The creative potential of metaphorical writing in the literacy classroom

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> ABSTRACT: Creativity is difficult to define and a universal definition remains elusive. However, common words associated with creativity affirm that it concerns novelty and originality, hallmarks of many great and enduring texts. Students can also be encouraged to surface original ideas through constructing their own creative texts. This article outlines such a project that focuses on metaphorical writing with students in the primary school setting. When teachers foster creativity in the literacy classroom, they provide open-ended lessons, encourage variety and innovation, and allow time to play with ideas. Engaging students in writing their own metaphorical texts is one way in which students can generate novel responses and multiple interpretations as outlined in this paper. The students' texts reveal unique voices that range from the playful to the dramatic in their creative exploration of what it means to be human. The potential of such writing for engaging students is discussed alongside the value of metaphorical writing for encouraging emotional exploration, imagination and sheer enjoyment.

> KEYWORDS: Creativity, metaphor, children's writing, emotion.

INTRODUCTION

> We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race and the human race is filled with passion. Now, medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love – these are what we stay alive for! (Mr Keating in *The Dead Poets' Society*).

It is clear that Mr Keating was not referring to the functional elements of his subject, but rather to the creative power of English, in this case poetry, to stir the heart as well as the mind, and to open both to the joy of richly enduring creative possibilities. In the film he disdains the formal analysis of texts by crude evaluative methods and instead challenges his students to "find their own voice" and think for themselves. From poetry to Shakespeare, English as an exciting and creative art was fundamental to his espoused philosophy.

This article highlights the importance and relevance of creativity, outlining some of the literature in the field that focuses upon ways to foster creativity. This is followed by a description of a project on teaching metaphorical writing in the primary classroom, which is illustrated by children's creative responses. Lastly, the potential of such writing experiences is discussed in terms of imagination, personal expression and emotional knowing, wherein children can not only find their own voice but invent new and multiple voices.

CREATIVITY

Early research in the creativity field focused upon person or process or product as separate entities, whereas contemporary thinking has generally focused more upon the ways in which person (for example, Gardner, 1993) process (for example, Torrance, 1984), product (for example, Amabile, 1983) and press or environment interact (for example, Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1996). This interaction between variables is a more holistic, less fragmented way of viewing the "enterprise" of creativity. It also has the logical advantage of illuminating the rich connections between what people may produce, how they produce it and under what circumstances. There have been many attempts at defining creativity but there remains no one universal definition. However, common words associated with creativity, amongst the many definitions are novelty, newness and originality.

It is this originality of expression that is evident when students in the literacy classroom are encouraged to find their own voice; and creative writing should naturally draw upon students' unique views of the world. However, such creativity is at risk in a curriculum that emphasises adherence to narrow assessment protocols and the achievement of targets and good test results above all else. In the United Kingdom, USA, New Zealand and Australia, numeracy and literacy are emphasised in education policy as the core business of schools. In the UK this has led to the daily "literacy hour" and a requirement for more prescription of pedagogy and content including more whole class teaching (Hancock & Mansfield, 2001). These developments need not necessarily restrict creativity, but the *National Literacy Strategy: Framework for Teaching* (DfEE, 1998) is very detailed in structure, reflecting the view that students "acquire skills in an incremental way" (Hancock & Mansfield, 2001, p. 98) via the formal instruction of the teacher. Tight curricula specifications including prescribed textbooks and high stakes testing also dominates USA education to a large extent (Hattie, 2002). Interestingly enough, more recent policy developments in the UK via *The Primary National Strategy* clearly signal a softening of the prescriptive practices such as the literacy hour with its stightly defined goals, towards teachers exercising greater professional judgement (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006). Current policy stresses the importance of both excellence and *enjoyment* in the classroom, the latter being a feature omitted from earlier pronouncements.

At the same time in New Zealand, there are some concerns that the current literacy emphasis in both primary and secondary schools (particularly the latter) tends toward teaching to an exemplar in order to meet the demands of an assessable task. While this can result in more focused learning of skills, it can equally restrict and constrain the students' responses, especially when it comes to creative writing (Locke, 2005). The latest draft New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006), however, highlights the need for greater teacher flexibility and the engagement of students in rich and authentic learning. Enjoyment is also emphasised in the draft when students both make meaning and create meaning "for themselves or others" (p. 15). Given the potential of creative writing to tap a wellspring of personal and imaginative expression, there is potential for much enjoyment and originality when creativity is fostered in the literacy classroom.

FOSTERING CREATIVITY

Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1996) argued that instead of asking, "What is creativity?", the more productive question to ask is, "Where is creativity?" In identifying those conditions under which creativity is likely to flourish, teachers have some influence in providing an environment wherein creativity can emerge and be enhanced. If classrooms are to take creativity seriously, we need to also know how it manifests itself in the context of the literacy programme.

The literature suggests that open-ended activities encourage creativity, since these allow for many solutions and invite personal and multiple interpretations. Such tasks can enhance students' motivation, interest and involvement (de Souza Fleith, 2000; Maker, 1993). In addition, open-ended activities require the use of more complex processes (such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation). Craft (2000) describes creativity as idea generation embedded in possibility thinking, which necessitates that one be open to a wide range of solutions. Creativity acknowledges that there is little that is absolutely "right" or "wrong" in many situations, but rather, that multiple solutions or further questions exist. This requires that pedagogy reflects this view of knowledge and relinquish the tendency to present information as static and having a single answer or perspective.

A further way to foster creativity is to encourage different responses, variety and innovation (de Souza Fleith, 2000). This is not a clarion call for "anything goes", as it is irresponsible to accept cruel and inhumane practices for the sake of acknowledging variety. Celebrating difference however, is about acceptance of the eccentric and extraordinary, rather than a banal and naive acceptance of all extremes; it is about delighting in the wondrous word-play of Margaret Mahy; it is about living vicariously through the childhood of Mona Williams as she spins her stories about growing up in Guyana; and it is about savouring the uniqueness of Peter Jackson's or the Coen brothers' films. In addition, those teachers who affirm, model and support creativity are more likely to foster students' creative abilities (Rejskind, 2000).

Fostering creativity also means giving students time to try out new ideas, to practise and to innovate (de Souza Fleith, 2000). However, they are more likely to develop an innovative way to solve a problem if they have some strategies already established. Encouraging creativity is not about abdicating responsibility to teach and just letting students develop what they will. This can be a recipe for mediocre, substandard work. Students need both time and materials to work through concepts and ideas, to trial these and make changes as necessary. The teacher's role is to stimulate and challenge, so that students are encouraged to go beyond the information given to consider nuance, uncertainty and multiple solutions.

The ability to find a relationship or common bond between two or more previously unrelated ideas, concepts or items in order to solve a problem returns repeatedly as a central element of the creative process. It is this feature that is evident in analogy and metaphor. The combination and reorganisation of existing knowledge can generate new ideas or novel solutions to problems. Such creative thinking requires adaptability, flexibility and more than the mere recall of information. Metaphors "work" by juxtaposing elements in unexpected and unusual ways such as, "Every betrayal contains a perfect moment, a coin stamped heads or tails with salvation on the other

side. Betrayal is a friend I've known for a long time, a two-faced goddess looking forward and back with a clear, earnest suspicion of good fortune" (Kingsolver, 1998, p. 469). The forming of such metaphors reveals the creative process of combining unrelated ideas (betrayal and coins; goddesses and suspicion) in unique ways. This definition of the creative process also forms the basis of synectics, which is commonly used in business settings (Gordon, 1974). (Synectics comes from the Greek word 'synecticos', which means the joining together of apparently unrelated elements.)

The following analogies and metaphors from literature exemplify the creative use of language, when relationships are "forced" between unrelated elements:

> Woke at midnight, swimming up through aubergine nightmare
> (Proulx, 1994, p. 29).

> Trousers a sullen crookedness of wool (Proulx, 1994, p. 37).

> The ocean twitched like a vast cloth spread over snakes (Proulx, 1994, p. 193).

> The clock gulps softly, eating seconds whole while she waits
> (Kingsolver, 1993, p. 4).

> The houses sit on their handkerchiefs and early in the morning begin
> to sneeze (Grace, 1987, p. 67).

It is not common to associate aubergines with nightmares, trousers with sullenness, oceans with snakes, clocks with gulping or houses with sneezing, yet the juxtaposition of these very different items creates images which are powerfully evocative. The impact of such creative language produces unique and effective ways of viewing and capturing the world. It is relatively straightforward to recognise the creativity of this language when compared with more hackneyed or cliche expressions such as waking from a nightmare "drenched in sweat"; trousers "looking like they were slept in"; or the ocean "dotted with white caps".

EXPLORING METAPHOR IN THE LITERACY CLASSROOM

Metaphor and analogy such as those above assist students with: thinking in the abstract about concrete events; summarising an idea, phenomenon or feeling in an original and personal way; relating seemingly disparate elements to create powerful symbols. According to Ortony (1975), "metaphors are necessary and not just nice" (p. 45) and he explained that there are various ways in which metaphor can facilitate learning. Metaphor can aid compactness in that chunks of well-known experience can be transferred to less well-known contexts. Metaphor can also impress a concept or idea though the powerful image or vividness of the expression. In addition, metaphor can capture the inexpressible in that what a metaphor conveys is virtually impossible to express in any other way without losing the potency of the message.

While it could be argued that all language is imprecise and requires flexibility of thought to create understanding, metaphors can be particularly challenging in that they are not intended to be literally interpreted. As Winner (1997) explained:

> A novel metaphor surprises the listener and challenges him [sic] to solve a puzzle by mapping attributes and relations between the stated or implied elements being linked....Literal descriptions do no such thing but simply describe the world in established ways. In the sense that metaphors force us to understand one thing in terms of another, metaphors must elicit cognitive processes not ordinarily called upon by literal language (p. 17).

The intellectual exercise of constructing metaphors is a process which enables people to explore ideas, develop insights and communicate complex concepts in ways which can be accessible to others. As Winner (1997) stated, "metaphor is at the root of the creativity and openness of language" (p. 16). The literature on metaphor persuasively conveys evidence of the creative process – ideas are juxtaposed in new and unique ways, original images are formed and succinct insights are captured through metaphorical expression. A project which capitalises on the creative potential of metaphor writing is outlined next.

TEACHING STUDENTS TO WRITE THROUGH METAPHOR

On a number of occasions, a pedagogical process that develops children's metaphorical writing has been undertaken by the author. Three classes of children (approximately 30 in each class) in New Zealand schools were involved, plus two writing interest groups. Each of the three classes were at different schools and were selected because the author was invited by the classroom teachers to teach a creative writing lesson. The three schools were all situated in a small city and varied in terms of ethnic, class and cultural mix. One school was predominantly white and of middle to upper socio-economic status (class). The other two schools had much greater cultural diversity (34 different ethnic groups for instance at one school) and children from a range of socio-economic status backgrounds. The first class consisted of 10 and 11-year-olds; the other two consisted of 7 and 8-year-olds. The two writing interest groups were part of independent parent-run organizations (children with special abilities and child cancer) and included small groups (approximately 10 in each) of boys and girls aged 6 to 11 years. Again, the author was invited to work with these groups. The variety of children involved in terms of age and socio-economic status, therefore, was serendipitous rather than a concerted effort to ensure diversity. However, working with such a wide range of children (some 140 in total) provided useful insight into the way in which this creative writing process appears to hold meaning for young people from many and varied backgrounds.

The lesson was undertaken in the children's classrooms (in the case of the schools), in a hall and at a parent's home (in the case of the interest groups).

Child volunteers were asked to read aloud to the class or group vignettes of personification from Gendler (1988), who explored dimensions of humanity from pleasure to pain. Gendler wrote about these human emotions and experiences as if they were real people. For example: "Worry has written the definitive work on

nervous habits. She etches lines on people's foreheads when they are not paying attention. She makes lists of everything that can go wrong while she is waiting for the train…" (p. 3); "Sensuality does not wear a watch but she always gets to the essential places on time…as a young girl she was often scolded for going barefoot…" (p. 97); Anxiety "…likes to visit me late at night when I am alone and exhausted…he kissed me on the forehead once and I had a headache for two years…" (p. 13); "Anger sharpens kitchen knives at the local supermarket on the last Wednesday of the month. His face is scarred from adolescent battles. He has never been very popular…" (p. 69).

After sharing a number of these, the children were asked to suggest human qualities or emotions and were then guided to focus on one in particular. This "quality" was discussed as a class as if it were a person they might meet. For example, one class chose "creativity". Therefore, we discussed what sort of house Creativity would live in, what job he or she might have, what kind of clothes Creativity would wear, what hobbies, passions or past-times Creativity might enjoy and who his or her friends might be. The children readily suggested various ideas and we discussed how well their suggestions matched with concepts of creativity. The children were then encouraged to select a quality or emotion of their own to write about. In each class the author has worked with, the children have shown much enthusiasm for writing in this manner and every child in either a class or an interest group was able to construct a text as suggested by the lesson with the exception of three children who had arrived as refugees that week from another country and who were new learners of English. All of the children who participated enthusiastically gave their consent to have their work published.

CHILDREN'S METAPHORICAL TEXTS

The ways in which various children decided to interpret the task described above varied considerably, as evidenced below. While each child personified an emotion of choice, their interpretations reveal different approaches, allusions and textual devices. Some provided what amounted to a list of characteristics and traits, attending closely to the structure that was introduced. For example, a young boy wrote:

> *Madness*
>
> He wears a bright red silk coat
> And lives in a world of anger.
> He eats chillies and wasabi
> And drinks wasabi water.
> His job is a rates collector.
> His nature is fire.
> He wants to kill Happiness.
> Watch out, he is slinky.
>
> (Richard, age 8)

Richard's choice of "hot" words (red, anger, wasabi, fire, kill) provides an internal consistency to his analysis of Madness. Clearly, Madness is a dangerous and cunning character whose intent is harmful. Richard's choice of chillies and wasabi tell us

something of his experience with these culinary challenges and reveals something of his family and cultural context. And his ability to link his knowledge of such hot food with Madness reveals a thoughtful and clever metaphor. While the action is literal (he eats chillies…), the association with Madness and the character chosen is metaphorical.

Other children created more of a narrative account of their character, constructing a story with action, setting and greater detail. In the following two examples the children seemed to enter the world of the chosen emotion and bring it to life:

Glum

Glum wears grey and black robes and cloaks
And he is 78 years old.
He lives in a dark, dark cave.
He hasn't really done anything mainly because he mopes around
And mutters to himself.
He has no friends
And he despises Laughter, Happiness and Humour
Because they take too much pleasure in life.
Glum's bed is made out of thunder clouds
And his pillow is lightning.
His only delight is in other people's UNHAPPINESS.
Beware of Glum he's on the prowl!

(Andrew D., age 10)

Adventurous

Adventurous wears a black shirt
Covered in all types of badges
From places he has visited
Parts of the world as far apart as Mt Everest
And the Japanese Trench
Or the freezing North Pole
And the steaming equator.

He doesn't have a real home
One settled place with friends and family.
He has a friend who sees him frequently
Called Curiosity.
They meet at isolated camp sites
In densely packed rain forests
Or on snowy peaks of mountains.

They share spicy foods
From far away places
With ingredients untried
And plan their next journey.

Adventurous never hesitates.
He always takes a risk.

(Andrew H., age 10)

Glum and Adventurous are two vividly contrasting characters – Glum has a distinctly pessimistic attitude and seems rather aimless, whereas Adventurous strides out into the world with the confidence of an avid explorer. While they both seem to prefer their own company, Adventurous has frequent meetings with Curiosity who seems to share his predilection for "exotic" locales and cuisine. The drive of one contrasts strongly with the lethargy of the other. These texts portray how wide-ranging human behaviour can be. They also indicate how self-fulfilling certain attitudes can be – it is little wonder that Glum remains so, given that he despises Laughter, Happiness and Humour. It is also of no surprise to learn that Adventurous takes risks, given the many geographical regions he has explored and his plans for future excursions. Adventurous is future oriented while Glum seems to dwell on issues. The psychological profiling indicated in these texts says much about the authors' understanding of these feelings and the implications for human behaviour.

Some children seemed to borrow from archetypal stories and classical themes to explore issues of sin, temptation and greed. And while the idea the boy below uses is not original, the *way* in which he has constructed his character shows wit and flair:

> *Secret*
>
> Secret is in a ruby-red car.
> He is dressed in a sky blue shirt and pants
> But deep inside him his soul is as black
> As the opals in a cave
> Reflecting away any good.
> He prances around like Excited or Handsome
> But he observes every detail
> And tells his boss Death
> Everything he sees.
>
> Death flings him a bag of gold coins
> And he scurries off from the underworld
> Up to the overworld
> Where he prances off again
> Ready to do anything
> For the gold coins he is carrying.
>
> (Shaun, age 9)

Themes of greed, bribery, vanity and corruption are evident in this drama which apparently borrows its plot from classical mythology. Shaun adds vitality and vividness to the actions of his characters with words such as "prances", "flings", "scurries" and "prances". Secret is not a passive character but one who is furtive, manipulative and open to extortion. This nine-year-old author reveals much about the behaviour of such devious characters and he indicates with considerable flourish how beguiling such villains can be.

In contrast to Shaun, Rosie created a text about Imagination, who is lyrical and aesthetically aware:

Imagination

Imagination wears a rainbow coloured coat,
She's friends with Joy and Beauty.
She works at a shop that sells dreams.
Her house is made out of musical notes
That speak very softly.
She likes to eat soap suds with cream.
She never wastes any of her time.
As a child she never played sport
Because she had such an imagination
And wanted to change the rules.

(Rosie, age 9)

Imagination is ephemeral and at home in the realm of fantasy. The images of pleasure are evoked by Rosie's choice of selling "dreams", having a house made of "musical notes that speak very softly" and eating "soap suds with cream". Rosie constructs Imagination as a gentle character, who nonetheless has her own mind and is certainly not afraid to play her own game. Rosie appears to capture the essence of imagination or, at least, a benevolent version of this human capacity

One could assume that the older children developed more sophisticated texts with greater attention to detail or more expressive language, yet one young girl composed the following text which has a strong mythical tone and does not bother with details of where Glory lives, what she wears, who her friends are and so forth. It seems that this young author did not need a suggested format at all:

Glory

Every day she will wait till sunset.
She is the daughter of the rise of the sun.
People believe she forms into the golden hemisphere at dawn
And fades at night.
She's clever and rays fling from her arms.
She's addicted to the fire's warning of night.
She will adore the brightness.

(Kate, age 7)

There is a distinctly spiritual dimension to Glory, and Kate's choice of structure is unique in comparison to the other children's interpretations. She appeared to abandon the structure that many others employed and developed a poetic description that captures the ethereal and profound nature of Glory.

Similarly, an older girl also captured the sense of her emotion in a few, carefully chosen words:

Passion

Passion is single-minded
She is an obsession

Demanding attention
Yet quiet in contemplation.

She can be a follower
As well as a leader.
Passion is her own style.

(Brie, age 11)

Some children chose issues that their teachers or parents reported were particularly pertinent for each child. A few children even volunteered that the emotion they chose to write about was indeed a strong feeling that they were (or had been) experiencing. For example:

Rage

Rage is Anger's brother.
Anger is a hurricane
And Rage is a tornado.
They are powerful and strong.
Rage is an eruption of red hot lava
Running down a volcano.
Anger is pitch black
Like the bottom of the ocean.
Rage throws spears of lightning and
Pushes fire through your veins.
Rage is an earthquake shattering buildings.
Rage is a powerful force
That causes total destruction.

(David, age 10)

Another girl wrote about Anger and composed three texts on the subject, pushing her pencil so hard during the event that she went right through her paper. Later she told her teacher, "You know that Anger I was writing about? That was me." This offering to her teacher reveals enormous trust and a sense of wanting to be heard and understood. Not every child will want to disclose thus and, certainly, not every metaphorical text is so intensely personal. However, in that case there appeared to be something very cathartic about the process for her.

One of the common statements made by teachers when discussing this approach to writing during subsequent professional development work in literacy, is that boys won't be interested. There is plenty of evidence from the work to date across a range of classrooms and children, that boys are just as keen on this metaphorical writing as girls. It seems evident that the choice of topic within the genre of personifying an emotion is what they find most liberating. With freedom to choose the emotion or quality they write about – a feature highlighted in fostering creativity – they are able to construct their own imaginative or dramatic response. Drama often features in their responses. A deputy principal of a low socio-economic school tried this approach to writing with his Year 5 class, which included a group of very reluctant boys who had writing avoidance down to a fine art (for example, they would protest that they had lost their pencils, couldn't find their paper, had no ideas and therefore couldn't start,

and various other reasons for not commencing). However, he was delighted to see that not only did this usually reluctant group get engaged, they produced some pieces that surprised him with their choices and their world-views, for example:

Love

Love wears red lipstick with red wooden high-heeled shoes.
She moves her hot-blooded legs on the rich floor.
She eats with a silver knife and fork and eats money and rich pork.
She drinks bubbly red wine with a crystal wine glass.
Her friend Joy, her thunder-fast boyfriend, happily picks her up for a date at a special restaurant.
She definitely hates sneaky black Anger.
She hopes he'll turn pinky and red just like a polka dot clown.
Love is the best pot of gold in your life.
She's an adult and would make a good girlfriend.

(Cole, age 9)

Anger

Anger wears a black leather jacket with scales and spikes.
He moves swiftly from dark alley to dark alley.
He eats rats, mice and any animal he can get to.
He drinks blood from innocent people
And is best friends with Fear and Annoyed.
His job is to go around in a gang killing Happiness.
His enemies are Happiness, Love and Excitement.
He is Angry.

(Kahu, age 9)

These responses from boys, who find writing a chore and whose socio-economic backgrounds are not middle-class, reveal fresh, dramatic and imaginative responses. Moreover, their teacher reported that this is the most they had ever written for any literacy task in the classroom.

A NOTE ON BOYS AND LITERACY

Much has been written about boys' achievement in literacy in recent years, and OECD (2001) figures show girls outperforming boys in most countries in both reading and writing. Moreover, *The National Education Monitoring Project* (Crooks, 2003) found that writing was the area where boys performed markedly worse than girls, especially in the poetic genre, which draws upon greater use of imagery and creative use of words such as metaphor.

The picture is somewhat complicated by the fact that New Zealand is represented in both the highest and lowest levels of achievement, showing a very large gap between those performing well and those who are not. Moreover, those from low socio-economic groups are over-represented in the poor performing group (Tunmer,

Chapman & Prochnow, 2004). Generally, boys from low socio-economic groups (especially Maori and Pacific Island students) are most at risk in literacy.

The response of these two boys from low-income backgrounds conveys an eagerness to engage with the creative use of metaphor. Despite the fact that these boys were reported to be highly resistant to writing, there appeared to be little resistance in their responses. In contrast, their teacher reported heightened engagement in the task. There is something liberating about creative writing like this that frees the author to call upon ideas and images of personal interest. While we can make this claim forcreative writing per se, the "structure" of this metaphor (personifying an emotion) provides a foundation from which authors can improvise. The description of an emotion as a character they could meet provides a wealth of possibilities, more so it would seem than if these boys were simply asked to write about Love or Anger. Through the language of metaphor, they can play with the idea of Love or Anger, inventing a narrative that explains their chosen emotion in ways that are both accessible and inventive. The boys are not asked to be creative or to choose particularly creative words, but rather to tell a story about their chosen topic – a story that appears to have a life of its own. When young writers experience this creative process, their voices are liberated and their motivation appears to be highly intrinsic. As Ortony (1975) explained, metaphor can capture that which seems inexpressible. For these boys who were reluctant writers, written expression became something benign and inviting.

Arguably, all of the young writers presented here show an ability to create a world related to their chosen emotion, a world which is their innovative response to how such an emotion might manifest itself as a person. New voices emerge as they bring their emotion to life. Such voices have a consistency of their own, framed by the child's narrative. This wealth of creative expression appears to come readily to children. Beyond the introduction of the idea as described earlier, teacher input was neither constant nor directive, and in every class (except for three new settlers for whom English was a brand new language) children have engaged readily with the personifying of emotion, making it theirs in unique and inventive ways.

EMOTION AND IMAGINATION

The transformative power of metaphors has long been recognised by the literature in terms of cognition and as a linguistic device. But these children's texts reveal that emotional exploration through metaphor is equally pertinent. Creating metaphors like these and communicating them to others seemed to help children convey the essence of a feeling. As Winner and Gardner argued, "a metaphor is often the only way of communicating precisely and efficiently what one means" (1993, p. 429). These texts reveal something of each child's culture in the broad sense (their world view, their values, their identity, their experiences) and something about their depth of emotional knowing. The process of metaphor-making itself may well be an emotional event, as these texts seem to tap the child's inner world, revealing issues of personal and social import. As May (2001) argued, "one's individual and social identities, and their complex interconnections, are inevitably mediated in and through language" (p. 132). Moreover, much of "self understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 233). This

opportunity to explore social and emotional issues through metaphor could be both a cathartic and self-enhancing process.

Such metaphorical writing can convey a depth of understanding of emotions, dreams, fears and beliefs. The writing provides a way of exploring a range of human emotions alongside the opportunity to play with context and character. The young authors published here reveal something of their unique views of humanity through a vehicle that encourages originality.

Torrance (1995) explained that creative writing like this can act as a legitimate and socially acceptable way to reduce pressure, reveal concerns and develop personal insights. Many argue that embedding learning in students' personal and social concerns intensifies their engagement (for example, Beane, 1997; Efland, 2002). While some of these texts written by children are not necessarily directly based on personal experience, the choices are theirs and are made with obvious discernment. The choices they made enabled them to explore the creative potential of the emotion or quality and their imaginative responses reveal depth of understanding as well as witty or poignant insights. These are not banal responses to a writing task, but rather personally chosen topics that indicate passion, ownership and originality.

A few of the choices children made did seem serious rather than playful. Ethically however, it was not appropriate to pry into children's private thoughts and question them on the whys and wherefores of their choice. It seemed far too invasive and ethically unsound to act in this way, given that the activity was intended to be educational and not aiming to be therapeutic. Nonetheless, a few children did explicitly claim some personal connection to their chosen emotion and freely volunteered this information. The metaphorical texts revealed a way to externalise strong feelings in relatively safe ways (see for example, Rage), to find a voice for things that may otherwise be difficult or impossible to express. As Ortony (1975) suggested, metaphors in such cases "are necessary and not just nice" (p. 45).

It is important to stress, however, that others seemed to have simply chosen feelings that enabled them to playfully enter another realm by taking on an imaginative persona for the sheer delight of the process. In doing so, these children revealed insights and emotional understanding that was either poignant, or humorous, or compelling, or all three. It seems likely that the vividness of their expression was enhanced by the sustained personification they achieved. Using metaphor enabled the taking of multiple perspectives, as children spun their tales about the beguiling nature of Secret, the despondency of Glum and the inventiveness of Imagination.

Narratives about emotion and human qualities reveal how many issues are constructed in a social, cultural and political context. What becomes important in a child's life is the result of complex factors from many sources. Metaphors can be a vehicle through which he or she takes a position of insight and personal growth, or simply enjoys the immersion in a narrative that is inventive. According to Petrie and Oshlag (1993), people "can learn to produce metaphors and thereby form new connections, view things in a different way, and generate explanations" (p. 607). Their metaphors certainly revealed a maturity of emotional knowing that generally belied their years. Their texts seem to support the notion that "a metaphor holds the most truth in the smallest amount of space" (Costa, 2002).

Richardson (1988) argued that personal insight and growth are fundamentals of creativity, and in creative writing, children should choose a topic with which they have an emotional bond. Richardson believed this helps their sensitivity to, and awareness of, deep feelings. Through such writing he asserted that

> ...the individual is actively involved in learning to understand and enjoy the self and the interactions which arise in living, looking, feeling, touching, dreaming, wondering, loving, thinking, hating and the like (1988, p. xii).

It seems that the children deliberately chose an emotion that intrigued or absorbed or concerned them in some way, and their affective exploration resonated with authenticity. If the writing of these texts helps children in any way to understand feelings, then metaphor may be especially appropriate for emotional knowing. Moreover, the externalising process of writing about an emotion or quality as if they were a person liberates the writer to explore numerous possibilities and therefore meet the criteria of being open-ended, which is stressed in the aforementioned creativity literature. In addition, the vehicle of metaphor provides a way to play with words in ways that are playful and evocative. In effect, possibility thinking (Craft, 2000) is given wings.

CONCLUSION

Eisner (1994) argues for expressive and flexible objectives in the Arts so that possibilities are expanded and teachers do not restrict students' responses in ways that are narrow, predictable and pedestrian. This means that teachers have a responsibility to be open to the unexpected and refrain from over-determining how students respond, particularly when a creative response is sought. With metaphorical writing, as the texts in this paper reveal, students can show remarkable discernment and sense of "fit" (Eisner, 2000) when given the opportunity and need to do so.

If teachers of English wish to tap students' potential in creative writing, then this seems to be a non-threatening, inclusive way to facilitate this. Moreover, teachers may find some surprises when students respond in unpredictable ways, revealing new and multiple voices, and they may find that children have the capacity to create metaphors that reveal insights and depth of human understanding that belie their chronological ages. For children, there is the freedom to express themselves through the narratives they construct. In this regard, there are no rules other than the rules the young authors themselves create within their fictional worlds. This does not mean that quality should be sacrificed and the skilled teacher of English will be alert to ensuring students are being stretched and stimulated.

Finally, it may seem obvious that creative writing should be an enjoyable (and challenging) undertaking. However, it can be argued that enjoyment has been at risk owing to the multiple demands on teachers, including the increased requirements of assessment and accountability. Talented teachers of English, like Mr Keating in the *Dead Poets' Society* mentioned in the introduction, have always recognised the joy that comes from engagement in literacy. But teachers cannot expect all students to simply capture the teacher's enthusiasm or adopt some external voice determined by set instructions on how to write creatively. Students need and deserve opportunities to

create their own metaphors – metaphors that enable the creative exploration of emotional depths, and that surface original voices.

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