

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S NARRATION OF PERSONAL EVENTS

An intervention study on the use of evaluation strategies

CARMEN GELATI & PIETRO BOSCOLO

University of Padua, Italy

Abstract. This study was aimed at analysing the effects of a 15-week instructional intervention with primary school children regarding the use of narrative functions and evaluative strategies in writing personal accounts. Eighty-one 4th graders from a primary school in a northern Italian town were divided into two groups: Labovian (N = 41) and traditional (N = 40). After the intervention, the children in the Labovian group, who were taught to use evaluation strategies, wrote longer and better narrations, and more personal and complete accounts than those in the traditional group. The improvement in writing ability was stable three months after the end of the intervention.

Keywords: Writing personal account; writing instruction; text quality; evaluation strategies.

1

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Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Carmen Gelati, Department of Developmental Psychology, University of Padua, Via Venezia 8, 35131 Padua, Italy, Phone +39 049 8276488, Fax: +39 049 8276499, E-mail: carmen.gelati@unipd.it

Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

提高小学生个人事件叙述的质量：有关评估策略运用的介入研究

摘要

本研究旨在分析为期15周有关小学生个人叙述写作中叙述功能和评估策略运用的教学介入效果。

81名意大利北部小镇的小学四年级学生分为两个组：拉波夫Labovian组(N = 41)和传统组(N = 40)。经过介入，被教授使用评估策略的拉波夫组学生比传统组学生写出篇幅更长，质量更好，而且更具个人和全面性的叙述。写作能力的提高在介入结束后三个月保持稳定。

关键词：个人叙述写作；写作教学；语篇质量；评估策略

Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL. Het verbeteren van de kwaliteit van persoonlijke verhalen van basisschoolleerlingen: Een interventie onderzoek naar het gebruik van evaluatieve strategieën

SAMENVATTING. Dit onderzoek had ten doel de effecten te analyseren van een 15-weken lange interventie met basisschoolleerlingen. De interventie was gericht op het gebruiken van narratieve functies en evaluatieve strategieën bij het schrijven van persoonlijke verhalen. 84 Leerlingen uit de vierde klas van een basisschool in een Noord-Italiaanse stad werden verdeeld in twee groepen: een Labov-groep (N = 41) en een traditionele groep (N = 40). De kinderen in de Labov-groep leerden evaluatiestrategieën te gebruiken. Na de interventie schreven kinderen uit de Labov-groep langere en betere verhalen, die meer persoonlijk en volledig waren dan de verhalen van de kinderen in de traditionele groep. Drie maanden na afloop van de interventie was de verbetering van de schrijfvaardigheid nog zichtbaar.

TREFWOORDEN: schrijven van persoonlijke verhalen; schrijfonderwijs; tekstkwaliteit; evaluatiestrategieën

French

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE. Améliorer la qualité des récits d'événements personnels des enfants d'école primaire : étude expérimentale sur l'utilisation des stratégies évaluatives

RESUME: Cette étude vise à analyser les effets d'une expérimentation didactique de 15 semaines avec des élèves d'écoles primaires sur l'utilisation des fonctions narratives et des stratégies évaluatives dans l'écriture de récits personnels. Les quatre-vingt un enfants de CM1 d'une école primaire d'une ville d'Italie du nord ont été divisés en deux groupes : Labovien (N = 41) et traditionnel (N = 40). Après l'intervention, les enfants du groupe Labovien, ayant reçu un enseignement des stratégies évaluatives, ont produit des récits plus longs et de meilleure qualité, à la narration plus complète et plus personnelle, que ceux du groupe traditionnel. Trois mois après la fin de l'expérimentation, l'amélioration des compétences en écriture s'est maintenue.

MOTS-CLÉS: récit personnel; enseignement de l'écriture; qualité des textes; stratégies évaluatives.

Finnish

[Translation Katri Sarmavuori]

TITTELI. Alakoulun oppilaiden persoonallisten tapahtumien kerronnan laadun parantaminen: interventiotutkimus arviointistrategioiden käytöstä

ABSTRAKTI. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli analysoida 15 viikon opetuskokeilun vaikutuksia alakoulun oppilaiden kirjoittamien persoonallisten selostusten narratiivisten funktioiden ja arvioivien strategioiden käyttöön. Pohjois-Italialaisen kaupungin alakoulun 81 neljännen luokan oppilasta jaettiin kahteen ryhmään: labovilainen (N 41) ja traditionaalinen (N 40). Kokeilun jälkeen evaluaatiostراتيجioita käyttämään opetetun labovilaisen ryhmän oppilaat kirjoittivat pitempiä ja parempia kertomuksia. Heillä oli enemmän persoonallisia ja täydellisempiä selostuksia kuin perinteisessä ryhmässä. Kirjoittamistaitojen paraneminen pysyi samana kolme kuukautta kokeilun jälkeen.

AVAINSANAT: Persoonallisten selostusten kirjoittaminen; kirjoittamisen opetus; tekstin laatu; arviointistrategiat.

Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος. Βελτίωση της ποιότητας της αφήγησης παιδιών της πρωτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης: Μελέτη παρέμβασης με τη χρήση στρατηγικών αξιολόγησης

Περίληψη. Αυτή η μελέτη έχει στόχο την ανάλυση των αποτελεσμάτων μιας διδακτικής παρέμβασης σε παιδιά δημοτικού σχολείου μιας βόρειας ιταλικής πόλης σχετικά με τη χρήση λειτουργιών αφήγησης και στρατηγικών αξιολόγησης στη γραφή προσωπικών αφηγήσεων. Ογδόντα ένα μαθητές της 4ης τάξης ενός δημοτικού σχολείου βόρειας ιταλικής πόλης χωρίστηκαν σε δύο ομάδες: ομάδα Labov (N 41) και παραδοσιακή (N 40). Μετά την παρέμβαση τα παιδιά της ομάδας Labov, που διδάχτηκαν τη χρήση στρατηγικών αξιολόγησης, έγραψαν μεγαλύτερες και καλύτερες αφηγήσεις, και πιο προσωπικά και πλήρη κείμενα από την παραδοσιακή ομάδα. Η βελτίωση στο γράψιμο ήταν σταθερή και μετά τρεις μήνες από την παρέμβαση.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Γραφή προσωπικών εμπειριών, διδασκαλία παραγωγής γραπτού λόγου, ποιότητα κειμένου, στρατηγικές αξιολόγησης

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO. Il miglioramento della qualità della narrazione di cronache personali nella scuola primaria: studio di un intervento didattico sull'uso di strategie di valutazione

SOMMARIO. Questo studio si pone l'obiettivo di analizzare gli effetti di un intervento didattico di 15 settimane rivolto a bambini della scuola primaria e dedicato alle funzioni narrative e alle strategie di valutazione nella scrittura di cronache personali. 81 alunni di una quarta classe della scuola primaria sono stati divisi in due gruppi: un gruppo che ha seguito l'approccio di Labov (N = 41) e un gruppo che ha seguito un insegnamento tradizionale (N = 40). Dopo l'intervento, i bambini del gruppo che ha seguito l'approccio di Labov, a cui era stato insegnato l'uso di strategie di valutazione, scrivevano cronache personali più lunghe e articolate, più private e complete di quelle degli alunni del gruppo tradizionale. A distanza di tre mesi dalla fine dell'intervento didattico, il miglioramento nell'abilità di scrittura del primo gruppo permaneva ancora.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Scrittura di cronache personali; didattica della scrittura; qualità del testo; strategie di valutazione.

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUŁ. Rozwijanie umiejętności opowiadania o osobistych doświadczeniach u dzieci ze szkoły podstawowej: eksperyment dotyczący używania strategii ewaluacyjnych

STRESZCZENIE. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu analizę efektów piętnastotygodniowego eksperymentu edukacyjnego dotyczącego stosowania przez dzieci ze szkoły podstawowej w wypowiedziach pisemnych funkcji narracyjnych i strategii ewaluacyjnych. 81 czwartoklasistów ze szkoły podstawowej w północno-włoskim mieście zostało podzielonych na dwie grupy: eksperymentalną (N=41) i tradycyjną (N=40). Po zakończeniu badań dzieci z grupy eksperymentalnej, które uczyły strategii ewaluacyjnych, napisały opowiadania dłuższe, ciekawsze, bardziej osobiste i kompletne niż dzieci z grupy tradycyjnej. Poprawa zdolności pisania utrzymywała się przez trzy miesiące po zakończeniu eksperymentu.

SŁOWA-KLUCZE: pisanie osobistych relacji; nauczanie pisania; jakość tekstu; strategie ewaluacyjne

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO. Cómo mejorar la narración de niños de nivel primario acerca de eventos personales: un estudio de intervención sobre el uso de estrategias de evaluación

RESUMEN. El propósito de este estudio es analizar los efectos de una intervención didáctica de 15 semanas con niños de nivel primario acerca del uso de las funciones narrativas y las estrategias de evaluación en sus narraciones personales. En un pueblo en el norte de Italia, 81 estudiantes de cuarto grado fueron divididos en dos grupos: labovianos (N = 41) y tradicionales (N = 40). Después de la intervención, los niños del primer grupo, quienes habían sido instruidos sobre el uso de estrategias de evaluación, escribían narraciones que eran más largas y de mayor calidad, con un estilo más personal e intrincado del que caracterizaba el grupo tradicional. La mejoría en la habilidad escrita siguió estable tres meses después de terminarse la intervención.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Narración de datos personales; instrucción sobre escritura; calidad de texto; estrategias de evaluación.

1. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S NARRATION OF PERSONAL EVENTS

One of the first writing experiences for primary school children is to write an account of events they are personally involved in (Chapman, 1995). This experience links students' lives to writing activity and gives them the opportunity to narrate events which are important to them. To produce a good personal account means integrating a coherent description of an experienced event with appropriate expressions of emotion and personal ideas. When narrating events regarding their home and school life, children must organize their own experiences coherently and reflect on events, as well as express their feelings and points of view (Labov, 1972; van den Broek, 1997), or, using Elbow's (1981) term, their "voice". Voice has been defined as "the writer coming through the word... the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling... When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he/she imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his/hers alone" (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001). The importance of expressing one's voice in writing has been underlined by many researches, particularly concerning disadvantaged groups (e.g., Albertini, 2008), and women (Sheridan-Rabidean, 2008).

The two components of written narration – coherence and voice – may imply different degrees of difficulty for young writers. Third graders have the notion of a well-formed story and are able to write coherent invented narrations which include the basic elements of a story. Students' narrations progressively improve, and they write longer and more complete stories (Donovan, 2001; Langer, 1985); during the last years of primary school, children's personal accounts also improve (Boscolo & Gelati, 2003). For struggling writers, knowledge of narrative genre is more problematic, as well as other aspects of writing such as planning, translating, and revising (McCutchen, 1995, 2006). Regarding voice, the expression of feelings in written form is more demanding. In primary school, language skills teachers are usually more concerned with written narration coherence and orthographic and morphological correctness, and seldom teach students how to express thoughts and feelings when writing personal accounts, although they often do underline the importance of writing in a "personal" way. Young students, therefore, learn to write coherent narrations, but are often unable to express their personal views of events appropriately, and their narrations can be a mere description of facts and events.

The present study assessed the effectiveness of an instructional intervention, aimed at teaching 4th graders how to use evaluation strategies in writing personal accounts. Although the importance of leaving students free to express themselves when writing has been stressed by the process approach to writing instruction (e.g., Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1985), to our knowledge no study has been conducted to analyse the effects of an instructional intervention on elementary school students' ability to express their feelings in narrative writing. The study was based on Labov's (1972) approach to personal account narration, which is outlined in the following section.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATIVE COMPONENT OF ORAL AND WRITTEN NARRATION

A personal account involves two components of the narration: the referential and the evaluative (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). The referential component includes describing events in a temporal order as well as information about the external and physical circumstances in which the events took place. The evaluative component includes information about the narrator's subjective state and personal interpretation of events. The narrator uses evaluation strategies to highlight the value and importance of what he/she is narrating (Berman, 1997; Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). On the basis of black preadolescents', adolescents' and adults' oral narrations of involving personal experiences, Labov (1972) argued that a good personal account consists of the following narrative functions:

- *abstract*, the summary of the narration, in which the focus of the situation is described;
- *orientation*, describing the initial situation, the people involved, the time and place of the events narrated;
- *complicating action*, the focus of the narration, that is the crucial event from which the sequence of facts follows;
- *resolution*, explaining the conclusion of the events;
- *coda*, signalling the end of the narration and connecting the narration to the present;
- *evaluation*, the narrator's emphasis on some aspects of the narration.

Evaluation is the most important function described by Labov (1972), and it is through these strategies that the narrator makes the narration more personal. By emphasizing some elements and/or understating others, the narrator stresses what is most relevant and presents his/her own view of the events. Unlike the other functions, evaluation has no fixed position in the text. It includes a variety of strategies: a) *external evaluation*: the narrator makes comments or considerations which may interrupt the narrative flow (e.g., "You know, it was very interesting"); b) *embedding of evaluation*: the narrator reports an evaluation, as it was expressed at the moment of the event being narrated: (e.g., "I shouted: be careful!"); c) *evaluative actions*: a protagonist action is stressed (e.g., "I never ran so fast in my life"); d) *suspension of the action*: the narrator stops at a specific point in order to capture the listener's attention and thus put more emphasis on the following narrative (e.g., "I waited for four hours and... he arrived with a fantastic present..."). Over the past two decades, many developmental studies have been conducted on both the referential and evaluative components in oral narration (e.g., Allen, Kertoy, Sherblom & Pettit, 1994; Peterson & McCabe, 1991; Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991; Baumgartner & Devescovi, 2001; Baumgartner, Devescovi, & D'Amico, 2000; Berman, 1997; Berman & Slobin, 1994). Regarding the evaluative component, although Labov (1972) expressed some perplexity about the possibility that children younger than nine could use evaluation strategies when recounting a personal experience, studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s showed that these strategies are present in young children's oral personal accounts (Bamberg & Dam-

rad-Frye, 1991; Miller & Sperry, 1988; Peterson & McCabe, 1983; Reilly, 1992). In particular, children use: (a) *paralinguistic devices*, such as emphatic stress, pitch, length, voice quality, volume, gesture, facial expression; (b) *linguistic devices*, such as quoted speech, hedging, negatives (no, un-, etc), causal connectors, repetition, similes, metaphors, evaluative adjectives and intensifiers; (c) *reference to internal states*, such as the expression of hopes, desires, motivations, intentions, purposes, emotions, frames of mind as cognitive and affective states attributed to the narrators (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991; Eaton, Collis, & Lewis, 1999; Miller & Sperry, 1988; Peterson & McCabe, 1983; Reilly, 1992; Umiker-Sebeok, 1979).

The use of these strategies in oral narrations increases from the age of three to five (Umiker-Sebeok, 1979), however, no significant difference was found in the frequency of devices used by children from five to nine years (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). Nevertheless, the variety of evaluative strategies seems to increase with age: at four/five years repetition to emphasize a fact is often used, at six/seven years stress devices are found (Peterson & McCabe, 1983), and at nine years pupils, like adults, use more “frames of mind” (e.g. references to emotional and mental states), in particular emotions (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991). Becoming aware of feelings helps children construct a meaningful sequence for emotional experience and allows them to express emotions (Saarni, 1999). Five year olds express emotions in free oral narratives with difficulty, but the use of prompt questions facilitates oral production (Eaton et al., 1999). School-age children are aware of their and others’ emotions and progressively become more able to express feelings in their oral narrations (Harris, 1989; Saarni, 1999).

There are differences between oral and written language (Halliday, 1989) and also continuities between them (Cragg & Nation, 2006). While many studies have been conducted on the use of evaluation strategies in oral narrative production, few, if any, regard the evaluative component of written narration. In our view, teaching primary school children to use these strategies is relevant for two reasons. First, children learn to express their feelings and points of view in written form, which can be a more demanding task than teachers expect. Second, they can realize that writing a personal account implies narrating personal experiences in a coherent way as well expressing comments, personal ideas and feelings; that is, they can become aware of the personal account as a genre. We focused on evaluative strategies since they must be used to add anything to the simple and mere description of facts, and are, in fact, the most efficient tools that a writer can draw on to express ideas, comments, and feelings in a written text, and allow a narrator to explain a point of view, making the narration more personal and pleasing to read. As will be shown in the intervention, evaluative strategies can be the expression of emotions, considerations, sentences used to catch the reader’s attention, or specific words that emphasize an event. We hypothesized that, after the intervention, children would learn to express their voice in their personal accounts, using the evaluative strategies as a tool to verbalize their feelings and thoughts. An improvement in text quality and in the use of evaluative strategies was expected. Although we focused on the evaluative component of written narration, we also considered the referential component of Labov’s (1972) model.

3. METHOD

3.1 *Participants*

Eighty-one 4th graders in four classes from a primary school in a northern Italian town participated in the study. By tossing a coin, two classes were assigned to the Labovian group (N = 41: M = 20, F = 21), and two to the traditional group (N = 40: M = 24, F = 16). Each group had two different language skills teachers. The mean ages of the groups were 9,7 and 9,8 years respectively. No student had cognitive or linguistic impairments. Several non-native Italian speakers participated in the activities, but were not considered in data analysis. Furthermore, 6% of the Labovian group children and 7% of the traditional group came from families that were classified as having a low socio-economic status.

In Italian primary school, classroom activities are usually based on discussion, group work, and interaction between both peers and the teacher. Teachers help children discover problems, stimulate them to find solutions, support them when in difficulty, and regulate discussion. From grade 3 onwards students learn that a narrative can be divided into three parts or sections: an initial part, in which characters and setting are introduced; a central part, in which events take place, and a final part that explains the conclusion of the events. To make children aware of this distinction, teachers provide narrative texts to be analyzed; in particular, children are invited to identify and label the three sections. Through discussion they become aware of the information expressed in each part. Children become familiar with the sections of narrative text through various analysis and revision activities of texts supplied (e.g., rewriting a text changing the setting or the protagonist, and completion of texts in which one part is omitted, etc.). They are then invited to follow this distinction when writing narrative texts. At the beginning of the intervention, children knew that a narrative text has a three-part structure, but they had no knowledge of Labov's model.

As no standardized test for the assessment of writing competence is available in Italy, the language skills teachers were asked to rate students' writing ability using the five-point scale adopted in the Italian school system (1 = scarce, 2 = sufficient, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent). No significant difference emerged between the Labovian and traditional groups, with $F(1, 79) = .001$, n.s. Students rated 1 and 2 were considered to be struggling writers.

3.2 *Measures*

Before the intervention:

- 1) Written personal account. Children were asked to narrate a personal experience based on the instruction: "Think back to a recent event that you experienced at home, at school, in the park or on vacation, etc, that involved people who are important to you (for example your parents, brothers and sisters, friends, teachers, etc.). Now write your text." Two primary school teachers not involved in the study scored the narrations holistically on a 4- point scale (Appendix A). No significant difference emerged between the two groups, with $F(1, 79) = .12$, n.s.

- 2) Enrichment of a narrative text. Children were asked to add evaluation to a supplied narrative text (a trip to the beach). The text included the orientation, complicating action, a conclusion but no evaluation (Appendix B). Children in both groups enriched their texts using predominantly qualifying adjectives. No significant difference emerged for the number of evaluation strategies used by the two groups, with $F(1, 79) = .12$, n.s.

After the intervention:

- 1) Written personal account. Children were asked to narrate a recent personal experience on the same topic used in the pre-test.
- 2) Enrichment of a supplied narrative text. This text (a trip to the countryside) had the same length and structure as the one supplied in the pre-test (Appendix C).

Three months later:

- 3) Written personal account: children were asked to narrate a recent personal experience based on the title used in the pre-test.

3.3 *The intervention*

3.3.1 *Labovian group*

The intervention had two objectives. The first was to introduce Labov's (1972) narrative functions and, in particular, evaluation. The second objective was to teach students to use evaluative strategies as a tool to express their voices in writing personal accounts. Although presented separately, the two objectives were closely related. The activities proposed in the intervention regarded both the referential (Labov's narrative functions) and evaluative components.

Each step of the instructional intervention and how to propose the activities were planned by the authors and teachers involved in the study. The intervention lasted 15 weeks (from October 2006 to mid-January 2007) with two 2-hour lessons a week. It was based on a variety of classroom literacy activities, including individual and small-group productions of oral and written narratives, analysis of written texts, revision and improvement of texts written by students and others provided by the teachers, and classroom discussions of text in terms of narrative functions and evaluative strategies. During the intervention, the teachers' work was constantly monitored and coordinated by the authors through weekly meetings. The intervention was challenging for the two Labovian group teachers because they had to change their teaching of personal account writing. Teachers were very interested in the study and performed as expected, following our suggestions. They were used to working together, since they worked in the same school and periodically met to monitor the progress of the curriculum and students' progress.

Labov's narrative functions. To introduce Labov's narrative functions, the teachers started from a narrative text which the children had just read, and asked them whether, in their opinion, it could be divided into parts or sections. Students pro-

posed a very simple division into initial, central and final sections, which had been learned in the previous year. Starting from this suggestion, the teachers introduced Labov's functions, asking children in particular what information was expressed in the first section of the text. Students noted that, at the beginning of the narrative, the crucial fact was expressed in advance, as well as the characters, place and time. They therefore realized that the first part of the narration can include both an abstract and an orientation. The same procedure was adopted to make students aware of the role of the central section (complicating action) and the final section (conclusion) of the narration. The teachers proposed various activities, including reading and revision of texts, to analyze further Labov's narrative functions. In particular, students:

- read narrative texts, identified and labeled the narrative functions;
- de-constructed and constructed narrative texts in which the parts were presented in the wrong order;
- completed texts in which one part was omitted. Interventions on the text were written on the blackboard or read aloud. Through discussion, students came to understand that some narrative functions are more important than others and, in particular, that the abstract is useful for anticipating the main event, while the orientation, complicating action (or crucial event) and conclusion are necessary for a coherent narration.

On the basis of the ideas emerging from discussion, children were invited to create guidelines including questions and notes to help in narrative writing. For example, the prompt for the orientation was: "Explain the initial situation: who the characters are, where and when the events happened. *Who was present? Where did the events take place? When?*". Guidelines were written on a card which could be used during writing. When children were asked to complete the texts in which a narrative function was omitted, or to change some parts in a written text, they were also invited to pay attention to the evaluative component of the narration. They were reminded to write not only the sequence of events, but also evaluative comments in order to express their thoughts better.

Evaluative strategies. At the beginning of the intervention, students were told they would learn and practice how to express their own points of view about the experiences in written form. Children "discovered" the concept of evaluation strategy, totally new to them, through an analysis of their own texts, as well as texts provided by the teacher. First, they were asked to write and orally recount the same experience. The oral account was audiotaped. Comparing the taped oral narration with the written text, students realized that in oral conversation the narrator can use gesture, facial expression and tone of voice to express feelings and ideas and to emphasize the salient events: instead, what can a writer use? This question was the focus of a classroom discussion. The teacher then distributed two texts based on the same sequence of events, one with and one without evaluative elements. Both texts were clear, but only the one with evaluation expressed the narrator's voice. A comparison between the two texts helped students understand how a narrator can use evaluative strategies to express personal views of the events, what the writer thinks, likes, or

dislikes, also improving on the quality of a written narrative. In particular, four types of evaluation were introduced (Labov, 1972):

- *evaluative lexicon*: including *quantifiers* (e.g. “We were *all* tired”), *adjectives* to describe (e.g. “I saw a *big blooming* park”), *nouns* (e.g. “The *adventure* was finished”), *verbs* (e.g. “My brother wanted to go home, I *protested* because it was early”) and *adverbs* (“You’ve arrived *at last*”);
- *evaluation techniques*: this category includes *external evaluation* which interrupts the narrative flow in order to catch the reader’s attention (e.g. “*Today I want to tell you about my holiday experience*”), *questions* (e.g. “*Why did Simon go out?*”), *suspension of the action* (e.g. “After the church there were some terraces, *I looked down and... it was wonderful*”), *punctuation* (e.g. “It was a special day!!!”), *repetition* to remark on a concept (e.g. “We caught the train and after *fourteen*, *I say fourteen* stops, we got off”), *similes* (e.g. “*You are slow as a tortoise*”), *metaphors* (e.g. “*I’m a fox*”);
- *emotions*: including emotional reactions expressed by *adjectives* (e.g. “I was *anxious*”), *verbs or descriptions of specific actions* (e.g. “I was so excited! Before the lesson *I skipped and shouted in the corridor*”), *bodily reactions* (e.g. “I was so excited! *My legs were shaking*”);
- *personal considerations*: the linguistic expressions of *comments or explanations* (e.g. “*It was a wonderful holiday, I liked swimming and looking at the fish in the sea*”).

The Labovian group teachers proposed tasks stimulating students’ active participation. The production and analysis/revision of narrative texts were conducted as follows:

Production of narrative text.

- Initially students narrated an experience which they had been involved in (e.g., a school trip), and planned a collective text using the guidelines of Labov’s narrative functions.
- Children were asked to organize the text, focusing on the referential component of the narration, noting their ideas before writing. In particular, they narrated orally the experience and the sequence of events was discussed by the class. The ideas accepted by all as appropriate were written on a poster.
- Children wrote the text also considering the evaluative component of the narration. At the beginning of the intervention, they were invited to express personal thoughts in the sentences. Later, after having learned to use the evaluative strategies, this request was no longer necessary because students autonomously produced sentences with evaluative strategies. Initially, complete oral sentences were produced and then written in their exercise books. In cases of disagreement, a student explained his/her opinion and wrote the sentence from his/her perspective.
- During and after writing, students’ personal accounts were revised to improve them.

Three texts were written following this procedure, as well as two texts in small groups and three individually, by writing notes in their exercise books. The teachers offered help when required.

Analysis and revision of narrative texts.

Children were presented with a narrative they had not read before. After reading aloud, the narrative functions of the text were identified and labelled. They were encouraged to use various evaluative strategies. These activities helped children understand and see multiple ways of expressing voice, and to realize that the narrator could use different types of evaluation. For example, specific evaluative techniques, such as suspension of the action, is useful for creating suspense; an emotion is useful if the aim is to express feelings; a personal consideration is useful for expressing a wish or personal thoughts, and so on. If students were unable to identify the evaluation strategies, they were invited to explain how they would express the narrator's point of view in their own words. They were then invited to suggest changes to the text, and wrote the modified text in their exercise books. The teachers also provided texts in which some narrative functions were omitted. For example, to analyse the conclusion in greater depth, texts omitting the final part were used and students were asked to complete the narrations. These tasks allowed teachers to monitor learning, focusing on specific aspects when students did not understand. Initially these tasks were solved collectively, under the teachers' guidance. Children then worked in small groups and individually, with the teachers' help if needed.

At the beginning of the intervention, some children tended to use too many evaluative terms and techniques. In these cases, the teacher underlined that evaluative strategies are a tool to be used only when a writer wants to stress some specific events that are relevant, or wants to express particular thoughts and feelings. Children were then encouraged to write more appropriate sentences. During the intervention, some students expressed difficulty in expressing their own feelings and emotions, and those of other people. To help them, the teacher carried out various activities such as providing texts in which different kinds of feelings and emotions were expressed (for example happiness, cheerfulness, serenity, surprise, fear, anxiety, disappointment) and discussing them together; proposing texts in which, for example, characters' feelings are incoherent with the story line which required reorganization of the narrative to modify the expression of emotions; encouraging the narration of pleasing emotional experiences first in oral form, when students could be helped to verbalize feelings, and then in written form (e.g., describing a happy situation such as a birthday party). This is an example of a dialogue between a student and the teacher (the names have been changed):

Alberto: "I organized a party for my birthday and I was happy. But I don't know how to write it...";

Teacher: "You could say you were happy and why. Did anything special happen?";

Alberto: "Yes, there was something";

Teacher: “What?”;

Alberto: “I received many presents...”;

Teacher: “Were you happy because of so many presents?”;

Alberto: “Oh yes, and because one present was my favourite computer game”;

Teacher: “What happened when you saw this gift?”;

Alberto: “I was so happy that I screamed and I ran into my room and after I hugged my friend. I was so excited...”;

Teacher: “Oh, good! When you saw your favourite computer game you were excited and so happy that you screamed, ran into your room and hugged your friend. Ok, I think that’s clear. Why don’t you write it...”.

The expression of voice was problematic for struggling writers, in particular, who took more time than skilled writers to learn how to express thoughts and feelings. Only the sequence of events was described in most texts until about halfway through the intervention. However, step by step, struggling writers too discovered how to verbalize their points of view, although their texts were simpler than those of skilled writers. Often struggling writers asked for teacher assistance during the individual writing. This is an example of a conversation between a child with difficulties in writing and the teacher:

Tommaso: “I don’t know how to start...”

Teacher: “What do you want to write?”

Tommaso: “I want to write about the football match that I played in last Sunday”

Teacher: “Oh, interesting! What do you want to say?”

Tommaso: “That I went to the football field with my parents”

Teacher: “Ok, you told me that last Sunday you went to the football field with your parents to play in a match. And what happened?”

Tommaso: “I played with my best friend Luca. At the beginning we were happy because I scored a goal before the end of the first time, but, in the second time, the other team scored two goals and the referee disallowed a goal by our team. Can I write these things and that I was angry?”

Teacher: “Of course”

Tommaso: “And also that I think that the referee got it wrong and why?”

Teacher: “Oh, yes. I think it is interesting if you write your ideas and why you think the referee was wrong. Very good...”.

At this point the student was encouraged to write down the main points of his narration and then to develop them in an appropriate form. As in other researches, the teacher's role was crucial in helping students write their feelings and thoughts (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007).

By the end of the intervention, texts became clearer and more personal and the reader was able to understand not only the description of events, but also what the students felt and thought about the experience. Both struggling and skilled writers benefited from the discussion with peers and teachers. By sharing experiences, listening to others' ideas, and reading a variety of texts in which feelings and personal points of view were appropriately expressed, children had the opportunity to understand multiple points of view and to see how to express voice. In particular, interaction with peers and teachers proved to be useful. Teachers encouraged students to take personal positions and children progressively learned to use specific words to explain their mood, desires, and so on.

It should be underlined that students were never forced to merely embellish their texts. In both the production and analysis/revision activities, if students did not agree with others, they explained their opinion and wrote the sentence from their own perspective. An example of a dialogue between a student and the rest of the class while writing a text about the school trip to a castle follows. The sentence chosen by the classmates was:

“When the bus stopped we were excited and curious to see a real castle. We got out of the bus very quickly. We were surprised when we saw a man near the entrance waiting for us, and wearing a strange costume...”;

Laura: “I was not excited, nor curious, nor surprised. As I told you, I went to the same castle a month before with my family and I had already seen all the things. I would prefer to write another sentence explaining that all my friends were excited that day, but I wasn't because I had previously visited the place with my parents. However, the first time I went there, I was excited like my friends...”;

Teacher: “Of course, you did not feel the same emotions as your friends. Does someone want to add anything?”;

Classmates: “No”;

Teacher: “Ok, let's go on”.

3.3.2 *Traditional group*

The traditional group was involved in a variety of text production and analysis/revision activities. They wrote and analysed texts individually and in groups, discussing collectively the structure of the narrations. When comparing the effectiveness of the traditional approach to teaching narrative writing and the referential and evaluative components of Labov's model, two main differences in the teaching of narrative writing emerged between the traditional and the Labovian group. The first difference was in teaching narrative text writing and analysis, as mentioned in

the participant section, where teachers did not follow Labov's model, but stressed the division of the narrative text in three parts or sections: initial, central and final.

The second difference was that evaluation strategies were not taught. To stimulate interest, the teacher started from children's personal experiences and proposed some texts. The active participation of students was stimulated by questions and prompts. Children very often recounted their personal experiences and asked questions. In this group, the teacher spent considerable time analysing the central part of the narrative because students, omitting important details about the event, wrote personal accounts which were too brief and superficial. Each week, the first author met the teachers who illustrated the activities that had been carried out in class. The traditional group children wrote eight narrative texts, four in small groups and four individually, following the subdivision of the text in three sections.

As in the Labovian group, in the traditional group writing skills were monitored constantly and the teachers underlined the cognitive processes implied in writing tasks. To stimulate text planning, the traditional group teachers encouraged children to express their ideas through discussion and to note their ideas before writing. Initially, as in the Labovian group, children, with teacher assistance, created guidelines including questions and notes that stimulated reflection during text planning and writing. Each student had the guidelines written on a card and followed them while writing texts, until they become autonomous. As in the Labovian group, children were invited to revise the narration while writing and upon text completion. The traditional group teachers proposed activities of analysis/revision of supplied texts, asking students to complete, construct and de-construct them. Table 1 shows an example of text analysis/revision for both groups. Both groups analyzed the referential component of the narrations, whereas the evaluative component was considered only by the Labovian group.

Table 1. *Example of text analysis/revision*

Labovian group	Traditional group
Reading of supplied text.	Reading of supplied text.
Analysis of text through comprehension questions.	Analysis of text through comprehension questions.
Individuation of Labov's narrative functions.	Individuation of the three sections (initial, central, final).
If some parts were deliberately omitted, completion of texts using Labov's narrative functions' scheme and evaluative strategies.	If some parts were deliberately omitted, completion of texts using the three sections scheme.
Focus on evaluative strategies:	
(a) finding and underlining evaluative strategies;	
(b) discussing the different types of evaluative strategies;	
(c) rewriting sentences using students' suggestions when students did not identify the evaluative strategies.	

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Length, text quality, narrative functions, and evaluation strategies were analysed in each personal account. Only evaluation strategies were considered when analysing the enrichment of the text supplied. A description of these measures follows:

- 1) Length: number of T-units. The T-unit (minimal terminable unit) is an independent clause with any number of subordinate clauses linked to it (Hunt, 1970, 1983).
- 2) Text quality: two elementary school teachers scored the narrations using a holistic score on a 4-point scale (Appendix A). Inter-rater agreement was 93%.
- 3) Narrative functions. Narrations were scored for the presence of the following narrative functions (Labov, 1972): abstract, orientation, complicating action or crucial event and conclusion. The focus of the narration was labelled “complicating action or crucial event”, since all personal experiences narrated had an important event, but this event was not always a problem or complicating action to be solved. The “coda”, more typical of oral narration, was seldom used in written narrative and was usually included in the conclusion.
- 4) Evaluation strategies. All types of evaluation strategy taught were counted: evaluative lexicon, evaluation techniques, emotions and personal considerations. Cases of an exaggerated use of evaluation strategies were not considered. When counting the evaluation strategies we considered whether children emphasised specific words, sentences, or expressions of personal feelings. When a whole sentence was evaluative - for example a question - with other evaluation strategies embedded - for example verbs used to emphasize an event - we counted both evaluation techniques and evaluative lexicon. All doubts or disagreements were resolved by discussion.

Inter-rater agreement between the first author and a previously trained language skills teacher, who did not participate in the study, was based on 30% of the protocols. The following agreement percentages were obtained:

- Personal account: 94% for T-units segmentation, 92% for abstract, 86% for evaluation.
- Enrichment of the narration without evaluation: 88% for evaluation.

5. RESULTS

Bonferroni's correction was applied to all analyses of variance. First, the results regarding the use of narrative functions and evaluative strategies in written personal accounts are described; length and text quality were also analyzed. An analysis of evaluative strategy use in the enrichment of narrative text follows. Multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) were carried out. In order to protect against Type I error, we considered each ANCOVA test at the α/p level of significance (Bonferroni's correction) in which p is the number of dependent variables (Stevens, 2002).

5.1 Written personal account

Narrative functions. In both groups, over 95% of narratives included orientation, complicating action or crucial event, and conclusion. Log-linear analysis showed that the Labovian group made a significantly greater use of the abstract after the intervention, $\chi^2(3) = 57.68, p < .01 (z = 4.4)$. The Labovian group also used abstracts significantly more often three months after the end of the intervention, $\chi^2(3) = 69.82, p < .01 (z = 4.73)$ (Table 2).

Table 2. *Frequencies of the abstract before and after the intervention*

		Labovian group		Traditional group	
				Post-test	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Pre-test	No	1	29	21	4
	Yes	1	10	13	2
Three months later					
Post-test	No	0	2	23	11
	Yes	7	32	5	1

Evaluation. In each text, the four types of evaluation were divided by the number of T-units. A repeated measures MANCOVA was carried out using the four types of evaluation after the intervention and three months later as dependent variables, group as independent variable, and the four types of evaluation before the intervention as covariates. The multivariate tests showed a significant effect of group, with $F(4, 72) = 14.28, p < .01, \eta^2 = .44$.

Table 3. *Evaluation of personal account*

Types of evaluation	Labovian group				Traditional group			
	Post-test		Three months later		Post-test		Three months later	
	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>
Lexicon	.70	.05	.63	.05	.36	.04	.38	.05
Techniques	.33	.06	.21	.02	.06	.06	.05	.02
Emotions	.08	.01	.07	.01	.05	.01	.03	.01
Considerations	.12	.01	.12	.01	.04	.01	.04	.01

*Adjusted means

A significant effect of group was found in the univariate tests for the following evaluative strategies:

- Evaluative lexicon, $F(1, 75) = 29.35, p < .01, \eta^2 = .28$;
- Evaluation techniques, $F(1, 75) = 17.98, p < .01, \eta^2 = .19$;
- Personal considerations $F(1, 75) = 40.50, p < .01, \eta^2 = .35$.

As the means showed, the Labovian group used more evaluation strategies than the traditional group, in particular evaluative lexicon, evaluation techniques, and personal considerations (Table 3).

Length and text quality. A repeated measures MANCOVA was carried out using text length and text quality after the intervention and three months later as dependent variables, with group as independent variable, and text length and text quality before the intervention as covariates. The multivariate tests showed a significant effect of group, with $F(2, 76) = 21.96, p < .01, \eta^2 = .37$, and of text quality before the intervention, with $F(2, 76) = 22.08, p < .01, \eta^2 = .37$. From the univariate tests, a significant effect of group was found for length, with $F(1, 77) = 30.79, p < .01, \eta^2 = .29$, and text quality, with $F(1, 77) = 22.87, p < .01, \eta^2 = .23$.

The Labovian group wrote longer and better accounts than the traditional group (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. *Length of personal account*

Labovian group				Traditional group			
Post-test		Three months later		Post-test		Three months later	
<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>
28.21	1.34	29.55	1.35	20.29	1.36	19.84	1.36

* Adjusted *M*

Table 5. *Text quality of personal account*

Labovian group				Traditional group			
Post-test		Three months later		Post-test		Three months later	
<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M*</i>	<i>SE</i>
2.63	.11	2.72	.10	2.13	.11	2.04	.10

* Adjusted *M*

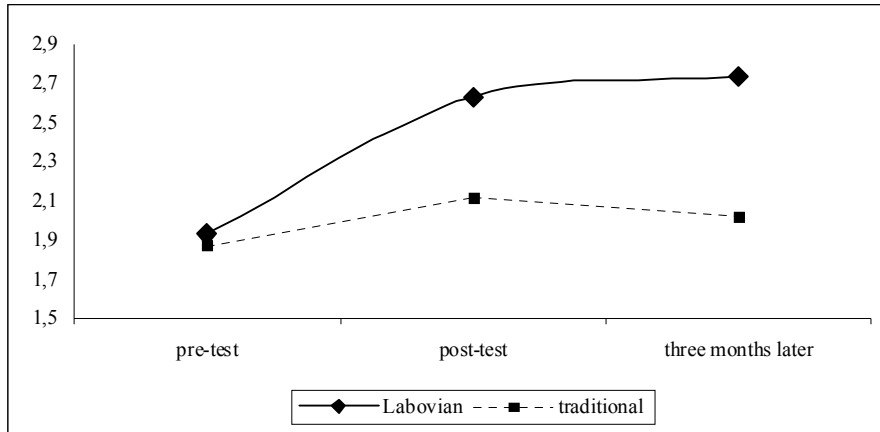


Figure 1: Text quality of personal account.

Both struggling and skilled writers in the Labovian group benefited from the intervention. Independently of writing competence, all children used more evaluation strategies at the end of the intervention, but the quality of skilled writers' personal accounts was higher than the quality of struggling writers', $F(1, 79) = 35.36, p < .01, \eta^2 = .31$.

Some examples from participants' texts written in Italian and translated into English follow:

Labovian group

- Abstract: "What an exciting day! At last I went to the swimming pool!" (Rosana).
- Orientation: "It was a Sunday, the most beautiful one I have ever experienced, well... It was a very special morning because I had my First Communion. I seemed like a little white monk, the way I was dressed. All of us left on time to go to church, we were all packed so closely together we looked like one big white sheet..." (Emilio).
- Complicating action/crucial event: "When he put the phone down he turned with a distraught look and said: "I've got burglars at home!" You had to have been there to see the scene... All the men sitting at the table stood up like a whirlwind! At one point Lucia arrived crying desperately..." (Martina).
- Conclusion: "When the famous day finally arrived, we met for the race. I started feeling scared when the list of children who were taking part was read out. When it was my turn, my heart was exploding in my chest and I forgot an exercise because I was feeling so nervous. As you can imagine my performance wasn't good and I looked at my mother who was clapping and my discomfort passed. In the car, my mother told me that even I was a winner, I had overcome

my fear of performing in public. At grandma's house I showed my medal to everyone and I felt as if I were the winner" (Fabio).

Traditional group

- Abstract: "I spent all day with my sister" (Angelo).
- Orientation: "It was an autumn day, I was riding my bike without holding the handlebars, I wanted to go to the football ground to play with my friends" (Roberto).
- Complicating action/crucial event: "I was going down stairs slowly and my foot slipped, I fell, I banged my head and then I stopped rolling and I stopped" (Ilaria).
- Conclusion: "At the end we went home happy and cheerful" (Massimiliano).

5.2 Enrichment of a narrative text

Evaluation. A repeated measures MANCOVA was carried out with four types of evaluation of written texts after the intervention as dependent variables, group as independent variable, and four types of written text evaluation before the intervention as covariates. The multivariate tests showed a significant effect of group, with $F(4, 72) = 17.79, p < .01, \eta^2 = .50$.

A significant effect of group was found in the univariate tests for the following evaluative strategies:

- Evaluative lexicon, $F(1, 75) = 24.62, p < .01, \eta^2 = .25$;
- Evaluation techniques, $F(1, 75) = 26.18, p < .01, \eta^2 = .26$;
- Emotions, $F(1, 75) = 29.57, p < .01, \eta^2 = .28$;
- Personal considerations, $F(1, 75) = 52.65, p < .01, \eta^2 = .41$.

In sum, as the means showed, the Labovian group enriched their texts more than the traditional group, using all evaluative strategies (Table 6).

Table 6. *Evaluation of text supplied (narration without evaluation)*

Types of evaluation	Labovian group		Traditional group	
	<i>M</i> *	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i> *	<i>SE</i>
Lexicon	14.29	.97	7.08	.99
Techniques	4.55	.49	.81	.50
Emotions	2.48	.27	.31	.27
Considerations	3.26	.24	.61	.25

*Adjusted *M*

Some examples are presented below:

Labovian group

- Abstract: “Now I want to tell you about a wonderful trip that I had, I really have to admit that my sister and I enjoyed ourselves so much!” (Nicole).
- Orientation: “At last, my family and I decided to go on a trip to the countryside. I was very excited and happy! Do you know why? Because spending a whole day with my parents is fantastic! I got ready in five minutes!” (Barbara).
- Complicating action/crucial event: “We went into the garage and ...nooo! My bicycle tyre had a puncture! I was afraid that we would have had to remain at home because of this and not go on our wonderful trip!” (Luca).
- Conclusion: “And so we started off! I had a fantastic day, but if my Dad had not fixed the bike, would we have gone to the country?” (Valentina).

Traditional group

- Abstract: “I had a beautiful experience with my family” (Lucia).
- Orientation: “It was a beautiful day: The blue sky was filled with small clouds” (Simona).
- Complicating action/crucial event: “I went into the garage and I saw that the tyre of my bike had a puncture, so I went to see my father” (Marcella).
- Conclusion: “When we returned home we were tired” (Marco).

In both narrative writing and enrichment tasks, the narrations of the Labovian group participants improved, including a higher number of evaluations. Labovian group children progressively learned to use more complex and varied strategies: writing comments, inferences, and explanations to express points of view; using specific techniques to catch the reader’s attention such as questions or suspension of the action; and reporting personal emotions and using a richer lexicon. Regarding evaluative lexicon, a qualitative analysis shows an important difference between the two groups: while the traditional group used qualifying adjectives to stress facts, after the intervention, the Labovian group also used evaluative nouns, verbs and adverbs (e.g., “When I went into the garage, *unfortunately* I saw that my bike didn’t work. I was *very* angry. I *grumbled* because when there is a *beautiful* day, there is *always* a *problem!*”).

6. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of an instructional intervention on 4th graders’ writing of personal accounts. On the basis of Labov’s model (1972), the referential and evaluative components of the narration were taught in the intervention. We hypothesized that, after the intervention, children would learn to express their voice, using evaluative strategies. It was expected that the personal accounts written by the Labovian group would improve qualitatively in both the use of evaluative strategies and text quality. The results confirmed the hypothesis of the study: by focusing on narrative functions as well as the evaluative strategies, the intervention helped students express themselves, producing more personal texts. The better performance of the Labovian group remained stable three months after the end

of the intervention. In particular, the intervention was successful in improving the following aspects of narrative texts:

Referential and evaluative component of the narration. Regarding the coherence of texts, the findings revealed that both Labov's narrative functions and the division of the text into three sections proved to be useful for the organization of content and narrative structure. In fact, both the Labovian and traditional students produced texts with an orientation, a complicating action and a conclusion, thus providing a complete narrative structure. Both groups were asked to plan, write and review their texts; however, as discussed in the intervention section, these cognitive processes were also related to the evaluative component of the narration in the Labovian group. Labov's (1972) model proved to be more functional in expressing personal and subjective aspects of experience. While students in the traditional group focused almost exclusively on events, those in the Labovian group were able to integrate the referential and evaluative components of the narrations. They wrote coherent texts enriched with feelings and personal thoughts by their personal interpretation of the experience in the sequence of events that occurred. Evaluation was found throughout the narrative in the Labovian group. For example, starting from the abstract and orientation, these students often used evaluation strategies to create expectation and suspense. The presence of an abstract in the texts increased considerably after the intervention on personal accounts. The Labovian group learned to use this narrative function to anticipate the main facts. Although not necessary for the coherence of a personal account, the abstract has a dual function. On the one hand it helps the writer reflect on the focus of the personal account and to keep in mind what he/she wants to express from the beginning; on the other, it helps the reader grasp the crucial aspect of the narration and create expectations and suspense that involve him/her in the flow of the narration.

Students in the traditional group tended to narrate events according to a chronological order while the Labovian group also used various types of evaluation to describe the crucial event, stressing the salient facts and expressing their own perspective. Often, the text conclusion was also enriched with evaluative elements with the Labovian group tending to conclude the narration with a personal comment based on their experience. The use of different evaluation strategies, integrated in the referential plan, might also have influenced text length since the Labovian group wrote longer personal accounts than the other students.

Variety of evaluation strategies. The Labovian group used evaluation strategies throughout the entire course of the narration, and also acquired a wide variety of evaluative strategies. Thanks to text production and text analysis/revision tasks, students learned different kinds of evaluation strategy. Through these activities, children understood that a writer can express his or her vision of events in different ways, and were stimulated to discover a personal means of expression. By using a variety of evaluative terms (adjectives, nouns, verbs and adverbs), they put emphasis on specific elements of the narration, and learned to express point of view using comments, explanations, reflections and personal interpretations. Students also re-

sorted to particular evaluation techniques to guide the reader's attention, keeping the events in suspense, emphasizing certain facts through punctuation, referring directly to the reader by inviting reflection with the use of questions, and remarking on some concepts through repetition, similes, or metaphors.

Text quality. By narrating events coherently and expressing feelings and points of view, the Labovian group made their narratives more informative, personal, and pleasing to read. As a consequence, the quality of their personal accounts improved - it was not only a question of superficial embellishment, but of content enrichment. Instead of writing a simple description of events, this information was integrated with what children felt, desired, thought and so on. In sum, they learned to use writing as a tool of self-expression and by learning to express what they thought and felt, students produced narrative writing corresponding to their voice (Elbow, 1981). As underlined by Bryant (2005), the construction of voice is a recursive process in which the voice is continually being reconstructed. The activities and the discussions proposed during the intervention helped students understand and construct their own voice and the modality to express it.

At the beginning of the intervention, the use of writing as a means of self-expression was difficult for struggling writers in particular. However, also these students progressively learnt to verbalize their voice using evaluative strategies. In fact, both struggling and skilled writers, at the end of the intervention, used more expressions of thoughts and feelings.

The teachers' role was crucial in promoting learning, stimulating and supporting children. They proposed activities and created situations to expand the students' "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978), and helped students overcome two main difficulties: comprehension of the concept of evaluation and the expression of emotions. At the beginning of the intervention, understanding this complex and new concept of evaluation was difficult for many children. In the initial phase, the evaluative terms were often used inappropriately by filling the personal account with too many evaluative terms and/or evaluation techniques. There were some difficulties in understanding when and why they were writing inappropriate sentences. Progressively, they understood the crucial concept of evaluation and, subsequently, the proper use of evaluative strategies. Constant monitoring was useful until students learned to use the various strategies appropriately.

Students had difficulty expressing their emotions, even if they understood the importance of the evaluative strategies and learned to use them properly. At the end of the intervention, pupils used more emotions to enrich the supplied text than in free writing of a personal account. They seemed to know how to write about emotions, but expressed them with difficulty when writing about their experiences. In sum, children seemed more able to improve a written narrative by adding emotions than use this evaluative strategy to express their own feelings. This difference seems to demonstrate a greater awareness of how emotions should be expressed than their ability to express in a written form the feelings experienced. This result might reflect the gap, underlined in the first part of this paper, between narrative instruction in

primary school, principally focused on narrative reading and text analysis, and the relatively scarce attention paid to writing personal accounts.

The results of the present study have an important instructional implication. As pointed out in the introduction, primary school teachers usually privilege the referential component of narrative writing and are particularly concerned with the coherence of written texts. The Labovian group teachers were satisfied with the experience, which gave them the opportunity to teach how to write personal accounts in a new way. In other words, they basically changed their way of teaching, coming to focus not only on the referential component, but also on how to make children express their voices. In our work, Labov's model was readapted for writing. Both narrative functions and evaluative strategies were necessarily modified to include specific aspects of writing, such as punctuation. The model, the evaluative component in particular, has proved to be useful for personal accounts; in fact, the expression of personal points of view, essential in this genre, improved. For invented narratives, where coherence rather than writer voice is a basic component, both the referential component of Labov's model and the distinction of narratives in three sections could be effective. As argued in analysing the results of this study, teaching children to use evaluative strategies should help them express their feelings and points of view better, thus becoming aware of personal account as a genre. Evaluative strategies are not to be considered as mere embellishment, but a tool for the written expression of voice which is helpful in leading young writers to clarify events to themselves and to recount them from their own perspective. Thanks to the intervention, students learned the structure, the peculiarities, and criteria of a personal account. They became aware of the genre-expectation of the reader; in particular, they came to understand that in personal accounts it is necessary to express one's voice.

Over the past 20 years there has been a debate between scholars in favour of an explicit teaching of genres in primary school (the Australian approach: see, for example, Cope & Kalantzis, 1993), and scholars sustaining the multiplicity of genres and the need to have students discover them through meaningful writing activities (Bakhtin, 1986; Bazerman, 1988; Freedman, 1995; Miller, 1984). We think that in our intervention these two conflicting perspectives are integrated: in learning how to express their voice, children also become aware of the components of a personal account.

While in primary school, children are often asked to narrate their experiences out of school, with their families and/or friends, however, this genre is used less from grade 6 and disappears completely in high school. We think that the personal account as a writing task should not be abandoned (Michaels, 1991). On the contrary, this type of narrative text should be taught as a necessary step towards more mature writing.

Teaching writing to primary school students involves many complex aspects related to various text types; we are aware that the ability to write personal thoughts-feelings is only one of the problems that children face when writing. In this research we have focused on students' ability to express themselves, and more intervention studies are needed on how to improve students' ability to write. This study is a first step in that direction.

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APPENDIX A: CRITERIA OF TEXT QUALITY EVALUATION

1. Information expressed in a confused way, text very poor in content, text limited to the exposition of facts that occurred, lack of personal thought (personal considerations, comments, emotions...), text without originality.
2. Information expressed in a sufficiently clear manner, text fairly poor in content, without, or with few personal thoughts (personal considerations, comments, emotions...), text not very original.
3. Information expressed in a clear manner, with fairly complete content and a reasonable number of personal thoughts (personal considerations, comments, emotions...), original text.
4. Information expressed in a clear manner, text with complete content and a good number of personal thoughts (personal considerations, comments, emotions...), very original text.

APPENDIX B: TEXT WITHOUT EVALUATION SUPPLIED BEFORE THE INTERVENTION

An afternoon on the beach

One day, my mum, my dad, my brother Carlo and I decided to go to the beach. As the car wouldn't start, we went on foot. I was carrying the bucket and the spades, Carlo was carrying the air mattress, Mum the towels and Dad the beach-umbrella. We decided to take a short-cut and we set off. At the end of the street we could see the sea. We arrived at the beach, put our things down and at eleven we went into the sea. Carlo and I played for twenty minutes in the water, then we came out and mum gave us towels. Carlo and I built a castle in the sand and then we played soccer. At six o'clock we came back home.

APPENDIX C: TEXT WITHOUT EVALUATION SUPPLIED AFTER THE INTERVENTION

By bicycle

Last Sunday, my family and I decided to spend the day in the countryside. Dad went to the garage to get three bicycles: two bicycles were fine, but mine had a puncture. Dad fixed the tyre and at ten we left. Dad was in front with a rucksack, I was in between and mum was behind with my sister Lucia. We went along some paths for half an hour and when we arrived at a park we stopped. In the morning Lucia and I played in the grass. In the afternoon we played with a ball, we went on the rides, like the swing, the slide, the merry-go-round and we ran on the grass. My parents talked and read a book. At five we came back home.