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Writing to Learn Writing

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WRITING TO LEARN WRITING

A Project Report

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

by

Dawn M. Williams

April, 1996

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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WRITING TO LEARN WRITING

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The literature and research regarding writing to learn writing was explored. Data were presented to support teaching writing in a holistic process approach such as the Writing Workshop. Mini-lessons for use in sixth grade Writing Workshop were developed to use as models for additional lessons created by the author or others. Implications for using a Writing Workshop format were discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

If it is true that people learn to do something by doing it, doesn't it follow that people learn to write by writing? As Smith (1982) points out, "we must learn (writing) by *exposure* to writing" (p. 162). According to Berthoff (1981), "writing can't teach writing unless it is understood as a nonlinear, dialectical process in which the writer continually circles back, reviewing and writing; certainly, the way to learn to do that is to practice *doing* just that" (p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

A number of researchers have indicated a need for more time spent teaching children to write effectively (Graves, 1983, 1978; Bridge & Hiebert, 1985; Deckert, 1988; Mavrogenes, 1993). They have found that effective writing instruction involves recognizing writing as a holistic process best learned through a combination of meaningful writing practice and writing-connected discourse. If there are to be any real changes in the writing experiences of children, we need to understand current classroom writing practices as well as factors that influence those practices (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985; Deckert, 1988; Smith, 1982).

According to Englert, Raphael, and Anderson (1992), teachers cannot

expect to change academic outcomes without providing students insight into the thinking and self-talk that guide the process of writing. As Lemke (1982) points out, teachers need to "talk writing" with their students, and through such talk and writing activities, enculturate students into the community of writers who speak a common discourse. This contemporary view of literacy instruction emphasizes the underlying cognitive processes in which writers engage rather than emphasizing merely the writers' products (Pearson & Raphael, 1990; Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to develop mini-lessons for use in sixth grade Writing Workshop, a program that provides teachers with a way to expose students to writing so that its fluency can indeed be learned by writing. This project also explored the literature and research regarding writing to learn writing and sought to document a need for teaching writing in a holistic process approach such as the Writing Workshop. Those lessons produced may be used as models for additional lessons created by the author or others.

Limitations

The lessons developed in this project were designed with West Valley (WA) sixth grade students in mind and may not be appropriate for younger or older students, although it was hoped that they could be easily adapted to

various audiences.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, these terms were defined in the following manner:

Mini-Lesson: a brief meeting that begins the workshop where the whole class addresses an issue

Writing Workshop: a highly structured environment for teaching and learning writing with clear rules and procedures which usually begins with a brief mini-lesson and then provides time for students to work independently on individual written pieces of their choice (Avery, 1993)

Holistic: involving all aspects of language

Metacognitive: thinking about one's own thought processes

Central Washington Writing Project: a collaborative university-school staff development program affiliated with the National Writing Project to (1) improve the teaching and learning of writing and (2) increase the use of writing to enhance learning in the content areas

Overview of the Remainder of the Project

Chapter 2 reviews literature regarding teaching and learning writing as a holistic process. It provides suggested categories of presentations for use in Writing Workshop.

Chapter 3 presents the design of the project, explaining procedures for research and lesson organization and production.

Plans for mini-lessons to be used in sixth grade Writing Workshop appear in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of this project and includes recommendations for lesson use.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The second "R" of traditional American education does not receive the attention it deserves. This assumption was supported in a study by Graves (1983) that reviewed public educational investment at all levels and found that for every hundred dollars spent on the teaching of reading, only one dollar was spent on the teaching of writing. Other studies have confirmed and extended these findings. Not only is little time spent writing in school, but when it is spent, grammar and punctuation are the emphasis instead of content and cohesion (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985; Deckert, 1988; Graves 1978; Mavrogenes, 1993). However, the reports also demonstrated "that those who read and write more frequently perform best in those subjects" (Rothman, 1990, p. 1).

Studies of writing instruction in elementary schools show that most of the time spent writing consists of verbatim copying of words and sentences from another's text and that teachers neglect opportunities to relate writing to class activities (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985). After he reviewed available literature, Mavrogenes (1993) concluded that the reasons for such a state are that language-arts texts stress the teaching of grammar and mechanics, with only fragmented writing tasks, and teachers do not feel prepared to teach writing.

Because few requirements exist for teachers to take courses in writing

theory and practice, they know little about how to teach it, do not feel confident about their own writing, do not know who the authorities are or where to find good research articles (Fitzgerald, 1993; Graves 1978; Walmsley, 1980).

Graves (1978), after analyzing eight language arts textbook series, found that 52% to 93% of the writing activities address only mechanics of grammar and punctuation and only 3% to 29% were actually devoted to original composition. The results of similar studies (Stewart, 1978; Walmsley, 1980; Bridge & Hiebert, 1985) confirm that texts stress the mechanics of grammar, punctuation and spelling in word or sentence level tasks in spite of the fact that most recent research in writing emphasizes writing as a process with a recursive nature.

The emphasis on word and sentence level writing tasks designed to teach grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting reflects a concern for product rather than process (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985). This emphasis on the surface feature of writing rather than the communication of meaning is part of the problem. According to Smith (1982), "no writer has ever claimed to have learned as a result of the grammar lessons given at school" (p. 162). Writing is a holistic process best learned through a writing connected discourse in order to communicate meaningfully. In Smith's words:

I . . . write about writing in order to understand better the act of writing and how it is learned. This is an enormous power of writing . . . not only can a piece of writing communicate thought from writer to reader, but also the

act of writing can tell the author things that were not know (or not known to be known) before the writing began. (p. 1)

Children learn language and its uses simultaneously. Children do not learn language as an abstraction, as a "tool" that they then apply to various uses; language and its uses are inseparable. Conventions such as spelling and punctuation are a way of achieving clarity and order for what has already been written; the teaching of conventions needs to come after the expression, when the writer begins to see their value (Deckert, 1988). As Smith (1982) points out, "we learn the conventions of writing when we have a use for its conventions ourselves or when we understand the use that others make of them" (p. 170).

Skillful writing also requires that writers carry on conversations with themselves about their evolving texts, their writing problems, and their solutions to communication breakdowns that occur in their texts. Vygotsky (1986) maintains that inner speech is as important as action since speech and action are parts of the same complex psychological function directed toward solving problems.

According to Englert, Rapphael, and Anderson (1992), writing involves self-talk, communication, and collaboration. Because of this, a shared conceptual vocabulary is an important aim of writing instruction. Englert et al. identify a direction for the self-talk and vocabulary to include in writing curricula and instruction: (1) the writing process and (2) text genre or structures that

underlie expository writing.

By referring to the process approach to writing, there is the possible inference that it is a particular method of teaching writing or that there is a set procedure or series of steps to follow. Rather, "writing is a process. . . . Certain elements are integral; however, they are not always overtly demonstrated or observed" (Parry & Hornsby, 1985, p. 114). In the words of Smith (1982):

the relationship of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought . . . thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. (p. 182)

Flower and Hayes's research describes the writing process as a nonlinear, recursive set of component subprocesses including prewriting, drafting, peer conferencing, editing, revising and publishing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1987). They also suggest that writers engage in self-regulated activities and inner speech related to each subprocess.

Integral elements or subprocesses of the writing process are defined below:

Peer Conferencing: sharing a piece of writing with one or more peers for the purpose of obtaining feedback and suggestions

Revision: the process of adding to, deleting from or rearranging a piece of writing to improve content

Rough Draft: first attempt at getting thoughts on paper

Prewriting: a stage in the writing process in which ideas are explored, brainstormed or contemplated before a rough draft is begun

Editing: proof reading and correcting a piece of writing for conventions

Publishing: in some way making public a piece of writing

In addition to knowledge of the writing process, good writers understand text structures and genres. At one level writers decide how to categorize and label their ideas; they analyze text for the organizational patterns that bind together the main idea and minor ideas and use this structure to generate, organize, and label these clusters of related ideas. At another level, writers make decisions about how to combine these clusters of ideas to create meaningful texts (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980).

Together, the research on text structures and the writing process provided a basis for thinking about writing instruction. "Specifically, writing instruction may be more effective if it involves modeling the self-talk, vocabulary, and strategies related to planning, drafting, editing, and revising expository text" (Englert, et al., 1992, p. 413).

Englert et al. (1992) concluded that three important implications existed in the relationship between metacognitive knowledge and writing performance:

1. instructional effort to develop students' talk about a cognitive process are likely to enhance the quality of the actual products guided by such talk
2. teachers have an important responsibility in modeling the talk and

inner thinking related to a cognitive process

3. teachers need to monitor the nature of student talk and the changes in that talk that result from such instruction. (p. 443)

The Swiss philosopher H. H. Amiel wrote: "the highest function of the teacher consists not so much in imparting knowledge as in stimulating the pupil in its love and pursuit. To know how to suggest is the art of teaching" (cited in Atwell, 1990, p. xviii). Teachers need to create situations in which students are called upon to describe writing strategies; monitor a paper with audience, purpose, and text structure in mind; discuss how to translate ideas into text; describe strategies for organizing and ordering ideas; and use personal examples to illustrate how writers employ strategies in the problem-solving process.

This process needs to be a dialogue. According to Lemke (1982), teachers need to talk with students as equal participants in constructing written meaning rather than talking at students and provide ongoing support to improve the quality of the conversations as well as the final products. "Dialogue is essential to the making of meaning and thus to learning to write" (Berthoff, 1981, p. 72). Simply telling students what teachers think they ought to know about writing is an ineffective approach.

In the words of Smith (1992):

Very little of what writers know can be explicitly taught. . . . You do not need to be told very much about writing in order to learn to

write . . . composition, the creative aspect of writing, is simply a reflection of the brain's natural activity. (p. 162-167)

Smith (1982) maintains the quality of the composition demands more than simply creativity, however. The word "quality" implies standards and criteria which shifts the focus to the use of conventions in general, and they must be learned.

Teachers must play a central part if children are to become writers, ensuring that they are exposed to informative and stimulating demonstrations and helping and encouraging them to write. Smith (1982) advises:

The most direct and relevant way for a teacher to demonstrate to a child the power of writing is to write with the child, not by requiring the child to engage in writing that the teacher determines the child must do, but by helping to bring out of the child writing that the child would like to do. (p. 201)

Emig (1983) summed up the findings from developmental research on writing as follows:

1. Writing is predominantly learned rather than taught.
2. Writers of all ages frequently work from wholes to parts as from parts to wholes: in writing, there is a complex interplay between local and global concerns: from an interest in what word should come next, to the shape of the total piece.
3. There is no monolithic process of writing: there are processes of

writing that differ because of aim, intent, mode, and audience:

although there are shared features in the ways we write, there are as well individual, even idiosyncratic, features in our processes of writing.

4. The processes of writing do not proceed in a linear sequence: rather they are recursive--we not only plan, then write, then revise; but we also revise, then plan, then write.
5. Writing is as often a pre-conscious or unconscious roaming as it is planned and conscious rendering of information and events.
6. The rhythms of writing are uneven--more erratic. The pace of writing can be very slow, particularly if the writing represents significant learning. Writing is also slow since it involves what Vygotsky calls "elaborating the web of meaning," supplying the specific and explicit links to render lexical, syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical pieces into organic wholes.
7. The processes of writing can be enhanced by working in, and with a group of other writers, perhaps especially a teacher, who gives vital response, including advice. (pp. 140-141)

Writing Workshop.

Writing Workshop, with its conferences and mini-lessons, provides opportunities for teachers' demonstrations and suggestions as well as blocks of

time for student writing. Teachers interact and learn with their students as they enculturate them into the language related to writing and constructing meaning. Teachers can help students move beyond superficial sterility in their writing by utilizing writing workshops to promote connections between ideas, self and form, allowing writing to become a more meaningful part of their lives (Wong-Kam, Sumida & Kawakami, 1992).

Mini-lessons are used in Writing Workshop to introduce new concepts and techniques as writers need them. Research described three categories of presentations: procedural information, the craft of writing, and skills (Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Englert et al., 1992).

According to Atwell (1987), mini-lessons during the first several weeks of each year should be procedural. "Students need to learn how the workshop works--what I expect of them and what they can expect of me" (p. 125).

The craft of writing category includes presentations that involve technique, style, and genre. Atwell explains that showing students writers' techniques has the same effects and benefits as demonstrating artists' methods in art class. Both help kids begin to develop a repertoire of their own strategies.

"Introducing conventions that will help writers communicate with readers is what skill mini-lessons are all about" (Atwell, p. 144). Skill mini-lessons fit into three categories: format, punctuation, and usage.

Format lessons deal with issues like what the page is suppose to look like. Paragraphing, letter formats, and proper prose and poetry margins are

also format mini-lessons as well as smaller technical format issues such as dividing words between syllables at line breaks.

Punctuation mini-lessons discuss use and misuse of the most common punctuation marks. Most often these lessons address periods, commas, quotation marks, and apostrophes. Other lessons deal with the semi-colon, dash, and colon, including problems with sentence fragments, run-on sentences and comma splices.

Usage mini-lessons include quick discussions of the differences between commonly confused words like lie and lay and sit and set. Pronoun usage when the subject is compound (Danny and I, or Danny and me) is also a usage mini-lesson.

Summary

Children are capable of learning to write effectively in classrooms although there is very little they can be taught about writing by way of explicit rules and exercises designed to transform non-writers into writers. "Instead, writing is learned by writing, by reading like a writer, and by perceiving oneself as a writer" (Smith, p. 199). Experience practicing collaboratively in classrooms develops interest in writing and provides opportunities for discovering relevant conventions in general. Students at all levels experience individual success which leads to the perception of oneself as a writer. The role of the teacher is to foster writing as a model and guide as the student explores

the world of writing. Writing Workshop provides a framework through which this can transpire.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

The author began to explore the possibilities of writing instruction while attending the Central Washington Writing Project under the instruction of Dr. Bobby Cummings. Research from the Central Washington Library was reviewed regarding teaching and learning writing and was combined with the Central Washington Writing Project lessons and research, and sixth grade teaching experiences to develop writing mini-lessons. Mini-lessons were designed to emphasize writing as a holistic process learned through active involvement in meaningful experiences.

The author categorized lessons into three sections emphasized in the research:

1. Writing Workshop procedures,
2. the craft of writing, and
3. skills.

The author produced a sampling of five lessons for each category to serve as models for other lessons created by the author or others.

Each mini-lesson consists of these parts:

1. the objective of the lesson,
2. a brief introduction,
3. a list of materials needed or tasks to be completed prior to

teaching the lesson, and

4. an explanation of the procedures for teaching the lesson.

The author used research and personal experience to develop a selection of mini-lessons to meet the instructional needs of sixth grade students learning to write through Writing Workshop experiences. The specific content of lessons was based on teacher judgement of student need, student interest, and student ability levels.

The lessons produced were placed in Chapter 4, and recommendations for their use were included in Chapter 5 of this project.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT LESSONS

The author used research and personal experience to develop this sampling of mini-lessons. The mini-lessons, designed to meet the instructional needs of sixth grade students learning to write through Writing Workshop experiences, were divided into three categories emphasized in the research: Writing Workshop procedures, the craft of writing, and skills.

The specific content of each lesson was based on teacher judgement of student need.

The remainder of Chapter 4 consists of the lessons themselves.

PROCEDURES LESSON 1
OVERVIEW OF RULES AND PROCEDURES

Objective

Students will be introduced to the Writing Workshop procedures and rules.

Introduction

On the first day of Writing Workshop, the foundation of its structure will be laid. These procedures will need to be reinforced and reviewed over the next days and weeks.

Materials

none

Procedures

Begin by telling students that Writing Workshop will be part of every school day; every day all students will be working in some way on their writing. This Writing Workshop will have certain rules. Outline and briefly discuss each rule with students.

1. No erasing. This is to save a record of your thinking and how your thinking has changed. When you change your mind, simply draw

a line through the part you wish to change.

2. Write on one side of the paper only. Writers often cut and paste to reorganize their writing. This will be easier to do if there is writing only on one side of the page.
3. Save everything. Students are creating a history of themselves as writers. What is decided against is as much a part of a writer as what is decided to keep.
4. Date and label everything. Mark each piece of writing as DRAFT 1, DRAFT 2, NOTES, and so on.
5. Speak in quiet voices only. Writing is thinking, and it is difficult to think when there are interruptions. There will be places to go to quietly conference to discuss writing with others.
6. Work really hard.

PROCEDURES LESSON 2

STATUS OF THE CLASS

Objective

Students will understand how the status of the class conference works.

Introduction

The status of the class conference is a record keeping system to map out the status of the students and their writing progress. It also serves as a verbal contract on what each student agrees he will be working on that day.

Materials

1. status of the class form (see Appendix A)

Procedures

Explain that each day before students begin to write, they will be asked to tell very quickly what they will be working on and where they are in their pieces. This is called a status of the class conference.

Describe some options that they might be working on, using vocabulary from the status of the class form such as first draft, second draft, peer conference, revise, self-edit, abandon, etc.

Ask students to take thirty seconds to look at the pieces they started

yesterday and decide what they will be doing today. Tell students that when you call each of their names, they need to tell you their topic and what they intend to do in today's Writing Workshop. Remind students not to talk while others are reporting their plans so they can be heard and so the conference will move quickly.

Call names and record student responses on the status of the class form.

PROCEDURES LESSON 3

WRITING FOLDERS

Objective

Students will take possession of and understand how to use their writing in progress folders.

Introduction

During the first group share meeting of Writing Workshop students will take possession of their daily writing folders. This folder will become their text for Writing Workshop.

Materials

1. a folder for each student with two forms stapled inside it (see Appendix B and C)

Procedures

Pass out a folder to each writer, explaining that it will be a daily writing folder. Remind students of the rule to save everything; this folder is where "everything" will be saved. All the drafts and notes for the pieces in progress will be stored in this folder. Tell students that they must bring the folder to class every day.

Explain the two forms that have been stapled inside the folder: a sheet

for students to list the pieces written this year and a second to list all the skills learned this year. Tell students that you will be talking more about how to use each sheet in other mini-lessons. In the meantime, the most important thing for students to remember is that this writing in progress folder is the text for Writing Workshop. Ask students to take good care of their folders and not to lose them.

PROCEDURES LESSON 4

EXPECTATIONS

Objective

Students will learn what is expected of them and what they can expect of the teacher during Writing Workshop.

Introduction

The first mini-lessons of the workshop need to be procedural so the students can learn how it will work. One of the first lessons is a straightforward explanation of expectations.

Materials

1. reproduced copies of Expectations for Grade 6 Writing Workshop
(see Appendix D)

Procedures

Distribute copies of Expectations for Grade 6 Writing Workshop and discuss. Students file the list of expectations in their writing folders for future reference.

PROCEDURES LESSON 5

WRITING AS A PROCESS

Objective

Students will learn that writing goes through a variety of steps before the initial idea becomes a finished piece of writing.

Introduction

Writing goes through several steps as it progresses from the author's original idea to a polished piece of writing ready to be shared with others. The purpose of writing is communicate ideas. Each step of the writing process helps make the author's idea easier to understand. When students see the different stages of their writing as important, necessary steps forward, they become less resistant to revising and editing.

Materials

1. reproduced copies of the writing process pencil
2. 4 by 9 inch strip of construction paper or tagboard for each student. (The writing process pencil will be mounted on this.)
3. a written selection like The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch for which you can provide a brief story background

Procedures

Read the literature selection. Tell as much as possible about the process the author went through in writing a story. Munsch was reluctant to try writing because he was a poor speller, but then he figured out that writing was not the same as spelling. He tells his stories over and over about 100 times before he writes them down. Each time he retells a story, he revises it. Then he writes it down and does his final revisions.

Explain that whether you are writing a story, designing a poster, or composing a song, all writing goes through several changes before it is ready for others to read. These changes are called the writing process. Not everyone thinks through the process in exactly the same way, but we all go through the same basic steps. Explain that students will use these steps as a guide to produce their best possible writing. Tell students that over the next few weeks they'll be exploring each step in greater detail.

Briefly discuss each of the following steps as you list them on the board or bulletin board.

1. Prewriting: This is the planning or outlining stage of writing. It will help you think ahead about what you want to say and help you stick to your topic.
2. Rough Draft: At this stage you want to get your ideas down quickly. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or neatness, as long as you can read your own work.

3. Peer Conference: Choose two peers whom you trust to give you advice on your rough draft. Read your draft out loud to them. Discuss what they like and what you might change to make your story better.
4. Revise: You now work to make your story better. You may want to use some of the suggestions you heard in your peer conference, or you may have some ideas of your own to try.
5. Edit: When you feel comfortable with your revised writing, check it for spelling and punctuation errors.
6. Publish: Decide how you wish to publish your writing. Type or recopy a final draft perhaps illustrating it so that others can enjoy it.
(Students may not choose to publish everything they write.)

Give each student the writing process pencil page and have them cut out the pencil and the steps in the writing process. Students glue the steps onto the pencil, mount the pencil on construction paper, and then decorate their pencil with markers or crayons. Finished pencils can be laminated before placing in writing folders.

CRAFT LESSON 1
USING A THESAURUS

Objective

Students will use a thesaurus to improve their writing.

Introduction

Begin this lesson by sharing an anonymous sample of student's work that contains overworked and tired words.

It was a cold day. I had to go outside to get the newspaper. I ran to get my coat.

Then read a descriptive passage taken from a trade book. One that may be used is from Dogsong by Gary Paulsen.

Russel Susskit rolled out of the bunk and put his feet on the floor and listened in the darkness to the sounds of morning.

It doesn't take long for the students to discover that Gary Paulsen's passage more vividly describes the scene than the first passage read to them. In their words, the first passage was "boring." Challenge the students to find a

descriptive passage in the book they are reading and to share it with each other.

After students have an opportunity to read aloud descriptive passages from their books, ask them how they can make their own writing more descriptive. If they don't mention using the thesaurus, have one close at hand and show it to them.

Materials

1. a transparency of a page from the thesaurus with enlarged print
2. a transparency of the passage that lacks verve
3. a thesaurus for each student or group
4. chart paper and markers

Procedures

Show the thesaurus to the students and tell them that with the help of this book, writers have a world of colorful, unusual words at their fingertips. State the objective--to improve writing by using a thesaurus.

Project the transparency of the thesaurus page on the screen. Together, examine it. Ask them to point out the different parts of the thesaurus and explain how they think the information is used. The first thing that a student usually notices is that the words are in alphabetical order. Make sure to mention guide words, the key, the meaning of synonyms, antonyms, idioms,

contrasting words, and related words. Encourage students to locate the synonyms on the transparency and to come to the overhead projector to highlight a few of them with a marker. Continue until all the parts of the page are discovered.

As soon as students understand the information that appears on a page of a thesaurus, display the student writing sample.

Ask the students to find synonyms or related words that they can substitute for the word cold. (Make sure that the page copied from the thesaurus has the word cold on it!) Invite different students to write the new sentences on the board.

Working Together

Now divide the class into groups and give each group a thesaurus and a large sheet of paper with a common, overused word written across the top. Give each group a different word, such as said, good, ran and pretty. (Overused words can be selected by reviewing student papers.)

Ask each group to write a sentence using the overused word and then to make a list of synonyms that can be substituted for their word. Rotate among the groups making certain they understand. As a closure, one person from each group shares their list of words and hangs it somewhere in the room where everyone can see it.

Ask students to take out a piece of their own personal writing and skim

through it to find a tired, overused word. With the help of the thesaurus and charts, students search for synonyms to substitute for the original words.

CRAFT LESSON 2

REVISION TECHNIQUES

Objective

Students will be introduced to seven basic revision devices.

Introduction

Sometimes students don't revise because they don't have the "know how." Showing students the techniques of writers helps them develop a repertoire of their own strategies. Students can then experiment with these strategies and apply them in their own writing. Each device may be introduced in a separate mini-lesson using a piece of the teacher's writing or a student sample.

Materials

1. piece of writing to be revised written on the board or on overhead

Procedures

Demonstrate one of the techniques for revising with a piece of your own writing or with a student sample. You may want to compose on the board or the overhead during Writing Workshop and then use that piece to revise. Elicit

student suggestions for additions, deletions and changes, showing them how to use the specific device to accomplish the improvement.

Seven basic revision devices described by Atwell appear below:

1. Carets (^) are invaluable when inserting a new word, phrase, or line.
2. Arrows allow writers to connect with the remaining empty spaces on the page: in the margins or on the back.
3. Asterisks or other codes are good for inserting chunks, something bigger than a caret or arrow can accommodate. Often kids will develop a whole system of symbols or numbers, inserting these into the text where appropriate, then heading up sheets of paper with the corresponding symbols and writing the additional material there.
4. Spider legs are another method for adding. Spider legs are strips of paper on which a writer writes new material; these are stapled to the draft at the appropriate points in the piece.
5. Cut and tape allows writers both to insert new chunks of text and re-order sections of a text. It can also save a writer from having to recopy when moving on to a new draft. Workable sections from an early draft can be retrieved and reattached to subsequent drafts. (Of equal benefit is the implication that revising doesn't mean recopying.)

6. Writers can also circle sections of text in different colored inks as a way to reorganize. Especially when writing about ideas, my kids' drafts jump from topic to topic and back again. When revising they use fine-point markers and circle in one color all references to one topic, circle in another color all references to another topic, and so on. On the next draft they can combine each of the sections marked with a particular color.
7. Writers circle, too, to indicate what they'll keep of a given text. For beginning writers, deleting---crossing out--is much harder than adding. Once those words are finally down on the page then become golden. I encourage reluctant deleters to circle what they like and want to keep.

CRAFT LESSON 3

FINDING TOPICS

Objective

Students will generate a list of writing topics.

Introduction

Students will attach their brainstormed topic list on the inside of their writing in progress folder. This should become an ongoing list. As students develop new interests and experience different events in their lives, they will add writing topics to the list.

Judith Viorst is a possible focus author. Her writing topics come from her own experiences or those of her three children. Possible titles are listed below:

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday

Earrings

If I Were in Charge of the World and Other Worries

Rosie and Michael

Materials

1. reproduced copies of topic chart (see appendix E)

2. literature selection to read aloud
3. students' writing in progress folders (see Procedures Lesson 3)

Procedures

Read a Judith Viorst selection and discuss how she might have come up with her ideas. Explain that Judith Viorst has written and published many children's books and several poetry books. She usually writes about the feelings and events that happen to her own children, Alexander, Anthony, and Nicholas. Like all good writers, she writes about the things she knows best.

Have students work in groups of three to five to brainstorm possible writing topics. These should be subjects or events the students know well, such as specific things they like to do, feelings, people, or pets in their lives. Allow five to ten minutes for the groups to discuss ideas.

Invite each student to share one idea with the class. Encourage them to listen carefully to avoid repeating an idea that has already been suggested. Record these ideas on the board.

Give each student a copy of the topic chart and list ten of their favorite topics, choosing from the board if they wish.

Have students attach this list of topics to the inside of their writing in progress folder for future use.

CRAFT LESSON 4

EFFECTIVE LEADS

Objective

Students will experiment with effective leads to improve their writing.

Introduction

There are a variety of options for writers to use in creating beginnings and endings in their pieces. Reading aloud good, varied beginnings and ending from novels in the classroom library, from essays, and from newspaper and magazine articles encourages students to consider alternatives into and out of a piece of writing. Students may then begin to consider the options when beginning and ending their own pieces of writing instead of settling for the first thing that comes to mind.

Materials

1. overhead transparency or reproduced copies of Leads (see Appendix F)

Procedures

Explain that the lead is a crucial part of any piece of writing. The lead is the point where readers decide if they are going to keep on reading. It's also

the point where a writer establishes the topic, the direction that will be taken, and the voice in the piece. A writer wants a lead that will bring the reader into the piece by creating tension--some kind of problem that the reader solves by continuing to read the writing. As the piece progresses, the writer can embed the context, filling in the who, what, where, when, and why a reader will need.

Explain that the copy of Leads shows four alternatives for kicking off a piece of writing: a lackluster lead that puts all the who, what, where, when, and why information up front, then three leads beginning with a character in action, reaction, or dialogue, so students can see how the alternatives work in a given writing situation.

Ask students to take out a piece of their own writing and write an alternative beginning for it using one of the styles modeled.

CRAFT LESSON 5

BRAINSTORMING TITLES

Objective

Students will brainstorm titles for a piece of writing.

Introduction

Reproduce a piece of the teacher's writing or a student sample to demonstrate brainstorming to find titles. By writing down many possibilities students can see how choosing one that best fits the piece is more effective than settling for the first one that comes to mind.

Materials

1. reproduced piece of writing on an overhead transparency

Procedures

Show the students the reproduced piece of writing and read it together. Ask students to help generate a list of possible titles. Write every title that is suggested on the board or overhead projector. Have students help choose the one that they think best fits the piece and that will appeal most to readers.

Ask students to work in groups of two or three to brainstorm a list of titles for a piece of their writing in progress. Have students choose the title from the list that they think best fits their piece.

SKILLS LESSON 1

PUNCTUATION

Writing Dialogue

Objective

Students will write effective dialogue.

Introduction

This mini-lesson was developed when the writers were happily cranking out fiction with an enthusiasm that outpaced their knowledge of the mechanics of writing conversation. At the time they were reading The Cay by Theodore Taylor, and they loved it. This offered the perfect vehicle for teaching the rules of writing dialogue.

Materials

1. a transparency of a selection from a text with which the students are familiar showing conversation including a variety of punctuation marks and placements of speaker tags (enlarge text on the copy machine for ease in reading and marking)
2. large chart paper with markers

Procedures

Project the transparency onto the screen and ask a student to read the passage out loud. State the objective--to discover rules that a writer follows when writing dialogue. Write the objective on the top of a chart paper that will be used later in the lesson.

Ask the students to identify the different speakers in the conversation. Since there are two speakers in this conversation, ask two students to come to the overhead and circle the speaker tags, using a different color marker for each speaker. Then ask for other volunteers to come and draw a line under the dialogue using the same color marker as the speaker tag. The different colors enable the students to see the format the author uses to write conversation.

Then begin the search for the rules for writing conversation. Lead the search by having students find answers to these questions:

1. What marks do you see around the words the speaker says?
2. Let's look at the periods. Do they stand alone or are they used with other punctuation marks? Do you see any pattern?
3. Where do you find commas in this dialogue? Is there a pattern?

By this time, students should be searching for a pattern for the question marks and exclamation points. If they are not, continue questioning.

After students discover the patterns, encourage them to restate each pattern as a rule for writing dialogue. On the chart paper where the objective was listed, write the heading "Rules for Writing Conversation" and then record the rules students suggest. Write them exactly as students express them.

Keep this chart where students can see it for reference when they are writing dialogue. They soon discover that there are other rules to add to the chart.

SKILLS LESSON 2

USEAGE

Writing PluralsObjective

Students will discover different ways works are made plural.

Introduction

This lesson was developed after a student found the word buffalo in a trade book he was reading and insisted that the author had made a mistake. The student knew that the passage referred to more than one buffalo and yet the word was spelled buffalo. The student was sure he had seen the word spelled differently in another source he was reading. Together we went to the dictionary and looked up the word buffalo, finding that there is more than one accepted way to pluralize it correctly.

Materials

1. several dozen two inch by four inch pieces of paper
2. chart paper

Procedures

Tell the students that the objective of this mini-lesson is to locate plural nouns and classify them according to the way the plural is formed. Say a list of nouns such as airplane, fish, turkey, microscope, and planet. Ask students what part of speech these words represent. If there is any confusion about nouns, review nouns before going further into the lesson.

Start a back and forth game where the teacher says, "one picture," and the student completes "three _____." The student responds, "three pictures." Do this for a short time to place the idea of plural nouns in their train of thought.

Next, send students searching through the books they are reading to locate plural nouns. As they find them, they write each one on a strip of paper, using a marker and large script. After a few minutes, open up the search to include unusual plural words they can think of not appearing in their books.

Divide the class into groups of three or four and have them pool their words. As a group, they are to arrange their words into categories based on plural endings. After students have had an opportunity to categorize their words, they share their discoveries. As each group shares, write their discoveries on chart paper. We then hear the chart paper with categories such as: add s to the word, add es to the word, the word stays the same, change the y to i and add es, and change the f to v and add es. The students then place their word strips on the chart paper with the correct heading.

SKILLS LESSON 3
PUNCTUATION/USEAGE

Possessive Nouns

Objective

Students will understand the meaning of possessive nouns and know how to correctly use the apostrophe to show possession.

Introduction

Many students confuse the apostrophe in contractions with the apostrophe in possessives. To help them understand the difference, look for pages in their trade books that illustrate the use of contractions and possessive nouns. Make transparencies of those pages to use with this lesson.

One possible sample comes from The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman:

Cutwater rummaged around in a black oak chest of stolen goods. Handkerchiefs flew out like soiled white does, work shoes, ladies' combs, a cowbell--a junk heap. They've had lean pickings, this raggedy pair of highwaymen, Jemmy thought. And maybe not as smart and clever as the song sellers made out.

"Here's a scrap of paper, Billy," said Cutwater, finding it in the pocket of a stolen coat. "But how are we going to do the scribblement:

We can't write."

*"I've seen it done. Sharpen us a hawk's feather,
Cutwater."*

Materials

1. Merry-Go Round, A Book About Nouns by Ruth Heller
2. transparency of a familiar book, illustrating the use of contractions and possessives
3. chart paper

Procedures

Gather students close and read aloud Merry-Go Round. Copy the two pages that refer to possessive nouns onto chart paper:

Add apostrophe S's when NOUNS are POSSESSIVE, except when they're PLURALS ending in S. . . the tiger's stripes, the lion's mane, the camels' obvious disdain.

Project the transparency and ask a student to underline all the words in the passage that contain an apostrophe. Lead the students in analyzing the words, discussing how and why the apostrophe is used in each word and whether each noun is singular or plural. Chart each word discussed on chart

paper headed Examples of How Apostrophes Are Used under the sub-heading of Possession or Contractions.

SKILLS LESSON 4

FORMAT

Dividing Words Between Syllables

Objective

Students will divide words between syllables at line breaks.

Introduction

Skills mini-lessons in format provide an opportunity to address both small and large format issues. Dividing words between syllables at line breaks is a more technical format issue students need to understand.

Materials

1. transparency of a page from a dictionary, enlarged for ease in reading

Procedures

Explain to students that words have to be split between syllables when they run out of room at the end of a line. One syllable words cannot be split.

Project the transparency and point out how words are listed already divided into syllables. Show how five or six of the projected words would have

to be split in a piece of writing.

End the mini-lesson by observing that this is an editing skill. As students draft, they should split the words between syllables according to their best guesses. When they self-edit, they should get a dictionary and compare their syllables against the book's. Make sure students know where to get a dictionary if needed.

SKILLS LESSON 5

FORMAT

Business Letter FormatObjective

Students will write a business letter in correct business letter format.

Introduction

Mini-lessons in format provide an opportunity to teach students how to set up correspondence. Proper letter format is the kind of convention that helps get writers taken seriously by the world of readers beyond our classroom. It is a convention that most students have some knowledge of but which few perfect unless they have an unusual amount of experience writing letters.

Students will develop their own personal reference for business letter format so they have fast access.

Materials

1. yellow bond paper
2. transparency of a business letter

Procedures

Tell the students the objective for the mini-lesson, explaining that proper letter format is the kind of convention that helps get writers taken seriously in the world of readers outside the classroom.

Project the transparency of the business letter labeling the parts with a colored marker and discussing what information is included in each section. Explain spacing and format.

Ask students to draft a mock business letter in correct format on scratch paper. Circulate and address any problems that arise. When the letter drafts are in correct format, ask students to transfer letters to yellow bond paper. Students will file sample letters in their writing in progress folders to use as a quick reference when they want to write a business letter.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project explored the literature and research regarding writing to learn writing and sought to document a need for teaching writing in a holistic process approach such as the Writing Workshop. A selection of mini-lessons for use in Writing Workshop at the sixth grade level were developed. It was hoped by the author that these lessons might provide models for using Writing Workshop to teach language skills and strategies.

The mini-lessons developed in this project were designed with West Valley School District (WA) sixth grade students in mind and may not be appropriate for others; however, they may be adapted to fit other curricula requirements and grade levels. They may also serve as models for additional lessons to be created by the author or others.

When possible, the mini-lessons in this project were based on fiction and non-fiction selections that related to units of study in the author's classroom so that they might be more meaningful to students. In other mini-lessons, students' writing and/or the writing of the teacher were used. Other literature selections familiar to another group of students may be substituted if desired.

Although mini-lessons which focus on Writing Workshop procedures should be taught first to provide students with routines that help them stay on task while the teacher works with small groups or individuals, other lessons were not designed to be taught in any certain order. Mini-lesson selection

should arise out of students' particular needs. These needs can be discovered by observing the students at work and by working with them. Lessons may be presented to the entire class when the majority of the students need help with a certain skill or strategy or to small groups of students who display the same need.

School and district guidelines may also be used in planning mini-lessons that will help students achieve content goals. Teaching skills when the students need them may be more effective than teaching them in isolation. Lessons should also be developed to complement students' interests and goals for themselves as they arise. Impromptu lessons like this may give students the message that their learning goals are important.

The literature and research suggested a need for more instructional time teaching children to write in a holistic process approach. Writing Workshop with its mini-lessons provided such an approach, combining meaningful writing practice with writing-connected discourse.

Debate the merit of each suggestion in this project as it applies to individual teaching situations; refine, reshape and elaborate the ideas to create Writing Workshop lessons suited to the unique needs of the students whom you teach.

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APPENDIX B

SKILLS LIST

THINGS THAT _____ CAN DO AS A WRITER.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

APPENDIX D

EXPECTATIONS FOR GRADE 6 WRITING

PART 1: YOUR ROLE

1. To come to class each and every day with your writing folder, in which you'll keep all drafts of your pieces-in-progress.
2. To take care of your writing-in-progress folder.
3. To write every day and to finish pieces of writing.
4. To make a daily plan for your writing and to work at it during class and at home.
5. To find topics you care about.
6. To take risks as a writer, trying new techniques, topics, skills, and kinds of writing.
7. To draft your prose writing in paragraphs.
8. To number and date your drafts of each piece.
9. To work hard at self-editing your final drafts and to self-edit in pen or pencil different in color from the print of your text.
10. To maintain your skills list and to use it as a guide in self-editing and proofreading.
11. To make final copies legible and correct.
12. To take care with the writing materials and resources I've provided you.
13. To make decisions about what's working and what needs more work in pieces of your writing; to listen to and questions other writers' pieces, giving thoughtful, helpful response.
14. To not do anything to disturb or distract me or other writers.
15. To discover what writing can do for you.

PART II: MY ROLE

1. To keep track of what you're writing, where you are in your writing and what you need as a writer.
2. To grade your writing based on your growth and effort as a writer and on the analytical writing traits.
3. To write every day and finish pieces of writing.
4. To prepare and present mini-lessons based on what I see you need to know next.
5. To help you find topics you care about.
6. To provide a predictable class structure in which you'll feel free to take risks as a writer.
7. To organize the room so it meets your various needs as a writer.
8. To help you learn specific editing and proofreading skills.
9. To be your final editor.
10. To give you opportunities to publish your writing.
11. To photocopy finished pieces.
12. To provide you with the materials you need to write.
13. To listen to you and to respond to your writing by asking thoughtful, helpful questions; to help you listen and respond to other writers' pieces in thoughtful, helpful ways; to make a record of what happens in my conferences with you.
14. To make sure no one does anything to disturb or distract you when you're writing or conferencing.
15. To help you discover what writing can do for you.

APPENDIX E
TOPIC CHART

People I Know:

Feelings I Have:

Places I Have Been:

Things I Think About:

Things I Have Done:

Special Ideas: