“How Long Does This Have To Be?”:

Exploring Ways to Increase Student Motivation and Enthusiasm for Writing

Courtney Stayer
The Pennsylvania State University- State College Area School District
Elemtary Professional Development School
Writing Enthusiastically

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Abstract:

How can a teacher increase student motivation and enthusiasm to write in a primary classroom? I set out to answer this after regularly hearing from my students “how long does this have to be?” This inquiry focuses on implementations put into place in my classroom and how they affected student enthusiasm for writing.

Teaching Context:

As a Penn State intern in the Elementary Professional Development School program, I am spending the year in a self-contained second grade classroom in the State College Area School District. My inquiry into writing involves a class of nineteen students at Lemont Elementary School. There are nine female students and ten male students, ages seven and eight.

The classroom diversity is mostly seen through academics. Of the nineteen students, three receive Title I services during Language Arts stations. One student is out of the room in the morning while receiving learning support for Language Arts and no longer participates in writing with the rest of the class leaving eighteen students to be part of my inquiry. There is one student who has a full time Special Education paraprofessional and also receives learning support in Math. All of the students identify English as their first language. None of the students in this class receive individual enrichment in any subject.

Behaviorally, this is an average to above average group of second graders. The only problems seem to be keeping two particular students on task during all subjects. There have been no major behavior issues in the class.

Writing time in this class occurs, on average, four days a week for anywhere between thirty to fifty minutes. They receive 10-15 minute mini-lessons as needed on topics that the group as a whole could improve upon. They also have journal writing to complete periodically.
Writing Enthusiastically

during language arts stations. The students have had experience this year writing narratives, journal entries, character descriptions, and informational pieces.

**Wonderings and Questions:**

During the second grade, students should continue to grow in their writing skills. They should write longer and more complete pieces using description and should edit using standard writing conventions. Many of the students in my class were ending their writing pieces when they had reached the page requirement and would ask if it was long enough to be done. They often displayed off task behavior during writing time such as talking with neighbors or taking frequent bathroom trips. I began to wonder what could make these students *want* to write. Are there improvements that we can make to every writing assignment that will motivate students to show enthusiasm? Through my inquiry, I hoped to identify factors that affect student motivation for writing. These questions led to my main wondering and many sub-wonderings.

**Main Wondering**

How can I motivate my second graders to write enthusiastically?

**Sub-questions**

- In what ways will electronically publishing students’ work be a motivator while writing?
- How can technology be used in a second grade class as part of the writing process?
- How can read alouds and literature influence student writing?
- In what ways will cooperative writing help to develop students’ ideas?
- In what ways are second graders best able to write while working with others (i.e. one shared piece or discussion of separate pieces)?
Data Collection and Analysis Process:

Before

To gather information on my students’ feelings about writing, I sent a parent survey home with all students (See Appendix A). Eighteen of the nineteen (including my Language Arts learning support student) surveys were returned. The intent of this survey was to find out how students’ attitudes toward writing were exhibited at home. I found that the parents in my class said only three of the students rarely or never talk about writing while at home and five have not mentioned any writing pieces we have done in the classroom.

I also completed student interviews before beginning any interventions or making any changes to our usual writing time (See Appendix B). I wanted to find out how students felt about writing and get an idea of what they did not like about writing. I was surprised to find out that only two of my nineteen students said that they did not like writing. The topic of student choice was also of interest to me. I originally planned to introduce student choice as an intervention, but I found out that students did not view being given an assigned topic as a problem. Students said they had good ideas about the topic of their story, but they were having difficulty thinking of events and ideas in the middle of the stories and making their writing “long enough”. My challenge, based on these interviews, seemed to be finding ways to make students’ enthusiasm for writing show in their work and to increase their motivation for getting their thoughts onto the paper.

During

After each writing piece that involved an intervention through my inquiry, I had students complete a survey. These surveys were meant to find out how students felt about the topic and their writing. Student surveys were completed on four writing assignments (See Appendices C,
D, E, and F). Through these surveys, I was able to find out more information about student feelings on aspects of writing including the topic, the literature used in connection with the writing, partner work, and the use of technology. By far, the most convincing results of the survey had to do with the literature connections. These connections were greatly enjoyed by the majority of the students. All students claimed that they loved or liked reading ice cream poems in class before writing their own poetry and only one student claimed to not have liked reading Raggedy Ann stories before writing his/her own.

To judge enthusiasm for their work, I had some form sharing after each piece. I collected the sign up sheets for these sharing times and sharing was not required for any students. I cannot say that the sharing sign up pointed to greater enthusiasm for any of the pieces. The Raggedy Ann and poetry sign ups had nearly the same number of students willing to share (11-12 out of 18). The American symbol writing, which all students shared by presenting beside the partner they wrote the piece with, and the spring writing, which all students shared by recording a video of them reading the story, had more popularity for sharing. All students elected to share the American symbol writing and seventeen of the eighteen students elected to share their spring pieces. It seemed that the students were more willing to share their work when technology was used in the process.

Finally, my P.D.A. and I kept observation and anecdotal notes during writing sessions. One way that I observed student behavior was by following an enthusiasm scale that I created to rate students on task behavior while actually writing (See Appendix G). This helped me while observing the students by helping to focus my attention on specific aspects of behavior. I chose the four categories of 1) Time on Task/Level of Engagement, 2) Quality of Writing, 3) Need for Assistance, and 4) Length/Completeness of Writing based on problems that I felt occurred often
during previous writing sessions as well as areas that I felt were important to being enthusiastic writers. I found that, by far, the Raggedy Ann story had the highest ratings on the enthusiasm scale. During this piece all but two students received a rating of two or three under category one, all students received a three for category two, all but two students received a two or three in category three, and all but two students received a two or three for category four. The other three pieces (American Symbol writing, poetry, and spring writing) were not as high scoring on the enthusiasm scale for the class. Less students scored a three in all four areas of the writing scale. Aside from the rating scale, I found that the most beneficial data I gathered came from anecdotal notes collected during writing sessions. I was able to collect quotes from working with students and through observing their behavior with their peers. I looked for behaviors and quotes that stood out, either positively or negatively, as being atypical in my classroom. Student conversation was a great way to collect data about enthusiasm, although individualized. This data was collected naturally throughout the classroom without requiring prompting from surveys or interviews. Students were therefore able to demonstrate their true feelings without feeling pressured to respond in certain ways. Their quotes show the level of excitement a writing session could bring when students were engaged. These also helped me to gauge who was motivated and think about other ways to motivate students in future lessons who were not.

After

After all interventions were completed, I again interviewed student about writing using the same questions as the pre-intervention interview (See Appendix H). I was looking to see if any of the students’ general feelings about writing had changed since the start of my inquiry. From these interviews I found that the students overwhelmingly chose the Raggedy Ann story as
their favorite writing assignment of the year with thirteen choosing this piece. The other answers differed from the pre interview, but no other changes were notable.

I also collected student writing scores as they were judged based on the State College Area School District Second Grade Writing Rubric (See Appendix I). By collecting this data, I wanted to see if my efforts at increasing motivation had an effect on the writing performance of the class. I collected writing scores from the pieces written during my inquiry as well as two pieces previous to the inquiry. I found that the scores fluctuated only slightly among all of the writings and my inquiry seemed to have no effect for the most part on their rubric score. However, the one exception was the Raggedy Ann stories. A score of Advanced was given for the first time this year and two students received this score. Eleven students were scored as Proficient, five students were scored as Basic, and no Below Basic scores given. Every student in the class performed at or above his/her usual performance level.

**Explanation of Findings- Claims and Evidence:**

**Claim #1**

*Connecting student writing to favorite children’s literature increases student enthusiasm for writing while also increasing the quality of writing.*

One implementation I made to our writing lessons was to spend more time connecting the student’s independent work and mini lessons to what we call “expert authors” and to children’s literature used in class. I found that reading literature that connected to our writing topic made students more enthusiastic to write. When we began writing poetry, I shared ice cream poems with the class by Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein. The students all said that they enjoyed reading the poems (See Appendix C) and my observations supported their words. They asked to complete choral reading of the poems multiple times and were eager to point our rhyming and
alliteration even when I did not ask for volunteers to do this. When students were given the time to write their own poems, I also observed what I considered to be enthusiastic writers. Only two of the eighteen participating students did not mark that writing poetry was fun on their survey. At the start of our third session of poetry writing six students were illustrating their first poem, eight students were working on their second or third poem, and four students were working on their fourth or fifth poem. None of the students chose to illustrate more than one poem; instead continued to write more poems. Although these poetry sessions led to a lot of talking from the class, I observed that most of this talk was related to the poems they were working on. After trying to quiet the students, my mentor said, “Well you wanted enthusiasm.” I can only say that the enthusiasm from the poetry sessions correlates with my claim. Another factor may also be that students enjoy writing poetry and this is helping to increase enthusiasm. However, I felt that their responses to the survey and excitement while reading the poems provide enough evidence to conclude that reading poems is correlated to high engagement levels.

I introduced an “Expert Writer” bin to our class writing sessions based on an idea from Susan Lunsford (See Appendix H). This bin is a place for students to place and label books that they think are high quality in some aspect. Students take a post-it note, write on the note what they like about the book, place it on the book, and place the book in the bin. The bin is available for all students to look at during any free time during the day and also during writing sessions. It is there for them to gain ideas and for me to choose examples during mini-lessons. After introducing the bin, the book collection quickly grew. I also noticed that the number of books in the bin would grow after a mini-lesson in which I shared my own “Expert Writer” choice. After our first poetry session, there were many poetry books placed in the bin. After a mini-lesson about opening sentences, there were many new books placed in the bin labeled as having “good
topic sentences”. Some writing sessions also required me to limit the number of students using the bin at one time because of the number of students asking to use our bin for ideas.

Basing a mini-lesson around a children’s book produced great results from that lesson which showed through students’ excitement to volunteer to answer questions and share their thoughts. We used the book *Chicken Little* by Steven Kellogg to start our exploration of boring words. The focus of this read aloud was for students to find other words that the author used to replace said. Every student in my class except for two initially volunteered to point out words. After I checked in with those students about paying attention, they both began to volunteer as well. This is important to mention because I sometimes have problems getting volunteers in my class, but that was not a problem during this lesson. The rest of that day, I noted that two boys were placing items in the Expert Author bin at any open moment they could find. I also had a student offer to bring a book from home that she thought did a good job replacing boring words. I also used *The Purple Coat* by Amy Hest to start a mini-lesson about description. Books started appearing in our Expert Author bin with labels that said “good description”. After that, I also had many volunteers during non-writing time read alouds that would raise their hand and say, “that was good description”. Using these children’s books was beneficial to getting the students thinking about specific aspects of writing and while making it enjoyable at the same time.

The strongest piece of evidence I have for this claim comes from Raggedy Ann stories that the students created. My mentor shared a Raggedy Ann story with the class, which was met with great excitement. She had the idea that these stories would make a good writing topic so the students began to write their own Raggedy Ann stories. As they worked on their own stories, my mentor and I continued to share Raggedy Ann stories during read aloud time. I observed the students to be more enthusiastic and on task during this writing assignment than during any other
writing that I had seen. On their survey, no student claimed that he/she did not like writing the Raggedy Ann stories and no student marked that they thought their story was not good. As previously stated, the Raggedy Ann story had the highest ratings on the enthusiasm scale. During this piece all but two students received a rating of two or three under category one, all students received a three for category two, all but two students received a two or three in category three, and all but two students received a two or three for category four. The speed at which the students wrote their stories also amazed me as well as the students. One girl in my class who is often the last one to finish writing said, “I don’t usually get this much done on the first day.” It was hard for me to get the class to stop writing. At the end of the second writing session, I stopped students so that we would have a chance to talk about another overused word; however, this was met with groans and “Ahhh”s so I allowed the students to either keep writing or to join me on the carpet for a tired word study. Six students chose to stay at their seats and keep writing. After just two writing sessions, there were students in my class who had finished writing their Raggedy Ann story. A student exclaimed, “Miss Stayer, I just realized something… one of my goals was to write longer stories and this one is five pages!” Not only did the Raggedy Ann stories work to motivate student enthusiasm, but the quality of the writing also improved. I cannot say that the quality improved directly because of their excitement to write since we have been focusing on descriptive writing for many weeks during our mini-lessons. However, these stories did demonstrate how they have grown as writers. For the first time in our room, the rating of Advanced was given to not just one but two students (See Appendix I). No students received a score of Below Basic. What I can say was that this story gave students the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities to produce quality writing. One of my students called me over to say that her story was finished, but when I got there she had
changed her mind. She said, “Never mind, my ending doesn’t sound that great. It needs pizzazz”.

I do recognize that this connection to Raggedy Ann did not work for every student. I still had two students that struggled to stay on task and to write a complete and quality story. I also recognize that one student marked on their survey that they did not like reading the Raggedy Ann stories. I once heard the typical “How long does this have to be?” question. However, I feel that this data points to the idea that finding literature that students enjoy can be a way to connect enthusiasm to writing. Looking at all of the data I collected from literature connections, I feel confident saying that connecting student writing to children’s literature that they enjoy will improve their pleasure while taking part in writing lessons and while writing.

Claim #2

*Publishing student writing by using technology does not improve student enthusiasm for the actual writing process as a whole, but does allow them to feel excited about their completed work.*

Although the students did enjoy publishing their work using computers, the data did not point to this helping their motivation to actually write. Students worked in partners on a writing piece about American symbols. They researched their symbol through books and Internet sites, wrote about their symbol, and finally typed their symbol on the computer and added pictures. Their enthusiasm scores during the research and writing were average. Also, the survey results showed that there was not a significantly higher number of students that liked using the computer or writing this piece than compared to our other writing survey results (See Appendix D).

Students also shared their spring information writing by using technology. I recorded students while they read their piece. Then, these videos were shared with the whole class during
our sharing session. Again, the excitement about recording a video did not improve their motivation to write. While students worked quietly and stayed on task, the enthusiasm level did not go above and beyond the norm. The survey results show that sharing was the most popular aspect of this piece with only two of the eighteen students not electing to record their sharing in the video (See Appendix F). Students wanted to share their work, but were not necessarily motivated while actually writing.

Even though the writing sessions did not dramatically improve when students were aware that they were going to publish using technology, they did demonstrate excitement about their completed work. Students raised their hand to share their completed American symbol piece. This enthusiasm does not correspond to the surveys and observations of their work time.

Similarly, when I introduced the spring writing and told students that they could create a sharing video I heard many “YAYs!” from the group. Yet, this did not have a significant affect on their writing behavior. Despite this, I do feel that using technology to share has a positive affect on developing students’ positive viewpoints about writing. The students seemed to be proud of their completed work and wanted to share it with others. One girl kept saying, “It’s so cool that we got to have the pictures on here with the words. It’s so neat!” as she went around and showed her American symbols print out to her classmates. Another boy, who is usually unfocused and struggles while writing showed me his printed symbols page many times. I caught him taking his symbols pieces out of his writing folder to look at during many of the following writing sessions. Finding a different way to publish and share their work made students feel proud of their writing. Even though it did not change their writing behavior, I feel that it was still a positive outcome of this inquiry.

**Claim #3**
Displaying concrete artifacts that exhibit aspects of writing motivates students to produce high quality work.

As we completed mini-lessons throughout this inquiry, I used multiple methods to display our learning in ways that I hoped would be both motivating and helpful for students to view while writing. The “Expert Writer” book bin was one method used for this (See Appendix H). We used this bin as a whole class to introduce some mini-lessons. I chose books that students had placed in the bin and shared what was impressive about them. I also had students use the books with partners and find specific aspects such as sentences with good description or use of different words during “tired word” studies. I observed students using the bin during multiple writing lessons and I had many students ask me if they were allowed to use the bin for ideas.

Another visual used was the “Room 18 Super Star Sentence” poster (See Appendix J). The poster is to celebrate those who have written good descriptive sentences. After I introduced the poster, I began looking at their writing for these sentences. When I find a sentence that I feel is worthy for the poster, that student gets to share their sentence with the class and it is added to the poster and displayed on the wall. The first writing assignment that was done after introducing this visual was the Raggedy Ann story. In the first five minutes of writing, two students showed me their introductory sentences and asked if they were good enough to be on the Super Star Sentence poster. The students were working hard to produce quality work for the poster. After I chose the first round of sentences, two students asked if they could use the sentences on the poster to get ideas for their own work. The poster is still growing and is now displayed on the wall for all students to look at for ideas. When a student’s sentence is chosen for the poster they have the option of sharing it in front of the class. So far, none of the students
have turned down the opportunity to share. This poster provides incentive to create quality work and motivates students by sharing ideas from their peers.

The writers in my classroom are also exploring the use of “tired words”. We have been making posters of overused words and more descriptive and original words that could be used in their place. The students enjoy making tired word posters (See Appendix K). The original poster “Said is Dead” is constantly mentioned during writing time. At least once a session, a student will call me over to show me a word they used from the “Said is Dead” poster. This was completed through reading Chicken Little by Steven Kellogg. By the end of that read aloud, every student had raised his or her hand at least once to point out a replacement for said. The students were giggling about the poster for a few lessons after. Also, after completing our poster two students still came to me with more replacements they had thought of and wanted to add to the poster. The class also created a poster titled “Happy Isn’t Happy… because he is overused”. They created the title themselves and used books from our author bin to help spark ideas for words. Again, students were coming to me after completion of the poster to add more words they had thought of. Now, as we work on writing assignments, students come to me during every session to show how they have been replacing tired words. As I look through their writing folders for super star sentences, I leave post-it notes to those students who have done a good job replacing tired words. As students write, they frequently get up to go see the posters of tired words displayed on the wall (See Appendix K).

The use of these visuals can be seen not only through students’ enthusiastic use in class, but also through their writing rubric scores. Many of the students have improved upon their use of description and this is reflected on the writing rubric. The concrete objects have worked together as motivational tools and sources of inspiration and help.
**Reflections and Future Practice:**

Although the time frame for this inquiry was not long enough to answer all of my initial questions, I have made many discoveries about teaching writing and motivating students to be enthusiastic writers. One teaching strategy I know I will always use is connecting writing to children’s literature. The data I collected from this inquiry were overwhelmingly supportive of using literature and it produced fantastic results in this class. I have found that students produce the best writing when they are motivated to do so. With this class, displaying their work and creating artifacts together was enough to encourage this motivation. While it may be different for every class, I see that the goal should always be to make writing exciting and finding ways that will encourage that particular class to enjoy writing. Also, although I did not directly explore the use of an author’s chair as part my inquiry, I found that this could be an exciting aspect of writing for some students. When my class was given a job to do during sharing time, such as giving compliments, they were more engaged. Also, the students who shared were encouraged by these words.

While the original intention of my inquiry was to focus on enthusiasm, I also found methods that increased the quality of my students’ work at the same time. Focusing on specific aspects of writing, in our case descriptive language, and using literature and artifacts that focused on this area greatly improved the use of descriptive language in my students’ work. I feel that I would be able to take the methods of using literature and concrete artifacts and move them to another aspect of writing, mechanics for example, and this would again produce positive results.

Throughout my inquiry, I was not able to answer all of the questions that I had and developed more as the project progressed. Although my formal inquiry is over, these are questions that I will continue to explore as I teach writing and develop writing lessons.
**Future Wonderings**

- In what ways will cooperative writing help to develop students’ ideas (i.e. one shared writing, partner planning, peer editing, etc.)?

- How can technology be efficiently integrated with writing in a primary classroom?

- How can sharing their work motivate students to write?

- What alternative forms of sharing are enjoyable for primary students who do not like to present to the whole group?
Appendix A
Parent Survey and Results Graph

1. Does you child talk about writing when he/she is at home?
   Often     Sometimes     Rarely     Never

2. Has your child mentioned any writing assignments that we have done in class?
   Yes       No

3. How would you rate your child’s interest in writing?
   Not at all Interested Somewhat Interested Very Interested

4. Does your child do any writing at home (not for school work)?
   Often     Sometimes     Rarely     Never
Appendix B
Student Interview Questions and Results

Pre-intervention responses (19 students)  Post-intervention responses (18 students)

1. How do you feel about writing? Do you like it? Do you not like it?
   10 are in the middle  
   7 like it  
   2 don’t like it  
   5 are in the middle  
   12 like it  
   1 doesn’t like it

2. What is your favorite part about writing?
   10 said something referring to thinking of different/creative ideas
   5 said illustrations
   2 don’t have a favorite part
   1 said “finishing”
   1 said doing informational writing
   9 said something referring to thinking of different/creative ideas
   6 said illustrations
   2 said actually writing out words
   1 said doing poetry

3. What is your least favorite part about writing?
   9 said they don’t have a least favorite part
   4 said going through the actual process of writing
   3 said thinking of ideas
   1 said illustrating
   1 said not having a choice in what they write about
   1 said writing information pieces
   6 said they don’t have a least favorite part
   2 said going through the actual process of writing
   5 said thinking of ideas
   1 said not having a choice in what they write about
   3 said editing
   1 said adding description

4. Do you have a favorite writing piece that we have done so far this year?
   Valentine story- 5
   Turkey story- 4
   Twisted Fairy Tales- 3
   Dragon story- 2
   American symbol writing- 2
   Winter informational writing- 1
   No favorite- 2
13 said Raggedy Ann
1 said Dragon story
1 said spring informational writing
1 said Turkey story
1 said American symbol writing
1 said poetry

5. Why is this your favorite?
   Answers varied but most said something about them having a lot of ideas for that topic/ it was a fun topic. The two students that chose the symbol writing said it was because they could use computers.
   Answers varied but most said it had to do with thinking of a fun or creative idea. 1 said it was because he got to be on the super star sentence poster. 1 said it was because they got to use the computer and one said it was because he worked really hard on it.

6. What is the easiest part about writing?
   Thinking of ideas-9  
   None- 5
   Illustrations- 3  
   Editing- 1
   Using “easy words”- 1
   5 said thinking of ideas 
   1 said “don’t know”
   3 said illustrations
   2 said editing
   3 said writing the ending
   1 said sharing
   3 said writing out their thoughts

7. What is the hardest part about writing?
   13 students gave answers having to do with thinking of enough events/information to make their story long enough.
   3 said actually writing their ideas down
   2- spelling/sounding out words
   1- editing
   1- none
   9 students said thinking of ideas
   3 said writing their ideas down
   4 said none
   1 said describing words
   1 said editing

8. Is there anything that you would like to do in writing for the rest of this year? Any ideas you want to try or write about?
   Answers varied: Most students said there was nothing, but 4 had specific topics they wanted to write about.
   Not asked
Appendix C
Poetry Survey and Results

1. I thought writing poetry was ______________.
   - Fun
   - Okay
   - Not Fun

2. I ______________ reading the ice cream poems in class.
   - Loved
   - Liked
   - Didn’t like

3. Reading poems gave me ideas for my own poem.
   - YES
   - NO

1. 2. 3.
Appendix D
American Symbol Survey and Results

1. I thought writing about my American symbol was ______________________.
   ![Face icons for Fun, OK, and Not Fun]

2. I thought researching on the computer was ______________________.
   ![Face icons for Fun, OK, and Not Fun]

3. I thought researching in books was ________________________.
   ![Face icons for Fun, OK, and Not Fun]

4. I thought making my report on the computer was ____________________.
   ![Face icons for Fun, OK, and Not Fun]

5. I thought working with a partner was ________________________.
   ![Face icons for Fun, OK, and Not Fun]
Appendix E
Raggedy Ann Story Survey and Results

1. I ______________ writing a Raggedy Ann story.
   - Loved
   - Liked
   - Did Not Like

2. I thought my story was ________________.
   - Good
   - OK
   - Not Good

3. I ______________ reading Raggedy Ann stories.
   - Loved
   - Liked
   - Did Not Like

[Bar chart showing the survey results]
Appendix F
Spring Informational Writing Survey and Results

1. I __________ writing about spring.

Loved  Liked  Did Not Like

2. I __________ editing with a partner.

Loved  Liked  Did Not Like

3. I __________ sharing my writing on a video.

Loved  Liked  Did Not Like
## Appendix G
### Student Writing Enthusiasm Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Time on Task/Level of Engagement</th>
<th>2. Quality of Writing</th>
<th>3. Need for Assistance</th>
<th>4. Length/Completeness of Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student is on task little of the time (4+ times): Looking around the room, talking to others about topics other than the assignment, or distracted with other materials, leaving their seat</td>
<td>Student’s writing does not reflect the topic and lesson. Their district writing rubric content score is lower than normal during editing.</td>
<td>Student needs constant assistance to develop ideas and/or write the piece. Student needs 3 or more reminders to stay on task or get back to work.</td>
<td>Student often asks how long the piece has to be and if they can be finished. Their work is incomplete and lacking content sections (beginning, middle, end, description) from the district writing rubric during editing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is on task much of the time: Occasionally (2-3 times) stops writing and looks around the room, talks to others about topics other than the assignment, or gets distracted by other materials, leaves seat only when necessary (sharpen pencil, get paper)</td>
<td>Student’s writing is on topic and somewhat reflects the lesson. Their district writing rubric content score is about the same as normal during editing.</td>
<td>Student needs some assistance to develop ideas OR write the piece. Student may need 1 or 2 reminders to stay on task.</td>
<td>Student may ask how long the piece should be. Does not ask to be finished unless they are sure their writing is complete. Is only lacking description from the district writing rubric for content during editing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is on task the majority of the time: Rarely (1 time) stops writing to look around the room or talk about topics other than the assignment. Does not get distracted by other materials. Thinking time or talking about the writing assignment is acceptable</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student only needs a small amount of assistance to write the piece. Develops ideas independently. Does not need reminders to stay on task.</td>
<td>Student does not ask to be finished. Writes until their work is complete. Not lacking any content sections from the district writing rubric during editing (including description).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H
Expert Writer Bin

Day 1

After 1 Month
Appendix I
SCASD Second Grade Writing Rubric – Content Scores

CONTENT (worth 80% of total score)

4/ADVANCED

Narrative - Has a beginning, middle, and end with characters, setting, details, major events (problem & solution when appropriate)
Expository - Has a central idea with introduction, body, and conclusion and relevant details
Maintains focus on topic, purpose, and audience
Uses sentences of differing lengths and complexities in an order that makes sense
Uses descriptive language (specific nouns, action verbs, adverbs, and interesting adjectives)
Includes characteristics of insight, vitality, richness of expression

3/PROFICIENT = EOY BENCHMARK

Narrative - Has a beginning, middle, and end with characters, setting, including 3 or more logically sequenced events
Expository - Has topic sentence with supporting details in an order that makes sense
Maintains focus on a single idea, purpose, and audience
Uses sentences of differing lengths and complexities
Uses descriptive words and action verbs

2/BASIC

Narrative - Has a beginning, middle, and end with characters, setting, including at least 2 logically sequenced events
Expository - Has a series of related informational sentences in an order that makes sense
Maintains focus on a single idea
Uses simple sentences
Uses descriptive words and action verbs

1/BELOW BASIC

Narrative - Has an event/s with characters and setting but does not include a beginning, middle, and/or end
Expository - Has some informational sentences but may not be in an order that makes sense
Maintains focus
Uses simple sentences
Uses descriptive words and verbs
Appendix J
Super Star Sentences

Room 18 Super Star Sentences

When the bird noticed it's unwanted passenger it dramatically tipped over and Raggedy fell onto the porch just before Marcella came out to get her.

- Joel, Raggedy Ann story

Descriptive Sentences

“One day in a park when the trees were blowing, Marcella was by the pond with Raggedy Ann fishing.”

- Anna, Raggedy Ann Story

“They went to...”
Appendix K
Tired Word Posters

“Said is Dead” and “Happy Isn’t Happy”

A Student Uses the Tired Word Posters
Appendix L
Inquiry Brief

Teaching Context

As a Penn State intern in the Professional Development School program, I am spending the year in a self-contained second grade classroom in the State College Area School District. My inquiry into writing involves a class of nineteen students at Lemont Elementary School. There are nine female students and ten male students, ages seven and eight.

The classroom diversity is mostly seen through academics. Of the nineteen students, three receive Title I services during Language Arts stations. One student is out of the room in the morning while receiving learning support for Language Arts. There is one student who has a full time Special Education paraprofessional and also receives learning support in Math. All of the students identify English as their first language. None of the students in this class receive enrichment in any subject.

Behaviorally, this is an average to above average group of second graders. The only problems seem to be keeping two particular students on task during all subjects. There have been no major behavior issues in the class. They are an enthusiastic group of students to work with.

Writing time in this class occurs, on average, four days a week for anywhere between thirty to fifty minutes. They receive 10-15 minute mini-lessons as needed on topics that the group as a whole could improve upon. They also have journal writing to complete periodically during language arts stations. The students have had experience this year writing narratives, journal entries, character descriptions, and informational pieces.

Rationale
During the second grade year, students should continue to grow in their writing skills. They should write longer and more complete pieces using description and should edit using standard writing conventions. Many of the students in my class end their writing pieces when they have reached the page requirement and they ask if it’s long enough to be done. They often display off task behavior during writing time and talk with neighbors or look around the room. After teaching a writing lesson of my own which involved writing “twisted fairy tales”, I noticed atypical behavior from a few of the students. There is one student who often cries when faced with a large writing assignment. However, with this piece, he seemed to get right to work and we were not faced with his typical anxiety over finding an idea. Also, as I sent students to share their pieces with one another while editing, I had multiple groups ask if they could write another twisted fairy tale with partners or as a whole class. I began to wonder what it was about this piece (the topic, the read-aloud introduction, the sharing, etc.) that influenced these improved writing sessions for a few of the students. I also began thinking about other writing the class has done and how some students have struggled while others have really enjoyed the assignments. Why do some writing assignments seem more enjoyable to the students than others and are there improvements that we can make to every writing assignment that will make students more enthusiastic to write? Through my inquiry, I hope to identify factors that affect student motivation for writing.

**Main Wondering**

How can I motivate my second graders to write enthusiastically?

**Sub-questions**

- In what ways will electronically publishing students’ work be a motivator while writing?
- How can technology be used in a second grade class as part of the writing process?
- How can read alouds and literature influence student writing?
- In what ways will cooperative writing help to develop students’ ideas?
- In what ways are second graders best able to write while working with others (i.e. one shared piece or discussion of separate pieces)?
- How can choice increase students’ enthusiasm to write?

Tentative Timeline


3/2-3/5: Use of technology and student choice- Complete informational piece about a president. Students choose which president to research. Hopefully record them reading their stories and show videos to the class for author’s chair. Survey students after their pieces are complete.

3/9-3/13: Spring Break

3/16: Exploring partner/group writing- Begin to work on partner/group writings. Explore ways to write with a partner using planning sheets and discussion starters. Students will begin by writing their own piece, but use partners to discuss ideas and for editing help.
3/23: Explore the use of read alouds and literature on student writing. Begin writing piece using read alouds and children’s literature for “expert examples”. Begin poetry or story about spring?


4/20- Presentation completed for rehearsal

4/22: Final Inquiry Paper Due

4/25: Inquiry Conference

Data Collection Ideas

- **Student pre-interviews:** Student group interviews will be conducted before implementing any changes to their usual writing routine. The purpose of these will be to gain insight on what students like and do not like about writing.

- **Parent Survey:** A parent survey will be sent early in the inquiry to gain more information about students’ feelings on writing.

- **Student Surveys:** A short student survey, using smiley faces, will be given after each writing assignment to assess student’s feelings on the given assignment.

- **Student post-interviews:** Group post interviews will be conducted to investigate whether students’ thoughts and feelings about writing have changed.

- **Observations:** Observations of student behavior, mainly time on task, will be made throughout all of the writing assignments.
- *Student Artifacts:* Student work will be obtained prior to and after implementation of interventions.
Appendix M
Annotated Bibliography

References


   This teacher resource focuses on the various ways to include technology in the classroom. The authors intend for these ideas to not only improve literacy instruction, but to also make students technologically literate and move educations into the modern world. What I found particularly useful for my inquiry into writing, were the ideas about classroom publishing. These sections have provided me with ideas of how to make the most out of electronic publishing and how to incorporate it into a writing curriculum. The authors also promote electronic publishing as it gives student writers a meaningful end to their piece.


   Although this book is directed to helping older students write for classes and younger students write for state tests, it gives a lot of helpful information to get students thinking and writing well. I found the section about using conversation to spark ideas useful. As students complete a partner or group piece in my inquiry, they will need to have the skills to work cooperatively. I will use some of the tips from this book in order to model conversation and show students how to talk to one another about writing. Additionally, the conversation skills students will use for their partner piece could be useful to them in other work if they need ideas about their writing.


   In this guide to teaching reading, I happened to find a chapter about the inquiry process and how it applies to writing. I had not previously considered how inquiry is a major part of the writing process when composing non-fiction work. As my students complete non-fiction pieces about American Symbols, they will be expected to do small amounts of research. Being an introduction to research, they will mostly be using books and some websites. The chapter in this book about research for primary students promotes the important of journals to keep track of what they discover. My students will have a planning sheet on which they will record information. A challenge with primary students, as the book points out, is keeping them focused and staying on a topic that is narrow enough to become an “expert” on. I plan on using these research tips as my students complete non-fiction writing.

This handbook is directed at young students and is a kid’s guide to writing. However, I found a few sections helpful to my own planning for writing lessons. The handbook presented the idea of keeping an idea notebook to hold ideas for future writings. As one of the challenges with many of my students is leading them to an idea, I think an idea notebook could help this problem. One of my interests is allowing students to choose what to write about, but a concern I have is that the assignment is too broad and many of my students would have trouble thinking of something about which to write. If they begin keeping an idea notebook, they could choose their idea from the notebook. I also plan to use the section about writing reports to create a planning sheet for the students’ American Symbols writing. The handbook gives ideas for gathering information and organizing findings that could be helpful to a teacher trying to help students plan.


This article provides an overview of how a primary classroom teacher was able to improve writer’s workshop and student writing by incorporating children’s literature into mini-lessons. It has given me many ideas of ways to use our favorite classroom literature as a model on which students can base their own writing. I am interested in using the author’s idea of allowing students to tag books when they find good examples for their own writing. I also would like to implement book bins of these books for easy and fast reference for student.


This book provides lessons and activities across subjects inspired by and based on favorite children’s books. I have taken some of the writing ideas to use in my inquiry by connecting writing to good examples. The book discusses writing analogies to describe colors through the book *The Art Lesson* by Tomie dePaola. Writing analogies, not just for colors, would help my students use description in their writing and connecting this to a favorite book would hook them to the topic. Another writing idea from the book is using sensory details by examining the book *Night Tree* by Eve Bunting. Again, this use of detail and description is something that second graders need experience with. This book is an expert’s example of how to do this that could be shared and discussed with students.

In this article, a fifth grade teacher details how she uses both literature and cooperative groups when writing. Although written from a fifth grade use, the ideas could be tailored to meet the needs of any age. This teacher presents how groups of three students must pre-plan their writing together and settle on events, problems, solutions, setting, and characters before they begin to write their draft. I am planning on completing a cooperative piece in my inquiry project and will use some of these ideas about pre-planning as I set my student groups up to write collaboratively.


   This resource details typical developmental characteristics of children ages 4-14. It is helpful to understand what is happening in the mind of a student of a particular age in order to be able to teach them. As I work within the writing curriculum, I will need to make adaptations that align with what students are capable of at ages seven and eight. I will use this resource in my inquiry to help plan developmentally appropriate writing activities. The book states that seven year olds like to be read to and eight year olds like cooperative activities. I plan to incorporate these needs into writing through read aloud introductions and group writing activities.


   This website is created and run by the National Council of Teachers of English. This article from the website details the council’s beliefs about the teaching of writing. Their views back some of the ideas that I would like to implement into our writing curriculum including the relation of reading and writing, the use of talk and cooperative work in writing, and the use of technologies. I have referred to it to learn what experts consider important in writing and to get ideas about changes to make to our class writing process.


   This guide to multigenre writing begins with a focus on the writing workshop and literature studies. These authors showcase the importance of connecting reading and writing. They use read alouds and literature discussion to focus students on the mini-lesson topic for that workshop. The authors also explain how students need to have many examples of good writing in order to be good writers themselves. As I plan to introduce writing pieces through literature and read alouds, I will use some of the ideas in this text about discussions of certain writing styles and good writing examples.