogy’ (Durst, 2006, p.79). As the focus of research has become more sociocultural, investigations of writing are increasingly conducted in non-academic settings, and address out-of-school practices – those of popular culture, the workplace or other specific groups (Nystrand, 2006). Vandenberg et al. (2006) concede that the broad messages about writing pedagogy which emerge from socio-cultural theories ‘can seem both eminently sensible and disturbingly cloudy’: developing students’ ‘awareness of the complexity of writing and the interrelationships that make individual agency possible’ (p.11), or helping them ‘to explore the ways they have been positioned’ (p.16), may not seem all that helpful to teachers charged with the task of improving writing. Such perspectives are limited in their ability to explain what actually happens as students learn to write well, or the real difficulties learners may face on the way. Thus for teachers, whilst feminist, post-structural and critical pedagogies are proposed, fewer discussions focus on ‘what it might look like to teach writing as critical process’ (Lee, 2000, p.179; original italics). Equally, it is not yet clear how understanding of composition in a multimodal or digital world might be aligned with inherited concepts and values which ‘cannot and should not be suddenly ditched’ (Kress & Bezemer, 2009, p.180). In a rapidly changing landscape, it is still important to understand the contribution of ‘writing’ on its own terms.

However, no unifying theory of writing or revision has yet emerged to inform current pedagogy. Certainly the role of revision is not clearly articulated in post-process theory. There does not seem to have been any significant reinterpretation of what it might mean to rethink and reconstruct one’s writing in new social and technological contexts, in spite of the fact that processes of
composition, creativity and criticality are clearly central to participation. Thus the
debate about effective composition pedagogies continues, even if, as Durst
(2006) suggests, it has lingered on too long to be called a controversy.

**Defining effective revision: purpose, process and success criteria**

In the absence of clear alternatives, teachers and policy-makers have continued
to look to process theories for guidance about the teaching and learning of
revision. For all their potential limitations, process studies made it possible for
educators to focus on ‘what it is that good writers do in terms of the mental
strategies that they employ and the behaviours that they exhibit’ (DCSF, 2008,
p.4). Whilst there may have been little shared understanding amongst process
theorists about how revision might best be taught, there was greater consensus
about teachability: the role of teachers in helping students broaden their
definitions of the task, and develop strategies for finding and solving problems,
was not in doubt. Cognitive researchers in particular have continued to
investigate the thinking and behaviours that characterise effective revision, and
to expand therefore on the kinds of change implied for progression. The
underlying concepts of purpose and success criteria, and the repertoire of
revising strategies that define expertise and mark growth in writing skill, are
relatively clearly described. Key findings are summarised below.

**Intrinsic and extrinsic goals**

At a fundamental level, writers’ concepts of the purpose of revision are
assumed to drive their behaviours, and potentially to account for differences in
effectiveness (Hayes, 1989). Since revision is an intentional goal-directed
activity, it seems intuitively obvious that the goals writers set themselves will
determine the scope of their revising achievement. In their model of revision,
therefore, Flower, Hayes and colleagues ascribe a controlling role to the writer’s
task definition (Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver & Stratman, 1986; Hayes,
Flower, Schriver, Stratman & Carey, 1987). The writer’s analysis of what is
involved in evaluating and improving a text is the guiding construct which
determines his or her revising activity: it specifies goals for revision, the scope
of revision, and the procedures to be used. As a metacognitive structure, it is
also dependent on the writer’s knowledge about revision, text features,
audience, and the writing context. Understanding the different aspects of writing that need to be monitored, for example, may serve as a precondition for global revision: ‘one cannot really expect to do a good job of revision with a task definition that ignores a very important class of problems’ (Hayes, 1989).

It is evident that the task definitions of effective revisers are more elaborate, more flexible, and of greater scope than those of younger or less competent writers (Hayes et al., 1987): experts establish a more detailed network of goals and sub-goals at multiple levels which are at once demanding but manageable (Kellogg, 1994); they also monitor and adjust their goals as necessary in response to their evolving texts and as revision proceeds (Hayes, 2004). Their goals are task-specific, whereas the goals of less skilled revisers are lower-level and more generalised. These qualitative differences in task representation are mirrored by differences in the quality of final texts (Carey & Flower, 1989).

Skilled revisers are known to set goals at three distinct levels. They consider not only the needs of the text, but also their own needs and the needs of their audience. These concerns interact to advance both the construction of meaning and its communicative impact. At text level, therefore, skilled writers target higher order concerns as well as surface features. Whereas inexperienced writers may prioritise local considerations, such as technical or lexical features, the primary purpose of experts is substantive – the making of meaning (Hillocks, 1995). When revising, they contemplate global structure and content and engage in more extensive change: ‘the reformulation of larger segments of discourse in more major and organic ways – a shift of point of view…major reorganisations and restructurings’ (Emig, 1971, p.43).

In so doing, experts seek to further their understanding of the subject: they review and revise in order to gain insight or discover meaning for themselves. According to Elbow (1973) and Murray (2001), it is this exploratory purpose that distinguishes revision from editing: the first being a voyage of discovery and the second a transaction between writer and reader. Thus skilled writers conceive of revision in heuristic terms, as a tool for learning. The ‘dual agenda’ (Rijlaarsdam, Couzijn & van den Bergh, 2004) or ‘dual purpose’ (Galbraith, 2009) which informs expert writing is regarded as the means by which writers
constitute new knowledge for themselves whilst at the same time creating a product that meets the requirements of the task. Thus, whereas unskilled writers may target extrinsic or rhetorical concerns only, skilled writers set out not just to express their ideas but also to reprocess knowledge and thereby secure greater cognitive benefits from the process: knowledge-transforming means deliberately seeking out alternatives in order to transcend initial thoughts and advance personal understanding (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Furthermore, flexible concepts of purpose – the willingness to change direction during writing and allow goals to evolve – may be a necessary part of creative thinking: as writers pursue one objective, ‘creative insights or breakthroughs may…occur unexpectedly along the way, for example by intuition or non-directed thought… sometimes the objective changes as new ideas and possibilities come into view; sometimes…new purposes are found when an initial product or idea has emerged’ (DfEE/ Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 1999, p.31). Thus, scholars identify the ‘value of keeping things tentative’ and ‘the willingness to generate chaos’ in writing (Berthoff, 1981, p.24). Skilled revisers remain open to suggestion, recognising that one alteration may set off a chain of other questions and opportunities which enable growth. Paradoxically, therefore, the intent may sometimes come after the act: revising to ‘discover’ requires the suspension of intent (Graves & Murray, 1981). For this reason, Elbow (1973) argues that editing too early can ruin writing: task definitions which prioritise linguistic problem-solving may shut down opportunities for ‘discovery’.

A third major purpose governs effective writing: addressing the needs of the audience. Skilled writers attend more explicitly to their potential readers (Hayes et al., 1987). They go beyond considerations of communicative intent and the text as is, and reflect on the likely interpretation of their readers. They actively seek out feedback and make use of it. Audience needs are frequently underserviced by novices, who tend to consider their readers only in generalised terms and find perspective-taking difficult (see Holliway & McCutchen, 2004). Indeed Kellogg (2008) argues that the most advanced level of ‘knowledge-crafting’, where writers not only adapt text with their reader in
mind, but intentionally review the text from another perspective, may be beyond the capabilities of many students.

At higher levels, therefore, revisers’ goals are multi-dimensional: text-oriented, self-oriented and reader-oriented. They incorporate not just expressive goals, but also sense-making goals and perspective-taking: ‘entertaining alternative perspectives and testing out tentative “passing theories” or hypotheses about the world’ (Beach & Friedrich, 2006, p.223). Thus writers’ concepts of purpose, and the intentions they create for themselves when revising, can be empowering or constraining. The way in which they construct and reconstruct an image of the task determines the opportunities they generate for creative thinking and for new learning as they write: it can open up possibilities for originality and new insights, or confine a writer to producing a routine, formulaic text (Carey & Flower, 1989).

**Flexible strategies**

Skilled and less skilled revisers also differ in their understanding of the processes involved and the strategies they deploy. From the cognitive perspective, revision is defined as a set of processes or ‘string of cognitive activities’ which include evaluation, the detection of problems, the selection of strategies, and the implementation of change (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2004). These processes are recurrently distributed throughout composition: thus pre-textual revision affects intentions, plans or mental formulations of text before transcription has occurred; on-line revision is integrated in the process of transcribing and affects what has just been written; and deferred revision takes place after initial drafting (Allal & Chanquoy, 2004). Whilst expert writers may prioritise revision at different points during composition, their approach is essentially non-linear: ‘the hallmark of a good writer is the ability to capture ideas during composing and revising and feed these back into a new cycle of composition…seen in this way, revision is the start of the writing process’ (Sharples, 1999, p.111). Whereas inexperienced writers frequently assume ideas come ready-made and just need translating, experienced writers adopt recursive process as both theory and strategy (Sommers, 1980). Rather than following a series of steps, their revising
procedures enable non-linear thinking and the recursive shaping of thought by language.

Recursive process is demanding, however. Motivation to revise is therefore a significant factor in writers’ choice of strategy: their assessment of cost/benefit determines their willingness to invest in critical reflection and cycles of revision (Beach, 1976). Thus, in his 1996 model of writing, Hayes incorporates a motivational/affective dimension which directly influences the cognitive processes brought to bear, reflecting the fact that writers have voluntary control of many aspects of the revising process and that predisposition, beliefs and attitude are important determinants of effective practice. Successful writers invest considerable time and effort in revision, and often perceive it as a ‘struggle’. Evidence suggests that the time they allocate to both ‘internal’ revision (the rethinking of thoughts) and ‘external’ revision (the alteration of text) exceeds that of novices, and the ratio of thought to text is greater (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; McCutchen, 2011): ‘writers do a great deal of revising as they compose. They revise sentences that have been completed; they revise sentences as they are being composed; and they revise ideas that have not yet been written down’ (Hayes, 2004, p.13). Authors have been found to spend over 70% of their composing time pausing (Matsuhashi, 1987). Indeed, for some writers, revising spills over into other activities and expands to fill the time available: ‘(it) goes on all the time – while I am in the car, walking to class, waiting for a meeting to start, eating, going to sleep, watching television, I constantly revise,’ (Graves & Murray, 1981, p.116).

As a conscious strategic activity, effective process is also dependent on procedural knowledge: selecting a more or less sophisticated strategy to address different kinds of problems relies on knowledge of the available options. Cognitive models identify the reviser’s understanding of possible strategies as fundamental to the process (Butterfield, Hacker & Albertson, 1996; van den Bergh & Rijlaarsdam, 1999). Flower et al. (1986) and Hayes et al. (1987) identify five basic options available to writers once a problem has been detected: to ignore the problem, to postpone revision, to search for a better representation of the problem, to revise the text, or to rewrite it. As Hayes (2004) acknowledges, however, writers revise not only to solve problems but
also in response to new opportunities; exploratory strategies are therefore implied which enable ‘discovery’, such as posing questions, introducing new information and adopting alternative perspectives. Furthermore, writers revise in response to the reactions of readers, and employ social strategies to develop writing. In other words, skilled writers have a repertoire of available procedures, both cognitive and social, for tackling different concerns or tasks. By contrast, inexperienced writers have fewer available strategies for detecting or fixing problems (Hayes, 2004), and particularly lack procedures or heuristics to help them address the larger concerns in writing (Sommers, 1980). Consequently they are less likely to be able to shift their approach according to purpose. Their tendency to adopt a sentence-by-sentence strategy when critically reading, for example, makes it especially difficult for them to address macro-level issues such as structure and meaning (McCutchen, 2011). Since effective process is purpose-led, no single set of procedures will suffice: as Applebee (1986) suggests, writing processes should be re-construed as strategies for particular purposes.

Research also shows that whilst individual differences and personality traits play a role in writers’ strategy choice, they do not define the successful writer (see Sharples, 1999). In particular, some writers prefer to front-load revision in the planning phase and others to respond as writing unfolds (Torrance, Thomas & Robinson, 1999; 2000). Galbraith (1999; 2009) distinguishes between 'low self-monitors' who prioritize 'dispositional' goals – the generation of understanding for oneself during text production – and 'high self-monitors' who prioritize rhetorical planning – the adaptation of one's knowledge to the task and audience. He observes that these strategies have different strengths, the first being more likely to generate new knowledge, and the second more likely to produce clearly structured text, so that both are required for effective writing. Skilled writers therefore adjust to the requirements of the task or situation, shifting to non-preferred approaches when necessary. In this sense, their strategies serve as a 'negotiating link' between writer and context, rather than represent consistent differences (Lavelle, Smith & O’Ryan, 2002). Expert writers know how the strategies they use work, and metacognitive awareness enables them to judge when, where and why a particular strategic choice is needed (Chanquoy, 2009). Inexperienced writers, however, are less adept at monitoring
their own thinking and may lack awareness of their own writing behaviours (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).

In short, ineffective revisers may lack understanding of the recursive nature of revision or of possible revising strategies. Alternatively, they may fail to use their knowledge through lack of metacognitive control, or they may be unwilling to use it through lack of motivation (Plumb, Butterfield, Hacker & Dunlosky, 1994; Chanquoy, 2009).

**Task-specific and multi-level success criteria**

Skilled and unskilled revisers also evaluate the quality of writing and define success criteria differently. Experts are highly attuned to the potential problems or missed opportunities in writing. They detect a greater number of problems, and more problem types, than novices. In addition, the discovery of new ideas, connections and arguments plays an important part in their revision process (Hayes, 2004). They reflect critically not just on the form of text but also the substance and the quality of thinking that it represents. Inexperienced writers, however, appear to be persistently insensitive to some text problems (Hayes, 2004). Their evaluation criteria are often narrowly-focused on linguistic aspects, and they do not account for the possibility of discovery (Sommers, 1980).

At text level, it is evident that skilled writers have more developed concepts of ‘good’ writing. Since notions of text quality are relative and context-bound, the specificity of writers’ evaluation criteria relies on knowledge of particular discourse structures and audience needs. Thus, later cognitive models of revision identify the knowledge necessary for revision. Butterfield et al. (1996) suggest three aspects are important: knowledge about the topic, knowledge about language and writing, and knowledge of the ‘standards of evaluation’. Experienced writers have more extensive knowledge relevant to writing and frequently more topic knowledge than novices (McCutchen, 2011). They have ready access to a more extensive vocabulary and other linguistic knowledge; explicit awareness of the rhetorical and stylistic values of different audiences; wider and more nuanced knowledge of different genre forms; and often greater topic knowledge – all of which enables them to detect and address complex problems of meaning and coherence (McCutchen, 2011). The evaluation criteria
they apply when revising are therefore sophisticated and task-specific. By contrast, the criteria of inexperienced writers tend to be lower-level and generalised, and their definitions of success therefore undifferentiated by task or purpose. They assume that disembodied, universal standards exist, and fail to recognise the fluidity of evaluative categories, or the role played by readers (Lee, 2000).

At reader level, experienced writers evaluate the extent to which their writing is adapted to meet the needs of readers and has the intended effect. Reader-related criteria are both purpose-specific and audience-specific. They address how well the text aligns with the writer’s rhetorical intent (to persuade, for example) in relation to its intended readership. They are also socially-focused, taking account of the likely response of readers to the text produced and the real or imagined dialogue that is generated between writer and audience.

Skilled writers also evaluate the outcomes of revision in relation to wider intrinsic goals – increased understanding, self-realisation or creative discovery. They judge the success of the process over and above its impact on product. By these criteria, effectiveness means securing not just improved text quality, but also the more radical ‘re-envisioning of one’s beliefs, perspectives, and ways of knowing that are essential for revision’ (Beach & Friedrich, 2006, p.223).

**Implications for pedagogy**

Descriptions of expert-novice revision have much to say about the nature of writing development and the implications for pedagogy. However, as Applebee (1986) notes, whilst ‘most instruction is based on the simple assumption that we can specify a curriculum by studying what experts do and teaching our students to do likewise’, this assumption is by no means unproblematic (p.106). There is both uncertainty and considerable disagreement about how children become expert revisers or how such progress is best supported.

From a cognitive perspective, development models describe different writing processes as being both progressively ‘installed’ and increasingly ‘elaborated’, but they offer little clarity about the factors which determine development, or the
significance that might be attached to maturation of the cognitive system on the one hand, and the effects of practice and teaching on the other (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001). Thus, whilst the reviewing process in writing is generally regarded as emerging later in life – that is, once translation skills are functional – and as progressing thereafter from local concerns (at word/sentence level) to global concerns (at paragraph/text level), it is otherwise barely addressed from a developmental perspective (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001). Not all cognitive theorists agree either that skilled and less skilled writers exist on a single continuum. Thus when Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) suggest that it is the responsibility of educators to move children beyond knowledge-telling (p.189), it is not obvious how this shift might be achieved: ‘the knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming constructs represent the poles of a developmental path that has yet to be fully investigated’ (Boscolo, 1995, p.353). In addition, teaching students what experts do when they engage in a knowledge-transforming process is especially difficult since the ‘strategies involved in the construction of personal knowledge are…remote from observation, inaccessible to assigned practice, and difficult to formalize under rules’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p.336).

Uncertainties about appropriate facilitation are further compounded by disagreement across theoretical disciplines about the kinds of problems young writers face in acquiring more expert practices, and about the kind of solutions that are required.

**Defining effective teaching: the problem of multiple perspectives**

Just as theoretical definitions of the writing process vary, so do analyses of effective teaching methods. Indeed the principles underpinning suggested methods are often clearly opposed. What’s more, such divisions exist not just *within* the research field; a ‘great divide’ also separates the perspectives of researchers and teacher-educators, and of researchers and policy-makers, ensuring that the implementation of evidence-based writing practices remains highly problematic (Coker & Lewis, 2008).
It is worth considering in more detail the assumptions about teaching and learning inherent in different conceptions of the writing process. These are frequently perceived as fundamentally irreconcilable since they differ in such fundamental respects, some assuming that the language system exists outside the child and has to be ‘acquired’, others that it is innate and unfolds naturally, and others still that it is socially and contextually determined, that the child is an active participant in constructing language in a particular environment (Kress, 1982). The following perspectives have particular implications for writing pedagogy.

**Current-traditional rhetoric**

Current-traditional rhetoric was a term coined in the 1950s to describe a modern version of traditional Aristotelian rhetoric, an approach which emphasised formal grammar, syntax, mechanics and spelling. The pedagogical model is usefully summarised by Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam (1999):

‘Writing was viewed as a process of translating preconceived ideas into words according to a set of prescriptive rules about the form of effective text. Teaching writing involved identifying the features of effective text; outlining these for students; asking them to practise producing texts with these characteristics; and giving them feedback about how effectively they had managed to do so. Learning to write involved learning how to transcribe language in a written form, learning spelling and grammatical conventions; learning the principles of a good style by examining exemplary models; and learning conventional text structures’ (p.93-94).

This model relied on teacher transmission and pupil practice: the necessary knowledge and skills were perceived as being ‘out there’ independent of the writer, and, like ‘tools’, linguistic techniques could be acquired and applied to achieve competence. In keeping with the ‘tool-kit’ logic, mastery of the skills of grammar and spelling, or the conventions of style and structure, could be acquired by completion of decontextualised practice exercises as much as by composing. For these reasons, the traditional paradigm is often characterised as ‘technicist’: writing is presented ‘as a device that can be put into
operation...just as one can be taught or learn to run an adding machine, or pour concrete’ (Coles, 1969, cited in Faigley, 1986, p.529).

It should be noted that traditional school rhetoric and prescriptive grammar teaching derived not from research but from interpretations of classical tradition. In this sense these approaches are a-theoretical, and should not be confused with contemporary linguistic theories such as transformational-generative and systemic functional grammars. Indeed, conventional approaches persist in spite of research findings which discredit them. In their meta-analyses of effective strategies for improving writing, both Hillocks (1986) and Graham and Perin (2007) found a negative effect for explicit teaching of the parts of speech and structure of sentences. In their systematic review of research, Andrews et al. (2006) also found little evidence to indicate that the teaching of formal grammar is effective in promoting writing development.

Nevertheless aspects of current-traditional rhetoric survive in recent policy and have become increasingly prominent in response to perceived falling standards and employer needs. A mechanistic emphasis on the acquisition of discrete skills, rhetorical techniques and grammatical knowledge is seen as a necessary return to ‘basics’: ‘the equivalent of getting under the bonnet of the vehicle of English, and looking at the engineering to understand better how it works’ (Department for Education and Skills, 2000, cited in Grainger et al., 2005, p.187). Critics suggest, for example, that whilst current-traditional methods were abandoned as ineffectual, the influence of the skills paradigm in National Curriculum and National Literacy Strategy has been such that history may be repeating itself (D’Arcy, 2000; Grainger et al., 2005). Clark (2005) sees the restoration of a prescriptive grammar school curriculum, ‘with the privileged text in English returning to the teaching of standard English, its grammar and its literature’, as a political move to instil social cohesion and a common national identity (p.37). Arguably the revival of explicit teaching and decontextualised testing of grammar in the latest English policy reforms is further evidence of an approach widely discredited for ‘denying the writer’s voice and doing little or nothing to improve students’ writing’ (Babin & Harrison, 1999, p.149).
The implications for revision of a formalist view of writing are significant. Because the focus is primarily on linguistic characteristics, little attention is paid to writing process. Adherents believe that competent writers know what they are going to say before they write, that the composing process is linear, and that improvement is achieved by subsequent editing (Hairston, 1982). Furthermore, since evaluation of writing concerns adherence to prescribed rules, students have little ownership of the editing process. Revision, then, is associated with correction and cosmetic change, not with deeper reflection. Indeed, Hairston (1982) argues that proponents of the conventional paradigm ‘believe that teaching editing is teaching writing’ (p.115). Revision as an integral part of composition, or as a means of developing ideas and personal expression, does not feature.

**Expressive process theory**

The so-called ‘process movement’ emerged during the 1970s as a reaction against ‘traditional product-driven, rules-based, correctness-obsessed writing instruction’ (Tobin, 1994, p.5). It brought about what Hairston (1982) described as a Kuhnian paradigm shift from analyses of writing as product to analyses of writers’ processes, and its influence on teaching both in the US and the UK has been profound. Dixon summarised the ideas generated during the Dartmouth Seminar in *Growth through English* (1967) and proposed a child-centred pedagogy which emphasised self-development through writing. Such an approach entailed more classroom discussion, increased opportunities for interaction and drama, greater attention to self-expression and discovery through writing, and a less authoritarian teacher role. The classroom was to be a ‘workshop’ where ‘language is learnt in operation, not by dummy runs’ (p.13).

Drawing on his own experience as a writer, Elbow (1973) also challenged the notion of writing as the translation of preconceived ideas, and suggested generative strategies such as ‘free-writing’ to help liberate natural expression and ‘authentic voice’. He argued that teachers should resist intervening and instead participate as writers themselves, sharing responses and allowing students’ to learn spontaneously. His metaphorical representations of writing as an organic process impelled from within, and of creative process as the
'cooking' together and transforming of elements, remain influential, and stand in stark contrast to formalist notions of language as rule-bound and stable: 'think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning – before you know your meaning at all – and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve. Only at the end will you know what you want to say…cooking is the smaller process: bubbling, percolating, fermenting, chemical interaction, atomic fission. Cooking drives the engine that makes growing happen' (pp.15, 48).

Murray (1978; 1982; 2001) further developed the idea of writing as an unpredictable and exciting process. Like Elbow, he stressed that writers discover what they want to say only through the act of writing. Students need to be encouraged to listen to their own voices and attend to their evolving texts, but must also take responsibility for and ownership of their own processes. Teachers therefore ‘have to be quiet, to listen, to respond (not as initiators but as) coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments’ (Murray, 1982, p.16). In particular, Murray raised the profile of revision as the essential driver of discovery through writing, as ‘the great adventure of the mind’ (Murray, 2001, p.3). Indeed, he perceived writing and revision as indistinguishable: revision is the radical process of ‘re-seeing, re-thinking, re-saying’ and therefore, paradoxically, ‘not the end of the writing process but the beginning’ (2001, pp.1-2).

A research-based case for process teaching was spearheaded by Graves (1981; 1983) whose studies of elementary school pupils showed that even emergent writers do not need motivating or supervising in order to write, but respond to choice and the freedom to adopt idiosyncratic processes. In particular, he noted that children have difficulty generating ideas when assignments are imposed, and benefit from selecting topics themselves. He emphasised the importance of the teacher’s role as model and consultant, promoting the use of teacher-pupil conferencing and peer response as means of supporting children individually through the prewriting (or ‘rehearsal’), drafting, and post-writing stages. Writing is a ‘studio subject’: children are engaged in the long, painstaking process of learning the craft of writing, and
teachers in demonstrating, observing and helping them take control of their material (Graves, 1983, pp.5-6).

As a consequence of these developments the teaching and learning of revision acquired new status. According to Faigley (1986), slogans such as “revising is good for you” were widely repeated in textbooks and classrooms from elementary to college level (p.527). Revision was reconceptualised as a creative and dynamic process at the heart of composition. The process movement also established other important principles: that revising is dependent on meaningful feedback from readers; that ownership of the decision-making must remain with the writer; that revising is an idiosyncratic process which requires individual support; that opportunities for extended writing are essential; and that formative feedback and assessment must be clearly separated.

The impact of expressive models of writing on subsequent policy and practice has been far-reaching. It is reflected, for example, in the developments of portfolio and coursework assessment of writing, and in the emphasis on redrafting and revising processes in curriculum documentation. However, the full implications of the process approach are not always recognised and the model is easily misinterpreted and reduced to a prescriptive, linear formula. Critics suggest that process teaching is over-reliant on a particular classroom culture and the role of the teacher is ambiguous. They also point out that the rationale is based on the processes of accomplished writers, whose strategies may not apply to developing writers. Others suggest that the emphasis on process has reduced writing product to ‘byproduct’ (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Fine (2003), for example, contends that ‘showing your working’ is not a virtue in writing: ‘art is a product, not a process’ (p.11). At a wider level, process theory has been accused of romanticism and naivety in its prioritising of self-expression and consequent neglect of the power relations affecting social groups: by failing to challenge, for example, children’s choice of topic or how their texts represent others, stereotypes and inequalities of class, culture and gender are potentially perpetuated (Smagorinsky, 2002).
Cognitive process theory

Following the cognitive process studies of Emig (1971), Perl (1979) and Sommers (1980), a substantial body of research on composing processes began to appear from the perspective of cognitive psychology. In many ways these analyses were compatible with concepts of expressive process, but they located models of writing within a formal scientific framework based on information processing and problem-solving theory.

Most notably, Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed a cognitive model of writing which identified the main components of writing as planning, translating and reviewing, and showed how these, and their related sub-processes, interact with the writer’s long-term memory and the task environment to address rhetorical problems. Based on evidence from protocol analysis, they concluded that all of these sub-processes are organised hierarchically and can be called upon at any time during the act of composing, effectively discrediting textbook representations of writing as a series of discrete steps. Their analysis emphasised the complex nature of composing and the multiple and concurrent demands it makes on a writer’s cognitive resources, the implication being that high levels of self-monitoring and executive control are required to successfully manage simultaneous considerations: ‘a writer in the act is a thinker on full-time cognitive overload’ (Hayes & Flower, 1980, p.33).

Kellogg (1988, 1990) conducted a series of studies on the role of working memory in writing, and proposed its inclusion as a central component in cognitive process models (Kellogg, 1996). He showed the impact on working memory of different composing processes, and the relationship between memory capacity and writing performance. This work further highlighted the fact that cognitive overload may be a significant problem for developing writers whose low level skills are not yet automated. Kellogg also investigated the impact of different writing strategies on the text produced, particularly in relation to the efficiency of advance planning or rough drafting strategies as means of reducing cognitive load: by separating planning and revising from the process of translation, the pressure on working memory might be reduced and writing performance enhanced. Whilst concluding that outlining strategies generally
produced superior texts, Kellogg also acknowledged that this approach may be
effective for some writers and some kinds of writing (Kellogg, 1988). Galbraith
and colleagues have since investigated individual differences in writing strategy
further, particularly in relation to idea generation (Galbraith 1992; 1999) and the
role of revision (Galbraith & Torrance, 2004).

Whilst Hayes and Flower’s model represented the composing processes of
competent adults, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) proposed an alternative
developmental model to explain the progression of writing from less
sophisticated ‘knowledge telling’, a strategy commonly employed by children, to
the more complex ‘knowledge transforming’ strategy used by expert writers.
Whilst skilled writers may use ‘knowledge telling’ strategies on occasions,
immature writers rely on this ‘think-write’ approach and need help, therefore, to
make the transition towards more reflective, goals-oriented writing. Bereiter and
Scardamalia (1982) suggested that procedural facilitation – providing external
prompts to support writing processes and reduce cognitive load – might enable
learners ‘to function in more complex problem spaces than they normally can’
(p.48). Such procedures had the added advantage of making the thinking and
decision-making processes involved in writing visible for students.

For the teaching and learning of revision, cognitive process models formalised
some important principles. They established the recursive nature of writers’
thinking during composing, and confirmed that revision could occur at any stage
during the writing process. They also identified the significant role revision plays
in sophisticated writing strategies, suggesting that the ability to revise effectively
characterises the difference between skilled and unskilled writers (Sommers,
1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981). Cognitive studies of revising behaviours also
raised awareness of differentiated composing strategies, not just between
learners and competent adults, but also between writers of different
dispositions, and in relation to different tasks. The importance of metacognitive
awareness was emphasised, and the need to make evaluative and strategic
thinking processes explicit for students. Increased understanding of the
complexity of the writing process led to the development of teaching
interventions designed to help students manage the competing demands on
their attention, ranging from cue cards to highly structured programmes such as
Self-Regulated Strategy Development, which teach the steps necessary for planning and revising text.

However, in spite of a substantial body of supporting evidence, and a central concern with how children learn to write, cognitive models of the writing process are judged to have ‘had little or no impact on classroom practice’ (Wray & Medwell, 2006, p.12). Being based largely on experimental research, classroom applications can seem problematic. Cognitive approaches also conceptualise writing and revision primarily in terms of problem-solving, and downplay the creative process favoured by many practitioners. Flower et al. (1986) describe revision, for example, in terms of the sub-processes of detection, diagnosis, and correction of textual problems. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1983) similarly suggest that revision involves the repeated sub-tasks of comparing (actual text with intentions), diagnosing (identifying the nature of mismatches), and operating (implementing changes). The limitations of this view are now widely recognised. Hayes (2004) acknowledges that a dissonance model fails to address ‘revisions that are stimulated by the discovery of new connections, new ideas, or new arguments’ and is therefore seriously limited in the range of revision phenomena it can explain (Hayes, 2004, p.20). Problem-solving models also appear to reduce thinking and language to memory probing and information-processing, inviting computer analogies and notions of human ‘programmability’ (see Faigley, 1986, p.533). In this sense, cognitive models contrast firmly with ‘romantic’ theories of creative and expressive process, particularly since they represent audience and communicative purpose as ‘constraints’. At a wider level, conceptions of the composing process as something negotiated between a solitary thinker and an emerging text are seen as flawed. Social theorists challenge the assumption that writing is a self-contained act, divorced from social and cultural contexts: ‘writing is not to context what a fried egg is to its pan’ (Reither, 1994, p.142). Bizzell (1982) suggests, for example, that the cognitive perspective fails to recognise the role of knowledge or genre familiarity in writing development: differences between skilled and unskilled writers may reflect social disadvantage within a particular discourse community rather than cognitive deficiency.
**Socio-cultural theory**

Socio-cultural theories of writing, articulated during the 1980s from a range of disciplines, share in common their rejection of the notion that writing is governed by any stable or universal rules, whether linguistic or cognitive. Equally they reject the idea that writing can be understood as an individual or autonomous act, independent of its immediate or wider social context. Rather, language is perceived as a dynamic phenomenon, evolving continuously over time, and co-constructed within social and cultural communities. Writing, therefore, is a social practice, ‘negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture, and activity’ (Englert et al., 2006). It is also historically determined: Faigley (1986) defines the social view of writing as one which looks ‘beyond the expressivist contention that the individual discovers the self through language and beyond the cognitivist position that an individual constructs reality through language. In a social view, any effort to write about the self or reality always comes in relation to previous texts’ (p.536).

Socio-cultural views of writing embrace a number of distinct perspectives from ethnography, socio-linguistics, post-structuralism, Marxism and other traditions. However, some key concepts influence thinking widely and have implications for educational practice. In particular, Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cognitive theories of language development emphasised the role of social mediation in language acquisition. He argued that higher order psychological processes such as writing are instigated through interaction with knowledgeable adults or more skilled peers: learning occurs first on the ‘interpsychological’ plane, and subsequently on the ‘intrapsychological’. In this sense, he viewed written language not as beginning with the writer, but as appropriated; it was the product of social and cultural history.

Subsequently the apprenticeship model of cognitive and language development was further explored in different socio-cultural contexts. In her cross-cultural study, Rogoff (1990) elaborated on the nature of the social interaction involved in children’s cultural initiation. She suggested guided participation as a framework for examining the way children learn from adults intersubjectively, as active partners ‘building bridges’ to understanding. Lave and Wenger (1991)
also provided an ethnographic analysis of situated learning as the outcome of increasing participation in *communities of practice*, whether at home, school, work, or leisure. Based on their observations of different apprenticeships, they showed how, as learners move from peripheral participation to full participation in the practices of a community, knowledge is generated interpersonally rather than acquired in the abstract: ‘the purpose is not to learn *from* talk…it is to learn *to* talk’ (p.108).

From the socio-linguistic perspective, Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogics was also influential. He stressed the interactive and context-bound nature of language, whereby all utterances are positioned in response to, or anticipative of, others. He asserts that language is not a neutral medium: words carry the imprint of past use: ‘the word in language is half someone else’s’ (p.294) and therefore conveys multiple voices and multiple meanings. Writing, therefore, is not just the product of intersubjectivity but also of *intertextuality*. Whilst this interpretation challenges simplistic notions of ownership and individual authorship, it does not necessarily suggest that writers have no agency: as they appropriate the language of others and ‘populate it with (their) own intentions’ (p.294) writers make culture as well as index it.

The complex interdisciplinary territory of socio-culturalism employs varied terminology and imagery. Metaphorical representations emphasise the complex and indexical nature of language as multi-layered or ‘laminated’, and the process by which it is constantly remade – woven and rewoven, constructed and reconstructed. The notion of ‘cultural tools’, which enable individuals to access and engage in social practices, is also prevalent.

For practitioners, socio-cultural perspectives on writing do not easily translate into classroom strategies: there has been little ‘systematic effort to use (socio-cultural theory) to inform the creation of learning environments and activity settings’ (Englert et al., 2006). However, emphasis on the dialogic development of writing, and the way in which texts are co-constructed, has helped to underline the importance of interactive opportunities for reflection during writing, and the value of such activities as collaborative writing and peer revision. The role of talk in exploring textual problems and possibilities, and promoting
understanding of alternative perspectives, is also endorsed. At a broader level, apprenticeship models of teacher-pupil interaction have been influential in policy and practice: teacher modelling, ‘scaffolding’, and procedural facilitation, as means of enabling students to move from guided practice to collaborative and then independent practice, are widely recognised. Awareness of school writing in the context of broader literacy practices out-of-school, and of culturally diverse literacies, has also been increased. Critical perspectives have gained prominence, emphasising the need to examine the cultural values and ideological assumptions inherent in literacy practices and written genres, and the power relations these reflect. Greater attention to discourse as social behaviour, and the nature of discourse in communities and society has resulted.

Genre theory

Genre theory derives from the work of Halliday (1978) in functional linguistics, and was developed in Australia during the 1980s, particularly by Martin, Christie and Rothery (1987) and also by Kress (1982; 1987). Genre theory combines aspects of the rhetorical tradition, the social tradition and the cognitive-psychological tradition (Donovan & Smolkin, 2006), but is critical of expressive process models which are perceived to define writing narrowly in terms of personal narrative at the expense of wider cultural analysis, and to do nothing to address inequalities of power. From a genre perspective, writers find their voices through understanding and control of the many different genres they are likely to encounter. By being taught the features and underlying functions of dominant genres in society, students are inducted into the discourses of power: ‘without the capacity to handle the written genres in which information is processed and understood in the contemporary world, people will be truly left out, unable to participate in a world of increasingly sophisticated information, construction and exchange’ (Christie & Rothery, 1989, cited in Stratta & Dixon, 1994, p.18).

The so called ‘Sydney School’, and other social linguists, defined genre within a socio-cultural theory of language: different kinds of text embody different goal-oriented patterns of meaning, are socially and culturally shaped, and have evolved out of a shared sense of purpose. Never totally fixed, therefore, genres are subject to the ‘possibilities for change, innovation and creativity’ (Kress &
Knapp, 1994). At the same time, genre theorists emphasised the formal conventions of generic text types which have developed over time in response to recurring social situations, and which therefore possess recognisable rules and linguistic features. This kind of knowledge, they argued, does not come naturally and is inequitably distributed in society. All children need to understand how language works to make meaning in particular contexts, and therefore how grammar functions in this respect. Martin and Rothery (1986) analysed and classified the forms of writing undertaken in schools according to purpose and structure as a basis for designing a genre-based writing pedagogy. In contrast with ‘progressive’ approaches to teaching, which they saw as replicating inequalities of access, they proposed an explicit model, following the socio-cognitive principles of guided interaction – moving from teacher demonstration, to joint activity and independent writing. They were concerned to be transparent about the social function of genres and about what it takes to succeed as a writer in different modes. This approach was widely implemented across Australia, and bold claims are made about the impact of genre-based teaching on literacy development (Rose, 2009).

Drawing on the work in Australia, Wray and Lewis (1997) promoted a genre approach in the UK particularly as a means of extending the range of non-fiction writing experienced in school and developing literacy competence through interaction with texts. They emphasised ‘assisted activity’ or scaffolded learning, and the targeted use of writing frames as a means of supporting children with literacy difficulties in a structured way. This work has had significant influence on recent policy-making, informing the National Curriculum for English and National Literacy Strategy both in terms of the range of genres included and suggested teaching strategies.

In principle, genre theory proposed a balanced approach to teaching writing as socio-cultural analysis and linguistic analysis. It also offered a meta-language for talking about textual options and the construction of meaning. In school practice, however, genres tend to become generalised and writing models potentially prescriptive. Wray and Lewis (1997) warned that an over-use of scaffolding tools could result in formulaic response: writing frames were not intended as a substitute for writing purpose. Adopted too literally, genre
teaching can reduce children’s writing to imitation: teachers provide templates and students mimic the requisite linguistic structures and techniques. Paradoxically, the teaching of writing may then become a means of transmitting and reproducing dominant cultural practices rather than a means of enfranchising disadvantaged groups. This dilemma, between knowledge of genre as liberating or as stifling, is noted by Kress (1982) who recognised that the formalist tendencies of some genre literacy models, particularly in their emphasis on classification and modelling of text types, might fuel a return to authoritarian pedagogies: ‘the child learns to control the genre, but in the process the genre comes to control the child’ (p.11). By some analyses, genre teaching has returned the writing curriculum to a rule-governed and product-oriented focus, constraining pupils’ autonomy and creativity. In this context, revision is construed once again as a matter of adherence to the codes and conventions of different writing forms rather than a means of moving beyond standardised responses.

Contested research claims

The lack of theoretical coherence in the field of writing research has long been acknowledged (see, for example, Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). Rather than a single conceptual framework, it offers a ‘grab bag of disciplines and methodologies’ from which to draw (Elbow, 2000, p.xviii). In particular, the ‘bright line’ which separates the scientific approach of psychologists on the one hand, and the literary and practice-based approach of composition researchers on the other, makes more integrated positions difficult. Theorists from one tradition tend to dismiss antithetical approaches as either reductionist or romanticized, positivist or anecdotal, even as ‘egotistically contentious’ (of critical theory, Hillocks, 1995, p.39), ‘pessimistically determinist’ (of Marxist theory, Faigley, 1986, p.528) or ‘pure bunk’ (of creative process theory, Flower & Hayes, 1980, p.32); as a consequence, ‘rhetoricians ignore the findings of cognitive psychologists …empirical researchers reject critical theory…theorists associated with the process movement reject the insights of rhetoricians. And on and on…’ (Hillocks, 1995, p.39). By some analyses, ‘internecine warfare’ afflicts the field of writing research and dogmatism prevails (Smith, 1995, p. ix).
Whilst efforts have been made to promote interdisciplinary or eclectic perspectives, particularly in the interests of pedagogy, these have been strongly contested (see Appendix B: Arguments for and against theoretical integration). Theorists such as Elbow, for example, celebrate the ‘intellectual pluralism and interdisciplinary dynamic’ that different analyses offer. In his view, diverse perspectives ensure a ‘larger theory’, one which exceeds the parameters imposed by single academic traditions, on the premise that theories can be contradictory and also right, at least in some respects (Elbow, 2000, p. xix). Others, such as Flower (1989) and Hillocks (1995), have attempted to move beyond simple dichotomies, and propose more ‘interactive’ explanations or meta-theories on the grounds that single perspectives provide only part of the picture. Nevertheless, the argument that different paradigms are fundamentally incompatible has tended to prevail: ‘competing views are more than different “takes” on language arts instruction…each constitutes a different view of education, language and learning (and) encompasses within itself a major philosophical framework and a particular political ideology…there can be no eclecticism at the level of deep underlying beliefs’ (Edelsky, 1990, p.7). The different assumptions underpinning genre-based, process-focused, whole-language or product-oriented pedagogies represent not just ‘overt sectarianism’ but also ‘masked differences of purpose’ and cannot be ignored (Candlin, 1996, p.xiv).

In proposing particular teaching strategies, therefore, cognitive and composition theorists make very different assumptions about what is needed to enable student progress, and even about the kinds of progress that are theoretically possible. Composition theorists assume that writing expertise will develop naturally given the right opportunities and support. Early exponents of expressive process and ‘whole language’ learning argued therefore that elementary grade children could revise ‘to find out what they mean’ in classrooms where writing process was allowed to flourish (Graves & Murray, 1981, p.106; Calkins, 1980). They favoured ‘naturalistic’ rather than ‘direct’ teaching methods, engaging students in authentic writing tasks in workshop environments. The emphasis was on student choice and ownership. Composition was supported by brainstorming and pre-writing activities, collaborative writing and peer response groups, and by opportunities to share,
display and publish writing. Teaching took the form of demonstrations, mini-lessons, and one-to-one conferencing. This child-centred model was based on the assumption that children are the authors of their own learning, and that writers’ developmental pathways may be as idiosyncratic as they are complex. By this analysis, no single method or structured programme would facilitate the natural unfolding of writing or writing skill: ‘there is no particular order. So it’s not effective to teach the writing process in a lock-step, rigid manner’ (Graves, cited in National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006, p.22). Whilst the model has evolved since to include more direct teaching, the principles underpinning the process approach are still favoured by many teachers and remain central to professional development programmes such as the US National Writing Project. They are also supported by research evidence. Studies of the impact of process teaching suggest that students engaged in this way revise more extensively and to better effect than students taught by traditional methods (see Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, for a summary). Teacher-student conferencing is identified as particularly powerful (for use with adolescent writers, see Romano, 1987; Atwell, 1998). National Writing Project studies suggest that when teachers receive training in the process approach, the effect on adolescent writing achievement is significant (see Graham & Perin, 2007a).

However, critics argue that the teaching methods advocated lack specificity and the supporting classroom research lacks rigour. They maintain that in practice the process approach has evolved more quickly than the theory, and has become so ubiquitous and so variously interpreted that it no longer represents a definable model. Success is perceived to be over-dependent on a teaching style and classroom culture which cannot necessarily be replicated. Furthermore, the rationale is based on the processes of accomplished writers, whose strategies may not apply to developing writers, and is narrowly focused on personal narrative writing at the expense of other forms. Educational psychologists seeking to identify more precisely ‘what works’ tend to regard the ‘informal’ and ‘incidental’ methods associated with ‘natural learning’ as insufficiently powerful for the teaching of writing, or at worst ‘learning by miracle or accident’ (Graham & Harris, 1997, Counterpoint section, para.1). They assert, like Graham and Harris (1997) in the title of their article, ‘It can be taught but it does not develop naturally’. 
By contrast, then, cognitive researchers assume ‘there is nothing natural about learning to read and write in the way that learning to speak is part and parcel of normal cognitive development’ (Kellogg, 2008). They favour explicit and systematic teaching of procedures and metacognitive strategies for writing. They also attribute some of the difficulty young writers experience to the limitations of cognitive capacity. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of memory in writing, the different constraints it places on writers’ processing capacities and the cognitive costs implied in coordinating the activities of planning, sentence-generation and reviewing. Thus Flower and Hayes (1980) surmised that young writers’ tendency to defer revision, or to tackle local rather than global concerns, might be explained by their need to reduce the ‘cognitive strain’ involved in managing multiple and simultaneous demands. Writers whose lower-level skills were not yet automated may be overwhelmed by the requirements of ‘translation’ and unable to devote conscious attention to higher-level goals such as revision. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) suggested that inexperienced writers may not have acquired an executive procedure for switching back and forth between text generation and evaluation, and from one level of analysis to another. More recently, Kellogg (2008) has argued that the greatest constraint on writers’ ability to move from knowledge-telling to knowledge transforming is the limited capacity of the central executive component of working memory. Since the regions of the brain that support executive functioning are relatively undeveloped in adolescents, capacity limitations serve as a fundamental brake on their revising skill and help to explain why they do not routinely and spontaneously make the kind of deep structural revisions that expert writers do. Most notably, Kellogg (2008) suggests that it takes two decades of maturation, instruction and practice to progress from knowledge-telling, through knowledge-transforming (between adolescence and adulthood) to the most advanced stage of ‘knowledge-crafting’ (professional expertise achieved in mature adulthood).

From an instructional perspective, cognitive researchers such as Kellogg (2008) therefore stress ‘the absolute necessity’ of reducing the burden placed on working memory by writing processes. They prioritise the teaching of ‘strategies that focus effort on a single process at a given moment in time’ (p.16) or procedural routines which can be practiced to the point of automaticity.
Cognitive strategy instruction programmes are favoured which teach students the steps necessary for planning, monitoring and revising text, and several ‘package’ interventions have been developed for this purpose, such as Graham and Harris’ Self-Regulated Strategy Development (see, for example, Harris & Graham, 1996). Other forms of scaffolded instruction and procedural facilitation are suggested to help move students from guided to independent revising, involving the use of cues to prompt reflective thinking or suggested strategies for resolving textual problems (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1986). Socio-cognitive apprenticeship methods have also been developed, whereby students are guided towards more effective revision through observation of models, peer assistance or mentor assigned goals. Kellogg (2008) cites Schunk and Zimmerman’s (1997) ‘four step training regimen’ which moves students through the stages of observation, emulation, deliberate practice and adaptation to the intended goal of self-regulation (p.19). Braaksma and colleagues have explored combinations of observation, scaffolded emulation and feedback as means of fostering students’ self-regulatory practices (see Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam & van den Bergh, 2002; Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh and van Hout-Walters, 2004).

Intervention studies suggest that such approaches can encourage more effective revision. Cognitive strategy instruction has been found to produce large improvements in writing quality and revisions, particularly for struggling or learning disabled writers (see Graham, 2006, for a meta-analysis). In line with the premise that reducing cognitive load may be important, deferred revision has been found to be more productive for younger students than revising during, or immediately after, writing (Chanquoy, 2001). Greater effects have also been found when students revise their texts after observing readers than when they simply revise, on the assumption that allowing students to step back from the cognitive demands of the writing task enables them to focus more on the learning about readers. Couzijn and Rijlaarsdam (1996) found that when students observed the reactions of readers to their own texts, and received written feedback, the benefits for revision were greatest.

However, the tendency to construct writing as a problem-solving task which can be approached systematically or reduced to protocols for learners appears to
contradict the premise that composition is by nature dynamic and recursive. Separating processes such as planning, transcribing, and revising, for example, may reduce cognitive load but does ‘violence to the nature of writing as a tool of personal expression, intentionality, and integration’ (Lavelle et al., 2002, p.402); revision needs to be ‘embedded within writing tasks rather than taught as a unitary, and final process at the end…emerging texts constantly serve as prompts for modifications at all levels’ (p.412). Highly structured procedural programmes are also seen as prescriptive and inflexible – they undermine motivation and fail to take account of individual preferences. Furthermore, critics maintain that rhetorical behaviour is not rule-governed, and since the nature of rhetorical problems is not clear-cut, there are no single well-defined solutions. Thus, in seeking to ascertain ‘what dose of each treatment is optimal, how these treatments are best combined, and what combination of treatments work [sic] best for which adolescents’ (Graham & Perin, 2007b, p.328), scientific methods are seen to over-simplify the complex negotiation between teacher and learner: education is not like medicine. Furthermore, Kellogg’s (2008) view that higher levels of revising expertise are not likely to be achieved by school students is considered controversial and has profound implications for writing pedagogy: if knowledge-transforming emerges only during late adolescence, and knowledge-crafting later still, the expectations of many secondary teachers would be confined to little more than knowledge-telling.

The lack of agreement or coherence in suggested teaching methods is epitomised in Graham and Perin’s (2007a) meta-analysis of effective strategies to improve the writing of adolescents, Writing Next. In the first place, as the authors concede, the nature of the review is selective by definition since only experimental and quasi-experimental studies are included, and rich qualitative data from real classrooms is not. The emphasis therefore is on discrete writing interventions and measurable student outcomes. Even so, the strategies identified illustrate Elbow’s ‘rag bag’ of approaches, including as they do cognitive strategy instruction; linguistic exercises such as sentence-combining; socially-oriented activities such as collaborative writing; ‘process’ methods such as pre-writing; inquiry-based and writing-to-learn initiatives; and more formalist methods such as the study of models and summarisation tasks. Coker and Lewis (2008) point out that only 4% of the citations in Writing Next also appear
in Hillocks’ (2008) review of secondary writing, even though both reviews target adolescent writing.

It is questionable how far the effective strategies identified in *Writing Next*, and more widely those emerging from different theoretical viewpoints, can be reconciled in the interests of an integrated pedagogy, or on what grounds a more eclectic approach might be justified. The challenge this poses for teachers and policy-makers is obvious. What are they to make of the contradictory messages, for example, in the *Handbook of Writing Research* published in 2006, an attempt to ‘synthesize current knowledge on writing development in children and adolescents and the processes underlying successful teaching and learning’? In spite of this aim, the assertions therein are frequently hard to reconcile. Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) argue, for example, that the ‘process’ approach to teaching writing has emerged as the primary paradigm in US classrooms and is often ‘mandated as the gold standard’ even though researchers hold surprisingly divergent views of what it entails (p.277); Prior (2006), on the other hand, claims that socio-cultural theory now represents the dominant paradigm for writing research, whereas Englert, Mariage and Dunsmore (2006) suggest that socio-cultural and allied theories are ‘currently under-investigated in writing research’ and have ‘had significantly less impact than cognitive theories on our understanding of writing development’ (p.216). Such discrepancies are symptomatic of the fact that interdisciplinary explorations of writing remain rare and classroom applications are seldom jointly explored (Beard et al. 2009). Thus, whilst few would dispute that understanding the writing process means understanding complex and interrelated influences – cognitive, social, cultural, linguistic, motivational and technological – little is known about the ways in which these factors *interact* as writers develop (Coker & Lewis, 2008).

**Incoherent policy representations**

The lack of a coherent view of writing process or writing development inevitably impacts on policy representations. Recent curriculum and assessment policy has also been shaped by considerations other than learning theory which cloud the picture further. The result, by some analyses, is an educational paradigm or

In recent decades, policy formulation across many English-speaking nations has been driven, at least in part, by imperatives such as economic development and competition; national identity-building; perceived school failure and declining standards (Priestley, 2002). It has been marked by increased political intervention and the introduction of national frameworks which have significantly reduced teachers’ choice and flexibility. Such changes have been controlled mostly by neo-conservative discourse, and have resulted in ‘a strong instrumental thrust’ and a ‘linear, atomized approach to learning’ (Priestley, 2002, pp.124, 132). This is particularly true of writing policy which has had to respond to an assumed ‘crisis’ in standards and to polarised views which set ‘progressive’ teaching against ‘back-to-basics’ and the subject ‘English’ against ‘Literacy’. In the UK, this debate is exemplified by the ‘cri de coeur’ of children’s authors who blame ‘bog standard literacy’ teaching for the ‘disastrous slide in standards of creative writing in schools’ (Powling, 2005; Fine, 2003, p. 11) whilst traditionalists like Michael Gove assert that ‘thousands of children – including some of our very brightest, leave school unable to compose a sentence’ (2010, Conservative party conference speech).

In response to shifting priorities, teachers in England and Wales have so far introduced four versions of the National Curriculum for English, and a National Literacy Strategy (now discontinued but largely integrated into the 2007 National Curriculum framework). A fifth ‘slimmed down’ National Curriculum is to be implemented from 2014. From the outset such policy was informed by five distinct models of English teaching which, whilst not mutually exclusive, are not comfortably compatible (Fleming & Stevens, 2010). They comprised ‘personal growth’, ‘cross-curricular’, ‘adult needs’, ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘cultural analysis’ (DES/WO, 1989, 2.21-2.25). In particular, analyses of writing as ‘personal growth’, which focus on the imaginative development of the child, and ‘cultural analysis’, which focus on the purposes of language in society, are often polarised (Daly, 2002). Consequently, rather than providing any single conceptualisation of writing, early policy offered a theoretical ‘cocktail of
expressive literariness combined with the beginnings of a move toward genres-as-text-types’ – a move that was reinforced in successive versions, and extended to the National Literacy Strategy (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p.16; my italics). The different ingredients predictably lost much of their integrity in the mix.

Most influential on National Curriculum writing policy was the Australian theory of genre which foregrounded the range of text-types employed in society, with a view to securing equal access for all children to the discourses of power. However, this central political dimension, of social empowerment through increasing control and manipulation of written genres, was lost in a ‘reduction to curricular fiat’ (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p.16; original italics). What remained was a strictly linguistic analysis without much attention to purpose and this tended to suggest imitation and compliance with ‘rules’ rather than empowerment. The focus on text features and the conventions of written products was also seen to contrast directly with the process-based paradigm (D’Arcy, 2000). Thus, whilst genre theory ensured that a wide variety of written forms were included in policy requirements, it also placed an ‘undue emphasis on form’ and ‘a somewhat static and formulaic conception of what language can do’ (Andrews, 2008b, p.13).

Aspects of process theory also featured in successive versions of the National Curriculum, and in teacher guidance. However, these have been streamlined to such an extent as to be ‘mere shells of the theory and pedagogy’ (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p.68). In particular, key concepts such as developing positive dispositions towards writing, student choice, discovery through writing, recursive and idiosyncratic process, were not incorporated. The emphasis instead is on the stages or phases of writing process, a misrepresentation noted in the earliest research (see Applebee, 1986). Furthermore, no attempt is made to reflect process development in assessment frameworks, so that by comparison with the genre and the skills paradigms which are clearly enshrined, policy is perceived to pay lip-service only to the process paradigm (Grainger, Goouch & Lambirth, 2005). In D’Arcy’s (2000) view, process theory was obliterated and a ‘narrowly interpreted linguistic paradigm’ put in its place, one which directed little or no attention to writing as the search for meaning (pp.3, 46). These
tensions persist in current guidelines, and may be exacerbated by new proposals, particularly assessment arrangements.

A traditional ‘skills’ dimension was apparent in early curriculum policy, notably in the Literacy Strategy, and also seems prominent in the latest National Curriculum specifications. The emphasis on technical features and Standard English grammar reflects an essentially a-theoretical perspective rooted in the formalist thinking of the 1950s. D’Arcy (2000) traces the ‘increasingly formalistic emphasis’ through successive National Curriculum Orders, the Literacy Strategy and QCA’s (1998; 1999a; 1999b) Grammar publications, suggesting that all of these present a ‘narrowly mechanistic framework…which focuses on writing as largely a matter of construction and correctness’ (D’Arcy, 2000, p.3). Critics regard this technicist emphasis as fundamentally reductive, stripping writing and reading of any real purpose and defining competence in terms of discrete skills and knowledge of linguistic features: ‘(young people) have increasingly become ‘entitled’ to a ‘core curriculum’ in English that stresses narrow competence in decontextualised, purpose-free reading and writing skills and the recall of bits of linguistic terminology’ (Ellis, 2006, p.9). Children’s authors have been vociferous in deploring this ‘tool-kit’ model of authorship, and what they perceive as an ‘analytical and vigorously tested drills-and-skills approach’ (Powling, 2003, p.18).

If the overall balance of UK curriculum policy is assumed to tip in favour of prescriptive and formulaic models of writing, it reflects a wider picture. In the US, the persistence of rigid formats such as the ‘five paragraph theme’ and narrowly-conceived methods which have no sound basis in research is highlighted by Hillocks (2006) who references his 1986 meta-analysis of teaching strategies to argue ‘that the study of forms (or models) is second only to traditional school grammar in having the least impact on student writing’ (p.62). He observes that the reduction of written genres to formal structures invites vacuous reproduction and is ‘conducive not to ideas but to clichés, commonplaces, and blather’ (p.62). The inclusion of prescriptive models in both US and UK curriculum policy is attributed to the triumph of political purpose over language theory (Clark, 2005), and a deeply controlling perspective on the purpose of literacy, one which prioritises writing as initiation in the conventions
of society and neglects writing ‘to think for ourselves…for the convenience of those who’d really rather we didn’t’ (Pullman, 2003, p.8).

It is, however, as Fleming and Stevens (2010) point out, not the programmes of study that have had the most negative impact in the classroom, but rather the regime of high stakes national testing. By judging writing success on the basis of written products ‘composed’ for the most part under timed conditions, assessment policy is judged to have narrowed the construct of writing to surface and structural characteristics, and trivialised curriculum objectives relating to process. In his study of high-stakes testing in the US, Hillocks (2002) argues that policymakers’ failure to align learning and assessment objectives has led to widespread theoretical confusion and distorted the teaching of writing. He identifies the paradox that whilst ‘contemporary educational theory and practice argue that effective learning must be constructivist in nature’, high stakes assessment methodology is, for the most part, rooted in a ‘current traditional rhetoric’ notion of an objective, one-size-fits-all, correct form (p.22).

From its inception, therefore, critics have noted the lack of a ‘consistent theoretical perspective’ in National Curriculum language policy which, like many committee-produced designs, attempted to include a variety of perspectives with no overall rationale (Stratta & Dixon, 1994, p.17). Andrews et al. (2006) suggest that the ‘eclectic approach, patchily implemented’ of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Curriculum, fails to identify those methods which most effectively promote writing development. Indeed they note that the inclusion of approaches in these policy frameworks which research suggests are ineffective is poorly justified on the grounds that a wide range of methods are encouraged. This eclecticism, they argue, ‘is actually leading to confusion about the best way forward in improving young people’s writing’ (p.41). In his review of the writing curriculum for the DCSF in 2008, Andrews argues the need for a better balance between the polarities of genre and expressive models, particularly to increase creativity: ‘the present English curriculum may have swung too far towards a catalogue of required forms of writing since the 1980s’ (Andrews, 2008b, p.13). A similar conclusion was reached following the QCA consultations (see QCA 2005a; 2005b; 2006), which set 2015 as the target date for a full-scale review of the English curriculum. However, there is little sign that
the kind of policy reforms currently envisaged will restore much in the way of creative purpose and expressive process to school writing. The introduction of ‘back-to-basics’ grammar tests for 11 year-olds from 2013, and the removal of written coursework components from GCSE, do not suggest that writing process is high on the agenda. Thus, the ever-richer conceptions of literacy presented in research remain markedly at odds with the determined conservative emphasis on basic skills, product-focused assessment policies, and scientific evidence-based practices (Sperling & DiPardo, 2008).

Meanwhile, writing policy is in an uncertain state. Whilst the current National Curriculum ‘may appear – indeed it seeks to appear – completely authoritative; in truth it offers a series of touchstones’ from which teachers must formulate over-arching aims and values as best they can (Fleming and Stevens, 2010, pp. 14-15). The ‘slimmed down’ proposals for 2014 and 2015 make this requirement on teachers all the greater.

The impact on practice

Teachers face the formidable task therefore of ‘negotiating between the complex vision of contemporary writing research and the modernist take on literate competency embedded in recent education policies’ (Sperling & DiPardo, 2008, p.62). They must also navigate between the two apparently distinct worlds of contemporary writing practice, which is frequently interactive and nonlinear, and curriculum and assessment policies that privilege ‘linear, essayist literacy’ (Herrington & Moran, 2009). Add to this, the ‘rampant and remorseless’ reform which has afflicted teachers since the 1980s and the task extends to one of perpetual reconstruction of their work and professional identity (Hargreaves, 1994, p.6).

The impact on teachers of top-down policy reform and increased accountability is well rehearsed. Evidence from the inspection of English teaching over more than 10 years suggests that the pace of change and the pressure to raise standards has led to ‘decreasing confidence about the nature of the subject, its position in the curriculum and how it should be taught’ (OfSTED, 2005, p.4);
consequently a ‘clear, defining vision for English’ and ‘clarity about how to improve teaching’ are lacking (OfSTED, 2012, p.36). In the words of one contributor to a 2009 White Paper on the National Curriculum, over-prescription and monitoring has led to ‘a generation of teachers who are curriculum deliverers rather than curriculum developers’ (Children, Schools and Families Committee [CSFC], 2009a, p.31). Similar circumstances are reported in the US where teachers of writing describe the losses they have experienced ‘in the time of testing’ as voice and ownership, time to reflect, belief in their ability to succeed, faith in the educational system, and even the desire to be a teacher (McCracken and McCracken, 2001). As teachers struggle to produce higher test scores whilst also meeting students’ needs, ‘the challenge of implementing research-based practices (seems) more formidable than ever’ (Scherff & Piazza, 2005, p.273). Evidence suggests that teachers have responded in different ways to the challenge of imposed requirements and competing demands. Whilst some ‘find ways to teach authentically within the constraints of test-driven instruction,’ others resort to mechanistic implementation of requirements, and others still lose their sense of purpose entirely (McCracken & McCracken, 2001, p.31; Messenheimer & Packwood, 2002).

In the best circumstances, talented and experienced teachers are observed to retain some ownership of curriculum design and to exercise professional judgement over how requirements are delivered. Rather than rejecting the standards agenda or allowing themselves to be intimidated by it, teachers with sufficient confidence find ways to embed assessment objectives and test preparation within a well-thought-out and coherent writing programme (Sainsbury, 2009). They are able to reconcile the tension between an ‘incessant drive for measurable standards on the one hand and the development of creative teaching and learning on the other’ by integrating both progressive and traditional elements in the classroom, as is required (Grainger et al., 2005, p.66). By adopting a ‘realistic’ approach, they hold off the worst effects of narrow skills-based standards.

For some teachers, however, a ‘realistic’ approach of this kind is not tenable. Scherff and Piazza (2005) argue that many teachers regard imposed requirements and desirable writing programmes as ‘mutually exclusive’ (p.291)
and they themselves question whether current educational reforms are flexible enough for teachers to navigate successfully between process and product instruction. The difficulty they face is illustrated in Beck’s (2006) fine-grained study of one ‘conflicted’ teacher who struggles, and ultimately fails, to integrate external standards and his own vision of good writing into a coherent set of expectations. At a wider level, the merits of an eclectic strategy, either in the classroom or in educational policy, are disputed (see Appendix B). All too often it is observed to be an under-theorised one, not far short of the pick-and-mix approach which Berthoff (1981) labels ‘recipe swapping’. Edelsky (1990) argues that it is impossible by definition to ‘combine what is best from all sources and have an eclectic, value-free, assumption-free mix’ (p.7). On these grounds, she rejects any suggestion that ‘whole language’ and traditionalist practices can be usefully combined in the classroom. Pring (2000) on the other hand argues that whilst ‘the transaction between teacher and learner…is essentially eclectic’ and should draw upon different theories according to the needs of students or circumstance, as soon as teachers are required to deliver someone else’s curriculum, there is no longer room for this transaction (pp.26-27). The scope for exercise of professional judgement in the context of centralised control of what is taught and how it is assessed is questionable. Ellis (2006) concludes that, ‘the choices for an English teacher seeking to reflect on their practice and…the purpose of English as a subject in schools appear to be fairly limited’ (p.9).

In the face of diminished professional autonomy, instrumentalism is therefore a more commonly observed response. Distanced from the debate about pedagogy and positioned as powerless to implement change, this strategy is described as pragmatic: ‘teachers in England…have simply become very good at doing what they have been told to do…performing the approved routines in ways that encourage inspectors to tick the box provided – and then leave’ (Ellis, 2006, p.9). Ellis concludes that the net effect is a classroom writing culture which is often pedestrian and markedly divorced from the kind of written language activities young people engage in outside school. Responses to a national consultation similarly suggest that English teaching has become ‘mundane’ as pressures have ‘led teachers to assume that success will be achieved by routines and structures with little time for experiment or expansion.
or following interests’ (QCA, 2005a, p.6). OfSTED likewise observes rigid and superficial practices: recommended lesson structures and frameworks for teaching are followed ‘too slavishly’ (OfSTED, 2005, p.16); teachers tend to focus on text form and text-type rather than purpose, audience and meaning; the teaching of grammar is over-simplified, with the emphasis on knowledge of the terms rather than how language is used or the impact on meaning; texts are used as ‘manuals’ to teach the surface features of writing without exploring the ideas and feelings they express, or to develop GCSE skills of analysis at the expense of personal response, even in the early stages of secondary education (OfSTED, 2005; 2012).

As Messenheimer and Packwood (2002) note, pressurised teachers ‘adopt an approach to writing that fosters a surface, as opposed to a deep, approach to learning…one which focuses on memorisation and technical competence; parts rather than the whole and is motivated extrinsically’ (p.12). Complex processes are reduced to prescriptive formulae at the expense of authentic writing. Thus the teaching of writing process becomes a relentless routine of planning, drafting and redrafting which ‘kills imagination stone dead’ (Fine, 2003, p.11) and the teaching of genre a tedious ‘death by writing frame’ (Myhill, 2001, cited in Daly, 2002, p.11). Assessment-led approaches are particularly prevalent. In the attempt to improve results, teachers ‘abrogate some of their professional judgement and autonomy’ and turn to commercially-produced materials designed specifically to meet the assessment requirements (Messenheimer & Packwood, 2002, p.14). They are observed to concentrate too much and too early on a narrow range of test or examination skills, reducing the breadth of students’ experience of English and their opportunities to respond in creative and individual ways (OfSTED, 2012). In effect, for too many teachers, the specified learning objectives have ‘become a tick list to be checked off’ (OfSTED, 2005, p.15). Such an approach may indeed resemble the ‘cookbook’ method that Berthoff (1981) and others describe, whereby practitioners have only to follow the rules ‘without further reflection’ (Biesta, 2007, p.11). As much was acknowledged in a 2009 White Paper reviewing the National Curriculum: ‘at times schooling has appeared more of a franchise operation, dependent on a recipe handed down by government rather than the exercise of professional expertise by teachers’ (CSFC, 2009a, p.4). The same White Paper notes that
over-prescription and monitoring of National Curriculum policy has contributed to the deskilling of teachers as researchers and reflective practitioners. It recommends that active measures be taken to empower teachers and a higher profile be given to the theory and practice of curriculum design in Initial Teacher Training, recommendations that were ignored at the time (see CSFC, 2009a; 2009b) and subsequently. Arguably, governments have been intent on prescribing not just what should be taught, but also how, thus redefining the professional role of teachers fundamentally. The centralised specification of competencies for qualified teacher status, and the decreasing emphasis on educational theory in initial training, may be interpreted as part of the same intention (see Fleming & Stevens, 2010).

Little wonder, then, that some teachers of writing are observed to lack adequate conceptual frameworks to guide their work, appear dependent on prescription, and implement requirements uncritically. OfSTED notes that English leaders sometimes ‘lacked the subject knowledge or confidence to articulate a clear vision and direction’ (OfSTED, 2012, p.35) and that some English teachers found it difficult to respond creatively to new opportunities: ‘they were implementing national policy changes unthinkingly, often because they had no deeply held views about the nature of English as a subject and how it might be taught’ (OfSTED, 2009, p.19). It was indicative of this lack of a sense of purpose that few schools had taken the opportunity to rethink their Key Stage 3 programmes following the ending of year 9 statutory tests, and offered no rationale to students for the work they were doing beyond reference to GCSE examinations to be taken ‘at some point in the distant future’ (OfSTED, 2012, p.23).

Inadequate theoretical knowledge and teachers’ tendency to accept prescribed requirements at face value is also seen in the US. Hillocks (2006) asserts that ‘most teachers appear to know little about the teaching of writing beyond the most general knowledge’ (p.74). He attributes this to the inadequacy of teacher education programmes which focus on literature or reading instruction at the expense of writing pedagogy, and practice at the expense of theory, leaving beginning teachers to develop their own conceptions of writing. The majority of teachers he questioned about prescribed assessment policy had not only
internalised their state assessment rubrics, but also believed that these supported a desirable writing programme and used the scoring guides to teach writing; a finding all the more alarming given the apparent misalignment between these and prescribed learning objectives (Hillocks, 2002). McCracken and McCracken (2001) wonder whether the new generation of teachers in the US will have the confidence and ingenuity to find ways to teach authentically within the constraints, particularly in view of the narrow criteria established for assessing trainee teachers’ subject knowledge. According to Coker and Lewis (2008) many teachers report entering the classroom ill-prepared to teach writing and operate from a position of ‘negative capability’ as they learn and create for themselves a repertoire of writing instruction. They suggest teacher-educators themselves may lack current knowledge of writing research because of the gulf that exists between research scholars and those involved in teacher preparation. Nagin notes that ‘composition pedagogy remains a neglected area of study at most of the nation’s thirteen hundred schools of education…nor is it a requirement in most state teacher certification programs’ (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006, pp.5-6).

If teachers lack theoretical knowledge to support the teaching of writing, the problem is compounded by the fact that many are not confident writers themselves (Cremin & Baker, 2010). A background in literature study means that many English teachers have greater understanding of texts than of writing process. As a result, they cannot always demonstrate writing in the classroom in ways which allow their students to ‘see how ideas and language are created, shaped, reviewed and revised’ (OfSTED, 2009, p.48; see also Horner, 2010). The need for ‘practice in writing by the very teachers who are teaching it’ is identified by Andrews in a DCSF discussion document and a case is made for professional development opportunities along the lines of the US National Writing Project (Andrews, 2008b, p.14; 2008a) but so far these have not materialised.

The combination of poor theoretical understanding and practical experience is clearly not conducive to enlightened classroom practice. Berlin (1982) highlights the impact that incoherent or under-conceptualised representations of writing can have on learners. He argues that teaching writing is always ideological:
teachers are ineluctably operating in the realm of epistemology, whether or not they consciously choose to do so: ‘to teach writing is to argue for a version of reality’ (p.766). Failure to recognise the full significance of pedagogical strategies can, therefore, ‘have disastrous consequences, ranging from momentarily confusing students to sending them away with faulty or even harmful information’; indeed he suggests that the dismay students’ often feel about writing may be the result of ‘teachers unconsciously offering contradictory advice about composing – guidance grounded in assumptions that simply do not square with each other’ (p.766).

**Conclusion**

In effect, despite decades of research in writing process, neither theory nor educational policy yet provides a strong conceptual basis for writing pedagogy. Models of teacher training are inevitably stretched to address this adequately, and teachers are under greater pressure than ever before to meet assessment targets. In the context of poor theoretical training, prescribed curricula and narrow assessment policy, Hillocks (2006) concludes: ‘it is obvious that students are receiving a diet of poor writing instruction that cannot provide appropriate nourishment for their growth as writers’ (p.55). If this is so, what might it mean for the teaching and learning of revision? Do current classroom practices enable students to move beyond the scant and superficial revising that characterised their approach in early studies? The second part of this literature review considers the available evidence about classroom practice. It attempts to ascertain what, if anything, has improved over the 40+ years since Emig’s (1971) landmark study and whether changes in theory and policy are matched by growth in students’ beliefs, concepts and attitudes.
The evidence base

Remarkably perhaps, given the level of concern about writing standards, there is insufficient recent evidence or longitudinal data on the views and practices of teachers or students to show the impact of shifting policy representations on classroom writing process. In the UK, the only large-scale post-National Curriculum student survey was conducted by the NLT in 2009. This explored the attitudes and perceived writing behaviours of 8-16 year-olds, with a particular emphasis on their use of technology. Otherwise there is a 20 year gap in the collection of national data on children’s perceptions. Between 1981 and 1983 the National Foundation for Educational Research conducted a one-off investigation as part of the International Study of Written Composition. This considered the views and performance of students in their last year of compulsory education, and the way in which writing was taught (Gubb, Gorman and Price, 1987). Between 1985 and 1988 a cross-phase National Writing Project engaged teachers from 24 local authorities in classroom research focused on teaching strategies and students’ views. Also during the 1980s, the Assessment and Performance Unit (APU) conducted a series of centrally-funded surveys to monitor reading and writing at ages 11 and 15, including students’ motivation and achievement; however, no equivalent surveys have taken place since to allow comparison. Furthermore, none of these studies were designed to address revision specifically or do so in any depth, although some relevant evidence was collected.

In the USA nationally-representative data on school writing has been collected more systematically. Surveys have been conducted on a regular basis since the 1970s as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and these provide some background data on teachers and students’ perceptions. However, they are not consistent in the questions they ask and therefore offer only a ‘mosaic’ rather than an accurate picture of trends over time (Applebee & Langer, 2006). Also, surveys of this kind by necessity provide very limited information about classroom practice; they do not attempt to describe teachers’
or students’ actual behaviour and they obscure important variations and examples of good practice that do exist.

Unfortunately, however, there is also a paucity of smaller-scale descriptive evidence, particularly of current practice in UK secondary schools. Some observations about writing are available from school inspection reports and classroom research but this data is impressionistic. It is only possible therefore to piece together a fragmentary picture of students’ understandings about revision by linking the more substantial evidence base in America with the limited, but generally supportive, evidence from research in the UK.

**Students’ revising practice**

Early studies were consistent in reporting that students of school and college age revised their writing primarily at surface level, if at all (Perl, 1979; Bridwell, 1980; Sommers, 1980; see also Fitzgerald, 1987). This was the case in both normal classwork and examination conditions, even when students were requested to redraft.

The 1977 NAEP test of students’ rewriting skills was indicative. 7500 students (aged 9, 13 and 17) were asked to write and then revise an assigned piece, albeit in highly constrained circumstances. In all age groups, a substantial number of students made no revisions to text at all (one third of 17-year olds). Of those who revised, changes were predominantly minor and seldom improved the overall quality or organisation of material. It was perhaps predictable, given that students had under half an hour for the task, that little substantive revision was undertaken. However, a similar picture emerged when Applebee (1981) conducted his study of writing in US secondary schools: less than a quarter of the 14 and 16 year-olds he interviewed claimed to redraft in more than superficial ways in spite of the fact that 59% of their English teachers regularly required more than one draft. Similarly in the UK, when the APU sampled the classwork assignments of 11 and 15-year-olds, only about 30% were found to have been revised or redrafted in any way. Even then, most of the changes made were minor and many had been instigated by the teacher not the writer (White, 1987). When asked about the nature of their revisions, more 11-year-
olds claimed to change spelling than any other aspect; only one in five pupils claimed to change 'ideas' (White, 1986). Little wonder then that students' revisions were found to have negligible, even negative impact, on the quality of their final drafts. Those who did revise during the NAEP assessment achieved minimal improvement between drafts and in some cases the quality declined, a finding echoed in qualitative studies of the same period (see Fitzgerald, 1987, for a review of studies over this period).

Large-scale student surveys conducted during the 80s suggest that most students at this time did not define the revision task in substantive terms. Thus, whilst the majority of 13 and 16-year-olds in the 1984 NAEP assessment expected to revise for their teachers, and 80% claimed to have done so before handing in their last paper, far fewer claimed to reorganise or rewrite their texts in major ways: revisions most commonly claimed were corrections and word substitutions (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1986). Similarly, whilst the vast majority of 15-year-olds surveyed in the UK at about the same time claimed to revise (only 6% admitted otherwise), and more than half claimed to do so both during and after text production, revision was not perceived as central to their writing process. When asked to draft a letter of advice about writing to a younger pupil, less than 10% mentioned drafting as a strategy, and only 20% advised revision or editing; even then, not all had put their advice into practice in the execution of their letter, and evident revision was primarily superficial. The researchers concluded that regardless of teachers' expectations or pupils' claims, 'the one draft attempt...can be assumed to be still prevalent' (p.67), a finding all the more disappointing given the positive relationship observed between students' use of revision and their writing scores (Gubb et al. 1987).

Early studies also suggested, however, that students' minimal revision may have been governed by teachers' practices. Emig (1971) claimed that teachers 'set rigid parameters to students' writing behaviours' which prevented reflection and development (p.93). She concluded that revision was 'lost' in classroom models 'not only because it is too narrowly defined but because...no time is provided for any major reformulation or reconceptualisation' (p. 99). Sommers (1980) likewise argued that the students in her study were simply doing 'what they have been taught to do in a consistently narrow, predictable way' (p.383).
Applebee et al. (1986) suggested that students’ tendency to revise smaller units rather than the substance of their writing might be explained by the nature of teachers’ feedback. Matsuhashi and Gordon (1985) queried therefore whether research findings tell us more about the nature of the given task than about the tacit or hidden abilities of students: ‘what we have really learned is how students respond to the directive ‘Revise!’...this directive elicits a schooled response, a knowing that revision involves a limited range of surface structure manipulations’ (p.229-231).

As process teaching increased in popularity, one might have expected some improvement in students’ practice. Applebee and Langer (2006) note that ‘process-oriented’ writing instruction has dominated teachers’ reports at least since 1992, when over 97% of 13-year-olds participating in the NAEP survey of that year were writing in classrooms where teachers claimed to incorporate process activities. However, the observed tendency in early process instruction was to treat the activities of pre-writing, drafting and revising superficially, as a means of augmenting more traditional approaches rather than as a means of promoting critical thinking, inquiry and problem-solving (Langer & Applebee, 1987); writing processes were easily reduced to a ‘lockstep formula’ – just another series of practice exercises divorced from the particular task and purpose (Applebee, 1986, pp.102-3). Subsequent research suggests that this tendency persisted, and students’ revising habits were unchanged. In his qualitative study of one senior high school composition class, Yagelski (1995) found that high school students’ revisions were predominantly low-level (82%), much in line with earlier evidence, despite their teacher’s apparent emphasis on ‘process’ and a classroom environment which encouraged frequent revision.

More recent research, conducted since the introduction of high-stakes testing in the 1990s, paints a mixed picture of students’ experience of process-focused teaching of any kind. Hillocks’ (2002) found that the priority US teachers attached to revision varied locally in accordance with the emphasis of state-mandated writing tests, some of which lent themselves better to developmental writing processes than others. The percentage of teachers who mentioned revision as an important aspect of their teaching ranged, by state, from 46% to 84% (Hillocks, 2008). In Florida, for example (a state with a history of high-
Scherff and Piazza (2005) found that 20% of high school students claimed they ‘never or hardly ever’ wrote more than one draft of an essay during the school year; 24% said they wrote multiple drafts in class ‘once or twice a quarter’; and a further 26% that they did so on a monthly basis, hardly different from the expected practice of 25 years earlier. Studies also point to a lack of classroom opportunities for reflection on writing, suggesting that these may have been marginalised in the drive to satisfy test requirements. Both the NAEP surveys (2002; 2007) and the Florida survey recorded the lack of pre-writing and rewriting activities: about a quarter of 13-year-olds, and a third of 17-year-olds, claimed they ‘never or hardly ever’ brainstormed with other students to decide what to write about (NAEP 2007); 28% of students claimed that they ‘never or hardly ever’ practised peer revision and editing, and a further 15% that they did so ‘once or twice a year’ (Scherff & Piazza, 2005). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in their study of secondary students’ perceived writing approaches Lavelle et al. (2002) found that in-depth reflection did not typically feature: factor analysis of the questionnaire responses of 398 students identified a ‘striking omission’ in their claimed strategies, namely a ‘reflective-revision’ dimension or engagement in evaluation at deeper levels of meaning.

Analyses of the effect of redrafting on the quality of students’ writing also indicate that little may have improved in the 20+ years since the 1977 NAEP assessment, even when redrafting is conducted in more encouraging circumstances. Zhang’s (2001) study of Delaware State’s 1998 test data revealed that only 9% of the essays written by 475 students (aged between 8 and 15) ‘demonstrated meaningful improvement through drafting and revisions’ (p.14). Two-thirds of essays across all age groups showed no improvement between drafts; only 3% improved greatly. The vast majority (96% for 15-year-olds) showed minor changes only or no changes at all. Revisions to overall content or total rewrites were least common at all ages, and for 15-year-olds constituted only 1% of all changes made. Zhang also considered the correlation between the number and type of changes made and overall improvement in quality, suggesting that more revisions, and more substantive revisions, were positively associated with improvement between drafts. Although the writing examined in this study was an extended piece and the test not timed, students did not seem any more able to move beyond their initial drafts.
As in the US, teachers and researchers in the UK observed that policy reforms of the 1990s had encouraged a superficial approach to the teaching of writing (D’Arcy, 2000; Messenheimer & Packwood, 2002). School inspection reports since have highlighted the impact that assessment pressures and teachers’ focus on technical features of writing has had, and continues to have, on classroom writing. They note that excessive pace has meant that discussion about writing and collaborative work are neglected (OfSTED, 2005): students lack opportunities ‘to talk through ideas before writing and to respond to friends’ suggestions’ (p.18). All recent reviews suggest that too little time is provided for extended writing, discussion or reflection (OfSTED 2005; 2009; 2012). Students are sometimes unable to complete writing in the time available, or are asked to self- or peer-assess before they have finished ‘more than a sentence or two’ (OfSTED, 2012, p.14). In particular, revision and redrafting appear as persistent weaknesses: ‘redrafting is often little more than making a neat copy’ (OfSTED, 1998, 7.1); there is ‘too little emphasis on the teaching of editing and redrafting’ (OfSTED, 2012, p.26).

These findings are especially disappointing since students’ potential to revise at higher levels is also apparent in recent research. Myhill and Jones (2007) found that, to different degrees, students aged 13 and 15 did engage independently in multiple revision activities as they composed, and not all of these addressed matters of surface accuracy. Some alterations were made to meaning (such as adding descriptive detail or further points) although not at a significant level. However, the researchers note that students struggled to identify the causes of dissatisfaction with their writing, and lacked a ‘language with which to talk about writing processes and textual possibilities’ (Myhill & Jones, 2007, p.340), reflecting, perhaps, the lack of opportunities for discussion about writing that inspectors observe.

For whatever reason, policy reform and assumed changes in pedagogy do not appear obviously successful in promoting more effective revision. Hillocks (2006) references Applebee’s (1981) national study of writing in US secondary schools in an attempt to gauge some measure of change in teachers’ perceptions of writing instruction. He compared evidence from interviews he conducted with over 300 English teachers across five US states (Hillocks, 2002).
with the claims made by 140 English teachers in Applebee’s study. The percentage of teachers who expected their students to revise or redraft regularly was virtually unchanged (at around 60%). Hillocks concludes that whilst other aspects of writing instruction had changed significantly over the twenty-year period in question, there had been no real change in the significance teachers attached to the teaching of revision.

**Students’ concepts and beliefs**

Early studies identified students’ limited concepts of revision, and the impact these had on their revising practice. Beach (1976) noted that the efficacy of students’ revising differed in direct relation to their beliefs about purpose and strategy. As revisers, students appeared ‘locked in by the myopia in their own goals and criteria’ (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p.379), ‘blind’ to what is actually involved in revision and to what constitutes good writing (Sommers, 1980). Even college students had a narrow view of the purpose of revising, a poor awareness of the processes involved, and a preoccupation with surface features which served to ‘restrict and circumscribe’ what they were able to do. For these students, the aim of revision was to ‘clean up’ language; indeed, because they did not recognise it as an opportunity to modify and develop ideas, they often could not see any reason to revise at all (p.382). They lacked understanding of revision as recursive, apparently assuming that meaning ‘need not be discovered or acted upon, but simply communicated’ (p.382). Consequently, they attached symbolic importance to their decision-making at micro levels, and perceived that most problems in their essays could be solved by rewording. Applebee (1981) similarly observed that secondary students ‘differ widely in the extent to which a second draft means anything more than editorial tidying up’, the more typical perception being that a first draft is ‘almost finished…you might want to recopy or even type it for neatness’ (p.83).

These researchers also observe, however, that students’ concepts of school writing process reflect their teachers’ representations. It was apparent from Applebee’s study that the standard high school model of writing at this time encouraged misunderstanding as well as ineffective practice: ‘(it) not only thwarts students’ writing development, but also pointedly confuses them about
how skilled writers compose and specifically precludes their gaining any insight into the ways writing can be useful to them' (Cooper, 1981, p.xi; my italics). Emig (1971) argued that teachers’ accounts of the composing process differed markedly from the accounts of established writers and indeed from students’ own conceptualisations and practices, causing confusion and hostility. Teachers’ tendency to over-simplify the composing process reduced understanding of planning to ‘outlining’ and revision to ‘correction’. In particular, the narrow criteria employed for evaluating students’ writing limited concepts of quality to ‘peripherals’ (Emig, p.99). It is indicative that in all age groups (9, 13 and 16) students participating in the 1984 NAEP survey reported that their teachers commented on mechanics more frequently than they did on ideas and how these were expressed in writing (Applebee et al., 1986).

Similarly, when 15 year-olds in the UK were asked what their teachers valued in writing, they also identified an overriding concern with presentation and accuracy (40% of all points made) and poorer writers mentioned little else. Considerations of audience were mentioned least (2% of all points made) and only by the most able writers (Gubb et al., 1987). It was also apparent that students had difficulty articulating larger concerns: as they proceeded from superficial to more substantive considerations, fewer were able to communicate their thinking. At about the same time, the APU found that one third of 15 year-olds identified surface accuracy and neatness as the most important indicators of success; only 10% identified intrinsic satisfaction as a measure. Students’ preoccupation with the ‘indissoluble trio’ of grammar, spelling and punctuation is attributed to the way in which writing was set and responded to in schools: surface features ‘are some of the few aspects of writing for which children themselves are deemed responsible, since content and organisation are so often prescribed, and matters of style and audience largely irrelevant in the closed circuit of teacher-pupil-teacher interaction’ (White, 1987, p.29). The researchers conclude that this might in part explain the apparent discrepancy between students’ public assessment of what counted in writing and their personal values. The APU surveys further identified the correlation between students’ concepts of quality and their writing achievement: higher scores were achieved by pupils whose views about writing went beyond the prescriptive or utilitarian. For a large number, however, narrow concepts prevented progress:
‘if they could conceive of a purpose in writing beyond ‘correctness’, they might possibly be encouraged to write better than they do’ (White, 1986, p.18).

Later studies found little change in students’ assumptions that surface or structural requirements are valued by teachers above holistic features of writing. Yagelski (1995) observed that the senior high school students in his US classroom study ‘seemed to have internalized a traditional conception of “good” writing that was reinforced overtly and implicitly in a variety of ways by (their teacher)’ (p.232). Like earlier researchers, he suggests that students’ limited revising strategies grow out of narrow classroom concepts of purpose and quality, noting that Sommers’(1980) complaints about ‘teacher-based’ revision still seemed applicable ‘more than a decade after she first expressed them’ (p.232). Larger-scale studies likewise show little apparent change in students’ perceptions of teachers’ values in over 20 years: secondary students participating in the 2002 and 2007 NAEP surveys reported that their teachers attached as much, or almost as much, importance to spelling, punctuation and grammar, as they did to the quality of ideas when grading their writing. Interestingly, the 17-year-olds perceived that the structural organisation of their papers was more important than either its content or surface accuracy (NAEP 2007). In the UK, secondary students surveyed in 2009 attached greater significance to their ability to ‘check’ their work than their ability to ‘try things out’, and only marginally greater significance to their use of imagination than to neatness or technical accuracy (NLT, 2009). Recent inspection findings also suggest that secretarial and presentational aspects still preoccupy students and teachers, at the expense of holistic concerns such as content, purpose and audience (OfSTED, 2005; 2009). This is in spite of developments which White (1987) speculated might change the emphasis, such as coursework components in GCSE and the influence of National Writing Project initiatives.

Recent classroom findings indicate that secondary students still lack awareness of the nature of the composing process and the role of revision. In her study of students’ conceptualisations, Morris (2007) found that 14 year olds avoided employing recursive processes: ‘in their view revision of ideas during the act of composition not only delayed completion of the task unnecessarily, it also interrupted the flow of ideas’ (p.88). Like Sommers’ students, they assumed that
good writing was ‘an accident of fate rather than the result of conscious craft’ (p.88). They referred to writing as a ‘knack’, implying it was a skill you either possessed or did not; there was little point in drafting or revising since the outcome was preordained. They attached no significance to the process of composition, and there was little evidence that they regarded it ‘in anything but a linear way’ (p.89). Thus they saw reviewing and revising as irrelevant and unnecessary: ‘pausing to consider what had been written was counterproductive…it led to alterations and eventual dissatisfaction with the written outcome’ (p.89). Revisions to text were undesirable because they marred the appearance of writing. Furthermore, these students assumed that it was the teacher’s responsibility to evaluate their writing and identify ‘problems or errors’, not their own. Myhill and Jones (2007) found that a linear view of writing process existed amongst UK secondary students in spite of evident behaviour to the contrary. Almost two-thirds of (34) students aged 14 -16 claimed to revise only after writing, even though most were observed to make changes as they wrote, and reflected on these during post-hoc interviews. Students conceptualised revision principally ‘as a macro strategy or even a discrete stage in the writing process, which follows textual production’ (p.339). They showed little understanding of on-line revision, and did not appear to recognise changes made during writing as ‘revision’ at all. Myhill and Jones conclude that both instructional practices and curriculum policy continue to ‘foster a fossilized view of the writing process…as chronologically determined’ (p.339).

In their statistical study, Lavelle et al. (2002) identified US secondary students’ limited concepts of the purpose of revision. Their analysis of students’ claimed beliefs and strategies revealed that ‘the deep, critical, analytic component involving a sophisticated understanding of revision (is) missing among the secondary population’ (p.407). They concluded that a major difference between secondary school writers and college writers was the ‘willingness to view meaning as an emergent pattern based on constant modification’ (p.412). By implication, secondary instruction failed to foster ‘a deep conception of writing as a tool for learning’ (p.411).
Some evidence further suggests, as Emig (1971) implied, that teacher and student assumptions about revision are mismatched. Beck (2006) explored subjective and inter-subjective understandings about writing in one US secondary classroom over the period of a year, and found that students sometimes misinterpreted teachers’ expectations or brought different values to conversations about classroom writing. She observed that when revising, students may hold firm beliefs about what counts as good writing that directly contradict those of their teacher; they may employ ‘different criteria…and approach the evaluation process with different stances or purposes’ (p.417). Beck concludes that discrepancies in knowledge, purpose and criteria may explain students’ underperformance, since ‘persistently mismatched expectations’ undermine students’ progress towards expected standards (p.418). Wallace and colleagues (Wallace & Hayes, 1991; Wallace et al., 1996) found that even at college level students may fail to understand what is possible or expected of them when revising writing. They note the potential discrepancies in understanding about purpose, process and success criteria: ‘when teachers assign revision tasks, they typically hope that the students will define revision in the same way they do, that is, that their students will set the same goals, make use of the same procedures and apply the same criteria for success. However, considerable evidence suggests that many freshmen students define revision very differently from their teachers’ (p.55).

From these studies, any growth in students’ thinking about revision since the 1970s is not obvious. There is little evidence to suggest that they have a set of beliefs about writing that include the wider possibilities of revising to discover meaning or develop thinking. Bruning and Horn (2000) conclude, ‘we often do not do a good job of showing (students) writing’s potential for enhancing their ability to think and communicate’ (p.34).

**Students’ attitudes**

Early studies identified students’ resigned and indifferent attitudes to writing and revising. Emig (1971) described her participants as approaching school writing tasks without enthusiasm and completing them without a sense of fulfilment: ‘stopping (writing), like starting, is a mundane moment devoid of any emotion
but indifference’ (p.87). Neurosis about surface features was endemic: even committed students were ‘enervated by worries over peripherals’ (p.99). Emig observed that students more readily revised self-sponsored writing than school tasks, and responded to their teachers’ narrow and rigid representations of the composing process with outward compliance but inward ‘cynicism and hostility’ (p.93). In particular they resented routine ‘outlining’ before writing, and ‘correcting of themes’ afterwards (p.88). In a similar vein, Sommers (1980) concluded that college students were not unwilling to revise, as their teachers often assumed, but lacked ownership of a process which was imposed and teacher-controlled: ‘at best the students see their writing altogether passively through the eyes of teachers...the textbooks, and…the rules’ (p.383). Beach (1976) observed that indifferent attitudes to revision caused students to set quotas on the effort they were willing to expend and the scope of their writing, thus dictating what they were able to achieve.

Large-scale surveys conducted during the 80s indicated that student attitudes to writing were particularly negative amongst adolescents. In their analysis of pupil responses during the 1984 NAEP writing survey, Applebee et al. (1986) found that US students’ attitudes deteriorate steadily as they progress through school, with only 39% enjoying writing by the age of 16. This picture is replicated in the APU surveys conducted in the UK over the same period: negative attitudes were voiced more strongly by 15-year-olds than by 11-year-olds, and by more boys than girls in both age groups; indeed boys increasingly resisted writing for school purposes and particularly resented the ‘burden of extended reflective composition’ (White, 1986, p.31). In both the NAEP and the APU studies, negative attitudes were also found to be associated with poorer writing performance. Furthermore, once established, attitudes appeared to persist: patterns of response established at age 11 influenced outcomes at age 15 (White, 1987).

Some subsequent studies have explored students’ attitudes in more depth. In her observation-interview study of the attitudes and writing experience of eleventh graders, Cleary (1991) reports that none of her 40 participants felt positive about school writing: all described a growing dislike of writing as schooling progressed, and the majority had experienced serious difficulty
maintaining concentration. Most of the ‘unsuccessful’ writers had ceased to care, and many had refused to write. Their defensive attitudes had been shaped by a history of failure and negative feedback, fear of humiliation and poor self-esteem. ‘Successful’ writers, on the other hand, were caught in the trap of pleasing the teacher: they lost intrinsic motivation and wrote to satisfy the requirement. For them, writing was a chore, often marked by painful procrastination, anxiety, and sometimes anger. They resented having to second-guess what was expected of them, and their lack of freedom to exercise choice and control. Cleary is prompted to ask, ‘What goes wrong for secondary students with regard to writing?’ A decade later, Lavelle et al. (2002) also identified secondary students’ lack of intrinsic motivation. Students’ apparently instrumental concerns – to stick to a plan, follow the rules and get a good grade – restricted their drafting and revising to surface and extrinsic goals; the construction and expression of personal meaning in writing did not feature in their responses.

The long-standing problem of boys’ attitudes has featured repeatedly in UK investigations of students’ writing response. Since its inception, OfSTED has identified their negative and ‘instrumental’ attitudes to writing (see Boys and English, OfSTED, 1993, for example). Successive reports note that many secondary students, and especially boys, continue to find writing hard, do not enjoy it, and make limited progress (OfSTED, 2005; 2012). Inspectors suggest that boys suffer disproportionately from teachers’ emphasis on improving surface features: they ‘tend to feel that weaknesses in their writing relate to presentation and accuracy, even when it is not noticeably different from that of girls’ (OfSTED, 2005, p.30). Boys’ antipathy to imposed structures and topics can also create tension between their personal preferences and their teacher’s approval (Jones & Myhill, 2007). A number of school-based studies, mostly at primary level, observed that boys found inflexible and compartmentalised approaches to composition process especially oppressive: they often resented the requirement to plan in detail before writing, regarding it as a waste of time (Maynard, 2002). Many perceived drafting as a chore, particularly when the purpose was unclear and the emphasis was on transcription, and were ‘noticeably more resistant to it than girls, despite the fact that weaker girls may dislike it just as much’ (Daly, 2002, p.11). In particular, boys showed an
‘unwillingness to return to, review or revise their work’ (Barrs & Pigeon, 2002). Furthermore, by secondary age, boys’ poor attitudes were found to be ingrained and especially hard to shift. The recent NLT survey found that boys at both primary and secondary level were more likely than girls to find writing ‘boring’, to rate themselves as ‘not very good’ at it, and to emphasise their lack of technical skills (NLT, 2009).

However, it is also apparent that the factors identified as affecting boys’ attitudes apply equally to girls: issues of gender and writing ‘are most likely issues of how literacy is conceptualised in the curriculum, with its attendant assumptions about teaching and assessment’ (Daly, 2002, p.5). Indeed, Cleary (1996) found that some girls responded to the demands of school writing in ways more costly to their personal fulfilment than boys. She observed that the successful girls in her 1991 study were more likely than the successful boys to subjugate their own purposes and interests in writing to the perceived requirements of the teacher. Male writers were apt to find ways to please themselves within the constraints of school writing tasks, whereas girls were inclined to ‘forgo writing for the feelings of competence they felt in it and for the joy of making meaning’ (p.52). As a consequence, girls’ success criteria, and their decision-making as they drafted and revised their writing, were limited by what they perceived their teachers would or wouldn’t like. More recently, Morris (2007) likewise found that the girls in her study ‘placed less emphasis on catering for their own needs within their writing’ than the boys (p.89).

The NLT (2009) survey suggests that adolescent perceptions of writing in the UK are no more positive than they were in the 1980s when the APU surveys were conducted. The attitudes of both boys and girls are observed to ‘plummet’ between primary and secondary school, with 65% of students in Key Stage 3 claiming to dislike writing. 57% of all secondary students found writing ‘boring’ and 45% expressed negative feelings about their own ability, citing problems with presentation, spelling and ‘checking of work’ as significant factors. Like students in earlier studies, many reported that they enjoyed writing for family and friends more than they enjoyed school writing and much preferred writing when they could choose the topic. OfSTED’s recent analyses of the causes of disaffection also echo the findings of earlier research. Inauthentic tasks and
audiences for writing, lack of relevance to the world outside school, over-prescription and too little time for reflection are all identified (OfSTED, 2009; 2012). In particular, inspectors found that pupils were too often ‘not motivated by the writing tasks they were given, and saw no real purpose to them’; they were frequently set writing tasks they would rarely, if ever, do outside school; and in some instances, the writing tasks had no purpose other than to keep pupils quiet’ (2009, pp.25-26). Furthermore, teachers tended to ‘dictate both the form and context’ of writing, and to closely structure the required response; paradoxically, as they progressed through school ‘pupils were given fewer rather than more opportunities to work independently’ (2009, p.38).

Consequently, in the view of the students in Morris’ (2007) study, the responsibility for the text and any necessary alterations was the teacher’s: s/he has set the task and s/he will judge the final outcome.

These findings suggest that students may be no more likely than in previous decades to care enough about writing to want to revise. By all accounts, motivating students to write remains one of the chief challenges for teachers (OfSTED, 2005). Bruning and Horn (2000) assert that evidence of ‘our failing to develop positive beliefs and motivation towards writing abounds’ (p.25). The authors of the NLT (2009) survey conclude that ‘it is paramount that the school curriculum reflects and utilizes writing forms that young people enjoy and engage with in order to demonstrate that writing is more than a compulsory task’ (p.38).

**Hollow progress?**

When Applebee (1986) attributed the inadequacy of process-based teaching to a predictable under-conceptualisation in the early stages of implementation, he retained an optimistic view for the future. More recently, however, he queried whether changes in writing instruction since his studies in the early 1980s represent ‘25 years of progress, or déjà vu all over again?’ (Applebee, 2008). Scherff and Piazza (2005) characterise the lack of progress in their article title ‘The more things change, the more they stay the same.’ They conclude that ‘in spite of advances in writing research, little has changed in many high schools’ in almost 40 years. Writing instruction in the Florida schools they surveyed
appeared to mirror what Britton et al. had found in the UK in 1975, a narrow range of purposes with little opportunity for higher-level thinking, analysis, or creativity (p.290-291). They surmise that top-down policy reforms since the 1990s, and the consequent pendulum swing towards writing product, may in part explain why the substantial body of research on writing process appears to have been ignored: students were not given ‘adequate exposure to best practices in instruction as advocated in the empirical and pedagogic literature’ (p.289). These researchers suggest that in spite of the considerable gains made since the 1970s in understanding the cognitive, creative and social dimensions of revision, the debate about effective pedagogies has not moved on much at all; it may even have come full circle.

If successive school models have failed to promote effective revision or to motivate students, the implications for writing achievement are obvious. The persistence of ineffective approaches may help to explain why improvements in standards of writing have not yet materialised in line with government expectations either in the UK or the US, despite substantial investment in policy initiatives. It may be that strategies focused on linguistic competence and functional skills can only achieve so much. As the US National Commission on Writing (2003) points out, securing gains beyond the basics is the greater challenge: whilst most students can write with some accuracy, few can ‘create prose that is precise, engaging and coherent’ or demonstrate ‘extended or complex thought’ in writing (pp.16-17). Applebee and Langer (2006) observe, from their analysis of NAEP achievement data, how deeply ingrained this pattern is. Langer (2008) concludes, like Applebee (2008), that secondary classrooms as they are typically conceived still leave little room for uses of writing as critical and creative thought.

The insufficiency of recent research evidence means we cannot know the extent to which such observations might apply in UK classrooms. What is clear, however, is that important considerations and sources of data have been neglected in the discussion about appropriate pedagogies.
What we need to know about learning

Almost entirely absent from the existing body of evidence on revision are the perceptions of learners themselves, their interpretations of the problems they face when revising for school purposes or their understanding of the possibilities revision offers. If effective revision is determined at a fundamental level by writers’ concepts of purpose and evaluation criteria, and by their meta-cognitive and meta-strategic awareness, it seems particularly important to investigate students’ perspectives. If we are to understand ‘how the concept of writing develops and how education contributes, mostly implicitly, to the construction of that concept’ we need to start with writers. Furthermore, since students’ representations are, at least in part, shaped by their teaching, such evidence is needed to inform pedagogy: to ignore how students take up and interpret teachers’ messages is to ignore an essential step in the activity of teaching (Beck, 2006). In the light of recent policy emphasis on listening to students’ views about teaching and learning, the failure to address the National Curriculum from the perspective of learners, as identified in the 2009 White Paper, would seem striking. Because children’s perceptions of their own learning may not reflect the assumptions of educators or researchers, their evidence may be especially important: neglected voices are often counter-hegemonic and therefore have the power to provide new theories (Lincoln, 1995).

Concepts, beliefs and feelings

As Bruning and Horn (2000) note in their review of research on motivation and writing, few studies at any time have addressed students’ beliefs about writing, let alone about revision. Those that exist have tended to focus on students’ perceptions of their own writing competence or anxiety about writing (self-efficacy and writing apprehension), rather than their understandings about writing itself, and what is expected of them or valued: ‘less is known about the patterns of beliefs that students hold about writing’ or how such beliefs ‘relate to willingness to revise and to choices about the kinds of revisions to make…two critical factors in shaping writers’ development’ (p.29). Beliefs are seen as the source of predispositions, and determine how tasks are represented and carried out (Dweck, 1986). The nature of beliefs about the purpose of writing have been
found to predict not only writing quality but also the development of understanding through writing: White and Bruning (2005) distinguish between ‘transmissional’ or ‘transactional’ beliefs, for example, the latter being broadly compatible with knowledge-transforming. The concepts and beliefs of secondary writers, however, have received little attention. Whilst some research suggests that teacher and student beliefs about writing are often mismatched, the nature of these discrepancies is rarely explored, even though they may explain students’ underperformance (Beck, 2006). If the teaching of writing includes helping students to construct functional beliefs about writing, we need to know more about ‘their implicit beliefs (e.g. on the various functions of writing, its perceived utility, the features of a good text, etc.) as well as their disposition, or motivation, to writing’ (Boscolo, 2008, p.306).

Young writers’ feelings about writing have been considered more frequently, although mostly in general terms. The data on negative attitudes, particularly amongst secondary students, is relatively extensive and findings have been consistent over time, in spite of attempts to improve motivation. A number of studies have also considered how motivation to write can be enhanced. However, few differentiate between deep and surface levels of engagement, or between writing tasks that are perceived by students to be more or less interesting, or to have more or less personal meaning (Boscolo, 1995). Bruning and Horn (2000) conclude that researchers need to inquire of students themselves to establish ‘those purposes of writing they consider to be most meaningful and motivating’; whether ‘their conceptions (are) consonant with ours’ and which ‘of all the features of context and purpose…contribute systematically to student perceptions that writing is interesting and meaningful’ (p.31). It is surprising, for example, that in spite of the relative underperformance of boys and their perceived antipathy to writing, evidence concerning the perceptions of boys themselves remains sparse (Daly, 2002).

In addition, researchers need to observe students writing in the classroom, since task and classroom attributes contribute to motivation as much as individual beliefs and intentions. There is insufficient evidence on how teaching approach on the one hand, and students’ beliefs and experiences on the other, interact to produce motivation or demotivation to write (Boscolo, 2009). Bruning
and Horn (2000) suggest that closer examination is needed of the motivational fluctuations that occur during the writing process as students set goals and make decisions about revision, in order to better understand how ‘motivation factor(s) into students’ beginning conceptions of writing tasks and their later reconceptualisations’ (p.33). If effective revision is a function of attitude, it is important to explore the points at which students gain or lose interest, persist or give up, and their reasons for doing so.

Arguably, an understanding of students’ beliefs and feelings is a necessary prerequisite to adequate interpretation of observed behaviours (Scherff & Piazza, 2005). Their role in writing performance is well established. Indeed, some studies suggest that motivation and attitude to writing may predict writing performance (Pajares, 2003; Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007). However, whilst theoretical models of writing acknowledge the activating role of ‘motivation/affects’ (see Hayes, 1996), such aspects are not well developed in models of the revision process (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001) and remain under-researched. In the unique context of school writing, we need to know on what grounds students make their assessment of cost-benefit when contemplating revision, and what factors they perceive enhance or inhibit their willingness to invest in the process.

**Strategies and behaviours**

Very little real-time data has been collected on school students’ writing behaviours, and observational studies are rarely conducted in the school context. Much of the cognitive research on revising process, for example, has either been conducted outside the classroom, or has not involved the normal class teacher or standard school tasks. We therefore know little about the strategies that students’ employ in response to teacher expectations and school conditions for writing. Sperling and DiPardo (2008) note that if research is to help shape students’ development as writers in schools, it must first ‘explore the nuances of classroom complexities to fully understand what it means to read and write in school contexts’ (p.72). In their discussion of how to move beyond the findings of intervention research, Coker and Lewis (2008) argue that much more qualitative research is needed which examines adolescent writing in real
classrooms, and explores how cognitive, social and motivational forces interact (p.245).

We also know little about individual differences in writing behaviours. Frequently assumptions about revising strategies are made on the basis of self-reports or from textual evidence alone. These data sources can be particularly misleading, as outlined in the methodology section of this thesis. Myhill and Jones (2007) found that student claims about strategy and their observed behaviours did not necessarily align. Furthermore, composing patterns are not likely to be stable or generalisable across different tasks or contexts; they need to be viewed in situ. Without observational data, we cannot understand how students' concepts of purpose, or their understandings about writing process, are enacted. Nor can we explore the relationship between strategy and writing achievement in the school context.

Very few studies consider students' revising behaviours over the full course of text development, or the range of strategies students may deploy. Most analyses focus on post-textual changes only, or specifically the alterations made between drafts. This is potentially unrepresentative, since early studies suggest young writers make major changes in their minds before putting pen to paper, and more competent writers sometimes make more changes as they write than they do between drafts (Fitzgerald, 1987). Revisions to text accounted for only a fraction of the cognitive activities of 15 year-olds writing under think-aloud conditions (van den Bergh & Rijlaarsdam, 2001, cited in Rijlaarsdam et al., 2004). However, we know very little about students' 'pre-textual' revision. As Hayes (2004) suggests, the omission of pre-textual revision in theoretical models is an important one since revisions of writers' plans and goals 'are often critical for improving the quality of the text' (p.11). For school students, who are frequently expected to generate text under timed conditions, revising 'at the point of utterance' may be an especially significant strategy: 'when a writer begins a task as soon as it is set, the conception and incubation processes are running concurrently with production. Writers then define and redefine the task, and plan ahead, and sort out their ideas, while they are writing' (Britton et al., 1975, p.26). Any holistic view of students' revision
therefore needs to take account of the rethinking or reshaping students do in their heads.

**Substantive revision**

In particular, more evidence is required concerning young writers’ understanding and experience of substantive revision. As Chanquoy (2009) notes, revision research generally has ‘tended to focus on error detection and correction, to improve the surface of the text, more than on structural or meaning-related revisions’ (p.93). Few studies with any age group have addressed revisions associated with the discovery of new ideas or changes of perception, even though these may mark occasions when the writer ‘learns something through the act of writing,’ and may be ‘a very important part of the revision process of skilled revisers (Hayes, 2004, pp.13, 20). There is also uncertainty about the extent to which children or adolescent writers are capable of the higher level revisions associated with perspective-taking and knowledge-transformation.

Equally, little is known about the conditions which prompt radical revisions, such as those which reconstruct all or large parts of a text or which represent a change of purpose or direction: ‘what provokes larger-scale revisions has not been studied in any detail but…may involve receiving new information…or feedback from an audience…from recalling something forgotten, from recognizing some anomaly or discrepancy in the text, from the invention of a new way of fulfilling the purpose, and so on’ (Hillocks, 1995, p.94). Rijlaarsdam et al. (2004) note that greater research attention to the role of revision as a tool for learning, and the classroom conditions which support revising-to-learn, may be highly significant in identifying powerful instructional strategies. In their meta-analysis of writing-to-learn interventions, Bangert-Drowns, Hurley and Wilkinson (2004) conclude that in the right circumstances, school students can make advances in thinking and understanding through the process of writing, particularly when supported by metacognitive prompts to evaluate their current knowledge and to reflect on learning processes. However, a range of contextual factors are seen as highly significant, including how writing is conceptualised and valued, the authenticity of the writing tasks, and the interest they hold for the writers themselves. The authors suggest that qualitative research may
enhance our understanding of these aspects by exploring ‘the meanings that teachers and students bring to writing, how those meanings shift in the context of writing to learn, and how writing to learn changes students’ relations with each other, with their teachers, and with the content they study’ (p.52).

**Adolescent capabilities**

There have been comparatively fewer studies of the writing processes of secondary students than of primary and post-secondary age groups, and very few post-National Curriculum studies of adolescent revising. From a developmental perspective, adolescent writers occupy an interesting position between immature and mature writing competence, and are observed to show great variability in the scope of their revising. However, intermediate stages of writing development are not clearly specified (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001) and our understanding of the limitations and possibilities of adolescent revising is imprecise. Andrews and Smith (2011) point out that adolescent writing development is particularly problematic, with apparently little improvement in written products through the teen years, but also little clarity about markers of growth: indeed, curricular objectives for this age group appear to consign them to ‘a nondescript stage of undetermined growth in their writing’ (p.72).

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) suggested that knowledge-transforming strategies, particularly in relation to complex text types such as argument, are not really efficient before the age of about 16; at the same time, they emphasise that expertise is a function of learning experience as well as of maturation. If writers progress through intermediate stages of increasing complexification as they move from knowledge-telling to knowledge-transforming, adolescent writers may be expected to possess at least the potential to engage in sophisticated revision. It is also more likely that the development of expertise in teenagers is subject to the effects of teaching and learning than might be the case with younger writers whose cognitive systems are maturing (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001). Whilst many teachers might therefore challenge Kellogg’s (2008) assertion that adolescents are unlikely to achieve advanced levels of knowledge-crafting, there is not yet sufficient data to support or refute this suggestion.
In summary

We currently know very little about students’ concepts of purpose or quality when they revise, even though these may determine achievement and serve as important indicators of the way in which teachers’ representations are received. Equally, we have little evidence of students’ revising behaviours or their understanding of potential strategies, even though this determines the kinds of outcomes that are possible. Finally, we have inadequate knowledge of students’ attitudes towards revising even though motivational and affective factors may predict achievement. Whilst it is clear that beliefs, feelings and behaviours influence written outcomes, we have a poor view of how these may interact for individual student writers. Thus our ability to explain why young writers make the choices they do when revising school writing, or how their perceptions shape their achievement, remains limited.

Conclusion

This literature review has considered the multiple perspectives that exist in the field of writing research and the problem this poses for teachers and policymakers. It has identified the sizeable gap that exists between definitions of effective revision and the apparent concepts and practices of school students, as far as these can be ascertained. In view of the paucity of available evidence on the perspectives and revising processes of adolescent writers, it suggests that research is needed to explore what students understand about revising school writing, how their understanding is enacted, and what this may tell us about teaching and learning. The current study sets out to address this gap.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research questions

A review of the literature shows how little is known about secondary school students’ concepts of revision and how these may influence their practice. It also indicates that writers’ understandings of purpose, process and success criteria are key differentiators which separate the practices of skilled and unskilled revisers. In seeking to explore adolescent writers’ understandings about revision, this study therefore considers the following three questions.

1. How do students define the purpose of revision and what goals do they prioritise when revising school writing?

2. How do students define the process of revision and what strategies do they employ when composing in the classroom?

3. How do students define the success criteria for revision and what concerns do they attend to when revising school writing?

The emphasis of the study is on individual students’ representations, both stated and enacted, in the context of classroom writing. The underlying assumption, common to most qualitative research, is that knowledge of any kind is not simply ‘discovered’ or transmitted from teacher to learner, but is actively constructed by individuals in different ways and from unique standpoints, so that the understandings reached by students in the same educational context will necessarily be idiosyncratic, even though they may well have common features.

Philosophical assumptions

From a constructionist perspective, understanding about any phenomenon is constructed both subjectively and socially: the way we see things is a product of both individual and cultural perspective, of ‘cognition in context’. Whilst individuals think differently, our subjective response is shaped by inherited and learned representations and cannot therefore be detached from the socio-
cultural context within which it occurs. Thus, even when describing our own understanding, we are also reporting ‘how something is seen and reacted to, and thereby meaningfully constructed, within a given community’ (Crotty, 1998, p.64). In the school context, therefore, learners are engaged in constructing and reconstructing meaning for themselves through their own experience and their interaction with others, notably teachers. Their understanding of what it means to revise for school purposes will therefore be to some extent unique and to some extent shared.

This perspective, and the interpretive paradigm within which the present study was conducted, have implications both for the way in which the research is undertaken and how the data is viewed. A constructionist view of knowledge inevitably implies a degree of relativism. Knowledge is regarded not as a stable entity but as constantly in the process of being redefined through social exchange. ‘Sense-making’ is by definition a dynamic and on-going enterprise: students’ understandings are always partial, continually remade, and will grow and change as learning progresses. Furthermore, interpretations may shift from situation to situation. Individual students may have different perceptions, or exhibit different writing behaviours, in response to different teachers, tasks, topics, intended audiences, classroom conditions, time of day, and any number of other contextual variables. Therefore, what may be the case for one individual at one time cannot automatically be assumed to apply on other occasions or in other circumstances, nor extrapolated to other cases or populations. That is not to say, however, that there is nothing ‘real’ to study. Observation and common sense show us that different people have different patterns of behaviour, attitudes, and ways of thinking about things that are discernible, often consistent, and sometimes deeply rooted. Equally, a shared social reality means that participants in a particular context will have some understandings and practices in common which can be described.

A constructionist view of knowledge, therefore, does not preclude the researcher from delivering generalisations altogether, although the principal emphasis is on providing readers with good raw material for their own generalising (Stake, 1995). Nor do assumptions about relativity and contextuality mean that all personal constructions are seen to be of equal merit.
Whilst there are diverse ways of making sense of the same phenomenon, and consequently multiple possibilities, the value of individual interpretations varies relative to their credibility and utility (Stake, 1995). Some understandings about writing process are clearly more useful or rewarding than others. As Stake suggests, there are ways, both philosophical and practical, of agreeing which explanations are best.

Finally, the principle of relativity presupposes the unique contribution made by each researcher to their study. In seeking to understand participants’ interpretations, the researcher is also engaged in an interpretive act: how I make sense of what I find will inevitably be shaped by my own experience and values, particularly my experience as a writer, as a parent of young writers, and as a secondary English teacher. I bring my convictions about the power of writing and revising process to the study. My own role in the research process contributes to the construction of meaning with participants and forms an integral part of the data. This means that research findings must be held tentatively – other interpretations and outcomes are possible. It does not mean, however, that others might not draw similar conclusions in the same situation, or that findings necessarily have no wider relevance.

**Exploring the social and subjective dimensions of understanding**

For research purposes, the premise that understanding is both individually and communally constructed is by no means straight-forward, however. The extent to which meaning is determined socially or subjectively remains contentious. Indeed, concepts of ‘understanding’ and ‘sense-making’ are not generally well-defined or agreed (Olson, 2003). Theorists differ in particular in their assumptions about the hold that culture and social context have on the way we think. On the one hand cognitive or constructivist theories have tended to foreground the role of the individual mind and internal processing in the construction of meaning: the way we see things is a product of prior experience, personal beliefs, interests and intentions, and individual cognitive resources, albeit shaped within a social context. From this perspective, sense-making is a self-directed process and ‘understanding’ a private and idiosyncratic representation. Socio-cultural or social-constructivist theories, on the other
hand, emphasise the collective generation of meaning and the role of inter-subjectivity: the way we see things (and feel about them) is a product of our cultural and social environment, so that context is not just a setting but is active in the mind, and cognition in a sense distributed. From this perspective, ‘understanding’ is a social construct specific to an interpretive community; it has a shared or normative dimension. Any consideration of students’ perceptions of the writing process must therefore account for ‘the extent to which writers act as individual agents, executing their own goals and visions for what and how to communicate in written language, and the extent to which their literate practices are shaped and situated within broader social and cultural contexts’ (Sperling and Freedman, 2001, p.374).

In the school context, literacy practices inevitably reflect not just embedded socio-cultural beliefs and values, but also explicit expectations. Teachers take responsibility for ‘making manifest the norms and standards against which student understanding is to be assessed’ (Olson, 2003, p.238). At one level, then, it is teachers’ representations of purpose and process that will inform students thinking about writing, and their writing behaviours in the classroom. Students’ understanding of the revision task, and of what counts as success, will reflect the messages and instructions they receive: learning to revise for school purposes is largely a question of mastering how one is ‘supposed’ to go about it and what is valued as an end result. By extension, ‘students’ thinking and their written texts move inexorably toward reflecting the voices valued in that context’ (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p.375). In this sense, understandings about the nature and purposes of revising may indeed serve ‘as a direct reflection of the effects of instruction’ (Beach, 1976, p.164). Students’ interpretations have important things to tell us about teaching, and about the impact school messages may have on students’ writing.

Of course, ‘understanding’ is more than the assimilation of inputs from others: students bring their own experience, beliefs and values to learning which may or may not align with teacher expectations. Account must be taken of students’ personal representations and of their autonomy as original thinkers and writers. Individuals may index different meanings from the same classroom representations, and interpret the messages they receive about writing
differently. Furthermore, teachers’ representations vary, from individual to individual or from discipline to discipline, and are themselves subject to change. Over the course of their schooling, students receive multiple and sometimes conflicting messages which they must make sense of for themselves, and find ways to implement in practice.

It is the learner, therefore, who must ‘make up his or her own representation, whether on the basis of telling or of exploration’ and this process of understanding or ‘grasping meaning’ is as dependent on internal criteria, largely unavailable to the teacher, as it is on external criteria (Olson, 2003, pp.238-239). Just as individual teachers bring their own epistemologies and private values to bear in their teaching of writing, so students bring subjectively-constructed beliefs, personal intentionality and emotional dimensions to their understanding of school writing. The goals students set themselves, as they formulate and reformulate their texts, are therefore individual: each has a unique rationale for investing in a piece of writing, one dependent on their interest in or knowledge of the topic, their self-concept as a writer, their belief in the value of the task, their motivation to gain new understanding for themselves, and so on. The meanings students attach to the choices they make when writing are also personal: revisions are ‘nested within persons: the meaning of a certain revisions [sic] is different for different writers’ (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2004, p. 207). Similarly, writers may have preferred strategies for composing and revising which do not conform to school models. In this sense writing is as much an assertion of personal identity as it is participation in socio-cultural practice. Students’ interpretations of revision, therefore, also have important things to tell us about subjective factors and the impact these may have on learning about writing.

Since understanding cannot be defined in terms of shared meanings alone, nor as purely psychological constructions, a more coherent conceptualisation is needed which recognises the dialogic interaction of social and subjective forces in learning. As Nystrand, Greene and Wiemelt (1993) observe, ‘what might be regarded as “the trap of oppositional thinking” is also the very quality of dialectic that moves us toward enriched understandings and interpretive resolutions’ (p.273). In order to understand how writers negotiate the interface of private
thought and public expression, some researchers argue that ‘convenient (structuralist) fictions like ‘the cognitive’ and ‘the social’ need to be dissolved’ and their mutually constitutive nature acknowledged (Nystrand et al., 1993, p.299). Just as the act of writing involves attending to the dual concerns of self and audience, so sense-making can be understood as the process whereby personal understandings are brought to bear upon ‘authorised’ readings or alternative viewpoints, in the continuous construction and reconstruction of one’s rationale.

If knowledge formation rests on this dialectical process, it will be important to ascertain the extent to which school students recognise and are able to negotiate the inherent tensions between what Olson (2003) calls ‘private, felt understandings’ and the ‘institutional’ knowledge and criteria by which performance is judged. As participants in the social system of school, young writers must continuously straddle their own interests and the kinds of justifications they believe are required by the ‘sense-making practices of a particular group’ (Brandt, 1992, cited in Nystrand et al., 1993, p.299). They must find ways to balance their own perceptions and goals with the demands of school writing, and the requirement to write for readers who are, at the same time, their instructors and examiners.

Of interest in this study, therefore, is how students might navigate this potentially tricky path when reviewing and revising school writing: how they make sense of the messages they receive and their own experience; what they perceive teachers expect of them and what they ask of themselves; and how they set about implementing these understandings in practice. In order to explore the ground between taught and personal representations, research methods were required that could capture both the psychological and contextual factors which shape school writing, and the way in which these variables might interact to determine the effectiveness of revising. The methodology employed would therefore need to engage closely with individual writers’ thinking and behaviours in the classroom context.
Available methods: strengths and limitations

The methods available to investigate writing process in any context are limited. Such study is inherently difficult: the cognitive-psychological aspects are not accessible in the way that written products are; it’s difficult to account for the impact of contextual variables; and it’s impossible to isolate particular processes such as revision from writing as a whole. The scarcity of tools and techniques available to adequately examine writing processes may, in part, explain the relative lack of empirical research (Levy & Olive, 2002).

The problem for researchers is twofold. On the one hand, the ‘hidden’ psychological processes involved cannot easily be brought into the open for research purposes. Indeed much of the revision process may be barely conscious: making selections and rejecting alternatives frequently occurs at the intermediate plane between thought and language – ‘a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing fluttering between word and thought’ (Vygotsky, 1962, as cited in Britton et al., 1975, p.39). Consequently ‘mental’ or pre-textual revisions cannot be measured, and questions about the recursive nature of different processes are difficult to test: ‘the methodological means do not seem sufficiently powerful to make the cognitive processes ‘visible” (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001, p.116).

As a sub-process embedded in planning, translating and reviewing, revision is particularly difficult to disentangle: where does initial thinking end and rethinking begin? Revisions do not occur as discrete or easily discernible events, but are triggered by ‘strings of cognitive activities’ which vary in type and length and can, in principle, occur in any combination (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2004). From a cognitive perspective, therefore, ‘it has been as difficult for researchers to devise methods to study writing processes in isolation as it has been for them to constrain and to assign quantitative values to writers’ responses’ (Levy & Olive, 2002, p.2).

On the other hand, ‘visible’ behavioural or textual data provide little information without evidence of the writer’s thinking – a pause during writing may represent substantive rethinking or simply boredom; an alteration to wording may signify meaningful change or simply a safer spelling choice. Since writers can spend up to 70% of their writing time pausing (Matsuhashi, 1987), and much revision may be conducted pre-textually (Witte, 1985), visible traces offer limited insight into writing process.
Furthermore, writers’ practices are not consistent, but subject to a range of contextual, motivational and task-related factors. Even if one can find regularities in psychological phenomena under controlled laboratory conditions, ‘as soon as we move to other, more natural settings these findings seem to disappear in the sea of “real life”’ (Wertsch, 1991, cited in Swanson-Owens & Newell, 1994, p.141). Consequently, investigations of writing process are difficult to replicate, and their findings impossible to generalise.

Precise examination of revision is therefore impossible. More tentative approaches are indicated which make some sense of the variables that influence writers’ responses, and elicit as best they can the elusive thought processes involved. Given ‘the chimerical nature of inquiry’, researchers often have little precedent to follow and the work is ‘very messy indeed’ (Smagorinsky, 1994, p.x). As Britton et al. (1975) observe, the methods available to examine writing process can only provide a little insight, some of the time: ‘we can learn a little from watching and listening to the writer work; we can study what people say about what they do; and sometimes we can infer something about the process from the product itself, especially if we know a good deal about the circumstances under which the writing has been done’ (p.39).

**Text analysis**

For practical reasons, large-scale studies of revision have tended to rely on text analysis. Text-based methods have several obvious advantages. Data can be collected easily and from representative samples. The evidence is naturally-occurring – researchers need not interfere with the writing process itself. Texts are amenable to repeated review. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of text revisions are possible. As ‘visible’ evidence, revisions made in and between drafts are easy to identify. They can be classified by type; frequencies can be calculated; and their impact on the text as a whole can be determined. Where writing is developed over several drafts, it is possible to follow the evolution of content and language from the writer’s initial notes through to the finished product, and to gauge shifting patterns of text revision at different stages along the way. The composing patterns of different writers across different tasks can
also be identified. In recent years, key-logging systems have opened up new possibilities for sophisticated analysis of individual writers’ text revisions.

However, analysis of text revisions cannot explain what goes on in the writer’s mind or the goals and motivation that the writer brings to the task. By divorcing the changes made to a text from knowledge of the writer’s intentions, it is impossible to ascertain what concerns are being addressed by revision or how successfully; the author’s evaluative criteria and intended meaning remain invisible. Text analysis alone offers no understanding of social or contextual factors, the conditions under which the writing was produced, the planning undertaken, or the kind of support provided. Nor can textual data shed light on individual writers’ strategies or behaviours, and the bearing these may have on written outcomes.

More significantly, text-based methods cannot account for revising that occurs pre-textually or in the writer’s mind only. Pre-textual revision may be especially significant in relation to the higher-level processes of re-conceptualisation, since writers are ‘fully capable of completing writing tasks…with ‘most substantive “discovery” occurring well before transcription’ (Witte, 1985, p.270). Indeed, it can be argued that minimal revision of text denotes greater pre-textual competence (Witte, 1985; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2004). A narrow focus on transformations to texts as evidence of students’ revising activity may therefore be deceptive; as a basis for judging effectiveness or revising skill, it ignores a part of the process in which significant competencies may be evident.

Rijlaarsdam et al. (2004) report that only 6.6% of the cognitive activities of 15-year-olds writing ‘aloud’ resulted in transformations to their texts, suggesting that visible traces of revision constitute the tip of the iceberg in relation to the reviewing and rethinking process as a whole. They query, therefore, the insight that studies of textual changes in isolation can provide: ‘what do transformations tell us other than that transformations were made? From transformations alone it is difficult to infer something about the other components of the revision process, let alone the writing process at large’ (p.194).

As Witte (1985) cautions, ‘research that limits itself to examining changes in written texts or drafts espouses a reductionist view of revising (and) can,
therefore, only describe either irrelevant or incomplete patterns’ (p.266). By limiting the phenomenon of revision to ‘retranscription’, text-based methods offer a potentially misleading view of the revising process which is ‘neither reliable nor valid’ and from which it is ‘well-nigh impossible to draw confidently many conclusions’ (Witte, 1985, pp.278, 261). To make sense of the revision process, writer-based methodologies are needed: ‘writers not revisions should be the unit of analysis...revisions are nested within persons’ (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2004, p.207).

**Observations**

Observational methods allow researchers to capture writers’ strategies and behaviours in real time, and can account for writing context. Since writing behaviours show large variances across tasks and situations, contextualised studies allow researchers to examine the ‘situated’ nature of writing response – what happens in different settings and circumstances, and how writers react to different demands. For school writing, where task and writing conditions are frequently imposed, research designs which take account of these factors are particularly important. Observations can also capture changing patterns of behaviour as writing unfolds. Differences in a writer’s engagement or strategy ‘within task’ can be traced, and the impact these changes have on textual development. Repeat observations can capture differences in revising over successive drafts. Writers’ patterns of pausing, reading, writing and rewriting can be analysed, and different writer profiles identified. Some behavioural data can also be collected without direct observation. ‘Real-time’ computer-based techniques such as ‘S’ notation and ‘Trace-It’ can provide sophisticated representations of revisions made during writing, including information about the order in which they occur, the actions which precede or follow them, the way in which they are grouped in episodes, and their structural properties (Kollberg & Severinson Eklundh, 2001).

However, observations can only reveal writers’ actions, not why they do what they do. As Pring (2000) and others note, what we do cannot be reduced to observable behaviours: ‘behaviours (are) infused with intentions...we need to know how (the participants) understood or interpreted the situation’ if behaviours are to be intelligible (p.98). Observations of writing tell us little more
than text analysis about the writer’s thinking; what is happening during pauses, ‘pre-textual’ decision-making and the reasoning behind textual choices, remains unknown. It is also evident that similar patterns of behaviour can be prompted by different intentions, difficulties and motivations: the tendency to adopt a particular writing pattern by no means tells the whole story (Jones, 2009). Furthermore, observations do not come independent of the concepts and theories, prejudices and preferences, of the observer (Pring, 2000). Without explanation from the writer, data from observations can only provide clues to students’ revising processes, and raise questions for further inquiry; explanation from the writer is needed to make sense of intended meanings. Moreover, observations by whatever method are intrusive. The researcher’s presence, or the use of recording equipment, may cause change to writers’ normal processes, and threaten ecological validity.

**Self-report methods**

Self-report methods provide some access to writers’ concepts of revision and the ‘hidden’ psychological processes involved in writing. A number of verbal and written reporting methods have therefore been used to elicit data about writers’ attitudes, strategies and thought processes.

*i) Questionnaires*

Survey questionnaires or attitude scales offer a means of collecting views about writing from a wider sample than can be reached by personal interview, and thus permit some generalisation. Data can be subjected to a range of statistical procedures, enabling quantitative measures of populations as well as exploratory analysis of relationships among variables. They can provide an overview of writers’ perceived strategies, beliefs and feelings, and allow the identification of trends and tendencies amongst and between groups. Questionnaires have a number of obvious practical advantages: validated instruments can be used; they are quick and easy to administer; they are replicable in other contexts; findings are accessible and easily compared. Questionnaire responses can also be given anonymously, and may therefore elicit more open responses than those acquired face-to-face. This may be an important consideration for research in authoritarian contexts such as schools.
However, questionnaires are blunt instruments for exploring the nature of understanding, and may provide a distorted picture of how respondents really think or feel about writing. Generic questions are not able to take account of differentiating factors such as genre, audience, tasks and conditions. Nor can they account for thinking and acting in context: students’ reports of how they ‘typically’ write or feel about writing may bear little resemblance to their actual response when faced with a particular task, just as their response in one situation cannot be assumed to reflect their writing process ‘writ large’. By reducing perceptions and feelings to abstractions, one may capture nothing of real relevance. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that one person’s reason for a particular response is comparable with another’s, or that the two can be added together as if they were the same thing. As Pring (2000) notes, surveys are potentially ‘even more insidious where children’s understandings, knowledge and attitudes are given numerical scores (and) compared with others’ scores…under the urge to quantify, we reduce to an arithmetical unit the complexity of children’s struggle ‘to make sense’ or to understand’ (pp.54-55). Other forms of data are needed to investigate the relationship between students’ generalised claims and their responses in context, and to understand their reasoning. Questionnaires are no substitute for talking to students and observing what happens in classrooms. However, whilst survey responses are necessarily perfunctory and limited in scope, they can provide a useful starting point for further investigation by qualitative methods.

ii) Concurrent protocols

Think-aloud protocols offer potentially more comprehensive data about writers’ thinking in context. By examining writers’ verbalised thought processes as they plan, write and revise, it is possible to trace something of the complexity of the process as a whole. Concurrent data can reveal the recursive nature of evaluation and decision-making as it unfolds and before it is forgotten. In this sense, verbal protocols may provide a powerful means of externalising hidden processes during writing. Smagorinsky (1994) argues that in spite of the problems of interpretation and bias, think-aloud protocols offer ‘a unique glimpse into the workings of the human mind, and…a distinct persuasiveness due to the story-telling character of the data’ (p.xiii).
Nevertheless, Hayes and Flower (1980) concede that such protocols are typically incomplete or ambiguous, even when used by accomplished and practised writers: ‘many processes occur during the performance of a task that the subject can’t or doesn’t report…analysing a protocol is like following the tracks of a porpoise which occasionally reveals itself by breaking the surface of the sea. Its brief surfacings are like the glimpses that the protocol affords us of the underlying mental processes’ (p.9). The validity of analyses which, by necessity, infer meaning from partial evidence is therefore questioned. Whereas concurrent verbalisations may effectively report the choices writers make and the strategies they deploy as they compose, they typically capture less of the reasoning behind their decisions (Greene & Higgins, 1994). Nor can they describe the thinking and rethinking that occurs before writing has commenced. Furthermore, concurrent protocols explain only writers’ underlying cognitive processes; they tend to ignore the broader social and contextual factors which influence the process, and therefore lack ecological validity.

With children, thinking aloud may be especially fragmentary: ‘it may be that children do not report all the thought they engage in because they do not see it as relevant, perhaps because goal setting is carried out at a less conscious level in children. Think aloud protocols may not therefore describe children’s competence’ (Wray & Medwell, 2006, p.33). From her experience with older school students, Emig (1971) suggests that composing aloud captures their planning and writing but not their reformulating. More significantly, the validity of the ‘think-aloud’ procedure as a research tool is challenged on the grounds that its demands may interfere with or distort the writer’s natural process. This is especially likely in younger or less competent writers. For school students, then, even at upper secondary level, managing the task of writing and reporting simultaneously is an ‘understandably difficult, artificial, and at times distracting procedure’ (Emig, 1971, p.5). Think-aloud methods are rarely practicable in the school context: ‘it is far too laborious a procedure to be used routinely in the classroom’ (Hayes & Flower, 1980, p.27).

iii) Retrospective reports

Some researchers have chosen to collect retrospective data as a less intrusive means of examining the thinking behind writers’ decisions during writing, and
the situational influences on their reasoning. Retrospective accounts of the writing process may be oral or written, and may or may not rely on the presence of the researcher. Arguably, writers are better able to identify patterns or themes in hindsight than while immersed in the dynamics of the moment (DiPardo, 1994). Retrospective methods have the advantage of allowing writers to explain and reflect on their decisions free from the demands of the task, and therefore a unique capacity to probe beyond the information offered by text or concurrent protocol analysis (DiPardo, 1994). Such an approach may be more appropriate for research with young writers for whom the cognitive demands of text production can be all-consuming.

Some studies have used stimulated-recall methods on the grounds that these enable students to reconstruct their thinking more effectively than ordinary post-hoc interviews. Such methods may involve observing or video-recording students as they write, and reviewing the process with them as soon after the event as possible. By presenting cues or reminders of critical incidents which occurred during writing, students are prompted to recall the detail of their thinking more vividly than they might otherwise. Some studies have addressed the problem of recall by asking students to give intermittent rather than after-the-fact retrospective accounts (‘intervention protocols’), thereby shortening the gap between performance and report (see Swanson-Owens & Newell, 1994).

The validity of retrospective reports is questioned, however, because they rely on memory, and are subject to rationalisation after the event. Writers’ reconstructions of their thinking are necessarily selective and incomplete, and liable to generalisation. The thought processes which precede decision-making are inevitably difficult to trace and easy to forget, especially at the complex level of re-conceptualisation – indeed they may be half-conscious. In attempting to fill in gaps or provide a coherent account, writers may distort their experience, or give plausible but inaccurate explanations based on what they perceive writers usually do or should do (Greene & Higgins, 1994). Interviews cannot provide direct access to thinking and experience, but offer the possibility of a jointly constructed narrative.
In summary, writers’ self-reports are considered problematic as evidence even by those who use them. Making inferences on the basis of what writers say about what they think is described as ‘unscientific’ ‘impressionistic’ ‘messy’ ‘unpredictable’ ‘incomplete’ and ‘unreliable’ (Smagorinsky, 1994, pp. ix-x). At best, writers’ accounts permit only tentative inferences to be drawn, and at worst they may represent little more than ‘performances’ rather than authentic reports of experience (Tomlinson, 1984, as cited in Greene & Higgins, 1994). For this reason, other sources of data may be needed to supplement findings from self-reports.

**Mixed methods**

Given the limitations of single methods, some researchers have combined different methods of collecting and analysing data in order to gain a more comprehensive view. Data acquired by converging methods, such as observations, interviews and text analysis, is seen as more likely to capture the multiple dimensions of writing process – social, cognitive, behavioural and linguistic. Similarly, the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis may be seen as complementary, each generating different insights which contribute to a larger picture. In their study of adolescent revising process, for example, Myhill and Jones (2007) combined qualitative analysis of stimulated-recall interviews with quantitative analysis of students’ pause-write patterns in order to examine more fully students’ on-line revising.

A mixed- or multi-method strategy represents a reasoned response to the faceted nature of the phenomenon being studied: it allows researchers to explore different questions or different aspects of the problem in ways that are mutually beneficial, and to produce a more unified account. Different kinds of data can shed light on each other and help generate new questions. Arguably, the possibility of representing the complexity of the revising process increases with the diversity of perspectives brought to bear on the subject and with the conflicting and overlapping findings they generate (Della-Piana, 1978). It is difficult to explore students’ understanding of the purpose of revising, for example, without considering their revising behaviours or the impact of revising on the text produced. Equally, an understanding of students’ beliefs and perceptions may be a necessary pre-requisite to adequate interpretation of
observed behaviours (Scherff & Piazza, 2005). The nature of the revising process is such that any ‘patterns described can be no more complete than the comprehensiveness of the methodology used to identify them’ (Witte, 1985, p.266).

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods also allows researchers to exploit the strengths of each in terms of breadth and depth, as when rich data about the individual is used to illuminate larger trends, or specific examples are elaborated in terms of broader patterns. Silverman (2005) notes (citing Hammersley, 1992) that combining qualitative research with quantitative measures of populations is one way of establishing some sense of the representativeness of cases (p.128). It helps avoid mere anecdotalism, or description for description’s sake, and may support tentative generalisation from cases to larger populations. Pring (2000) argues that seeking to understand the world from the perspective of participants does not preclude quantification or generalisation, since individual interpretations are nevertheless constrained by understandings already constituted socially, and will therefore exhibit some shared features which can be measured. Thus, for certain purposes, ‘qualitative investigation can clear the ground for the quantitative – and the quantitative be suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretive mode’ (p.56).

Mixed-method approaches are not without their detractors, however. The principal objection raised is that mixed designs violate the ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with qualitative and quantitative methods – that the data derived from each must be interpreted in different ways and are not therefore commensurate. Such criticisms are increasingly challenged from a pragmatic stance. The view that specific methods are inextricably linked to particular paradigms and are therefore fundamentally incompatible is rejected as both divisive and unrealistic. Symonds and Gorard (2008) argue that ‘it only holds true for those researchers who are philosophically committed to bipolar paradigms anyway, and has very little bearing on how research is and can be conducted’ (p.10). From this perspective, research conducted within the interpretive paradigm need not preclude quantitative analysis: indeed, the identification of themes, trends and tendencies in qualitative research requires the adding together of responses or
observations in any case. The advocates of mixed methods research conclude that perceived paradigmatic boundaries distract from consideration of methods that best meet the purposes of research. Even so, the rationales underpinning mixed designs need careful thought; in particular, the potential problems associated with triangulation cannot be ignored.

The principle of triangulation is open to question when attempts are made to aggregate different types of data, or data collected in different contexts, in order to arrive at an overall ‘truth’. As Silverman (2005) cautions, the aggregation of data from different sources or gathered in different contexts does not necessarily reveal ‘the whole picture’ – it can lead to under-analysis, and loss of a sense of context. Furthermore, the compatibility of different forms of data is dependent on the analytic framework adopted: data which are assumed to be socially-constructed and context-bound cannot be equated with data collected in another social context as if both contributed to one overarching reality (p.122). However, the use of different approaches to investigate aspects of the same phenomenon in one population can strengthen research claims without neglecting context. If the intention is not to amalgamate data but to explore interrelations amongst them, the findings derived by one method may lend weight to, or cast doubt on, the findings by another. If triangulation procedures are used to determine complementarity rather than mutual-validation, they have the potential to provide a more nuanced perspective on the phenomenon being investigated.

**Case studies**

Case study methodology lends itself to the combining of different types of data from multiple sources, and is seen as particularly useful for examining the complexities of educational phenomena. Teachers, learners, classrooms or programmes may be studied as particular cases, of interest both for their uniqueness and their similarity to others. Case studies are designed to address multiple variables in real-life contexts, often over a period of time. For this reason, they are especially suited to investigation of ‘process’ rather than outcomes (Merriam, 1998). They have the potential to generate ‘rich’ data of a kind that is hard to obtain by other methods, and therefore to provide novel insights.
Case study methods have been widely used to examine the composing processes of both professional and student writers. Typically, researchers have employed think-aloud protocols, observations, interviews and text analysis to explore the thinking and behaviours of individual writers. In some investigations, a single writer is studied as a unique or intrinsic case, of interest for its own sake, as in Berkenkotter’s (1983) study of Donald Murray’s planning and revising strategies. In others, a small number of individual writers in the same or similar contexts are studied in order to consider the problem several times from different points of view, the purpose being to explore both the particularity of each individual’s writing approach and shared features amongst the group. Stake (1995) defines collective case studies as those which seek to gain more general understanding through the insights offered by particular cases; variety and balance in the selection of cases, and coordination between the individual studies, allows the researcher to examine broader themes whilst preserving the integrity of each case. Notably, Emig (1971) conducted multiple case studies in her examination of the writing processes of twelfth-grade students, and Graves (1975) in his study of seven-year-olds, in order to understand what the strategies and thinking of writers in these age groups might tell about teaching and learning. By comparing the different interpretations of individuals it is possible to identify practices or understandings which are common, and which may reflect wider patterns, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the significance of the idiosyncratic. In these multi-case studies, therefore, the ‘cases’ represent individual units which share some common characteristics, such as class teacher, curriculum programme or school year group, and are considered comparable for the particular purposes of the research. Since each case is studied both individually and as part of a collection, it can be argued that such designs enhance the potential for generalisation of a kind without sacrificing the depth of qualitative research.

One of the main criticisms of case study methodology is that data from single or small group designs cannot sustain generalisation to larger populations. In his critique of Emig’s study, for example, Voss (1983) queries the dependability of ‘sweeping’ generalisations based on a small study of unusually able writers. Of course, many case study researchers make no claims to general explanation. Rather, their emphasis is on recreating ‘the mental atmosphere, the thoughts
and feelings and motivations’ of individuals’ in all their complexity (Von Wright, cited in Stake, 1995, p.38). The practical relevance of highly-contextualised case study description may therefore seem difficult to ascertain. However, Stake (2005) contrasts the intrinsic case study design, which is concerned to explore uniqueness, with the instrumental or multi-case design which is also concerned to look beyond the case and to secure ‘better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases’ (p.446). Case study methodology does not therefore preclude either quantification or generalisation; however, the generalisations are of a different sort – not rule-bound or context-free projections, but situated illustrations of the common and the unusual in relation to a larger research question (Stake, 2006).

Another criticism is that because case study methods are ill-defined, the rationale for adopting them is not always thought through. The lack of a clear framework may mean that data are treated with insufficient rigour, and can be used to support almost any assertion. Interpretation is also seen as particularly susceptible to researcher impact because it is so closely tied to the relationship between investigator and the case/s being investigated. Accusations of bias or undue influence are difficult to refute. However, all authoritative accounts of case study methodology (see Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995, 2006) address the question of rigour extensively: key principles and systematic procedures are identified for structuring data collection and analysis and for minimising researcher misinterpretation. Arguably, proper application of these criteria ensures greater quality of interpretation in case study research than is apparent in some statistical analyses.

School-based studies: particular methodological considerations

Research with young people in school contexts presents particular methodological problems. In addition to the observations above, the following considerations influenced the choice of methods for the current study.

The principle of contextualisation

The embedded nature of students’ understandings about school writing requires a contextualised research design. The need to examine students writing in
normal classroom conditions in response to tasks set by their teachers necessarily rules out several methodological options. For example, the idea of extracting students from the classroom to write for research purposes was dismissed as insufficiently 'situated' for this study even though it would have made possible some degree of consistency in approach across different classes and schools. Classroom-based studies mean that a number of variables cannot be controlled – the nature of instruction, the writing task, conditions for writing, the time allocated and the intervals between writing episodes, all become part of the data. Highly intrusive methods such as think-aloud protocols, intervention protocols or computer-based techniques for tracing revising processes are also clearly not feasible in the classroom. Teaching schedules and timetable considerations necessarily dictate the timing and length of interviewing opportunities. Consequently, if the objective is to capture writers' thinking and behaviour as it occurs in context, the emphasis must be on discreet observation and discussion with students as soon as practicable after writing.

Case study methods are seen as most suited to studies where the investigator 'has little or no control' (Yin, 1994, p.9). They are designed to examine how and why questions in relation to 'the activity of the case as it occurs...in its particular situation' (Stake, 2006, p.2). They are especially indicated, therefore, when the context is assumed to shape directly the phenomena being investigated, or when the 'boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 1994, p.13). The problem with Emig's (1971) study was not her choice of case study methodology per se, but her adaptation of it to 'scientific' purposes and her control, therefore, of contextual features: by first creating and then intervening in her students' context for writing, she violated the principle of contextuality in ways which were likely to skew the results (Voss, 1983). Classroom-based case studies, however, enable the researcher to get as close as possible to subjects in their natural setting and may be the best choice of design when investigating students' writing process over the course of text development.

**Accessing the views of school students**

The need to elicit students' views about writing in the school context brings with it another set of potential problems, however. Students' voices are frequently
absent in educational discourse, and their experience of the curriculum is rarely sought (Erickson & Schultz, 1992, cited in Scherff & Piazza, 2005). Investigating the perspectives of students who, through the process of schooling, may have ‘learned silence’ or ‘not know they have a voice’ is easier said than done (Lincoln, 1995, p.91). For a range of reasons, not least the pressures of crowded curricula, students frequently lack opportunities to critically evaluate or take ownership of their own learning processes. Consequently, they may be unaccustomed to reporting on themselves. They may even suspect the purpose of such reporting, assume that there are right or acceptable ‘answers’, that they need to demonstrate their competence or are obliged to state something rather than nothing, even when uncertain. They may feel particularly uncomfortable expressing views which run counter to those they have been taught. The testimony of school children is therefore especially susceptible to external influence: students may simply parrot their teachers’ explanations or respond in ways they perceive are expected of them by the interviewer. Assurances of confidentiality, and sensitive interviewing in relaxed environments, may not be enough to elicit genuine responses.

Furthermore, young people may struggle to talk about their own writing process for other reasons. From a developmental perspective, it is widely assumed that adolescent writers’ ability to reflect on their thinking is emergent – it is in part for this reason, it is argued, that they occupy a transitional position between mature and immature writing competence (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Young writers may lack the metacognitive awareness necessary to identify their own processes, or the metalinguistic knowledge necessary to describe their textual choices. Methods are needed which help students to retrieve their thinking and articulate what is ‘at the edge of current awareness’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, p.324). An iterative design, for example, which provides repeat opportunities for students to build their responses, and to revisit and clarify their initial thoughts, might help them explain their reasoning.

Nevertheless, the particular challenges associated with accessing students’ views suggest that self-reports alone might not capture the inert understanding that young writers possess or even their personal views. The use of additional sources of evidence may be implied. Brannan (2005) cites examples drawn
from her own research with young people where data collected by predominantly qualitative methods are supplemented by quantitative data for this reason. In one such study, the authors concluded that ‘focusing upon children’s perspectives, even accessed via qualitative methods, do not enable children to emerge as authors of their own stories…rather their understandings have to be pieced together by researchers drawing upon multiple sources of data’ (p.21). For the purposes of the current study, multiple sources of evidence might have additional benefits: data from observations of writing and text analysis could be used not only to ‘piece together’ students’ understandings, but also to support their reflective processes during interviews. ‘Probe-based’ interviewing, whereby texts or video material are used to prompt interpretation is considered particularly effective (Stake, 2006). A design which allowed students to consider evidence from observed behaviours, for example, might help them move beyond initial responses to more elaborate explanations, and suggest new questions for subsequent discussion.

**The problem of generalisability**

In the context of educational inquiry, where the intention is to generate useful information for practice, consideration of the needs of the likely users of research may preclude some methodologies. The ‘intrinsic’ case study, for example, which aims to describe a case in all its particularity (Stake, 2006), might reasonably be received with indifference by those required to design curricula. Single stories alone are of limited use to teachers and policy-makers who have to deal with generalities as well as with individual differences. On the other hand, experimental designs which aim to identify cause-and-effect may be greeted with scepticism by practitioners who seek to solve complex problems or respond to different needs. As Pring (2000) observes, educational practice is not well served by either the scientific model, which assumes ‘an inflated confidence in general explanations’, or the highly interpretive model which insists on uniqueness and ‘a total distrust of any general explanations’ (p.49). A more eclectic approach is called for, one which adopts the ‘common-sense’ view that there are features of both the social and personal worlds that can be usefully quantified and generalised without reducing them to an arithmetical unit or means-end analysis. This view extends to studies which seek to understand the world from the perspective of participants, since individual interpretations
are nevertheless constrained by understandings constituted socially and historically, and will therefore exhibit shared features which can be measured (Pring, 2000). Because the complexity of educational practice requires a more flexible approach, 'mixed methods' is observed to be an increasingly dominant design structure in educational research (Symonds & Gorard, 2008).

One of the strengths of case study methodology is its adaptability: not being tied to particular methods or traditional research paradigms means that the research design can be problem-driven not methodology-driven. Generalisability can in part be addressed by multi-site and collective case study designs which seek to balance examination of the particular features of individual cases with common issues across a group (Stake, 1995). Such designs allow thematic exploration of the 'interactivity' amongst several cases, and therefore permit some wider inference (Stake, 2006). Stake notes the mistaken belief that decision-makers want statistical solutions, when in fact those seeking to solve problems or make improvements need case-based contextual understanding. In this respect, the generalisability of case studies is strengthened by the experience and knowledge that users of the research bring to them: ‘unlike traditional research, the reader participates in extending generalisation to reference populations’ and this constitutes ‘part of the knowledge produced’ (Stake, 1981, cited in Merriam, 1998, p.32). Claims of wider ‘resonance’ are well grounded in case study research because findings are rooted in contextualised experience. School-based studies provide concrete data about actual student responses, rather than hypothetical possibilities or ‘typical’ patterns. Practitioners and policy-makers can use such data, alongside their own contextualised knowledge, as the basis for theorising and differentiated strategy.

**A two-part research design**

For the current study it was decided therefore that a multi-case study design, exploratory in nature (that is, without initial propositions) and informed by a preliminary larger-scale survey, was most likely to elicit data relevant to the research question and useful for practice. An initial survey of all students in the chosen cohort would provide the basis for more in-depth inquiry with a small number of individual cases from the same sample. The research design
therefore comprised two distinct elements – a cohort questionnaire and selected case studies, and assumed an incremental model of data collection. Table 3.1 outlines the specific questions the survey and case study components of the design were intended to address.

Table 3.1: Research questions addressed by different investigative methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research method</th>
<th>Questions addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SURVEY: Student questionnaire</td>
<td>Generally speaking, how do students perceive their own writing and revising strategies? What do they perceive is the purpose of revising school writing? What do they see as important criteria for success? Is there any apparent relationship between students’ perceived strategies and their stated beliefs about purpose and success criteria? Are there any differences in the responses of boys and girls, students in years 9 and 10, students in different ability groupings or from different schools?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE STUDIES: Pre-writing interviews</td>
<td>What generic and task-specific goals do students set themselves before writing and revising? What strategies do they expect to use? What do they see as the factors which will enable or inhibit success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
<td>What writing and revising strategies do students employ in practice? Are these consistent with their perceived strategies? Are there differences in their writing/revising patterns during drafting and redrafting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-hoc interviews</td>
<td>What specific concerns do students attend to during drafting and revising? Are these consistent with their stated goals? By what criteria do they evaluate their success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text analysis</td>
<td>What type of changes do students make to their texts? What is the frequency and extent of the changes they make to their texts? Are there differences in the nature or frequency of changes made to initial drafts and to redrafts? Are the changes students make consistent with their perceived goals and stated practice?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A two-stage design of this kind is a well-established model (termed an ‘explanatory’ model by Cresswell, 2003) whereby a macro pattern is identified by quantitative analysis, and then investigated in detail with a subset of cases. It allows the two datasets to be used in a complementary way and the interconnections between them to be explored. The survey data, for example, may suggest particular tendencies, whilst the qualitative data may help uncover the reasoning behind such responses and the complexity of rationales that inform students’ choices. However, the qualitative emphasis of this study prioritises understanding over explanation, and does not assume a straightforward ‘illustrative’ relationship between the two; rather, the two datasets are intended to highlight potential tensions between students’ front-line responses and the more nuanced reality presented by case studies. The student questionnaire was intended as a means of generating questions for further investigation during the case study phase: it would inform the design of interview schedules, and the focus of classroom observations. The case studies were intended to illuminate the range and complexity of understandings that might prompt similar or atypical responses and behaviours.

The primary strategy, therefore, is qualitative. The data from one-to-one interviews with students are assumed to carry the weight of the study, supported by quantitative analysis of writing behaviours and revisions to text. The inclusion of quantitative elements had the added advantage of allowing comparison with previous studies in ways which might extend existing knowledge or support wider generalisation. It was also recognised that the quality of case study research is dependent on the ability of the researcher to ask good questions and observe purposefully. The methodology chosen therefore builds on my personal experience and training as teacher, schools adviser and inspector: classroom observation, pupil interviewing and analysis of students’ texts were central activities in this work. Such activities were also informed by preliminary statistical analysis of performance data. Thus, the use of quantitative data as the basis for further investigation, as the survey component implies, is a familiar strategy.

The research design also builds on the methodologies employed in two previous studies of secondary students’ composing processes. The survey
component is modelled on Lavelle et al.’s (2002) investigation of writing approaches which focuses more broadly on students’ writing beliefs and writing strategies. The case study component is based on Myhill and Jones’ (2007) investigation of students’ on-line revising processes, particularly in the use of one-to-one structured observations of classroom writing and post-hoc (stimulated-recall) interviews. These methods were extended in the current study to address pre- and post-textual revising as well as on-line revisions, and were therefore deployed on successive occasions over the course of text development.

The survey component

The survey component was intended to explore students’ general perceptions of the purpose and process of revising school writing, and the relative importance they attached to different criteria for success. A questionnaire was seen as a means of eliciting the views of a larger and more representative sample of the student population than was possible by other methods, even though the limitations of generalised and decontextualized data, as outlined above, were clear. It was designed to capture prominent patterns of response across the sample as a whole and amongst different student groups, alongside which more reflective data from case studies of individual writers could be considered. Thus the apparent trends or contradictions in students’ survey responses could be used to suggest lines of inquiry for the case study observations and interviews, rather than provide evidence from which conclusions could be drawn directly. The survey responses of case study students would also provide a useful starting point for individual inquiry.

The case study component

The case study component was designed to investigate individual writers’ understandings of purpose, process and success criteria in relation to a specific classroom writing task and at different stages of composition. The intention was to obtain contextualised data from a series of observations, one-to-one interviews and analyses of texts over the course of each student’s pre-composing, composing, and post-composing stages. Multiple methods of data collection were seen as a means of engaging closely with the processes by which individual writers moved from their initial thoughts to a final written
product. Data from observations and students’ texts could be used to focus
discussion during interviews, and to prompt students’ reflections on their textual
decision-making. Repeat data collection also meant that changes in revising
activity or attitude as the task unfolded could be traced, and a view obtained of
the ways in which different concerns operated over time to determine the
outcome. The accumulation of layers of evidence would allow a comprehensive
view of their response. An incremental model of data collection and data
analysis would also enable progressive clarification of students’ understanding:
data collected by one method or at one point in time would serve to focus
subsequent inquiry, so that students’ initial explanations could be expanded
upon or amended as new evidence emerged.

In addition to the exploration of individual writer’s personal interpretations, the
study of multiple cases was intended to allow comparative analysis. Whilst each
case is regarded as necessarily unique, it is assumed that writers sharing
similar educational, curricular and social situations are likely to have some
understandings in common. The selection of a small number of cases from the
same cohort and from comparable school and classroom contexts was intended
therefore to support cross-case analysis and strengthen the potential for wider
inference.

**The pilot study**

A full pilot was conducted with students not participating in the main study. 119
students (aged 13-16) from two schools completed questionnaires, and two
students were subsequently observed writing on two occasions and interviewed
afterwards. Findings from the pilot study were reported at the 12th International
Conference of the EARLI (European Association for Research on Learning and
Instruction) Special Interest Group on Writing and subsequent discussion
helped refine the final design in several ways.

The questionnaire used in the pilot study was an attitude scale based on an
existing validated measure, Piazza and Siebert’s (2008) Writing Dispositions
Scale. This addressed the various dimensions of the attitude-complex in terms
of writers’ self-confidence, passion for writing and persistence for writing.
Analysis of data from the pilot study revealed some interesting patterns in students’ stated behaviours, some statistically significant differences between the attitudes of girls and boys, and a positive correlation between attitude and predicted GCSE grade. However, it offered little insight into students’ concepts of revision, particularly their perceptions of the purpose of revising or their beliefs about success criteria. Since perceptions of purpose and success criteria may account for behaviours and feelings about revision, it was decided that a broader set of questions was required to explore the potential relationship between these different dimensions. It was also felt that a scale measure, from which individual scores were computed, was not sensitive to the different rationales informing students’ responses, nor appropriate for the purpose of generating questions for further investigation. The questionnaire was therefore redesigned, as outlined below. This meant it was significantly longer, but better addressed the research questions.

For the pilot study classroom observations were recorded using an annotated timeline, similar to that employed by Myhill and Jones (2007), to capture students’ moment-by-moment writing behaviours – the duration of writing and pausing episodes, where pauses occurred in the text, the sequence of revisions and so on. This was found to be overly demanding for the observer, and quite obtrusive for students. It was difficult to discern the detail without sitting very close to the writer. Time-keeping also distracted from observation of larger episodes of behaviour which may have merited more attention during interviews, such as when writers repeatedly reread particular sections. For these reasons, it was decided to use a small desk-top camcorder to record pause-write patterns and to focus on the minutiae of text revision. The observation schedule was simplified to record more significant pauses or writing ‘bursts’ and contextual details. Whilst the camcorder was an additional intrusion, it was directed only on the writer’s pen and paper; face-to-face observation was avoided and the researcher could sit at greater distance from the writer.

The findings from the two pilot case studies confirmed the value of an incremental model of data collection and the juxtaposition of evidence from different sources. For example, discrepancies between students’ claimed strategies and their observed behaviours were apparent: self-report alone was
not a reliable indicator of revising practice. Similarly, students’ stated beliefs about success criteria were not always reflected in the concerns they attended to during writing. Repeat interviews enabled these contradictions or mismatches to be teased out, and it was possible to obtain more complex explanations than were evident from both students’ initial responses, and to identify some unresolved dilemmas. It was decided therefore to extend the interview schedule to include a pre-writing discussion and a post-analysis follow-up.

The main study

Following the pilot study, participants were identified for the main study as follows.

**Participating schools**

An opportunity sample of three maintained secondary schools in Devon was identified. All were large or very large 11-18 comprehensive community colleges. They were classed ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in recent OfSTED reports and had GCSE results above the national average. The schools were all located in small towns and served mixed urban and rural communities of above-average socio-economic background. They had very few students from ethnic minority groups or with a first language other than English.

Initial contact was made with Head teachers and Heads of English, and meetings were then held with the class teachers who expressed an interest. Written information was provided about the aims of the research and the role of participating schools, followed by a proposed research schedule for discussion with the teachers concerned (see Appendix C). Three teachers agreed to participate; all were all female and in the early phases of their careers.

**The cohort sample**

The student sample was drawn from years 9 and 10 (aged 13-15). This age group was selected on the following grounds: they were likely to have sufficient mastery of the mechanics of writing to devote time and attention to content and compositional aspects; they had sufficient experience of writing for school purposes to have formed concepts and beliefs which were relatively stable, and
to have some awareness of their own practices; they were mature enough to be able to reflect upon and articulate these; and that extended writing, developed over several drafts, was expected of this age group for GCSE coursework and controlled assignments. Students in Year 11 were excluded because of exam commitments. Students with Special Educational Needs (in lower-ability sets) were also excluded because the diverse nature of their difficulties with writing was felt to be beyond the scope of this study.

Participating year 9 and 10 classes in each school were taught by the same teacher for English. Classes were broadly arranged in upper or middle ability bands, representing predicted GCSE English grades from A*-D. A total of eight classes participated in the survey, two from each of schools A and B, and four from school C. The gender balance in both year groups was uneven (approximately 60/40 female to male) reflecting the weighting of upper and middle ability groupings. All students in these classes were invited to participate in the cohort survey. Information about the purpose of the research was provided in advance by the class teacher, and a brief covering letter accompanied the questionnaire and offered students the opportunity to withdraw if they wished (Appendix D). 185 students participated. This number represented most students in these classes although there were several absentees and a small number in one class who declined to participate. Table 3.2 shows the number of participants from each school in each year group.

Table 3.2: The cohort sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
<th>Year 10</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>185</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The cases**

A sample of six students across three sites was considered a manageable number of cases, and in line with Stake’s (2006) recommendation that groups of between four and 10 cases are sufficiently large to generate cross-case findings and sufficiently small to preserve uniqueness. A sample of this size also allowed equal representation of male and female students from two year groups and two
ability sets across the three schools. A purposive sub-sample of students from participating classes was identified in conjunction with class teachers. The sample was stratified by school, year group, gender, and ability grouping, as shown in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: The case studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ability group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection criteria were agreed with class teachers, and only students who were deemed willing and able to talk about their writing were considered. Students were invited to participate, initially by their teacher and then formally by letter (Appendix E). All those approached agreed. One student had a specific learning disability (dysgraphia) and therefore used a word processor with spell-check facility for school writing.

**The writing task**

An appropriate writing assignment was identified with the help of class teachers from their planned curriculum. It was agreed that the task should be broadly imaginative and allow students some choice of topic. It did not therefore require writing in an unfamiliar genre or on an unfamiliar topic, since lack of genre or topic knowledge may affect writing process and inhibit substantive revision (McCutchen, 2011). Writing was also planned to take place over at least two sessions to encourage development through revision or redrafting. The tasks given focused on ‘writing to explore, imagine and entertain’ or ‘writing to argue, persuade and advise’. They included: a short story on a topic chosen by the student; a story in response to a chosen picture stimulus; or a newspaper article on a topic chosen by the student.
**Instrument design**

i) Questionnaire

A self-report 5-level Likert-style questionnaire comprising 37 items was compiled for the initial survey (Appendix F). Construct validity was established by reference to the literature and to published questionnaire items that had been validated in other settings. In particular, Lavelle et al.’s (2002) inventory of writing approaches and Piazza and Siebert’s (2008) writing dispositions scale were adapted to focus more specifically on revision, although some items common to both were retained. Questionnaire items related to three constructs. Firstly, concepts and beliefs about the purpose of revising and redrafting (task definition); secondly, concepts and beliefs about success criteria (what makes good writing and what makes effective revising); and thirdly, writers’ perceived composing and revising strategies. Items were designed to span the range of possibilities defined in the literature, and particularly in relation to models of expertise and development, as outlined in the literature review. Items concerning purpose were framed in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic factors; items concerning success criteria were framed in terms of text, audience and writer considerations; and items concerning process were framed in terms of procedural, spontaneous or integrated approaches. No attempt was made to establish strict subsets of items for analysis purposes, however, since these constructs were not considered clear-cut or mutually exclusive. Some questionnaire items were phrased positively and others negatively to avoid any response tendency towards agreement rather than dissent. In addition, an open-response question was included to probe affective/motivational factors. Content validity was checked by two secondary English teachers who were asked to comment on relevance, comprehensiveness, balance and comprehensibility. Minor adjustments to the phrasing and order of items were made following their feedback. A small-scale pilot was also conducted with six students who were not part of the main study to identify problems with comprehension or procedure. Further minor adjustments to vocabulary were made, and an explanation of the terms ‘revising’ and ‘revision’ included in the pre-questionnaire briefing.
ii) Observation schedule

For the case study observations, a simple in-class observation schedule was developed for recording contextual information and writing behaviours, such as significant pauses and subsequent actions, or episodes of rereading, with line references (see Appendix G for a completed exemplar). Students were supplied with line-numbered writing paper to aid location of observed pauses or other behaviours in subsequent interviews. In addition to providing a reference point for post-hoc discussions with students about their textual decision-making, observations were concerned to explore two other theoretical concepts: firstly, whether patterns of composition were clearly differentiated or reflected categorical ‘types’ of writer, as defined in the literature (and summarised in Sharples, 1999); and secondly, whether the rhythm of writers’ pause-write behaviours varied between initial drafting and subsequent development.

iii) Interview schedules

For the case study interviews, three semi-structured interview schedules were prepared: one pre-writing schedule and two post-hoc schedules (Appendix H). A semi-structured format was chosen for flexibility and potential responsiveness to different perspectives and evolving data. Whilst the same core questions were explored with all students, questions were also adapted or extended in the light of students’ previous responses, observed behaviours or textual evidence. The constructs probed during the interviews were the same as those explored in the survey, but contextualised and elaborated. Students’ concepts and beliefs about the purpose of revision, their criteria for success and perceived strategies, were explored in relation to the allocated classroom writing task. The questions posed were also informed by the findings from the survey. Lines of inquiry suggested by whole cohort survey responses are outlined in chapter 4. In addition, individual survey responses suggested specific questions for each student and provided a starting point for initial interviews.

Data collection

Data were collected incrementally, with each data set informing the focus of subsequent data collection. Thus, initial survey responses informed the focus of
case study inquiries; individual questionnaire responses informed the focus of first interviews; the data from classroom observations and revisions to text were used to focus discussion during subsequent interviews; the account given in one interview was used to raise questions in the next. Consequently, it was possible to revisit students’ responses over time, and clarify apparent contradictions or ambiguities. Separate data files were kept for each student and for the sample as a whole to facilitate in-case and cross-case analysis as the study proceeded. This iterative model reflects the ‘recursive, interactive process’ associated with case study method (Merriam, 1998, p.134). Table 3.4 shows the sequential nature of data collection, the methods employed and the data generated at each stage of the study.

Table 3.4: Incremental model of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence of data collection and method</th>
<th>Dataset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort questionnaire</td>
<td>Generalised responses to items concerning purpose of revision, strategies employed and evaluation criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one pre-writing interviews</td>
<td>Explanations of questionnaire responses, task-specific pre-writing goals and strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one observations of writing</td>
<td>Contextual evidence Pause-write patterns and revising behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination of first draft texts</td>
<td>Nature and frequency of text revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one mid-process interviews</td>
<td>Post-hoc reflections on writing process, evaluation of first draft and goals for next session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd observations of writing</td>
<td>Contextual evidence Pause-write patterns and revising behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination of final draft texts</td>
<td>Nature and frequency of text revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one post-writing interviews</td>
<td>Post-hoc reflections on writing process and evaluation of finished text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one follow-up interviews</td>
<td>Further explanations of key themes and any additional ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four types of data were collected: whole cohort questionnaire responses; audio-recorded case study interviews; video-recorded case study writing patterns and observed behaviours; case study texts (including written plans and self-evaluations where applicable). In addition, field notes were kept.
**Questionnaire responses**

The questionnaire was conducted with eight whole classes in years 9 and 10, including those from which case studies were drawn. It was administered during timetabled English lessons by myself and class teachers. The purpose of the survey was explained during an initial briefing and the term ‘revision’ clarified. Students were asked to respond anonymously and not to confer. Assurances were given that all answers would be treated as confidential. The option of withdrawal was offered and a small number in one class chose not to participate. Of the 185 students who completed the questionnaire, 107 were female and 78 male, in line with the gender weighting of ability groups. 168 students also completed the open-response question. Completion time was 10-15 minutes.

**Interviews**

A total of 20 one-to-one interviews were conducted with the six case study participants. Each student was interviewed on at least three occasions: following completion of the questionnaire and prior to writing; immediately after initial drafting; and following a second writing episode. Interviews were conducted in private rooms outside the classroom and the time interval between writing and reporting was minimal. The length of interviews was determined by the length of the lesson. Each lasted between 20-40 minutes and was recorded. Stimulated-recall was chosen as the method most likely to prompt metacognitive reflection and enable students to reconstruct their decision-making during composition. Data from questionnaire responses, observations and students’ texts were therefore used to focus discussion. In the first interview, students were asked to reflect further on their questionnaire responses, and to consider these in relation to the writing task ahead. In the second and third interviews, students were asked to reflect on their decision-making during the preceding writing episode and to evaluate progress in relation to their stated goals. Throughout the sequence of interviews, initial interpretations of data were shared with students and clarified or elaborated. A complete interview transcript is provided in Appendix I. The intention was to offer all students a further opportunity to contribute following completion of the study and once a draft profile of each writer had been constructed. In the event,
it was only possible to conduct follow-up discussions with two students, as others were involved in exams. In these cases, the individual profiles were shared and an additional layer of data generated in discussion.

**Observations of writing**

Case study students were observed writing on two occasions: firstly during the initial drafting of text and secondly during the redrafting or development phase. These observations took place during normal class time, and lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. I sat close to the writer but to one side so as to observe writing behaviours and any associated activities – discussion with teachers or peers, use of a dictionary/thesaurus, reference to written plans, and so on. Particular episodes of reading, pausing and revising were recorded with line references to prompt subsequent discussion and to aid students’ recall of their thinking. A small desk-top camera was used simultaneously to record in detail the sequence and duration of students’ writing and pausing activities, so that an accurate representation of students’ pause-write patterns and the sequencing of revisions could be established afterwards.

**Written drafts**

Copies of students’ initial drafts and revised drafts (total 14 scripts) were retained for analysis of text revisions. Students were asked to use different coloured pens on each writing occasion so that revisions made at different stages of the writing process could be distinguished. Outline plans and self/peer evaluation sheets were also retained where these were used.

**Field notes**

Brief field notes were kept during school visits to record relevant teacher input and classroom discussion. Frequently, completion of the questionnaire or explanation of the writing task prompted whole-class discussion about writing process and the purpose of revising. On these occasions students’ comments were noted verbatim. Similarly when opportunities for one-to-one discussions with students arose, their responses were recorded. On one occasion, for example, the class teacher suggested that an additional student was interviewed, since he had volunteered and obtained parental consent.
Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively and simultaneously with data-collection, in keeping with suggested case study method: ‘analysis begins with the first interview, the first observations, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection’ (Merriam, 1998, p.151). The model was therefore one of ‘progressive focusing’ (Stake, 1995): that is, emerging issues were gradually clarified and refined as the sequence of research activities proceeded. In common with much qualitative analysis, this process was characterised by the ‘constant comparison’ of each new dataset with every other to identify relationships or discrepancies and to generate questions for the next phase. With the exception of initial quantitative procedures, the to-ing and fro-ing between the different data sources, data and theory, and the research questions was intended to be an immersive process rather than strictly analytical, so that premature interpretation was avoided and the tensions between data sets could be maintained and explored.

Case study data were considered both horizontally (cross-case) to identify similarities and differences amongst participants, and vertically (within case) to identify the characteristics of individual writers. As common patterns of behaviour or key themes emerged, these were mapped across cases to gain an overview of their range and relative importance. Particular attention was paid to divergent views and apparently atypical cases and the way in which these might extend or modify initial conclusions, since divergent cases can help elucidate the ‘upper and lower boundaries of experience… that may be missed by standard statistical (or empirical) approaches’ (Sanders, 1981, cited in Merriam, 1998, p.33). Individual cases were similarly mapped to identify the tensions within and between different themes. Particular attention was paid to apparent inconsistencies or ambivalent views, as these could be followed up in subsequent interviews. Examples of in-case and cross-case mapping can be found in Appendices J and K.

As analysis progressed, in-case and cross-case themes were also considered in relation to theoretical models of revision and the findings of previous studies.
– in particular, development models and expert-novice distinctions, as outlined in the literature review. Cross-case findings in relation to each of the main research questions were then summarised, and are reported in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. In-case findings were used to compile descriptive profiles of each writer, two of which are reported in chapter 8. Figure 3.1 shows the iterative model of data analysis.

Figure 3.1: Iterative model of data analysis

| THEORETICAL MODELS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS | 
|--------------------------------------------------|---|
| Compilation of individual writer profiles | | Summary of shared and atypical features |
| THEORETICAL MODELS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS | 
|--------------------------------------------------|---|
| Coding of text revision | | Similarities and differences in nature and frequency of text revisions |
| Analysis of observational data and pause-write patterns | | Similarities and differences in composing behaviours |
| Coding of interview data | | Similarities and differences in perspective or attitude |
| Individual Responses | | Whole-sample statistics |
| ANALYSIS OF COHORT SURVEY | 
| -----------------------------------------------|---|
| Cross-case findings were then summarised, and are reported in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. In-case findings were used to compile descriptive profiles of each writer, two of which are reported in chapter 8. Figure 3.1 shows the iterative model of data analysis.

The different data sets – survey responses, interview responses, classroom observations, text changes and field notes – were analysed using the following methods.

**Initial survey data**

Responses to questionnaire items were analysed using SPSS version 19. Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution and measures of central tendency – mean, median and mode) were calculated item by item for the sample as a whole, and split by school, year group, ability groupings and gender to identify
any patterns of response amongst groups. Apparent correlations, broad
tendencies, inconsistencies and uncertainties were identified and used to frame
the case study interview questions and the focus of observations. In line with
the broadly interpretive approach of the study, no attempt was made to
aggregate individual students’ scores or to draw conclusions directly from the
quantitative data. Responses to the open question were coded using NVivo
version 9. In addition, the individual responses of case study students to
questionnaire items were analysed to identify ways in which these reflected or
differed from whole-cohort patterns. Apparent inconsistencies or contradictions
in individual responses were noted for further investigation during initial
interviews.

**Interview data**

All interview transcripts were jointly coded with a research assistant using NVivo
version 9. A co-coding strategy was employed in order to improve reliability.
Steps were taken to ensure that categories identified were agreed and the
allocation of comments to categories was consistent. As a preliminary step, early
transcripts were read independently and a small number of top-level or
‘summary’ categories proposed as a framework for considering the data. It was
agreed that students’ comments fell broadly under four headings, in line with the
types of questions asked. These categories were defined as shown in Table
3.5.

Table 3.5: Definitions of summary coding categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of purpose</td>
<td>All comments that refer to reasons for revising, perceived priorities or specific goals (the writer’s rationale for revising, as distinct from evaluation criteria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of process</td>
<td>All comments that refer to strategies or procedures for composing and revising, problems or opportunities encountered, or preferred methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of success criteria</td>
<td>All comments that refer to perceived qualities of effective/ineffective writing or revising, the relative importance of different criteria, or particular qualitative concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image</td>
<td>All general comments relating to students’ assessments of their strengths and weaknesses as writers, likes and dislikes, attitude and motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments allocated to the 4th category were used to compile individual profiles since these did not relate specifically to revision.

Two interview transcripts were then coded independently, and identified sub-codes shared and refined. An initial set of code labels was agreed. All subsequent transcripts were coded jointly. Disagreements were either resolved in discussion, or where uncertainty remained or comments appeared to hold two meanings, they were double-coded. As new themes emerged, transcripts were revisited, and codes and sub-codes refined over several iterations. When students’ comments could easily be assigned to existing categories, and no new codes were suggested, the framework was considered sufficiently inclusive. The number of codes in each main category was then reduced by amalgamating allied topics and grouping them under thematic headings. A manageable number of main themes and sub-codes were identified in each of the three areas of inquiry, as outlined in the relevant findings chapters. Table 3.6 shows the sequence of coding activities. A coded interview extract (NVivo screen capture) can be found in Appendix L.

Table 3.6: Interview coding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence of coding procedures</th>
<th>Progressive focusing of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial reading of transcripts to identify summary categories</td>
<td>4 main categories defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding of all comments over several iterations</td>
<td>Up to 40 codes identified and refined in each main category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping of allied codes into themes</td>
<td>10-11 themes with sub-codes identified in each category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of relative prominence of themes by frequency of reference and number of cases</td>
<td>Hierarchical coding frameworks established for each summary category</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observation data**

Data recorded on the observation schedules were intended primarily as reference points for discussion in subsequent interviews, and to prompt students’ recall. Students’ comments and behaviours during writing were also
used to compile descriptive profiles of individual writers. Video recorded data were analysed quantitatively using EXCEL to identify individual pause-write patterns during initial drafting and subsequent revising. This method was used by Myhill (2009) and Jones (2007) in their study of secondary students’ on-line composing patterns, and comparisons were therefore possible. Time spent writing was recorded as a positive number and pausing as a negative number, so that the graphs produced showed episodes of writing above the x axis, and episodes of pausing below it. The percentage of time spent writing and pausing, and the average number of switches between the two, were also calculated so that individual profiles could be compared. Analyses of students’ pause-write patterns were used to compile individual writer profiles and are also reported separately for the sample as a whole in Appendix M.

**Text revisions**

All students’ changes to text were classified by type using Yagelski’s (1995) scheme. This scheme was designed to analyse the revisions of secondary students. It delineates four main coding categories: surface changes (or mechanics, concerned with accuracy and conventions of written English); stylistic changes (minor additions and deletions, rewording or rephrasing); structural changes (reorganisation of text); and content changes (more substantial additions or deletions, changes to ideas or arguments). The first three categories include changes that Faigley and Witte (1981) describe as ‘meaning-preserving changes’, and the fourth category ‘meaning changes’. Full category descriptors are outlined in Appendix N. For this study, the intention was to further sub-classify students’ meaning changes as additions, deletions or alterations to meaning; however, in the event this proved unnecessary since all but one were additions.

Coding of text changes was conducted jointly. Whilst there was very little disagreement about coding decisions, it was occasionally unclear how to classify a text change. For example, students’ sometimes chose to substitute words for reasons of accuracy rather than style, and sometimes to correct accidental wording, as when writers had prematurely moved on to their next idea, rather than to alter meaning. In these cases, it was usually possible to clarify the reason for the change with students themselves. Whilst the
categories in Yagelski’s scheme are not mutually exclusive (particularly since stylistic changes can change meaning), they provided a straightforward method for distinguishing between minor and substantive revisions, and between structural and content changes. Use of the scheme also enabled comparison with Yagelski’s findings. Examples of coded texts are provided in Appendices O and P. Students’ first draft and final draft revisions were analysed separately to identify any changes in frequency or type. Frequency was calculated as an average number of changes in all categories per 100 words of completed text. Analyses of students’ text revisions were used to compile writer profiles and are reported separately for the whole sample in Appendix Q.

**Field notes**

Data recorded in field notes were used in two ways. Contextual evidence relating to teacher input and conditions for writing was used to inform interpretation of individual responses and case study profiles. Incidental classroom data and relevant comments from class members were used to elaborate on themes arising from the survey, and are reported separately in the cohort findings chapter.

**Validity and reliability**

Whilst data analysis is always an act of interpretation and therefore subject to bias or selectivity, qualitative researchers have a particular responsibility to demonstrate the reliability of their methods and the validity of their research claims. Several criteria have been proposed in the literature by which the credibility of qualitative research findings can be judged. The following principles underpin most accounts of quality criteria in interpretive research.

**Transparency**

Establishing trustworthiness means being as transparent as possible about the procedures employed and the evidence used to reach conclusions – for example, by providing examples of coding decisions and making available the raw material from which data are drawn. In this study, the inclusion of sample interview transcripts, observation records and coded texts contributes to this transparency. The use of NVivo software for interview analysis also provides an
auditable record of coding decisions which can be documented to strengthen confidence in the analysis. Complete coding frameworks with all identified sub-codes are therefore presented in the findings chapters, and an exemplar screen capture showing coding decisions provided. Qualitative analysis software also helps define the space between purely inductive procedures (topic coding) and the analytic process of interpretation (linking data and theory) so that the two can be clearly differentiated (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Verbatim comments from all of the contributing cases are reported theme by theme in the findings chapters to show how topic coding provides a substantive basis for interpretation of the data and subsequent theorising.

**Comprehensive data treatment**

In order to counter accusations of anecdotalism, researchers must be seen to analyse all of the data collected, and to attend to contrary cases. Readers need to know the ‘typicality’ of examples summoned in support of an argument. Comprehensive data treatment means actively seeking out discrepancies within and between data sets, and reporting exceptions where they exist. In this study, all relevant evidence was accounted for in the process of analysis, not just the instances which might support an emerging hypothesis. Atypical themes were deliberately retained in the cross-case coding frameworks and reported in the relevant findings chapters. Examples of cross-case and in-case mapping are provided to show divergent views and behaviours. The inclusion of figures to show the frequency of references and the number of cases concerned also provides some assurance that the key themes discussed existed throughout the data and not just in favourable examples. Contrasting case profiles were chosen for presentation in the thesis to illustrate the range and variation apparent in students’ understandings and writing behaviours. As many verbatim comments as possible are included in the findings chapters to support conclusions drawn.

**Systematic coding procedures**

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman, 2005). In this study every effort was made to ensure that coding procedures were always applied in a systematic manner.
The co-coding strategy, the steps taken to establish inter-rater agreement and to define category boundaries clearly, are indicative of this intention. The use of NVivo software to structure the coding process also supported the consistent handling of data. Whilst the use of qualitative data analysis software is no guarantee of rigour, such packages strengthen reliability by systematically linking and organising multiple sources of data and enabling an otherwise non-linear process to be managed efficiently (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). The use of an existing scheme for the coding of text revisions also supported consistency, since examples and explanations of coding decisions were available for comparison.

**Triangulation and member checking**

Various procedures have been proposed by which researchers might ‘cross-check’ the quality of their interpretations, notably the protocols of triangulation and member checking. Neither method is without problems when used for validation purposes, but both can contribute to the credibility of the research in other ways. As noted earlier, triangulation as a validation procedure is criticised on both theoretical and contextual grounds. In the first place, the assumption that findings from different sources (data triangulation), or acquired by different methods (methodological triangulation), can be used to corroborate each other would seem to subscribe to a naively realist view that there can be a single definitive account. Furthermore, it fails to take account of the different social circumstances from which different sets of data are drawn (Bryman, 2004). Thus, in the current study, responses to a questionnaire conducted in the classroom cannot be assumed to converge with the views expressed in private interviews for obvious reasons of context. Member checking or ‘respondent validation’ is also questioned as a means of confirming conclusions drawn. The assumption that participants (and especially children) are necessarily in any better position than the analyst to validate the ‘truth’ of research findings is clearly flawed: ‘there is no reason to assume that members have privileged status as commentators on their actions…such feedback cannot be taken as direct validation or refutation of the observer’s inferences. Rather such processes…should be treated as yet another source of data and insight’ (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, cited in Silverman, 2005, p.212).
In this study, therefore, triangulation and member checking were used to secure additional interpretation rather than to confirm a single meaning. The findings from one dataset generated new questions to be pursued by another method or with another case, and therefore extended interpretive possibilities. Similarly, member checking was used throughout the research process to assist interpretation. Clarification was sought from students, for example, when initial analysis of comments made in interviews or revisions made to text proved difficult to interpret. Following data analysis, preliminary writer profiles were also shared with two students to generate additional data. Insofar as different data sets contributed to the complexity of the inquiry, and every opportunity was taken to expand on students’ explanations, the persuasiveness of the research account is likely to be enhanced.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for the study (Appendix R) was secured on the following grounds.

**Informed consent**

Written information about the purpose of the study, the research activities involved, and the assistance sought from staff, was provided to all prospective schools in advance and followed by discussion with interested teachers. Written information was also provided in student-friendly language for survey participants, and for prospective case study students and their parents, outlining the objectives of the research, and how the data would be collected and reported. Written consent was sought from Head teachers, participating teachers, case study students and their parents before research commenced (Appendix S). All documentation clearly stated that participation was voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any time.

Particular care was taken to ensure that student participants were willing volunteers. School students are potentially vulnerable to exploitation: being subject to authority, they may feel obligated when approached by teachers or other adults. Informed consent was therefore sought sensitively. Students were given time to reflect and consult with their parents before agreeing to
participate. Their right to withdraw was clearly explained in writing, and reinforced verbally at key stages. Specific consent was sought prior to the use of audio and video-recording equipment.

**Anonymity and confidentiality**

Participating schools, teachers and students were assured that they would not be identified in any reports of the research, and that all records of the data would be anonymised. Students were asked to complete questionnaires anonymously and not to put names on their written texts. Pseudonyms were used in all references to case study students.

**Protection from harm or stress**

Teachers were assured from the outset that their teaching was not under scrutiny, and that students would not be asked to comment on their teaching during interviews. Every effort was made to ensure that the research process was as unobtrusive as possible in the classroom, and did not interfere with students’ or teachers’ normal ways of working. The research schedule was designed to fit with existing lesson plans during normal timetabled English classes. The writing tasks were selected in conjunction with teachers from their intended curriculum programme.

Every effort was made to ensure that case study students did not suffer any loss of educational opportunity as a consequence of participation in the research. Interviews were therefore conducted during English lesson time when the focus was on writing. Students were not asked to give up any of their free time, and no other lessons were missed. Every effort was made to put participating students at ease during research activities, and to minimise potential stress. One-to-one interviews were conducted informally and in private spaces. Classroom observations were conducted as discreetly as possible. The desk-top camera used was small and focused only on the student’s hand and text. It was emphasised to students that the researcher had no role in assessing their competence or in grading their written work.
Limitations of the study

Methodological choices inevitably involve both gains and losses. The choice of a case study approach means that whilst research findings may well have wider resonance, they should be tentatively held for several reasons.

Sample characteristics and size

No claims can be made about the representativeness of the school or student sample. The characteristics of the schools participating mean that findings cannot be assumed to apply in other circumstances. In particular, the schools were not ethnically diverse, nor representative of the full socio-economic range. The small size of the case study sample also makes generalising from the data to other student populations difficult. In particular, no students of low writing ability (predicted GCSE English grades of E or below) or with English as a second language were included in the sample. Furthermore, analysis of students’ text revisions was based on a single assignment and cannot be extrapolated to other tasks.

Selection bias

Whilst an effort was made to recruit participants of different writing abilities, selection criteria included willingness and ability to talk about writing and willingness to be observed while writing in the classroom. This will have ruled out a number of students, particularly those lacking confidence, verbal skills, interest in writing, or motivation to talk about writing. Reliance on teacher identification of potential participants may also have led to selection bias, since selection may have reflected individual teachers’ criteria.

Contextual and task variables

Neither writing task nor conditions for writing were common to all participants. For example, in some lessons students wrote in silence, and in others talk was permitted. The time allocated for writing also varied. Whilst all writing tasks were intended to be broadly imaginative and included a choice of topics, some tasks were more tightly defined than others. Similarly assessment criteria were more explicitly stated for some tasks. The data cannot, therefore, support generalisations based on classroom context or writing task, nor can reliable
comparisons be made between the responses of participants in relation to these
variables. However, since the writing tasks selected were typical for this age
group and in line with GCSE English requirements, the findings are likely to
have resonance in other situations. Equally, whilst classroom writing
environments vary and conditions are always dynamic, their broad features are
nevertheless likely to apply elsewhere.

Self-report

It cannot be assumed that students’ claims or stated beliefs necessarily reflect
their true views. Student responses may have been inhibited by perceptions of
the researcher as teacher, or by school context. However, students’
explaining were revisited over several interviews, and were considered in
relation to observations of their writing process and text analysis, and these
methods lend support to the conclusions drawn.

Researcher impact

The methodology chosen of repeat one-to-one observations and interviews may
have increased students’ awareness and understanding of their writing process.
Since ‘gaining insight into the cognitive processes of writing is seen as
especially important as a basis for moving from knowledge- telling to
knowledge-transforming’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p.320), the research
process had the potential to bring about an improvement in the quality and
extent of students’ revising. It may also have prompted greater attention to
revision during writing than would otherwise have been the case, or improved
motivation for writing. The use of research methods which support writing
development inevitably has implications for the data. The intervention of the
researcher forms part of the data. Since it is well-nigh impossible to separate
the influence of the research process and the background knowledge and
strategies that students bring to the study, it is important that reported outcomes
bear this confounding effect in mind (Swanson-Owens & Newell, 1994, pp.147-
8). However, research methods were designed to interfere as little as possible
with normal classroom routines and to minimise researcher impact. Thus, whilst
no reliable conclusions can be drawn about students’ ‘typical’ writing processes,
inferences can be made about the understanding students can explain and
demonstrate when prompted, and these are likely to have relevance in other contexts.

**Strengths of the study**

The study has several methodological features which differentiate it from previous research and offer the potential for new understanding.

*The comparison of behavioural, textual and self-report data*

The inclusion of different types of data analysed by different methods means that findings from each component can be compared both within the study and with findings from previous single method studies conducted with students of similar age, such as Lavelle et al.’s (2002) statistical analysis of writing approaches; Yagelski’s (1995) analysis of text revisions; and Myhill’s (2009) analysis of students’ pause-write patterns. Such comparisons may support wider generalisation or raise new questions for further study. The integration of these different components in one study also provides a composite picture of students’ writing and revising process. It allows new connections to be made between students’ thinking and behaviours, and may therefore extend understanding gained from single method studies.

*Naturalistic context for writing*

The school-based context provides a clear distinction between revising for normal school purposes and revising in other circumstances in a way that experimental studies by definition do not. Studies which ‘create’ classrooms and conditions for writing, such as Chanquoy’s (2001) study of deferred revision, or studies which dictate teachers’ methods, such as De La Paz and Graham’s (2002) Strategy Instruction intervention, are not intended to examine students’ naturalistic revising behaviours but to test hypotheses. In seeking to understand students’ reasons for revising as they do, however, the current study may help identify strategies for enhancing revision and inform the hypotheses experimental studies test. Case-studies which adopt a ‘scientific’ approach, and therefore compromise ecological validity such as Emig’s (1971), are also limited in the extent to which they can capture contextualised understanding and
behaviour. Such studies therefore obscure the impact school models and writing conditions may have on students’ understanding.

Incremental model of data collection

The incremental nature of the research design allowed exploration of revision at all stages of composition, including pre-textual goals and post-textual evaluation. This may also extend the knowledge gained from studies which focus on particular stages, such as on-line revision (Myhill and Jones, 2007), or from studies which consider the totality of text revisions without reference to the point at which they were made. Consideration of the composing process as it proceeds from initial planning to final product permits a view of revision in its entirety. An iterative design also allowed the researcher to refine questions and the student to refine responses in the light of emerging evidence. To my knowledge, no recent studies have explored students’ revising process over the course of text development in the school context in this way. The methodology adopted is likely therefore to provide new insight into adolescent writers’ understanding of revision for school purposes and an original contribution to existing knowledge.
CHAPTER 4: COHORT PERCEPTIONS

Research questions

The purpose of the cohort survey was to identify salient themes and questions to inform the case study research. The 37 questionnaire items addressed perceptions of purpose, process and success criteria in generic terms and in broadly equal measure, although these categories were not treated as discrete subsets. In addition, an open-response question invited comments about feelings and attitudes towards revision. The intention was to explore patterns of response for the cohort as a whole, and any marked differences in the responses of boys and girls, students in years 9 and 10, students in different ability groupings or students from different schools.

Statistical findings from the main questionnaire

185 students completed the main questionnaire. The sample represented whole classes in years 9 and 10 from three schools – four middle and four upper-ability English sets of varying size, each containing a greater number of females than males. One student completed only half of the questionnaire; otherwise, there was very little missing data. Responses were analysed statistically using SPSS version 19. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for the questionnaire and yielded a reliability co-efficient of .74 suggesting acceptable internal consistency (Field, 2005; Pallant 2007). Descriptive statistics were obtained for the full sample and itemised distribution frequencies are provided in Appendix T. The dataset was also split by school, gender, year group and ability group.

Descriptive statistics revealed some clear patterns of response to questionnaire items. There was considerable agreement expressed in relation to some items, and widespread uncertainty in relation to others. There were also sharply divided responses to some questions. As might be expected, there was evident correlation between responses to some associated items. However, there were a number of apparent inconsistencies or contradictions in patterns of response which raised questions for further investigation during the qualitative inquiry.
Split file analysis also showed some differences amongst the responses of students from different groups. Students attending one school, for example, were more likely to value redrafting and to claim they revised substantively than those attending the other two; they were also more likely to enjoy writing and to feel that their own feelings and opinions mattered. Across all schools, differences between the responses of students in year 9 and year 10, and between those in upper and middle ability sets, were sometimes notable. These are included below under the relevant headings. Some gender differences were also apparent and reported below.

**Perceptions of the purpose of revising**

Responses to questionnaire items concerning students’ reasons for revising showed considerable agreement across all groups, but included some curious discrepancies. A clear majority, for example, saw revision as an editing task and did not expect to make more than surface changes to their texts. 68% agreed that most of the changes they made to writing were minor alterations such as rewording and corrections; 71% saw redrafting as a problem-solving or correction task. 30% claimed their first draft was usually their final product. By contrast, only 18% agreed that revising or redrafting meant changing whole sections of their writing, the lowest level of agreement for any item relating to purpose. Similarly, only 28% of students claimed to make major changes to the content of their writing. The perception of revision as minor adjustment is matched by the high percentage of students who rated matters of style and accuracy as primary concerns, or claimed to try out different words and expressions in their writing (77%) rather than alter the substance.

Interestingly, however, a large number of students claimed to pursue more substantive goals, and to use drafting and redrafting to explore and develop ideas. 56% claimed to re-examine their ideas and arguments when reviewing their writing; 51% to use a first draft to find out what they wanted to say; and 58% to use redrafting to develop their ideas further. These claims seem at odds with the majority view that redrafting was mainly a corrective task, and they were not matched by claims about changes to the content of writing. Figure 4.1 shows the apparent conflict between perceptions of revision as correction and perceptions of revision as meaning development.
This apparent ambivalence is further reflected in the 19% of students who saw no reason to redraft writing and the 34% who were undecided; fewer than half of all students saw a positive reason to do so. A similar inconsistency was apparent in students’ claims about the reorganisation or restructuring of text. 64% claimed they often rearranged the order of things to improve their writing. However, only 18% saw the purpose of revising as changing whole sections of their writing, suggesting that the re-arrangement envisaged was minor.

A commonly agreed goal for writing and revising was to satisfy external requirements. 75% claimed their main concern was to meet the assessment criteria and get a good grade. Of these, 29% agreed strongly – the highest level of strong agreement for any questionnaire item; only 5% disagreed. By contrast, less than a quarter of students felt they revised for their own satisfaction. This weighting may explain why more than half of students claimed to make most changes to their writing after feedback from their teacher. However, the high percentage of students who cited assessment requirements as their main concern was not matched by the low percentage who judged the teacher to be the most important reader. Indeed, 48% disagreed that the teacher was the most important audience, and a further 30% were unsure. Thus, whilst the majority (72%) of students judged that attending to the needs of the reader was important and more than half expected to think about their reader’s response when reviewing writing, only 22% of students claimed to prioritise the teacher in
this respect. Figure 4.2 shows the apparent mismatch between audience-related goals.

Figure 4.2: Cohort perceptions of purpose – reader needs v examiner needs

- The most important thing when writing is to entertain, inform or persuade your reader.
- When reviewing my writing, I imagine how my reader might react to it.
- My main concern when writing is to meet the assessment criteria and get a good grade.
- The teacher is the most important audience.

Perceptions of the composing and revising process

Responses to items concerning composition process or personal strategies were mixed. Students were divided, for example, about the role of planning and redrafting. More than a quarter expressed uncertainties about the usefulness of advance planning and about their own practice. 54% claimed they found planning worthwhile, and 26% claimed to make a plan and stick to it when writing. However, 21% agreed that planning was a waste of time, and 43% claimed to leave writing to the last minute. Students were also divided about their redrafting practice. More than half claimed to use a first draft to explore ideas, and 58% to use redrafting as an opportunity to develop their ideas further. However, since far fewer students claimed to revise in major ways, and far more regarded redrafting as a problem-solving and correction process, it is not clear how extensive the redrafting envisaged might have been.

Furthermore, fewer than half of all students were convinced about the value of redrafting, and students in middle ability sets were especially unlikely to view redrafting as purposeful or to use it to develop their ideas. Boys were also much more likely than girls to judge both planning and redrafting a waste of time.

Figure 4.3 shows the divide between apparently procedural and spontaneous approaches to writing for the sample as a whole.
Figure 4.3: Cohort perceptions of process – procedural v spontaneous

![Bar chart showing responses to questions related to writing process.]

Whilst there were mixed views about planning and redrafting, responses suggested that many students attached greatest significance to initial drafting, or indeed one-off drafting. 30% agreed that their first draft was usually their final product and a further 25% were undecided. More respondents claimed to leave writing tasks to the last minute (43%) and to give little thought to their writing at other times (46%) than disagreed. However, awareness of on-line planning and revising was less evident: 47% claimed they did not plan or revise during writing, 33% were uncertain, and only 20% claimed they did.

Revision was therefore regarded by the majority as a retrospective activity: 62% claimed to write first and then make changes (only 15% disagreed). Significantly, more than half of all students claimed to make most changes to their writing after feedback from the teacher, and students in year 9 or in middle ability sets were especially likely to do so. These responses tally with students’ claims about minor editing and suggest that revision was not widely regarded as an integral or formative part of the composing process. However, the high percentage of students who claimed to use drafting and redrafting for developmental purposes – to find what they wanted to say or to develop their ideas further – might suggest a more complicated picture. Figure 4.4 shows the discrepancy between perceptions of revision as formative and perceptions of revision as retrospective.
There was an apparent discrepancy between students’ claims about the process of reviewing and the process of revising. More than half of respondents claimed to evaluate their writing in substantive ways: 56% to re-examine their ideas and arguments, and 55% to review with their reader in mind. A similar percentage liked to discuss their writing with others and hear their suggestions. These claims were not matched, however, by claims about substantive revision of writing. This discrepancy may reflect the widespread uncertainty students expressed about judging the quality of their own writing or identifying how it might be improved (see Perceptions of success criteria below).

Whereas the majority (58%) of students claimed to enjoy writing of many kinds, there was less certainty about personal success, and neither enjoyment nor self-esteem was consistent across groups. As might be expected, students in middle ability sets expressed less enjoyment than those in upper sets, and only a third thought they were good writers. Across the sample as a whole, particular uncertainty was also expressed in relation to revision and redrafting: more than half of all students were not confident they knew how to improve their writing, and a similar number saw no positive reason to redraft. Written responses to the open question about revision (reported below) further suggest that most students found this aspect least pleasurable.
Perceptions of success criteria

Responses to items concerning success criteria showed some clear patterns of agreement, particularly in relation to stylistic aspects of writing. There was greater uncertainty, however, in relation to wider values. Linguistic concerns were particularly prominent, whereas holistic concerns were less evident.

Choice of vocabulary was judged important by more students (71%) than either content or structure. Only 6% disagreed that word choice was the key to good writing. Almost half of all students saw accuracy as a priority; split-file analysis showed that the percentage of students in year 9 and in middle ability sets was considerably higher – only 9% of both groups disagreed that sticking to the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation was the most important thing when writing. The significance students attached to vocabulary and accuracy was matched by their claims that revising was predominantly a matter of rewording and correction (68%), and redrafting a correction task (71%). By contrast, just over half of students agreed that ideas matter most in writing – barely more than the 48% concerned about accuracy and fewer than those concerned about word choice. Furthermore 39% were undecided about the significance of ideas in writing. Figure 4.5 shows the discrepancy between surface and substantive concerns in writing.

Figure 4.5: Cohort perceptions of success criteria – surface v substantive

This ambivalence is reflected in students’ claims about substantive revision: 32% claimed they did not make major changes to the content of writing and 38% were undecided. Similarly, whilst students acknowledged the importance
of structure in writing, major structural change was not envisaged by the vast majority. Thus whilst 64% claimed to rearrange the order of things to improve their writing and 43% judged that arranging information in a logical order was a priority when writing essays, only 18% expected to change whole sections of writing.

Personal and expressive aspects of writing attracted considerable support, but were perceived as less relevant to essay forms and did not seem to carry over into claimed revising goals. In particular, 80% agreed that it was important to develop one’s own style in writing (of whom 23% strongly agreed and only 2% disagreed). This was the highest rated success criterion and the highest level of agreement for any questionnaire item. However, there was greater uncertainty about the value of personal opinion and originality, particularly when writing school essays. Whilst 56% claimed it was important to convey what they really thought and felt in their writing, 38% were unsure, and 32% felt one need not express opinion in an essay. Similarly, whilst 56% claimed that originality was important in essay writing, 36% were uncertain. Furthermore, the value placed on personal aspects of writing was not reflected in students’ claims about revising for intrinsic reasons: less than a quarter of students felt they revised for their own satisfaction whereas three quarters claimed their priority was to satisfy assessment criteria. The apparent conflict between expressive and extrinsic concerns is shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6: Cohort perceptions of success criteria – intrinsic v extrinsic

![Figure 4.6](image-url)
The majority of students also rated audience impact highly: 72% judged that entertaining, informing or persuading the reader was important. However, views about the significance of the teacher as reader were more mixed: less than a quarter of students considered the teacher the most important audience, even though more than half apparently relied on teacher feedback to guide revision and three-quarters claimed their main concern was to get a good grade.

Despite considerable agreement amongst students about some criteria, widespread uncertainty was expressed about evaluating quality. Only 5% of students felt certain about the quality of their writing; 76% claimed they were never certain – one of the highest agreement levels for any survey item – and 20% of all students felt this strongly. Fewer than half were confident they could find what needed to be changed to improve their writing. This apparent lack of confidence was equally prevalent in the responses of students from both ability sets. It was also evident in students’ comments in response to the open question about revision and redrafting.

**Findings from the open-response survey question**

168 of the 185 survey respondents completed the open-response item which asked them to describe how they felt about revising and redrafting their writing. Of the 17 students who did not respond, the majority were from the middle sets, and more were boys than girls. Written responses varied in length from three words to 50+. All comments were coded using NVivo version 9.

Coding of responses to the open question revealed three key themes, with most comments expressing thoughts or feelings about usefulness, engagement or enjoyment. Although fewer boys than girls responded, there was no obvious gender divide in students’ comments regarding usefulness or engagement. However, whilst an equal proportion of boys and girls expressed dislike of revision, only four boys expressed any enjoyment or satisfaction. There was also no obvious difference in the perceptions of students in years 9 and 10, or in middle and upper sets.
Perceptions of usefulness

The vast majority of comments endorsed the usefulness of revision (110 references), although this endorsement was often qualified and sometimes begrudging. The predominant sentiment expressed was one of worthy resignation, as in ‘I don’t like doing it but I know it will help my work’ or ‘I get bored. However I know it’s very helpful’. Common descriptors included ‘necessary’, ‘important’ and ‘something you should do’ (30 references), often followed by a qualifier: ‘important but time-consuming’; ‘necessary but boring’, ‘paramount… but I don’t enjoy it’, ‘annoying but beneficial [sic]’, ‘laborous [sic] but worth it in the end’. One student noted the irony that whilst revision was ‘essential for a high level piece, in tests/essays due to the time limit it can’t always be done’.

The sense in which revision or redrafting were perceived as ‘useful’ was often expressed in general terms, such as ‘a good way of just generally improving your work’ or ‘it makes your writing better’ (35 references). Where particular aspects of writing were specified, surface-level improvement was most frequently mentioned: grammar, spelling, punctuation, ‘fixing mistakes’ (33 references); expanding or developing ideas (20); vocabulary and phrasing (11); reordering material (2). For many, revision was associated with minor change, and for some its usefulness was therefore marginal: ‘I don’t think it does a lot but it does help’; ‘it’s helpful to change small things’; ‘it helps a bit’. For a few, its impact was more substantial: ‘I like to make changes so that it all flows, makes sense and gives good effect’; ‘I often rearrange the order to make it different’. One student expressed the view that redrafting was only useful if one had already made major changes, suggesting that the redrafting process itself was not associated with revising, only with the tidying up afterwards: ‘I only feel that it is effective after I change a major part of my writing’. A number of students identified usefulness as dependent on circumstance, suggesting that ‘it can be useful but not always’. The distinctions drawn were varied, as in ‘sometimes it’s useful if it is an important piece of work’ or ‘it depends on how much time you have to plan’ or ‘it depends whether you think it’s (already) good enough’.

Redrafting in particular was not seen as automatically useful: ‘redrafting can be
good thing or a bad thing’, and ‘if your [sic] pleased with your first draft there isn’t neccessarily [sic] any need’.

Some students did not consider that revision ‘helps with writing’ or is ‘really neccessary [sic] half the time’ (24 references). Of these, half identified redrafting in particular as ‘a wast [sic] of time and paper’; ‘just like copying my first draft’; ‘it does nothing for me’ (12 references). Redrafting was perceived as ‘only necessary for neatness’ or ‘if I can’t understand what I’ve written’ (6 references) and then not always successful: ‘I redraft but my writing still looks scruffy [sic]’.

Four writers felt that making changes destroyed something of the integrity of writing: ‘it becomes somebody else’s work’; ‘it disrupts the flow of my writing’; ‘it confuses me and muddles up my work’; ‘I think it’s important to write when your head is in the story. When you re-write an entire piece it can lose the spontinuity [sic] of the original’. Disaffection was also apparent in a number of comments: ‘honestly I pheel [sic] I could be doing a lot more with my life if I wasn’t spending so much time revising and redrafting’ or ‘writing isn’t important to me’.

**Engagement**

For 21 students the motivation for revising was explicitly instrumental: ‘I don’t enjoy it but I realise I need to do it to get a better grade’ or ‘to meet more of the assessment criteria’. For some the better grade was their ‘main target’ and for others ‘a bonus’. A few also noted intrinsic benefits: ‘revising is necessary to get a good grade and genuinely feel happy with the piece [sic]’; ‘I feel better about myself for correcting my work’; ‘I feel better about my writing when I do’. Three writers saw it as an investment in the future: ‘it helps you improve your writing skills’ and ‘you can use the techniques in the future’. Two writers mentioned revising with the reader in mind: ‘you can make it more interesting for the reader’ or ‘make your point come across better’. A sense of discovery through revision was apparent in four responses: ‘revising is important to me as it’s then that my best ideas come’; ‘I think of better descripted [sic] words and then even more stuff comes to me!’; it gives you the opportunity to add something you may not have thought of first time round’; ‘after writing out the whole piece I have come up with better ideas’.  

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15 students avoided revising and particularly redrafting if they could. Of these, about a third lacked motivation generally: ‘can’t be bothered’; ‘I’m not remotely interested’; ‘I forgets’; ‘I leave assignments to the last minute’. Others suggested they saw no reason to do so because they were happy with writing as it was, or they had too little time. Two students claimed to revise only ‘if the teacher tells me to do so’ or ‘if I don’t think the reason the teacher has given me is pointless’.

**Enjoyment**

40 students expressed dislike of revision, ranging from forthright antipathy, ‘I hate it’, to the more pained ‘I really find it hard to write’ or ‘I prefer to wright [sic] it out as few times as possible’. 13 students claimed they just didn’t like writing. For them, revision represented an additional burden: ‘it’s a very bad thing if you don’t like writing’. For six students revising was ‘hard’ and they were unsure how to go about it: ‘I find it hard to think of ways to improve my work’; ‘I find it hard to find what needs to be changed’; ‘it’s hard because if I don’t have many ideas to start with I can’t really change it’; ‘I don’t really do it properly’; ‘it confuses me’; ‘I’m not sure how much of it we should change’. Lack of confidence in one’s own judgement was also a factor: ‘I’m very self-conscious about other people reading my writing because I’m worried they’ll disagree with what I’ve said or think it’s really bad’. For others it was plain ‘boring’ (10 references), ‘not enjoyable’ (5 references), ‘annoying’ (3 references), time-consuming (2 references), ‘arduous’, ‘laborous [sic]’ or ‘tedious’. Only 15 students admitted that revising was ‘sometimes’ enjoyable or might be ‘in some contexts, i.e. creative writing’ or ‘if you enjoy the subject you’re writing about’. Expressions of positive enjoyment were rare: ‘in a weird way I kind of like redrafting because it makes me feel happy that I’ve improved it’. 16 students were either neutral (‘it’s OK’; ‘I don’t mind it’) or didn’t know.

**Incidental data from field notes**

Additional evidence was noted during the classroom discussions which immediately preceded or followed completion of the questionnaires. It was evident that some students in several classes were not familiar with the term ‘revising’ in relation to writing, and many students confused it with exam revision. A few students did not know what redrafting meant, and when the
teacher explained, dismissed it as not applicable to them: ‘I don’t do that, so that’s OK’ (year 10 girl). Many students assumed that redrafting meant copying out in neat: ‘make it clear to read so it’s not just arrows and stuff’ (year 10 girl). When asked to define the revision task, most students volunteered editing and proof-reading functions, or ‘checking’ that requirements have been met: ‘go back over it and check that you’ve met the criteria’ (year 10 boy). One boy observed that it was more important to make sure writing was interesting: ‘there’s not much point in getting everything else right if it’s boring’ (year 9). Some students positively objected when asked to revise, suggesting that revision would make writing worse: ‘if you edit it all the time, it’s like the spontaneity goes, it becomes almost not your own piece’ (year 10 girl). Others were concerned that revision would make writing worse because they did not know what to change: ‘I think if I kept going over it I would end up making changes that I didn’t have to, cos I just wouldn’t know what to change so just change stuff for no reason…when you’re doing it for no reason it could make it worse’ (year 9 boy). The view was also expressed that ‘improvement’ of writing was in the eye of the beholder and therefore difficult to determine: ‘it all depends what the teacher might like, they might like it but someone else might not, it’s opinion’ (year 9 boy).

**Conclusion**

The broad patterns of response to questionnaire items would seem to imply that these students’ interpretations of revision are narrowly-conceived and limited in scope. Their definitions of purpose are predominantly surface-focused and instrumental. Their claimed behaviours suggest they attach greatest significance to initial drafting, and tend to revise in minor ways retrospectively. Their stated beliefs about success criteria are not reflected in their claims about revising goals or practice. The survey responses might support Lavelle et al.’s (2002) findings, and the wider view that secondary writers typically do not reflect deeply on their writing or revise extensively of their own accord. The overwhelming impression from students’ written responses is that revising is a mundane and joyless experience undertaken to satisfy teachers. The widespread ambivalence about enjoyment and engagement appears to echo the findings of the NLT survey (2009) in which
more than half of secondary students expressed negative feelings about writing and 45% did not rate themselves as good writers.

On the other hand, aspects of students’ response suggest their orientations towards deep and surface concerns are not clear cut. Whilst their revising goals appear limited, their stated beliefs about what makes good writing suggest substantive and personal concerns over and above cosmetic ones. Concern for their reader is apparent, and perceptions of readership appear to extend beyond the teacher. Mixed views about the usefulness of particular composing strategies suggest distinct preferences. Furthermore, a number of tensions are apparent which imply a more complex picture, for example between students’ perceptions of purpose and their claims about practice or between the significance students attach to particular success criteria and the extent to which they claim to address these when revising.

These inconsistencies and contradictions might reflect a range of factors which cannot be captured in survey research. Students’ overriding concern to satisfy assessment criteria, for example, alongside an apparently widespread uncertainty about how quality is judged, might suggest difficulties interpreting requirements or making sense of school messages. Students may struggle to evaluate their writing at higher levels or set goals for improvement because they lack ownership of the process or of the evaluation criteria. Lack of revision might equally be a function of the kinds of tasks set or the conditions imposed, rather than of students’ understanding or capability. Furthermore, similar responses may reflect very different individual rationales. For example, the emphasis on minor revision might be explained in a number of ways, each reflecting very different positions. It might reflect poor understanding of the task; insufficient knowledge of more substantive evaluation criteria; lack of motivation; or a reasoned response to perceived assessment requirements. Similarly, students’ claims about a single drafting strategy might indicate a spontaneous ‘think-say' writing strategy; a minimal-effort strategy; an integrated, high self-monitoring strategy; or simply a pragmatic response to writing under timed conditions. Such variables can only be explored through observations of writing and discussion with writers.
As anticipated, therefore, students’ survey responses raised more questions than they answered. However, they suggested interesting lines of inquiry for the qualitative study, and provided a useful focus for closer examination of individual rationales and the kinds of problems and opportunities students face when revising school writing. Table 4.1 outlines the key questions arising from the survey that informed initial case study interviews and observations of writing.

Table 4.1: Questions arising from survey responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main research question</th>
<th>Subsidiary questions suggested by survey responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do students define the purpose of revision and what goals do they prioritise when revising school writing?</strong></td>
<td>• To what extent do students perceive their personal goals for writing and revising align with extrinsic requirements?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might they prioritise them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might they reconcile intrinsically-motivated goals such as self-expression or creativity with prescribed requirements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might they reconcile a concern to satisfy assessment criteria with a perception that an audience wider than the teacher is significant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do students define the process of revision and what strategies do they employ when composing in the classroom?</strong></td>
<td>• To what extent do students’ perceived writing strategies align with those expected of them in school?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do students adopt different strategies in practice?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How do students who do revise substantively manage it in the time available?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What do they perceive makes the difference between successful and less successful single drafts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do students define the success criteria for revision and what concerns do they attend to when revising school writing?</strong></td>
<td>• To what extent do students’ perceive that their own beliefs about quality in writing align with what is valued in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might they prioritise them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might they reconcile personal values with assessment criteria when evaluating their writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might they go about revising to improve quality when they lack confidence in their own judgement?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5: UNDERSTANDINGS OF PURPOSE

**Research question**

The six case studies were designed to investigate individual students’ understandings about revision in the context of school writing. Evidence from their questionnaire responses, observed writing patterns and text revisions were used to focus a series of one-to-one discussions conducted over the course of a classroom writing assignment. These interviews formed the primary source of data for exploring the research questions posed.

The first research question addressed students’ understanding of the purpose of revision: *How do students define the purpose of revision and what goals do they prioritise when revising school writing?* To investigate this question, students were asked to reflect upon perceived purposes and their revising goals in the context of an assigned classroom writing task. The assigned task was either an imaginative piece or a persuasive piece, and students were explicitly encouraged by teachers to review and revise their texts. All interview comments that referred to reasons for revising, perceived priorities or specific revising goals were coded under the broad heading of Purpose. Within this, thematic categories and sub-codes were identified and refined over several iterations. This analysis revealed 10 top-level themes, hierarchically organised according to frequency of reference and number of cases, as shown in Table 5.1. These themes and the various views which contribute to them are considered below.

**Revising to find and eliminate flaws: ‘nit-picking’**

The most prominent theme arising from the data concerned the detection and correction of errors or faults. Five students defined the purpose of revising as checking for flaws and repairing them. Reviewing was described as a kind of detective work, whereby writing is examined and re-examined any number of times with a critical eye in order to spot deficiencies: *‘going through it lots and lots of times’* (Jamie), *‘over and over again’* (Zoe), *‘like when you’re checking over your work, and you’ve checked over it and you’ve checked over it and you’ve checked over it’* (Sara). This task involved searching for mistakes: *‘any*
Table 5.1: Coding framework for all comments relating to the purpose of revision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 codes</th>
<th>No. of refs.</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
<th>Level 2 codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revising to find and eliminate flaws</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Error correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repetition and omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising as minor adjustment</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising to enhance language</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising to elaborate</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising for grades</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising content</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ill-advised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To develop ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To explore ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising as counterproductive</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising for presentation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising to reorganise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising for the reader</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

flaws in it’ (Jamie); 'something wrong' (Luke); 'the misplaced thing’ (Chris), or for more general causes of dissatisfaction: 'whether it sounds right to you' (Jamie); 'what you like and don't like’ (Luke). They characterised the revising task as a nit-picking exercise which required particular skill: ‘like my granddad, who would nit-pick it completely, pick out mistakes right the way through it…point out flaws’ (Jamie).

For lower-achieving writers, proofreading was the primary reason for revising: ‘I do it to see if I’ve got my punctuation in the right places, and if it makes sense, and if the words are like, if I’m using the right words and things’ (Zoe). These students revised particularly to correct punctuation, spelling and paragraphing. They checked to make sure that ‘everything’s right’ (Luke) and ‘in its place’ (Chris). Higher-achieving writers were also concerned to identify repetition or omission: ‘(I) look back at each key feature that I need to make sure I’ve got it in there’ (Jamie). Sara focused particularly on poor word choice and clumsy phrasing rather than mechanical error. Only Anna defined the purpose of revision as more radical and exploratory than retrospective checking: 'the purpose for me I think is…how to sort (my ideas) out'.
Revising as minor adjustment: ‘perfecting what you’ve got’

An allied theme was revising to ‘perfect’ existing text. The same five students expected to make only minor changes to their writing, not larger-scale restructuring or reformulating: ‘it doesn’t tend to be developing ideas, it’s just changing little things’ (Sara). They perceived a first draft as almost complete: ‘it’s like what I want to say and it’s pretty much all there, but just, you know, gotta change a few bits for the redraft’ (Luke); ‘you’ve got a basic content and then you just add tiny bits to it. I don’t think you could change the whole thing when you’re looking over your work...what you’ve put down first is the bulk of what you’ve written’ (Jamie). Chris saw his occasional tendency to change the whole thing as a failure: ‘if I’ve reread, sometimes, instead of changing sentences, I’ll be changing the whole thing’.

The purpose of revising therefore was not to reconsider overall shape or substance, but to ‘try and perfect it as best (you) can with the content (you’ve) got’, to bring existing text up ‘to a good standard’ (Jamie). It meant looking for possible enhancements: ‘to see the improvements...what I could change’ (Sara); to ‘make sure it’s all as good as it can be, and up to its best’ (Chris). This relatively minor ‘tidying up’ offered limited scope for improvement: ‘it only slightly gets it better, it’s not a vast change’ (Jamie); ‘just a few words mixed about and stuff’ (Zoe). Success was dependent on the quality of the initial draft: ‘if what you’ve got is to a good standard then you can pick that up to be quite a good piece of writing’ (Jamie). However, revising more substantively was not seen as feasible or necessary by these students: ‘you just edit what you’ve got...the content’s already there, so if the corrections and editing is easy to read, then there’s not much need (to do more)’ (Jamie).

Revising to enhance language: ‘chopping and changing words’

All students shared the view that an important purpose of revising was to enhance the expression in writing: ‘when you reread it you can think oh, actually this would be a better way of phrasing it or this would be a better way of describing what I’m trying to say’ (Sara). Substituting unsatisfactory bits of text for more considered choices was the most frequently mentioned goal
references) after correction. It was seen as an opportunity to improve the way you 'put your ideas across' rather than the ideas themselves. Enhanced language was seen as something that required attention after writing because it didn't come spontaneously: 'you don't think out really complicated vocabulary in your head usually, unless your conscious [sic] speaks like Stephen Fry!' (Jamie). Word level objectives were mentioned most frequently: 'chopping and changing would be just changing words' (Jamie); 'most of the time it's just changing words 'cos I do like to use the best words possible' (Sara); 'just reading it a few times and making sure that...all the words are used at their best' (Chris). Thus, over-used words are replaced, extra adjectives are added, superfluous conjunctions removed, and so on. Phrase and sentence level objectives were also mentioned: rephrasing or changing sentence structure for better effect, or shortening or lengthening sentences to give variety. Larger elements were sometimes candidates for substitution: '(I'll change) mostly words, and then if the sentence isn't right, then I'll change the sentence and then if it just doesn't (work) I'll start again on the paragraph' (Chris). However, paragraph level changes were seen as beyond the scope of revision: 'when it comes to revising you don't write another paragraph' (Jamie).

Revising to elaborate: 'adding that extra thing'

One of the main reasons given for revising was to add to existing text: 'I think that's what the revising's for, adding in that extra thing...you're adding that extra bit of precision and that extra bit of flair, extra bit of description...a bit of style' (Jamie). For the most part, 'you just add tiny bits...a few sentences' (Jamie): 'put a few more words in' (Zoe); 'put that idea in' (Chris); 'explain that more' (Anna); 'adding in extra thoughts, elaborating, describing, that kind of thing' (Jamie). Different forms of writing merited different kinds of addition. Whereas with imaginative writing the purpose was to elaborate language and description, with analytical writing it was to expand on points. Two students mentioned exploiting the PQE/PEE formula 'to its full' (Sara) when revising essays. The focus here was on 'the detail of your analysing...how you've explained your points...you have to be more analytical of your own analytical piece when you're writing a non-creative piece' (Jamie). The assumption was, however, that the ideas themselves already existed – you just needed to explain them further: 'I
don’t really know if it helps me to develop my ideas or not, I have really good ideas (to start with) and then I just try and expand on it [sic]’ (Zoe).

Three students were ambivalent about the value of revising to ‘add in’, and saw it as likely to make writing worse: ‘you add in bits, and obviously the longer it gets the more you drag on what you want to say’ (Luke); ‘putting in loads and loads, just adding in more detail, I think that would (make it) longer, more boring and everything’ (Chris). For Zoe, however, revision was seen largely as an opportunity to ‘add on’ and thus to extend the length of writing rather than to supplement what had already been written. Indeed, having written an initial conclusion, she described adding ‘a better one’ afterwards, even though her first was retained. Revising to remove text (other than single words) was not an expressed goal. Two students stated that deleting text was an unlikely outcome of revision: ‘you could, but I think most people think oh I’ll write a really long thing and they’ll like it ‘cos it’s got like loads in it’ (Luke).

Revising for grades: ‘doing the list’

For four students the primary purpose of writing and revising was to satisfy assessment criteria: ‘I think getting the marks is what young people write for, which is a shame obviously…both (revising and redrafting) have to be done to better potential grades’ (Jamie); ‘you write to get good grades’ (Sara). Consequently, their revising goals were determined extrinsically rather than personally: ‘if that's what's going to get a high grade, then I'll do it’ (Sara); ‘you've got to do what the examiner wants you to do’ (Jamie). It was recognised that teachers’ purposes were also dictated by examining body requirements, so that revising in the GCSE years was especially prescriptive: ‘they always talk about going through it lots and lots of times…I just think it's for the grades. I think ultimately that's what the teacher has to say, they have to get it for the grades’ (Jamie). For these students, the reason for revising was an instrumental one: ‘it could help put those marks up and it could get you the better grade, literally just reading it a few times and making sure that everything is in its place’ (Chris); ‘I have come to think of it as something you just have to do because of the teacher’ (Jamie).
Zoe and Anna, however, were torn between their personal goals for writing and revising, and those imposed upon them: 'I want to get a good mark, but I want to be happy with it as well, but it’s really hard' (Zoe); 'I guess you do need grades…but I think I'm different in the way that I wouldn't like really focus on what the school wanted or what my teacher wanted, I'd more or less focus on what I wanted out of the piece…I do try to do the things they want you to do, but at the same time do it my way. You have to believe in it, otherwise there’s no point in writing' (Anna). Inattention to school purposes, however, was a recipe for disappointing grades: 'I haven't done what she's like looked for' or 'I didn't listen to exactly what I did [sic]' (Anna). Pursuing personal goals also got harder as exams got closer: ‘doing it your own way, it gets harder as you get closer to GCSEs. You have to think about accuracy’ (Anna).

**Revising content: ‘stick with your first idea’**

Most students did not associate revising with rethinking the content of writing. Only the higher-achieving students mentioned it as feasible but probably ill-advised. Making substantive changes was seen as ‘a waste of time’ (Jamie), or as a failure to think through one’s ideas in the first place: 'I'll think I want to change it around, but a lot of it is laziness because I should probably plan’ (Anna). Rethinking content was also impractical in the time available for classroom writing: ‘I find that I don't have the time, and if I can't completely think through it all, then I just won't bother’ (Anna). Thus some students consciously suppressed the inclination to revise the content of writing in order to meet the perceived demands of school writing: ‘You have to stick with an idea and try and battle it out really’ (Jamie). Deeply reflective revision was not advisable in the GCSE years because ‘you have to…be more decisive’ (Anna).

However, for Sara and Anna in particular, this was a compromise that bothered them. They recognised the developmental possibilities of redrafting, and did not feel that the content of a first draft was complete: 'when you do it first off, it’s just a draft really, then I just think, if you don't change it then it's not going to get like developed…it's not going to be the best you can do, just your first' (Sara). They saw drafting and revising as a means of trying out ideas in order to select 'the ones that are really good' (Sara); 'the purpose for me I think is because, like I
said, I'll write down eight ideas...and I think when I redraft...it's just how to sort it out' (Anna). They also recognised the potential for reconceptualisation: ‘as you check it through you might have new ideas, and...you can see things in new ways’ (Sara). However, neither regarded their exploratory tendencies as necessarily wise, since it left too little time to attend to other goals: ‘I end up...spending way too much time on my draft and then not having the time to make it look readable or anything’ (Sara). They were deterred from pursuing new avenues because it would distract them from the purpose of the task: ‘I think if I look into something so much, I'll get so many ideas and so many thoughts and I'll think about it too much and then...I'll think about how it links to other things and then I'll go off task’ (Anna). Thus whilst both saw that reflecting on writing could generate new thinking and increase learning, they were inclined, to a greater or lesser degree, to suppress exploratory goals in favour of taking 'the first (ideas) that come into my head' (Sara). For these students, there was an apparent conflict between their personal more substantive goals for revising and the goals that were feasible in the school context: 'when I redraft I think oh I should explain that more or I should rethink that or I should not put that in...so in my head it's how to sort it out, but then I think if I don't get the time to do that...I'll get really annoyed because my work won't be very good and I think I could make it better. I get very frustrated' (Anna).

Revising to develop ideas was perceived by higher-achieving writers as potentially desirable, 'if you're allowed to develop your ideas!' (Jamie); however, it was not seen as practical in the school context. Whilst students expected to ‘tidy up’ ideas that were ill-expressed, or to rephrase ‘half ideas’ (Jamie), changing your mind more radically was problematic in the time available: ‘whether you do it again, or you change it, or you leave it and just struggle on, I don't know’ (Anna). Ultimately, the limited scope of revising for school purposes meant that the only real choice was to stop rethinking and 'go with your first opinion' or 'stick with what (you've) put down' (Anna).

**Revising as counterproductive: ‘over-cooking’**

All students had some reservations about the benefits of revising, or regarded it as counterproductive. Making changes retrospectively could spoil the flow of
spontaneous writing: ‘a little bit of temptation to over-cook something really, 'cos you can change stuff too much, so that it's too complex and it's not free-flowing' (Jamie). It could compromise your natural style: 'by making your sentences more accurate, you're kind of losing the flair because you've written a sentence how you'd write it and then you edit it so it's perfectly accurate which is not how someone would write normally' (Jamie). It could also make writing over-long and boring: 'I think the longer I spend looking at it and trying to change it, it makes it worse because...you make it so much longer, 'cos you add in bits, and obviously the longer it gets, the more you drag on what you say, and it's not like short and sweet' (Luke). Curiously, Chris concluded that trying to revise without feedback from the teacher was likely to be counterproductive because it prevented one from learning how to improve further: 'it wouldn't be right if it didn't have little errors in it because...you wouldn't be able to get better, (but if) your teacher told you this wasn't good enough and she told you why it wasn't good enough, you (can) put it in the next one...then that next bit of writing will be better' (Chris). The purpose of 'redrafting' was also questioned, because it was associated with copying out in neat: 'a bit of a waste of time really, unless the scribbles on your page get too much' (Jamie). Substantive revision was also seen as ill-advised because it generated more problems than could be resolved in the time available.

Revising for presentation: ‘writing it neater’

Three (lower-achieving) students saw redrafting as necessary for presentation: 'when I have homework or something, I have to do a draft first and then I have to do it in neat' (Zoe); 'I copy it out again with the changes that I made, and write it neater' (Luke); 'I made so many scribbles on it...I had to write the whole thing again' (Chris). For high-achieving students as well, concerns about presentation sometimes impacted on more substantive purposes because the more time one spent annotating, the less time was available for rewriting and the more unreadable one's work became: 'I end up...spending way too much time on my draft and then not having the time to make it readable' (Sara). In this sense, the goal of revising in one's head and getting it right the first time took priority, since the fewer text changes necessary the better: 'that's actually quite good for
me...there’s not too many crossings out’ (Zoe); ‘I didn’t actually cross anything out for a long time, that’s quite good for me’ (Anna).

Revising to reorganise: ‘changing things round’

Three students saw revising as an opportunity to restructure or rearrange material. This was mostly at a relatively minor level: changing sentences around or changing word order. For Jamie, the overall structure of his writing was pre-planned and therefore revising was simply a question of checking paragraphing and improving sentence structure. For Sara, revision was triggered by the realisation that ‘this would be better following on from this (rather) than where I’d originally decided it was going to go’. For Anna, however, drafting was associated with trying to sort out her ideas, and this was a constant process of reorganising: ‘I’ll think oh no wait, I should probably write that in there or change that round to make it sound better...so I’ll write it all up, and then I’ll read through it again and think, yeah, no right, I want it the other way round, and then I’ll want to change it more around’. However, she felt that this was a planning failure on her part rather than a revising task, particularly since she was rarely able to arrange her thoughts to her own satisfaction in the time available: ‘I think I should start planning because I think in my head it needs to be sorted out so it’s easier to sort it out on paper’.

Revising for the reader: ‘writing skill not reading material’

In spite of the fact that several students were writing articles for newspapers, only Anna explicitly mentioned the needs of an imagined reader other than the teacher-examiner when discussing her goals for writing and revising. She was concerned to make choices that were tailored to accommodate her reader’s interests and feelings, and to take account of alternative perspectives, although her definition of the imagined reader was imprecise: ‘I would reread this like three times...to see like how, if I was reading it, someone else's writing, where I'd, how I'd want them to go with it. I'd think more about that than I would about what I wanted to say...the things that other people liked...but then I don’t really know who the reader was’. Sara and Jamie were explicit about the need to revise for a reader-examiner not a real reader: ‘they’re probably looking
for...stuff that would get you marks, not like this is something I would want to read at home, because they're examining it, they are just trying to look for your writing skill, not reading material' (Sara).

Conclusion

In summary, these students tended to define revision as a task of small consequence, a matter of ‘checking’, ‘tidying’ and ‘perfecting’ writing rather than reshaping or rethinking it, at least for school purposes. They did not distinguish between revising and editing; indeed, lower-achieving students focused almost exclusively on word substitution and proofreading. The purpose of redrafting was not clearly perceived, and no student regarded it as unambiguously beneficial. It was seen variously as necessary for presentation; a waste of time; the consequence of poor planning; or desirable but not practical in the time available. Thus, the majority regarded a first draft as almost complete, and content as largely fixed. Revising was intended to address errors and problems or to cosmetically enhance text, not to move beyond first thoughts. Consequently students expected revision to have a relatively marginal impact on quality. Even high-achieving writers perceived the scope for improvement as finite: 'I find that once I've checked it through, like three times or something, I do find that I can't...change anything else, like when...you've checked over it and you've checked over and you've checked over it...there comes a point when you can't think of any improvements because you've done everything you can to it, I think there's a cut-off point' (Sara). Only one student considered the scope of revision to be potentially infinite.

Paradoxically, all students expressed reservations about the usefulness of revision beyond error-correction and minor enhancement, and some felt that revising made writing worse. Whilst higher-achieving students recognised the possibility of substantive changes to their writing, they saw this as more problematic than purposeful for school tasks. Rethinking the content of school writing was not judged to be a practical goal even by those who were inclined to do so. Their reasoning was that in the limited time available it was better to stick with initial ideas rather than risk having to rewrite the whole thing. Only
one student defined the purpose of revision as primarily content-focused, but saw this as a planning failure on her part. Whilst students expected to add minor content such as further explanation or description during revision, the deletion of text (beyond the odd word) was not an expressed goal, in spite of concerns about being long-winded. Major restructuring was also perceived as ill-advised.

Revision as a tool for learning barely featured in students’ task definitions: revising-to-explore or revising-to-gain-understanding were not seen as feasible or relevant in school writing. Intrinsic goals for revision were notably absent, or deliberately ignored. Most students saw the main reason to revise as an instrumental one: to satisfy assessment criteria and improve their grade. However, all of the high-achieving writers recognised the mismatch between the kinds of purposes that were feasible or expected in school, and those they might otherwise pursue, such as ‘sorting out’, ‘selecting’ and ‘developing’ ideas. All described deliberately suppressing their own inclinations in favour of perceived extrinsic demands, and in one case managing these conflicting demands was frustrating and demotivating.

Audience consideration was also barely mentioned by students as a reason for reviewing or revising writing. Whilst revising for ‘readability’ was a commonly expressed goal, only one student mentioned reviewing writing with the needs of a reader other than the teacher in mind. Indeed, imagining any other reader was perceived by some to be irrelevant. For the majority, and especially those in year 10, rhetorical goals were explicitly focused on display rather than purposeful communication: on ‘stuff that would get you marks…not reading material’ (Sara).

Students’ definitions of revision as a minor and relatively ineffectual task were also reflected in practice. In all cases, students’ revisions to text were overwhelmingly surface or stylistic. Only one student made any change to text structure and this was at sentence level. The few content changes made were small-scale, and almost always added to meaning rather than altered existing ideas or argument. Overall, the changes made were neither extensive nor of great consequence, constituting on average fewer than 10 changes per 100
words in all but one case. The largest content change was an addition of 15 words. All students chose to extend the length of their texts during the second writing episode rather than to redraft what had already been written.

Contrary, therefore, to policy suggestions that students revise to explore ideas and craft their writing or that redrafting should move ‘beyond proofreading for errors to the reshaping of whole texts or parts of texts’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.99), these students saw such purposes as irrelevant or potentially detrimental, and focused in practice on minor editing.
CHAPTER 6: UNDERSTANDINGS OF PROCESS

Research question

The second research question addressed students’ understanding of the composing and revising process: *How do students define the process of revision and what strategies do they employ when composing in the classroom?* To investigate this question, students were asked to reflect on their writing and revising processes in the context of a classroom writing task undertaken over two lessons. All comments that referred to procedures or strategies for composing and revising, problems or opportunities encountered, or preferred methods, were coded under the broad heading of Process. Thematic categories and sub-codes were identified and refined over several iterations. This analysis revealed 10 top-level themes, hierarchically organised according to frequency of reference and number of cases, as shown in Table 6.1.

Translating: the biggest challenge

The most prominent theme emerging from the data concerned the process of translation. Translating ideas into language was perceived as a struggle by students of all abilities. They felt they knew what they wanted to say but were ‘slowed down’ by the business of transferring it to paper: ‘*I tended to, as I was writing, have like the points I was trying to make in my head, but like getting it down on paper, and in which order I'd write it, and what words I'd use to write it (was difficult)*’ (Sara). Sometimes the ideas came faster than the writing, and this was difficult to manage: ‘*I have so many thoughts going off that I just, I like try and verbalise all of them, but I'm never quite sure how to write them all down*’ (Anna). To varying degrees the extreme frustration voiced by Anna was a shared response: ‘*I know what I want to say, but I don't know how I want to say it...if I can't work out how to say it, it annoys me, like if I can't work out how to word it properly it really annoys me*’; ‘*I'll sit there and think, oh how do I word that? How do I make it sound? 'Cos in my head it will sound good, but then I'll write it down and think, oh that sounds rubbish, oh no, and then I'll rewrite it again*’ (Anna).
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For lower-achieving students the challenge was ‘making sense’. They had difficulty keeping track of the ‘narrative person’ (Luke) or getting the words out in a comprehensible order ‘(I have) to like juggle my words around a bit...to get it to make sense’ (Zoe). Finding the necessary vocabulary and forming sentences was a constant battle which involved repeated rehearsal in their heads: ‘I knew what I was going to write but I couldn’t get my words out onto the piece of paper. I stopped. I tried to like go over them in my head. I knew what I wanted to write, but I just couldn’t get them out...I struggled with like making it, getting the words out, using the right words...I know what I’m thinking but I can’t get them out, like in a sentence if you get what I mean, and I kind of like use the wrong words most of the time’ (Zoe). Frequently, attempts to translate ideas did not match up to expectations: ‘you know you want to say it but it doesn’t come out right’ (Chris). Handwriting and spelling problems also impeded transcription, and all found word-processing easier: ‘I can’t like form letters properly...if I write I’ll have to do it in like small portions (but) I’m good for ages if I’ve got (the computer)’ (Chris); ‘I have to do it in neat... so I’ll do it in my book and then I’ll write it up on the computer’ (Zoe).

For higher-achieving students, the challenge was presenting ideas in the best way or the best language: ‘I can get a story, but it’s how to present that story as best I can’ (Jamie) or ‘how to put it in a way that would be nice to read’ (Sara). They were able to explain how they shaped and revised sentences in their heads to improve them: ‘they just kind of pop up, but then I kind of try and use better words in them, different synonyms for stuff, and just try and build them in my head...mould it into something decent...which is why I don’t tend to go back and cross out as much as some people, as I’ve already subconsciously tried to do it in my head’ (Jamie).

For all students success was partly or largely dependent on the ease with which translation proceeded, ‘just how free-flowing it is when I write it, like as soon as I finish writing it I know whether it’s going to be good, or whether it’s one of my not so good pieces’ (Jamie). Whilst one could improve a piece to some extent by revising it afterwards, the fluency and pace one could command during translation was all-important: ‘I try and make sure my pen keeps up with my brain...you’re just trying to get down the best you can all the time’ (Jamie). Thus
the more reflective writers judged themselves ‘slow’ (Sara) or indecisive: ‘I don’t like settling for something’ (Anna).

**Generating ideas: a spontaneous process**

Whilst some students talked about idea-generation before writing, all students described the generation of ideas during writing: ‘just write one thing, and it sparks another idea’ (Sara). There were differences, however, in the degree to which students relied on spontaneous idea generation.

Lower-achieving students claimed to rely almost exclusively on the flow of ideas during writing: ‘well when I’m writing something my ideas normally just pop into my head and then I just write them down’ (Zoe); ‘I always tend to get ideas as I’m writing’ (Luke); ‘I just go straight into it really...just comes to mind, whatever Miss says, I’ll write and just think up here’ (Chris). For these students, the hardest part was ‘getting started’ (Chris; Luke). They preferred to have specific prompts from the teacher or stimulus material to trigger the writing process. Once they had an initial idea, they could usually keep going: ‘once I get writing I’m alright, it just comes to me’ (Luke); ‘well I probably would think like the first sentence, I’d probably think that for about five minutes...and then for the rest will just come with every sentence’ (Chris). Particular significance was therefore attached to ‘starting right’ (Chris). For Chris, success was contingent on having made the right choice at the outset, not on revision afterwards. His overriding concern was to ‘make sure that the start is good, and then I can just carry that on’. So long as he got off on the right foot, he felt that the rest ‘will all slot in place when it comes’. This had been his strategy from primary school days: ‘in primary I had like loads of people come in and then take me out of lessons and show me how to write properly...they just said make sure you start right and you’ll finish right’.

Having started, these students relied on maintaining the flow of ideas. During pauses, their focus was primarily on ‘what next’: ‘I was just thinking about what I was going to write next really’ (Luke). When ideas came freely, getting them down quickly before they escaped was a concern: ‘when I have a thought in my head I like to get it down on paper as quick as possible’ (Zoe). Zoe found
spontaneous idea generation easiest when writing from her imagination: 'I normally come up with really good ideas...and I have to get them all down...I have quite a wide, big imagination (and) I quite like to use it'. She therefore wrote in highly concentrated bursts, barely pausing, until her arm ached. However, she had more difficulty when writing 'in a tighter space' and preferred to make a plan. When ideas were less forthcoming, progress was difficult. Luke sometimes experienced writer's block and lost momentum easily: 'I was just stuck for what I was going to say, a blank out kind of'. He felt that conferring with others would help him generate ideas: 'if you can sort of talk to other people...just like about what I was going to put into the story'. Chris, on the other hand, preferred to follow his own thoughts: 'I just kind of let it roll...see where it goes'. Indeed, once underway, Chris cautioned against stopping writing as this might disrupt the flow: 'you just carry on writing, don't stop (till) I haven't got anything left to write'. However, he was aware that this strategy did not always work; sometimes 'it starts to drag on a bit...like you've got a really good start, and then it just comes, and it sounds like it's dragging on'. When this happened, he felt his options afterwards were limited and his tendency was 'to leave it'.

Concluding writing was therefore unpremeditated for this group. Writing ended when the flow of ideas came to a natural halt: 'it would just, like with the flow of an idea, it would just flow and then it would come to a slow stop, and then that last sentence would make it finish, so you know that that would be the end' (Chris). The end-point was an instinctive one: 'I get this weird feeling like it's coming to an end when I read it, it's so weird, yeah, it's like a feeling in my body, I can't really describe it' (Zoe). Students who relied on generating ideas as they wrote were also sometimes reluctant to make changes: it seemed they read through their work not so much to improve what had been written, but to trigger the next idea: 'I'll read it through again, and then just, er, keep writing' (Zoe). Once started they didn't expect to change their minds: 'I just make sure it flows from that start, and then it usually stays the same' (Chris).

This 'think-write' strategy was perceived as risky, however. Success or failure was somewhat unpredictable: 'I think it just happens really. It's where you are and what sort of mood you're in I think that changes your writing' (Luke); 'for me
probably it would be luck’ (Chris). It was also more problematic when particular requirements or constraints were imposed, such as having to produce a persuasive argument or to implement a particular technique. Furthermore, in exam conditions, ‘because you’re under more pressure you think slower, so ideas don’t come out as quick as they would in a lesson’ (Chris).

High-achieving writers also generated ideas as they wrote, but relied more on planning or revising to bring their ideas into line with rhetorical intentions. Their approach during writing was also more measured, as they tried to control their ideas: ‘still thinking logically, not crazy writing…it’s almost taming, like taming your ideas…some people might have the tendency to keep writing and writing, but it has to be…about precision and control as well as content’ (Jamie). Jamie distinguished between genres that required a more spontaneous approach to idea generation, and those that demanded greater precision. In his view, analytical writing needed structure and planning, whereas creative forms relied on free expression: ‘creative’s more like as it comes out your head usually…I don’t think you can really plan a poem…I think it’s just got to be free in your head’.

For students of all abilities, idea-generation during writing was an important factor in success: ‘I suppose it just comes down to the day, and how much you’ve got to write about it, how much you can think of’ (Sara). Being stuck for ideas was an uncomfortable experience, especially when time was limited: ‘when you don’t know what you want to say is when you have a problem, ‘cos I’m like, ohh, I just sit there for ages’ (Anna). The nature of the topic was judged to be especially significant in this respect, and students often felt handicapped by their lack of knowledge or interest in the subject given, even when writing imaginatively (5 cases): ‘it was kind of hard because you had like no background information about any of the topics…I was just guessing some facts…trying to like stretch points…take a point that I didn’t know much about, and trying to stretch it out, so there’s something, like actual body to the writing…without really knowing what I was saying’ (Sara).
Planning: recommended but not always productive

Planning was perceived by all students as a discrete stage in advance of writing. It was a strategy most students felt they ought to use and which their teachers recommended. Planning rather than revising was identified as the route to improvement and the cause of problems with writing: ‘a lot of it is laziness because I should probably plan but I don’t’ (Anna); ‘I don’t often plan my conclusion which is a bad thing, I should start planning’ (Jamie). Nevertheless, students claimed to adopt different approaches in practice.

For two students, planning ahead was not always perceived as helpful: ‘teachers tend to tell you to plan, structure and stuff, but I never do it because I just don’t find that works for me’ (Sara). Sara and Anna found formal planning unproductive for several reasons. In the first place, their plans tended to morph: ‘it never stayed the same at all, like always changed, and we had tasks where you had to make a plan, write it up and then finish it, and see if your plan matched, and my plan would never match’ (Anna). Secondly, plans often ended up as first drafts: ‘it would just end up being me writing out my essay really’ (Sara); ‘I never know how to plan and just write notes, I always write sentences’ (Anna). Finally, both felt they had insufficient time to plan and to write: ‘I always find it really hard to strike the balance between over-planning so you don’t have much time to write it and under-planning so you don’t have much to go on’ (Sara); ‘I think (I’d plan) if I had more time to think about it...because planning’s always like a really quick lesson…you should plan it so it works...and you have to take time to work out how, but then it’s like, when does that time happen?’ (Anna). Anna concluded that plans were unnatural and got in the way of writing: ‘it’s not realistic, like if you’re about to say something you don’t think ‘first I’m going to say this, this and this’, or if you’re writing a report on someone, you don’t make a list of bullet points...when I’m writing I don’t want to keep looking at a list’. Consequently, these students tended to plan only in their heads or as they wrote: ‘I kind of like in my mind prepare what I’m going to write and then I just write it down’ (Sara); ‘I’ll think it in my head – I will never write down what I wanted it to be’ (Anna). Whilst their initial writing was ‘mostly spontaneous’ (Sara), these two writers expected to revise more extensively than others.
By contrast, two students preferred to make a written plan. Jamie outlined the topics or key points to be covered in each of his paragraphs, and used this as his guide during writing, ‘rather than just to wing it’. He felt a plan should be 'flexible, but detailed where it needs to be' and that 'you obviously write somewhat to your plan because you can't just go in free will'. Zoe liked ‘having a plan just to have everything out’ rather than risk forgetting what she wanted to say, especially when writing essays: ‘otherwise I'll forget everything...so that's why I plan'. Planning ahead meant that writing became a more straight-forward translation exercise, and revision almost unnecessary: 'I do that less because I've got my plan there...I just basically put it into sentences instead of like notes'. Both of these writers felt that revision was a minor editing task which did not change the content of writing.

Two (lower-achieving) writers considered planning as a prompt rather than as a framework. They felt they needed an initial idea of what they were going to say rather than an outline plan. Once started, they could write fluently. Luke used a spider-diagram or brainstorm ‘just to get me started...once I get writing I'm alright, it just comes'. Chris focused particularly on his opening sentence and then tended to 'go straight into it really….the rest will just come with every sentence'. Like the planners, these writers also saw revision as a minor task and did not expect to change their ideas.

Regardless of preference or advised method, advance planning was often a brief process in practice. Students planned on the hoof – as they made their way to the classroom or as teachers introduced the task: 'I'll probably think of stuff as I'm coming up to the lesson' (Jamie); ‘as soon as she said we're going to write about such and such, I'd start thinking about it' (Chris). Planners and non-planners alike claimed that they rarely knew in advance how their writing would end, and planned at different levels as they went along: ‘as I go along I usually think of a conclusion, quickly scribble it down and then carry on writing' (Jamie); 'when I’m writing and I have like ideas and stuff, I tend to usually end up thinking about where I want to go' (Sara); 'I plan like a sentence ahead when I'm writing' (Zoe); 'I won't really know where to go with it until I've like written the first paragraph' (Anna). In effect, even written planning was often truncated, little more than the jotting down of first thoughts: 'sometimes when I'm planning I just
sit there for ages thinking of something, and then it just comes to me, um yeah, and I just write it down, otherwise I'll probably forget it' (Zoe). A written plan was used as a memo rather than as a means of developing ideas. More thorough planning was perceived as time-consuming and effortful. It required special motivation: 'if it's something that I really care about and something that I think is important then I'll do it, and I'll plan it, and I'll try and really think about what I want to say, but if it's something that I just think meh, if I don't really fancy it then I just leave it to the last minute' (Anna).

**Reviewing and reflecting: an afterthought**

For most students, revising was not associated with deep reflection. Reviewing writing was a finite task which became 'quite tedious' when repeated over and over again (Jamie). Five students drew the line after checking their work 'a few times' (Chris): 'I find that once I've checked my work through, like three times or something...there just comes a point where you can't think of any improvements...there's a cut-off point' (Sara). After a first check, reviewing was assumed to yield diminishing returns: 'usually if I was just writing I'd get probably 80% accuracy, which is why I probably revise once, but they always talk about going through it lots and lots of times' (Jamie).

For the three lower-achieving students the reviewing process was particularly cursory: 'I read it through and thought, nah it doesn't need changing' (Zoe); 'I read through it and it sounded alright' (Luke); 'If I've got enough time, then obviously I'll go over it, but if I don't have enough time then I'll just leave it and hope that the start is good' (Chris). Once writing was completed, it seems these writers withdrew their attention prematurely: 'if I don't really know if I'm happy with it or not, then I'll just like say, oh I'm happy with it 'cos it's alright' (Zoe). They sometimes failed to implement their original intentions or teacher requirements, and recognised this when asked to reflect on their writing: 'I haven't got very much detail in there...something I haven't done quite as well as I hoped...oh yeah, that was supposed to be there, but I forgot...yeah, that's what I haven't put in either 'cos I forgot' (Luke).
Sometimes students couldn't see how to implement changes: 'I would have added in a lot more things...but the thing is I never know where to add them in' (Anna); 'I just didn't know where to put a simile...I had no idea' (Chris). Rereading was therefore often unproductive: 'the last hour I just read it through a few times, changed a few things'; 'yeah, I already felt finished, there was not much to do, 'cos I couldn't find where I'd put a simile or metaphor, so...' (Chris). In this sense, 'finished' writing was sometimes just abandoned writing, particularly when the subject was boring or motivation poor: 'if it's not like my favourite time of writing, then I'll know there'll be bad points in it, so it won't really matter because I know that I don't like this writing and I'm not the best at it, so...there it is really' (Chris); 'if it's something that I don't care about, then I'll just think oh that's a bad bit of work but fair enough, which is a very bad attitude' (Anna).

Most students claimed to reflect little on anticipated writing or on their developing texts outside the classroom: 'I'm not going to lie...if it was like a GCSE or something, I would have gone home and done some research, but because...it's just like a classroom task, I didn't really think about it at all' (Sara). Writing set for homework was often left to the last minute: 'If I'm going to do my homework at like 8, I wouldn't think of it until 5 to 8' (Chris); 'if I don't really fancy it, then I just leave it to the last minute' (Anna). When asked if they were likely to think, or had thought, about their writing in the period between first draft and redrafting, the response from five students was unequivocal: 'No' (Sara); 'Not really, I pretty much switch off when I leave the lesson' (Luke); 'No, I came to it fresh today' (Zoe); 'I've got quite a busy timetable academically...I'll probably think of stuff as I'm coming up to the lesson' (Jamie); 'No' (Chris). Anna was the exception: 'probably in the shower. I always think about things in the shower...think of different ways to say it...I won't have written it down anywhere, but I'll think about it’. Anna claimed that when the topic was of sufficient interest, her thinking about it spilled over into other activities and beyond the time available: 'I'll be thinking about that for weeks now'.

Anna was the only student who did not see the reviewing process as finite, or ever completely resolved. For her, writing was never completed to her satisfaction: 'I don't think it's ever as good as I can make it because I can spend
hours changing it...I'm never pleased with it. I never think it's finished. I can look at it again and think but that's not what I think'. Anna's thinking tended to shift as her text evolved, so that her composing process was characteristically punctuated by expressions of doubt: 'oh no wait...' or 'but then I think, no' (22 references). She not only reviewed her writing in terms of her own goals but also from the perspective of an imagined, but ill-defined, audience (8 references). Consequently decision-making was especially difficult and Anna felt herself to be in a perpetual state of re-evaluation when writing.

**Revising text: a retrospective chore**

Revision was perceived by all students as a retrospective task, rather than a more formative or creative process: 'it's like walking back on yourself really' (Chris). It was something they consciously deferred because they didn't want to interrupt the flow of writing: 'I tend to get a lot down quite quickly and then look back' (Jamie). Nevertheless, most chose to 'take it paragraph at a time, chunk of writing at a time' (Sara) in order to avoid making too much work for themselves later on: 'I like working in sections of things...then I feel like I haven't got to change loads' (Anna). Some chose to revise after writing each paragraph: 'I often write a paragraph and then proofread through the paragraph' (Jamie); 'I tend to just write a paragraph, read it through, and then just change what I think needs changing, then carry on writing' (Sara). They also revised at the end of writing: 'once I've finished I'll go over, read the whole thing, then go over it again and start changing things to make sure it's all as best as it can be' (Chris). However, leaving all revision to the end of writing was considered unwise: 'I wouldn't ever write like a whole thing and not reread it, like never. I don't understand how you could do that because then, if you get one thing wrong, you have to change loads to make it fit, and I'd rather just do it bit by bit' (Anna).

Since revision was a matter of annotating existing text rather than generating new writing, they had procedures for doing it which did not destroy the integrity of the first draft: 'I'll cross it out and do like another bit to put it on top... (or) if you want to add in something you can just put a star and write it down at the bottom' (Zoe); 'I'd just put a little asterisk and write like a whole other thing' (Anna). Preserving the appearance of writing was a practical priority,
messy work might mean having to write it out again, whereas ‘if the corrections and editing is easy to read then there’s not much need’ (Jamie).

In a linear routine, the final stage was expected to take ‘a short amount of time’ (Jamie). Some judged that very little revision was necessary, and most set limits on their reviewing and revising activity beyond which they could not see further scope for improvement. However, teachers often asked for more. Thus the process of rereading and checking ‘over and over again’ was seen as a painful but necessary chore: ‘I have come to think of it as something you just have to do because of the teacher...to be honest I get a little bit bored of reading my own writing...just revising and revising it is quite tedious sometimes...(but) it has to be done’ (Jamie); ‘I will do it, but I don’t like writing so I try and save time’ (Luke); ‘I get bored of it very easily...however, I know (it) is very helpful’ (Anna). Paradoxically, however, the same students acknowledged that the revising process could usefully be extended. In practice they envisaged the possibility of further improvements to their texts given more time: ‘I think I could do better with a bit more time’ (Jamie); ‘you always feel like if you had more time you could have improved it’ (Sara); ‘I think probably another lesson would be good, another hour on it or something’ (Luke). For Anna the scope was almost unlimited: ‘I can’t even remember the last time I wrote a piece and then I thought that’s finished...I don’t think I’m done. I’ll think there’s loads more to do...improve on’. Her revising ended only ‘when the teacher tells me to stop’.

The scope for more reflective, and less painful, improvement of text was also envisaged if revision was deferred to a subsequent lesson: ‘you’re able to see it like fresh, and look at it differently, ‘cos when you’re writing it you think that’s the only way you could have put it, ‘cos that’s how you think it in your mind, but then when you come back to it you’re obviously in a different mind-set...you’re able to expand it and see it in a new light and pick out things that are wrong with it that you wouldn’t have seen when you were writing it’ (Sara); ‘it gives you a little bit of a break from what you want to write...(you come back to it) with a bit more energy and differently, because you feel you’ve got different ideas’ (Luke). This experience of ‘seeing again’ was compared by Sara to the purchase of a new dress which, when tried on at home afterwards, is found not to suit after all: ‘it’s like...when you try a dress on in a shop and it looks really good, and you think
oh yeah I really like that, and you get home and you think actually this doesn’t fit properly or this doesn’t look as good as I thought it did, and take it back... because when you (write) it first off and don’t make any changes, it is just like, it is just a draft really...it’s not going to be the best you can do, just your first’. At the same time, however, the idea that deferred revision might involve major changes of mind, or seeing things again in a significantly different way, was regarded as problematic and best avoided.

All at once: getting it down in one go

Whilst all students perceived planning, translating and revising as discrete stages, they also described some planning and revising as they went along. Because both advance planning and retrospective revision were often truncated, students tended to focus their efforts on a single draft and therefore tried to manage all sub-processes in one go, largely in their heads. The year 10 students recognised that in practice they integrated planning and reviewing activities, thinking ahead and revising their ideas and language as they wrote. Whilst attending to everything at once was demanding, it was also recognised that sticking rigidly to a plan was unrealistic and would make writing ‘unenjoyable’ (Jamie). Equally, leaving all revision to the end was ‘just silly’ (Jamie): ‘there’s no point in finishing if you’re just going to change it...when you could do that as you’re carrying on’ (Chris). A more time-efficient strategy was to ‘think about it...write it...and change it as I go’ (Sara).

Higher-achieving writers were also able to describe how they directed their attention, and shuttled between these different decision-making processes, as they tried to manage multiple concerns during writing. Their strategies, however, were all somewhat different. The two writers who found advance planning unhelpful were nevertheless differently orientated when producing text. Sara felt she adopted a ‘forward-feed’ strategy: ‘I don’t know if it’s the same for everyone else, but me, when I write, I kind of like not really think about what I’ve written, more what I’m going to write’. If she was unable to resolve a dilemma at the point of writing, she deferred the decision until later and continued her forward direction: ‘I couldn’t think of another word for ’event’ so I put ’event’ in brackets and then I was going to go home and look it up’. During pauses, she
was considering how to develop points or exploit unanticipated opportunities: ‘I did a whole paragraph...which I guess I wasn't expecting to do...I did the first bit and thought, might as well go into a bit more detail’. Her sense of direction, and her envisaged end-point, developed as she wrote: ‘when I'm writing...I tend to usually end up thinking about where I want to end up, like there's a place where I want everything to go to’. Anna, on the other hand, felt her attention was directed backwards, a ‘feed-back’ strategy: ‘I try to forward plan, but then I'll have to go back and do it again...I don't usually go like more than two sentences without crossing things out, 'cos I always backtrack on myself'. She prioritised getting small sections of writing as she wanted them, and described her strategy as ‘bit-by-bit’: ‘I like working in sections of things, like I'd rather write a paragraph and then string it all together...I write in small bits and then I think, oh that bit was good, maybe the next bit wasn't'. She therefore sometimes struggled to maintain a sense of direction: ‘I think I'm bad when I actually have to take it somewhere, like go forward with it or something’. During pauses, Anna was reconsidering global aspects – content, genre, and audience – as much as linguistic ones, but was often unable to make decisions and move on: ‘I think oh, I should explain that more, or I should rethink that, or I should not put that in because it doesn't quite make sense, or I should not put that in because it's not like sympathetic or not thinking of other people's feelings’. Both writers characterised themselves as ‘quite slow’ or ‘stop-and-start’ writers.

By contrast Jamie, who preferred to work to an outline plan, adopted a more even writing pattern and focused his attention on local features. He planned and revised at sentence level, getting down as much as possible and as fluently as possible in the time available: ‘I plan like a sentence ahead, I don't really look too much further than that really’. Larger possibilities, such as ‘an advancement of the plan’, or a potential conclusion, were quickly noted down for attention later on: ‘I think I just tend to get as much down as possible...but then I'll go back and perfect it later’. During pauses, he was mainly considering linguistic or mechanical features: a ‘catchy’ title, an ‘empathetic’ word, a simpler sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. He characterised himself as a ‘fluent’ writer: ‘it just comes naturally to me most of the time...I just write really’.
All three upper set writers were aware of their attempts to control and monitor their thinking processes as they wrote: *thinking logically, not crazy writing…precision and control* (Jamie). They judged it important to keep the task in sight and curb their impulses: not to *rush it* or *just go off on one* (Anna). Ideas could be unruly and required a firm hand: *it's almost taming, like taming your ideas* (Jamie). The pressure to produce finished writing in a limited time was keenly felt. *It's hard to get a balance between relaxing and being focused, 'cos if you go too far either way you're not going to do as well* (Jamie). It was difficult to think ahead and write simultaneously without losing track of one's intentions: *a mind lapse* (Jamie); *I do that all the time, like when I'm thinking of something and writing something else, like when you're...listening to a song, and you end up writing the lyrics* (Sara). It was particularly difficult to maintain a sense of the whole piece: *I find it really hard to visualise (the whole)* (Sara); *you can get lost from what you're writing about to start with and go off on a tangent* (Jamie).

Anna was perhaps the most conscious of trying to manage all of the sub-processes of writing simultaneously. She described her struggle to maintain a sense of purpose as she wrestled with ideas that had a will of their own, and with her own tendency to reconsider. Whilst Anna viewed her strategy somewhat negatively, as a failure to plan ahead, she also recognised that planning for her was indistinguishable from drafting and revising – her tendency was to plan in full sentences, and to revise her plan constantly. Revising also quickly became rewriting: *I find it easier just to rewrite it, so you can put sentences together*. For her, reviewing was a perpetual process. Whilst her tendency was to *just jump straight in and do it*, she also compared the start of writing to the more controlled process of setting up for a horse jump: *if you don't set it up right, it's not going to work, and you have to work out how to set it up, so you have to work out how to line up for the jump, where to look and where to place your foot or how to hold the reins, and it's like the slightest movement can depend on whether you're going to go over it right or not, or hit the bar, and I think it's kind of like that*. Her analogy captured the recursive nature of the composing process and the multiple considerations of audience, self, and task: *I think it's a lot like horse-riding, 'cos you have to consider some-one else...so you consider your audience like the horse, and then you consider how you're
going to get over it, and then when you get to the end you have to figure out where you're going to go, and it's a lot of planning... but then I'll have to go back and do it again... and then maybe second time it won't work, and then third time it will'. She recognised that for school writing, single-mindedness and keeping control were paramount since her more exploratory or reflective strategy was not always productive.

**Time management: a matter of compromise**

Time management issues were mentioned by four students (33 references). They often felt they did not have enough time for pre- and post-writing activities, or to write in the way that they would like: 'I think my biggest issue when I'm writing is timing, like I never feel I have enough time to do anything, so I won't spend very long on my plan... it will be mostly spontaneous writing' (Sara); 'I think (I'd plan) if I had more time... but then it's like, when does that time happen?' (Anna); 'if I've got enough time obviously I'll go over it, but if I haven't got enough time then I'll just leave it' (Chris). One-off drafts with minor editing were therefore the norm. Because drafting took priority, students inevitably felt hampered by the demands of managing all sub-processes in one go, and holding everything in their heads. They were unable to sort out or develop their ideas. However, when asked if they would like more time, responses were ambivalent: 'not always, like, um, if it's something I feel like I can write a lot about, obviously I want as much time as possible, but if it's something like this, if I had more time I would not be able to write more about it... something that I don't care about or don't want to write about, it just bores' (Sara); 'I wish I had more time, but then I can't be bothered to have more time, it's just like more effort, more writing, more hours doing it, so it's kind of like, yeah I wish I had a little bit longer... but then I wouldn't want to do it for ages kind of thing, I'll get bored of writing it, yeah just boring' (Anna). There was a sense in which students did not want to prolong the tedium of writing about something they didn't care about, but when the topic interested them, they wanted the opportunity to complete writing to their satisfaction.
Interaction and feedback: not always helpful

Few students saw writing as a social or collaborative process. Talking about writing with peers, and working in groups or pairs, was valued by some students more than others. Luke liked to discuss his plans for writing and 'confer with other people' rather than 'sit there silently and write'. He found talk a useful prompt and felt it would help him keep his objectives in view: 'kind of just refreshes your memory'. Anna felt that she was better able to develop her ideas verbally than in writing, and that classroom discussion helped her think about what she wanted to say in writing. She conceded, however, that talk could also be an excuse for not writing, and that listening to music was more conducive to applied work. Sara and Chris were more inclined to work independently and to prioritise teacher feedback.

Students were also divided in their views about peer assessment. Two students particularly valued others' suggestions and would make use of them 'definitely' (Anna); 'they (can) tell you what obviously you need to do to improve it' (Luke). Jamie wanted a critical reader: 'I like someone to point out flaws 'cos then you can change them, obviously'. Three students, however, found peer assessment less helpful: 'it can be (helpful), but sometimes it can't be, 'cos like boys are very vague and stuff, they just go yeah it's good, and you're like well what do I need to improve it?' (Zoe); 'they just don't really care...like if they've got a good idea, they wouldn't put it down, they'd just leave it...no, I don't think it's good...they just put like one word, like one or two words, 'this is good' or something like that...they really can't be bothered' (Chris).

Similarly, feedback from teachers was appreciated when it was specific not vague: 'if they writ [sic] on your work why this was good, and if they, instead of just saying this was good, they'd write you like what you've done to make it good' (Chris). Constructive suggestions and targets were welcomed and utilised: 'that's what I like about my teachers, you'll get a target to work on. If they go, oh this is really good, I'll be like yeah but what do I need to do to improve it?' (Zoe); 'we get targets at the end of everything we've done...if that tells me that I should...craft (my) sentences more, then I'll just, on the next piece, focus a lot on crafting sentences, and focus on it and focus on it to the
point where it just becomes part of my writing and how I write' (Sara). Some students appreciated feedback from teachers during the process of writing too: 'I'll always be putting up my hand, like, oh can you read this, see if it's OK? I need reassuring about a lot of things' (Anna).

**Substantive revision: best avoided**

Changing your mind about what you wanted to say in writing was perceived as costly in several ways. It represented a waste of time and effort, and was demoralising: 'If I don't get the time to (sort it out) then I'll just be in a bad mood...I'll get really annoyed...I get very frustrated...it's very confusing' (Anna). Major revision was seen as something of a failure to plan ahead or to keep control: '(my weakness is) like rereading it and making sure it's all as good as it can be, 'cos...sometimes, instead of changing sentences, I'll be changing the whole thing' (Chris); 'I'm not very good at like sticking to (something), I dunno, I always find ways to modify it' (Anna). Consequently students avoided rewriting larger sections of writing if they could, often preferring to add to content, rather than rethink ideas: 'like I'm happy with this idea but I want to expand on it...like expand on the idea that I had, like I'll have both ideas in it' (Zoe). However, when larger problems occurred, some students found it easier to start from scratch, or abandon a whole paragraph, rather than struggle with an unsatisfactory effort (3 cases): 'I've done that quite a few times, like gotten rid of a whole paragraph and just written it again' (Chris); 'I started writing it and I was like, this isn't really going anywhere, so I just like crossed it out, flipped over a new page and started again' (Zoe); 'I find it easier just to rewrite it, so you can put sentences together' (Anna). Others made the best of their first effort rather than change direction, particularly since redrafting was not practical in timed situations: 'in the controlled assessment situation you're timed, and you just can't be doing with writing it all out at the end...you have to stick with an idea and try and battle it out really' (Jamie).

Anna was the only student who habitually reconsidered the content of her writing: 'I do rethink what I want to say and the way that I explain it...your perspective on things changes'. She faced the dilemma of whether to make major changes to her text, start afresh or 'just leave it and struggle on, I don't
know'. If she revised or redrafted, she felt that she was embarking on something that had no clear end: 'redrafting I find, I like to do it, but then it takes me a very long time because I change massive chunks of it...like I'll write a whole paragraph and then think no, I can do that better, or again and again, it would just go on for ages'. Rethinking writing was a painful and chaotic process and the outcomes were unpredictable: 'I get frustrated if I don't know what I want to say...you can tell when I'm doing crossing out, like rrraarhh, and if I don't like it, I'll like swoosh swoosh, really cross it out...you can tell from that if I'm frustrated'. Furthermore, the opportunity to move beyond one's initial thoughts was often cut short in timed situations, so that the content of writing remained unresolved: 'I would think of my initial opinion and...I'd be half way through writing it, and then think oh, but wait, other people probably think this, and then wonder why they think it, and then try and think why they thought it, and then get to my conclusion and be like really confused' (Anna). This was demotivating, and caused her to give up trying: 'if I can't think it all through, I won't bother' (Anna). The emotionally challenging task of demolishing text in order to rebuild it required a special level of motivation and determination, as well as sufficient time and support.

Exploring ideas: not necessary or not possible

If planning in advance was often perfunctory, generating ideas through drafting and redrafting was also a process rarely exploited. Most students did not see the need to explore ideas in writing since even the briefest planners felt they knew what they wanted to say beforehand, or that they would know once writing began: 'I would have thought it all from the start' (Chris). This suggestion conflicted, however, with the claim made by all that they didn't know exactly where they were going with writing until they were underway.

Two students in particular (the non-planners) did not feel they always knew what they wanted to say in advance: 'it takes putting it down on paper to realise what it is, like spell it out for you' (Sara). Anna was naturally inclined to work out her meaning in the course of writing: 'I never really know what I'm writing about'. She felt she needed 'to sort it out on paper' but was frequently unable to get past the stage of recording her own 'mind-track': 'I think sometimes in my writing
it’s like you’re reading my thoughts…it’s very confusing’. Sara also wanted the opportunity to consider her ideas in writing before selecting the best, but could not do so in the time available: ‘I don’t know if this sounds really stupid, but I sometimes tend to have a lot of ideas…and then my plan is writing them all down and selecting the ones that are really good, (but) I know ‘cos time is limited I write the first (ideas) that come to my head, but then I think, oh no I want to change that, but I don’t have time to and I haven’t finished yet’.

The potential discovery of new ideas or new connections through writing was recognised by both Anna and Sara: ‘you have like the point in your head that you want to make, and then once it’s down on paper you get, like it inspires, more ideas linking to that and you’re able to follow on from ideas that may be quite singular in your head…it’s like a realisation, once you’ve spelled it out, what else it could be trying to be saying, and how else it could link into other aspects of the work you’re studying’ (Sara); ‘I would say that happens to me a lot, like I’ll be writing and I’ll think, oh those words don’t mean anything…and then I’ll think, ah but wait, if I said that or if I changed that around or, yeah, it’s like an ‘ah ha’ moment’ (Anna). Such discoveries were likely triggers for substantive revision, and for new understanding: ‘when you’ve written it down, you think actually that’s not at all what it’s like, it’s more like this, because once it’s written down you realise that what you’re trying to say isn’t that, it’s…not what you actually think it’s about’ (Sara). However, in practice these students often found themselves unable to realise new opportunities, or to complete the process of finding what they wanted to say, because the development of content over several drafts was not a practical possibility: ‘I don’t tend to like draft my work because when I do that…I end up running out of time and spending way too much time on my draft and then not having the time to make it look readable’ (Sara). The opportunity to move beyond their first thoughts was therefore cut short, and they felt obliged to stick with their first attempts, or indeed to give up: ‘it will take me 15 minutes to start writing, to start thinking about what I want to say, and then another 15 minutes later I’ll think, oh wait, I want to start again now, and then the time, so I have to continue saying, and then I get really annoyed that I haven’t thought of it before…and then I just stop’ (Anna).
The inability to explore ideas during writing was disheartening. Anna in particular experienced a range of strong and conflicting emotions in her struggle to find what she wanted to say, ranging from frustration, annoyance, the desire to succeed, reluctance to conform, demotivation, confusion, enjoyment and boredom. She was not always willing, therefore, to invest the time and effort to sort out her ideas. She also felt herself different from others in her exploratory approach, and at odds with the school requirement. For most students, exploration or experiment was confined to linguistic features.

Conclusion

In summary, these students described different composing and revising strategies and were divided about the usefulness of both planning ahead and redrafting. Higher-achieving writers in particular had distinct views about their preferred approach, and the factors which enabled or inhibited their development of text. They also showed high levels of metacognitive awareness, and were able to specify how they managed the sub-processes of planning and revising in their heads as they wrote, or to identify their decision-making as recursive. Lower-achieving writers showed less awareness of their own strategies or preferences, and simply did as they were asked: '(How I go about it) doesn't really bother me. They just set me a task and you get on with it' (Luke). Curiously, however, all students perceived writing as a linear process with planning as a pre-writing activity and revision as retrospective, even though they described doing both on-line. Irrespective of their personal preferences, they also assumed that a procedural approach was expected and advisable. The irony of individualised writing strategies and a single taught model was not lost on all students: 'I think school’s a bit weird, ‘cos if everyone learns in different ways then why do you teach us in one way, like all the time?' (Anna).

Students of all abilities attached greater significance to initial drafting than to either planning or revising, and perceived it as more challenging. Lower-achieving students relied almost exclusively on the generation of ideas during writing, but all students agreed that they rarely knew how their writing would end when they embarked on it. The production of writing was associated with
intense, all-or-nothing efforts such as shooting for goal (Chris) or horse-jumping (Anna), rather than with constructing or crafting. Similarly, since improvement of writing was associated with ‘planning’ and ‘practice’, there was relatively little one could do to about it after the act: ‘as soon as I finish writing it I know whether it’s going to be good or one of my not so good pieces’ (Jamie). How writing progressed was perceived as outside the writer’s control, largely a question of ‘how it comes out on the day’ (Jamie). Students did not see revising as an essential part of the creative process or as central to the design and development of writing, at least in the school context.

There were some unresolved tensions, however, in students’ representations of the writing process. Some made contradictory claims about knowing what they wanted to say in advance, and not knowing what they wanted to say until writing was underway. All suggested that revision was, or should be, a minor undertaking whilst at the same time claiming that time constraints prevented them from improving their writing further. Furthermore, students’ assumption that revising was a retrospective activity was not reflected in their observed practice. Contrary to their claims that revising was mostly conducted after the completion of a paragraph or the whole piece, all writers made more changes during the process of writing than after completion.

Sadly, no student expressed unqualified enjoyment of either writing or revising. For most, composing was a joyless experience, undertaken with neutral emotions or resignation: ‘writing is just, it just is what it is...writing in itself isn’t really something I enjoy or don’t enjoy’ (Sara); ‘I don’t really enjoy writing…but if I’m told to do it, I’ll do it’ (Luke). Whilst the majority found creative writing more enjoyable than other forms because it offered greater freedom, even this was not seen to be genuinely expressive or empowering: ‘it’s not creative though. I don’t think it’s creative. Creative writing comes from you and from your own experiences, not from being told what to do and then all do the same thing’ (Anna). The revising process was considered necessary but tedious – the dull fulfilment of expectations. Thus, even those who felt they could revise further were ambivalent about the provision of more time. Students identified greater ownership of the composing process as likely to enhance their motivation to write and to revise: choice of a topic that one cared about and the
freedom to adopt one’s preferred writing approach were, unsurprisingly, likely to prompt greater reflection and revision.

Contrary to policy expectations and theoretical definitions of expertise, therefore, most students did not connect revision with deep reflection or critical analysis; indeed they often deliberately avoided asking the big questions about writing. Nor did they regard writing and revising as a process which enabled them to ‘experiment with language and explore different ways of discovering and shaping their own meanings’ (DCSF/QCA 2007, p.99). The minority who were inclined to explore ideas and reflect on writing were deterred from doing so because they felt there was insufficient time to complete the process; ironically, these were the same students who described the generation of new perspectives and new understanding through revision. It is also worth noting that no student recalled observing a writer at work, or seeing the revising process modelled, as national policy suggests.
CHAPTER 7: UNDERSTANDINGS OF SUCCESS CRITERIA

Research question

The third research question addressed students’ understanding of success criteria: How do students define the success criteria for revision and what concerns do they attend to when revising school writing? To investigate this question, students were asked to reflect on their evaluation criteria in the context of a classroom task and an assigned genre – narrative fiction or argument. Students defined these genres loosely as ‘creative writing’ or ‘opinion’, and distinguished them from ‘analytic’ or ‘essay’ forms, for which their evaluation criteria sometimes differed. All comments that referred to perceived qualities of effective/ineffective writing or revising, the relative importance of different criteria, or particular qualitative concerns, were coded under the broad heading of Success Criteria. Thematic categories and sub-codes were identified and refined over several iterations. Analysis revealed 11 top-level themes, hierarchically organised according to frequency of reference and number of cases, as shown in Table 7.1. An additional code was created to accommodate general remarks about not knowing how to evaluate or improve writing, which is reported separately below.

Word choice: ‘the best words possible’

All students in all interviews identified vocabulary choice as a significant concern. For some students word choice was ‘key to good writing’ or ‘the key to some forms of writing’. It was mentioned more frequently than any other success criteria. Two concerns predominated: the selection of ‘good’ or ‘better’ vocabulary (all cases), and the avoidance or elimination of repetition (all cases). One student mentioned selecting vocabulary that was true to the character speaking, or appropriate to the circumstances described (Sara).

Good vocabulary was variously defined as: ‘sophisticated’, ‘complex’, ‘complicated’, ‘more professional’, ‘empathetic’ (Jamie); ‘the best words possible, like ones that make me sound most intelligent’, ‘interesting’, ‘stronger’ (Sara); ‘powerful’, ‘descriptive’ (Zoe); ‘emotive’, ‘creative’ (Luke); ‘bigger’, ‘more
Table 7.1: Coding framework for all comments relating to success criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 codes</th>
<th>No of refs.</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>Level 2 codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word choice</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Good words</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate words</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repetition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text features</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Techniques and devices</td>
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<td>Good ending</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Characters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accuracy and presentation</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience consideration</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not boring the reader</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting a message across</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Persuading/engaging the reader’s feelings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Putting a picture in the reader’s head</td>
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<td>Making sense</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reader as examiner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole structure and coherence</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Coherence and consistency</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Going somewhere</td>
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<td>The order of things</td>
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<td>Flow</td>
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<td>Paragraphs, introduction and conclusion</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The bits v the whole</td>
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<td>Originality and personal style</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explanation and elaboration</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideas and content</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
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<td>Subjectivity</td>
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<td>Assessment criteria</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding right</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion and feelings</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*technical*’ (Chris); ‘*describing words that people don’t usually use*’ (Anna).

Word choice was seen as the route to achieving higher marks: ‘*better, bigger, or like technical words...could get you the better grade*’ (Chris). In creative writing, ‘*descriptive words*’ were especially prized (4 cases). All felt that ‘*little*' words
could be replaced by bigger and better ones when revising. It was also judged important to use 'a wide variety' of words (Luke). Repetition was therefore regarded as undesirable and a wasted opportunity; one student identified 'purposeful repetition' as an exception (Jamie). Particular concerns were the overuse of 'menial' words such as 'and', 'the' and 'but' (3 cases), and the need to find 'different synonyms' or 'ways of rephrasing' to avoid using the same word twice (4 cases).

Text features: ‘ticking the boxes’

All students identified a number of must-have text features, and some listed them recipe-style: 'well, I'd probably say you need some description in there of some sort and some speech and full stops, capital letters, punctuation and stuff, and preferably a few questions' (Zoe). After word-choice, particular text features received more comment than any other aspect of writing. Most frequently mentioned were description, specific techniques or literary devices, and a good ending.

Description

Four students equated successful creative writing with descriptive detail (17 references). The defining quality was 'elaborating and describing' (Jamie); 'just lots of detail' (Luke); 'description...that's the main one probably' (Zoe); 'a lot of the marks for creative writing you get for describing' (Anna). Characters and setting were particular candidates for lengthy descriptive treatment. Students had different views, however, about how much description was desirable and when enough was enough. For one student, there appeared to be no limit: to attract top marks you needed to 'use loads of descriptive words, like loads of descriptive words, like more descriptive than this' (Zoe). For another, it was a question of balance: if you add too much detail, 'you’re describing one thing for a whole page which doesn't need to be, doesn't need that much describing...I'd say detail, but not too much detail' (Luke). For Anna, description was something of an elephant trap. She was inclined to lose sight of her narrative: 'I would describe something for ages but then I got to the end of describing it and I'd think oh, I can’t really lead on from here because I can’t go anywhere 'cos I'd described it so much...like I would describe a building loads, and then I'd like
stop and then I’d think oh wait what about the person, I’ve left him behind somewhere’.

**Literary techniques and devices**

Five students referred to the use of taught techniques or literary devices as a means of demonstrating writing skill and gaining marks. They were concerned to ‘show off’ their repertoire by including ‘rhetorical questions’, ‘persuasion techniques’, ‘the PQE thing’, ‘Point-Evidence-Explain’, ‘alliteration’, ‘similes’ and ‘metaphors’. Higher-achieving writers recognised the potentially contrived nature of such writing, and alluded to doing the list’ (Anna) with some cynicism. They distinguished between writing which was designed to impress examiners and writing which was fun to read. ‘Ticking the boxes’ (Jamie) was seen as a necessary means to an end: ‘you do it...to get good grades’ (3 cases).

**A good ending**

Five students mentioned the importance of ‘a good ending...a good stop’ (Luke). The closing sentence seemed to hold particular significance: ‘I think the closing sentence is extremely important’ (Jamie); ‘that last sentence would make it finish, so you would know that that would be the end...it would be the last sentence for me anyway’ (Chris). The aim was to find something that ‘ties it up a little bit’ (Sara). Promising possibilities included: ‘a cliff-hanger’ (Luke); ‘a twist’ (Jamie); ‘a quote’ (Sara); ‘one word or like a phrase or something’ (Chris); a widening of the focus to encompass ‘whole world’ references (Anna, Jamie) or ‘overall thoughts’ (Anna).

**Dialogue**

For Zoe (6 references) the inclusion of dialogue in creative writing appeared to be an overriding concern: ‘I was starting to write and I was like, I need to get some speech in there, there has to be speech in there, so I got speech in there’.

**Characterisation**

Two students referred to characters or characterisation as important features of creative writing. Luke felt the characters in his narrative were lacking both in number and in substance: ‘I could have used a few more characters, umm more detail...yeah I haven’t got very much detail in there really...about the characters’. 
Sara described choosing vocabulary which would convey her speaker’s personality: ‘I wanted the bishop to come across as like a really deep character...the sort of person who would always use like, words that would have the most effect on people, and that's what I've done for like the whole quote, and made him quite intellectual’.

**Accuracy and presentation: a key concern for some**

Four students cited accuracy as significant, and particularly punctuation (28 references). For Jamie it was a leading concern because he believed markers would look ‘first and foremost for accuracy... probably because it's the easiest to analyse’ so ‘it’s got to be precise, every time’ (Jamie); for Luke, correct punctuation was one of few stated objectives for revising. For two students, spelling and punctuation mattered less ‘as long as it’s understandable’ (Chris) and the teacher knows ‘what I meant’ (Zoe). In two cases, matters of accuracy and presentation were barely or never mentioned as success criteria.

The three lower-achieving students were particularly concerned about the appearance of writing (9 references). Ill-formed ‘rubbish’ handwriting, ‘too many crossings out’ and ‘scribbles’ caused them to prioritise copying out again in neat. Chris chose to do so even during a controlled assessment: ‘I’d be making like so many changes and like scribbles of like words, it just looked so rough that I had an hour to write the whole thing again, as good as I can, ‘cos I literally didn’t like the look of it’. For higher-achieving writers, presentation was a secondary concern: ‘some people are very aware of like how good their handwriting is, whereas I would be on the opposite side where I try and made sure my pen keeps up with my brain. I think handwriting should be second thought...(it's) all about getting the content down rather than the presentation’ (Jamie).

**Audience consideration: a problem of definition**

Five students expressed concerns about audience: ‘you have to consider someone else’ (Anna). In particular, they felt that good writing should be engaging: it ‘can't be good if it's boring’ (Sara). As readers, they valued writing
that 'grips you', is 'funny', 'witty', 'interesting', 'different', and 'imaginative'. As writers, their foremost concern was therefore to keep the reader's interest (5 cases): if writing was dull, readers 'wouldn't like to finish it – if they could they'd stop right now' (Chris). Whilst entertaining the reader was uppermost in their minds, communicating meaning was also judged important. Writing had to 'get a message across' (3 cases); 'make sense to someone else' (2 cases); and 'make other people understand' (Anna). Audience considerations were further defined in genre-specific terms. Good journalism should be 'informative', 'persuasive' and 'put an opinion across' (3 cases); it should focus on having something 'important and worthwhile to be saying (and) making other people think it was a worthwhile thing', not 'just putting information out there for no apparent reason' (Anna). Engaging the reader's feelings was also mentioned: 'making the reader feel like this is what they'd want to do' (Chris) or 'persuading the people to empathise with (the character)' (Sara). Anna was concerned that writing should be 'sympathetic' to the reader's views, consider 'other people's feelings' and take account of alternative perspectives and interests. Good creative writing should capture readers' visual imagination: 'put a picture in the reader's head' (Zoe) or 'create a film in your head' so that when you read it 'the story's coming through you and it's all up here and you can see what's happening, and you're not reading it for the sake of reading it' (Chris).

At the same time, higher-achieving writers recognised the discrepancy between a teacher-examiner's requirements and the needs of an authentic audience. Engaging writing could still fail school success criteria: 'really good bits of writing that I would genuinely read ... get low marks because they didn't, you know, put in three similes and four metaphors or something' (Anna); 'because they're examining it, they are just trying to look for your writing skill, not reading material' (Sara). For these students, audience consideration was more explicitly about display than communication: 'showing off your writing skills' (Sara) or 'jumping through hoops' (Jamie).

**Whole structure and coherence: the parts take precedence**

All students referred to overall structure as an important feature, especially of essays and arguments, 'otherwise they'd just be free-flowing thought' (Jamie) or
'random paragraphs' (Sara). Structure was defined in terms of paragraphing (5 cases) and the sequence of things (3 cases). It was important to 'make sure it's all laid out properly and that...it's all in order...it all links together' (Chris). An appropriate structure was 'like five good paragraphs' (Sara), each of sufficient length, and with an adequate 'basis' (Jamie). Paragraphs should 'fit (together)...bear relevance to each other' (Sara) and 'refer back' to the introduction (Jamie). The conclusion should 'tie-up' what has gone before. For creative writing, the arrangement of material was more flexible. A story might advance chronologically or it might be less predictable: 'not like chronological, like it doesn't just go 'and then this, and then this, and then this', it changes patterns' (Sara). Higher-achieving students also expressed concern about the organisation of meaning and the need to sustain coherence. Writing should move in a consistent direction and not 'go off on a tangent' (Jamie) or 'zigzag' from the 'straight path' (Anna).

However, in practice, all respondents felt that they didn't know where they were going with writing until they were underway. The holistic concern most frequently expressed was to 'make sure it flows' (4 cases, 11 references), although they had difficulty defining this further. 'Flow' seemed to refer to both coherence and cohesion: 'as long as the small bits...flow together to make the whole' (Sara); one thing 'leads on' to the next (Anna) and nothing jars or is 'misplaced' when you read it (Chris). For Chris, maintaining flow was both a qualitative and a process concern: 'obviously when you're writing you don't want to jump from one idea to the other...if you're walking down the street...you wouldn't like go off in one direction, you’d carry on walking and you wouldn't stop and that's like writing, you just carry on walking, don't stop, and then read over it'.

Two students conceded that consideration of the parts took precedence over the whole: 'I don't really think about the whole thing, I think about it in bits' (Sara); 'I don't tend to look at my writing as a whole...I do just take it paragraph at a time' (Anna). These were the two students who also found planning ahead difficult or unhelpful.
Originality and personal style: ‘may be unsuitable’

All students commented on matters of style. ‘Style’ was interpreted variously in terms of stylishness or flair, tone, ‘a bit of personality’ (Jamie) or more loosely ‘what you put into the work’ (Luke). It was deemed important to different degrees, relative to genre and to context. Two students felt ‘style’ was an important quality in creative writing, but less so in analytical forms: ‘I think personal style is important in some things, like obviously creative writing, but when it comes to like analytic writing I don’t think personal style comes into it as much’ (Sara); (in analytical writing) you’ll be looking for structure and accuracy...whereas creative would be more just adding a bit of flair, bit of style in your writing’ (Jamie). Success in poetry writing was identified as being ‘dominated on writing style’ (Jamie).

As readers, students appreciated the ‘different’ and ‘definite style’ of particular authors (Sara, Jamie) and especially admired ‘wit’ or ‘smart-ass...cocky’ tone (Chris). Views were mixed, however, about the extent to which school writing should reflect personality or style in this way. Zoe felt ‘I should just be myself and write like me’. Others concluded that personal style and standardised grading criteria were not always compatible. A ‘mature writing style’ and ‘sophisticated’ tone was judged to be what counted (2 cases); being ‘witty’ in an exam was ‘obviously’ not appropriate (Chris). Anna observed that students receive mixed messages about individual style and conformity: ‘they always tell us you have to be your own writer and do your own thing and you know be unique or whatever, then they make us all do the same thing’. Jamie similarly noted that one’s style could be ‘jeprodised’ [sic] when revising for school purposes and he regarded this as an inherent conflict of values: ‘you can lose a bit of your style if you keep editing it for what the examiner wants, which is quite contradicting because in the content it looks for style, but in the accuracy you have to get rid of some style...which is not how someone would write normally’.

Views about the importance of originality in writing were similarly qualified. Five students identified originality as an important quality in creative writing (14 references). It was defined in terms of individual ideas, a different angle, non-traditional structure or unusual vocabulary. Second-hand ideas were to be
avoided: ‘like if you heard a story or seen a film...you can’t take that idea, like that, so sort of come up with your own ideas rather than other people’s’ (Luke). Ideas could be reinterpreted or looked at in novel ways: ‘exploring ideas, like taking them further and looking at them in new ways, like not taking obvious things, trying to find background ideas that other people might not see’ (Sara). Original ways of structuring writing were admired: ‘I just really like the way it’s not like chronological...it’s just different to how most people write’ (Sara).

Unusual sentence structure was desirable: ‘not start sentences in like the traditional way, so sentences aren’t really predictable and mainstream almost’ (Sara). Word choice could also be inventive: ‘like use describing words that people don’t usually use...think outside the box kind of I guess’ (Anna). However, originality was also perceived as a potential risk in school writing: ‘you can put across your ideas to some extent, but you can’t put too much in otherwise it may be unsuitable for the task’ (Jamie). The necessary depersonalising of school writing was attributed to the nature of assessment criteria. It was ‘hard to branch out and do your own thing...because they’re graded on different things, it's... not writing in the way you want to’ (Anna).

Explanation and elaboration: ‘detail but not too much detail’

The need to explain oneself in writing, and to elaborate on points made, was mentioned by all students, particularly in relation to analytic writing. It was perceived as a means of adding to marks: ‘you need to give really good explanation...at least five or six reasons for why you've written that' (Chris); ‘you know, the PQE thing, using that like to its full, because you know that's what you've been told is going to get you marks' (Sara). Distinctions were drawn between analytical writing, where the perceived emphasis was on ‘the detail of your analysing', and creative writing, where the emphasis was on the ‘elaboration of ideas’ (Jamie). Expanding on ideas in creative writing was often perceived in terms of adding detail, or specifically adjectives. Persuasive writing was effective ‘if you had good reasons...if you went on and explained it more’ (Chris). Specific use of the PEE (Point-Evidence-Explain) or PQE (Point-Quote-Explain) formula was mentioned by two students.
For some, success was a question of balancing the number of points made with the level of explanation: 'it’s finding the balance, well what I think is a good balance, between reading into a point and covering as many points as possible' (Sara). Sometimes this equation was difficult to judge: on the one hand, 'I kind of rush it and then I don’t explain my points' whilst on the other 'I got a bad mark 'cos I put in too much detail...so I was like, ah, bummer' (Anna).

At a wider level, five students identified the need to balance quality and quantity. Length was frequently equated with long-windedness: 'obviously the longer it gets the more you drag on what you say' (Luke). The danger of droning on and boring the reader was keenly felt. Students were concerned to avoid 'babbling on ...about nothing, 'cos you’ve said everything' (Chris). Including too much detail, too many points, or points that were superfluous, was a temptation to be avoided: 'most people think, 'Oh I'll write a really long thing and they'll like it 'cos it’s got like loads in it', but sometimes it’s not all about how much you do...it's about the quality of the work not the quantity' (Luke). For these students, knowing when to stop was especially important: 'finding a cut-off point...'cos no-one just wants to read about the same thing over and over again' (Sara). Related to this concern, was the assumption that writing could be over-developed, and was likely to get longer and more boring the more one worked on it.

Most students appreciated the value of ‘short and sweet’ (Luke), and of concise, well-crafted work: 'people like short and snappy, short and more 'done' than just like finished' (Anna). They also recognised the fine line between being succinct and lacking substance: 'I'd say detail, but not too much detail' (Luke). In practice, striking this balance was perceived as challenging: 'I've gone on a little bit about some stuff or haven't described enough on other parts' (Jamie); 'I think I went more on the over-labouring side' (Sara). By contrast, Zoe perceived writing of length as an achievement, not a concern. For her, expanding on ideas and including as much detail as possible was a priority.
Ideas and content: ‘probably come second’

All students made some reference to the idea that writing should say something of interest, whether 'important and worthwhile' (Anna), 'imaginative' (Zoe; Chris), 'clever' (Jamie) or 'different' (Sara). The ability to come up with 'good ideas' was a source of pride for some (3 cases); conversely, when you 'run out of things to talk about' (Luke) or 'when you don't know what you want to say...you have a problem' (Anna). Having too few ideas or insufficient topic knowledge to draw on were commonly expressed anxieties. There needed to be substance or 'actual body to the writing' (Sara). This meant finding 'enough content to build a paragraph' (Jamie) without 'stretching out', 'over-labouring' or 'recycling the (same) things over and over again' (Sara). On the other hand, including too many ideas and not explaining them adequately was also a mistake (Anna; Jamie). Ideas needed to be relevant to the question, and properly thought through (Anna).

However, when reflecting on writing quality, students made fewer comments related to ideas and content (23 references) than to word choice (54), text features (44), structure (31), or accuracy (43). Indeed, the higher-achieving writers concluded that, for school writing, what you say may be less important than how you say it: 'content they probably look for second' (Jamie); 'they are just trying to look for your writing skill, not reading material' (Sara). Jamie also believed that judgements about the quality of content, particularly in creative writing, were subjective: 'who's one person to say that the content in a book...is not good, because another person would say it was good? I don't think you can have a right and wrong for ideas'. For imaginative writing, therefore, content-related criteria were regarded as somewhat inscrutable, and assumed to rank below features that were easier to assess. For essays, required content was important, but including ideas of your own might be ‘unsuitable’ (Jamie). Whilst all students were concerned to make the necessary points and not bore their reader, only Anna explicitly prioritised meaning over all other aspects: in her view even music lyrics should ‘mean something’ and blogs say something of significance.
Sentence structure: size and shape matter

Three students referred explicitly to the importance of sentence structure in good writing, and two described ways in which they had rearranged sentences for improvement. In particular, the need to vary sentence length over the piece as a whole was identified: "I'd say you need to include simple sentences as well as like compound sentences" (Luke). The need to avoid over-long sentences, and the use of short sentences for emphasis was also mentioned. One student stressed the value of ordering sentences in different ways so that they are 'not predictable' or 'traditional': 'I do think crafting sentences is important' (Sara).

'Sounding right': a catch-all criterion

Four students (15 references) voiced concern about writing 'sounding good' or 'sounding right'. They were unable to define this quality precisely, even though, for at least one student (10 references), 'sounding right' appeared to be the main criterion by which he judged the success of his own work. Chris's struggle to articulate the cause of his satisfaction or dissatisfaction when reviewing writing was marked: 'when you read it through and it just like, you know that that's, you know, it's like you start at the beginning and you read the whole thing, and then you start from the beginning and you read to this one bit and it just doesn't sound right, but then before you read the whole thing and it sounded right, but then this bit just makes it not sound as good as it can be...like, if you're writing and then it like, like the misplaced thing again, it doesn't sound right and then you have to change your idea again and keep changing your idea, but then that like helps you make the rest of the writing good because you know that you've changed that to make the rest of it flow' (Chris).

'Sounding right' was a catch-all term associated with the elimination of dissonance at both local and global levels: some ideas or arguments, as well as phrases, were judged to sound better than others. Writing doesn't sound right if something interrupts the 'flow' or doesn't fit. This might be a clumsy sentence: 'it just feels a bit like stuttery, like doesn't really flow as a sentence...it just upsets me' (Sara); or it might be a clumsy response to the subject as a whole: 'I'll think
if it doesn't sound right to me, I think it’s a really sensitive subject so you can’t get it wrong, and I think if you get it wrong, it’s a bit like you don't understand, and I don't like to not understand‘ (Anna).

Opinions and feelings: not always appropriate

Two students (13 references) felt strongly that writing should be about self-expression; conveying their opinions and feelings to readers mattered to them: ‘I think that’s what writing should be about, expression, rather than just copying out and writing what people want you to write, it should be what you want to write and what you feel about...I think that’s the key in writing, otherwise I don't think English Literature would be worth doing, if there was no opinion’ (Jamie); ‘I like writing my opinions. I don't really like trying to talk about someone else's opinions, I like to think of how I think of it, it’s the easiest way I think, 'cos you write what you know...if I have a really strong opinion and it matters to me, I like it to matter to other people’ (Anna).

However, these students also questioned the appropriateness of expressing personal opinions in school writing which they assumed was sometimes ‘more about stating other people's opinions using sources, and that really bores me 'cos I'm like oh, I have my own opinion’ (Anna). Self-expression was difficult in analytical pieces and essays, where the perceived requirement was ‘just having to jump through the hoops’ (Jamie). Inserting an opinion was considered superfluous and approached tentatively: ‘I like to put my opinion, and I do it in the conclusion, but I often feel like I shouldn’t put it in the other paragraphs’ (Anna). Whilst persuasive writing provided a welcome ‘opportunity to put an opinion across’ (Jamie), it was also felt that the production of a clear argument was more important than a personal response. Reflecting too much on your own views could be counterproductive: ‘I think sometimes if you do something quickly and you do go with your first opinion, maybe it will come across better, maybe not exactly as you wanted it to, but it will come across as a more worthwhile piece of information’ (Anna).
Uncertainty about assessment criteria: ‘nope, I don’t have a clue’

A separate code was created to accommodate the general uncertainty expressed by all students (26 references) about the criteria against which their writing was assessed, and the difficulty they had evaluating the quality of their work. All students claimed they didn’t know how aspects of their writing would be judged, and some had no idea at all: ‘I don’t know how they analyse the content’ (Jamie); ‘I don’t really know what she’ll think about it’ (Zoe); ‘I don’t really know what a good piece of work would be’ (Sara); ‘I don’t have a clue. I hand it in and hope’ (Luke); ‘I don’t really understand the system of it’ (Anna); ‘I don’t know whether the teacher will think it’s good and whether the examiner will think it’s good… I just give it in and see what happens’ (Chris).

Whilst most felt their main reason for writing was to get good grades, success in assessment terms was seen as unpredictable, and sometimes a matter of ‘luck’ (Chris). Self-evaluation was therefore problematic: ‘it’s really hard to judge your own work’ (Sara). For three students, the grades they received sometimes diverged (favourably and unfavourably) from their own assessments, and did not always reflect the effort made: ‘if I’m pleased with something then it’s like, I’m probably more likely not to get a good mark for it’ (Zoe).

All students valued explicit teacher feedback, tried to use it to improve their work, and felt it helped clarify what was expected of them. They distinguished between constructive feedback and imprecise marking which did nothing to illuminate success criteria: ‘as long as they’ve…like, come off with a line and writ [sic] why that’s good, but if they’ve just ticked it then you wouldn’t really know…and if they, instead of just saying this was good, they’d write you like what you’ve done to make it good’ (Chris). Some students felt peer assessment was unhelpful because it did not identify why writing was good or how it could be improved. One student described her perceptions of quality as entirely teacher-dependent: ‘that’s based on whether I get a good grade or not… I will only think it’s a good piece of work if like, someone else says it was good, and not like my friends’ (Sara).
Conclusion

In summary, most students defined their success criteria for writing and revising largely in extrinsic terms: they focused on what they perceived teachers and examiners looked for when judging text quality rather than on expressive gains or process benefits such as the discovery of new learning. Audience considerations were particularly narrowly focused. Some students distinguished between the criteria which matter to a reader-examiner and the criteria which matter in ‘real’ writing, judging that for school writing audience considerations were less significant than the display of skills.

Furthermore, the perceived emphasis was on micro text features. Students of all abilities prioritised surface and linguistic aspects of writing over substance, since they assumed that these aspects were more highly valued. Some saw success in formulaic terms, citing the use of particular techniques or the inclusion of specified text features as indicators of quality. Whilst higher-achieving writers identified substantive criteria such as originality of ideas, precision of analysis and detail of explanation, they had reservations about their relative importance, speculating that for some tasks at least, what you said mattered less than how well you said it. Only one student prioritised ‘meaning’ over other aspects of writing, but did not regard this as necessarily wise in the school context. All students had difficulty describing global or holistic success criteria, and resorted to imprecise terms such as ‘flow’ and ‘sounding right’. Lower-achieving writers in particular struggled to define quality criteria over and above mechanics and word choice. All had trouble distinguishing between the quality of content and the quality of language. These understandings were largely reflected in students’ revisions to text. The vast majority of changes made by students of all abilities addressed surface features of accuracy and word-choice; changes to the substance of writing were rare and small scale.

Little significance was attached to personal aspects of writing, or intrinsic benefits of revising. Students reasoned that self-expression was not what counted in school writing and indeed that personal ideas or individual style might be ‘unsuitable’. Since assessment criteria were specified in ways which
encouraged uniform responses, some writers judged it difficult to find their own voice: ‘because they’re graded on different things…it’s like you’re not writing in the way you want to but it’s the only way you know how because that’s the only way you’ve ever been taught and it’s like what everyone’s taught, so I think it’s hard to branch out and do your own thing’ (Anna). The conflicting messages students received about individuality and standardised expectations were also noted. Some students struggled with the impossibility of standardised assessment criteria for writing content: ‘I don’t think you can have a right and wrong for ideas’ (Jamie). Thus, whilst creative writing provided a welcome reprieve from more tightly prescribed genres, ironically, this greater freedom was perceived as problematic: because the assessment criteria were less clear, students felt at a loss as to what to do. In spite of their identification of prescriptive micro criteria, all students expressed considerable uncertainty about how they should evaluate their writing and how it would be assessed.
CHAPTER 8: TWO REVISING PROFILES

Introduction

The writing and revising profiles of two case study students were constructed to illustrate divergent priorities and approaches, and to highlight the kinds of opportunities and problems each encountered when revising school writing. Both writers were from upper set ability groupings for English, although not attaining at the same level. They attended different schools and were in different year groups: Anna in year 9 and Jamie in year 10.

The writing task for each student was broadly similar – to plan, write and revise a newspaper article on a topic of their own choosing. The time available for writing was the same (two lessons of the same duration). The conditions for writing were somewhat different. In Anna’s case, writing occurred in an informal atmosphere, with support provided by the teacher when requested, and some peer discussion. In Jamie’s case, writing was conducted as a practice GCSE controlled assignment; minimal teacher support was available and writing was undertaken in silence.

Anna’s draft profile was discussed with her following data analysis. She agreed that it was a fair representation, and was able to elaborate further on some points. She had also clarified her stance over the course of the year, and this provided an additional layer of data. In Jamie’s case, member checking after data analysis was not possible, but his perceptions were revisited and clarified over the course of three initial interviews.

Anna: a disillusioned reviser

Anna described herself as ‘an OK writer’ who enjoyed writing when she could express her own opinions, but not when it involved ‘just putting information out there for no apparent reason’. If the subject mattered to her, her motivation to succeed was strong; however, she considered her attitude ‘bad’ and ‘lazy’ because she was not always willing to invest in tasks she didn’t ‘care about’.
She often found writing ‘hard’ and ‘frustrating’, and was unable to complete it to her satisfaction in the time available. She was also an infrequent reader who lost interest easily and rarely completed books, but who nevertheless found elements of them engaging and resonant: poetry and descriptive passages tended to stay in her mind ‘for a long time’. There had been some suggestion in the past that she was dyslexic, but this had not been pursued. Her predicted GCSE grade was B/C.

Anna’s initial questionnaire responses were atypical of the cohort in several respects, particularly her apparent orientation towards redrafting, major revision and self-expression. However, some of her responses seemed contradictory, implying both deep and surface approaches to revision, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The reasoning behind these mixed responses, and some unresolved conflicts, emerged during the interviews.

Of all the case study students, Anna seemed to struggle hardest to marry her personal goals for writing and revising with the requirements of school tasks. She felt her priorities and her way of working were at odds with the expectations of teachers, and often unsuccessful, since she was rarely able to complete writing in the way that she wanted. This was a source of great frustration and uncertainty. On the one hand, she was inclined to reject school purposes in favour of her own intentions: ‘I think I’m different in the way that I wouldn’t like really focus on what the school wanted or what my teacher wanted, I’d more or less focus on what I wanted out of the piece’. On the other hand, she recognised the need to comply with prescribed goals, particularly as GCSE approached: ‘I suppose you do have to play the game. I resent it a bit though. The writing you have to do, it’s not ‘true’ is it, not an accurate reflection of you and what you can do, how intelligent you are or how you think about things…it’s not creative…being told what to do and then all do the same thing…but doing your own thing gets harder as you get closer to GCSEs, you have to think about accuracy and be more decisive’.

**An exploratory purpose**

Anna’s primary motivation for writing and revising was communicative. She had strong views about writing as an authentic act of communication, as having
something ‘important and worthwhile to be saying (and) making other people think it was a worthwhile thing’. She was the only case to define her goals in terms of audience and content, not language. She was also unusual in claiming to revise to sort out and ‘think through’ her ideas: ‘the purpose for me is… I’ll write down eight ideas...and I think when I redraft...it's just how to sort it out’. She expressed a strong need to get it right for herself, to ‘understand’ and to be understood: ‘if it doesn’t sound right to me… it’s a bit like you don’t understand and I don’t like to not understand’; ‘if I have a definite opinion I want to make it completely right, I don’t like being misunderstood’.

However, in spite of her apparently strong sense of communicative purpose, Anna often had difficulty maintaining direction when writing: she described herself as easily ‘going off on one’: ‘I’ll get so many ideas and so many thoughts and I’ll think about it too much and then I’ll... think about how it links to other things, and then I’ll go off task’. She judged that poor planning and her reflective tendency were to blame for disappointing grades, that it was better to ‘do it quickly’ and ‘go with your first opinion’ even if that meant the end result was ‘not exactly how you wanted it’. However, she found this hard, as her natural inclination was more exploratory: ‘I should just be walking down the straight path, but I don’t, so I dunno, it’s very confusing’. Since she felt that revision had infinite potential (an assumption not shared by other case studies), she found it difficult to know where to draw the line: for her, writing ended only ‘when the teacher says “Stop!”’.

Anna’s sense of purpose was certainly confused at the start of the specified writing task. She embarked on this with no real task-specific goals: ‘I honestly don’t know, I’m really confused by this whole task…I don’t know what I’m going to write about…I genuinely don’t know what we’re doing’. It was her teacher who suggested she write about the Glastonbury music festival she had just attended. Anna’s only stated aims at the outset were generic, in line with her assertion that writing should be worth reading: to write something others would find ‘worthwhile’ and ‘interesting’, and to ‘make other people understand’. However, she didn’t know ‘what to go into...what would be more interesting...(what) people would want to hear about’. She conceded that she
hadn’t decided who her reader was, or whether her account would be personal, like a diary, or a more formal report.

However, as writing progressed, Anna’s sense of purpose emerged. By the end of her first drafting session she had developed a ‘feeling’ for her target audience (readers of the Financial Times!) and a clear sense of ‘where I want it to go’. Her main objective was to convey something of the atmosphere of the festival and particularly the feeling that one had entered ‘a completely different…whole other world’ as if ‘you’ve been in the middle of a city and then you go into Chinatown’. This idea gave her a shape for the whole piece and an end-point: ‘once I’ve written about the whole different world thing… it will end there, end well there’. Thus for the second writing session, she had a much clearer idea of what she wanted to achieve, and her revising focus changed. During initial drafting, Anna’s reviewing and revising goals were primarily generative, focused on audience and content. She tried to identify and elaborate on those aspects of the experience ‘people would want to read about’ and ‘the things that other people liked’. During her 2nd draft, however, her revising goals were linguistically focused: ‘I kind of knew what I wanted to say today…but I don’t know how I want to say it’. She concentrated primarily on wording and corrections.

In this sense, Anna’s initial writing and revising fulfilled the exploratory purpose she had described before the task began: ‘I won’t really know where to go with it until I’ve like written the first paragraph and then I’ll know I think’. Having found what she wanted to say, the second writing session then enabled her to attend to language. However, she recognised that her exploratory approach was a risky one in situations where time was limited and she regretted not having a clearer sense of direction from the outset.

A reflective process

In advance of writing, Anna characterised her composing process as ‘stop and start’. She declared herself a ‘jump straight in’ writer who developed her text ‘bit by bit’. She had never found a planning strategy that worked for her, and identified more strongly with writing as ‘discovery’: ‘I would say that happens to me a lot, like I’ll be writing and I’ll think oh those words don’t mean anything and they won’t mean anything…and then I’ll think ah but wait, if I said that or if I
changed that around or yeah it’s kind of like an “ah ha” moment’. Thus she expected to pause frequently to reread and to make changes as writing unfolded: ‘I normally pause for like yeah, I literally, I don’t usually go like more than two sentences without crossing things out, ’cos I always backtrack on myself’.

This strategy was apparent during observations of her writing. It was notable that in spite of the teacher’s initial instructions to plan, Anna’s pre-writing reflection was minimal (18 seconds). She began writing without notes or a title, stating aloud ‘I don’t know how to start – I don’t know what I’m writing about’, and deleting her first attempt at an opening sentence. As shown in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, she spent more time pausing than writing across the task as a whole, and particularly during the initial drafting phase, when 64% of total time was spent pausing (similar to the ‘sustained pausers’ in Myhill’s 2009 study). Her composing pattern was characterised by writing bursts of less than 20 seconds, followed by pauses of similar or considerably longer length. During the second writing session, pause time diminished somewhat as the focus moved from idea generation to linguistic considerations. Nevertheless, her longer pauses during both sessions exceeded those of any other case. As she anticipated, much of her pause time was spent rereading (sometimes aloud) in order to generate the next idea: ‘I’ll re-read this like three times and then keep reading…to see like how, if I was reading it, someone else’s writing, where I’d…want them to go with it’. However, rereading was also evaluative, and often resulted in revision – the addition of a sentence or phrase in the margin, crossings-out of varying lengths, and more minor rewording, corrections of spelling and punctuation.

Anna was relatively pleased with her writing process on this occasion, suggesting it had been more fluent and efficient than usual. Nevertheless, it was perhaps indicative of her approach that reflection and revision were not confined to the allocated writing sessions. She claimed to think about her text ‘in the shower’ between drafts. She also continued to revise after the class writing sessions (and my observations) had ended: during typing-up of her text for display she made further changes to content and vocabulary, and once printed and displayed in the classroom, she made more minor alterations by hand. In all, she made more text revisions after the classroom writing episodes than she
Figure 8.1: Anna’s pause-write pattern – 1st writing episode

(Pausing is recorded as a negative value, writing as a positive value; time in seconds)

Figure 8.2: Anna’s pause-write pattern – 2nd writing episode

had done during them. This subsequent redrafting was not observed as part of the research process, but appeared to support her claim that she never perceived her writing as ‘finished’.
However, as shown in Table 8.1, the revisions made to text were not as substantive or extensive as Anna had anticipated. She claimed that she often changed whole sections of writing at the level of content, and sometimes changed her opinions. Thus she expected to spend considerable time revising: ‘it takes me a very long time because I change massive chunks of it’. On this occasion changes to content were more modest. With the exception of her initial false start, revision involved the addition or elaboration of ideas rather than radical changes in thinking. She made only one structural change (after the observed writing lessons) which involved the rearrangement of two sentences.

Table 8.1: Anna’s revisions to text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency Draft 1</th>
<th>Frequency Draft 2</th>
<th>Total: both drafts observed</th>
<th>Frequency Draft 3 (not observed)</th>
<th>Frequency Draft 4 (not observed)</th>
<th>Total: all drafts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total words in text | 415 | Total words in text | 500 |

Anna’s comments immediately after writing suggested that for this task she devoted more attention to generating content than to modifying it. This may have been because she chose to write about her experience rather than argue a position, since she claimed she was most inclined to rethink persuasive writing. Equally, she may have felt under more pressure to produce text during the time she was being observed. Anna often felt she should suppress her tendency to revise at deeper levels, and this presented a strategic dilemma: ‘whether you do it again, or you change it, or you leave it and just struggle on, I don’t know’. For whatever reason, in this instance she perceived that she made fewer changes than normal: ‘I didn’t actually cross anything out for a long time, that’s quite good for me’. She also concluded that her execution of the task had been more successful as a result. See Appendix O for Anna’s text and coded revisions following the two observed writing episodes.
Global concerns

Anna perceived that her own evaluation criteria differed from those that applied in school. In her view, creative writing should be an expression of self: ‘(it) comes from you and your own experiences…you have to believe in it, otherwise there’s no point in writing’. As an assertion of identity, writing was in some respects non-negotiable. Anna placed high value on personal qualities in writing: perspective, authenticity and originality. She also believed that writing should be judged according to its impact on readers. These global criteria were of greater significance to her than technical features. However, she felt that these criteria counted for little in assessment terms: ‘really good bits of writing that I would genuinely read ... get low marks because they didn’t, you know, put in three similes and four metaphors or something'; ‘they don’t mark it on how good they think it is, they mark it on whether it does what’s on the list’. In Anna’s view, ‘the list’ comprised surface features such as accuracy, word choice and linguistic devices. She found this conflict of values problematic.

Although Anna was keen to get good grades, it was evident that success on her own terms was especially important. Early on she admitted that assessment criteria were ‘not my first priority I don’t think’. Thus, in spite of her perception that school success meant ‘doing the list’, she paid little attention to the assessment criteria outlined and displayed on the classroom wall: ‘I don’t think about that, ’cos I don’t know if you noticed but in the classroom there’s like the levels on the wall and like she writes it in our books and she’ll write like “L” or, I can’t even think what they’re called, and I never look at them on the wall’. At the same time, she recognised the need to address prescribed requirements and her attempts to satisfy both were especially demanding: ‘I do try to do the things they want you to do, but at the same time to do it my way…it gets harder as you get closer to GCSEs’. By the end of the study, Anna conceded that she would have ‘to play the game’ to succeed.

During the observed writing task, Anna’s main focus was on capturing accurately the feelings and impressions she experienced over the weekend at Glastonbury, and communicating them in a way that would appeal to a wide audience. Her decision-making in this respect was at both holistic and local
levels. She changed her mind about writing a purely personal account and tried to expand her perspective to represent the views and interests of others: ‘I kept putting like what I liked…and then I realised that maybe those weren’t the things that other people liked’). She added sense details: ‘it’s a definite part of Glastonbury, you have to smell’). She tried out different words and phrases to describe the impact of a performer on the audience. She also attended to more minor concerns, revising to eliminate repetition, colloquialisms and redundant phrases, and to correct mistakes. Thus her attention to problems of different types and sizes was reasonably balanced. She not only attended to text quality, but also to the needs of an imagined audience wider than the teacher and to her own needs.

For this task, Anna was relatively pleased with the outcome. She felt she had been able to realise her own goals and bring writing to an impactful conclusion. She was ‘kind of happy’ with her last paragraph, which did in fact contain two similes (she hadn’t noticed), describing her departure from the festival as ‘like leaving another world behind, like coming out of Narnia’. However, she admitted that she really didn’t know how her piece might be judged in school terms.

**In summary**

Anna articulated a sophisticated understanding of the deeper purpose and potential of revision, and to some extent this was reflected in her practice. She showed high levels of metacognitive awareness, identifying her own thinking and composing processes precisely, as well as her efforts to bring them under control. She recognised the recursive nature of writing, even though she was not convinced of its value, at least for school writing.

Both her self-assessment and her observed practice suggested a deep ‘reflective-revision’ strategy, as defined by Lavelle (1993), one which was not found in Lavelle et al.’s (2002) factor analysis of the approaches of secondary students. In some respects, Anna’s revising profile appears to exhibit the characteristics of expert writers: exploratory purposes, non-linear strategies, global considerations. Her pause-write ratio was also close to that of skilled writers, and her reflections on writing continued beyond the allocated time period. Her consideration of audience and content when revising, and her
intrinsic drive to see her thinking through, might be suggestive of a knowledge-transforming strategy. Her composing process appeared consistent with the ‘dispositional’ approach of the ‘low self-monitor’ as described by Galbraith (1992, 1999), a strategy considered best suited to knowledge-development through writing, although at the possible expense of organisation. In support of a knowledge-constituting process, Anna claimed to experience ‘ah ha’ moments of discovery during writing, echoing Olson’s (2003) definition of ‘felt’ understanding. Olson suggests this subjective ‘ah ha’ experience is critical to all cognition and to a learner’s judgements about his or her own learning, forming one of the main routes to the control of one’s own understanding. Furthermore, of all cases, Anna was most inclined to engage in the more substantive revision suggested in National Curriculum policy.

Nevertheless, Anna judged her approach inefficient and unsuccessful when writing for school purposes. In her view assessed tasks required one to be decisive, ‘to do the list’, and to focus on technical matters, whereas she was ‘indecisive’ and ‘fussy’ about the larger questions. At the same time, she perceived herself too inflexible, or too lazy, to adopt alternative strategies, such as outline planning, which might have helped her manage school tasks on her own terms. Her inability and unwillingness to ‘settle for something’ meant that all too often she gave up: ‘if I can’t completely think through it all then I just won’t bother’. Interestingly, by the end of year 9 when she was interviewed for a final time, Anna’s position had shifted somewhat: she had concluded that compliance with school practices and an instrumental approach was necessary for GCSE success and claimed to have adjusted her approach accordingly. She did not ‘believe’ in the value of this approach more widely, but was resigned to it for school purposes.

**Jamie: the pragmatist**

Unlike Anna, Jamie regarded writing and revising as largely unproblematic. He saw himself as a natural writer to whom success came easily: ‘I don’t really have to think about it. I just write really. Some people wonder how I get the grades that I do, but I just write. It’s quite a simple thing’. He was also a keen reader: ‘since I was about five I’ve been averaging about 20 books a year, yeah
I read an awful lot’. Jamie considered English his favourite subject and his enjoyment derived in large part from his success: ‘I’ve got full marks on all of my assessments so far so I kind of enjoy English…it’s always been my top subject so I’m not ever worried about it, ever’. He felt he did not have to struggle with idea generation, structure or vocabulary when writing, and was only able to identify punctuation as a potential weakness. He was the only case study student who preferred ‘analytical’ writing to ‘creative’, on the grounds that expectations for the former were clearer and more logical. His predicted GCSE grade was A*.

Jamie’s initial questionnaire responses were in several respects the antithesis of Anna’s. In common with most other students, he expressed a procedural tendency and an inclination towards minor revision. In particular, he stressed planning ahead, sticking to a plan, revising after completion and redrafting. Like the majority of respondents, he also placed greater value on linguistic and technical features of writing than on content. His responses overall were more emphatic than those of others and contained the greatest number of strong agreements and disagreements, suggesting a writer who knew his own mind and method. He expressed uncertainty only about the significance of ideas and originality in writing, and in relation to exploratory and intrinsic writing purposes. In most respects Jamie’s initial responses were reflected in subsequent interviews and during observations of his writing.

Jamie regarded school writing as a distinctive phenomenon, the requirements of which were not immediately accessible to those on the outside: ‘I just don’t really tend to talk about what I write about at home really, I think most people wouldn’t understand, my family wouldn’t understand what I was talking about…no they wouldn’t understand the school task, I think they appreciate writing but not in the depth that we’ve been taught to’. He was concerned to master the requirement as precisely and efficiently as possible. At the same time, like Anna, he harboured a somewhat cynical attitude towards what he saw as the necessary hoop-jumping this entailed. Jamie’s long term plan was to become a lawyer.
An instrumental purpose

In advance of writing, Jamie portrayed his approach to writing and revising as notably single-minded. His primary motivation was to achieve high grades, and he was untroubled by any broader considerations. Having set his objectives, he claimed to stick to his plan and not allow himself the luxury of reflection beyond a certain point. He focused on what he perceived the teacher/examiner required, and on what was feasible in the time available. Whilst he acknowledged that broader writing goals might be desirable in other circumstances, he did not see these as relevant for school students: ‘I think getting the marks is what young people write for, which is a shame obviously, because not a lot of people write in their…spare time’. In his view, writing for school purposes was not about self-expression or even about developing ideas; it was simply a matter of ticking the right assessment boxes: ‘you just have to tick the boxes to guarantee an OK mark in it…writing in English as GCSE, you’ve got to jump through hoops as I said, you’ve got to do what the examiner wants you to do, you can put across your ideas to some extent but you can’t put too much in otherwise it may be unsuitable for the task’. Consequently, Jamie felt least secure when assessment requirements were not clear-cut, or when he perceived they were subjective; he was ‘quite daunted’ by creative writing tasks because ‘there’s not like a set what you need to do…I feel more pressure from that’. Although Jamie professed concern for his readership, he made no mention of an audience for writing beyond the teacher/examiner.

Jamie’s view of the purpose and potential of revision was similarly pragmatic: ‘like I said, you have to tick all the boxes, jump through all the hoops, so when you’re revising you’ll be looking for structure, accuracy and those kind of thing’. Revision was a checking task specifically focused on criteria fulfilment: ‘(I) look back at my structure and then look back at my punctuation and look back at each key feature that I need to make sure I’ve got in there. ‘Cos that’s purely for grades though really’. His aim was not to rethink or to reformulate content, but to eliminate errors and enhance wording, to ‘try and perfect it as best I can with the content I’ve got so far, just add a few sentences and that kind of thing, nothing too major’. Revision therefore offered limited scope for improvement – it represented a compromise between what was practical in the school context
and what might be feasible in different circumstances: ‘it has to be that the more you work at something the better, but I think in the short amount of time that you do work on it afterwards it only slightly gets it better, it’s not a vast change because what you’ve put down the first time is the bulk of what you’ve written’. Given the constraints, he judged that to a large extent you were stuck with your first effort, with ‘how it comes out on the day, and then you’ve got to improve that as best you can with what you’ve got, ‘cos when it comes to revising you don’t write another paragraph at it, you just edit what you’ve got’.

Because Jamie equated revising with editing, he did not regard it as an integral part of composing, nor of any great consequence. Rather, he saw it as a necessary but tedious obligation, somewhat overrated by teachers: ‘I have come to think of it as something you just have to do because of the teacher. Whereas usually if I was just writing, I’d get probably 80% accuracy, which is why I probably revise once, but they always talk about going through it lots and lots of times, but to be honest I get a little bit bored of reading my own writing, especially if it’s an essay and it’s chunky, just revising and revising it is quite tedious sometimes. I just think it’s for the grades, I think ultimately that’s what the teacher has to say, they have to get it for the grades’. He was sceptical about the value of too much revision on a number of counts. He believed that it could detract from one’s natural writing style, ‘a little bit of temptation to overcook something really, ‘cos you can change stuff too much that it’s too complex and it’s not free-flowing’. He also thought that extensive revision was impractical: ‘in the controlled assessment situation you’re timed and you just can’t be doing with writing it all out at the end’. Redrafting or rewriting whole sections he judged to be a ‘waste of time’ and an indication of earlier failure. Equally, he regarded changing your mind about the content of writing as an unnecessary distraction, particularly since he perceived that content was of secondary concern to examiners ‘I don’t think you have time really. You have to stick with an idea and try and battle it out really…content they probably look for second’.

As anticipated, Jamie approached the specified writing task with a clear sense of purpose. His stated goals prior to writing were explicit and clearly aligned with the perceived requirement: ‘I’ve got to be accurate with punctuation and stuff… I
think they’ll be looking first and foremost for accuracy…I’m going to take it as an opportunity to put an opinion across…I think they would analyse that on sophistication and elaboration of ideas and that kind of thing…the GCSE course is about precision and control as well as content, so I’ll try and use good vocabulary and use a bit of writing style…complexity probably, and sophistication, good words then it will sound more professional’. He produced a written plan in advance which briefly outlined content for each paragraph and he adhered to this throughout. He was therefore able to forget about generating and organising his ideas during writing, and focus primarily on the required linguistic elements. During both writing sessions he concentrated on formulating sentences and selecting vocabulary which met his criteria. Consistent with his stated aims, revising was similarly focused on stylistic aspects and accuracy. He applied himself intensively and with little hesitation. When new ideas did occur to him, he jotted them down quickly on his plan and returned to the translation task.

A procedural process

In advance of writing, Jamie described his composing process as staged. He expected to plan in outline, produce a first draft fluently, and revise retrospectively: ‘I know a general outline of what I want to say but sentence wise I tend to get a lot down quite quickly and then look back…I just write quite fluently, would be my style, then just go back over’. Whilst his planning was not normally detailed, he always knew how his writing would proceed, often paragraph by paragraph: ‘(I) always have a definite idea of the topic and the general chronological advancement of the (piece)’. In his mind the challenge was how best to translate his ideas: ‘I can get a story, but it’s how to present that story as best I can’. He therefore attached the greatest significance to the drafting stage, upon which he judged success or failure hinged, rather than to subsequent reflection. He compared the act of writing to a kind of adrenalin-fuelled performance – hoop-jumping, rock-climbing, team sports, a matter of taming his ideas and battling it out. He judged that a good writing performance required mental preparation as well as a game-plan: ‘you can’t just go into it. It’s hard to get a balance between relaxing and being focused, ‘cos if you go too far either way you’re not going to do as well’. Revising afterwards, by contrast, was
a somewhat mechanical process, conducted systematically: ‘I often write a paragraph and then proof read through the paragraph’.

Aside from outline planning and minor revision, Jamie relied on a composing strategy which might be characterised as ‘shaping at the point of inscrption’: ‘(sentences) just kinda pop up but then I kinda try and use better words in them, different synonyms for stuff and just try and build them in my head… mould it into something decent… and then write them down…which is why I don’t tend to go back and cross out as much as some people, as I’ve already subconsciously tried to do it in my head’. Rather than deferring some of his decision-making to a later revising stage, Jamie preferred to attend to most of it internally at the point of writing, focusing on one sentence at a time. The quality was therefore dependent on the fluency he could command during the drafting phase, on ‘just how free flowing it is when I write it, like as soon as I finish writing it I know whether it’s going to be good or whether it’s one of my not so good pieces’. Since the outcome was to some extent beyond his control, he sought to manage the drafting process as closely as he could, sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph, ‘thinking logically, not just crazy writing’.

Jamie expected therefore to write for reasonably sustained periods with short pauses to formulate sentences, and longer pauses periodically to reread what had been produced so far and to revise. This proved to be the case during the observed writing sessions. Having produced a written plan in advance which specified content for each paragraph, and having formulated his opening sentence during the teacher’s introduction, Jamie began writing immediately. In the initial drafting stage he only paused for any length of time once he had completed a paragraph or paragraphs, at which point he referred back to his plan, reread what had been written and made minor changes. As shown in Figures 8.3 and 8.4, his composing pattern was similar during both writing periods, with relatively frequent pause-write transitions and few bursts of either exceeding 40 seconds. His pause-write ratio was more or less evenly balanced throughout, although as anticipated, the time spent pausing increased during the second session (from 43% to 53% of total time), and more revisions were made to text. This writing profile is similar to that of the ‘rapid-switchers’ in
Myhill’s (2009) study, a profile which, when combined with advance planning, may be associated with higher achievement.

**Figure 8.3: Jamie’s pause-write pattern – 1st writing episode**

(Pausing is recorded as a negative value, writing as a positive value; time in seconds)

![Graph](image1.png)

**Figure 8.4: Jamie’s pause-write pattern – 2nd writing episode**

![Graph](image2.png)

It was noticeable throughout that Jamie monitored progress both against his plan, ticking off each section as it was completed, and against the clock. He also reread earlier paragraphs in his text in order, he suggested, to keep a view of the whole: ‘I want to refresh myself with my introduction so I can go and refer
As he predicted, the changes Jamie made to his text were predominantly stylistic, as shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Jamie’s revisions to text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency: draft 1</th>
<th>Frequency: draft 2</th>
<th>Total: both drafts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total words in text 553

He made more stylistic changes than any other student observed, and at least twice as many as all except Anna. These were in line with his stated concern to make his sentence structure more complex and his vocabulary more ‘professional’. He added short phrases to extend sentences (‘in particular’, ‘of course’, ‘once again’) and combined sentences by adding a connective, comma or semi-colon. He also replaced common words with more formal vocabulary (‘issue’ in place of ‘problem’; ‘allows’ in place of ‘gives’). The changes made to content also served to deliver the ‘sophistication and elaboration of ideas’ he sought: all four were added metaphors: ‘Homework – Time eater!’ for the title, and in place of ‘homework is useless’ – ‘homework is unuseful [sic] baggage in the airport called life’. Jamie adhered to his paragraph plan and made no changes to text structure. Of all the case studies, Jamie’s total word count was the highest, and he made the greatest number of text revisions during the two observed lessons. See Appendix P for Jamie’s completed text and coded revisions.

**Linguistic concerns**

Jamie’s evaluative priority was linguistic ‘sophistication’, a term he used frequently: ‘I think that’s key to good writing... that’s how I analyse my sentences, with whether they’re the good sentences...I personally look at sophistication first.’ He defined good sentences and good words as varied and complex, ‘otherwise they’re just words on a page’. He also rated accuracy as
highly important because he judged it to be the first concern of examiners ‘probably because it’s the easiest to analyse’. By contrast, he attached less significance to the ideas in writing because he was uncertain how quality of thinking might be assessed: ‘I don’t know how they analyse the content…’cos obviously they don’t know what was going on in the person’s head beforehand’.

He saw no discrepancy between the evaluation criteria he applied when writing and revising, and the expectations of the teacher or specified marking criteria. Indeed, his concern was to ensure the two were closely aligned. This was hardest to achieve in relation to the substance of writing: ‘it’s a hard thing because you couldn’t have multiple people read it and then…mark it on content which, I don’t see how you can mark something on content without a bit of (subjective) opinion in there…’cos who’s one person to say that the content in a book, like their published book, is not good, because another person would say it was good, which is a problem’.

If Jamie had any unresolved dilemma, it concerned those aspects of writing associated with personal expression and creativity, aspects which defied precise measurement and did not sit comfortably with his rationale for school writing. On the one hand he felt intimidated by creative writing tasks for which ‘there’s not like a set what you need to do’. On the other hand, he felt that the assessment criteria were unreasonably narrow: ‘creative’s supposed to give you a bit more like area to work in and more to think about but it’s still quite set in what you have to do to achieve the grades. ‘Cos you can’t mark a piece on opinion of the person marking it ‘cos that would vary from place to place, so you have to, that’s why they have to set guidelines on it, which is probably why I don’t like it so much, I don’t think it should be guide-lined as much’.

He was pleased that the specified task provided an opportunity to express his own opinions, and include ‘a bit of personality’ in his writing. It meant that on this occasion he could attend to ‘self’ as well as to text and the specific needs of a teacher-reader. Nevertheless, unlike Anna, he was not inclined to revise his views, only to express them better: ‘not the ideas, but sentences… I was just going through and looking for the better vocabulary and varied sentence length’. Thus during the observed writing task he directed his attention to matters of style, rejecting words that were ‘not catchy’ or had been used before, and
extending or simplifying sentences. Jamie's linguistic revisions were not confined to local considerations however. Since the overall structure was pre-planned, he was able to attend to linguistic links which enhanced the integrity of the whole: for example, he changed his closing phrase to read 'in a homework free world', thereby referring back to his opening phrase 'students world-wide' and reinforcing the scale of the problem described: 'I just try to…end on quite an empathetic word, like “world”; it’s quite vast so it covers that it’s a big deal’

In summary

Jamie was by all accounts a highly successful writer. His approach appears consistent with Galbraith’s (1992, 1999) ‘high self-monitor’ – a writer who prioritised rhetorical goals and adapted his thinking to the demands of the communicative context. This strategy is considered best suited to the organisation of ideas, although at the possible expense of knowledge-constitution. By his own admission, writing and revising did not represent for Jamie a means of discovering or transforming knowledge. Nor did he find revising a liberating or empowering process; on the contrary, he saw it as tiresome and sometimes counterproductive. In Lavelle’s (1993) terms, therefore, Jamie’s approach cannot be defined as a deep learning strategy, since he did not engage deeply with intrinsic or expressive needs. Furthermore, Jamie did not revise in the exploratory and substantive way National Curriculum policy suggests, and he did not regard such revision as either feasible or wise. Given the proximity of GCSEs and the context of the particular writing task discussed, it is unsurprising that Jamie’s interpretation of revision was as circumscribed as it was. He acknowledged that in other circumstances it might be different and recognised that more substantive considerations might apply ‘if you’re allowed to develop your ideas’.

Jamie was not unconcerned about ‘meaning’ or unaware of the transformative potential of revision, but he perceived that the possibilities were limited when revising school writing. He therefore adopted a procedural approach in keeping with that found by Lavelle et al.(2002) in their factor analysis of the approaches of secondary students, namely: close attendance to external expectations and requirements; observation of the ‘rules’; orderly and sequenced approach to writing; and tight management of the process. Unlike Anna, he was able to shut
out other intrinsic inclinations. However, this approach was not necessarily the approach he felt mattered at a wider level, and he found it ‘hard’ to reconcile personal expression and school tasks: ‘I think that’s what writing should be about, expression rather than just copying out and writing what people want you to write, it should be what you want to write and what you feel about…otherwise I don’t think English… would be worth doing’. Equally, he did not feel his procedural strategy was appropriate for expressive writing, which he saw as a more spontaneous outpouring: ‘creative’s more like as it comes out your head’. For writing such as poetry, for example, he deemed that neither planning ahead nor revision afterwards were desirable: ‘I don’t think you can plan a poem…it’s just got to be free in your head….I think it’s dominated on writing style and freedom…that would have to be free-flowing otherwise it wouldn’t be very good’. In this sense, Jamie perceived that his highly successful approach to school writing was also somewhat limited.

Conclusion

It is worth noting that in spite of their very different intentions and practices, both Anna and Jamie shared some clear understandings about the nature of the revising task in school, and the discrepancy between the purposes and priorities that applied to school writing and to ‘real’ writing. Arguably Jamie accommodated his writing and revising to the perceived requirement more effectively than Anna; he was therefore able to derive greater pleasure and success from the process. However, both retained a cynical attitude to what they regarded as a narrowly circumscribed endeavour. Both saw the possibilities for creative, exploratory and substantive revision as distinctly limited in the school context.
CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

The defining features of students’ understandings about revision

This study sought to explore adolescent writers’ understandings about revision. In particular it posed questions about the nature of their revising goals, the strategies they adopt and the success criteria they apply when writing for school purposes. The findings provide a complex picture, reflecting a number of apparent dichotomies in students’ thinking and some distinct differences between the most able and weaker writers.

On the face of it, all students’ representations of the revising task, both stated and enacted, were undoubtedly limited. For the most part, they expected to revise superficially, and they did so. Since they tended to equate revision with editing, they positioned it as a retrospective rather than a formative activity, and judged their success in narrow linguistic terms. Survey responses, observations of writing and textual evidence were broadly consistent in suggesting that these secondary writers’ interpretations were unduly circumscribed in all key areas when compared with those of so-called experts. In this respect, the findings echo those of much earlier research, suggesting that students’ responses have changed little in spite of increased policy emphasis on substantive revision. From a developmental perspective, therefore, the data might lend support to the view that adolescent writers lack the metacognitive or metalinguistic skills necessary for more effective revision, rather than that classroom representations of the task are at fault. It would be easy to conclude that closely structured support of these emergent skills, and classroom strategies which reduce cognitive load, will best advance students’ understanding and revising behaviour.

On the other hand, the interview data cast new light on students’ rationales for approaching revision in the way they do, suggesting that the problems associated with revising school writing may have less to do with learners’ skills, and more to do with their interpretation of the school requirement. Students assumed that school expectations were themselves narrowly focused. Improving accuracy and word-choice, or delivering required content, was judged
to be as important, or more important, than rethinking ideas in school tasks. In
this respect, the findings might support the view, also advanced in some early
studies, that limited concepts and revising behaviours grow out of inadequate
classroom explanations. One might conclude that explicitly redefining the task
as more substantive, in the way that Wallace et al. (1996) found successful with
college students, and encouraging students to ‘do more’, would help them
restructure their response.

However, the case study data suggested that able writers lacked neither the
skill nor the understanding to revise more effectively. It was clear that these
students recognised the wider possibilities of revision, and their assessment of
the school task was well-reasoned. They drew both genre and contextual
distinctions, surmising that the highly-specified nature of school tasks did not
‘allow’ the development of ideas. Not only did they perceive a gap between the
choices available to them when revising school writing and those that might
apply elsewhere, but they also attempted, to different degrees, to modify their
approach accordingly even when this meant suppressing inclinations to revise
more. They seemed to entertain a parallel understanding of revising potential,
and had gone some way to rationalising the discrepancies between ‘real’ and
taught models. For these students, neither of the teaching strategies identified
above would necessarily prompt more effective revision. If able writers
possessed the capability to revise at higher levels, their reasons for not doing
so require further analysis. What are the factors, both subjective and contextual,
that hold them back and how might these be addressed?

Of course the nature of learners’ understandings are likely to reflect school
messages, implicit and explicit, as much as any subjective assessment of the
task; intentionality and success criteria are context-bound, at least in large part.
In the school context, purposes for writing are inevitably distinct from those that
writers might pursue in the real world, as indeed some students in this study
noted. Schools have evolved their own special forms of discourse, ‘as well as
largely non-negotiable norms and standards’ (Olson, 2003). Indeed, as Sheeran
and Barnes (1991) suggest, much of what is expected in school is not intended
to have relevance to the everyday world: an abstract ‘disembedded logic’
defines the tasks and activities students are asked to undertake (p.5). Students’
narrow definitions of what it means to revise school writing raise questions therefore about the nature of this logic, and the degree to which it has been internalised or accepted, as well as its efficacy in relation to writing development. At the same time students bring their own logic to school writing, and questions need to be asked about the role of particular values and assumptions in supporting or inhibiting more effective practice.

This discussion chapter examines more closely the gap between students’ representations of revision and those of ‘expert’ writers in relation to purpose, process and success criteria. It explores the way in which perceived school models may shape students’ response, and dictate both the kinds of problems they encounter and the possibilities available to them when revising. It also considers the dichotomous nature of students’ assumptions, and the implications such understandings may have for writing development.

**Discrepancies in students’ representations of purpose**

By comparison with the multi-level definitions of experts, students’ representations of revising purpose in this study were one-dimensional. In all but one case, the goals they set themselves were predominantly text-based not writer- or reader-based. They were concerned to align their texts with perceived linguistic requirements, often emphatically so; attention to intrinsic goals or the broader needs of an audience was rare. Tellingly, no student saw revision as a tool for learning. This asymmetry was perhaps all the more surprising given that the writing tasks (to explore, imagine and entertain or to argue, persuade and advise) apparently invited a personal response and engagement with the reader. The paucity of process or substantive goals was reflected in the few changes students made to the content of their texts: only 13 of the 203 revisions made by all students during observed writing impacted on meaning, and only one of these altered rather than added to meaning (see appendix Q). Furthermore, such limited aims applied irrespective of writing ability or motivation. It was not the case, as development models might suggest, that the most able writers in this study necessarily pursued higher-level or multi-dimensional goals. On the contrary, they shared an intentional suppression of any objectives which might have led to the reformulation of content. This would
seem a curiously perverse closing down of opportunities to improve ideas or advance understanding.

However, students’ narrow definitions of task did not necessarily reflect their understanding of the potential scope of revision or the goals they might set themselves in other circumstances. Rather, able writers perceived broader aims as surplus to requirements or as fundamentally incompatible with school purposes. Indeed, the two highest-achieving writers explicitly chose to adopt an instrumental approach whilst at the same time acknowledging the discrepancy between their personal goals and perceived expectations. Whereas weaker writers were vaguer about requirements beyond mechanics and tended to set themselves generalised goals, the overriding priority of successful students was attention to specified requirements. Furthermore, these students identified an increasing need to jettison personal goals and narrow their focus on extrinsic criteria as they progressed towards final examinations. They perceived revising at GCSE level as a ‘box-ticking’ exercise. This narrowing-down would suggest a reverse trajectory to that described in development models and in policy, namely that writers progress from local to global concerns when revising, and their definitions of task increase in scope and flexibility.

How might school models inform students’ preoccupation with ‘doing the list’ at the expense of wider goals?

**The perceived nature of authorised purposes**

Writing purposes at secondary level are closely bound to evaluative procedures, grading and selection. Standardised measures inform curricular and policy goals, and those aspects of writing most amenable to measurement can exert oppressive influence. However much teachers seek to encourage broader aims, they remain accountable for ensuring that students align their writing with stated assessment criteria; in practice their students ‘hear’ that attention to prescribed features and surface conventions is a priority. In addition, the peculiar problem of writing for a teacher-examiner brings with it a further set of apparent irrelevancies: the purpose is to demonstrate learning – being original or engaging with the ‘reader’ may be desirable but is not enough. By the same logic, the subordination of intrinsic goals in writing is implied; the ability to
'bracket' personal interests and experience when required seems particularly important to school success (Sheeran and Barnes, 1991). Frequently, then, the purpose for school writing is entirely removed from the writer. Students are expected to 'write to an audience of one – the teacher – on a topic defined by the teacher, for a reason specified by the teacher. In such situations, children have few opportunities to develop their own goals and little invitation to do anything other than report their existing knowledge. When put in similar situations, expert writers often balk,' (McCutchen, 2006, p. 116).

This picture may appear at odds with stated curriculum aims, which include helping students to 'develop independence in writing…develop their ideas…see writing as a powerful tool to achieve a purpose’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.99). National Curriculum policy is at pains to stress the importance of real purposes and audience for writing, and to encourage creative and exploratory reasons for revising. However, these principles rarely translate in the detail. The ‘fictionalising’ of purpose and audience is explicit, for example, when teacher guidance suggests that students ‘should be given a ‘purpose’ and an ‘audience’ card’ to inform editing (DCSF, 2008, p.101). Revising activities are presented as contrived exercises which remove decision-making from the writer: ‘ask pupils…to rewrite the paragraph to include more or less specialised language, at least two complex sentences, a simile or longer noun phrase and so on’ or ‘ask them to stop at the end of each paragraph and…make at least one improvement each time’ (p.105). ‘Experiment’ is defined primarily in linguistic or structural terms rather than at content levels: ‘experiment with words and phrases; use a bank of phrases’ or ‘cut up and reorder the essay’ (pp.101-102). Revising tasks are also frequently focused on 'provided' writing – ‘a corrupted text’ or ‘a poorly drafted story’ – so that the rationale for improvement is depersonalised (p.103). These prescriptive representations reinforce the perception that revision is about aligning text with pre-determined surface requirements. By presenting the reason for revising as largely separate from the intentions of writers, goals related to the construction of meaning are inevitably eclipsed.

In such circumstances, a legitimate, and arguably efficient, student response may be to ignore their own needs and the needs of imagined ‘readers’ and to
focus instead on decontextualised requirements. A dependency on teacher
cues for target-setting naturally follows. From a critical perspective, the implied
removal of ‘self’ from school writing purposes raises questions therefore about
empowerment. To what extent are students expected or able to exercise
authorial choice and control? The assumption that writing requires ‘the erasing
of one’s “self”, the regurgitation of the teacher’s ideas, the following of rules for
the sake of adhering to rules’ (Lee, 2000, p.253) may indeed cause students to
conclude: ‘because I’m taught in this way, I don’t think I’d ever know how to
write a piece of my own writing’ (Anna).

In this study, able writers recognised school purposes as inauthentic. Their
understanding of writing as an exercise in ‘display’ determined their revising
goals and their negation of self and reader: ‘because they’re examining it, they
are just trying to look for your writing skill, not reading material’ (Sara).
Consequently, they saw little reason to take risks or to engage critically or
creatively with their own meaning. The most successful writers nevertheless
retained active intentionality; they took responsibility for matching their goals
with perceived expectations, albeit with some cynicism: ‘(I) look back at each
key feature that I need to make sure I’ve got in there, ‘cos that’s purely for
grades...you’ve got to jump through hoops as I said, you’ve got to do what the
examiner wants you to do’ (Jamie). Not all, however, were willing or able ‘to
play the game’. Anna was explicit in her unwillingness to participate when she
could not attend to the process of sense-making: ‘if I can’t completely think
through it all then I just won't bother’. Weaker writers, on the other hand, had a
less elaborate understanding of the purpose their revising was expected to
serve, and little sense of agency. Their goals were either too loosely specified
to be helpful or arguably misdirected – ‘I should just be myself and write like
me’ (Zoe). When it came to revising for school purposes, their tendency was to
adopt a passive stance and rely on the teacher to determine objectives: ‘they
just set me a task and you get on with it’ (Luke).

In the school context, successful goals for revision depend therefore not only on
an accurate analysis of required effect, but also on leaners’ willingness to
collude with purposes they might perceive as flawed. Students are expected to
make a leap of faith ‘that one day these activities will make sense’ (Sheeran &
Barnes, 1991, p.7). This acceptance is itself contingent on their ability to shift to alternative frames of reference for comprehending what’s required, and to suspend purposes that may appear more immediately relevant. Furthermore, such leaps of faith may rely on particular forms of cultural capital not equally available to children from different social backgrounds (Sheeran & Barnes, 1991). Conversely, therefore, educational failure might represent ‘an unwillingness to subordinate one’s own voice to that of another rather than an inability to learn’ (Forman et al., 1993, cited in Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p.375). Galbraith (2009) points to the profound feelings of alienation that may arise when external constraints prevent writers from pursuing dispositional goals or ‘constituting thought’ since personal expression is central to ‘who they are’ (p.63). The frustration expressed by students who perceived their revising objectives as incompatible with school purpose would seem to support this, and underline the potential for mismatched goals.

Ironically, the kind of instrumental detachment deemed necessary to deliver the grades may ultimately be more costly in terms of revising expertise. Students’ narrow constructions of the task may serve to shut down creative possibilities, prevent them from gaining new insights or perspectives, and indeed limit the quality of their texts (Carey & Flower, 1989). A fixation on extrinsic criteria may fulfil school purposes but confine a writer to producing routine, formulaic texts. The instrumental nature of students’ revising goals casts doubt, therefore, both on the levels of motivation they can support and the scope they offer for writing improvement.

**The de-prioritisation of intrinsic goals**

Students’ apparent suppression of intrinsic purposes runs counter to the kinds of goals associated with expertise. Skilled writers are deemed to use revision for heuristic purposes as well as to align text with extrinsic requirements; it is this exploratory purpose that distinguishes revision from editing and enables writers to reprocess and regenerate meaning. The difference between what Bereiter (1980) terms ‘performative’ writing and ‘epistemic’ writing is the difference between writing which is intended mainly or solely as ‘verbal artefact’ and writing which includes the active intention to reorder thought. ‘Performative’ writing may demonstrate mastery of high level conventions, such as the use of
varied sentence structure or avoidance of ambiguity, but is nevertheless considered inexpert because social goals and subjective goals – the ‘personal search for meaning’ – are not an integral part (p.88). When the intention to make sense of something or to communicate meaningfully with someone else is strong enough, writers are engaged in an altogether more rewarding enterprise.

For this reason, intrinsically-motivated goals are assumed to indicate a deep learning strategy, whereas extrinsic goal-satisfaction is associated with surface learning and less enjoyment (see Lavelle et al., 2002). Research suggests that writers who prioritise intrinsic goals are more likely to develop their understanding through writing and discover new knowledge than those who prioritise rhetorical goals (see Galbraith, 2009). They are also more likely to engage in critical and creative thinking: ‘the act of defining one’s own rhetorical problem and setting goals is an important part of “being creative” and can account for some of the defining differences between good and poor writers’ (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p.373).

Of course, for students and teachers alike, the prioritisation of such goals for revision may seem all very well for some forms of writing, and in particular writing circumstances, but something of a luxury in other contexts. In reality, most writing, undertaken in or outside school is intended to fulfil some extrinsic purpose, and ‘personal expression’ or ‘knowledge-constitution’ is rarely the primary purpose. Expert revising of the kind described above presupposes high levels of motivation and persistence, not to mention expanses of time rarely available in school. The effort required to achieve ‘authenticity’ in writing is also unlikely to be painless: it ‘requires cognitive and emotional investment, the willingness to revise or start over, and the willingness to grow, along with whatever growing pains are required to advance the process’ (Smagorinsky, 2009, p.371). Contemplating intrinsic goals of this kind for many writing tasks would clearly be absurd, and potentially disastrous in the time-controlled conditions of writing assessments. However, for students to marginalise personal goals for writing as somehow ‘unacademic’ or inappropriate in the school context is equally nonsensical. Writing which involves the processing of thought ‘is inescapably personal whether literary or non-literary’ (D’Arcy, 2000, p.40). To ignore such goals is to ignore the intentions that enable students to
‘explore different ways of discovering and shaping their own meanings’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.99).

Some students in this study recognised the potential of writing to further thinking and understanding, but were often unable to realise this in the classroom: ‘the purpose for me I think is… just how to sort (my ideas) out, but then I think if I don’t get the time to do that…I’ll get really annoyed because my work won’t be very good and I think I could make it better. I get very frustrated’ (Anna). They tended therefore to dismiss exploratory goals as impractical. Even ‘creative’ tasks were not judged to offer opportunities to determine their own expressive goals: ‘it’s not creative though. I don’t think it’s creative. Creative writing comes from you and from your own experiences, not from being told what to do and then all do the same thing’ (Anna). For as long as students perceive their own thinking as sometimes ‘unsuitable for the task’ (Jamie) and an instrumental approach more likely to ‘pay off’, any personal investment in writing becomes superfluous.

For learners who are in the process of discovering and developing their identities as writers, disengagement from the struggle to ‘get it right’ for themselves may be especially detrimental. The importance of a piece of writing to the writer determines its quality in ways that adherence to criteria alone cannot: ‘students who willingly invest time and emotional energy in their compositions are likely inscribing meaning and their emerging identities in them as well…such writing is better evidence of one’s ability than the uninspired writing produced during wide-scale assessments and much other school writing’ (Smagorinsky, 2009, p.371). It would seem an obvious point, therefore, that enabling students to identify goals for revision which are writer-based as well as text-based is essential: ‘helping them to take responsibility for finding a purpose, rather than imposing a purpose on them, might be a means of engaging them more fully in the composing and learning processes’ (Lee, 2000, pp.255-256; original italics), but also of improving writing quality. This is not to suggest that normative goals are unimportant, or that writers need somehow to inscribe their identity in all writing. What is clear, however, is that learners need to find ways of adapting to the values and conventions of the classroom without abandoning
personal intentions. The motivation to revise substantively can only come from the writer.

The perceived dichotomy between personal and normative goals

Students' tendency to see expressive and sense-making goals as incompatible with school purposes was therefore disempowering. A defining feature of revising expertise is the writer's ability to bring both subjective and normative considerations to bear in whatever proportions the task demands. This parallel or 'dual purpose' involves an assessment of the needs of both audience and writer, and the setting of goals which advance meaning and meet relevant norms. It does not help teaching and learning, however, that these dual concerns are frequently portrayed as fundamentally opposed in the literature – 'internal' and 'external' (Murray, 1982), 'affective' and 'critical' (Lavelle & Zuercher, 2001), 'dispositional' and 'rhetorical' (Galbraith, 2009) – even though all agree that the conflict is a necessary one. Galbraith (2009) himself concludes that the perennial conflict between approaches to writing which prioritise personal expression and those that prioritise rhetorical skill arises because both are essential components of effective writing: it is at the intersection between the two that thinking takes place.

These polarised representations, therefore, are particularly unhelpful. They suggest separateness, whereas in reality the two concerns interact. They also serve to perpetuate the perceived division between creative-expressive and skills-based purposes that have dogged debate about writing instruction for so long. Even within the highly constrained context of school writing, it is clearly not the case that writers have to sacrifice the development of ideas in order to deliver prescribed requirements, or personal style in order to show rhetorical skill. Such misconceptions need to be challenged if students are to move beyond the fulfilment of assessed demands. Adherence to requirements need not be slavish, and can be liberating; equally, intrinsic goals are not necessarily romantic, and may be highly disciplined.

This more integrated conception of purpose eluded students in this study, although some did recognise the need to balance personal and prescribed objectives: 'I do try to do the things they want you to do, but at the same time do
it my way. You have to believe in it, otherwise there’s no point in writing’ (Anna). Even the most able writers struggled to reconcile expressive and instrumental goals, or to think of them in other than binary terms: ‘I think that’s what writing should be about, expression rather than just copying out and writing what people want you to write, it should be what you want to write and what you feel about’ (Jamie). This dichotomous view was apparent in their tendency to caricature both the nature of school expectations and the nature of ‘creative’ writing. It informed their misconception that ‘self-expression’ should not be subject to external constraints, did not require planning or crafting, but was best ‘as it comes out your head’ whereas analytic writing was about ‘precision’ (Jamie). It also informed their difficulty with the rhetoric of authenticity and individuality: ‘they always tell us you have to be your own writer and do your own things and you know be unique or whatever, then they make us all do the same thing, and I’m like what do you mean? I don’t understand’ (Anna). For weaker writers the failure to achieve a balance was sometimes all too apparent: ‘if I’m pleased with something then…I’m probably more likely not to get a good mark for it…I want to get a good mark but I want to be happy with it as well, but you don’t, it’s really hard’ (Zoe).

There is a sense in which students felt the ‘non-negotiability’ of prescribed purposes for school writing made revising to explore or revising to learn almost impossible. This understanding is misplaced and leads to the assumption that it will be ‘the exceptional pupils who can make school writing at the same time serve their own purposes and meet the teacher’s – and the unseen examiner’s – ground rules’ (Sheeran & Barnes, 1991, p.99). If, as Olson (2003) suggests, the point at which subjective and normative goals modify each other is the point at which students come to take control of their own writing and learning, then students need help to understand and manage what may seem to them to be opposing intentions.

**Discrepancies in students’ representations of process**

In line with their limited revising objectives, students defined revision as a ‘light touch’ exercise – one conducted after the production of text and in a relatively short space of time. Irrespective of their personal inclinations or their writing
ability, all identified a single linear routine for school writing, whereby planning ahead determined the content of writing, and revising afterwards perfected language. This plan-draft-revise model was seen as the advisable and endorsed method. However, all students also conceded that in practice advance planning was often cursory or non-existent. Consequently they focused their efforts on generating and translating ideas in one go; it was the moment of writing that determined quality, not planning or subsequent revision: ‘just how free-flowing it is when I write it, like as soon as I finish writing it I know whether it’s going to be good, or whether it’s one of my not so good pieces’ (Jamie). During the observed tasks, very little time was devoted to pre-writing reflection or to rewriting; only one student had a prepared outline, and no student took the opportunity to redraft. Nor was it the case that higher-achieving writers necessarily spent more time reflecting during writing than weaker writers, or revised more extensively, as development models might suggest. All students made a similarly modest number of changes in relation to total word count (except when using a spell-check facility), and the vast majority were small-scale. Indeed, successful writing process was equated with uninterrupted fluency: ‘if it flowed…you wouldn’t stop, you just carry on writing, don’t stop, and then read over it again’ (Chris). It was compared by students of all abilities to walking in a straight line; pausing or changing direction was a dangerous distraction. By comparison with the iterative processes of skilled writers, one might conclude therefore that students were engaged in little more than ‘pre-writing’ since their strategies for rehearsal and improvement were so slight (Hillocks, 2002).

It should be noted however that not all students regarded this approach as their preferred one. Indeed, able writers articulated the need to moderate their reflective tendencies in response to school tasks and conditions, and to compose in ways that did not always come naturally. They judged that for school writing a one-draft approach with minor editing was most practical, and for time-controlled tasks the only option. Whereas weaker writers tended to rely on an intuitive drafting strategy over which they had limited control – ‘I just kind of let it roll’ (Chris) – more able writers attempted to adapt to the requirement. They deliberately set parameters on their reviewing and revising processes and described their efforts to keep their more divergent thinking in check – ‘you have
to be more decisive’ (Anna). Either way, substantive rethinking or reworking was avoided: ‘if you do something quickly and you do go with your first opinion maybe it will come across better’ (Anna). This inflexible strategy would seem to offer little scope for growth in expertise, since writers are assumed to develop an increasing repertoire of strategies – pre- and post-textual, exploratory and remedial, macro- and micro-level – which they deploy flexibly according to purpose.

How might school models inform students’ limited revising strategies?

*The perceived nature of classroom process*

Like writing purposes, school writing process operates within a set of contextual constraints which dictate what is feasible or efficient. Manageable classroom procedures can become institutionalised and intractable. In particular, the pressure of time can reduce school models of composing to little more than a straitjacket. The gap between the complex and individualised processes of skilled writers and the kinds of routines that can be implemented in classrooms or examinations is particularly hard to resolve.

Consider the tensions in policy guidance. On the one hand, it is stressed that composition is not a simple linear process at all ‘but iterative’ – drafting and revising are aspects of a ‘common process involving constant rereading and improvement’ (DfEE, 2000, p.12). Teachers are advised to model the composing process in all its complexity, thinking and rethinking out loud, rehearsing possibilities, deliberating on choices and monitoring intended impact (DCSF, 2008). It is suggested that adequate classroom time should be allowed for reflection and revision of this kind (DCSF, 2007). At the same time, however, the observation is made that ‘pupils struggle to write to time in examinations because the bulk of the writing undertaken in the curriculum is not time limited’ (DCSF, 2008, p.3). The message here is difficult to decipher. How are teachers to encourage substantive revision and overcome the problem of writing to time? The suggestion offered, that students should practice revising their writing to improve content, style and structure ‘under strict time constraints…as preparation for GCSE’ (p.105) betrays an underlying double-think about effective process. There are confusing messages too about the teaching of
revision as an integrated or a procedural process, and about the role of redrafting in timed writing conditions. Teachers are advised, for example, to ensure that ‘stages’ are not omitted: ‘redrafting should be purposeful and, as such, will require explicit teaching to ensure that pupils do not move directly from drafting to proofreading, missing out the essential editing and revision stage’ (DCSF, 2008, p.97; my italics).

Students in this study recognised that writing in ‘tight spaces’ offered few options: frequently the only choice they saw available to them was to ‘wing it’. In these circumstances, neither reflective planning nor redrafting was a realistic option: ‘you’re timed, and you just can’t be doing with writing it all out at the end...you have to stick with an idea and try and battle it out really’ (Jamie). Able writers did not assume that ideas were simply translated rather than constructed, but found themselves unable to move beyond initial thoughts when planning, evaluating and revising were conducted largely on the hoof: ‘I know 'cos time is limited I write the first (ideas) that come to my head, but then I think, oh no I want to change that, but I don’t have time to and I haven’t finished yet’ (Sara). Nevertheless, these writers did engage in much more than ‘pre-writing’. They described revising sentences in their heads immediately before committing to paper, and they adopted a controlled ‘stop and start’ process which enabled them to shape their texts: ‘I just tend to get as much down as possible but still thinking logically, not just crazy writing’ (Jamie). Paradoxically, therefore, the composing strategy they employed made effective writing especially difficult: all of the sub-processes were tackled in one go, a task that few accomplished writers would attempt if the stakes were high. The production of one-off drafts inevitably minimises the possibilities for reconceptualisation: the ‘dialogue between initial conception and final realization can be delicate. It can be halted or inhibited by trying to do too much too soon or at the same time...trying to produce a finished version in one move is for most people an improbable task’ (DfEE/DCMS, 1999). Consequently, the single-draft approach is associated with superficial writing and learning (Lavelle et al., 2002) even though it may be a skilled and demanding response to school tasks.

Students saw advance planning as the solution to such demands, not redrafting. Even those who found planning ahead problematic understood that
this was the advised method by which the difficulties of one-off drafting might be avoided. Concepts of advance planning were often inflexible, however. For some writers, the assumption that successful planning meant adherence to a pre-determined model caused confusion and failure: ‘we had tasks where you had to make a plan, write it up and then finish it, and see if your plan matched, and my plan would never match’ (Anna). For others an initial outline provided a helpful blueprint to be followed: ‘I've got my plan there...I just basically put it into sentences’ (Zoe). Weaker writers may have found planning ahead and sticking to the plan the sole means of managing complex tasks. However, rigid interpretations of pre-planning are judged ineffective because they require students ‘to solve all of their problems before they have begun to work on them’ (Sheeran & Barnes, 1991, p.100). Students’ inflexible concepts therefore denied them one potential strategy for improvement: ‘I still don’t know how to plan. I do the bullets or the spider diagram, but then don’t follow it because when I’m writing I don’t want to keep looking at a list’ (Anna). On the other hand, students also saw redrafting as too time-consuming in the school context. This strategy was therefore ruled out too: ‘I don’t tend to like draft my work because when I do that...I end up running out of time’ (Sara). The limited options available to students served to reinforce their perception that effective process meant solving the larger problems of content and structure pre-textually, whether on paper beforehand or in their heads at the point of transcription. The crafting of text itself therefore involved the manipulation of surface aspects, not reshaping.

The composing strategies students expected to use in the classroom might be seen as encouraging linear thinking and discouraging knowledge-constitution, the antithesis of expert processes. If school tasks are judged to invite uniform and inflexible approaches to revision, students may respond accordingly not because they lack the cognitive capacity to do more but because they find themselves unable to in the circumstances. By extension, students who engage in more exploratory processes, who ‘tolerate ambiguity and explore alternative understandings’ or follow ‘personally engrossing aspects of the content’, may be regarded as failing to learn what is actually required (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004, p.33). Ironically, therefore, the kind of composing strategies deemed necessary for school writing may deter the kind of mental operations associated with learning through writing or knowledge-transformation. Indeed, far from
being ‘synonymous with learning’ as policy-makers assume (DfEE, 2001, p.15), writing in some conditions may even diminish learning (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004). It is effective strategies for evaluating and reflecting on text which are seen as critical to the development of thought. In other words, the iterative process of to-ing and fro-ing between initial thoughts and final conception is the means by which ideas are constructed and organised, new connections made and implications explored; there is dialectic involved that needs attending to. In this sense, it is the non-linear strategies that skilled writers employ which enable them to explore and transcend their first ideas.

**The de-prioritisation of non-linear strategies**

Students’ assumptions that exploratory strategies are best avoided is therefore at odds with the strategies skilled revisers adopt. Proponents of expressive process, such as Elbow and Murray, have been most emphatic in advocating non-linear strategies as the means by which new ideas and perspectives are secured. They represent the composing process not as a line but as an unpredictable journey, on the premise that one can’t get to the desired endpoint directly but by ‘a long, chaotic, wandering swampy path’ (Elbow, 1973, p.71). Their model ‘preaches, in a sense, lack of control…you don’t need a plan or an outline, let things get out of hand, let things wander and digress’ (Elbow, 1973, p.32-33). This approach involves both the deliberate suspension of intent – ‘standing back’ and letting the words and ideas ‘take on a life of their own’ – and more radical intervention: deliberately disrupting what has been written, encouraging conflict and contradiction, dragging one piece of material ‘through the guts of another’ (p.49). The strategies these writers advise range from the more familiar heuristics of brainstorming, free association, clustering and mapping, to the counter-intuitive reversal of expected procedures: start writing before you know what you want to say; outline after writing; ‘write backwards, sideways, or start in the middle’ (Murray, 1982, p.187). Such representations of writing process convey the dynamic that linear models lack, and open the door to possibilities that might not otherwise have been imagined.

These romanticised representations of creative process are also supported empirically. Psychological studies identify the simultaneous conceptualisation of opposites or the bringing together of different ideas and genres as characteristic
of innovative thinking (Rothenberg, 1976, cited in Sharples, 1999). Carey and Flower (1989) found that recursive approaches not only opened the door to creative interpretations but also had a positive impact on the quality of written text. They contrast the maladaptive approach of student writers who adopt a single inflexible strategy (and stick with it even when it obviously isn’t working) with the kind of flexible writing process that fosters creativity. They conclude that skilled writing process not only allows, but calls for re-representation, and this enables reconceptualisation of the task and global revision. Contrary to perceptions that creativity relies on special insight, therefore, Carey and Flower argue that it results from the application of ordinary cognitive processes in particular ways. Many students, on the other hand, are observed to shut down this potential in themselves by invoking rigid rules and using revision as a limited tool (Carey & Flower, 1989).

In the current study, students appear to have shut down this potential in response to perceived expectations, often reluctantly. Their assumption that school writing discourages experimental or ‘playful’ strategies is ironic since National Curriculum policy identifies creativity as ‘essential in allowing students to progress to higher levels of understanding’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.84). Whilst policy suggests students should ‘approach tasks from a variety of starting points, or change forms to surprise and engage the reader…build on ideas or follow their own interests…explore different ways of discovering and shaping their own meanings’ (DCSF/QCA 2007, pp.84, 99), able writers perceived such strategies as counterproductive. It was not that they didn’t recognise the potential of non-linear approaches for advancing thought: ‘you have like the point in your head that you want to make and then once it’s down on paper…it’s like a realisation, once you’ve spelled it out, what else it could be trying to be saying… you think actually that’s not at all what it’s like, it’s more like this’ (Sara). In fact these writers claimed to discover new ideas or make new connections ‘a lot’. Rather, they concluded that ‘zig-zag’ thinking, digressing from the subject or changing the direction of writing, presented problems that could not be resolved in the time available: ‘whether you do it again, or you change it, or you leave it and just struggle on, I don’t know’ (Anna). They judged that a more decisive, linear approach was advisable: ‘I should just be walking down the straight path’ (Anna). Such an approach, however, did not always
serve them well. It meant they had to ‘struggle on’, for example, before they knew what they wanted to say: ‘it was kind of hard…trying to like make things up, like take a point that I didn’t know much about and trying to stretch it out so there’s something…without really knowing what I was saying’ (Sara).

If teaching for creativity requires emphasis on ‘the roles of intuition, unconscious mental processes and non-directed thought…learning through experimental play…a special flexibility…the need to find, introduce, construct or reconstruct something new’ (DfEE/DCMS, 1999, pp.105,107), this emphasis was not reflected in students’ understanding of school process. Of interest, however, is the fact that able writers did not necessarily lack the metacognitive capacity to monitor their thinking and writing processes, or to deploy alternative strategies when they judged it appropriate, as is sometimes suggested in the psychological literature. It was just that in suppressing non-linear thinking in favour of a more straight-forward approach, they chose to exercise a form of control that made meaningful revision less likely. This is not to imply that linear strategies are not important, or that effective writing process should be an undisciplined process of exploration and experiment. What is clear, however, is that writers need different strategies to respond to different kinds of problems both within and between writing tasks; single inflexible approaches to problem-solving will never be sufficient.

The perceived dichotomy between procedural and reflective strategies

Students’ assumption that exploratory and reflective approaches are at odds with school procedures reflects a wider tension evident in the theoretical literature as well as in policy. The tendency to depict composing models in binary terms, or to categorise writers as ‘planners’ or ‘revisers’, ‘high- self-monitors’ or ‘low self-monitors’, ‘knowledge-tellers’ and ‘knowledge-transformers’ is unhelpful. Such representations reinforce notions of separateness and incompatibility which bear little relation to writers’ experience.

Procedural models are misleading because they fail to recognise the shifting modes of thought that occur naturally during writing. In reality, planning and revising are often inseparable. Planning ahead is therefore only restrictive if
plans are treated as sacrosanct. As Flower and Hayes (1980) note, ‘good plans are rich enough to work from and argue about, but cheap enough to throw away’ (p. 43). For most writers, most of the time, plans get revised. Exploratory representations, on the other hand, are misleading because few writing tasks permit the kind of extended reflection and reformulation that non-linear models imply; time constraints and practical considerations apply and writers have to make pragmatic cost/benefit analyses. Creative approaches can therefore appear relevant only to literary or imaginative writing, when in reality ‘creativity is an everyday activity’ equally applicable to everyday forms (Sharples, 1999, p.37). Furthermore, non-linear strategies can seem mysterious or unteachable, whereas, as Sharples notes, the methods writers use to gain insight and new ideas can be usefully analysed and taught.

Of course skilled writers actually adopt a more balanced approach. They possess a range of strategies for generating and evaluating, integrating and reintegrating content which they deploy flexibly in response to the writing task. They make conscious decisions about which strategies to use when, and this enables them both to solve problems and to exploit new discoveries. Understanding this more flexible representation of writing process was not beyond able writers in this study. They acknowledged that an either/or choice of strategy was unrealistic. The most procedurally-oriented writer recognised that a plan should be ‘flexible, but detailed where it needs to be’ and that rigid adherence to an outline or leaving revision to the end was ‘just silly’ (Jamie). Equally, the writer most inclined to rethink during writing conceded that ‘I should start planning because I think in my head it needs to be sorted out so it’s easier to sort it out on paper’ (Anna). Their problem was knowing how to manage the balance within the constraints of school tasks: ‘I always find it really hard to strike the balance between over-planning so you don’t have much time to write it and under-planning so you don’t have much to go on’ (Sara). Helping students to understand and manage the interaction of different modes of thought – both generative and reflective – during composition is therefore a pivotal task of educators (DfEE/DCMS, 1999).
Discrepancies in students’ representations of success criteria

In line with their representations of purpose and process, students tended to evaluate the success of revising in narrow linguistic terms. Unlike expert writers, they attached less significance to global features than to superficialities of style, and very little to audience impact or self-realisation. Indeed, students’ understanding of effective revision sometimes centred so specifically on the inclusion of valued text features or formulae as to reduce the qualities of good writing to caricature. Whilst able writers drew broad distinctions between the kinds of success criteria that might apply when writing in different genres, (including the quality of ideas and analysis), their attention when revising was primarily on linguistic presentation. In the task observed, all writers’ focused their revisions to text exclusively, or almost exclusively, on matters of style and correction. It was not the case that more able students necessarily attended to higher level concerns than weaker writers, as one might expect from development models. If anything, it was the highest-achieving writers who most explicitly focused on micro requirements; weaker writers struggled to identify any criteria beyond accuracy and word choice, and resorted to imprecise definitions of quality. All were unclear about the criteria by which holistic features might be judged, and had difficulty describing how the substance of writing might be improved. Notably, perspective-taking and adapting to the needs of the reader – assumed to be key indicators of growth in expertise – featured least in students’ representations. The hierarchy of concerns expressed by students was effectively the reverse of that of expert writers: surface features were judged most important, content less so, and imagined reader least. No student defined effective revision at the multiple levels of text, audience and self, or distinguished between successful process and successful product.

However, students attributed their assumptions about quality to specified assessment requirements and the feedback they received from teachers. More able writers recognised the discrepancy between school success criteria and the kinds of criteria that might apply in ‘real’ contexts. They drew distinctions between the kind of writing they enjoyed reading, and the kind of writing that was valued in school. Thus, whilst they rated original ideas and personal style
highly, they assumed these were not always appropriate in school writing. They also expressed some cynicism about requirements that they perceived as formulaic and unrepresentative of their writing ability: ‘it’s not true though is it? Not an accurate reflection of you and what you can do, how intelligent you are or how you think about things’ (Anna).

How might school models reinforce the notion that successful revising means ‘ticking the boxes’?

**The perceived nature of prescribed criteria**

In the high-stakes context of secondary education, both teachers and students are obliged to foreground specified assessment criteria as measures of success. For examiners, the unit of analysis is inevitably the written object, independent of the author and the processes that produced it. Furthermore, the criteria applied address those aspects of writing most amenable to measurement – typically specified content or formal elements. These are the values most clearly stated. Thus a narrow set of decontextualized criteria, separated from the writer’s personality and detached from audience needs, come to dominate thinking in the classroom. Even when ostensibly conceding the priority of thought and meaning, teachers maintain their roles as guardians of ‘superficial expressive decorum’ (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1984, cited in D’Arcy, 2000, p. 41). Knoblauch and Brannon note the irony that ‘those features of discourse that are most accessible to reliable measurement – the surface conventions – tend also to be the features having least to do with writers’ true competence’ (p. 46).

By contrast, wider success criteria frequently remain ill-defined. As Sheeran and Barnes (1991) describe, other values operate in the classroom which are lightly signalled or unspoken, extending beyond patterns of language to assumptions about ‘relevance’ and ‘appropriateness’. Such ‘ground rules’ are less accessible to students, and may only be dimly perceived by teachers themselves, but nevertheless determine what it means to write well. They concern, for example, the extent to which children’s experience, feelings and opinions are admissible or valued in school writing; the kind of content that is deemed pertinent or desirable; the mode of address associated with writing for an ‘assumed’
audience. Students have to intuit the unstated norms that apply within and across disciplines, how such requirements might fit with stated criteria and what priority they should be given. Inevitably, ‘intuition alone…may serve some but will leave many blind’ (Sheeran and Barnes, 1991, p.117). School success or failure may not therefore reflect students’ linguistic resources so much as their ability to penetrate unspoken rules about language and meaning: those who miss the teacher’s cues are unlikely to meet the requirement.

Less clear still, however, are measures of progress in writing process. The kind of critical reflection and rethinking that is valued is only ever broadly suggested in writing policy, even though significant assumptions are made about how writing process supports learning. Teacher guidance comes closest to specifying how progression in writing process might be planned for or demonstrated in the classroom. Growth in revising expertise is identified in terms of increasing independence, the ability to revise more complex texts, and an expanding repertoire of techniques (DCSF, 2008). However, such indicators are not built into assessment schemes, and process skills thus assume the status of by-product. It is the application of technical skill that is explicitly valued: ‘drawing on rhetorical and other devices; applying the grammatical knowledge…making confident use…of new vocabulary and grammatical constructions; using Standard English (DfE, 2013b, p.6; my italics). For students, therefore, success criteria are clearly articulated at the lowest level, increasingly opaque at the upper levels, and almost invisible at the level of process. The skills associated with each also assume very different levels of significance in assessment terms.

In this study, able writers recognised the authority of prescribed assessment criteria over wider considerations and also their inadequacy as decontextualised measures of quality: ‘they don’t mark it on how good they think it is, they mark it on whether it does what’s on the list’ (Anna). They perceived success criteria as imposed not owned, even by teachers: ‘I just think it’s for the grades, I think ultimately that’s what the teacher has to say, they have to get it for the grades’ (Jamie). Even ‘creative’ writing was perceived as beset with requirements: ‘it’s still quite set in what you have to do to achieve the grades…they have to set guidelines on it’ (Jamie). Consequently these students had internalised what
they understood to be required text features. They had also internalised some of the unspoken rules which defined acceptable style and tone: the inclusion of ‘personality’ in writing, humour, even opinions and original ideas, was not always judged ‘suitable’ even though these were qualities students valued as readers. Instead they sought to emulate an abstracted academic register for much school writing and to use language that sounded ‘professional’, ‘mature’, ‘sophisticated’, ‘technical’, ‘complex’ and ‘most intelligent’. However, students of all abilities expressed marked uncertainty about larger success criteria and some confessed to being ‘clueless’. An assumption was that examiners looked ‘first and foremost for accuracy… probably because it’s the easiest to analyse’; holistic features were harder to judge and ‘they probably look for second’ (Jamie). This understanding meant that meaningful revision was especially difficult, and not a priority.

Students’ perception that larger evaluation criteria lacked specificity also made them dependent on the judgement of others to determine quality overall. Neither self-assessment nor peer review were seen as sufficiently authoritative: ‘I will only…think it’s a good piece of work if like someone else says it was good, and not like my friends’ (Sara). This dependency reduced the control students could exert over the reviewing and revising process, and prevented them from making ‘independent judgements about how to communicate effectively’, as policy suggests they should (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p. 84). Equally, it equipped them poorly to take an active role in defining and applying success criteria (DCSF/QCA, 2007; DCSF 2008). However, the assumption that final-draft editing by the teacher would help students develop their writing is also clearly flawed. Research shows that only when students are helped to assess the quality of their writing for themselves can they make substantive revisions (Beach & Friedrich, 2006). If revision is always a response to the perceived standards of others, the outcome is likely to be imitative – the uncritical replication of provided formulae. Writing is observed to become ‘a parody of itself as pupils strive for a precocity of style that is not their own’ (Sheeran & Barnes, 1991, p.108). Thus, for as long as students are unable to evaluate and revise writing autonomously ‘they remain students rather than becoming writers’ (Huot & Perry, 2009, p.427). The fact that students perceived holistic values in school writing as ill-defined and their own
critical judgement as inadequate, raises questions therefore about their capacity to revise more effectively.

**The de-prioritisation of critical evaluation**

In adhering to what they perceived as prescribed criteria and deferring judgement on the larger questions about writing quality, students tended to invert the priorities that skilled revisers assume. Whereas, experts evaluate holistic features first, students reconsidered the ‘parts’: ‘I don’t really think about the whole thing, I think about it in bits’ (Sara). The logical progression from macro to micro concerns was cut short and revision confined to stylistic and grammatical features: 94% of all text changes made by students during observed writing were in this category. Elbow (2002) describes this approach as back-to-front on the grounds that there is no point in fixing cosmetic problems when they may be disposed of during substantive reformulation. In line with models of effective revision, Elbow advises student writers to attend to three levels of concern when revising in priority order: first, rethinking what a piece says (its “bones”); second, reworking or reshaping how a piece says it (its “muscles”); and third, editing or checking for deviations from standard conventions (its “skin”). Thus the high-level value judgements that experts make prioritise global aspects of intended meaning, form and genre, and the quality of thinking these represent. They call for critical evaluation, not ‘checking’; ‘compliance’ is a lower-level concern, addressing mechanics and usage. However, students in this study avoided interrogating their texts in this way, prioritising compliance over the kind of critical questioning implied in expert models. Thus, whereas from a critical perspective, successful revision might entail the challenging of prescribed rules and conventions, or the manipulation of standard genres or styles (Lee, 2000), from the students’ perspective, this was untenable: ‘you do have to play the game. I resent it a bit though’ (Anna).

This stance is again at odds with the values espoused in National Curriculum policy. Critical understanding is positioned as ‘essential’ if students are to progress in writing or to ‘form and express their own views independently’ (DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.85). Practices are advocated which enable students to challenge ideas, interpretations and assumptions, such as ‘experimenting with language, manipulating form, challenging conventions and reinterpreting ideas’
DCSF/QCA, 2007, p.84). Considerations of this sort rarely featured in students’ representations, however. Even though as readers they admired original thinking and the disruption of expectations of style and structure, they were tentative about challenging perceived norms in school writing. Their perception that prescribed values favoured alignment over innovation made them risk averse: breaking the mould, challenging norms, moving beyond rules and formulae, was not seen as commensurate with standardised assessment criteria. It was not that they accepted such values uncritically. Able writers in particular aspired to ‘think outside the box’ and realise new perspectives: ‘exploring ideas, like taking them further and looking at them in new ways, like not taking obvious things, trying to find background ideas that other people might not see’ (Sara). However, they did not see these creative concerns as priorities for revision, and in practice they were not reflected upon in the same way as language choices. Students’ perception that evaluating writing quality involved the application of a set of decontextualised measures rather than holistic critical analysis caused them to close down opportunities for substantive improvement. It constrained not only the form and language they felt able to utilise, but also the meanings that could be expressed.

This is not to suggest that attending to the norms and values that define competence in the conventional sense is not important. However, helping students to understand what it means to succeed as a writer also means helping them to recognise the limitations of rules and norms. ‘Safe’ writing is frequently dull writing and doesn’t help progress, whereas effective writing often breaks ‘rules’ and challenges accepted notions of ‘quality’. Crucially, therefore, ‘generic conventions provide certain dimensions of constraint’ but are also subject to the ‘possibilities for change, innovation and creativity’ (Kress & Knapp, 1994).

**The perceived dichotomy between normative and creative values**

Students’ perception that compliance with expected norms and individual creativity are not easily reconciled is perhaps hardly surprising. It reflects the wider divide between so-called traditionalist and aesthetic definitions of quality, a divide exacerbated by alarmist assertions on both sides – that progressive methods mean children leave school unable to compose a sentence (Gove,
2010) or that traditionalist methods mean the standards of creative writing plummet (Powling, 2003). However, a dichotomous view is particularly unhelpful for learning; the choice between rigour and creativity is manifestly false. A more nuanced understanding is needed if students are to reconcile their conflicting representations of quality.

Sharples (1999) identifies some of the paradoxes that define effective writing: that both conformity and originality are necessary but neither are sufficient; that writers need to work within the constraints of grammar, style and topic, but that creative writing involves the breaking of constraint; that constraints are both restrictive and liberating – they ‘allow us to control the multitude of possibilities that thought and language offer…we have to impose constraint to avoid thinking and writing gibberish’ (p.41). He concludes that ‘constraint is not a barrier to creative thinking, but the context in which creativity can occur’ (p.41). Thus skilled writers are able to work within and beyond the confines of normative values. They see genres and linguistic conventions not as fixed entities, but as frameworks to be adapted as needed. When evaluating and revising writing they make judgements about what is predictable thinking or commonplace language, and whether generic structures and formulae serve the purpose at hand. This probing of possibilities and parameters facilitates the transformation of writers’ first attempts.

Students, by contrast, felt boxed-in by constraints. They wanted ‘a bit more like area to work in and more to think about’ but the perceived specificity of assessment criteria made school writing an exercise in holding back: ‘you can put across your ideas to some extent, but you can’t put too much in otherwise it may be unsuitable for the task’ (Jamie). Working always within the confines of prescribed values was seen as fundamentally disabling since they were not taught how to move beyond conformity: ‘I think because they’re graded on different things…it’s like you’re not writing in the way you want to, but it’s the only way you know how because that’s the only way you’ve ever been taught, and it’s like what everyone’s taught, so I think it’s hard to branch out and do your own thing’ (Anna). Helping students understand that success criteria are fluid and negotiable, that independent choices can be made and defended without jeopardising ‘quality’, may free them to revise in more exciting ways.
Conclusion

It goes without saying that understandings about writing can be empowering or disempowering. In this study, students’ interpretations of what it means to revise school writing led them to set unnecessary parameters on their revising behaviours and to limit the possibilities for writing improvement. Students were further hampered by their perception that polarised approaches and values dictated either/or choices about purpose and strategy. These false dichotomies are echoed in the literature and in policy, and are likely to inform teaching. Furthermore, the fact that successful school writers claim to limit their revising in response to school tasks and conditions would seem to indicate that insufficiencies in practice are embedded in school representations, rather than that students have simply misconstrued the task.

It is clear that the expectations attached to writing, the way in which it is conceptualised and valued in the school context, is likely to have significant effects on its cognitive operation (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004). How teachers define and control the writing process determines how students respond at deepest levels: if they are expected to follow narrowly-defined procedures and align with tightly prescribed criteria that is what they will do. Schools may need to convey more nuanced messages about the nature of revising if students are to resolve the tensions they perceive exist between taught models and ‘real’ writing. However, redefining revision will not alone be sufficient if school tasks are not structured and assessed in ways which invite more flexible responses. Moreover, students have to want to revise at deeper levels. Building the kind of motivation required may entail a shift from teacher control of writing tasks and their evaluation to greater student ownership: ‘the judgements that students make regarding personal agency affect the strategic choices that they make, the effort that they expend, persistence, and the thought patterns and emotional reactions that they experience’ (Lavelle et al., 2002, p.404). What remains unclear from this study is the level at which students might revise if given the opportunities and conditions they perceived they lacked.

In conclusion, the received wisdom that adolescent writers revise little and at superficial levels deserves further scrutiny. The findings from this study suggest
that apparently limited concepts and practices do not constitute the whole picture; they may not in fact reflect poor understanding about writing process but rather a necessary response to a particular set of demands. Successful writers appeared to understand precisely how to fulfil the values of the community of practice in which they found themselves. They had a reasoned understanding of revision as it is framed in the school context, and aligned their efforts with the requirement as they saw it. They had indeed assessed and acted upon the ‘needs' of their reader-examiner. In terms of the particular phenomenon of school writing, therefore, these students’ goals and strategies were effective. Less successful writers, on the other hand, appeared to have more trouble identifying appropriate strategies to ‘deliver what the people are looking for…everything the teacher expects’ (Chris) and tended therefore to rely on teacher guidance for revision beyond surface correction. Furthermore, weaker writers were inclined to accept school criteria at face value, whereas able writers clearly detected their limitations and the irony of some school messages. The high-achievers recognised that what they learn is how to craft their texts in line with the rhetorical purposes and constraints of school, rather than how to develop their powers as writers in wider terms. More significantly, however, these writers understood the potential scope of revision and showed the capacity to do more. That this potential is not more evidently exploited in current classroom models begs questions about the efficacy of writing policy and practice.
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

The problem with ‘writing in tight spaces’

The findings from this study highlight the extent to which young writers’ understandings about writing are rooted in the school context and may be modified and potentially diminished in response to perceived requirements. They suggest that students’ thinking about revision is governed by their analysis of teacher expectations and the imperatives of assessment criteria, and their revising behaviour shaped by imposed conditions for writing and the demands of timed tasks. In other words, students’ limited concepts and practice may emerge directly from their perceptions and experience of school writing. In essence, the students in this study regarded school representations of writing as too tightly specified to allow alternative interpretations. Whilst some had a wider sense of the possibilities that might apply in other circumstances, they were only able to articulate these in general terms. Their understanding of revision as a tool for developing ideas was largely speculative and they were unable to define substantive values with any precision. Moreover, the most successful writers in school terms nevertheless harboured some dysfunctional beliefs about writing which were likely to impede development of revising expertise. The narrow or false assumptions students voiced about writing process not only appear to have survived unchallenged by school representations but arguably are reinforced by them. Such understandings may deliver for school purposes but, as students themselves noted, hardly equip them to be their ‘own writers’: ‘because I’m taught in this way, I don’t think I’d ever know how to write a piece of my own writing’ (Anna). Thus whilst able writers recognised the limitations of their approach, they did not necessarily possess a sufficiently rich or flexible set of beliefs about writing to help them move beyond this position. These insights contribute to understanding of adolescent writing process in several ways. They help elucidate aspects of theory, and have important implications for policy and practice.
Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the findings underline the degree to which poor revision may be a function of context and pedagogy rather than writers’ cognitive or linguistic resources. Developmental models which associate levels of revision primarily with metacognition, memory capacity or executive control, are insufficient to account for the rationales provided by students in this study. Equally, the assumption that revision progresses from local to global aspects in line with cognitive and linguistic growth relies on conditions for writing which support such concerns. The findings here indicate that 14 and 15 year-olds do not necessarily lack the metacognitive awareness necessary for effective revision, and may have linguistic resources beyond those they deem ‘suitable’ for school purposes. This apparently untapped potential suggests that in more conducive circumstances adolescent writers might be capable of the sophisticated crafting of text sometimes assumed to be beyond their reach (see Kellogg 2008, for example). However, in this study, such potential remains unknown since students did not regard goals of this kind as necessarily relevant or valued in school writing.

Furthermore, the evidence from this study suggests that more conducive conditions for writing may not in themselves be enough to prompt higher level revising. Students’ explanations highlight the significant role that beliefs about writing play in determining levels of response. Whilst positive beliefs about self-efficacy or the value of writing are frequently associated in the motivational literature with more effective revision and higher attainment (see Pajares, 2003; Piazza & Siebert, 2008, for example), the findings here suggest that beliefs about the nature of writing process itself also exert a powerful influence on revising behaviours. In particular, the false assumptions students made about creative writing process or the opposition of planning and reviewing caused them to set unnecessary parameters on their revising. Of interest is the fact that such misconceptions were expressed by writers who were both motivated and successful in school terms, raising questions about the kind of understandings that are promoted by or best serve school purposes, irrespective of their wider utility. What these findings illustrate is the complex interaction of subjective and contextual factors which governs the development
of revising expertise. By extension, they indicate the importance of theorising from an integrated or interdisciplinary perspective in order to account for the social, linguistic, cognitive and affective dimensions implied.

**Implications for policy**

From an educational perspective, the findings from this study are particularly salutary. They illuminate the ways in which school models of writing may actively discourage effective revision, even from the perspective of learners. Such evidence has a contribution to make to the debate about writing pedagogy and the causes of under-achievement. Two key inferences can be drawn which clearly underpin more specific implications for both policy and practice.

Firstly, greater clarification and agreement is needed about what we mean when we ask students to revise, redraft and edit their writing. Proper definitions of task are necessary prerequisites to effective practice. They are needed not only to disaggregate the formative processes of revision and redrafting from cosmetic processes such as proofreading, but also to challenge assumptions about linearity. Imprecise definitions which lump together such tasks as error correction or checking for fluency with the construction and shaping of meaning are patently unhelpful. However, procedural definitions which suggest reflection after the act and present planning and revising as opposites also invite superficial interpretations and cause students to conclude writing too early. Over-simplified models of composition necessarily restrict opportunities for critical reflection and rethinking. Explanations are needed which make clear what is involved in the development and crafting of text without ducking the recursive and fundamentally disordered nature of the process.

Secondly, a richer and broader discussion is needed about what is valued in terms of writing outcomes. Such discussion should explicitly address process skills and the quality of critical reflection, as well as the characteristics of final product. It should emphasise the diversity of responses valued in writing in order to challenge assumptions about success criteria as formulaic and de-personalised. It should also clearly locate definitions of quality in the context of
purpose and audience, and reject the generalised notion that particular language choices are good in their own right. More inclusive explanations of what might constitute ‘improvement’ of writing are needed which acknowledge the range of possibilities available and the different considerations that inform writers’ choices. In particular, definitions of quality are needed which clearly differentiate between assessment objectives and wider values.

For policy-makers, therefore, the development of more flexible assessment models poses the single greatest challenge. From the perspective of learners, current arrangements serve as a barrier to effective revision by cramping writing process and confining revision to a narrow range of fixed requirements. Assessment is seen as the only end-point for writing in the curriculum. Until the impact of high stakes assessment is confronted, such models will continue to ensure that assessment criteria, with all their inevitable limitations, become the measures of writing quality, and process expertise is ignored. This is an oft-repeated argument which continues to be out of step with policy thinking. Nevertheless, if creativity and critical understanding are indeed key skills essential to learning in English (DCSF/QCA, 2007), policy-makers are in danger of defeating their own aims unless measures are found which recognise students’ ability to reconceptualise and reformulate. There is a clear need to refocus on the skills of evaluation and discrimination which determine the success of writers’ choices, rather than the demonstration of particular techniques or structures for assessment purposes. The inclusion of writer self-evaluation might be one way of redressing this imbalance. An assessment model which required students to critique their own texts, for example, would provide an opportunity for writers to explain their thinking and some evidence against which to judge their success. Portfolio-based assessments which focused on students’ development of text over several drafts would allow examination of revising expertise more specifically, particularly if accompanied by an explanation of the writer’s goals. Such assessment models would also help students to think about themselves as writers rather than as deliverers of prescribed elements.
Implications for practice

At practice level, the findings from this study clearly indicate the need for increased classroom time for reviewing and revising writing. The pressure to produce finished writing in one go was keenly felt, and overwhelmed students’ inclinations to pause or reconsider. This is a long-standing problem. OfSTED (2005; 2009; 2012) repeatedly notes the lack of opportunities provided for students to discuss ideas before writing or to respond to feedback from peers, observing that writers cannot be expected to improve writing solely by doing more of it (OfSTED, 2005). However, dedicated classroom time for rehearsal and reflection need not mean discrete ‘planning’ and ‘revising’ episodes. Teaching approaches which disrupt the emphasis on linear production are needed to encourage critical engagement throughout composition and to help counter students’ tendency to seek premature closure. Opportunities for generating and organising ideas, for example, might usefully be introduced at different points during writing, and not confined to pre-planning. Strategies which rely on non-linear thinking, such as brainstorming, free-writing, mind mapping or ‘reverse outlining’ (briefly summarising the content of drafted sections to inform structural progression) may also help engage students more thoughtfully with the substance of writing and alleviate the perceived problems of ‘getting started’ or ‘finding something to say’. Evaluative activities should explicitly focus on the connection between purpose and effect, requiring students to articulate what it is they want to convey or to identify in others’ writing the choices that trigger their response. Such opportunities for review and feedback should occur at formative stages of writing, causing students to stand back from their developing texts and reflect as readers.

Students not only need time to reflect during composition. They also need opportunities to assemble selected pieces of writing over longer periods. In this study students suggested that returning to writing after ‘a bit of a break’ with ‘more energy’ and ‘different ideas’ (Luke) allowed them to see their writing afresh and from new perspectives: ‘you’re obviously in a different mindset…you’re able to see it in a new light and pick out things…you wouldn’t have seen when you were writing it’ (Sara). Putting distance between writing episodes has been shown to enhance the level and extent of children’s text
revisions (Chanquoy, 2001). Young writers are also more likely to revise independently when they have opportunities to observe the reactions of readers and redraft in response (see Couzijn & Rijlaarsdam, 1996, for example). The facility to set aside problems for consideration later, to seek advice or new material between drafts, and to act on feedback from readers is one that professional writers often take for granted. Learners also need time to bring new information to bear in this way, and to build writing portfolios which allow them to show-case their expertise in developing their texts, over and above simply incorporating teachers’ suggestions.

Another clear finding from this study is the diversity of students’ preferred composing strategies, and the difficulty some encountered in their attempt to conform to a perceived ‘correct’ model. In spite of their different inclinations and experience, students retained fixed views about how writing should proceed. They were also able to hold conflicting representations of writing process simultaneously. The two common assumptions, that skilled writing unfolds in a series of steps or that it emerges spontaneously from a creative source, were particular stumbling blocks when thinking about revision. Alternative models and exemplars should be presented in the classroom. Teachers should engage students in discussion about their own and other writers’ composing strategies, drawing attention to the idiosyncrasies of authors’ methods and the central role of revision. Modelling and collaborative composition should be used to emphasise the flexibility of tools such as planning and redrafting, and to demonstrate how different strategies can be deployed to solve different kinds of problems. Workshop approaches to classroom writing are needed which accommodate and support differentiated strategies, and encourage students to experiment with alternative ways of managing the generation and regeneration of text. Teachers composing alongside students and sharing their own experiences may be a powerful way to emphasise the trial and error involved, complete with the false starts, blank spots, and ‘U’ turns that students so often regard as ‘failures’.

However, enabling effective revision means more than providing time for reflection or encouraging more flexible strategies. Students need a strong sense of what it is they might change to secure improvement. A problem with
the novice/expert differential that informs much writing pedagogy is that it under-states the additional knowledge of texts and audiences that expert writers have. Building young writers’ knowledge about textual possibilities and establishing a shared vocabulary for discussing these are clearly essential. Students in this study often struggled to explain their thinking or to define qualities or problems in their texts beyond the semantic. Their assessments of good writing tended to focus on generalised and reductive criteria, and their grasp of authorial purpose and reader perspective was weak. Classroom representations of success criteria are needed which explicitly distinguish between genres and contexts, writers’ intentions and readers’ needs. Emphasis on the fluidity of success criteria and the fallibility of definitions and specifications may also help challenge students’ assumptions about ‘formulae’ for success. Teacher modelling should illustrate the situated nature of choice-making, drawing on purpose or audience-specific considerations, to challenge the assumption that ‘good writing’ exists in a vacuum. Self-assessment and peer review activities should be closely structured to focus attention on targets and criteria other than vocabulary choice and accuracy. In particular, there is an evident need for greater transparency about holistic and substantive aspects of writing. Given the undoubted difficulty of talking explicitly about deep criteria, learners need help to acquire the same meta-language as the teacher to explain and justify their choices. However, demystifying success criteria should move beyond simply sharing rubrics or deconstructing tacit expectations. Establishing shared understandings about quality means engaging students as equal participants in the discussion and helping them to generate their own criteria. A shift from teacher-led identification and monitoring of success towards increased student responsibility is critical if students are to become autonomous writers and revisers.

In short, teaching methods are needed which interrupt fast-paced production of writing and challenge writers to think more deeply about their choices: rather than simply encouraging further development of text in predictable directions, ‘teachers need to interrogate students’ need for closure and certainty by highlighting alternative perspectives and dialogic tensions’ (Welch, 1997, summarised in Beach & Friedrich, 2006, p. 224). Such challenge, however, will only succeed if writers are taught to revise effectively, and equipped with a
creative sense of the possibilities available to them. The inadequate emphasis in current practice on the teaching of revision, creativity and purpose in writing are key inspection findings (OfSTED, 2012). It should be noted that in spite of its conspicuous emphasis on grammatical features, the revised National Curriculum for English offers teachers new freedoms: the opportunity exists to reinstate creative approaches to writing and revising.

Implications for teacher training and development

The implications for writing pedagogy inevitably pose challenges for providers of initial teacher training and continuing professional development. Effective teacher modelling and skilful management of discussion about writers’ goals and strategies presupposes teachers’ own writing expertise, and relies on rich conceptualisations of writing process. In view of most teachers’ backgrounds in literature study, their confidence and proficiency in compositional process cannot be taken for granted. Studies suggest that teachers are neither as keen nor as assured writers as they are readers, and many do not regard themselves as writers; consequently they report rehearsing set pieces before ‘pretending’ to demonstrate writing spontaneously in the classroom (Cremin & Baker, 2010). Trainee teachers in particular can be highly apprehensive about modelling authorial expertise in the classroom (Turvey, 2007). At the same time, the lack of theoretical agreement about appropriate instruction methods, and the emphasis on assessing written products, makes coherent classroom representations particularly challenging. Teacher development programmes should prioritise building ‘teachers’ conceptions of the transactional, constructive, problem-solving nature of writing’ (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p.35) and provide opportunities for teachers to observe, practice and share writing of different kinds. It is unfortunate that the proposed piloting of a professional development programme intended to provide just these opportunities (Andrews, 2008a) has so far been ignored by politicians and no alternative national initiative put forward. Given OfSTED’s unambiguous call for a national debate and ‘a significant initiative…to improve the teaching of writing and to raise standards nationally’ (OfSTED, 2012, p.27), the DfE and other funding agencies should consider teacher development needs in writing process as a priority.
Implications for future research

This study makes a contribution to existing knowledge about adolescent writers’ understanding of revision by examining the connection between what individual students do and why they do it in the classroom context. It identifies the highly contextualised nature of students’ reasoning, and raises questions about the sufficiency of current policy and classroom practice. However, the limitations of a small study are evident and the lack of comparable contextualised research highlights the need for further studies located in real classrooms. Furthermore, this study can only identify potential improvements in classroom practice; it tells us nothing about the impact these might have. Investigations of classroom practices which support effective revision are much needed to inform policy. These would serve to extend the existing body of largely American research which has tended to focus on Special Needs learners, and is criticised for over-procedural or scripted approaches to the teaching and learning of revision. Emerging as they do from a cognitive tradition, strategy instruction programmes frequently neglect linguistic, social, or affective-motivational factors and the way in which these interact to determine students’ response. Genuinely interdisciplinary studies of best practice in mainstream contexts are notably absent and consequently little is understood about what students might achieve in optimal circumstances.

Further studies might usefully explore the potential of collaborative writing processes which require students to articulate their thinking and to take account of other perspectives. Peer review activities, for example, take many forms and their efficacy in terms of enabling meaningful revision needs closer examination. Students in this study had mixed views about the value of peer review, suggesting that the feedback received was often too generalised to be of practical use or that readers identified weaknesses but offered no advice about how these might be addressed. Checklist approaches, for example, which specified evaluative questions, were observed to reduce feedback to yes/no judgements and provide almost nothing in the way of reader response. Since peer review is seen as a key strategy in supporting evaluative thinking and revision, clarity is needed about how such activities are best prepared for and structured. In particular, practices which help students develop the meta-
language necessary to explain or defend their choices, or to talk explicitly about deep criteria, have been little researched.

Future research might also consider the affordances of word-processing in the classroom, and the kind of teaching about revision that aids their effective utilisation. The facility to revise and restructure text easily, to share writing displayed on screen, and to retain multiple versions for comparison, ought to enable more extensive reformulation and address students’ reluctance to cross-out or rewrite what has been handwritten. Findings so far, however, are equivocal. Whilst students are often observed to write at greater length or to revise more frequently when word-processing, it is far from clear whether computer use impacts on the quality of their revisions (Goldberg, Russell & Cook, 2003). The tendency to focus on micro-structural rather than macro changes might be explained by inadequate task definitions or students’ inability to exploit the potential benefits: without effective teaching, students may simply bring old habits to a new medium (Owston, Murphy & Wideman, 1992). Indeed, some findings suggest that word-processing can impede effective revision. In the current study it was the weaker writers who most emphatically valued word-processing, although their reasoning concerned the ease and speed of writing, neatness and accuracy, rather than revising per se. Further research could investigate whether weaker writers’ reliance on spell-check and grammar applications reinforces their focus on surface elements or effectively frees them to attend to larger concerns.

Since underlying beliefs about writing drive writers’ goal-setting and revising, more evidence is needed of the values students apply when evaluating text and their assumptions about how skilled writers write. In this study, for example, some common misconceptions about the sequential nature of composing or the spontaneity of creative process impacted on students’ willingness to revise beyond correction. Furthermore, the values they applied as readers were not always matched by those they applied when writing and this too restricted their revising goals. Without knowledge of these potential misalignments, teachers cannot effectively counter or build upon existing understandings about writing. At the same time, studies are needed of teachers’ conceptualisations of writing process since these clearly frame, and potentially limit, students’ interpretations.
Scant attention has been paid to teachers’ identities as writers with reference to their classroom roles and pedagogic practice (Cremin & Baker, 2010). Findings suggest, however, that their understandings and feelings about writing process are frequently problematic. Trainee teachers, for example, sometimes see it in terms of progressively acquiring discrete skills (Turvey, 2007). Further research is needed to identify the tensions and inconsistencies that may exist and to inform professional development opportunities.

**Final thoughts**

As Chanquoy (2009) rightly notes, there is still a lot to do in revision research before we can explain, let alone solve, revision failures. However, the rationales that students provide for revising as they do can shed new light on these failures and signal classroom strategies that may enable greater success. The process of engaging in this discussion with students is itself supportive of learning: ‘this has helped me, knowing that someone’s obviously listening to me and doing something about it’ (Chris). It contributes to the reflective discourse that underpins both effective teaching and effective learning, and marks the difference between unskilled and skilled revision. In conclusion, it seems difficult to overestimate the value of talk about writing between teachers and students. As a research strategy, however, it is under-utilised, and this is a missed opportunity. In seeking to understand and resolve ineffective revision, the perspectives of students have much more to tell.
APPENDIX A

Appendix A: Literature review search terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>KEY TERMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer or learner focused</td>
<td>Revision/revising/writing/rewriting/(multi)drafting/redrafting AND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student/pupil/learner/writer + perceptions attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>approaches strategies behaviors motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive/meta-cognitive/metalinguistic + process(es) understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collaborative peer-review self-monitoring self-evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher focused</td>
<td>Teaching/pedagogical/instruction(al)/classroom + strategies practices approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy focused</td>
<td>Curriculum/assessment + policy criteria requirements standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exclusion criteria
- Published before 1970.
- Related to Early Years.
- Related to EFL/TESOL
- Related only to SEN or specific learning difficulties.
Appendix B: Arguments for and against theoretical integration

i) Incompatible paradigms

Theoretical conceptions of the composing and revising process are often portrayed as oppositional. Deriving from disciplines as diverse as linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology and semiotics, they not only define the nature and learning of writing in different ways but employ different methodologies and terminologies. It is argued that these different theoretical frameworks are epistemologically and methodologically incompatible: ‘paradigm wars’ are inevitable, for example, because ‘there is no single conception of science which each relevant discipline shares’ (Heap, 1992, cited in Hillocks, 1995, p.49). Edelsky (1990) therefore suggests that pleas for integration or eclecticism betray at best ‘paradigm blindness’ and at worst an imperialist attempt by dominant paradigms to subvert alternative viewpoints to their own agendas. Philosophical differences cannot be conveniently resolved: ‘there can be no eclecticism at the level of deep underlying beliefs’ (Edelsky, 1990, p.7).

ii) Meta-theoretical and dialogic perspectives

Not all composition theorists, however, regard the field as a battleground, or different perspectives as mutually exclusive. Perceived polarities are regarded by some to be ill-founded, based on stereotyping and prejudice, and particularly unhelpful for practitioners. Researchers who foreground their role as educators see the need for a more unified framework within which decisions can be made about what and how to teach.

Faigley (1986) urges the adherents of expressivism, cognitivism and socio-culturalism to acknowledge a concept of writing ‘broader than any of the three views’ on the grounds that failure to do so will allow by default an a-theoretical skills-based approach to predominate, one based on notions of abstract form and conformity to the rules. He argues that different perspectives can be reinterpreted and integrated in a more flexible theory which understands writing process and pedagogy as socially and historically dynamic (pp. 528, 537). Flower (1989) similarly argues for a more ‘interactive’ explanation of writing than that afforded by ‘floating islands of theory’. She argues that both cognitive and socio-cultural analyses offer only partial understanding since they each address particular interests at the expense of others; a more grounded conceptual framework is required which accounts for writing process as it is experienced by individuals in context: ‘educators do not work with abstractions; they work with students (and) cannot afford to present only half the picture’ (p.284).

Hillocks (1995) attempts to provide a meta-theory, suggesting that ‘the rancorous controversy over what constitutes research’ which separates
disciplinary camps is not irreconcilable (p.39). He argues that different paradigmatic assumptions can be bridged, on account of some shared concerns and potential complementarity. Disparate theories may be integrated, or coexist, in a 'landscape of knowledge' without boundaries. He envisages the reflective practitioner as a traveller in this diverse landscape, examining and re-examining theoretical features in the light of practical experience and need (p.39-53).

Elbow (2000) deplores what he sees as the 'jousting and competition for theoretical dominance' in writing research. He argues that the nature of writing itself holds many paradoxes, conflicting skills, concerns and purposes, which should be embraced: through oppositions we come to understanding, and contraries can be resolved through dialectic (Elbow, 1986). Diverse theoretical perspectives can be explained in terms of the many dialogues which writing entails: 'the reason why there is a perennial conflict between romantic approaches to writing, which focus on personal expression, and more classical approaches which focus on rhetorical skill, is that they both capture an essential component of the writing process' (Galbraith, 2009, p.63). For these reasons, Nystrand et al. (1993) point to the emergence of a more dialogic understanding of writing process as theoretical perspectives have advanced.

Sharples (1999) also attempts to synthesize different perspectives in an accessible way and to demystify the writing processes described by cognitive psychologists, media theorists and social constructionists. He draws on the language of creative design to resolve some of the differences and to capture writing at once as 'a cognitive process, a creative act and a cultural activity' (p.71). However, in order to do this, he deliberately avoids the more complex theoretical arguments and glosses over some of the debates, acknowledging the strength of division and treating different perspectives somewhat separately: 'like a hedge separating the gardens of warring neighbours, writing is a mutual object of dispute seen from many different viewpoints' (p.xii).

### iii) Eclecticism

Rather than attempt to construct an integrated conceptual framework, some scholars advocate a pragmatic or eclectic approach to writing theory. Williams (1977) suggests that since no one theory is likely to do justice to the complexity of language learning, to seek an overarching theory is not only misguided but also, for epistemological reasons, impossible to achieve: ‘language can contain many theories; which one we choose depends on what we want to know about it’ (p.58). She concludes that ‘the teacher must be eclectic...must be informed about all these theories...must become a language expert in his own classroom’ (p.60, original italics). Pring (2000) also argues that, by necessity, the transaction between teacher and learner is essentially eclectic. The ‘embedded’ nature of educational practice evades the simplistic application of theory of any kind: teachers draw upon different theories according to the particular needs of...
their students and the context within which they operate. This requires ‘having a nose for those theoretical considerations which can be fed into the unique concrete, practical situation’ (Pring, cited in Williams, 1977, p.61). In the context of writing development, such knowledge is necessary in order to guide pupils’ explorations of language in as many different directions as possible (Williams, 1977, p.60). This concept of the reflective practitioner as mediator between theory and practice suggests that whilst different research traditions can provide different ways of imagining a problem – ‘an understanding of possibilities…to guide…the intelligent selection of possible lines of action’ (Biesta, 2007, p.16) – it is a practical epistemology that determines what makes sense in a given situation.
APPENDIX C

Appendix C: Initial information provided to schools

i) Introductory letter

PhD study of secondary students' writing processes

Dear colleague,

My supervisors Dr Susan Jones and Professor Debra Myhill have suggested you may be interested in my proposed PhD study of secondary students’ writing processes. I am therefore writing to ask if you would consider the possible involvement of some of your students as participants in my research. I am interested in particular in students’ understanding of the purpose of revising writing. In order to investigate this further, I would like to work with a small number of year 9 and 10 students in three schools on a case study basis.

I have attached a summary research plan which outlines what would be involved for participating schools and students. You will see that the focus is on students’ views and writing behaviours; I am not looking at teachers’ practice. The intention is to interview students, and observe them writing, on several occasions over the course of developing a piece of classroom writing, such as a narrative. The nature of the writing task, and the organisation and timing of research activities, will, of course, depend on your own curriculum plans. I would hope to collect data over the spring and summer terms.

If you were willing to consider this research proposal further, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with you at your convenience. You can contact me by email or telephones as above.

With many thanks,

Lucy Oliver
ii) Summary research proposal

Proposed PhD study:
What do secondary students' understand about revising writing?

Aim
The study aims to explore how secondary students’ think and feel about revising school writing, and how their perceptions of purpose, process and success criteria are reflected in practice. It seeks to establish how individual students interpret the messages they receive about revision and how they make sense of their own experience; what they perceive teachers expect of them, and what they ask of themselves; and how they implement these understandings when they evaluate and reformulate their texts.

Rationale
Research has clearly shown that revising ability marks the difference between the skilled and the unskilled writer. Effective revision has the potential to improve not just the quality of expression but also the substance of a text, enabling writers to move beyond their initial ideas and secure new thinking. Adolescent writers may be expected to develop increasingly sophisticated revision processes, yet are frequently observed to revise little themselves, and in superficial ways.

How young writers conceptualise revision, their definition of purpose and their attitude towards it, inevitably determines the scope of their revising practice. However, little recent research has explored how secondary students think about revision, nor how their thinking impacts on their development of texts. Such evidence may have important implications for writing policy, teaching and learning.

Research design
This study seeks to identify aspects of students' understanding by combining data from school-based observations of writing, one-to-one interviews, and analysis of texts. The evidence from a small number of in-depth case studies will be set against a larger-scale survey conducted with students in the same cohort for contextualising purposes.

For participating schools and students, the following research activities are involved:

i) Survey:
A short questionnaire will be provided for use with the whole classes from which case study students are drawn. This attitude scale is designed to elicit students' perceptions of their own revising practice, and general views about the purpose and value of revising. It will take about 15 minutes to complete, and can be administered by class teachers.
ii) **Case studies:**
2 or 3 volunteer students aged 13-15 (Yrs 9/10) will be sought from each participating school. The sample overall will need to represent a broad spread of ability and a balanced gender mix. All participants will need to be able and willing to talk about their writing.

It is proposed that each participating student will be observed and interviewed several times over the course of developing an identified piece of writing (a personal narrative, for example):

**Observations:**
Each student will be observed writing on two occasions: during initial drafting and subsequent redrafting of the chosen assignment. It is anticipated that these observations will take place during normal class time, and last about 30 minutes. However, it may be feasible to conduct an observation separately – if, for example, redrafting is not normally a class-based activity. It will only be possible to observe one student at a time. The observer will need to sit close to the writer, and a small desk-top camera may be used to record the sequence and duration of writing/pausing activities.

**Interviews:**
Each student will be interviewed on 4 occasions: prior to writing; immediately after each observation of writing; and at some point following data analysis. Interviews will last about 30 minutes. The second and third interviews will rely on students’ recall of their decision-making during writing, and will therefore need to take place as soon as possible after classroom observations. The timing of the first and final interviews is flexible.

**Text analysis:**
Copies of students’ scripts will be requested in order to analyse revisions made. Students will be asked to use different coloured pens on each writing occasion in order to distinguish between revisions made at different stages of the writing process.

**Assistance sought from participating teachers**
Assistance with the following aspects will be required:
1. Identification of potential case study students and provision of initial information to ensure students’ informed consent.
2. Administration of information to parents/parental consent forms, in line with school policy.
3. Administration of the whole-class questionnaires.
4. Identification of an appropriate writing task and classroom writing opportunities.
5. Accommodation of researcher in identified classes to conduct observations.
6. Identification of suitable times and room space for one-to-one tape-recorded interviews; negotiation with school colleagues as necessary.

**Ethical issues**
Ethical guidelines regarding informed consent, right to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly adhered to, and all data will be securely stored.

LJO: 01/11
### iii) Research schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH PLAN:</th>
<th>ADMIN:</th>
<th>TIMINGS:</th>
<th>MATERIALS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INITIAL SCHOOL DISCUSSION</td>
<td>Identify potential class(es)/students.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Written information re: research project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify suitable writing task.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consent form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure written consent of HT/ teacher(s).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) WHOLE CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>Notify students/parents in advance re: questionnaire and right to withdraw.</td>
<td>15 mins duration.</td>
<td>Questionnaire with covering brief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administer questionnaire – can be done by class teacher.</td>
<td>Flexible timing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) CASE STUDIES</td>
<td>Identify potential case study volunteers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Information for students/parents and consent form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide information for students/parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure written consent of students/parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify suitable time-table slot for interview 1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrange interview room.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-writing interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>30 mins duration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify class-times for:</td>
<td>Flexible timing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i) initial draft of writing assignment + interview 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) redraft of writing assignment + interview 3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrange interview room for both.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observation 1 + follow-up interview</td>
<td>Photocopy student’s first draft.</td>
<td>30 + 30 mins duration. Interview follows asap after writing.</td>
<td>Line-numbered paper and coloured pen for observed student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observation 2 + follow-up interview</td>
<td>Photocopy student’s redraft.</td>
<td>As above.</td>
<td>As above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final interview/debrief</td>
<td>Identify suitable time-table slot for interview 4.</td>
<td>30 mins duration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrange interview room.</td>
<td>Flexible timing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear student,

I am a researcher at the University of Exeter. I would like to find out more about how you write, and your personal views about writing.

I’d be very grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire, which should take no more than 15 minutes. Your name is not required, and your responses will be confidential. The questionnaire will not contribute in any way to school assessment. You do not have to complete it if you do not wish to.

I am interested in your views. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer as honestly as you can and do not consult your friends.

Thank you very much for helping me with my research.

Lucy Oliver.
APPENDIX E

Appendix E: Initial information provided to case study students and their parents/guardians

Dear student,

Your Community College is one of three secondary schools participating in a University of Exeter Writing Research Project. The research will focus on students’ views about writing. In particular, it aims to find out more about the changes you make to improve your writing, and what you think is important for success. This information is especially important now that you are required, as part of your GCSE English course, to spend time developing a piece of writing under controlled conditions, without help from the teacher.

I’d like to invite you to participate in this research on a voluntary basis. If you do choose to participate, you will be involved in the following activities:

- **Observations of you writing:** you will be observed by me while you are writing during your normal English lessons. This will happen twice – once when you are writing a first draft, and once when you are completing your writing. The purpose is to track your writing process from start to finish – for example, how often you pause for thought or change your mind as you go along. With your permission, a small flip-top camera may be used to record your hand movements only (not your face).

- **Interviews:** You will be interviewed by me before and after writing, about your plans for writing and about the choices you made while you were writing. This will happen four times. The interviews will take place during your English lessons, but in a separate room: you will therefore miss part of the lesson on these occasions. This has been agreed with your teacher. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-recorded.

All of the information you provide will be treated as confidential. Extracts from your writing and from your interview responses may be included in reports of the research, but they will always be anonymous. None of the information collected during observations or interviews will contribute to school assessment or your English grades.

If you have any questions or concerns, please discuss these with your English teacher. If you are happy to participate, please consult your parent/guardians, and sign the attached consent form which should be returned to your English teacher.

Thank you.

Lucy Oliver (researcher).
Appendix F: Student questionnaire

BACKGROUND INFORMATION. Please circle the appropriate statements:

1. I am male / female
2. I am in year 9 / year 10

WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE.
Please circle ONE answer per question to show how far you agree or disagree with the following statements.

SA = strongly agree
A = agree
N = neither agree nor disagree
D = disagree
SD = strongly disagree

Circle ONE answer

3. I enjoy many different kinds of writing. SA A N D SD
4. I am a good writer. SA A N D SD
5. I often leave my writing assignments to the last minute. SA A N D SD
6. When writing, I make a plan and stick to it. SA A N D SD
7. I like to discuss my writing with others and hear their suggestions. SA A N D SD
8. The most important thing when writing is to stick to the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation. SA A N D SD
9. The teacher is the most important audience. SA A N D SD
10. For me, planning my writing is a waste of time. SA A N D SD
11. I often think about my writing assignments when I'm doing other things.

12. It's important to develop your own style in writing.

13. I see no reason to redraft my writing.

14. Most of the changes I make to my writing are minor alterations, such as rewording or corrections.

15. It's important to me to convey what I really think and feel in my writing.

16. I'm never certain whether my writing is good or not.

17. When reviewing my writing, I imagine how my reader might react to it.

18. When writing an essay, the main task is to arrange the required information in a logical order.

19. I plan, write and revise my writing all at the same time.

20. I make most changes to my writing after feedback from the teacher.

21. It's the ideas in writing that matter most.

22. I often rearrange the order of things in my writing to improve it.

23. Originality is important when writing an essay.

24. The main reason to redraft is to put right problems or mistakes in writing.

25. I try out different words and expressions in my writing.

26. The most important thing when writing is to entertain, inform or persuade your reader.

27. My first draft is usually my final product.
28. When writing an essay, it isn’t necessary to give your own opinion.  

29. I re-examine my ideas and arguments when I review my writing.  

30. I can always find what needs to be changed to make my writing better.  

31. For me, revising or redrafting means changing whole sections of my writing.  

32. Choice of vocabulary is the key to good writing.  

33. I use a first draft to find out what I want to say.  

34. I usually write the whole piece first and then make changes.  

35. I often make major changes to the content of my writing.  

36. My main concern when writing is to meet the assessment criteria and get a good grade.  

37. I use redrafting as an opportunity to develop my ideas further.  

38. I revise my writing to please myself.  

39. Writing helps me develop my ideas.  

Please describe how you feel about revising and redrafting your writing:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time. 😊

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Appendix G: Observation schedule

STUDENT: Zoe DATE: April 8 OBSERVATION NO: 1st

Context and task

Task: Displayed on the board: ‘to transform a chosen article or poem into a short story’ (750-1000 words) based on homework plan. To be completed over two lessons. Controlled conditions.

Teacher briefing: focus on sentence openings and sentence variation; use of imagery; narrative structure; emotional impact not just plot. Use the extended time opportunity to improve your writing.

Pre-planning: Zoe has a brief outline in her book: topic, character names and setting.

Time: 10.00: Lesson start 10.08: Writing starts. 10.33: Writing terminated for interview.

Line no Comment
1 Starts writing before teacher has finished talking. Briefly consults plan then head down. No title.
4 Heavy scrubbing out of single word, speedily replaced, then scrubbed out and replaced.
5 Scrubs out one word and continues writing.
8 One word written then another word inserted immediately before it. Carries on quickly.

Very few pauses during this episode and no evidence of rereading.

12 Punctuation mark deleted.
13 Starts new line (for each speaker?).
14 Single letter written then deleted (capitalisation?).
19 Dialogue continues. Single letter altered at end of last word.

Short pauses during this episode. Still no rereading.

20-21 Several short pauses, consults plan, no revisions.
22 Word written, deleted, rewritten.
24 Single letter deleted, carries on; single word deleted, carries on.
25 Pause. Small change - letter(s) scrubbed out.
26 Single letter deleted, carries on writing.
27 Longer pause. Crosses out phrase (first revision of more than one word?).
30 Traces over some words again with her pen to make clearer. Emphatic full stop. Returns to previous line.
29 Single letter scrubbed out and replaced by word (the?).

No paragraphing. Almost all revisions are made at the point of writing not retrospectively.

31-33 Reaches the bottom of the page without stopping. Makes alteration to spelling of penultimate word. Then stops writing with a flourish of pen and big out-breath! Sits back. Wipes brow. Consults clock. Consults plan, then stares into space.
Appendix H: Interview schedules

i) Pre-writing interview schedule

**FOCUS 1:** Generally speaking, how do students perceive their own writing/revising strategies? How do they define the revising task? How do they define good writing?

Using students' questionnaire responses, especially those where strong agreement or disagreement is expressed...

1. **Tell me more about you as a writer.**
   What kinds of writing do you most/least enjoy doing?
   What would you say are your strengths/weaknesses in writing?

2. **How do you normally go about writing?**
   At what point/s do you tend to think about your ideas for writing?
   Do you ever change your mind about what you want to say/find new ideas as you are writing?
   What makes the process of writing easier/harder for you?

3. **Do you revise or redraft your writing?**
   What kinds of things do you look for/tend to change when revising?
   Do you think that the more you work on a piece, the better it becomes?
   How would you describe the revising task to a younger pupil?
   What other activities or experiences might you compare it to?

4. **How do you judge whether your writing is good or not so good?**
   How do you know/decide when a piece is finished?
   If you were asked to list the kinds of things that make writing ‘good’, what might you include?
   What about ‘bad’ writing?
   Tell me more about the kind of writing you like to read.

**FOCUS 2:** In the context of the specified writing task, what goals do students set themselves? How do they define success?

5. **Tell me about the writing task you are about to begin, and what you will be aiming to achieve.**
   What will your priorities be?
   What if any difficulties do you anticipate?
   How will you go about it?

6. **Do you have a reader in mind?**

7. **What do you think your teacher will be looking for?**
ii) Post-observation interview schedule 1

**FOCUS 1:** By what criteria do students evaluate their success? How do their stated goals/plans play out?

1. How well do you feel this piece of writing is progressing?
   
   What are you most pleased with?
   Are there aspects you are less happy with?

2. Is it developing as you expected, or have your plans changed?
   
   Have there been any surprises or unanticipated developments?
   Did you change your mind about any aspects as you went along?

**FOCUS 2:** What specific concerns do students attend to when revising school writing?

3. Let's look at the lengthier pauses during your writing…
   
   What were you thinking about here?

4. Let's look at the changes you made to your writing…
   
   What was your reason for your change here?

**FOCUS 3:** What goals do they set themselves for improvement?

5. What will you aim to achieve when you continue with this piece?
   
   What will your priorities be?
   Might you change anything already written? If so, what/why?

6. Will you think about/discuss/work on this piece in your own time before next lesson?
iii) Post-observation interview schedule 2

**FOCUS 1: By what criteria do students evaluate their success? How do their stated goals/plans play out?**

1. How well do you feel this piece of writing has progressed?

What are you most pleased with?
Are there aspects you are less happy with?

2. Did it develop as you expected, or did your plans change?

Were there any surprises or unanticipated developments?
Did you change your mind about any aspects as you went along?

**Before writing** you said.................................................................

**After your 1st draft** you said.............................................................

3. Is it finished in your opinion?

If you had more time, could you/would you develop this piece further? How?

**FOCUS 2: What specific concerns do students attend to when revising school writing?**

4. Let’s look at the lengthier pauses during your writing…

What were you thinking about here?

5. Let’s look at the changes you made to your writing…

What was your reason for the change here?

**FOCUS 3: Do students perceive any differences between their own evaluation criteria and assessment criteria? Or between their preferred way of working and that expected of them for this task?**

6. What do you think your teacher will be looking for when she reads it?

What do you think she will focus on when assessing this piece?

7. Did this task allow you to develop your writing in the way that you wanted?

What helped you in this? What made it more difficult?
Appendix I: Interview transcript (Sara, post-observation 2)

R: How do you feel your writing progressed today?
Sara: Um, I think it went OK. I’m like happy with some bits but um, not all of it, but I think it’s finished.
R: Can you tell me about the bits you are pleased with?
Sara: Um…I quite like how it ends, like I ended it on like a quote, like obviously I made it up because I have no idea what he [Archbishop Tutu] actually said, but I think it kinda like ends it nicely (reads).
R: So why does that work so nicely do you think?
Sara: Um…It think it like ties it up a little bit at the end.
R: OK. Anything else you are especially pleased with?
Sara: Um no, but well I just feel like sometimes, when I’m writing something like this I don’t really know much about, I tend to like repeat things quite often, like, it was just looking for new ways to rephrase things and like, like the different words to rephrase things that I’d said before.
R: So you were trying to avoid repetition?
Sara: Yeah.
R: Can you give me an example?
Sara: ‘Cos I said the word “occasion”, ‘cos I didn’t actually know what to call it, so I thought it was like an occasion, then I said it like twice or three times, I just thought, OK I’ve got to have another word for this because, yeah, just using “occasion” over and over again is just not very interesting.
R: I see. So how did you deal with that?
Sara: In the end I just changed the whole thing, ‘cos it said, “he came to share at this event” and then “occasion” and I just changed it to “share on this day”, instead of calling it anything, just the day. I thought that was better.
R: OK. So you got rid of some repetition. What about the bits you’re still not happy with?
Sara: Um yeah, I just think, this sentence or this little section, it’s just a really long sentence and I don’t like it but I can’t, I tried to think of a way to split it up and I couldn’t think of anything so I just, yeah…
R: So what is it that bothers you about it?
Sara: The length and it just feels a bit like, stuttery, like doesn’t really flow as a sentence.
R: So from line 29?
Sara: Yeah, to about 32, and just, it just upsets me. It’s just then I couldn’t think of what I was trying to say, like how to put it in a way that would be nice to read, so in the end I just gave up and just let it be.
R: If you’d had more time, would you have been able to resolve that problem do you think?
Sara: I would have wanted to but I couldn’t think of any, yeah, I probably wouldn’t have bothered trying to change it ‘cos I couldn’t think of anything else. I
mean, if I’d left it for a while and then came back maybe a week, 2 weeks later, I think it would have been different; I might have been able to change it.

R: OK, so how does having a gap between writing sessions help?

Sara: You’re able to look at it like, fresh, and you can see it differently. Cos when you’re writing it, it’s like you kind of think that’s the only way you could have put it, ‘cos that’s how you think it in your mind, but then when you come back to it you’re obviously in a different mind-set to how you were and it’s different, yeah.

R: So you think you can make more improvements to writing if you come back to it after a time?

Sara: Yeah, ‘cos you’re able to expand it and see it in a new light and pick out things that are wrong with it that you wouldn’t have seen when you were writing it.

R: Let’s have a look at some of the things that you did change then. I’m interested in why you made these changes. For example, you added a word at line 6 or 7…

Sara: That was changing, I changed the structure of the sentence then ‘cos um I didn’t like, again I was repeating a word, I repeated the word “world” and I didn’t like it so I just got rid of the second “world” and just changed the sentence round.

R: So was that just to avoid the repetition?

Sara: Yeah, but I also think it’s actually like, it’s, ‘cos obviously we’re doing embedded clauses and I just, I like the way it makes the sentence, I prefer it this way, the sentence in general.

R: Right, can you tell me more about that?

Sara: Yeah, I changed it to like, ‘cos it was just “Cameramen had flown all over the world to film what should have been a momentous occasion” but I changed it to “Cameramen, who had flown all over the world to film what promised to be a momentous occasion” and it was like, it did say “as the world watched”, but I just changed it to “the cameramen watching” because like, yeah, I just preferred it. It makes it more direct in a way.

R: OK. So what about the changes down here, line 19

Sara: Yeah, well that one I changed, I noticed it actually right at the beginning, is because I’d just, I said the same thing twice and I realised that’s not what I meant to do, I don’t know why I did it so. I said “claiming compensation or demanding compensation” and I realised that’s not what I meant to write.

R: Just a mind blank?

Sara: Yeah I do that all the time, like when I’m thinking of something and I’m writing something else, like you know when you’re like listening to music or something and you’re listening to a song and you end up writing the lyrics, I think it was something like that, I was thinking of the word “compensation” but yeah..

R: OK. And then line 20, what were you trying to achieve there?

Sara: Umm, I dunno really, I just like, the whole thing that I’ve like made my quote, is, I decided what I wanted the archbishop to come across as is like a
really deep character who like, um thought about really, err… can’t think of the word, I dunno he’s just really like, thought about other people before himself, not unselfish, just always thinking of a bigger picture and like, um, but and like, the sort of person who would always use like, words that would have the most effect on people, and that’s what I’d done for like the whole quote, and made him quite intellectual, like um, and I just thought that wasn’t, it was just quite blunt.

R: I see. So you were thinking about the kind of character that you wanted to portray through the speech. So what was it you crossed out?

Sara: Yeah it said “and maybe then we can prevent this from happening again” and I just thought that sounded pretty boring

R: So you replaced it with “maybe we can prevent such horrors ever unfolding again”. And that’s because you thought the Archbishop would use language that would affect people?

Sara: Yeah.

R: And then you’ve changed this to “around 1 o’clock”. What were you thinking there?

Sara: Yeah ‘cos before I’d just made a time and been “exactly 1.18” but I just thought that wouldn’t, they wouldn’t know the exact time really, they wouldn’t be like “ooh he’s crying, let’s check the time” you know it would just be a kind of vague, yeah, just changed that..

R: So you were thinking about it from the perspective of the observers? And then you’ve got, you’ve changed “apologised” to “repent”?

Sara: ‘Cos I just thought apologised was something you kind of did when it’s like, you knocked over the milk or something, it seemed quite like a menial word, you wouldn’t just apologise for planting a bomb, you know, you’d, you would obviously, if you’re coming to this thing you’d feel a little more remorse than just that, so I thought, it’s a much stronger word.

R: I see. OK, so those were the changes you made today. What I’d like to do now is to go back to the things you said to me originally about what you would be trying to do with this piece, to see whether you’ve changed your mind about anything since. When we first talked you said that this kind of writing should be informative but also persuasive, that it should express a clear point of view. Did that intention stay with you?

Sara: I dunno, I guess obviously when I said that I didn’t realise what I’d be writing about and perhaps if like, I dunno, I chose this one because I thought it would be much easier to write an article about, because it was something real but because of this it’s like, you know, it is what it is, horrific things have happened and it’s made this man cry, there’s nothing you can really, there’s not a point of view you can take on that, it’s just, err…

R: So the thing about presenting an opinion, because you talked about bias in journalism, you thought in this particular instance...

Sara: I suppose, I think I’d obviously persuade more to saying that he was, not right to, but accept it was perfectly reasonable of him to cry because you know,
it’s not a light, it’s not a light hearted thing but I suppose you could have gone more like, can’t believe he cried, he was supposed to be chairing the session.

R: But you wanted to portray him in a sympathetic way?
Sara: Uh yeah, I don’t, yeah I don’t think I really tried to persuade anyone umm, I don’t think there’s much you can persuade someone to do with this, I dunno, maybe persuading the people to like, empathise with the bishop or umm…

R: OK. And you also said you wanted to say something important in your piece, something that did justice to the subject but was also easy to read. You didn’t want to ‘just skim the surface’ but you didn’t want to ‘labour the point’ either. How do you feel about the balance of those things now?
Sara: Yeah I think I went more on the over-labouring side, yeah I think I did.

R: Can you explain why you feel that?
Sara: Um I just think ‘cos I mean, before we started talking about it I had no idea, I didn’t really know anything about the Apartheid even, like, so, I dunno, I felt like things that I did know I just tried to reuse and like recycle the things over and over again, and I think like, I over-laboured some points a lot.

R: Such as?
Sara: Um, how the like, realisation was just too much for the archbishop and like how the people were trying to apologise or like people were, how horrible it was for the people and that sort of thing really.

R: OK. And when we spoke after your first draft, you said you were worried that you didn’t really know enough about the subject, that you didn’t have enough information to go on. You felt you were dragging things out a bit and you wanted to tighten that up. Do you feel you achieved that?
Sara: Um, no, ‘cos um, I’m not going to lie I completely forgot about it, if you know, if it was like a GCSE or something I would have gone home and done some research but because this is just like, I don’t mean to like say, but it’s just like a classroom task, I didn’t think about it at all so you know.

R: Fair enough. So you didn’t have any more information today. You said to me last time that you thought your introduction was too thin on facts, too ‘stretched out’. You wanted to add some more points. Do you still feel the same about that?
Sara: Um, I don’t think I brought any more points in, but I do think, I thought that yeah, my, what my problem was, was like stretching out, I think, in a way I almost stretched it out more but it felt more relevant, ‘cos like, ‘cos I stretched it out but from like, it was all based around that point, it kind of like tied in, whereas before it was just more like random things.

R: I see. So you changed your mind about the introduction as your piece developed?
Sara: Yeah, because before it had no like direction or anything.

R: But now that you can see it as a whole…
Sara: Yeah, it works better.
R:  OK. So you also talked about word choice: you wanted to get some good vocabulary in there. You were using the thesaurus quite a lot, so did you achieve what you wanted to?

Sara:  Um, I think I did like, when I was writing, I do think that in this piece I've got in some quite good vocabulary for me but like um, and actually like, I didn't use the thesaurus so much for describing words, more for menial words, that you don't tend to realise that you're like repeating because it's just something that you should say and it comes naturally for you to say and I was just, but when you're reading you kind of pick up on it more.

R:  Can you give me an example?

Sara:  Um well like “occasion” or something, you just refer to something as an occasion. It is like it is, it's the birthday, it's going to be an occasion, it's an occasion, it's an occasion. As you're saying it you don't realise it but then, and as you're writing it sometimes you don't either because you tend to not really think about what you've just…well, I don't know if it's the same for everyone else but me when I write, I kinda like not really think about what I've written, more what I'm going to write, so occasion, because this is what I think of it as being, that's what I'm going to use to describe it, So yeah, when like, I think that's, yeah, I suppose that's an aspect of redrafting is that when I went back over it that's what I could change, as I read it through I could see that this has been used too much, let's replace it.

R:  And what do you think your teacher will be looking for when she reads it?

Sara:  I don't really know, I suppose if it's a journalism piece then they'll read a lot more newspapers and they're probably looking for like a profession, like mature writing style and you know, interesting vocabulary, well structured, um sentences used for effect, that kind of thing, but like, stuff that would get you marks, not like more this is something I want to read at home because they're examining it, they are just trying to look for your writing skill, not reading material.

R:  OK. And do you look at your writing in the same way, or more as reading material?

Sara:  The same yeah. I think that's what most of my writing is, to try and show off your writing skills as much as possible, in ways that will make the examiner think oh this is good, you know, the PQE thing, using that like to its full, because you know that's what you've been told is going to get you marks so you do it. You write to get good grades.

R:  So is there any difference between writing to get good grades and writing for your own satisfaction? Or are they the same thing?

Sara:  Yeah, a satisfactory piece of work for me would be a work that gets a high grade, so if that's what's going to get a high grade then I'll do that.

R:  So you try to fit your style of writing with what's required?

Sara:  I don't really remember in primary school what my writing style was but I just feel like I've just adapted it to fit what's required from the writing tasks that are presented, um, and if it doesn't, like we get targets obviously at the end of everything we've done like, if that tells me that I should, if there's a, to make
your piece more higher marking or sophisticated, you should craft your sentences more, then I'll just, on the next piece focus a lot on crafting sentences and like focus on it and focus on it to the point where it just become part of my writing and like how I write.

R: And what about your way of working? You've said that you tend to develop your writing as you go along, rather than plan it ahead. Did this task allow you to do that in the way that you wanted to?

Sara: Umm, I don't really know, I don't plan and I suppose, I mean Miss does try and get us to plan but, I always find it really hard to strike the balance between planning, over planning so you don't have much time to write it and under planning so you don't really have anything to go on.

R: Is time a problem, then?

Sara: It is time, yeah, because it's, I suppose it just comes down to the day and how much you've got to write about it, how much you can think of.

R: And if you had more time, could you keep on improving your writing do you think?

Sara: Not always, like, um if it's something that I feel like I can write a lot about, obviously I want as much time as possible but if it's something like this, if I had more time I would not be able to write more about it, it's just, I always reach a point when I'm writing or working or something when I just have no more to say and if that point varies on whether I know a lot about the subject or feel passionate about the subject or like, you know something that I don't care about or don't want to write about it just bores me so yeah.

R: Would you develop this piece further if you had more time?

Sara: No, I think I got to the point where, unless I was going to take this really seriously and go home and do research, I think that's all I'm really going to get out of it.

R: OK. That's great. Thank you.

END
APPENDIX J

Appendix J: In-case mapping exemplar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME: PERCEPTIONS OF PURPOSE – REVISING TO EXPLORE OR DEVELOP IDEAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data source</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a first draft to find out what I want to say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My first draft is usually my final product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see no reason to redraft my writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me, revising or redrafting means changing whole sections of my writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often make major changes to the content of my writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing helps me develop my ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you see as the purpose of revising or redrafting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But you don’t think that writing helps you develop your ideas? Can you tell me more about that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So is time a problem for you when revising?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text revisions</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX K

### Appendix K: Cross-case mapping exemplar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Case study: Luke (Year 9, middle set)</th>
<th>Case study: Sara (Year 10, upper set)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey items</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main reason to redraft is to put right problems or mistakes in writing.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree (minority view)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important thing when writing is to stick to the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree (minority view)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the changes I make to my writing are minor alterations, such as rewording or corrections.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree (minority view)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 references to punctuation, making mistakes, checking and correcting.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 references to mechanics or correction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'I go through it (checking) my commas, where they’re all placed, punctuation, if my paragraphs are in the right place...um, make it neater if you’re like rewriting it and just check your punctuations are correct and just generally going through the work again to check everything’s right...it’s just like reading a book really, so you read through it and if you see something wrong just correct it’</td>
<td></td>
<td>'I don’t really think about that, it’s more like... when you reread it you can think oh, actually this would be a better way of phrasing it or this would be a better way of describing what I’m trying to say...because when you do it first off, and you don’t make any changes, it is just like, it is just a draft really, then I just think, if you don’t change it then it’s not going to get like developed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text revisions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74% of all text revisions are surface changes: 6 x spelling; 6 x punctuation; 3 x capitalisation; 2 x grammar. Most were made after text completion in response to teacher prompting and peer assessment. There was little evidence of rereading during the 1st writing episode.</td>
<td></td>
<td>24% of all text revisions are surface changes: 3 x spelling; 1 x numeral replaced with word; 1 x handwriting. Most were made during the drafting process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L

Appendix L: Coded interview extract (NVivo screen capture)
Appendix M: Students’ pause-write patterns

Pause-write analysis
Students’ writing patterns were video-recorded, and the duration of all pauses and writing episodes calculated. This data is represented below in excel graph form: pausing is recorded as a negative value, writing as a positive value, and time is in seconds.

Differences between writers
Over the task as a whole, pause-to-write ratios varied between writers: one tended to write fluently, pausing only for short periods; three adopted a more balanced pattern, with almost equal amounts of time spent pausing and writing; and two spent considerably longer pausing than writing, although primarily during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} writing episode. This finding is in line with Myhill’s (2009) larger study of adolescent writing patterns which identified five distinct writing profiles.

Differences between drafts
There were also differences in individual students’ pause-write patterns between drafts. For four students, pausing increased in frequency and duration and writing decreased during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} writing period; of these, two students wrote very little at all during their 2\textsuperscript{nd} drafting period. For one student there was little difference in 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} draft patterns. For another, writing increased and pausing decreased in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} writing episode. These differences are in part explained by the fact that to varying degrees students used the 2\textsuperscript{nd} writing period to extend or complete their piece rather than review what was already written. Two of the weaker writers also lost momentum or interest after the initial writing episode and spent more time off-task.

Differences between higher and lower-achieving writers
There may be some evidence to support an association between students’ composing patterns and their writing achievement, since the higher-achieving writers adopted more balanced pause-write strategies, and allocated similar time to each over the task as a whole. By contrast, the pause-write patterns of lower-achieving students were unevenly balanced: they either paused for long periods which were not matched by subsequent writing, or they spent long periods writing without stop. This finding aligns with Myhill’s (2009) observation that higher-achieving writers in her study exhibited more or less even patterns of writing and pausing with frequent pause-write transitions, whereas lower-achieving writers were more likely to be ‘flow writers’.
Zoe

1st draft

2nd draft

305
Jamie

1\textsuperscript{st} draft

2\textsuperscript{nd} draft
Luke

1\textsuperscript{st} draft

2\textsuperscript{nd} draft
Sara

1st draft

2nd draft
Anna

1\textsuperscript{st} draft

2\textsuperscript{nd} draft
Appendix N: Coding scheme for text revisions

Yagelski’s (1995) coding scheme provides four categories for the classification of text revisions. The first three categories represent changes which are meaning-preserving; the fourth represents changes which affect meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface changes</strong></td>
<td>a. Punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Capitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Pluralisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Word form corrections other than pluralisation (e.g., subject-verb agreement; tense changes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Substitutions (e.g., fewer for less)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Corrected handwriting (*my addition) or typographical errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stylistic changes</strong></td>
<td>a. Lexical – stylistic word substitutions (e.g., several for a few; increase for grow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Phrasing: i) syntactic (meaning-preserving rewordings, including adding or deleting words); ii) structural (meaning-preserving sentence-restructuring: e.g., when we went outside for having gone outside)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural changes</strong></td>
<td>a. Organization (within paragraphs; within essay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Paragraphing (moving whole paragraphs; creating new paragraphs from existing ones)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content changes</strong></td>
<td>a. Addition of new material (new subject matter or ideas – as distinct from simply adding new words to tighten a phrase or sentence) to develop subject or clarify points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Deleting material (subject matter or ideas – as distinct from deleting words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Altering an idea, argument etc. (e.g., changing from pro to con on an issue; shifting focus from description to narration).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix O: Coded text (Anna, 2nd draft)

[At 3 [in] this morning [today] i got back from Glastonbury.]

Glastonbury 2011, a muddy year! I arrived at [Glastonbury on tuesday the 21st of June, and left on [the] Sunday the 26th. ^ An amazing experience, that will stay with me forever! [The mud, rain and wind [the atmosphere] did not [mind blowing] dampen the terrific atmosphere [!] [!] People danced to the wide range of ^ [amazing] music in [wellies] and waterproofs [], not letting the rain get them down.

I saw alot of great acts maybe some of the best artists of this day and age, Cold play, Biffy Clyro, Jessie J, U2, Beyonce, the list could go on [d] and on. I think the best acts were the ones who interacted with the crowd, Jessie J did this [wonderfully] [w] wonderfully. She sat on her throw with her Broken leg, [a] wiped mud on her face, and got a little girl up with her to sing [with] price tag with. It was a beautiful moment, and everyone [on] was in a daze over her attitude and how down to earth and friendly she was. Another great act was Tinie Tempah, hes [presence]

Presence ^ [attitude] [and] throughout his set was incredible! I was very lucky and managed [and got us to] to be near the front for him. He got us all singing [and], dancing. ^ [he got us [was fantastic] to] get [d] [l] down low and crouch in the mud, ^ [it was a fantastic] atmosphere ^ . I would defently say he was [s] one of the best i saw. There were so many great acts, [his] very few disappointed. The only one who disapointed me [a bit] was Plan B, ^ [i dont know why] sound system didnt come out very well and I thought he would be more energetic. I found myself getting bored of him, [But] but thats just my opinion.
Other[s] might disagree.

Beyonce was the perfect closing act, and a well deserved Headliner, Her Presence was unbelievable, [you felt inferea to her, like you were in the] Her [strong] stunning[ly] voice, and overall area had everyone trying to catch [their] thier breath. She opened with crazy in love, it got everyone singing. She did a number of well known songs and some [from] of her new stuff. She was truly amazing and was such an privalige to see her live!

Leaving the [festivile] [festivile] festival was like leaving another world behind, like coming out of NaNea or something. Glastonbury was friendly and although others would disagree, it felt safe there. You could start convosations with strangers, dance with them, [berr] ask them for loo roll, and it felt exce[t]ptable, comfortable. Something i dont think you find very often in the real world.
Appendix P: Coded text (Jamie, 2nd draft)

**[Homework - Time eater!]**

As the majority of people have experienced; homework is a huge part in all teenagers lives. Imagine yourself coming home after a hard work with the prospect of homework. It is a problem facing students worldwide and it is a problem which must be eradicated.

**[in general]**

Homework is set far too regularly, a key problem I and most youths have with the concept. The average student obtains 4 hours of homework a week. Put into perspective there are 168 hours in a week if you minus the 30 hours of school and the additional 4 hours of homework the average student is left with 134 hours to do as they please. That may sound like a large amount of time but with approximately half of this being used for sleep our youth is left with little free time due to the curse of homework. The education system generallises in the amount of time a certain piece of homework may take, however this may differ from pupil to pupil due to academic ability. This is just another reason that often, if not all the time, too much homework is given out.

**[in particular]**

Secondly homework hinders teenagers social lives. The pure magnitude of homework set allows little time for socialising. This poses a major issue of decreased speaking and listening skills it is this ability that the majority of employers look for when recruiting. A below par social life can lead to isolation, loneliness and lack of belonging in teenagers. In theory it is these emotions that often lead to youths acting violently towards
themselves and those around them.

Of course it is not just homework that causes the lack of interaction to a poor social life, but it is a large factor.

Family life is vital to young people; it allows youths to gain advice, feel loved and have an outlet for concerns. However there is little time for family life with your head buried in a book, or eyes fixed to a computer screen. Homework decreases the level of family interaction and can once again lead to isolation and loneliness, especially in young children aged 5 - 10.

On the hand some people would argue that issuing homework advances the learning of students. If teachers were good at their job where is the need for homework? It is also proven that the majority of homework is set for the sake of setting it, but are time consuming. It is the 'little' homeworks that bore students and do not advance learning at all. The amusement of homework is often short lived and leads to students completing it without much thought. This further reiterates the lack of point in issuing homework, especially in the quantity it is at the moment.

It is not just a waste of time for students; it is a waste of time for the teachers who are setting the work. It takes time to set and mark homework, time that would better be spent planning lessons. Most teachers could do without the hassle of homework in general and would argue that it is not as valuable an asset to learning as some might believe.
In conclusion, I believe that homework is useless. Baggage in the airport called students' lives. Pupils, teachers and the world can and should live without homework in a homework free world.
APPENDIX Q

Appendix Q: Students’ text revisions by type and frequency

Coding scheme used
Students’ text revisions were analysed using Yagelski’s (1995) four category coding scheme, and are reported below as the number of changes made in each category during each writing episode. The first three categories represent changes which are meaning-preserving; the fourth represents changes which affect meaning. Category definitions are provided in Appendix N but can be summarised as follows:

- **Surface**: grammar, punctuation, spelling and mechanics.
- **Style**: rewording; minor additions, deletions and substitutions.
- **Structure**: reorganisation of material.
- **Content**: addition of new ideas, deletion or alteration of ideas.

Total number of changes made
Five students made on average fewer than 10 revisions (of all types) per 100 words of text (ranging from 5.4 to 9.4). The sixth student used a word-processor with spell checking facility and thus made many more corrections than others, averaging 16.7 changes (of all types) per 100 words of text. It is worth noting that following the observed writing periods, one student (Anna) continued to revise her text and almost doubled the average number of changes made per 100 words from 9.4 to 17.

Nature of changes made
In common with students in Yagelski’s (1995) and earlier studies, students in this study focused their revisions on surface and stylistic concerns. All students in all drafts made significantly more surface and stylistic revisions than structural or content changes. Only one student made any change to text structure and this was at sentence level. Of the 203 revisions made by all students, only 13 impacted on meaning. The few content changes made were small-scale, and all but one of them added to meaning rather than altered existing ideas or argument; the largest content change made was an addition of 15 words. As might be expected, the students from middle ability sets made more surface changes than stylistic, whilst the students in upper sets made more stylistic changes than surface. Most stylistic changes were substitutions or additions; the deletion of text was rare. All students chose to extend the length of their texts during the second writing episode rather than redraft what was already written. Addition to length was not coded as revision.

Stage at which changes were made
In three cases, there was little difference between the number of changes made during 1st and 2nd writing episodes. Two students made more changes during the 2nd episode. One student made considerably more changes during the 1st writing episode (owing to his use of a word-processor and spell-checker). In all
cases and in both writing episodes, more changes were made during writing (on-line) than after completion of writing. There was little evidence that returning to an initial draft after a period of time (deferred revision) prompted more extensive or substantive revision. Indeed, some students made no further changes to their first draft during the 2nd writing episode.

**Conclusion**

The number and nature of students’ revisions did not make an extensive or substantive impact on their texts. This would support students’ claims that most of their revisions are minor linguistic enhancements or corrections. However, the point at which changes were made does not support the view expressed by some that revising is undertaken at the end of writing.

**ZOE** (Total words 529)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Draft 1</th>
<th>Draft 2</th>
<th>Both drafts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
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**JAMIE** (Total words 553)

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**LUKE** (Total words 296)

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**SARA** (Total words 387)

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### ANNA (Total words 415)

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### CHRIS (Total words 215)

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<td><strong>36</strong></td>
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</table>

*word-processed using spell-checker
APPENDIX R

Appendix R: Ethical certificate

Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 580013014

Title of your project:
Revising writing: secondary students’ understanding of purpose, process and success criteria.

Brief description of your research project:

Rationale
Research has clearly shown that revising ability marks the difference between the skilled and the unskilled writer. Adolescent writers may be expected to develop increasingly sophisticated revision processes, yet are frequently observed to revise little and in superficial ways. How young writers conceptualise revision, their definition of purpose and their attitude towards it, inevitably determines the scope of their revising practice. However, little recent research has explored how secondary students think about revision, nor how their thinking impacts on their development of texts.

The study
This study aims to explore how secondary students’ think and feel about revising school writing, and how their perceptions of purpose, process and success criteria are reflected in practice. It seeks to identify the understanding students can articulate and demonstrate by combining data from an attitude survey, school-based observations of writing, one-to-one interviews, and analysis of texts.

An initial questionnaire will be used to survey whole classes in participating schools. This is designed to elicit students’ general views about the purpose and value of revising writing, and their perceptions of their own practice. A small number of case studies will be conducted, based on a sub-sample of volunteer students, to provide in-depth data about individual students’ perspectives and how their perceptions play out in the context of a specific school writing task.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

Schools/teachers
English teachers in a number of secondary schools in Devon and elsewhere will be invited to participate. It is anticipated that 2 or 3 schools will provide an appropriately varied sample in terms of the teaching students have received, the characteristics of the community served, and other variables.

Survey
All students in the Year 9/10 classes from which case-study students are drawn will be invited to complete a short questionnaire during normal class time.

Case studies
A small number of students aged 13-15, drawn from a range of classes across participating schools, will be invited to participate in a series of one-to-one interviews, to be observed while writing, and to submit copies of their texts for discussion and analysis. It is anticipated that 6 case studies will provide sufficiently detailed data, and allow a reasonable ability spread and gender balance.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010
Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

a) **informed consent**: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents. An example of the consent form(s) must accompany this document. A blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents.

**Participating schools and teachers**
Written information about the purpose of the study, the research activities involved, and the assistance sought from school staff, will be provided to prospective schools in advance. This will be followed by discussion with staff. Practical details and some aspects of the research design (for example, the writing task selected) will be agreed with the teachers concerned. Written consent will then be sought from both the Headteachers and teachers involved (see attached consent form).

**Student survey**
Participants will receive advance information concerning the attitude survey, its purpose, and students’ right to withdraw. In accordance with the school’s policies and procedures, this information may also be sent to parents. In addition, a covering letter to all participants will be provided with the questionnaire itself which clearly states that completion is voluntary. If teachers administer the questionnaire, they will be asked to draw students’ attention to this information.

**Case studies**
A written explanation of the objectives of the case-study research, and the activities involved, will be provided in student-friendly language for all prospective participants in advance. This information will clearly state that participation is voluntary, and that students have the right to withdraw at any time. It will also make clear how data will be collected, what lesson-time may be missed, and how students’ data will be used and reported. Verbal consent will be sought initially, and written consent after a suitable period for reflection. Information will also be sent to parents and their written consent sought once students have agreed in principle.

b) **anonymity and confidentiality**

Participating schools, teachers and students will not be identified in any reports of the research, and any descriptors used will be agreed between the researcher and the institution/participants. All records of the data collected - completed questionnaires, transcripts of interviews, copies of writing samples and observation notes - will be anonymised.

**Survey**
Questionnaires will be completed anonymously.

**Case studies**
The written information provided to prospective case-study students will stress that all information they give will be treated confidentially, and that their names will not be attached to any records of data, or used in any reports. These assurances will also be made verbally prior to interviews. Pseudonyms will be used in all records and reports of the research, and these will not be linked to particular schools.

---

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee  
updated: July 2010
Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

Survey
The Likert attitude scale for use with whole classes will take 10-15 minutes to complete. It is anticipated that this will be administered during normal English lesson time, either by the researcher or by the class teacher concerned. Appropriate timing will be agreed with the teachers concerned so that disruption to lesson plans is minimised.

Interviews
It is proposed that case-study students will be interviewed on a one-to-one basis on 4 occasions, each lasting about 30 minutes. Every effort will be made to ensure that these occasions do not erode break-times, detract from teaching programmes or educationally disadvantage students. Students will not be asked to give up free time. Appropriate timings for interviews will be negotiated with teachers and students, and any lesson-time missed will be by agreement of all concerned. It is anticipated that interviews will normally take place during timetabled English periods, and on occasions when writing is considered an appropriate focus, so that they do not result in any significant loss of educational opportunity.

Interviews will be semi-structured and, with consent from participants, recorded. The first interview will explore students’ perceptions and anticipated goals in relation to a particular type of writing task. The second and third interviews will rely on students’ recall of their decision-making during writing, and will therefore take place as soon as possible after classroom observations. The final interview will offer participants the opportunity to comment on or contribute to initial conclusions about their views and practice. It will also allow debriefing.

Observations
It is proposed that case-study students will be observed while writing on two occasions, each lasting about 30 minutes. It is anticipated that observations will take place during normal English class time, and that the researcher will sit a short distance from the writer in order to record writing, pausing and revising patterns. One-to-one observations in the classroom are inevitably intrusive both for the teacher and student concerned. Every effort will be made to put participants at ease in advance and to carry out observations discreetly. With participants’ consent, a small desk-top camera may be used to record the duration of writing/pausing episodes. This will be positioned so as to focus on the student’s hand and paper only.

Writing samples
Copies of students’ scripts will be requested in order to analyse revisions made. Students will be asked to use different coloured pens on each writing occasion in order to distinguish between revisions made at different stages of the writing process. It will be made clear to students that the researcher has no role in assessing or grading their written work.

General considerations during data collection
The additional workload for participating teachers and students during data collection will be kept to a minimum. As far as possible the researcher will take responsibility for all necessary admin, and related costs. The potential sensitivities of teachers will be taken into account. It is possible, for example, that teachers may feel under scrutiny when student perspectives are sought, or during observations in their classrooms. Every effort will be made to establish collaborative relationships with the teachers involved based on mutual respect and trust.

If, at any stage, participating students exhibit distress, the researcher will take appropriate action to reduce this, by ceasing an observation, for example, or offering to switch off the voice recorder during an interview.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010
Data analysis
Quantitative data from the initial questionnaire, and from text analysis, will be analysed statistically using SPSS 15.
Qualitative data from interviews will be transcribed and coded thematically using Nvivo 8. All transcribing will be done by the researcher and/or her assistant, and transcripts will be anonymous.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

All legal requirements as specified in the Data Protection Act will be complied with. Records of all data collected – completed questionnaires, video recordings of writing, observation records, recorded interviews, transcripts and writing samples – will be securely stored within a locked building. Electronic data will be stored on a secure server accessible by password only to the researcher and her assistant. All data will be destroyed or deleted when it is no longer required.

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004), and the University of Exeter’s School of Education guidelines, will be followed in all respects. The policies and procedures of participating schools will also be followed where relevant, for example re: information to parents/obtaining parental consent. The researcher has Criminal Records Bureau clearance, and is a qualified and experienced secondary school teacher.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

Conducting research with school students
School students are potentially vulnerable to exploitation. Students may feel obliged to participate in research when approached by teachers or adults in authority. It is especially important therefore that informed consent is sought sensitively, and students’ views respected. During research activities proposed in this study, students may experience anxiety about their performance or interview responses: they may feel uncomfortable expressing views which run counter to those they have been taught, for example, and worry about potential repercussions; they may suspect the uses to which their data will be put, or its potential impact on assessment/grading processes. It will be important to reassure students throughout the study that all data is confidential. Given the intensive and extended nature of data collection from case-study students, the option to withdraw will also be reinforced throughout the study.

Small sample issues
The small number of case-studies, and the small number of schools involved in this study, means that particular care needs to be taken when writing up the research to preserve anonymity and ensure that participants do not feel compromised. Whilst all interview quotations or extracts from students’ texts will be anonymously attributed, and not linked to particular schools, a sensitive approach to the use of such material will be important. Students will be provided with clear information from the outset about how their data will be presented, and specific consent will be obtained for the use of extracts from their writing. Students will also be offered the opportunity during a final interview to reflect and comment on their case-study profile, and their views will be included in the final report.

Confidentiality and safe-guarding
It will be made clear to participants that in the exceptional event that the researcher has cause to fear for the safety of participants or other people, information will be passed to the relevant bodies in line with the Child Protection Act.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010

323
This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor.

This project has been approved for the period: **JANUARY 2011** until: **SEPTEMBER 2011**

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): ____________ date: 9th Feb 2011

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: ____________

Signed: ____________ date: 10/02/2011
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from: [http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/](http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/)

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010
Appendix S: Consent forms

HEADTEACHER/TEACHER CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the PhD study: **Student perspectives on revising writing.**

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw.
- Participants have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about them.
- Any information provided will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.
- If applicable, the information provided may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.
- All information provided will be treated as confidential.
- The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve the anonymity of participants

.............................................................................................................................................................................
(Signature of participating Head teacher/teacher).................................................................................................
.............................................................................................................................................................................
(Date)

.............................................................................................................................................................................
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact me by phone or email as above. Thank you.

Lucy Oliver

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.
I have been fully informed about the aims of the writing research project and the activities I will be involved in.

I understand that:

I do not have to participate. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the research at any stage if I wish to.

The information I provide will be treated as confidential. I will not be named in any reports of the research, and anything I say during interviews or any extracts from my writing will only be used anonymously.

Any information I give will be used only for the purposes of this research project.

In order to participate, I will need to miss some English lesson-time for interviews, as agreed with my teacher.

(Signature of student)                        (Date)

(Printed name of participant)

I give my consent for my daughter/son to participate in this research project.

(Signature of parent/guardian)                        (Date)

(Printed name of parent/guardian)

If you have any questions or concerns about the project please contact your English teacher.

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.
APPENDIX T

Appendix T: Questionnaire responses: itemised distribution frequencies.

1. Year group; 2. Gender.

3. I enjoy many different kinds of writing.

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<tr>
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<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<td>54.6%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
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4. I am a good writer.

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<tr>
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<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<td>38.4%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
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</table>

5. I often leave my writing assignments to the last minute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>19.5%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
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6. When writing, I make a plan and stick to it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>23.8%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
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7. I like to discuss my writing with others and hear their suggestions.

<table>
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<th>Response</th>
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<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
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</table>

8. The most important thing when writing is to stick to the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. The teacher is the most important audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. For me, planning my writing is a waste of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. I often think about my writing assignments when I'm doing other things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. It's important to develop your own style in writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. I see no reason to redraft my writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Most of the changes I make are minor alterations, such as rewording or corrections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. It's important to me to put across what I really think and feel in my writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. I'm never certain whether my writing is good or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. When reviewing my writing, I imagine how my reader might react to it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. When writing an essay, the main task is to arrange the required information in a logical order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. I plan, write and revise my writing all at the same time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. I make most changes to my writing after feedback from the teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. It’s the ideas in writing that matter most.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22. I often rearrange the order of things in my writing to improve it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. Originality is important when writing an essay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. The main reason to redraft is to put right problems or mistakes in writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. I try out different words and expressions in my writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. The most important thing when writing is to entertain, inform or persuade your reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27. My first draft is usually my final product.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28. When writing an essay, it isn’t necessary to give your own opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. I re-examine my ideas and arguments when I review my writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. I can always find what needs to be changed to make my writing better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31. For me, revising or redrafting means changing whole sections of my writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. Choice of vocabulary is the key to good writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
33. I use a first draft to find out what I want to say.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34. I usually write the whole piece first and then make changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35. I often make major changes to the content of my writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36. My main concern when writing is to meet the assessment criteria and get a good grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37. I use redrafting as an opportunity to develop my ideas further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38. I revise my writing to please myself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39. Writing helps me develop my ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The opportunity to engage in this inquiry and to reflect on students’ responses has been a real privilege. I am very grateful to the ESRC whose sponsorship made this research possible. I am also indebted to Dr Sue Jones and Professor Debra Myhill at the University of Exeter for their invaluable advice and support throughout. I would especially like to thank the three teachers who so generously welcomed me into their classrooms and their six students whose testimony provided such a rich resource for study.
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