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# UNIT 18 PROCESS WRITING AT A MORE ADVANCED LEVEL

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## STRUCTURE

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## 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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In the previous unit, we had discussed the stages of the writing process and how these can be transacted in the classroom through the process writing approach. We looked in detail at a sample of a simple piece of process writing with a class of young beginners. The writing was taken up as a whole class, controlled activity in which all the children were working together on a single piece of writing. The main objective was to help the children to understand and experience the different stages of the writing process. Once the children have internalised the different stages of the writing process, they are ready to explore different forms of writing, such as letters, poems, articles, speeches, reports, plays etc. The children are also ready to take up individual writing. Initially it is useful to have all the children in the class writing in the same form at the same time, to facilitate teacher support. When the children are in higher classes they will be ready to work on completely individualised writings, with different children working in different forms at the same time.

In this unit we shall look at the ways of working at a range of more complex writing tasks and writing forms through process writing classes at the upper primary level. After you have completed this unit you should be able to :

1. Help children select topics which are suitable for this older age level.
2. Help children select appropriate forms of writing for the particular writing tasks they are taking up.
3. Provide suitable pre-writing support, to equip the children with the requirements of the particular writing tasks they are working on.
4. Help children to provide peer-group support and feedback whenever necessary.
5. Equip the children with suitable skills of reflection, and self evaluation.
6. Help children develop the social skills required for effective peer conferencing and offering constructive feedback and suggestions to each other.
7. Help children become active participants in the writing process.
8. Accept the child's ideas and views, even though these may not be in agreement with your own.

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## 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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Writers constantly make choices about language and content. Even at a young age, if they are doing their own thinking, they make complex decisions about structuring sentences, paragraphs, and entire texts and about selecting vocabulary that best conveys their meaning. These choices are of course interdependent and also relate to topic,

audience, purpose and so on. This unit will explore a number of classroom strategies that will help children to consider the available choices in their sentences, paragraphs and texts. The choice of a specific text structure or form grows out of the writer's purpose. If the child's purpose is to tell a story, a narrative structure is the appropriate choice. If the student needs to write a speech for the school assembly an expository structure is probably more appropriate. Initially the children need guidance to help them select the form which is most suited to the purpose of their particular writing. With experience children learn to select the appropriate text structure intuitively, if they have determined the purpose, topic and audience for themselves. This happens gradually, as children move slowly towards freer writing. In order to lead up to this stage children need to work on their individual pieces within pre-determined structures or forms which have been chosen by the teacher. It is very important to have a discussion on why the particular form was selected. Thus if the children are writing a letter to another class about a play that they saw, the teacher would need to discuss the other possible forms in which the children could have written, such as paragraphs or poems, and why a letter was thought to be most suitable for this purpose of letting the other class know the reactions to the play. Discussions of this kind should become an ongoing part of the process writing class. They help children to begin to internalise processes which are teacher directed. Teachers need to also point out the different written forms, that the children encounter in their reading class, and have discussions about which other form may have been used, or the range of writing and how it varies with the purpose. The variation in formal and informal writing also need to be focused on.

One important transition that the children make from the earlier teacher guided stage is that slowly they begin to express themselves as individuals, through their written words. It becomes absolutely vital for the teacher to know the students in her class and to be sensitive to their individual needs, beliefs and values. As some children struggle, and are not able to write, the teacher may realise that the more proficient writers in the class understand that written language exists to communicate meaning; while less proficient writers may, typically believe that writing is done to practice written language forms, such as word recognition, spellings or handwriting. With these latter students no matter how much the teacher tells the students that she doesn't want them to worry about spellings and neatness, and that their ideas mattered most in the initial drafts, the students will not take risks and will prefer to do 'safe' writing. One way of helping such children is by getting children to share their processes, and sharing some initial drafts, which have explored non-familiar words and not been bogged down with spellings or punctuation. When the more hesitant children see how some of their classmates have not let spellings interfere with the idea in their initial drafts, but instead have invented spellings, they are likely to slowly begin taking risks and drop their fears of incorrect grammar or spellings. Be careful that the children do not ridicule each others' writing, but learn to explore it to gain insights about how to write. Children have to be taught how to do this. Also make sure that several children's work is discussed and no one is singled out. Writing along with the children is very useful, if you can from time to time share your own process or the difficulties you are encountering and how you solved them or attempted to solve them. For example you might bring in a rough draft of something you are writing, and you might say, "Oh, I just remembered something I should have written before. I'll write it in the margin and draw an arrow to show where it goes". This kind of sharing helps children to gather enough confidence to take risks.

When children choose what they write, they are often writing about things that are very precious to them. One of the most important aspects of a process writing class is to help children to respect each other through the way they respond to each other's writings. In a large class this can be quite difficult, particularly if you do not have enough opportunity to get to know the children. In such cases begin by writing on topics which are less likely to be sensitive. Through your own example, and through writing conferences teach the children to give positive feedback. Children at this young age respond very quickly, so use every opportunity you get to reinforce a classroom climate of mutual trust and respect. It is essential to be aware of the classroom dynamics, and



We shall look at some specific writing forms:

- 1) Paragraph writing
  - writing instructions
  - writing a descriptive paragraph
- 2) Letter writing
- 3) Writing a story
- 4) Writing a simple rhyme or poem

We shall take up report writing in detail. These are being taken up as examples of the classroom transactions of different types of process writing and the kind of support that may need to be given. It is, however, ultimately upto the teacher to decide what support to give and how to provide it.

#### 1) Support for Paragraph - writing

We have already discussed the pre-requisites of paragraph writing in the last unit. We shall just quickly recapitulate these over here, without going into details. The children need to be told that a paragraph is a group of sentences that are all about one idea. **A paragraph has only one main idea.** Each sentence tells us about that one main idea. The first sentence of all paragraphs is indented. The children can be asked to look at different paragraphs and state the main idea of each. Make sure that the paragraphs you give the children have a clear main idea. They could also be given some sentences about one idea and asked to arrange these in a paragraph. Ask them to identify the main idea. The children need to be told that a topic sentence tells us the main idea and that usually, the topic sentence is the first sentence. Each of the other sentences adds a supporting detail such as an example, a description, a reason and so on. The teacher then highlights the importance of correct order and sequencing to get a logical flow, particularly in a paragraph giving instructions or describing an event. Suitable 'order' words are introduced for example – first, then, after that, next, finally. Give children practice in reading and writing paragraphs, since it is a form of writing that they are likely to use quite often.

#### a) Writing instructions in a paragraph

Tell the children that you often give them instructions, but now its their turn to give instructions. This activity will demonstrate to the children the importance of giving complete instructions and of giving them in the correct order. Ask the children to give simple instructions for some simple everyday activity like peeling a banana, making a phone call, or emptying a sharpener. Write these on the board exactly as they are given. Do not give suggestions or make corrections. After the instructions have been given, ask the children to number these in the correct order. When the children are satisfied follow their instructions exactly. Do not assume any missing information. If the instructions cannot be followed, ask the children to improve them.

Stress the fact that there are two important things to remember

1. Be sure to tell enough.
2. Tell the steps in order.

You could tell the students to write in the present tense. Show them why and how. Also reinforce action words or verbs. After this pre-writing experience, children can be asked to list possible topics for a paragraph of instructions. They can choose from the list – and decide who these are for. After the task is completed let each receiver actually carry out the instructions and give a feedback!

#### b) Writing a descriptive paragraph

The children would be asked to write a short paragraph describing an object, a person or an animal. The primary focus is on using rich and exact descriptive language. The children are given practice in listing and classifying sense words.

Give the children a paragraph in which the descriptive words are missing. Let the children add a word that describes colour, shape size, sound, smell, touch or taste. Let children make lists of words that come under each of the above categories. This is an effective way of helping children use all their senses when they are describing something.

Next tell the children that when they write a description, it is important to try and use exact words, that give a clear picture. Give the children some practice. For example, ask children to change the underlined word in each of the sentences given below to a more exact word. You could provide the exact words in a box.

1. The apples tasted good (sweet) rainy,
2. The flowers are red (roses) soft,
3. The dog's fur is nice (soft) raced,
4. Irfan went after the ball (raced) sweet,
5. The bad weather lasted a long time (rainy) roses

Tell the children that writing exact words helps the reader to get a detailed picture. Words like 'good', 'bad', 'nice', are vague or fuzzy words. Sometimes we need to ask the questions, what ?, how ?, where ?, when ?, who ?, to make sure that we are using exact words. If you want to describe a new toy how will you describe it? What if you say it is a nice toy? What picture will the reader have? If you say it is a large, red, soft, furry, toy will the reader have a clearer picture? You might ask the children to ask such questions about each sentence they write. Ask the children to play guessing games, where one child describes an object, and the others guess it.

After these experiences the children will be ready to write a descriptive paragraph.

## 2. Support for Letter-writing

You would need to :

a) review different kinds of letters, for different purposes and occasions. For example a friendly letter, a thank you letter, a get-well letter or an invitation. It's a good idea to actually bring in samples to show and discuss with the children. Let the children know that they will actually be posting the letters they write, so they would need to think carefully about what kind of letter to write. You may want to take the children through all the steps of writing a letter as a group, before they write individual letters, in which the whole class would need to decide who they want to write to and what they want to say.

b) The children need to identify the parts of a letter and be able to write these in the correct places.

- The date (which tells us when the letter was written)
- The greeting
- The body (i.e. the main part of the letter)
- The closing or salutation (i.e. saying good bye)
- The name (i.e. who wrote the letter).

The children could discuss different types of greetings and closings. They would need to know which words in the greeting and closing begin with capital letters. Where are the commas used?

As practice, children could be given a letter with some blanks which they would be required to fill in. The children would need to be clear about the purpose of each part of the letter.

## 3) Support for Story-writing

In the previous unit, we had explored story writing with beginners, where we had confined ourselves to a story written in one paragraph, because we were working with

very little children. With a more advanced group of children, we can introduce the different elements of a story. First of all, children need to know that there are many types of stories. There are make-believe stories, like fairy-tales and true stories. There are sad, funny, scary or exciting stories. Some stories have a lesson to teach us, while some stories are very old and come to us from our grandmothers, these are called folk tales. Try and make connections with the stories children have read or heard. The children could be asked for examples of each type. You could make a class chart. Actually writing down the names of some stories children have read under each of these categories. This could be made into an attractive poster and put up in the class. Such activities greatly motivate the children to read and become excited about books. In addition to this they help children to make connections between their reading and writing.

Once the children are clear about different types of stories, they would need to know the different parts of a story, namely that each story has:

- a) **Characters** it is about a person or persons or animals or other creatures (may be from outer space) The characters have names.
- b) **Setting** - it has a place and time. The story happens somewhere. It could be in a forest, in school, in outerspace, in a village, on a holiday trip, in a palace. It happens at some time.
- c) **Plot** - it has action. The plot is in three parts.

**The beginning** - where the characters and setting are generally introduced and the readers' interest is captured.

**The middle** - where something happens or in other words there are some events. Generally there is a problem that needs to be sorted out.

**The end** - which tells how things get sorted out.

You may want to take the children through the process of choosing a story idea or ideas by making a class chart. Write the headings shown below, on the board. Then have the children give you story ideas. List these on the chart.

#### Sample story chart

Characters	Setting	What happens
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If children prefer to make individual charts, they could do so. They should discuss their charts in small groups. They should take time to think carefully about their ideas before they write.

Grammar reinforcement could focus on action – words and their correct usage, as well as descriptive words. You may for instance want to reinforce the use of the past perfect tense. You may want to reinforce linking devices and order in the organisation of ideas. Writing of stories would provide a suitable context for actually practising such grammatical structures.

#### 4) Support for Writing a Simple Rhyme or Poem

Students must first be able to identify rhymes in the spoken form before they can be expected to find them in the written form. You may want to prepare exercises of the following kind to be done orally and then in writing.

Tell the children that you will say certain words. They are to identify the one that does not rhyme. Use familiar sets of words. For example -

1. pot, hot, tree, got
2. pan, man, can, table.

Read out samples of funny poems, rhymes, descriptive poems. Let the children get a feel of different kinds of poems. Let the children know that poems are primarily for enjoyment. Let children bring and share poems they like. Let children look at images in poems. They could draw pictures of what they imagined when they heard a poem. Children need to feel the music in poems. They could actually give tunes to some poems and sing them. Give them a feel of the rhythm. It's a good idea to give a framework for writing a poem in the beginning. This has already been discussed in Unit 2.

**What is the teacher's role in a process writing class?**

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### **18.3 PROCESS WRITING AT A MORE ADVANCED LEVEL**

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While looking at the classroom transaction of process writing with beginners we took up a sample of story writing. We shall now take a detailed look at the classroom transaction of report writing, through the different stages of the writing process. We shall use this as an indication of how process writing can be transacted at a more advanced level, and the role of the teacher at each stage. We shall begin with the pre- writing stage.

#### **18.3.1 Pre-writing**

Before getting the children to write a report it is advisable to give children some skills in researching and doing reference work, which are useful for the purpose of report writing. It will be useful to give children some ideas about identifying and using different resources such as:

1. **Finding words in a Dictionary** - Looking for meanings and definitions
2. **Using the Library** - Children should be able to locate fiction, non-fiction and reference books. They may be taught how to use the card catalogue when they are old enough.
3. **Using an encyclopaedia** - to find information about a subject. They may learn how to distinguish between volumes and identify keywords.
4. **Using a table of contents** - to locate a general topic in a book
5. **Using an index** - to locate specific information in a book. They also learn to differentiate between main topics and sub topics.

It is advisable to team up with the librarian. During the library period the children could then be broken into smaller groups and familiarised with the above. The teacher needs to grab every opportunity within and outside the writing class to reinforce the various pre-writing skills listed above. It is not practical to do everything within the writing class. Sometimes it becomes important to tie up with other subject teachers. The pre-writing activities need to reinforce the basic technicalities that are required for writing a report. In addition to the reference skills that we talked about there are some other useful skills, required for report writing that you may want to reinforce. For example:

1. Distinguishing facts and opinions.
2. Taking notes
3. Making an outline. Students learn correct outline form and practice writing an outline.
4. Writing a paragraph from an outline : students practice generating a topic sentence from a main topic and supporting sentences from the subtopics in an outline.

**Distinguishing facts from opinions-** As a start, it is useful for the children to be able to distinguish facts from opinions. Children need to know that a fact is a statement that everyone agrees is true, while an opinion is a statement of thought or feeling. Give the students practice in separating factual sentences from those giving opinions.

Next the children would need to be equipped with certain **pre-report writing skills:**

1. Taking notes
2. Making an outline.
3. Writing a paragraph from an outline.

### 1. Taking Notes:

This is a way of remembering what you have read. Tell the children that when they write notes, they should write just enough words to remember the main ideas and the important facts. Give the children some practice in writing notes.

### 2. Making an Outline

An outline is a plan. It is a way of organising ideas. Tell the children that an outline can help them put their ideas together and arrange them in order. The notes that children take can be made into an outline. The children could be given an example. Lets take an example:

Tell the children that an outline has different parts which may be represented diagrammatically as :

Main idea – topic sentence tells the main idea.

Sub topics – other sentences that tell them about a main idea.

Have the children compare a set of notes with an outline which has been developed from them. Highlight the format of an outline i.e. the main topic has a Roman numeral with a full stop before it. It has no full stop after it. A subtopic is marked with a capital letter and a fullstop. The first word of each subtopic and main topic begins with a capital letter. An outline also has a title. An example:

#### Notes

What is special about an insect's body?  
 –body divided into three parts  
 –hard outside covering instead of bones  
 –six legs, two pairs of wings

In what ways do insects help people?  
 –eat decayed things  
 –eat other harmful insects  
 –help plants make flowers/ seeds  
 –give honey, silk, resin etc.

#### Outline

All about Insects

I. An insect's body

a) Body divided into three parts.

b) Hard outside covering.

c) Six legs and two pairs of wings

d) Two antennae used for feeling.

II. How insects help people.

a) Eat things that are harmful.

b) Eat other harmful insects.

c) Help plants make flowers.

d) Give honey and other useful products.

Remind the children that in an outline the questions from the notes become the main topic and the answers become sub-topics. They will now see how the main topic and the sub-topics become a paragraph of sentences that tell us about one main idea.

### 3. Writing a Paragraph from an Outline

Tell the children that a paragraph can be written from a well-planned outline. Use the main topic to write the topic sentence of the paragraph. Write the sub-topics as complete sentences following the topic sentence. The children need to remember to indent the paragraph.

Give children some practice in writing notes, making an outline from the notes, and then finally get them to write one, two or three paragraphs from their outlines as a part of report writing. The children are now equipped with some basic skills and conventions of report writing.

### 18.3.2 The Writing Process

We shall take up a sample of report-writing with older and more experienced writers. We shall go through the entire process within a classroom context just like in the earlier case. You will notice the differences in the teachers' strategies when dealing with more advanced learners. You will also begin to realise how pre-writing activities provided the structured input to build the basic skills and knowledge required for a particular writing form, which in this case is a report.

Introduce report writing by drawing the children's attention to the difference between fact and opinion, which the children have already been exposed to. Tell the children that when they write a description or a story, they include their own ideas, feelings and experiences. However to write a report they should only write facts about the topic. They should not include their own ideas or experiences. The skill of drawing their own inferences and writing their views on the topic, is an advanced one, and one that children at this age find difficult. We therefore, confine ourselves to the more developmentally appropriate form of writing factual reports only. The children would need to decide the purpose of the report, namely, who it is for. This purpose will influence the choice of organisation and the choice of language.

Introduce the steps of report writing:

- Step 1 Choose a topic
- Step 2 Plan the report
- Step 3 Write the report
- Step 4 Revise the report
- Step 5 Proof read
- Step 6 Make a final copy to share

We shall now look at all the stages in detail.

#### 1. Step one: Choose a Topic

Discuss what subjects make a good report. Tell the children there are many, many good topics for reports. The best topic however is the one that interests the child. If a child chooses a boring topic, then the report will probably be boring too. It's important to make the children realise that all topics are not suitable. Have the children suggest topics for reports, try and confine these to a general subject area. List each suggestion on the board. Stop when you have five or six suggestions. Now discuss the suitability of each.

For example:-

1. My red bicycle
2. Tandem bicycles
3. New kinds of bicycles
4. Making a toy bicycle
5. My favourite bicycle
6. Tricycles

Sample discussion:

**Topic 1** might be a better topic for a description than for a report. **Topic 2** is a good report topic, since it is unusual and therefore interesting. We could find interesting facts as well as pictures. **Topic 3** seems too broad. **Topic 4** would be giving us instructions and not facts. **Topic 5** would give us opinions and not facts. **Topic 6** is a good topic, but it is about a common object. We are likely to find the most interesting information on **topic 2**. Therefore this would be considered the best choice.

After this discussion ask the children to suggest other suitable topics for a report. Let the class finally select a topic. If necessary this could be done through a vote.

## 2. Step two: Plan the Report

Explain to the children that they usually begin writing their first drafts after they choose their topics, because the ideas for writing come from experiences and observations. A report, however, is different. For their reports they will be using facts; so before they begin writing, they must find the facts about their topics in books, encyclopaedias or other references. They would need to make their notes and plan their outlines. The planning step is the most important step in writing a report. Assure the children that if they do their research and note-taking carefully, they should have little difficulty in writing their reports.

It's a good idea to divide the class into small groups of three or four children. Let each group do their independent referencing, note-taking and preparing of outlines. Give the children a suggested list of reference material and where to find it. It would be useful for each group to share their outlines. Those children who have had problems will learn from the discussion of other children's outlines and the process they underwent. The children need to know that the most important part of planning a report is to decide on what facts to include. Point out that different people may have different ideas about what facts to include or what order makes the best sense. As they write their outlines they should think about the order of the details and arrange their subtopics logically. Depending upon the needs of the class you may need to do a quick review of how to take notes or how to prepare an outline. Some children would need help with their research and reference work. Teach the children to write the source of their information at the bottom of the page, so that they can always go back and check a point that is not clear.

## 3. Step three: Write the Report.

Tell the children that writing the first draft of the report is not the same as writing other drafts. Point out that because they have their facts organised in their outlines, much of the work is already done. Ask the students to use their outlines to write the first drafts of their reports. They could work in small groups or in pairs. Explain to the children that in this step they should concentrate on getting their facts and ideas from their outlines into paragraphs. Remind students not to worry about errors in spelling, capital letters, punctuation and grammatical usage. There will be time to make these corrections later on. Right now they need to focus on getting the facts into a logical sequence in a clear way. It may be useful to put up some guidelines such as :

1. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Use the main topics from the outline.
2. Write the subtopics as complete sentences
3. Write only facts in your report
4. Write the names of the books or encyclopaedias where you found your facts. Write them at the end of your report.

You may want to go through the first draft process as a whole class activity.

It's important to remember that at this stage we are introducing the format of a report in its simplest form. At a later stage the children would be writing one or two paragraphs on each sub-topic. This would be done in an older class. Children must keep their first drafts in their folders.

#### 4. Step four: Revise the Report

Tell the children that the purpose of reading a report is to present information about a particular subject in a clear and interesting way. Then others can enjoy reading the report and learn about the topic. Children will read out their reports to their peers in small groups. They will respond to each other's reports by asking questions such as :

- How did you decide on these facts?
- Could you add more detail? How did you choose the order of subtopics?
- Could you give more information about....?
- They could also add some positive suggestions.

Tell the children not to look for errors in spellings, capital letters or punctuation at this stage.

It is useful to put up some sample questions that children need to look into as a guideline:

1. What is the topic sentence for each paragraph? Does it state the main idea? Could it be better?
2. Do the other sentences keep to the main idea? Does each sentence tell a fact?
3. Are the sentences interesting? Can details be added?

You may if you like take the whole class through a process of revising one piece of writing as a whole class activity. If the children are revising on their own in small groups, the teacher needs to go around and spend a little time with each group to see that they are on the right track. Tell the children not to get up and come to you, as this creates chaos, but instead to raise their hands whenever they have a problem. Remind children to speak clearly and listen attentively. Tell them that it is a good idea to say something nice about their partners' report before they politely ask questions or make useful suggestions. Encourage children to make notes during these discussions or conferences with their peers, so that they will remember their listener's suggestions. Also encourage children to be open and receptive to these suggestions. It is however ultimately upto the writers to adopt or reject the suggestions, since they have the ownership of the piece of writing.

#### 5. Step Five: Proofread

Tell the students that they have worked very hard to make their reports interesting and informative, now it is time to proofread the reports and look for errors that would get in the readers' way. Explain to the children that when people read something that is written correctly, they enjoy it more.

It's a good idea to display a piece of incorrect writing on the board. Let this not be any child's work. Try and put in the common errors you noticed while you went around. Ask the children to look for errors in capitalisation, punctuation, spellings and some particular type of grammatical usage. Have volunteers come upto the board and mark corrections. You could teach children some simple signs and symbols which would help them mark errors while proofreading. It is a good idea to check the children's proof-read drafts before they make their final copies.

#### 6. Step six: Make a Final Copy

Ask children to make neat copies of their reports so that others can read and enjoy them and learn something new! They could draw or paste pictures if they want to. Encourage them to be creative and original. They could if they like make posters, models or collages to go with their reports. The reports could then be shared with other children either through bulletin boards or at a sharing time.



ne of the things a teacher does during the writing process is to have children help one another to revise or edit. We have all experienced the need for outside readers to enhance our perspective on what we write. This is a good natural process for the children to learn. The idea of the teacher as a sole audience is very limiting. When children find that their peers do not understand, they are involved more actively in finding out what is missing. However, children need to be taught very carefully how to respond to one another's work.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

ne of the things the teacher does during the process writing classes is to have children help one another to revise or edit. We have all experienced the need for outside readers to respond to our writing and through their feedback, enhance our perspective on what we write or clarify some ideas that are not clear, or change the order in which we have presented the ideas. This is a useful natural process for the children to learn. The idea of the teacher as the sole audience is very limiting. When children find that their peers do not understand what they have said, they are more actively involved in finding out what is missing. However as we have discussed earlier, children need to be taught how to respond to one another's work in a positive way.