

Sponsoring Committee: Dr. Richard Grove, Moravian College
Meg Mikovits, Moravian College
Megan O'Brien, Nazareth Area High School

What Should I Write? To Choose or Not to Choose

Jennifer Henninger

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
Moravian College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
2018

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research examined the effects of student choice in writing and writing achievement. The participants were 4th grade students in a general education classroom who receive writing instruction on a daily basis for 45 minutes. During the time, students were given the opportunity to choose from a variety of sentence starters, character ideas, settings, problems, and genre. Students participated in a pre and post survey. They were interviewed about their thoughts and opinions of student choice in writing. Students created their stories using technology where they had the opportunity to search and add images to match their story.

At the end of this action research project, it was clear from the triangulation of data, that writing achievement increased when given the opportunity to choose a topic of interest and complete the project using technology. Students preferred choosing a topic to write about because they could select topics interesting to them. Students were more engaged using the computer to create their stories because they liked being able to type instead of paper and pencils. Students also like using media to create their stories because they can search for pictures to insert into their story. Therefore, student choice and technology helped to increase interest and achievement in writing.

Acknowledgements

There was a time in my life when I didn't believe in myself. I thought I was stupid. Negative educational experiences shaped my attitude. There were always two people I could count on. They always saw the best in me when I couldn't. I want to thank my parents for all of their support. When I was ready to quit, they reminded me how strong I am and that I could conquer the obstacles.

My oldest daughter was 3 when I graduated from Moravian College. I remember seeing the Master of Education graduates sitting on stage and I thought to myself one day that is going to be me. Fourteen years later, I am walking as a graduate from the Masters program. I want my daughters, Lindsie and Courtney, to know how much I appreciate their patience when I had to do graduate work. I know there were many nights of take-out because I didn't feel like cooking. I want them to know that I did this for us so we can have a better future. I appreciate their encouragement when I felt like giving up. Thank you for always supporting my goals. I love you both to the moon and back.

Thank you to my sister Traci. I appreciate you listening to me and encouraging me.

This study would not have been possible without the help of my students. For that, I thank my class for their willingness to participate and their daily effort. I appreciate all of you and how much you care about our classroom. I appreciate

you wanting to help me become a better teacher. I admire how much you all believe in yourself and always willing to try harder.

Thank you Dr. Grove, you always had a wonderful smile and calmness that somehow managed to help ease my stress. I didn't think I was going to finish the program, but you never doubted it for a minute. I will always be grateful for your meaningful feedback, patience, and understanding.

Kelsey, it seems like just yesterday we embarked on this journey together. I am so grateful to have had a wonderful friend and colleague by my side. I appreciate you always helping me along the way and listening to me when I was completely overwhelmed. Thank you for taking this journey with me and I am so glad we walked down the graduation aisle together.

Thank you to all my colleagues in my graduate classes. We did it! I have learned so much from you along the way. Thank you for making class a learning experience and giving me tools to use in my classroom. I wish you the best as this chapter closes and a new one begins.

Thank you to every professor I've had the pleasure of working with at Moravian College. The time, effort and guidance you gave me. It helped me be the teacher I aspire to be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
RESEARCHERS STANCE	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY.....	22
Setting	22
Participants	22
Procedures	23
Data Gathering Methods	24
Observations	24
Surveys	24
Questionnaire.....	25
Student Artifacts.....	26
Trustworthy Statement	27
MY STORY	29
Where do I begin?	29
Theodore and Luis	33
Kay	35
Jennifer	36
And so it Begins	37
Back to the Drawing Board	38
Students love Technology	42
FINALLY	43

How do you feel about yourself as a writer	44
Should Students Choose	45
Writing on the Computer	48
Writing Prompts.....	49
Student Artifacts.....	51
DATA ANALYSIS	54
THEMES AND STATEMENTS	63
NEXT STEPS	65
REFERENCES	66
APPENDICES	70
A. Consent Forms	70
i Principal Consent Form	70
ii Parent Consent Form.....	72
iii Participant Consent Form.....	74
B. Survey.....	75
C. Interview Questionnaire	76
D. Baseline Assessment	77
E. District Rubric	78

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Survey Questions	25
Table 3.2 Interview Questions	26
Table 3.3 Baseline Assessment	26
Table 4.1 Google Classroom	43
Table 5.1 Pre-Survey Results	54
Table 5.2 Post Survey Results	55
Table 5.3 Comparison of Likes Writing Stories Results	56
Table 5.4 Comparison of Thinks He or She is a Good Writer.....	57
Table 5.5 Comparison of Likes Writing at School Results	58
Table 5.6 Comparison of Trouble Thinking about what to Write Results..	59
Table 5.7 Comparison of Assessment Results.....	60
Table 6.1 Codes and Bins	62

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Theodore’s Baseline Assessment	34
Figure 4.2 Luis’ Baseline Assessment	35
Figure 4.3 Kay’s Baseline Assessment	36
Figure 4.4 Jennifer’s Baseline Assessment	37
Figure 4.5 Donald’s Post Assessment	51
Figure 4.6 Kay’s Post Assessment	51
Figure 4.7 Theodore’s Post Assessment	52
Figure 4.8 Jennifer’s Post Assessment	53

RESEARCHERS STANCE

Educational Journey

Growing up in a predominantly white school district, I wasn't exposed to different cultures. I moved to Bethlehem and eventually had children. Through their activities, we met many new friends from other cultures. I also began teaching in schools filled with students from a variety of races and students living in poverty. What I didn't realize was how these students would change my life and my teaching philosophy. As a child, there was always a warm meal for dinner and snacks when my belly was hungry. My parents and I spoke the same language. We had family traditions that I have passed down to my children. All of my childhood friends spoke English and many of our parents worked at the Bethlehem Steel. My childhood was very different from what my students' experience. I have witnessed children ripped from their homes and placed in foster care. I have students who spoke Spanish until entering the American educational system and now cannot remember how to speak Spanish because they learned English. Their parents only speak Spanish and communication is a challenge. I have other students who are bilingual. I have worked with students who are homeless or living in extreme poverty where school breakfasts and lunches are their only meals. I work with students living in the foster care system and students who come from broken homes. My students are growing up in a life

that is very hard for me to imagine. Despite our differences, it is our differences that changed my life. Students love to share their stories and are very proud of their cultures. They love to hear stories about my family and me. They forget that teachers are human beings outside of the school. What opportunities can I give my students to share their stories? I started to think about writing. I felt like writing was a subject I needed to improve as a teacher. Students don't enjoy writing. They don't seem to make the connection that writing is more than simply writing a story. Students do not make the connection that writing is also a form of communication. How can I get my students to share their stories and recognize that writing is an important subject that demonstrates how to communicate your ideas and thoughts?

School did not come easy for me. I did not understand how I learned or have strategies to help me be successful. I remember asking my teacher for help and he told me to get a tutor. So my parents hired me a tutor. The one-on-one instruction was helpful because she explained things to me in a way I could understand. I also felt safe to make mistakes. Though never officially diagnosed, I'm convinced I have a learning disability. I see numbers backwards and at times reread the same sentence several times for it to make sense. I never experienced a teacher trying to figure out why my grades were not so good. I wasn't taught strategies to overcome any barriers. I remember another teacher tell me, in front of my peers, I should have been in school and would be doing better. He didn't try

to understand why I wasn't in school. He wasn't aware that I was dealing with a major life stressor. I do not believe that any child wants to fail or struggle in school. It is the teacher's responsibility to investigate why. I know I did not want to fail or struggle in school. I did very well in elementary school. The problems surfaced when I went to 7th grade. Reflecting why things went downhill for me makes me think of student-teacher relationships. Delpit stated, "If there is one message I tried to convey to them, it is that nothing makes more of a difference in a child's school experience than a teacher" (Page 71). I adored my music teacher because she knew us personally and made me feel special. I loved my history teacher because he also knew us personally and inspired me to be successful. I never felt a connection to any other teacher.

I believe that every human being has a gift. Some are gifted in school while others have gifts in the arts, sports, or music industry. We all learn differently. The world would be pretty boring if we were all the same. I believe it is the teacher's responsibility to help a child understand his or her gift. I wanted to be the kind of teacher who inspires her students. I strive to create a safe community for my students. I encourage students to make mistakes because it's a step in the learning process. I share my negative experiences with my students so that they understand that I was once in their shoes. It's also part of creating the safe environment so we can all flourish. Teaching chose me because I wanted to be a positive influence and help change public education. Teaching is

not just about teaching children. It is about forming relationships with the students and the parents. I advocate for my students so they can be successful because no one advocated for me. I establish a partnership with the parents and work together for what is in the child's best interest. It's not about what I want; it's not about what others mandate you to do. It's about what is best for the students to be successful. I am proud to be part of public education. My goal is to make it better through my students and awareness. Delpit stated, "The caring, the persistence book, the pushing-all these create trust. It is the trust that students place in the strong teachers that allows them to believe in themselves" (Page 86). In my professional opinion, it is crucial to establish a safe learning environment that creates trust between student and teacher. Students work harder when they trust the teacher and feel valued.

Curriculum Obstacles

I want children living in poverty and/or challenging home lives to know that they matter. Situations and circumstances do not define who we are. It is my belief that how you treat a person is more important than how educated you are, how talented you are or how rich you are. Unfortunately, those who make decisions about education do not recognize why there is an "achievement gap". Unfortunately, those who make decisions about education put too much emphasis on high stake tests and then label the school as failing when they do not meet the standard. The media labels teachers as failing. Politicians want to give vouchers

as a choice for families living in a neighborhood where a school was labeled as failing school based on poverty and low-test scores. The problem my students and I face with the curriculum is lack of opportunities. Students of privilege are given opportunities such as sports teams, vacations, and books. Because their basic needs are met, they do not need to worry about where their next meal will come from or shoes that are too tight or not having a winter coat when it's cold. We need to shift the thinking from achievement gap to opportunity gap. I want my students to understand they are important and that they can accomplish all of their dreams. I want my students to embrace their challenges and know that overcoming those obstacles make them a stronger person. I want my students to look adversity in the face and recognize that's what makes them unique. Despite growing up in poverty, they matter and are an important key to the future. Delpit stated, "For children of poverty, good teachers and powerful instruction are imperative. While it is certainly true that in equity, family issues, poverty, crime and so forth all affect poor children's learning opportunities, British educator Peter Mortimore found that the quality of teaching has 6 to 10 times as much impact on achievement as all other factors combined" (Page 73).

My goal of my action research is to become better at teaching writing. I feel it is my weakness, especially with my disabled students. I have high expectations for all my students and myself. I want our learning community to

feel safe and be successful. I believe in creating a partnership with my students and parents so that each child can be successful.

I will measure my research by surveying students at the beginning and ending of the research. I want to know how they feel about writing before we start. I will also collect a writing baseline assessment and will use the school district rubric (Appendix E). At the end, I will give the same survey and compare the results with the other. I will look to see if writing experience improved or decreased. I will also assess their final piece, using the same rubric, to measure their progress from the benchmark assessment. My goal is for their final writing to show an improved rubric score.

I think that I have had the wrong expectations for writing. I have been focusing on teaching writing the way I was taught. What could be so different? Isn't writing putting a few sentences together to make a story? It might be for some. Not every child grows up to be a storywriter. However, every child grows up and needs to be fluent in a language to communicate with others (McNiff, 2013).

I wanted to become a teacher for a few reasons. I had several negative experiences that are embedded in my memory. Unfortunately, I had more bad experiences than positive ones. It was those experiences that made me want to be a better teacher than so many I had. Maya Angelou said, "People may forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel." I remember

teachers making me feel like I was stupid. I would never want a student to feel how I felt.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Struggle

Every year I struggle trying to figure out how to increase writing achievement. Not every child is going to grow up to be a professional writer, but every child should be able to communicate fluently in the language he or she speaks. Students do not make the connection that writing is about communicating your ideas and thoughts. They don't seem to recognize writing is a part of all subjects. Many think it's only about writing stories, which was the focus of this study.

My school is a Title I school. Schools qualify for Title I funds when the building is 40% or more living in poverty. The federal government provides supplemental funding to schools for deprived students to improve educational opportunities. Title I programs help students meet state and performance standards by providing funding for upgrading curriculum or schoolwide programs. (PA. gov.org) My class is 100% free and reduced lunch, which means all students are living in poverty. Students living in poverty have other challenges in life such as lack of opportunities and resources.

Best Practices

Lucy Calkins is the Founding of Director of Teaching College Reading and Writing. She is the author of Units of Study for Teaching Reading and

Writing, Grades K-8, which has been implemented in tens of thousands of schools across the country (Calkins., L 2018). In an interview for Education Week (Rebora, 2016), she was asked what teachers' biggest challenge today is and she believes that teachers need more professional development and more knowledge of how to teach writing. Common Core has raised the standards for both students and teachers. Students are now expected to transfer their ideas in all subjects such as argument writing and informational writing.

Calkins , suggests that there should be a greater emphasis on writing when undergraduate students are in the college education program. According to Calkins, teachers cannot just say, “write” and expect the students to write. Writing is a skill that needs to be taught, practiced, and coached along the way. Teachers need to give clear instruction for students to be able to write. Calkins was part of the first study done on young writers through the National Institute of Education when the focus was on writing their own stories. She has been involved in writing for 30 years and still believes it's important for young writers to write their own stories. Calkins believes in equal time between informative, narrative, and argument writing. Common Core also expects kids to be able to determine the author's purpose and recognize that literature is crafted to create an effect on the reader (Rebora, 2016).

Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) found that there are key components to improving writing in schools and a district. There should be a shared vision of

what good writing is, good writing instruction and an established curriculum that builds on each grade level. Also, the schools and district should implement shared writing assessments. Finally, teachers need to commit to professional writing development.

One of the writing techniques Calkins and Ehrenworth suggest is a writing classroom. Teachers and students work together writing and providing feedback. Teachers can teach one-on-one skills as needed. Calkins argues there needs to be more of teaching in the midst of the writing process during immediate feedback. Calkins argued it is important to schedule 45 minutes of daily writing to practice the skill of writing. She recommends 10 minutes of explicit whole group instruction and thirty minutes for writing. During this time, the teacher will conference with students and teach small group explicit instructions. The last five minutes students should share their writing and/or goals with a partner.

The last step is feedback to accelerate writing achievement. It's critical to give students feedback as they are developing their skills. Also, there needs to be a time for peers to give peer feedback during the writing process. The writing workshop routine is designed to allow time for feedback and independent practice for mastery. The idea is to create a supportive, learning community.

Student Choice

Another essential piece of writing is giving students the choice about the topic. Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) reported that students write well when they

are writing about topics they know well and care about. The student should be able to write daily about something meaningful to them. There are times when a topic selected by the teacher is a challenge for students. Calkins reported that this difficulty is typically a lack of understanding of the subject. A writing classroom can share a topic of interest and each student can inquire about a subtopic of interest, therefore increasing writing achievement because the student was able to choose a subtopic of interest. Calkins says it's important for students to choose which strategies they will use. Teachers need to teach students to self-regulate and set goals during this process. When students are taught to self-regulate and set goals, they are more invested in their writing pieces, which increase writing achievement. A checklist can be given to guide students to self-regulate.

Hanrahan (1998) found that student autonomy benefits the student and teacher when the goal is to promote positive motivation. Allowing students to participate in choice increases motivation in learning. According to Hanrahan, small group instruction requires careful planning by the teacher. The teacher needs to plan appropriate level activities and scaffold the process so that the student becomes more independent. Motivation also stems from a sense of belonging to a community. The community supports gradual progress towards independent and self-monitored actions. Hanrahan's findings support student choice and involving students in the learning process, which increases intrinsic motivation, time and energy spent on task. Hanrahan (1998) recommends giving

students the opportunity to be involved in planning small group collaboration and individual research projects. Autonomy in smaller tasks increases motivation.

Garlid (2014) noticed a decrease in writing achievement amongst male students over his years as an educator. He argues that the decrease in male writing achievement has to do with how writing is taught and when. He noticed that his students had interests in the other subjects likes math and science. Males are engaged when problem solving but tend to be off task when asked to complete writing assignments. He argues that the problem lies within the methods taught and the learning environment. Garlid suggests let the students do the talking because learners will positively respond to opportunities to talk throughout the writing process. Next, work collaboratively in a shared writing, which means students and instructor work together on a writing piece. Students need structure along with the freedom of choice. Garlid recommends consistent focus on conventions and structure is necessary to develop writing skills.

Angela Kinney (2015) found that families teach their children a variety of skills through activities. Classrooms are limited because the learning is taking place within the classroom. However, the child is not restricted to a single room. The child might have an uncle or aunt that may teach him to fish or sew. The child might go to church with another family member. These experiences can be used within the classroom. The learning is stemming from the child's interest rather than standards mandated by the district. Kinney suggested that schools use

students' social and cultural values rather than remediating students that might be struggling.

Kinney (2015) found Funds of knowledge theory suggests that families offer cultural resources. It's unfortunate that schools label the child as an at-risk because they determined the child as lacking. Kinney described Ruby Payne's work and how it predicts students' living in poverty in need of remediation or fixing. Kinney argues that Funds of Knowledge would focus on cultural and language as resources. Kinney observed, interviewed and recorded field notes throughout the study during home visits. She asked about family history, language used in the home, moving to America, every day household activities. She noted that most Funds of Knowledge studies only included the parents. She also wanted to know the students' point of view and interviewed them on their activities and favorite subject. Kinney also interviewed each of the participants' Language Art teachers to determine the perception each teacher had. Kinney found that families and students have access to social, cultural and specialized knowledge. These resources were acquired through labor history, school, and social networking. The findings of the study also challenge schools to focus on the resources of families and view the child as a capable learner.

“Every human is unique. Each one is the product of their own biological and cultural journey, with a unique schemata and capacity for personal and public ways of knowing, being, and self-expression.” (Lake, 2010, p.1). Robert Lake

suggests that personal stories are one of the best ways to challenge racial norm myths. White people are usually considered the norm and all others are raced. Personal stories can challenge this idea because every human being is unique.

Lake (2010) reported in traditional school that whiteness is seen as the norm and all others are races. Lake suggests being critically conscious, which allows us to see beyond how people look on the outside. Subjects should not be considered as separate subjects. Lake suggests using a variety of narratives together; such as literature, philosophy, art, and others that are part of the art of teaching. We label others based on race, gender, and socioeconomics. “Teachers should become better at reading hearts than they are at reading labels.” (Lake, p.44) Lake reported that in traditional school teachers lecture, which is not genuine dialog with people generating questions and responses. Teachers need to be able to read people because without we won’t know if students’ are grasping the concepts.

Nadia Behizadeh (2015) asked, “Why do people write?” She believed the easiest answer is people write to communicate. She wanted to dig deeper to report what communication is considered authentic. Behizadeh reported her research found education views authentic as residing in the task or text. She argued that for the writing to be authentic the students are the only ones that can deem it to be authentic. Behizadeh found a lot of research to support the term authentic. The problem she argues is that few have asked the students about their opinions and

needs on authentic writing. She worked with a student that indicated writing at school serves a different purpose than writing at home. Behizadeh found that writing for school and home serve as two different purposes. Findings indicate students need a purpose for writing for it to be authentic from a student's point of view NOT teacher's point of view. Behizadeh reported that authentic writing is writing for self-expression and writing narrative from personal experiences.

Beatrice Mendez Newman (Newman, 2012) noted that teachers often stated, "My students can't respond to the prompt because nothing good happened to them" The teachers felt they didn't have many life experiences. This statement implies that students living in poverty have nothing to write about. Newman argued that she rejects this idea completely. Recognizing students from working class, poor, or immigrant families might lack the vocabulary. They all have stories to share and all students have something to write about. Newman believes it is the teacher's job to guide students to have successful writing experiences. Newman advocates teachers replace the idea of students being deficient with using students' Funds of Knowledge. Empower students to tell their stories and guide them to express themselves. Their Funds of Knowledge are the tools they need to become writers. Newman suggests an inverted triangle with four levels. The students start off with a big idea, which is the only thing they share with other writers. The next level needs to be more specific. The third level would be a little

more specific. The final level is the student's very specific experience that only the student has had.

Effects of Poverty

Poverty is a growing epidemic in America. Poverty creates a specific way of life with hidden rules. It is another world within our world that forms its own culture. As per Lacour and Tissington (2011), low achievement is correlated with lack of resources and low socioeconomic status. How does a teacher understand the effects poverty has on his or her students? Values and beliefs from the family and community have an impact on student achievement. Lacour and Tissington suggest that teachers use students' own life experiences for instruction to be effective because the writing needs to be purposeful. It is necessary to create a partnership between the school, community, and families. Through this partnership, schools can give advice to parents for how to assist students with school. Schools need to provide effective interventions for struggling students. Unfortunately, not feeling accepted by the school is an issue for families living in poverty. A key piece to the partnership is a positive relationship with the parents. Teachers should give positive feedback to at-risk students, which will help the families feel accepted. Poverty affects the resources that are available to students living in poverty. They are at a disadvantage for reaching the same academic levels as students not living in poverty.

According to Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2000), low birthrate, lead poisoning, child mortality are some the effects poverty inflicts on children's health. Poverty also has an effect on student achievement. Children living in poverty are more likely to have a learning disability, grade retention, or dropping out of school. Duncan suggests understanding the different pathways that may affect children living in poverty. The quality of a child's home environment will influence the child. Parents provide learning experiences inside and outside of the home, such as, going to the library and reading to your child. Another issue is the quality of care the child receives outside the home. It is necessary to invest in programs such as intensive early-childhood education to increase verbal and reasoning skills. Early-childhood programs may influence mental health and coping skills that a child not living in poverty receives from his/her parents. The pressure of a family's lack of financial resources may cause family conflicts. Parent health can also impact children because poor mental health can create difficult parent-child interactions. The neighborhood a poor family lives in can also affect child development. Unfortunately, poor neighborhoods have crime and gangs leaving it unsafe for children to have resources such as childcare, parks and playgrounds.

Cedro, Martinez-Arias, and Bueno (2016) suggest that socioeconomic status (SES) is a predictor of academic achievement. They researched if academic performance would improve if students were given proper support.

They define proper support as cognitive training programs in schools such as yoga, exposure to nature, mindfulness and integrative body-mind training. Cedro, Martinez-Arias, and Bueno found that chronic stress impedes learning by compromising the executive functions such as problem-solving, decision-making, working memory which correlate to comprehension, learning and reasoning. Stressful events affect attention and increase the risk of academic failure. (Cedro, Martinez-Arias, and Bueno 2016). Teachers need to remember that students who come from lower SES might benefit cognitive training to increase attention skills.

Digital Tools

Yumac & Ulusoy (2016) found that the National Commission declared writing as the most neglected domain according to a report in 2003 on Writing. Today, writing is becoming important to express oneself and communicate with the world. Many other countries, such as Turkey, find students lack writing skills. Digital Storytelling (DTS) is increasing in today's technological world. Storytelling has been passed down for generations. Using the multimedia tools allows students to insert pictures and music to their story. DTS increases engagement and motivation, which also increases writing achievement. Another benefit is the spellcheck and grammar tool. It helps students with writing difficulties recognize when words are misspelled and/or incomplete sentences. Many studies indicate DTS motivates students to write stories with greater details and encourages students to use their own style.

Student participation in DTS may increase their communication skills, such as expressing opinions and creating narratives. It is also a tool that can be shared on the web. Students have the opportunity to view others stories online. DTS gives students the opportunity to develop skills needed in the 21st Century such as visual, media, and technology. Student motivation increases when students have the opportunity to add images, video, and/or music to their story.

Saulsbury, Kilpatrick, Wolbers, and Dostal (2015) argue technology may increase writing achievement, especially for students who avoid writing and are struggling writers. Their article stated, “We are living in a technology-infused world where most of our students live digitally connected lives.” They found using digital tools increases student motivation when writing. The key is to find the right technology and tools to motivate your students.

McAdams (2013) argued that teachers should have an understanding for which digital tools they implement. Teachers need to create an engaging learning experience. Technology is continuously changing and educators need to continue learning new technology through professional development. McAdams recommends using computer-generated graphic organizers such as Popplet (www.popplet.com). Glogster EDU (<http://edu.glogster.com>) is a website where students can create posters with videos, sounds drawings, or graphics. Storybird (www.storybird.com) is a website for students to create stories using animators and illustrators worldwide. The teacher sets up the class and students have a login.

Zoch, Adams-Budde, and Langston-Demott (2016) discussed that writing is a way people participate in the social world. They created a writing camp for students in elementary, middle and high school. Writing is a form of defining oneself. For example, expressing one's feelings, values, attitudes, and social relationships. Educators need to create opportunities for students to become the writer. Wyatt was a student that was part of the study and was chosen for a case study. Zoch, Adams-Budde, and Langston-Demott found that Wyatt was comfortable writing when he chose the topic. They suggested student choice so students can write with an authoritative voice. The traditional writing prompt teachers give may limit a student's ability to use voice. Technology also motivated Wyatt because he was able to focus on his creation and not focus on physically writing. Digital tools helped Wyatt eliminate negative thoughts about writing and overcome his struggles because they supported his creativity and increased his confidence. Zoch, Adams-Budde, and Langston-Demott recommend finding the right digital tool for students. Wyatt struggled with traditional writing forms (handwriting and composition notebook). It's important for teachers to figure out ways to increase writing achievement despite challenges they face. Zoch, Adams-Budde, and Langston-Demott encourage educators to create an environment that allows students to grow as writers using digital tools.

Bandi-Rao and Stepp (2014) argued that Digital Storytelling is a tool that can be used to differentiate instruction for all learners. Digital Storytelling gives

students the opportunity to be creative. It is recommended that technology be organically implemented to reduce the stress of technology and increase the learning process. Digital storytelling allowed students to be able to insert sounds, pictures, and images which allowed students the opportunity to create writing with organized details and develop ideas. Student choice in selecting story ideas and multimedia gives the students a sense of empowerment.

My Goal

My study focused on writing workshop and student choice. I can relate to the teachers that feel their students have nothing to write about. I have often thought it was because they didn't have an imagination. Through reviewing research, I discovered that students do have something to write about, but the writing needs to be purposeful. I need to encourage my students to write about topics that are engaging and interesting to them. Each year I reflect and wonder how I can teach writing better. I struggle each year trying to figure out what I am doing wrong. My research is important because it is going to help me become a better writing teacher. I will be able to help each student grow as a writer through student choice. My goal is to help students realize they have a voice and to advocate for what they need to help them be successful writers. My study focused on increasing writing achievement and student choice.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The intent of this research was to help me become a better writing teacher for my 4th grade students and increase students' writing achievement. The student participants completed a Writing Attitude pre-survey to gauge their opinions and attitudes about writing. One of the questions asked if students have trouble thinking what to write about. The majority of participants found it challenging to think of a topic. I found resources like sentence starters, ideas for characters, setting, and problems. Students had choices of what they wanted to write about. I didn't give them a topic with expectations of what they should write about. They have the option to look through the choices and choose a topic that sparks their imagination.

Setting

The setting of this action research was at a Title I elementary school in Pennsylvania. The school qualifies for Title I funding due to the amount of students that qualify for free and reduced lunches. Therefore, the students are living in poverty and/or come from lower Socioeconomic Status (SES).

Participants

There were 19 participants in the fourth grade, with ages ranging from nine to ten years old. Included in this study were two English Language Learners (ELL), two students with Individual Education Plan (IEP), one Emotional Support (ES) student, and one student with a 504 Plan.

Students were introduced to this action research study and made aware their first writing sample would be the baseline starting point. I told them I would be collecting data in the form of notes, surveys, questionnaires, and writing samples over the next few weeks. This data would help me complete my action research study. Students completed their assent forms and took home forms for their parents to complete.

For the next eight weeks, students worked their entire forty-five minute writing block independently, the occasional buddy and one-on-one conferencing. Activities over the next eight weeks are as followed:

Procedures

Week One

- Get principal signature on consent form
- Hand out student consent form
- Explain research to students
- Hand out parent consent form
- Give baseline assessment
- Make a list of who is participating

Week Two

- Pre-survey
- Plan for writing centers

Weeks Three and Four

- Observations
- Implement writing centers
- Collect student artifacts
- Student Interviews

Week Five

- Writing centers are not working & needed to change direction
- Implement Student Choice

- Observations
- Student Interviews

Weeks Six and Seven

- Observations
- Collect student artifacts
- Student Interviews Questionnaire (Appendix C)

Week Eight

- Post Survey
- Collect student artifacts
- Final Assessment

Data Gathering Methods

Observations: Throughout the duration of my action research study, I kept a detailed digital log that included observational data, and informal student interviews that happened during small groups and one-on-one conferences. All this information was stored securely on my laptop that required login credentials to access. Observations were essential to seeing the progress made or not made along with thoughts and writing attitudes in the moment. I participated in participants' observations to get a collection of insights and comments from my students. All notes were taken on a Google Doc or Google Sheet, organized by date.

Surveys: Students were given the same pre and post survey to determine where their thoughts, views, and feelings stood on writing and if they changed throughout the action research study. The surveys were then analyzed and results were recorded in my field log. The survey had thirteen questions on it. I chose to

only focus on three questions because it helped me determine how to increase writing achievement. The questions that were not used in this study asked questions such as if the student liked to draw and write notes to others. The questions eliminated were irrelevant.

I like writing stories. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

I like writing at school. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

⋮

I have trouble thinking about what to write. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

Table 3.1 Survey Questions

Questionnaire: Students were also given a formal interview, in which they individually completed in a Google Form online to determine individual

thoughts and feelings on student choice. The questionnaires were then analyzed and results were recorded in my field log.

How do you feel about yourself as a writer?

Should students be allowed to choose what they want to write about or should the teacher give them the topic to write about?

Tell why.

How has writing on the computer helped you?

How do the writing prompts help you write a story?

What do you suggest I do to make writing more interesting?

Table 3.2 Individual Interview Questions

Student Artifacts: Student artifacts served as the most important data collection for my study. Artifacts included all writing samples during the duration of my study; baseline assessment and final assessment. Both assessments were on demand, in which the district defines as a student produced worked without the guidance and revisions made without teacher support. Student work was graded using the district rubric (Appendix E).

Write a story about something fun you did over summer break. Then draw a picture to illustrate your story.

Table 3.3 Baseline Assessment

Trustworthiness Statement

In order to establish that the results of this study were valid and trustworthy, I followed the protocol of ethical guidelines. Prior to the study, I obtained approval and written permission from Moravian College's Human Subject Internal Review Board. The principal of my school also gave me written permission to conduct the study (Appendix A, Section i). I provided parents with an Informed consent letter, explaining that I would only use data from those students who had permission to be a participant (Appendix A, Section ii and Section iii). The letter explained that students could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty. The letter also stated that students' names would be kept confidential and using pseudo names would protect personal information and all information would be kept in a secured location and destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

The participants gave their assent and the study began. I remained open to unexpected findings and always considered multiple points of view when gathering and analyzing the data. I gave the participants a Writing Attitude Survey (Appendix B). This data helped me gain an understanding of how they felt about writing. Next, I gave the students a writing assessment. (Appendix D). This assessment was used as baseline data to assess the participants' writing skills. I

created a reflection log to note observations and keep track of what is happening throughout the study.

MY STORY

Where do I begin?

Every school year I reflect on my teaching, class management, and ideas to implement the following year. It always amazes me that each new class brings a new set of challenges and obstacles. Despite my reflections, writing is consistently a subject that I don't feel confident teaching because there is no writing curriculum. Reading and math have curriculum and teacher manuals that guide me, but writing doesn't. I rely on Pennsylvania Common Core Standards when writing lesson plans because there is no manual. I don't believe planning is the problem. It made me wonder what I was really trying to accomplish with writing. I just wanted to increase writing achievement because I have seen a decline in writing achievement over my 13 years of teaching. The district used to have a department that was in charge of curriculum and instruction specifically for writing. The department wrote a specific curriculum for teachers to follow with guidelines. For instance, there was a schedule with skills to follow to teach reading, writing, spelling, and vocabulary daily. It was clearly laid out with how much time was to be spent on each skill. The teachers were given a timeframe window where every teacher in 4th grade would give the same writing assessment. Teacher volunteers would grade each paper. Three educators would assess the same story and would have to agree on a final grade. Teachers were expected to teach the same writing skills and give the same writing assessments using the

district rubric. Now teachers do not have a specific writing curriculum to teach. However, we still are expected to use the same rubric to grade writing assessment. It's natural that writing achievement decreased because of the lack of focus that has been placed on writing. It frustrates me because I teach a grade that is expected to participate in the Pennsylvania School State Assessment (PSSA). Every year the Pennsylvania Department of Education releases practice assessments with samples of writing and explanations of how professional scorers will score the test. Students are expected to analyze a passage and write an essay. Why is there no writing curriculum to follow yet a district rubric we are expected to use? I feel like writing is my weakness because of the lack of guidance from administration.

Let's be honest. Not all children grow up to be professional writers. Why do we need to teach writing in elementary school? Writing isn't only writing a story. Writing is also organizing one's ideas and thoughts. Writing is also being able to communicate with others. Vygotsky, "The acquisition of language can provide a paradigm for the entire problem of the relation between Learning and Development. Language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Only subsequently, upon conversion to internal speech, does it come to organize the child's thought, that is, become an internal mental function" (Pg. 89).

According to Dewey (1938), “The conclusion is that and what are called the new schools, the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility” (pg. 56) Poverty is an epidemic that has a huge impact on children and education. My current class consists of all students getting free lunches. In order for a family to qualify for a free or reduced lunch program, they must apply for assistance and meet the income guidelines. The program is to help at risk students receive healthy meals at school. Despite what circumstances my students face, I have high expectations for them and want to give them every opportunity to contribute to our classroom community. I want them to know they are important, have a voice and inspire them to overcome adversity.

I’ve heard many colleagues say students don’t have experiences to write about and best writing comes from experiences. I teach 4th grade and it made me wonder what kind of experiences. I thought back to my childhood experiences. My family and I took vacations, my sister and I were involved in many activities, and we took day trips to museums. My basic needs were met. There was always food and clean clothes. My parents are married and we shared household chores. We celebrated birthdays and holidays with family and friends. My students aren’t taking vacations. They aren’t traveling to other states. They have different needs.

I know their parents love them, but many are trying to survive on what little they have.

I've heard colleagues say students do not have an imagination. I might agree to an extent, but some kids have stressors others don't have to worry about. For instance, fathers in jail or not in the picture at all. Some families have a single parent that has to work many hours to keep the roof over their heads or a parent that is no longer living. Some children have other gifts such as fixing things or computer skills. It is unfair to make the assumption that all students do not have an imagination. Some children are very talented and creative in the arts. Despite the obstacles my students and their families face I will always have high expectations for my students and myself as their teacher.

The first day of school began and like any other school year. I gave a baseline writing assessment (Appendix D). Like many teachers, I asked the students to write about their summer vacation. The baseline assessment gave me information about my class. I used the district rubric to score each writing assessment. It tells me which students remember the foundational skills such as complete sentences, grammar and conventions, and who does not correctly spell high frequency words. The most important information it gave me was which students enjoy writing and the students that were reluctant to complete the task. Two students stood out to me because they both only wrote a sentence and gave me a hard time completing the prompt. One said he had nothing to write about

and the other said he didn't do anything fun over the summer. I also noticed a few that wrote quite a few paragraphs.

Theodore and Luis

Theodore stood out to me the first day of school when working on the baseline assessment. He pouted and did not know what to write about. He wrote one sentence and it took him an hour to complete. He had his head on his desk and just stared at the blank paper. I was immediately drawn to him to be one of my participants to focus on. I need to improve his writing achievement. How was I going to do it? He really seemed to struggle focusing and had no motivation to be in school. I asked him what was going on. I asked him why he only wrote one sentence.

“I have trouble thinking about what to write about. I'm not smart and I just don't care.” – Theodore

Theodore and Luis were very similar. Luis only wrote one sentence and it took him two days to complete. I wasn't sure if it was lack of motivation, coming back to school after summer break, or something else. I encouraged him to write about something he did with friends over summer or family. He explained to me he didn't do anything but watch television and that was what he wrote about.

Luis stated, “I just don't know what to write about.

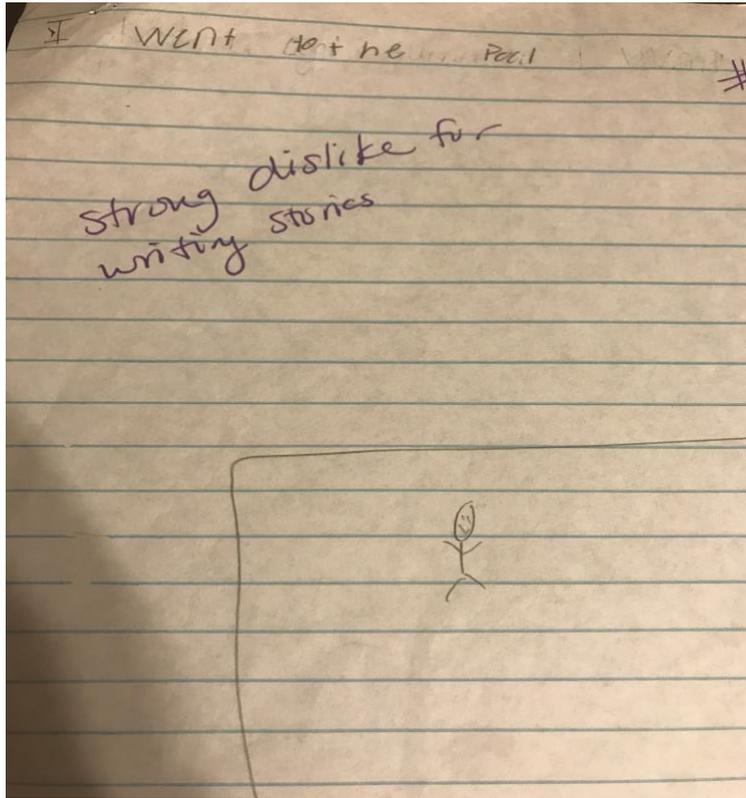


Figure 4.1 Theodore's baseline Assessment

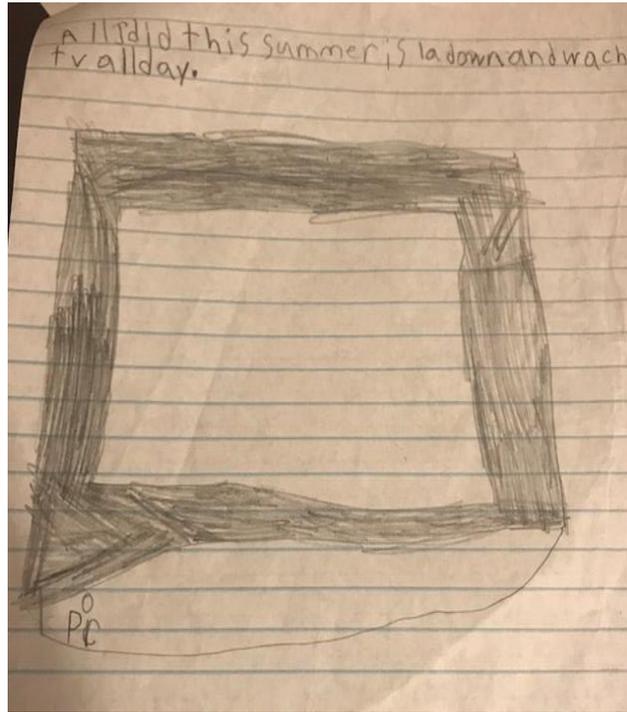


Figure 4.2 Luis' Baseline Assessment

Kay

Kay stated, "I like to write because I get to make up stories."

Kay also stood out to me because she was a struggling writer with a strong work ethic. She worked very hard and was extremely proud of her work. I knew it was not 4th grade writing. She wrote letters backwards and mixed up letters when trying to phonetically spell them. The bigger indicator for me was she only wrote two sentences and scored a 2 on the district rubric (Appendix E). I wanted to dig further to increase her writing achievement and see what other strategies would help her be successful in school. She had problems in all academic areas. I referred her to our SAP process, which is part of the process to implement

This has been the best summer Ever!!!

This is what I did this summer. I went to Boston its a rather state its where my mom was born. I love it there! When I was out here I went to a Zoo. By the way I was there for a week. But when I was at the Zoo I saw so many animals I saw a bear, a cheetah, and lots and lots more like monkeys. There was a day when the monkey just got grass and a monkey came over and took some of his grass away. He is fine, but another monkey came over and took all of his grass away. The monkey that took all the grass the one that elected he only had pieces of grass. So the one that took most the grass that means the second one the day that elected the grass smacked the one that took his grass away, than the monkeys fighting. Me and my 2 year old sister were riding the same horse on that day. I was so happy. The next day we went to Bonkers its a place with a big jungle gym. Its huge and its fun. We were there 5.00 to

Figure 4.4 Jennifer's Baseline Assessment

And so it begins

I explained to my students that I was a graduate student at Moravian College and would be conducting research on writing. I made it clear the writing work was a regular part of our classroom and they would complete the work with

or without participating in my study. Giving their assent meant they would allow me to use their survey, interviews and artifacts in my research. Also, I explained that their parents had to sign the consent form allowing me to use their data (Appendix A). Everyone returned his or her consent forms signed. I was excited that they were all willing to help me and all parents gave their consent as well. I began collecting data right away. I had already given the baseline assessment. The next step was to administer the writing attitude survey found online. (Appendix B) I plugged the survey questions into a Google form. Students completed the survey online by answering feelings about writing on a scale of 1-5, one being strongly disagrees and 5 strongly agree.

The data painted a picture that I never thought about. Students have trouble thinking about what to write. It didn't surprise me they thought writing was boring because I hear the moans and groans when it is writing time. More than half of the students didn't like writing stories at all. I had a challenging road ahead of me. I have a class full of students that have trouble thinking about what to write, think it's boring and don't like writing stories at all. I was feeling the pressure of trying to increase writing achievement. I am always reluctant to implement centers because of the independent piece. I gave it a chance.

Back to the drawing board

Dewey (1938) said, "The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process"

(pg.58). I attempted to follow Lucy Calkins writing centers philosophy. I think I gave up too quickly. Students were heterogeneously grouped in small groups. They had a folder with writing work and a schedule to follow. There were four small groups writing, journaling, small group conferencing, and spelling and vocabulary on a website. Small group writing focused on working on a writing piece independently. This writing piece would be the focus in small group conferencing. We would share writing, share ideas, feedback, and offer suggestions. Journaling was to practice writing down ideas, jotting down notes, or lists. The last group would be online where students would go to the website SpellingCity.com. Students would practice spelling words and vocabulary words. The first day was a complete disaster. Students talked and fooled around when they were to be working independently. Others were shouting out when they finished and interrupting my small group to ask what to do next. We reviewed expectations and attempted to try writing centers for the next week. I honestly think I gave up too soon. I was frustrated because I expected writing to go according to plan and it wasn't. I really think the bigger issue was that we never practiced working in small group centers. Every year brings a new group of students with new needs and dynamics. The other issue was the lack of resources. There are many free educational websites that allow students to work on skills and give data reports for teachers. The problem we ran into was that we didn't have a class set of computers and we needed them for 3 out of the 4 groups. I felt

my small group conferencing was being interrupted with I'm done. I don't know what to write about. Can I go to the bathroom? The phone ringing and kids being pulled out for services like speech, counseling, and instrumental lessons.

So it was back to the drawing board. I planned and planned again. I replaced journaling with buddy editing. They were asked to read a partner's story and check for capitals and punctuation marks. The students didn't know how to proofread, which was my fault because I didn't give them any guidance or tools to peer edit. Some of the kids were so excited to work on their story and wanted to be on the computer working on it. They indicated they felt frustrated to have to wait until that center to continue working on their story because they wanted to continue to work on it. There was a disconnect with the flow of the centers. I had another group of students that moaned and groaned because they did not know what to write about.

At this point I am in tears because I felt like my research was going to be a big flop. I didn't know how I was going to increase writing achievement. The answer was staring me in the face, but I still didn't see it. I went to my graduate class and told my colleagues the nightmare I was living. Fortunately, others were also focusing on writing and suggested I try writing prompts. At first, I was confused because I thought I was using writing prompts. They suggested that I allow students to select from a variety of choices such as sentence starters, characters choices, setting choices, and/or a problem to write about. It suddenly

became clear. The survey asked students if they have trouble thinking about what to write and many of the students indicated they have difficulty coming up with ideas. According to Dewey, “But it is certain that the general principle of social control cannot be predicated upon such cases. It is also true that no general rule can be laid down for dealing with such cases. The teacher has to deal with them individually. They fall into general classes, but no two are exactly alike. The educator has to discover as best he or she can. The causes for the recalcitrant attitudes” (pg. 56). My focus turned to student choice. It finally occurred to me to ask the students that I was about to study. It was like a light bulb went on.

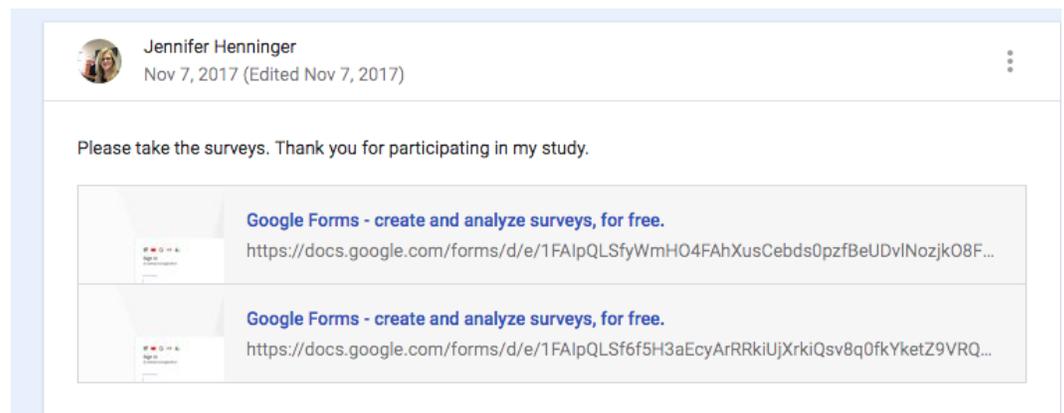
Students have a voice and it’s important they learn to advocate for themselves. I threw out all my ideas and went back to my field log for the data on the writing attitude survey (Appendix B).

I went to the website teacherspayteachers.com and found story starters. I printed out a mountain of story prompts for students to choose from. I color-coded the choices. For example, genre choices are on black construction paper and laminated. I organized a writing area where students can look through the different bins to get ideas. Students were collaborating and sharing ideas they liked. I started to feel the research was finally heading in a positive direction. The students were taking an interest in writing and working nicely with their peers. Vygotsky stated, “Therefore, the issue of teaching writing in the preschool years necessarily entails a second requirement: writing must be “relevant to life” - in

the same way that we require a relevant arithmetic” (Page 118). We also borrowed computers from other classrooms so each student was able to work on his or her story.

Students love Technology

The next phase I wanted to implement was technology. Kids today are growing up in a technological world. I incorporate technology as much as possible because it is engaging to my students and it is a skill they need as they continue their educational journey. I used Google Classroom to set up our online writing class. Students were given a classroom code to login. Google Classroom allowed me to create writing assignments online while having access to what the students were working on. Students clicked on the assignment and created their story in Google Docs or Google Slides. They completed all surveys and interviews online through our Google Classroom. It was an easy way for me to collect data.



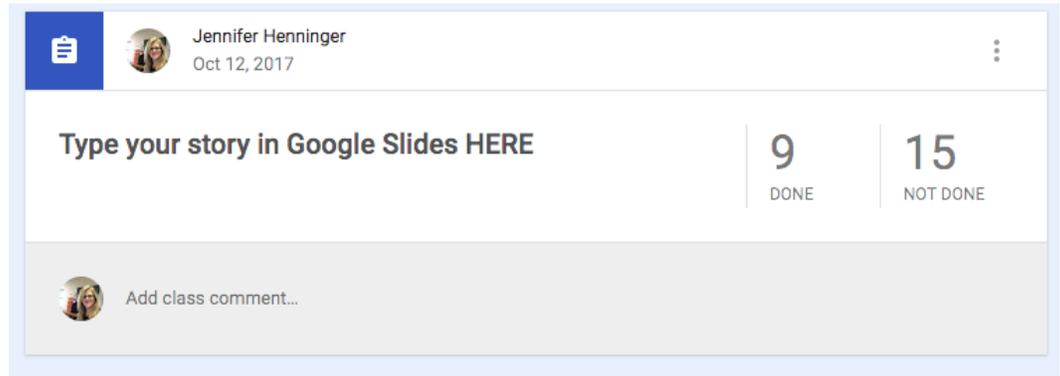


Table 4.1 Google Classroom

Finally

Dewey said, “But observation alone is not enough. We have to understand the significance of what we see, hear, and touch” (Pg 68). With my action research finally underway, I was able to observe students and what they were saying about writing. I could feel excitement when they were sifting through the sentence starters, character ideas, and writing prompts. They were engaged. They were collaborating together and were excited to share their stories with each other, including me. I wanted to see if students agreed with my observations. I interviewed them one-on-one.

Kay stated, “I like writing stories because I get to make up stories. Writing is so much more interesting with choices.”

Luis stated, “I did better on this story because it was interesting me.”

Isabel stated, “I love to write because I get to express my feelings.”

Kelly asked, “Can I work with Kay to help her add details?”

Theodore stated, “I liked writing this story because it was cartoon like.”

I started to see an improvement in writing achievement. The students were working on Google Slides. Luis and Theodore were writing stories. Also, students were more engaged. They were working together and sharing ideas. They were excited to have peers read their stories. Students were excited to share their stories with me. I wanted to know what students were thinking about choice so I created a Google survey to interview each student. They logged into our Google Classroom and completed the survey independently. I asked the students to be honest because it would help me be a better teacher. They preferred typing stories on the computer rather than handwriting stories. Students felt it was easier to type because when mistakes were made they could easily fix them. They liked being able to insert pictures.

How do you feel about yourself as a writer?

“I love writing but it’s hard for me.” - Kay

“I think I am really good at it.” - Donald

“I don’t think I’m a good writer because it’s hard for me to come with ideas and then once I do it doesn’t make any sense.” - Kelly

“I feel good to be a writer.” - Eddie

“I do not feel good about being a writer.” - Henry

There is a mix of responses from the participants. One student, who is a strong writer, felt it's hard to come up with ideas and that her story was unclear and unorganized.

Should Students Choose

Students were asked the question, "Should students be allowed to choose what they want to write about or should the teacher give them the topic to write about? Tell why." The following statements are their responses.

Anne stated, "I like to be able to choose what to write about. I didn't like writing about the graveyard because the class voted on it. The prompts help when I choose them and get to write about what I want to write about."

"They can help you because they could help you think of a setting or topic of your story sometimes." Andy

Andy is a good writer and he doesn't get stuck with writing ideas. I wonder if the prompts jog a memory and that is where his ideas come from. He tends to draw from personal experiences.

"I think kids should be allowed to write what they want because writing is a fun thing to do for a lot of people or just being free on what to write about." - Cecily

“I think students should be allowed to write about what they want but they have to write about something good and not something inappropriate.” Lenny

“Students should be able to choose because it is easier writing something you came up with then having the teacher tell you what to write about.” - Juan

“Both should choose because sometimes the teacher has exciting topics.” - Traci

“Students should be allowed to pick what they want write about because it could help them get a better grade and it helps me write a better story.” Timothy

“Students should choose because we might have more ideas.” - Henry

“Students should choose because everything the teacher writes about is boring.” - Theodore

“Both because sometimes no one has any ideas about what to write about and sometimes they do.” - Andy

“I think students should pick their own topic because students like me could think of amazing stories.” Alicia

She is creative and writes from her imagination. Writing prompts don't really help her because she is so creative with writing. She also tends to draw from personal experiences. She enjoys creating mysteries too.

“They help you because they give you a lot of ideas and things to write about.” Cecily

Prompts trigger an idea, which leads to adding more details into her writing.

“A writing prompt helps me by giving me an idea of what my starter sentence should be or what my story should be about.” Kelly

She tends to write stories that are off topic and don’t make sense. She adds details that make the reader wonder why that detail is added. The prompts help her stay on topic.

“It has helped me because in the computer we can do pictures and it is more interesting.” Isabel

We live in a technological world and my students are more engaged when writing stories on the computer. I agree it is more interesting because they add different fonts and pictures to go along with their story. It is easier to make changes and revise stories. Plus it doesn’t get lost because Google docs automatically save it.

“Writing prompts help me because it gives me ideas and I'm not so good at coming up with ideas.” Anny

Creative writer and prompts help trigger imagination.

Writing on the computer

I wanted to see if students preferred writing on the computer rather than writing on paper. It bothers me that there are a lot of engaging technology tools to use and so many educators continue to have students write using paper and pencil. How has writing on the computer helped you writing stories?

“It helped me because if the teacher wants you to do a story on paper and she collects it you can't go back and read it and make changes. But if it's on the computer you can always go back and fix it or reread it.” - Anny

I don't know how it helps me be a better writer but it does. To me I'm a better writer on computer. - Annie

I like using the tools. - Eddie

It has helped because in the computer we can do picture and it is more interesting. - Luis

It helped me by adding more flavor to my story and I like adding picture to tell my story more. - Jennifer

It helps me because when I write with a pencil my hand gets in a lot of pain. - Theodore

“It helps me spell words.” - Donald

He is a creative writer when focused on a topic of interest. I agree using the computer is helpful for him because he struggles spelling words. My rule is that he can use voice to text to help spell words. Spelling was a red flag when I analyzed his baseline assessment. He struggled spelling the high frequency words. He sounded them out phonetically. I was very happy with his progress on his final assessment. It was clear that he increased his writing achievement.

Writing Prompts

“They help you because they give you a lot of ideas and things to write about.” - Kelly

“A writing prompt helps me by giving me an idea of what my starter sentence should be or what my story should be about.” - Anny

“They can help you because they can help you think of setting or topic.” -

Cindy

“They don’t help me because I like to get started with the story right away.” - Juan

“The writing prompts help me because they give me ideas.” - Kay

“It helps me because I know what I am writing about.” - Debby

“Writing prompts help me because it gives me ideas and I’m not so good at coming up with ideas.” - Henry

“It help me plan what to write.” - Isabel

Student Artifacts

The pet dragon

Once upon a time there was a dragon who got roses for the princes hid but the dragon is going to her but the king saw the dragon the king called the guards the dragon gave the princes the flowers the dragon took her bake. Ie a big and tall castle but the king and his daughter had a big fight. The prince's left. She went on the roof "I never get what I want " sade the princes she saw the dragon 'I love the princes but she will never love me' said the dragon.

The End

Figure 4.5 Donald's Post Assessment

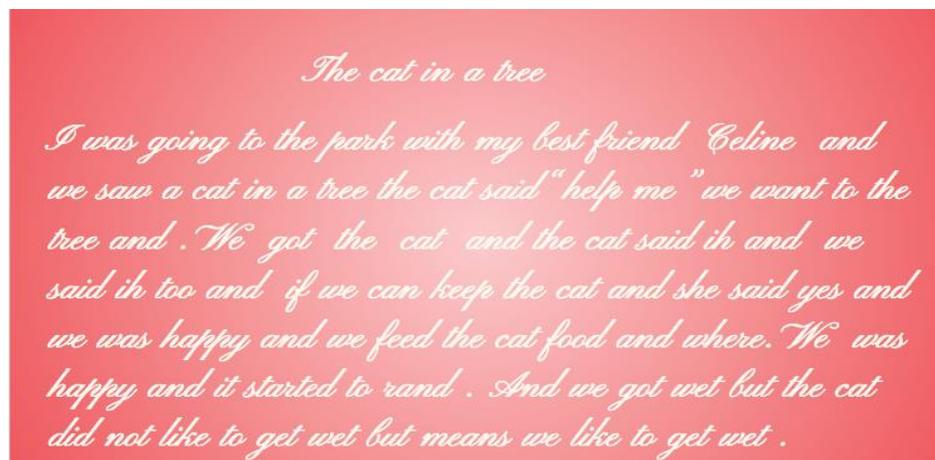


Figure 4.6 Kay's Post Assessment

“The computer does help me a lot but writing on paper pencil does not help me. It was cartoon like.” Theodore

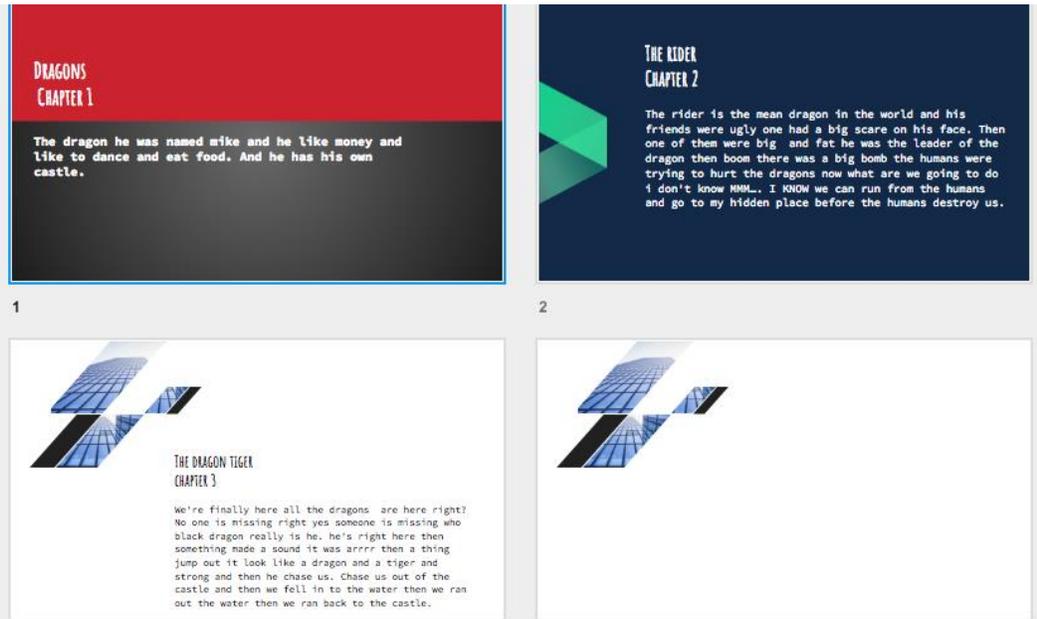


Figure 4.7 Theodore's Post Assessment

“Writing on the computer helps me because my hand does not get tired and if I have to delete something you could delete real quick. You don't have to ask someone for an eraser.”

Jennifer

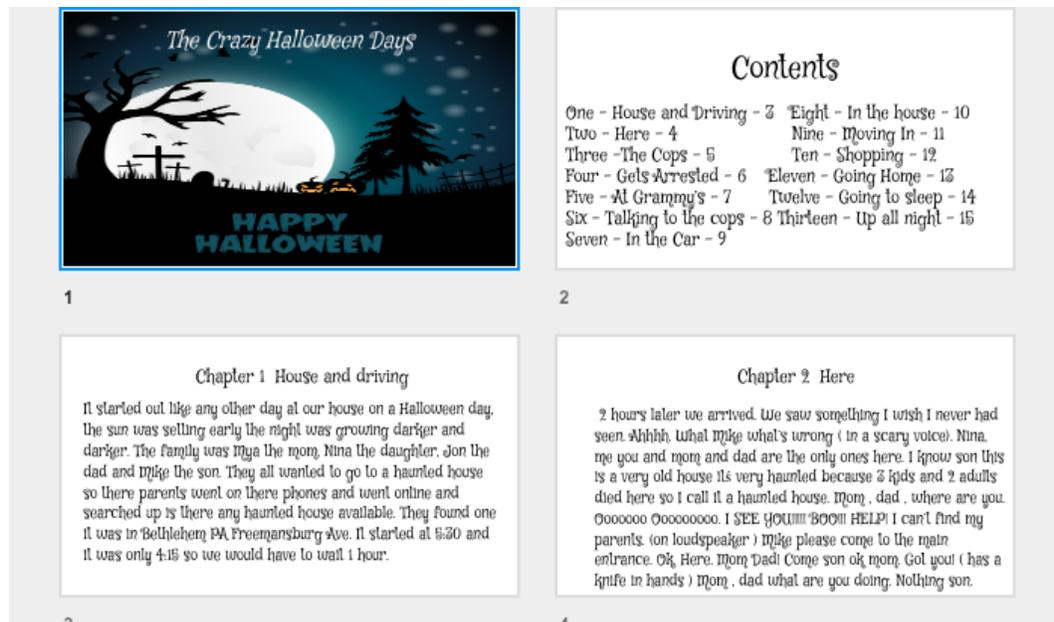


Figure 4.8 Jennifer's Post Assessment

We were almost finished with the study. I gave the students a final survey and compared the results with the pre-survey. I was so excited to give the survey because I was expecting to see better results than the first survey. I was surprised that the results only slightly changed. I wondered if students understood the survey? It didn't seem to match the results of the artifacts, students' interviews and observations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The pre and post survey asked a variety of questions. However, the most relevant question to this qualitative research was “I have trouble thinking about what to write.” The pre-survey showed that 14 students strongly agree or agree they have trouble thinking about what to write about (Table 5). The final survey indicated that 10 students still have trouble thinking about what to write (Table 6).

I have trouble thinking about what to write.

19 responses

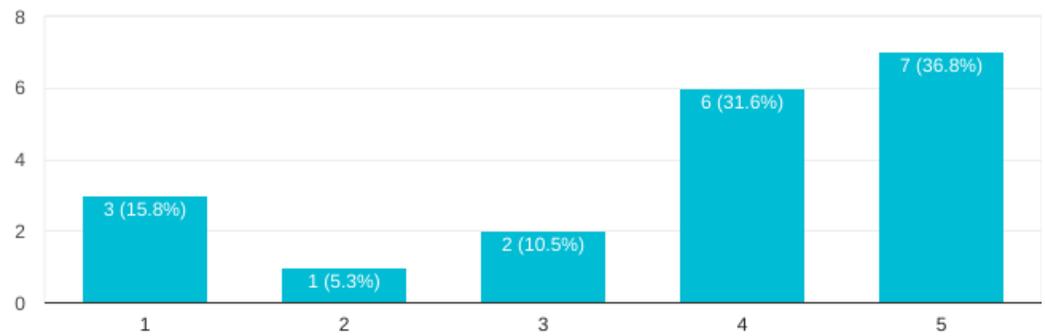


Table 5.1 Pre-Survey Data

I have trouble thinking about what to write.

19 responses

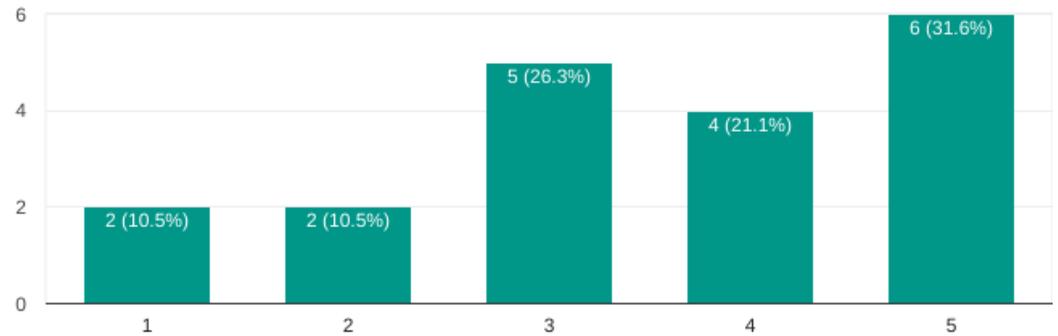


Table 5.2 Post-Survey Data

Individual Results

I focused on four individuals throughout this study. I chose Luis and Theodore because each only wrote one sentence on the baseline assessment. I needed to understand why. I thought it was maybe lack of motivation. Donald stood out to me because he worked very hard but struggled with spelling high frequency words such as saw, went, etc. He struggled to write in complete sentences, but was motivated to write stories. I noticed red flags with Kay because she also only wrote a sentence and most of the words were misspelled. She was spelling them phonetically. Jennifer loved writing and scored a 4 on the district rubric (Appendix E). I gave each student the survey on a scale from 1 - 5, 1 being strongly disagree, 3 neutral, and 5 strongly agree. The following are the results.

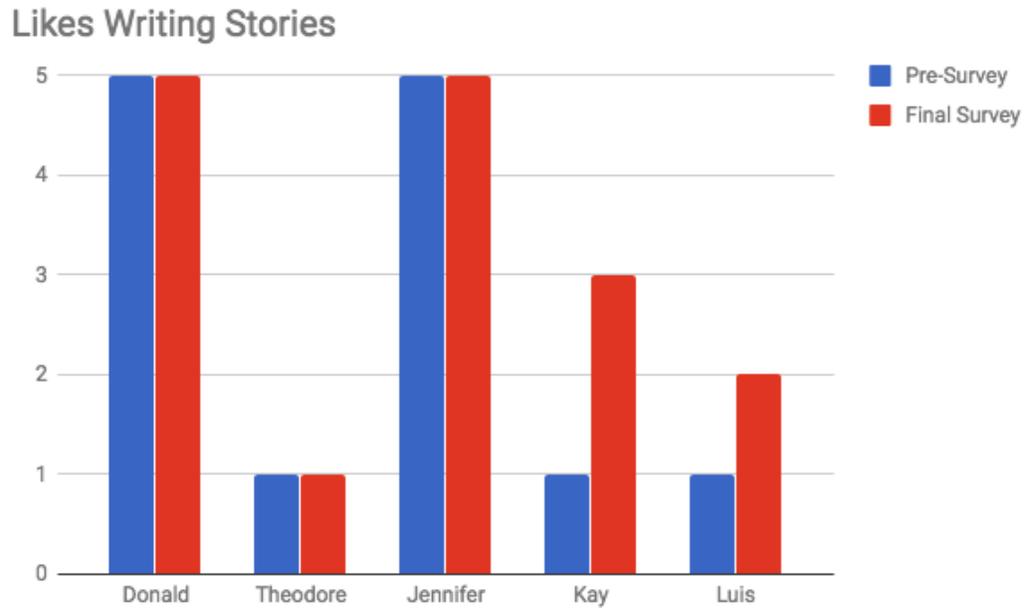


Table 5.3 Comparison of Likes Writing at School Survey Results

I wanted to know if they liked writing. As I suspected, Luis and Theodore strongly disagreed they did not like writing stories. Theodore still strongly disliked writing. Luis changed from strongly disagree to disagree. Donald and Jennifer both liked writing at the beginning of the study as well as after. Kay was the only participant to jump 2 deviations from strongly disagrees to mutual.

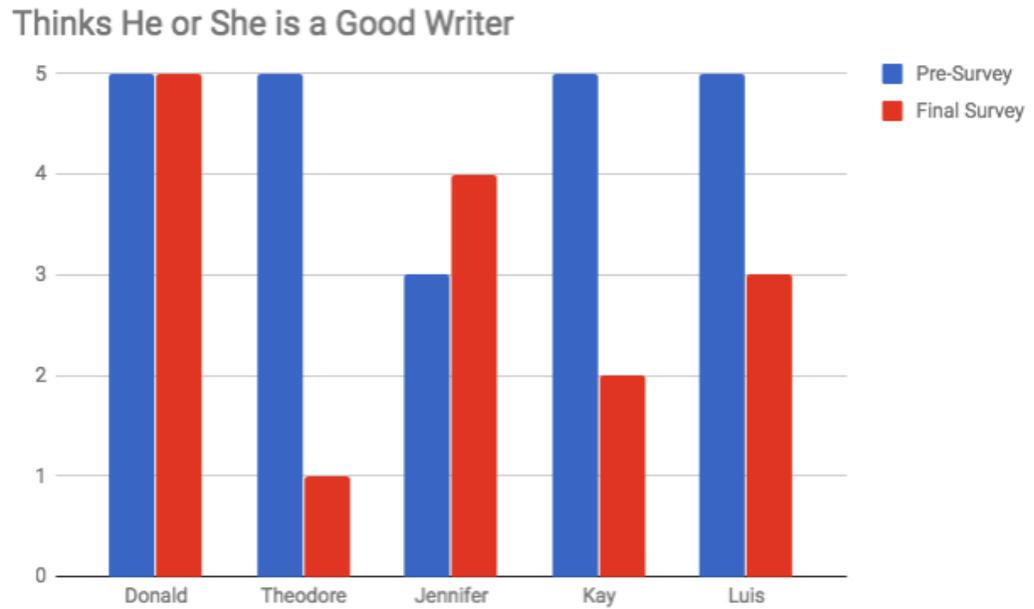


Table 5.4 Comparison Thinks He or She is a Good Writer Survey Results

According to the survey, only 1 participant changed her mind and thought she was a good writer. Despite being engaged and scoring better scores, the key participants still did not feel they are good writers.

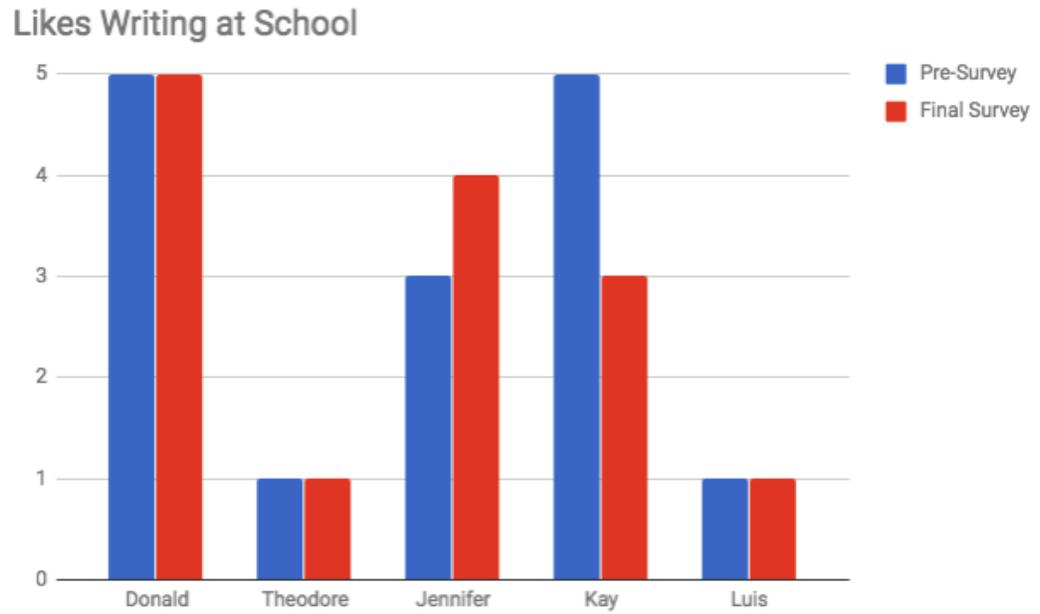


Table 5.5 Comparison of Likes Writing at School Survey Results

According to the survey, Theodore and Luis strongly dislike writing. Donald's response remained the same. He strongly likes writing at school. Jennifer changed from mutual to liking writing at school. Kay's answers significantly changed from liking writing at school. Kay felt mutual about it.

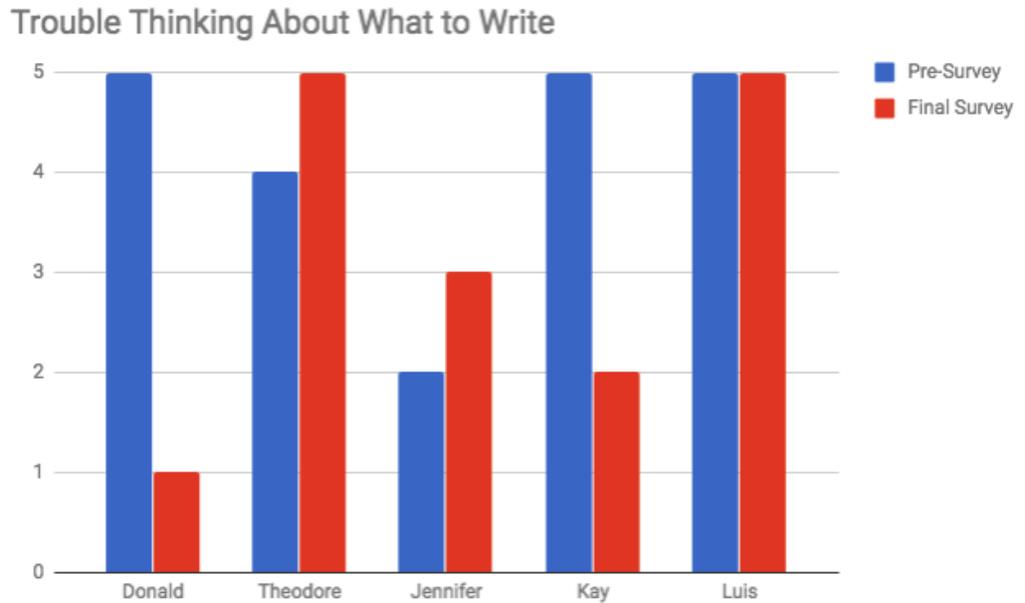


Table 5.6 Comparison of Trouble Thinking about what to Write Survey Results

Luis did not change his mind. Kay changed from strongly agree to having trouble thinking to disagree. Donald changed his mind the most. He felt he had trouble thinking about what to write at the beginning of the study to no trouble at all. Theodore still had trouble thinking about what to write. Jennifer changed from no trouble to mutual feeling.

I'm not sure the participants understood what the survey was asking because the student interviews and artifacts painted a different picture. Students had trouble thinking about what to write about at the beginning of the study. Luis, Theodore, and Kay's final assessment showed growth in writing achievement.

The students were scored using the district rubric (Appendix E). The table shows the scores the students received on the baseline and final assessment.

Student	Baseline Assessment	Final Assessment
Donald	2	4
Theodore	1	4
Luis	1	3
Kay	1	3
Jennifer	4	4

Table 5.7 Comparison of Assessments Results

Luis stated, “I did better on this story because it interests me.” He was given a few prompts and he selected what he would like to write about. This allowed him to tap into his interests to motivate him to write stories.

Kay stated, “I like writing because I get to make up stories.” She also stated, “ Writing is so much more interesting with choices.”

Theodore stated, “Writing on the computer does help me a lot but writing on paper pencil it does not help me.”

I asked him why and he said, “It was cartoon like.” The computer allows students to be able to insert pictures, animations, and transitions to the slide.

Donald is a hard worker. He struggles to spell high frequency words. When asked how the computer helps, he stated, “To help me spell words.” Students can use voice to text to help them spell words on the computer.

“Writing on the computer helps me because my hand does not get tired and if I have to delete something you could delete real quick you don’t have to ask someone for an eraser, you could search up stuff about what to write about.” – Jennifer

Dewey (1938) stated, “Growth, or growing as developing not only physically but intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the principle of continuity.” (pg. 36) Growth is an important piece in the data. The baseline assessment showed which students were struggling. The final assessment showed growth from the five students that I focused on as indicated in the above section “My Story”. Luis, Theodore and Kay showed the most growth. They felt being able to choose what to write about made writing more interesting to them. They also liked being able to create a story on the computer. Donald was able to use voice to text when he needed help spelling a word and felt it helped him write a better story. He indicated that he liked writing stories and felt he was a good writer. His struggle was spelling words when writing a story using traditional paper and pencil.

Analysis of Data through Coding and Bins

I gathered a lot of data throughout my action research. At the end of the study, I organized all the data into bins. In order to code the data, I read over my digital field log, student artifacts, surveys, and interviews. I started to notice patterns and themes throughout all my data sources and began linking the pieces together. I coded similar bins together. (Figure 12) Next, I created theme statements for the bins.

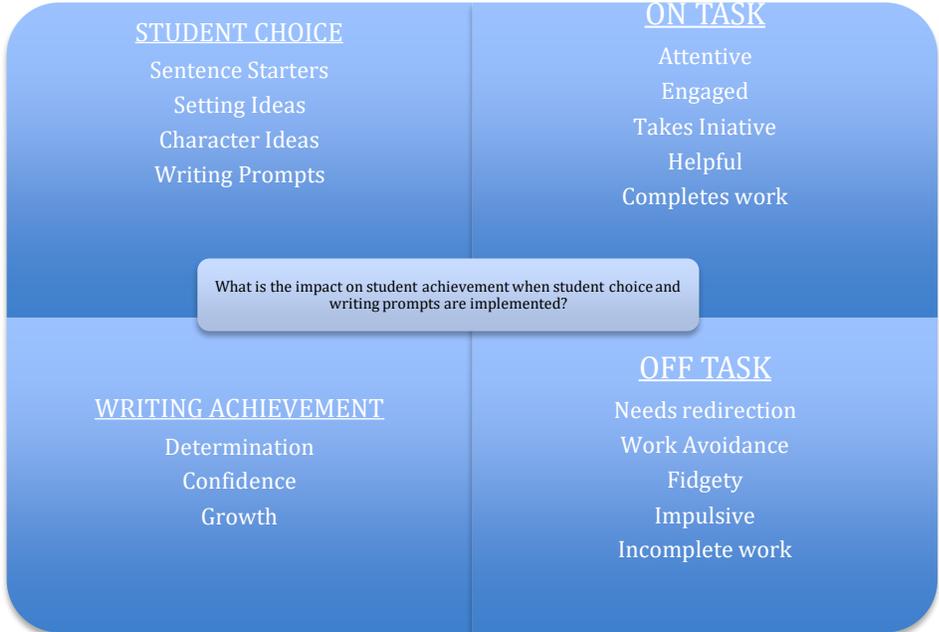


Table 6.1 Codes and Bins

THEME AND STATEMENTS

Student Choice - Students were able to choose from a variety of choices.

Student choice provides the students ideas of what to write about. The writing prompt generates ideas such as genre, setting, characters, problems, and sentence starters. Vygotsky said, “A second conclusion, then, is that writing should be meaningful for children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for Life” (Page 118).

On Task - Students working on the task assigned fosters growth and engagement. On task behaviors include attentiveness, engaged, helpful, and completing work. Vygotsky stated, “A second conclusion, then, is that writing should be meaningful for children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused and them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for Life” (Page 118). Writing needs to be purposeful for the student to be engaged.

Off Task - Off task behavior is a loss of instructional time and requires redirection, which takes away from the learning environment. Off task behaviors include needing redirection, work avoidance, fidgety, impulsiveness, incomplete work. Freire stated, “Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and the knowledge as processes of inquiry” (Pg. 72) Students were off task when I expected the student to write

based on my writing topics. They did not know where to start and had trouble thinking about what to write.

Writing Achievement - Student achievement is measured by growth from the baseline assessment to final assessment using a district provided rubric. Delpit stated, “These were teachers who push them, who demanded that they perform, even when they themselves thought that they could not” (Page 72). My current class is performing below grade level in writing. Many students are easily frustrated when they are expected to write a story that makes sense. They rush through their work to get it finished when writing with paper and pencil. Students are more engaged when creating a story on the computer. They tend to write longer stories and add images to their story, which makes the story come to life.

NEXT STEPS

Freire stated, “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly.” (Pg. 60) If I were to give this survey again, I would change the survey responses to only 2 choices agree or disagree. I think the students were a little confused with all the choices and were unsure how to respond. Results indicate more research is needed to understand motivation. A consistent theme was trying to understand what motivated some students and how to motivate students that really disliked writing.

Initially, I expected to use students’ Funds of Knowledge to pull into their writing pieces. When I realized students had trouble thinking about what to write, I implemented student choice options. I would like to incorporate a writing prompt to draw from these experiences. Students are always eager to share their personal stories and this is another way I would like to increase writing achievement.

Students were engaged and interacted well with others when sharing ideas and looking for ideas. Students were asking to work together to help each other. I would like to pursue peer editing.

REFERENCES

- Alismail, H.A. (2015). Integrate Digital Storytelling in Education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(9), 126 – 129.
- Angelou, M. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved May 1, 2018, from BrainyQuote.com
- Bandi-Rao, S., & Sepp, M. (2014). Designing a Digital Story Assignment for Basic Writers Using the TPCCK Framework. *Journal Of Basic Writing*, 33(1), 103-123.
- Behizade, N. (2014). Xavier's Take on Authentic Writing. *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(4), 289-298. doi:10.1002/jaal.357
- Calkins., L (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.heinemann.com/authors/430.aspx>
- Calkins, L., & Ehrenworth, M. (2016). Growing Extraordinary Writers: Leadership Decisions to Raise the Level of Writing across a School and a District. *Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 7-18.
- Cedeño, L. F., Martínez-Arias, R., & Bueno, J. A. (2016). Implications of Socioeconomic Status on Academic Competence: A Perspective for Teachers. *International Education Studies*, 9(4), 257-267.
- Delpit, L. (2014). *Multiplication Is for White People*. New Press
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: MacMillan
- Dunca, G. & Brooks-Gunn. J. (2000). Family Poverty, Welfare Reform, and Child Development. *Child Development*, Vol. 71(1) 188-196.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

- Garlid, S. W. (2014). "Writing Is Not Really Something I Do": Engaging Reluctant Male Writers. *Afterschool Matters*, (20), 47-52.
- Hanrahan, M. (1998) The effects of learning environment factors on students' motivation and learning. *International Journal of Science Education* 20(6) p 737-753.
- Kilpatrick, J. R., Saulsbury, R., Dostal, H. M., Wolbers, K. A., & Graham, S. (2014). The Integration of Digital Tools during Strategic and Interactive Writing Instruction.
- Kinney, A. (2015). Compelling Counternarratives to Deficit Discourses: An Investigation into the Funds of Knowledge of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse U.S. Elementary Students Households. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 4(1), 1-25. Doi: 10.4471/qre.2015.54.
- Lacour, M., Tissington, L. (2011). The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Review* Vol. 6(7), pp. 522-527, July 2011.
- Lake, R. (2010). Reconstructing Multicultural Education through Personal Story. *Transcending the Essentialist/Relativist Dichotomy, Multicultural Education*, 18(1), 43-47.
- McAdams, L. (2013). Innovate Literacy Instruction with a Classroom Computer: A Solid Rationale for the Integration of Specific Digital Tools. *Texas Journal Of Literacy Education*, 1(1), 54-59.

- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- McNiff, Jean. 2013. *Action Research: Principles and Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Newman, Beatrice Mendez. 2012. "Mentor Texts and Funds of Knowledge: Situating Writing within Our Students' World." *Voices From The Middle*, 20(1), 25-30.
- PA.Gov. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers - Administrators/Federal Programs/Pages/Title Information/Title-I.aspx](http://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers-Administrators/Federal_Programs/Pages/Title_Information/Title-I.aspx)
- Rebora, A. (2016, December 06). Remodeling the Workshop: Lucy Calkins on Writing Instruction Today. Retrieved June 19, 2017, from <http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2016/06/20/remodeling-the-workshop-lucy-calkins-on-writing.html>
- Saulsburry, R., Kilpatrick, J. R., Wolbers, K. A., & Dostal, H. (2015). Getting Students Excited about Learning: Incorporating Digital Tools to Support the Writing Process. *Odyssey: New Directions In Deaf Education*, 1630-34.
- Toure-Tillery, M, Fishback, A (2014) How to Measure Motivation: A Guide for the Experimental Social Psychologist. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 8: 328–341. doi:10.1111/spc3.12110.

Yamac, A., & Ulusoy, M. (2016). The Effect of Digital Storytelling in Improving the Third Graders' Writing Skills. *International Electronic Journal Of Elementary Education*, 9(1), 59-86.

Zoch, M., Adams-Budde, M., & Langston-Demott, B. (2016). Creating Spaces for Students to Position Themselves as Writers through Experiences with Digital Writing. *Texas Journal Of Literacy Education*, 4(2), 111-125.

APPENDICES

A. Consent Forms

i. Principal Consent Forms

Department of Education
1200 Main Street
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18018
610-868-1558

Dear Mr. Alogna,

As a requirement for a graduate course I am taking at Moravian College, I will be studying the effects of storytelling. Participation in this study involves regular classroom activities and does not require any additional work. There are no anticipated risks in this study. All students will be involved because it is part of my regular fourth grade curriculum.

The purpose of this study is to increase student-writing achievement by implementing storytelling. Students will write personal narratives about their own personal experiences. This study will begin August 28, 2017 and will end October 20, 2017. The procedure to be followed is a 40-minute writing block. There will be direct teacher instruction on writing skills, independent writing time, small group collaboration to discuss ideas and revisions, and one-on-one conferences. During this study, I will collect various forms of data to determine how storytelling increases student achievement. Possible data will include surveys, baseline assessment, interviews, and final student project. At the conclusion of the study, all data will be destroyed. Students will keep their projects.

Benefits of this study include increased student achievement in writing class and an awareness of how one learns. Students will also benefit from small group teacher instruction. I understand that participation in this project is voluntary, and I understand that a parent or guardian may withdraw his/her child from this study at any time by notifying me. I understand that participation in this project is confidential. Only I will have access to the students' identities and to information that can be associated with their identities.

Thank you for your time,

Jennifer Henninger

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

- I give permission for my school to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.
- I do not give permission for my school to participate in this project.

Signature of Principal

Date

ii. Parent Consent Forms

Department of Education
1200 Main Street
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18018
610-868-1558

Dear Parents,

As a requirement for a graduate course I am taking at Moravian College, I will be studying the effects of student achievement during the 40-minute writing block in my classroom. The principal has approved this study and can be reached at 610-866-6681. Participation in this study involves regular classroom activities and does not require any additional work. There are no anticipated risks in this study. All students will be involved because it is part of my regular fourth grade curriculum.

The purpose of this study is to increase student-writing achievement by implementing students writing personal narratives. This study will begin August 28, 2017 and will end October 20, 2017. The procedure to be followed is a 40-minute writing block. There will be direct teacher instruction on writing skills, independent writing time, small group collaboration to discuss ideas and revisions, and one-on-one conferences. During this study, I will collect various forms of data to determine how storytelling increases student achievement. Possible data will include surveys, baseline assessment, interviews, and final student project. At the conclusion of the study, all data will be destroyed. Students will keep their projects.

Benefits of participating in this study include increased student achievement in writing and awareness of how one learns. I will have access to the data in the study. Your child's participation in this project is strictly confidential. My Moravian College professor Dr. Shosh and I will have access to your child's data. You may also contact Dr. Joseph Shosh at 610-861-1482 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu.

Use of data from your child is voluntary, and you may contact me at anytime to have your child's data removed from my study without penalty.

Thank you for your time,

Jennifer Henninger

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

- I give permission for my child stated to be used in the study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.
- I do not give permission for my child's data to be included in this project.

Student's name

Signature of parent/guardian

Date

iii. Participant Consent Forms

Department of Education
1200 Main Street
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18018
610-868-1558

Dear Student,

I will be conducting a study in our classroom to determine student engagement in Writing. I am asking permission to use the data I collect from you during this process. Participation in this study involves only regular classroom activities. You may ask me questions at any time about the study. The principal of the school has approved this study.

The purpose of this study is to increase student-writing achievement by implementing students writing personal narratives. This study will begin August 28, 2017 and will end October 20, 2017. The procedure to be followed is a 40-minute writing block. There will be direct teacher instruction on writing skills, independent writing time, small group collaboration to discuss ideas and revisions, and one-on-one conferences. During this study, I will collect various forms of data to determine how storytelling increases student achievement. Possible data will include surveys, baseline assessment, interviews, and final student project. At the conclusion of the study, all data will be destroyed. You will keep your projects.

Benefits of participating in this study include increased student achievement in writing and awareness of how one learns. I will not include your name in any report about the study. You have the right to ask me not to include your data in the study or to tell me later if you no longer want your data included.

Thank you for your time,

Ms. Henninger

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

- I give permission for my data to be used in the study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.
- I do not give permission for my data to be included in this project.

B. Survey

Student Writing Attitude Survey

I have trouble thinking about what to write. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

I like writing at school. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

⋮

I think I'm a good writer. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

I like writing stories. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree				

C. Interview Questions

How do you feel about yourself as a writer?

Should students be allowed to choose what they want to write about or should the teacher give them the topic to write about? Tell why.

How has writing on the computer helped you?

How do the writing prompts help you write a story?

What do you suggest I do to make writing more interesting?

D. Baseline Assessment

Name _____ # _____ Date _____

Write a story about something fun you did over summer break. Then draw a picture to illustrate your story.

E. District Rubric

Name _____ # _____ Date _____ MP _____ Grade _____

	Advanced (4)	Proficient (3)	Needs Work(2)	Not Yet (1)
CONTENT Main Idea/Supporting Details	Effectively identifies the main idea and includes most of the important details.	Clearly identifies the main idea and includes most of the important details.	Main idea is unclear and/or not specifically stated in the writing; some important details are missing.]	Main idea is not present ; contains only some details.
FOCUS Beginning, Middle & End	Effectively writes a beginning, middle and end. Includes literary devices.	Clearly writes a beginning, middle and end. Includes literary devices.	Beginning, middle and end are unclear . Does not include literary devices.	Beginning, middle and end is not present. Does not include literary devices.
Organization How the story flows.	Main idea and supporting detail are in logical order.	Main idea and supporting detail are fairly logical order.	Some problems of main idea and supporting detail.	Lacks a clear organization of main idea and supporting details.
CONVENTIONS Grammar/Usage/ Punctuation/ Capitalization/Spelling	Contains few , if any, errors in the conventions of the English language; errors do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing	Contains some errors in the conventions of the English language; errors do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing	Contains several errors in the conventions of the English language; errors may interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing	Contains numerous errors in the conventions of the English language; errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing

