

Winter 12-31-2016

Creating a Community of Writers the First Week of School

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CREATING A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS THE FIRST WEEKS OF SCHOOL

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts in Literacy Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December, 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This capstone is dedicated to my loving family and friends who encouraged me throughout this lengthy process, my past and future students who inspire me to desire growth in my teaching, and my dog, Cooper, who patiently waited for walks and attention as I was enhancing my knowledge surrounding education.

A special thanks to my advisors, Terry, Lynnea, and Jamie. I could not have done this without you! Also to my colleague, Lori, who took on more than her share over the past year as I completed this project.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my cohort of seventeen ladies who helped make this process pleasant and life enriching in oh, so many ways. ‘She thought she could and so she did!’

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

*“I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I say.”
-Flannery O’Connor*

Introduction

As my seventh year of teaching commenced, I found myself reflecting on my skills as an educator in a Spanish Immersion school. Being an English language arts teacher gave me plenty of opportunity to share my passion of reading with my students. I loved being able to guide students towards a love for the written word. In fact, many parents and teachers have given me feedback regarding my ability to ignite a spark inside students that leads them to become proficient readers. Even as I thought of these successes, I knew in my heart that parts of my teaching could definitely be improved, specifically my writing instruction. Could I learn to inspire writers in the same fashion as in reading? Can I take my strengths in teaching reading and transfer them to how to teach elementary students about writing?

Literacy encompasses more than just reading, and my recent college graduate classes on the importance of writing to build literacy skills have enlightened me. Hence, my reflection on my teaching practices points me towards improving my abilities as a writing teacher with the question of how to improve my writing instruction. As I seek to uncover information, I will attempt to improve my abilities as a writing teacher by thoughtfully and scientifically synthesizing current research and current research-based strategies for writing. I will also be searching for strategies that are engaging and effective with my students. To begin this quest for answers, I return to my own journey as a reader and writer to better understand my students. Next, I will look at my own journey as a writing teacher over the past seven years, and finally, I

unfold my plan for answering my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

My Journey as a Writer

As I searched back into my childhood for glimpses of my literacy life, I recall many memorable moments that pertained to books and reading. I remembered my kind first grade teacher, Mrs. Stammen, with her slightly graying hair and colorful knit dresses. I remember reading Dr. Seuss books in my father's lap and later all of the Beverly Cleary and Henry Huggins books I could get my hands on. I reminisced about my local library and how I would visit and then leave with a stack of books every couple weeks.

However, I do not have many recollections of myself as an elementary writer, or any moments of clarity that shaped me as a writer. I do recall one project in fifth grade where I composed a hardcover book that was all about me. I still recall drawing the pages. I remember enjoying the process as well as the result. I still have the book. A couple years later, at the age of thirteen, a fiery red-haired teacher named Ms. Werner encouraged me while I was in seventh grade by planting the seeds that started my journey of seeing myself as a writer. She was followed by two more influential people who assisted me by fertilizing those beginnings of a belief that I had something to say that was worth reading.

My first influential person at the tender age of thirteen really affected me. I was beyond socially awkward that seventh grade year, not really fitting in at the middle school among many different types of peers. Ms. Werner was the first 'Ms.' I had encountered, and as a young girl attempting to find her place in the world, I found her ideas and comments about women's rights thought provoking. She took the time to acknowledge everyone, even the shy introverts like myself. I realize now that having a relationship with Ms. Werner was the foundation for me

believing what she had to say about my writing. Specifically, I recollect a creative writing story I wrote entitled, "Beyond the Closed Door." The piece was about the upstairs of my grandmother's house, an area that had been forbidden to me as a young child. I told the story of sneaking up to that banned place for my creative writing assignment. At this time in my life when everything seemed awkward and painful, she somehow got through to me that my writing had merit and voice. I still remember how she made such a big deal over it, even to the point of embarrassing me in front of my peers. She later apologized but reiterated how much she enjoyed my narrative. I still have the paper. This teacher's encouragement planted the seeds that helped me to believe that I had writing skills. Thanks to Ms. Werner, I began to see myself as a writer.

My searching of memories also took me back to high school, where my journey of considering myself as a writer continued. It was during tenth grade; my teacher was Mrs. Glowski, and we were learning how to do our first big research paper. I remember the process of choosing a topic of our own choice, and how empowering that was. The topic that sparked my interest was Extra Sensory Perception, and I recall spending lots of time reading many books and articles. I remember Mrs. Glowski attempting to help me make sense of my note cards of information and then synthesizing all of this into an opinion of whether or not E.S.P. was truly possible. It was an overwhelming process of writing, but one that I ultimately enjoyed. This satisfaction actually surprised me, as most of my peers felt it a tortuous procedure. I would say that it was in the progression and ensuing product from this assignment that I learned about my ability to delve into a subject and really understand it, and my seeds as a novice writer sprouted a little more.

The next 25 years went by with very little writing happening in my life, unless you count letters to my husband and sweet notes to my three children. The writing seeds were

dormant. Time passed, and I found myself to be 44 years old and unsure of what I wanted to be when I grew up. When my youngest child started college, I decided I, too, would give college a try. Honestly, I truly never intended to finish more than one semester, but knew if I went I would be able to say I ‘tried’ and that college just was not for me. My first class was English 101, and my professor, Don Bouchard, changed my preconceived notions about college. His comments about my narrative writing and constant supportive feedback once again awakened the writer inside of me that Ms. Werner saw back in seventh grade. The dormant seeds planted long ago were revived!

I was fortunate enough to have Professor Bouchard for three classes those first few semesters of college. He was my guide through my first major research paper. It was demanding, challenging, and time-consuming, but somehow I managed to produce a decent paper with his guidance. He believed in me in ways I did not believe in myself. I was able to refine my writing and learned to excel at the college level. Fortunately, I was able to thank Professor Bouchard publicly when I graduated from Crown College in 2009. He had cultivated and further fertilized the seeds of seeing myself as a writer. The three teachers from my past taught me not only how to see myself as a writer, but also the importance of encouragement for a young writer. As I reflected on my past writing experiences, I wondered, could I be an influence on my students so that they might see themselves as writers?

As I look back over these early moments in my life as a writer, I realize that each influential person assisted me in developing as a writer with different important pieces. The earliest positive writing memory I have was the book mentioned previously from fifth grade about myself. It had meaning because it was all about me. The seventh grade teacher who encouraged me offered a relationship first, which laid the foundation for believing her when she

affirmed my writing. My high school teacher allowed me to choose my topic of interest, something that was rarely done back in the 1970s. These three experiences help me to see the importance of relevance, choice, and relationship. I am curious to research further regarding these themes so that I might implement more of what worked in my own life into my teaching practices.

Teaching Writing

I began my teaching career seven years ago at a Spanish Immersion School as an English language arts teacher, and I am presently still teaching there. When I began teaching, I was limited in my knowledge about teaching writing or reading, but I did have in my possession a love for the written word. Sharing books with my students brought great satisfaction, especially books with themes and topics that were rich in content. I threw most of my energy into teaching reading and spelling, with a little writing sprinkled in when absolutely necessary. Like many other teachers, I was not nearly as comfortable teaching the writing process as I was teaching reading practices. My students were beginning to love reading, and so I felt I had guided them well. However, I knew in my heart that I was not as skilled at teaching writing and could use improvement in that area. I also had limited writing curriculum resources from the district, so that made it even easier to neglect this important aspect of literacy.

My early attempts at teaching writing were met with limited success. I recall trying to teach students to write a poem about themselves that actually resulted in some great products, but it was much harder than I had anticipated. It took much longer and was extremely difficult for many students. I had offered an important aspect of writing about oneself, but I still needed to improve on writing practices.

I was attempting to teach all of the components of language arts in a 45-minute/day class and there really just was not enough time to devote to writing. I had to prioritize, and reading and spelling came in higher on my list than writing. I was given Lucy Calkins materials to read and digest, and thus began more effort towards integrating additional writing into our short class period of 45 minutes. I attempted several writing projects with limited success.

Once my students made attempts at narrative writing about favorite places. Another time we composed 'All About' books and 'How To' books. The whole process was overwhelming and chaotic to me, as I would guess it was to my students. Many of them were unable to write with any clear direction. This was when I learned that many of my students were not motivated to write. They seemed to dislike writing a lot. They were in their first years in a formal English language arts classroom, which made writing in English more difficult for them than typical non-immersion English students. I learned from other teachers that writing would typically be the last skill to transfer between Spanish and English. So, I did the best I could with my inadequate knowledge and our limited time together each day. My first five years as a teacher were full of growth, especially as a writing teacher.

Now, as a somewhat more seasoned teacher, I use my own writing abilities daily as I model and teach my third and fourth graders how to read and write. I try to have some type of daily writing embedded in my instruction each day. I have learned about the works of authors Lucy Calkins, Ralph Fletcher, and Nell Duke, just to name a few. I am entrusted to plant and grow reading and writing seeds on an everyday basis with approximately 115 students. I attempt to create a classroom where they see themselves as readers and writers. How can I best help them to see themselves as not only readers, but writers, too, who have something to say that is worth reading and important? Can I create a classroom environment where students actually

enjoy writing? What are the current research-based best practices surrounding writing? These questions fuel my inquiry, as many of my students struggle with literacy in this area.

Before I attended the Hamline University Summer Literacy Institute in July of 2015, I attended three other classes and also had taken time to reflect on my prior school year. As an English teacher at a Spanish Immersion school, I had lots of ideas for the upcoming year swimming around in my head. What could I improve? What would benefit my students the most? The English classes I teach had additional minutes for the 2015/2016 school year, with students attending each day for 60 minutes. In past years my time spent with students was just 45 minutes each day, and it was very hard to fit in any type of writing workshop. The Spanish classroom teachers had language arts for 75 minutes a day, so the rationale from the past had been that the classroom teachers should be doing most of the teaching of writing during their Spanish language arts block. With the additional allocated minutes, I knew I could improve on writing instruction.

After the 2015/2016 school year ended, I reflected on my year. While I definitely improved as a writing teacher, I knew I still needed to more fully understand best practices for teaching writing. That recent school year had me more aware of writing in front of students and modeling how writing evolves from my thinking. I was able to incorporate writing into reading instruction with reading responses. Yet, I still was met by many students who do not enjoy writing in any form at all. After reflection, I feel I need to understand more about creating a community of writers, especially at the beginning of the school year. According to Denton and Kriete (2000), the ability to cooperate and collaborate must be taught at the beginning of the year in order for students to achieve high standards as they take part in education together as a class. I

am looking forward to delving into current research and strategies to effectively further improve as a writing teacher.

Would it be possible to begin each school year with a focus on building a community of learners and then writers? For some, writing seems tortuous. They stare with blank faces and cannot seem to get even one word written. I wonder how to be effective and encouraging to these reluctant writers, especially during the first few weeks of school. I have noticed over the years that when given writing experiences with authentic audiences, as in letters, posters, pages in a book, students seem to rise to the occasion of writing and I see less of the pained faces. Each September I am given the opportunity to develop writers and readers through the choices I make in my instruction. This brings me once again to my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

Looking Ahead

In this chapter I have detailed my journey as a writer. I recalled early memories regarding my own writing and the educators who influenced me with their teaching, encouragement, guidance, and intention. The relationships I had and the choices I was given regarding writing were important to note. I then reflected on my own history as a teacher of writing and stated that my instruction in this area is weak. It is through these reflections that I go forward to understand more about building a community of writers.

Writing this Capstone will influence my practice in various ways. I will be striving to look for ways to grow a community of writers as I answer my research question. My students will begin future school years with a teacher who values writing and has researched how to build a community of learners at the beginning of the year. Like my influential teachers from my past,

I hope to learn how to be able to inspire my students to see in themselves what they don't see, and grow some more writers in the world.

The upcoming chapters will delve into my research question. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature surrounding strategies for effective writing instruction. In addition to these research-based best practices, I will look specifically into how to build a community of writers. In Chapter Three I will describe my methodology for uncovering the answers to my research question. In this chapter I will describe my district, the setting of my classroom, and the types of learners I instruct. I will also explain the processes that will be implemented after they are discovered, and how they might change my practice. In Chapter Four I will unveil the new curriculum that has been designed with the specifics of my dual literacy learning environment. Finally, in Chapter Five I will summarize my capstone and discuss the ways in which my work will impact others. I will look again to the literature and its connection to my teaching as I note what I have learned and applied to my own teaching practices. In all of my investigation, I will be focusing on answering my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In Chapter One, I shared my journey and thought processes surrounding writing and reading, both as it pertained to my past and now to the present as a language arts teacher in a Spanish Immersion school. Realizing that teachers were influential to seeing myself as a writer guides me to know the importance of wanting that same influence for my own students. Helping students to see themselves as writers is of high value as I discover how to best create that environment.

This investigation will explore current research that points to creating a classroom environment that contains engaged writers using best practices. I will be researching how to create a community of writers as well as how to integrate research-based strategies into writing instruction. I will be focusing on how to guide my young students to learn to see themselves as writers. How will I steer students to see themselves as writers with something to say that is worthy of being read? I will be focusing on answering my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

When school begins each year children once again have classroom opportunities to discover who they are through talking, writing, sharing, and enjoying the written word. We see this in children as little people who have voices – both for talking and writing. Writing, along with reading, is a foundational piece of literacy that deserves a strong knowledge base, especially if one is an educator. Bromley defines writing as a, “.... complex interaction of cognitive and physical factors. It involves the hand, eye, and both sides of the brain as one makes connections and constructs meaning. It is a way to explore thinking and create new knowledge” (Graham,

MacArthur, and Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 296). Certainly this complicated process is an integral piece of literacy. A second definition of writing comes from Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, and Olinghouse :

Writing is a skill that is vitally important to achievement in college and beyond. It has been established among researchers that writing ability is directly tied to success. Students who do not learn to write well are at a great disadvantage, because weaker writers are less likely to use writing to extend their learning, more likely to see their grades suffer, less likely to attend college and successfully complete a college degree, and more likely to face challenges in obtaining successful employment and promotions in today's competitive job market (2013, p 445).

The previous quote establishes that writing is an important part of many vocations and therefore the need for attempting to guide young students on their journey as writers can be made with this knowledge. Rothstein implores us to realize that neglecting writing instruction affects all areas of educational growth when she informs us that writing is an integral component of improved academic performance among all content areas (2007).

Writing research has been lacking, even though current research has been established that writing instruction needs improvement in our schools (Mo, et. al, 2013). Of reading, writing, and math, writing has become overlooked in the classroom and also has less research and dollars allocated to it (Harris, Graham, Friedlander, & Laud, 2013). With the knowledge that writing is an important and often overlooked component of literacy, I journey into the research to uncover applicable information to answer my question.

In this chapter, I will look into the two separate aspects of my research question: creating an environment for writing and research-based effective strategies for teaching writing. Within

the first section, *Creating an Environment for Writing*, I will explore motivation to write, social-emotional learning to build a community of writers, and academic choice. In the second section, *Strategies for Effective Writing Instruction*, I will investigate the latest research on best practices for teaching writing to elementary students. This will include sections on the writing process, mentor texts, and collaborative talk. The purpose has been established that I am striving to create a community of engaged students who see themselves as writers, all the while using effective writing practices that have research to support their use. I seek to answer, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

Creating an Environment for Writing

Students need a classroom writing environment that is engaging, calm, and nonthreatening to give their best efforts while writing or learning to write. In classrooms seen as unfriendly, full of chaos, or risky, students withdraw or avoid producing work (Hansen, 1989, as cited in Graham, MacArthur, Charles, & Fitzgerald, 2013). This shows the importance of the learning environment to be essential to the success of learners.

Recent studies (Jones, 2015) have shown that the majority of children found writing to be frustrating and did not enjoy it. This research establishes the need for an environment that supports the enjoyment of writing. It also fuels the inquiry process as to what strategies would evoke an environment supportive of writing and also a positive attitude or enjoyment towards writing. It is important to look at practices that would develop writing skills that would foster this type of an environment. Guiding children to learn to enjoy writing as a way to express themselves, communicate, and understand who they are will be the focus of this section. I will be reporting on motivation, social-emotional learning, and academic choice as I uncover ways to

build community among my 4th graders. Creating an environment that lessens the negativity associated with writing is a critical piece in developing young writers.

Motivation. When students view school activities such as writing as negative, it could be as a result of their attitude. Brophy states that there are three main factors that influence a student's attitude toward school learning:

- Value they place on the learning activity
- Expectancy and concern about their competence and outcome
- Social environment in which the learning takes place, like the climate of the classroom, peer relationships, and goals of the educator (as cited in Graham, et.al, 2011).

In other words, activities need to hold a value in students' minds, they need to offer success to all, and the learning environment needs to be positive with a teacher who can foster all of the previous. A large portion of these necessities for a positive student attitude towards learning have to do with motivation.

A motivated student values writing and is willing to use the process to communicate or express himself because it has value (Graham, MacArthur and Fitzgerald, 2007). Motivation to write is an integral piece of writing development. Writers become better writers by writing, but if students do not enjoy writing, how can educators motivate them to write? How can we get students to perceive themselves as writers of worthwhile and attractive communications? There are various components regarding the development of motivation to write.

When looking at creating a positive writing environment, one of the most significant facets is the role of the teacher. Research has shown that teachers play a significant part in improving writing output (Mo, et. al, 2013). Encouragement alongside writing tasks that students

view as worthwhile can increase motivation to write. Lack of motivation can come from unattractive writing tasks or self-perceptions regarding their competence as writers. Teachers play roles in both the tasks and self-perceptions that students hold (Graham, Fitzgerald, and MacArthur, 2013). Boscolo and Gelati also emphasize the importance of the teacher having the belief that, "...writing is not only an essential subject or ability in the curriculum, but an important experience through which students should be helped to find a personal meaning in literate practices" (Graham, et.al, p 305). They make the case for motivation to come from a student's attitude more than just providing interesting topics.

Besides kindling a writer's attitude and motivation, ~~Boscolo and Gelati point out that~~ teachers need to be very intentional in choosing tasks and activities that support interest, collaboration, and challenge students (Graham, et.al., 2013). The educator has an important role in cultivating writers, both through attitude towards writing and the intentional choices made to support students. In order to foster motivation to write, educators need to use strategies to help students see writing as worthwhile and attractive. ~~According to Boscolo and Gelati,~~ this can be accomplished through guiding students to see writing as useful. Traditional writing instruction has focused more on process than product, and new arguments are coming up in current research that are having educators rethink this practice. If students don't see their writing products as 'useful,' then motivation to write is lessened (Graham, et al, 2013).

Useful writing has two different components. First, Boscolo and Gelati point out that whatever is written by students has to be relevant and hold value to its writer. In addition, the researchers point to a different type of usefulness, that is the use of writing as a tool for learning. Although there is much less research on this type of usefulness, the logical conclusion would be

that if students feel writing to learn is helpful, then they would also view it as useful (Graham, et al, 2013).

In addition to assisting students with motivation through useful texts and writing to learn, Boscolo and Gelati offer specific ideas for kindling the communicative function of writing. They state that writing has evolved to be more of a social activity because of the many opportunities for collaboration and the interactive aspects of writing (Graham, et al, 2013).

Allington persuades us to consider six important daily literacy tasks, of which two are specific to writing and connect to Boscolo and Gelati's communicative function ideas. Allington feels time for students to talk about their reading and writing is one of the most underused, no cost, and important pieces of necessary instruction. It requires only a decision to make it a part of daily literacy practices. He feels it provides benefits in all areas, including motivation. He points out that "... the task of switching between writing, speaking, reading, and listening helps students make connections between, and thus solidify, the skills they use in each" (Allington, 2012, p. 14).

In addition, Nolan points out that the use of these types of literacy activities foster relationships between individuals within a community of learners. When writing switches from a solitary activity to one where writers and readers communicate and switch roles, a literate community evolves (as cited in Graham, et al, 2013). Nolan uses the term 'literate community' to describe a classroom where literacy activities are the foundation of the relationships within the classroom. In traditional settings, writing has been more of an individual activity. Students in a literate community use writing to communicate with each other and to collaborate and share ideas. Some examples would include: making class rules, reading blogs, writing/interviews to get to know each other and report to the class as a whole. Traditional writing instruction was done

for individuals with the reason being that writing is important, whereas a literate community uses writing to communicate with one another, which in turn can be motivating to students (Graham, et.al, 2013).

In summary, motivation is a key piece of the writing literacy puzzle. It has several components, the first being teacher attitude and intentionality. As cited earlier, when teachers view writing as an important experience through which they have influence on their students, students benefit. Also, when teachers assign tasks that foster communication and useful products, students are more motivated to write. Truly, each of the researched ideas regarding motivation have the educator as the center. If the teacher understands and implements the ideas of making writing collaborative, relevant, and useful, she is much more inclined to foster motivation in her writers. She also needs to have a strong viewpoint of the impact she has through her encouragement and intentional instructional practices. A successful writing classroom would have an environment that fosters motivation in the various ways mentioned. In addition to motivation, another important aspect of creating an environment for writing would be that of building positive relationships within the classroom.

Social-Emotional Learning. One practice that is recognized for fostering strong relationships at school is Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom is a well-known approach to teaching that facilitates a classroom where relationships among teachers and students are seen as an integral part of a successful education (Denton & Kriete, 2000). It is defined by Baroody, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Curby as, “an instructional delivery and social-emotional learning intervention designed to provide teachers with skills needed to create caring, well-managed classroom environments that are conducive to learning” (2014, p. 69).

The approach is shown to benefit both teachers and students as the practices lead to closer relationships (Baroody, et.al, 2014). The researchers found that the effects of positive relationships between students and teachers led to better school engagement, achievement, and school adjustment, both for current and future outcomes (Baroody, et.al, 2014). These types of results would be beneficial in my quest to build a community of writers during the first weeks of school.

Improving classroom climate and student teacher relationships through Responsive Classroom techniques is a process defined explicitly in trainings from the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC), who developed the approach. Charney explains the interconnectedness of academics and social behavior and implores her readers to take the time to put into place the pieces of a Responsive Classroom to offer the best possible learning environment (2002). The parts that make up the program are specific, detailed and consist of seven different principles and 10 various practices (NEFC, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, as cited in Baroody, et.al).

The seven guiding principles of the Responsive Classroom approach are:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction
- To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control
- Knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach

- Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's education
- How the adults at school work together is as important as their individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community (Denton & Kriete, 2000)

Although all of the principles are clearly important, for the purposes of my investigation, I will be focusing on the principles regarding cognitive growth through social interaction, and the relationship component of knowing the children we teach.

Also heralding the power of teaching social-emotional skills is Mraz. She asserts that educators need to focus more time on nurturing and teaching social-emotional skills because they are a better predictor of success than academic skills (2016). She implores teachers to take the time to teach specific social-emotional skills so that students will be able to grow academically. She specifically points to the importance of teaching optimism, persistence, flexibility, resilience, and empathy as part of a social-emotional curriculum (2016).

The Responsive Classroom guiding principles and research from Mraz would support my quest to build a community of learners by creating a learning environment that is focused on all three aspects of growth: social, emotional, and academic. In addition to the guiding principles and the research from Mraz, there are some specific *practices* from within the Responsive Classroom that will also support this journey.

The ten classroom practices of Responsive Classroom are:

- Morning Meeting—gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead
- Rule Creation—helping students create classroom rules to ensure an environment that allows all class members to meet their learning goals

- Interactive Modeling—teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique
- Positive Teacher Language—using words and tone as a tool to promote children's active learning, sense of community, and self-discipline (Principles and Practices of RC)
- Logical Consequences—responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity
- Guided Discovery—introducing classroom materials using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility
- Academic Choice—increasing student learning by allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work
- Classroom Organization—setting up the physical room in ways that encourage students' independence, cooperation, and productivity
- Working with Families—creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches
- Collaborative Problem Solving—using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students (Denton and Kriete, 2000)

All of the practices come together to form the approaches of a Responsive Classroom. It is based on the premise that children learn best when they have both academic and social-emotional skills. The practices combine to produce an environment in which children can learn best because they have competencies in social emotional areas as well as academics (Denton & Kriete, 2000). For the purposes of my investigation, I will be focusing further on the Responsive Classroom practice of Academic Choice. Academic Choice can be defined as “increasing student learning by allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work” (Principles and Practices,

2016). Writing is an area of curriculum in which having a choice about topics or subjects would logically seem to be important.

Academic Choice. As defined above, academic choice refers to allowing students to have structured choices within their instruction. Offering academic choice to students has been widely known to have a positive impact on learning (Gambrell, 2011). In writing, offering as much choice as possible within parameters for topics, purposes, and genres is encouraged. Research showed that having an interest in a topic has a positive effect on the writing that students do (Graham, et al, 2013). In addition, Gambrell has shown that when students have options to steer their own learning, they are more apt to put forth effort that will result in growth (2011). Academic choice is research proven to enhance writing. The importance of having writing choices is clear, and I have experienced it personally in my engagement as a learner as well as in my own practice as an educator. Academic choice is not just writing about whatever comes to mind, though, as there are specific parameters and structures around choices that need to be in place.

In a large 10 year study (2011), Gambrell and Morrow found that writers need both balance and freedom within writing. They propose that writing instruction be intentional, have interactive talk among classmates, and be authentic in order to keep the balance of structure and freedom. For instance, students might have a writing task that calls for them to write a persuasive letter. Students would be writing actual letters, which would encompass intentional structure of the assignment. They would brainstorm ideas with each other, which would be an example of collaborative talk for social interaction. They would then actually send the finished products to someone, which is a demonstration of authentic purpose. There would be a balance between the freedom, or academic choices of who or what to write about, and the teacher-given structure and

purpose of the writing. It would seem to be an important criteria to offer structured academic choices to support the research presented.

Another way to add academic choice into writing instruction is to allow various choices for how to do the actual writing. Gambrell suggests that when students do not possess automaticity in spelling and grammar, they use up their metacognitive processes worrying about these aspects of their writing, and in turn then struggle with writing (2011). I have noticed this in my own teaching, where some students get so stuck on spelling or conventions that they lose their ideas and motivation to continue. Gambrell (2011) as well as Graham & Harris (2016) have shown through studies that the use of word processing improves writing among students. Their research suggests that students understand revision and spelling patterns better when using a word processor because of the corrections it offers.

Gambrell also points to voice to text technology for striving writers as helpful (2011). These applications take recorded speech and convert it to text, which Gambrell states has been shown to be effective as a strategy for striving writers (2011). I teach in a 1:1 digital environment, so the suggestions of using word processing or voice to text as a format are possible to implement or to offer as a choice for writing. Word processing allows for those students who struggle with writing due to grammar and spelling blocks. Voice to text offers dysgraphic students a way to get their ideas into words without having to use a pencil. These new ideas can be effective for creating an environment for all types of writers in my classroom.

In these last two subsections I have looked at the research concerning social-emotional curriculum and The Responsive Classroom approach, as well as academic choice as they pertain to writing. As noted, research strongly suggests that the social-emotional curriculum is an integral part of academic success. The importance of students being taught more than academics

at school is strong. Teachers creating a climate that is conducive to learning is necessary for positive outcomes. Having academic choices relating to writing also has research to support its use. I take away important information regarding how to best create an environment to support young writers. The environment in which they learn is important to growth- academically, socially, and emotionally. With this research in mind, I go forward into the following section to explore writing instruction.

Strategies for Effective Writing

Now with new information and research concerning classroom environment, I seek to uncover research regarding the specifics of how to teach children to be proficient writers within a positive environment. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) recognize the importance of several aspects of writing, including foundational skills like spelling and handwriting, as well as specific writing applications such as writing for various purposes, producing and publishing by using the writing process, and using writing to learn (Harris, et. al, 2013). Minnesota has adapted the CCSS and my school district centers curriculum around the Minnesota Academic Standards for English Language Arts K-12. This framework guides me to look at three specific aspects of writing instruction.

There are multiple strategies for producing effective writing, but for the purposes of this investigation, I will first be focusing on the ‘producing and publishing by using the writing process,’ which will be the first topic of this section. This phrase comes from CCSS as a College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for K-5 writing (MN CCSS, 2010). This anchor standard is written as, “Use a writing process to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, drafting, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach” (MN CCSS, 2010).

Within the CCSS there are many writing standards that refer to specific aspects of writing for various purposes. As previously stated, my unique immersion learning environment only allows my literacy block to be 60 minutes in duration. With this in mind, the second key topic is to investigate mentor texts as a way to combine both reading and writing into my instruction.

Another core segment of CCSS is subtitled under ‘speaking and listening’. This CCSS leads me with curiosity to explore research surrounding collaborative talk. This final topic of collaborative talk will conclude the final section of chapter two.

The importance of daily writing is known among educators as being powerful and significant. All writing researchers agree that time to write is an important component of growth in writing. In the best of writing curriculum, there would be a true writer’s workshop, where students have uninterrupted writing time each day and conferring each week with peers and their teacher. Since this won’t work with my unique classroom environment, I need to make sure that my students are writing each day. This writing could appear in many forms including responses about their reading, write to learn activities, as well as more formal types of writing.

One thing that I have discovered as I have read more about writing is that the metacognitive process of thinking, writing, reading, and finally learning all work together to create new understandings and growth as writers. In order for students to write well, we have to teach them how to choose and organize their thoughts (Rothstein, 2015). It is with this in mind that I go forward to look at the writing process.

Teaching the writing process. In 1968, Murray revolutionized the teaching of writing by asking an important question, ‘Why don’t we teach writing like professional writers write?’ He shared with the world the fact that all different types of writers use a process of writing that is systematic. They collect ideas, organize, draft, revise, and edit before publishing (Calkins,

Ehrenworth, 2016). Calkins and Ehrenworth also point out that this writing process takes many forms and can take place in a day, as in someone who blogs, or it can take several years, as in a novelist (2016). They liken the writing process to being as, “fundamental to writers as the scientific method is to scientists” (p.1, 2016).

There is agreement among researchers (Graham & Harris, 1997, Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016) that daily writing is important to becoming proficient, but that there are other integral pieces that needs to be taught; those are the specific processes of writing. They further state that this process of writing is a learned skill, and it is important to teach the processes of planning, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing (1997, 2016). McGrail and Davis also implore teachers to teach writers about the writing process. They state that students become writers by writing, and they also need to understand how the writing process occurs to develop as writers (n.d.). Graham and Harris also point out that often times very little attention is given to teaching these important processes (1997). Graham and Harris also note that even though these processes are important for students to understand, most teachers do not take the time to teach the writing process.

The writing process is recognized in the CCSS and is foundational to writing that takes place in elementary classrooms. Thus, student writers need to be explicitly taught about this writing process as well as need adequate time to practice writing to become proficient.

Calkins and Ehrenworth also point out that a mindset about writing is necessary. This mindset is such that in order to write, a writer needs to not only consider what he will write about, but also how to write well (2016). Bromley also encourages teachers to make sure that students are aware of their own strengths and areas to grow by providing them with self evaluation tools, including questions like...

- What do I do well as a writer?
- What is one thing I have learned most recently as a writer?
- What do I need to learn to be a better writer? (as cited in Morrow and Gambrell, 2011)

These two ideas regarding self evaluation show that educators hold an important piece of writing development in their hands. Offering academic choices within writing has already been established as producing better writing. The other factor here is regarding how to write well. Educators need to teach the writing processes consisting of planning, organizing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

According to Graham and Harris (2016), there is evidence from over 30 years of research that directly teaching writing skills and processes improves the overall quality of student writing. In fact, Graham and Harris noted a 35 percentile jump in writing quality when students were taught strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing their work. It has been established by many experts to explicitly teach about the writing processes so that students can develop strategies for monitoring and improving their writing. What are the best practices for doing this?

Graham and Harris (2016) offer ideas such as directly teaching thinking processes, modeling how to apply them, and also having students practice with the teacher. They have suggested that after students then try out the processes in their own work, they will become independent. Ehrenworth (2016) suggests that teaching specific writing process mini-lessons with intention is an integral piece in developing writers. She offers an architecture of a mini-lesson that she has researched and developed and encourages teachers to employ.

In her format, an essential part is what she refers to as the connection, a 1-2 minute engagement strategy that explains the ‘why’ for the upcoming lesson. She suggests having

students close by and using intimacy for this portion of the lesson to connect with students and let them know that they matter. An example would be “I thought of you because” or “I was watching football last night when.....” This coincides with creating an environment for writing. The final piece of the connection would explain the relevance and importance for the upcoming lesson.

Ehrenworth’s writing process mini-lesson next moves into the ‘how’ where the teaching point is explained and demonstrated in a 5-8 minute time frame. Students would then be actively engaged as they practice on a piece of text before they then plan for their own writing. Furthermore, she suggests uninterrupted time for writing to apply what has been taught and finally ends a writing session with sharing and reflection of writing and the teaching point. Her architecture of a writing mini-lesson fits with teaching the processes of writing (2016).

I have uncovered research based strategies for directly teaching the processes of writing to students. From brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and finally publishing, the writing process can and should be explicitly taught in such a way that students feel supported and capable of their own writing. Ehrenworth offers a format for teaching about the writing process that will fit into my unique immersion setting. My next thoughts on this lead me to exploring mentor texts. I am looking to expose ways of using the books I teach for reading skills as mentor texts for teaching the writing processes.

Modeling with mentor texts. Using various texts for teaching reading and writing skills is an everyday practice employed by all literacy educators. This common strategy is often used to bolster reading comprehension or build vocabulary. Some educators use mentor texts to teach the craft of writing. Laminack and Wadsworth (2015) assert that reading and writing go hand in hand; that is that by finding insight in reading it improves knowledge of writing and vice versa. It

is with this thought that I go forward to explore how mentor texts can best be used for teaching writers.

A mentor text is defined by both Friese (2010) and Alber (2016) simply as an example of writing that is done well and can be used as a model of good writing. Harrison (2014, paragraph one) elaborates with his own definition:

A mentor text is a published work (picture book, novel excerpt, poem, non-fiction article, editorial, song, etc.) whose original idea, whose structure, or whose written craft techniques can be discussed during a writing lesson or during writer's workshop as a means to inspire students to write their own original ideas, to borrow an interesting structure, or to impersonate craft techniques used by real authors.

Harrison includes in his definition that there are different purposes for different mentor texts. He cites mentor texts as possibilities for teaching about ideas, text structure, or writer's craft. Alber (2014) points out the various values in using mentor texts. She states that as long as educators allow time for students to talk about the text, give time to practice, and also give time to share their efforts with peers they will improve their writing. She further guides educators to not grade or evaluate practice that is a result of a mentor text because she feels that it gives writers a chance to take chances and explore their creativity (2014).

According to Gallagher (2014), the choosing and use of specific texts to teach writing skills requires a shift in students' thinking. He points out that students are accustomed to being asked questions about *what* is in a text. For a writing lesson, however, they will need to think about *how* the writer was able to convey emotion or explain something. Gallagher also points out that using mentor texts is not just giving examples and expecting students to emulate the text. Rather, teachers need to use strong mentor texts and invite students to analyze how a writer used

techniques, choices, or words to make the text effective. When they recognize the techniques an effective writer uses, he claims that students are then able to infuse that into their own writing.

He also feels that the power in using a mentor text comes when it is used all throughout the writing process. He points out that in the prewriting stage students need to be guided to discern what writers do to make their text noteworthy. Gallagher adds that after moving into the drafting stage students need excellent models to analyze and imitate, even their teacher. He also feels that the revision stage of writing can also be enhanced through the use of mentor texts. By placing two essays side by side students can learn to identify which one is stronger and what makes it that way (2014).

Mentor texts can be used in various formats. Exemplars would be one way to utilize a mentor text. When students see examples of effective writing of peers or other children, they have a better idea of how to proceed with their own writing. Choosing a thought-provoking picture book would be another way to use a mentor text that allows for great discussion and collaborative talk as well as serving as a model for strong writing. Students can analyze what made the words from the book compelling or meaningful and then ideally transfer that skill to their own writing. Another possibility would be to examine together a short piece of writing and discuss possibilities of why it is effective in its purpose (Harrison, 2014).

Gallagher (2014), Clark (2014), Harrison (2014), Alber (2014), and Ehrenworth (2016) all suggest the use of mentor texts for use in explicit lessons on the various components of writing. Included in their ideas for lessons are modeling, practice, and talking. They suggest breaking down parts of the writing process and guiding students with lessons using mentor texts.

Most importantly, using mentor texts is an effective practice that has definitive results. Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) cite research regarding teaching students to imitate mentor texts,

and how this results in stronger writing outcomes (as cited in Graham, 2016). Now that I have established the effectiveness of using mentor texts, I am curious about the repeated direction from various researchers about the importance of talk among students when teaching writing skills.

Collaborative Talk. Literacy Links (2013) defines a collaborative conversation as purposeful talk centered in grade level text and topics in which ideas are traded, hopefully generating new thinking and better understanding. Collaborative talk is heralded by Allington, who includes talking about writing as a foundational piece of expert writing instruction (2012). Allington feels time for students to talk about their reading and writing is one of the most underused, no cost, and important pieces of necessary instruction. He points out that it requires only a decision to make it a part of daily literacy practices. He feels it provides benefits in all academic areas. He points out that “.... the task of switching between writing, speaking, reading, and listening helps students make connections between, and thus solidify, the skills they use in each” (Allington, 2012, p. 14).

Allan also points to talk as essential. He lists several research based structures within a writing curriculum that need to be in place to support the cognitive thinking of young writers. First on his list is student talk, followed by academic choice for topics, purposes, and genres, flexible schedules, offering various tools, and assessing for growth (2009). Calkins also directs educators to support the thought processes of young writers and also cites student talk as important (2009). These three researchers, Allington, Allan, and Calkins, have shown strong support for the power of collaborative talk in the classroom.

The CCSS surrounding speaking and listening direct educators’ practices in this area.

A fourth grade standard to build a foundation upon within the Speaking, Listening, Viewing, and Media Literacy standards calls for students to: “Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly” (CCSS, 2010). Gambrell and Morrow (2011) call on teachers to facilitate writing instruction that is intentional, socially interactive, and authentic as a way to support good writing. The social emotional curriculum fits into best practices for teaching writing with this ‘social interaction’ that is embedded in the CCSS.

Between the research and the CCSS, I am driven to discover how to best implement collaborative talk into my instruction surrounding writing. Graham and Harris (2016) noted a 31 percentile gain in writing quality when students were asked to work together through the writing processes. They point out that the reason this approach had such impressive gains was that the teachers gave very specific directions on what to do when working together. One study (Yarrow & Topping, 2010, as cited in Graham & Harris, 2016) showed how specific prompts and questions for each portion of the writing process guided students as they talked to each other about their writing. Question frames were available for each portion of the writing process, so peers knew what to ask and were also taught how to listen and offer feedback. Educators taught students how to work together to complete the processes with very specific guidance.

This type of collaborative talk offers immediate feedback and an authentic audience. Another possible format for talk between peers is offered by Bromley (as cited in Morrow and Gambrell, 2011). She points out that students help each other through the writing process by just listening and providing an authentic audience. Bromley continues that sometimes just hearing their words read out loud can help writers figure out what needs to be changed. In addition, she

also uses an explicitly taught strategy called Praise, Question, Suggest (PQS), in which the listener responds with three statements from the PQS frame.

Both of the previous examples would need instruction and practice as a foundation for this type of collaboration to be successful. Literacy Links offers additional suggestions for instructional strategies to support collaborative conversations.

Suggestions include:

- Teach discussion rules and model both appropriate and inappropriate talk
- Have expectations of the use of complete sentences and model this
- Encourage elaboration on ideas
- Teach about wait time so students think and feel comfortable responding
- Use various partnerships and groups so all students are contributing
- Structure discussions by providing many opportunities with rich text to evaluate
- Assist students in learning to share their thinking by using sentence starters
- Encourage the use of graphic organizers for note taking prior to discussions as well as during collaborative talk (2013).

Collaborative talk has many possibilities for enhancing writing instruction. There are several research studies that have shown a positive outcome in regard to writing through the use of student talk. Teachers need to be thoughtful and purposeful as they guide students to use this tool for enhancing writing through conversation. It would be extremely important to take the time to model how to use this powerful tool for writing development.

Margaret Wheatley sums the practice of collaborative conversation up when she states, “Conversation creates the conditions for us to rediscover the joy of thinking together” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 31). It seems that the power of thinking together has benefit to students as they navigate

the world of learning to be writers. I look forward to implementing this process into my instruction, as it looks to be a practice that will facilitate growth in both writing development as well as providing critical skills surrounding discussion and thinking.

In this second section, *Best Practices in Writing*, I have sought to uncover specific information regarding the writing process, the use of mentor texts, and collaborative talk. It is my plan to combine information from these three areas of writing that will enable me to formulate a plan to build enthusiastic writers during the critical first month of school.

Summary

In this literature review, I have examined how to create an environment for writing as well as looked at best practices surrounding writing instruction.

First, motivation to write is an integral component of a learning environment that is in the hands of the educator. Intentional instruction and relevant useful writing tasks are two of the keys to fostering motivation. Secondly, social emotional learning is another important piece of establishing an environment for writing. Research shows clear positive correlations between social emotional learning and academic progress. Responsive classroom offers principles and practices to guide the facilitation of social emotional learning. In addition, academic choice has been shown to support a balance of structure and freedom within a writing curriculum. These three important pieces are foundational to foster an environment for writing.

Of the many best practices of writing instruction, three were examined. First, teaching students explicitly about the writing processes of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing has been shown to improve writing among students. Specific short lessons where modeling and practice take place enhance skills for students. In addition, the use of mentor texts offers students the opportunity to evaluate how a writer is effective, and therefore allows for their

own writing to emulate that of a proficient writer. Mentor texts can be used for various reasons within writing instruction. Finally, collaborative talk was found to be an important practice for improving writing. It is important that this strategy have clear specific guidance for improving cognition among student writers. All of these components hold promise of improving writing instruction.

In the following chapter, I will apply the knowledge I have gained from this literature review to unveil my methodology to answer my capstone question: *How can an environment be created during the first month of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

My research will guide my creativity as I write curriculum to grow my students into seeing themselves as writers during the first month of school.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

As an English Language Arts teacher in a Spanish Immersion school, I am striving to refine my craft of teaching writing. My unique environment of a 60-minute literacy block dedicated to a comprehensive balanced literacy curriculum doesn't allow for a daily writer's workshop. Thus, I am planning on developing a writing curriculum specific for the first weeks of school that will allow my students to experience writing from research-based practices that are authentic, collaborative, and engaging. This curriculum will also foster the building of community within my classroom. Most importantly, it attempts to answer my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first month of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

In this chapter I will describe my school district setting, my specific school setting, immersion literacy, and my role in the school. Next is an overview of my students that this curriculum is designed for. The third section, Curriculum Development for Establishing a Community of Writers, will discuss the type of curriculum presently adopted by my school, the standards that will be targeted for the first month of school, and the importance of the first month of school for establishing community. Finally, the methods I used to develop curriculum to address my research question will be examined. These methods include social emotional goals, the use of mentor texts, and the format for lesson plans for the first month of school.

Setting

I teach in one of Minnesota's largest suburban school districts that serves approximately 9,000 children. The large high school has approximately 3,000 students and has won several awards for academic excellence. There is one middle school that serves grades seven and eight, and six large K-6 elementary schools. The enrollment is decreasing slightly each year as the demographics of the city evolve. While the enrollment decreases, the number of languages spoken has increased to over 70, which is part of the demographical change. Also part of the demographics is the number of students served with free and reduced lunches, which is approximately 20%. As for diversity, the district has approximately 20% of students who are within data systems designated as students of color.

The school where I teach is one of the K-6 elementary buildings with 813 students. There are presently 30 sections; six sections at levels Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, and four sections at each grade 3 through 6. The school offers EL services, gifted education, and special education services. It is less diverse than overall district averages. While I do not know exactly how many students are marked as receiving assistance regarding free and reduced lunch, I do know 9% of the students in my school take advantage of this service. As previously stated, 20% of district students receive free and reduced lunches, while the school I work has only 9% of students taking part in that service.

It is important to note the unique characteristics of the school where I currently teach. The setting and frameworks for literacy instruction are unique because my school is a Spanish immersion school. That is, most students come to kindergarten with English as a first language and are 'immersed' in Spanish language and instruction for 90% of their day. By fifth grade, they are considered bilingual. By design, students do not receive any formal English instruction until third grade, because all of their prior education has been completed in Spanish. When they do

begin to receive instruction in English in the third grade, they have unique needs as dual literacy learners.

One of the unique aspects for immersion schools is the fact that in grades three through six the students' literacy block is split between Spanish and English learning, which presents issues specific to writing. Presently, I am given only 55-60 minutes each day to implement a comprehensive balanced literacy program in English. Students also receive sixty minutes of Spanish Language Arts each day. Within my designated sixty minutes I am expected to carry out lessons that include shared reading, interactive read-aloud, writing about reading, phonics, spelling and word study, and of course writing.

Since it is well understood among educators that students need a large block of time (often more than 120 minutes) to be devoted to instruction in reading and writing, a sixty-minute block designated just to English needs to be carefully and purposefully thought out. Writing seems to be the aspect that is most easily omitted, even though it is foundationally important to literacy development. Within my unique setting, I am looking for ways to integrate writing into as many aspects of my instruction as possible. As a result of the unique type of language arts program at my school, I will need to take these circumstances under consideration as I create meaningful opportunities to engage and grow my young students as writers.

As previously noted, my immersion school is unique in that students' entire language arts block is split between two languages. Another pertinent factor for my English classroom in my dual-literacy school is that the school district has recently moved to cross-district grade level 'units of study'. There are six separate units of study throughout the school year, and each one has a focus such as nonfiction, literature, or poetry. This results in each teacher having clear guidelines for each unit that include reading, writing, and media. At my school we have decided

to divide up the goals and standards for each unit between the English and Spanish teachers. Because my language arts block has just 60 minutes available to me to teach my portion, the district guidelines don't fit. This leads into the need to develop curriculum that is unique to an English classroom within a dual literacy school.

Participants

My role in the school is to teach English as a specialist and also as a reading interventionist. Four classes of third and fourth grade students attend class each day with me for approximately one hour. I am the English teacher for these four classes that total 109 students. One hour of my day is also designated as a reading specialist, and I serve twelve of my own 109 students with extra help using Leveled Literacy Interventions (LLI) during this hour.

Of my 109 students, 50 are fourth graders for whom this curriculum was developed. Three of my students are English Language Learners; the rest of my students speak English at home. Eight students have been identified as gifted, and four are presently identified with Special Education needs. The racial demographics of my fourth grade classes are divided. Forty of my students are White (80%), five are Black (10%), and five are Hispanic (10%).

Of my 50 fourth grade students, eight did not meet academic standards on the MCA Reading test last spring. Seven students only partially met academic standards on the MCA Reading test last spring. In addition to MCA tests, fall reading tests administered within the first weeks of school mirror the MCA tests. Of the fifteen students who have entered fourth grade reading below grade level, seven are students of color. This is an example of the achievement gap that exists in our education system. It was important to me to design curriculum with this in mind.

Curriculum Development for Establishing a Community of Writers.

My school district has moved away from language arts instruction that uses a basal reader to standards-based curriculum. The curriculum is based on Calkin's *Building a Reading Life* as well as Fountas and Pinnell's *Continuum of Learning*. Over the past two years, the district has aligned grade level units of study for reading. This year, the district will have a focus of developing more specific writing curriculum to implement into the comprehensive balanced literacy program that was put in place over the past two years.

My school continues to focus on reading achievement and increasing students' reading abilities. Laminack and Wadsworth (2015) remind us that reading and writing go hand in hand. **By** finding insight in reading it improves knowledge of writing and vice versa. In fourth grade, the Minnesota State Academic Standards for reading focus on understanding text in a deeper and more meaningful way. The writing standards for fourth grade direct teachers to the overarching concept that students need to learn to appreciate that the main purpose for writing is to communicate clearly to varying audiences as they write to accomplish different tasks and purposes (MN Academic Standards, 2012).

It has been established earlier in this paper that writing is a skill that is important for students to acquire to achieve success (Mo, et al, 2013). It is also known that many students dislike writing. Through my literature review, I have discovered various research-based ideas to support designing a writing curriculum for that critical first month of school that will hopefully ignite some writing seeds within my classroom. This curriculum is specific to the beginning of the school year. The ability to cooperate and collaborate must be taught at the beginning of the year in order for students to achieve high standards as we take part in education together as a class (Denton and Kriete, 2000). My quest was to create writing activities that will foster

cooperative, collaborative, authentic ways to communicate as we learn more about the individuals within our classroom.

I took the discoveries regarding motivation, social-emotional curriculum, academic choice, the writing process, mentor texts, and collaborative talk together to blend into a five-week curriculum that will become a strong start at building a community of writers in my fourth grade classroom. Academic goals are not put on hold during the beginning of the school year, but rather they are integrated into building a community of learners that function together as a group (Denton and Kriete, 2000). The foundation for academic achievement is the establishment of a community of learners.

The curriculum I designed will be implemented the following year. I developed curriculum that addresses the unique needs of my Spanish immersion school. My hope is that this curriculum will be utilized by not only myself, but other English Language Arts teachers at my school. I developed five weeks of writing curriculum to coincide with the beginning of the year. My curriculum is directly tied to the priority standards within the first unit of the school year, Building a Reading Life. Each of the five weeks includes mini-lessons, mentor texts, collaborative talk, and academic choices within parameters.

Social-emotional skills. I planned Responsive Classroom activities that use writing as an authentic source of communication and information. I have a five week plan that includes teaching points and a social skill such as optimism, persistence, flexibility, resilience, or empathy as part of this curriculum. Embedded in each of the five weeks of lessons and activities are reading, writing, talking, and listening, just as the CCSS direct. The writing portion of this critical first month of school incorporates writing that is communicative in nature as it builds knowledge of classmates. The purpose of introducing these skills is both to allow students to

begin to see themselves as capable writers as well as establishing a collaborative classroom community.

Mentor texts. I chose specific texts that will foster the building of community alongside relevant writing opportunities. I chose these texts based on social-emotional skills I feel are necessary to build at the beginning of a school year. Choosing the appropriate texts took place through further research of well-known mentor text experts like Lester Laminack or Katie Wood Ray. I chose several books that will each become the center of learning about specific social emotional skills. The most important piece of this part of the curriculum development is the choice of book specific to these social-emotional skills.

Lesson plans for writing. In addition to carefully choosing mentor texts and coinciding social emotional activities, there are academic choices around writing activities. These writing assignments use the research-based practices uncovered in my literature review to introduce students to the idea that they are, indeed, writers with something to say. Their products will be read by a real audience and will also be a way to build community amongst students. Within the five week beginning of the year curriculum I developed, students will produce different writing pieces that are tied to themselves, the mentor texts, and the social-emotional skills we work on together. I will be modeling as students watch and then subsequently practice with their own ideas.

Summary

In this chapter I described my school district setting, my specific school setting, immersion literacy, and my role in the school. The second section, Participants, discussed my sections and types of students. The third section, Curriculum Development for Establishing a Community of Writers, explained the type of curriculum presently adopted by my school, the

standards that were targeted for the first month of school, and the importance of the first month of school for establishing community. Finally, the methods I used to develop curriculum to address my research question were examined. These methods included social emotional goals, the use of mentor texts, and the format for lesson plans for the first month of school.

With guidance from the research, specifically on motivation, social-emotional skills, academic choice, the writing process, mentor texts, and collaborative talk, I have created a curriculum that engages students while building classroom community at the beginning of the year. I seek to uncover ways to shift from being a teacher that emphasizes reading to a teacher that emphasizes both reading *and* writing. I will also be looking for ways to foster student enjoyment of writing at the beginning of the school year. I will attempt to utilize the 60 minutes I hold each day to take district curriculum and adapt it for my unique immersion setting. I will unveil new strategies and curriculum in the following chapter as I attempt to answer to my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first month of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

In chapter four I will reveal my specific curriculum to attempt to answer my research question. Specific mentor texts, social-emotional activities, and writing lesson plans will be unveiled. The template for my weekly plans will be divided as such:

Week #	Social-Emotional Learning	Mentor Texts	Writing Activities	District Guided/ School Curriculum
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In chapter five I reflect on my learning and curriculum development. I explored the implications of my research findings as well as some of the limitations. I look to the future with possibilities of further study as I go forward in my career.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

As I searched for strategies and activities to answer my question, *How can an environment be created during the first month of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*, I recalled many research points and began some thoughtful reflections. In all I read and researched, one thing that kept coming up over and over was the need for a social-emotional curriculum. I pondered my personal philosophy that the foundation of learning is a feeling of belonging and relationship. I was inspired by Denton & Kriete, who remind us that the foundation for academic achievement is the establishment of a warm and friendly classroom (2000). Secondly, I decided that specifically teaching qualities such as perseverance, resilience, optimism, persistence, flexibility, and empathy had important value. Mraz (2015) impacted my thinking on this with these thought-provoking words:

Implicitly, or explicitly, teachers select certain things to things to highlight and certain things to ignore. In this way we can build a community that highlights being smart or one that values effort and flexibility. A teacher can direct the way a community works in the intentional celebration of specific actions and words of its members. (p. 3)

These words remind me of the direction that I hold in my hand as I lead my classroom to become a community of learners. Because my research showed that many students often dislike writing and are unmotivated to write, I began to cogitate on the possibilities that the environment has to come first, then the curriculum for writing. Could I create a mindset within my students that they are capable of writing? It seems to make sense that in order for students to become capable

writers, they first need to see themselves as able to do something difficult. They also need to feel a part of a community of learners that know and support each other.

As mentioned earlier in the summary of chapter two, motivation to write is an integral component of a learning environment that is in the hands of the educator. Intentional instruction and relevant useful writing tasks are two of the keys to fostering motivation. I will attempt to create writing activities that are relevant and useful. Secondly, social emotional learning is another important piece of establishing an environment for writing. I will be keeping this in mind as I choose mentor texts that send messages regarding persistence, resilience, optimism, flexibility, and optimism. In addition, I know I need to have academic choices in my instruction to support a balance of structure and freedom within the writing curriculum. These three important pieces are foundational to foster an environment for writing.

With these conclusions in mind, I combined all of my new information and new understandings and began to develop ideas for curriculum specific to my unique environment. My beginning of the year Spanish immersion English curriculum began to take shape in my mind.

Curriculum Development for Establishing a Community of Writers

My ideas came together as an integrated approach to using new strategies with the guidelines set by my district and CCSS. The first unit of 4th grade is entitled, 'Building a Reading Life', and writing is embedded as well. How could I develop an engaging, authentic, fun, and social-emotional enhancing plan to integrate into my district-mandated unit? What type of environment needs to be created to support efficacy in student writing? What mentor texts best support the teaching of social-emotional skills?

I decided that the first two weeks would be dedicated to establishing relationships, agreements, and building our classroom community. Writing would have a part in this as an authentic source of communication. These activities could be the beginnings of students seeing themselves as writers. There would be games that included writing down names of new classmates and answers to questions. Letters by students would be written to me as a part of this foundational first two weeks. Once we had our foundation of getting to know each other, we would move into the some of the writing curriculum designed with my research question in mind.

I returned to my earliest memory regarding writing and knew there needed to be some writing surrounding the individual lives of my students. I wanted it to be authentic and purposeful with an actual audience. I knew that before students would feel comfortable enough to share writing with classmates we needed to build our classroom community by getting to know one another. I devised several authentic writing activities that were communicative and simple that were specific to the very first two weeks of school. They were chosen to build relationships among students and me as their teacher. Each day we had 60 or so minutes together to begin fostering the classroom community that would build our foundation for learning for the rest of the year. It was important work.

After the first two weeks, where names, new friendships, getting routines, and agreements had occurred, I next took the path of writing goals and plans. This is required by my district, but it does offer a great opportunity to honor each individual learner as they create unique goal/plan projects during the third week of school. The following two weeks consist of introducing persistence, individuality, peer pressure, empathy and resilience through the use of mentor texts and authentic writing activities. The first month of school is critical to the

foundation of students seeing themselves as learners who read, write, and communicate in a literate classroom.

This five-week curriculum weaves together the findings and conclusions from my research, specifically that of the importance of social-emotional learning, how to use mentor texts, and various specific writing activities. Details of each week will follow the brief overview that is within the chart below. The rest of this chapter unveils more detailed plans for the five weeks of building foundational community to foster efficacy in student writing.

	Social-Emotional Learning	Reading Mentor Texts	Writing	District Guided
Week One (4 days) (Appendix A)	Focus: Importance of Names (empathy) Names; BINGO (appendix B)	<i>First Day Jitters</i> (first day) <i>The Name Jar</i> (empathy)	-Nametags -A letter to my teacher (Appendix C) -Informational -Parent Interviews (Appendix D) Index Cards/Blobs and Lines (Appendix E)	FAST testing Math and Reading
Week Two (Appendix F)	Focus: Friendship/Getting to know my classmates (friendship, empathy, flexibility, persistence)	Mentor Text: <i>Enemy Pie</i> (friendship, empathy, flexibility) <i>My Friend is Sad</i> (empathy) <i>Elephants Can't Dance</i> (optimism and persistence)	Classroom Rules Notes from my teacher Blobs and Lines/This or That (Appendix G)	Building a Reading Life Fire Drills
Week Three (Appendix H)	Focus: Perseverance/Persistence and Growth Mindset (optimism, flexibility, resilience, persistence)	<i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i> (persistence, resilience, and optimism)	Student Goals and plans (appendix I) SMART Goals Lesson Heads to attach to goals and plans (Appendix J)	Building a Reading Life Student Goals and Plans for attaining the goals
Week Four (Appendix K)	Focus: Individuality Peer Pressure (resilience, optimism)	<i>A Bad Case of Stripes</i> (individuality) <i>What Do You Do With an Idea?</i> (peer pressure)	Character Traits I Am.... (Appendix L)	Building a Reading Life: Read to Self Good Fit Books

Week Five (Appendix M)	Focus: How are we alike? How are we different? (empathy, resilience)	<i>Junkyard Wonders</i> (uniqueness) <i>Whoever You Are</i> (differences)	I'm the Only One... class book (Appendix N)	Building a Reading Life
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Week One

	Social-Emotional Learning	Reading Mentor Texts	Writing	District Guided
Week One (4 days) (Appendix A)	Focus: Importance of Names (empathy) Names; BINGO (appendix B)	<i>First Day Jitters</i> (first day) <i>The Name Jar</i> (empathy)	-Nametags -A letter to my teacher (Appendix C) -Informational -Parent Interviews (Appendix D) Index Cards/Blobs and Lines (Appendix E)	FAST testing Math and Reading

On the first few days, the focus will be names. Names are such a significant part of a person, and they need to be treated with respect and importance. Treating the names of each of my students with respect as I learn to pronounce them sends a clear message that their name deserves to be pronounced as intended when it was given to them. It sends the message to classmates to do the same. The book, *The Name Jar*, by Yangsook Choi, is the mentor text chosen for this foundational time of establishing a respectful classroom culture.

The book represents everything needed to begin a school year with a focus on the importance of every person's unique individual name. It is a story about a girl who has recently immigrated from Korea, and has a name that is hard to pronounce. It offers a platform for a multicultural discussion on the significance and origin of each person's name.

Students will also play a beginning of the year bingo game (Appendix B) to learn names and specific pieces of information regarding their classmates. The first authentic writing assignments will be to write a letter to the teacher (Appendix C) and to interview parents as to

the origin and choice of each student's' name (Appendix D). Students will compose the letter to the teacher with the help of modeling and sentence starters. This letter will serve as a baseline sample for writing ability and an authentic example of two-way communication, as I will respond to all letters and ask for more information. For the name interview, students will ask questions that pertain to where their name originated, stories about their name, cultural significance, and what they like about their name.

The entire first week of English class will touch a little bit each day on learning names, pronunciations, and information regarding each other. Students will also create nametags and will practice saying each other's names in game format. Students will create informational cards (Appendix E) that will be used to play games where commonalities will be observed. Students will be sharing interview information regarding their names with classmates. Students will use writing in ways that communicate unique things about themselves to the other children in their class.

Week Two

	Social-Emotional Learning	Reading Mentor Texts	Writing	District Guided
Week Two (Appendix F)	Focus: Friendship/Getting to know my classmates (friendship, empathy, flexibility, persistence)	Mentor Text: <i>Enemy Pie</i> (friendship, empathy, flexibility) <i>My Friend is Sad</i> (empathy) <i>Elephants Can't Dance</i> (optimism and persistence)	Classroom Rules Notes from my teacher Blobs and Lines/This or That (Appendix G)	Building a Reading Life Fire Drills

The second week of school will continue building the learning community through various activities. The emphasis on names will continue as I take roll and also as we take ten

minutes each day to listen to one child report about where his name came from. This will be done in small groups, and therefore completed in one week. By taking the time to have students share their name origins within small groups, there is an authentic audience for the answers to the interview questions they asked of their parents. I will circulate and spend two minutes at each table to hear a portion of the name information specific to each child. I will continue to call roll each day and ask for a one or two word individual responses to facilitate the continued learning about each other.

A community building game called Blobs and Lines will be played for ten minutes each day of this week. This interactive game fosters learning about the unique opinions and attributes of each person in the class. It also offers an authentic use of the written word as a part of the game (Appendix E).

Besides continuation of an emphasis on names and community building, several social emotional skills will be introduced and discussed. The mentor texts, *Enemy Pie* (friendship, empathy), *My Friend is Sad* (empathy), and *Elephants Can't Dance* (optimism and persistence) will be used to foster growth of social emotional skills that are important for learning. *Enemy Pie* is a delightful story of a new boy who moves into the neighborhood and quickly makes an enemy. The enemy's father has a plan to get rid of the enemy that delights readers. The two Mo Willems books are very short and allow for a great introduction to the concepts of empathy, optimism, and persistence. These social emotional skills are touted by Mraz (2015) as foundational to all academic learning. The long-term plan would be to go into more detail regarding these important skills through future mentor texts.

In addition to being introduced to empathy, optimism, and persistence, students will receive notes back from their teacher in response to the letters they wrote the previous week.

This authentic, communicative exchange of the written word will take time and effort, but I believe it to be valuable. My hope is that students will find the communication to be useful and novel as they begin to think of themselves as writers. I will be asking students for another communication to build on the first exchange. Hopefully they will find this authentic writing experience to be engaging and valuable.

The final part of the second week will consist of developing rules and agreements for our English classroom. Students will have completed this in their Spanish homerooms, but because I have 25 students that come from two separate classrooms, there is a need to compare and contrast the rules and agreements they made in their own classrooms before we can devise a class charter for our English class. This will be accomplished through examining together the agreed upon words from each individual class and then writing our own agreements. Again, the authentic use of the written word and collaborative use of those words will hopefully be seen as authentic and engaging.

Week Three

	Social-Emotional Learning	Reading Mentor Texts	Writing	District Guided
Week Three (Appendix H)	Focus: Perseverance/Persistence and Growth Mindset (optimism, flexibility, resilience, persistence)	<i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i> (persistence, resilience, and optimism)	Student Goals and plans (appendix I) SMART Goals Lesson Heads to attach to goals and plans (Appendix J)	Building a Reading Life Student Goals and Plans for attaining the goals

Now that we have used the first two weeks to focus on names, getting to know one another, writing a class charter, and introducing social emotional traits, it will be time to write district mandated goals. Teaching children how to write goals and plans to accomplish those goals will likely be a challenging task. The book, *The Most Magnificent Thing*, by Ashley Spires,

will be the choice for a mentor text on this topic. It offers an example of persistence, resilience, and optimism, which are all social emotional skills that would benefit learners. The girl in the story has a really hard time creating something from her mind, but doesn't give up, even after a meltdown. It offers a connection for students to recall when things were hard for them. A SMART reading goal and plan will be taught and developed into an individual student made head that represents themselves. The finished product has the goal and plan displayed directly below the head (Appendix I, Appendix J). It will consist of three sentences for each student.

It will take a whole week to teach this important topic. There will be direct instruction, practice isolating types of goals, writing, editing, and finally creating the finished product unique to each child. The products will become a colorful display that students will refer back to as the year progresses. These projects will also consist of students' first attempts of writing for the new school year.

While there will not be much time this week for games or roll call, I think it is still important to include at least ten minutes each day to build classroom community. I will plan to do a few rounds of Blobs and Lines or a roll call to continue to get to know my students. The rest of the hour each day will be spent with the mentor text, teaching about SMART goals, creating or editing goals, and finally creating the display pieces with their heads and goals. On Friday a new game, This or That (Appendix G) will be introduced.

Week Four

	Social-Emotional Learning	Reading Mentor Texts	Writing	District Guided
Week Four (Appendix K)	Focus: Individuality Peer Pressure (resilience, optimism)	<i>A Bad Case of Stripes</i> (individuality) <i>What Do You Do With an Idea?</i> (peer pressure)	Character Traits I Am.... (Appendix L)	Building a Reading Life: Read to Self Good Fit Books

After writing goals and continuing to build community the third week, there will be time for more social emotional learning. The social emotional learning is setting the foundation to build a community of learners who see themselves as writers. Over the past three weeks, students have used writing for interviewing, communicating in silence, a letter to the teacher, forming class rules and agreements, and finally, creating goals and plans. The texts, *A Bad Case of Stripes* and *What Do You Do With an Idea?* will facilitate our focus for the fourth week. The themes will be surrounding individuality and peer pressure, with a focus on the skills of resilience and optimism.

A Bad Case of Stripes is an engaging book with a message that encourages students to be themselves and not worry so much about what others think. *What Do You Do With an Idea?* offers readers possibilities about believing in their ideas and taking the time to grow them. Discussions surrounding individuality, peer pressure, resilience, and optimism will accompany the read-alouds. Both books would be referred to and reread later in the school year with a different focus of writing.

These texts also offer very strong opportunities for examining a character and their traits, which students will then transfer to looking deeply into their own character traits. Students will create character trait PicCollages (Appendix L) to demonstrate their traits and evidence to describe themselves. These projects will be uploaded into a media album where all students will have the ability to get to know their classmates. This shared album also offers an opportunity for students to compare their efforts to that of others in a nonthreatening fashion. Students might see other creative ideas and decide to improve their own collage. Learning to see with a critical eye is a skill that will benefit students as the year goes forward.

The writing for the week would begin with circle maps regarding oneself and their own specific character traits. The questions, ‘How am I unique?’ and ‘What words describe me on the inside?’ frame the creativity that will result in a digital book. Students will create the collages on media that include their picture, name, and five or more character traits that they feel are unique to them. Students would be encouraged to find images to represent the words or sentences that give evidence for the chosen traits. As students create these individualized projects, they would be shared in a group media album for all to view, which promotes community. As students get to know one another, a climate is created in the classroom that is more conducive to learning.

This fourth week together focuses on individuality, peer pressure, resilience, optimism, and character traits. The academic choice surrounding the media album project allows students to show how they see themselves as individuals. The resilience, optimism, and peer pressure discussions prompted by the mentor texts help to lay the foundation for future schoolwork and social learning.

Week Five

	Social-Emotional Learning	Reading Mentor Texts	Writing	District Guided
Week Five (Appendix M)	Focus: How are we alike? How are we different? (empathy, resilience)	<i>Junkyard Wonders</i> (uniqueness) <i>Whoever You Are</i> (differences)	I’m the Only One... class book (Appendix N)	Building a Reading Life

The fifth week of the curriculum will continue to build a community of learners, readers, and writers by targeting the social emotional learning skills of empathy and resilience as we focus on our likenesses as well as our differences. The texts, *Junkyard Wonders* by Patricia Polacco and *Whoever You Are* by Mem Fox, will be the anchors for the learning. Students will compare and contrast themselves with a classmate using a double bubble thinking map, which is

similar to a Venn Diagram. While it is important to celebrate how we are similar to one another, it is also necessary to honor the differences we have. The class will create a book together entitled, 'I'm the Only One in Sra. Fimmen's Class Who...'. This book (Appendix N) will celebrate the unique differences within a classroom of learners.

The two mentor texts celebrate differences as well as illustrate empathy and resilience. In *Junkyard Wonders*, a class of students are inspired by their teacher even though they each have something that makes learning difficult. *Whoever You Are* is a reminder of cultural diversity and the fact that deep down inside we are more alike than different. Both texts offer opportunities for discussions and activities surrounding likenesses and difference.

After students create a Venn diagram or double bubble thinking map to compare and contrast themselves with a classmate, the groundwork will be in place for the important 'how am I different?' discussion. With a carefully guided conversation, a 'uniqueness' for each student can be found to honor the differences within the community of learners. Because each page of the book will highlight a way that the learner is unique, there will need to be a long discussion. This will not be used to brag about abilities or accomplishments, but more to honor cultural differences, heritage, or family units. Once we have found a unique sentence for each student, students will write and illustrate their page for the class book. Names will go on the back of each page so that the book itself becomes a game to try to recall which unique sentence is associated with each classmate. This final week celebrates the likenesses and the differences within the community.

Summary

This beginning of the year curriculum will build classroom community and engaged learners through the use of social-emotional learning, authentic writing tasks, and mentor texts.

The first weeks of school are critical for building relationships that are integral to learning. I have attempted to create a curriculum that lays the foundation for students to see themselves as part of a community, capable of completing challenging tasks, and able to use writing to communicate. These factors will create an environment that supports efficacy in student writing.

The sequence of the five week curriculum begins with the importance of names and moves through friendship, goal setting, persistence, resilience, optimism, character traits, similarities and differences. There are many group games, social emotional topics, and communicative authentic writing activities. All have been designed with an end result in mind that is based on the research from my quest to answer the question, *How can an environment be created during the first month of school to foster efficacy in student writing?*

The games have a bigger purpose than the laughter and excitement that will likely occur. They become the platform for the class relationships to develop. All of the social emotional learning that takes place during the critical first weeks of school can be expanded on as the year progresses. The writing tasks we undertake in the beginning of the year are all communicative in nature, have an authentic audience, and serve a purpose. They are examples of useful ways to use writing to communicate, and are also building blocks for future and more in depth writings to occur.

The mentor texts can be revisited later in the year with different purposes. The authors from these foundational mentor texts will become writing mentors as craft is eventually explored during future mini-lessons. First, though, students will become comfortable with classmates, learn to see writing as communicative and useful, and develop some basic knowledge of social emotional skills so that they can see themselves as writers.

In chapter five I will reflect on my research and unique beginning of the year curriculum. The process of going from a question to researching and developing curriculum will be examined. I will also explore the implications of my research findings as well as some of the limitations. I will look to the future with possibilities of further study as I go forward in my career. Taking time to reflect on this overwhelming process will assist me in further understanding all I have uncovered.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Introduction

Throughout this capstone process, I have attempted to find answers to my research question regarding students seeing themselves as writers. When I go back to the beginning, where I began to formulate my question, I recalled my own early attempts as a writer as well as my college level writing experiences. I also reflected on my own teaching practices as a teacher of writing, and I knew I wanted to understand how to create a better writing environment for my students. Influential teachers helped me to see myself as a writer, and I yearned to be the person who planted seeds of writing in my present students' minds. These ponderings led me to my research question, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?* My efforts have given me information, ideas, and hope that I have found answers to my question. In this chapter I will reflect on all I have learned from researching my topics and developing the curriculum to create an environment where students see themselves as capable writers. I will also discuss the limitations of my new curriculum, its impact on my school, and recommendations for the future.

Connections to Research

I was able to break apart my question into different areas, and chose topics of research I thought might lead to answers. I was enlightened and informed through many various sources. As I synthesized my new understandings, I decided what direction to take my curriculum. From all of the many resources I delved into, I came away with several new understandings that compelled me to design the first weeks of school writing curriculum for my unique setting.

Time after time I read research on writing motivation being connected to intentional teaching. I also learned how significant the classroom environment established by the teachers is, and how vital it was for students to see writing as useful and communicative. I began to think about the possibility that the beginning of the year was not the time to have the latest and greatest writing strategies put in place, but to instead use writing as a way to communicate as we began to form our classroom community.

My strongest insights from my research were the literature reviews regarding motivation and its relationship with teacher effectiveness. Secondly, the importance of social emotional learning and its ability to be integrated into language arts instruction was profound. Another area of new growth occurred when I looked at the many different uses for mentor texts. There were other facets of new learning that took place, but these three ideas offered the most impact to my decisions about how to attempt to answer my research question.

Motivation and teacher effectiveness. As stated above and in chapter two, the research on motivation being in the hands of the educator was impacting. If students don't see their writing products as 'useful,' then motivation to write is lessened (Graham, et al, 2013). This information made me realize how intentional my teaching needed to be. Teachers play roles in both the tasks and self-perceptions that students hold (Graham, Fitzgerald, and MacArthur, 2013), so carefully choosing writing tasks that are useful will increase students seeing themselves as communicators through writing. Could doing this set the foundation for harder writing tasks as the year unfolds? It would seem to be integral for students to see themselves as writers with a useful purpose, such as getting to know classmates, collaborating on a class charter, writing a letter, playing games, or creating written works about themselves.

Integrating social emotional learning. While I had some background knowledge in this area, the literature I reviewed guided me to an even deeper understanding. Social emotional learning is starting to become widely recognized as a foundation for academic learning. Mraz asserts that educators need to focus more time on nurturing and teaching social-emotional skills because they are a better predictor of success than academic skills (2016). I agree with her philosophy, but social emotional skills are not part of our district curriculum. Could I integrate these important skills into existing reading and writing standards? Mraz specifically points to the importance of teaching optimism, persistence, flexibility, resilience, and empathy as part of a social-emotional curriculum (2016). I believe I found the best way to incorporate these skills into the beginning of the year curriculum through carefully selecting books with themes that show characters with optimism, persistence, flexibility, resilience, and empathy.

Using mentor texts with various purposes. When I began to research mentor texts, I knew that text examples were very powerful for teaching writing craft. What I had not considered was how to use a picture book to teach a specific social emotional skill. Within my research, I identified different purposes for using mentor texts: teaching about ideas, text structure, or writer's craft (Harrison, 2004). I originally was thinking of research surrounding mentor texts to guide me to the best writing examples, but my thinking switched as my curriculum for the first weeks of school became more centered on social emotional skills. This new way of thinking about mentor texts anchors my curriculum. The plan would be to use these same books again later in the year for one of the other purposes, such as writer's craft. I look forward to taking a familiar text and repurposing it.

Implications

The new understandings from my literature review guided me to create a unique curriculum for the first weeks of school. I believe that my future students will be exposed to writing in authentic and useful ways that could change how they view writing. Any future students I have will have a better chance of having writing seeds developed within themselves. I think my entire writing paradigm has shifted because of the research and development within this project, which in turn affects my relationships with all present and future students.

Along with future students, I plan to share with colleagues my findings and thoughts on teaching writing. I have a partner teacher whose job mirrors mine with four different classes. When I pilot the new curriculum next year, she will likely be joining me, therefore affecting another 115 students. This year my district is focusing on writing within our comprehensive balanced literacy program, and I can already tell that my research has benefitted me in this area. I am willing and able to share with others from my school ways to help students see themselves as writers. My district curriculum expert and my principal have asked to read my capstone, and if they should ask me to share my findings or ideas I will be willing to do so. I believe teachers to be hungry for practices that help their students achieve success, especially during the critical beginning weeks of the school year.

Limitations

Those same busy first weeks of the school year account for some of the limitations of my curriculum. When I first started this process, I envisioned teaching the writing process with great new strategies I uncovered. What I realized during the progression was that just like the procedures and guided practice that take place for all aspects of a new school year, there needs to be a foundation of writing that is built before any type of formal writing instruction can begin.

The work is still important and has the possibility of setting the stage for student success as the year unfolds and becomes more rigorous.

Another constraint of the curriculum I developed is that it is unique to the Spanish Immersion setting. Because my students have just one hour each day in English class with me, and another hour in Spanish language arts, the curriculum I developed might not transfer into a traditional classroom setting. It could likely be adapted for a typical classroom, though, as the beginning of the year is a critical time for any learner to decide whether or not he is capable of communicating through authentic writing activities.

Finally, I regret not being able to implement this curriculum this year. It was being designed as the school year unfolded, and I wish it would have been in place. Perhaps all is not lost, though, as my current students have benefitted through partial exposure to some of the activities and mentor texts. This delay also allowed for me to realize that a survey would be appropriate right at the beginning of the year for me to measure how students see themselves as writers. While a survey was not a part of my plan, I will be creating or locating a survey so I can see the possible impact my unique curriculum has on students.

Future Possibilities

Although my research resulted in curriculum that was developed specifically for the first five weeks of school, I will be using information and strategies gained during my quest throughout my writing instruction. This creates exciting new prospects as I continue to strive to improve my teaching. Specifically, I plan to implement Mraz's unique writing mini-lesson template into my classroom at least once a week. Collaborative talking about writing as well as the praise, question, suggest strategies will also be utilized within my classroom. In addition, my improved teaching will contain specific instruction on the writing processes of planning,

drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. Students will know I value writing as a skill that will help them in whatever profession they will choose.

When I think of future research, I know that this process has allowed me to see the many possibilities of inquiry. My most pressing question is to look for answers of how I can integrate social emotional learning into district guided units. I also have more specific questions surrounding the teaching of writing craft and also the best mentor texts to use for various purposes. Are there books out there that are great examples of craft, a social emotional skill, and culturally relevant? I want to know more about effective peer conferencing as well as one-to-one conferring. Even though this has been an exhausting process, I see myself as a lifelong learner who will never be finished searching for answers to these and other questions.

Final Thoughts

My reflections as a teacher gave me the quest to become a better instructor of writing. The desire to improve led me to the question, *How can an environment be created during the first weeks of school to foster efficacy in student writing?* This research led me to the understanding that social emotional learning is a foundational piece to students' writing success. Also of equal value was the new understanding that students will be more motivated to write when intentional planning results in truly communicative and useful writing. Finally, mentor texts can serve various purposes, one being to teach important social emotional skills like optimism, resilience, or persistence.

Writing is a skill that is necessary for academic success. It is my hope that through this research and reflection process I have acquired skills and knowledge to grow some writing seeds in my students, just as a few of my teachers did as I was learning to see myself as a writer.

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APPENDIX A

Lesson Plans for the First Week of School

1st Week	Social-Emotional (Focus is Names)	Mentor Text(s)/Writing Activity	District or School Curriculum
Tuesday	<p>Students make nametags and decorate them with small pictures that represent things that are important to them. I practice and model pronunciation guided by the students. Adding individual characteristics, such as favorite place, color, food, or animal to the name work during roll call makes it more personalized.</p> <p>A Little About Me (PPT. About the teacher) Introduce letter writing as a way to tell teacher about yourself.</p>	<p><i>First Day Jitters</i> by Julie Danneburg A book that has a surprise ending to show how to gain courage to do hard things like start a new school year.</p> <p>Teaching Point: we are all nervous at the beginning of the year, even the teacher.</p> <p>First Writing: A Letter to My Teacher. The letter serves two purposes. It demonstrates a baseline for writing ability as well as allows the student to share about their family, hobbies, and passions. Sentence starters are given. Teaching Point: Writing is a way to communicate. (Appendix C)</p>	Classroom procedures: Chimes Bathroom Exiting
Weds.	The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day. This serves two purposes. First, it ensures that names are respected and learned to be pronounced correctly. It also serves as a time to share information that would potentially create connections among students.	<p><i>The Name Jar</i>, by Yangsook Choi Teaching Point: Our names and backgrounds are all different and it is important to honor them.</p> <p>Beginning of the year BINGO Students will find commonalities with other students as they learn names. (Appendix B) Teaching Point: It is important to learn what we have in common.</p>	Classroom procedures: Entering Supplies Pencils Fire Drills
Thursday	The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day.	Finish BINGO and share out after 30-minute test. Each child shares one of their findings until all children are recognized by another classmate Teaching Point: It is important to learn what we have in common.	FAST Test (reading)
Friday	The names characteristics is repeated each day for two weeks, or until the teacher can 'pass' the test of naming and pronouncing each student's name correctly. (Usually takes 2 weeks)	Writing: Informational Cards that are used for Blobs and Lines game throughout the next two weeks (Appendix D) . Teaching Point: It is important to learn about our classmates	FAST Test (math)

APPENDIX B

Find Someone Who Game

Was born the same month as you Name Month	Who plays an instrument Name Instrument	Who moved here from a different state Name State	Who is new to our school this year Name Last School	Who was born in another country Name Country
Who is the youngest in their family Name Age	Who is the oldest in their family Name Age	Who has twins in their family Name Twins	Who loves the outdoors Name Why?	Whose favorite season is fall Name Why?
Who can speak 3 sentences in a third language (Not Sp!) Name Language	Saw a movie they liked recently Name Movie	Read a great book recently Name Book	Has a job and gets paid for it Name Job	Has a favorite sport Name Sport
Took a trip out of Minnesota last year Name Where?	Prefers to read fiction Name Type	Has a book they have read 10 or more times Name Book	Has written a letter recently Name To who?	Who likes to write Name Why?
Who enjoys music Name What kind?	Prefers to read nonfiction Name Type	Whose favorite subject is science Name	Who has a favorite movie Name Title	Who had fun outside with a friend recently Name Doing what?

APPENDIX C

A Letter to My Teacher Frame

Write me a letter using the frame below.

Date: _____

Dear Sra. Fimmen,

I am _____ about school this year.

(excited, nervous, or your own word)

Three things I would like to tell you about me are:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Three things I would like to tell you about my family are:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Two questions I have for you are:

1) _____

2) _____

One thing I heard about English class is _____

Your student,

APPENDIX D

Parent Name Interview

Note to families: To begin our year, we are focusing on the importance and uniqueness of our individual names. This interview will provide an authentic use of the written word to communicate the history of your child's name. My goal is to facilitate a classroom where we honor each other's unique qualities and attributes, and this will be one of our first activities to begin that process.

Your child is going to interview you about the story behind his/her name. Please elaborate as much as possible, so that your child will be able to share with others the origin of his/her name. Thank you!

Name _____

Date _____

"The History of My Name" Family Interview Research

Interview a parent or other family member to learn about how you got your name. Use what you learn from your interview to answer the questions on this page. Try to answer as many of the questions below as possible. Write your answers in complete sentences.

Who picked out your name?

How did they decide on your name? Is there a story behind your name?

Does your name have any personal or cultural meaning to your family?

What would you have been named if you had been born a boy/girl (opposite of what you are)?

Does your family call you by any nicknames? How did you get your nicknames?

What do you like about your name?

Did you learn anything else about your name that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX E

Blobs and Lines

Informational index cards are created to be used to coincide with this game. The index cards are divided up into four sections on each side of the card. Information specific to each student goes in each quadrant on each side. This card is then used for the 'lines' portions of different rounds of the game, Blobs and Lines. This adaptation from the original game allows for silence during portions of the game, as well as an authentic use of written communication.

Front:

(First and Last Name)	(Birthdate)
(Favorite color)	(how many people live in your family)

Back:

(what time you woke up today)	(favorite book)
(favorite animal)	(favorite place)


Blobs and Lines

1 * 0:05

Directions


2 * 0:02

BLOB questions will tell you to gather with other people in groups, or BLOBS.



3 * 0:09

LINE questions will tell you to line up in the order described by the question.



4 * 0:08

Ready to play?

Click to Continue

5 *

1

Gather with people who have similar favorite water places.
Lake...Ocean...Pool

Click to Continue

6 *

2

Line up in order of your birthdays, from January 1 through December 31.

Click to Continue

7 *

3

Gather with people who have the same favorite season as you.
Fall...winter....spring...summer

Click to Continue

8 *

4

Line up in order of how many people live in your house (including you).

Click to Continue

9 *

5

Gather with people who are wearing the same kind of shoes as you (sneakers, sandals, etc.).

Click to Continue

10 *

6

Line up in alphabetical order by your first names.

Click to Continue

11 *

7

3 Blobs:

1. You have **no chores** at home
2. You have **some chores** at home
3. You have **lots of chores** at home

Click to Continue

12 *

8

Line up in order of how many languages you speak.

Click to Continue

13 *

9

Gather with people who have the same eye color as you.

Click to Continue

14 *

10

Line up in order of your shoe size.

Click to Continue

15 *

11

3 Blobs:

1. You get sick **A LOT**
2. You get sick **OCCASIONALLY**
3. You **NEVER** get sick

Click to Continue

16 *

12

Line up in order of how many pets you have.

Click to Continue

17 *

13

Gather with people who have the same favorite cookie as you.

Click to Continue

18 *

19

Line up in alphabetical order by your last names.

Click to Continue

20

15

3 Blobs:

1. You have NEVER worn braces
2. You CURRENTLY wear braces
3. You wore braces IN THE PAST

Click to Continue

21

16

Line up by hair length, from shortest to longest.

Click to Continue

22

17

Gather with people who get to school in the same way as you (bus, car, walk...).

Click to Continue

23

18

Line up in order of the time you woke up this morning.

Click to Continue

24

19

3 Blobs:

1. You play NO musical instruments
2. You play ONE instrument
3. You play MORE THAN ONE instrument

Click to Continue

20

Line up in order of your height.

Click to Continue

That's all, folks!

Blobs and Lines
an Icebreaker Activity for Grades 6-12

By Jennifer Gonzalez
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Questions? Email me:
jenn@cultofpedagogy.com

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APPENDIX F

Lesson Plans for the Second Week of School

2nd Week	Social-Emotional (Focus is Friendship/Getting to know my classmates)	Mentor Text(s)/Writing Activity	District or School Curriculum
Monday	<p>1)The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day.</p> <p>2) Students continue to get to know their classmates as we share the stories of our names. This will be done in table groups of five. We will do one student each day, each student having 10 minutes to share their information and/or pictures of themselves and their family. This demonstrates an authentic use of written answers to communicate about their own names. Teacher visits each group for 2 minutes.</p>	<p>1) Mentor Text: <i>Enemy Pie</i> (friendship, empathy)</p> <p>A book that shows how friendship can develop if you are open to the possibilities. Teaching Point: It is important to put yourself in another person’s shoes, like the new boy. It is important to be open to making new friends.</p> <p>2) Play Blobs and Lines using informational cards students created. Teaching Point: It is important to learn about our classmates, both likenesses and differences.</p>	Classroom procedures: Practice: Chimes Bathroom Exiting
Tuesday	<p>1) The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day.</p> <p>2) Students continue to get to know their classmates as we share the stories of our names.</p> <p>3) Students will continue to get to know each other as we play a few rounds each day of Blobs and Lines (Appendix E)</p>	<p>Reread <i>Enemy Pie</i>. Students will notice something from the second reading regarding traits of the characters. Class discusses. Teaching Point: We can understand characters in a text by looking closer at the text.</p> <p>Students will respond to my questions from their letters of the previous week. Teaching Point: Letters are a form of two way communication.</p>	Classroom procedures: Practice: Entering Supplies Pencils Fire Drills
Wednesday	<p>1) The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day.</p> <p>2) Students continue to get to know their classmates as we share the stories of our names.</p> <p>3) Students will continue to get to know each other as we play a few rounds each day of Blobs and Lines (Appendix E)</p>	<p>1) <i>My Friend is Sad</i> by Mo Willems Teaching Point: When we are able to think about another person’s feelings, we can be a caring friend.</p> <p>2) Classroom Rules Discussion/Shared Writing By now homerooms have established classroom rules and agreements, and we will compare and contrast the two groups that</p>	

		make up my English class using a Venn Diagram. From this list, students will help to create classroom rules and agreements. Teaching Point: Collaboration can join words from two places to make new ideas for agreements.	
Thursday	<p>1) The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day.</p> <p>2) Students continue to get to know their classmates as we share the stories of our names.</p> <p>3) Students will continue to get to know each other as we play a few rounds each day of Blobs and Lines (Appendix E)</p>	<p>1) Continue working on classroom rules and agreements. As a class, come to agreements. Students create a class charter that all agree on. Teaching Point: Collaboration leads to a finished product that is agreed upon by all.</p> <p>2) Choosing a 'good fit' book. Teaching Point: 'I can choose books I enjoy and understand.'</p>	Classroom Library: Choosing a 'Good Fit' book
Friday	<p>1) The names characteristics upon roll call is repeated each day.</p> <p>2) Students continue to get to know their classmates as we share the stories of our names.</p> <p>3) Introduce 'This or That'. Students will continue to get to know each other as we play a few rounds of a game each day (Appendix G)</p>	<p>1) The finished class charter is signed after reviewing and a final discussion. Teaching Point: Collaboration leads to a finished product that is agreed upon by all.</p> <p>2) <i>Elephants Cannot Dance</i> by Mo Willems Teaching Point: I can choose to be optimistic and persistent.</p>	Classroom Library: Choosing a 'Good Fit' book

APPENDIX G

This or That

1 ★ 0:04

2 ★ 0:02

3 ★ 0:11

4 ★ 0:11

5 ★ 0:09

6 ★ 0:10

Click to Continue

The image displays 18 numbered slides for a poll activity, arranged in a 6x3 grid. Each slide has a black background with white text and a scale of four colored dots (blue, light blue, green, dark green) for voting. A 'Click to Continue' button is at the bottom of each slide.

- Slide 1:** Which animal makes a better pet? Dog vs. Cat.
- Slide 2:** Would you rather live in... The City vs. The Country.
- Slide 3:** Which is worse? Bad Breath vs. Stinky Feet.
- Slide 4:** Would you rather be... Inside vs. Outside.
- Slide 5:** Are you more of a... Morning Person vs. Night Person.
- Slide 6:** Would you rather live in... A Rainforest vs. A Desert.
- Slide 7:** Which is more important? Being Kind vs. Being Smart.
- Slide 8:** Would you rather go to... An All-Girls or All-Boys School vs. A School with Both Genders.
- Slide 9:** Should smoking be illegal? Yes vs. No.
- Slide 10:** Would you rather... Bake vs. Shop.
- Slide 11:** Should students be allowed to wear hats at school? Yes vs. No.
- Slide 12:** Would you rather be... A Police Officer vs. A Firefighter.
- Slide 13:** How important is it to be on time? Very Important vs. Not that Important.
- Slide 14:** Would you rather... Read a Book vs. Watch a Movie.
- Slide 15:** Should all students be required to learn another language? Yes vs. No.
- Slide 16:** Would you rather... Have 10 Kids vs. Have No Kids.
- Slide 17:** Which is better? Playing Sports vs. Watching Sports.
- Slide 18:** Would you rather... Travel Every Single Day vs. Never Leave Home.

Slide design by Jennifer Gonzalez, Cult of Pedagogy. Adapted from Jennifer Gonzalez, Cult of Pedagogy.

APPENDIX H

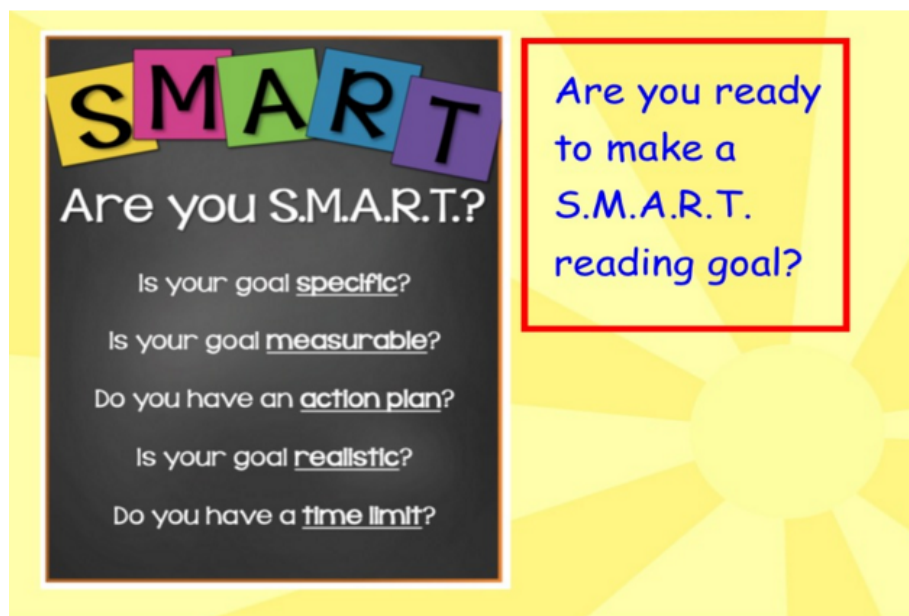
Lesson Plans for the Third week of School

3rd Week	Social-Emotional (Focus is SMART Goals, optimism, flexibility, resilience, and persistence)	Mentor Text(s)/Writing Activity	District or School Curriculum
Monday	Name game with individual responses. Teaching Point: We can learn about each other while listening or playing.	1) Mentor Text: <i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i> by Ashley Spires This book offers discussion points on the social emotional skills of optimism, flexibility, resilience, and persistence. Teaching Point: It is important to choose thoughts of optimism, be resilient during difficulty, and stay flexible as solutions to problems arise. Persistence sometimes results in success! 2) SMART Goals Lesson -Collaborative work (each table will be given one letter and two possible correlating goals and will decide together which one is the strongest and share out) Teaching Point: I can understand SMART Goals. -Sentence starters and goal writing Teaching Point: I can write a SMART Goal (Appendix I)	Classroom procedures: Practice: Chimes Bathroom Exiting
Tuesday	1) Ten minutes of Blobs and Lines. Teaching Point: We can learn about each other while listening or playing.	1) Reread <i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i> together Search for evidence of optimism. 2) SMART Plans Lesson -Collaborative work understanding SMART Plans (again, at tables students will collaborate to find strong plans vs. weaker plans) Sentence starters and writing of plans Teaching Point: I can write a plan to reach my goal	Classroom procedures: Practice: Entering Supplies Pencils
Wednesday	1) Name games with individual answers. Teaching Point: We can learn about	Partner read the text from <i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i> Search for evidence of resilience. 1) Copying Final Goals/Plans	SMART Goals

	each other while listening or playing.	2) Decorating Goals and Plans Teaching Point: I can write my goal and plan correctly and make it look attractive.	
Thursday	1) Ten minutes of Blobs and Lines. Teaching Point: We can learn each others' name with lots of practice.	1) Creating 'bodies' of goals and plans and individual heads to represent each student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modeling creation - Faces (Appendix J) - Assembly Teaching Point: I can create a project that is unique to me with my own goal, plan, and creativity.	SMART Goals
Friday	1) Name TEST! Does the teacher know ALL of the names? Is there a student who knows all the names?s. Teaching Point: We can learn about each other while listening or playing.	1) Creating individual heads to represent each student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modeling creation - Faces - Assembly Teaching Point: I can create a project that is unique to me with my own goal, plan, and creativity. Students who finish may read to self or assist other students with assembly	SMART Goals

Appendix I

Student Goals and Plans



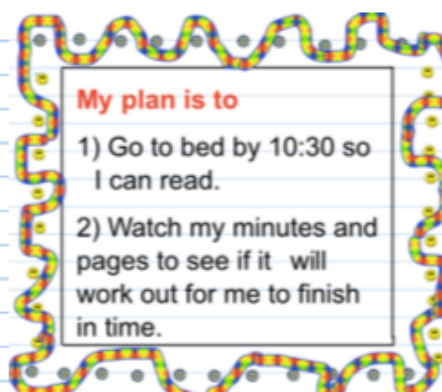
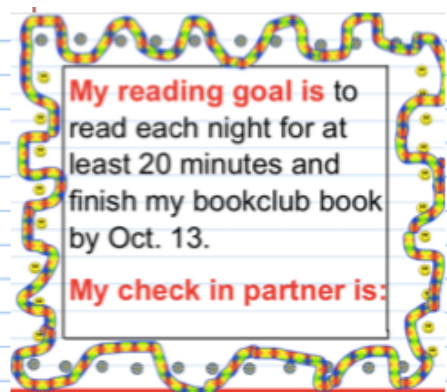
Teacher Example:

My reading goal is to read each night for at least 20 minutes and finish my bookclub book by Oct. 13.

My plan is to

- 1) Go to bed by 10:00 so I won't be too tired.
- 2) Watch my minutes and pages to see if it will work out for me to finish in time.
- 3) Read extra on the weekends!

Image from Jessica Boschen; *What Have I Learned?*



Your 2 cards need :

- 1) best handwriting
- 2) correct spelling
- 3) Capital letter at the beginning of your sentences
- 4) Period at the end of your sentences
- 5) decorate the edges

My plan is to _____ (name on back)

read on the bus (or car) read to my brother

read in the morning AND at night

set a timer take brain breaks

set a specific time each day read to my teddy bear

read right after breakfast each day read outside

choose good fit books read BEFORE TV

After your cards are finished.....

1) Name Art:

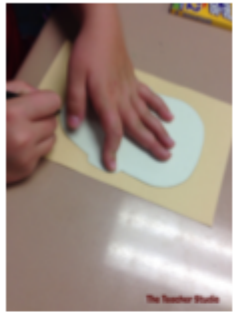


2) Glue goal cards and name

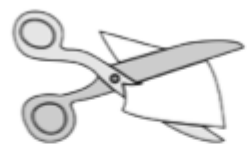


3) Make head

Making Your Head



1) Trace



2) Cut



3) Face



4) Hair



5) Glue Hair



6) Glue neck to goals

Appendix J

Goal and Plan Project Examples





Adapted from [The Teacher Studio](#); Wisconsin, United States

Appendix K

Lesson Plans for the Fourth week of School

4th Week	Social-Emotional (Focus on Individuality and Peer Pressure)	Mentor Text(s)/Writing Activity	District or School Curriculum
Monday	<p>1) Ten Minutes of This or That.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can choose a 'side' and support our decision with a reason.</p>	<p>1) <i>A Bad Case of Stripes</i> by David Shannon This book offers discussion points on individuality and peer pressure. Students will think about and discuss connections to this book.</p> <p>Teaching Point: When we make connections to a book, (Text to self, text to text, or text to world) we understand it better.</p> <p>2) Connections: After discussion, students will write down a connection they had with the text on a post-it note and decide what type of connection (Text to self, text to text, or text to world) it was. We will sort by type onto a poster.</p> <p>Teaching Point: There are different types of connections to make when reading any book.</p>	Unit One: Building a Reading Life
Tuesday	<p>1) Five Minutes of roll call with unique answers. Five minutes of This or That.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can learn about each other while listening or playing.</p>	<p><i>A Bad Case of Stripes</i></p> <p>1) We will reread a portion of the book that illustrates character traits of the main character.</p> <p>Teaching Point: Character traits are shown in how a character acts and what they say.</p> <p>2) Circle Maps: Together make one for teacher (citing evidence) from character trait list.</p> <p>3) Students create a circle map of themselves with 5-10 words to describe themselves</p> <p>Teaching Point: I am unique in my character traits!</p>	Unit One: Building a Reading Life

<p>Wednesday</p>	<p>1) Ten Minutes of This or That.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can choose a 'side' and support our decision with a reason.</p>	<p><i>What Do You Do With an Idea?</i> by Kobi Yamada</p> <p>1) This book offers its readers the possibility that it is important to believe in and grow ideas. Students will discuss connections to the book.</p> <p>Teaching Point: When we make connections to a book, (Text to self, text to text, or text to world) we understand it better.</p> <p>2) Introduce PicCollage project Students will begin creating a collage from the words in their circle map.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We are all unique and creative.</p>	<p>Unit One: Building a Reading Life</p>
<p>Thursday</p>	<p>1) Five Minutes of roll call with unique answers. Five minutes of Blobs and Lines.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can learn about each other while listening or playing.</p>	<p><i>What Do You Do With an Idea?</i> by Kobi Yamada</p> <p>1) A discussion will take place after rereading the text. 'What did you notice the second time we read together?' The book is very subtle in message and illustrations.</p> <p>Teaching Point: Rereading promotes deeper understanding of a text.</p> <p>2) Students will continue to create collages on I pads.</p> <p>Teaching Point: Images can represent a character trait. (Model finding images for trait words)</p>	<p>Unit One: Building a Reading Life</p>
<p>Friday</p>	<p>1) Ten Minutes of This or That.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can choose a 'side' and support our decision with a reason.</p>	<p>1) Fluency Friday/Partner reading. Text will be available from both of the prior picture books.</p> <p>Teaching Point: Partners can help each other become stronger in fluency.</p> <p>2) Finish and upload collages</p> <p>Teaching Point: How to upload to Schoology.</p> <p>3) View Album in Schoology as a whole class.</p> <p>Teaching Point: Everyone is creative in different ways. 'I can learn from others how I might improve my work.'</p>	<p>Unit One: Building a Reading Life</p>

APPENDIX L

Character Traits Examples



APPENDIX M

Lesson Plans for the Fifth week of School

5th Week	Social-Emotional (Focus is likenesses and differences among classmates)	Mentor Text(s)/Writing Activity	District or School Curriculum
Monday	<p>Ten minutes of Blobs and Lines or This and That Games</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can continue to learn about each other.</p>	<p>1) <i>Junkyard Wonders</i>_by Patricia Polacco This book offers its readers great examples of resilience and fosters empathy. Students will discuss connections to the book. Teaching Point: We are alike AND different; Define empathy and resilience</p> <p>2) Classmate interviews for finding same and different. Students will take notes with question prompts and discover at least 5 commonalities and 5 differences Teaching Point: I can compare and contrast myself with a classmate. We are alike AND different; empathy and resilience</p>	Building a Reading Life
Tuesday	<p>Ten minutes of student choice get to know you games.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can continue to learn about each other.</p>	<p>1) <i>Junkyard Wonders</i>_by Patricia Polacco We will reread portions of the text to look for evidence of resilience. Connections discussed. Teaching Point: Resilience is defined and examples given.</p> <p>2) Double-Bubble Thinking Map to compare/contrast two classmates Teacher demonstrates a map between self and another child. Teaching Point: Comparing and contrasting can be done in a visual way using a thinking map.</p> <p>3) Students will use notes from prior day plus knowledge from demonstration to create a double bubble thinking map that compares/contrasts themselves with a classmate. Teaching Point: We are alike AND different.</p>	Building a Reading Life

<p>Wednesday</p>	<p>Ten minutes of Blobs and Lines or This and That Games</p> <p>Teaching Point: We are alike AND different; empathy and resilience</p>	<p>1) <i>Whoever You Are</i> by Mem Fox This book is a reminder of cultural diversity and the fact that deep down inside we are more alike than different. Students will discuss connections to the book. Teaching Point: We are alike AND different; we are more alike than different discussion. Connect to different colors for skin we chose for our goals project.</p> <p>2) Students will finish up and share their double bubbles with another pair of students. Teaching Point: We are alike AND different. We are still learning about each other.</p>	<p>Building a Reading Life</p>
<p>Thursday</p>	<p>Ten minutes of student choice get to know you games.</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can continue to learn about each other.</p> <p>2) Brain Break! This is a longer discussion so we will need to learn about brain breaks Teaching Point: Brain Breaks help me to focus and sit in longer discussions.</p> <p>3) Each student will write his or her sentence as it is granted on a post-it note, which will be used to create the individual book page. Teaching Point: We all have a unique something that is ours alone!</p>	<p>1) <i>Whoever You Are</i> by Mem Fox We will reread portions of the text to look for evidence of differences. Connections to be discussed. The longer discussion of unique differences based on heritage or culture begins. Students sit in a circle, and are directed to think of something they are pretty sure is unique only to them. Teacher models with examples first. One by one, each child will be granted a 'I'm the ONLY one in this class who... ' sentence that will become their page in the book. Teaching Point: It is important to honor our differences!</p>	<p>Building a Reading Life</p>
<p>Friday</p>	<p>Ten minutes of Blobs and Lines or This and That Games</p> <p>Teaching Point: We can continue to learn about each other.</p>	<p>1) Class Book: I'm the Only One in Sra. Fimmen's Class... (Appendix N) Students will illustrate and write their uniqueness decided on the previous day to form a page of a class book. They will illustrate with color and labels. They will include their name on the back in an interesting and artistic way. Teaching Point: We can be proud of how we are different. I can create an illustration to represent my uniqueness.</p>	<p>Building a Reading Life</p>

APPENDIX N

'I'm the Only One' Class Book Page

(drawing to represent sentence)

I'm the ONLY one in Sra. Fimmen's class who _____

_____.