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Writer's Workshop: Promoting Peer Relationships on Early Literacy

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WRITER'S WORKSHOP: PROMOTING PEER RELATIONSHIPS
ON EARLY LITERACY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

Master Teacher

by

Jim LaBrie

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ABSTRACT

WRITER'S WORKSHOP: PROMOTING PEER RELATIONSHIPS

ON EARLY LITERACY

By

Jim LaBrie

May, 2009

Writer's Workshop and the influence of peer relationships and art on young children's literacy development were explored. There was found to be a direct correlation between children's art/drawings on their literacy development. Peer interactions during writing were also found to positively impact young writers. Peers and art do impact early literacy and have influences on Writer's Workshop and children's attitudes toward writing. Based on this research a handbook was developed to aid educators in planning a Writer's Workshop model, developing peer relationships during writing, and assessing student writing.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The act of writing requires many components for writers to consider. Some of these include writing through art/drawing, writing to tell a story or explain a concept, and writing for audience/peers. These components are interrelated and inextricably linked to early literacy development. This paper will explore the strong connections among these writing components and how each can compliment and build upon the others.

The urge to write and become increasingly more proficient in writing so that others can “read” one’s creations is a continuing force that propels the writer on to greater and greater attempts. Invariably, once children know there is interest in their writing, they will return time and time again to the interested party, producing sample after sample. For example, picture a young child who comes to a parent with scribbles on a paper. If asked to tell about the scribbles, the child will often come up with an elaborate story with vivid details and be encouraged to do it again. It is in this way that practice is important. Each self-initiated attempt consistently explores and broadens their developing concepts of how print communicates in our society (DeFord 1980).

Educators must encourage all children to write and become life-long writers who love and need to write every day. Writer’s Workshop provides this encouragement and is an interactive approach to teaching writing in which students learn and practice the importance of rehearsal, drafting, revising, and editing their own work (Calkins, 1994). Providing children with consistent time set aside to write is crucial to their literacy development and ability to learn the rhythm and style of writing. Children

are more likely to be successful writers if they are simply given ample opportunity to write.

For some young writers, rehearsal, how writers plan to begin to write, is through drawing (Calkins, 1994). Ultimately, drawing allows children with limited writing ability to further explore and organize their ideas as well as construct meaning from experiences (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Drawing is an essential element in early writing that allows children to fully tell their stories through pictures. Picture stories eventually give way to stories with pictures and words where each should compliment the other.

Writers need response not only from the teacher, but also from their peers as well (Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998). Peer interaction is important to the process by allowing students opportunities to help one another in all aspects of their writing. In one study a student asked if she could share her writing piece on the Author's Chair, a special place in the classroom where students are encouraged to share their work with the class, even though she was not finished. She said, "I want other people to ask me more questions so I can add more details to my story" (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). This complimenting and asking questions of a peer's writing not only serves to uplift the writer, but also gives him/her feedback to go back to make his/her writing better.

Purpose of the Project

Writing is a life skill that no student can do without. Every student will need to learn good writing skills to create stories, poems, letters, thank-you notes, reports, essays and more that will last a lifetime. It is essential to promote good writing habits and encourage young writers early on. The hard part is teaching students how put their

thoughts together and down on paper into a cohesive draft. Organizing and planning writing are challenging concepts to convey to young children.

The solution is to help young students write better by thinking about the process behind good writing. We need to teach and give them the language and tactics to tackle the writing process. Students must understand the art/drawing connection to the process and how their pictures complement their writing. The students need to recognize how peer review and the sharing of written work can further enhance their progress as young writers. Just as students are learning to write, we as educators are learning how to best teach writing to them. The focus on writing was chosen so this educator could learn to be a more effective writing teacher for his students.

The purpose of this project is to examine the influence of peer relationships on young children's literacy development and to design a toolbox or set of materials that fosters peer collaboration. The project will focus on the following areas: How Children Learn to Write, Writer's Workshop, The Art/Writing Connection, and Peer Influences on Writing. This paper also contains a review of literature and research concerning these four areas of writing. The lessons and ideas generated from the project can serve as a guide or model for other first grade teachers and could be extended for use in second grade as well.

This project is motivated by the desire to see children learn to and love to write. The hope is to design a writing program that encourages collaboration and allows all first grade students to feel successful in writing. By creating a learning environment where students are free to experiment with different types of writing and discourse with peers, this teacher hopes to see significant personal growth in each student's writing abilities

and confidence.

Limitations of the Project

The lessons and materials developed for this project are intended to be used in a first grade classroom. They are applicable to students with varying ability levels, socio-economic status, and multi-language backgrounds. Some adaptations could be made for use in second grade or even beyond. Most of the materials could be used or easily adapted for use in primary grades one through three. The materials may also be adaptable and applicable for use in upper elementary grades as well.

Definitions of Terms

Writer's Workshop: a structured period of time set aside daily, where students are encouraged to show their own literary expressions. It most often begins with a whole-group mini-lesson, followed by independent writing practice by individual students, and concluded with shared reading at the Author's Chair (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

Mini-Lesson: a brief five or ten minute lesson which is taught at the beginning or at the end of the process. Mini-lessons focus on improving one aspect of writing, such as classroom procedures, prewriting strategies, revision strategies, editing, and writing skills (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p. 132).

Author's Chair: One student shares his or her writing orally with the entire class. This student then asks other students to either share a comment on what they thought or ask a question about the writing. Use of an author's chair gives children feedback on

their writing, models conferencing, and develops a sense of community for writing (Washington State's Essential Academic Requirements, p.48).

Peer: a person who has equal standing with another or others, as in rank, class, or age (Dictionary.com, 2008).

Peer Conference: a sharing of the writing process and experience with a peer partner or with the whole class (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The focus of this project is to design a toolbox or set of materials that fosters peer collaboration in writing for a first grade classroom. In order to support the premise of this project a review of literature in the following areas was conducted. It began by looking at the recent history of teaching writing and how children learn to write. Attention was then focused on best practices in writing and what makes an effective writing program. Writer's Workshop was explored and showed to encompass many of the traits that have proven effective time and time again. It also looked at how art is an essential component of early writing. Lastly, how peers can be influential in the writing process was studied. Peers can be successful in helping each other to write and revise their writing.

Recent History of Teaching Writing

In the late 1960s and early 1970s leading literacy educators suggested that students should be supported in writing through a process of generating ideas, reflection, planning, composing, and revising. U.S. educational leaders began to appeal for the teaching of writing in these ways at the very start of schooling, stating that learning to write could help students learn to read, and vice versa ("Teaching of Writing", n.d.).

By 1985 the U.S. federal government funded a research center devoted to the study of written language; attention turned to how writing develops across a lifespan. It

explored the influences of varied school and out of school experiences on learning to write, and how these experiences intersect with learning to write in school. "Writing was then judged effective where it is appropriate to audience, purpose, and occasion" ("Teaching of Writing", n.d.). Classrooms have come to provide practice in addressing a range of challenges and contexts. Along with this focus on the contexts in which writing occurs has been an increased interest in the diversity of individual writers. Teachers are looking at what these writers bring to particular writing units, and how they can support and monitor their growth over time. Teaching writing as a process has become common with teachers providing opportunities for their students to brainstorm ideas, write drafts, receive peer and teacher feedback, revise, check, and share.

"Although teachers continue to guide young children toward the standard forms, many are encouraging students to explore sound-letter correspondences through their own "invented spellings", drawing on research that explores these as important developmental building-blocks" ("Teaching of Writing", n.d.). In the 1990s the National Council of Teachers began the New Standards project. This group of literacy educators was charged with figuring out how portfolio assessment could be used both at the classroom level and beyond. The cost and complexity of portfolio assessment have relegated them primarily to schools and classrooms. Portfolios continue to provide teachers with evidence of students' processes, products, and growth over time.

Finally researchers have found important links among the activities of writing and reading. These links are related to the finding that writing is primarily a process of making meaning in social, cultural, and material contexts. Given the diversity of our student population, it is critical that teachers understand the ways students make meaning

outside of school and that teachers know how to help students use what they bring as a resource for what they learn inside the classroom (“Teaching of Writing”, n.d.).

How Children Learn to Write

The evidence suggests that learning to write happens implicitly, as does oral language. As children move toward learning specified forms, they organize print in their environment and learn generalized communication strategies (Deford, 1980). Young children expect the print in the world to make sense and their earliest efforts to read and write, while not yet conventional, reflect the meaning they bring to their efforts. Knowing this about young students means that school-based teaching need not begin with a “blank slate”. Rather, supportive teaching begins as educators tap into the diverse and rich experiences all language users have been building over their first five or six years of life (Egawa, 2008).

How does writing develop from age by age? Keeping in mind that there are no specific ages and stages when we can expect writing skills to develop, here are some general guidelines: -

- By 18 months to 2 years, children may begin to scribble.
- At about age 3, children’s scribbling may begin to acquire characteristics of print.
- Between the ages of 4 and 7, children may begin to translate the words they hear and can say into the letters that spell them (Neuman, 2004).

So how do children learn to print? They draw pictures, and the teacher writes their dictated captions. They trace over the teacher’s script. They copy underneath the teacher’s captions. They copy words and captions from around the room. They

remember some word forms and write them independently. They invent word forms, often correctly, and ask the teacher for unknown words (Clay, 2001).

The first things young children learn will be gross approximations, which later become refined: weird letter forms-scribbles for the way the child sees the letter rather than how it is truly formed, invented words-U for you, KOM for come and EN for in, and make-believe sentences-"I like to ride on unicorns". Such creative efforts suggest that the child is reaching out towards the principles of written language and any instruction should encourage him to continue to do this (Clay, 2001).

Knowing these things about children and learning, educators need to view the writing process as interrelated to the other processes of oral language and reading. Rather than viewing modes of communication other than speech and writing as "add-ons" in learning, a multi-modal approach begins from a theoretical position that all communicative modes are potentially equal in their contributions to learning (Kendrick & McKay, 2002). A multi-modal approach allows educators to meet the needs of a diverse group of students with different learning styles and abilities. Therefore multi-level instruction is needed to reach developing writers. Fox (1993) states worksheets alone can not develop writers who can think for themselves, who can create extended texts, who can be logical, who can use voice or tone, or who can write with power. It is perfectly possible to be able to fill-in endless worksheets correctly yet not be able to write a single coherent paragraph, let alone a longer piece of connected prose (Klatt, 1996, p. 18).

Although there has been a general move to test writing through writing tests initiated by prompts, few tests also offer writers a choice of topic or opportunities to return to their initial drafts, factors that influence the quality of writing. Yet even with

these limitations, the findings of the NAEP 1998 Writing Report Card were clear: students experienced with writing more than one draft of a paper and students whose writing was saved in folders or portfolios, achieved higher average scores than their peers who did not write multiple drafts or save their writing. An increasing number of the teachers of these students acknowledged involving students in the “writing process”, or the strategic processes of drafting, prewriting, revising, and editing (Egawa, 2008). Writer’s Workshop connects students to all of these processes.

Writer’s Workshop

Writer’s Workshop has been termed “authentic” because students write about what is important to them. They focus on what interests them, just as professional writers do. Their lives and own experiences are what the children use to select topics they write about (Landry, 2000). Writer’s Workshop provides students with daily uninterrupted blocks of time. This allows students time to think, write, confer, choose, read, and rewrite. Students learn writing mechanics in whole meaningful contexts. Writer’s Workshop exposes children to the processes writers experience in the real world (Klatt, 1996).

There are several reasons for choosing Writer’s Workshop as part of an action plan. First it allows for student choice. Students are able to decide for themselves what they want to write about based on their experiences and knowledge. Developmentally Appropriate Practices show that when learners are given choices, they are more invested. Secondly it provides students with real writing opportunities. Students are more motivated by having a real-world purpose for their writing such as writing a “How to…”

are familiar with for someone who has never done or made it before. Third it allows for many social interactions with peers throughout the writing process. In peer response, students are given plenty of opportunities to brainstorm ideas in pairs or groups, to give feedback on each other's writing and to proofread and edit for each other. This also involves the integration of reading and writing as students continually reread and fix-up their writing either alone or with the help peer partners. Lastly students are exposed to various types of writing through units of study (Klatt, 1996). These are many ways to make writing exciting and relevant to one's students. Teachers just simply give children reasons and opportunities to write every day.

According to Goodman (1986), "Children of all ages write best when they are able to choose their own topics" (Klatt, 1996, p. 29). If a particular theme is being studied the teacher may want to suggest some topics; however, the final choice of topic is left up to the child. By allowing students to make their own choices, learning becomes meaningful and relevant. Additionally, by giving the children the right to make their own choices, the teacher is empowering students. The more literacy skills a child possesses, the more power a child has. Imagine not being able to fill out a job application or read the latest newspaper headline. The ability to read and write has direct impact on one's life. Literacy equals knowledge which equals power. This power is what allows a child to succeed in today's society (Klatt, 1996).

Writing can be more enjoyable and meaningful to students if they are allowed to choose topics that are important to them and given time to put their ideas on paper. According to Graves (1996) "If students are not engaged in writing at least four days out of five, and for a period of thirty five to forty minutes, beginning in first grade, they will

have little opportunity to learn to think through the medium of writing.” (Benischek, Vejr & Wetzel, 2001, p 21). Children who are given opportunities to write consistently are able to plan, organize, and structure their ideas. These skills are very important in helping children learn how to monitor and adjust their writing so that their ideas are crystal clear.

The first component of Writing Workshop is the mini-lesson. A mini-lesson is a brief lesson at the beginning of the workshop that focuses on a particular skill or strategy. “In mini-lessons, we teach our students’ intentions. Our students are first deeply engaged in their self-sponsored work, and then we bring them together to learn what they need to know in order to do that work. This way, they stand a chance of being active meaning-makers, even during this bit of formal instruction” (Calkins, 1994. p.193-194). Students not only learn about proper grammar and punctuation, they also come to learn and value the importance of drafting, revising, and editing their pieces of writing.

For example, a mini-lesson on the importance of using periods could be done with a teacher sample where periods are omitted. The teacher will read the sample non-stop without taking a breath and ask students what is wrong with the piece. The students will help the teacher insert periods at the end of every complete thought and then reread the piece, this time stopping to take a breath at periods. Students will learn how important it is to put in periods so that they know where to stop and take a breath in their own writing. This helps to make the writing clear to both the author and the reader.

The mini-lesson teaches children about the writing process and provides them with numerous opportunities to practice and internalize what goes into a piece of writing just as a professional author does (Landry, 2000). For instance “Just as children learn to

talk and read, swim or jump rope by imitating people who already know how, they learn to write by mimicking the habits and strategies of real writers. Teachers play a valuable role in the process. By modeling good reading and writing habits, they show students that reading and writing are important activities deserving of their time and attention” (Benischek, Vejr & Wetzel, 2001). These demonstrations of writing and thinking aloud by the teacher show the students how writers work through the process.

The second component of Writer’s Workshop is the writing process. This includes prewriting-thinking of an idea and planning what the writer wants to say about it, writing-getting the writer’s ideas onto paper, revising-making the writer’s writing clearer by possibly adding a detail etc., checking-correcting spelling, capital letters, and punctuation in writer’s writing, and publishing-rewriting one’s piece in writers’ best handwriting to share with others.

Conferencing is another piece in which the teacher talks with the student about his/her writing. As the children are engaged in these various steps of the writing process, the teacher observes and confers with the students. The teacher’s role is to listen, tell back, and ask questions to help students discover meaning and build on what they know (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). The concept of Writer’s Workshop can be extended to include a more student-centered approach in the classroom by implementing peer conferencing to assist in the organization and practice of writing (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Additionally, children learn how conferencing with the teacher as well as with their peers can help them become better writers. Research has shown that this type of writing process increases student’s independence and self-efficacy (Landry, 2000).

Another component of Writer's Workshop is sharing. The sharing of writing is a very important part of Writer's Workshop. Students look forward to this. The sharing takes place at the end of the workshop and usually lasts five to ten minutes. The students sit in the Author's Chair when they share their writing. Only a few students share their writing each day. The children are randomly chosen unless one has written something that the teacher thinks the others should see or hear. At the end of each sharing that student receives an energizer from the rest of the class. An energizer is the recognition of their work by clapping, a group cheer, and etc. This sharing of writing is important for several reasons. One is that some of the better students serve as models for lower students. It also gives ideas for topics to the other students. The children also feel good about themselves and their writing. The energizers help with this (Klatt, 1996).

A culminating activity in Writer's Workshop is the celebration. A writing celebration consists of the children sharing their final pieces with an audience. This can take the shape of many forms. For instance, it could just be a celebration with peers sharing with peers, parents can be invited to hear the published pieces, or even faculty from school. A writing celebration is a closing to weeks of hard work and determination of the children. It makes them feel like real authors (Landry, 2000).

There is research that indicates if children foresee writing every day, they will start to acquire habits of good writers. It further suggests that these good habits include students thinking about writing all the time, not just during "writing time". This equates to more proficient writers (Landry, 2000). What does writing time look like? It looks like children reading each other's pieces, or children helping one another with a spelling word. The teacher may be on the floor listening to a child read a story and making

suggestions on how to make it better. There also may be children under tables writing so intensely, no one would want to bother them (Landry, 2000).

In a study by Jasmine & Weiner (2007), when students were asked if they had become better writers, one student responded, "I'm a good writer now. I'm a good writer because I add more details to my story after my friends ask me questions. I'm a good writer because my friends really liked my story when it was my turn to go on the Author's Chair. They clapped and they said it was good" p.138. In the Kos & Maslowski study (2001), children were asked, "What makes somebody a good writer?" and "How have you changed as a writer this year?" Two children noted their increased comfort as writers in their responses. One said, "I write more and more, almost every day," and another said, "I've got more ideas in my head, and I've been thinking about more things I can write down" (Kos & Maslowski, 2001, p. 581). These children had begun to think of writing more globally, as their interpretation of the term writer in the question indicates. To them, writers were persons who engaged in the act of writing frequently and used writing to express ideas.

In a case study by Stafford (1993), a troubled student was helped by Writer's Workshop. The teacher was convinced that the first grade Writer's Workshop and writing were the central dynamic for helpful change in the child's life. The Writer's Workshop hour was a flexible time when the teacher could relate to this student on a personal basis. The student knew (as did all the children) that she could talk, and then write, about things of pressing importance to her, about how she was truly feeling (Stafford, 1993, p.13). She knew that things she most needed to say would be listened to and respected as highly important. She found that she could make a connection, and

expand it through writing. She used writing to express feelings and to analyze feelings to do some important “critical thinking” about herself. This student clearly had found in writing a means of expression that served her well. Writer’s Workshop is a place where children can learn to use and love a tool that can do many things for them. Hopefully it will lead all children into writing for a lifetime. With a few children like this child, Writer’s Workshop may mean writing for life itself (Stafford, 1993).

Art

A drawing or any other product of a child is good, if the work accomplished accords with the child’s age and is altogether uniform in quality and when it is honest and true in every single detail (Leeds, 1989, p. 99). To children, art is the language of thought, and it comes naturally as a means of expression. From children’s first scribbles, art is a very real representation of their world, and it is through this representation that they are able to understand that world and the myriad of associations between objects and places as well as emotions and feelings (Dickinson & Schaffer, 1991).

Drawing is a learning context that facilitates assimilation of new learning tasks. Picture writing is a cognitive exercise for young children during which they integrate drawing and writing. Drawing offers them a spontaneous way of making sense of the novel, by using existing and more generic knowledge of how to draw (Kouvou, 2006, p. 5). Young children’s art expressions are not very much learned from copying others, but are spontaneous products of the individual’s own eye-hand-brain development and visual feedback from their own scribbles (Kellogg, 1973). As a previously developed form of expression, drawing can facilitate the exploration of ideas, it reduces cognitive demands

through its close ties with the narrative form, and, as an alternative symbol system, it has certain structural advantages over writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991, p.207). The main advantage is that students do not get caught up in the form and function of language and are able to fully develop their ideas through pictures.

Studies of children's early writing show that beginning writers spontaneously use alternative symbolic forms, such as drawing, to add depth and meaning to their writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991). It appears that very young children treat writing in a pictographic sense that includes using drawing as writing or using scribble-like markings with meaning only to the child (Whitehurst & Lonigan 1998, p. 853).

Drawing is an important part of the literacy process. Children read pictures to understand, make pictures to tell what they mean, and write the pictures into words.

Continuing to use drawing past those early years not only helps students to make personal connections with their writing, but also results in more natural writing and a greater range of writing genre. It helps prompt ideas for writing and teaches the skills of observation (Egawa, 2008, p. 5). Rehearsal through drawing may therefore help to overcome some of the problems encountered by novice writers, enabling them to gain control of the process of generating and organizing content prior to writing. Moreover, drawing is a resource which is available to every teacher of writing. It has potential to act as a simple, effective strategy for increasing students' motivation to write and enhances the quality of the resultant writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991, p. 216). The results of this study indicate that drawing is a viable and effective form of rehearsal for narrative writing at the second and third grade level. At these grades, drawing as a planning activity can be a more

successful form of rehearsal than the traditional planning activity, discussion (Caldwell & Moore, 1991, p. 216).

This art through writing connects to writer's workshop in many ways. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it helps younger students organize and rehearse their ideas for writing prior to adding the words. The drawings elaborate on the words by showing what the words are telling and enhancing the stories through pictures. Children know that by reading their words and the pictures they can clearly write and tell a concise story that makes sense to themselves and to others. Pictures also play an invaluable part in "How to..." writing by showing the steps in drawings as well as in words. How many times have we as adults put together something from just the pictures or diagrams without reading the word instructions? Pictures can and do tell or in this case instruct us how to do or make something. Art through drawing clearly has close ties to the writing process and writer's workshop.

Peers

Informal talk between peers at the beginning of the Writer's Workshop allows children to discover topics for writing and to decide whether they will write alone or with others. It was in these conversations that children negotiate their literate roles as audience-who their writing will be for, idea generators-how they will get their ideas for writing, or illustrators-who will draw the pictures to go with the writing (Rowe, 2001, p. 428). Most of the talk is informal, among children who sit near one another and who talk quite a bit as they compose. This is especially true of children early in their careers as writers. Young children often externalize their rehearsal for writing, speaking aloud

before they write and as they write, in order to articulate a plan and also to hear the language (the phonemes early on) of the message they intend to write. However, other people around them can (and do) hear them and talk back. This means that throughout the process of writing, young writers are socially visible and vulnerable, and that the text itself often becomes an occasion for negotiating relationships. Young writers' talk therefore, fulfills different but interpenetrating functions that are once cognitive and relational (Bomer, 2004, p. 423).

Peer collaboration has proved to be an effective catalyst to increased achievement in writing (Daiute & Dalton, 1989; Dyson, 1988). Peers have a huge influence on each other and peer interaction is important to all aspects of life. Collaboration is essential in writing for three reasons. First, collaborative exchange between writers and readers makes the concept of audience visible to writers, helping them to internalize the questions and concerns of their audience. It sets the stage for students to role play, taking the perspective and using the language of readers. Second, since collaboration requires that students talk to others as they explain their writing, problems and solutions, collaboration is an essential opportunity for students to use vocabulary and talk related to writing that have been modeled by the teacher. Third, implicit in the notion of collaboration is the joint activity of authors and readers in problem-solving activities. In the process, students hold cooperative discussions with each other to share their ideas and solve potential problems, generate new alternatives, and receive immediate response from peers. Thus, collaboration ensures not only further rehearsal of the writing dialogue but exposes students to new problem-solving alternatives and provides writers with peers

who can support their writing and coach them in solving writing problems (Englert, Raphael & Anderson, 1992, p. 415).

Another successful peer collaboration process that is sometimes an element of play is cognitive conflict-disagreeing, arguing, contesting-for the elaboration of knowledge and processes (Daiute & Dalton, 1993). When children disagree, they examine their own thoughts as well as those of others and, thus are more likely to clarify, refine, and expand their thinking than when they work without question (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p.286). More important, however, are the theory and emerging research indicating that collaboration encourages children to express and reflect on thinking that might otherwise remain unexamined or unelaborated. Writing is a skill that requires much generative and reflective thinking and action. Experienced writers actively control the writing process, planning and forming ideas through their interactions with others (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p. 293).

Peer-conferencing gives children the opportunity to work with peers in a structured way to improve their writing. It is important that children not only learn how to write, but also be able to find strengths and weaknesses as well as make suggestions towards other peer's writing (Landry, 2000). Give and take between young writers and their peers allows children to see what others value in writing, just as defending their ideas causes children to think about those ideas from their perspectives (Kos & Maslowski, 2001, p. 569). Children could be heard critically analyzing their own writing and the writing of their peers. The classroom environment encouraged children to interact with each other and with the teacher. The children approached writing with

enthusiasm, dignity, and a sense of ownership, and they enjoyed the literature that was frequently used to stimulate writing (Davis-Samway, 1993, p. 237).

In end-of-year interviews by Rowe (2001), two students were named most frequently by peers as “good writers”. When asked what made her a good writer, one peer responded: “She writes make-believe books, and she kind of just writes them herself.” A second child noted that “She knows how to spell lots of things” (Rowe, 2001, p. 429). Similar criteria were used to explain why he was a good writer. His peers commented that “He knows how to spell big words” and “He knows how to write long books” (Rowe, 2001, p. 429).

CHAPTER THREE

PROCEDURES

The author first became interested in the topic of children and writing after attending a workshop on writing. In addition, writing has been an instructional focus this year in Highline School District and there have been many opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and work with our Literacy Coach Meghan Martin. A review of current research available regarding the topic of children's development in writing, Writer's Workshop, peer influences, and art in writing was conducted at Central Washington Library in Des Moines. The information gathered was combined with information from study groups and workshops, as well as personal teaching experience with emergent writers as a first grade and second grade teacher. The mini-lessons, checklists, and rubrics in the project reflect the emphasis of writing as a developmental process which occurs over time with frequent experimentation with written language on the part of the student.

The author developed a handbook which is organized into the following sections under Writer's Workshop:

1. Mini-lessons
2. Revising/editing checklists
3. Peer conferencing
4. Rubrics

There is a sampling of lesson plans, checklists, forms, and rubrics. It is the intention that these samplings will generate creativity for future lessons and units by

others as well as the author. The lesson plans in the handbook were chosen on the basis of author understanding of student need, interest level, developmental status, and best practices in writing.

It is recommended and is the author's intention that this project be shared and implemented by colleagues and peers at Hazel Valley Elementary in Highline School District #401. In addition the author plans to share the project with teachers in the Renton and Bethel School districts for use in their own classrooms with adaptations as needed.

A Handbook of Effective Writing Practices for a First Grade Classroom

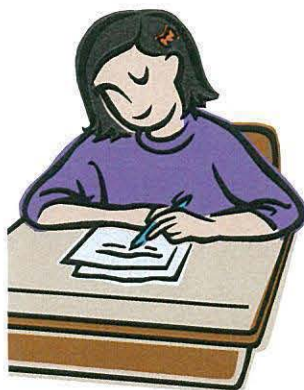


**By
Jim LaBrie**



Welcome educators!

I hope you find the following pages helpful in planning, implementing, and assessing a Writer's Workshop model in your own classrooms. It begins with how to plan a writing unit and gives you some ideas for mini-lessons that could be covered. Checklists are included to help your students with revising, editing, and working with peers during writing. Lastly there are some rubrics that could be used or adapted as assessment tools for scoring your students' writing after a unit of study.



WRITER'S WORKSHOP

UNITS OF STUDY

MINI-LESSONS

REVISION/ EDITING CHECKLISTS

PEER CONFERENCING

RUBRICS

UNITS OF STUDY

Teachers to help prepare for a unit of study, one must plan for the curriculum both mentally and physically. Materials will need to be gathered including mentor texts to model good writing in a particular genre using a particular structure. Lessons must be carefully thought out as to what will be best to teach. One must reflect on the writing goals and plan how to guide children toward them.

The following page shows you one way to approach creating a writing unit of study. There is also a sample first grade units of study and overview with links to the activities and lessons that follow.

One Way to Approach Creating a Writing Unit of Study

1. Name the unit
2. Getting smart about the genre...
 - a. What to the GLEs say students are supposed to know and be able to do this year?
 - b. Read professional text and student text to name the characteristics of that genre.
3. Ask yourself some questions:
 - a. What do I need to teach in this unit? (strategies)
 - b. How long will this unit be?
4. String lessons together in each stage of writing based on what I need to teach.
(Go back to GLEs to help name strategies).
5. Craft rubric**

**I've approached crafting the rubric in two different ways.

1. If I'm really clear on what I need to teach it makes sense to create the rubric before I string the lessons together.
2. If I'm learning about the genre as I go I might need to create the rubric after the unit is created.

Sample First Grade Writing Units and overviews with links to upcoming lessons, activities etc.

•**We Are All Writers** – This first unit creates a community of writers teaching students the skills and strategies so they can write independently.

(Mini-lessons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, Celebration 1, Peer forms 1 and 2, Revision 1, Editing 1, Rubric 1)

•**Pattern Books** – This unit the students develop their own pattern books that contain predictable structures and repetitive language.

(Peer forms 1 and 2, Revision 1, Editing 1, Rubrics 2 and 3, Self Assessment 1)

•**Personal Narrative** – This unit the students learn to write clear and well-structured stories about meaningful experiences in their lives.

(Peer forms 1 and 2, Revision 1, Editing 1, Rubrics 4 and 5, Self Assessment 2)

•**Response to Literature** – This unit teaches the students how to evaluate, make connections, and summarize text.

•**Expository-How to...** - This unit shows the students how to write explicit instructions on how to make or do something.

(Revision 2, Editing 2, Rubric 6)

•**Poetry** – In this unit students choose a poetry form to take through the writing process.

•**Non-Fiction Informational** – In this unit students research and write an animal report.

•**Fiction**- In this unit the students will write engaging narratives about realistic characters that include a realistic problem and solution.

MINI-LESSONS

Teachers the following mini-lessons are scripted for your use or can be modified to fit your needs. Each mini-lesson focuses on teaching a specific concept or skill in writing. Mini-lessons should be conducted with the students at a special meeting area you set up in your classroom. A mini-lesson should last about 10 to 15 minutes and be conducted at the beginning of your writing time. The 10 to 15 minute mini-lesson consists of the connection, teaching, active engagement, and link. After this students should be allowed to work on their own writing and practice the skill or strategy taught in the mini-lesson. After the writing time, bring students back to the mini-lesson area for sharing and wrapping up the lesson. Washington's Essential Academic Learning Requirements for First Grade Level Expectations (GLE's) are also included for each lesson.

Mini-lesson 1

Lesson – Developing a Story Idea

GLE 1.1.1 Applies at least one strategy for generating ideas and planning writing.

Materials: Books to hold up, Chart paper/pens

Connection	This year you will learn to become great readers and you will also learn to become terrific writers! Writers, did anyone notice all the books we have in our classroom? (hold up a few books) All of these books were written by authors, and this year you will all be authors too. Today we will be authors, and I will show you what authors do.
Teaching	Watch what I do when I write...Demo developing a story idea (hmm not rainbows, I've never done anything with a rainbow!) I think I will write about a time when I was reading outside and I realized I couldn't go back in my house because the doors were locked! I am going to draw that time. (Sketch picture) Now I will write words. (label pictures, then write 2 short sentences, sounding out each word as I write) Writers, what did you notice that I just did? I thought about something that happened to me and I got it in my head. Today and every day you can do the same thing. You can think about things in your life and you can write about them. (Give possible examples)
Active Engagement	Close your eyes and think of something you can draw and write about. Open your eyes and tell someone what you might write about today.
Link	Writers I know you are ready to get your great stories onto your paper. Go back to your desks and get started doing what writers do. I will come around to admire the great work you are doing.
Sharing	Every day after you have time to write, you will bring your paper and come join us on the carpet. Ask students to hold up work as you point to them so we can all admire it. Point out/admire what students did that you want them to do again.

Adapted from proteacher.net

Mini-lesson 2

Lesson – Telling Stories in Pictures

GLE 1.1.1 Applies at least one strategy for generating ideas and planning writing.

Materials: Chart paper/pens

Shared class experience

Connection	Writers, there are lots of ways to get ready to write. One way that some of you have used is to close your eyes and think of an idea. Today I want to teach all of you how to start with an idea for writing and put that idea on paper.
Teaching	Writers today I am going to show you something. I am going to close my eyes and get a story of something I've done in my head. Ok I've got it! (think of shared class experience) Think aloud to draw details of story. Do you see how I'm putting the whole story in my picture?
Active Engagement	Turn to the person next to you and think what other parts of the story I could put in my illustration. (Listen in – pick 2 ideas and add to drawing)
Link	Today and everyday as you write, make sure you picture something that happened to you and put details of the story into your drawings. Let's get ready to write. Close your eyes. Once you get a story in your head, open your eyes and give me a thumbs-up so I know you are ready to write.
Sharing	Show drawing of an author who included great detail in their pictures (pictures tell the story/match the words). Show picture and ask students to turn to the person beside them and really study this picture to see if they can figure out what is happening in it. Tell them that, like them, the author wrote the story that goes with his picture. Read the words on the page and point out how all these things can be found in the picture. "That's what writers do. We put our stories into our pictures and into our words." Turn to the person next to you and show them your picture. Tell the story of your picture just like you told the story of the author's picture. Suggest students add more detail in drawings-point out detail in one child's drawing.

Adapted from proteacher.net

Mini-lesson 3

Lesson –Drawing Even Hard-to-Make Ideas

GLE 1.1.1 Applies at least one strategy for generating ideas and planning writing.

Materials: Chart paper, markers, story that is hard to draw

Connection	Writers I have been so excited about what you have been drawing/writing about. But sometimes I see you excited about a great idea but then you're not sure how to draw it. Sometimes you even decide not to write about your great idea because you're not sure how to draw it! That is so sad because we miss out on your great stories. Today I will teach you what to do when you get that "Oh no! I don't know how to draw that!" feeling.
Teaching	Use story of shared class experience. Model beginning to draw it and then getting stuck on a hard-to-draw part. Stop and contemplate giving up and drawing something easy, like flowers. But then dramatically decide not to give up and just do "the best I can and keep going"
Active Engagement	Get stuck one more time on something hard to draw. Ask students to turn to the person next to them and decide what I should do...should I just give up and draw something easy? Elicit response of "I should do the best I can and keep-going". Share this response with the class as if they just came up with that idea.
Link	Writers today I'm hoping that if you get to a tricky part of your picture that you will do what I did and draw it the best you can and not give up!
Sharing	Writers, remember today in our mini-lesson we talked about how writers sometimes get to tricky parts of their pictures and they just do the best they can? Today _____ did just that. (Ask student to share what happened today.) Tomorrow you can try to do this if you didn't get a chance today. I know you are eager to draw a hard picture in your mind the best you can.

Adapted from proteacher.net

Mini-lesson 4

Lesson – Using Both Pictures and Words, Like Famous Authors

GLE 1.2.1 Produces a draft in words or sentences.

Materials: 2 familiar books (one with pictures and words on each page and one with labeled drawings like Richard Scarry), Writing paper to give out when students come to the mini-lesson (box with 4 lines or blank)

Connection	Writers I have loved learning so much about you from your writing! (cite 2 examples of things you have learned) During Writer's Workshop each of you has thought of things that you care about and put them on the page. I can look at your drawings and stories and learn about your lives! Today I want to teach you that writers use pictures and words when they write.
Teaching	<p>Hold up book that students have heard before that has a picture on top of the page and words on the bottom. Point out where the picture is and where the words are. Ask a student to come up and point to the words. Say: I am telling you this because you can do the exact same thing this author has done: put a picture on top of your page and words on the bottom.</p> <p>Hold up a Richard Scarry book. This author does it a little differently – he draws his pictures and then goes back and labels important things. Say: You can do either of these things, but you need to put pictures and words in your writing.</p>
Active Engagement	You have a new piece of writing paper in front of you. Point to where you will draw the picture. Point to where you will write the words.
Link	.So writers, today I am hoping that each of you will use pictures and words to tell your story.
Sharing	

Mini-lesson 4

Lesson – Using Both Pictures and Words, Like Famous Authors

GLE 1.2.1 Produces a draft in words or sentences.

Materials: 2 familiar books (one with pictures and words on each page and one with labeled drawings like Richard Scarry), Writing paper to give out when students come to the mini-lesson (box with 4 lines or blank)

Connection	Writers I have loved learning so much about you from your writing! (cite 2 examples of things you have learned) During Writer’s Workshop each of you has thought of things that you care about and put them on the page. I can look at your drawings and stories and learn about your lives! Today I want to teach you that writers use pictures <u>and</u> words when they write.
Teaching	<p>Hold up book that students have heard before that has a picture on top of the page and words on the bottom. Point out where the picture is and where the words are. Ask a student to come up and point to the words. Say: I am telling you this because you can do the exact same thing this author has done. – put a picture on tope of your page and words on the bottom.</p> <p>Hold up a Richard Scarry book. This author does it a little differently – he draws his pictures and then goes back and labels important things. Say: You can do either of these things, but you need to put pictures and words in your writing.</p>
Active Engagement	You have a new piece of writing paper in front of you. Point to where you will draw the picture. Point to where you will write the words.
Link	.So writers, today I am hoping that each of you will use pictures and words to tell your story.
Sharing	

Mini-lesson 5

Lesson – Stretching and Writing Words: Initial Sounds

GLE 1.2.1 Produces a draft in sentences.

Materials: Chart paper, markers

<i>Connection</i>	We've been talking about writing our words the best we can. Today I want to show you how to get the main sounds you hear in your words on the paper.
<i>Teaching</i>	Go back to a previously started story and decide to add another sentence. Watch me say the word and write down the sounds I hear. Model this with 2 words in the sentence, sounding out what I hear first, then what I hear – not worrying about spelling the word correctly (for example, “please” could be “pls”). Did you notice how I said the word and wrote down what I heard at the start of it? Then I said the word again and wrote down what I heard next. I'm telling you this because you can do the same thing.
<i>Active Engagement</i>	Do the same technique for the next word (a longer word) in the sentence, asking students what they hear at the beginning of the word. Then say: there are more sounds in this word. Everyone say the word and listen for more sounds. Record additional sounds. What you are doing is smart. Keep on rereading and saying “Are there more sounds I could record?” Work with a friend and think about what comes next.
<i>Link</i>	So today, when you are writing your words, make sure that you say the word once and write down what you hear in the beginning, and then say the word again and write down the other sounds you hear.
<i>Sharing</i>	Writers I want to share what happened to some of you today. When some of you listened and wrote down the sounds that you heard, you got a lot on your paper. That's what happened to _____ today. Have student share their writing. With excitement, tell students they can all try writing more and more and more!

Adapted from proteacher.net

Mini-lesson 6

Lesson – Choosing a piece to Publish

GLE 2.1.1 Knows that an audience exists outside of self.

Materials: Examples of writing you have done.

Connection	After we have been writing for a while, writers choose a piece of writing we love, one we are absolutely crazy about, and we publish it. We put it in our library or we read aloud to our friends. So today we are going to choose one piece we especially love and then fix it up for publication.
Teaching	(Take the contents of my folder and lay them out so I am surrounded by a web of writing.) I'm trying to decide which of these to put in the library...Model briefly rereading pieces...Hmm I think people will really like this one.
Active Engagement	Writers, did you see that I looked over all my writing and chose one I thought readers would like? I had to spread out all my pieces and remember them all. I had to reread some of them.
Link	Would each of you, right now, go through your folders and choose a piece that you want to fix up and fancy up for publication? Remember to spread them out, reread some, and choose the one you think others would like the best.
Sharing	Put the paper you chose right on top of your folder. Now think for a minute about how you can add to your writing – whisper to a partner the first thing you are going to add when you work on it later.

Adapted from proteacher.net

Mini-lesson 7

Lesson – Fixing Up Writing

GLE 1.3.1 Revises text by adding words and/or phrases to draft.

Materials: Short story written on chart paper about a shared class experience.

Connection	Writers, since school began, you have been doing what writers do – think of ideas to write, plan their writing, pick paper to match plans, write as best they can and keep going. We have learned that writers also publish their work – today I’ll show you how to do that because in a few days we need to be ready a writing celebration.
Teaching	All through the world, when writers are ready to publish their writing, the writer rereads all of their writing and chooses the best one. Then writers get the piece ready to go out into the world. Have you ever seen a person getting ready to be married or graduate? Usually that person fancies themselves up. The same happens with writing. Before writers send our writing out for real readers to read, we fix it up and then we fancy it up.
Active Engagement	Reread a story about a shared experience and ask students to help me fix up my story. Elicit that a word is missing/an important part of the story is missing. Say: these are good ideas. Before I publish my piece, I’ll add in the missing word and reread what I’ve written and see if I can fit anything else in.
Link	So writers, today you’ll take the piece you decided to publish and you’ll reread it and fix it up. Ask, “Does this make sense?” “How can I fix it?” “What can I add?”
Sharing	Writers, will you bring your piece with you and come to the carpet? Let me show you the smart ways in which you have all been fixing up your writing. (Share stories of success with revision – not just the most advanced writing, things everyone can do.) Now, think to yourself which of the things these writers did would you like to try? Tell the person next to you what you might try tomorrow.

Adapted from proteacher.net

Mini-lesson 8

Lesson – Editing and Fancying Up Writing

GLE 1.4.1 Applies understanding of editing appropriate to grade level.

Materials: 2 stories written on chart paper to be edited

Connection	Writers, today we're going to fix up our writing in another way. Today we will <u>edit</u> our writing –that's what writers call it. Ask students to repeat the word "edit". When we edit our writing, we check everything to make sure people can read it.
Teaching	Show students piece of writing on chart paper. Today I am going to edit my own writing and I want you to watch how I reread my writing, making sure that my words look right. Hmm I better get my finger underneath my words so I can look at each word carefully. Model correcting 2 or 3 spelling mistakes of common words as I reread – cross our misspelled word with a single line and write correct spelling above it. So, writers, what did you notice I did to make sure my words looked right?
Active Engagement	So let's try that again, together, with this story. Read a second story – students should tell a partner if the word looks right or if you'd change it. After I read the whole story, ask for suggestions.
Link	So writers, look again at the writing you will be publishing at our celebration. Reread it like it was your independent reading book. Read it with your finger just like I did and check to make sure your words look right – and when there is a word that doesn't look right, rewrite it above so that it does.
Sharing	Share your story with a partner and see if there are any other things you can fix and edit together on your piece. Have one or two students share something else they were able to fix with the help of their peer partner.

Adapted from proteacher.net

At the end of each writing unit a small celebration of the students' published writing can be planned. These can take many forms and only last a day, and they only last as long as that particular subject typically lasts. Here are some celebration ideas:

Writing:

1. Share "published" writing piece with a partner and have an apple juice toast.
2. Share writing with kindergartners, receive a certificate.
3. "Sharing Circle" (sit in circle and pass their published piece around and around and around) also receive a new writing pencil.

The following lesson gives a detailed plan as to what one writing celebration could look like.

Celebration 1

Lesson – Reading Into the Circle: An Author’s Celebration

GLE 1.5.1 Publishes own writing.

Materials: classroom decorations (balloons, sign), small snack, juice

***Practice the celebration the day before – students should know to go to carpet, sit in a circle with their writing on their laps. They should know that after they read their favorite part/page of their story, they should turn and look at the person to their right – that is the next child’s cue to start. Students should know what to do when moving to reading in small groups – where to go, how to share their story.**

Writers, let’s gather. It’s finally time for our celebration! Welcome to Room ___’s first writing celebration. I am very proud of all that you have done in Writer’s Workshop so far. You have learned to draw pictures and write words about the things that matter to you. You have also learned that if you get to a hard part, you just do the best you can. You learned how to choose a piece of writing and revise it and edit it. You did a great job! You should give yourself a round of applause.

Writers, let’s start Reading into the Circle with _____. Students will go around circle, reading their favorite page/part of their story and turn to the person to their right when they are finished. (Don’t interrupt flow of reading – don’t say anything until Reading into the Circle is finished.)

Now we can move to our tables, hear the whole pieces from the people in our groups, and share our own writing! (Send students to pre-determined areas to share stories.)

After children have all had a chance to read stories to their group... Writers may I have your attention? It looks like most of you have finished reading and are ready to have refreshments. Could you carefully place your lovely writing on the table and come join me at the refreshment table for a quick toast? (Pass out cups of juice – remind students not to drink yet.)

I would like to make a toast (when someone says they are making a toast it means they are about to say some really nice things.) Writers, you have worked hard. You deserve this very special day. May we continue to have writing celebrations that are as great as this one. Congratulations!

Give students time to drink juice/have snacks and talk with friends about their writing.

**Create bulletin board – “We Are Writers!” Display students’ work with a picture/quote from child about writing or themselves as writers.*

Adapted from proteacher.net

REVISION CHECKLISTS

EDITING CHECKLISTS

PEER CONFERENCING

The following forms and checklists should be used by your students who are at the revision and editing stages of the writing process. These can be used by the writer alone or in tandem with a peer partner. Choose the form or checklist that best fits your students' needs at a given time. This should serve as a resource to your students to make sure their writing is the best they can do. Enjoy!

Please note:

This content has been redacted due to copyright restrictions.

Pages 43 - 59: Checklists and forms have been redacted.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary

This project and review of literature found that there is a connection between art and writing. Just as picture books tell stories in words and pictures, young children also use their own drawings to tell their stories. These picture stories are the precursors to their writing as they begin to add labels, words, and eventually sentences to complete their stories just as real authors do.

There is also a relationship between peer influences and the writing process. Students are motivated to write when they know there is an audience for their writing. Peers are influential in providing this motivation by being an audience for each others' writing. They also give each other feedback and help throughout the writing process. This is significant in increasing student attitudes about writing.

Finally Writer's Workshop was found to create such a framework that allows students to use art and each other to help in the writing process. Students are able to share ideas with one another during prewriting. They can tell their story in pictures before adding the words and sentences. Students are able to get ideas down on paper in both pictures and words to create a first draft of writing. Then with the help of the peer partners, students are able to revise and edit their writing in order to get it ready for publication. Truly there is a strong correlation in the areas of the art/writing connection, peer influences on writing and Writer's Workshop.

Conclusions

This project is important because it describes the writing process and how it is interconnected to art and peer relationships. I was particularly interested in how peer relationships influence writing. In my own classroom I found my students naturally having discourse about their ideas for writing as well as the writing itself. In order to get them to talk about their writing in ways that were most beneficial to them though, both our literacy coach and I noticed that students had a higher quality of discourse when they had more opportunities to see discourse modeled. Regardless, my students wanted to share and help each other with their writing whether that meant helping spell a word or asking a question to get a partner to add more detail.

In addition, many factors of Writer's Workshop contributed to creating a positive writing atmosphere. These included opportunities for students to choose what they wished to write about and working with peers. Author's chair provided students with an appreciative audience and feedback while promoting a greater commitment to writing. Teaching children to write their thoughts and become comfortable and confident about writing while de-emphasizing spelling and mechanics appeared to increase their fluency.

Recommendations

Teacher directed small group instruction is recommended for those students that seem to lack motivation, direction or the necessary writing skills during workshop time. Another strategy that may prove helpful is partnerships with motivated and skilled peers. Both the teacher and capable peers would be able to prompt and coach other students

through the process. This could look like the teacher or peer providing direction by asking questions. These questions might address such areas as creating a logical sequence, adding details, and varying sentence length.

Another recommendation is to plan for frequent and consistent time for the Author's Chair. Students were anxious to share their writing with an audience.

Providing many opportunities for students to share their writing will be beneficial in improving their confidence and skills as readers and writers.

It is the hope that this project will be used by fellow teachers as a guide to how writing might look and be assessed in their own classrooms. The ideas presented in the project can be adapted and more fully developed by others to truly fit the needs of their students. As students develop their written language skills, they may come to enjoy writing in its entirety.

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