

Exploring the role of the more knowledgeable other (MKO)

In these activities, you will explore how a more knowledgeable other (MKO) can support a child's written language development.

Key concepts/issues:

- Jerome Bruner's theory of social interactionism
- Lev Vygotsky's definition of the more knowledgeable other (MKO).

Key terminology:

Scaffolding, virtuous error, synthetic phonics, homophone, transposition, high frequency, low frequency, grapheme, phoneme, proper noun, verb, linearity, directionality, text-image cohesion.

Tasks

1. Read the handwritten text produced in a lesson by Jack, a 6.8-year-old child. The transliteration (written transcript) of the handwritten text may also be helpful. Corrections by the teacher are shown in the transliteration in brackets, after Jack's original attempt at writing.
2. Next answer the questions that follow in as much detail as you can, considering the key terminology and concepts above.

Extension task

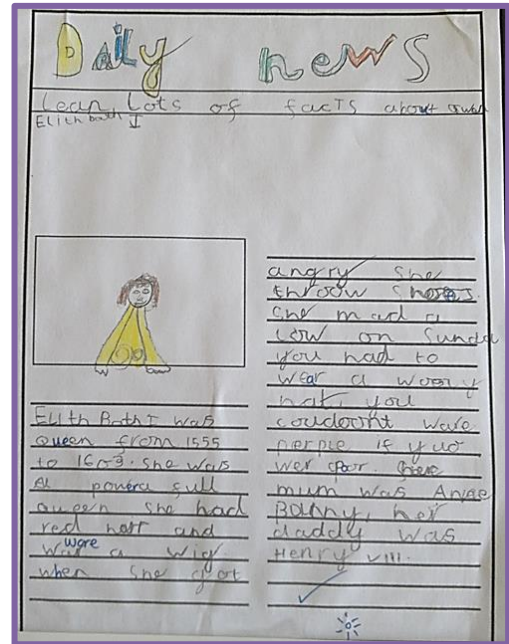
Analyse a wider range of features of the text. For example, Jack's developing ability to use punctuation, or comment on his growing knowledge and understanding of structural features.

Transliteration:

DAiLy news

Lean lots of facTs abowt (about) Qwen
Elithbath I

Elith Bath I was Qwen (Queen) from 1555 to 1603. She was A pow a (power) full Queen She had red hair and war (wore) a wig wen (when) she got angry she throw shoos (shoes). She mad a low [law] on Sunda you had to wer (wear) a wooly hat, you coudoont ware people if yuo wer por (poor). Her mum was Anne BoLlny, her daddy was Henry VIII.



Questions

1. What lesson and what activity do you think Jack was taking part in when this text was produced? How independently do you think he was working to produce this text, and why?
2. The teacher has corrected eight of the words that Jack has written. However, there are several more mistakes that have not been corrected. Why do you think the teacher has not corrected all of the mistakes?
3. Look at the overall appearance and layout of the text. Apart from the teacher's corrections, in what other ways has Jack's writing development been supported?
4. The teacher has corrected Jack's spelling of 'war' to 'wore'. Suggest why Jack initially wrote 'war'. What type of error has he made?
5. Jack has attempted to write the present tense verb 'wear', writing it as 'wer' and 'ware'. Suggest reasons why Jack might have spelled the verb in these ways. How much has the teacher scaffolded Jack's spelling of 'wear', and why do you think this is?
6. Look at Jack's attempts at writing the proper nouns 'Elizabeth I', 'Anne Boleyn', and 'Henry VIII'. Has Jack written any of these proper nouns standardly? Has the teacher made any corrections? Why or why not, in your opinion?
7. Jack has written the following words using standard spelling: 'was', 'from', 'she', 'got', 'her', 'mum', 'daddy'. Why do you think this is?
8. Jack's spelling of 'purple' as 'perple' shows some evidence of writing development. Can you explain how?
9. Jack has written 'you' twice using the standard spelling, but has also written it once non-standardly. Find the non-standard spelling and identify what Jack has done. Why has Jack made this error, do you think? Why has the teacher not corrected it?
10. In your answers, have you applied a) Jerome Bruner's theory of social interactionism and b) Lev Vygotsky's definition of the MKO? If not, how could you do so?

Teaching notes

1. It was probably a History lesson, in which the class was studying the topic of Elizabeth I and learning a variety of facts about her (this learning objective has been written at the top of the page, probably copied from the board). The task seems to be intended to encourage the children to consolidate and present learned knowledge of this topic. The worksheet is designed as a simple newspaper front page, which would also assist the class in learning about the newspaper genre.
2. Correction of all errors could have a detrimental effect because Jack might feel discouraged and overwhelmed by the number of errors made. The amount of correction on the worksheet could make it difficult to read and difficult for Jack to understand what to prioritise. The teacher has selected and corrected a manageable amount of high-frequency lexis for Jack to target, then will focus Jack's attention on learning other words once this selection has been mastered.
3. Lined paper helps Jack to keep handwriting consistently straight, maintaining linearity and directionality. The box guides Jack to create an image to support the writing, promoting text image cohesion and encouraging a creative response. The space at the top of the page encourages Jack to apply the conventions of the newspaper genre.
4. 'War' and 'wore' are homophones, so a child is likely to confuse them because they sound the same although they are spelled differently. Jack's use of 'war' is therefore a virtuous error.
5. Jack may have written 'wer' when he was attempting to sound out the word 'wear'. He may have written 'ware' because he has some knowledge of the effect of lengthening the vowel 'a' by adding a terminal 'e'.
6. Jack has spelled 'Henry VIII' correctly, showing some knowledge of more complex lexis and also of Roman numerals, possibly a new area of study. The name 'Henry' may be familiar to Jack if it is the name of a classmate, friend or family member. The other two proper nouns have not been spelled correctly, although it looks as if Jack has attempted application of skills learned from synthetic phonics lessons by trying to segment the phonemes and then reproduce them as graphemes. The teacher has not corrected the misspellings, perhaps because these are low-frequency words and therefore not as important for Jack to learn as the other words which have been corrected.
7. They are all high-frequency words which Jack is likely to use on a regular basis. More frequent exposure to the sounds and visual appearance of these words means that a child is more likely to be able to write them accurately.
8. Although Jack has spelled 'pur' incorrectly as 'per', he has correctly written 'ple', even though it is not a phonetic spelling, showing that he has retained an accurate visual memory of the second part of this 'tricky' word.
9. Jack has written 'you' as 'yuo' near the end of the text. This is an example of transposition of the graphemes 'u' and 'o'. There is evidence in the text that he knows how to write 'you' correctly, so this error may have been due to his effort to finish the task quickly, and/ or due to loss of concentration, perhaps. The teacher has not corrected this error as Jack has shown elsewhere in the text that he does know this word.