Exploring ways to improve the quality of primary students’ written pieces and their attitudes toward writing.

A Teacher Inquiry

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Description of Teaching Context

My first grade classroom at Park Forest Elementary School is composed of eighteen students including six boys and twelve girls. Most of the students in my classroom began first grade at the same developmental age, approximately 6.5 years old. However, there were two students who had already turned 7 years old, and one student who had not yet turned 6 years old. Seven of the students in my classroom have been identified as in need of instructional support services. Five students receive additional reading instruction through the Title I program, and two students have been referred to the speech therapist. While I have a wide range of academic abilities in my classroom, none of my students have been formally identified as learning disabled, gifted, or in need of emotional support. Overall, my students are very agreeable and seem eager to learn. Most of my students seem to enjoy school, have positive attitudes, and diligently complete their schoolwork.

While the students in my classroom display a wide range of academic abilities, most of the students are not strong writers. On the district writing assessment administered in early November, eleven of my eighteen students scored at the basic level. One student’s writing was identified as below basic. The students seem to struggle with the content of their pieces as well as conventions. Several of the students have had trouble using the correct letter formations. In addition to their weak writing skills, many of the students do not demonstrate an interest in writing. They tend to complete their writing assignments quickly making careless mistakes and neglecting to add more than minimal detail (A more in-depth context as well as a rationale for my inquiry are included in Appendix A).
Wonderings and Questions

Main Wondering:
What effect does the context in which writing occurs have on the quality of students’ written work and students’ attitudes toward writing?

Sub-questions:

- How will providing students’ with the opportunity to choose the topic they write about impact the quality of students’ written work and their attitudes toward writing?
- How will providing students’ with the opportunity to share their written work impact the quality of students’ work and their attitudes toward writing?
- How will providing students’ with the opportunity to publish their pieces impact the quality of students’ written work and their attitudes toward writing?

Data Collection and Analysis

Analysis of students’ writing samples

Over the past three months, I have collected and analyzed eleven writing samples produced by each of my students. The writing samples included both fiction and nonfiction pieces. These pieces were written with varying degrees of student choice and teacher assistance. Some writing assignments were completed as whole class activities during a weekly 30-45 minute writers’ workshop while other written pieces were produced over the course of 2-3 days during 18-minute language centers.

The written pieces were analyzed using rubrics based on the State College Area School District’s Writing Assessment Rubrics (Appendix B and C). On the rubrics, students’ written compositions could be scored as advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic. The expectations for each level designation vary slightly, in regard to content, between narrative and expository
writing. When analyzing my students’ written pieces, I also recorded the number of words and sentences students’ used.

During my analysis of the students’ writing samples, I did not uncover many of the patterns I expected to find in the scores that students’ received on their written work. There was no correlation between student choice in topic and students’ writing scores. The structure of writing time, writers’ workshop or language centers, also had no significant impact on the quality of students’ work. As a whole, the class did seem to receive consistently higher scores on expository writing than on narrative fiction writing. On average, only one student received a basic score on each expository composition we completed while four students earned such a score on each narrative writing assignment. The class received its highest scores on the published story assignment. All of the students were awarded, at least, a proficient score on these pieces. Two students’ stories met the expectations for advanced writers.

Pre-intervention interview and Post-intervention interview

Before beginning any intervention for my inquiry project, I conducted a brief interview with each of my students (Appendix D). The interview was designed to assess students’ attitudes toward writing. Students were asked whether they liked or disliked writing as well as which parts of writing they liked best, liked the least, and found the most challenging. The final question asked students to reflect on how writing instruction could be made more enjoyable.

Three months later, I interviewed my students a second time (Appendix E). Many of the questions from the initial interview were included in the post-intervention interview. I wanted to see if any of the students’ beliefs or attitudes about writing had changed. In addition to the questions from the pre-intervention interview, in the second interview, students were asked to
reflect on different writing assignments and activities we had completed in the classroom. Students were also asked about their preferences in regard to choice of topic and style of writing.

On my pre-intervention interview, I was surprised to find that almost all of my students said that they liked writing. Fifteen of the eighteen students stated that they spent time writing at home. During their interviews, all but five of my students indicated a preference for fictional writing. Their responses to the question, “what is the hardest part of writing?” varied greatly. Students cited spelling, generating ideas, the required length of written stories, and the physical act of writing as challenges.

Most of the students’ responses to the questions from the pre-intervention interview were the same as their answers during the post-intervention interview. Students still cited the same likes, dislikes, and challenges. When asked what their favorite writing assignment was, ten of the students identified the published story assignment as their favorite. Three other students selected expository pieces because they were easy to write. All but three of the students indicated preferences for student choice in topic and narrative fiction writing. During the post-intervention interview, students were also asked to consider the value of the graphic organizers they used when working on their published stories. More than half of the students thought that the organizers were helpful and claimed that they referred to them throughout the writing process.

**Daily attitude surveys**

Through my inquiry project, I was interested in examining students’ feelings and/or attitudes and how these impacted the quality and quantity of their writing. A study completed by Graham, Berninger, and Fan found that there is a statistically significant relationship between students’ attitudes toward writing and their achievement (2007, 1). Each time the students
participated in a writing activity they were asked to fill out a simple attitude survey (Appendix F). The survey included three questions: how did you feel when writing today, did you like/dislike the topic about which you were writing, do you think that your story is good/okay/bad. In order to keep this survey from becoming a tedious task for my first grade students, I designed it, so the students simply had to circle the faces that reflected their feelings.

At the end of my inquiry project, I compared students’ responses on the attitude surveys to the quality and quantity of the writing completed on the corresponding day. Surprisingly, there was little or no correlation between the students’ responses on the attitude survey and the quality of their written work. Some students’ responses to the survey questions varied daily even when they were working on the same assignment. There were no apparent correlations between student choice in topic, genre of writing, and students’ survey responses.

**Teacher observations/student quotations**

While working with the students at the writing table during language centers, I took notes on students’ behaviors and comments. These dated student comments provided insight into students’ opinions of particular written assignments, their abilities as writers, and their attitudes, in general, toward writing.

**Explanation of Findings**

**Claim 1:** Student choice of topic as well as the genre of writing (narrative or expository) does not seem to influence the length of students’ written pieces or their attitudes toward writing.

Despite students’ interview responses indicating preferences for student choice in topic selection and narrative fiction writing, my analysis of the students’ written pieces identifies no consistent correlation between these factors and the length of students’ written pieces or their
attitudes toward writing. I had expected student choice in topic selection to influence the quality of students’ writing. Some research has found that giving students a choice in the topic of their writing “results in better quality text production as well as greater student satisfaction and motivation (Graham, Berninger, & Fan, 2007, 20).” However, little correlation between student choice in topic selection and the length of students’ compositions appears within the word count data I collected (Appendix G). Trends are not even evident within the work of individual students.

Based on general observations I have made in the classroom, I would agree with the remarks made by Donald Graves that teachers should beware of the “vacuum of choice.” When students are given too much choice and little guidance, they can quickly get lost (Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998, 10). Many of my students seemed to struggle to begin writing when they were asked to select their own topics. Students appeared to get to work more quickly when they were given a limited number of topics from which to choose or were required to write about a specific topic. This is a claim I would like to explore further in my future wonderings as I do not have any concrete evidence to support it.

On an individual basis, some students may have written longer pieces when working in a particular genre; however, this genre was not the same for all of the students. Even those students that indicated a preference for expository writing on their post-intervention interviews did not average higher word counts on their expository writings than their fiction pieces. Thus, I do not believe that any claim can be made about genre’s influence on the length of students’ compositions.

Students’ attitudes towards writing seemed to be more closely related to their moods than to the opportunity to choose the topic or the genre of writing. The daily attitude surveys did not
display any striking trends in students’ preference for student choice in topic selection, genre, or interest in individual assignments. Over the course of my inquiry, several of the written assignments that the students worked on carried over a span of several days. Individual students’ responses to the attitude survey changed from day to day despite the fact that they were working on the same written assignment.

The genre of writing may have some impact on the quality of students’ writing. On average, one student received a basic score on each of the expository compositions our class was assigned while an average of four students earned basic scores on each narrative piece. I believe that further evidence would be required in order to make this statement a claim. Other factors may have influenced these findings. There are more specific criteria for attaining a proficient score on a narrative fiction piece than an expository composition. Also, most of the expository writing assignments given to my students focused on presenting facts about particular animals. Therefore, my findings are based on only one type of expository writing and one topic, animals, in which many primary students exhibit great interest. I would like to explore the influence of genre on the quality of students’ writing in my future practice as a teacher.

**Claim 2:** Students seem to enjoy formal sharing, but there is no conclusive evidence that sharing improves the quality or length of students’ writing or their attitudes toward writing.

When I first introduced the author’s chair in my classroom, my students seemed very excited. They wanted to use the chair immediately. Upon completing their first written piece after the author’s chair’s arrival, fourteen of my eighteen students signed up to read their stories. Ten students signed up to read the second piece they completed.

While the students were eager to share their work, I do not believe that they gained much from the process of sharing. As Lunsford states, sharing should involve feedback including
constructive criticism (1998, 37). Despite my encouragement and modeling, the students did not consistently provide much constructive feedback. Their comments often centered on the presenter’s picture or a specific fact such as “You could have said that frogs have sticky tongues.” When analyzing the students’ written compositions and daily attitude surveys on the days following their formal sharings, I was unable to identify any conclusive evidence that improvements had been made in the quality or length of students’ compositions or students’ attitudes toward writing.

Unfortunately, I was not able to incorporate formal sharing of students’ work into the classroom as effectively and efficiently as I had intended. As a result of unexpected changes in our schedule, the author’s chair was not brought out as consistently as I would have liked, and I never had the opportunity to create a basket for showcasing students’ written compositions. I would like to further investigate the effects of formal sharing on students’ writing abilities in my future classrooms.

**Claim 3: The opportunity to publish a story gave students a purpose for writing and a sense of accomplishment when the piece was completed. When publishing was their goal, students seemed to exhibit more positive attitudes toward writing and produce higher quality written pieces.**

From the first day I introduced the idea of publishing to my students, they seemed to be interested in the process. While working on their published stories, the majority of the students consistently responded on their daily attitude surveys that they liked the topic that they were writing about and that they thought their stories were good. Even those students who had provided average or negative responses to the survey questions throughout the process of writing the published story gave positive responses by the time they completed the project. I have one student who does not like to write at all. During his interviews with me, he could not come up with one positive thing about writing. However, on the day he completed his published story, he
was happy, and for the first time, all of his responses to the daily survey questions were positive. This student was not the only one who was happy when he completed his story. I collected comments from more than a third of my students who independently, without any provocation, expressed how happy they were and/or how good they felt because they had finished their stories. The students seemed to have a sense of purpose for their writing. Fletcher and Portalupi believe that when students have an authentic purpose, they pay attention differently to instruction (2001, 10). Publishing provided the students with a purpose for writing, revising, and editing.

The published stories represent some of the best work my students have completed, in regards to writing, all year. All of my students received at least a proficient score on their published stories based on the criteria of the State College Area School District’s Writing Assessment Rubric for first grade. Two of my students qualified as advanced writers. When I began my inquiry project, I had, on average, six students scoring at the basic level on their narrative writing assignments.

Two factors associated with the publishing process that may have contributed to the students’ scores on their published stories were time and planning. Unlike many of the written assignments the students have completed this year, the published story had a flexible time frame. Students were given several weeks to work on these stories. Most students completed the writing of their stories during language centers in 4-5 days; however, they knew that additional time was available. The students also took time to plan their published stories before they began writing. For the first time, students were given graphic organizers to assist them in planning out their stories.
Claim 4: The use of graphic organizers to create a framework for a story prior to beginning writing seemed to help students improve the quality of their fiction stories.

The use of graphic organizers was not a focal point of my inquiry project; however, I believe its impact on the quality of my students’ fiction stories is worth recognizing. In order to provide my students with some additional planning time before they began the fiction stories I intended to publish, I created a graphic organizer on which my students could draw their main characters, the setting of their stories, and think about the problems in their stories (Appendix H). The students responded so well, working diligently and sharing ideas, that I decided to follow this activity with a second graphic organizer focusing on the events in the middle of the story (Appendix I).

I believe that the additional planning students put into their stories as a result of the graphic organizers is one of the primary reasons that the quality of the students’ stories was higher on these stories than on any other story they completed this year. All of the students received a score of proficient or advanced on their published stories. During their post-intervention interviews, ten of the seventeen students who completed the organizers said that they found the worksheets helpful. They particularly enjoyed being able to draw their ideas before they began their writing. These findings support Sidelnick and Svoboda’s suggestion that, “drawing can be used to motivate a child to learn and write (2000, 176).” When I compared the information contained in the graphic organizers to the students’ completed stories, eleven of the stories were aligned almost perfectly. Two students had chosen to completely change their topics, so they could not be included in my sample.

Although I believe that the use of graphic organizers had a positive impact on the quality of my students’ writing, my evidence to support this claim is limited to one completed composition. I hope to utilize graphic organizers more regularly in my future writing instruction.
I believe that the use of graphic organizers will help students remember the elements essential to a well written story and will assist them as they strive to consistently write at the proficient level.

**Reflection and Implications for Future Practice**

While I was unable to resolve all of my original wonderings, I learned a great deal about writing instruction throughout my inquiry project. Unintentionally, I discovered the value of using graphic organizers during the writing process. As their responses during the post-intervention interviews indicated, most of my students were not bothered by this additional step in the writing process; however, the positive influence of these tools was evident in their final written pieces. I intend to use graphic organizers more regularly in order to encourage my students to plan and think through their ideas before they begin to write. During my project, I also witnessed the excitement students experience when they feel like real authors. Most of my students seemed to thoroughly enjoy the opportunities they had to share their stories, whether it meant reading them in the author’s chair or displaying their published stories in the classroom. The students seemed more motivated when they had a purpose or objective for writing.

After engaging in my inquiry project and discussing writing with some of my colleagues, I was left with some unresolved wonderings as well as some new wonderings. For example, I was not able to fully explore the effects of formal sharing on the quality of students’ written work. I am also still uncertain about the influence of student choice in topic selection on the quality of students’ writing or their attitudes toward the subject. These are variables I hope to explore further in my future practice. I wonder what impact these variables would have if they were introduced at the beginning of the school year and examined for more than just a couple of months.
Further wonderings

- When sharing is introduced near the beginning of the year, what impact will this process have on the quality of students’ work, students’ attitudes toward writing, and students’ social skills?
- What effect does the use of graphic organizers during the planning of written pieces have on the quality and length of students’ written pieces?
- How does the organization/structure of writing time (ex: whole class, small group centers) influence the quality and length of students’ writings?
- What impact does daily writing time have on the development of students’ writing skills and the quality of their written pieces?
- How do modeling and interactive writing practices influence the development of students’ writing skills, the quality of students’ work, and students’ attitudes toward writing?

The inquiry process has helped me to grow as a teacher. Not only has this project allowed me to explore practices that may improve the quality of my writing instruction, but it has also enabled me to discover and/or reaffirm beliefs about teaching in general. Teachers must be vigilant observers who can identify areas of weakness or concern in their classrooms. They should also be life-long learners who are willing to seek out the best practices to improve their teaching practices and the learning environments in their classrooms. Through inquiry, teachers may achieve these goals. After completing this inquiry project, I believe I am much more mindful of my teaching practices and their implications on the learning of my students, and I am more willing to incorporate new teaching techniques into my classroom.
Appendix Table of Contents

A: Inquiry brief and annotated bibliography

B: Rubric for the assessment of narrative writing

C: Rubric for the assessment of expository writing

D: Pre-intervention interview questions

E: Post-intervention interview questions

F: Daily attitude survey

G: Word count chart

H: Story starters graphic organizer

I: Meaty Middles graphic organizer

J: Scores of students’ written assignments

K: Findings of daily attitude surveys
Appendix A:  
Inquiry brief and annotated bibliography

Context:

My first grade classroom at Park Forest Elementary School is composed of eighteen students including six boys and twelve girls. Most of the students in my classroom began first grade at the same developmental age, approximately 6.5 years old. However, there were two students who had already turned 7 years old, and one student who had not yet turned 6 years old. Seven of the students in my classroom have been identified as in need of instructional support services. Five students receive additional reading instruction through the Title I program, and two students have been referred to the speech therapist. While I have a wide range of academic abilities in my classroom, none of my students have been formally identified as learning disabled, gifted, or in need of emotional support. There are several students who have exhibited strong reading abilities and tend to be high achievers that might benefit from enrichment programs later in their schooling.

While the students in my classroom display a wide range of academic abilities, most of the students are not strong writers. On the district assessment administered in early November, eleven of my eighteen students scored at the basic level. One student’s writing was identified as below basic. The students seem to struggle with the content of their pieces as well as conventions. Several of the students have had trouble using the correct letter formations. In addition to their weak writing skills, many of the students do not exhibit an interest or passion for writing. They tend to complete their writing assignments quickly making careless mistakes and neglecting to add more than minimal detail.

Overall, my students are very agreeable and seem eager to learn. Most of my students seem to enjoy school, have a positive attitude, and diligently complete their schoolwork. However, there are five students in the classroom who frequently struggle to complete their work and/or display a negative attitude toward school activities. There are no nonconformists who challenge my authority in the classroom. We have not had any significant behavioral problems in our classroom this year. I feel very fortunate to have this group of wonderful students in my classroom this year.

Rationale:

In a first grade classroom, there is a strong emphasis on teaching and reinforcing literacy skills. First grade teachers spend a great deal of time providing instruction on reading and writing. Throughout the first half of this year, my mentor and I have done our best to encourage our students to write. However, despite our efforts, the students in our classroom do not seem to be very motivated to write. Many of the students are content to stop writing when they have fulfilled the minimum requirements of the assignment. Few, if any, of the students are willing to take time to add details to their writings or edit their work. I realize that my students are only in first grade, but I know that they are capable of reviewing their work for appropriate capitalization, punctuation, and letter formation. The students do not seem to take great pride or
ownership in their work. Through my inquiry, I hope to examine the effects of several variables on students’ motivation to write and the quality of their written pieces.

**Main Wondering:**

What effect does the context in which writing occurs have on the quality of students’ written work and students’ attitudes towards writing?

**Sub-questions:**

- How will providing students’ with the opportunity to choose the topic they write about impact the quality of students’ written work?
- How will providing students’ with the opportunity to share their written work impact the quality of students’ work?
- How will providing students’ with the opportunity to publish their pieces impact the quality of students’ written work?
- Which of these writing activities is most effective in motivating students to write?

**Timeline:**

**February**

- Week 2: - Create a rubric for evaluating the quality of students’ work.
  - Evaluate students’ instructions for building a sandcastle and first fiction piece using teacher made rubric (These written pieces were composed in January). These will serve as baseline writing samples.
  - Investigate the effect of choice: Students will write one nonfiction piece about a teacher chosen topic.
  - Conduct survey of students’ attitudes towards writing after every work session. Analyze the pieces students create with teacher-made rubric.
  - Compare these writings to the students’ baseline writings.

- Week 3: - Investigate the effect of choice: Students will write one nonfiction piece on a topic of their own choice (personal experience) and one fiction piece of their own choice. In preparation for the district writing assessment, the students will also write a fiction piece on a teacher chosen topic.
  - Conduct survey of students’ attitudes towards writing after every work session.
  - Analyze the pieces students create with teacher-made rubric.
  - Compare these writings to the students’ baseline writings.

- Week 4: - Investigate the effect of sharing: Introduce the idea of formal sharing. I will bring an “author’s chair” into the classroom. Before students begin writing a new piece, I will stress the fact that they will have the opportunity to share the written pieces they create with the class. When written pieces are near completion or complete, students will have the chance to sign up, sit in the author’s chair, and read their pieces to the class.
- I will also bring a “kids’ writing” box into the classroom. After sharing, the students may put their writing in the box, so their peers may read it again during free time. This is also an alternative form of sharing for those students who do not wish to read their stories in front of the class, but would still like to share their work.

- Conduct survey of students’ attitudes towards writing after every work session.

- Analyze the pieces students create with teacher-made rubric.

- Compare these writings to the students’ baseline writings.

March

- Week 1: Investigate the effect of sharing: Students will be given the opportunity to share selected pieces.
  - Conduct survey of students’ attitudes towards writing after every work session.
  - Analyze the pieces students create with teacher-made rubric.
  - Compare these writings to the students’ baseline writings.

- Week 2: Spring Break

- Week 3: Investigate the effect of publishing: Introduce the idea of publishing to the students. Explain what is involved with publishing and the expectations for the quality of published writing. Selected pieces will be published. Students and teachers will work together to select which piece(s) will be published. Student may chose the piece to publish as long as it meets the teacher’s requirements.
  - Conference with students and help them edit pieces.
  - Conduct survey of students’ attitudes towards writing after every work session.
  - Analyze the pieces students create with teacher-made rubric.
  - Compare these writings to the students’ baseline writings. Make note of the differences in pieces written with publishing in mind and those that are not.

- Week 4: Investigate the effect of publishing: Remind students of the expectations for pieces that will be published.
  - Give students time to work on revisions and illustrations for their pieces to be published.
  - Conference with students and help them edit their work.
  - Conduct survey of students’ attitudes towards writing after every work session.
  - Analyze the pieces students create with teacher-made rubric.
  - Compare these writings to the students’ baseline writings. Make note of the differences in pieces written with publishing in mind and those that aren’t.
April
- Week 1: Finish compiling data and begin formal composition of inquiry paper.
- Week 2: Continue composing inquiry paper.
- Week 3: Make any necessary revisions to my inquiry paper. Continue to work on PowerPoint presentation
- Week 4: Make any revisions or adjustments to PowerPoint. Practice presentation for the inquiry conference

Data Collection Ideas:
- **Student interviews:** Short interviews will be conducted with each student to survey students’ attitudes towards writing, what components of writing they like/don’t like, and how they feel writing time could be improved (prior to any intervention)
- **Parent survey:** A short survey will be sent home to the parents to gain more information about students’ experience with writing, reading, and other creative forms.
- **Student writing samples:** Both fiction and nonfiction samples will be collected and evaluated using a rubric.
- **Student surveys:** Student surveys will be conducted after each writing session to assess students’ feelings about writing on that day and the given writing assignment. I will use a short and simple smiley face survey.
- **Teacher observations**
- **Student interviews:** A post interview will be conducted to note any changes in students’ attitudes towards writing following the intervention.
References

Books


The text begins with a section, which provides information about the factors a teacher should consider when establishing an environment for writing. Throughout the text, the authors have included quotes from respected professionals in the field of writing instruction. The authors seem to support an idea central to my inquiry, choice can impact the quality of students’ writings. The text includes a variety of mini-lessons that can be used in teaching writing to students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

I would recommend this book to any teacher who provides writing instruction to students in kindergarten through eighth grade. I plan to use several of the mini-lessons in this text as I encourage my first graders to add more details and descriptions to their written work.


This text provides suggestions for how a teacher may establish a writers’ workshop in his/her classroom. The authors believe that writers’ workshop is a valid approach to writing instruction at any grade level because it allows the students to take more ownership of their writing and provides an authentic purpose for writing. Throughout the text, the authors address all three of the variables examined in my inquiry: choice, sharing, and publishing. The text supports the incorporation of each of these variables into a writing curriculum. Within the book, the reader will find suggestions for how sharing and publishing can occur within classrooms at various grade levels. I intend to use several of these strategies for sharing and publishing during my inquiry.

I would recommend this text to any teacher who is trying to incorporate writers’ workshop into his/her classroom for the first time or any teacher who is looking to improve the structure of his/her current workshop. The text will give the reader an idea of what factors to consider as he/she sets up his/her room, structures the day, and establishes routines within the classroom.


The book is composed of various mini-lessons that could be used to enhance the teaching of writing in kindergarten through third grade. I was particularly interested in the sections of the book which focused on the sharing of students’ written work and the creation of an authors’ tea. I intend to introduce the concept of sharing into my classroom as it is described in this text. Students will have the option to share, but they will not be forced to share if they do not want to. There will be several methods of sharing, so students will not necessarily have to share orally in
front of the entire class. As described in Lunsford’s book, the sharing in my classroom will be a
time when students can receive constructive feedback from their peers. The author’s experiences
may also serve as evidence for my claims that both sharing and publishing student work can be
motivating to young writers.

I would recommend this book to any primary teacher who is looking for ideas or short lessons to
enhance his/her writing instruction. The instructional mini-lessons in this book focus on a wide
range of language skills.

State College, PA.

The Language Arts Continuum: Writing provides the reader with a description of the
expectations for student writing at each grade level and/or developmental level. The text also
includes teaching strategies and suggested mini-lessons that may be used for providing writing
instruction at each grade level. Perhaps, most importantly for my inquiry, this text contains the
rubric used by State College Area School District to assess students’ written work and the
development of their writing abilities.

I would recommend that every teacher in the State College Area School District be familiar with
this text. Not only does it contain the expectations for students’ writing performance, but it also
includes suggestions for improving the quality of the writing instruction in the classroom.

Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.

This text provides a thorough explanation of the writers’ workshop approach to writing
instruction. According to the text, the components of writers’ workshop include writing, sharing,
mini-lessons, and reading aloud. After reading the text, I believe that the writers’ workshop
approach utilizes all of the variables highlighted in my inquiry: choice, sharing, and publishing,
to motivate students to write. The text also discusses several methods a teacher may use to share
and/or publish students’ work in the classroom. I plan to implement several of the ideas
presented in this book in my own classroom.

I would recommend this book to an elementary teacher who would like to gain a greater
understanding of the writers’ workshop approach to teaching writing. The writers’ workshop
approach to teaching writing is different from the traditional approach. It may be very difficult
to incorporate all of the elements of writers’ workshop into an elementary classroom, especially
a primary classroom, but the theories behind the practice are worth reviewing.

Journal articles

Large Scale Performance Assessment in Writing: Effects of Student and Teacher Choice
ERIC database.
This article discusses the results of a study examining the effects of student and teacher choice on students’ performance on state writing assessments in Kansas. In this study, students were given the opportunity to choose the topics they wrote about on the assessment, and teachers were able to select the time allotted for the writing. Although the effects of student choice on students’ composite test scores were negligible, the researchers believe there is still merit to the idea of student choice in writing. Other research supporting the effects of student choice on the quality of students’ writing is presented in the article.

I would recommend this study to an individual who is interested in exploring the effects of student choice on students’ academic performance. Those who are interested in examining state assessment procedures may also want to review this article.


In this study, the authors investigated the relationship between the writing achievement of primary students and their attitudes towards writing. Three potential models for this relationship were tested: (1) attitude towards writing directly effects writing performance, (2) writing performance directly effects attitude towards writing, and (3) the effects of attitude and writing performance are reciprocal. After conducting a study of first and third grade students, the researchers found that their findings most closely supported the model in which students’ attitudes towards writing directly effected their writing performance. Students with more positive attitudes towards writing demonstrated higher writing achievement. Their findings support claims that individual differences in motivation may predict writing performance.

This study provides evidence for my wondering regarding whether students’ attitudes towards writing influence the quality of their written work. I would recommend this article to any educator or researcher that is interested in how attitude or motivation may influence students’ academic performance.


This article described the experiences of three new teachers as they begin their teaching careers and attempt to incorporate innovative teaching strategies, including writers’ workshop, into their classrooms. These teachers found that allowing students to have choice regarding their writing in a structured writing environment resulted in more enthusiasm towards writing and fewer management issues. Like these teachers, I am working to increase my students’ enthusiasm towards writing. This article provides support for the claim that freedom of choice can improve students’ attitudes towards writing. I will be examining this claim within my inquiry.

I would recommend this article to teachers, especially new teachers, attempting to introduce writers’ workshop into their classrooms and schools. A teacher introducing writers’ workshop...
may face some opposition. This article encourages teachers and administrators to be open to new and innovative teaching strategies.


This article discusses the festival one school created to motivate students to write and to celebrate the students’ accomplishments. The festival was a school-wide event involving all students in kindergarten through fifth grade who were interested in participating. The author interviewed students, parents, and teachers to gain their perspectives on the event. All of the individuals interviewed believed that the event had a positive impact on the students and the writing curriculum. All of the students’ pieces shared at the festival were also published in an anthology.

This article offered one idea for how an instructor could go about incorporating sharing and publishing into the writing curriculum at his/her school. While I do not think I will organize a school-wide festival, I could conduct a smaller festival in my classroom inviting other students and parents to come and be an audience. The comments of the teachers, parents, and students lend support to one of my claims, sharing can improve students’ attitudes towards writing.

I would recommend this article to any teacher who is considering creating an event to celebrate students’ accomplishments or any teacher who is looking for new ways to motivate his/her students to write. This article may provide encouragement to any teacher who is apprehensive about implementing new ideas or expanding his/her teaching outside of his/her classroom.

**Interviews**

10. Andrea deCarle, Second grade teacher at Easterly Parkway Elementary School.

I plan to interview Andrea deCarle, a former PDS intern and second grade teacher at Easterly Parkway Elementary School. Andrea places a strong emphasis on writing instruction in her classroom. As a former PDS intern, she also has experience conducting an inquiry project. I hope that Andrea will be able to provide me with more information about some of the teaching strategies that seem to be effective in motivating young students, particularly primary students, to engage in writing. She may also be able to direct me to additional resources to support my inquiry.
Appendix B:
Rubric for the assessment of narrative writing

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<th>Writing Rubric (Narrative)</th>
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<tr>
<td>___ Beginning, middle, and end</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Includes: characters, setting, major events</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Maintains focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Uses different lengths and types of sentences</td>
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<td>___ Sentence order makes sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Uses descriptive language</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Demonstrates creative thinking</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Proficient:</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Beginning middle, end</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Includes: people, places, and things</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Uses simple sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Maintains focus</td>
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<td>___ Sentence order makes sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Uses simple descriptive words and verbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic:</td>
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<td>___ Writes a complete thought or sentence</td>
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<td>___ Includes a single event or several events loosely linked</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Uses pictures and/or print to convey meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ May add labels related to topic</td>
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</table>

- Sentence count: ________
- Word count: _________

Comments:
## Appendix C:
### Rubric for the assessment of expository writing

**Writing Rubric (Expository)**

**Content:**
- **Advanced:**
  - Central idea
  - Series of related sentences
  - Maintains focus
  - Uses different lengths and types of sentences
  - Sentence order makes sense
  - Uses descriptive language
  - Demonstrates creative thinking

- **Proficient:**
  - Series of related informational sentences
  - Uses simple sentences
  - Maintains focus
  - Sentence order makes sense
  - Uses simple descriptive words and verbs

- **Basic:**
  - Writes a complete thought or sentence
  - Includes a single event or several events loosely linked

- **Below Basic**
  - Uses pictures and/or print to convey meaning
  - May add labels related to topic

- Sentence count: _________
- Word count: _________

**Conventions:**
- **Advanced:**
  - Spells all current benchmark words correctly
  - Capital letters at the beginning of sentence and most proper nouns
  - Uses ending marks most of the time

- **Proficient:**
  - Spells all current benchmark words correctly
  - Capital letters at the beginning of sentences, names of people, and “I”
  - Uses ending marks most of the time

- **Basic:**
  - Uses beginning and ending consonants well enough to be read
  - Leaves spaces between words
  - Writes left to right and top to bottom

- **Below Basic:**
  - Copies names and words
  - Represents whole words with 1, 2, or 3 letters

**Comments:**
Appendix D:
Pre-intervention interview questions

Name of Student ______________________________ Date __________________

A Survey of the Student’s Attitude toward Writing

- How do you feel about writing? Do you like writing? Do you not like writing?

- Why?

- What is your favorite part of writing?

- What is your least favorite part of writing?

- Do you ever do writing just for fun? What kind of writing?

- Do you do writing at home? What do you write?

- What is the hardest (most challenging) part of writing?

- What could we do to make writing more fun in our classroom?

- What topics do you like to write about?

- Do you prefer: Fiction Nonfiction
Appendix E:  
Post-intervention interview question

Name of Student ______________________________  Date __________________

A Survey of the Student’s Attitude toward Writing

- How do you feel about writing? Do you like writing? Do you not like writing?

- Why?

- What is your favorite part of writing?

- What is your least favorite part of writing?

- What is the hardest (most challenging) part of writing?

- What was your favorite writing assignment?

- What do you like best about writing in the classroom?

- Did you read in the author’s chair? Why/why not?

- How did you feel when sharing your story?

- Topics:  Your choice  teacher choice
  - What type of writing is easier?  Fiction  Nonfiction
  - What type of writing do you like to do best?  Fiction  Nonfiction

- Did you like the graphic organizers we used?  Were they helpful? Did you look at them while writing?
Appendix F: Daily attitude survey

1. When writing today I felt
   - Good
   - Okay
   - Bad

2. I _____ the topic/kind of writing.
   - liked
   - disliked

3. I think my writing/story is
   - Good
   - Okay
   - Bad

Name: ________________________
# Appendix G -- Word Count Chart

## Number of words

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* An asterisk is used to indicate written assignments on which student had choice in topic selection.
Appendix H:
Story starters graphic organizer

Name_________________________________________

**Story Starter**

Main Characters: What are their names?

Setting: Where does your story take place?
Problem: What is the problem in the story?


Ending: What will happen at the end of your story?


Appendix I:
Meaty Middles graphic organizer

A Meaty Middle
If your story is going to be interesting, something has to happen in the middle. Below write at least 3 major events that will happen in the middle of your story. What steps does your character take to solve his or her problem?

1. ____________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________________

5. ____________________________________________________
## Appendix J - Students’ Writing Scores

### Students’ writing scores

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* An asterisk is used to indicate written assignments on which student had choice in topic selection.
**Appendix K: Findings from Daily Attitude Survey**

Question 1: When writing today I felt....

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**The letter coding system was designed to organize the students’ responses to daily attitude surveys. The letter “S” represents a smile and signifies a positive response. The letter “O” represents a student response of okay. The letter “B” stands for bad and indicates a negative response.**
Question 2: I _____________ the topic/kind of writing.

**The letter coding system was designed to organize the students’ responses to daily attitude surveys. The letter “S” represents a smile and signifies a positive response. The letter "O" represents a student response of okay. The letter "B" stands for bad and indicates a negative response.**
Question 3: I think my writing/story is …..

**The letter coding system was designed to organize the students’ responses to daily attitude surveys. The letter “S” represents a smile and signifies a positive response. The letter “O” represents a student response of okay. The letter “B” stands for bad and indicates a negative response.**