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IMPLEMENTING A WRITER’S WORKSHOP IN THE PRIMARY GRADES:

STUDENTS LEARN THE WRITING PROCESS WHILE
BUILDING THEIR INTELLECTUAL INTEREST IN WRITING

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ABSTRACT

To teach writing in the elementary classroom a teacher needs to find strategies to use with beginning writers. Writer’s Workshop is a strategy that can be used to teach the writing process as well as creative writing. With my research question I set out to find: What would be the observed and reported experiences when I incorporate Writer’s Workshop into the primary classroom? Writer’s Workshop occurred on a daily basis for a set block of time. The children chose topics to write about that were of interest to them. Conferences with individual children were conducted at various stages of the writing process. From these conferences, mini-lessons were formed to address areas of concern.

A writing block of forty minutes was set aside five days a week. The first five weeks of the study focused on phonics instruction and conventions of writing. The writing block began with a mini-lesson, followed by a modeled shared writing of the skill. The writing block concluded with the children practicing the targeted skill. Implementation if Writer’s Workshop began during the sixth week of the study. The ultimate goal of Writer’s Workshop was to create an atmosphere where all children worked independently through the writing process. The writing process consists of prewriting, writing, sharing/revising, editing, and publishing.

I found Writer’s Workshop to be an effective strategy to use in the classroom to teach the conventions of writing and the writing process. The
environment that was created provided students of all abilities the security to take chances in their writing. Student writing data showed that with each writing sample, the number of words increased. Additionally, through daily practice of the conventions of writing, the number of children that used punctuation in their writing increased. Positive student attitudes toward writing in addition to the concrete writing data prove that implementing Writer’s Workshop in the primary classroom is a worthwhile endeavor.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.......................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES............................................................................................................... viii

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... ix

RESEARCH STANCE ....................................................................................................... 1

LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................... 7

METHODS ......................................................................................................................... 22

THIS YEAR’S STORY ....................................................................................................... 32
  Play: “What Do We Do?” ............................................................................................. 34
  Poem: “Learning to Write in Rhyme” ......................................................................... 37
  Pastiche: “How Do You Feel?” .................................................................................. 43
  Writer’s Workshop: The Journey .............................................................................. 44
  Nathan’s Story ............................................................................................................. 47
  Layered Story .............................................................................................................. 50
  Play: Writer’s Workshop Dialogue ............................................................................ 55
  Vignette: James’ Story ................................................................................................ 56
  Play: One of Those Days Plays .................................................................................. 61
  Play: Writer’s Workshop Interview ........................................................................... 64

DATA ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................. 67

FINDINGS ......................................................................................................................... 71

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? ............................................................................... 88

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 92

APPENDIXES ................................................................................................................ 97
  A. HSIRB Approval Letter ........................................................................................... 98
LIST OF TABLES

1  Student Writing Data .................................................................75
2  Student Writing Rubric Results .......................................................81
3  Student Survey Results .................................................................84
4  Punctuation Data ...........................................................................86
LIST OF FIGURES

1  Quotation Student Samples.............................................................................41
2  Nathan’s Web..................................................................................................46
3  Web to Story Student Samples .......................................................................49
4  Caitlin’s Finished Copy ..................................................................................62
5  Laila’s Finished Copy.....................................................................................63
6  Bins Graphic Organizer ..................................................................................69
7  Student Writing Word Count Results Chart ...................................................79
RESEARCHER STANCE

The first grade classroom I envision is filled with inquisitive minds, bright eyes, and eager learners that are constantly thirsting for more knowledge. They are using their hands and minds to help each other figure out problems. They are writing and publishing stories using the computer and other forms of print to get to the finished copy of the narrative, research report, or poem they have been working on.

When I walk into my classroom I do see, on most days, those inquisitive minds, bright eyes, and eager learners. Then, in my bravest voice I tell the children it is time for writing. The moans and groans that ensue tell me that I have treaded on dangerous territory. How could this be? Writing is supposed to be fun I tell them. I wonder if they hear the doubt in my voice. I tried to think of how writing could be such a terrifying subject for me to teach.

Where did my own doubts about teaching writing come from? I searched through my elementary years, through seventh and eighth grade, through early high school. I could not find evidence of any negative writing experience. Then came twelfth grade English class. We were asked to write a term paper. I cannot recall feeling more terrified. Up to this point I had not had any real writing practice. How do I do this? Where do I start? We were told to make note cards and use the note cards as guides to write our paper. I immediately marched to the public library to find the information I needed for my paper. I hunted and
gathered what I felt at the time to be the most pertinent information. I wrote my note cards, got out my hand-me-down Brother electric typewriter and got to work. I typed and typed and re-typed because the correction tape did not work that well. That was it. I was finished. I handed in my paper with high hopes. Nothing could prepare me for the day I got my paper back. The grade was not good. How could this be? I felt at that time I would never want to write again. I realized at this point that before that twelfth grade English class I did not have any negative writing experiences. On the other hand, I did not have any positive writing experiences either. All through my years of schooling I was never taught *how* to write. Writing was not modeled for me so I had not a clue how I could model this extremely important skill to my students.

Years rolled by before I finally mustered the courage to try some college classes. After one class I had a new love of learning and could not get enough of all this new knowledge that I was experiencing. Eventually I had to take an English course that I knew would include writing. In this course, we were taught how to write. I saw that I could take my ideas and organize them into a logical sequence that became a well-written story or report.

The students I had in this one particular first grade class were, for the most part, enthusiastic readers. Their listening and speaking skills were very apparent during our Language Arts discussions. The children offered indepth explanations when discussing stories we read. As I watched the children’s language
development blossom, I was sure they would be ready to write detailed and well-thought out responses to questions or prompts I had posed. However, what I found was that the children were reluctant to write. As they became more reluctant and moaned every time I said it was time to write, I became less confident in my ability to model how enjoyable writing can be. My mind flashes back to my own early writing experiences. I was beginning to wonder if I was really helping these children to become better writers.

Students enter first grade at the start of the school year with a reluctance to write. Each year I am faced with the challenge of convincing these young minds that writing can and should be fun. Each writing assignment is a struggle for the children to finish. The first question they usually asked is, “How many sentences do we need?” Another difficulty the children experience during writing is their lack of phonics skills and their inability to confidently sound out words.

Research done by Anderson, Mallo, Nee, and Wear (2003) identifies factors that may influence the writing skills of students. These factors include students’ poor attitude and motivation, teacher instruction, and time. As I look back at previous classes and writing times, I realize it was not always a pleasant experience for the children. The writing that occurred during our writing block was normally in response to a teacher prompt and the children would write in response to that prompt, whether the topic was of interest or not. When students would ask how to spell words they were unsure of how to spell I would write
these on the board for them to copy. The students were just doing what was asked of them. They were not motivated to write. They did not have an intended audience so there was no real reason to make the writing interesting.

I thought as I went around the room and conferenced with individual students that I was doing a great service. It turns out I was doing a disservice to those students. I was using this conference time to point out misspelled words, missed punctuation, capitalization errors, and other mechanics of writing. Through research I have read I now realize I should have been inquiring about how the story developed or asking probing questions to get the children to want to make the story clearer. Ray (2001) states that writers need to talk about their writing during these conferences. Through this essential characteristic of sharing the writing with others and receiving feedback, the writer’s peers and teacher could offer the writer assistance in making the writing clearer to the audience. In pointing out the mechanical errors during conferences as I had done with the children, they began focusing more on the mechanics of the writing rather than the content. There is always time later to look at the mechanics of the writing.

Anderson et al. (2003) also mention time as a factor that influences students’ writing skills. I know there were days when we would be running behind in our schedule for any number of reasons. Because of the reluctance of the children to write during our writing time, this was usually put aside for another day. Therefore the children were not getting a consistent writing time, and
they may have picked up on my own reservations about our writing block. Ray (2001) suggests that “the writing workshop is a lot like lunchtime” (p. 51). We would never think about not having lunch on any given day and the amount of time given for lunch is consistent. Although writing may not be able to happen at the exact same time everyday, it should happen for the same amount of time everyday, and, like lunch it should occur everyday.

The reluctance the students exhibited during writing also appeared to stem from the children’s apprehension at trying to spell unfamiliar words, their uncertainty of the exact task that was asked of them, and not enough teacher-modeling. At this point I wondered if I was pushing them into unfamiliar territory before they had the resources to help them write. I wondered if my explanation of what they needed to do was explicit or if I was guessing that they would or should know what I was asking of them.

As a first grade teacher, I realize the importance of instilling a positive attitude toward writing as the children embark on their first writing experiences. Dewey (1938/1997) states that “everything depends on the quality of the experience which is had” (p. 27). These experiences, he stated, must be set up by the teacher. They must be engaging activities “more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences” (p. 27). I did not want to be the one that instilled a negative attitude toward writing. I wanted the
experiences, like Dewey said, to be enjoyable so the children would want to write more now and in the future and for many purposes.

Through the observations I have made in my classroom and through research I have done on the topic of Writer’s Workshop, I feel Writer’s Workshop would be the best approach to use to teach the writing process and many aspects of writing to the children. My research question is: What would be the observed and reported experiences when I incorporate a Writer’s Workshop into the primary classroom? According to Adams, Power, Reed, Reiss, and Romaniak (1996) and Ray (2001), Writer’s Workshop encompasses many topics of writing. It includes mini-lessons, which can teach capitalization at the beginning of a sentence and for proper nouns, punctuation, word spacing, and using descriptive words in writing. It also incorporates teacher modeling of the writing process. The writing process includes brainstorming, first draft, revising, editing, and publishing. The teacher models various aspects of the writing process by either using his or her own work or student samples.

Writer’s Workshop occurs on a daily basis. There is a set block of time set aside. For Writer’s Workshop, children choose topics that are of interest to them. The teacher conferences with individual students at various stages of the writing process. During these conferences the teacher may find areas of concern that certain students need help with. The teacher would address the area of concern either whole group, if the problem is widespread, small group, or individually.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To teach writing in the elementary classroom a teacher needs to find strategies to use with beginning writers. Writer’s Workshop is a strategy that can be used to teach the writing process as well as creative writing. Mini-lessons, peer editing and teacher conferencing are ways the teacher can convey various aspects of the writing process to students. Creating an environment that is conducive to writing can stimulate young writers. Motivators can be used to help make writing more inviting for the children.

Teachers can help instill and nurture children’s interest in writing. Graves (1978) states that “Americans are writing less and less” (p.4). If they do write, they do so with very little confidence. Sanacore (1995) asserts that teachers and administrators must work together to help children develop a lifelong love of writing. He further states that children need to experience the sheer pleasure that writing will bring as they record their experiences in their life. As Dewey (1938/1997) states, “everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had” (p. 27). It is up to the teacher to be sure that these writing experiences are engaging and enjoyable. With engaging and enjoyable writing experiences, the children would be encouraged to write more now and in the future. There are strategies teachers can use to help foster this love of writing that Sanacore speaks of. Some of these strategies include building a professional attitude toward
writing in the school, providing extended blocks of time for writing, guiding children in a variety of writing experiences, helping writers to “go public”, having a visiting authors’ program, and inviting parents to be partners in promoting the lifetime writing habit (p. 8).

Writing in Elementary Education

Research suggests that children must have a solid phonemic background before they can be successful readers and writers. Bailey, Borczak, and Stankiewicz (2002) found that children that did not have a strong phonics background experienced difficulty in learning writing skills taught in school. One of the most important steps in learning to read and write is the development of letter-sound relationships. They also suggest that in using a whole-to-part strategy, the children will have a base to recognize familiar sounds in unfamiliar words. Allowing the children to take this technique they have learned and using inventive spelling in their writing lays an important groundwork to help further develop their phonemic awareness.

Bailey et al. (2002) suggested classroom activities to help children develop these phonemic skills to aid them in becoming more productive writers. Modeling proper writing, they state, is one of the most important activities teachers can use. The teacher also models and instructs in encoding strategies like segmenting, finding familiar word patterns, and word parts. Another suggested activity is to use word sorts in which the children use a hands-on approach to
manipulate letters to make words. They also felt the word wall is an important part for developing writers in the classroom.

According to Reimer (2001), “writing improves reading while reading improves writing” (p. 7). As children read books they are exposed to examples of good writing. They also see how writers express themselves on paper. Reimer (2001) notes that reading influences the children to become better writers. When children write they attach sounds to letters, which in turn helps them in reading. As children write, they may also begin to notice letter patterns in words.

**Writer’s Workshop**

Implementing the Writer’s Workshop once the children have a grasp of phonemic awareness and the basics of sentence structure will help the teacher teach the writing process and creative writing. Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore, and Dreznes (1998) state that teachers find it difficult to teach creative writing in the classroom. Reasons for not teaching creative writing include students’ lack of interest in writing, students’ poor attitude toward writing, lack of teacher modeling, and insufficient time to implement creative writing into the schedule. To pique student interest in writing, Calkins (1986) suggests letting the students write about their interests. She states that students do have interests they share with others but they keep these internally until the day’s end. Calkins (1986) also states that a predictable time should be set aside for writing. This way, students can plan their writing activities for the day and may already be thinking about
what they want to write. Besides the predictable time, a large block time should be set aside. Graves (1983) suggests a block of forty-five to fifty minutes four days a week. He states that if we just have the students write one to two times a week that is just enough time to remind the students that they can not write.

Large, Maholovich, Hopkins, Rhein, and Zwolinski (1997) found that possible causes of poor writing in elementary age students were the lack of skills needed to be effective writers and the lack of appropriate teacher training to effectively teach writing skills. This lack of skills experienced by the students leads them to become quickly frustrated with their written work. Adams (1995) found that “one of the greatest challenges regularly faced in the teaching of writing methods to pre-service teachers is the students’ lack of models for process writing” (p. 3). Adams (1995) realized the importance of teaching the writing process to elementary education majors so these students would be able to model effective writing practices in the classroom.

Through interventions that were put in place to remedy the lack of creative writing in the classroom, Colantone et al. (1998) noted an improvement in creative writing. These interventions included Daily Oral Language to teach correct use of capitalization, grammar and punctuation, and the teacher introducing mini-lessons followed by a pre-write activity and a writing session. Mini-lessons could include but were not limited to the teacher modeling the corrections of punctuation, grammar, and capitalization through Daily Oral
Language sessions. Graves (1994) uses his mini-lessons to teach the conventions of writing. First, he would give a mini-lesson whole group then work with small groups of children who still displayed difficulties with the concept. Graves (1994) provided an extensive list of topics that could be used for mini-lessons such as, conventions of writing, grammar, and choosing a topic. Mini-lessons could also include brainstorming, which was another intervention used by Colantone et al. (1998) to organize ideas. Brainstorming can be done whole group to show various strategies for formulating ideas for a topic. A shared writing experience with the teacher modeling from teacher work or student work can be used during the intervention to model sentence structure and editing.

Strategies

Adams, Power, Reed, Reiss, and Romaniak (1996) agree with the idea of implementing a Writer’s Workshop to improve writing skills. They cite that a writing workshop is a possible solution to teach writing because it includes four key routines: mini-lessons, the writing workshop itself, sharing time, and class conference. Mini-lessons focus on targeted skills, which include but are not limited to capitalization, punctuation, word spacing, and the use of descriptive words. Writer’s Workshop occurs on a consistent basis and takes students through the writing process. The writing process involves brainstorming, writing a first draft, revising, editing, and publishing the writing piece.
Ray (2001) identifies essential characteristics that are in place in many Writer’s Workshops and that show themselves in various ways as the children write daily. These characteristics include choice about content. The students decide what it is they will write about. Ray (2001) gives the definition of writing as “having something to say, and it is the writer’s right to decide what this will be, to decide what he or she wants to say” (p. 23). Another essential characteristic is that students should work on their writing for a sustained block of time, every day in the Writer’s Workshop. Ray (2001) also states that Writer’s Workshops should have a lot of rigorous teaching going on, which can happen in many forms. This could be whole-class, small-group, one-on-one as the teacher conferences with individual students, as well as the teaching that occurs when students share from the strategies and techniques they are using to get their writing done.

Writers also need to talk about their writing, which is another essential characteristic identified by Ray (2001). Sometimes writers just need to be heard. The response from others through talking could offer the writer assistance in making the writing clearer to the audience. During Writer’s Workshop there are also periods of focused study. Some of the topics for this focused study could be writer’s notebook, various text structures in writing, conventions of writing, point of view in writing, the process of publication, or a particular genre. During this time the teacher is doing some direct teaching; however, the student is still choosing what to write about. One of the essential characteristics, publication
rituals, is the expectation that students will be working toward publication on various writing projects throughout the year.

Ray (2001) writes that other essential characteristics of Writer’s Workshop are high expectations and safety. The children are expected to write everyday in Writer’s Workshop. But, it is also a safe environment for everyone. A safe environment is a place where even the struggling students can work to the best of their ability. The last essential characteristic Ray (2001) refers to is structured management. Writer’s Workshop is a place that is highly structured because the students must learn how to use the room during the workshop; how to manage the supplies; how to manage time, writing, and sharing; what the publication expectations and structures are; and how to figure out what to do next.

During the Writer’s Workshop, sharing and conferencing will also occur. Sharing his or her writing with peers allows the student to write for a wider audience. Conferencing with students is used to guide them through the writing process and to guide them through reflections about their writing. Anderson, Mallo, Nee, and Wear (2003) state the writing process used during writing workshop consists of prewriting, writing, revising, and publishing. Reimer (2001) adds one other component and states the writing process includes the stages of prewriting, writing, sharing and responding, revising, editing, and publishing. It would be up to the individual teacher to determine whether they would add the sharing and responding portion of the Writer’s Workshop. As the students move
through each stage, the teacher is modeling various parts of writing through mini-lessons.

Through the writing process, the students take ownership of their work and subsequently grow through the stages of the writing. Graves (1978) states much of students’ written expression was being done by completing workbook pages, penmanship, vocabulary, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar practice. Jackson (1996) found that teacher conferencing through Writer’s Workshop can accomplish teaching these same skills. And Graves (1994) states that these skills can be taught using the students’ own writing. By using students’ writing, the children have a vested interest in the writing.

The first stage of the writing process is prewriting. At this stage the writer brainstorms, or thinks of ideas to write about. There are many ways to begin the brainstorming process. Ray (2001) suggests using a writer’s notebook. The writer’s notebook goes with the children wherever they go. As an idea occurs to them or they observe something closely, they can write this in the notebook. When it comes time to think of a topic to write about during Writer’s Workshop, the children already have a bank of ideas from which to draw upon.

In an attempt to get students to organize their writing, Capretz, Ricker, and Sasak (2003) find the use of graphic organizers helpful. Graphic organizers can be in the form of webs, maps, diagrams, and grids. These graphic organizers can be used to help guide the students through the stages of the writing process by
keeping the information in a sequential order. According to James, Abbott, and Greenwood (2001) by “using graphic organizers the teacher was able to provide explicit instruction in the often abstract writing concepts of a writer’s workshop” (p. 33). Once the children brainstormed a topic they used the graphic organizer to organize the topic. The information from the graphic organizer is then used to write sentences about their topic. James et al. (2001) cite research by Griffin (1995) and Robinson and Keiwra (1995) in which children with special needs made great gains in their writing and this was attributed to the use of graphic organizers. The graphic organizers allow the instructor to provide the concrete steps necessary to ensure success for all students.

As the students work through the process and begin to write, Poindexter and Oliver (1998) suggest that during the rough draft stage, the children write on every other line to make it easier for revising and editing. Harp and Brewer (1996) suggest that when the children are in the drafting stage, they focus on the content and not the mechanics. Conferences teachers have with their children during this stage should also focus on the content rather than the mechanics. Poindexter and Oliver (1998) feel that if the children limit what they write only to words they know how to spell, their writing will be stifled.

Adams et al. (1996) cite Pflaum’s (1986) assertion that students need to gain another perspective of their work. This can be accomplished by teaching the students peer editing. With this the teacher is not the main audience. The students
can get a different perspective of their writing by sharing their writing with their peers. However, to make peer editing successful, the teacher needs to properly model the technique with the students. Reimer (2001) suggests setting up rules for this portion of the writing process to prevent inappropriate remarks. First, the writer should read the piece of writing out loud to the listener. The listener should be conscious of the other person’s feelings. In responding it is helpful if the audience states something positive about the writing before asking probing questions of the writer. The listener also wants to be sure the writing piece was received correctly by stating back to the writer some of the key points.

Graves (1994) advocates using the “author’s chair.” This term was coined as Graves and Hanson did research with a teacher, Ellen Blackburn Karelitz. When using the author’s chair the audience needs to listen closely to what the author’s story is about. When responding, the audience must first tell the author all they remember about the story. Graves (1994) then puts a limit of two to the number of reminders. Reminders are the stories the audience has that are triggered by the author’s story. Once the “remembers” and “reminders” are aired the audience may ask the author questions about the story.

Environment

Classroom environment is critical in creating an atmosphere that will promote writing, sharing of work, conferencing, and space to store folders. Atwell (1987) suggests that to make the most of the writing experience it is important to
establish a physical climate and room arrangement. She suggests clustering students’ desks, providing an area for small-group conferencing, an area for large-group conferencing, a place for an author’s chair, and someplace to store the writing folders. Supplies that writers will need are placed within reach.

Lapp and Flood (1993) also feel that writers need an appropriate environment, materials with which to write as well as an area to confer with the teacher and peers. An area should be designated in the room for conferences, a study area where students can go for information, a place for independent work, and a place to share their work with the class. The independent writing area should be supplied with paper, pencils, crayons, and other writing tools, while the research area should contain dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopedias, books, and plenty of reference materials.

**Motivation**

Haley-James (1981) states there is the need for teachers to let the children dialogue before and during the writing process.

Authorities such as Sterling Leonard (1917), Ruth Carlson (1970), and Donald Murray (1973, 1978) have recommended the following steps: (1) guide children first to talk about their topics and what they want to do with them, (2) ask them to write about the topics, and (3) confer with the writers while they are writing. (p. 10)
The use of dialoguing during the writing process supports what King and Rental (1982) found as cited by Lu (2000). They “investigated the development of complexity in children’s story writing during the first two years of schooling. They found that as children’s oral skill develops, the complexity of their writing increased accordingly” (p.3).

Gau, Hermanson, Logar, and Smerek (2003) offer strategies for improving students’ writing abilities and motivation to participate in writing as the children’s oral language skills develop and their writing becomes more complex. The strategies include journaling, writing across the curriculum, student choice and interest in topic, and Writer’s Workshop. They found that journal writing gives students opportunities for reflection and a safe place to write. Writing across the curriculum allows the teacher to teach more writing throughout the day. Student choice allows the students to write about things that are meaningful to them. Atwell (1998) states that writing workshop is a student-centered approach to writing. Johnson (2001) found that when students chose the topic, they had a personal vested interest in the material. Graves (1983) found that children wrote more when the teacher did not assign the writing assignment topic:

The data show that writers who learn to choose topics well make the most significant growth in both information and skills at the point of best topic. With best topic the child exercises strongest control, establishes ownership, and with ownership, pride in the piece. (p. 21)
During these assignments he also found that the children went through the prewriting, writing, and post-writing stages of writing. And the Writer’s Workshop, as stated by Gau et al. (2003), is a powerful tool to teach writing instruction where the focus initially would be the substance of the material.

When a student’s writing piece is in its polished state it is time to publish the work. Smith (2003) uses Manning’s (1998) definition of the term “publish,” stating that it means a writer shares his or her writing with the public. Smith (2003) states that by publishing a student’s work it gives the student meaning and purpose for writing. Some suggested methods for publication were offered by Smith. These include Author’s Chair and publishing. Publishing could be as simple as displaying student work on the walls in the classroom or school hallways for all to see. Publishing could also be in a more complex model of making a book cover and putting the work in the classroom or school library for all to enjoy. Smith (2003) also suggests using classroom and school newspapers. Smith (2003) cites Lund and Sanderson (1999) by saying that newspapers for publishing allow the students to make sense of real language in real context.

The style of the Writer’s Workshop can vary depending upon a teacher’s own style. Strech (1994) set up the basic components of Writer’s Workshop to start with a mini-lesson for about ten minutes followed by a status of the class where the students share what stage of the writing process they are currently at. This is followed by twenty to thirty minutes of writing time. The Writer’s
Workshop ends with group share, which lasts about ten minutes. Gau et al. (2003) reiterate that a set block of time should be set aside daily to do Writer’s Workshop. They state the writing becomes easier as the process is done on a consistent basis.

Sanacore (1995) agrees that writing should be done on a consistent basis and that extended blocks of time should be set aside for writing each day. He states that writing is a recursive act and as the students become more involved with the writing process they will reflect on their writing, modify their ideas and conference with the teacher and their peers. Therefore, longer blocks of time would be beneficial to ensure the students can work through this process uninterrupted.

How to assess the writing piece is a concern for teachers. Essex (1996) finds that most teachers feel creative writing is difficult to grade because of the subjective nature of writing. Teachers further feel that if there is no fair way to assess the writing then it would be difficult to monitor growth and progress. Glazer (1994) states that assessment of writing can be practical, useful, and fair but the teacher needs to clearly communicate the consistent criteria for which the work will be graded. The criteria to focus on for the evaluation could be description in writing, organization, and punctuation. However, it would be the decision of the teacher to decide the criteria to assess as long as the students are aware of these before the writing begins.
In summary, there are strategies to use in the classroom to teach writing to beginning writers. Writer’s Workshop is one such strategy that can be used to teach the writing process. Mini-lessons, peer editing, and teacher conferencing are used in Writer’s Workshop to teach the writing process as well as the conventions of writing. The conventions of writing include capitalization, punctuation, space between words, and use of describing words in writing. Creating an environment conducive to writing stimulates writers. The research suggests that Writer’s Workshop is a powerful tool to use in the classroom to teach the writing process and conventions of writing to beginning writers.
METHODS

The school where this study was conducted is nestled in a growing community in the northeast. Sprawling farmland is quickly being replaced with housing developments. This in turn creates rapid growth in the community and many new students each year. Many of the new students enroll in this school throughout the year. The school currently has 601 students enrolled in the Kindergarten through grade five setting. There are twenty-five teachers that currently teach at this school and one principal. This school recently acquired a modular with two classrooms in it to accommodate the growing enrollment.

The classroom in which this study took place is a self-contained classroom. The children leave the room for Art, Music, Library, and Physical Education. In the classroom, the desks are arranged in five groups of four desks in each group. There are five student computers and one teacher computer. There is a table for the writing center with all the paper and materials needed for writing. An area to store the children’s writing folders, and a place for the reference materials is located in close proximity to the writing table. The classroom has two word walls and a place on the wall for seasonal words. There is a magnetic chalkboard and a door that leads to the back playground area in addition to the hallway door. A sink area with water fountain and a bathroom are also in this classroom.
This class was a class of nineteen students. At the end of the study, there were eleven boys and eight girls. The children were first grade students aged six and seven years old. During the course of the study one girl moved out of state and one boy joined our class. I obtained permission slips from all twenty students. The socioeconomic status of the majority of the students is middle class.

During the course of the study, I followed the ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity of the students remained intact. Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001) suggest guidelines to follow that guarantee this will occur. At the onset of the study I sent out consent forms to notify the students and their parents that I would ensure the children’s confidentiality by using pseudonyms to protect their identity. The children were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. If a student did decide to withdraw from the study, they were made aware that there would be no penalty or consequence for doing so. However, the children were still required to participate in regular classroom activities which were the activities that occurred during Writer’s Workshop. The parents and students were also given phone numbers to contact my research advisor, the principal, or myself if any questions arose about the study.

I talked with the children and let them know that I am conducting a study in the classroom. They were told that they are participants in the study. I used each child in the classroom for observations, surveys, and student work. I involved the students in setting up rules for Writer’s Workshop to ensure that the
students were full participants in the study. The children also helped me think of topics to write about during the mini-lessons. During the course of the study the children were informed as to how the study was progressing. Keeping the students informed throughout the study allowed them to be full participants in the study.

My struggles with teaching writing to my first grade students led me to pursue a change in the way I taught writing. I found Writer’s Workshop to be a technique that offered the most promising approach to teach the writing process and many aspects of writing to my children. The major objective of my research was to implement a writing program through which my students would enjoy writing, be able to write a well-written writing sample with a beginning, middle and end, and to use the proper conventions. My research study was designed to take into account the children’s reluctance to write and their lack of phonemic awareness when they write.

Before my study could actually start, I had to be sure that my planned research would be ethical and would not harm the children in any way. I accomplished this by presenting my study to Moravian College’s Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). My study was reviewed by the board who determined that the children’s safety and confidentiality would not be an issue. The HSIRB approval letter can be found in Appendix A.

Prior to the start of the school year, I set a physical climate for a Writer’s Workshop classroom by clustering the children’s desks, arranging writing
materials, writing folders, and resource materials. All materials were located in an area of the room where the children had easy access to them. Writing posters and word walls were put up on the walls in clear view for the children to see. I gathered a permission slip from the school principal (Appendix B) and one from each student in the class who wanted to participate in the study (Appendix C).

To determine student interest in writing, I administered a writing survey to the students (Appendix D). This same survey was administered at the conclusion of the study to determine if attitudes toward writing had changed over the course of the study. The first week of school the students completed a writing sample with a teacher prompt (Appendix E) so I had baseline data of my students’ writing skills at the beginning of my research.

A writing block of forty minutes was set aside five days a week. The first five weeks of the study focused on phonics instruction and conventions of writing. Each day the writing block began with a mini-lesson, followed by me modeling the skill. The writing block ended with the children practicing the targeted skill. Week One focused on letter-sound relationships and working with words in which the students made words using letter cards. An example of one day’s letter cards can be found in Appendix F. During this time, word families were introduced to demonstrate to the children how new words could be made from familiar words. The next week focused on inventive spelling techniques and
utilizing the word wall to assist the children in writing words they may know how to read, but may not know how to spell.

Beginning with week three and continuing through weeks four and five, the mini-lessons focused on the conventions of writing. These included capitalization, space between words, and punctuation. As a consistent practice of the conventions of writing, Daily Oral Language was introduced early in the school year. As part of their morning warm-up, the children would correct two Daily Oral Language sentences. A sample page is located in Appendix G. These sentences contained punctuation, capitalization, and grammatical errors. The children found the errors and wrote the sentences in the correct form.

Implementation of Writer’s Workshop began during the sixth week of the study. It began with an explanation of how Writer’s Workshop would work. Students learned where materials for the workshop would be kept as well as where to find their writing folder and what is to be kept in the folder. Writer’s Workshop is a way to teach the writing process. The ultimate goal of Writer’s Workshop is to create an atmosphere where all the children work independently through the writing process.

The writing process consists of the following stages: prewriting, writing, sharing/revising, editing, and publishing. During the prewriting stage the students generated ideas that they used to compose a piece of writing at a later time. The students chose their own topics and did not receive prompts from me. Methods
used during the prewriting stage included clustering or making a web, free writing, reading to gain ideas, and graphic organizers. An example of a graphic organizer is located in Appendix H. Ray (2001) suggested that students keep a writer’s notebook with them at all times. As an idea occurs to the students or they observe something, they write it in their writer’s notebook. This gives the children a ready bank of ideas from which to draw on during Writer’s Workshop. At the beginning of the school year I gave each child a writer’s notebook to record ideas or observations. On the inside front cover of each notebook I taped a suggested list of ideas to write in the notebook (Appendix I). A parent letter was sent home to explain how to use the writer’s notebook (Appendix J).

From the prewriting stage the students moved to the writing or drafting stage. This is the stage when the students put their ideas onto paper. I modeled this step by writing with the students. It was very important to model during this stage so the students could see the possible struggles that could occur as I tried to put ideas in written form. As I modeled I showed the children how to sound out words, use the room to find words, and how to use inventive spelling. These model pieces of writing were made on chart paper or transparency so I could use them during editing at a later stage. During the drafting stage we did not worry about correct spelling, punctuation, or other mechanics of writing. The point of this stage was to get the ideas down on paper. Reimer (2001) suggests that during this stage there is five minutes of uninterrupted writing at the beginning of the
Writer’s Workshop. It is stated that during this time, as students are forced to work on their own, they may learn to solve their own problems where writing is concerned.

Once the students had a written piece they were ready to share with peers. I modeled this step of sharing a work in progress by using an earlier writing sample. The students learned to listen to the author then ask questions about the writing or offer suggestions. To ensure that the students in the audience did not ask inappropriate questions or criticize what the author has written, I first modeled appropriate responses. A guide of appropriate questions was available so the children had something to reference (Appendix K).

The next step of the writing process was to revise what the students had written. The ideas for the revisions came from ideas the students received after sharing their work with others in the class. Reimer (2001) states that revision is not the time for editing. During the revision stage the students added, deleted, and refined what they had written. Graves (1983), suggests that adding information should come before deleting information. At this point of the writing process I asked guiding questions of the children. I did not offer to change the students’ writing as this would have taken away ownership from the children.

Editing is the stage where the students worked on the mechanics of their writing. During this stage the students checked for errors in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, word order, and sentence structure. An observation
checklist can be found in Appendix L. I modeled for the students how to read their writing slowly and to search for errors rather than to read the writing piece for content. During this stage the children learned how to use a dictionary to help find the correct spelling of words. Publishing is the stage when the students made a finished, polished copy of their writing piece. Because of the short amount of time we had for this study, the children hand wrote the finished copy of their story. Other options available to the children to use for publishing were the computer and blank books.

Each stage of the writing process was introduced at two week intervals during Writer’s Workshop. However, the students continued to move through the writing process at their own pace to create writing pieces. The students were not placed into groups for Writer’s Workshop. If I noticed a few students had difficulty with a particular skill, I would work with that group to ensure they understood the concept. I also circulated through the classroom conferencing with individual students.

This was a qualitative study using qualitative data analysis (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1998). Data for my study were collected using various forms. I made daily observations while the children were writing, I collected student writing samples, I administered a student survey at the beginning and the end of the study, and I conducted interviews. This triangulation as stated by Hubbard and Power (2003) helps to build a compelling case for what has been discovered. One part of the
data I collected consisted of observations I made during Writer’s Workshop. I then typed up these observations and reflected on them. These observations and reflections were coded and put into themes. I looked for recurring themes within my observations to determine what was occurring in the study. As Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1997) state, “a theme can be defined as a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact.” (p. 206). As I made my observations in the classroom, I included anything that was pertinent to my study. This would also include observations when I felt that Writer’s Workshop was not going as I had expected. With the reflection pieces I added to the observations I tried to tell as completely as possible what transpired for that observation.

To be certain that I gathered data that would paint a complete picture, I collected student work to analyze. I used a rubric to assess the writing (Appendix M). This rubric is based on the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) rubric used to score writing on the state tests. The rubric was posted in the room so the children were aware of what was expected of them. I created a rubric checklist so I could easily assess how the children scored overall (Appendix N). I had the children complete a writing sample at the beginning of the study so I had baseline data of student writing abilities. Throughout the study I
collected student work from their journals and writing folders. These writing samples documented the children working through the writing process.

I administered a student survey at the onset of the study to determine student interest in writing. I wanted to see if the children enjoyed writing in school and out of school and what type of writing they preferred. An identical survey was given at the conclusion of the study to determine if attitudes toward writing had changed over the course of the study. In addition to the surveys, I conducted an informal interview about halfway through the study. I simply asked the children how they felt about writing. I hand wrote their responses so I was not able to interact as much as I would have liked with their responses and have them elaborate more. I gave one more informal interview again at the end of the study. Again, I asked the children how they felt about writing. I was able to probe a little further this time with some of the responses and questioned some of the children a little further.

A possible bias that could surface during my study may be that because the writing process has become easy for me, I may feel that everyone in the class should be able to write coherent stories with ease. To ensure this did not occur, I was sure to model writing each day at the start of our writing block. I conferenced with the children as often as possible to be sure they understood the concepts that had been taught.
THIS YEAR’S STORY

The class I had this year started off as any other class I had in the past. There were those challenging students and then there were those students on the other end of the spectrum that loved challenges. Because of my own hesitations about teaching writing to my students I was a little apprehensive about how this research study would take root with the mixed ability class I had. I decided to go about the study day by day.

I felt that the children needed daily practice on the mechanics, punctuation, and grammar of writing. Daily Oral Language (DOL) offered these important aspects of writing practice. I implemented DOL the first week of school. During the first week of school the children traced over the DOL sentences that were typed as a dashed tracing font. Then they wrote the corrected sentences on a blank line. Starting with the second week, the children used the regular format DOL sheet in which they wrote the sentence in the correct form. Daily Oral Language was done on a daily basis. I wanted to introduce this to the children early in the year so they would learn to recognize grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization errors before they began to write on their own. I was very discouraged the first few days of DOL. The amount of time this seemingly simple task consumed was eye opening. Each day I kept at it though hoping that with time this would soon become second nature for the children and they would move through the two sentences with ease.
To get an idea of the children’s writing abilities at the onset of the school year I gave the children a writing prompt in which they wrote about what they did over the summer. I asked the children to write as much as they could about what they did. The results show that out of 19 students there were zero students that got a four in focus, content, organization, style, and conventions. The majority of the scores fell below basic which would be a rubric score of a two or a one.

For Writer’s Workshop I wanted the children to come up with their own ideas to write about. However, I know from past experience that as soon as I tell the children to write about whatever they want, they can rarely think of something to write about. To remedy this, I gave each child a Writer’s Notebook. I told the children they could take this with them wherever they went. When they saw something interesting or thought of something that could be a story, they should write it in their notebook or draw a picture of it. This way, when it came time to write, they would be able to look in their notebook and find something to write about. Because modeling is such an important part of all aspects of the Writer’s Workshop, I modeled for the students with a Writer’s Notebook of my own. I shared an entry with the children of some wild turkeys I saw crossing the street on my way to school one day. When I gave each child his or her Writer’s Notebook you would have thought I gave them the world. Looking back on it, maybe I did. The following day I was curious to see if any of the children shared their Writer’s
Notebook with their family. Parents were very enthusiastic about the idea and most of the children had already begun to write in their notebook.

Early on I could see how the Writer’s Notebook might be a valuable tool when the children write. The following play depicts the early stages of a writing session that demonstrates the amount of confusion, insecurities, children helping each other, and the accomplishments that occurred in a short amount of time.

**Play: “What Do We Do?”**

**TEACHER:** Today in your One Hundred Day journal I would like you to draw a picture of whatever you would like and write a sentence about it.

**JESSICA:** Do we have to write about something we want?

**TEACHER:** No, write about whatever you want.

**NICHOLAS:** Can it be something you do?

**TEACHER:** It can be about whatever you want.

**LAILA:** I am going to draw a picture of me marrying my Writer’s Notebook.

_Elena points to her picture._

**ELENA:** Mrs. O’Leary, look the wind is blowing.

**TEACHER:** Good, why don’t you write a sentence about it?

**ELENA:** OK

**MATTHEW:** Do I have to write a sentence?

**TEACHER:** Yes

**MATTHEW:** Aw, I don’t have one.
Matthew sounding out “went.”

SHELBY: I helped him write “went.”

Looking at Matthew’s journal, “went” is spelled “wot.”

RONALD: Mrs. O’Leary, look.

Ronald’s journal entry: one dea i sow a red. Translation: One day I saw a rainbow.

RYLIE: Do we have “flag” in our dictionary?

TEACHER: I’m not sure, but you spelled it right.

RYLIE: Cool!

Phonemic awareness is another area of concern for beginning writers. I wanted to be sure the children had an understanding of how to form words and sound out words confidently. First the children learned how to make rhyming words from known words. The children were very excited when I showed them the word “like” on our word wall. After some hesitation at first the children helped make words that rhyme with “like,” then used the words to make sentences. As the children tried to make sentences on their own, I started to see the insecurities surface. James’s sentence contained four words: “Mike went to Nike.” “I don’t like to write,” he told me. I asked if he could put more in his sentence. He came back with, “Mike went home to ride his bike.” I knew the children had it in them; it just needed the chance to emerge. As I circulated around the room, there was a sudden flurry of questions which revealed many
children were unsure of what they needed to do. My own insecurities about teaching writing would not get in the way this time.

In order to help the children see how to make new words we used letter tiles in which the children could manipulate the letters to make new words. I modeled for the children how to start with one word and then change the first letter to make a new word. I have been very conscious about modeling everything that I do in writing. I am also very aware of the amount of time I have taken for each writing session. It is my hope that the time invested will give the children the strategies they need so they will need less time to complete these writing tasks in the future. One particular day we were using letter tiles to make rhyming words. I modeled for the children how to make new words from familiar words, write the words on a white plastic plate, then how to use those words to make sentences on the dry erase board. I had the children try some on their own. The following poem captures the essence of our first attempt.
Poem: “Learning to Write in Rhyme”

LEARNING TO WRITE IN RHYME

Time to rhyme. Is everyone ready?

I will model how. You try now.

It takes so much time – this concept of rhyme.

It will be okay. I hope, one day.

We have one – The man sol a rat.

Where is the rhyme? They have to rhyme?

Look at my plate – the tap cat

Look at my tiles – top

Show me “cat.” What rhymes? “rat”

Can you make another? Would it be “sat?”

It takes so much time - this concept of rhyme.

To be sure the children understood this concept we made new words with letter tiles for a week. Each day the children worked with more confidence and made many words and sentences. As I walked around the room Nicholas and Michael showed me their rhyming words. Nicholas excitedly turned to Michael and said, “Let’s make sentences with rhyming words.” The excitement around the room was quite contagious as the children made sentences with their rhyming words.
In addition to making new words from familiar words by using the rhyme, I wanted the children to learn how to stretch words out to spell the word the best they could. As I modeled how to write a paragraph using words that are difficult to spell, I wanted to use the word “August.” All the children got very excited and start yelling and pointing. I asked, “What is the matter?” They told me I could find “August” on the birthday cakes in the front of the room. I had one of the children spell the word for me.

We continued to use this strategy in writing for a week. Each day I modeled for the children how to stretch words out that I used in my paragraph. The children helped me spell these words. I wrote exactly what the children told me to write. I have never modeled writing as much as I have done for my study. I see how this has been very valuable for the children. When I walked around the room as the children wrote in their journals I heard them pulling words apart and sounding out unfamiliar words.

The next strategy I wanted to teach the children was how to use the room to help them spell words they wanted to use in their writing. I modeled for the children how to write a paragraph. They helped me stretch out unfamiliar words and they helped find words around the room to use in my story. We worked on this strategy for a few days in a row. I noticed how nice it was to reinforce these skills repeatedly. I have never done this before and I think the children are getting
a better handle on the concept with this repetition. I have noticed that the children are writing with more confidence.

As the children were learning these new strategies to use in their writing they seemed to get right to work when they got back to their seat. However, there were days when it seemed as though every student in the room had a question all at the same time. On one particular day, though, the children just kept calling out my name and asking questions without raising their hand. The room seemed quite chaotic. I remembered Graves’ (2001) suggestion that children should write for a set block of time without asking the teacher for help. I asked the children to stop writing. I told them, “From now on you will not be allowed to say my name for the first ten minutes of writing. You may talk to each other and help each other out but you will not be allowed to ask me for help.” It was exciting to hear the room in those next few minutes after I implemented this new rule. There was such a great buzz around the room as the children were helping each other sound out words or reading what they wrote to each other. It had to be the best moment so far.

Although the children had daily practice using capitals in sentences with DOL, I wanted the children to practice this using their own writing. For each paragraph I modeled, we still stretched out words and used the room to help us spell words. One day, I needed the word “back” spelled. Nicholas enthusiastically raised his hand and said we could get the word from the computer. I was curious.
He said we could find the word from the backspace button on the computer. It was so exciting seeing the children using all these resources around the room. Not only were they using the resources around the room, they were using each other as a resource. Since the children were not allowed to say my name for ten minutes I have witnessed conversations between the children as they helped each other to spell words they wanted to write.

Next I introduced how to use quotation marks. The concept of using quotation marks seemed a little obscure at this point. To model quotation marks in writing I used sticky notes that are in the shape of a speech bubble. After I modeled using quotation marks for the children, I had them use the sticky notes in their picture and quotation marks in their writing. The examples in Figure 1 on page 41 demonstrate that this is a topic that we would need to revisit. A couple of students such as Rylie and Caitlin seemed to understand the concept of using quotation marks. Michael and Jack, however, appeared to just keep the conversation going from the speech bubbles to the writing as the samples in Figure 1 demonstrate. Michael and Jack were not isolated cases.
Once the children had some of the mechanics of writing, they were ready to add describing words to their writing. I found it necessary and helpful to repeat these lessons for a few days. The children were asked to write so that the reader would be able to picture what they were writing about. Each day Alexis would write about her mom and cat and that she loves them. Since we were working on describing words I asked her to describe her cat. Moments later her writing was still void of describing words. She did not know how to spell her cat’s name so she would not continue on. The children learned the strategy of stretching the word to sound it out, but Alexis seems to want to get this word spelled right. I helped her spell her cat’s name. However, she was still unable to provide words to describe her cat.

Since we had been writing now for a few weeks, I wanted to get an idea of how the children were enjoying their writing block. I asked the children, “Now that we have had some time to write, how do you feel about writing?” This pastiche tells how the children felt about writing at the time of the interview.
Now I used to write as much as I did before
and now it seems a lot more fun.

I feel happy.

Like, I used to think writing was not fun because you
used to think you maybe didn’t do things you want to
do. But it is fun because you get to write about things
you want to.

Whenever we take Stephanie to dance I have something to do.

What do you mean?

I take my Writer’s Notebook and I write in it.

When I write I feel happy because I used to not know
that I would be able to sound out words. But now that
I learned how to sound out words I actually like
writing.

HAPPY!

I feel good.
Writer’s Workshop: The Journey

It has been about five weeks since the beginning of my study. The children have learned many strategies to help them write with confidence. It was time to begin the actual act of Writer’s Workshop. It was an exciting time for the children. They were responsible for getting their writing folder, which on some days took forever. I wanted the atmosphere for Writer’s Workshop to be a positive one. The classical music, mostly Vivaldi: The Four Seasons, played in the background, the children talked to each other, listened to each other’s stories, and helped each other spell words. The children were allowed to walk around the room to look for words, get paper, a dictionary, or whatever they needed for writing. I wanted to trust the children. I was not sure, however, if I gave them this extra freedom if they would take advantage of it and waste the whole time wandering. I decided to trust. I did not want to focus on the movement of the children. I wanted to focus on their actual writing.

Writer’s Workshop seemed to move along smoothly. One day, I had four or five children calling my name at the same time. I looked to the area where I kept the folders, paper, and dictionaries, there were six children pushing and shoving to get what they needed. I asked the children to return to their seats. I told them it was time we set up rules for Writer’s Workshop. The children made up the rules we would use to guide our behavior during the writing time. I was struck by
how the children knew the rules that they should follow. They needed to see these rules in concrete form in order to adhere to them.

Now that the children have a somewhat better grasp on using unfamiliar words in their writing, stretching words to sound them out, and making words from unfamiliar words we were ready to begin the writing process in Writer’s Workshop. The children already had a bank of ideas started from their Writer’s Notebook. I wanted to show the children how to take their ideas and begin to organize them. I showed the children how to make a web to organize their thoughts. They put the main idea of what they wanted to write about in the center of the web. Supporting details branched off the center of the web.

To help the children use detail in their writing, I taught them how to use their five senses to help them think of details to support their main idea. I modeled for the children how to put the main idea in the center of the web, then the five senses around the center. Some of the children seemed to understand how to use the web to write details about their main topic. The sample in Figure 2 on page 46 of Nathan’s web shows he wrote about dodge ball as his main idea.
Nathan’s Web

Originally, the supporting ideas were about his friends playing dodge ball with him. I redirected him to use his senses to tell about playing dodge ball. As I explained this to him, his eyes lit up. I think he realized what he needed to do. Nathan was not the only child who had difficulty with this task. Elena’s web had the names of two boys from her group in the center of her web. The supporting details were what they like to see and eat. I knew at this point how important it was to model more than once the skill I was trying to teach.
I wanted to be certain the children understood the concept of using their five senses to think of details for their main topic. We used the topic of Thanksgiving for the main idea. I showed the children how to use the main idea and supporting details to make a story. I could tell by their faces that this concept was still quite obscure. As I walked around I noticed Nathan was wandering around the room. I reminded him to get to work. In the center of his web he had “my falle (family).” The detail on the outside was, “like to stay inside.” I tried to get Nathan back on track. He continued to work on his web. When I checked back to see how he was doing I saw that for the sense word, “touch”, he had “dor” (door). I asked him, “What does that have to do with touch?” Confidently he tells me that his family touches doors. I do not think he got the concept.

Nathan’s Story

Nathan was not in my class in the beginning of the year. He missed a lot of the beginning skills my students received. I could tell he was not used to the way we conducted our writing time. The children in my class became proficient at thinking about their own topic to write about. Nathan struggled with this concept. There were many days of Writer’s Workshop I would watch Nathan. He would just sit at his desk watching all the other children. One particular day I decided to check on Nathan to see how he was doing with his writing. I stood up, slowly approached Nathan’s desk and looked at his folder which was sitting on his desk closed. He had been sitting there for twenty-five minutes without doing a thing. I
was completely exasperated. I mustered the courage to ask him, “Why did you sit for the entire writing time without doing a thing?” He told me, “I did not know what to do.” I asked, “What should you have done?” He responded, “I tried to ask Jeffrey, but he did not hear me.” I did not say anything to Nathan. But I knew I would need to try to find a way to be sure the children remained on task while I work with other children in the classroom.

Hannah had been working on a web. The center circle was blank. On the outside she had, “fire smell” and “apple touch.” When I asked what the main idea was she said she forgot. I wondered how she could write details without a main idea. I saw that she was trying to think of something for a main idea but nothing would come to her. I realized that small groups would be an important part of Writer’s Workshop. I would be able to re-teach skills that children may not have gotten the first time they were introduced.

Now that the children had the general idea of how to make a web to organize their ideas, I thought they would be ready to write a story from the ideas in their web. I modeled for the children how the center of the web would be the main idea and the supporting details for their story were on the outside of the web. Laila and Jessica had quite a bit written. The samples in Figure 3 on page 49 demonstrate the sentences were coherent and they had the main idea and supporting details that were in their web.
Figure 3

Laila’s Web

Jessica’s Web

Laila’s Story

I have a kitten. It’s name is Angel. She is shy. She has spots and stripes. One morning I woke up and she was meet next to me. Then I went back to sleep. In the morning she looked at me from the hallway.

Jessicas Story

Olivia is nice.
As I read their writing, it took everything in me not to focus on the grammar, punctuation, and spelling. I had done this in the past when I conferenced with the children about their writing. I would look at these errors rather than the content of what they had written. This time, when I conferenced with the children, I remained focused on the content of their story. I praised them when their sentences all pertained to the main idea.

Some children were not too sure of how to use the web to make a story. The following layered story shows the struggles of Michael and Hannah when they tried to complete the task. My own thoughts are portrayed as I tried to help these children through this task.

Layered Story

Michael

Okay, I’m supposed to make a story from a web. Mrs. O’Leary said it could be about whatever we want. I want to write about my dog. “My dog” is in the middle of my web. My first sentence is “My dog.” What does she mean I need to introduce my dog? My dog is not even here. He can’t talk like a person. How can I introduce him? She said I need to tell his name and what my dog is like, so I told her, “His name is Sammy and his fur is brownish gold.” What more do I need to tell her?
Hannah

Okay, here I go. We are supposed to use one of our webs to write about whatever we want. I love my little brother. I think I’ll use my web about my brother to make a story. There, I wrote my sentences, three of them. Each sentence says, “I like my little brother.” Mrs. O’Leary is reading my sentences. She is telling me I need more detail. I told her his name. I am not sure why it needs to be on paper. She keeps asking for details. I’m not sure what she means.

Mrs. O’Leary

I wish Michael and Hannah would be able to write in more detail. Michael tends to daydream when I give directions so maybe he did not understand what to do. I see hesitation in Hannah’s writing when she is unsure of the spelling of a word. I know I keep asking for detail. Maybe Hannah is just writing words she is sure how to spell. When I sit with the children I do not want to put ideas in their writing as I had done in the past. I want them to become confident writers. I want them to know that they can write.

I was a bit nervous about introducing the concept of making a story from a web. I remember in years past that this would end in disaster. However, I think the first experience may have gone a little better because we worked through many of the mechanics of writing and the children seemed to have a better comfort level with writing than children I had in past years. I did not notice the
apprehension in the students as I had in previous years. I do not know if this can be attributed to the amount of time I have spent modeling, the safe writing environment, or the consistent writing time the children have received. What I have noticed is that I have done everything differently in writing than I had done in the past. I have also noticed that I have enjoyed teaching writing and the children seemed to genuinely enjoy their writing time.

There were days of Writer’s Workshop that were quite frustrating. Michael had the same two words, “My dog,” on his paper for two days. He had been playing with his pencil every time I looked at him. Ronald had finished what he was working on so he just sat at his desk. Hannah was watching Shelby who had knocked some coins off a shelf. These were the moments when I was not sure of how to handle the children that seemed to be wasting their writing time. I knew I could not be with each child each moment. I was not sure how to trust that the children I was not watching were working productively during our writing time.

Although there were those frustrating days, there were also those great days when I heard great writing conversations occurring. The chatter around the room would take on an air of real writers talking. Laila asked Rylie, “Could you listen to my story to see how it sounds?” Hannah asked Michael, “Can I read my story to you?” It was enlightening to see that the children were comfortable enough to share what they wrote with the others in the class.
One thing I have done for this study is to focus on a particular concept at least a few days in a row. I found that when the children saw the concept modeled, then, practiced it on their own, and had the pattern repeated for consecutive days, they were able to master the skill. Most of the students would master the skill after repeated practice. Other students needed more time. James was one such student. In the beginning of the year he told me honestly that he does not like to write. I was not discouraged by his comment. I kept working with him and watching him. Over time he started to write more and more during Writer’s Workshop. One day I sat with James when he was using one of his webs to make a story. He was using a picture dictionary to look up animals. His web had “the zoo” in the middle and on the outlying areas he had; see, smell, hear, and touch. When I read his story he had written, “I like the zoo animals.” He then listed all the zoo animals he saw at the zoo. When I asked him about his story he told me, “This summer I went to the zoo and I saw all these animals.” I told him that would be a good start to his story. He then read his list of animals to me. I did not want to tell him what to write, but he needed to narrow his focus and write in sentence form rather than list form. He told me his favorite animals at the zoo. We came up with the idea that he could write about some of his favorite animals at the zoo.

As I sat with one group to observe their writing behaviors, I glanced around the room to check on the other children. Michael was just staring into
space with the same piece of paper he had the day before. Nicholas was
sharpening his pencil with a hand held sharpener for about three minutes. Nathan
was just sitting at his desk. Jeffrey was resting his head on his arm. I was
reassured when I looked to Rylie’s group and they were working wonderfully.

I wanted the children to be full participants in all aspects of Writer’s
Workshop. I told the children that I had noticed that some children appeared to
just sit during Writer’s Workshop. Some children did not work during writing
time and I wanted help in figuring out a way we could prevent this from
happening. The children helped me to brainstorm ideas so this would not happen
again. Caitlin thought that if they saw someone just sitting there they could ask if
that person needed help. I told the children that sometimes they might get stuck in
their writing and that by talking to someone it could help the ideas come out. We
thought this would be a good thing to add to our rules for Writer’s Workshop. I
thought that if I brought up the point that I knew some children were not using
their writing time wisely that this would encourage everyone to try to work
harder.

One more time I had the children use one of their webs to make into a
story. The following play demonstrates how the children dialogued during
Writer’s Workshop.
Play: Writer’s Workshop Dialogue

_Elena is holding her web about frogs._

Elena: Meghan, can you listen to my web? Frogs can hop. I hop.

Meghan: That sounds good.

Elena: Oh, wait a minute! I don’t want “I hop” there. That doesn’t make sense.

_Elena replaces “I hop” with, “frogs hop on logs and lily pads.”_

Elena: I could write that frogs hop on logs and sometimes on lily pads.

Meghan: That would be good.

Elena: Thanks for you help, Meghan!

Meghan: You’re welcome.

It made me happy when Elena reread her work then realized that one of the parts of her web did not fit in with the main idea. As Elena talked to Meghan about what she had written I could see that she had already solved her own problem. It was almost as if a light went on when Elena told Meghan that she had a great idea about how she could write her story about frogs.

Each child had a writing folder. One problem I encountered with the children’s writing folders was the organization of the folders. I knew that many of the webs the children had in their folder were not going to go beyond the web stage but I was not sure how to help the children prioritize what they needed to keep. I have told the children many times during this study that this was a learning process for me. I told them that there may be things that we would do that may
change if it did not work well. I was beginning to rethink the folder situation and how I could help the children keep these folders organized.

One of my goals for Writer’s Workshop was for the children to become independent writers. On some days however, I found that the children would work only if they were being watched. Writer’s Workshop had gotten to the point where the children were at different stages of writing. There was activity occurring in all parts of the classroom. This may have been a contributing factor to what appeared to be children off-task or easily distracted. The following vignette shows a lesson when I learned to trust.

Vignette: James’s Story

The activity around the classroom did not affect all the children. James seemed to be able to get lost in his own world no matter what was going on. As I watched him he sat with his writing folder and his writer’s notebook closed. He was rocking back and forth on his chair just staring off into space. When he came out of his fog he looked around and asked where Hannah was. She had been gone for quite some time getting caught up on some missed tests. James sat at his desk staring off into space doing absolutely nothing, I was sure he had nothing written down. Further review of what he had completed revealed that he did have a coherent story about snakes. It did not completely match his web but he used the main idea of the web to write the story. This was a definite lesson in trust. It was not the first lesson I had learned, and it would certainly not be the last.
It was only in retrospect and after hearing a child’s comment that I realized that too much time and emphasis had been spent on the concept of using a web to make a story. I finally moved the children on to the next phase of the writing process which was how to revise a piece of writing. When I modeled this stage for the children I used a story we had previously written on chart paper. The children helped me think of ways to make the writing sound better. To make the changes in the writing I used a different color marker so the children could see the changes. When I set the children to task, I had them revise a piece of their own writing from their folder. Their revisions were blending in with their first draft because they used a pencil to make the revisions. I had the children use a colored pencil so they would be able to see the changes they made.

The children were truly using the revising techniques we had discussed earlier. Christopher wanted to know how to remove words from his writing. Jessica read me a story she was revising. As she read it to me, she realized she left a word out. It was exciting seeing the children using these revising techniques for their writing.

Most of the children seemed to understand how to revise a piece of writing. Nathan just sat at his desk with a blank piece of paper. I had him get a story from his folder he had worked on before. He had a story about his geckos. In his web he said they like to hide, but this was not mentioned in his story. I suggested how this might be good to add to his story. I walked away to see what
he would do. He wrote part of the sentence but then stopped and played with his pencil. I went back to see how he was doing. He said, “I can’t spell through.” I explained to Nathan that before he came to my class, I taught the children how to sound out words. I helped him sound out the word “through.” I told him anytime he was unsure of how to spell a word he could always sound it out. Nicholas was sitting in Nathan’s group and he offered to help him anytime he needed. It was great to see the children willing to help one another.

I found this episode to be interesting because Nathan was in our school since the beginning of the year, but in a different classroom. Therefore, he was not with me when I started my research study with my class. I had noticed that he had difficulties during our writing time. When I taught writing in the very beginning of the year I started off by teaching phonics skills, how to stretch words and sound them out, how to use the word wall, and other strategies to help the children write. The children in my class knew that at this point of the writing they should not be concerned with the spelling of a word. We wanted to get the ideas down on paper. There had been struggles along the way, but I was beginning to see confident writers emerge. It had occurred to me that because Nathan was not in my classroom at the start off the school year that he might have missed some of these important writing strategies.

I looked over to Nathan. He was very upset. He started to cry. When I asked him if everything was ok he would not respond. Again, Nicholas offered to
help him anytime he needed it. I was not sure where Nathan’s sadness was coming from. I tried to talk to him to let him know that everything would be ok. I wanted him to know that he could just continue at his own pace. I let him know that I would be there for him.

I watched as the children worked together through the writing process. James read a story he was working on about dinosaurs to Patrick. Patrick gave James some ideas on how he could change some of the words to make the story sound better. Jack read his story to the other children in his group. Rylie asked why he put “why” at the end of his story. When he could not give her a reason, he made the change. These were not isolated cases. I noticed that the children trusted each other enough to read their stories to each other and they accepted the comments and suggestions their classmates made.

As Writer’s Workshop progressed, I also noticed how the children would get right to work once they had their writing folder. They would find a writing sample they were working on, read it to a classmate and make changes to their writing.

I introduced the children to free writing as a method to use in place of making a web to organize their ideas. The children seemed to like this style of prewriting. They started to write about various topics. Alexis, who would always write about her mom and then just list names of people she knew started to write about other topics. The web was a difficult concept for her. She was unable to get
her thoughts from the web to story form. Once she was able to free write, she wrote a complete sentence. She wrote, “My mom picks flowers at the Walmart.” Alexis asked Caitlin if she spelled Walmart right. Caitlin told her she did not need to worry about the spelling right now.

After we had worked on the revisions, the children were ready to edit their stories. The children learned how to use the dictionary to look up words they were not sure how to spell. The children could either use their individual dictionary which had their high frequency words and words they use in their writing, or they could use a regular children’s dictionary.

Jack, however, could not find the word cousin anywhere so he walked around the classroom asking everyone how to spell cousin. Meghan remembered she had used the word in one of her stories so she looked through her folder for the word. Unfortunately, her search came up empty. I stepped in and helped Jack spell his word. As the children wrote and corrected their work, if a word was recognizable and the child had tried to find the word, I would leave the word as it was. If the children had some difficult words, I would help the children spell those words. The children caught on quickly on how to use the dictionary to look up words.

Because of the nature of Writer’s Workshop where the students work independently, I found it difficult at times to make sure each child remained on-task. I needed to learn to trust the children. I needed to trust that there was a
reason they were sharpening their pencil for five minutes. Some days of the Writer’s Workshop felt as though there were more off-task minutes than on-task minutes. One particular day felt something like a comedy skit.

Play: One of Those Days Plays

_The teacher is circulating around the room as the children write._

Jeffrey: What’s the date?

Nathan: How do you spell of?

Nicholas: I did every single one!

Jessica: 11/30/05

Nicholas: Mrs. O’Leary, I didn’t revise this one!

I didn’t revise this one!

_Michael is playing with his folder – until he notices me!_

_Matthew is reading the same paper and looking around – until he notices me!_

_Meghan is watching what Michael is doing – until she notices me!_

_Rylie is just staring – until she notices me!_

_Patrick is reading a story he made – oh finally!_

The children picked a story that they had revised and edited. They were ready to make a finished copy. Because we needed to get at least one story all through the writing process from brainstorming, to rough draft, to revising, to editing, and then finally to publishing before the end of the study, the children did not have much choice in how they published their story. Student samples in
Figure 4 and Figure 5, on page 63 show that the children wrote their stories and illustrated them.

Figure 4

Caitlin’s Finished Copy
Angel the new kitten. It was July I was going to get a new kitten. We went to the doctor's home after church than me and my family got Angel and we went home and I played with her.

Support carried her around the house. Then I walked a row and she jumped up on me and me, then and Norman watched the movie together with we were watching the move my mom.
I wanted to get an idea of how the children liked the way Writer’s Workshop had been going. I asked the children how they felt about writing. During this interview I could not write fast enough as every child wanted to share their feelings.

Play: Writer’s Workshop Interview

The teacher is sitting on the chair by the easel. The children are seated around the teacher waiting eagerly for what will happen next

TEACHER: How do you feel about writing?

RONALD: It’s fun. It’s really fun to always be doing it.

TEACHER: What do you mean?

RONALD: Every second of free time, during writing time we get to write.

RYLIE: I feel really good about it.

TEACHER: Why?

RYLIE: It’s fun and you get to make up your own story.

MATTHEW: I’m happy that I have my story printed out – finally!

NATHAN: A little excited about writing just because you get to get your stories and get to type on the computer.

CHRISTOPHER: Writing is fun.

TEACHER: Why?

CHRISTOPHER: Because you get to write a lot about what you’ve done or what you make up.
CAITLIN: It’s one of my favorite things to do in school because it is really fun and you get to pick what you want.

JESSICA: I love writing because it’s really easy. I found it’s not really hard and I can do it whenever I want.

NICHOLAS: It’s okay, but it’s pretty hard to think of the beginning of the story.

PATRICK: I usually like to write all the time and I just love doing it a lot.

ELENA: I really, really like writing because you can think about what to write. It can be real or make believe or it can teach you.

JAMES: Really, really, really fun because you can make up a lot of stories, more than one.

TEACHER: How do you feel about writing now?

JAMES: I feel better about it. I didn’t like to do the webs.

HANNAH: I really like writing a lot because you think about what you want to write about. It’s fun to think about what to write about.

PAUL: I really like it because some people help me and I get to do my own stories.

RONALD: I like about when you get to choose where you go to write because you can talk to your friends about ideas for your writing.

MICHAEL: I like it a little bit because I’ve gone to my third page.

CAITLIN: I’m getting lots of good ideas. It’s one of the best stories I’ve ever written. It’s just really fun to do.
NICHOLAS: I’m gonna have a funny story. I can’t wait to write it.

JACK: I think writing is pretty fun, but when you type and type on the computer it starts to get boring.

This interview shows that the children really enjoyed their writing time. The children had started to type their stories on the computer after they had a hand-written, edited, story. Writer’s Workshop allowed the children to choose their own topic to write about. When I conferenced with the children I was careful not to change the ideas they had. I found this to be an amazing experience. We have continued to write. The children truly enjoy their writing experience.
DATA ANALYSIS

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), “data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials” (p.157) that are gathered during the study to gain an understanding of the data and to be able to explain and present to others what the study has revealed. Hubbard and Power (2003) describe data analysis as a way of “seeing and then seeing again” (p.88). For this research study I have evaluated the data I collected throughout the course of the study using various forms of analysis.

A constant source of information was gathered through my fieldnotes and participant observations made during the study. I made my observations each day during writing and then reflected on those observations. These reflective memos enabled me to look back on what occurred during writing. By looking back, I was able to gain a better understanding of how Writer’s Workshop unfolded.

I wrote analytic memos to connect what was occurring in my study to the thoughts of such theorists as Dewey, Vygotsky, Delpit, and Friere. These perspectives helped me to see research from a theorist’s point of view. Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001) define an analytic memo as “a memo to yourself about what you see emerging as patterns of behavior, words, key ideas, events” (p.187). I also wrote an analytic memo about halfway into the study. This helped me to see
what common themes were emerging and if there were problems surfacing with
the study.

Next, I assigned codes to the various topics that occurred during my
observations and reflections. For example, if I wrote in my fieldnotes about
children not staying on task, I would write “Off-Task” in the margin. Ely, Vinz,
Downing, and Anzul (1997) look at coding as a way to label the data in the field
log. My list of over thirty codes included: teacher frustration, time, off-task,
teacher learning, self-confidence, independence, student enthusiasm, student
choice in writing, organization, hands-on practice, and strategies.

When the study was nearly complete, I took the codes and put them into
bins. The graphic organizer in Figure 6 on page 69 clearly showed the themes that
ran through my data. My research question was placed in the center of the web.
The topics that surrounded the question were various themes of what emerged
during the study as I reviewed my codes and organized them into bins. I was then
able to write theme statements from each of the bins. Ely et al. (1997) define
themes as “a statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the pertinent
data” (p. 206). These theme statements became the most important findings for
my study.

When I wrote my narrative story, I used a pastiche, vignette, a poem,
plays, and a layered story. Each of these narrative forms was used to relay
feelings of the students and activities occurring in the classroom. The pastiche
Figure 6 - Bins

**Student Centered**
- Student Enthusiasm
- Student Success
- Student Choice in Writing
- Students Working at Own Pace
- Peer Conferencing
- Children Helping Each Other
- Ownership
- Student Styles

**Classroom Management**
- Organization
- Classroom Management
- Transitioning

**Writing Task**
- Overwhelming Task
- Familiar Task
- Repetition
- Hands-on Practice
- Mechanics
- Strategies
- Explicit Directions

**Research Question**
What would be the observed and reported experiences when I incorporate a Writer’s Workshop into the primary classroom?

**Frustration**
- Teacher Frustration
- Time
- Confusion
- Overwhelming Task
- Teacher Uncertainty
- Off-Task
- Not Following Directions

**Confidence**
- Self Confidence
- Lack of Confidence
- Independence
- Safe Environment
- Trust

**Teacher Involvement**
- Teacher Help
- Teacher Learning
- Teacher Modeling
- Conferencing
- Re-teach
was used for the first interview. It was used to write the children’s responses for an interview question I had asked. I chose the pastiche because it removes the researcher’s voice and through the students’ quotes, only the children’s voices are heard.

The layered story was used when I had two children having difficulty with the same concept. I wrote from the perspective of the students, relaying feelings they had during this writing assignment. I captured my own thoughts as this writing assignment unfolded. Plays were used to put the reader at the same time and place when the students were having conversations during writing.

I used quantitative data as well. The student surveys that I gave at the beginning and the end of the study were put into table form so I could analyze the results. The study began with a baseline writing sample. I collected student work throughout the study. Student writing was scored using a rubric. The rubric was used to score the children’s writing in the areas of focus, content, organization, style, and the conventions of writing. To see if the students grew in writing, I took a word count for the writing samples collected. I wanted to determine if quantity had increased over the course of the study. The many student samples gathered over the course of the study reflect the growth in student writing as they participated in daily writing experiences.
FINDINGS

For my study I wanted to find out what would be the observed and reported experiences when I incorporate a Writer’s Workshop into a primary classroom. I found Writer’s Workshop to be a technique to use in the classroom to teach the conventions of writing and the writing process to the students. The environment that was created provided students of all abilities the security to take chances in their writing. The children learned to trust each other and I provided support to all the students while implementing Writer’s Workshop. The children helped each other during all stages of the writing process. The children also helped me set the rules for Writer’s Workshop which gave the children ownership of that aspect of Writer’s Workshop.

On a daily basis, I conducted mini-lessons, modeled writing and conferenced with students while they were writing. I found the modeled lessons in phonemic awareness in the beginning of the year were invaluable and gave the children confidence and strategies to use when they attempted to write on their own. This finding supports what Bailey, Borczak, and Stakiewicz (2002) found when they saw that children who did not have a strong phonemic background had difficulty learning writing skills. I feel that it is through the extensive practice of working with words, stretching words out to spell them, and using the room to help spell unfamiliar words that the children in my class were able to become productive writers. Daily Oral Language also occurred on a daily basis. I found
that practicing the conventions of writing consistently led the children to use punctuation in their own writing.

An inevitable part of Writer’s Workshop as it was implemented and successfully maintained was the frustration that occurred with both the students and myself. The children’s frustration was apparent during observations I made during the study. I noticed frustration on the part of the children at various parts of the Writer’s Workshop. Meghan experienced writer’s block one day. I could see the anguish in her face as she struggled to think of something to write about. She normally writes during the whole writing time so I knew she was genuinely stuck on a topic to write about. I suggested that she look through her Writer’s Notebook for ideas. During a mini-lesson conducted on another day, I taught the children strategies to use when they do not know what to write about. As problems occurred during Writer’s Workshop we addressed them. Since this was my first experience teaching writing in this form, I was not sure what to expect.

The times that I felt most frustrated were when it appeared as though the children were off-task or when I saw them all grouped in certain parts of the classroom either looking for a word or grouping in the book area. I did not set up rules at the start of the study because the children were learning strategies to help them write words. For the most part, they remained at their desk and wrote only in their journals. As the children began to write more they became more mobile, looking for words around the room or getting paper and supplies for writing. It
was at this point we decided we needed rules. The children helped write the rules for Writer’s Workshop. Once the rules were written, the children knew their boundaries and how they could move around the room. One of the rules we had was that no more than two children could be at a particular spot looking for a word or a book. The children helped enforce this rule by reminding each other when they saw people grouping in parts of the classroom.

I also became frustrated when it appeared as though children were sitting at their desk staring off into space and not writing. Ray (2001) feels that sometimes writers just need that thinking time. When it appeared the students were just staring off into space I needed to remind myself to trust that they were thinking about what they were going to write about. I found teacher trust to be an integral part of Writer’s Workshop. As I worked with individual students or a group of students I needed to trust that the other children were writing during that time. For the most part when I circled the room to see how the children were doing they were writing. However, there were days when children would sit for the entire writing time without writing at all. As the workshop progressed and the children became more confident writers, I noticed less children off-task during our writing time.

Because Writer’s Workshop was a student-centered approach to teaching writing, the students were able to interact with their peers as they worked at their own pace and level. We had established a rule part way into the study where the
children were not allowed to ask me questions or talk to me for a set amount of
time. I found this to be an effective technique as the children started to ask each
other for help. This created an atmosphere of trust between peers. I found that
when the children learned how to peer edit, they were supportive of their peers
and were genuinely interested in helping their peers. During one conference, I sat
with Christopher when he was revising a story. As he read it to me he pointed out
parts that Paul suggested to him that he could add to help make the story sound
better.

Since Writer’s Workshop occurred each day it allowed the opportunity for
the students to practice various writing strategies through repetition and hands-on
involvement. The children worked in an environment where they were
encouraged to take risks in their writing. Since they wrote daily for a set block of
time, the writing tasks became much easier as the year progressed. Through this
daily writing the children began to feel comfortable with their environment and
their peers. I noticed a confidence emerge from the children. As the children took
risks in their writing, they realized they were praised for their efforts. Trust was
established between my self and the students which helped to create writers that
were independent and confident writers. An exception was Nathan who came to
our class later in the year. I noticed he was hesitant to take risks in his writing.
Table 1 on page 75 shows evidence of his writing samples where he does not
show growth for word count from one writing sample to the next until the end of
Table 1 Student Writing Data

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the study. As his comfort level with the class increased, so did his confidence in writing. This is reflected in his final two writing samples.

A key factor that encouraged the children to become independent writers was a classroom environment that was conducive to a Writer’s Workshop. The children had access to all the materials needed for writing. The clustered desks allowed the children the opportunity to work with their peers. Although I had the room physically set up prior to the start of the school year, I did not have the rules for the workshop in place. Teaching writing using a workshop format had been a new experience for me so I was not sure what to expect as far as behavior was concerned. Rules such as, the children not being allowed to call my name for a certain amount of time was the result of many children calling out all at once for help. When I do my Writer’s Workshop next year, I will have the children help create the rules early in the year and add rules if needed as situations arise. I will know what to expect and therefore I will be able to guide them in creating rules that will work for Writer’s Workshop. If I had some rules established at the onset of Writer’s Workshop, some of the early frustrations may have been avoided.

I found that teacher involvement and teacher modeling of effective writing also helped the children grow into independent writers. My observations revealed that when the children wrote on their own, they stretched words out and used the same strategies I used in the model lessons. As I conferenced with individual children, I noticed there were concepts that they may have not grasped. Writer’s
Workshop afforded me the flexibility to plan future mini-lessons to re-teach concepts that needed to be addressed again.

During all stages of writing, the children chose the topic they wanted to write about. Two exceptions were the prompt in the beginning of the year for the baseline data and a prompt I had given the children in November. The baseline writing sample was given the first week of September. For the writing prompt, the children had to write about what they did over the summer. I asked the children to include as much detail as they could to describe their summer vacation. The results revealed that the average number of words the children wrote was seven. For the second prompt in November, the children wrote a response to a story we had read. They were to write about what their family likes to eat and when they like to eat it. The results show that for this writing sample the average number of words was twenty. The children’s writing samples offered wonderful insight to their growth in writing. I wanted to see if the children wrote more as Writer’s Workshop continued. Table 1 on page 75 shows the word count for writing samples I had collected over the course of the study. I found it interesting, as Table 1 shows that when the children were given a prompt for writing, the average number of words for this writing sample decreased.

The children chose their own topic for writing. I found this to be a very difficult task for them at first. During observations I made in the beginning of the study, the children appeared very hesitant to write. Once they knew they could
take risks in a safe writing environment they began to write more. Table 1 shows that with each writing sample the average number of words the children wrote increased at a fairly steady rate from an average of seven words to an average of thirty-one words with the exception of the prompt conditions.

I found that when the children were able to choose their own topic, they wrote much more. The chart in Figure 7 on page 79 shows that with each writing sample most of the children wrote progressively more. This leads me to believe that when the children are able to write about whatever they would like, the topic is of interest to them so they tend to write more. When the children are given a prompt, it stifles their creativity and they do not have as much to say on the topic. This finding supports what Johnson (2001) found when it was stated that when the children choose the topic they have a personal vested interest in what they are writing. Graves (1983) also found that children write more when the teacher does not assign the topic. James had one writing sample that had a word count of forty-one then, his next writing sample dropped to fifteen words. This is attributed to the fact that for the larger word count writing sample, James merely listed animals he saw at the zoo. He used the picture dictionary to help him spell the animals’ names. I found that as he learned how to write varied stories, the writing was more focused and did not use repetitive patterns. Therefore, even though subsequent writing samples showed a lower word count, the writing was of better quality.
Figure 7 Student Writing Word Count Results
I also found, as the rubric scores located in Table 2 on page 81 indicate, that when the children were given the writing prompt in November, fourteen children scored a four on the rubric for Focus. Ten children scored a two on the rubric for Content which is the criteria where the students are graded for detail in their writing. The published writing sample showed that for Focus ten children received a score of four. For Content six children scored four and six children scored a three. This is significant because it shows that when the children chose the topic for their writing, they remained focused on a topic and they added detail to their writing as noted in the Content scores for the published sample. This leads me to believe that when the children were given a writing prompt they remained focused on their topic; however, their writing lacked detail they add when the topic is of their own choice. For the prompt, the children completed a writing task that was given to them. They did not have a vested interest in the topic which is reflected in their word count and rubric scores.
Table 2

Student Writing Rubric Results

**Baseline Writing Sample**

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**Writing Prompt Sample**

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<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

**Published Sample**

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<th>3</th>
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<th>1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Content</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>5</td>
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In order to gain a better understanding of the children’s attitudes toward writing, I gave a survey to the children at the beginning of the study. I gave the identical survey at the end of the study to determine if the children’s attitudes toward writing had changed over the course of the study. The results from the survey in Table 3 on page 84 indicate there is a modest positive change in students’ attitudes toward writing. There was a small increase in students’ responses to most statements. The number of “Always” responses increased from a total of 102 to a total of 113 “Always” responses. The greatest difference I found was the number of children who answered “Never” for various statements decreased from a total of 34 to 19 “Never” responses. When I compared Survey #1 to Survey #2, I noted some drastic differences for individual students, such as Nicholas. His attitudes changed dramatically from Survey #1 to Survey #2. On Survey #1, Nicholas responded that he “Never” likes to write at home and in school, as indicated in statements three and four. He responded in statement six that he “Never” likes to write about something he has read. Again on the second survey, he answered “Never” for statements three and six. He also responded negatively for statement s five, eight, nine, and ten. His responses indicate that he does not like to write stories and that writing is difficult for him. This supports the interview I had with the children toward the end of the study when Nicholas shared that it is hard to think of the beginning of the story. Also, according to the survey, he indicated he did not like to share his writing with others. When I
compared Nicholas’ word count to that of his peers in the early writing samples, he had been consistently in the bottom half of the class for number of words written. Later writing samples indicate his writing had become comparable to his peers. Through observations I had made of Nicholas, there were occasions when he needed redirection, however, most of the time he appeared enthusiastic during writing. He did indicate in the second survey that he “Always” liked to write in school. His answer for the same question in the first survey showed he “Never” likes to write in school. This suggests that his comfort level for writing in school may have increased over the course of the study.
Table 3

Student Survey Results

<table>
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<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A  S  N</td>
<td>A  S  N</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. I like to write during free time.</td>
<td>8  8  3</td>
<td>10  7  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I like when I get to choose a topic to write about.</td>
<td>13  3  3</td>
<td>16  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I like to write at home.</td>
<td>8  8  3</td>
<td>9  9  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I like to write in school.</td>
<td>10  5  4</td>
<td>13  5  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I like to write stories.</td>
<td>10  7  2</td>
<td>10  8  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I like to write about something I have read.</td>
<td>5  6  8</td>
<td>6  7  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I like to write letters to family and friends.</td>
<td>12  5  2</td>
<td>13  5  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I think writing is easy.</td>
<td>11  5  3</td>
<td>11  5  3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I check for mistakes after I write.</td>
<td>13  3  3</td>
<td>14  3  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I like to share my writing with others.</td>
<td>12  4  3</td>
<td>11  7  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>102 54 34</td>
<td>113 58 19</td>
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</table>

A – Always S – Sometimes N – Never
Each morning as a morning warm-up the children completed two Daily Oral Language sentences. The children would find the punctuation, grammar, and capitalization errors then write the sentences correctly. I wanted to see if this had any effect on the children’s use of these conventions in their own writing. Table 4 on page 86 shows that on the baseline writing sample only four children used a period in their writing. For each writing sample, the number of children that used punctuation gradually increased. By the published piece each child had used punctuation in their writing. Some of the children had even used varied punctuation such as exclamation points, question marks, quotation marks, and commas. The published piece had been through the entire writing process so one area we do focus on in the editing stage is punctuation. This could be the reason every child used some form of punctuation in their writing. The writing sample right before the published piece reveals that all but two children used punctuation. Therefore, I believe that Daily Oral Language and conferencing with the children during the editing stage has helped them to use punctuation in their writing. This supports what Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore, and Dreznes (1998) found to be beneficial as an effective intervention to improve writing.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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At times, especially in the beginning, Writer’s Workshop was a very frustrating strategy to implement. However, as I watched the children grow in their writing and grow to love writing I felt Writer’s Workshop to be a very worthwhile endeavor. The results show continued growth in all the students. The surveys and especially the final interview indicate that the children truly enjoy writing. Implementing Writer’s Workshop into the primary classroom proved to be an effective strategy to teach the writing process and creative writing to my students.
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Implementing Writer’s Workshop has been such an incredible experience. The children have grown to love writing. We continued to write each day and the children grew in all aspects of their writing. They loved writing so much that if we had an assembly or a school delay where Writer’s Workshop would need to be postponed, the children were genuinely upset.

As the children’s writing flourished, they continued to revise their stories on the same piece of paper they wrote their rough draft. As the stories became more involved and their revisions became more detailed, I noticed how difficult it was for the children to keep track of the changes they were making.

After the winter break I taught the children how to use Student Writing Center on the computer. I had the children hand write their rough draft. Then, they would type the story on the computer exactly how they had written it on the paper. I had the children use large font and double space the text. This allowed room for any revisions or spelling corrections. I found this to be very helpful for the students. It was much easier for them to see the misspellings and other errors with the story printed out. They used a flair marker to note their corrections on their paper. Once the corrections were made, they went back to the computer into their saved story to make the corrections. When the children were satisfied with their story, they printed it out and illustrated it.
When I sat with the children to conference I did not mark up their paper. I used stick-it notes if they needed help with words that were difficult to spell. I pointed out words in their writing to fix that they should know or that they could find on the word wall.

Also after the winter break, I allowed the children to go wherever they wanted to go in the room to write. The children were allowed to sit with whoever they wanted and they were allowed on the floor or any part of the room. I was hesitant at first, but I reminded myself to trust. There were times when clusters of children would occur, or the children would get loud, but these incidences were remedied with a quick reminder for them to get back to work. When I sat with the children I would keep one ear on the other conversations going on around the room. I was pleased to hear the children reading their stories to each other and helping each other with corrections.

The children became quite efficient at getting their own stories from their folder. After the mini-lesson we talked about where the children were with their individual stories. The children that needed to go on the computer to type their stories went to the writing folders first and the other children followed after them.

There are certain aspects of the Writer’s Workshop I would do differently from the way I had done it for my research study. As soon as the children start writing stories I would teach them to use a Writing Topics List sheet (Appendix O). This would remain in their writing folder so they could keep track of the
stories they are writing and check off the stage of the writing process for each story. I introduced the Writing Topics List to the children after the winter break. I believe if it had been introduced at the onset of Writer’s Workshop, it would have helped the children keep their stories better organized.

After the research part of the study concluded I implemented a rule that the children should have four stories started with at least a rough draft before they go on further with the writing process. This way, the children had a variety of stories from which they would pick one to revise, edit, and publish. When I conferenced with children that were still working on getting four stories I would ask how the writing was going. I wanted to know how they came up with their ideas, or I helped them if they needed help with any of their stories. Children that were in later stages of the writing process I would help revise and edit. I encouraged the children to read their story to a peer to help with revisions before they came to me. I feel it is important for the children to get positive feedback from their peers. When the children read their stories to their peers, they often received wonderful insight and ideas to add to their stories. The children used a Peer Editing Checklist (Appendix P) as a guide for peer editing.

As I watched the children’s writing skills improve, I saw a confidence through their interactions with their peers emerge. They constantly wanted to read their stories to each other in order to gain feedback. I found that as the children were stretching out words to use in their writing they were applying sound-letter
strategies. These same strategies were used when they tried to read unfamiliar text. A future study related to my topic could be the relationship writing has on a student’s reading.
References


attitudes and writing abilities through increased writing time and opportunities. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 481441)


Exceptional Children, 33(3), 30-37.


Appendix A
HSIRB Approval Letter

MORAVIAN COLLEGE

August 13, 2005

Colleen O’Leary
258 Delaware Lane
Bethlehem, PA 18020

Dear Colleen O’Leary:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has approved your proposal: Writer’s Workshop in the Primary Grades. Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

A hard copy of this letter will be sent to you through U.S. mail shortly. If you do not receive the letter by the time you need to begin gathering data, please do not hesitate to contact me. Also, please retain at least one copy of the approval letter for your files. Good luck with the rest of your research.

Debra Wecker-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415 (voice)
medwh02@moravian.edu
Appendix B
Principal Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

September 12, 2005

Dear Principal’s Name,

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I do a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on Writer’s Workshop. The title of my research is Writer’s Workshop in the Primary Grades. My students will benefit from participating in this study as they will learn the writing process, conventions of writing, and creative writing through Writer’s Workshop.

As part of this study, students will be asked to complete an interest survey at the beginning and end of the study and participate in Writer’s Workshop activities. The study will take place from August 30, 2005 to December 23, 2005.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms – no one’s identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, the students must participate in regular classroom activities. All of the activities listed above are regular classroom activities for participant and non-participant students. Data for non-participant students will not be included or analyzed as part of the research.

I welcome questions about this research at any time. Each child’s participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions parents have about this research can be directed to me, Colleen O’Leary, (school phone) or email (my email address), you, (principal’s name) at (school phone) or email at (principal’s email address), or my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-625-7958 or email czales@moravian.edu.

Sincerely,

Colleen O’Leary

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher participating in the research study, and that I have read and understand this consent form, and received a copy. Colleen O’Leary has my permission to conduct research at School Name, City, State.

Principal’s Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix C
Parent Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

September 12, 2005

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I do a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on Writer’s Workshop. The title of my research is Writer’s Workshop in the Primary Grades. My students will benefit from participating in this study as they will learn the writing process, conventions of writing, and creative writing through Writer’s Workshop.

As part of this study, students will be asked to complete an interest survey at the beginning and end of the study and participate in Writer’s Workshop activities. The study will take place from August 30, 2005 to December 23, 2005. The data will be collected and coded, and held in strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms – no one’s identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, the students must participate in regular classroom activities. All of the activities listed above are regular classroom activities for participant and non-participant students. Data for non-participant students will not be included or analyzed as part of the research.

We welcome any questions about this research at any time. (Principal’s name) has approved of this study. Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about this research can be directed to me, Colleen O’Leary, (school phone number) or email (my email address), (Principal’s name) at (school phone number) or email (principal’s email address), or my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-625-7958 or email crzales@morvian.edu.

Sincerely,

Colleen O’Leary

I attest that I am the student’s legally authorized representative and that I have read and understand this consent form. I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

Parent/Guardian Signature: ____________________________

Child’s name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Appendix D
Student Writing Survey

1. I like to write during free time.  
Always  Sometimes  Never

2. I like when I get to choose a topic to write about.  

3. I like to write at home.  

4. I like to write in school.  

5. I like to write stories.  

6. I like to write about something I have read.  

7. I like to write letters to family and friends.  

8. I think writing is easy.  

9. I check for mistakes after I write.  

10. I like to share my writing with others.  

*Portions of this survey were taken from Anderson, D., Malle, A., Nee, K., and Weaver, M. (2003).*
Appendix E
Baseline Writing Prompt

Writing Prompt

Draw a picture and write about something you did this summer.
Appendix F
Letter Cards

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# Appendix G
Daily Oral Language Sample Page

## Week One
Rewrite the sentences correctly.

| Monday | | | |
|--------|------------------|
| 1. my name is tom | | |
| 2. me be going home. | | |

| Tuesday | | | |
|--------|------------------|
| 1. i went to visit jim and pat. | | |
| 2. susan had a book to read | | |

| Wednesday | | | |
|----------|------------------|
| 1. who wants to go | | |
| 2. the ball be over there. | | |

| Thursday | | | |
|----------|------------------|
| 1. i and jake like to play. | | |
| 2. she played with joe and chad. | | |

| Friday | | | |
|--------|------------------|
| 1. They was happy to see the puppy | | |
| 2. can him swim? | | |

Name ____________________________
Appendix I
Writer’s Notebook Entries

Kinds of entries you might try in your notebook...

1. Very close observations of things, capturing sights, sounds, textures, moods, and so on.
2. Snippets of interesting things people say – talk written down!
3. Entries that ask lots and lots of questions about a subject, person, thing, place, and so on.
4. List of things you want to think about later or just want to keep in lists.
5. Quotations from music, movies, books, magazines, and so on that interest you.
6. Writing about photographs or pictures that interest you.
7. Memories, memories, memories – ask questions such as “What does this remind me of?” Look at things from your life, and think about what they make you remember.
8. Things you see that are interesting. Remember, a writer is someone who notices and is enormously taken by things other people may walk right by.
9. Character ideas from people you observe. Try to imagine the smallest details of their lives.
10. Setting ideas from interesting places you are writing. Try going somewhere interesting and writing about its setting.
11. Entries that interest you as a person – Antarctica, inchworms, vacuum cleaners, mountain biking, soccer, snakes, WHATEVER!
12. Great first lines for things you’d like to write.
13. Poems that just “come to you.”
14. Reflections (thinking) about what you see, hear, or think about.
15. Play around with words you like.
16. Family stories that you know orally. Write them down!

*This list was taken from Ray, Katie Wood (2001). The writing workshop: Working though the hard parts (and they’re ALL hard parts).
Appendix J
Writer’s Notebook Parent Letter

September 14, 2005

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Today your child is bringing home a Writer’s Notebook. For Writer’s Workshop this year I would like the children to write of things that interest him/her. There will be times I will give the children prompts to write about, but this is mainly to get them ready for tests such as the PSSA’s, where they are asked to write about a particular topic. For the most part though I would like the children to come up with their own topic. I have found that in the past, children have difficulty coming up with a topic during our writing time. Through some research I have done, I came across an idea, which I believe will help the children have a ready bank of ideas for our Writer’s Workshop. This is the Writer’s Notebook.

The children will take their Writer’s Notebook home each night and bring it back to school each day. I have taped an idea bank of things that could go in the notebook to help get them started. What I envision is that the children will think of topics and write them down in the notebook. They do not need to write full paragraphs in the notebook, just have them (or you) jot down ideas as they come. That way when it comes time to begin our Writer’s Workshop, the children will have an idea bank of topics to write about already started. The list taped in front of the notebook should help your child think of things to put in the notebook.

This is a new experience for all of us. I believe it will truly help the children become true writers. If at any time you do have questions or concerns about anything, please do not hesitate to call the school at [phone number] or email me at coleary@ [email address] Thank you for all your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Colleen O’Leary

P.S. This is not considered homework. It is a place for the children to write down ideas if something comes to them at home.
Appendix K
Guide for Sharing Stage

Guide for Sharing Stage

This is only a guide. The questions will be determined by the context of each individual writing piece.

- Say something nice about the author’s writing.
- Ask for missing information.
- Ask for clarification of characters.
- Please explain the beginning, middle, or end.
- Be sure to always use positive comments.
- Offer suggestions to the author.
Observation Checklist

(+) Always  (☐) Sometimes  (-) Never

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Follows Rules of Capitalization</th>
<th>Follows Rules of Punctuation</th>
<th>Uses Details</th>
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<td><strong>FOCUS</strong></td>
<td>You have clearly focused on a well-narrowed topic. I know exactly what you are writing about.</td>
<td>You focused on one topic that could have been narrowed.</td>
<td>I wasn't always sure on what topic you were focusing.</td>
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<td><strong>CONTENT</strong></td>
<td>You used many facts with specific details, examples, and reasons.</td>
<td>You used enough facts with a few details, examples, and reasons.</td>
<td>You just listed your facts with a few details, example or reasons.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ORGANIZATION</strong></td>
<td>You have a strong beginning, middle, and end. Your writing is in the correct order.</td>
<td>You have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Your writing is in the correct order.</td>
<td>Your beginning, middle, or end is not clear. Your writing is not always in the correct order.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STYLE</strong></td>
<td>You used many interesting words and sentences to make your writing creative.</td>
<td>You used some interesting words and sentences to make your writing creative.</td>
<td>You used plain words and sentences with some repetition.</td>
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<td><strong>CONVENTIONS</strong></td>
<td>You consistently used capital letters, end marks, and capitalization correctly.</td>
<td>You used capital letters, end marks, and spelling strategies correctly most of the time.</td>
<td>You did not use capital letters, end marks, or spelling strategies correctly enough to help me understand your writing.</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
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Appendix O
Writing Topics List

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<th>Editing</th>
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Appendix P
Peer Editing Checklist

Peer Editing Checklist

Name ___________________ Date ____________

Directions: Circle the face that fits the sentence.

The story made sense.

😊 ☹️ ☹️

The words made clear pictures in my mind.

😊 ☹️ ☹️

I can tell what happens first, second, third...

😊 ☹️ ☹️

The writer used strong words.

😊 ☹️ ☹️

There are capital letters and punctuation where there should be.

😊 ☹️ ☹️

Writing Connections 2001