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Writer's Workshop in Kindergarten: A Study of Writing Mechanics, Attitudes, and Behaviors

Emily Stover
The College at Brockport

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Writer's Workshop in Kindergarten:

A Study of Writing Mechanics, Attitudes, and Behaviors

by

Emily Stover

July 1, 2011

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the
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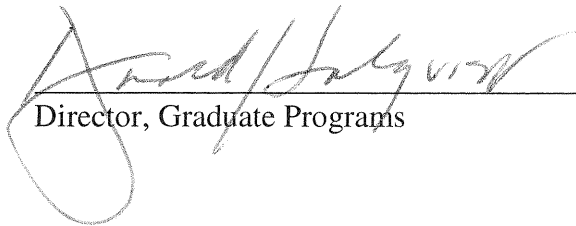
APPROVED BY:



Advisor

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Date



Director, Graduate Programs

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Date

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Brooklyn (all student names are pseudonyms) is an energetic kindergarten student. As she works on her writer's workshop piece, she stands, she sits on one foot, fidgets her body, and chews on the cap of her marker. On her wrinkled writing paper is a drawing of the top half of a person – no hair, no hands, no legs or feet. Beside the half-drawn person is a somewhat lopsided rectangle. Brooklyn writes the letter "I" and then shoots her hand up in the air. Jumping up and down, she yells across the room, "Miss Stover! Miss STOVER!! How do you spell "happy?" Bethany's enthusiasm can be seen across the room. She is excited to draw and write about her experience at swim lessons, but is not yet able to work independently for more than a minute or two at a time.

At another end of the room sits Hannah, quietly working on her writing, a conscientious little girl who always wants to do the right thing. Her picture includes a carefully drawn person labeled "me" and a splotch drawn on the ceiling of the picture. Hannah's writing is fairly sloppy and rushed. It copies the subject and wording modeled in my mini lesson of the day, *AhuLINThe SiLIING IWUNDR Woy* "A hole in the ceiling. I wonder why!" "Ah," I think to myself; she is still copying my writing topics.

The boy next to her starts telling her about his dirt bike.

"No talking!" she tells her classmate, "It's writing time!"

"But I'm *done!*" he exclaims.

“When you’re done, you’ve just begun.” Hannah chants in a sing-songy voice, pointing to the poster in the room that lists what to do when finished writing: “Add to the words. Add to the picture. Take a new writing paper.” Hannah raises her hand, waving it in the air as she waits for me to come over so she can show me her work.

Jeremy sits at the next table. His drawing lacks details but includes stick figures drawn to scale and clearly labeled with words and arrows, “DAD,” “Me” MOMMY.” He writes effortlessly on the lines below, *I AM SleepinG WiTH my moM. AND DAD.* I chuckle to myself as I see the picture. Jeremy has clearly drawn two separate beds in his picture: One bed with him and his mom, and a separate bed with his father in it. “If only his parents knew what he was drawing,” I think to myself. Jeremy writes independently, uninterrupted by those around him. He places a period at the end of his sentence and puts down his marker. He walks across the room, grabs another writing paper, and gets right to work on this new piece.

These three students display three very different personalities, show a range of writing independence, and demonstrate unique writing abilities and needs. Within the busy hustle-and-bustle of my kindergarten classroom, I can observe exciting learning happening. Yet with all the mandates placed on my teaching, I question where to fit in writing time within my busy day. As I race from student to student, I wonder if I am best meeting each of their individual writing needs. I jot down some anecdotal notes and decide I must explore this topic further.

Problem Statement

Current trends in literacy education focus on reading instruction in the primary grades. Reading First mandates require a ninety-minute block of time devoted to reading. However, free writing is not allowed during the ninety-minute reading block. With such a heavy focus on reading, little attention has been placed on writing.

Ritchey (2008) conducted a study on writing development in kindergarten at a Reading First school. She found that the mandates of Reading First placed a heavy emphasis on reading in the curriculum. In turn, many teachers in these schools followed a literacy curriculum grounded in reading research and neglected to fully develop their writing instruction. Wong-Ratcliff, Powell, and Glenda (2010), McDonald Connor, Jakobsons, Crowe, and Meadows (2010), and Al Otaiba, Connor, Lane, Kosanovich, Schatschneider, Dyrund, Miller, and Wright (2008) conducted studies on the reading impact of Reading First schools; however, little research exists on writing instruction in Reading First schools. Wohlwend (2008) investigated writing instruction at a Reading First school and expressed the struggles of a teacher to balance writing instruction. Wohlwend found that teachers in Reading First schools reacted to mandates and accountability standards by over-emphasizing correct mechanics and limiting writing assignments to narrow prompts. Wohlwend's study sought to explore ways to balance writing instruction to incorporate creativity and promote risk taking as well. The problems discussed by Ritchey and Wohlwend are widespread in Reading First Schools.

Significance of the Problem

Writing is an important component of literacy development, despite the lack of attention it has received lately (Cassidy, Valadez, Garrett, & Barrera, 2010). Stotsky's (1983) correlational study showed that writing and reading are reciprocal. Shanahan and Lomax (1986) studied three models of the reading-writing relationship. Their study revealed that writing instruction is important, just as reading instruction is, and that writing should be introduced to students at a young age, soon after reading instruction begins (Shanahan & Lomax). Calkins (1986) writes that children should begin experimenting with writing before they even know most of their letters. If we neglect to include proper writing instruction for our students, the results could be rather scary. Our students will suffer in writing development and conventions (Wohlwend, 2008). Furthermore, they may lack writing creativity, voice, and the ability to write in various genres (Wohlwend). Answering closed-ended questions may have its purpose; however, broader writing instruction is essential for shaping strong, well-rounded writers (Wohlwend).

This study is important because it provides information regarding effective writing instruction approaches in kindergarten and strategies for incorporating this instruction within the context of Reading First. If such research were not conducted, teachers in Reading First schools might not be aware of the importance of writing instruction at this level or may lack the resources necessary to effectively implement writing instruction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the writer's workshop approach in a kindergarten classroom, given the confines of Reading First. The goal was to use this information to more effectively assist kindergarten students in developing their writing skills. This study was designed to highlight the importance of writing instruction at this level and to explore one particular writing approach, writer's workshop. Furthermore, it could prove to be informative to other teachers at my school who are struggling to include writing instruction while also meeting all the requirements of Reading First. Thus, my research questions were as follows:

- What impact can writer's workshop have on kindergarten students?
- How can writer's workshop affect students' writing mechanics?
- What impact can writer's workshop have on students' writing attitudes and behaviors?

In order to explore the impact of writer's workshop in my classroom, I selected three of my students for case studies. I chose students about whom I wished to learn more and students with a range of abilities. I selected a student who struggled in writing, one who excelled, and a student who was more average in her writing skills. In this way, I was able to consider in what ways the writer's workshop approach was or was not effectively meeting each student's individual needs.

I used rubrics weekly to collect data. I used the Kindergarten Writing Rubric to analyze writing samples and assess the writing conventions used. This rubric analyzed language use, spelling, legibility, directionality, spacing, punctuation, and

capitalization. I selected the Kindergarten Writing Rubric, because it was the rubric used in my district for grading the fall, winter, and spring writing benchmarks. Thus, it corresponded with my district's writing standards.

I also observed student behaviors during writer's workshop time and used the Writing Workshop Rubric to determine my students' writing attitudes and behaviors. I adapted this Writing Workshop Rubric from Lucy Calkins, using her categories and adding my own indicators. This rubric analyzed student attitude, confidence, planning, independence, and productivity. I also conducted interviews with the three participants at the beginning and conclusion of the study using questions I developed.

Rationale

As a kindergarten teacher in a school based on the Reading First model, I struggled to find time for writing instruction. Since writer's workshop was not permitted during the ninety-minute block, I had to try to find another time of the day to implement writing instruction. As in many Reading First Schools, teachers in my school are held to accountability measures for reading, yet little is discussed about writing. To fit writing into the reading block, teachers ask students to respond to closed-ended prompts about the books they were reading, never enabling students to express themselves creatively through writing. In the process, student writing development suffers. I, like many teachers in my school, questioned:

Isn't writing important too?

How can I fit in meaningful writing instruction into my day and still meet all the other mandates?

What is an effective way of teaching writing to kindergarten children within these confines?

I used the writer's workshop approach outside the reading block in an attempt to provide my students with the opportunity to write freely, without the constraints of narrow prompts.

Definition of Terms

Reading First is a federally funded program which "provides assistance to...districts to establish scientifically based reading programs for students enrolled in kindergarten through grade three" (Reading First, 2009). Funds are allocated based on poverty rates for the district. The program requirements include "scientifically based" progress monitoring assessments, a basal reading program, and a ninety-minute reading block of uninterrupted reading time.

Writer's workshop and *writing workshop* are terms used to describe an approach to writing instruction, which includes a mini lesson and engages students in writing, conferencing, editing, and publishing their work (Calkins & Harwayne, 1987; Calkins, 2003). The students share their work and reflect on their writing during writer's workshop as well.

Summary

Working in a Reading First school, I often felt constrained by the ninety-minute reading block. I struggled to find time in my day to fit in writing instruction, and I wondered how I could best teach my kindergarten students to be effective writers. I decided to study more about the writing workshop approach and analyze its

impact on my students' writing, not just their writing conventions, but their writing attitudes and behaviors as well.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Much research exists on reading instruction, yet there is far less research currently on writing instruction. Schulze (2006) and Ritchey (2008) examined the benefits of writing instruction, revealing its link to reading development. Current trends in Reading First and demands for accountability measures have also impacted writing instruction. Wohlwend (2008) and Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) studied the effects of standardized tests and accountability measures on teaching practices. Dorn and Soffos (2001) and Schulze described writing instruction at the kindergarten level, explaining the students' writing development at this age and appropriate benchmarks. There is also current research on the writer's workshop approach, although most focuses on the mid- to upper-elementary grades. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) explored the effects of writer's workshop in a first grade classroom. This literature review will outline some of the important studies in the following areas of writing: the importance of writing instruction, the impacts of mandates on writing instruction, writing instruction at the kindergarten level, and the writing workshop approach. This section will describe the research on which this study is built and also reveal the gaps which this study is designed to help fill.

The Importance of Writing Instruction

Writing instruction can have a positive impact on a student's overall literacy development. Stotsky (1983) conducted a review of correlational and experimental studies investigating reading and writing relationships from the 1930s through 1981 and found that "better writers tend to be better readers" (Stotsky, p. 636). Shanahan (1980) conducted a study of twelve second grade and nine fifth grade classes, with a total of 256 second grade and 253 fifth grade participants. He found that reading and writing are related, that both reading and writing instruction were necessary, and that one form of instruction could not replace the other.

Shanahan and Lomax (1986) conducted a study which compared and evaluated theoretical models of the reading-writing relationship. This study also suggested that the combination of reading and writing instruction is the most beneficial for students. It found that the traditional approach, which provided several years of reading instruction before introducing any writing instruction, was "inefficient" (Shanahan & Lomax, p. 122). Rather, the results suggest that writing instruction, along with reading instruction, should begin at a young age (Shanahan & Lomax).

Goodman and Goodman's (1983) article on reading and writing relationships also suggests that reading and writing have an impact on one another and that "people not only learn to read by reading and write by writing but they also learn to read by writing and write by reading" (p. 592). They suggest that students must actively participate in both reading and writing experiences and that these experiences should

have “significant and personal meaning” for the user, so that they relate to their lives and can have a functional purpose (Goodman & Goodman).

Clay (1975) described the value of writing instruction as a means to provide students with the opportunity to develop their own literacy understandings and build strategies that they can use as readers. For example, creative writing helps children to attend to print, build their own words, follow spatial and directional rules, and consider the features of letters (Clay).

In an unpublished Master’s thesis, Robinson’s research revealed that writing is the main predictor of early reading progress for children in kindergarten and first grade (as cited in Schulze, 2006). Ritchey (2008) studied the impact of early writing skills on early reading skills by examining the skills of sixty kindergarten children enrolled in full-day kindergarten classes from late February through May. Ritchey’s data collection included four writing measures: letter writing, sound spelling, real word spelling, and nonsense word spelling. She used the following reading measures: letter name fluency, letter sound fluency, and the Test of Early Reading Ability, Third Edition (TERA). Ritchey also assessed phoneme segmentation fluency and phonological awareness. The findings revealed that students who had developed strong writing skills often demonstrated strong reading skills as well (Ritchey). Like Ritchey, Schulze found that invented spelling helps build children’s abilities to segment the sounds in words and develop their phonemic awareness. Schulze emphasized the importance of affirming students’ writing attempts and helping them learn through the process.

The Impacts of Mandates on Writing Instruction

Despite concrete research that suggests the importance of writing instruction, many programs focus on reading instruction, with little attention placed on writing. Reading First is a federally funded program which mandates a ninety minute reading block. Writing instruction is not allowed during this block of time. Teachers who choose to work on writing must find another time during the school day for this subject. Furthermore, federal mandates and testing guidelines are leading to a push for accountability. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires that students achieve “adequate yearly progress” (Stat. 1444). This act uses tests as accountability measures which, in turn, can largely impact students’ futures in school (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). Many school districts have reacted to these mandates by changing their literacy programs, so that all children are receiving the same, “standardized teaching across elementary classrooms” (Wohlwend, 2008, p. 59) through the use of commercialized programs (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann). Children are expected to perform on high stakes exams and to meet predefined benchmarks (Wohlwend). With this push comes a stress to meet these standards and an emphasis on correctness (Wohlwend).

In reaction to these accountability measures, teachers and programs are emphasizing the use of proper conventions (Wohlwend, 2008). Such curricula focus on correct mechanics, such as spelling and punctuation, proper letter formation, writing orientation, and spacing. Writing assignments in these classrooms often require students to write responses to narrow prompts, fill in the blanks, or complete

test-prep activities (Wohlwend; Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). These assignments leave little room for creative thought, individuality, or voice. These programs neglect to consider the writing quality, students' understanding of the writing process, use of genre, variation in phrasing, and sentence structure (Wohlwend).

Meyer (2002) found that writing instruction that over-emphasizes mechanics and uses formulaic assignments can actually stunt children's writing skills. Furthermore, such teaching practices are often not developmentally appropriate for young learners, as they focus too heavily on specific skills rather than the overall process and product (Wohlwend, 2008). Wohlwend explains, "The reductive definition of literacy in national educational policy stresses convention, ignoring decades of literacy research that supports developmentally appropriate practice in literacy teaching" (p. 59). Thus, meaningful learning experiences are no longer the focus; rather tests determine the focus of instruction (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). Teaching to the test, instead of teaching for learning can limit the curriculum, waste instructional time on test-prep, and often involves formulaic teaching practices with little room for individuality (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann).

Wohlwend (2008) described the other extreme of writing instruction. She found that teachers unconcerned with accountability standards may give their students fun writing activities which provide opportunities for self expression and creativity. However, these teachers often lose sight of mechanics and may underestimate the students' abilities. Wohlwend described both of these curriculums as "excesses" and

advocated for a balance in writing instruction to provide opportunities for creativity and voice, yet also setting appropriate expectations for following proper writing mechanics. Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) also recommend best teaching practices, explaining that such writing instruction can not only boost students' writing creativity, but can also provide students with all the skills they need to pass the standardized tests.

Writing Instruction at the Kindergarten Level

Children in kindergarten are early writers, developing and revising their understandings of print. Calkins (1986) supports the use of writing instruction at an early age, declaring that “long before youngsters know a handful of letters they can begin writing ‘as best they can’” (p. 37). In fact, Vygotsky (1978) argues that writing development stems from children’s understanding of the meaning behind gestures; thus, this development begins long before children enter formal schooling. Martinez and Teale (1987) recommend daily writing experiences in kindergarten, with adult coaching. Studies by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) and by Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1981) identified concepts that children need to acquire in order to be able to read. Both studies found that children need to be able to discriminate drawing from writing, pictures from text, letters from numbers, letters from punctuation, and letters from words (Ferreiro & Teberosky; Harste, Burke, & Woodward). Before and during their kindergarten year, children build these understandings, and begin to apply them in their writing (Schulze, 2006). Dorn and Soffos (2001) described the

writing benchmarks for the end of kindergarten as follows. At the end of the school year, students can be expected to:

- Generate topics and lists for writing
- Understand that writing should make sense
- Write a narrative that includes three or four events in order
- Produce writing that uses some of the words and phrases from read-aloud books
- Write a reaction to a story
- Maintain a focus for writing about a topic
- Read their own writing to others (soon after the writing is completed, they can still remember the message)
- Write initial sounds and some ending sounds to represent words (semiphonetic stage of spelling) (Dorn & Soffos, 2001)
- Leave spaces between words
- Experiment with punctuation (e.g., use periods or exclamation marks throughout their writing) (p. 20-21).

Healy (1994) described the goal of writing to develop three components of writing – comprehension, expressive language, and conventions. Clearly, the emphasis on mechanics in Reading First Schools only meets one of these three components. As children work through the writing process, they should develop all three of these skills.

During their kindergarten year, students develop in their level of writing competence (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Dorn and Soffos describe this development as follows. Most children in kindergarten are emergent writers. The *emergent writer* finds the act of writing the message to be challenging. These children are still learning how to write letters and words. They are developing the skill of writing the sounds they hear in words, and are working on conventions such as spacing and directionality. The *early writer* is more skilled with the writing portion, and can now attend to other aspects of the writing process. These students are able to consider the length of their writing pieces, and are able to begin some basic editing. They are developing their abilities to write opening sentences, closing sentences, and utilize describing words in their writing. By the end of kindergarten and into the primary grades, many children are beginning to work on some of these skills. The *transitional writer* is older, now able to write at a faster pace with greater ease. These writers can focus more on their composition, revising their work and preparing a final version.

Students also go through stages of developmental spelling, as they work on their writing (Gentry, 1982; Schulze, 2006). Gentry and Schulze describe the stages of spelling as follows. Children often begin their kindergarten year at the *precommunicative* stage. Their writing cannot be read by others. Students in this stage mix symbols, letters, and mock letters. During the *semiphonetic* stage, children acquire the alphabetic principle, and understand that letters correspond with sounds and that letters can be put together to make words. Often, these young writers may use the initial sound, or the initial and ending sounds to write words, using one or two

letters. They also have a stronger understanding of the left-to-right directionality of writing. By the end of kindergarten, many students are in the *phonetic* stage. These children are able to write most of the sounds in a word, and now use spaces between their words. Although they do not yet use conventional spellings, their writing can be read by an adult. The *transitional* stage describes students who demonstrate a stronger understanding of conventional spelling patterns, and are able to use prefixes and suffixes properly, with endings such as -s, -ing, and -est. A handful of students in kindergarten may have developed these skills. The final spelling stage is the *conventional* or *standard* speller. These writers are able to spell most words correctly and are able generalize and apply spelling rules (Gentry; Schulze).

Teachers must understand the typical writing stages that their students will go through to best meet their needs and to develop meaningful writing instruction. Graves (1983) advocates for the use of invented spelling so that children can focus on meaning; however, he also stresses that teachers work with their students to lead them toward correct spellings.

Richgels (2003) conducted a year-long study of kindergarten literacy development, collecting data through the use of audio tape recorders, microphones, note taking, and collection of work samples and artifacts. Data was collected for 164 days in one kindergarten teacher's classroom. Richgels describes authentic, meaningful writing activities that were utilized throughout the school year. The topics children explored were based on student interest and portray "child-centered teaching" (p. 315). Writing was integrated into many different subject areas, and

children learned to use invented spelling and environmental print. Thus, Richgel's study reveals the power of a well-rounded kindergarten writing curriculum, one that sparks student enthusiasm and engagement and provides the scaffolding necessary for children to grow as learners and as writers.

The Writing Workshop Approach

The writing workshop or writer's workshop approach is one method for teaching writing through use of the writing process. Calkins (1986) defines writer's workshop as a time when children learn about the process of how to write, helping them grow as writers by making a personal connection to what they are writing. During this time, students plan their writing and choose their own topics; "they perceive themselves as authors" (Calkins, p. 9). They learn to organize their writing through multiple drafts (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Calkins and Merimelstein (2003) describe the purpose of the writing workshop:

Our goal is to offer children the opportunity to bring their lives to school and to put their lives on the page. At first, we're especially cultivating rich conversations, lots of storytelling, and detailed drawings. We definitely *don't* want children to limit what they say and think because of a concern for spelling or penmanship. We want to teach all children that the writing workshop is an opportunity to make and convey meaning. (p.1)

The writer's workshop consists of several components. These components vary, depending upon the source, but certain elements can be found in all writing workshops: mini-lessons, independent writing, conferences, and group sharing. Mini-lessons may last anywhere from four to fifteen minutes, and the lessons provide teachers with the opportunity to focus on a specific skill or strategy with which their students are struggling (Calkins, 1986; Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). The mini-lesson is a time for teachers to model a particular procedure (Calkins; Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann). In kindergarten, teachers may use other writing experiences as well to help develop their students' print concepts. Teachers may use shared writing and interactive writing, to engage students in writing one piece together with the teacher (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). During this "shared writing event," the class may write a story, a letter, or perhaps a poem (Dorn & Soffos, p. 35).

Following the mini-lesson, children have the opportunity to write on their own (Dorn & Soffos, 2001; Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). The students choose their own writing topics, often writing about their personal experiences. At first, the children work on a draft, focusing on getting their thoughts down on paper, without worrying overly about using proper conventions (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann).

Students have the opportunity to conference with the teacher or with a peer. At the beginning of kindergarten, the teacher may help individual children "stretch out" the sounds in words through guided writing (Behymer, 2003). Teachers may also conference with students during the revision process, to help children expand their ideas and to make their writing more interesting and clearer to the reader.

Students can then edit their work for mechanics, such as spelling, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization. Teacher conferences and peer conferences are used during the editing process as well. Research shows that even young children can revise their work (Hansen, 2007; Kissel, 2008). Hansen explored the effects of providing first grade students with more freedom in the writing process, while asking them to revisit their work and reflect on their learning on a regular basis. Hansen found that the students were able to revisit and revise their work successfully and that they became more motivated writers in the process. Kissel observed pre-kindergarten students during the writing process and found that even these young learners were able to envision their work or revise their thoughts on paper. Thus, the revision portion of writer's workshop can be adapted to be effective at every age level, even for children who are early writers.

The final stage of the writing workshop approach is publishing student work (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). Students have the opportunity to share their work with the class, reflecting on their writing growth (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007; Higgins, Miller & Wegmann). Students often share with their class, taking a seat in the "author's chair," taking pride and ownership of their work during the process (Graves, 1983; Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Students may select some writing pieces to be published in a book, on a bulletin board, or typed on the computer (Behymer, 2003). Graves explains that publishing is important for all children, to help them benefit from having an audience and a sense of pride and accomplishment.

At the heart of writer's workshop is teacher observation (Calkins, 1986). Graves (1983) discusses the importance of learning from our students and how to use that information to guide students and help them develop their own understandings. Calkins explains that teachers must be researchers; they must observe the process their students use when writing and use what they learn to help their students become better writers. Thus, through careful observation, teachers can tailor their mini lessons and conferences to meet their students' individual needs.

Lamme, Fu, Johnson, and Savage (2002) explored the impact of the writing workshop approach in two full-day kindergarten classrooms. The students participated in writing workshop each morning. Their study revealed that children in kindergarten can become successful and enthusiastic writers when given time to write, a supportive environment, modeling, and adult assistance that is developmentally appropriate. The children in these classes showed growth in their drawings, understanding of letter-sound correspondences, use of spacing, word identification, and abilities to write sentences. Their writing showed significant gains, and the students became more fluent in their storytelling and writing (Lamme, Fu, Johnson, & Savage).

Jasmine and Weiner (2007) explored the effects of writing workshop on first grade students' writing independence and confidence. Their participants were five- and six-year-old children in a first grade class, twelve boys and nine girls. Jasmine and Weiner used quantitative research data collection methods. They used surveys to measure the students' attitudes and confidence using a four-point Likert scale and

made systematic observations using a checklist. They also collected student writing samples through the use of portfolios, and analyzed these writing pieces using a 6 + 1 writing rubric. The findings of this study suggest that the writing workshop helped to boost student enthusiasm toward writing, along with their confidence and independence (Jasmine & Weiner). Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann (2006) also state that writer's workshop builds students' interest and promotes ownership of writing by allowing students to choose their own topic and genre. Hansen (2007) found that writer's workshop positively impacted student motivation and writing skills.

Hachem, Nabhani, and Bahous (2008) conducted a study analyzing the writing workshop approach in a second grade classroom. These researchers found that writer's workshop provided the opportunity to differentiate writing instruction, enabling all students to work at their own developmental writing levels. The writing workshop approach encouraged students to take risks and provided students with the support they needed through conferences. Furthermore, their research suggests that the students' writing skills improved during the writing workshop process (Hachem, Nabhani, & Bahous).

Beyond the academic benefits, studies have revealed other positive impacts of the writing workshop and the writing process with young learners. Dutro (2006) found that writing can provide an opportunity for students to express themselves within their own identities and social contexts. Their writing pieces can, in turn, prove to be vital resources to teachers so they can better understand each unique student (Dutro).

Summary

Writing instruction is a critical component of a language arts program. Despite the recent focus on reading instruction, it is important that teachers remember to continue high quality writing instruction as well. Current mandates often stress accountability measures and proper conventions when writing, yet children should also learn to use creativity and voice in their writing. Children at the kindergarten level are ready to begin writing using pictures, letters, words, and eventually sentences, as they move through stages of writing development. The writer's workshop or writing workshop approach can provide students with a structure for using the writing process. Studies have found the writer's workshop method to be effective in strengthening students' writing, boosting student confidence, and increasing their writing independence. By sharing or publishing their work, students also take pride in their writing accomplishments.

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

Introduction

This study was designed to explore writer's workshop at the kindergarten level and examine its effect on the writing of particular kindergarten students as well as its impact on their attitudes and behaviors during writer's workshop time. In this chapter, I discuss the participants, procedures, and data collection methods I used. I also address the ways I chose to analyze my data and describe the limitations this study may have.

Questions

I planned my methods and procedures in an effort to answer the following research questions:

- What impact can writer's workshop have on kindergarten students?
- How can writer's workshop affect students' writing mechanics?
- What impact can writer's workshop have on students' writing attitudes and behaviors?

Participants and Context

I conducted this study in my kindergarten classroom in a public school that follows the Reading First model. This school is located in a rural-suburban area of western New York, and my class was comprised of 9 female students and 13 male students, ages five and six. The district's population consists mostly of Caucasian,

Christian students, with over a third below the poverty line. This particular class included one African American student, and five students for whom English was their second language. These English Language Learners were from Greece, India, Russia, and Vietnam; four of these students displayed strong English skills. One displayed very limited English skills. This study involved case studies on three students in the class. I selected these three students to demonstrate the range of writing abilities in the class and to examine the impact of writer's workshop on the writing development of children with a range of needs and understandings. I sent a letter home to the parents to obtain their permission for their children to participate, and I also read to students a statement of assent to confirm the assent of all participants. To ensure confidentiality, I refer to each participant using a pseudonym.

Procedures of the Study

This study was conducted over a period of six weeks, during January and February of 2011. I implemented the study during the three-day-a-week, half-hour writer's workshop time in my kindergarten classroom.

Components of the Writer's Workshop Approach

I implemented the writer's workshop approach based partially on the ideas of Calkins (2003) but also drawing on techniques from other educators. Three times a week, my class spent 25 to 30 minutes engaged in writer's workshop. I often began with a brief mini lesson, modeling techniques and strategies that would benefit the

students at their current stages of writing. At the beginning of the year, these mini lessons focused on developing a writing topic, adding details to pictures, labeling their pictures, and stretching out the sounds in words. Other mini lessons included the topics of using finger spaces, adding supporting details, and attending to conventions, including punctuation and capitalization.

Following the mini lesson, the children worked independently at their seats on their writing pieces. They typically began with a drawing and then tried to label the items in their picture. When I began the study, most of my students were able to label their pictures and write a sentence to match. Most students were able to write the sounds they heard in words, and many could write several sounds that they heard. I instructed the children on how to stretch out the sounds in the words, a technique I referred to as “turtle talk.” When my study began, I still had a few students who wrote random letters, not yet recognizing the connection between letters and the sounds in words. I also taught my class some basic sight words, such as *I* and *am* and was able to see the children incorporating these sight words into their writer’s workshop pieces.

While the students worked on their writing pieces, I held conferences with individual students, scaffolding their learning according to their particular needs. Each day, two to three children had the opportunity to share their work with the rest of the class at the author’s chair. The children also began learning about proofreading and revising their work and had the opportunity to publish their work.

Writer's Workshop Adaptations

The methods I described above reflect the basic components of writing workshop, as described by Calkins (2003) and Bridges (1997). The methods I used for implementing writing workshop were similar to those of several other teachers in my school as well. I chose to adapt some components of the writing workshop approach to meet my students' needs as early writers. My students had the opportunity to conference with me. Although they did not officially conference with other students due to their young age, they were able to share and discuss their work with a partner. I began teaching the children about editing their work, yet I did not instruct them to use editing marks, which are used in the mid- to upper-elementary grades.

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

During the course of this study, I used several data collection methods, as shown in following sections. The data was collected using two different rubrics and student interviews. These methods provided insight into my students' writing mechanics and their writing attitudes and behaviors.

The Writing Workshop Rubric

I used the *Writing Workshop Rubric*, adapted from Calkins' (2003) *Assessment Rubric for Launching the Writing Workshop*, to assess the students' attitudes towards writing, their confidence, their ability to plan writing ideas, their

independence in writing, and their productivity (Appendix A). This rubric describes student characteristics for each of these five categories with rating scales 0-3. The *Writing Workshop Rubric* was used once a week during writer's workshop time to record my observations of my students' work habits and dispositions towards writing. The *Writing Workshop Rubric*, adapted from the *Assessment Rubric for Launching the Writing Workshop*, aligns with Calkins' approach to writer's workshop. I chose this rubric because it is based on a dependable source which is highly regarded in the literacy field. Furthermore, it touches on the various aspects of the writing process and matches the methodology I use in my classroom.

The Kindergarten Writing Rubric

I also utilized the *Kindergarten Writing Rubric*, used by the district to assess language use and mechanics: spelling, legibility, directionality, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization (Appendix B). This rubric describes characteristics in each of these areas, with a rating scale of 0-4. I collected writing samples for each of the three students selected for the case studies over the course of the six weeks, and I used both rubrics on a weekly basis. I used the *Kindergarten Writing Rubric* to examine each week's writing samples. I analyzed this data to look for trends and growth by comparing the scores on both rubrics from the six weeks of writing samples. I chose the *Kindergarten Writing Rubric*, used for writing prompts in this district, because it reflects the school's curriculum and also highlights the skills that these students will be expected to develop in writing during their kindergarten year.

Both the *Writing Workshop Rubric* and the *Kindergarten Writing Rubric* are analytic rubrics, which will produce both qualitative and quantitative data. I analyzed the descriptions in the rubrics to reveal students' unique strengths and needs in writing, producing qualitative data. These rubrics also have numerical values for each specific criterion. This quantitative data was not as specific or informative as the qualitative data, yet it provided an effective way for comparing a student's work over time and for comparing the writing of multiple students. Hampton, Murphy, and Lowry (2009) recommend using rubrics as formative assessments to help improve the writing of kindergarten students. Both the *Writing Workshop Rubric* and the *Kindergarten Writing Rubric* were used to analyze individual students' writing needs and to guide my instruction.

Student Interviews

I conducted an interview with each student participant at the beginning of the study and again at the end of the study. The interview questions centered on how the student felt as a writer, his/her attitudes and confidence towards writing, and how he/she felt about writing workshop (see Appendix C). These interviews were able to provide a more complete picture of the students as individuals, and the interviews helped explain some of the observations I made using the *Writing Workshop Rubric*.

Limitations

This study includes several limitations. It took place over a six week period of time. The short length of the study could prove to be a limitation, as it could not show any long-term impacts of writer's workshop.

The data collection methods I have selected also have some limitations. The student interviews proved not to be the most valid source, as all three student participants contradicted their own statements during their interviews. Students also may respond with answers they think their teacher wants to hear, instead of responding truthfully. Furthermore, they may have a tough time articulating their feelings and expressing themselves orally due to their young ages.

In addition, rubrics offer possible limitations. The two rubrics provided both quantitative and qualitative measures. They provided thorough descriptions to help analyze the writing and work habits of particular students, which proved to be helpful in planning mini-lessons and conferences with these students. They were also helpful in finding common patterns among students, to guide future whole group instruction. The quantitative data, on the other hand, was less informative in terms of specific students' needs and strengths; however, it provided an effective way for analyzing a particular student's growth and for making comparisons among participants in the study. The quantitative data was useful for data analysis for this study, but was not as helpful for me, the teacher, in planning classroom instruction.

Therefore, both the qualitative and quantitative data from the two rubrics were be useful and informative, but in different ways. One downfall of these data

collection methods is that rubrics can be somewhat subjective. I chose these rubrics because they have fairly specific descriptions of each indicator, to help make the scoring process more accurate and reliable. However, the fact remains that different people scoring the data could come up with different data, which is a limitation of this type of data collection method and could affect the reliability of the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

In this section, I will discuss the findings of my six week study. I will begin with my data on Bethany, a student in my class who is struggling academically. I will then explain the findings for Hannah, a fairly average student in the class. Last, I will include my findings from Jeremy, a student who is significantly above average in his reading and spelling skills. For each student, I will discuss the qualitative findings from the Writing Workshop Rubric and the Kindergarten Writing Rubric, and the results of the two interviews. I will then analyze the quantitative results from the two rubrics and summarize my findings.

Qualitative Data

The following qualitative data includes observations made throughout the six week study. The data in this chapter is organized by data collection method: Writing Workshop Rubric, Kindergarten Writing Rubric, and Interviews. For the two rubrics, the data is organized by the indicators or subtopics within each rubric.

The qualitative data from the Writing Workshop Rubric discusses what I observed during writer's workshop time. This section has subcategories for attitude, confidence, planning, independence, and productivity. Refer to Appendix A to view the specific descriptors for each area on the Writing Workshop Rubric. The Kindergarten Writing Rubric qualitative data describes my analysis of the writing samples. The Kindergarten Writing Rubric discussion will be organized by language use, spelling, legibility, directionality, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization.

Consult Appendix B to see descriptors for each area on the Kindergarten Writing Rubric. I have also included findings from the initial interview taken during week one and the final interview in week six. To view the specific questions asked during the interview, refer to Appendix C.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was also collected using the Writing Workshop and Kindergarten Writing Rubrics. For the Writing Workshop Rubric, rating scales were used, zero through three, with numbers zero and one representing a deficit, and two and three representing a positive. For example, for the “Attitude” category, a score of *0* represents the following descriptor: “The child displays a dislike towards writing.” A score of *1* represents “the child is somewhat indifferent towards writing. *2* means “the child approaches writing with some eagerness,” and *3* means “the child approaches writing with eagerness.” Refer to Appendix A to view a copy of the Writing Workshop Rubric and see the descriptors for each area of the Writing Workshop Rubric: attitude, confidence, planning, independence, and productivity.

Rating scales were also used for the Kindergarten Writing Rubric (see Appendix B), zero through four with zero representing no attempt, one representing the pre-emergent stage, where students typically are at the beginning of kindergarten, two meaning the pre-conventional stage, a typical benchmark by January, three representing early emergent writing, the end of the year benchmark, and four representing late emergent writing (Gentry, 1982). For example, the “Spelling” criteria is as follows: *0* represents “no attempt to write” (Kindergarten Writing

Rubric). A score of 1 describes a child in the pre-emergent stage who “scribbles or some attempt at notation” (Kindergarten Writing Rubric). The score of 2 means that the child “begins to use letters to represent words. May use beginning sounds” and is in the pre-conventional stage also listed on the Kindergarten Writing Rubric. A score of 3, or the early emergent stage, describes a writing sample in which the child “writes dominant (initial and ending) sounds” and “may spell high frequency words correctly and use environmental print” (Kindergarten Writing Rubric). To receive a score of 4 and be in the late emergent stage of writing, the child must have “many high frequency words spelled correctly” (Kindergarten Writing Rubric).

Participant 1: “Bethany”

QUALITATIVE DATA

Instrument 1: The Writing Workshop Rubric.

Attitude

During the first week of the study, I observed that Bethany approached writing with some eagerness. Each day as writer’s workshop time wrapped up, the class began cleaning up and the reading teacher came into the room to take three children back to her office for intensive reading instruction. Bethany received this reading intervention, and thus, went with the reading teacher at the end of writer’s workshop time. On this particular day, Bethany told the reading teacher that she did not want to clean up; she wanted to keep writing, demonstrating some eagerness towards writing.

Her attitude remained constant for the first three weeks of the study. She demonstrated some eagerness, but was not overly eager. She seemed content at writer's workshop, but not particularly excited to be writing. During week four, her attitude shifted. She then demonstrated a more positive attitude towards writing and was eager to be writing. She reached the highest quality indicator for attitude on the Writing Workshop Rubric and continued to demonstrate this positive attitude throughout the remaining weeks, five and six.

Confidence

At the beginning of the study, Bethany was not confident in her writing ability. She often asked adults how to spell words instead of trying them herself. For example, she asked me, "How do you spell happy?" During the second week, she continued to lack confidence, but demonstrated some growth in this area during the third week of the study. During weeks three and four, Bethany showed a little confidence, an improvement over earlier weeks when she did not display confidence. Although she was still a bit unsure of herself and continued to appeal for help, she took more risks in her writing attempts. However, when writing independently Bethany relied on environmental print to copy classmates' names, or wrote random letters, instead of attending to letter-sound correspondences. Bethany demonstrated a boost in confidence during the fifth week of the study, showing some confidence in her writing. She was then able to follow basic phonics rules to write invented spellings of words on her own, without always appealing for teacher assistance. Her writing confidence remained at that level through the end of the study.

Planning

Planning was one of Bethany's strengths at the beginning of the study. She was able to generate ideas for writing without great difficulty although she often gravitated towards the same subjects, writing about herself and her mom. During the third week of the study, she started branching out on her writing topics and demonstrated a firm ability to plan her ideas without resistance. Planning remained a strong suit for Bethany, as she met the highest quality indicator in that area for weeks three through six of the study.

Independence

Independence was one of Bethany's greatest needs at the beginning of the study and an area that continued to be a struggle for her throughout the six weeks. Bethany was a very active child who was easily distracted by things around her and could be very impulsive in her behavior. She was also a chatty and social child, who often initiated conversations with her classmates instead of completing her schoolwork. Thus, focus was Bethany's greatest hurdle.

During the first week of the study, Bethany displayed little initiative and was unable to work independently. She constantly sought my assistance and often became side-tracked in conversations with her peers. During the second and third weeks, Bethany continued to struggle with independence, unable to complete her work without adult assistance. She chose to work in her "office" area, a quiet corner of the room, to help her focus.

Bethany demonstrated growth in her independence during the fourth week. For the first time, she was able to work on her own for at least four minutes at a time. Although she sought teacher attention less frequently, Bethany wrote using strings of random letters instead of attending to letter-sound correspondences. In this way, Bethany seemed to be going through the motions, writing letters and drawing pictures, but was not yet able to apply the phonics skills she was learning to her writing independently. Bethany was effective in using environmental print on her own, however. She correctly spelled classmates' names, copying the spelling from the word wall. During the fourth week, Bethany showed that she was able to work for longer periods of time on her own, and knew how to utilize environmental print and the word wall; however, she did not yet have the confidence to attempt spelling unknown words on her own.

During week five, Bethany's independence remained the same. She was able to work for at least four minutes on her own before appealing for teacher assistance. However, her writing showed a shift during this week. She was not only writing independently for short periods of time, but she was attending to some letter-sound correspondences on her own, no longer stringing along random letters in her writing. Thus, I observed a link between her confidence and her writing during this week.

The data from week six reveals a major accomplishment for Bethany. During the final week of the study, Bethany was able to work independently for at least eight minutes at a time. She no longer sought my assistance as regularly during writer's workshop and was less distracted by her peers. Instead, she attended to her own

work, sitting at her “office” to avoid distractions. I was a bit shocked and amazed when I analyzed the data for the sixth week. Six weeks earlier, I would have never guessed that Bethany, a child so easily distracted and so impulsive in her behaviors, could focus and work independently for at least eight minutes. I still get goose bumps thinking about Bethany’s growth in this area. Working independently takes so much more focus and hard work for Bethany than it does for an average kindergarten student, and yet, she showed such determination. She did not meet the highest quality indicator in this area, but she certainly demonstrated an exciting accomplishment.

Productivity

Bethany’s productivity can be loosely linked to her independence while writing. During the first week, Bethany worked at a very slow pace, unable to complete each day’s work. She was not yet able to work independently either, and thus only produced work when working one-on-one with an adult. Given the reality of a kindergarten classroom with 22 students, I was unable to spend all my time with Bethany. Therefore, she produced little work.

Working in her “office” weeks two through four helped Bethany focus some; she worked fairly slowly and was still side-tracked on occasion, getting out of her seat to chat with classmates. During week five, Bethany demonstrated growth in her productivity. She worked fairly productively each day although her work was not always the highest quality. During the final week of the study, Bethany worked productively every day during the writing workshop, completing a new writing paper each day. Bethany demonstrated a jump in her independence during that final week

as well and was, therefore, better able to work productively. By the end of the study, Bethany was meeting the highest quality indicator for productivity on the Writing Workshop Rubric. This is a major accomplishment since she was at the lowest quality indicator in this area just six weeks earlier.

Instrument 2: The Kindergarten Writing Rubric.

Language Use

Language use describes the sophistication of the written language in the writing samples. The indicators on the rubric begin with “no attempt to write” and “attempts to write.” It works up to “writes using some sentence variety” and “using some descriptive words.” Thus, language use is not focused on mechanics, but rather on the sentence fluency, voice, and details included.

During the first week of the study, Bethany attempted to write, writing random letters on the page. She did not yet have clear words or a sentence; however, she was able to dictate her message orally: “I got ready for swimming,” and she drew a picture to match. Bethany’s writing samples from the second, third, and fourth weeks revealed that she was attempting to use words and write using simple vocabulary. During the second week, she could not remember what she had written, yet during the third and fourth weeks, she was able to dictate a complete sentence to go along with her written message. By the fifth week of the study, Bethany was able to write using simple sentences. She used the descriptive word “big” for “WeaRe Sled InG aT o BiG BuRK” *We are sledding at a big park.* Bethany continued to write simple sentences during the final week of the study. Although she did not use

describing words that week, she chose some interesting wording. Instead of writing “It was fun,” as Bethany and other classmates are prone to doing, she wrote, “We have AGto toGDDre” *We have a good time together*. This showed a level of sophistication to her language use.

Spelling

For the first two weeks of the study, Bethany used random letters in her writing. She knew that writing was made up of letters and that it conveys a meaning, as she was able to dictate complete sentences. However, she was not yet applying letter-sound correspondences. During week three, Bethany wrote a list of items that she would need for her dance recital. This was clearly a topic of interest to her and helped motivate her writing actions. She began using initial sounds in her writing, and at times even wrote a second dominant sound as well. After writing the first sound or two, she filled in the rest of the line using random letters. Thus, Bethany knew to listen to the sounds she heard in words. She realized that one or two letters did not look like the words she saw in books, so she filled them in with other letters in an attempt to try to make it look right. Bethany continued this practice of using initial sounds and then random other letters during the fourth week of the study as well.

Bethany’s spelling made a jump during the fifth week. She was able to write multiple sounds in words without using random letters. She even correctly spelled our sight words “we” and “are.” During the final week of the study, Bethany continued to write dominant sounds. For example, she spelled the word *party* “BDPe” and *together* “toGDDre.” She also spelled a number of high frequency

words correctly: *I, at, is, we, have, to*. Bethany's spelling showed significant growth over the period of six weeks. She began the study writing random letters and ended using the sounds in words to write inventive spelling along with proper spelling of some high frequency words.

Writing Mechanics: Directionality, Spacing, Punctuation, and Capitalization

At the beginning of the study, Bethany wrote using random letters. Most letters appeared to go from left to right although at times they looped to the side or moved up and down some. During the fifth and sixth weeks of the study, Bethany's writing showed a clear use of left to right directionality and demonstrated that Bethany had mastered this skill.

Bethany did not attempt to use punctuation during the first week of the study. During the second week, Bethany attempted to use punctuation for the first time. She ended a sentence using a question mark. Although the question mark was not used properly, as she was not intending to ask any questions, her use of it revealed several exciting understandings. First, Bethany's writing demonstrated that she has some understanding of where people use punctuation marks—at the end of a sentence. Secondly, it showed that she knew that a question mark was a kind of punctuation mark. This was an area of interest to me since most children in the class were only using periods in their writing.

During week three, Bethany again attempted punctuation. She used a period after each line showing that she was still developing an understanding of when punctuation should be used. She even included an exclamation point at the end of her

title. Her writing samples during week four reveal that Bethany was still developing her understanding of punctuation and that she was continuing to experiment with it. She used an exclamation point and a period both in the middle of sentences and in the middle of lines. During the weeks five and six, Bethany used punctuation sporadically. When she did use it, she properly placed a period at the end of a sentence; however, she failed to place any punctuation at other sentences. Thus, Bethany was then using punctuation correctly when she remembered it, but she was not yet consistently remembering to use punctuation for all sentences.

Throughout the six weeks of this study, Bethany used both capital and lowercase letters sporadically in her writing. Part of this might be that Bethany was still learning some of her letters and that we had not yet covered the proper formation of all of the letters in handwriting. Spacing was another area in which Bethany did not demonstrate growth. Throughout the six weeks, Bethany's writing did not include any clear spacing. Spacing will be a topic that I continue to work on with Bethany.

Legibility and Handwriting

Bethany's writing samples during the first week were difficult to read. Many of her letters were not formed correctly, she wrote letters on top of other letters, and did not write particularly neatly. By the third week, she was attempting to form letters correctly. They were not all formed perfectly, but I was able to see significant improvement. Writing samples from the last week of the study reveal that Bethany was paying more attention to her handwriting and letter formation. Her letters looked

as though they were formed correctly. Many recent mini lessons had focused on why we write and making our writing readable for other people. We also worked on handwriting each morning as a class, learning the proper formation of a new letter every day or two. Perhaps these factors may have impacted Bethany's legibility when writing.

Instrument 3: Interview.

Initial Interview

During the initial interview, Bethany told me that she felt "kinda happy" about writer's workshop time. When asked why she feels that way, she replied that "sometimes I get it right like that time I said the Rapunzel thing," referring to one of her previous writing pieces for which she had received praise.

Bethany displayed little confidence in her writing ability during the initial interview. I asked her if she thought she was a good writer; she responded "kind of...because sometimes I get it wrong; sometimes I get it right." She explained that writing is "kind of easy and kind of hard...because we have to think about what to write. She told me, "I'm not too good at turtle talking. I do it too fast," referring to the challenge of stretching out the sounds she heard in words and writing using inventive spelling. She explained that she would feel "kind of mad" if she had to write without a teacher helping her "cause I might get it wrong each time." It was interesting that Bethany viewed writing tasks to be so cut and dry as being right or being wrong. She indicated that she felt happy when meeting with me to work on her writing, telling her "Because you help me out. You help me sound out the words.

That's why I have this," she said pointing to an alphabet chart in her supply box, "to help me sometimes." Bethany indicated that writing could be challenging and frustrating for her, but that she was learning strategies to help with her writing, using teacher assistance and an alphabet chart with pictures to help her remember her letter-sound correspondences.

Bethany's favorite time during writer's workshop was sharing her writing "because it's kind of fun." Her least favorite time was when she and a classmate "fight over that seat," she told me, pointing to a desk separate from the rest of the class in a quiet corner of the room. "Why do you like that seat?" I asked. "Because it's a fourth grader seat," she explained. As indicated by the *Kindergarten Writing Rubric* data, Bethany can be easily distracted by her peers and is eager to chat.

During the interview, she also indicated that she tried to remember to "be quiet and do careful writing" during writer's workshop time. Therefore, working quietly without being distracted with conversation was challenging for Bethany. She preferred to sit at the desk or "office" as I called it in the quiet corner of the room, so that she could focus on her work. The children typically sit at their seats at tables, with four or five other classmates. This desk or "office" helped Bethany be successful with her school work, and she associated it as a positive place to be, since it reminded her of the desks in a fourth grade classroom.

Final Interview

Bethany demonstrated growth in her attitude towards writer's workshop during the final interview. She told me that she felt happy at writer's workshop time

because she got to write, indicating that she considered writing to be a positive thing. Her favorite time was “when we write words, a lot of words.” Thus, Bethany was no longer overwhelmed by the task of writing and found the writing part to be her favorite. Her least favorite time was when she worked with a buddy because, she explained, she would rather show it to the whole class.

Her confidence was still shaky. When asked if she is a good writer, she stated, “maybe.” She explained, “Cause I don’t really know how to write really. I don’t really want to read sometimes ‘cause it makes me tired and my eyes start to hurt.” Therefore, working on writing (and reading) tasks were still challenging for Bethany. Interestingly, she later indicated that she found writing to be “pretty easy;” however, when asked why, she explained that “sometimes people give me a hint.” Thus, she thought that writing was easy when she had some support, but perhaps not yet when working on her own. She told me that she felt happy when she wrote on her own, explaining that “I can just work on the picture while I’m waiting. I like working on my own.” She stated, “When I get stuck on something I need, I raise my hand.” Bethany also stated that she felt happy when I worked with her, explaining, “You help me out. You can help me write my words.” Bethany was less frustrated and overwhelmed by the idea of working on her own at times; however, she still felt the need to have assistance with writing words.

Bethany revealed that she reflected on her writing, explaining that before she began writing, she thought about her “careful details.” She clarified, “like drawing pictures and sometimes I write the words more than the picture.” Excitingly, Bethany

was able to see growth in her writing since kindergarten began. She told me that her writing had grown “a lot.” She clarified, “Cause you teach me how. Because I get to learn how more to write.”

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Instrument 1: The Writing Workshop Rubric

The quantitative data collected from the Writing Workshop Rubric revealed that Bethany made considerable growth in her dispositions towards writing and her understanding of the writing process during the period of this study. Figure 1 displays the specific scores on each area of the Writing Workshop Rubric. Using rubric criteria, I labeled Bethany’s attitude towards writing as 2 during the first week and moved up to 3 by the end of the six weeks. Her planning also showed growth, starting out at 2 and ending at 3. Bethany demonstrated considerable growth in her confidence, independence, and productivity. She moved from 0 to 2 in confidence, from 0 to 2 in independence, and from 0 to 3 in productivity. Refer to Figure 2 for a visual comparison of the results from the first and last weeks of the study.

Week Of	Attitude	Confidence	Planning	Independence	Productivity
1/3	2	0	2	0	0
1/10	2	0	2	0	1
1/17	2	1	3	0	1
1/24	3	1	3	1	1
1/31	3	2	3	1	2
2/7	3	2	3	2	3

FIGURE 1: Quantitative Results from the Writing Workshop Rubric (Rating Scale 0-

3)

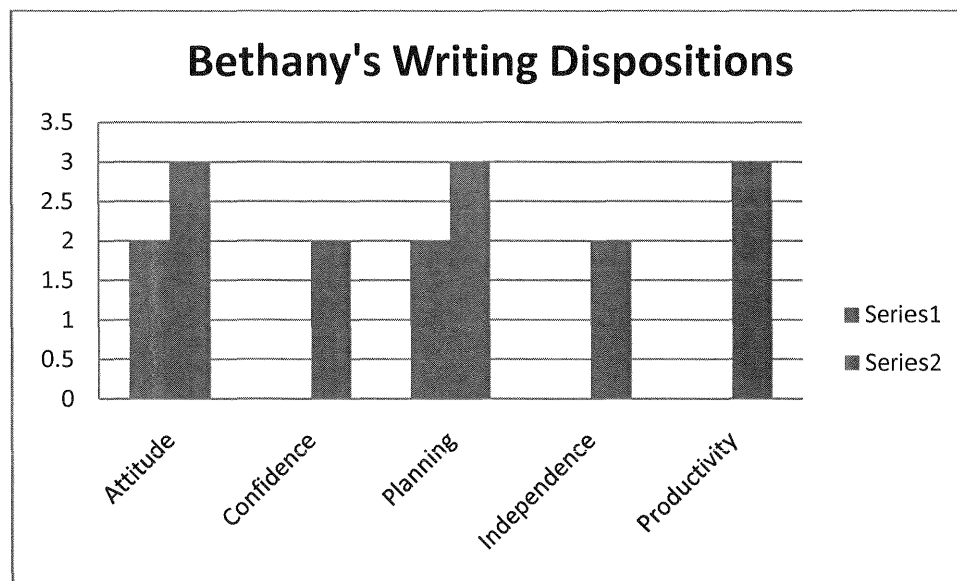


FIGURE 2: Comparison of Week 1 and Week 7 Results from the Writing Workshop Rubric

Instrument 2: The Kindergarten Writing Rubric

The quantitative data from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric revealed significant growth in Bethany's understanding of writing mechanics. Figure 3 displays the quantitative results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric. During the first week of the study in early January, Bethany's overall writing score was 1,

placing her writing in the pre-emergent stage (Kindergarten Writing Rubric) typical of the beginning of kindergarten student. Her writing received a score of 1 for spelling, legibility, directionality, and capitalization. She attempted to write but used random letters with no consideration of letter-sound correspondences. She wrote using all capitals, and did not write very legibly. Her writing received a score of 2 for language use, spacing, and punctuation. She dictated a complete sentence and did not yet attempt spacing or punctuation.

By the sixth week of the study, mid-February, Bethany’s writing scored a 3 in the areas of language use, spelling, legibility, directionality, and punctuation, for an overall score of 3. Her writing score placed Bethany’s writing in the early emergent stage, meeting the end of the year benchmark. She was not yet attending to spacing or capitalization and received scores of 2 in those areas. She showed significant progress in each area except for spacing, which remained stagnant. Refer to Figure 4 for a visual comparing the first week’s results with the results of the final week of the study.

Week Of	Overall Score	Lang. Use	Spell.	Legibility	Direction.	Spacing	Punct.	Capital.
1/3	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1
1/10	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	2
1/17	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
1/24	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
1/31	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	2
2/7	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2

FIGURE 3: Quantitative Results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric (Rating Scale 0-4)

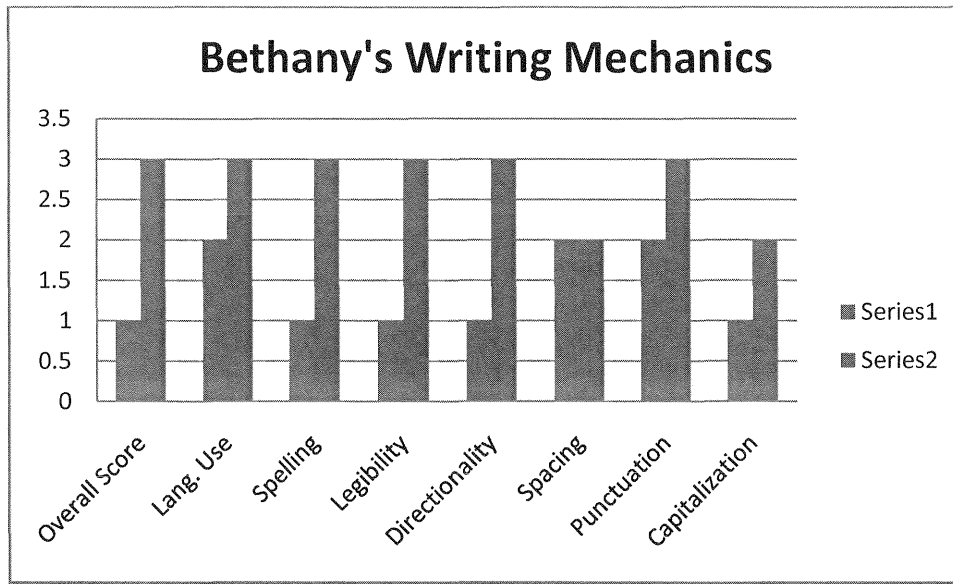


FIGURE 4: Comparison of Week 1 and Week 7 Results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric

Bethany Discussion and Summary

Bethany’s dispositions towards writing changed dramatically during this six week study. During the first week, she was not confident in her writing ability. She displayed little initiative, was unable to work independently, worked at a very slow pace, and was easily distracted. She showed some eagerness in her writing and gravitated towards the same writing subjects. Bethany showed growth throughout the study in her dispositions and understanding of the writing process. By the final week, she displayed eagerness towards writing, showed some level of confidence, and was able to develop her own ideas for writing. She initially struggled with working independently and getting distracted, but by the last week was able to work productively on her own, with initiative, for at least eight minutes. Although writing

was still challenging for Bethany, she demonstrated a more positive attitude towards writing by the end of the study and recognized the growth in her writing. She even knew to add “careful details” to her pictures and writing.

Overall, Bethany’s writing samples revealed considerable growth during the six weeks. Her first writing pieces showed some attempt at notation using random scattered letters, both capital and lowercase, with no spacing or punctuation. At times she could dictate a sentence; other times, she forgot what she was writing about. Thus, at the beginning of the study, in early January, Bethany’s writing was in the pre-emergent stage, typically where children are in the fall of kindergarten. Bethany began to write words using initial sounds and started experimenting with punctuation, using periods, question marks, and exclamation points, but not always correctly, placing her in the pre-conventional stage, the January benchmark. By the end of the study, Bethany was moving into the early emergent stage, making her way towards the end of the year writing benchmark. She was able to write full sentences using sight words, environmental print, and the dominant sounds in words. She wrote stories in booklets, stretching one topic over three pages. Her final writing pieces included the use of descriptive words and attempts at punctuation. At the end of this study, Bethany was not yet attempting spacing or capitalization, so these would prove to be upcoming teaching points for Bethany. The qualitative and quantitative data both suggest that writing workshop had a positive impact on Bethany’s writing development, specifically her writing mechanics. The results also demonstrated

growth in writing productivity and independence, although Bethany still benefitted from adult support.

Participant 2: “Hannah”

QUALITATIVE DATA

Instrument 1: The Writing Workshop Rubric.

Attitude

Hannah already demonstrated a fairly positive attitude towards writing at the beginning of the study, showing some eagerness at writer’s workshop time. She demonstrated a boost in her eagerness during week four, meeting the highest quality indicator on the Writer’s Workshop Rubric. The class had recently started writing stories in booklets, over three pages, and Hannah enjoyed making her own books. The booklets may have been a motivating factor that positively impacted her eagerness and writing attitude. Hannah continued to approach writing with eagerness during the final two weeks of the study.

Confidence

Hannah demonstrated some confidence in her writing during the first four weeks of the study. She showed that she knew she was a capable writer, but on occasion, she was not fully sure of herself. During the fifth week of the study, Hannah’s confidence made a jump. She demonstrated strong confidence in her writing, meeting the highest quality indicators on the Writing Workshop Rubric. Her confidence remained strong through the final week of the study.

Planning

During the first two weeks, Hannah struggled to plan her own original writing topics. She had limited ideas for writing, often choosing to write about the same topic I used as my model during my mini lesson that day. For example, during week one, the class was curious about a hole in the ceiling in the hallway of the school. I built on student curiosity and wrote about that during my mini lesson. Hannah chose not only to write about that topic as well, but she even used much of my wording, writing, *I wonder why*. During the second week, I wrote about going to the hair dresser during a mini lesson. Hannah then wrote about getting her hair cut too.

Hannah showed growth in her planning abilities during the third week. She was able to generate her own ideas without great difficulty instead of copying the ideas that I modeled. Her planning jumped again during week five, when she was able to develop writing ideas on her own effortlessly. She continued to demonstrate strong planning and ideas through the final week of the study.

Independence

At the beginning of the study, Hannah demonstrated limited initiative and independence when writing, working for at least four minutes before appealing for help. During week three, she showed growth in this area and was then able to work on her own with initiative for at least eight minutes at a time. Hannah showed improvement in her independence again during week five. She was able to work independently for at least fifteen minutes at a time and continued to demonstrate strong confidence throughout the end of the study.

Productivity

Productivity was the one area from the Writing Workshop Rubric in which Hannah did not demonstrate any growth. She worked fairly productively each day, but her work was not of the highest quality before she started another story. She continued to be fairly productive throughout the six weeks, but her work often looked a bit rushed and was not her very best. I would like to work with Hannah in this area, to help her take pride in her work by attending to details. Perhaps publishing work and sharing it could be an avenue to help Hannah with this.

Instrument 2: The Kindergarten Writing Rubric.

Language Use

Hannah's writing was in the pre-conventional stage during the first week of the study. This is the January benchmark for kindergarten, and the first week of the study took place at the beginning of January. Thus, Hannah's writing was fairly average for her age. She wrote using simple vocabulary and in simple sentences. By week two, she was able to read back her written sentences.

During the third week, Hannah began writing her stories in packets of three pages. She titled her work "a SNoWe DAY," *A Snowy Day*. Her writing was sequential over the three pages, describing how she made the snowman, adding the arms and a hat. During weeks three through five, Hannah continued to write in booklets, with a simple sentence on each page. Her stories also continued to be sequential. For example, Hannah wrote about going swimming:

Page 1: "I Got my BAING SUt." *I got my bathing suit.*

Page 2: "I am oN the DOVING BUD with My momAtme." *I am on the diving board with my mom and me.*

Page 3: "IJumpt of theDOVIBURD with MY mom ADme" *I jumped off the diving board with my mom and me.*

Hannah often wrote about things that she did with her mom, and the phrase "with my mom and me" could be seen frequently in her writing.

Hannah's writing was firmly in the early emergent stage of writing by the sixth week of the study and was meeting the end of the year benchmark for kindergarten in many areas. For the first time, Hannah used some sentence variety and even used some descriptive words to describe the pepperoni dip that she made for the Super Bowl.

Spelling

During the first week of the study, Hannah was able to write the sounds she heard in words and even properly used the *-ing* ending. During the second week, she again demonstrated her ability to write using inventive spelling, but also spelled many high frequency words correctly: "I am At the haRJrassR with. my mom." *I am at the hair dresser's with my mom.*

Her writing continued to demonstrate subtle growth in her spelling each week, using inventive spelling and using conventional spellings for sight words. During the fourth week, Hannah even correctly spelled the word "playing," a word that was not introduced at school: "I am At my mom HOSt PlaYINGthe wii" *I am at my mom's*

house playing the wii. Although her writing still included a lot of inventive spellings, Hannah was able to write many of the sounds in words by the end of the study. Her inventive spellings were so effective that an onlooker could read most if not all of the words in her sentences.

Writing Mechanics: Directionality, Spacing, Punctuation, and Capitalization

Hannah demonstrated an understanding of left to right directionality from the start of the study. By week two, her writing showed a firm understanding of directionality and her writing pieces continued to consistently use left-to-right directionality throughout the rest of the study.

During the first week of the study, Hannah made no attempt to use spacing; however, by week two, she was attempting spacing and using it properly some of the time. Hannah continued to attempt spacing during week three, yet showed a slight decrease in this skill this week. For the first time, Hannah was writing a story with three pages, a more challenging task. She used spacing sporadically throughout the writing sample, perhaps because more of her attention was focused on writing the three-paged story. For the remainder of the study, she continued to attempt spacing but remembered to use it only some of the time. She often started out a writing piece with proper spacing, but by the end of the piece only used it sporadically, if at all. Thus, Hannah demonstrated some understanding of spacing, but had not yet mastered the skill. A lesson on making writing readable for someone else may help her recognize the importance of consistent spacing.

Hannah's writing did not include any punctuation during the first week of the study. During the second week, Hannah began attempting to use punctuation. Not only did she attempt punctuation, but she used it properly throughout the writing sample. Hannah attempted punctuation again during week three, and for the first time used an exclamation point, or an "excited mark" as I called it with the students. She correctly used the exclamation point on the first page, placing it at the end of the sentence. The second page did not include punctuation, and the third page correctly used a period. During week four, Hannah did not attempt punctuation, and in week five, she used it properly in two of three pages. By the final week of the study, Hannah was continuing to use periods and exclamation points. When she remembered punctuation, she used it properly, placing the punctuation mark at the end of the sentence. However, she was still inconsistent with her punctuation, forgetting to use it in some sentences. Therefore, Hannah demonstrated a growing understanding of punctuation but had not yet mastered this skill.

Throughout the study, Hannah's writing included both capital and lowercase letters. She did not demonstrate growth in this area, and we will continue to work on capitalization in class.

Legibility and Handwriting

Hannah began the study writing with very poor handwriting. Her handwriting started to improve during the second week. Although her writing was still a bit sloppy, it was easier to decipher the letters. Some of Hannah's writing pieces were

more legible than others, but overall, her handwriting improved over the course of the study. By the final week, Hannah properly formed her letters and wrote more neatly.

Instrument 3: Interview.

Initial Interview

Hannah's results from the initial interview reveal some conflicting statements. Hannah started out the interview expressing confidence and a positive attitude towards writing. When asked how she felt about writer's workshop time, Hannah responded, "I like it." She further explained, "I like writing and drawing." Her favorite part of writer's workshop time was when she got to write. Her least favorite time was "when grown-ups help you...because I know how to write." Hannah expressed that she believed she was a good writer "because my mom told me that."

However, about half-way through the interview, Hannah's dispositions and confidence towards writing seemed to shift. When asked if writing is easy or hard, she said that it was hard "because when I try to write at my house, it's hard for me to sound them out." She told me that she sometimes gets "frustrated" when trying to write on her own without teacher assistance. She went on to explain that she felt "good" when I met with her to help her with her writing "because I like people helping me." This directly contradicts her earlier statement that her favorite part of writer's workshop is writing on her own and her least favorite time is when grown-ups help her. Earlier in the interview, Hannah said that she was a good writer, yet later, she told me that she gets frustrated when writing "because some people tell me

I'm not a good writer." I was surprised, because a few minutes earlier, she told me that her mom tells her what a great writer she is. I probed further, asking "Who tells you that?" "The next door neighbor," she replied. This interview demonstrated the somewhat fickle nature of five-year-olds and perhaps a fairly ambivalent disposition towards writing.

Final Interview

During the final interview, Hannah expressed a positive disposition towards writing, stating that she feels "good" about writer's workshop time, explaining, "Because I know how to write." Her favorite part of writer's workshop was "when you teach us stuff on the rug." Her least favorite time was "when we have to cross things out," she said, referring to editing and revising her work. She stated that she did not like that part "because we get mixed up and we cross out the words that we didn't write right."

At times, Hannah displayed confidence in her writing, stating that she was a good writer, explaining, "Because I know how to write stuff." However, at other times, she seemed less sure of herself. She told me that writing is hard "because sometimes I don't know how to write but I try to write." She told me that when she wrote on her own without assistance, "It's hard. I feel frustrated, but I can still write good." She said that she felt "good" when she worked with me on her writing "because sometimes I need help." Thus, Hannah's responses seemed a bit contradictory, revealing that perhaps she was still a bit ambivalent, at times confident and other times unsure.

Hannah revealed strong planning skills, telling me that she thought about what she was going to write about before she began writing. She tried to remember “finger spaces and periods [and to] check for stuff you didn’t mean to write and cross it out.” Hannah demonstrated a stronger understanding of some of the mechanics necessary when writing and also showed that she was beginning to learn about editing and revising.

When reflecting on how her writing had changed since the beginning of the year, Hannah replied, “It changed good.” In the beginning of the year, she reflected her writing was “kind of bad because we used to write stuff not so good.” However, then she stated, “I write good.” Hannah recognized that her writing had grown throughout the school year and she was then able to write in ways she was not yet able to do in the fall.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Instrument 1: The Writing Workshop Rubric

The quantitative data collected on Hannah from the Writing Workshop Rubric revealed progress in her attitude, confidence, planning, and independence. Refer to Figure 5 to view the results. Her planning and independence both scored 1 in the first week and 3 by the final week of the study. Her attitude and confidence began at 2 and were at 3 by the sixth week. Hannah’s productivity remained constant throughout the study, scoring 2 each week. Refer to Appendix A to view a copy of the Writing Workshop Rubric and see the descriptors for each area of the Writing

Workshop Rubric. Figure 6 provides a visual, comparing Hannah’s quantitative data from the Writing Workshop Rubric on the first and last weeks of the study.

Week Of	Attitude	Confidence	Planning	Independence	Productivity
1/3	2	2	1	1	2
1/10	2	2	1	1	2
1/17	2	2	2	2	2
1/24	3	2	2	2	2
1/31	3	3	3	3	2
2/7	3	3	3	3	2

FIGURE 5: Quantitative Results from the Writing Workshop Rubric (Rating Scale 0-3)

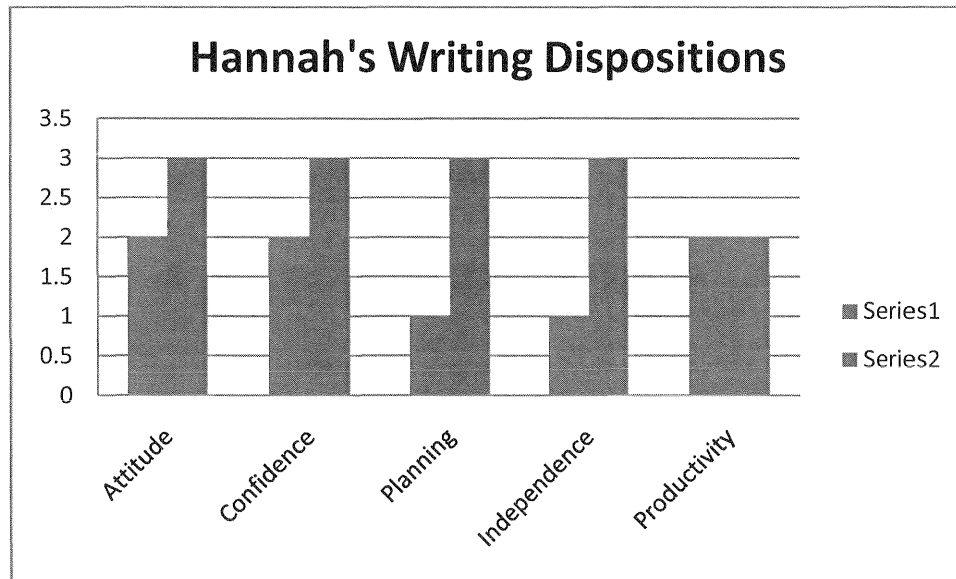


FIGURE 6: Comparison of Week 1 and Week 7 Results from the Writing Workshop Rubric

Instrument 2: The Kindergarten Writing Rubric

Hannah displayed progress in her writing mechanics, as revealed by the quantitative data from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric. Refer to Figure 7 to view the results. During the first week of the study, Hannah's writing scored a 1 for legibility, yet six weeks later, her legibility scored a 3. Hannah's writing received scores of 2 in the areas of directionality, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization during the first week. By the last week, she scored a 3 in each of these areas. Her scores for spacing and punctuation fluctuated between 2 and 3 for a few weeks, indicating that she was experimenting with using spacing and punctuation in her writing. By the last two weeks of the study, she received consistent scores of 3 in these areas, demonstrating that she had then mastered these skills. When the study began in early January, Hannah's writing scored a 3 for language use and spelling, meeting the end of the year benchmarks for these areas. She continued to score a 3 in these areas throughout the study. Her score for capitalization remained constant as well; she did not yet attend to capitalization rules and scored a 2 in this area each week. Hannah's overall writing score was 2, the January benchmark, and had reached 3 by the end of the study, meeting the end of the year benchmark. View Appendix B to see the specific descriptors for each area on the Kindergarten Writing Rubric. Refer to Figure 8 for a visual of Hannah's growth shown on the Kindergarten Writing Rubric, comparing week one to week six.

Week Of	Overall Score	Lang. Use	Spell.	Legibility	Direction.	Spacing	Punct.	Capital.
1/3	2	3	3	1	2	2	2	2
1/10	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2
1/17	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2
1/24	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
1/31	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2
2/7	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2

FIGURE 7: Quantitative Results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric (Rating Scale 0-4)

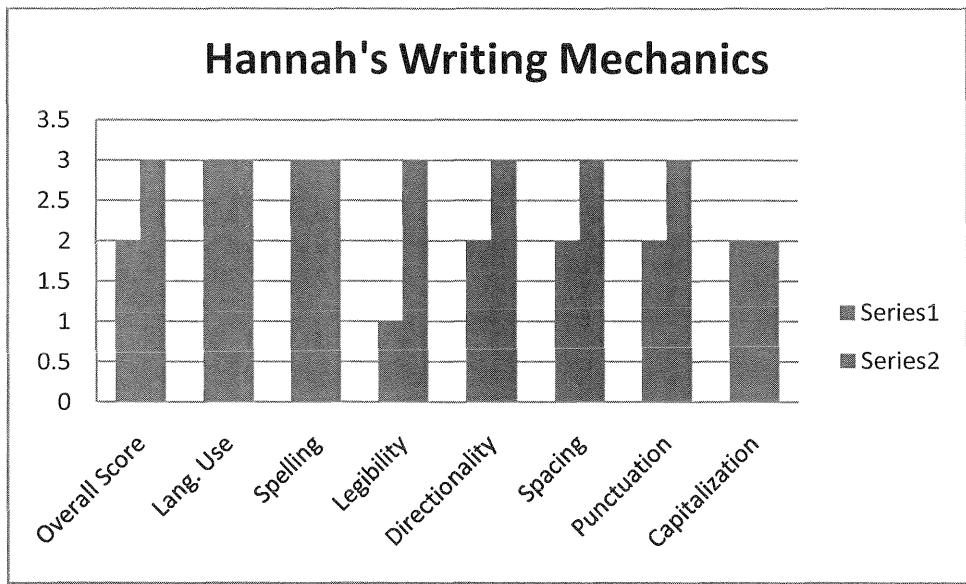


FIGURE 8: Comparison of Week 1 and Week 7 Results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric

Hannah Discussion and Summary

Hannah demonstrated growth in her attitude, confidence, planning, and independence over the course of the six week study. Writer’s workshop provided her

with the time and assistance necessary to practice her writing. With positive writing experiences, it only makes sense that her attitude improved as well as her confidence, independence, and ability to plan her writing topics. Although her confidence appeared to be high by the end of the study, Hannah's interview results reveal that she might have had somewhat mixed confidence. Hannah's productivity remained about the same throughout the study. She worked fairly productively throughout the six weeks, but her work was not always the highest quality. Thus, Hannah was able to produce writing pieces, but she was more interested in hurrying through them than slowing down to take her time and attend to details.

Writer's workshop also had a positive impact on many of Hannah's writing mechanics. Her legibility, directionality, spacing, and punctuation all improved during the study. Her language use and spelling were already meeting the spring benchmarks at the start of the study, and they remained constant during the six weeks. Hannah's greatest need was capitalization. She was still mixing capital and lowercase letters throughout her writing pieces, and did not improve in this area during the study.

Participant 3: “Jeremy”

QUALITATIVE DATA

Instrument 1: The Writing Workshop Rubric.

Attitude

At the beginning of the study, Jeremy was already approaching his writing with some eagerness. By week five, he displayed a positive attitude towards writing and was eager to approach his writing tasks during writer’s workshop time. Thus, Jeremy already had a fairly positive attitude towards writing and his attitude continued to improve during the six weeks.

Confidence

As a student who was well above average in reading and writing, Jeremy started out the study with very high confidence. This high confidence continued throughout the six weeks. Interestingly, Jeremy’s high confidence might have had a slightly negative effect on his learning curve. Jeremy was used to things coming easily to him. His spelling skills were well above most of his peers, yet he did not always attend to spacing, punctuation, and especially capitalization rules. Had he been a bit less confident, he might have been more likely to attend to mini lessons and apply the skills taught in his own writing.

Planning

Jeremy was able to generate ideas without great difficulty during the first two weeks of the study. By week three, he was developing his own writing topics easily, choosing to write about different ideas for each new writing piece. Some of Jeremy’s

writing topics included snowboarding, snowball fighting, wrestling, and the Super Bowl.

Independence

Jeremy was already a fairly independent worker at the beginning of the study, working on his own with initiative for at least eight minutes at a time. Starting in week four of the study, Jeremy was able to work independently for 15 minutes or more. In fact, by the final week of the study, he could work on his own without seeking teacher attention for the entire writer's workshop period!

Productivity

Jeremy worked fairly productively each day during the first four weeks of the study. Although he was producing a fair amount of work, it was not always the highest quality. By weeks five and six, Jeremy was able to work productively while still attending to details. He worked more on a writing piece before starting a new one.

Instrument 2: The Kindergarten Writing Rubric.

Language Use

During most of the study, Jeremy was writing in the early emergent stage, the end of the year benchmark for kindergarten. Jeremy wrote using mostly simple sentences and simple vocabulary during the first four weeks. He did, on occasion, use some sentence variety and descriptive words, but the bulk of his writing consisted of short, basic sentences. During weeks five and six, Jeremy used more sentence variety and some describing words. Thus, over the course of the study, Jeremy's language

use became more sophisticated. Writing workshop provided him with the practice he needed to write stories in a more interesting, descriptive manner.

Spelling

Spelling was certainly Jeremy's greatest strength in writing. He wrote well above the average kindergarten student, and even well above the end of the year expectations. His spelling is in the late emergent stage, as he spelled many high frequency words correctly. During week one, Jeremy wrote every word correctly in his writing piece: "IAMSLeepinG WiTh my moM. AND DAD." *I am sleeping with my mom and dad.* His understanding of spelling rules was well beyond the basic consonant-vowel-consonant patterns that most of his peers were working on. Beyond high frequency words, Jeremy demonstrated an understanding of the -ing ending, writing "riSTinG" for *wrestling*. He used the *th* digraph for "BroThr" *brother*, and the *ch* digraph in "woching" *watching* and "coch" *coach*. He demonstrated an understanding of some basic long vowel patterns, "sLeePinG" and "ouT side." Interestingly, during a later week, he spelled the word *inside* "iN siD," omitting the *e* at the end of the word. Jeremy also properly spelled "SNoW BaLL," showing an understanding of the double *l* ending. One possible explanation for Jeremy's very strong spelling skills could be his high reading ability. Jeremy was able to decode very advanced reading texts, and this reading ability may have positively impacted his spelling as well.

Writing Mechanics: Directionality, Spacing, Punctuation, and Capitalization

Jeremy's writing conventions were largely in the early emergent stage during most of the study. He demonstrated a clear use of left to right directionality and attempted spacing. Although he attempted spacing in all of his writing pieces, he did not yet use it consistently and correctly until the sixth week of the study.

Over the course of the six weeks, Jeremy's use of punctuation remained stagnant. He attempted punctuation but did not necessarily use it consistently or correctly. During the first week, he added extra periods. Throughout the rest of the study, he used punctuation properly when he remembered to include it, but omitted it entirely from some sentences. Capitalization was another area with which Jeremy struggled some. He used capital and lowercase letters sporadically throughout the study. Thus, Jeremy could benefit from extra work with incorporating conventions into his writing, particularly capitalization and punctuation.

Legibility and Handwriting

Jeremy was able to form most of his letters correctly throughout the study, but did not always write using his best handwriting. By the final week of the study, Jeremy wrote more neatly and legibly.

Instrument 3: Interview.

Initial Interview

During the initial interview, Jeremy displayed a positive disposition towards writing. He said that he felt "good" about writer's workshop because he likes writing. His favorite part of writer's workshop time was sharing. He explained, "because you

get to share what you drew.” His least favorite part was the mini lesson “because I don’t get to write ‘cause I like writing a lot.”

Interestingly, Jeremy answered most of the interview questions by referring to drawing rather than writing. When asked if he is a good writer, he responded, “Um, yeah... ‘cause at my house, I always draw stuff and give it to my mom, my dad, or my brother.” He said that writing is hard, explaining: “When I’m drawing something that’s hard to draw, I draw something that’s kind of weird.” I asked him what he thinks about when he sits down to write, and he responded “Drawing about T-ball.” I made sure to emphasize writing in the next question, asking what things he tries to remember to do when *writing*. He answered, “Add to the pictures.” Jeremy told me that he feels good when writing on his own without teacher assistance, explaining “Because I’m better than anybody in my family at drawing.” Often towards the beginning of the year, kindergarten children associate writing with drawing and may discuss the two as interchangeable. However, I was surprised to hear this in January from my most advanced writer.

Jeremy made one statement that seemed to contradict himself. When asked how he felt when he met with me to work on his writing, he said that he felt “a little bit good and a little bit bad.” When I asked why, he explained that “The good part is when you give me a star or a smiley. The bad part is I’m good at writing.” I probed further, asking why it was *bad* that he was good at writing. He responded, “Um, I don’t know. It’s not.” At this point, Jeremy recognized that his sentence did not make sense but did not clarify or modify his response. Overall, the initial interview

revealed that Jeremy was confident in his writing and drawing, and that he associated writing time largely with drawing.

Final Interview

During Jeremy's final interview, he continued to display a positive attitude towards writing. He told me that he felt good about writer's workshop time "because I like to write." His favorite time during writer's workshop was the writing time "because it's fun and you learn." His least favorite time was the mini lesson on the rug "because I like to write a lot." He expressed confidence, stating that he was a good writer explaining, "I write all the time at my house." He told me that writing was pretty easy, stating "because I'm a really good writer." Jeremy told me that he felt good when writing on his own without help, explaining again that he was a good writer, but he also told me that he felt good when working with me on his writing, explaining that I helped him.

Jeremy demonstrated a stronger understanding of things to think about during the writing process than he did during the initial interview. He said that when he sits down to write, he thinks about things he does at home. Thus, he took time to plan what he wanted to write. He said that he tried to remember "finger spaces [and] periods."

When asked to compare his current writing to the way he wrote at the beginning of the year, he recognized that it had changed. I asked how it changed and he explained: "Because I got older. I'm not that unsteady. I know more." Therefore, Jeremy was

able to recognize his own writing growth and demonstrated more confidence and a more thorough understanding of writing than he did during the initial interview.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Instrument 1: The Writing Workshop Rubric

Jeremy's quantitative scores on the Writing Workshop Rubric indicate growth in his attitude, planning, independence, and productivity. See Figure 9 to view the results from this rubric. At the beginning of the study, Jeremy already met the highest quality indicator for confidence, receiving a score of 3 in this area throughout the study. During the first week of the study, he received scores of 2 in the areas of attitude, planning, independence, and productivity. By the end of the study, Jeremy received the highest score possible on the Writing Workshop Rubric, scoring 3 in every area: attitude, confidence, planning, independence, and productivity. Consult Appendix A to view a copy of the Writing Workshop Rubric and see the descriptors for each area of the Writing Workshop Rubric. Refer to Figure 10 for a visual comparing Jeremy's scores on the first week with those on the final week of the study.

Week Of	Attitude	Confidence	Planning	Independence	Productivity
1/3	2	3	2	2	2
1/10	2	3	2	2	2
1/17	2	3	3	2	2
1/24	2	3	3	3	2
1/31	3	3	3	3	3
2/7	3	3	3	3	3

FIGURE 9: Quantitative Results from the Writing Workshop Rubric (Rating Scale 0-

3)

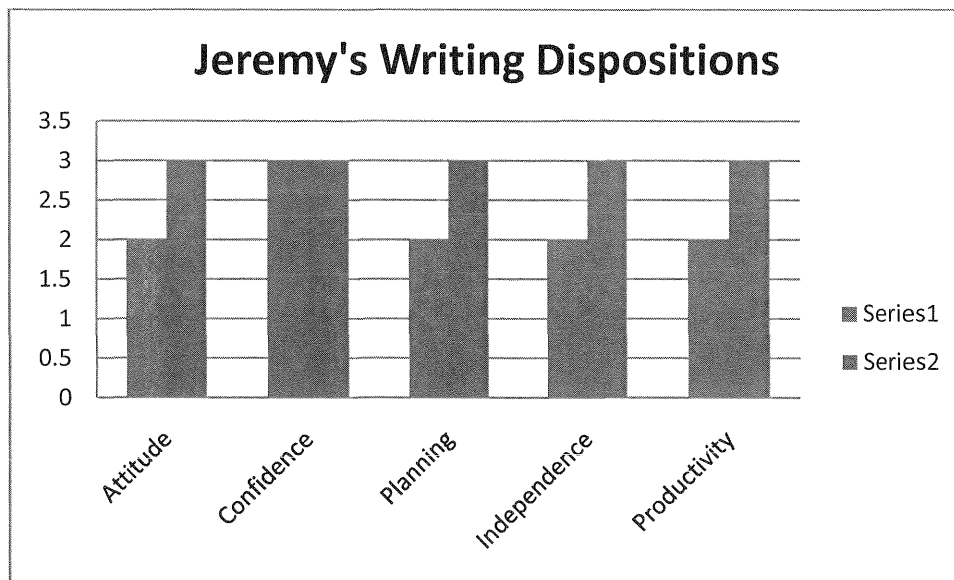


FIGURE 10: Comparison of Week 1 and Week 7 Results from the Writing Workshop Rubric

Instrument 2: The Kindergarten Writing Rubric

The quantitative data from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric indicated that Jeremy's writing grew in the areas of language use, legibility, directionality, and spacing during the study. Already at the beginning of the study he received a 4 in the area of spelling, the highest score possible. Therefore, his spelling score remained a 4

throughout the six weeks. Jeremy also did not improve in the areas of punctuation and capitalization. He used punctuation in his writing throughout the study but did not yet use it consistently. He did not yet use proper capitalization. Jeremy's writing at the beginning of the study earned an overall score of 3, already meeting the end of the year benchmark. By the end of the study, his overall writing progressed to a 4, beyond the typical expectations for kindergarten. View Appendix B to see the specific descriptors for each area on the Kindergarten Writing Rubric. Refer to Figure 11 to view Jeremy's scores from each week. Figure 12 provides a visual representation of Jeremy's writing scores from week one and week seven of the study.

Week Of	Overall Score	Lang. Use	Spell.	Legibility	Direction.	Spacing	Punct.	Capital.
1/3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	2
1/10	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	2
1/17	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	2
1/24	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	2
1/31	3	4	4	3	4	3	3	2
2/7	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2

FIGURE 11: Quantitative Results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric (Rating Scale 0-4)

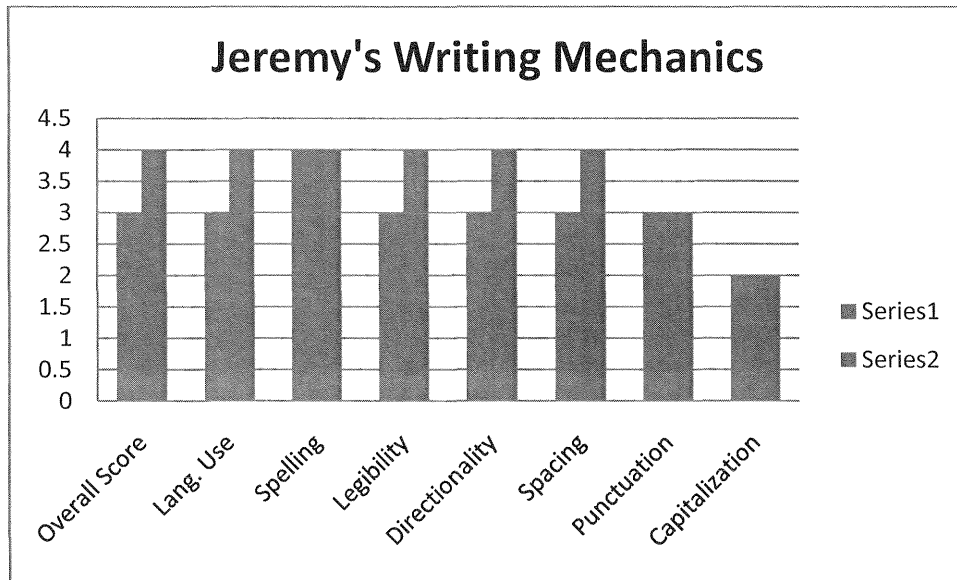


FIGURE 12: Comparison of Week 1 and Week 7 Results from the Kindergarten Writing Rubric

Jeremy Discussion and Summary

Jeremy was an above average writer and the most advanced student in the class. His strong writing skills could be a contributing factor to his high confidence in his writing. At the beginning of the study, Jeremy associated writing with his drawings, although he was already writing simple sentences to go along with the writing. He was not yet using spacing consistently, applying punctuation correctly, or attending to capitalization when the study began. By the end of the study, he had mastered spacing and punctuation although he had not yet shown growth in the area of capitalization. In early January, Jeremy wrote simple sentences using simple vocabulary. In February, at the end of the study, Jeremy was writing with sentence variety, at times using descriptive words and adding details.

Spelling was clearly one of Jeremy's strengths. Jeremy could easily decode high level texts. In fact, his mother has told me that he was reading the newspaper and the bible at home! All of this reading may have contributed to his strong spelling skills. Furthermore, it was exciting to see that Jeremy was applying the areas I focused on for word work in his writing at writer's workshop time. Examples of this were the mastery of digraphs and use of the "bossy E" or silent E. During the final interview, Jeremy said that he tried to remember finger spaces and periods when writing, both of which were items that I had modeled during mini lessons, and both were areas in which he demonstrated growth over the course of the study.

Given Jeremy's high spelling level, at times it perplexed me that he was still not attempting capitalization. This is an area I worked on with Jeremy, and perhaps he was not yet developmentally ready for that step at this time. Shortly after the data collection was completed for this study, Jeremy began using lowercase letters in his writing and following basic capitalization rules given some teacher reminders and prompts.

Throughout the study, Jeremy demonstrated confidence in his writing and was fairly eager and independent. By the end of the study, Jeremy was very independent, productive, and was able to plan his writing topics on his own. Jeremy showed considerable growth in his writing mechanics, his language use, and his writing dispositions.

Summary

Bethany, Hannah, and Jeremy all demonstrated significant growth over the course of the six week study. They showed improvement in their writing dispositions, making progress in their attitude, planning, and independence. By the end of the study, all three students showed a positive writing attitude, at least fairly high confidence, strong planning, improved independence, and decent productivity. Bethany, Hannah, and Jeremy also made great progress in their writing mechanics. All three demonstrated strong language use, spelling, legibility, directionality, and punctuation by the end of the study. Hannah and Jeremy also used regular spacing in their writing. A common area of need continued to be capitalization for all three students.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

Using the results from this study, I was able to draw conclusions on the impact of writer's workshop. The study illustrated that writing workshop can positively impact the writing of kindergarten students of various ability levels. Writing workshop can lead to improvement in children's writing mechanics and can also result in greater writing independence, higher confidence, and improved attitude towards writing. Furthermore, writer's workshop proved to be an effective form of writing instruction, helping kindergarten students achieve writing benchmarks. The results also revealed the importance of teacher observation and reflection in improving students' writing. These results proved to be useful to me as a teacher in better meeting my students' unique needs. The implications of this study could also provide information that could help other kindergarten and first grade teachers with their writing instruction, better educate parents on how to assist their children with writing, and be informative for administrators who strive to improve students' writing scores. I also make recommendations for researchers and teachers for future research studies, using larger sample sizes, longer time frames, and focusing on specific components of writing – mechanics or dispositions.

Conclusions

Writer's Workshop Can Have a Positive Impact on Students

The results from this study demonstrated that writer's workshop can have a positive impact on the writing development of kindergarten children, increasing the children's use of writing conventions. Bethany, Hannah, and Jeremy each demonstrated growth in their written language use, writing in more sophisticated

ways by the end of the study. The three students also demonstrated increases in legibility and directionality. Jeremy and Hannah demonstrated growth with spacing and punctuation, and Bethany also showed growth in her use of capitalization. The results of Lamme, Fu, Johnson, and Savage's (2002) study support the findings of this thesis, also demonstrating that writer's workshop can help kindergarten children to grow in their writing abilities.

A second conclusion is that writer's workshop can be linked with more positive writing dispositions, including an increase in writing attitude, confidence, planning, independence, and productivity. Bethany, Hannah, and Jeremy each showed improvement in their writing dispositions, demonstrating growth in their attitude, planning, and independence. At the end of the study, all three children wrote productively, improved their independence, demonstrated strong planning skills, showed a positive attitude, and conveyed at least fairly high confidence. The results of Lamme, Fu, Johnson, and Savage's (2002) study also demonstrated that writer's workshop can help kindergarten children improve their writing attitudes. Works by Jasmine and Weiner (2007), Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann (2006), and Hansen (2007) all support these findings, demonstrating that writing workshop is linked to greater writing independence, confidence, interest, and motivation.

As the study included students of varying ability levels, the results also suggest that writer's workshop can be beneficial for all students, those who are struggling, children who excel, and all the students in between. Bethany was a student who struggled with her writing, and she demonstrated considerable growth in

her writing mechanics and dispositions. Hannah was fairly average with her writing and Jeremy's spelling was very advanced for his age. Both Hannah and Jeremy demonstrated growth in their writing mechanics and dispositions as well, showing that writing workshop can provide instruction which meets the needs of many different learners. These findings support the work of Hachem, Mabhani, and Bahous (2008), illustrating that writing workshop can provide the opportunity to differentiate instruction and meet children's unique learning needs, enabling students to work at their own developmental writing levels.

Writer's Workshop Is an Effective Form of Writing Instruction

The results of this study also support that writer's workshop can be a developmentally appropriate way for students to practice and experiment with writing, boosting children's confidence, excitement, and independence, while also improving their writing conventions. By the end of the study, Bethany, Hannah, and Jeremy all demonstrated proficiency in multiple writing mechanics. Impressively, all three children met the June writing benchmarks for language use, spelling, legibility, directionality, and punctuation in February, when this study concluded. Hannah and Jeremy also met the June benchmark for punctuation use. The three children also demonstrated positive dispositions towards writing, all demonstrating a positive attitude, and high confidence, planning, and independence. Hannah and Jeremy worked very productively by the end of the study, and Bethany worked fairly productively. Thus, writer's workshop proved to be an effective way of leading writing instruction at the kindergarten level, preparing children for their writing

benchmarks and positively impacting their writing dispositions at the same time. These findings support the work of Wohlwend (2008) and Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann (2006), showing that narrow prompts and fill in the blank activities are not necessary for writing instruction; writing workshop can boost students' writing abilities while also providing opportunities for the children to be creative with their writing.

I found my reflection on student observations to be critical in identifying and meeting each of my students' unique writing needs. I considered my observations of students during writing time and also analyzed their writing samples. Therefore, teacher reflection proved to be a key component of writer's workshop. Calkins (1986) states that teachers must be researchers, observing their students as they write to tailor their mini lessons and conferences. Thus, teachers must be reflective practitioners to best meet the needs of individual students and help them through the writing process.

Implications

I found the data from this thesis to be particularly useful for my own teaching, and I was able to use my findings to drive my instruction. I observed trends in my students' data and identified needs that I could address with whole group mini lessons. For example, one need that seemed fairly universal for my class was work with capitalization. I decided to address this in multiple whole group mini lessons. I also reflected on the data to identify what the class was ready for next, to help

students improve their writing, not just with their conventions but with sentence variety, details, and dialogue as well. I used data from individual students to develop a specific plan for that child. I was able to conduct mini lessons with a small group of students who shared this common need and also worked one-on-one with students during conferences.

The results of this study could prove to be useful for other teachers as well, particularly those who teach kindergarten and first grade. This thesis outlines the use of writer's workshop in a kindergarten classroom and provides developmentally appropriate ways of utilizing this instructional approach at this level, both of which could help guide other teachers' writing instruction. This study illustrates the importance of having regular writing instruction as well as ample time for students to write and practice their writing skills in a fun, and motivating way. This thesis highlights the importance of teacher observation and reflection. The findings also reveal that teachers who utilize writer's workshop can help differentiate instruction and meet their students' individual writing needs.

The results of this study might also be insightful to administrators to provide an example of a successful, developmentally appropriate, and creative approach which can positively impact student writing. Writer's workshop could provide administrators with an alternative to many of the cookie-cutter, fill-in-the-blank or answer the writing prompt activities which many schools are resorting to due to accountability measures and Reading First mandates. This study is one small sample that could provide evidence of an effective approach to teaching writing, which can

be used within the context of Reading First, yet also can include creativity, higher level thinking, and voice. Thus, this study supports the work of Wohlwend (2008) and Higgins, Milles, and Wegmann (2006), regarding appropriate ways to prepare students for accountability measures.

Parents might also find some elements of this study informative, to help them better understand the writing development of their kindergarten children and to gain knowledge of developmentally appropriate ways to facilitate their children's writing. As children build a repertoire of sight words, develop their understanding of spelling rules, and learn to utilize letter sound correspondences, they are able to experiment with writing, becoming more capable, confident writers in the process. However, many parents are unaware of developmentally appropriate ways to foster young children's writing and often provide children with the conventional spellings of each word. If an adult spells every word for them each time they write, the children lose out on the opportunity to experiment with writing and may lack the confidence to make attempts when they are unsure of a spelling. The information provided by my study could prove to be useful for all parents of kindergarten children and first grade children, as their children play with writing at home, perhaps writing about a picture, making a journal or book, or creating a list. With proper communication and education, parents and teachers can work together to help foster a love of writing and build competent, confident young writers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers and teachers may wish to explore the use of writer's workshop with kindergarten children using a larger sample size with participants from a range of areas in the country and with a range of abilities and backgrounds. A longer time frame could also provide more insight for future studies. A year-long study could show the tremendous growth that kindergarten children experience from the start of school until the end of the year. Researchers may also wish to conduct more in-depth studies regarding the writing independence of kindergarten students during the writer's workshop approach or on the effects of writer's workshop on the writing mechanics of kindergarten students. By focusing on just one of these two questions, researchers could conduct a more comprehensive study on that one particular topic, using a wider participant pool.

Summary and Conclusion

Through the process of conducting this study and analyzing the data, I learned just how powerful the use of writer's workshop can be in a kindergarten classroom. With all the literature and hype on reading under the Reading First model, it is easy to dismiss the importance of writing. The data from this study not only supported my hunch that writer's workshop would prove to be beneficial, but the growth proved to be much greater than I had imagined it could be. Thus, this study helped to strengthen my own belief in the importance of writing instruction and the

appropriateness and effectiveness of the writer's workshop approach and could prove to be informative for other teachers and researchers as well.

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Appendix A

Writing Workshop Rubric

	3	2	1	0
Attitude	The child approaches writing with eagerness.	The child approaches writing with some eagerness.	The child is somewhat indifferent towards writing.	The child displays a dislike towards writing.
Confidence	The child displays confidence in writing.	The child displays some confidence in writing.	The child shows little confidence.	The child is not confident in his/her writing ability.
Planning	The child generates ideas for writing without resistance or difficulty.	The child generates ideas without great difficulty, but may gravitate towards the same subjects.	The child has limited ideas for writing.	The child has great difficulty generating ideas for writing.
Independence	The child works with independence and initiative for at least 15 minutes.	The child works with independence and initiative for at least 8 minutes	The child displays limited initiative and works independently for at least 4 minutes.	The child displays little initiative and is unable to work independently.
Productivity	The child works productively every day during the writing workshop, taking at least one new writing paper every day or two.	The child works fairly productively every day, but may not have the highest quality work before taking on another paper.	The child works fairly slowly, and may get side-tracked on occasion.	The child works at a slow pace, and does not complete each day's work. The child is easily side-tracked and distracted.

**Adapted from Calkins (2003)*

Appendix B

Kindergarten Rubric

	Late Emergent 4	Early Emergent 3 May/Spring	Pre-Conventional 2 Jan./Winter	Pre-Emergent 1 Oct./Fall	0
Message Quality	Message matches and may expand upon prompt.	Message matches and may expand upon prompt.	Message matches prompt.	Message matches at least part of the prompt.	Message does not match prompt.
Language Use Written	Writes using some sentence variety. Writes using some descriptive words.	Writes simple sentences. May use descriptive words.	Attempts to use words. Writes using simple vocabulary.	Attempts to write.	No attempt to write.
Language Use Oral		Reads back written sentences.	Dictates a complete sentence.	Attempts to speak in complete sentences using simple vocabulary	Some attempt to speak.
Mechanics					
Spelling	Many HF words spelled correctly.	Writes dominant (initial and ending) sounds/May spell HF words correctly and use environmental print.	Begins to use letters to represent words. May use beginning sounds.	Scribbles or some attempt at notation.	No attempt to write.
Legibility	Letters formed correctly/consistent use of spaces.	Letters formed correctly. May attempt spacing	Attempts to form some letters correctly.	May use random scattered letters.	
Directionality	Mastered	Clear use of left to right directionality.	Begins to use left to right directionality.	No evidence of directionality.	
Punctuation/Capitalization	Uses capitalization and punctuation independently. (. ? !)	May use UC & LC letters correctly. Attempts to use punctuation.	Uses UC and LC letters sporadically.		

*District Curricula

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How do you feel about writer's workshop time? Why do you think you feel that way?
2. Which part of writer's workshop time is your favorite? Why do you like that part?
3. Which part of writer's workshop time is your least favorite? Why don't you like that part?
4. Do you think that you are a good writer? Why do you think so?
5. Do you think that writing is pretty easy or do you think it is hard?
6. When you sit down to write, what do you think about? What are some of the things you try to remember to do?
7. How do you feel when you are asked to write on your own, without a teacher helping you? Why do you think you feel that way?
8. How do you feel when you meet with me to work on your writing? Why do you think you feel that way?

The Post-Interview will include all of the above questions, and one additional question:

9. Think about the way you wrote when we started kindergarten. Do you think your writing has changed since then? How?