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The Effects of the 6+1 Traits Writing and Assessment Program on the Writing Improvement of First Grade Students

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THE EFFECTS OF THE 6 + 1 TRAITS WRITING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM ON THE WRITING IMPROVEMENT OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

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by

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Approved:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if the 6 + 1 Trait model of writing would improve the Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Conventions of student writing in a first grade classroom.

Significance of the Study

Teachers are faced with increasing "public demands for educational improvement and accountability with research findings on composition and composition instruction." (Holbrook, 1984, p. 1) Due to this, teachers are required to search for methods of writing instruction that will prepare students, from Kindergarten through graduation, to become proficient in the area of writing that meets state standards.

Teachers must not only find ways to help students become proficient writers but they must also find assessments that will show a developmental progression of skills. Writing instruction and assessment must be consistent to ensure that teachers are assessing what they are teaching and show a progression of skill development.

According to Teale, (1988) assessment of young children must be based on sound knowledge. At the very least, the assessment methods for early childhood education should "(1) reflect a theoretically accurate picture of the skills and knowledge that students are developing during this period and (2) be sensitive to developmental and personal characteristics of young children that relate to testing." (Teale, 1988, p. 174)

This study of using the 6 + 1 Trait method of instruction and assessment could prove to be of significant importance in the development of a school-wide writing instructional

and assessment method to help students reach a level of writing proficiency that is required to pass state proficiency tests.

Question to be Investigated

Will the first grade students in this study show growth of at least one level in each area of writing from pre to post assessment as a result of the 6 + 1 Trait Writing and Assessment method?

Definition of Terms

- 6 Trait Writing – This is a method of writing that integrates writing instruction and assessment. It is divided into six sections: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency and Conventions.

- 6 + 1 Trait writing- This is the same as the 6 Trait Writing except that it has a seventh trait, Presentation, added to the original six. For the purpose of this study only four of these traits will be used: Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Conventions.

- Ideas- the main theme of the writing piece along with all the details that develop the theme.

- Organization –The internal structure or pattern of the piece of writing.

- Voice – The voice of the writer or way of talk. A sense that a real person is speaking.

- Word Choice – The use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader.

- Sentence Fluency - Sentences that vary in length and style. It is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns.

- Conventions – The mechanical correctness of the piece – spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals and punctuation.

- Presentation – How the writing looks on paper.

- Action Research – Research done to develop or improve a product, procedure or program in a particular setting, with no intention of generalizing the results.

- Assessment – The process of obtaining information through measuring, testing, or judging.

- Rubric – For this study a rubric is the procedure for the assessment of writing.

Research Procedures and Methodology

This research project was conducted as an action research. The subjects were given a writing prompt after being read a story to encourage creative thinking. The subjects were then asked to write on the same subject as the story. Four impartial trained assessors then assessed the writing for ideas, organization, sentence fluency and conventions using the 6 + 1 Traits writing rubric for beginning writers. (See appendix A) This was used to set a baseline before instruction began.

The students were first given a mini-lesson on the target trait including how they were to be assessed. The first trait taught was Ideas. The students were then given time to write on a given topic. After writing, the students were given the opportunity to share what had been written with the class or individually at least once a week. At that time, the students analyzed the piece to look for signs of the targeted trait. This was the process for teaching the four targeted traits: Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Conventions. At the end of the study, the subjects were again read a story and then asked to write. The four trained assessors who assessed the first writings also assessed the post writing using the same rubric.

Assumptions

1. The subjects are able to use invented spelling so that the researcher can read their writing.

2. The subjects are able to read their own writing for clarification to the researcher.

3. The subjects have not received any writing instruction in the 6 + 1 Trait writing method.

4. The subjects are willing to learn.

5. The pre-test and post-test will accurately measure students levels of writing.

Limitations

There are three identified limitations with this study. The first one is the composition of the class. The class was selected by the building principal and the researcher did not have any say in what students, used in this study, were placed in the classroom. The second one was the subjectivity of the assessors. Even though the assessors were trained in the 6+ 1 Trait model, subjectivity could not be ruled out. The last limitation was the movement of students in and out of the district. Because of this, students who moved out of the classroom were not followed and students who moved into the classroom were not part of the study.

Delimitations

This study was confined to one first grade classroom of nineteen students in a public school setting. It had a time limit of eight weeks giving each trait a limit of nine days each of instruction and practice. Only four of the 6 + 1 Traits were taught: Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Conventions.

CHAPTER II

Related Research and Practices

Each year teachers are inundated with new and improved methods for teaching and evaluating student writing. In response, teachers study, implement, and assess these new methods only to find their student scores on state mandated tests are 1) lower than previous years, 2) there is no change in scores or, 3) scores are only somewhat improved.

According to Routman (2000) in her book Conversations, she has found that "…more kids are writing but that writing isn't getting any better." (p. 208) She also states that "Too often writing is reduced to a formula" and "that there is an … enormous amount of time spent on ' writing-test-writing.' " (p.208) This results in students not learning meaningful writing such as, letters, note taking, lists, cards and business requests or letters, that they will need outside of the school and test-taking environment.

In response to this, one must ask, "How is the teacher of writing supposed to teach and assess writing in a way that assists students in becoming the proficient writers that the state and society wants them to be?" To answer this question, teachers need to look back on the history of writing instruction and assessment practices and current research and practices to determine a common theme of what good writing looks like. Then, they need to find a program that supports the research.

A History of Writing Instruction

Being able to write is not something humans have innately. However, the desire to communicate is an inherited trait we all possess.

All humans begin communicating wants and needs as soon as they are born by using cries to indicate that something needs attended to. As the human gets older and is more

aware of his surroundings he notices that particular sounds are put together to form a verbal language so he begins to try to imitate the language through babbling. Eventually, those sounds are put together to form a speech that is understood by all those around him.

Then, as he gets older he sees those around him using tools to write with and realizes this is another form of communication. Consequently, he notices that this must also be a valuable way to communicate so he begins to mimic this. Even though the marks he makes look like scribbles, they tell something important. At an early age, the human realizes that not only being able to talk is important but writing is also important as they are both a means to express oneself.

Society has, for the most part, used some form of writing from cave drawings to modern day e-mail to convey messages to others. Writing is a form of communication that, as long as it is not destroyed, is a permanent record of society's thoughts, feelings and attitudes. In view of this, writing has become a skill that society feels is important enough that it needs to be learned. In fact, as far back as the sixth century, writing was so important to one society that it could even determine what position you held.

Spandel (2001) had stated that authentic assessment of writing was used as far back as "sixth century China, where it was used in the Sui dynasty as a means for government positions." And, "in nineteenth century China, it is recorded, some unfortunate applicants, apparently plagued by unusually persistent writer's block, actually repeated their writing exams for as long as thirty years, or more." (p. 18)

As it has been in the past, it is even so today, being able to write effectively is a skill that is important to our society. In fact, many job applications and college entrance and exit exams include a writing sample to determine if the person is able to communicate

effectively through writing. Because writing is so important to our society, a major focus in education over the past 40 years has been to identify the traits of effective writers and then to develop ways to teach people to not only write effectively but also ways to assess how well they can write.

In the 1960's, "the National Council of Teachers of English commissioned a study to find out what was known about the teaching of composition." (Smith, 2000, p. 1) In a report knows as " 'The Braddock Report' the authors found only rudimentary understanding of the teaching of writing instruction." (Smith, 2000, p. 1) This report brought about a shift from the " 'prescriptive and product-centered' " (Smith, 2000, p. 1) approach to writing instruction, which emphasized correct usage and mechanics to a more processed oriented approach in the 1970's and 1980's. The process approach focuses more on the stages of writing instead of so much on the mechanics. However, according to Smith, "in 1986, [Arthur] Applebee found little use of process approaches." (p. 2) The problem was not in the idea of process writing but the implementation of it. It was found that most educators spent little time in the pre-writing stage, which is an important part of effective writing. However, due to the increase in the use of the terms pre-writing, revising and editing in increasingly numbers of texts this was about to change.

Smith also noted that Applebee expressed that writing instruction should include the following criteria:

1. Writing processes must be reconstrued as strategies that writers employ for particular purposes.

2. For different tasks, writers will use different strategies, and for some tasks these strategies may involve no more than the routine productions of a first and final draft.

3. More extensive writing routines must be recognized as problem solving heuristics appropriate to work-in-progress: they are unlikely to be so useful in writing about things (or in ways) the writer already knows well. (Applebee, 1986, p. 106 cited by Smith, 2000, p. 3)

Finally, it was found, from Applebee's work, that writing will require: "(a) allowing students to take a more active role; (b) building on students knowledge while introducing challenging new material; (c) following a natural sequence of thought that helps students learn useful approaches to the task; (d) collaborating with students to help them solve problems; and (e) encouraging students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning." (Applebee, 1986 cited in Smith, 2000, p. 3)

In the 1990's, "thirty years after The Braddock Report, Jensen followed up on its finding by asking a number of experts to respond to this question: 'What is the single most important thing that we as a profession know now that we didn't know 30 years ago about the teaching and learning of writing in the elementary school?' " (Smith, 2000, p. 4) In response, she found that:

1. Writing in the early years is a natural "gateway to literacy."

2. All children can be writers.

3. Understanding writing and writers means understanding complex and interrelated influences—cognitive, social, cultural, psychological, linguistic and technological.

4. We write so that both others and we can know what we think. (Jensen, 1993 cited in Smith, 2000, p. 4)

In response to these findings, more educators are moving toward a more real world approach to writing instruction in which children are given purposes for writing and more freedom of choice in what they write about. Teachers, on the other hand, are taking on the role of facilitator in which they model what they want students to focus on through mini-lessons, individual conferences with students, and giving students the option to share their writing with peers to obtain feedback and suggestions.

Research on Effective Writers

Writing instruction has changed over the past 40 years but even with better methods of instruction teachers are still faced with what comprises the traits of an effective writer.

In an effort to determine what quality writing should look like, " 'Diederich (1974) asked teachers, writers, editors, business people and other readers to rank samples of student work – high, medium, and low –then identify those qualities that had caused them to rank the papers as they did. (Spandel, 2001 p. 41) From Diederich's study it was found that the following traits were the key ones that they valued or looked for in writing the most.

1. Ideas

2. Mechanics (usage, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling)

3. Organization and analysis

4. Wording and phrasing

5. Flavor (voice, tone and style, and person qualities) (Spandel, 2001, p. 41)

Other researchers "including Alan Purves (1992) in his work on international writing assessment (Spandel, 2001, p. 41) have replicated Deiderich's study. Purves study found that raters "identified the traits of content, organization, style and tone, surface features (essentially conventions, but also including neatness), and personal response of the reader" (Spandel, 2001, p. 41) as significant traits. These traits are comparably close to what Deiderich found.

Also, In 1983 and 1984, a group of 17 teachers from Beaverton, Oregon set about replicating Deiderich's study. At about the same time a group from Portland Public Schools was conducting their own research into a way to better score student writing. Even though they did this without the knowledge of the other doing the same kind of study, they both found virtually identical traits. Out of these studies the teachers found that the traits teachers value most in writing tended to be:

1. Ideas – Clarity, detail, original thinking, and textual interest.

2. Organization – Internal structure, a captivating lead, logical sequencing and a sense of resolution.

3. Voice- Liveliness, passion, energy, awareness of audience, involvement in the topic, and capability to elicit a strong response from the reader.

4. Word choice – accuracy, precision, phrasing, originality, a love of words, and sensitivity to the reader's understanding.

5. Sentence fluency – Rhythm, grace, smooth sentence structure, readability, variety and logical sentence construction.

6. Conventions and Presentation – Overall correctness, attention to detail and an editorial touch –along with effective use of white space (layout and formatting) (Spandel, 2001, p. 42)

In all these studies and numerous others, the same traits that experts of writing value most tend to remain the same. In a final analysis, these common traits are ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation.

<u>6+1 Traits</u>

The 6+1 Trait model is not a new idea and it is very similar to what research says are the skills proficient writers possess. In fact, according to Spandel (2001), "they are an inherent part of what makes writing work, and they have been around virtually as long as writing itself." (p. 40). However, she goes on to state that what is new about 6 traits is that, "teachers and writer's have invented a language for describing the qualities, or traits that most other teachers, writers, and readers think are important in good writing." (p. 40)

According to the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL), (2001) "the 6 + 1 Trait model is now being widely used in virtually every state in the country, not to mention Great Britain, France, South America, China, Venezuela, Bahrain, Australia, Turkey, and the Middle East." (p. 2) However, also according to the NWREL very little research of 6 + 1 Traits model has been documented in the literature. In order to determine its effectiveness, however, in 1993 the NWREL(2001) did a study to determine if "it would make a difference in analytical writing testing results to purposefully weave assessment strategies into the writing curriculum." They chose six fifth grade classrooms in which to conduct their study. Three of the classrooms only had the pre and post

assessment with no more intervention on NWREL's part and the other three had

instruction in the six trait analytical model of assessment and instruction. This study

showed that the group that received the training showed significant gains in their writing

when compared to the group that did not.

In another study conducted by an educator, Pamela Freck, significant gains in writing

improvement were also noted after students received writing instruction using the six

traits model. Her study was conducted with a small group of fourth through sixth grade

students in a rural school in Nebraska. After giving the pre test she found that:

Based on the criteria set by the NE standards, one student (17%) would

have received an acceptable score on the pre test writing. At the

conclusion of the study, five students (83%) received

a score that would have been acceptable and four students (66%) received

a score that was significantly above the acceptable standard. (2001)

Others have also studied the effects of six traits but in other ways. One such study

completed by Deanna L. Heefner (1996) "examined whether the Six-Trait Analytical

Scale was a reliable and valid instrument for assessing written narratives of students who

are deaf." (p. 1) This study was conducted over a four-year period, from 1990 to 1994.

Nine hundred forty-three written narratives were collected from 206 students over this

period and scored using the 6-trait rubric. Her study found that the six trait assessment

guide was both "reliable and valid for assessing written narratives of students who are

deaf." (p.1) Also, according to Heefner (1996), her findings "… supported previous

research that showed slow improvement in the mechanics or conventions of written

English for students of all ages with hearing losses. (p. 1)

Even though the research is slim for the effects of the 6 + 1 Traits program, some of the same traits appear over and over again in research literature such as the use of voice, organization and conventions as being traits that assessors look for in writing. The 6 + 1 Traits program is one that needs to be studied further by educators to assess its effectiveness.

Writing Assessment

Identifying the qualities or traits of good writers, as important as they are, still leave teachers with the question of how to assess student writing. Over the years state testing of writing has moved from multiple choice questions to more performance assessment in which student writing is scored according to a set criteria or rubric. This has led to an increase in the use of rubrics in the classroom. However, according to Mabry (1999) "rubrics standardize the teaching of writing, which jeopardizes the learning and understanding of writing. " (p. 2) Also, according to Huot (1990), " 'for over 40 years researchers struggled with the development of methods able to produce reliable and valid means of directly assessing writing quality.' (Godshalk, Swineford & Coffman 1966 pp. 1-5)." (p. 1) He goes on to state that, "The problem in evaluating writing quality revolved around the issue of having two different readers arrive at an identical quality rating for the same piece of writing." (p.1) One study, conducted by "Deiderich, French, and Carlton (1961) had 300 essays read by 53 judges and found that 94% of the essays received at least seven different scores." (Huot, 1990, p. 1)

" 'Before the improvement of direct testing procedures for writing, the score a paper received could more likely depend on the rater than on the qualities of the paper itself.' (Deiderich 1974).) (Huot, 1990, p.1) Because of these problems, three of the most

widely used direct writing assessment procedures were developed: primary trait, holistic, and analytic.

"Primary trait scoring involves the identification of one or more traits relevant to a specific writing task." (Huot, 1990, p. 2) In other words, one trait is usually weighted more than others and is specific to the task. Spandel (2001) states that "both teachers and assessment specialists point out the inherent difficulty in scoring just one trait while attempting to put others on the back burner. If a person unfolds a set of bicycle directions that are full of spelling errors... [But the organization of directions is in correct order] it may be hard for [the reader] to look beyond that." (p. 25) This type of assessment does not help the assessor to identify strengths or weaknesses in all areas that make an effective writer but is useful for assessing a specific skill such as organization when writing directions.

"Holistic scoring reflects a rater's general impression of the quality of a piece of writing." (Huot, 1990, p. 2) Holistic scoring is divided into two sub categories: focused holistic scoring and general impression scoring. Focused holistic scoring is based on a specific set of criteria and general impression scoring is used "when raters assign scores by matching students' papers to exemplars (aka anchor papers), samples that typify performance at various score points." (Spandel, 2001, p. 25) Holistic scoring has been shown to be an effective scoring model but it is limited in diagnosing writing skills.

On the other hand the third assessment mode; analytic scoring, gives the rater a more specific diagnosis of writing strengths and weaknesses. Huot (1990) states that, " analytic scoring focuses on several identifiable qualities germane to good writing. ...And a paper's quality is judged by how many components of good writing it contains." (p. 2)

Diederich developed the first analytic scoring guide. This guide was "developed from research identifying qualities of good writing from a factor analysis of remarks assigned to papers by independent judges." (Huot, 1990, p. 2) Following Diederich's lead, others have developed assessment guides including a group from the NWREL in Portland, Oregon. The researchers from there helped develop a writing assessment model known as the Six Trait Analytic Model now known as the 6+1 Traits. It is now becoming widely used in classrooms everywhere as not only an assessment tool but also a model in which to guide instruction. The one problem with this, however, is that it takes the rater at least one to two minutes per trait to score. This takes more time than either the primary trait or holistic scoring but if a teacher wants to identify what skills need focused on, it is more useful than the others are.

Analytic assessment is also useful to the student as it identifies what areas of writing the student needs to focus on instead of simply telling a student that his piece is not of quality work. Spandel (2001) explains that "this is not to say that these traits actually function independently of one another—or that they will never come together in one unified whole.... Writing is by nature holistic. An analytical approach simply makes revision manageable." (p. 27)

Research says that writing is a subject that can be divided into specific traits that experts consider important in quality or effective writing. By closely analyzing these traits in students' writing the teacher can become more effective at delivering instruction that will guide students toward the goal of becoming effective communicators through writing.

The 6+1 Trait model of writing instruction and assessment is a program that is based on the most current research and provides educators with a clear picture of where students are in their writing. Teachers can identify those areas that need more focus and those that do not which will help guide instruction. It is not only useful to the teacher and the student but also to the parent and others that want to know how the student's score on a writing sample was determined. Thus, also addressing the accountability issue educators are faced with today.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES FOR THIS STUDY

Subjects

Northwestern Elementary is an elementary school in the outskirts of Springfield, Ohio that has approximately 650 – 700 students in grades kindergarten through grade four in the 2001 – 2002 school year. The school is a predominately white, middle class population. It has two Title 1 teachers, a gifted teacher and three special education teachers. The remaining teachers are all certified elementary education teachers with either a bachelor's or master's degree.

This research project focused on only one first grade classroom of 19 students. The students range in age from five years old to seven years old. All have attended kindergarten, eighteen at Northwestern and one at a different school in Clark County. Four were currently repeating first grade. Eight had qualified for Title 1 reading instruction and one had been identified as gifted.

Instrumentation

To assess the pre and post student writing samples, a rubric from the Northwestern Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) for beginning writers was used. This assessment rubric is divided into five levels of beginning writers. They are experimenting, emerging, developing, capable and experienced. Under each section are the 6 traits: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency and Conventions. Under these areas were checklists that identified what the writing looks like for each level of beginning writers. (See Appendix A) For this research project, only the areas of Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Conventions were used.

The subjects were given a pre and post writing prompt and asked to write on that prompt. The two samples were assessed to determine if any improvement in writing skills had been obtained. Trained assessors did these assessments.

Procedures

Pre-writing Sample

To obtain a baseline sample, a writing prompt was given after students had listened to a story that was on the same topic as the writing prompt. This sample was used to compare to the post writing sample.

Post-writing Sample

The post-writing sample was obtained the same way the pre-writing sample was taken. The subjects were given a writing prompt to write about after listening to a story that was on the same topic. Then the two were compared to determine if any improvement was made. This was determined by the writing rubric for Beginning Writers from NWREL. The student showed improvement if he moved from one level to another in any of the targeted traits. For example, if a student scored at an experimenting stage in the pre-assessment but then scored at the emerging stage, which is the next stage, in the post-assessment then that student was considered to have improved in his writing skills.

Instruction

To begin instruction in each of the four traits the students were shown the rubric that was to be used to score their writing before each trait was taught. They were also shown samples of what a 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 paper looked like. Then, they were taught using

lessons taken from NWREL and the book Creating Writers: Through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction.

The students were taught only four of the traits. The first one taught was Ideas. This is where the main theme and details of a story are taught. The second one was Organization or the order of the story. Third was Sentence Fluency where the students were taught to use different ways to begin sentences and to vary the length of each sentence. Lastly, they were taught Conventions. This is where the rules of grammar are taught such as capitalization and punctuation. Each trait was taught for nine days and two days were used for the pre and post writing samples. The project took eight weeks to complete.

Evaluation

In order for the assessment to be as valid as possible, the researcher enlisted four peers to serve as assessors. They consisted of a principal, an assistant principal, a first grade teacher and a second grade teacher. The researcher trained the assessors by first giving the assessors the rubric to be used along with information on the 6 + 1 Traits method of writing instruction and assessment. They then met to look at student writing samples from both the 6 + 1 Traits website and classroom students. During this meeting they looked at the samples and determined what an experimenting, emerging, developing, capable and experienced writer in each of the four traits chosen should look like. These samples were then used to help with the assessment of the pre and post writing samples.

It was also agreed upon that each assessor would individually use the rubric to score each of the nineteen papers presented from the pre and post writing samples.

The data from the pre and post samples was analyzed to see if any improvement in writing had occurred using the 6 + 1 Trait method of writing instruction and assessment. A mean score will be taken from the total scores of each paper from each assessor from both the pre and post samples. These scores were then analyzed to determine if any improvement had been made. The researcher looked at individual and group scores to determine the extent of progress in each area from the pre and post samples.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This study was conducted to determine if the 6 + 1 Trait writing and assessment program would improve student scores in the areas of Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. Indirectly, it was also conducted to determine if it could possibly be a program that would beneficial to implement on a school-wide basis. The data obtained from this study was analyzed for individual and whole class improvement.

For individual scores a mean was taken from the four scores given by the individual assessors and then a comparison was made between the pre and post-test. This resulted in the scores having a decimal point in the average that resulted in scores that were in between levels. (See Table 1)

When determining the whole class scores a mean of the students scores were obtained in each separate area Then, as with the individual scores, the scores between the pre and post-test were compared to determine if any growth as a whole group occurred.

Question to be Investigated

Will the first grade students in the study show growth of at least one level in each area of writing from pre to post assessment as a result of the 6 + 1 Trait Writing and Assessment method?

Individual Data

Each student's level of writing was obtained through a pre and post test writing sample that was scored using the Six-Trait Assessment for Beginning Writers in the areas of Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Conventions. (See Table 1)

In the area of Ideas, it was found that all students improved on some level. Ten of eighteen students improved one level or better, while the remaining eight improved from three fourths of a level or less. None of the students dropped their scores or stayed the same in this area.

When scoring the area of Organization, it was also found that all students showed some level of improvement. It is significant to note here that this is the level that showed the most improvement. Fourteen of the eighteen students gained at least one level or better and the remaining four showed a growth of three fourths of a level or less.

Looking at the scores in Sentence Fluency and Conventions, it was noted that these two areas showed the least amount of growth. Ten of the eighteen students showed an increase of one level in Sentence Fluency and just five of eighteen students showed a growth of one level in Conventions. Even though the growth in the area of Sentence Fluency was the same as Ideas, one student stayed at the same level between the pre and post-test and then showed a drop of one quarter of a level between the pre and post-test in the area of Conventions. The remaining scores increased by at least eighty seven hundredths of a level or less.

Table 1

Individual Writing Performance											
Student	Ideas			Organization			Sentence Fluency			Conventions		
	Pre	Post	Plus/Minus	Pre	Post	Plus/Minus	Pre	Post	Plus/Minus	Pre	Post	Plus/Minus
Student 1	3.13	3.25	+0.12	2.63	2.75	+0.12	2.38	2.63	+0.25	2.0	2.5	+0.50
Student 2	2.5	3.0	+0.50	2.0	3.0	+1.00	2.0	2.5	+0.50	1.88	2.0	+0.12
Student 3	2.25	3.25	+1.00	2.0	2.75	+0.75	2.6	2.75	+0.75	1.75	2.0	+0.25
Student 4	2.25	3.25	+1.00	2.0	3.5	+1.50	1.75	3.25	+1.50	2.0	3.0	+1.00
Student 5	1.63	2.75	+1.12	1.0	2.25	+1.25	1.0	2.5	+1.50	1.13	2.50	+1.37
Student 6	2.5	3.75	+1.25	2.25	3.75	+1.50	2.63	3.75	+1.12	2.0	2.75	+0.75
Student 7	2.25	3.0	+0.75	1.75	2.75	+1.00	2.0	2.75	+0.75	1.5	2.63	+1.13
Student 8	2.0	3.25	+1.25	2.0	3.25	+1.25	1.25	3.0	+1.75	1.63	2.5	+0.87
Student 9	2.25	2.5	+0.25	2.0	2.5	+0.50	2.0	3.0	+1.00	1.75	2.25	+0.50
Student 10	2.5	4.0	+1.50	2.0	3.5	+1.50	2.0	3.25	+1.25	1.75	3.0	+1.25
Student 11	2.0	3.0	+1.00	1.5	2.5	+1.00	1.25	2.5	+1.25	1.5	2.5	+1.00
Student 12	3.0	3.25	+0.25	2.5	3.5	+1.00	2.5	3.0	+0.50	2.0	2.75	+0.75
Student 13	3.0	4.0	+1.00	2.38	4.25	+1.87	2.25	3.75	+1.50	2.75	3.25	+0.50
Student 14	2.5	3.25	+0.75	2.5	3.5	+1.00	2.25	3.0	+0.75	2.0	2.5	+0.50
Student 15	2.25	2.50	+0.25	1.5	2.0	+0.50	1.75	2.25	+0.50	1.63	1.88	+0.25
Student 16	2.0	3.5	+1.50	1.25	3.25	+2.00	1.63	3.0	+1.37	1.63	2.25	+0.62
Student 17	2.75	4.25	+1.50	2.25	4.25	+2.00	2.25	3.75	+1.50	2.38	3.25	+0.87
Student 18	3.50	4.25	+0.75	2.5	4.25	+1.75	2.75	2.75	+0.00	3.0	2.75	-0.25
Student 19	* This student moved up one grade level during this study.											

Whole Class Data

By looking at the individual scores it was possible to see where the strengths and weaknesses were for each student and how effective the program was in those areas. However, by looking at the class scores as a whole, it was even more possible to evaluate the program as an effective means to deliver writing instruction. (See Table 2)

In the area of Ideas the class pre-test level was a 2.45. This indicated that the students as a whole were between the emerging and developing level. The post-test score was a 3.33 which showed that the class had moved to the developing stage and were just beginning to enter the capable stage. Even though this was not exactly one level of improvement, it did show that the class was improving in that area at a significant rate.

As a whole, the class did better in the area of Organization. The pre-test level indicated a mean average of a 2.0. This was the emerging stage. The post-test level was a 3.19 which was 1.19 better than the pre-test and clearly showed that the students were in the developing stage and slightly moving toward the developing stage. As indicated in the individual scores as being the area of most improvement, this area was also the most improved when compared as a class average.

Sentence Fluency was the second most improved area when the whole class average was compared to the other four areas. The class at the beginning of the study was at a 1.98 level which was very near the emerging stage. At the end of the study the class average was a 2.96. That was an increase of .98 points and meant that the students were passing through the emerging stage and beginning to advance to the developing stage.

The least gain was in the area of Conventions. This area was probably the most difficult because the students were just beginning to understand that not all letters needed

capitals and they were beginning to have a basic understanding of punctuation. A gain of only .67 was noted between the pre-test score of 1.90 and the post-test score of 2.57. This meant that they had only gained a little bit less than three quarters of a level from the pre to post test.

Table 2

Whole Class Writing Performance			
Trait	Pre-test	Post-test	Plus/Minus
Ideas	2.45	3.33	+.88
Organization	2.0	3.19	+1.19
Sentence Fluency	1.98	2.96	+0.98
Conventions	1.90	2.60	+0.67

*The numbers have been rounded down.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

In the beginning of this study it was expected that all students should gain at least one level on the Six-Trait Assessment guide for Beginning Writers. However, as seen in the analysis of the data this did not occur. In spite of this, however, each individual student increased to some degree in all areas with the exception of one student that slightly declined in the area of Conventions and stayed the same in the area of Sentence Fluency. The areas that showed the most improvement were the areas of Ideas and Organization. This could have occurred because these areas were the first two that were taught and were the ones the students seemed to grasp the most. The area of Conventions was the most difficult. This tended to be the area that the students understood the least. During the period of instruction, the students tended to put capitals at the beginning of each word and periods after each word. As instruction continued more students were becoming aware that this was not correct. In fact, one student observed that in a beginning piece of writing she had placed periods after each word and indicated to the teacher that she had made that mistake.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the program did have some positive impact on student writing. However, it should be noted here that some caution should be observed because the improvement of writing could partially be the result of the students being more confident in their abilities as writers. This could be the result of being less inhibited in their writing ability due to the encouragement of the teacher.

Also, subjectivity of the scorer cannot be dismissed. As with Diederich, French and Carlton's 1961 study on the reliability of having different judges or assessors score the same piece of writing to determine if there were consistency in scoring, this study also found that there were some inconsistencies with the scoring. When the pre-test was scored by the four assessors three tended to score comparatively close to one another while the fourth tended to score much lower. Then, when the post-test was scored, the two teachers scored fairly consistent with each other while the assistant principal scored much higher and the principal scored much lower. This was interesting to observe and leads one to believe that as with any other assessment tool that uses a rubric, subjectivity and interpretation is left to the individual.

Implications

The problem with how to teach and assess writing is not going to disappear because it is not some new fad. Being an effective writer is a skill that is important in any position you hold in society. The findings in this study have shown that teachers need to spend the time teaching specific writing strategies that is consistent with the research if they want students to become effective writers. They must also teach students what they will be assessed on and how to become self-assessors.

This is a difficult task, particularly with young students. However, as this study has shown, even those as young as six and seven years old can be shown how to evaluate a piece of writing, including their own, to determine if it has details (Ideas), a beginning, middle and end (Organization), sentences that begin differently (Sentence Fluency), and correct grammar and punctuation (Conventions).

This is important in the respect that educators must realize that if it was taught by direct instruction, even the most youngest and reluctant writer can learn to become an effective writer. Also, if students begin to use the language and assessment strategies at an early age, less instruction will be needed on specific skills in later grades.

For the past three years, the Northwestern School District has strived to bring consistency in the use of terms and instruction between the grade levels in all areas. The intent of creating this consistency is the belief that students will become better writers because of it. This program could provide the Northwestern School District with that continuity because of the way the writing instruction and assessment are delivered. If the teachers from the lower grades begin with the program and teach the students the skills and language of the program and this is continued throughout the grades then students may become more effective writers. This could also solve the confusion of terms related to writing that tend to happen between grade levels and even individual teachers thus, causing student confusion as to what is expected of them.

Recommendations and Future Research

This study was conducted in a short amount of time that was during the first three months of first grade. During this period, first graders are in various stages of writing. Some are able to write short sentences using inventive writing while others use drawings, single letters for words and strings of letters that tell whole stories. Because of these wide ranges in abilities, eight weeks are not enough time to see a great amount of growth. It is recommended that to obtain a more reliable assessment of the effectiveness of the 6 +1 Traits program, future research should be done over at least one school year.

Another study that would be interesting to pursue would be to have a study group and a control group that are chosen for like abilities. Then the researcher could compare the two groups to more accurately determine if this program is effective.

A third study could look at how easy or difficult the rubric is to use in a classroom situation. In other words, would teachers feel that the rubric is user friendly and does it require a more excessive amount of time to use than a previous assessment tool? This could then lead into a study of how much information the 6 + 1 Trait rubric gives the teacher and parent compared to another tool. The possibilities are endless and one study could lead into many others.

Appendix A

6-Trait Assessment for Beginning Writers

1 **EXPERIMENTING**	**2** **EMERGING**	**3** **DEVELOPING**	**4** **CAPABLE**	**5** **EXPERIENCED**
IDEAS — Uses scribbles for writing — Dictates labels or a story — Shapes that look like letters — Line forms that imitate text — Writes letters randomly	**IDEAS** — Some recognizable words present — Labels pictures — Uses drawings that show detail — Pictures are supported by some words	**IDEAS** — Attempts a story or to make a point — Illustration supports the writing — Meaning of the general idea is recognizable/understandable — Some ideas clear but some are still fuzzy	**IDEAS** — Writing tells a story or makes a point — Illustration (if present) enhances the writing — Idea is generally on topic — Details are present but not developed (lists)	**IDEAS** — Presents a fresh/original idea — Topic is narrowed and focused — Develops one clear, main idea — Uses interesting, important details for support. — Writer understands topic well
ORGANIZATION — Ability to order or group not yet present — No sense of beginning or end — Connections between ideas are confusing	**ORGANIZATION** — No title (if requested) — **Experiments with beginnings** — Begins to group like words/pictures — Transitions or evidence of sequencing are haphazard	**ORGANIZATION** — A title is present (if requested) — Limited transitions present — Beginning but no ending except "The End" — Attempts at sequencing and transitions	**ORGANIZATION** — An appropriate title is present (if requested) — Attempts transitions from sentence to sentence — Beginning works well and attempts an ending — Logical sequencing — Key ideas begin to surface	**ORGANIZATION** — An original title is present (if requested) — Transitions connect main ideas — The opening attracts — An effective ending is tried — Easy to follow — Important ideas stand out
VOICE — Communicates feeling with size, color, shape, line in drawing or letter imitation — Work is similar to everyone else's — Unclear response to task — Awareness of audience not present	**VOICE** — Hints of voice present in words and phrases — Looks different from most others — Energy/mood is present — Treatment of topic predictable — Audience is fuzzy—could be anybody, anywhere	**VOICE** — Expresses some predictable feelings — Moments of individual sparkle, but then hides — Repetition of familiar ideas reduces energy — Awareness that the writing will be read by someone else — Reader has limited connection to writer	**VOICE** — Writing is individual and expressive — Individual perspective becomes evident — Personal treatment of a standard topic — Writes to convey a story or idea to the reader — Attempts non-standard point of view	**VOICE** — Uses text to elicit a variety of emotions — Takes some risks to say more then what is expected — Point of view is evident — Writes with a clear sense of audience — Cares deeply about the topic

1 EXPERIMENTING	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPING	4 CAPABLE	5 EXPERIENCED
WORD CHOICE — Writes letters in strings — Imitates word patterns — Pictures stand for words and phrases — Copies environmental print .	**WORD CHOICE** — Recognizable words — Environmental words used correctly — Attempts at phrases — Functional language	**WORD CHOICE** — General or ordinary words — Attempts new words but they don't always fit — Settles for the word or phrase that "will do" — Big words used only to impress reader — Relies on slang, clichés, or repetition	**WORD CHOICE** — Uses favorite words correctly — Experiments with new and different words with some success — Tries to choose words for specificity — Attempts to use descriptive words to create images	**WORD CHOICE** — Everyday words used well — Precise, accurate, fresh, original words — Creates vivid images in a natural way — Avoids repetition, clichés or vague language — Attempts at figurative language
SENTENCE FLUENCY — Mimics letters and words across the page — Words stand alone — Patterns for sentences not in evidence — Sentence sense not yet present	**SENTENCE FLUENCY** — Strings words together into phrases — Attempts simple sentences — Short, repetitive sentence patterns — Dialogue present but not understandable	**SENTENCE FLUENCY** — Uses simple sentences — Sentences tend to begin the same — Experiments with other sentence patterns — Reader may have to reread to follow the meaning — Dialogue present but needs interpretation	**SENTENCE FLUENCY** — Simple and compound sentences present and effective — Attempts complex sentences — Not all sentences begin the same — Sections of writing have rhythm and flow	**SENTENCE FLUENCY** — Consistently uses sentence variety — Sentence structure is correct and creative — Variety of sentence beginnings — Natural rhythm, cadence and flow — Sentences have texture which clarify the important idea
CONVENTIONS — Writes letter strings (pre-phonetic: dmRxzz) — Attempts to create standard letters — Attempts spacing of words, letters, symbols or pictures — Attempts to write left to right — Attempts to write top/down — Punctuation, capitalization etc. not making sense, yet — Student interpretation needed to understand text/pictures	**CONVENTIONS** — Attempts semi-phonetic spelling (MTR, UM, KD, etc.) — Uses mixed upper and lower case letters — Uses spaces between letters and words — Consistently writes left to right — Consistently makes effective use of top to bottom spacing — Random punctuation — Nonstandard grammar is common	**CONVENTIONS** — Uses phonetic spelling (MOSTR, HUMN, KLOSD, etc.) on personal words — Spelling of high frequency words still spotty — Uses capitals at the beginning of sentences — Usually uses end punctuation correctly (.!?) — Experiments with other punctuation — Long paper may be written as one paragraph — Attempts standard grammar	**CONVENTIONS** — Transitional spelling on less frequent words (MONSTUR, HUMUN, CLOSSED, etc.) — Spelling of high frequency words usually correct — Capitals at the beginning of sentences and variable use on proper nouns — End punctuation is correct (.!?) and other punctuation is attempted (such as commas) — Paragraphing variable but present — Noun/pronoun agreement, verb tenses, subject/verb agreement	**CONVENTIONS** — High frequency words are spelled correctly and very close on other words — Capitals used for obvious proper nouns as well as sentence beginnings — Basic punctuation is used correctly and/or creatively — Indents consistently to show paragraphs — Shows control over standard grammar

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