DOCUMENT RESUME

ABSTRACT
        A study was designed to identify and codify
behavioral trends in the composing process of early writers'
narrative attempts in literate environment instructional settings.
The study also examined regressive patterns within behavioral
responses to determine how development in one area of the writing
task influenced the development in other areas. Subjects, 18
kindergarten, first- and second-grade students from three elementary
classrooms in an integrated, urban public school, were interviewed
weekly using structured interview procedures similar to techniques
used by the teachers in the participating classrooms being studied.
Data also included the students' actual writing products,
transcriptions of students' rereadings and discussion of those
products, and field notes. Results indicated: (1) a relationship
between self-selection of task and emergent writing development; (2)
an interactive relationship between instruction and assessment; and
(3) the focusing/refocusing efforts of individual subjects is
critical to understanding individual progressive tracks in writing.
Findings suggest that: assessment of writing should not be removed
from the context in which it was developed; assessment as it pertains
to emergent writing needs to be redefined; and the
focusing/refocusing phenomenon needs to be explored further. (Three
tables and three figures of data are included. Contains 19
references. (RS)

Mary Anne Domico, Ed. D.

Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Westampton Township Public Schools

700 Rancocas Road

Mount Holly, New Jersey   08060

(609) 261-6059 (office)

(215) 729-1914 (home)

Patterns of Development in Narrative Stories

of Emergent Writers

Patterns of Development in Narrative Stories of Emergent Writers: Implications for Assessment

Research generated during the last fifteen years in the area of literacy development has influenced a paradigm shift in the theoretical framework for describing how young children learn to read and write. This emergent literacy framework (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, 1989 and others), suggests that literacy learning is a developmental process that emerges in young children as they have multiple opportunities to interact with print through contextually-significant experiences.

In the area of writing development, this process has been well-documented and has resulted in changes in instructional approaches to support and enhance children's growth in composing (Clay, 1975; Gentry, 1981; Strickland, 1989; Sulzby, 1990a).

While significant strides have been made in describing emergent writing development, attempts to assess this development have been extremely difficult. Researchers have independently identified emergent behaviors within certain features of the composing task and/or have developed checklists or scales to reflect these behaviors (Clay, 1975; Genishi & Dyson, 1984; Heald-Taylor, 1986; Sulzby, 1990a, 1990b; and others), but there has not yet been developed a rating technique that documents the relationships among these features and their mutual influences on writing development. Additionally, there has not been developed a method for aggregating behavioral trends.

A persistent problem in attempts to examine relationships among features and aggregate behavioral trends has been the consistent rate of variability observed in the performance of individual writers. Discoveries about the relationships between children's development in different feature areas of the composing task (Dyson, 1985; Sulzby, 1990a), their behaviors and intentions while in the act of writing (Blazer, 1986; Sulzby), and the contexts in which writing is generated (Farr, 1984; Gundlach, 1989; and others), have generally been regarded as influential factors in accounting for this variability. Such variability has refuted theoretical claims that would attempt to identify stage-like behaviors in writing development, making the task of assessing growth problematic.

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The observation that emergent writers do not move in a clearly defined hierarchy of ordered stages, but negotiate between and among a "repertoire of understandings (Sulzby,1990a p.85), has further suggested that even with contextual features such as setting and mode of discourse being constant, the choice and focus by a child on a particular feature related to the writing task may mask her understanding of another concept, or may even produce a regression in a recently-learned behavior (Clay, 1975; Sulzby). Barnhart and Sulzby (1986) have documented evidence of recurring disparity between written products of children and their rereadings of those products, with regression appearing in the product as complexity of the intended compositioal message increased. Such findings caution researchers to review less conventional forms of writing with a critical eye, and to consider both compositional products and compositional intentions in determining levels of conceptual development.

This research study attempted to control certain environmental and contextual aspects such as mode of discourse, setting and expectation so that multiple tasks being negotiated in the act of writing could be examined separately, perhaps providing insights into any relationships between and among these tasks and variability.

Specifically, this study attempted to identify and codify behavioral trends in the composing processes of early writers' narrative attempts in literate environment instructional settings. First, it attempted to analyze relationships between compositional products and compositional intentions of emergent writers within three feature task areas of narrative story: quality of composition, conventions of print and language level. Ranges of behaviors in on-going story attempts were examined, as well as changes in behavioral responses over time. Second, it attempted to examined regressive patterns within behavioral responses to determine how development in one feature area of the writing task influenced development in other areas.

Research Design

The research methodology employed was descriptive and exploratory in nature, utilizing inductive and deductive elements of recursive qualitative analysis. This design was selected so as

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to attempt to provide a systematic approach to examining all aspects of emergent writers' narrative stories, as constructs were generated and relationships established among them. It was also selected to build on the work of Clay (1975), Dyson (1984, 1985), Sulzby (1985, 1988, 1990a), and others who have established frameworks and inventories related to some of the aspects of emergent writing behaviors. By comparing and refining existing classification schemes in the process of identifying and establishing new categories, this design attempted to increase the probability of achieving external validity of constructs developed.

Integration of qualitative procedures described by Goetz and LeCompte (1984) was utilized to analyze and interpret data. A constant comparative method of analysis was initially employed to create comprehensive taxonomies for each area of analysis being studied, and to provide the basis from which data could later be reduced to categorical data. As content of data was analyzed, allowances for new categories or reorganizations were made. Then typology procedures were used to group taxonomies and categories, and to identify core properties. As categories of behaviors were defined, enumerative strategies were used to code, tally and compare categories for evidence of recurrences, and to provide supportive evidence for existence and valididy of behavioral trends.

To support conditions for achieving internal validity and reliability, an independent examiner was utilized to verify and refine categories identified, and to achieve consistency in interpreting and rating individual entries within the classification scheme.

Setting

The subjects being studied included eighteen primary age students in grades Kindergarten, first and second, selected from three elementary classrooms in an integrated, urban public school, having the following characteristics: heterogeneous grouping of students, socio-economic diversity, and instructional settings reflective of literate environments. Class sizes of this Kindergarten, first and second-grade population were 30, 31, and 33, respectively.

Factors in determining the setting included the diversity of the population of the participating classrooms and the level of expertise and consistency in approach of the respective teachers.

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As part of a desegregated school, these classrooms had racial and ethnic diversity. The proximity of the school to both a low-income housing project and to two universities attracted a student population with cultural and economic diversity as well. Additionally, students were grouped heterogeneously, with range of prior educational experiences of children including pre-school, day-care and entry to Kindergarten directly from the home. It was anticipated that the diversity of this setting would provide a fuller range of composing behaviors than a less diverse setting. This setting might also allow for greater generalizability to less-heterogeneous populations.

Teachers in these classrooms were experienced elementary educators, and all currently held views about literacy learning reflective of an emergent literacy perspective. For example, each had a daily-scheduled writing time block that included self-selected writing and sharing of individual writing pieces through a conferencing format, and each made available the opportunity for self-selected writing during a choice-time activity. Each teacher also provided regular opportunities for students to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and in a variety of content areas. All supported and encouraged student experimentation with written language, accepting all forms of writing, including scribble, pictures and invented spellings. Each teacher additionally kept cumulative portfolios of individual students' work.

Subjects

A criterion sample of subjects (N=18), representative of the student population in each of three classrooms, including a Kindergarten, first and second grade, was selected to participate in the study.

Several factors were used to determine sample size: the research procedures being utilized in the collection of data, the frequency and amount of data to be collected, and the methods for analyzing the data (Yin, 1984). Inclusion of these factors assisted in providing the richness of data critical in attempting to construct an accurate portrait of individual children's composing development over time and in comparing these individual portraits for evidence of developmental trends.

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In order to assure selection of a sample representative of the range of grades being studied, all children in the three participating classrooms were interviewed. Criteria for sample selection included grade level, gender, and level of understanding about writing and the printed code.

During the interviews, children were asked to respond to a series of structured questions that sought to identify their general attitudes about writing, their understanding about the permanence of writing, their understanding of the conventional code and their knowledge of revision. Children were also asked to select and reread two pieces of writing generated during the two week period prior to the interview. Analysis of writing samples sought to identify individual students' levels of understanding of narrative story composition and their ability to apply this understanding to ine printed code.

Teachers of the three classroom populations were additionally asked to rank their students along a continum of high, average, and low, regarding overall level of understanding about writing and the printed code.

Data generated from interview responses and teacher rankings were used to create a range of scores at each grade level from low to high. From this ranking process, three sub-groups were formed in each classroom. Two students (one boy and one girl) were then identified from each sub-group of high, average, and low, who represented the mode score for that group. Mode scores were selected so as to avoid extreme scores at either end of the continuum.

The distribution of subjects in the three participating classrooms is illustrated in Table 1.

Data Collection

Data were collected weekly for a total of twenty five weeks for each of the subjects in the criterion sample, during individual interview conferences conducted during regularly-scheduled writing periods.

During the interviews, subjects were asked to reread stories they had written during that week and to discuss their accompanying illustrations. The interview protocol used in the data collection process as well as the interview setting were designed to simulate the conferencing

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techniques used by the teachers in the participating classrooms being studied. This complementary method of data collection was developed to increase the probability of achieving external validity and to preserve the social context of the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Data collected for analysis included actual writing products generated by primary grade writers, audio-recordings and transcriptions of writers' rereadings and discussion of those products, transcription of responses to interview questions posed by the researcher, the recording of behaviors observed during the rereading act, and field notes of behaviors of writers during the rereading interview.

A total of 450 pieces of writing, accompanying illustrations, and audio-recordings of interviews were collected, duplicated and transcribed during this time period (25 samples per student). Additionally, at four intervals during the data collection period, each student was asked to read for a second time, a selected piece generated six weeks prior to that interval. This was done so as to establish the level of consistency of rereading over time and to compare product/intentions responses.

Triangulation of data from these multiple sources was incorporated so as to provide a comprehensive view of emergent writing behaviors that could be analyzed for trends.

Data Analysis

Student narrative story-writings were examined for evidence of patterns of growth and regression both in compositional product (as evidenced by analysis over time of products), and in compositional intention (as evidenced by analysis of rereading transcripts and observed rereading behaviors). Within the unit of analysis, narrative story writing, this included examination of differences in compositional products and compositional intentions as they occurred within three feature areas of the composing task: quality of composition, conventions of print and language level.

Table 2 provides a description of each task analyzed within the three feature task area of narrative story.

For each area of analysis above, both products and intentions of writers for each writing entry were examined and compared, so that important insights toward understanding individual levels of

conceptualization might be observed. Each actual compositional entry being analyzed was therefore viewed as a combination of product and intention, with composed message equaling the sum of both.

Results and Conclusions

From the analysis of data a range of codifiable composing behaviors was observed in writers' compositional products and intentions, both in individual entries analyzed weekly throughout the study, and in revisited entries selected at four six-week intervals. Within each area of analysis, recurring patterns were observed that strongly suggested evidence of developmental trends.

Recurring patterns were used to develop rating scales reflecting continua of behaviors for each area of analysis. Descriptors reflecting levels of development on each scale are detailed in Table 3 .

Rating scales were then used to analyze, score and record individual subjects' entries so that points of variability and regression could be identified. For each child, overall trends in each feature task were tracked over time, as were trends in overall growth of the three composing areas.

Evidence from the analysis of data indicated patterns of variability within all subjects across the sample. Initially, a level of regression appeared to be related to the complexity of the compositional task. For example, if a child's intended text reflected a complex story idea, her written text appeared less conventional than a formerly observed written product with a simpler idea. However, as variability within feature areas of the composing task over time were observed, highly individualized patterns were identified that appeared to link regression to the composing area in which a child chose to focus her efforts rather than on the complexity of the overall task.

There appeared to be a relationship between individual focus on one feature of the composing task and level of development in other features. Some children chose to concentrate on one or two features of the composing task and stayed with them for a long time, often at the expense of development in another area. Other children attempted to juggle several areas at once, occasionally regressing in one area as they attempted to give greater attention to another area, or as they attempted to recover from negotiating a particularly complex task.

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With regard to individual progress, patterns of development appeared to reflect a shifting focus of attention from one aspect of the composing task to another, with refocusing efforts resulting in a subsequent regression in other areas. While regression in one area appeared to be balanced by progression in another area, subsequent refocusing efforts were observed to result in development of sustained higher levels of conceptualization. This was evidenced both in higher levels of performance in area of refocusing and in increasing ability to simultaneously negotiate other areas of focus. When children focused on one area of development, their sustained efforts over time seemed to result in a high degree of control over that particular area.

The following profiles of individual patterns of response of selected subjects illustrate this progressive/regressive trend.

Chris, a Kindergarten subject, almost exclusively used pictures to convey his messages, often incorporating action and sequences of action in his illustrations. He used reorganized combinations of the letters in his name to provide the written text for his stories, representing his understanding that writing includes the use of a printed code. As he began to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the functions of that printed code, he began to focus on developing an invented code that reflected this level of conceptualization. This new focus on spelling and print resulted in regression in directionality and spacing behaviors formerly observed.

Blayre, a first grade subject, was quite focused in early attempts, on developing colorful, detailed drawings and on using print to illustrate these drawings. Written text usually consisted of two to three sentence units that labeled or described her pictures. Text was always neatly written and spaced, with conventional (or nearly conventional) spellings. As Blayre began to experiment with longer, multi-paged stories in which character and plot development became more sophisticated, a regression in both spelling and spacing were observed, and pictures became less detailed. Eventually, as reconceptualization occurred, spelling and spacing regained their former more developed forms, with stories maintaining their richness. Drawings now were less frequent and less central to the message of the writing piece.

Jonathan, a second grade subject, focused early on, and maintained throughout the year, an interest in developing a richly-detailed plot. His entries consistently revolved around an ongoing saga of a super hero, unabashedly adapted from tales of his favorite cartoon characters. His focus was on creating action-packed, cliff-hanging episodes, with print carrying the major role in conveying message. Pictures served as illustrations to highlight particularly powerful scenes or to infer character traits or internal responses to initiating events. His highly focused attention to message was paralleled by his lack of attention to spelling development, resulting in very little progress in this area for most of the year. To the independent reader, his invented coding system was difficult to decipher, and was certainly more primitive than the codes of his second grade peers. Yet, he could consistently and quite easily reread his own code, often referring the researcher back to a point in his last rereading interview where he might begin to assist her in recalling the context for the next entry.

For Jonathan, negotiating this feature of writing was neither important, nor necessary to convey his message. Intererestingly, as he gained control over plot negotiation during the latter part of the year, his spelling did progress, and maintained this improved status for the duration of the study.

Each of the above examples illustrates overall patterns of growth, regressive behaviors and periods of conceptual reorganizations for individual writers over time. In each case, the selection of an area of focus by a child determined where growth could be observed and where regression could be predicted for that child.

The following analysis of selected entries of Becky, a Kindergarten student, further illustrates this pattern of focusing/shifting focus/refocusing, and it role in the construction of an individual child's portrait of growth.

Most of Becky's writing efforts throughout the year were focused on conveying very simple story messages with invented forms of print. Her knowledge and understanding of the printed code as a permanent form of written expression were evident in her written texts and in her attempts to reread them. Her spelling patterns most frequently reflected a form of consonant spelling in which

the beginning sounds of words were followed by random letter strings. From time to time, as she began to experiment with more sophisticated compositional ideas, her print would regress. While a focus on quality of composition, appeared to fluctuate in Becky's ongoing work, print always regained its status for her as a predominant area of focus throughout the year, with spelling and speech/print match showing sustained growth.

Figure 1 illustrates Becky's areas of variability within an entry, dated January 16, with attention to conventions of print dominating her effort. In this entry, apparant low levels of performance in quality of composition and language level, are balanced by a higher level of performance in conventions of print, suggesting that focus on one area will affect level of performance in other areas, resulting in an eneven overall level of performance for an individual entry.

Figure 2 compares areas of variability between two entries, dated January 2 and January 16, illustrating Becky's shift in focus from quality of composition in the first entry to conventions of print in the second, with resulting regression in former area of focus. Variability of performance here, appears to be related to both feature area of focus within a piece of writing and shifting area of focus from piece to piece. Resulting regression seems to be balanced by a corresponding progression of response in the new area of focus.

Figure 3 represents a comparison of several selected entries over time, with refocusing efforts and increasing control evidenced as Becky's area(s) of focus shifted from entry to entry. Growth appears to be reflective of a shifting focus of attention from features of quality of composition to features of conventions of print. This pattern of shifting emphasis involves a continuing refocusing on conventions of print with refocusing efforts seeming to result in development of sustained higher levels of performance in that area. Also apparent is an increasing ability to simultaneously negotiate other aspects of quality of composition. Just as refocused areas show increased gains in performance, levels of regression decrease.

In summary, Becky's overall performance illustrates a highly idiosyncratic yet progressive path of development, with similar trends being observed in all subjects in the sample. The notion

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that children should progress in all areas of production appeared to be refuted by these children's behaviors, suggesting that self-selection of feature task focus in a composing attempt yields a more thorough understanding of that aspect of the writing process. It further suggests that choice in task negotiation may result in greater control over a particular aspect of the composing task than when specific tasks are imposed by others. The pattern observed in which shifting of area of focus was followed by a refocusing gain, additionally suggests that regression may be a necessary part of the process of reorganized experience and conceptual growth.

Conclusion/Implications

The relationship between self-selection of task and emergent writing development as suggested by this study, provides insights into understanding and assessing individual progression and behavioral trends among groups. This relationship is particularly important as it influences successful negotiation of tasks, and higher levels of conceptualization toward sustained use of conventional written discourse. This finding indicates that assessment of writing which is not removed from the context in which it was developed, may serve to more adequately describe growth, and to accelerate it as well.

The interactive relationship between instruction and assessment suggests a redefining of assessment as it pertains to emergent writing. This may require a rethinking on the part of test-makers, educators and policy-makers regarding the content, context, administration and analysis of assessment measures as they are currently being defined. This includes re-examining the current use of moment-in-time sampling assessment procedures such as decontextualized group-administered topic prompts that do not take into consideration the influences of individual progressive tracks. It also suggests a need to reconsider the reporting of achievement data based on level of conformity to a set of established standards or on status relative to age or grade level norms. Additionally it suggests interpreting individual progress in terms of frequency patterns of individual behaviors rather than on composite averaging of scores.

In the findings of this study, acknowledgement of the focusing/ refocusing efforts of individual subjects was observed to be critical to understanding individual progressive tracks in

writing, and in identifying periods of reconceptualization. This phenomenon needs to be further explored with larger samples of similar populations and with other populations. Not only should this be studied as it pertains to writing development, but also as it influences development in other curriculum areas of schooling. The insights to be gained regarding the role of variability and regression and its relationship to current testing and evaluation practices could have dramatic consequences for teaching, learning and assessment.

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Table 1.   **Criterion Sample**   **N=18**

Grade	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Average/Age
Kindergarten	3 boys 3 girls	4 Caucasian 2 African-American	5.3
First	3 boys	2 Caucasian	6.3
	3 girls	4 African-American	
Second	3 boys	2 Caucasian	7.3
	3 girls	4 African-American	

Table 2. Feature Task Areas of Narrative Story

QUALITY OF COMPOSITION

STORY DEVELOPMENT

- number of elements of story structure present in story; i.e., setting, character identification, theme/problem identification, plot episodes, problem resolution/goal attainment; and
- degree to which story is organized and developed: i.e., evidence of fluency, logical progression and sequencing events, focus on theme, elaboration and description of theme, evidence of transitions, etc.

VOICE

- evidence of compositional risks, use of variety of sentence structures and rhetorical modes;
- experimenting with new compositional behaviors;
- emergence of individual "style"

DECENTERING

- degree to which tense is stable and reflects narrative/story telling or expository mode;
- degree to which writer moves from interpersonal to intrapersonal dialogue, from self as audience to a "global" audience

TEXT/PICTURE RATIO

- degree to which story or theme is expressed in the text and/or in the pictures;
- degree to which the text and pictures contribute to understanding of story or theme

CONVENTIONS OF PRINT

DIRECTIONALITY/SPACING

- use of left to right progression; word spacing, line spacing, page spacing

SPELLING

- level of understanding and use of a coding system and movement toward conventional orthography

PUNCTUATION/CAPITALIZATION

- evidence of understanding of mechanics of punctuation and capitalization

SPEECH/PRINT MATCH

- degree of one-to-one correspondence between rereading of text and actual written form

LANGUAGE LEVEL

LANGUAGE STRUCTURE

- level of linguistic organization used in text: i.e., pictures, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, theme, letter, paragraphed story, chapter, book, etc.;
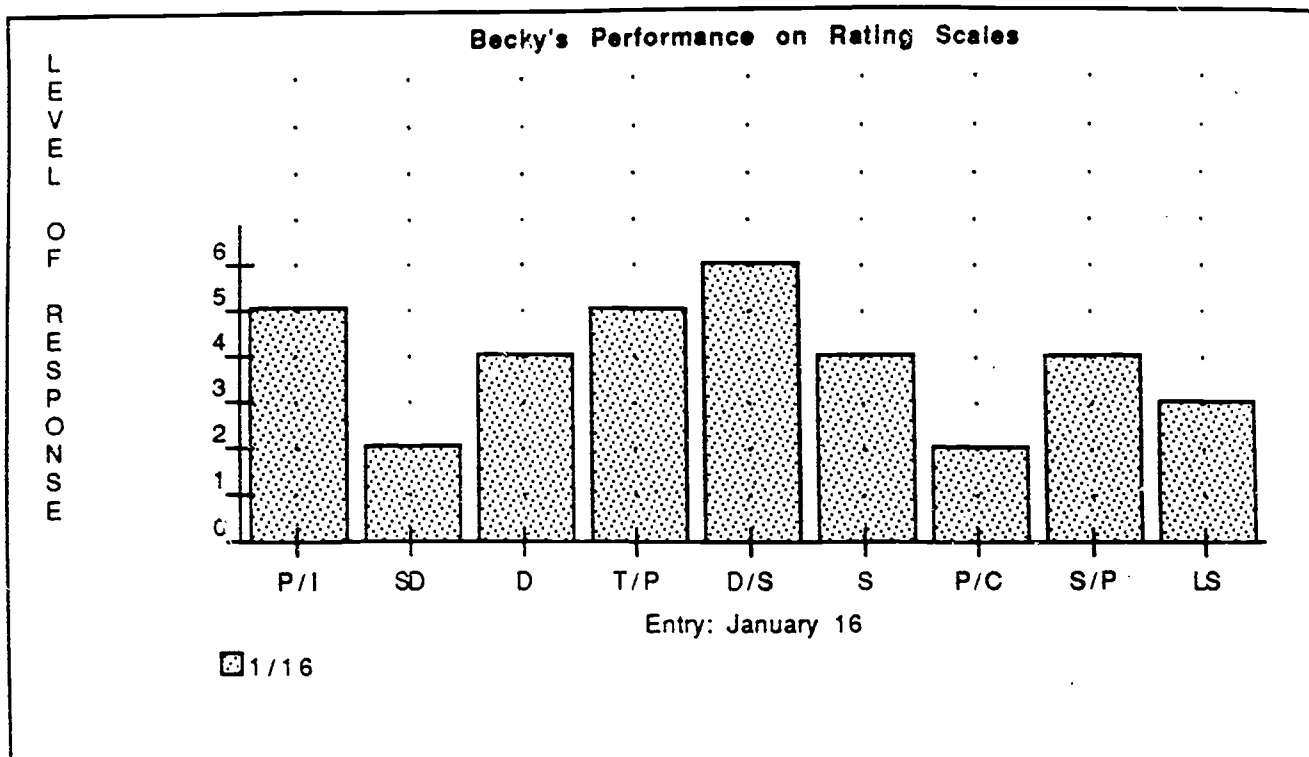- length of level of organization

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18

Table 3.   Levels of Development on Feature Scales

			Quality of Composition		
Rating	Product/Intention Relationship	Story Permanence	Story Development	Decentering	Text/Picture Relationship
Level 1	Dialogue	No Recall	Setting Labeled	Picture-Making	Picture as Label
Level 2	Monologue/Dialogue	Invents New Theme	Setting Elaborated	Picture-Describing	Picture as Story
Level 3	Monologue	Recalls Theme Inconsistently	Story Theme Introduced	Story-Making	Picture/Text as Labels
Level 4	Explicit/Dialogue	Recalls Theme Consistently	Story Theme Developed	Emergent Storytelling	Picture/Text as Details
Level 5	Explicit/Monologue	Limited Recall of Text	Story Developed	Intermediate Storytelling	Picture/Text as Story Idea
Level 6	Explicit	Accurate Rereading of Text	Story Developed/Resolved	Advanced Storytelling	Picture/Text as Story

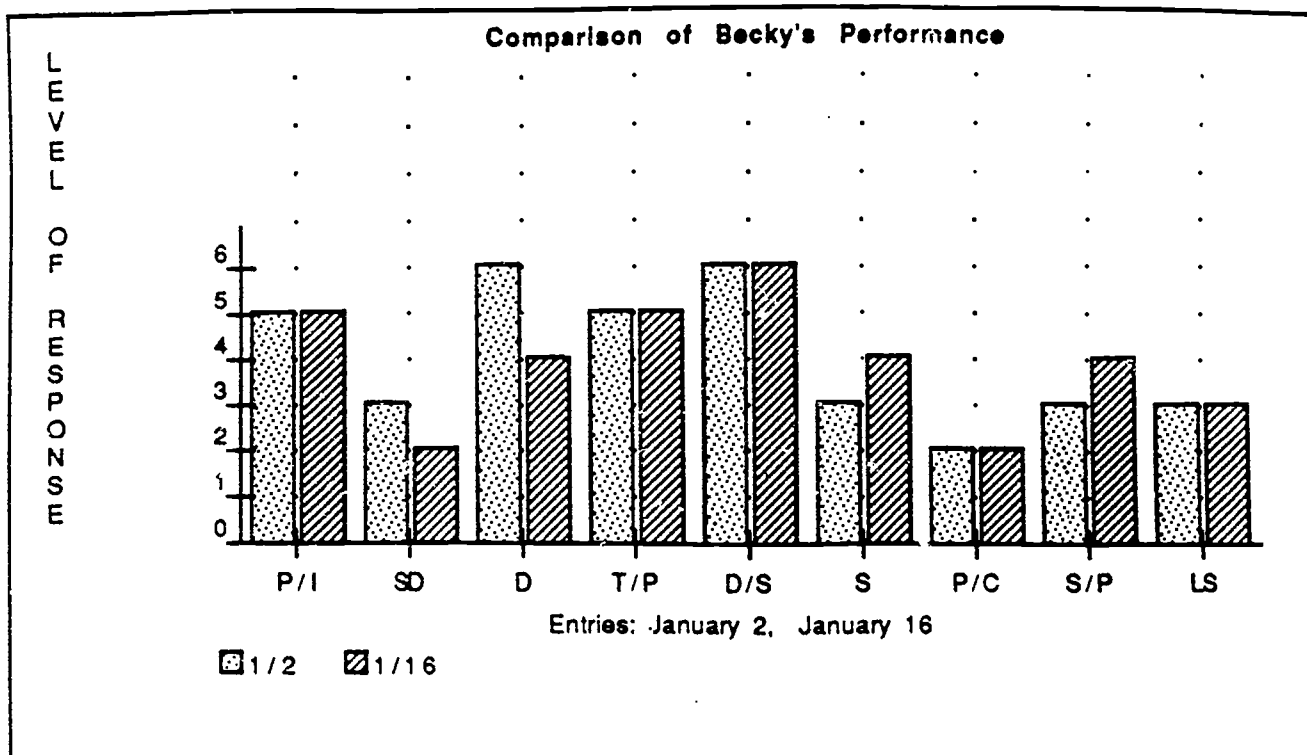|	Conventions of Print			Language Level	
Rating	Directionality/Spacing	Spelling	Capitalization/Punctuation	Speech/Print Match	Language Structure
Level 1	No Evidence	Scribble Spelling	No Evidence	No Speech/Print Awareness	Picture/Word
Level 2	Beginning	Letter Spelling	Beginning	Speech/Print Awareness	Sentence
Level 3	Developing	Consonant Spelling	Developing	Acknowledges Print	Paragraph
Level 4	Emerging	Articulated Spelling	Emerging	Attends to Print	Paragraphs/Theme
Level 5	Inconsistent	Visual/Phonetic Spelling	Inconsistent	Attends/Self-Corrects	One-Page Story
Level 6	Consistent	Transitional/Standard Spelling	Consistent	Reads Conventionally	Multi-Page Story

LIST OF FIGURES

Becky's Performance on Rating Scales

LEVEL OF RESPONSE

Bar	Level
P/I	5
SD	2
D	4
T/P	5
D/S	6
S	4
P/C	2
S/P	4
LS	3

Entry: January 16

1/16

Key:
P/I:	Product/Intentions	S:	Soelling
SD:	Story Development	C/P:	Capitalization/Punctuation
D:	Decentering	S/P:	Speech/Print Match
T/P:	Text/Picture Relationship	LS:	Language Structure
D/S:	Directionality/Spacing		

Note. Level 1 behaviors indicates least conventional reponse. Level 6 indicates most conventional response.

Comparison of Becky's Performance

Entries: January 2, January 16

◻1/2 ▨1/16

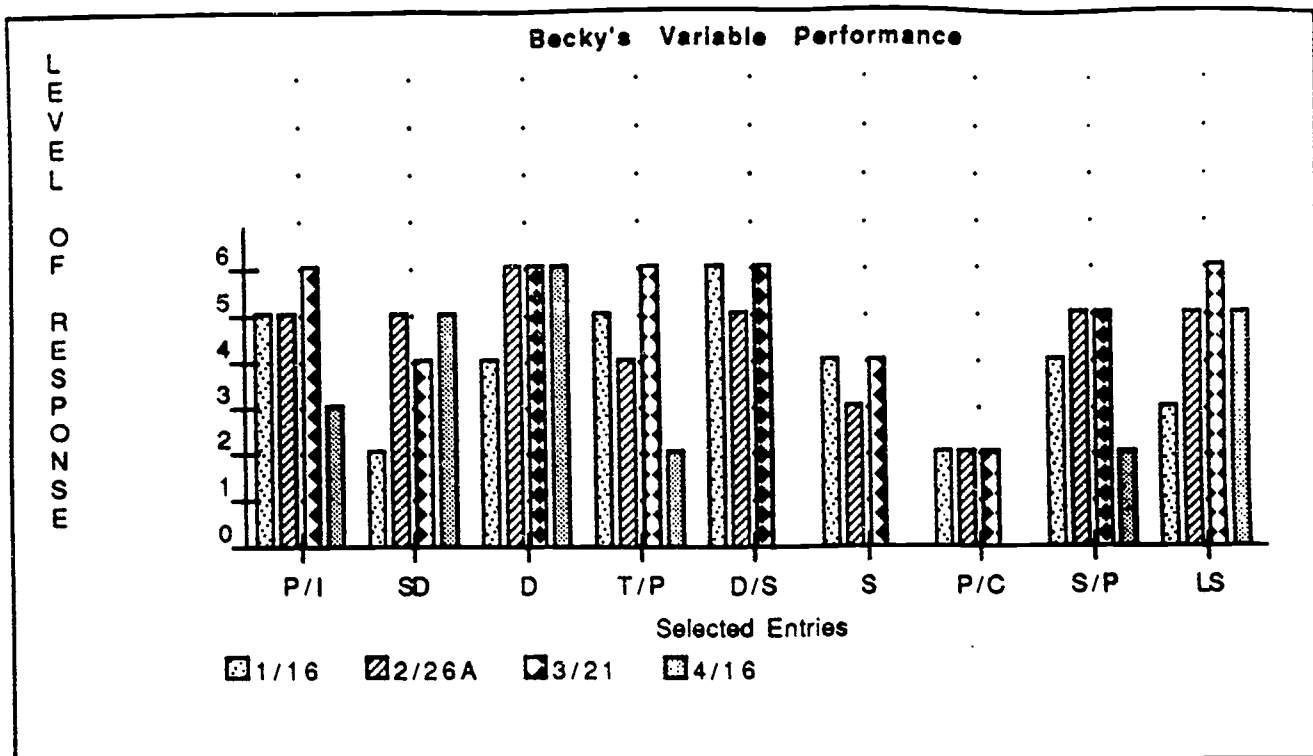
Key: P/I: Product/Intentions   S: Spelling
      SD: Story Development   C/P: Capitalization/Punctuation
      D: Decentering   S/P: Speech/Print Match
      T/P: Text/Picture Relationship LS: Language Structure
      D/S: Directionality/Spacing

Note. Level 1 behaviors indicates least conventional reponse. Level
6 indicates most conventional response.

Becky's Variable Performance

Key:
P/I:	Product/Intentions		S:	Spelling
SD:	Story Development		C/P:	Capitalization/Punctuation
D:	Decentering		S/P:	Speech/Print Match
T/P:	Text/Picture Relationship		LS:	Language Structure
D/S:	Directionality/Spacing			

Note. Level 1 behaviors indicates least conventional reponse. Level 6 indicates most conventional response.