

# **Advanced literacy development for the years of adolescence**

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## **Introduction**

Research and theory about literacy and literacy education have been major themes in educational discussion for some time. One of the most encouraging developments in recent years has been the increasing frequency with which we see use of the word 'literacy', both in educational theory and discussion and in wider community discussion. The word 'literate' has had a long history in the English language and a literate person was said to be one of letters. But, perhaps a little surprisingly, the noun 'literacy' has quite a recent history. According to the Oxford Dictionary it appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, in educational theory and research, as well as in state curricula, the term 'literacy' came into wider use only in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Research and theory, like the various state curricula, referred to the teaching of reading or of writing, but they did not make extensive use of the word 'literacy'. That is a more recent development, spurred by renewed scholarly interest in the phenomenon. The term 'literacy' is a very useful and important term, serving as it does to suggest the interrelatedness of the two literate modes of reading and writing. It has also served to suggest the importance of pedagogies that support frequent movement between reading and writing, breaking what was once a well established school practice of focussing on the teaching of reading to young children for some time before they embarked on learning to write. Thus, in the contemporary world we can talk usefully of the teaching and learning of 'literacy', rather than of 'reading' or of 'writing', and we can draw on a great deal of recent research of value in doing so.

In fact, in the contemporary world, literacy is now of a very high order, so citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will potentially need to engage with, produce and use a very wide range of literate texts. Hence, if we are to imagine the world of the future in which the children now in schools will make their way, we need to think about the features of literacy that will be most significant for literacy learning.

Probably inevitably, a great deal of the literacy research done in the past has tended to focus on the early years of development - the first years of schooling in particular, but in any case, mainly those of the primary years. There have been good reasons for this: on the entry to school, mastery of literacy and of numeracy looms large as an educational goal. All the visible features of literate behaviour tend to attract the attention of parents and community leaders, as they think about such matters as the alphabet, the spelling system, the writing system and the punctuation system. Indeed, these matters attract the attention of early childhood teachers as well, as they start the processes of initiating the young into reading and writing behaviours. While there are indeed important literacy learning tasks of the first years of an education, to do with learning spelling, writing and so on, it is nonetheless seriously misleading to imply that the most significant learning is

done in the first years, or that it is concerned primarily with these visible manifestations of the written code. It was even suggested a few years ago in Melbourne that for young children in primary schools there is a 'narrow window of opportunity' available through which the young must master the 'basic literacy skills', to do with spelling writing and punctuation. Some rather minimal literacy skills are assumed to be sufficient in this manner of conceptualising the issue, and it is implied that these, once mastered, will be endlessly recycled in the service of dealing with future literacy tasks in some reasonably unproblematic way.

Such a model of literacy is insufficient, however, both because it fails to address the nature of written language, and because it cannot throw light on the challenges of learning literacy as students grow beyond the early years. Recent research (e.g. Macken-Horarick, 2002; Martin 2003; Christie, 2002; Derewianka, 2003; Coffin, 2003) reveals that there are significant developmental tasks in achieving control of literacy and that these are a feature, at the earliest, of late childhood to adolescence, marking the transition from primary to secondary schooling as an important rite of passage. This is because the forms of literate language change as students mature and as they make an entry to the curriculum of the secondary school and the expanding nature of the subjects taught.

I want to pursue these ideas by outlining aspects of some work I am doing with colleagues in New South Wales, in which we are seeking to trace developmental changes in children's control of literacy from childhood to adolescence.<sup>1</sup> I shall refer to texts written by three children of different ages, and in the light of examining them, I shall argue that we need a much enhanced model of literacy and its learning, one which encompasses a sense of the nature of written language and which embraces an awareness of the developmental challenges for students learning literacy for effective participation in secondary schooling and in adult life.

Increasing control of literate language, I shall suggest, will be expressed in expansion of all the resources of the language, leading to capacity for dealing with abstraction, detailed description, judgment, opinion and evaluation. The grammatical organization of the language changes quite fundamentally to facilitate the emergence of these capacities, and ideally this is a developmental of late childhood to adolescence. In practice, many students in schools do not succeed in mastering the literacy levels required for successful participation in secondary school, and they fall behind. If we can develop a knowledge of the language resources required, then such knowledge can be used to guide pedagogy in the future, assisting students in the transition years of upper primary to secondary schooling.

In order to develop the discussion, I shall select one text type or genre only, the better to trace some of the developmental changes in control of written language needed if children are to make a successful entry to adolescence and to later life. I do this because

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<sup>1</sup> My colleagues in this ARC funded activity are Beverly Derewianka, Shooshi Dreyfus, Sally Humphrey and Helen Lewis. I am grateful to them for their assistance in the preparation of this paper

the linguistic demands for students shift somewhat, depending upon the particular text type in construction, and it is desirable to control the genre selected for close discussion. The target genre I have selected is the narrative, and this is selected because it remains ubiquitous, widely read and written in schools, a continuing source of pleasure to many.

### Early literacy developments: a first narrative

Text 1 was written by Tim, aged 6, at home on the family computer. It was written without assistance and he was rather proud of his effort. I have set it out to display the elements of structure. He had in fact selected a time honoured structure familiar in children’s narratives, though he was not familiar with the notion of schematic structures, and was a little surprised, if interested, at being shown them. (The manner of representing the structure of narrative owes most to the work of Labov and Waletzky, 1967, Plum, 1988, and Rothery, 1991.)

#### Text 1: The story of a minotaur

<b>Orientation</b>	<i>In the ancient times there was a minotaur that was very nice and kind and lived in a cave</i>
<b>Complication</b>	<i>but one day he stepped on a magic spot and turned bad. So he started to kill the dwarfs and people</i>
<b>Resolution</b>	<i>and one day a witch came along and turned him good again and made everything alive again</i>

What can we say of the language choices Tim made and how indeed do we know this is by a young writer, albeit one who understands quite a lot about the requirements for writing a successful story?

One reason we know this is a successful instance of a narrative is the manner in which its elements are structured, each step signalled with a new reference to time and its passage. In each case, using the functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) we note that time is signalled using a marked topical theme <sup>1</sup>, starting a new element of the tale:

*In the ancient times.....  
but one day he stepped..  
and one day a witch came along..*

Each of these serves to progress the text forward, and while each is a marked theme, they are also instances of what are termed circumstances of time. Written English makes considerable use of circumstances, expressed normally in prepositional phrases and sometimes in adverbs, and they provide a great deal of information. They first appear in

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<sup>1</sup> An unmarked topical theme occurs wherever the subject of the verb is theme as in ‘The boy chased the ball in the street’. But if we were to write ‘ In the street the boy chased the ball’, we would be making ‘in the street’ the marked or atypical theme.

children's language, in speech, and later in writing, expressed in prepositional phrases of time (*in the ancient times*) or of place (*in a cave*). Overall, the language choices in Text 1 are simple, and this is evident both in the simplicity of the circumstantial information and that of most of its nominal or noun groups, such as *the ancient times*, *a witch*, *a magic spot*. One nominal group in the opening sentence makes use of what in the functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen, *ibid*) is termed an embedded clause (such a clause is sometimes called a defining relative clause) *a minotaur* [[ *that was very nice and kind* [[ *and lived in a cave*]] ]]. Here, Tim has exploited one of the resources of the nominal group in English: namely its capacity to 'pack in' a great deal of experiential information by expanding upon the noun that constitutes the head word, in this case by use of the clause embeddings. Capacity to expand the nominal group in this way in writing would appear to be developmental. Many young writers don't use it for a time in writing (though they are of course capable of using such expressions in speech). I note that another child known to me (Aidman, 1999), called Anna, who wrote a little narrative at age 6, also started her opening sentence similarly:

*Once upon a time there was a Fairy* [[ *who was pretty.*]]

It may be that it is in this kind of formulation to introduce characters in stories that typically appears first in young children's writing. Looking to the verbal groups that realise the processes, we can see that the text begins in orthodox fashion with a use of an existential process: *there was a minotaur*, serving to bring the principal protagonist into being. This is followed by an attributive process realised in another part of the verb 'to be', *that was very nice and kind*, while a later process creates action: *the minotaur lived in a case*. There is thus a patterned interaction of process types that build character, characteristics and action. Such a pattern is sustained in the middle element, where action is followed by a new state of being: *he stepped on a magic spot and turned bad*. A sad consequence follows: *he started to kill the dwarfs and people*. Finally, in the concluding element, another action this time by a witch, is followed by a return to happier states of being: *and one day a witch came along and turned him good again and made everything alive again*.

Conjunctive relationships between events are signalled very clearly. Thus, the happy state of the minotaur established in the Orientation is challenged with the use in the Complication of the contrastive conjunction *but* (*but one day he stepped..*) and the bad events that follow are further signalled with the use of the conjunction *so*: *so he started to kill the dwarfs and people*. Several additive conjunctions are then used in the Resolution to signal the return to the usual state of goodness: *and one day a witch came along and turned him good again and made everything alive again*

What can we note of the attitudinal expression in the text? Among mature writers, attitudinal expression is found in the discourse in several resources. It is found in the lexis itself, in nouns, verbs, adjectives and the like. It is found in the resources of intensity as in adverbs such as *very*. It is found in uses of modality, building judgments about the degree probability, usuality, obligation or inclination accompanying events.

A sense of judgment about matters deemed ethical informs Text 1, giving moral purpose or point to what is written. The minotaur, we are told, was *very nice and kind*, where the intensity involved in the use of *very* and the two associated adjectives build a value position. A reference in the Complication to the minotaur's turning *bad*, and others in the Resolution to his being turned *good again* and to the witch *making everything alive again* serve further to build the general moral position. The bad forces in the tale didn't triumph while the minotaur returned to his state of goodness. In this sense the tale is transformative, and it reinforces the values of being good and kind.

In general, the text is simple, and its language choices, while revealing that the child is aware he is handling a written text, represent instances of a control of the grammar of the language that is congruent and in many ways close to that of speech (Halliday and Matthiessen, *ibid*: 636-9). That is, the language choices accord with the most direct and immediate ways in which English grammar works to build experience: nouns identify entities- persons and other things, and, with the exception I have noted involving an instance of an embedded clause, the nouns are indeed simple; verbs identify actions or states of being; prepositional phrases create circumstantial information, in this case of time or place. Increased control of these linguistic resources leads in time to much enhanced capacity to mean in new ways.

Now let us turn to a text by an older student and trace some of the apparent changes.

### **Literacy development in the junior secondary years: a narrative from year 7**

Text 2 is a 'traditional narrative' written by Nina, as part of a Year 7 class unit of work on narratives including traditional tales having some moral significance. As in the case of Text 1, I have set it out to show the elements of structure, drawing on other descriptions of narratives I alluded to above. Nina did not set it out this way, though she had spent a lot of time with her teacher and classmates reading traditional tales and discussing their schematic structures. She has a good grasp of the structure involved, and an interest in writing such a text for the imagined audience of young readers.

#### **Text 2 A 'traditional narrative.'**

<b>Orientation</b>	<p>A poor man named Cody once roamed the beautiful green hills and the dusty paths of the countryside, thousands of years ago. Cody had a kind heart but no money and nothing to eat but a stale piece of bread.</p> <p>A few months passed and the weather began to turn bad. On one moderately cold day Cody was walking along a curvy path when he tripped and fell flat on his face and came at eye level with a pixie. This pixie introduced himself as Zucchini and gave Cody an offer he couldn't refuse. Zucchini told Cody that if he could give him shelter during the winter then he would give Cody 10 bags of gold.</p>
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	<p>Cody agreed to keep Zucchini in his coat pocket during the winter. The winter that year was one of the worst ones ever. It was raining nearly every day and there were always storms and hailstones falling. At times Cody had nowhere to stay and would have to spend the night outside in the freezing cold and it was usually raining. Cody had many colds that winter but he soon got better. During these months while Cody was living it rough Zucchini was kept snug, safe and warm during the winter months.</p> <p>The winter passed and Zucchini was kept out of the rain for all of the winter and as promised Cody received his 10 bags of gold. He built a castle and hired many servants. He married a lovely lady named Leah and they had two children named Lachlan and Julia.</p>
<b>Complication</b>	<p>As the months turned into years Cody changed quite a bit. He began to work his servants over time until they were completely worn out and he even began to disrespect his wife and children. His whole castle had transformed from a lively and cheerful castle to a dull and lifeless castle all because of this one man. It seemed as though he has lost his kind heart.</p>
<b>Temporary Resolution</b>	<p>It was time for Cody to learn his lesson. While parading around his castle, he tripped and came face to face with Zucchini. Zucchini gave him a warning telling him that if he didn't ease off on his wife, children and servants then he would lose everything including his family. Cody agreed to change and he did, for about two days, and then the trouble started again.</p>
<b>Complication</b>	<p>As threatened, Cody lost everything and was not angry at Zucchini because he deserved his punishment. He was however at a loss on what to do. So again he roamed the country a poor man with no money.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p>Cody lived poorly for the next 10 years and during that time he started to become his old self again. His kind heart had returned. He was always happy although at night he longed to see his family but he knew it was not possible. He had learnt his lesson.</p>
<b>Resolution</b>	<p>Cody awoke one morning with the sun streaming in his eye. In front of him, staring at him straight in the eye was Zucchini. He told Cody that he had learnt his lesson and that he was never to make the same mistake again or he would lose everything for good. At that moment Cody was back in his castle with his family and his servants. He was extremely grateful at being given a second chance and he never did a horrible thing again.</p>

The text is of course much longer than Text 1. Its principal interest for us lies in revealing in what ways the language is used differently from the earlier text, marking evidence of growing maturity in deploying language to construct a story, including evidence of its deployment to express attitude and value judgment. In a manner characteristic of such narratives, the passage of time is signalled very visibly, often revealing the onset of a new stage in the overall development. In the opening sentence, time is indicated with the use of the adjunct *once*, while later movements forward are often signalled in whole clauses.

In at least two cases the dependent clause is put first, making it thematic to what comes next:

*A few months passed*

*The winter passed*

*As the months turned into years* Cody changed quite a lot. (a dependent clause put first)

*It was time for Cody to learn his lesson*

*While parading around his castle* he tripped....(a dependent clause put first)

Sequence of event is also signalled in other themes expressed in circumstances put first:

*On one moderately cold day* Cody was walking..

*At times* Cody had nowhere to stay

*Cody lived poorly for the next 10 years and during that time* he started to become his old self again.

There is considerable skill in the resources in which the text is progressed forward, either with uses of prepositional phrases that build circumstances, or with dependent clauses. One important dependent clause is made thematic at a point where the Complication is introduced:

*As threatened,* Cody lost everything and was not angry....

Now let us turn to consider at least some of the grammatical choices in which the text constructs its experiential information. We can note for example, the fact that this text, like the earlier one, starts by identifying a principal participant using another embedded clause:

*A poor man* [[ named Cody]] once roamed the beautiful green hills....

This is not the only instance of an embedded clause, however, and this is revealed as one resource that is often exploited by this writer:

*Cody .. had nothing* [[to eat]] but a stale piece of bread.

*Zucchini gave Cody an offer* [[he couldn't refuse]]

*He married a lovely lady* [[named Leah]] and they had two children [[named Lachlan and Julia]]

*It was time for* [[Cody to learn his lesson]]..

Each of these serves to 'pack in' relevant experiential information, helping to build the increased lexical density that is a feature of written language. Use of embedded clauses constitutes one of the several resources available in English for building information. A clause that is embedded is said to be 'rank shifted' (Halliday and Matthiessen, *ibid*), in that it does not have independent status as a clause of rank; instead, it is buried in another structure, often but not always in a nominal group. Both Painter (1999) and Derewianka (2003), have suggested that emergence of such features of language in children is a first

step towards capacity to play with and expand on the congruent expressions of language. A movement towards less congruent expressions creates what Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen, *ibid*: 592-3) has called ‘grammatical metaphor’, about which I shall say a little more below.

There are of course other ways in which the resources for building experiential information are used. One notes for example the manner in which the nominal group structures are expanded by means other than clause embeddings:

*Cody roamed the beautiful green hills and the dusty paths of the countryside.*

In these cases the noun that constitutes the head word is expanded either with pre-modifier (*the beautiful green hills*), or a post modifier (*the dusty paths of the countryside*).

Many nominal groups are found within the prepositional phrases that create circumstantial information, one of which we have already noted

*On one moderately cold day Cody was walking along a curvy path..  
Zucchini told Cody that if he could give him shelter during the winter.....  
Zucchini was kept out of the rain for all of the winter  
His whole castle had transformed from a lively and cheerful castle to a dull and lifeless castle*

All these expressions necessarily reveal an expanding control of vocabulary or lexis. Verbal group structures and the processes they realise are more complex and varied than in Text 1, also revealing an expanding control of vocabulary, and a growing capacity to deploy it. Some, as was true in Text 1, build actions necessary to the unfolding of the story:

*A poor man named Cody roamed the beautiful hills..  
He built a castle and hired many servants  
While parading around his castle, he tripped and came face to face with Zucchini.*

Some build attributes of the main character, using relational processes:

*Cody had a kind heart  
Cody was not angry at Zucchini  
He started to become his old self again,*

Others build other aspects of his inner behaviour:

*His kind heart had returned  
He had learnt his lesson*

In fact, the text is particularly successful in its manner of creating a sense of the feelings of the central character and its manner of building judgments about his actions, and I

shall say more about this below. Before turning to that we should say something of the clause structures in the text.

Clause types are more varied than was true in Text 1, and such a pattern appears to be very much a development of late childhood to adolescence, alluded to in an important study by Perera (1984) some years ago. Above I briefly looked at some clauses when examining how some thematic choices were made. We can look in addition, at the manner in which several dependent clauses are enclosed in others, making them variously prominent in the unfolding of the events:

*Zucchini told Cody that << if he could give him shelter during the winter>> then he would give Cody 10 bags of gold.*

*During these months << while Cody was living it rough>> Zucchini was kept snug, safe and warm.....*

*The winter passed and Zucchini was kept out of the rain for all of the winter and << as promised>> Cody received his 10 bags of gold.*

*Zucchini gave him a warning telling him that << if he didn't ease off on his wife, children and servants>> then he would lose everything including his family..*

The writer at times shows skill in playing with conventional sentence structure, as in the following in which Subject and Finite verb are placed in atypical positions:

*In front of him, staring at him straight in the eye was Zucchini.*

Overall, sentence structures are varied, ranging from a number which involve several clauses to others which are remarkable for their simplicity in making their point as in:

*He had learnt his lesson.*

This last sentence marks the end of the element I have termed the Evaluation and indeed it opens the way for the next stage of the tale – the Resolution- in which we are told:

*Cody awoke one morning with the sun streaming in his eye.*

Cody is returned to his former state of goodness and all is well. Like Text 1, this narrative is a story of personal transformation. All the linguistic choices I have alluded to are significant in marking the developmental changes in a student capable of writing Text 2 rather than Text 1. If we use them specifically to look at how attitudinal expression is constructed in the text we can see a number of important developments. Note for instance, how strong judgment about Cody is expressed in part in the choices of vocabulary or lexis: he was *a poor man*; he began *to turn bad*; he kept Zucchini *snug, safe and warm*; he *began to disrespect his wife and children*; he *lost his kind heart*. Some of the resources create intensity, gradually adding to and hence amplifying the sense of what is going on, sometimes with modality and sometimes with other resources. Especially in the build up to the Complication this is significant. Thus, we are told, it was a *moderately cold day* when Cody met Zucchini. But later, as the tale advances, the

winter was one of the worst ones ever and at times Cody would have to spend the night outside in the freezing cold and it was usually raining. After Cody turned bad he lost everything. However, in time he became good and he was always happy. Having learned his mistake he knew that if he ever made more mistakes he would lose everything for good. He was extremely grateful and he never did a horrible thing again.

Most of the linguistic resources to which I have alluded for the building of judgment and attitude, when viewed individually, may appear quite simple. Yet it is their very frequency and location throughout the text that makes their presence skilled, and it is the total deployment of linguistic resources in all aspects of the grammar that makes this possible. Attitudinal expression of the kind we have identified and the linguistic patterns in which it is realised are not features of the texts written by young writers. It takes some years to develop the necessary facility to handle all the linguistic resources involved. Indeed, we are talking here of developments of late childhood to adolescence at the earliest.

Finally, let us turn to text 3, written by Anna, aged 14 years. This is a narrative, written as an imagined extract from a diary of a settler in the late nineteenth century.

### **Literacy development in the mid secondary years**

#### **Text 3 An Imagined extract from a diary: Remains from the Diary of Hew Costello, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1887.**

<p><b>Preface/ Orientation</b></p>	<p>Last night was something I would prefer never to relive again, yet it was the most wonderful night of my life. I am certain that Kit does feel the same way about last night, when we both delivered our twin boys. Such a night cannot be described in words, for it seemed that it would end in disaster. Kit had been worrying such a night as this. She had become fretful and turned to the Old Ways of her People, creating frightful concoctions and brews with such revolting smells that they hung around the house for days of end, finally resulting in me spending a night under the stars. Kit had her firm belief that her people would return to help her with the birth, but I knew better. Her People would never return to my beloved Kit, seeing that I am still around. Days past (sic) and her anxiety increased, as she saw no sign of her tribe. We both knew that with such isolation, medical help would be a good few hours from here. All we had to rely on was a drunkard's wife who lived half an hour's walk from our residence and the hope that my experience with delivering foals would prove useful.</p>
<p><b>Complication/ Evaluation</b></p>	<p>And so the night arrived and Kit was taken with such a panic that it terrified me. We had been waiting for this time, but the reality of our situation alarmed me even further. It was raining and the ground had become deep with mud, the undergrowth slippery and the trees (were) * providing little shelter from the rain. Kit insisted I get the drunkard's wife,</p>

	<p>her decision strong and firm. At first I refused, not knowing the trust we should have with this woman, but Kit’s present condition begged me to at least try. And so out into the pounding rain I ran, the pitch black of the night covered me like a blanket and the feeble glow from the lantern barely made out my path. As the rain pelted down, blinding me, I managed to tack up my bay horse Sykes and plunge him through the relentless scrub hidden with sticks and slippery leaves. I trusted Sykes with my children, Kit’s and my life as we negotiated our way around trees and cautiously sliding slopes, always picking up the pace when the ground looked flat. I was constantly alert even though the darkness and rain left me sightless and the pounding of droplets crashing onto the foliage around us caused me (to go) deaf. I knew fox traps were laid around these parts and the last thing I would need was to have Sykes’ leg snapped by one of those vicious contraptions.</p> <p>Finally, when the rain assailed us harder than ever, we made it to Bill, the drunkard’s house. Their structure was not a sturdy one, and I saw no hope on it becoming one, for it was a wonder how Bill scrapped (scraped) enough money to buy grog than to fix up his house. I ran up the rotted, termite infested steps and banged on the door. Fortunately it was his wife Martha who answered, but she was not in good sorts. She kept her voice down and demanded why I was here, I explained my dire situation but she told me she could “not do nuthin’ ‘bout it”. I noticed the great black mark that had blossomed it’s (sic) way into an ugly shade of purple-red across her cheek. Her breath too, indicated that she had become fond of the bottle tonight. I did not want to put my Kit’s life, and my children’s in the hands of this broken woman. I shortly departed from Martha’s presence and mounted my horse, driving him back into the hazardous bush we had just emerged from. I pushed good Sykes harder than ever; hearing his ragged breath as we scrambled up slippery footings and watching the flecks of foam fly from his mouth and dissolve into the pounding rain.</p>
<p><b>Resolution/ Evaluation</b></p>	<p>I returned to the house and Kit was in a dreadful state. She did not protest when I said that I would have to help deliver the children for she was in such pain it almost paralysed her. Birthing babies in this day and age is always tricky and dangerous business, my wife, or children or both could have easily died and something could have simply gone amiss seeing the conditions Kit and I were faced with. It was bloody business birthing children; I never wish to experience it again. Every item of clothing was soon stained with blood and I only used the most delicate and sterile tools to cut the attachments on my two babes. After hours, near the break of a new day, my two boys were born and brought into the world by Kit and me. A good shedding of tears were passed between Kit and me as we marvelled at the birth of our two sons.</p> <p>The sunlight of the day broke, flooding the bush with new rays of light. The storm had ceased only a few hours earlier leaving the trees dripping</p>

<p>crystalline drops glittering in the sunlight. My feet sank ankle deep into the mud as I plunged my way outside to clean up the bloodied sheets. And so now, I sit on a damp tree stump, in awe of what I had been given hours earlier. The most precious gifts of my life. Kit is lying, half asleep by the fire with my two sons cradled in her arms. The most beautiful boys ever seen. Their skin is a deep chocolate brown and the hair black and curly like their mother's, but their eye, they possess the most astonishing eyes that I will never tire of. Amazing yellow eyes, like mine, (such) a sharp contrast to their dark skin that it makes them stunning. When I return and once Kit has mustered enough strength after the ordeal last night to be able to talk we shall debate names for our children. And from now, we have the entire future ahead of us, Kit, my two baby boys and me.</p>
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\* Note: where an occasional set of brackets is introduced, this marks a word that has been introduced into the text to clarify the meaning.

Text 3 reveals considerable advance upon Text 2, and since it is also longer than the earlier text, it will be possible to deal only selectively with some of its features.

The passage of time is again very visible in the text, and expressed in a variety of resources, often in theme positions, helping to structure and forward the discourse:

*Last night was something I would prefer never to relive again..*

*At first I refused...*

*As the rain pelted down.. blinding me, I managed....*

*Finally, when the rain assailed us harder....*

*After hours, near the break of a new day, my two boys were born...*

The experiential information is expressed in a range of nominal group structures, many of them involving embeddings:

*Last night was something [[ I would prefer never to relive again]]*

*yet it was the most wonderful night of my life*

*all [[ we had to rely on]] was a drunkard's wife [[ who lived half an hour's walk from our residence and the hope [[ that my experience with delivering foals would prove useful]] ]]*

*At first I refused not knowing the trust [[we should have with this woman]]*

Other nominal group structures show evidence of grammatically metaphorical or non-congruent expressions as in:

*We both knew that with such isolation medical help would be a good few hours from here.*

A more congruent or spoken way to say this would be as follows, showing several separate or ranking clauses:

*We both knew // that we were isolated// and therefore it would take a good few hours// to reach medical help.*

I earlier alluded to the notion of grammatical metaphor. The grammar of speech (e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen, *ibid*) changes with the entry to writing, creating the more lexically dense expressions typical of the written mode. Grammatical metaphor is one of the resources that contribute to this increased density. In the case I have cited, the relationships between events signalled with uses of conjunctions in speech are buried within the circumstance *with such isolation*, and this is also a tendency of writing.

Other circumstantial information is provided in a variety of resources, though I shall identify only a few:

*It seemed that (the night) would end in disaster.* (circumstance of manner)

*we had been waiting for this time* (circumstance of purpose)

*when the rain assailed us harder than ever* (circumstance of manner)

*watching the flecks of foam fly from his mouth* (circumstance of place)

*The sunlight of the day broke, flooding the bush with new rays of light* (circumstance of accompaniment)

Clause structures are varied, and there are several sentences containing non-finite clauses, for example:

*I pushed good Sykes harder than ever; hearing his ragged breath as we scrambled up slippery footings and watching the flecks of foam fly from his mouth and dissolve into the pounding rain.*

All the grammatical resources that are used contribute to the building of strong attitudinal and evaluative expression. There is plenty of action expressed, in the main through material or action processes as in:

*we both delivered our sons*

*we had been waiting for this time*

*out into the pounding train I ran*

*my feet sank ankle deep into the mud*

However, while action is important, the text makes its impact mainly through uses of language that expresses attitude, evaluation and appreciation of the magnitude of the turn of events. A strong sense of the writer's emotional response to events is evident from the opening:

*Kit had her firm belief [[that her people would return // to help her with the birth]].*

*Her people would never return to my beloved kit..*

*Last night was something [[I would prefer never to relive again]]*

*it was the most wonderful night of my life*

*I am certain [[ that Kit does feel the same]]*

As the text unfolds, the language draws on all the resources of attitudinal lexis, intensity, and modality to build a strong sense of the emotional significance of the events for the storyteller and his wife

*And so the night arrived and Kit was taken with such panic that it terrified me  
As the rain pelted down blinding me, I managed to tack up my bay horse Sykes and  
plunge him through the relentless scrub..  
I was constantly alert  
I returned to the house and Kit in a dreadful state  
I never wish to experience it again.  
And from now on, we have the entire future ahead of us, Kit, my two baby boys and me.*

Once again, this is a tale of transformation. In this case, out of hardship and fear come joy and fulfilment with the arrival of two new lives. Narratives very often offer a sense of a transformative experience, and it is notable that the three students involved in the texts I have looked at all provided such a sense.

## **Conclusion**

What then can we say of the developmental changes that emerge in children's control of literacy as they mature and grow into adolescence? As I noted earlier, I have looked at narratives only and to some extent that constrains what is said. However, many of the characteristics of developing literacy I have alluded to are relevant for other genres. All the resources of the language are extended and expanded, and the various capacities in control of language that are unleashed make possible the expression of abstraction, judgment, evaluation and opinion. Thus, experiential information is expanded in that nominal group structures are enlarged, often by use of embedded clauses, but sometimes by expanding on the head noun in other ways. Circumstantial information, as captured in both prepositional phrase and adverbial groups is also enlarged, and greater delicacy in expression of such information is made possible. Verbal groups are expanded, creating a greater range of process types. Theme choices become more varied, having particular significance in directing the discourse forward, shaping the manner in which the text unfolds. At the same time, much of the grammar changes, creating grammatically metaphorical expressions which contribute to the enhanced density of written language. One result of this is that conjunctive relations between otherwise independent clauses are buried in other expressions in the grammar. Clause structures change, and a range of dependent clauses emerges, including some that are non-finite, helping to add to the lexical density. Attitudinal expression becomes enriched, drawing on all the resources of lexis, modality and intensity.

All the linguistic resources I have alluded to take some years in their development and their appearance is a feature of secondary school. To return to a theme with which I opened this paper, literacy teaching is not uniquely the responsibility of the early years of schooling, for it is a responsibility of secondary schools as well. Many children don't achieve adequate levels of literacy of the kind they need to be effective participants in the modern world, and this is often a failure of the secondary school. We need communities

of teachers who understand the linguistic resources in which mature control of literacy is expressed, so that they can anticipate their students' requirements, model various forms of written language, and intervene to direct them towards appropriate patterns of written language in order to meet the challenges of literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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