

Primary School Children's Articulation of the Development of Quality in Writing During
the Implementation of *Assessment For Learning*

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, I investigated six grade 1 and 2 children's change in their articulation about the quality of their writing throughout one school year of exposure to *Assessment For Learning*. The *Assessment For Learning* strategies included giving and receiving feedback, co-creating assignment criteria, one-on-one and small group conferences, and articulating work with peers and teacher, as well as considering work samples from previous students, supported student writing.

In addition, writing samples were analyzed to search for authenticity in what students were saying about their writing and about what makes good writing.

The research questions that I was investigating were:

1. In what ways do students articulate their understanding of accomplished or needed improvements in their written work?
2. In what ways is this articulation related to implemented *Assessment For Learning* practices?

Research methods involved both naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory analysis. Data included a semi structured interview, used at the beginning and end of the school year; teacher observations; student writing samples; tape recordings of teacher-student (one on one and small group and whole class) conversations; and samples of student developed criteria. Transcripts were read and re-read to develop themes, searching for how the selected six students articulated their understandings of quality writing. In addition, writing samples were analyzed to search for authenticity in what students were saying about their writing and about what makes good writing

The six children were chosen for maximum variation on beginning ability, and gender. Of the six students, all began, in September, by talking about appearance of writing – neatness, spaces between words, etc. By November, they were talking about quality of words, length of sentences, and were articulating methods for improving their spelling, and increasing sentence and story length. By June, the high achieving boy was talking about quality writing having “to make sense”.

In this study, the boys improved as much, or more, as the girls. Although no generalizations can be made from such a small qualitative study, this is an unexpected outcome.

An important finding of this study is the link between children's ability to articulate about quality writing from having participated in Assessment for Learning principles, and their ability to regulate their own learning (self-regulated learning). Theory derived from this study points to a relationship between *Assessment For Learning* and self-regulated writing activity.

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Chapter 1: Research Beginnings

Most of my teaching career has taken place in communities with students who are at-risk, compromised, or are from immigrant or working poor families. Many of these students enter school with language deficits in both their receptive and expressive language. Some of them often come to school hungry and use the school's breakfast and lunch programs. For a number of my students, their families also face barriers with the education system. Some examples would be having First Nations students who had families raised and educated within residential schools or those recent arrival children to our country whose families do not speak English. Because of the diversity in learners and their personal struggles, I found myself searching for ways to improve my teaching to best engage and educate my students.

Foundational Beliefs

I have foundational beliefs about teaching that have been formed as I learned and grew as a teacher, with the most important belief beginning to build a community of learners in my classroom. I ask my students to become a team not only to improve themselves but also to help improve the success of their 'teammates'. I place the students in table groupings and ask them to work together to achieve tasks based on academic and social outcomes. The language I use is based on the idea of community, friends, and team members, and I ask the students to use this language when describing our classroom as well. I believe creating a community of learners not only builds relationships with the students but allows them to feel supported and deeply connected to their learning tasks.

Another of my foundational beliefs stresses students' need to focus on learning goals (goals based on what students need to succeed and grow) rather than performance goals (goals based on the evaluation of a student). With the introduction of students to a positive and powerful relationship to others in the classroom, I have found that students become more comfortable and more confident to take risks both socially and academically in the classroom. With others around them working as a respectful team of learners, students can try things that are outside their prior knowledge and believe they will not be mocked by their peers or me as their teacher. This comfort, in turn, allows them to engage in their tasks without worry about having only the 'perfect' outcome for all to see.

Allowing students to engage in authentic tasks is an additional fundamental belief I have, where the process of engagement includes tasks that are of value to the student. Notwithstanding curricular expectations, I base my instruction on authentic activities or project tasks. I believe that students will gain a deeper and more powerful understanding of conceptual ideas when they work towards a more authentic process to obtain an idea. This, in turn, seems to allow them to be more engaged in their learning.

With my beliefs in place, I then have a pretty good idea of what my role should be as a classroom teacher. I need to provide the students with a safe and respectful classroom culture, a culture that includes teaching and modeling classroom expectations and consequences and being both fair and consistent with the entire classroom when dealing with problems and successes of the students. I do not see myself as a teacher standing at the front of the room every day telling students what to do and how to do it. I am there to facilitate learning and empower students to find answers and successes in their learning. To do this I will need to use both explicit and implicit methods that allow students to discover and interact with their learning and environment.

Because I want to have my students find a positive spirit of learning, I also believe that I need to model learning to them. As a teacher, I should be looking at my practice and finding ways that work for me to improve it. This belief has not only improved my skills as a teacher, but also has given me a more positive and productive way to view professional growth. I think this journey should be shared in the classroom. By talking with students and inviting them to join the journey, they have a voice that guides them toward success. Modeling the practice of learning guides the students to follow the path of learning success.

Considerations of Practice

Considering my beliefs and my role as a teacher, I began to look introspectively at my personal practice and the community in which I was working. I questioned my knowledge and proficiency in implementing a program that was based both on curricular expectations and on the need to engage and inspire my students toward success. I knew I was on the right track, but needed to find some powerful and productive strategies to support what I was already interested in developing. These strategies needed to include strong student engagement practices, community-building ideas, and the use of authentic tasks to facilitate student learning. By including these practices, I believed I could allow students to focus on their learning, what they

needed to succeed and grow instead of the evaluation of what they knew at one moment in time. With this in mind, I began my journey to find such practices in education.

Through some professional development opportunities offered in my school division, I began to learn about *Assessment For Learning* strategies offered by Anne Davies. These practices made sense to me. They not only resonated with my teaching philosophy but showed me a way to engage students in their own achievements and success. The use of authentic tasks to drive student learning, intertwined with co-construction of criteria to formulate self/peer and outcome assessment of a task, should not only connect students to learning, but also improve their outcomes. This philosophy aligned directly with what I was looking for to improve my professional abilities. I needed to find a way to learn and implement these *Assessment For Learning* strategies into my daily practice.

One of the first things I did to learn more was attend an intensive seminar on *Assessment For Learning* strategies. I learned core information about implementation of the practice of *Assessment For Learning*. Firstly, teachers must give students a target for their learning and talk to them about what this target means for them. They must include students in the conversation about learning and encourage them to have a conversation with themselves and peers about what they know or need to learn.

Secondly, students must be involved in formulating the criteria that will be used to assess their outcomes. Not only will the students have an active role in the development of these criteria but in assessing their own progress as they work to completion of the task.

Thirdly, I learned that the use of positive, consistent teacher feedback to students and feedback by students is essential to enhance growth. Teachers, students, and peers need to use this feedback in a constructive manner to enrich and deepen everyone's ability to think about, express, and edit the tasks.

Lastly, I gleaned from my experience that all of this activity takes time. It is an on-going mission and needs to be embedded into my personal practices on a daily basis. I should not feel the need to rush through the implementation but rather give students and myself time to achieve that deeper understanding that will better transfer to a lifelong, natural use of self-assessment for personal learning.

After being introduced to these new ideas, I began to have a conversation with myself and other researchers. I began to see links between my beliefs and powerful understandings about learning. I agree with ideas expressed by Anne Davies and others when they assert that when students are engaged in conversations around their ideas, they “shift from being passive learners to being actively involved in their own learning. By being engaged, they use and build more neural pathways to the brains” (Davies, 2007, p. 3). This will make retrieval of information easier, and, in return, connect it to other learning paths more successfully. Davies goes on to state that when students are given time to discuss and be involved in their learning, they “use their prior knowledge and learn more about the language of learning and assessment” (p.4).

Learning is positively affected by having conversations or ‘helping’ students with their learning. Davies (2007) explains that when students begin to understand what is expected of them, take positive ownership of the work they are doing, and are given more descriptive feedback about what they need to do to succeed, students learn more. The conversation about student understanding gives teachers better ideas of what students know and therefore what should be taught next. The next step in my learning was to read a collection of research studies focused on classroom assessment. While the research fundamental to these ideas is broad, I am going to highlight four studies I believe are particularly relevant to my research questions and that have shaped my work in this area.

Study One:

Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) meta-analysis represents between 20 and 30 million students. The researchers state, “Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 81). They also state that “feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent...regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (p. 81) or it is the “consequence of performance” (p. 81) by the student. The writers go on to say that this performance does not happen in a vacuum and to “be powerful in its effects, there must be a learning context to which feedback is connected” (p. 82). Their research led to these three findings:

1. Tangible rewards “significantly undermined intrinsic motivation” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.84). The writers concluded that these extrinsic rewards take away people’s (students’) ability to ‘motivate’ and ‘regulate’ themselves and then lose the inner value of what

was asked of them. This then leads to a more competitive way of learning and undermined the ability to enhance engagement in the task.

2. Feedback back works better when it is connected to previous ‘trails’ of teaching or goals that have been established. Feedback that builds on what has been done well will move learners towards their established goals, and will make them more effective learners.

3. Students learn better from feedback that is not connected to their self-esteem. Learners pay more attention to feedback when it focuses on improving learning, not on students earning praise or being faulted.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) expand on their ideas of a model of using feedback effectively. They believe by using their three questions (Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?) about feedback and the four levels of focus feedback needs, feedback can be effective. The first question, *Where am I going?* deals with setting a goal or a task that is achievable for the student or a ‘success criteria’ they can follow. The next question, *How am I going?* says in order to have success, effective feedback needs to consist of “information about the process, and/or about how to proceed” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.89). The last question, *Where to next?* asks that there be a more ‘feed-forward’ approach where the teacher provides students with the next possibilities of learning. This could be by deeper understanding, greater fluency or efficiency, different strategies to use, and a number of other ‘forward’ thinking tasks or idea. Hattie and Timperley (2007) believe that you need to integrate these three questions to then work through the four levels of feedback.

The levels of feedback that Hattie and Timperley have shaped are :

- Feedback about task or product (FT) – this is feedback aimed to move students along their learning path and is sometimes called corrective feedback. The benefits of this feedback depended on (a) students being attentive to their tasks (b) students having accurate memories of what is expected of them (c) students given cues and strategies to use to succeed.
- Feedback about the process used to create or complete (FP) – this feedback is aimed at the process of the task and gives strategies and cues to help the students move on in the task. It allow them a deeper understanding of the task.
- Feedback about self-regulation including self-evaluation, confidence, and engagement (FR) – this feedback interplays with commitment, control, and confidence of the learner and develops his or her ability to create internal feedback and cognitive routines to help engage more deeply in tasks. When students have these self-appraisal skills they can

metacognitively evaluate their strategies, efforts, goals and performance of the tasks they engage in.

- Feedback about the person or the self (FS) – this is the least effective model of feedback. It is too often used as a hollow or passive approach without giving the ‘why’ factor. Saying statements such as ‘good girl’ or ‘nice job’ are un-informing about the student’s progress and can instead be attached to a personal feeling about ‘self’.

In order to be successful in introducing feedback in a positive and engaging way into the classroom, the writers suggest that we need to move from believing assessment is “an activity used to assess students level of proficiency” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 101) to “activities that provide teachers and/or students with feedback information relating to one or more of the three feedback questions” (p. 101). This assessment feedback has to address “the process (FP) and the metacognitive attributes (FR)” (p. 101) of the task to be more powerful than traditional assessment practices that focused on ‘driving’ student’s performance to a higher grade. When assessment is used as the writers suggest, students can “share the challenging goals of learning, adopt self-assessment and evaluation strategies, and develop error detecting procedures and heightened self-efficacy to tackle more challenging tasks leading to mastery and understanding of lessons” (p. 103). These practices will allow teachers to break away from getting a ‘snapshot’ of their students’ learning but rather make ‘critical conclusions’ gathered from many learning opportunities.

I use the three questions not only in my planning in my *Assessment For Learning* practices but when I am building criteria with students to improve their learning. As Hattie and Timperley state, “feedback can only build on something; it is of little use when there is no initial learning or surface information. Feedback is what happens second, is one of the most powerful influences on learning, too rarely occurs, and needs to be more fully researched” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 104).

Study Two:

A report titled, “Testing, Motivation and Learning” (2002) examined ways that of motivating that can positively affect pupils’ learning. The writers used 183 studies to establish evidence relevant to the questions; what is the nature of the impact on the way pupils learn and on their motivation to learn and does pupils’ learning benefit from it? The study asked five questions that were answered by the evidence in the studies. These questions were:

1. What is the overall impact on pupil’s motivation?

2. How does the impact vary with the characteristics of pupils?
3. How does the impact vary with the conditions of testing?
4. What impact on pupils has been found, what is the evidence of impact on teachers and teaching?
5. What actions in what circumstances are likely to increase the positive and decrease the negative impact on pupils?

Study Two found that offering students more choice, responsibility, feedback, encouragement, as well as making purpose, learning processes, criteria, goals, and value more clear, as well as setting up relationships, and opportunities for collaboration resulted in students being more motivated to engage in the learning tasks. As a result of answering the research questions, the researchers noted implications for teachers in a “*do more of this... and less of this*” (Assessment Reform Group, 2002, p.8) list that will work to “enhance motivation for learning” (p.8) in students. The implications for professional learning should focus on activities that are formal, within and outside the school and through peer interactions and observations. These focus times should involve: extended awareness of tests, recognize how to prepare, be involved and respond to tests, devise strategies to minimize negative motivation, understand the differential impacts, develop skills in designing tests and implement strategies that emphasise goals not performance.

Study Three:

Dochy, Segers, Gijbels, Stuyven (2006) state, “the traditional view that the assessment of students’ achievement is separate from instruction and comes only at the end of the learning process is no longer tenable” (Dochy, et al., 2006, p. 87) and there is “strong support for representing assessment as a tool for learning” (p. 87). Through their research, they came up with six ideas to make “learning and instruction more congruence ” (p.88) with learning:

1. integrate learning, instruction and assessment, as well as presenting assessment *FOR* learning
2. encourage students play an active role in their learning through some ideas like criteria building, self-evaluation, peer interactions, tutor/teach/coach others, reflection, and keeping track of their growth
3. use many sources to measure achievement
4. use tasks that are interesting, meaningful, authentic, challenging and engaging while teaching
5. assess high-order thinking skills
6. assess metacognitive, social and affective learning outcomes

If the students gain the “necessary metacognitive knowledge and skills, they become capable enough to draw conclusions themselves about the quality of their learning behaviours”

(p. 90). Dochy et al (2006) conclude that guidelines were needed to ‘engineer’ assessment into the “processes of learning” and “have educationally sound and positive influences” (p. 97) to guide us. Three helpful ideas :

1. influence the quality and distribution of student effort
2. influence the quality and level of student effort
3. be accompanied by timely and sufficient (peer) feedback

These researchers lead me to think, in a metacognitive way, about making sure that students are firstly aware of their own learning destination so they can be clear about where they are going. I also could see the need to get students to participate in the development of ‘what’ is needed to get there. This gives the students both the knowledge of where they want to go, and of how to get there.

Study Four:

Andrade, Du, and Wang (2008) investigated the effect of reading written samples and then generating a list of criteria for the assignment. They then explored students’ ability to self-assessing according to a rubric. They also examined how “gender, time spent writing, prior rubric use and previous achievement on elementary school students’ score for written assignment” (Andrade, Du & Wang, 2008, p. 3) affected scoring. The team involved, Andrade, Du and Wang, and the focus were 116 students in grades three and four from seven public elementary schools in north-eastern United States. In this quantitative study, the treatment group “(1) read a model story or essay, discussed its strengths and weaknesses, and generated a list of qualities of an effective story or essay: (2) received a written rubric; and (3) used the rubric to self-assess their first draft” (p.6). The essays from both groups were then evaluated by using three types of scoring. Twenty-three percent of the mark came from a co-scoring (working as a team to evaluate) method. Fourteen percent of the mark came from averaging two scores of evaluators. Fifty-two percent of the scores were given by an independent evaluator’s scoring. The results of this study showed that students in the treatment group had a small positive statistical difference in their scores. The researchers say that the .15 positive difference in the statistic represent “the average grade for the treatment group would be a low B, compared to the average comparison group grade of a high C” (p.8). Other findings from the study were that girls achieved higher scores than boys, time spent writing did not affect scoring and most students had

not used rubrics prior to the study. This means that the teams' hypothesis that the treatment group would be more successful in their achievement scores was correct. Some of the limitations the research team expressed were that they only had a short time with the students and that they only used one strong essay as a model, not several different levels of writing abilities. In addition, the study did not take into account the teaching styles, previous writing assignments, and using non-equivalent groups in the process. The team acknowledged "the limitations inherent in the design of this study" (p. 9). The authors, by using a large sample and quantitative methods were not able to address different writing levels, teaching style, etc. In my classroom, all students experienced the same teaching style, and I deliberately selected students who varied in their prior writing abilities. Also, because gender has been demonstrated to make a difference in children's writing abilities, I selected three boys and three girls for my study, one of each gender for each ability level of low, medium, and high.

Other Important Studies

Two other writers have been important in shaping my thinking. First, Gordon (2006) wrote about Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory and how when "experience is intrinsically rewarding life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain" (p.70). He went on to say that teachers should be more focused on the process of educating and not the desired outcome. Also, he wrote that schools "need to be the vehicles for enhancing and mobilizing the creative capacities of all our children so that the thinkers of today can be translated into the creative advancement of tomorrow" (p.72). The second writer is Kohn (2008) who believes when students "formulate the questions, seek out (and create) answers, think through possibilities and evaluate how successful" (p.1) they are becoming learners. Kohn deemed these actions will produce students who have ownership not only over their learning, but the ability to question, challenge, and seek new ideas and experiences in the future. These ideas struck me as a positive and effective way to help students become more invested in their learning, an outcome that will enable them to be the creative thinkers of the future.

Origins of a Study

In order to connect my foundational beliefs with my practice, I decided to focus on integrating *Assessment For Learning* strategies with teaching my students about becoming strong and successful writers. The practice of writing and how students could improve their abilities as writers seemed to fit with this newly acquired knowledge.

The students and I followed the strategies and ideas I learned about *Assessment For Learning*. Some of the ideas we used included: explaining the target we were trying to achieve; building criteria as a learning team about writing; communicating our knowledge about writing growth both verbally and in writing; and giving and receiving feedback about writing and the improvements that either need to happen or have already happened. We visited and revisited these ideas and the students grew as writers in many ways. I wondered about the students' improved ability to articulate about the quality of their writing and the changes they made or still needed to make. It seemed to me to be an indicator of a deeper, more metacognitive way of thinking about assessment. However, this was something I noticed alongside the other learning that was taking place. Was it really happening? Were students actually thinking differently about their learning in writing? I felt I needed to investigate these questions in a more clear and systematic manner. I needed to find out if I were in fact enhancing learning. These thoughts led me to my thesis questions:

1. How do students articulate their understanding of accomplished or needed improvements in their written work?
2. How is students' articulation related to *Assessment For Learning* practices that I implemented in my classroom?

Chapter 2: On the Shoulders of Giants

I began to investigate the path I would need to follow to answer my research questions regarding what ways students articulate their understanding of their accomplishments or needed improvements in their written work, and how this articulation is related to implemented *Assessment For Learning*. In order to make these connections with my foundational beliefs and wonders about *Assessment For Learning* strategies, I had to consider the links I was already aware of. I studied and explored many expert ideas and researchers' findings that drew links between these beliefs, wonders and practices.

Provincial Curriculum: Learning to Write

The provincial government and our mandated curriculum dictate the expectations for writing outcomes in all Saskatchewan schools. The main foundational objectives for grade-two students for writing at the time of the research, from the Evergreen curriculum, are:

1. Write to express thoughts, information, feelings, and experiences in a variety of forms for a variety of purposes and audiences
2. Learn about and practise the skills and strategies of effective writers [before, during, after writing]
3. Assess personal strengths and set goals for future growth (Evergreen Curriculum, 2002)

The Ministry of Education for the province has set these objectives as a guide and directive for educators to plan outcomes to ensure students' progress in both their personal learning and educational achievement goals. They aim to grow the emotions, connect to previous knowledge and intellectual knowledge that learners have established. The first foundational objective, which speaks to the expression in writing, has the following as goals to achieve:

- write to record personal experiences and observations
- write patterned stories, original stories, learning logs, poetry, riddles, friendly letters, messages, notes, instructions, and explanations
- write short informative reports and narratives when given help with organization
- work through the stages of a writing process including pre-writing, drafting, beginning to choose drafts for revision, and sharing
- create original texts (Evergreen Curriculum, 2002)

The second foundational objective is strictly interested in the process of writing and includes the following goals from the Evergreen Curriculum (2002):

Before Writing:

- use pre-writing strategies including brainstorming, talking with others, interviewing, drawing, mapping, and clustering or webbing
- begin to focus on key questions and to answer questions about a topic
- generate ideas on a particular topic
- plan and make decisions about what to include in written products
- recognize that information and ideas can be expressed in different forms for different purposes (e.g., poetry, articles, stories, songs, simple reports)

During Writing:

- stay on topic in writing
- write complete sentences
- begin to organize writing with a clear beginning, middle, and ending
- arrange ideas and information to make sense
- use a variety of forms to organize and give meaning to familiar experiences, ideas, and information
- use common patterns as a framework for writing
- recognize that dialogue adds interest and detail to narratives
- experiment with words and simple sentence patterns to enhance communication
- apply knowledge of commonalities in word families
- develop and demonstrate an understanding of written language conventions including:
 - write complete sentences, using capital letters and periods
 - use a variety of spelling strategies such as approximations, best-guess, and checking grade-appropriate references
 - spell many high frequency words correctly and use familiar spelling patterns
 - begin to include the question mark and some commas
- print legibly to form letters and words of consistent size, shape, and spacing
- explore and use the keyboard to compose and revise text

After Writing:

- choose to revise
- add or delete words to make sense
- check work for beginning, middle, and end
- try to correct capitalization (e.g., to begin sentences, the pronoun I, names, days of week, month, and titles) and punctuation (e.g., period at the end of a sentence, question marks, commas to separate items)
- check work for spelling errors using word wall, word rings, picture dictionaries, and personal dictionaries

- share own writing with others and respond to suggestions
- acknowledge writing achievements of others

The work of a number of researchers in the field of writing examines outcomes similar to those presented in the Saskatchewan English Language Arts curriculum. Culham (2005), Heffernan (2004), Thompkins (2004), Robb (2003), Carr (2001), Dysan and Freedman (1985), Lensmire (1994), and Calkins (1991) all identify, in some form, processes involved in writing. Culham (2005) and Tompkins (2004) subscribe to the step-by-step method of instruction that includes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, publishing. Culham (2005) includes a ‘share’ time in the middle of this process to allow students to retrieve feedback on their draft to ensure that their writing is clear.

The Evergreen curriculum (2002) is set up much like the processes that these scholars describe. The ‘before writing’ includes similar wording to those of Culham (2005) and Tompkins (2004) in their description of prewriting skills. Further, drafting, sharing, and revising steps mimic the expectations of the ‘during writing’ strategies the curriculum suggests to take. The ‘after writing’ section of the curriculum suggests that the writer could be editing and publishing work. I think educators believe that by teaching this method of writing instruction, students will be able to become proficient adult writers in the future.

Other researchers suggest that writing “is not linear but jumps from process to process in an organized way that is largely determined by the individual writer’s goal [and] has seemingly to have only minimal success in improving students’ writing” (Dyson & Freedman, 1985, p. 760). A more natural approach to writing not only teaches some valuable skills like the ones outlined in Saskatchewan’s curriculum, but also recognizes that “children do not develop as writers by simply imitating ‘experts’” (p. 761). Because as students learn, peers and learners “affect the teachers just as the teacher affects the learner, as [all] move to build a support structure that meets the learners needs” (p. 768). Other researchers add that “[w]hile highlighting the active and constructive nature of meaning-making by the child” (Tierney & Sheehy, 1991 p. 180) a student’s writing should also be informed through conversation.

Heffernan (2004), Robb (2003), Lensmire (1994), and Calkins (1991) claim the need to “provide opportunities for students to engage in and practice the craft of writing” (Lensmire, 1994, p. 3) through the use of writers workshops. They believe that through workshops students have more ownership and control of their writing than they do through a more phased or staged

process. Lensmire notes further that “[i]t is essential to put meaning-making at the center of literacy work with children, to enliven and transform classrooms with the voice and text of children” (p. 3). He goes on to suggest that “Traditional practices actually deny participants, demand passivity, and produce student resistance. Thus, workshop approaches emphasize the need for teachers to provide students with the opportunity to explore and learn about writing by writing” (p. 12). The writer’s workshop is meant to allow the process of writing to form a “thin line between work and play” (Calkins, 1991, p. 1) which not only includes stories that are real and familiar to the writer but “that bring with them the freedom to explore and act on our past, present, and future” (Heffernan, 2004, p. 3). According to the Evergreen Curriculum (2002) students learn skills and outcomes similar to those expected from the curriculum, but are delivered their learning opportunities through a more flexible and student centered method. Through mini lessons, conversations with peers and teachers, and varied forms of writing, writers workshops “bring the work of their lives to school [so] they will invest themselves heart and soul” (Calkins, 1991, p.304) into their writing.

The third foundational objective focuses on gaining the ability to self-assess and question to find ways to improve on personal learning. The goals here were not lengthy in their description, but proved to be necessary for a complete and rounded learner. They include “reflect upon own writing behaviours, skills, and strategies by asking questions such as ‘What did I do that worked well and made my writing clearer?’” (Evergreen Curriculum, 2002).

Through working with *Assessment For Learning* strategies, students are clearly able to reflect, talk about, and express what skills or processes they need to address to grow as writers. I will explain in greater detail some of the reasons and processes in place in *Assessment For Learning* a little further in my writings.

The Saskatoon School Division, in which I work, also has an expectation that all teachers from kindergarten to grade four use the strategies and attributes of the Picture Word Induction Model (PWIM) while teaching writing skills and processes in the classroom. PWIM is considered to be:

[A]n inquiry-oriented language arts strategy that uses pictures containing familiar objects and actions to elicit words from children’s listening and speaking vocabularies. Teachers use the PWIM with classes, small groups, and individuals to lead them into inquiring about words, adding words to their sight-word and writing vocabularies, discovering phonetic and

structural principles, and using observation and analysis in their study of reading and writing. (Calhoun, 1999, p. 21)

The instruction of PWIM cycles happens through moves that stress the “components of phonics, grammar, mechanics and usage” (Calhoun, 1999, p. 23). As connected to the teaching of writing, Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2009) indicate that students will have a correctly spelled picture dictionary to help launch them into formal writing. The authors say by making sentences out of the picture being used and repeating the process throughout the year, the students add the processes to their storehouse of knowledge. They go on to say students will study authors and use their devices to enhance their writing skills to reflect those authors. Teachers are then instructed to lead metacognitive discussions on title selection and sentence and paragraph building. “Thus, another major principle at work in the picture-word inductive model is that reading and writing are naturally connected and can be learned simultaneously, and later can be used together to advance one’s growth in language use rapidly and powerfully” (p. 133).

My Processes of Writing or Development of Writing

My learning of the writing process has had many influences. As I stated above, the mandated curriculum influenced me by giving me a template of ideas and outcomes to achieve within my educational year. The process set out by my division through implementing PWIM to my students has given me some non-negotiable methods to connect to my practice. However, other equally important concepts have been woven together to form a strong and effective process for students to find success in their writing. Both students and teachers need this woven tapestry of learning. For if “your obligation as a teacher is not simply to contain children but to help them overcome weaknesses...one must search for ways to reach everyone” (Lyons 1990, p. 164). In this chapter, I describe how and why I teach writing the way I do, as I attempt to reach all the children in my class.

When I first learned about *Assessment For Learning*, I set about in the last few years to introduce the practice and strategies into my classroom. Therefore to begin the process of writing, my students and I discussed what we knew about writing and what we were going to learn about it. Davies (2007) has suggested that when students ‘begin their learning with the end in mind,’ they use familiar language that is meaningful to them. It also gives them permission to share and explain their ideas about the topic being discussed and to formulate a guide to follow

through their investigation, assessment, and evaluation of the work. I felt I needed to change my teaching so my end results were “not merely to keep track of learning, but to help students learn more. The tools and strategies [help] students go on internal control and take responsibility for their learning” (Stiggins, 2008, p. 35).

In our conversations on what we could learn about writing, I asked the students to tell or show me where they could find ideas about writing or cues to help them develop their writing. This idea of pre-writing is a well-recognized design by which to start the process of effective writing. During this time, students “come up with ideas for the work” (Culham, 2005, p. 47) they will become involved with. These ideas or ‘wonders,’ as Culham calls them, should help students “figure out the possibilities for writing” (p.49). These possibilities then can become the ‘targets’ (Davies, 2007; Stiggins, 2008) for the learning that will come. When students are involved in this process of conversation in a group setting, they “can check their thinking and performance and develop deeper understandings of their learning” (Davies, 2007, p.7). Still early in the year my community of learners and I continued our conversation to deepen this budding understanding. Students thought we could look in the books we had both for words and good written work examples, or they could ask a teacher, like me, for help. With some more questioning and discussion, they also came up with using words around the classroom walls or the words on our Picture Word Induction Model boards to help them to write. I was surprised to observe that students never thought about talking to a learning friend to help them with a writing problem.

My students and I then made a quick list of what attributes we needed to have well written pieces of work. This list was the first time my students were introduced to criteria making. This list becomes the foundation from which we build our growing knowledge. “[A]uthorizing students’ perspectives can directly improve educational practice because when teachers listen to and learn from students they can begin to see the world from those students’ perspectives” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). The building of criteria helps students to learn to take their natural abilities to ‘think’ and “learn how to focus and organize their thinking into reasoning” (Stiggins, 2008, p. 56). Not only does the practice provide a visual map of the ideas surrounding writing, it also “keeps students engaged and involved by building ownership, and helps teachers identify the needs of the group” (Davies, 2007, p. 57). Students can then use this knowledge to provide a next step in what they need to learn in the writing process and what they

already understand. Students expanded on the beginning criteria for good writing practice that I co-constructed with my students as they grew as writers. They used the ideas and targets that had been developed to self-assess their progress. These self-monitoring students “are developing and practicing the skills needed to be lifelong, independent learners” (Davies 2007, p. 57).

“Recognition and the values placed on students’ prior knowledge of their illiteracies and culture are the focal point for students’ adjusting to schooling and...an important element of understanding how learning takes place” (Giampapa, 2004, p. 415).

Modeling effective feedback processes is a tool I used with my students. Calkins (1991) asks, “How can we expect students to write with vigour and voice if they are silenced throughout the rest of the day?” (p. 13). In readings and research, I learned that teachers can assist in positive learning by “clarifying goals, enhancing commitment or increased effort to reaching them through feedback. Teachers can create a learning environment in which students develop self-regulation and error detection skills” (Hattie & Timperly, 2007, p. 87). McTighe and O’Connor (2005) add that feedback “must be timely, specific, understandable to the receiver, and formed to allow for self-adjustment on the students’ part” (p. 18). Davies (2007) concludes:

When students understand what needs to be learned and are involved in gathering evidence of their learning, it is easier for them to see evaluation as a part of the learning process, rather than as a defining moment describing success or failure. Teachers seeking to improve student learning are advised to reduce the amount of evaluative feedback and increase the amount of descriptive feedback. (p. 18)

Feedback is an important way to allow “youngsters to feel confident to take part, knowing what matters about talking is not how they sound but what they think” (Goodwin, 2001, p. 31). Students need to use a range of talk or feedback “for a range of purposes and to gain an appreciation of the needs of their audience” (p. 85). Understanding this important element, I strove to teach my students three styles of feedback to help express ideas and improve written work: teacher-student conferencing, peer-to-peer exchange, and small group conferencing.

Our classroom began with a teacher-student conference with me leading the discussions for improvements. This usually took place with just the student and me involved in a space away from the rest of the students, though on occasion other students were around to hear the feedback and it turned into a small group conference. By listening to what a student was saying about his or her learning, there needs to be a “shift on the part of teachers, students... in the ways of

thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power, and self” (Cook-Sather 2002, p. 9). Culham (2005) would term this concept of talking and listening to students as either being in the sharing/revising stage or editing stages of writing processes. With the sharing/revising process, students have finished writing and then share what they have written with the teacher, have been encouraged on their progress, and then also invited to make changes and go on. Culham believed these changes should expand the students’ writing to help in “making their writing more powerful and interesting” (p.56). One might think my students and I were using the editing stage at this time because we talked about “spelling, punctuation, grammar usage, and paragraphing. In other words, we looked at whether the piece meets the conventions of writing” (p.61). In my practice, we went deeper than the one time process of sharing. My process of teacher-student conferencing could take place once or numerous times in the process of writing one piece of work. Unlike Culham’s perceptions of the linear step-by-step processes of pre-writing, draft, share, revise, edit and polish, I want my students to experience their learning in a continuous cycle. Davies (2007) called this concept the assessment-learning cycle, which allows students to have many opportunities to revise, check, share, and edit their written work. The continuous cycle allows me as the teacher not to provide the only form of contact and feedback they will receive in the process.

To ensure students do get other forms of contact and feedback, I used the second style of feedback, peer-to-peer exchange. I wanted the students not only to engage in their writing but also to be a positive influence for their learning friends through the feedback process. Literacy processes are not a “discrete set of skills ... [but] a set of socially and culturally constituted practices enacted across and within social and institutional spaces” (Giampapa, 2004, p. 410). I wanted the students to have discussions with each other that allowed both parties to feel encouraged by what was being said, encouraged not only to talk about others’ work, but also about their own writing. I began to teach the students how to be effective learning friends by first modeling for them what it looked like. When we begin the writing process, I started the process of conferencing with the students about their written work. We ‘edited’ their work by talking about both things that worked and things that needed improvement. I then asked the students to work with a learning friend to give each other both a positive aspect and an improvement suggestion. The students were given two sticky notes that they could write or draw on after they had read and talked about their learning partner’s work. One of the sticky notes was

for the things they liked about the writing and the other was for what they thought that person needed to make 'stronger' or improve on. Students gave these sticky notes to their learning friends and explained what they had written on it. The friends were then able to make a choice: if they liked the suggestion given they were encouraged to change their writing; if they did not, they left their writing as it was. They also had an instant constructive feedback given to them from a peer. This "helps students to gain a strong sense of their own abilities" (Mitra, 2003, p. 290) and build self-esteem and self-assurance in their writing practices. This ownership of knowledge creates deeper connections to the learners feelings of belonging and others "respect their opinions and listen to what they believe" (p. 652). Allowing students to have a voice in the process of writing provides an individual "a sense of control over her environment, [and] she will feel more intrinsically motivated to participate" (p. 290) in the process. Mitra (2003) described this process as the growth of agency or the increased ability of students to articulate opinions, construct new identities, and develop greater leadership abilities.

I used small group conferencing as the third way to help my students give feedback to each other. Traditional practices of teaching writing "actually deny participation, demand passivity and produce student resistance" (Lensmire, 2000, p. 12) but with similarities to the process of conducting a writers workshop where "approaches emphasize the need for teachers to provide students with the opportunity to explore and learn about writing" (p. 12). When my students were first asked to work as learning teams to give feedback to each other, they were very uncomfortable. They did not have enough language to express how their learning friends could improve their writing and had not practised leading discussions on learning away from a teachers' guiding hand. Lensmire would say that the students had not yet entered the 'carnival' of giving feedback where they were active participants, were given free and familiar contact with people, and were allowed a playful, familiar relationship with the world. We began our small group discussions by having students read their writing to each other and then use sticky notes to write positive and constructive feedback. They were then asked to talk about the feedback they produced with the group of learners they were working with. This "discussing was collaboratively establishing a learning place in which taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing your ideas and feelings, and taking responsibility" (Carr, 2001, p.136) for your feedback were important. I would sometimes send students back to talk about certain elements in the writing so they were forced outside their comfort zone a little.

Much as in a writing workshop, I needed to be “responsible for creating the context within which these dialogues, as well as dialogues among students, take place” (Lensmire 2000, p. 41). In small group interactions, much like the “environment of the [writers] workshop, the student’s interactions with the teacher and other students are strictly and externally prescribed. The child can collaborate in writing a story with peers, get help from the teacher with a particular writing problem, seek out response to a draft or final copy of a story from classmates” (p. 43). In this forum, most students seemed to feel comfortable. Students were not put in a position “at sharing time that may have had negative consequences for a student writer” (Heffernan, 2004, p. 15), but, much as Lensmire and Heffernan suggest, allowed to find a safe and supportive environment in which to share and learn.

Growth in the classroom’s safe and caring environment became evident as the students interacted with each other. When asked to work in learning teams to discuss elements of writing or a peers’ written work, most students were quickly able to talk about their ideas, and how they thought things could be made ‘stronger’. These discussions allowed the students to make “judgments and assessments public” (Carr, 2001, p. 125) and form connections to “another’s point of view in familiar circumstances” (p. 131). The room buzzed with students working together to solve the writing problem they had in front of them. They talked about attributes in the writing, read and discussed each other’s writing, and gave solid suggestions on what they should improve. Through this social sharing the students began to form “both the enduring form of narrative organization and the perceived value to self and others” (p. 131) as well as “expressing diverse ways of making sense of the world” (Lensmire, 2000. p. 41). I was proud of the interaction they were achieving and a bit shocked at the length of time they remained engaged in the process. Some students struggled when it came to writing on the sticky notes. It was a cognitive challenge for them to put into words the spoken suggestions they had made. I attributed this to factors like lack of language/spelling skills, the need to practise expressing their thoughts, and the fear of not giving good or ‘strong’ feedback to their peers. Through continued practice, students’ voices will “make available a multiplicity of texts that can be examined, learned from and criticized” (p. 65).

Over the last years, I had been collecting student work samples. I glued them onto construction paper and laminated them so students could handle them as much as they needed. The samples that I use vary from a beginner writer level to a developing level of writing that an

accomplished grade-three student should be able to achieve with success. As teachers we often “define what students need to learn and be able to do without showing them what it looks like when they do” (Davies, 2007, p. 33). Samples of writing “illustrate the description of learning and answer the question: What will it look like when I’ve learned it?” (p. 35). Because I had students in my grade one-two split classroom that ranged from beginning writing stages to grade-three level, I needed samples to facilitate all learning. Because organization of ideas and processes of writing “may well be the hardest trait for students to master” (Culham, 2005, p. 117) it is effective to give a road map toward success in the targets they will reach next. The students and I first went over the ways to use the samples to help them with their writing. I modeled how to study the sample and the reasons why I put them into the categories I did. We discussed and practised the principles of the mechanics of printing and writing as the samples showed us. I reminded them of some of the things we had talked about in the classroom. I then asked them to use the ‘schema’ from their brains to think about other things they might have seen or already knew about high-quality written work. The samples I gathered led us to “gather enough evidence to lead us to a confident conclusion” (Stiggins, 2008, p. 90) about our decisions. Samples are also a functional way to show student growth to outside stakeholders like parents or administrators by “comparing students’ work to samples, models, and criteria” (Davies, 2007, p. 37). The sequenced samples also help these stakeholders see the targets the students are striving for in their next learning times.

The students were also encouraged to compare their own work to the samples available. By doing so, students were “able to select different ways to show what they learned ...[and therefore this] ...form of representation is less likely to be a barrier to their success” (Davies, 2007, p. 37). What struck me when I asked students to view the samples and talk about them to categorize them was the growth in their language. Each time I asked them to do this activity they could talk more and with more depth and understanding of what they wanted to tell me. This anecdotal observation began the thread to my thesis question which addresses students’ ability to articulate learning. I was curious to know what classroom assessment practices might assist students in talking about strengths and weaknesses in their own writing.

Throughout implementing mandated and expected strategies and outcomes, as well as connecting these to my own practice, I felt as if there was a measurable phenomenon happening with the students. With all the interactive and community building activities being experienced,

I wondered whether my students were able to *articulate* learning about their writing. What was the growth that the students were experiencing in their ability to express through speech? Were the students actually stretching their ability to communicate their *learning* therefore showing and expressing their own growth as writers? With these wonders in my mind, I felt the need to formally question my conjecture. These were the questions I had in hand:

1. How do students articulate their understanding of accomplished or needed improvements in their written work?
2. How is students' articulation related to *Assessment For Learning* practices that I implemented in my classroom?

I took the next steps in making some of those formal conclusions through the research journey.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Problem and Perspective

I had to find a research method that would both fit my style and my questions:

1. How do students articulate their understanding of accomplished or needed improvements in their written work?
2. How is students' articulation related to *Assessment For Learning* practices that I implemented in my classroom?

I tried to allow my students not to be “passive receivers of information but instead very active in the learning and creating meaning that is relevant to them as they move through the school year” (Clark, 2010, p. 37). This belief made me a constructivist teacher or one who uses “an intensely subjective, personal process and structure that each person constantly and actively modifies in light of new experiences” (Abbott, 1999, p. 67). Much like Dewey’s views on progressive education, I believe that students should relate to the world and their lives and use “problem based learning where the problem needs to be new enough that it is challenging to the student and not easily solved but it cannot be so difficult or removed from previous experience and knowledge that the student is over whelmed or has no basis with which to begin formulating a response” (Clark, 2010, p.39).

Because I had an inkling of my perspective, I knew I needed to use a research method that was “rooted in the meanings that are constructed and attached to everyday life” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 77). These meanings, then, needed to show that the “patterns of explanations are equally legitimate and useful and may be a better scientific goal for many purposes” (P.79). Through my understanding of the basic of Naturalistic Inquiry underpinned by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Bowen (2006), and Radar (2010), I felt I could build a foundation of research.

Starting not with a hypothesis but with a desire to find a perspective that “emerges not out of objective view but rather as a composite picture of how people think” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.80) made sense to me. Lincoln and Guba believe that naturalists need both to interact and influence each other through inquiry and find a ‘phenomenon’ that is grounded in the data that is collected out of the interactions. In my opinion, interaction of the naturalistic inquiry method and grounded theory seemingly work together to facilitate good practice. Grounded Theory, according to Bowen (2006), is an inductive system of collecting data, analysing them,

and finding a theory that is ‘grounded’ in the relationship that is formed. These discovered “connections among the grounded indicators evident in participants’ responses, understanding how these emerge as conceptual categories and patterns, and then integrating these emergent themes” (Rader 2010, p. 2) outlines the gist of grounded theory. These ideas and processes helped me to find, through data and patterns that emerged, in what ways my students were able to articulate meaning about their writing.

Procedure

Instrument

In Naturalistic Inquiry “the instrument of choice is the human” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). Lincoln and Guba suggest a number of accommodations that a person could make. In my case, these accommodations would include:

1. representing a variety of perspectives or in my classroom standpoints of both living and learning
2. representing a multitude of disciplines or in our case levels of abilities
3. pursuing multiple strategies of instruction or engagement
4. reflecting in a substantive and methodological way
5. organizing to provide internal checks

I was looking for an increased understanding of complex phenomena in this study – one is children learning to write and the other is the relationship between learning to write and learning how to assess one’s own writing. I wanted the instrument (myself) to feel part of the learning and to be comfortable to seek knowledge and educational growth. By using the five examples in the list above, the students should find a positive and productive climate and culture to learn and grow in.

Sample

The sample that I used in this study involved the students in my grade one-two classroom. There were two samples, one a subset of the other. The first sample was all the students whose parents gave consent, and students gave assent. Everyone but two students fell into this group “(which I learned at the end of June. Consent and assent forms were returned in sealed envelopes, so that I would not be affected by parent and student willingness to participate in the study.). As the year passed, nine students left my classroom and seven new students joined my classroom. A core group of eighteen students started and finished the year with me. Because

this transient flow of students interfered with my ability to get consent and assent from some of the new students, their data were not used. I did not know who had given consent and assent from the children who started in September, so all the children in the class were audio taped in large and small group conversations in case I needed their conversations for data. I collected sample assignments, as well. These data would have been collected anyway, as part of my teaching activities. At the end of June, when I opened the envelopes to see who had given consent and assent, I could then report on those children, but I focused, due to the amount of data, on six purposely selected students selected at the end of June, after the children had graduated from my class and I had opened the envelopes.

Because the students were unable to declare their own ability to consent to participate in the research, I asked their parents. Nineteen children were given permission, by their parents, to participate. I asked the children to give assent to participate. Nineteen children gave assent. From these two groups, I selected children only whose parents had given consent and who had given assent. See Appendix B for the consent form that I sent home.

Because the data collected for the study are the data I would normally collect to assess student learning, parents' consent and children's assent were not an issue for data collection. However, at the end of June, I learned who had consented and assented and from this sample I selected six students for thorough analysis. These six students were chosen for these characteristics:

1. A boy and a girl who were struggling writers for their expected levels for their grade and age group
2. A boy and a girl who were performing at typical expected levels for their grade and age group
3. A boy and a girl who were above grade level in their writing skills expected for their grade and age group.

There were many reasons for my selection of these students. The first is so that we could analyse the different growth between emergent, expected, and above grade-level students. These comparisons not only showed me any differences in the students' articulation gains but also gave me a broad view of the students in the classroom.

Another reason to have these samples was to be sure I was looking at boys' and girls' growth. In my experience, the two groups develop skills at different rates. Having three of each

gender under examination was a fair and reasonable way to address the expected growth of the students. With a sample size of six, I did not make generalizations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that I did purposeful rather than representative sampling based on the interactions *with* the samples. Purposeful samples make an “effort to uncover multiple realities, local conditions, local mutual shaping and local values in order to devise grounded theory” (Glaser, 2004, p. 5). The interactions of the purposeful samples will “include as much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and constructions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). The purpose of this type of sample allowed all the information and interactions involved to form an emergent design in which a “grounded theory can be based” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). As well, “the quality, not the quantity, of individuals and their experiences is paramount” (Rader, 2010, p. 12) to investigate a deeper understanding of the question.

Because there were 33 different students in my classroom throughout the year, examining all the data deeply and intensely would be very time consuming. Therefore, for the sake of time and personnel (me alone) the ‘deep’ examination of only six students seemed a more achievable goal.

There were some drawbacks to having a grade one-two group as a sample group. The students were unable to review any notes, transcripts from taped interview, or other data that I kept about them. If the group were older, they would be more able to review and check the reliability of the research.

Another concern with the sample group being used was that they might “engage in boasting, exaggeration, or even outright fabrication while taking advantage of the special ‘spotlight’ they are in” (Rader, 2010, p. 14). Could this happen in my study? Because I was completing the study in Saskatchewan, the students had to follow a specific curriculum and the expectations provided in that document. As well as having these expectations, the students in this study had to talk about their writing. It would have been difficult for them to boast, fabricate, or lie about the work that they were talking about. As well, there were many samples of work that I used to validate the students’ level of work.

Lastly, none of the students was separated out as “being special” because all students were doing the same work, all were being interviewed, all were having copies of their work being made. I chose the six children for in-depth study based on gender and ability. No student knew who would be chosen for in-depth study.

Process

The procedure for this study was based on the classroom culture I develop each year with students. I had them participate and learn in the classroom as they would if the study were not taking place. At the start of the year, I gave the students a pre-test to determine what kind of articulation they had in regards to assessing their own written work. I did this testing in a one-on-one setting and I audio taped the sessions to ensure accuracy in what the students said. I asked them to choose one piece of writing from their writing journals. Because we had been in school only a short time, the students had only five or six writing pieces to choose from. I then asked them to either read what they had written or tell me about the story on their page. When they finished I asked them two more pointed questions: 1) What do you like about your writing? 2) What could you do to improve your writing or make it stronger? After this process was finished, I felt I had a baseline of students' knowledge surrounding articulation of their work samples.

The implementation of *Assessment For Learning* practices was a slow and steady process that took place throughout the year. We began with introducing criteria building in the classroom. This process took place by establishing rules and expectations in the classroom, and then transferred into building ideas about good writing. I used the practice of criteria building continuously through the school year, a practice that allowed the students to “include a multitude of inexpressible associations which give rise to new meanings, new ideas and new applications of the old [and] that each person, novice or expert, has stores of tacit knowledge with which to build new understandings” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 196). In other words, students developed tacit knowledge surrounding their understanding of criteria building and writing development.

The next steps to take in the progress of building *Assessment For Learning* skills was to introduce the students to using writing samples as a tool in the writing process. The provided writing samples were ones that students in other years in my classroom had written. These samples varied both in level of writing skill and types of writing. I used them not to “focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 201). The students had many opportunities to study, talk, and think about the samples not only with me as their teacher, but also with other students and adult professionals that interact in the classroom. I taught the explicit examples of positive and productive writing skills in conjunction with my modeling

language development. These combinations took place during the school year and grew as the students' knowledge of written expectations grew.

With the students in a continuous cycle of criteria building mixed with investigation and talking about writing samples and how to make improvement to them, I then asked them to participate in the next process: the introduction of building continuums. With me, the teacher, as both the expert in how students should develop as writers in grade one or two and the facilitator of the students' learning, I asked them to classify the writing samples in a continuum from "beginning writing" through various qualities of "improving writings".

Throughout this process, I also asked the students why they put each sample in the place they did as well as encouraged them to ask their peers the same questions. This development of common language not only facilitated the students' knowledge building, but also allowed them to have the words necessary to then express questions and understandings of others about writing.

This gain in knowledge helped facilitate the next process for implementing *Assessment For Learning* into the classroom. With the understanding of expectations from the criteria – language to express their ideas and practice to understand how to review writing, the students then used their own writing to make improvements. Within this process, the student interacted in the classroom with me, their peers, samples available, and the criteria they helped to develop. In *Assessment For Learning*, the teachers' role is again to guide the students' understanding towards improvements that could be made to the writing. The peers are there both to give and receive ideas on how to improve their written work; other professionals in the classroom are encouraged to be facilitators of these developments in the students. Data that I collected at this time included my anecdotal and field notes, which were unstructured, the occasional audiotaping of students talking about learning, and written records of the criteria the students developed. An example from the eighty-three pages of transcript which date from September 21, 2010 to June 8th, 2011 are available in Appendix A. The following table shows when *Assessment For Learning* strategies were introduced into the classroom.

Table 1: Assessment For Learning Strategies Implemented

Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
pre-interview									
	co-constructing criteria about what we knew about writing	co-constructing criteria about what we knew about writing							
		categorizing criteria into word spy, strong printing, writing mechanics, and thinking about writing							
			use samples of writing to compare and discuss the differences in writing	use samples of writing to compare and discuss the differences in writing					
		one-on-one conferencing	one-on-one conferencing	one-on-one conferencing	one-on-one conferencing	one-on-one conferencing	one-on-one conferencing	one-on-one conferencing	
group discussions	group discussions	group discussions	Group discussions	group discussions	revisited criteria and began to give peer-to peer feedback	peer-to peer feedback group discussions	peer-to peer feedback group discussions	peer-to peer feedback group discussions	
						put samples into a continuum of writing			
							built criteria about continuum		
								articulated learning about their own writing in groups and in peer-to-peer conversations	
practice learning	practice learning	practice learning	Practice learning	practice learning	practice learning	practice learning	practice learning	practice learning	practice learning
									post-interview

These processes took a cyclical pattern in the classroom. As the students grew and learned, they were challenged to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the writing process, which included the language they used to represent both the ideas of writing and the words used in the written work itself. Toward the end of the school year, I again had a one-on-one conversation with each student. I asked them to read or tell me about a recent piece of written work they completed. I asked again the two questions from the pre-test interview: 1) What do you like about your writing? 2) What could you do to improve your writing or make it stronger? These data gave me the evidence to begin to understand and analyze if the students

did indeed improve on articulating their learning in writing while using *Assessment For Learning* practices.

Data and Analysis

Data

There were many forms of data used in this study. They included:

1. Pre and post interviews: these interviews took place with me (the teacher). I asked the same question of the students each time in relation to their writing. When interviewing I had the students in a quiet room with as few distractions and interruptions as possible.

The questions were;

1. Can you read or tell me about your writing?
2. What do you like about your writing?
3. What can you improve about your writing?

The session was audio taped to ensure an accurate record of the answers.

2. Audio and video tape: taping of random lessons, interviews, and interactions gave a rich and full detailed record of interactions with students and their articulated ideas.
3. Work samples/artefacts: I kept all the students' writing so that each student and I could compare that student's work over the term, to determine in what ways the student's writing skill had improved.
4. Observations: watching and making field notes on what students were doing and saying demonstrated what they knew or learned about their learning.
5. Personal journal: this was a record of my thinking about the implementation of the *Assessment For Learning* process. It allowed me to have a time line, and a record of my processes through the study.
6. Interview (outside of the pre and post interviews): I periodically had interviews with the students both one-on-one and in small groups. We discussed our learning about writing and the processes of *Assessment For Learning*. This procedure not only allowed conversations to grow, but also allowed me to better understand and assess any gains in knowledge. When interviewing I had the students in a quiet room with as few distractions and interruptions as possible.
7. Peer interactions: students were asked to both tell and write other students about needed improvements in their writing and things that were positive. These interactions

demonstrated growth in what students were able to express. I archived the noted work and put the spoken words in my journal or in observational field notes.

I was able to conduct interviews in this way because I had other people to help me. I had co-workers or the Educational Assistant from my classroom work in the room with students while I conducted one-on-one interviews.

Analysis

“Data analysis is open-ended and inductive for the naturalist” researcher (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 224) . Because of this perspective, it is difficult to represent an organized and thought out plan for analysis. Such qualitative research “does not start with hypotheses or perceived notions. Instead, in accordance with its inductive nature, it involves the researchers’ attempt to discover, understand and interpret what is happening in the research context” (Bowen, 2006, p. 14). With no working hypotheses used in naturalistic inquiry, there is nothing “that can preordinately guide data-analysis decisions: these must be made as the inquiry proceeds” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 224). This act of inquiry allows researchers to watch the process “emerge, develop, unfold” (p. 225). This inductive way of viewing the data allows researchers to make sense of the information that they gather after the process is finished.

This process is based in Grounded Theory and as stated earlier is “grounded in the perspectives of those being studied, so as to not only generate theory in the interest of furthering knowledge, but also providing a more accessible platform for voices otherwise unheard” (Rader, 2010, p. 2).

Grounded Theory is “generalized by themes, and themes emerge from the data during analysis, capturing the essence of meaning or experiences drawn” (Bowen, 2006, p. 13). Because the development of theory is grounded in the data that are collected, a constant comparison of the data will need to take place. This comparison has a process of “comparing incidents found in the data to previous incidents and categorizes them according to whether they fit existing or warrant new codes, properties or categories” (Rader, 2010, p.26). In my study, I analysed to determine students’ increase in their ability to articulate writing changes in a classroom where I had used *Assessment For Learning* strategies. I looked for the “themes” or threads that emerged from my collected data. I did this by doing three things to investigate the data that were provided by the pre and post interviews, samples of student work, observing of students, and my review of the taped transcripts.

I first looked for concepts that students developed over the course of the year. This is what I as a teacher was most interested in: student learning. These concepts varied from observing students' growth in adapting a higher level of writing mechanics to seeing improvements in student grammar and punctuation use in written work. I also wanted to observe students' adaptation and use of the strategies that *Assessment For Learning* provided such as giving and receiving feedback or articulating their growth in understanding the composition of strong written work.

Then I examined the language the students used over the term to express the concepts they were learning. Because I and other adults that worked with my students used specific language to introduce and explain *Assessment For Learning* strategies, I wanted to see if the students picked up on the language we used. I began this process by investigating what language the students first used when talking about the samples provided and how the writers could improve their writing. The students then explained how they had or could improve description in their own writing. For example, if in the first interview, students talked only about grammar, I then taught them about more than grammar – i.e. what strong writing looks like. In the next recording of students constructing criteria, I looked at their ability to identify grammar, as well as their ability to pay attention to the qualities of strong writing. This process showed me that they developed and grew as learners. Also, having the students explain how their illustrations connected to their stories indicated their intellectual development.

Lastly I looked at the concepts that related to the use of language and if this use connected to the practice of using *Assessment For Learning* in the classroom. Some of the connections I looked for were the words students used, the concepts they talked about, and the growth they showed through the teaching year. I wanted to see the connections between language and growth then connect this information to the *Assessment For Learning* strategies introduced in the classroom.

Schedule

The schedule that I used was both concrete and unpredictable. I concretely established my research from September 1, 2010, until June 30, 2011, which was a complete school year in Saskatchewan. As for the processes that took place in my classroom, there was no concrete time line. As with most studies using naturalistic inquiry, events were “always diverging rather than

converging, the time span of an inquiry is not determined by a predetermined schedule but by practical considerations” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 225).

After the school year was complete, I then did the analysis of the findings. This process took place in a span of about a year. The analysis includes not only the facts of the study but also recommendations on the use of *Assessment For Learning* practices in the classroom.

Ethics

To be ethical is to ensure the relationship between researcher and researched is healthy, and is not based on power. The students who participate have to do so because they choose to. Since these were children, and were my students, specific provisions were put into place. Parents and children were informed about the research, and about the purpose of the research. As well, they were advised that: their participation or not would have no effect on how their children were taught, nor how I perceived their children. To ensure that I was not affected by the children’s participation, all parents returned permission forms in sealed envelopes. Data were collected from all children – but these data were part of my normal teaching practice. Only at the end of June, when the children graduated from my class, did I open the envelopes to see whose data would be used for the study.

Anonymity for the children who participated was assured, with students assigned pseudonyms. Any information that might identify a child was generalized. For example, some of the children in the study spoke languages other than English. The information that they spoke another language at home was important to understanding the child, but the specific language was not. Since more than half of the children spoke another language at home, the second language information was not a breach of anonymity. However, listing the specific language would have been.

To conduct an ethical research procedure, a few items needed to be in place. I obtained permission from the University to collect data and use these data to write my thesis (see Appendix D). This approval then was forwarded to my school board. After close scrutiny of the study they, too, granted me permission to move forward with my research and data collection.

As mentioned previously I then obtained permission from my students and families to be involved in the study (see Appendix B). I did not open the permission letters from parents until the end of the school year, ensuring that I did not teach any students differently than I would have if the research were not being conducted.

I also ensured all stakeholders in the study that all students would have pseudonyms. This way the students would not have their specific names written in the paper.

Because this was a qualitative study, the influence of how I taught and the relationship I had with my students influenced the learning. The reality in qualitative research is similar to what is discussed regarding the portraiture method where “the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85).

Understanding this, I did not change who I was as a teacher to influence or manipulate the data I obtained. As I always do, I taught the students what I believed they needed to be successful, competent, and independent learners.

Chapter 4: How My Students and I Learned To Understand Quality Writing

Participants and Process

Picking the six students to use as a focal point for my research was a challenge. Although most of the students' parents gave permission and children assented, the classroom was transient. Throughout the school year, I had approximately twelve students from both grade one and grade two leave and twelve new students arrive into my classroom. My core sample group of students, who stayed with me from the start of the year to the finish, consisted of both grade one and two participants. Within this core group, there were more boys than girls and most of the students fell in either a lower achieving group or an above average achieving group. Upon review of the data, I chose the following six students. Darryl and Janet, both grade two students, were below grade level, Al and Bev, again both grade two students, were at grade level and Jeff and Anne who were in grade one. Anne and Jeff were achieving reading and comprehension scores that were higher than the other four students in the data group therefore both were above grade level. Because I had consent from most of my families to be involved in my research I was able to observe, report and make conclusions based on other students' learning as well as my classroom as a whole. This allowed my data to represent specifics and conclusions on how students interacted with *Assessment For Learning* strategies.

I had three questions that I asked each student in both the pre and post interview. The questions were:

1. Can you read or tell me about your writing?
2. What do you like about your writing?
3. What can you improve about your writing?

I chose these questions not only because they were open-ended enough for the students to answer in more than one word but also because they were simple enough for them to remember and use to expand their knowledge throughout the teaching year.

I conducted the interviews using a recording device so I could capture not only the words of the students but also the feel and tone of their voices. Using these three factors, words, feel, and tone, I felt I would be better able to have a fuller picture not only of the students' ability to articulate but also of the subtle changes and thus better interpret their feelings. When interviewing I had the students in a quiet room with as few distractions and interruptions as

possible. I felt that this way they would not be influenced by their peers nor feel embarrassed or wary about speaking in front of them.

Table 2: Participant Traits

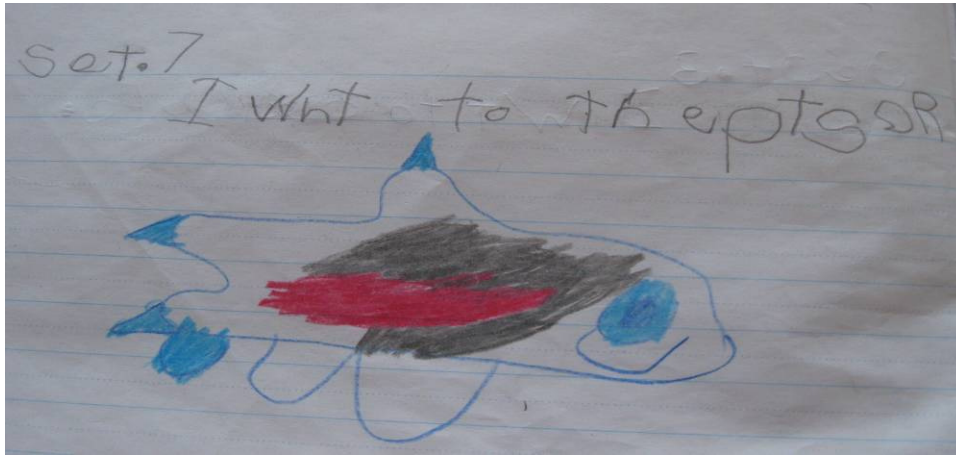
Student	Ability level	Gender	Languages at home	Grade
Darryl	Below grade level	male	English	2
Janet	Below grade level	Female	English	2
Bev	At grade level	Female	English and other language	2
Al	At grade level	Male	English and other language	2
Anne	Above grade level	Female	English	1
Jeff	Above grade level	Male	Other language	1

Pre-Interview September

Darryl: Grade Two

Darryl was a shy boy who came to me with many learning struggles. Unable to write thoughts or ideas onto paper, he was at an early kindergarten level of reading. This assessment was established by past performances and evaluations by his previous teachers. The Educational Assistant (EA) in my classroom assisted by taking him with a small group of students into a quiet space and then helped him spell words and sort out ideas for his writing. Because he did not do any writing in the classroom without adult assistance, I believed he would benefit from this extra help. Because he was shy, he also had trouble verbalizing his learning. At times, he would stop what he was doing and try to engage his peers in off task conversation; I believed he did this to draw attention away from his school work related struggles.

In our first interview, the base-line interview, Darryl was apprehensive and quiet. By the look of his rigid body and serious face, I suspected he was anxious about talking with me. He chose a piece of journal writing that was simple and easy for him to communicate about.



"Sept. 7 – I went to the pet store"

Darryl had very rapid answers to the questions I asked. These quick answers were basic and he was either not willing or unable to expand on any of his statements. By observing his tone, body language, and word choice, I believed Darryl wanted this interview to be over quickly. I used Darryl's interview as a sample of how I conducted the interviews. The interviews were one-on-one in a quiet setting. I tried to have a comfortable and social conversation to elicit a straightforward response from the students.

Teacher: If Miss Barr was to say to you, Darryl we are going to take what you wrote right there and we are going to improve it, make it better and make it stronger. What do you think you could do with your writing on that page to make it better.....make it better quality?

Darryl: Write more.

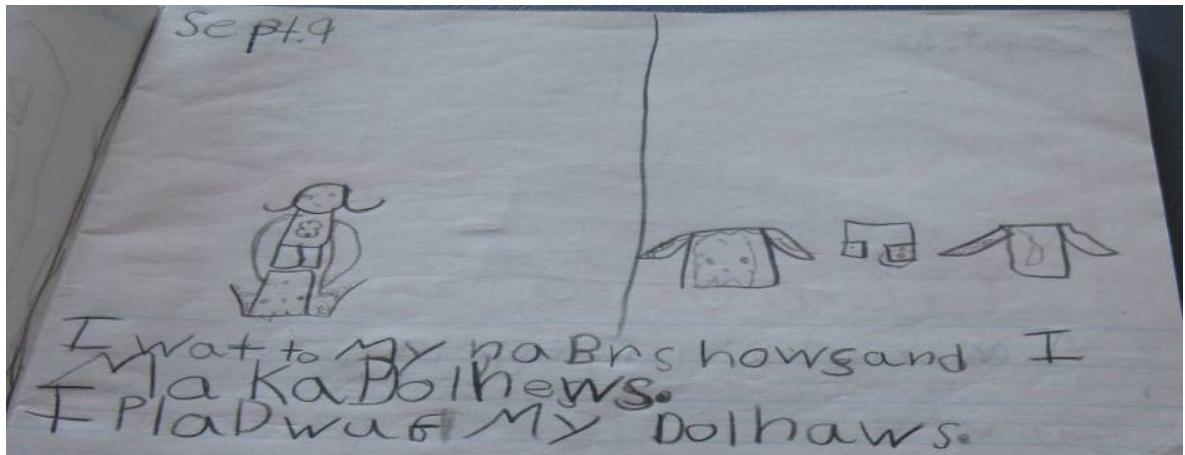
Teacher: Anything else you can think about...Nothing else?

Darryl: Nope. (Transcript, Page 13)

Darryl's lack of expansion in his answers was typical for him. In a classroom setting, he acted much the same.

Janet: Grade Two

Janet, a girl who tried hard to learn, was below average in her reading abilities and began her year as a weak writer.

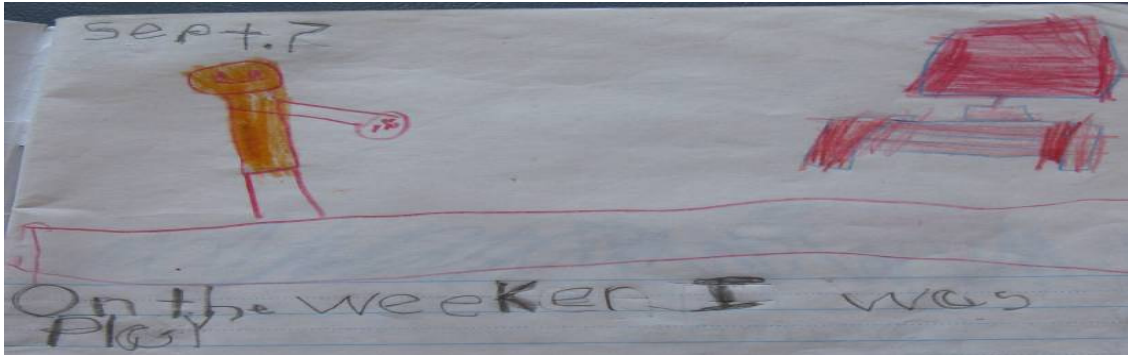


"Sept. 9 – I went to my neighbors' house and I make a dollhouse. I played with my dollhouse."

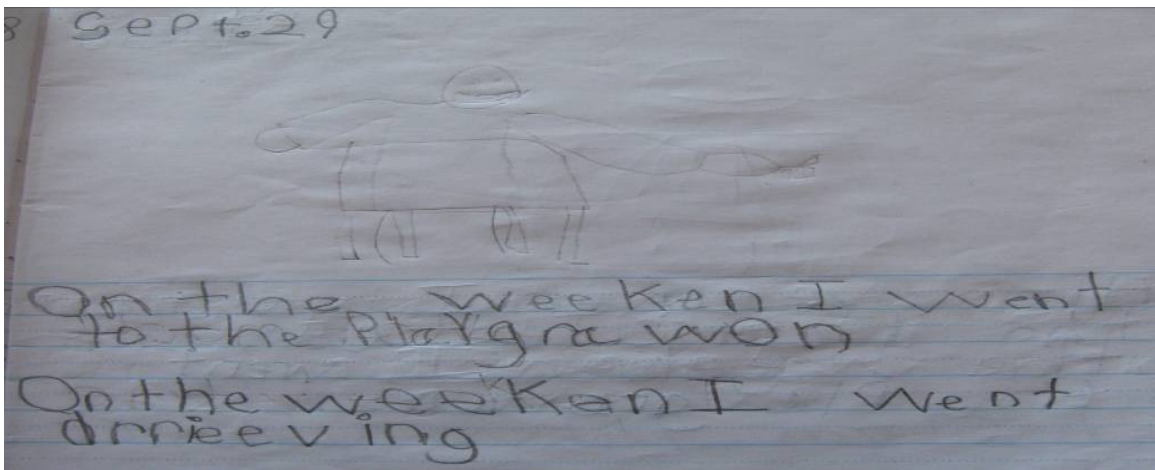
Her beginning interview was rather short because she did not answer the questions asked in much detail. Observing her word choice, tone and body language, I noted that she was uncomfortable with being asked the questions in the interview. When I asked her the final question, how could she make her writing stronger, she thought she could "fix it up" (Transcripts, p. 4). She had no answer as to how she might be able to do this other than making letters "better". At this time I was unsure if Janet did not have the language skills to answer the question or if she lacked the knowledge base to be able to answer the questions. Either way, she did not take the time to ponder an answer to the questions asked.

Al: Grade Two

Al was a boy who was willing to talk, share and learn. Learning new things rarely frustrated him. He not only helped his learning friends but also did it with a smile on his face. He came from a home where two languages' were spoken and he sometimes became confused by the two languages vocabularies. Al spoke only English, but could understand his parents when they speak to him.



“Sept. 7 – On the weekend I was play”



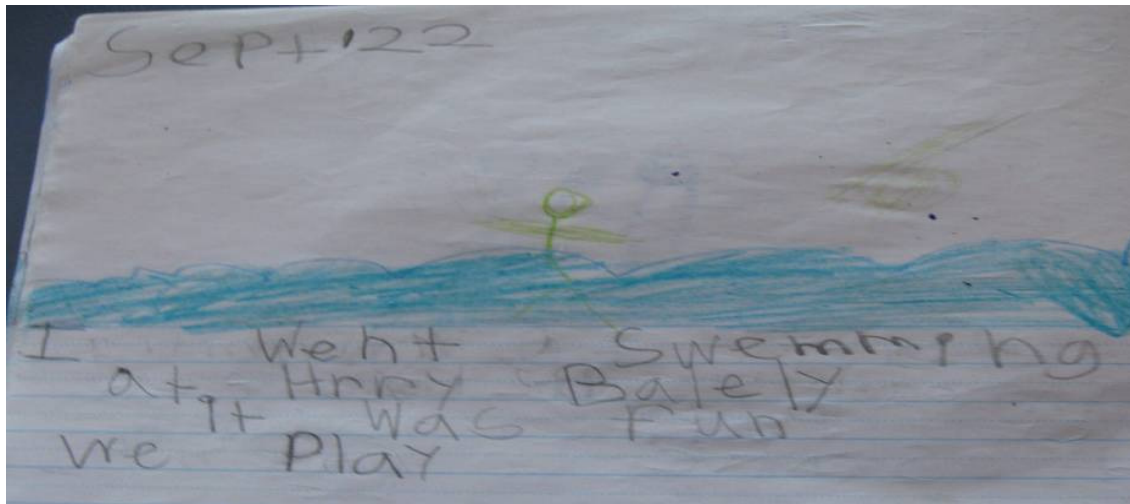
“Sept. 29 – On the weekend I went to the playground. On the weekend I went driving.”

Al chose two different written works to talk about because the tape ran out in the middle of our interview and he decided to talk about another piece while I reset the recorder. When we had our pre-interview, Al tried to express his knowledge about his writing the best he knew how. He liked some of the sentences because “the words they help me make sentences. You can make sentences like the teacher” (Transcript, p. 11). When I asked what he could do to improve his work, he thought he could “Make more writing to make like longer sentences” (Transcript, p. 11).

In this pre-interview Al was writing sentences that started with similar patterns but ended with no periods. He had an understanding that to write more meant to improve, but did not seem to know how to write more in a quality way. This quality could mean grammar issues, the mechanics of writing, or the look of the written work. He used inventive spelling which could indicate he knew how to sound out words, or he did not know how to spell automatically.

Bev: Grade two

Bev was a very personable girl who was willing to help others learn and grow. She appeared to be an average grade two student in reading and comprehension skills. I based this assessment on the previous teacher input, standardized reading test scores, and my personal observations and professional judgment. She started the year by showing some frustration when she did not know the answer or understand the processes she needed. She was also a talker and I thought that this pre-interview would be easy for her. She chose this writing to talk about:



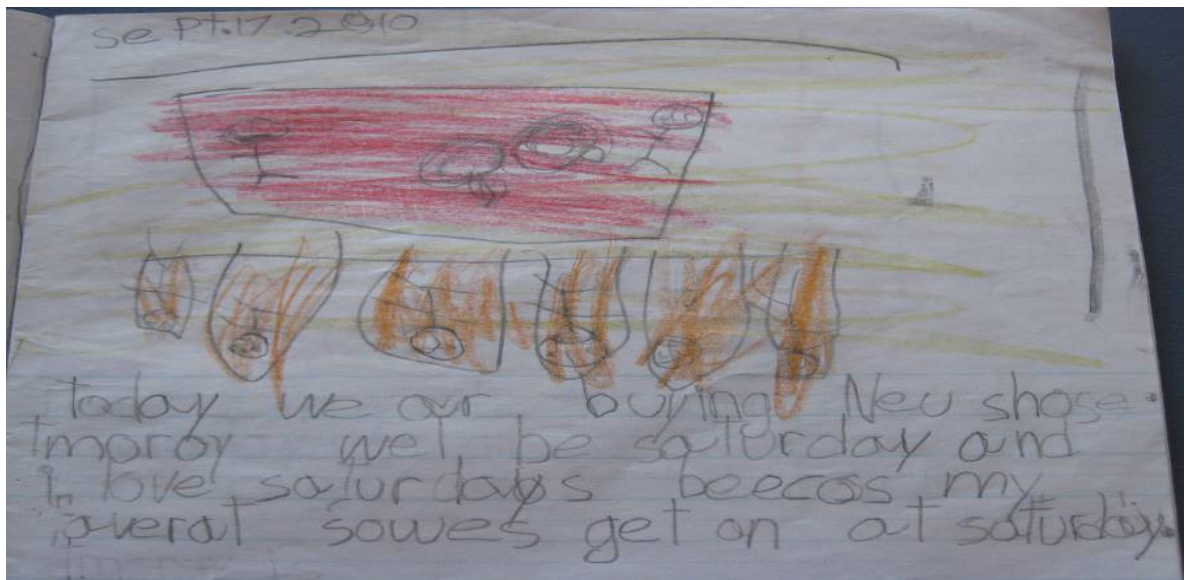
“Sept. 22 – I went swimming at Harry Bailey. It was fun. We play.”

Bev began her interview by telling me she liked the activity she wrote about when I asked what she liked about her writing. She had no hesitation in thinking about the story before she thought about the writing process. When I again asked her how she could improve her writing, she had a very long pause. She either did not know the answer or was not confident enough to answer. I asked the question again in different wording and she answered “Make longer sentences ...[with] colour...[and] more quality” (Transcript, p. 5). She had no answer to what quality was.

In her interview, I was surprised by her hesitation and lack of language when she explained her writing. In this interview, I observed Bev having difficulties finding words to explain her learning as well as how she could improve her work. I am not sure if she did not have the understanding needed to answer the questions or if language restraints hindered her answers

Jeff: Grade One

Jeff was working at an above grade level for a grade one student. From my first interactions with him, I knew he was a verbal communicator who not only enjoyed expressing himself but also could do so at a level higher than expected for a grade one student. Although Jeff had been born in Canada, the language at home was not English. Nonetheless, Jeff was reading at a much higher level than an average beginning grade one student and his level of comprehension of his reading was higher than the normal grade one level, too.



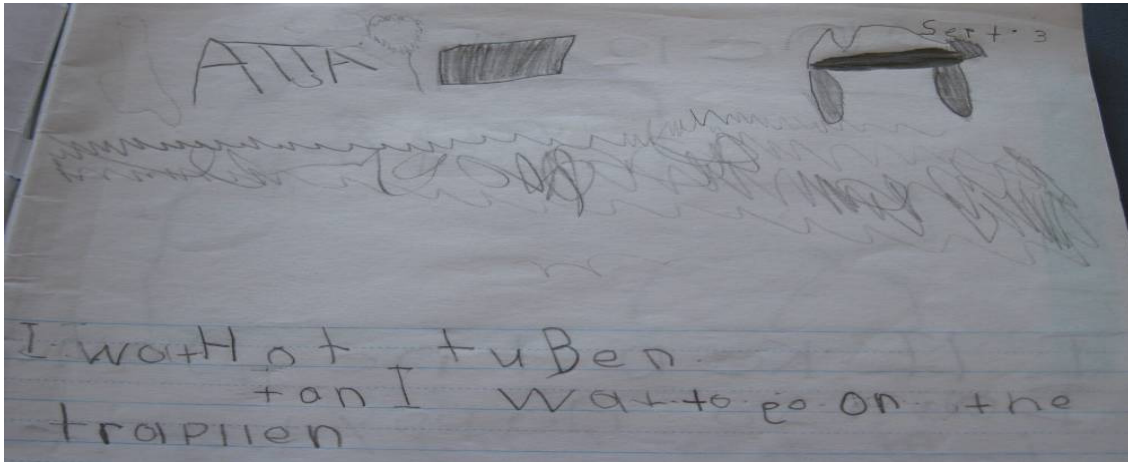
“Sept. 17, 2010 – Today we are buying new shoes. Tomorrow will be Saturday and I love Saturdays because my favorite shows get on at Saturday.”

In our pre-interview Jeff struggled to finish his answers in an intellectual way. I observed him stumbling to find words to fully explain or express what he wanted to say. I was unsure if this was because his language did not yet match his thinking or if he was not able to figure this out. When I asked what improvements could be made, he answered, “I could get more ... I could rewrite... I could make better words and try my best to like... think about it” (Transcript, p. 7).

This statement showed he did have well-established ideas on how you could improve writing. The idea he expressed about ‘thinking’ about his work showed that he was already pondering about assessment of writing on a deeper, less superficial level than the average grade one, or even grade two student would in September.

Anne: Grade One

Anne started the year with reading and comprehension skills that were above grade level as determined by the previous teacher input, standardized reading test scores, and my personal observations and professional judgment.. She was a spirited learner who was engaged in her learning by talking, listening, and writing about what she was doing.



“Sept. 3 – I want to tubing. Then I went to go on the trampoline.”

I was expecting her interview to yield an informative conversation about her writing based on the conversations we had in the classroom. She began strong by telling me she “just wrote how I like to read it” (Transcript, p. 11), which told me she was connecting the processes of reading and writing. When asked about improving her writing, Anne would make changes like “make my words a little smaller and better...[or]move around the sentences” (Transcripts, p. 11) to make a stronger quality written work. I told her she was doing some smart thinking!

Summary of Students

In their pre-interviews, students had difficulty expressing their understanding about their writing. Some students had a beginning recollection of changes or improvements that they could do to improve their written work; however, they did not seem to have the vocabulary to express their knowledge. Janet articulated an idea about improving letter formations. By improving some letter formations, she would then make it a better piece of writing. Bev and Al’s ideas centred around sentence structures of writing such as making a sentence longer to improve their work. Jeff, Anne, and Darryl articulated ideas about improving the body of their writing by “adding”

more to their writing. Jeff and Anne went on to add that they needed to do more “thinking” about the work. Al showed me a glimpse of deeper thinking with one of his statements. He answered my question about which sentence he liked better by saying the first one because “I like the words, they help me make sentences. You can make sentences like a teacher” (Transcripts, page 14). Anne, too, said she “just wrote how I like to read it” (Transcripts, p. 12). This showed me she was both thinking beyond beginning writing skills, such as letter formation and the mechanics of writing, and also thinking about the structure of a story and how to include personal voice into her writing.

Table 3: Student Vocabulary and Understanding in September

Student	Vocabulary for Expressing Understanding	Understanding	Analysis
Darryl	* limited vocabulary * rapid answers to the questions	* no real understanding of the questions asked	* apprehensive * shy * rigid in both the way he talked and sat * reluctant or unable to answer questions
Janet	* limited vocabulary * slow to answer questions	* said she could ‘fix’ her writing by making it better but could not tell what better meant	* unwilling or did not know how to answer questions * no vocabulary to answer questions asked
Al	* eager to talk * used simple terms to articulate knowledge	* to write more meant to improve * was using inventive spelling	* did not seem to know how to write more in a quality way. * he seemed to know how to sound out words * it seems he did not know how to spell automatically.

Student Vocabulary and Understanding in September continued

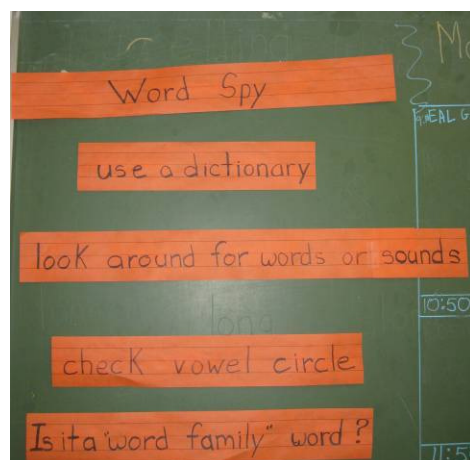
Bev	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * hesitation * lack of language * having difficulties finding words to explain her learning * difficulty expressing how she could improve her work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *either did not know the answer or was not confident enough to answer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * when asked questions she seemed to hesitate and then not answer * very different from her normal personality which was talkative, engaging and knowledgeable * seemed to lack the use of language to express her thinking
Jeff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * eager to talk * lots to say * used simple language to express ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * established ideas on how you could improve writing * talked about writing more and using better words * 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * showed the ability to express ways to ‘thinking’ about his work showed that he was already pondering about assessment of writing on a deeper and less superficial way
Anne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * enthusiastic * used simple language to describe her writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * connecting the processes reading and writing * thought she could make her words smaller * move around the sentences to make a stronger quality written work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *showed the ability to connect with her learning and articulate how she felt and what she knew * she was doing some intelligent thinking about the writing process

Teaching and Learning in the Middle: October through May

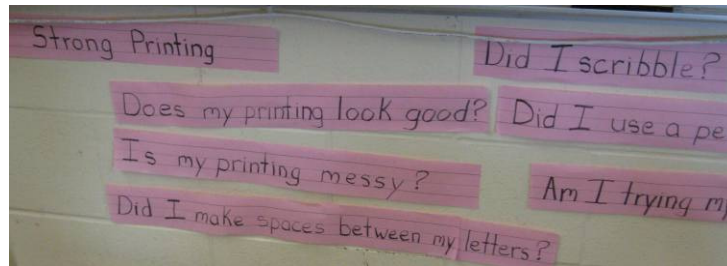
Throughout the year, I had many opportunities to introduce elements of *Assessment For Learning* strategies into the classroom and, therefore, students’ learning: the use of small groups – both teacher led and student focused – whole group discussions, delivering feedback to and from students and teachers as well as peer-to-peer, and teacher conferencing. The students worked in their learning spaces to practice and share ideas not only at their table groupings, but

also on the floor, in the hall, or with other adults. Tools such as work samples, sticky notes, and coloured highlighters enabled the students to take a hands-on interactive approach to assist in the learning. I encouraged students' conversations, discussions, and working as a community of learners to build their confidence not only to ask for help, but to give feedback to allow a learning friend to grow instead of just giving them an answer.

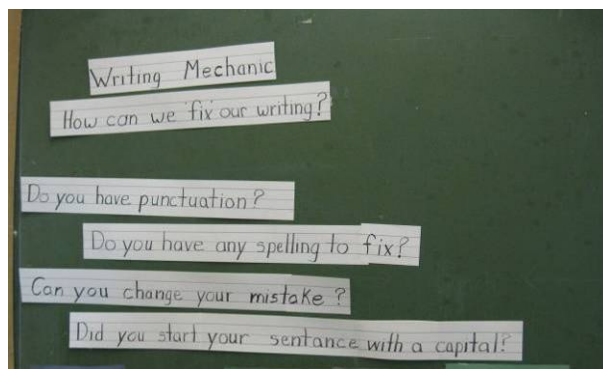
We began with co-constructing criteria about what we knew about writing. This was done mostly in a full group setting but did include small group conferencing as well when I felt it was warranted. In this process, all students had an opportunity to articulate some knowledge about what they thought they needed to do to be a strong writer. Janet started us off by telling us, "You would have to use good words...and... you have to make your words look good" (Transcripts, page 18) in order to show good writing. Jeff had a similar response. He believed that when you were writing you needed to "try not to erase too much because then it will look messy" (Transcripts, page 19). Anne based her initial ideas on writing words. She thought when writers were writing a word they needed to "Think how to spell it" (Transcript, page 19) before they began writing it. Shortly after Anne articulated her idea, Darryl voiced a similar one about spelling of words when writing. He knew that writers needed to "Sound out the words" (Transcripts, page 20) when they were writing to try to be a strong writer. Jeff wished to share another idea with his classmates. He must have had a very strong feeling about his first message because again he knew he was doing strong writing "When I do good work and good writing big without erasing" (Transcripts, page 21). Al knew that "You don't scribble when you are writing" (Transcripts, page 21) if you want to be a strong writer.



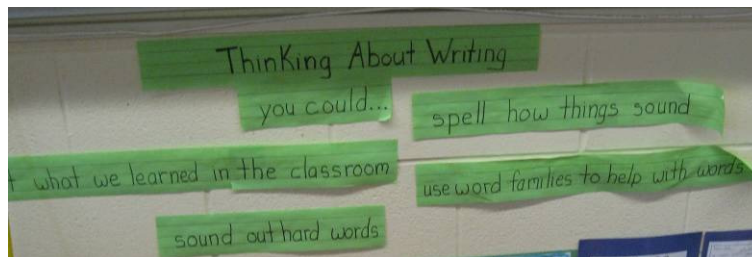
Criteria students co-constructed: Word Spy



Criteria students co-constructed: Strong Printing



Criteria students co-constructed: Writing Mechanic



Criteria students co-constructed: Thinking About Writing

Bev came up with a connection to writing that she shared with the class. She knew to “Make sure you write use a pencil to write not the markers. If you use a marker, you cannot erase. My Mom writes to my Dad with a pencil and sometimes she erases a word” (Transcripts, page 22). Al and Jeff had some other criteria ideas to share at this point in our discussion. Al knew that writers “Don’t play around when you are writing” (Transcripts, page 22) and Jeff followed up with that writers “Do not rush” (Transcripts, page 22) when they are writing.

As the year progressed, we continued to learn about writing and practice the craft in many forms. Throughout December and January, we focused on another *Assessment For Learning* strategy. Using my collection of written samples taken from former students from grade one through three, I encouraged the students to use these samples to compare and discuss the differences. I taught this strategy by using a whole classroom setting, in small groups, with peer-on-peer interactions, and with one-on-one conferencing with me. While the students compared these samples, I asked them to articulate what each sample showed about writing, what positive strategies the writer used, how the writer could have improved their writing, and to determine if the writer was a beginner writer or someone who was an improving writer. I also asked them to put a group of samples in order from beginning writer to improved writer and talk about why they put them in that order.



Samples put into order from beginning writer to improved writer (left to right)

After a great amount of discussion and engaging interaction with their peers, some students sat down with me in a one-on-one conference to talk about their understanding of how the writers in the samples showed quality or how they could improve their writing to show a stronger written piece of work. This activity was done in a less formal way than in the pre-interview sessions. I used some of the same questions as before, but did not structure them as I did in the pre or post interviews I conducted. I wanted these conversations to be as natural and informative as possible. The conversations were similar to the following one I had with Al.

Al: It has periods on it and some strong writing.

Teacher: Tell me about the strong writing

Al: There was some strong writing

Teacher: Tell me about it. I don't know what strong writing is. You tell me about it

Al: It was writing that was "goodly".

Teacher: What do you mean by "goodly".

Al: Good

Teacher: What does that mean? What are they doing right?

Al: They did stuff right, like they put periods and punctuation.

Teacher: Tell me about the letters.

Al: The letters look like a wiggly.

Teacher: Are there spaces between the words?

Al: Yes,

Teacher: That is a positive thing, isn't it? Look at that again, Al, and tell me what you think that person could have done to make their writing stronger.

Al: To make it stronger they tried to listen to their teachers. (Transcripts, pages 26 & 27)

Through this discussion Al showed that he was comfortable having this conversation. He was willing to share his knowledge and although he may not have had strong and deep answers, he fell easily into the conversation about what he did know and was able to articulate.

Jeff showed his advanced articulation abilities when he talked about his sample. For a grade one student his language was quite knowledgeable. He thought the writers in his sample had done good work "Because when I look at it there are some spaces and it looks like this person is trying to make the letters that straight" (Transcript, p.29 & 30). When I asked what improvements could be made, he said that they "could put punctuation... try making another sentence [or] could put a couple more things in their picture" (Transcript, p. 29 & 30). Jeff is finding the language he was missing at the beginning of the year to express himself and the ideas he understood about writing.

Anne, also a grade one student, was able to talk about her samples with confidence much like Jeff. She came up with ideas about improvements in the sample such as they should use

capitals, not put words close together, or they could “have spelled this out, sounded it out” (Transcript, p. 30 &31), words they did not know. She was using understanding not only of our criteria categories of mechanic (how to fix sentences) but also of word spy (how to fix words). She was very confident in her knowledge and willing to express her learning to anyone she worked with.

The conversations students had while working in groups proved not only to allow them to articulate their thinking, but to use others’ ideas to scaffold and expand their own thinking. These ideas were then added to the other students’ knowledge base and used when asked to perform either written work or oral assessment tasks. Bev worked with Anne and Jeff as a learning team when investigating the samples. They were involved in a very vibrant conversation with me and other students in the group about the samples they were given to compare, analyse, and discuss.

Bev: Like the writing.

Teacher: What do you like about it?

Bev: No spaces

Teacher: What about the /ee/? I don’t think you just look at the word. I want you to look at the whole thing. What do you like about it? What is really good about it? So what I know Bev is that maybe you weren’t talking about this if you can’t tell me about it. Tell me what they could do better about this one.

Bev: Make the words go right there. There are too much spaces.

Teacher: Too much space.

Bev: Yes.

Teacher: What else?

Bev: That is it.

Teacher: If I was going to ask Jeff what you could do on here for your writing today. Two things you could do to make that writing stronger today.

Jeff: I could write a little bit more.

Teacher: You could add on some more sentences.

One more thing.

Jeff: I could make my printing better.

Teacher: How would you make your printing better?

Jeff: I could just not cross the blue line. I sometimes get it out from the line.

Teacher: How about this space here. Where would you start your next sentence if you were going to make this a little bit stronger?

Anne: Here

Teacher: Yes, you wouldn't have those spaces at the end, would you? How about Anne? How would you make your writing stronger? Tell me what you would do differently.

Anne: Maybe I could have kept on going but I didn't know what to write next.

Teacher: You didn't know what to write. Tell me about this. Should you be writing on to the next page?

Anne: I didn't think it would fit in on the other page.

Teacher: If it didn't fit in could you have started on the next line for that. Could you have erased it and started on the next line? Yes, you could have.

Anne: But you usually say that we are not supposed to erase.

Teacher: But if you had this go on to the next line I would tell you that you could erase that and go on to the next line so that we weren't on the next page. Pretty good stuff.

(Transcripts, page 32-34)

I found it interesting to be involved in conversations like this one. The conversation above showed that for the most part students were still focused on the appearance or basic mechanics of writing. But, I noted the leap into talking about adding more to their written work by continuing on with their writing or adding to what they already have. This thinking about adding to the content of the writing shows growth into a more cognitive view of their writing compared to a technical view.

As we proceeded with our learning year, we needed to revisit our criteria and make some categories our ideas could fit into. These categories would further allow the students to use their

Assessment For Learning strategies to begin to self assess their own writing, using the information we have on writing. I asked the students to find titles and place our criteria into the appropriate titled place. One of the first conversations involved Darryl. We were finding a title for finding words in the classroom to help students with writing. Darryl thought, “you would spy a word you would try and spy a word... We can spy for words for writing” (Transcripts, page 36). I used his thinking to make one of the categories ‘word spy’. Jeff, too, was part of this conversation. He articulated his ideas about a category we named ‘strong printing’ and when I asked, “What am I doing when I talk about when I use all three things. What are we doing when we don’t scribble, when we use a pencil, when we use spaces?” (Transcripts, page 38) he said, “We are doing stronger writing” (Transcripts, page 38).

We continued to have conversations about how to improve writing and used the samples to explain how samples differed. The students had to articulate their feedback not only to me the teacher, but also to their peers and other adults that visited our learning environment. At the end of January, I had the students use their own writing to assess how *they* would improve *their* writing. I asked for one or two things they thought they could have changed to make the improvements next time. Darryl, who began his year as a reluctant learner, talked and participated by telling his story in this way:

Teacher: Ok Darryl how can you make your writing better?

Darryl: I can make spaces... I can sound out.

Teacher: Between letters or words?

Darryl: Words

Teacher: So it wasn’t so squished. What else?

Darryl: I could sound out and then spell.

Teacher: Do you think you could find some words in there you could change by sounding out. If you were going to sound out, what in the classroom would you use?

Darryl: I could find the word and then look at it and then use what I need.

Teacher: Is there another way? Just by the sound?

Darryl: I don’t know. (Transcripts, page 43).

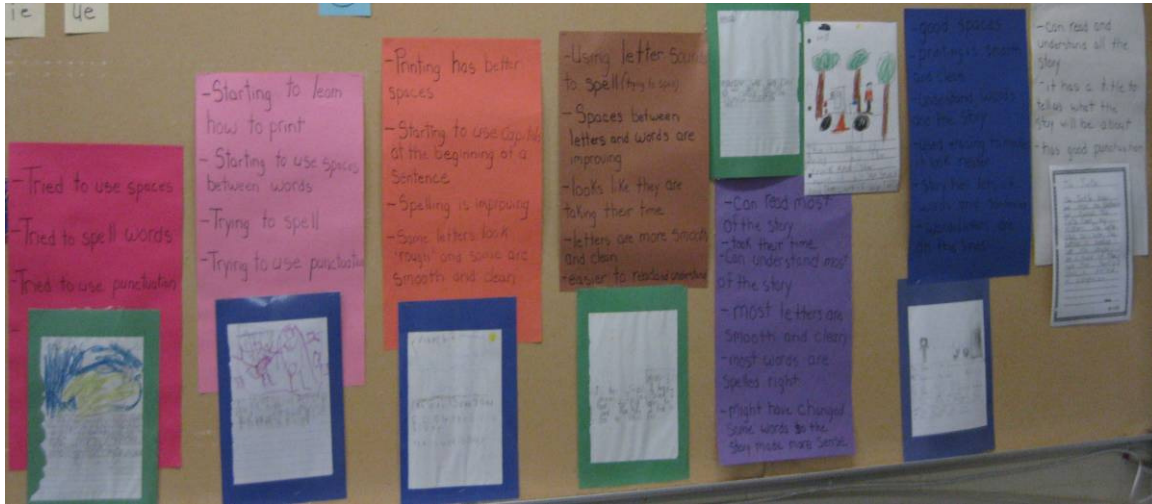
It was evident to me that he was showing signs of improvement. He was able not only to talk about the look of his written – spaces between letters and words – but also to consider the use of strategies to help him spell words. Other students in the classroom were also focusing on letter formation (messy letters), spacing between letters and words, and capital use, as well as Darryl’s thought about spelling usage.

As March came around, we circled back to talk again about improvements in writing. I wanted to find evidence of changes in the language or ideas the students were using when articulating about writing. I asked Anne what makes this sample so much stronger, to tell us about it, and tell us why it is stronger. She said although her writing was good because “it has, punctuation and commas and that stuff in it and has a Capital at the start of the Story. That little swirly thing should not be there. It looks like the turtle’s head or something” (Transcripts, p. 49-50). When asked about spelling mistakes and how she would fix them, she had a very insightful answer. She said, “They could get some feedback and they could ask some people to help them spell words and then that would help them to know how to spell some more words” (Transcripts, p. 49-50). This response showed me that Anne not only developed skills to self-assess her work and articulate her learning to others but also used the same language of assessment that I was using in the classroom. Darryl, although not as advanced in his skills development as Anne, was able to express what kind of writer had written the sample he was looking at. He thought “it is a bad writer because if they have got to write over and this ‘I’ you can’t even see but there is lots of spaces” (Transcripts, p. 51). His ability to articulate his ideas about writing improved from his first interview. He was not using the exact language I was using in the classroom, but found ideas about the sample that he could express to the group we were working in.

Al was using his prior knowledge about what writing needs to make sense to the reader to answer questions about the sample he was assessing. He expressed the fact that the sample did not make sense because “It missed some words ... some helping words” (Transcripts, p. 52) as well as having punctuation and spacing problems. The language he used to express his understanding was a combination of his words and words we used in the classroom to assess writing

By the end of March, our classroom was making writing continuums with our samples. When implementing this *Assessment For Learning* strategy, the students placed samples in order

from beginning writer, to improving writer, and finally to stronger writer. We also had to write a script with each of the samples to say what made them more successful than the previous sample.



Student developed continuum

In our next conversation, the students were split into groups to talk about a specific category and how the writing they were talking about could be improved in accordance with that category. Anne had the category that was about printing. When asked why the sample was not strong, she said, “Because it is not all squished like the other one and you could see some words” (Transcripts, page 60). Janet, too, was asked about printing. When thinking about her sample, she thought it was stronger “Because it has better writing and spaces and they were trying to write it as good as they always do” (Transcripts, page 61). One of the students outside my six I focused on in the classroom made an observation and assessment of writing. He thought the writer missed some words but was still better than a beginner story “because if that was a good story it doesn’t matter about how it looks, it is like if they write the straight words and we can understand the story” (Transcripts, p. 62). This was an indicator that this student, like others in the classroom, was assessing beyond the “look” of the writing process and thinking and articulating about the ‘story’ part of the writing.

By May, the students had many opportunities to use *Assessment For Learning* strategies to articulate their learning about writing. I took the opportunity in the middle of May to collect a final set of taped data with a random group of students. We were looking at our writing continuum and the criteria we had built about how each writing sample was improved from beginning writer to strong writer. I covered up the written portion of the criteria and asked the

students to tell me how each of the writing samples improved in their own words. Anne was in this group of learners. When asked why she thought the sample was next in our criteria line-up she said:

Anne: Because they did do some spaces, but they made this one darker.

Teacher: Do you think this one fits in our kitchen room up here because it is not perfect and they still have improvements to make.

Anne: Yes.

Teacher: What kind of improvements do you think they could make on this one, you said the darker writing. What else could they do better and stronger. Can you understand the story on that one?

Anne: No.

Teacher: What is wrong with it and what would you improve on if it were you.

Anne: It is actually backwards. I would put that the right way and I would erase a little more there so it would look nice.

Teacher: What would you do differently in the story to make it stronger?

Anne: I would write a little more and I would put in more spaces.

Teacher: Okay, Anne, you come and tell me your opinion. In big words, please.

Anne: I think that the turtle one should go up because it has really. really good writing and it is the best one of all the samples.

Teacher: Good thinking. (Transcripts, pages 63 – 64)

She not only was articulating her learning in a positive and coherent fashion at this point, but she had a multitude of ways that the writer could improve any written work. Much like other students in the class, she too was assessing beyond the ‘look’ of the writing process and thinking and articulating about the ‘story’ part of the writing.

Post-Interview: June

By June, I needed to know if the reviewing, giving and receiving feedback, and participating as learning teams had shaped student understanding of their writing. Thus, I

conducted post-interviews, asking the same three questions I had asked in the pre-interview.

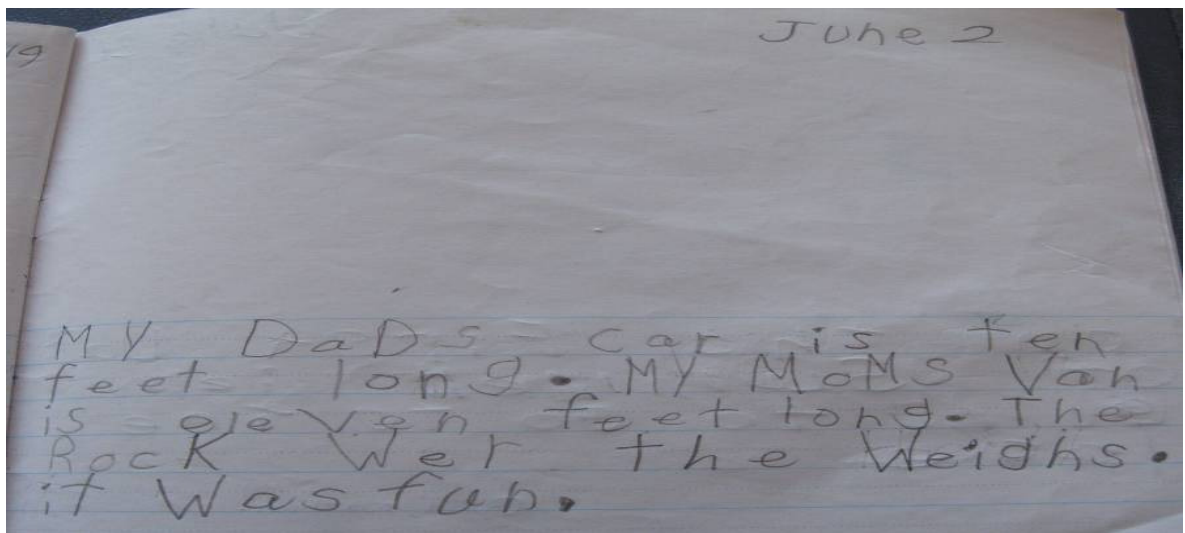
These questions were:

1. Can you read or tell me about your writing?
2. What do you like about your writing?
3. What can you improve about your writing?

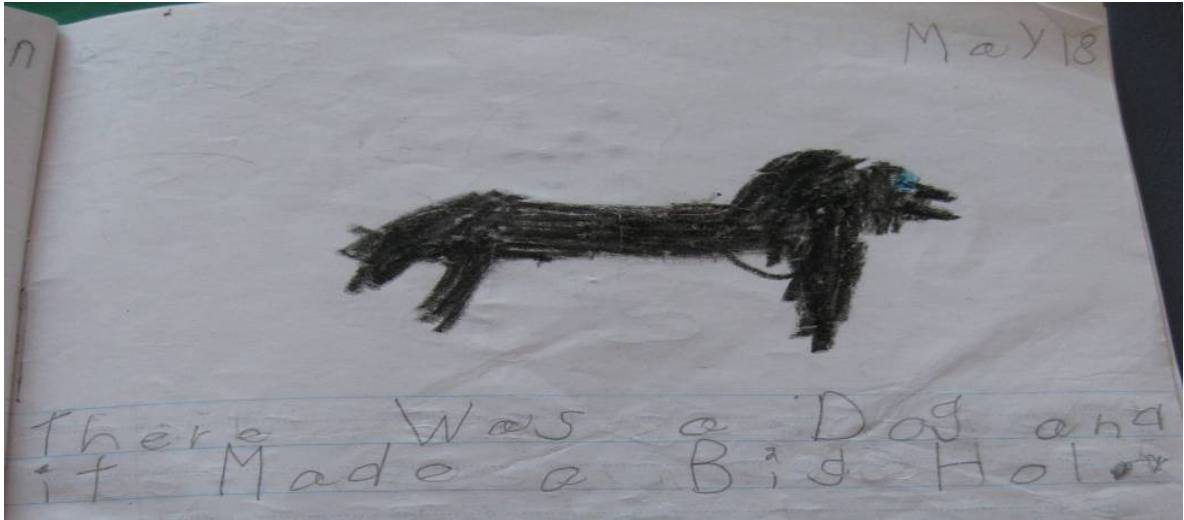
I took the students back to the same area I did the pre-interviews. I again used a tape recorder to record their answers just as I did in the pre-interviews.

Darryl

Darryl had a very different attitude when he came into this interview. He was much more confident in his knowledge and was excited about telling me about it. He chose this writing sample to compare with his first one.



“June 2 – My dad’s car is ten feet long. My mom’s van is eleven feet long. The rock were the weights. It was fun,”



"There was a dog and it made a big hole."

When he talked about it, this is what he said:

Teacher: Fine. Tell me about the very beginning when you were a writer at the very first couple of pages. Tell me about that writing

Darryl: I didn't know how to spell stuff but I sounded it out and had three words.

Teacher: Anything else you want to talk about with this beginning writing, what you were like in the beginning.

Darryl: I got better at writing and knew lots of words.

Teacher: You are telling me you got better at writing. Tell me about some of this last writing.

Darryl: I figured stuff out and sounded things out and writing more words.

Teacher: Tell me about the stories you were writing. At the beginning what kind of stories and now what kind of stories.

Darryl: Stories about thunder and our neighbor's dog digging holes in our yard.

Teacher: What kind of stories were they, the beginning stories or are those the stories you are talking about now.

Darryl: The stories we are talking about now.

Teacher: Which stories were stronger?

Darryl: The stories we are talking about now.

Teacher: How come?

Darryl: I am getting better at writing and reading helps learning words.

Teacher: Now this is the big question. Can you look at your writing right now, the last couple of pages of writing and the one you chose about the dog and the hole? How could you make this writing even stronger? What could you do to make this improved?

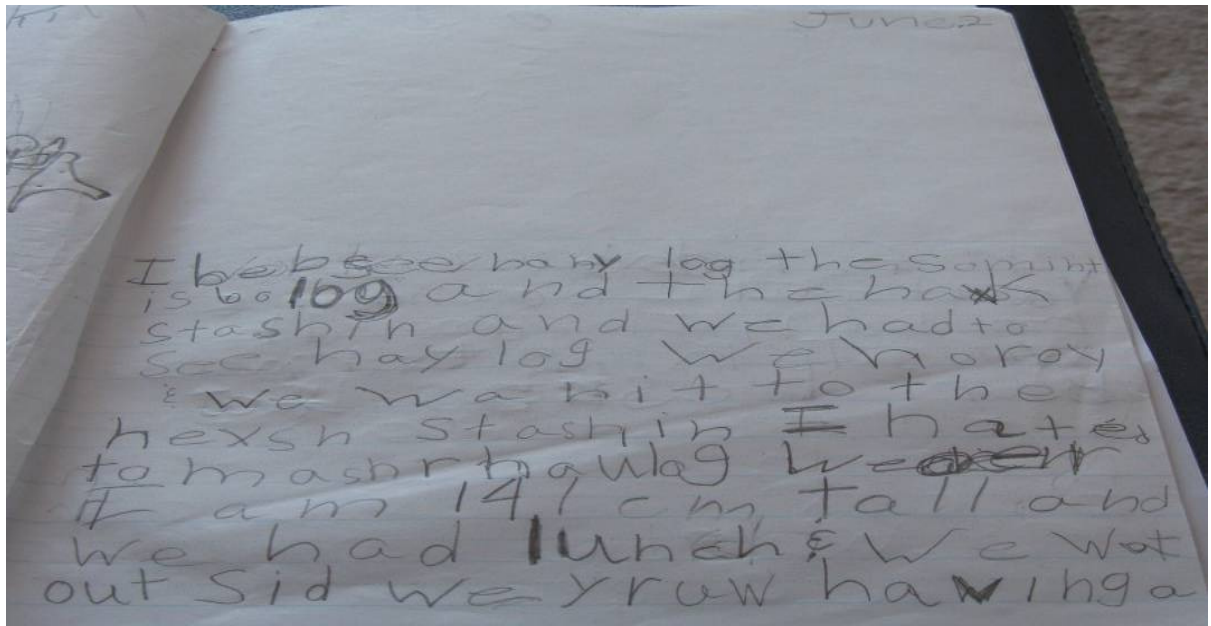
Darryl: I could write more. Sound out some stuff.

Teacher: So you could write more, you could use your sounding out skills. Anything else you could do to make this stronger writing? No more ideas for today. Excellent.
(Transcripts, page 65)

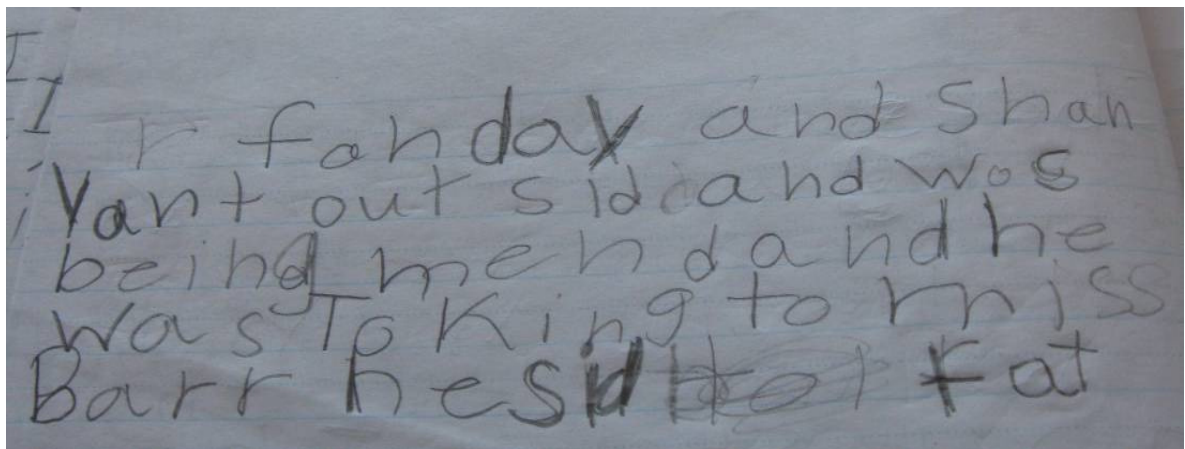
It was evident to me that Darryl had made positive strides in his learning this year. He was able to articulate strategies in spelling and mechanics but also understood he could spell or understand more words and ideas and used them in his writing. As I said, he was confident in his conversation and held his body upright with confidence. He seemed to be at ease with showing me and talking to me about his success.

Janet

Janet arrived for the interview at ease and more than willing to chat. She had no hesitation in her answers and was willing to express her knowledge. The following selection is the writing she chose to compare with her pre-writing.



“I have see many long the cement is 60 long and the next station and we had to see how long we hurry and we want to the next station. I hate to measuring _____. I am 141 cm tall and we had lunch and we went outside. We were having a”

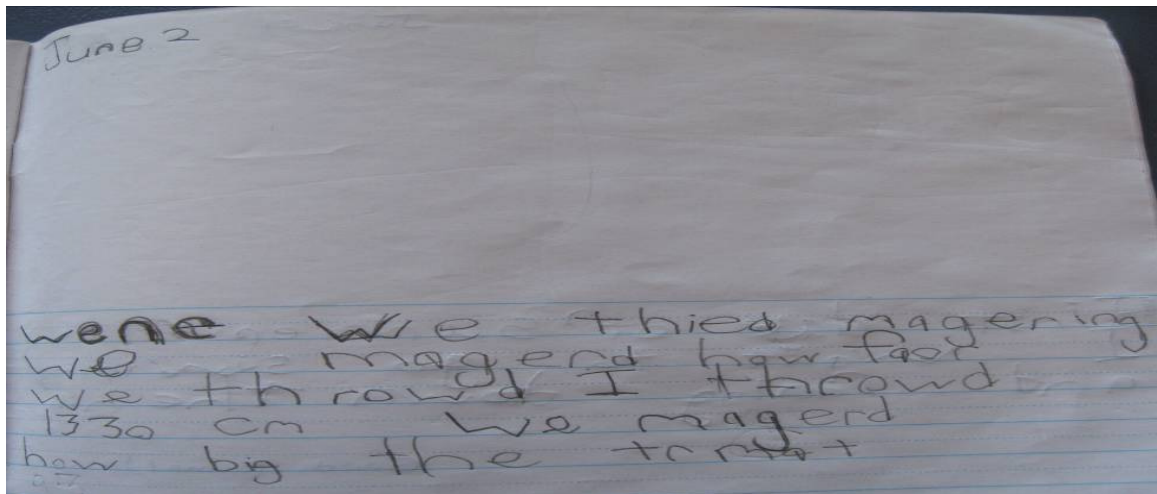


“fun day and Shane went outside and was being mean and he was talking to Miss Barr he said fat”

In this interview, Janet focused on how to fix up her sentences through making spaces and making her writing ‘better’. Though she did not grow into a writer that was thinking about the story and other higher-level thinking, she was able to articulate her knowledge and thought of herself as “A stronger writer...because my printing looks nicer” (Transcript, p.74). This comment indicates to me that she found confidence in herself as a writer this year. That is growth!

Al

Al had the same ability to interact as he did at the beginning of the year. He came in with a smile and had answers to my questions without hesitation. He chose the following writing to read and talk about.

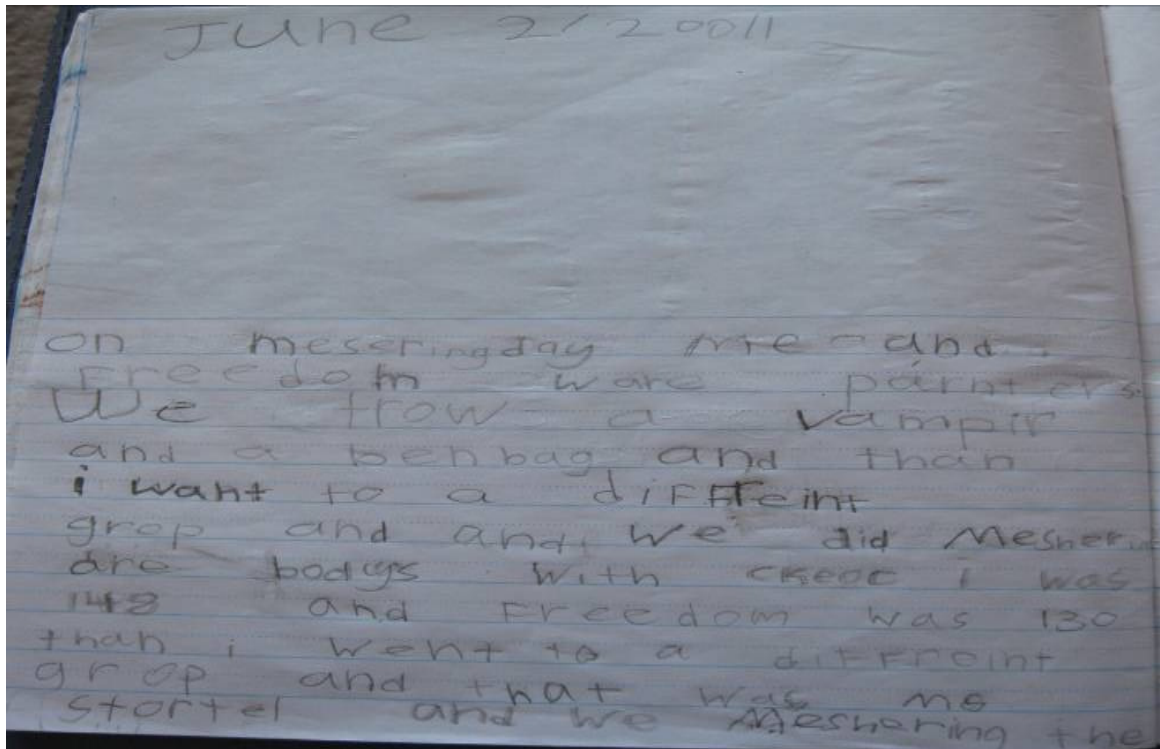


“June 2 – When we tried measuring we measured how far we throwed. I throwed 1330 cm. We measured how big the tarmac”

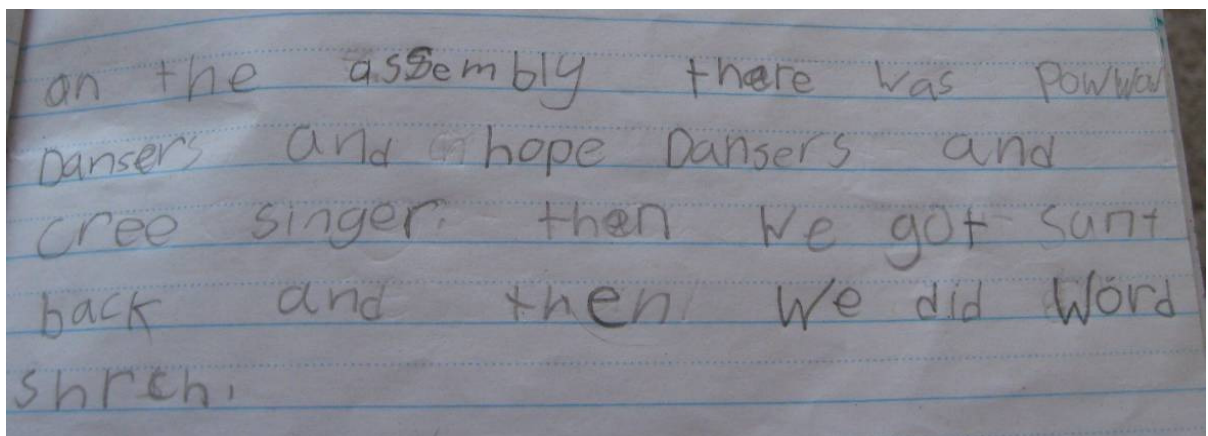
As always, Al was relaxed while he talked to me. From the beginning of our conversation, he articulated ideas about how he had become a good writer. He showed understanding in how he was improving when he said, “To make my story strong if I add more sentences and then if it is like ten sentences it is going to be too much when you read it. It is like you have a long story” (Transcript, p. 79 -80). He was not focused on the minor mechanical fixes that Janet and Darryl articulated, but the more complex issues about story and the addition of detail through more sentences to his writing. He was proud of himself as a writer, and much like Janet, this showed just how much growth he had made.

Bev

I had seen improvements in Bev’s classroom interactions with her writing and learning, I expected her post-interview to be more detailed. She chose this writing to talk about:



“June 2/2011 – On measuring day me and Freedom were partners. We throw a vampire and a beanbag and then I went to a different group and we did measure our bodies with chalk. I was 148 and Freedom was 130. Then I went to a different group and that we Ms. Stordahl and we measured the”



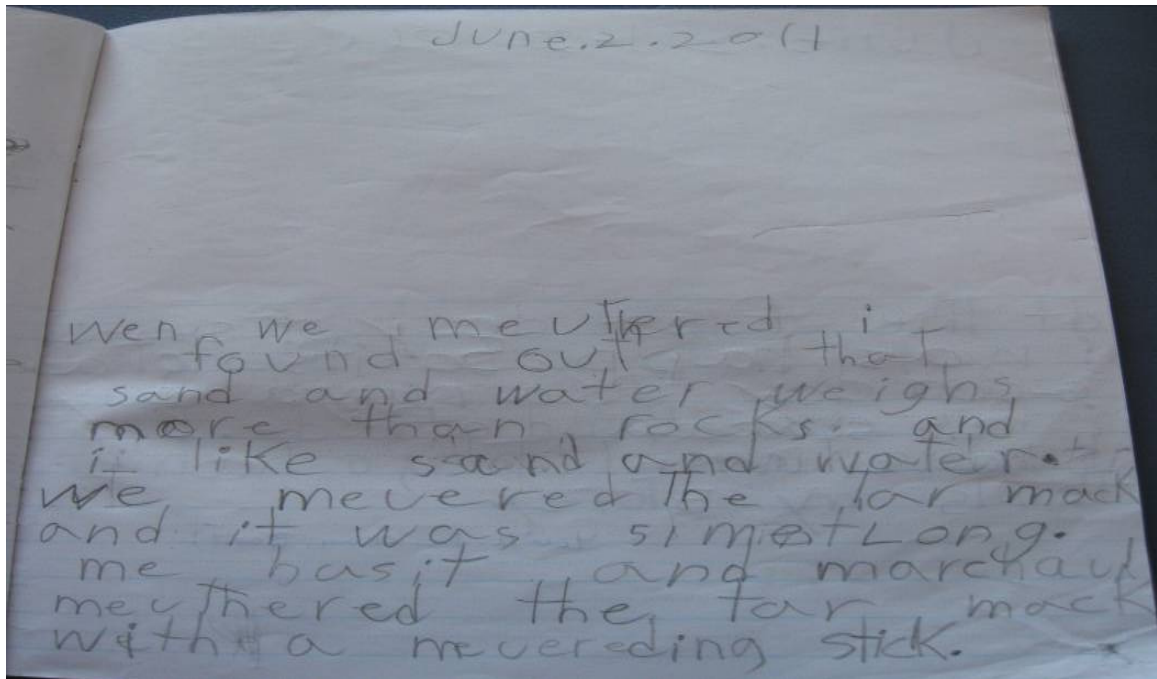
“On the assembly there was pow-wow dancers and hoop dancers and Cree singers, Then we got sent back and we did word search.”

In Bev’s first writing, she has made visual improvements, improving spacing and letter formation and using positive spelling strategies to find success because her misspelling results in phonetic tries. In her interview she articulated that she was a stronger writer because she made better spaces and used better words, and wrote more and asked for assistance if needed. All

actions Bev talked about and did were strategies of working towards becoming an enhanced quality writer.

Jeff

Jeff chose this writing to chat about with me:



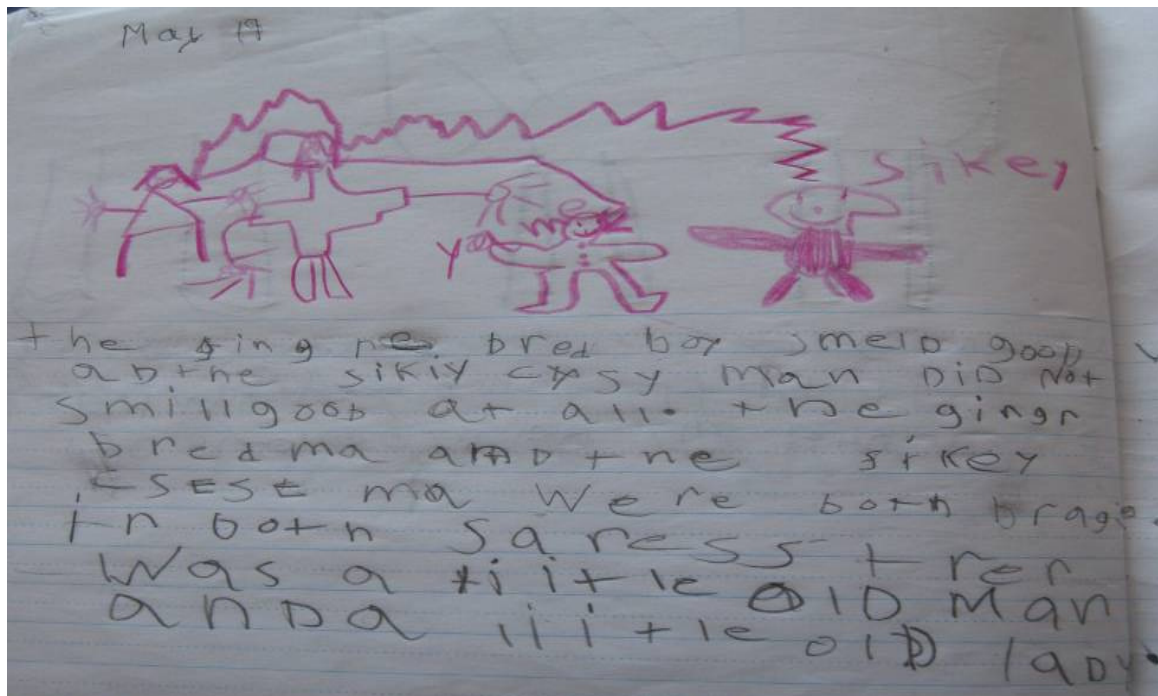
“When we measured I found out that sand and water weigh more than rock and I like sand and water. We measured the tarmac and it was 51 cm long. Me Jeff and Marshal measured the tarmac with a measuring stick.”

He was very excited to articulate his learning to me and used not only his words but his body to express himself. He pointed to items and really wanted me to engage in his explanations. He expressed some of the changes in his writing and knowledge building while we spoke. He thought that he was a better writer “because I can write more and I can spell better. My words are getting stronger” (Transcript, p. 76). When I asked how he could improve, he said “because I am using more punctuation and more periods, more spaces. I get help with words in the classroom if I can’t spell it sometimes. I know lots of words and how to spell them a lot. At the beginning of the year, I didn’t know how to spell that many words and I am doing lots of things. Now I use more punctuation and write and add new things. Use words that make more sense” (Transcript, p. 76). Jeff understood he could improve the mechanics of his writing but also that he could spell

many words. He also understood that strong writing needed to make sense and using descriptive words helped when a writer wanted their writing to make sense.

Anne

Anne, a very eager learner always looked for ways to talk about what she knew and helped others to succeed. She chose this writing to talk about in the post-interview.



“May 19 – The ginger bread boy smelled good and the stinky cheese man did not smell good at all. The ginger bread man and the Stinky cheese man were both bragging. In both stories there was a little old man and a little old lady.”

Her humour was very evident in her writing; she was a strong story teller as well. She understood that she was writing more than at the beginning of the year and understood that she knew “sort of what to actually write because now I could write what I am learning in the classroom” (Transcript, p.67). She articulated her understanding in a detailed manner and showed a deeper understanding of the mechanics of writing. The most profound statement she made was when she told me, “You should have fun writing” (Transcript, p. 67). How right she was.

Table 3 Student Vocabulary and Understanding in June

Student	Vocabulary for Expressing Understanding	Understanding	Analysis
Darryl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * used terms and ideas like: got better at writing ; knew lots of words ; I figured stuff out; sounded things out; writing more words; reading helps learning * excited about articulating knowledge * confident in his conversation * his body up right with confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * confident in his knowledge * chose this writing sample to compare with his first one * articulated strategies in spelling, mechanics * understood he could spell * could understand more words and ideas and use them in his writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * at ease with showing me and talking to me about his success * had vocabulary to use when articulating learning * had time to practice articulating and assessing his own work to become more confident
Janet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * answer questions with little hesitation * used terms and ideas like: looks nicer, stronger writer, make better, fix some of it up, more words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * focused on how to fix up her writing * thought making spaces would make her writing ‘better’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * willing to express her knowledge * focused on mechanics and visual aspects of the writing process * thought of herself as a stronger writer
Al	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * eager to talk * used terms to articulate knowledge like: strong, add more sentences, check if it is good, learning and doing what people say are good, always think 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * articulated ideas about how he has become a good writer * know to add more sentences to improve writing * was not focused on the minor mechanical fixes but missed some of the more complex issues about story and adding detail through more sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * was proud of himself as a writer * understood the need to add more content to his story

Student Vocabulary and Understanding in June Continued

<p>Bev</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * less hesitation * Used words like: Write more, ask, writing more * less pauses in between thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * improved spacing and letter formation * used phonetic spelling for words she did not know * made better use of spacing * used better words * know to use the strategy of asking for assistance if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * expecting her post-interview to be more detailed. * she articulates that she is a stronger writer * was using strategies to work towards becoming a enhanced quality writer
<p>Jeff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * eager to talk * lots to say * expressed ideas by using terms like: add new things, use words that make more sense, get help, words are getting stronger, *used both words and his body to express himself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * thought that he was a better writer because I can write more and I can spell better * felt he used stronger words in his writing * felt he was using more punctuation, periods, and more spaces in his writing *know to get help in the classroom if I can't spell sometimes * felt he knew lots of words and how to spell them * add new things and using words that made sense was a good strategy to use * understood he could improve the mechanics of his writing * understood that strong writing needed to make sense and using descriptive words helped when you wanted to your writing to make sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * showed the ability to express ways to 'thinking' about his work showed that he was already pondering about assessment of writing on a deeper less superficial

Student Vocabulary and Understanding in June Continued

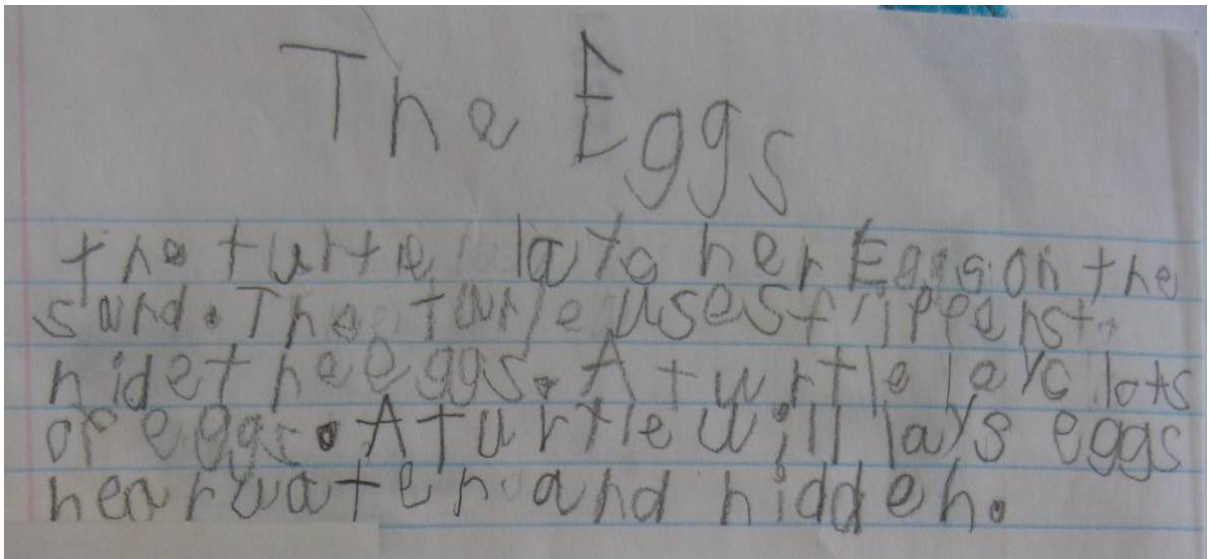
Anne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * enthusiastic * described her writing using terms and ideas like: feedback, try not to make little mistakes, fix them, have fun writing, lower case letter, I am learning, before I was only writing like a couple of words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * used humour in her written work * understood she was writing more than at the beginning of the year * though she could use what she learned in the classroom to be a better writer * was able to articulate her understanding in a detailed manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * looking for ways to talk about what she know and help others to succeed * showed a deeper understanding of the mechanics of writing * thought you should have fun writing * was able to articulate and think about writing in a deeper way
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About The Students' Learning

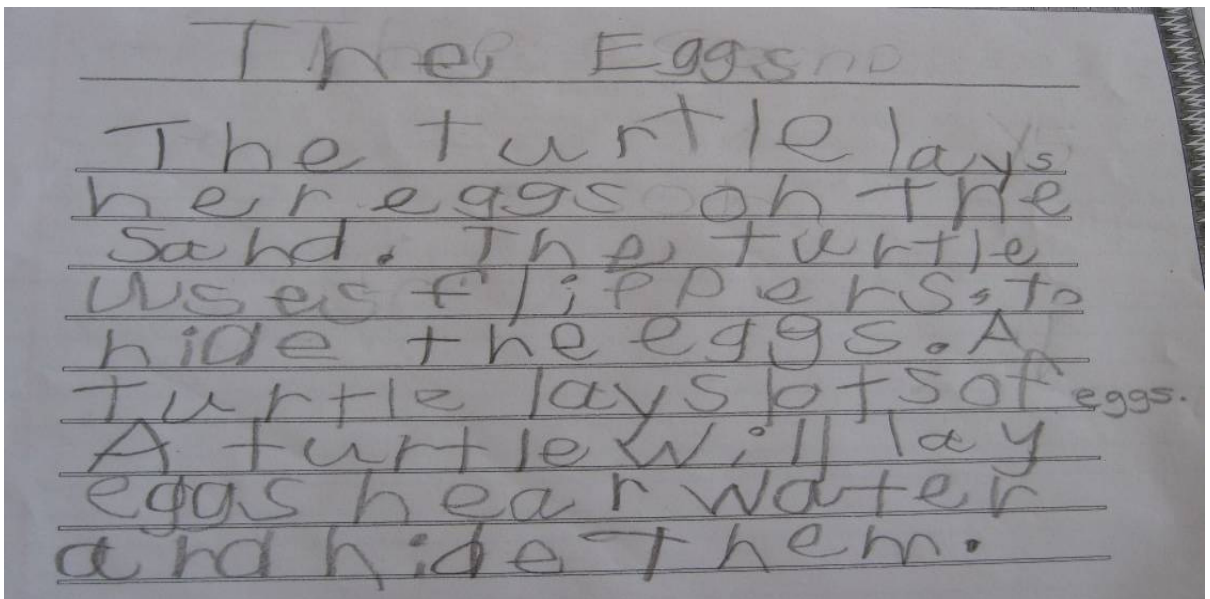
Throughout the process of introducing *Assessment For Learning* strategies into the classroom, I noticed many changes in the students. These changes not only related to their articulation of learning or their improved writing abilities but also filtered over into their confidence and comfort levels surrounding their identity as learners. Each child had a different path in his or her journey, but has shown growth and spirit as they have traveled.

Darryl

Darryl started his year as a reluctant learner. As I mentioned, he was not engaged in his learning and was unable to write a great amount or speak much about his learning. In his pre-interview Darryl had very little to say. He was uncomfortable being asked and having to answer any questions about his writing. As the year went by, I watched his rigid body relax and his confidence levels increase. The climate in the classroom and the strategies he learned enabled him to express himself in different ways and to different people. In October, Darryl involved himself in criteria building and shared his personal knowledge about what makes a quality writer. His answers were quick, but more thoughtful and certainly given in a more comfortable manner. In the next recording with Darryl, he had more to say when he answered the question asked, and what he said showed that he was engaged in a deeper thinking about the topic.



“The Eggs: The turtle layed her eggs on the sand. The turtle used flippers to hide the eggs. A turtle lays lots of eggs. A turtle will lays eggs near water and hidden.”



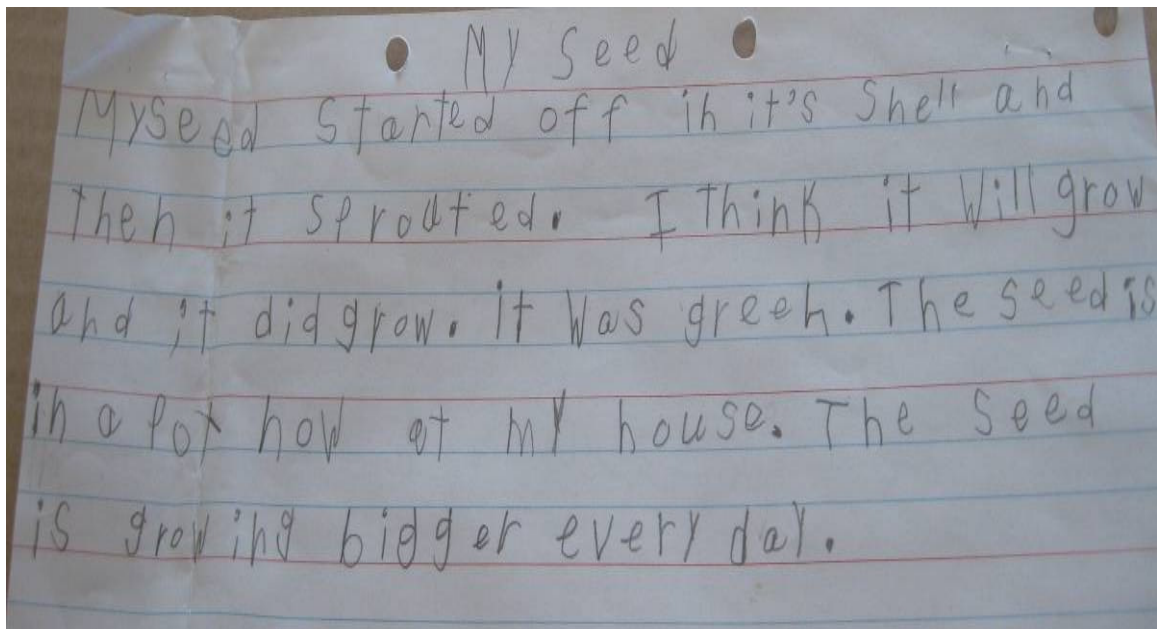
“The Eggs: The turtle lays her eggs on the sand. The turtle uses flippers to hide the eggs. A turtle will lay eggs near water and hide them.”

At this time, his writing also showed improvements. Not only was he writing more, but also his choice of words had improved from simple to more descriptive. He had decided on what kind of ideas that he wanted to express in his writing.

By March, Darryl was an engaged learner interested not only in writing, but in answering questions and sharing ideas with his learning friends. The climate of learning in the classroom

allowed him to be comfortable with his learning and he knew that he would not be persecuted for what he did not know but celebrated for what he did share.

When Darryl and I did our final interview, I could see a different boy. Not only was he comfortable talking about his learning, but his voice was strong and confident as he spoke. In his post-interview, he used language that expressed his knowledge. His improved state also allowed him to write a more detailed and expressive writing sample. His final piece of polished work showed a visually improved piece with growth in his understanding of how to write an engaging story.

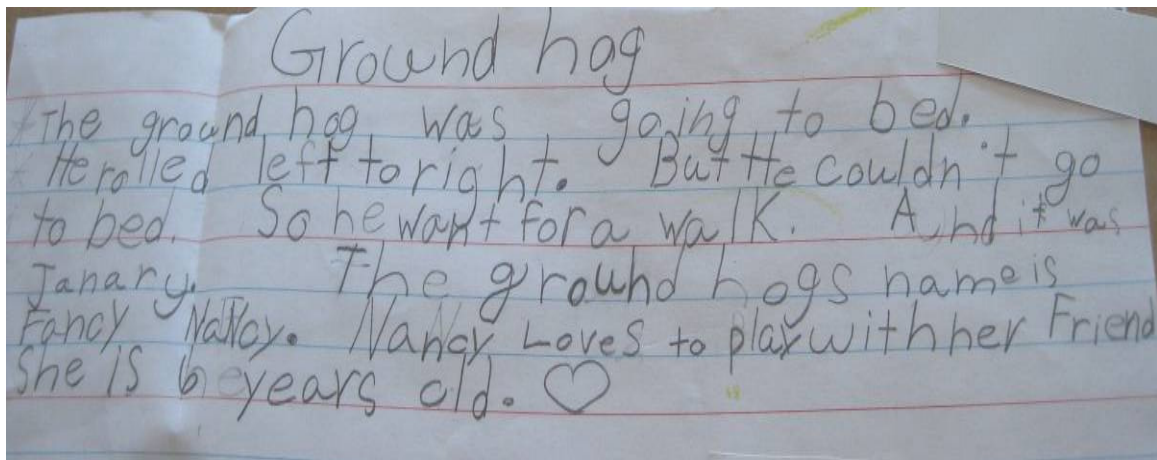


“My Seed: My seed started off in it’s shell and then it sprouted. I think it will grow and it did grow. It was green, The seed is in a pot now at my house. The seed is growing bigger everyday.”

Over all, I was extremely proud of the change in Darryl as a learner, and reassured in the knowledge that he learned skills to guide him toward future success. He showed such an improvement in his confidence level across the board and improvement in his abilities not only as a writer but also as a reader. He may not have left my classroom working ‘at grade level’ in accordance to the curriculum, but he made strides toward success that pleased me as a teacher, his parents as caregivers, and, most importantly, him as a learner. Another point that is worth mentioning is that Darryl no longer had assistance from an EA when he did his writing. Throughout the year the need for assistance got less and less until he was happy and able to work by himself and write.

Janet

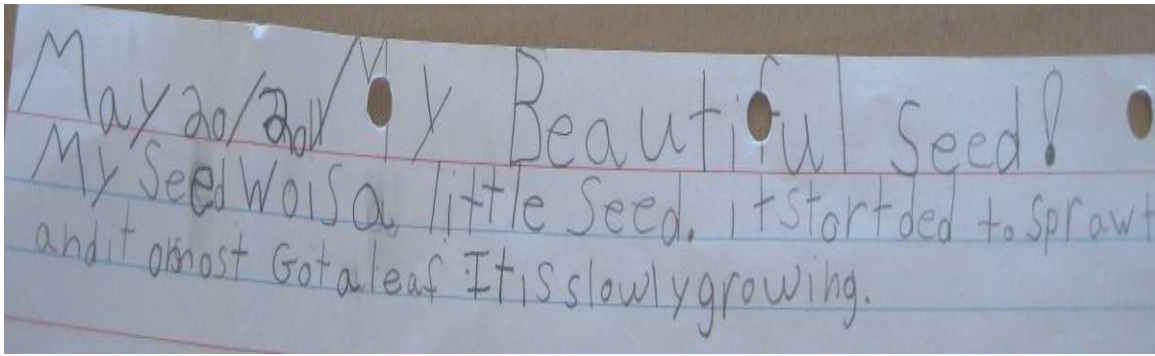
This young girl showed me every day that she had a strong spirit for learning. She started her year in the pre-interview with very little to say about her writing. She talked about some of the basic elements of writing such as the neatness of her letters and the spacing between letters and words but did not engage in conversations at any length. By January, she started to become more expressive in her writing and had more detail in what she said. The conversation was still relatively simple, but was still an improvement. Into March, Janet was expressing herself with more detail and with more confidence.



“Ground Hog: The ground hog was going to bed. He rolled left to right. But he couldn’t go to bed. So he went for a walk. And it was January. The ground hogs name is Fancy Nancy. Nancy loves to play with her friends. She is 6 years old.”

Her polished piece of work around this time showed that she had begun to improve in the following ways. Visually she was trying to present her letters and spacing in a more consistent way and providing adequate spacing between both letters and words. Her writing was more sequential and she included ideas with humor (Fancy Nancy is in reference to me and the children think it is a pretty funny joke!)

By the end of the year, Janet had shown growth as a learner. Her post-interview did not show the same growth as her polished work did.



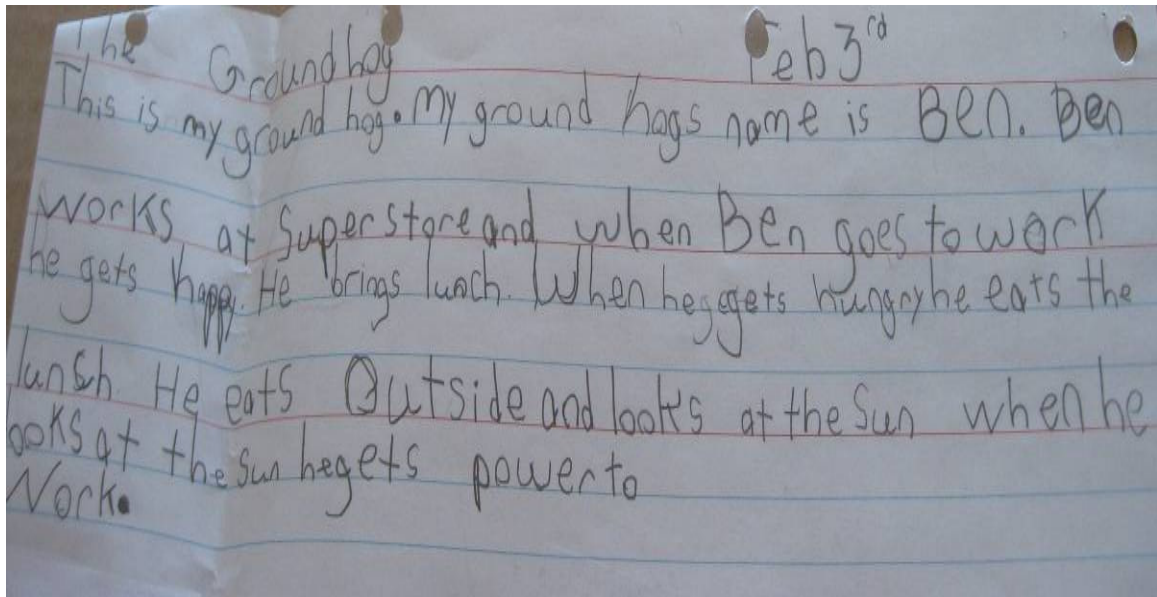
“May 20/2011 – My Beautiful Seed: My seed was a little seed. It started to sprout and it almost got a leaf. It is growing slowly.”

In her interview she talked about the mechanics of writing: spaces, letter printing, and erasing to ‘fix-up’ words. Her polished work at this time showed the same growth as in March with a more sequential and thoughtful feel to her writing. Her spelling and word choice had also improved and showed in her written work.

Although her articulation was basic in most of the taped interview, Janet took what she had been learning and filtered it back into her written work. She, too, like Darryl, was learning strategies that she was using to succeed as a learner.

Al

As an eager learner, Al started his journey willing and able to sit and talk. What he did not have was the language to use to describe or articulate his progress or the processes he was engaged in. His pre-interview was short, focusing on adding to his sentences or the story. He did not have any other ideas to share. By January, I recorded Al articulating his learning in a more detailed manner. Although his language was still simple, he was thinking about punctuation, letter formation, and listening to instructions from the teacher to improve his writing. At this point, he showed improvements in his written work as well.

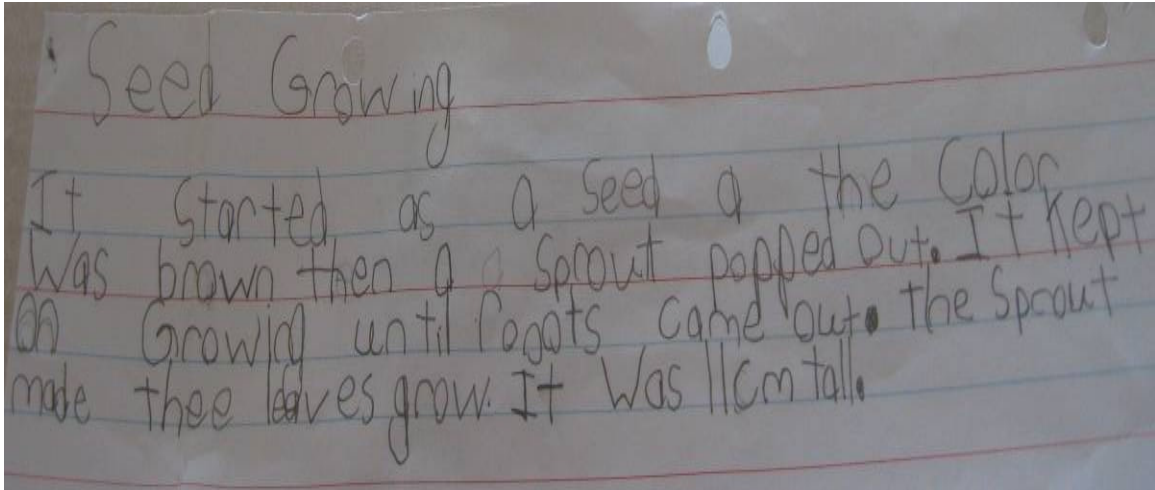


“Feb 3rd – The Ground Hog: This is my ground hog. My ground hogs name is Ben. Ben works at Superstore and when Ben goes to work he gets happy. He brings lunch. When he gets hungry he eats the lunch. He eats outside and looks at the sun. When he looks at the sun he gets power to work.”

In Al’s polished writing sample, he was working on giving the best visual representation he could. Letter formation, spacing, and capital use had improved significantly. He had also begun to be more detailed in his story writing and used expression to gather interest in the story he wrote.

Further in the year, Al articulated the building of his deeper understanding about the processes of writing. He had expanded his thinking to include not just printing expectations, but the need for correct spelling, spacing between letters to form a polished look, and use of vibrant colors in his art work to form vivid illustrations to connect with the writing.

By the time Al got to the end of the year and did the post-interview with me, he was capable of having a lengthy conversation about his learning. This conversation was relevant to his writing; but also the amount of information he shared was more extensive than at the beginning of the year. His polished written work showed his improved knowledge base. That same improvement in detail and expression from earlier was prevalent in his written work.

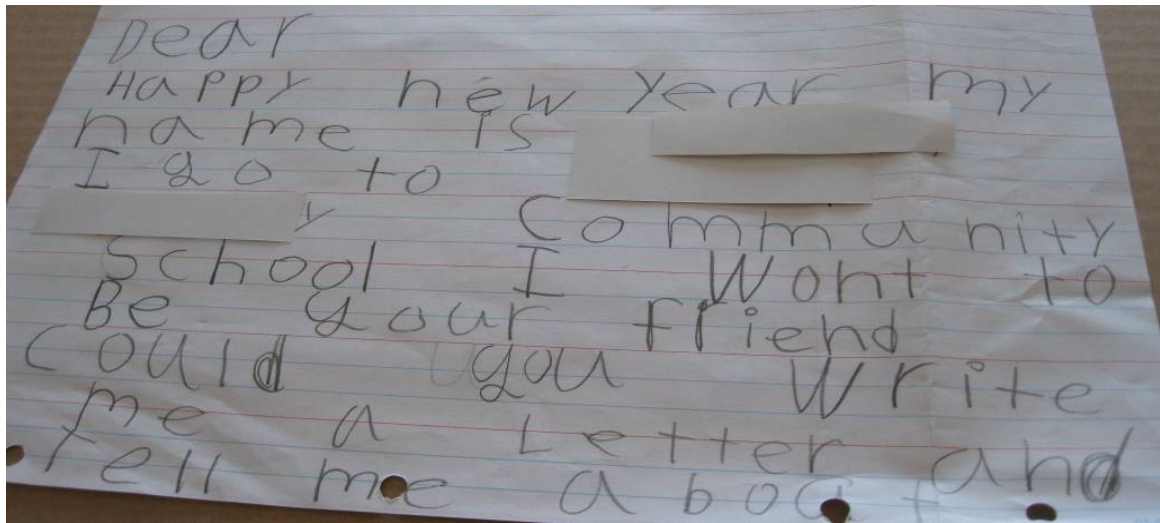


“Seed Growing: It started as a seed a the color was brown then a sprout popped out. It kept on growing until roots came out. The sprout made leaves grow. It was 11cm tall.”

Bev

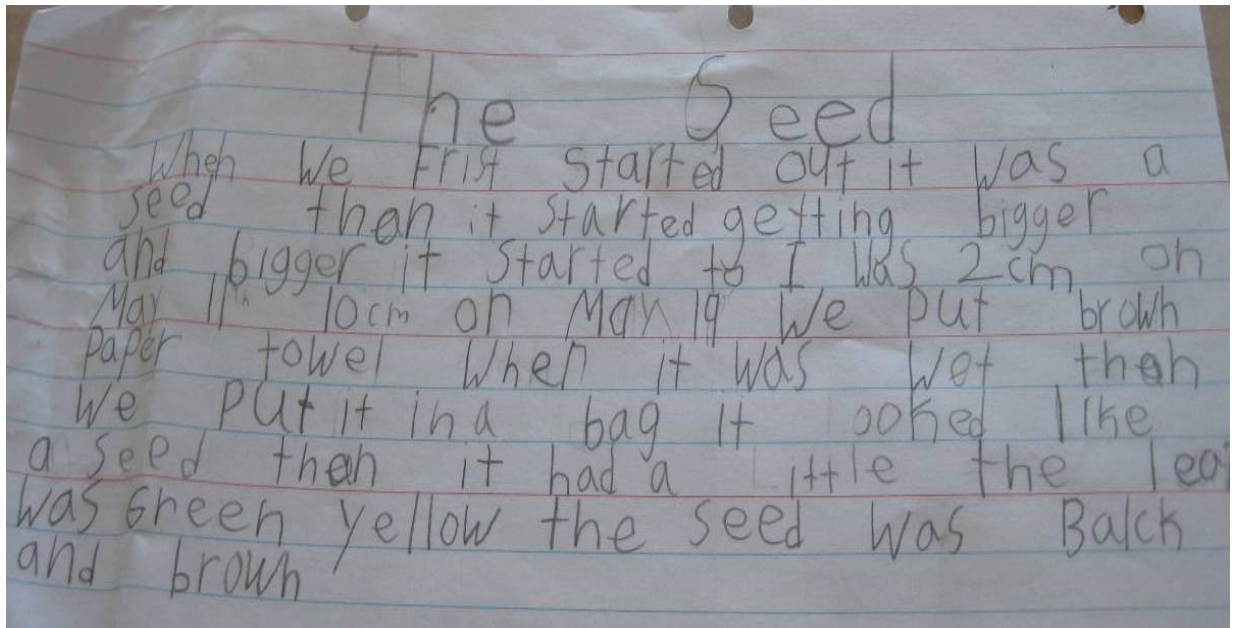
Bev was an active learner and chatters about in the classroom easily. She is not shy nor did she have problems with social conversation. This was not the case when it came to her conversations about learning. In her pre-interview Bev had long pauses between her answers, and when she had something to say it was very quick and had no detail. The interview seemed to be difficult for her. By January, she seemed to be more comfortable speaking about her learning within a group setting. In this supported environment, she not only could piggyback on other people’s ideas but she also used some of the language her peers were using to express learning. She included knowledge about letter spacing and placing capital letters at the beginning of sentences.

Bev’s polished work differed from her speaking abilities. She was still struggling with letter formation, spacing and, staying within the lines as she wrote. Her use of words and ideas had improved. Going beyond simple sentences, she included a more descriptive vocabulary in her writing.



“Dear Happy New Year my name is ___ I go to _____Community School. I want to be your friend. Could you write me a letter and tell me about “

By June I had anticipated that Bev would have handled her post-interview with skill and ease. Her interview was an improvement from her pre-interview; she had many more examples about how she improved and what she was doing as a writer. The surprise to me was the difference in her abilities in the classroom to her interview. In a classroom setting she talked about spelling by articulating that if “I don’t know what that word is so it would have to be checked [you could] sound out hard words. Spell other things out. Use words from the word family to help.” (Transcripts. page 59). She was a great helper! In her peer setting, she showed a greater ability to articulate her learning to others and to help others find the language and understanding of processes to improve their writing.



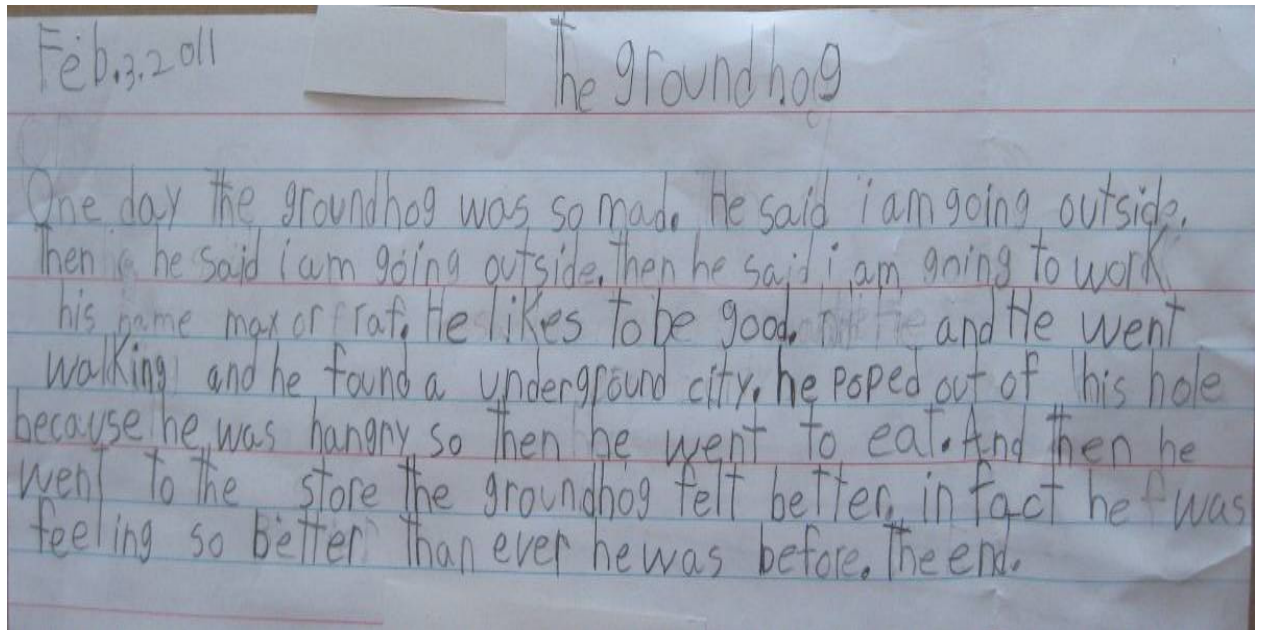
"The Seed; When we first started out it was a seed. Then it started getting bigger and bigger. It started to it was 2cm on May 11th, 10 cm on May 19th. We put brown paper towel when it was wet. Then we put it in a bag. It looked like a seed then it had a little leaf. it was green yellow. The seed was black and brown

Her polished writing in June showed a great improvement from even her mid-year work sample. Visually she had improved her formation skills and had a much more polished work to show her audience. Her skills around story building had also improved. The example above shows a greater detailed sample that had a more completed and sequential feel to it. Her word choices, although they are not the biggest and most complex, showed she was trying to write a story that was easy and interesting to read.

Jeff

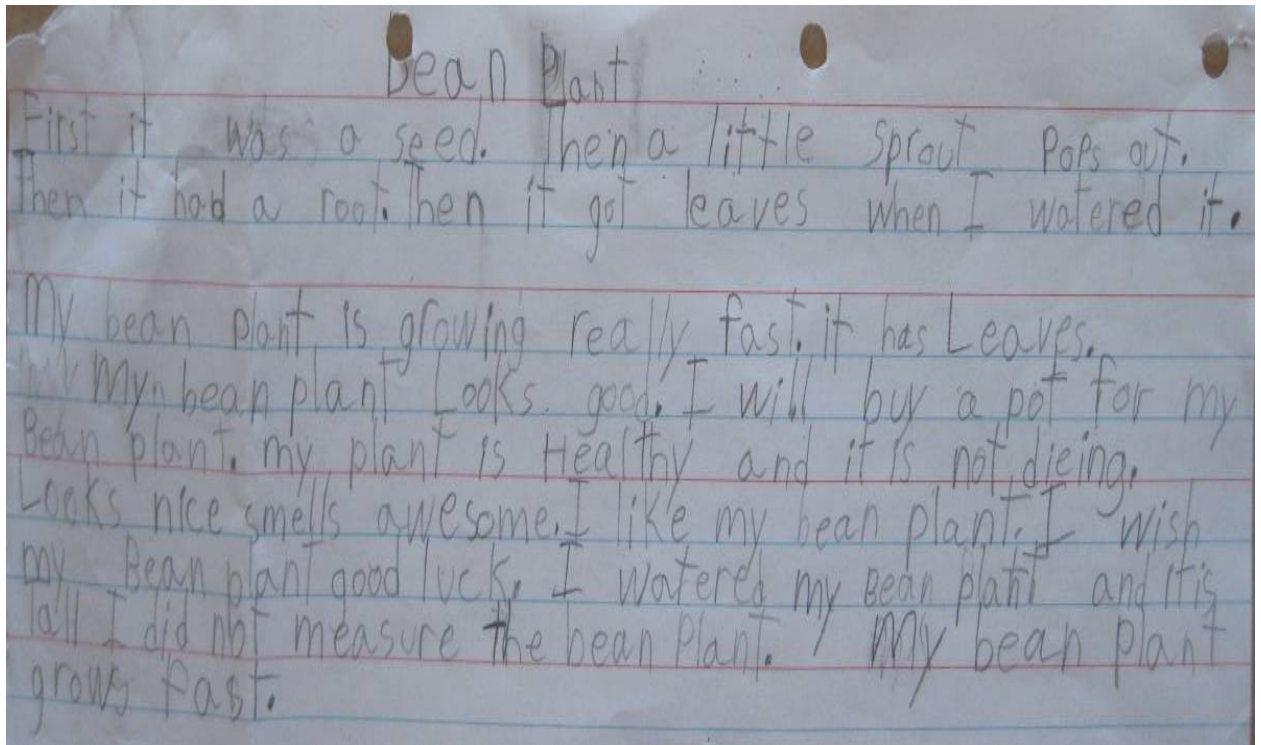
From the very beginning of the year, Jeff was willing and able to talk. His verbal skills and confidence in speaking to anyone in any situation were strong for a child of his age. In our pre-interview discussion, Jeff articulated his understanding about his writing in a deeper more detailed way than others were at his age. He thought about the story and how he could improve in certain ways. As we investigated more ideas and strategies, Jeff talked about them and used both the ideas and the language we used in the classroom. His polished work around February showed that he could not only talk, but also write about what was in his mind. He used many detailed words and ideas in his groundhog story to engage the reader in his story. He still had

difficulties with capital letter placement and the proper use of the word ‘and’ in writing. He showed expression in his writing and the ability to have a beginning, middle, and end to the plot.



“Feb.3, 2011 – The Groundhog: One day the groundhog was mad. He said I am going outside. Then he said I am going outside. Then he said I am going to work. His name Max or raf. He likes to be good and he went walking and he found a underground city. He popped out of his hole because he was hungry so then he went to eat. And then he went to the store. The ground hog felt better. In fact he was feeling so better than ever before. The end.”

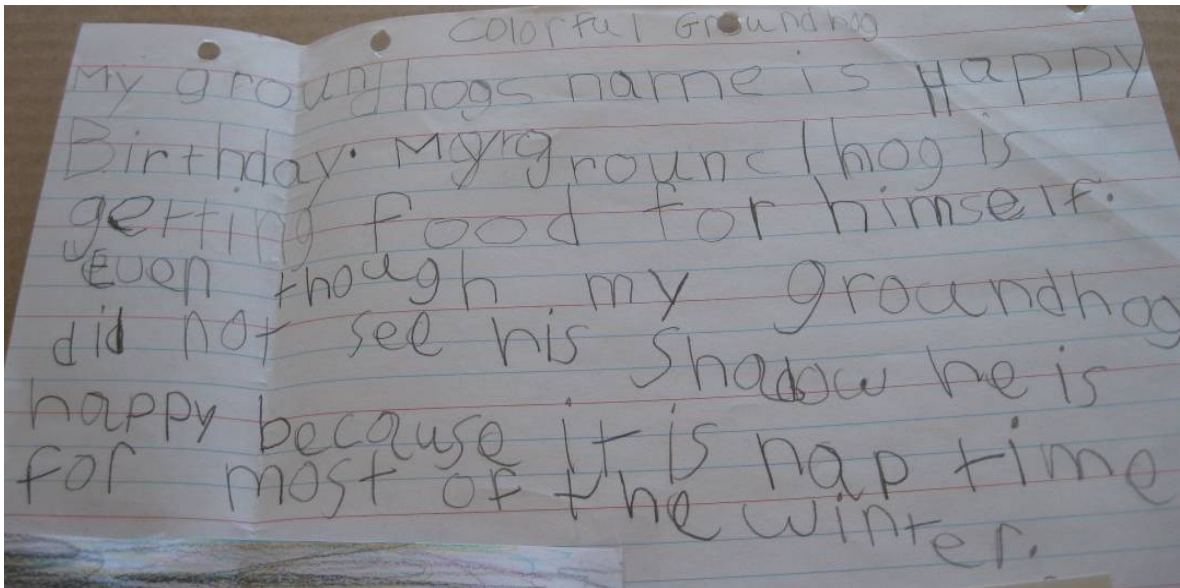
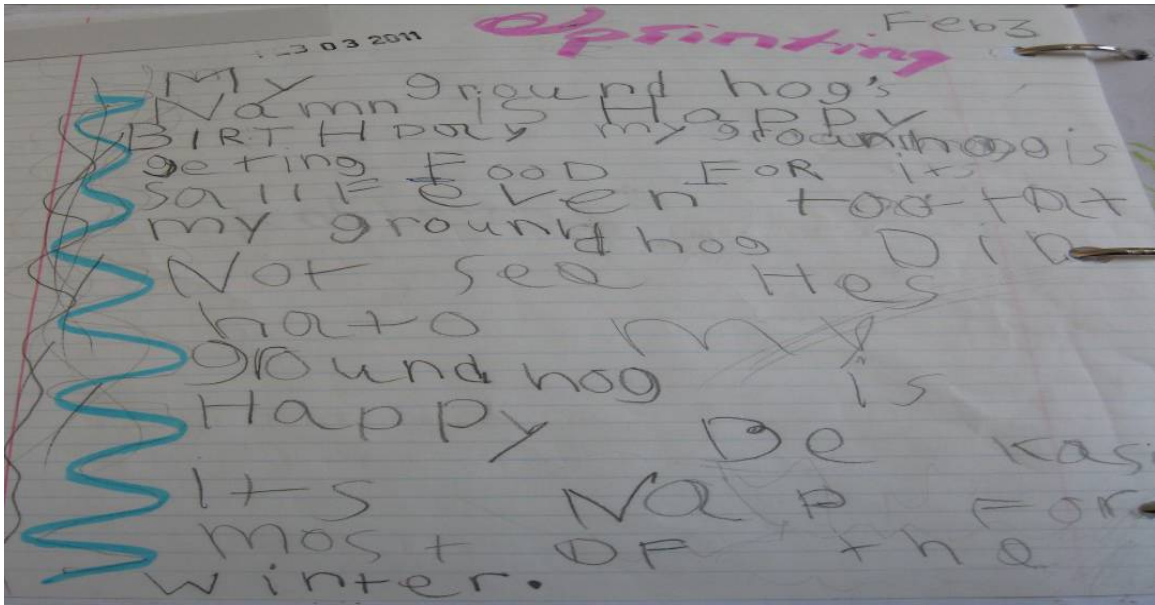
In our post-interview, Jeff was the poster boy for articulation. He talked not only about the mechanics of writing but also about wanting to add to his writing to make more sense. His polished work aligns with what he articulated in his interview. He was able to write a story that was sequential, detailed, and interesting to the reader. He showed improvements in his capital use and chose words to express his thinking that were beyond what a ‘typical’ grade one student is capable of using.



“Bean Plant: First it was a seed. Then a little sprout pops out. Then it had a root. Then it got leaves when I watered it. My bean plant is growing really fast. It has leaves. My bean plant looks good. I will buy a pot for my bean plant. My plant in healthy and it is not dying. Looks nice smells awesome. I like my bean plant and it’s tall. I did not measure the bean plant. My bean plant grows fast.”

Anne

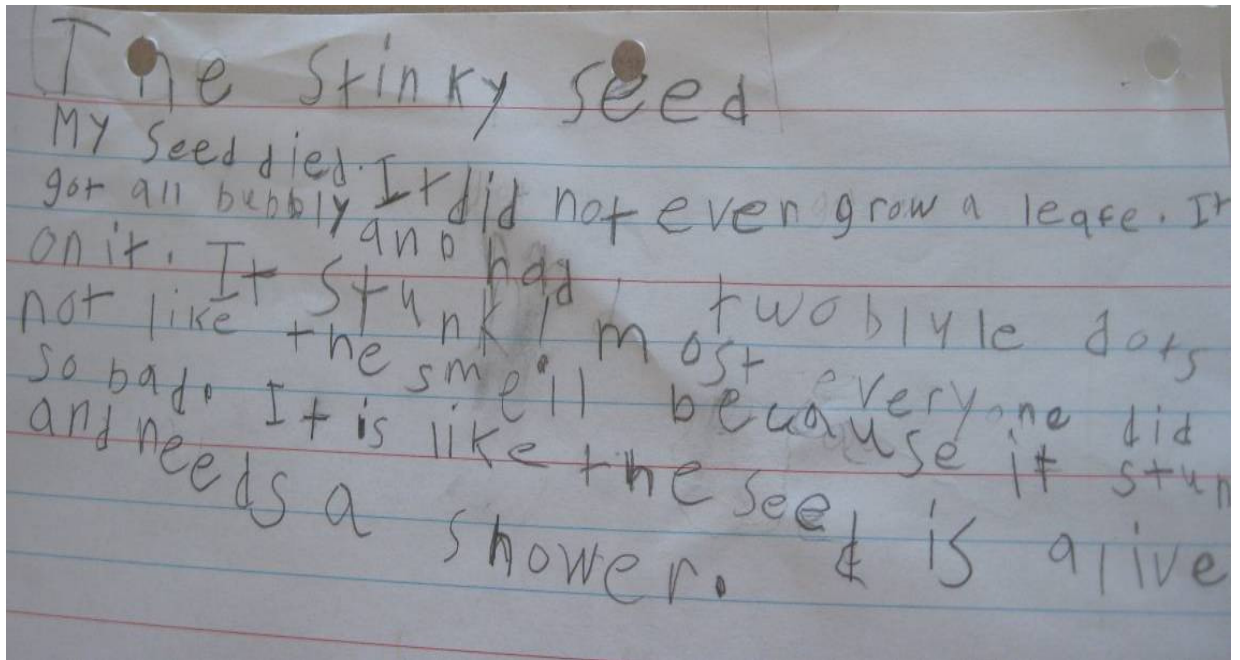
My spirited Anne was an eager and dedicated learner, always willing and anxious to try new things and share with her learning friends. In her pre-interview Anne did not express any real knowledge about her writing, perhaps because she did not know the answer to the questions that I asked or did not have the language to answer them. As we learned and grew as learners, Anne started to express herself more. A couple of months into school she talked about using spelling to improve writing and by January she articulated many ideas about how to improve her writing. Her rough copy and polished work around this time showed that her ability to tell a story exceeded her ability in the mechanics of writing. Anne’s letter formations, spacing, and ability to write on the lines was still developing. The story and words she used were much more advanced. She was able to tell a story and use words to describe and express what she wanted her audience to understand in her writing.



“Colorful Groundhog: My ground hogs name is Happy Birthday. My ground hog is getting food for himself. Even though my ground hog did not see his shadow he is happy because it is nap time for most of the winter.”

In March, Anne amazed me with the language she used. We talked about how people can improve their writing from a sample we were looking at and she thought, “They could get some feedback and they could ask some people to help them spell words and then that would help them to know how to spell some more words.” (Transcripts, page 50). This kind of thinking and

articulation indicate that she had moved into understanding more complex ideas about what was involved in quality writing.



“The Stinky Seed: My seed died. It did not even grow a leaf. It got all bubbly and had two blue dots on it. It stunk! Most everyone did not like the smell because it stunk so bad. It is like the seed is alive and needs a shower.”

When examining her polished writing samples from this period, I note that she had also developed some humor. Her choice of title for her story and her ending sentence made everyone laugh. This, coupled with word choice and the ability to be sequential in her writing, showed significant growth from the beginning of the year. Visually I saw improvements in her letter formations but she still was weak on staying on the lines as she wrote.

Chapter 5: What Does This Tell Us

In what ways DO students articulate their understanding of accomplished or needed improvements in their written work? In what ways IS this articulation related to implemented *Assessment For Learning* practices?

Were my students better able to articulate their accomplishments and abilities because I taught them *Assessment For Learning* strategies in the classroom? I believe I can get closer to this answer by looking at some of the themes that have developed in the data.

Students' Language Use

Upon reviewing the data, I found that a theme emerged which centered around the students' language use. I thought it might be because the students used metacognition to articulate and express their knowledge and because of their increased building of this knowledge. Metacognition is described as "Thinking about thinking or cognition about cognition." (Terrace & Metcalfe, 2008, p. 242). It happens when a person begins "slowing down and taking the time to enjoy the thinking process, even to marvel at the ability we have to think about so many different things and allow ourselves to follow our thoughts" (Larkin, 2010 p. 4). I saw this in the students and how they were learning. However, I also began to see something that I believe was more than 'thinking about' their thinking, but 'thinking about' the words they were using when they talked about their knowledge of writing: what I call meta-articulation. Larkin (2010) touched on this concept of meta-articulation when he discussed the Talk to Text project that was associated with looking at metacognitive awareness and development in Kindergarten students. She believes that students become part of a linguistic community whose "context is a type of metacognitive knowledge, which is translated into metacognitive skill" (Larkin, 2010, p. 80). Although I saw the students' knowledge base grow, I also saw something more. The students began to think about the words they used to describe their writing. My wonder is, is meta-articulation just a sign of inner speech that "promotes higher-order reasoning" (Tarricone, 2011 p. 23) or maybe verbalization created by the "zone of proximal development which Vygotsky describes [as] one which moves from an individual to a social cognitive process" (p.23)? I believe it is a combination of all of these concepts, and more. I believe the students are 'thinking' about their words and meta-articulating their learning.

Another compelling theme that became apparent through the data was the increase in students' knowledge about writing. I saw the connection to the students' development of their metacognitive and meta-articulation skills and their knowledge about writing through the processes they were involved in.

In the pre-interviews and early data collection between October and the end of December, students articulated ideas on improving writing or describing what they saw in the writing. When I look at all the pre-interviews I did with my classroom, the focus on students' ideas on improving writing fell on letter formations or the mechanics of writing. Adding more spaces in writing, including punctuation, and improving letter formation were the trending themes for improving. Some of the students also thought about improving the pictures they made in association with their writing.

When I asked the question of my students about what they liked about their writing, I was surprised to observe how many of the students expressed that they liked the activity they wrote about. This observation suggests to me that many of my students could tell me about the story idea. When I asked for further ideas about the writing and processes of writing, I had 'I don't know' or silence for an answer.

By early November, the data shows the beginning of a transition. While developing criteria and investigating samples, some students began to discuss the idea of what was needed to improve writing. They felt that to improve writing you need to "write more" (Transcripts, p. 14) or "look for a word...to add [like] 'to'" (Transcripts, p. 17) or that you "have to use good words" (Transcript, p. 17). They also started to talk about how to "think about spelling" (Transcripts, p. 18) or how to "sound out words" (Transcripts, p.20) when they were looking at improving their writing.

Another transition the data shows in this time frame was the language the students used to describe the mechanics and letter formation of writing. The students now said that writers need to "make your words look good" (Transcripts, p. 18) by "trying not to erase so much because then it will look messy" (Transcripts, p. 19), and to "make the letters the right way... [like]...don't make a 'b' a 'd'" (Transcripts, p. 20). They also insisted that writers needed to "make sure you write using a pencil to write not a marker. If you use a marker you can not erase" (Transcripts, p. 22) and "don't rush" or "play around when you write" (Transcripts, p.22) if you want to have a better quality of writing.

From the end of January until the middle of March, the students were able to describe how to improve writing using multiple ideas. Jeff now understood that one of the samples we looked at and discussed was of better quality than the others. He thought the writer was working “stronger” because their writing had “some spaces and it looks like this person is trying to make the letters straight...putting punctuation... making another sentence [and even] they could put a couple things in the picture” (Transcripts, p. 29). One of my most timid and struggling students, not part of the participants’ group, was even able to pick out something from a sample that could be improved. He knew that the illustration of the mom, sister, and dad did not have “hands, feet, no clothes” (Transcripts, p. 32) and could be improved by adding them to the picture. This seemingly small step was a huge success for a boy who barely spoke. Students were even picking up some on the language of assessment that I encouraged them to use when they articulated their learning or ideas of improving. According to another young boy, he could make “printing stronger....better” (Transcripts, p. 43), which are two words that I used often in the classroom discussions. One of those proud teacher moments happened for me in early March. Anne was assessing her written work within a small group. She was asked if someone could do anything about spelling mistakes. She told us, “They could get some feedback and they could ask some people to help them spell words and then that would help them to know how to spell some more words” (Transcripts, p. 49) and two places to get feedback could be from her “teacher [or] your mind” (Transcripts, p. 50). I could not have said it better myself.

In the last months of school, I was amazed and astonished at the language the students used. In the pre-interview, the students all had trouble articulating about their learning. The answers were thin in length and content and for the most part the students were uncomfortable talking about their learning. As I introduced the *Assessment For Learning* strategies and implemented them into the learning environment, things began to change for the students. Their conversations became richer in language and focused on the task of learning. They used the language I used to describe knowledge building and learning strategies to use in quality or strong writing. This began my questioning why they changed their language patterns. Students articulated complete thoughts on how to improve their writings with ease in all forms of discussions: peer-to-peer, whole classroom, small group, and student-to-teacher. Instead of having one word or one-sentence ideas, students had discussions about how and why things could be changed and improved.

This development of language also coincided with an increased ability to assess deeper understandings about writing and the processes used to improve writing. Students expressed through their assessment of written samples that many ingredients were needed to improve writing but just “because if that was a good story it doesn’t matter about how it looks, if is like if they write the straight words and we can understand the story” (Transcripts, p. 62).

By June 8th, 2011, I was doing the post interviews with the students. It took me about twice as long to do these interviews because the students had more to tell me about their writing. The written transcripts from the interviews also gave evidence of the students’ ability to articulate more about their writing. In September, I had 13 pages of written transcripts derived from these interviews in comparison to the 20 I had for June. The students assessed their written work and continued to impress me not only with the knowledge they had about writing, but also with their ability to self assess their own work.

The new ideas that some of the students expressed at this time solidified my belief that the *Assessment For Learning* strategies I was using to facilitate students’ learning were not only effective but powerful. The students were telling me, “you should have fun writing” (Transcripts, p. 68), that they are “stronger writers” (Transcripts, p. 77), and “Whenever I have to do my journal, I always think if I only do a little more. I want to get proud of myself to do more” (Transcripts, p. 79). One of my immigrant students expressed that he was “practicing my words and they are getting better and better. Now I write better. I write stories about the gingerbread man and how much old I am” (Transcripts, p. 78). The ability to both express and understand that he improved was a true success in my eyes.



Self-Regulated Learners

Yet another theme that emerged from my data was students were becoming both self-regulated and motivated learners. The process of becoming a self-regulated learner occurs when learners take “a proactive approach to their own education through the utilization of knowledge and the strategic oversight and adjustment of their affect, cognition and behavior” (Fryer & Elliot, 2008, p. 53). This metacognitive process “requires students to explore their thought process to understand and evaluate the results on their actions and to plan alternative pathways to success” (Pajares, 2008, p. 118). This metacognitive practice shows a link to the previous theme I found in the student data. There have been questions on how to develop “instructional programs in different instructional areas [that] foster the development of children’s motivation and self-regulation” (Wigfield, Hoa, & Klauda, 2008, p. 190), and on what can “schools do to buttress appropriate self-efficacy beliefs and help ensure that students effectively engage in self-regulatory practices” (Pajares, 2008, p.125), and “how does an instructor motivate a passive student to expend the extra effort needed to implement self-regulatory processes” (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008, p. 3). The answer to these questions is to implement *Assessment For Learning* practices into classrooms.

Researchers like Wigfield, Hoa, Klauda, Zimmerman and Schunk (2008) believe that three phases must be present for students to become self-regulated learners:

1. planning /forethought
2. monitoring/performance
3. reflection

These phases are meant to be cyclical and overlap each other as learning takes place. The same three phases can be explored in *Assessment For Learning*.

By beginning the process of criteria building, I facilitated the students in setting roles or targets as Davies (2000) and Stiggins (2008) would say. This process sets an “aim of an action [to] attain a specific standard of proficiency” (Zimmerman & Schulk 2008, p.18) thus beginning the process of self-regulation. When combined with pre- interviewing the students and setting up the classroom as a community of learners, the students begin to learn strategies that begin to help them “decrease adverse emotional reactions such as anxiety , and various forms of defensiveness, such as helplessness” (p. 5) which are strategies used when students practice positive self-regulation.

In the middle of our learning (October – May), students used a multitude of monitoring and performance driven strategies just like in phase two of what makes self-regulated learners. Using *Assessment For Learning* strategies allowed students to talk with each other in small groups or peer-to-peer settings; in doing so I lowered “the competitive orientation of a classroom ...to increase students’ self-efficacy beliefs” (Parjares, 2008, p.128). Giving the students the ability to talk and interact in each other’s learning gave them both forms of guidance and models to become more proficient in their learning tasks. Working as a learning community is a developmental process that “has been described as a transition from other-regulated to self-regulated” (Newman, 2008, p. 316). Another form of modeling that I used was viewing and talking about samples of work to inform the students about different abilities and qualities of written work. When allowing students to copy models or, in my terms, to use samples to have a visual representation of developing and quality work only lends to “help their understanding that missteps are inevitable, that they can be overcome” (Parjares, 2008, p127). Proponents of self-regulatory methods in learning believe that “in a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to consult with one another, even when not explicitly instructed to do so, students may take good advantage of their classmates as knowledgeable resources when they have difficulty with part of an assignment rather than flounder and lose the motivation or ability to persist at a task” (Wigifield, Hoa &Klauda, 2008, p.186).

When I was researching individuals such as Calkins (1991), Hattie and Timperly, (2007), McTighe and O’Connor (2005), Davies (2007), Stiggins (2008), Giampapa (2004), Goodwin (2001), and Cook-Sather (2002), I noted that they talked about engaging students by having them give feedback about their work, which in turn increases their achievements. This observation was also true with my students. The more they engaged the more they were comfortable and confident in the processes we were learning: criteria building, feedback both written and oral to and from peers and teachers, samples to build a solid understanding of their learning, and self assessment through the articulation of the tasks. As I stated before, the amount of data I had from the pre-interview compared to the post-interviews was significant. The students were engaged and excited about sharing with me their knowledge and ideas.

This was also evident in the level of chatter that permeated my classroom. I came to think of the clamor as music produced by eager learners using their articulation skills as instruments. In the times the students were asked to give or receive feedback, I had little problems with

student behaviors or students not engaged in their work. The ability to assess work, talk about it, and then make changes to their own writing allowed not only their writing to improve but also their confidence as writers to increase. What previous researchers have not talked enough about is the students' excitement about their learning. In general terms, the students were excited by the process of *Assessment For Learning*. Putting a natural social process – talking – as a natural process of learning into my daily classroom culture allowed the students not only to be engaged, but also to be excited about what they were doing. It was rare that I had to move students to work by themselves, or cut a lesson short. The students were in a state of learning fury! They were talking, teaching others about their idea, debating suggestions, and excited about doing it.

It did not surprise me that feedback use is a powerful tool to develop students' ability to become self-regulators in their learning. When teachers provide “students with attributional feedback [it] influences their attributions, self-efficacy, motivation and achievement” (Schunk, 2008, p. 253). This “complex weave of students' knowledge, feedback they create and feedback they receive” (Winne & Hadwin, 2008, p. 297) enables students to learn how to regulate not only what they are thinking about their own learning, but what others see and feel about their writing. The experience of using feedback ‘spoke’ to students and “caused a shift in engagement in response to feedback” (Corno, 2008, p.202) which is evident in learners who are proficient self-regulators.

Another connection to being a self-regulated learner my students had through the *Assessment For Learning* process was having their teachers there to support their learning. By setting up my classroom as a community of learners and allowing students to work in groups with peers, and to have student-to-teacher conferences, I organized “the environment to support the development of positive feelings ... that is a critical condition for subsequential interest development” (Hidi & Ainley, 2008, p98). Throughout the year, I acted as a facilitator to students' growth in learning. By doing so, my “students became more intrinsically motivated for learning, felt motivated for learning, felt more competent at learning, and developed a higher level of self esteem.” (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008, p16). It is thought that teachers like myself who encourage and support students' learning “help ensure that their students will develop the robust sense of self-efficacy required to rely on their own initiative and engage the world on their own” (Pajares, 2008, p134). This strong sense of self in turn allows these students to foster the

ability of “students to develop the self-belief and self-regulatory habits that will serve them for a lifetime.” (p. 135).

In the third phase of developing into a strong self-regulator, students are asked to reflect on their learning. Within the practice of *Assessment For Learning*, students are asked to reflect all the time. Through interaction with their teacher and peers, developing criteria and articulating their learning about samples or their own written work, students reflected throughout the year. Hidi and Ainley (2008) believe that as students reflect and question their learning like what happens with *Assessment For Learning* they develop “more positive feelings, increased knowledge and value for particular contents of interest” (Hidi & Ainley, 2008, p. 90). This self-regulatory strategy not only increases the students self worth but also increases “the self-evaluations they make about the outcomes of their self-monitoring” (Pajares, 2008, p. 120). *Assessment For Learning* provides “opportunities for students to self-monitor, revise work, receive frequent feedback, and reflect on their own thinking and learning processes.” (Meece & Painter, 2008, p. 354). This shift allows students to become more responsible for their own learning.

Informal Formative Assessment

Another theme shone from the data developed from this study. The interaction, articulation, and informal formative assessment the students were involved in as they learned was exhilarating. Being involved with students and the conversations they are having permits “teachers to recognize students’ concepts, mental models, strategies, language use or communication skills, and allow them to use this information to guide instruction” (Ruiz-Primo & Furtak, 2007, p. 60). This is known as informal formative assessment and happens in every avenue of introducing *Assessment For Learning* strategies to students. This informal process “does not imply a focus on the naturally unpredictable events that arise in any classroom, but rather on the small-scale, frequent opportunities teachers have for collecting information about their students’ progress towards the learning goals they have in mind.” (Ruiz-Primo, 2011). Informal formative assessment will (1) involve discussions in which students share their thinking, beliefs, ideas, and products (eliciting); (2) allow teachers to acknowledge student participation (recognizing); and (3) allow teachers to use students’ participation as the springboard to develop questions and/or activities that can promote their learning (Ruiz-Primo and Furtak, 2007, p. 62). *Assessment For Learning* strategies allow teachers the time and

structure to elicit learning. In other words, teacher and students are “evoking, educating, bringing out, or developing. To describe a teacher’s actions as eliciting during informal formative assessment is thus a more accurate description, as teachers are calling for a reaction, clarification, elaboration, or explanation from students” (Ruiz-Primo & Furtak , 2007 p. 59). The practice of Informal formative assessment much like the processes involved in *Assessment For Learning* “can take place within the context of any student-teacher and student-student interaction” (Primo, 2011). Because conversations are often “on the fly,” *Assessment For Learning* strategies “allow instruction to move in different directions depending on the ways in which students respond” (Primo, 2011). In the practice within my classroom the peer-to-peer, in small groups, and teacher-student conversations allowed me to know “where students stand on a day-to-day basis. [This] enables teachers to determine where they are in relation to where they should be, so that they can provide the appropriate scaffolding to move their students forward in their learning. The distance between the actual level of understanding and the potential level of understanding that a student can achieve with the help of the teacher” ((Primo, 2011) aligns with the practice of implementing *Assessment For Learning* into a classroom.

Gender Similarities

I was surprised by the next theme that I discovered in my data. It is commonly thought “when gender differences in the use of, or confidence to use, self-regulated learning strategies have been reported, they typically favor female students” (Pajares, 2008, p. 122). Unlike what is commonly observed, I believe the boys benefited as much as the girls from using *Assessment For Learning* strategies in the classroom. I am sure you are asking the question, how so? The answer is simple: they began to talk and share their *learning* more. This group of boys was a pretty typical group. Some talked in a social manner more than others, but most were not the first with their hands up to answer questions in class to share what they thought about the learning. I wonder why my group of boys did develop confidence and self-regulated learning strategies, as much as the girls? Was it because they were learning *how* to talk and communicate about their learning? Could it be that they were being given the opportunity to talk? Was it a deeper social issue surrounding how we train boys to only talk about certain subjects? Whatever the reason or reasons, I was happy to see them able, willing, and as excited as their female counterparts to take the opportunity to articulate about learning in a positive and productive manner.

Chapter 6: Where To?

From the beginning of my research, I was certain my students benefited by using *Assessment For Learning* strategies in the classroom. The relationship between the learning and articulation was still a wonder to me when I began the study. This is why my questions were:

1. In what ways do students articulate their understanding of accomplished or needed improvements in their written work?
2. In what ways is this articulation related to implemented *Assessment For Learning* practices?

The data provided by the students' efforts throughout the year have shown that all students grew in their ability to articulate learning. The degree in which this ability increased was as varied as the students I taught, but all students showed growth and success with articulation of their learning. As a whole, students could talk about what quality writing looked like and what strategies were needed to accomplish this writing growth. They have also shown an increased ability to interact with each other and articulate constructive feedback to their peers. This growth in articulation translated into growth as writers as is evident in the written work shown in this study. These elements of learning were in direct association with introducing *Assessment For Learning* strategies to my students. They were able to learn safe and interactive skills that allowed them to become empowered to leap forward in their learning.

However, there are new questions that have come about from my research that need to be investigated and answered. I am most interested in studying students' excitement in their learning when *Assessment For Learning* strategies are used in the classroom. Does the excitement I witnessed affect their ability levels? Is this excitement in fact a part of the 'engagement' in learning or an additional benefit brought on by students being taught to be a part of their learning journey? The connections to the practice of *Assessment For Learning* and children's excitement for learning could also connect to the phenomena I discovered between self-regulation and *Assessment For Learning* strategies. Research should be done to highlight the alignment of these two powerful practices and the ways they can harness the students' excitement and knowledge to further develop students' intrinsic need to learn.

Another question became apparent from my research when I was analysing data. Why were the boys I was working with developing a level of growth and participation in their learning

that seemed to be different from that which other teachers and researchers have observed? The boys in this class did as well as the girls. A more focused look needs to be taken on just how much growth the boys are able to make when asked and shown how to talk about their learning in a comfortable and safe environment. Could the practice of *Assessment For Learning* be another avenue of success for the male population when looking at writing? Should this powerful strategy be thought about as an influential tool to use for the benefit of the male population of learners? A more detailed and developed study would help to answer these questions.

In my research and observations through-out this process, I watched and listened to students articulating their learning in a different manner than I had before I introduced *Assessment For Learning* practices into the classroom. Further studies need to be completed to sort out the phenomenon of students becoming meta-articulate in their learning practices. I wonder if my view on meta-articulation is just a part of their metacognition functions or in fact its own distinct learning trend? It would be interesting to see if the practices and strategies that *Assessment For Learning* offers are just well informed or if they are in fact breaking learning ground on new ideas and focus towards learning.

The last question, which needs an answer, is that on students' language development through the use of *Assessment For Learning*. My data concluded that students did improve on articulating thoughts ideas and assessments about writing. I think a further more pointed study which focuses only on the language students used throughout the process would further the research that concludes just how strong the practice of *Assessment For Learning* is for student growth and development.

Further studies need to be done to both reinforce the data and conclusions I found in my study and examine some of the questions I have asked. A reconstruction of this study being done with different learning communities in relation to language and socio-economic or ethnicity groupings could give educators further data on how introducing *Assessment For Learning* influences articulation and growth in students' learning. Another study to be done to further explore is the questions about boys' learning trends and development when *Assessment For Learning* is used in a classroom. Further investigation into the relationship between *Assessment For Learning* and self-regulated learners would be of great use to educators who are looking for powerful strategies to encourage students to grow as learners and productive citizens. Lastly a study that would begin to focus on the emotional connection of students and their learning when

Assessment For Learning strategies were introduced in a classroom would explore what I found in my study was typical in other situations.

The answer to these questions about implementing *Assessment For Learning* into a classroom could add another dimension to practices effective and strong teachers strive to use to affect students' learning in a positive way.

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Appendix A

Transcript Sample

March 9th

Teacher; student 1 is going to start with her big voice and tell us about the very first one.
Tell us what you know about it.

Student 1: It doesn't have no space.

Teacher: Space between what

Student 1: Space between the letters.

Teacher: Space between the letters. Does that make it easy to read or hard to read

Student 1: Hard.

Teacher: What else do you know about that one, Lauren. Tell me about the printing
..what does it look like. Is it messy. Are all the letters Capitals or are all the letters little
letters. What about that Letter in the middle of the sentence. Should it be that capital or should it
be something different. Do you know the answer.

Student 1: No

Teacher: Can you read any of that for us.

Student 1: I see the ice, see the, The ice is slippery. The man played on the ice.

Teacher: On the other side we have our other Grade 1 girl, Anne. Anne, tell us the one at
the very end because Lauren told us about the very, very beginning writing sample and now you
are going to tell us about the one at the very end. What makes this sample so much stronger than
the very first one that Lauren told us about. Tell us about it and tell us why it is stronger.

Anne: This one is...

Teacher: Now tell me about the writing

Anne: I think the writing is good.

Teacher: Why?

Anne: Because it has punctuation and comas and that stuff in it and has a Capital at the
start of the Story. That little swirly thing should not be there . It looks like the turtles head of
something.

Teacher: How about the story, Can you read it for us.

Anne: The turtle eggs are in the sand and is hunting them up.

Teacher: Do you think everything is spelled perfect in there.

Anne: No

Teacher: Which words do you know that aren't spelled with perfect spelling.

Anne: Art...Sand

Teacher: Could the person who was doing this writing do something about spelling mistakes?

Anne: They could get some feedback and they could ask some people to help them spell words and then that would help them to know how to spell some more words.

Teacher: Absolutely, Fantastic Could you do something else. You said "get some feedback from and friend. That was a very very smart idea. Is there any other places around our room that you could get some feedback to help you spell.

Anne: a Teacher, your mind,

Teacher: How about if we looked up in our file circle, could that help us. How about if we looked at our PWIM Board or our dictionary. Good thinking.

Teacher: Now We are going to get Darryl to do some thinking because him and Al are over there not listening

Appendix B

Parent Letter

November 30, 2010

Dear Families;

Last summer I was lucky enough to go to a seminar with Dr. Anne Davies, an expert at engaging students in authentic tasks and criteria building. This practice is called *Assessment For Learning* (AFL) and has proven to increase students' abilities both to talk in depth about what they are learning and to know how they are developing as a student. I am now doing my research thesis with Dr. Davies and Dr. McVittie. The research for my thesis will help me to learn more about students' knowledge through real-world learning tasks and idea building.

I would like to use information I gather from the students' learning to help me in my research. In order to do this I need the approval of my students' families to use the information. However, ethics requires that you not tell ME if you approve; rather, I am asking you to sign the included form with either a yes (your child will be a participant in the study) or no (your child will not be a participant.) I will then pass the forms to Dr. McVittie, who will not tell me who is to be involved until the end of June, after your child has completed grade 1 or 2 with me.

The kind of work I collect on your child is work that I would collect anyway. I always keep copies of student writing samples, I often video-tape small groups of students discussing what strong writing looks like, and I always write in my journal about how I believe things went in class each day. If you sign that your child may participate in the research, then, during the summer of 2011, I will analyze your child's writing samples and talk in small groups (video-tapes) and the notes I have made in my journal about your child for a systematic analysis about the effectiveness of my teaching practices.

I will *never* include a student's name or write in such a way that a student can be identified. Also, I will not include pictures or students' work without their families' direct consent for that piece of work. There will be no extra work on the part of students who are involved; everything will continue as usual in the classroom. It is just that some of the observations I make and normally include in my daily reflections could be included in my thesis. No one will be able to identify who the children are from my journal notes.

I intend to tell my story of how I introduced AFL, what I did in the classroom and how the students reacted to the process. This will help me reflect on my practice as a teacher and help me improve my own teaching. The information I use will be shared with my two University professors Dr. Davies and Dr. McVittie. They have asked to see my collection of information – my journal and any work that I make copies of – in order to assess my understanding of the AFL practice. I hope that my writing will also help other teachers develop effective teaching skills in their classrooms using AFL strategies.

Your family's involvement in this project is *voluntary*. If you do not wish to have your child's information used for the direct purpose of my writing project, you have the option not to be involved from the beginning or to withdraw at anytime. Being involved or not being involved – either way there are no repercussions for your child. After the research is written, you can choose to read a summary of it, and to view your child's work that will be included, and withdraw consent at this time. I am happy to answer any questions you might have surrounding my learning opportunity.

The information I would like to use for my research will be gathered until the end of May 2011. This time-line would give me a large enough snapshot of the process we have been engaged in and the influence it had on students' learning. Since the information I would be using is part of the typical classroom assessment, your child would not be in any way affected if you do not wish for them to be part of my research.

Please fill out the consent form on the following page whether or not you consent, noting one way or another. Please put the form in the provided sealed envelope, and only

Dr. Janet McVittie will open it, and will not inform me of who is involved until after your child has finished grade 1 or 2 – at the end of June. If you still have questions or concerns surrounding my intended project, call me (683-7480) or stop by the classroom and I will be more than happy to explain the project further.

This study was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board on:
[date]

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to call my University supervisor, Dr. Janet McVittie, at 966-7582. If you have concerns about ethical issues, you may call the University Research Ethics office at 966-2975.

In summary:

- It is entirely your choice about whether you consent or not.
- There will be NO repercussions for your child either way.
- I will not know who has agreed to participate until after I have completed teaching your child.
- Your child, you, the school, will be anonymous in my research.
- The research will be published in a masters thesis, and might be published as a chapter in a book about *Assessment For Learning*, and in teacher and researcher education journals.
- Before the research data are analyzed, I will show it to all the families who consent, so they can read it and make any suggestions they believe would make the understanding richer, or the child more anonymous.
- The information used for the research is information I collect daily for my teaching and assessment purposes anyway. Special permission will be asked for student work that will be included in the thesis.
- Your child will not do any extra or any less work because of you agreeing that I may use my reflective journal notes, and/or sample assignments.

Thank you in advance for helping me to become a stronger and more effective teacher.

Ms. Barr

I _____ the parent or guardian
Parent or Guardian's name

of _____ consent to Nancy Barr using
Student's name

information obtained by observations, normal classroom conversations, work samples, and any other assessment tools used to help in her reflective review of the *Assessment For Learning* in her classroom. I understand that my child will not be named in this written work nor will any other personal indicators such as pictures or work samples be used to identify my child without my explicit consent. I also understand that Nancy Barr's evidence will be shared with her graduate professors on this project and may be included as a chapter in an up-coming book by Dr. Anne Davies.

DATE SIGNATURE

I _____ the parent or guardian
Parent or Guardian's name

of _____ DO NOT consent to Nancy Barr using
Student's name

information obtained by observations, normal classroom conversations, work samples, and any other assessment tools used to help in her reflective review of the *Assessment For Learning* in her classroom. I understand that my child will not be named in this written work nor will any other personal indicators such as pictures or work samples be used to identify my child without my explicit consent. I also understand that Nancy Barr's evidence will be shared with her graduate

professors on this project and may be included as a chapter in an up-coming book by Dr. Anne Davies.

DATE

SIGNATURE

Appendix C

Consent After Reading Summary

I _____ the parent or guardian

Parent or Guardian's name

of _____ consent to Nancy Barr using

Student's name

the essay to reflect her learning. I understand that Nancy Barr's evidence will be shared with her graduate professors for this thesis and may be included as a chapter in an up-coming book by Dr. Anne Davies, for essays published in teacher and researcher journals, and given at teacher conferences.

DATE

SIGNATURE

I _____ the parent or guardian

Parent or Guardian's name

of _____ DO NOT consent to Nancy Barr using

Student's name

Information about my child for her research.

DATE

SIGNATURE

Appendix D

Ethics Approval From The University Of Saskatchewan

UNIVERSITY C Behavioural Research Ethics Board, (h-RE8)

SASKATCHEWAN Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR DEPARTMENT BEH#

Janet McVittie Curriculum Studies 10-269

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED

University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHERS

Nancy Barr

SPONSOR

UNFUNDED

TITLE

Introducing Assessment for Learning into the Classroom

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE APPROVAL ON APPROVAL OF EXPIRY DATE

10-Oct-2010 29-Oct-20 10 Ethics Application 29-Oct-20 11

Consent Protocol

Full Board Meeting **LI** Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review Expedited Review: **EI**

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal

was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or

regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to

the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time

period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for

Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics> review!

University of Saskatchewan

Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to: Research Ethics Office

University of Saskatchewan

Box 5000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place

Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8