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Implementing writer's workshop in a kindergarten classroom

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Implementing writer's workshop in a kindergarten classroom

Abstract
Can children be taught to write in kindergarten? Should children be taught to write in kindergarten? How do you teach children to write in kindergarten? These and many other questions about the appropriateness of writing and how to teach writing have been swirling around the education community for many years. As a kindergarten teacher I myself began wondering about these questions and how to answer them. I was intrigued by the idea of providing a framework in my classroom that would encourage emerging readers and writers to create and manipulate their own text.

In an effort to better understand the framework of writer's workshop, I began reading and researching early reading and writing. Three areas in the literature that I reviewed greatly influenced my understanding of how a writer's workshop might be implemented in a kindergarten classroom: emergent writing, the writer's workshop strategy, and recommendations for combining the two by implementing writer's workshop in kindergarten.
Implementing Writer's Workshop
in a Kindergarten Classroom

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of Literacy Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By
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Implementing Writer's Workshop in a Kindergarten Classroom

Can children be taught to write in kindergarten? Should children be taught to write in kindergarten? How do you teach children to write in kindergarten? These and many other questions about the appropriateness of writing and how to teach writing have been swirling around the education community for many years. As a kindergarten teacher I myself began wondering about these questions and how to answer them. I was intrigued by the idea of providing a framework in my classroom that would encourage emerging readers and writers to create and manipulate their own text. In an effort to better understand the framework of writer's workshop, I began reading and researching early reading and writing. Three areas in the literature that I reviewed greatly influenced my understanding of how a writer's workshop might be implemented in a kindergarten classroom: emergent writing, the writer's workshop strategy, and recommendations for combining the two by implementing writer's workshop in kindergarten.

Emergent Writing

The definition of emergent writing can include a wide range of writing behaviors such as: drawing, scribbling, random letters, inventing spelling, and/or beginning to write conventionally (Fisher, 1991). Research by Graves
(1982) states that children approach learning as a problem-solving process. Spelling, handwriting, and convention are the first three problem areas that young children grapple with (Graves). Graves' data showed that children are constantly changing the problems they solve, as well as their consciousness of what they do when they write. As children solve one problem in their writing, a new one arises and the child grows in their abilities (Graves).

"Children grow as writers because they wrestle with imbalances between their intentions and the problems at hand," (Graves, 1982, p. 178).

According to Graves, children need to be stretched, but not to the point where the problem encountered makes no sense at all.

Clay (1987) suggests that children learn most when they are actively constructing writing themselves. In other words, the students need to create or write their own text (Clay). This involves complex sensory integration, a process of gradual refinement and a good deal of management of the process by the child, whether conscious or otherwise (Clay).

**Writing Process**

A widely accepted practice for writing instruction is the teaching of the writing process. Many models follow the basic process of planning, drafting, and revising. The writing process is not linear, but recursive;
writing does not follow a step-by-step, ordered procedure (Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels & Woodside-Jiron, 2000). At any moment writers may go back a phase and/or jump ahead a phase to plan, re-draft, and/or revise depending upon where they are in the process and what is consciously pressing in their mind (Lipson et al.).

The writing process captures this complexity of writing and the difficulties of teaching writing (Dyson & Freedman, 1991). The writing process has the flexibility to meet the needs of individual students by allowing them to work at an appropriate pace on an individual level (Dyson & Freedman). It also allows teachers to interact with students about the specific issues that they are grappling with as they write (Dyson & Freedman). Dyson and Freedman (1991) believe teachers need to be astute observers and make instructional decisions in response to the writing issues that the students' are facing.

**Writer's Workshop**

The writer's workshop strategy allows children to write with total control over themselves and their writing process (Graves, 1983). The strategy also allows the opportunity for students to practice higher order thinking skills (Lipson et al., 2000). The teacher/student interaction that
occurs in writing workshops permits teachers to create writing scaffolds for the students; the teacher can develop learning stair steps which build upon each other and form meaningful contexts for students to learn about writing (Lipson et al.). As a skill is mastered, the teacher support is no longer needed in that area, the support can then be focused on other more complex skills that the student is still struggling with. (Lipson et al.). Calkins (1994) states that for young children, mini-lessons are needed to convey important information about writing strategies and skills which are directly related to the students' own writing. These are usually presented at the beginning of the writing workshop session and relate directly to the skills that students are currently struggling with in their writing (Calkins).

The writer's workshop framework includes six steps: 1) prewriting - the getting ready to write phase, 2) drafting - the student gets words and ideas on paper, 3) revising - he/she is to refine and polish the content of the piece, 4) teacher to student and student to student conferencing - an on-going activity that spans across several different phases of the writer's workshop, 5) editing - the editing phase centers on the correction of mechanical errors - spelling, punctuation, etc., and 6) publishing - the writing is shared and celebrated with an audience (Poindexter & Oliver, 1998-1999).
As students are progressing through the process of writer's workshop, the teacher's role is to circulate among the students and guide the writing based upon the current struggles of the students (Graves, 1983). Graves believes the challenge for the teacher is to know when to step in, teach, and expect more out of the students (Graves).

**Writer's Workshop in Kindergarten**

Writer's workshop has been found to be an effective strategy for older students. The question then arises, is writer's workshop an effective strategy for emergent writers? Smith (2000) believes that the workshop process is effective with helping students master the principles of process writing even in kindergarten.

However, a few adaptations and provisions need to be made (Poindexter & Oliver, 1998-1999). A systematic system for the organization of materials, a predictable routine, many models, and developmentally appropriate mini-lessons all need to be in place (Smith, 2000). As a result of her work with middle-level students, Calkins (1994) suggests mini-lessons should include the following: procedures, strategies writers' use, qualities of good writing, and skills. According to Poindexter & Oliver (1998-1999), these types of mini-lessons can be appropriately adapted to the
developmental needs of young students. By developing and teaching simple procedures and frameworks for writing, providing a simple introduction to the process, supplying activities for each phase, making available models for each phase, and giving ample opportunities to practice, Poindexter and Oliver (1998-1999) agree with Smith (2000) that young children can begin writing even before they read.

Poindexter and Oliver (1989-1999) suggest that the process of writer’s workshop in kindergarten will look a little different from writer’s workshop in older grades. Workshops should adhere to the format of a mini-lesson, writing time, and group sharing sessions (Hertz & Heydenberk, 1997). Prewriting activities may include pictures and simple graphic organizers (Poindexter & Oliver). During the drafting phase the only goal is to get something on paper; they shouldn’t be limited to only words that they can spell (Poindexter & Oliver). Conferences with the teacher include a simple reading of the writing by the student and a discussion of suggestions for improvement (Poindexter & Oliver). These conferences can serve as individual mini-lessons where concepts of print, phonics, etc. can be taught (Hertz & Heydenberk). The revising and editing phases are generally collapsed together (Poindexter & Oliver). Since young children are usually
not critical readers, they need simple suggestions to help get them through these two phases (Poindexter & Oliver). Revising concepts should be limited to one element and editing should be limited to one or two elements to avoid feelings of frustration by students (Poindexter & Oliver). Publishing can take many forms at this age. Reading the piece from the "Author's Chair", creating books, displaying writing on bulletin boards, and sharing writing at parent-teacher conferences or open house are all options available to kindergarten students (Poindexter & Oliver). Hertz & Heydenberk (1997) recommend that kindergarten students be encouraged to write frequently as they engage in process writing activities. The classroom teacher should hold writing workshops on a regular basis with a predictable routine (Fisher, 1995, Hertz & Heydenberk).

Trust and commitment are essential for a writer's workshop to be successful (Fisher, 1995). Fisher (1995) states that the teacher needs to be committed to providing writing time every day. With this in place, the students will trust that they will have opportunities to pursue their own topics, work by themselves or with friends, and be able to either, begin a new piece, or continue to work on a story or book over time (Fisher). It is important to establish a safe and nurturing writing environment where the
children feel comfortable taking risks (Behymer, 2003). Research by Hertz and Heydenberk (1997) has concluded that the interactive format of writer's workshop, including input from both peers and teachers, appears to enhance the motivation of students. When students view themselves as authors, they realized that what they had to say was important (Hertz & Heydenberk). Beyhmer (2003) believes that in order to be successful as a writer, you must feel confident and the implementation of writer's workshop is an excellent framework to develop writing confidence for young students.

This information gave me, as a Kindergarten teacher, the impetus to investigate the effectiveness of such a writer's workshop in my own classroom. I began my classroom research by framing a question I thought would be most beneficial to my students and to informing my teaching: does implementing writer's workshop in the kindergarten classroom provide a framework for children to develop their writing skills?

The Beginning

I decided that by the beginning of the second semester in the academic school year, the students would be able to compose a couple of sentences (which for kindergartners, is a story) and proceed through this adapted writing process model. The students were from an urban, mid-
western area. The school that they attended had 571 students. Of those 571 students, 83% were white, 10% Hispanic, 4% African American, 2% American Indian, and 1% Asian. 15% of the total population was considered to be learning English as a Second Language. 59% of the students were living in high poverty and qualified for the Federal Free & Reduced Lunch Program. Finally, the elementary school had many students moving in and out of the attendance area throughout the year with an 83% mobility rate.

A total of 30 children agreed to allow me to evaluate their writings. 16 of the students were involved in the writer's workshop strategy (Workshop Group). Eight were boys and eight were girls. 14 of the students were members of another classroom and did not participate in writer's workshop (Classroom Group). Of those 14 children, eight were boys and six were girls. In addition to a balanced literacy curriculum that was implemented across the school district, the Workshop group participated in writer's workshop every day. The sessions lasted about 20 minutes; during the session there was a short (approx. 5 min.) mini-lesson that was followed by writing time. The Classroom group was involved only in the regular balanced literacy curriculum that entailed opportunities for modeled, shared, interactive, guided, and independent writing. Although the students did
write daily, there was not a set aside “writing time” every day as there was with the Workshop group.

I based my mini-lessons on Calkins’ (1994) recommendations. The mini-lessons focused on three main areas: procedure, skills and strategies, and writer’s craft. Procedural mini-lessons incorporated rules for writing time. At the beginning of the semester, several lessons focused on a picture rules page which was kept in each student’s writing folder; rules included always write the date, never throw anything away, use a quiet talking voice, etc. Organization of materials was another area that was addressed very early on. Each student was responsible for his or her own writing folder; special writing “tools” (pencils, erasers, date stamps, etc.) were kept in writing trays that were shared by all who were sitting at the same table. Finally, the procedures of writing, having a writing conference, conflict resolution, etc. were discussed. I spent a considerable amount of time at the beginning of the semester explaining and demonstrating behaviors for participating in writing and sharing time.

Mini-lessons about skills and strategies composed the majority of the semester’s lessons. The focus here, at the beginning, was on phonemic segmentation skills so that as they pronounced words slowly, they could
match the individual phonemes to letters. These phonemic segmentation mini-lessons were intended to help students feel confident writing any words they should choose. In addition to the segmentation, other skills that were targeted included capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of sight words.

Finally, the last area was writer's craft - staying on topic, organizing ideas, and elaboration. During a mini-lesson, I would present models of both quality and inadequate writing for the idea to be discussed. The models came from a variety of sources - trade books, my writing, student writing, etc. Students were involved in the discussion and evaluation of the writing; many times this would be followed by an interactive group activity before they were to write independently. All mini-lessons were driven by what I observed during their writing, areas where they were struggling with and/or components missing in their writing. At the beginning, most students struggled with mechanical issues such as spacing, spelling, and punctuation, therefore many lessons were taught in this area. As the semester progressed, students had a firmer grasp of the basic mechanical skills and I wanted to stretch the content of their writing pieces; This is when the lessons about organization, staying on topic, elaboration, and other areas relating to the craft of writing were introduced. Many of the mini-lessons
were repeated several times throughout the semester to provide multiple opportunities for students.

The remainder of the workshop time allowed students to work on their writing pieces. During this time, I held conferences with students about their writing. During the conferences, I was able to observe, coach, and evaluate their stories. At the beginning of the conference, I would note the student's independent writing. After that, I was able to create scaffolds for individual students. We would celebrate a positive aspect of their writing, and, depending upon the abilities of the student, the student or I would find an area that needed some improvement. This whole process allowed me to evaluate the student's mechanical skills, content writing abilities, and motivation for completing and sharing the story. When a story was deemed finished by both the writer and me, the student then would read the story to the class from the "author's chair."

Three different assessments were administered three times during the semester. The first was a subtest from Clay's Observation Survey - Writing Vocabulary (2002). During this task, the child was asked to "Think of all the words you know how to write and write them all down." (Clay, 2002, p.104) The student was allowed 10 minutes to complete the task. This is a
simple and reliable test that correlates well with other literacy measures over time (Clay).

The second evaluation tool was also from Clay’s Observation Survey - Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (2002). This is an authentic task that calls upon the student to listen to the sounds in words in sequence and to find the appropriate letters to represent those sounds (Clay). The teacher tells the child a sentence to be written. Points are accumulated when the child successfully records the sounds that were heard in the sentences.

The third and final assessment was the comparison of writing samples to the Council Bluffs Community School District’s Writing Bands/Rubric (2002). Writing is given a letter score based upon criteria, which makes up good writing for young students (spacing, punctuation, capitalization, sentence variety, ability to convey meaning, etc). A student would earn a letter score of A if they used some recognizable symbols and used drawings. A student would earn a letter score of B if they used some sound/symbol relationships, wrote from left to right, and wrote words in a logical order. A student would earn a letter score of C if they used some conventional spelling and punctuation, put words together as units of thought, and
attempted to organize their writing. (See Appendix A for complete writing rubric.) This set of bands has been developed and refined over a period of years. The bands are best used to describe an individual student's stage of development based upon examples of that child's writing. In order to make scoring more reliable, the Language Arts Assessment Committee created a set of annotated "anchor papers" to show what papers look like at each level. (See Appendix B for complete anchor papers.) Each assessment was administered to both groups at the beginning of the semester, the midpoint, and conclusion of the semester.

**What Happened**

In January, both groups were assessed with all three evaluation tools. During the course of the semester, the Workshop group had three fewer students in the low range and two more students in the high range. The Classroom group had two more students in the low range and two students move into the high range. The trend of the Workshop group was more positive than that of the Classroom group.

On the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words assessment, the Workshop group had six students (37.5%) with stanine scores between one and three, the Classroom group had four students (28.6%) in the low range
(Clay, 2002). The Workshop group had eight students (50%) with scores between four and six, and the Classroom group had eight students (57.1%) in the middle range. Finally, the Workshop group had two students (12.5%) with scores between seven to nine, and the Classroom group had two students (14.3%) in the high range.

In May, the scores for Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words were as follows: the Workshop group had three students (18.8%) between one and three, the Classroom group had six students (42.8%), the Workshop group had nine students (56.2%) between four and six, the Classroom group had four students (28.6%), and the Workshop group had four students (25%) between seven and nine, the Classroom group had four students (28.6%). (See Figure 1)
The next assessment was the Writing Vocabulary subtest (Clay, 2002). By the end of the semester four students moved up and out of the low range in the Workshop group and one student moved into the high range. In the Classroom group, one student moved back into the low range and four students moved into the high range. Again, the overall trend for the Workshop group was positive, and the Classroom group's trend, although overall positive, did have students move in the negative direction.

On the Writing Vocabulary assessment, the Workshop group had eight students (50%) with stanine scores between one and three, the Classroom group had four students (28.6%) in this range (Clay, 2002). Seven students (43.8%) from the Workshop group had scores between four and six, with nine students (64.3%) from the Classroom group in this range. Finally, one student (6.2%) from the Workshop group had a score between seven to nine, which is similar to the one student (7.1%) from the Classroom group.

In May, the number of student scoring in the low range (stanines from one to three) on the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words were as follows: four students (25%) from the Workshop group, and five students (35.7%) from the Classroom group. The students scoring in the middle range (stanines between four and six) included ten students (62.5%) from the
Workshop group, and four students (28.6%) from the Classroom group.

Finally, the students scoring in the high range (stanines above seven) were two students (12.5%) from the Workshop group, and five students (35.7%) from the Classroom group. (See Figure 2)

![Figure 2](image)

When the writing samples were compared to the Council Bluffs Community School District’s Writing Bands/Rubric (2002), both the Workshop group and the Classroom group had positive trends. The Workshop group did have more students move into a level C and all of the students performed at a level B or higher. This was not the case with the Classroom group.

In January, the Workshop group had eight students (50%) score an A, and the Classroom group had six students (42.9%) score an A. The Workshop group had eight students (50%) score a B, and the Classroom
group had eight students (57.1%) score a B. The Workshop group had zero students (0%) score a C, identical to the Classroom group which had zero students (0%) score a C.

In May, the Workshop group had zero students (0%) score an A compared to the Classroom group who had one student (7.1%) score an A. The Workshop group had 12 students (75%) score a B, similar to the Classroom group with 12 students (85.8%) score a B. The Workshop group had four students (25%) score a C compared to only one student (7.1%) scoring a C from the Classroom group. (See Figure 3)

At the beginning of the semester, I reviewed the data from the Hearing and Recording Sounds assessment and discovered that the Workshop group was performing at a lower level than the classroom group
Six (37.5%) of the Workshop students were in the lower group compared to four (28.6%) of the Classroom students scoring in the lower group and two (12.5%) of the Workshop students scored in the higher group which is similar to two (14.3%) of the Classroom students in the higher group.

At the end of the semester, more of the workshop students had moved into a higher level on the Hearing and Recording Sounds assessment and fewer of the Classroom students moved to a higher level on the same assessment (Clay, 2002). In the Workshop group, three (18.7%) of the students moved from the low to the middle group, and two (12.5%) of the students moved from the middle group to the higher group. In the Classroom group, two (14.3%) students actually moved in the negative direction and moved from the middle group to the lower group and two (14.3%) students moved from the middle group into the higher group. (See Figure 4)
When reviewing the data from the Writing Vocabulary assessment, I found the same to be true - the Workshop group began the semester performing at a lower level than the Classroom group (Clay, 2002). In the Workshop group, eight (50%) students had stanine scores in the low range and only one (6.2%) student had a stanine score in the high range. In the Classroom group, four (28.6%) students had stanine scores in the low range, and one (7.1%) student had a stanine score in the high range.

At the end of the semester, more students from the Workshop group moved out of the low range and more students from the Classroom group moved into the high range. Four (25%) of the Workshop students moved out of the lower range and into the middle range, while one (7.1%) Classroom student actually moved backwards from the middle range into the lower range. One (6.2%) Workshop student moved from the middle range into the
higher range and four (28.6%) Classroom students moved from the middle range into the higher range. (See Figure 5)

![Figure 5: Writing Vocabulary Stanine Scores](image)

Finally, when the writing samples were scored in January, the Workshop group again scored lower than the Classroom group (Council Bluffs Community School District, 2002). In the Workshop group, eight (50%) students' writing aligned with level A while in the Classroom group, six (42.9%) students' writing aligned with level A. In the Workshop group, zero (0%) students' writing aligned with level C, and in the Classroom group, zero (0%) students' writing aligned with level C as well.

In May, when writing samples were evaluated against the Council Bluffs Community School District's (2002) writing rubric, again, more students from the Workshop group moved to a higher level of performance than did from the Classroom group. All eight (50%) students that scored a
level A from the Workshop group scored a level B or higher, while only five (35.5%) students that scored a level A from the Classroom group scored a level B or higher. Also, four (25%) students moved from a level B to a level C from the Workshop groups, and only one (7.1%) student moved from a level B to a level C from the Classroom group. (See Figure 6)

![Figure 6: Writing Samples](chart)

**Figure 6**

Writing Samples

After evaluating the data results as a whole group, I wanted to look at some individuals. I decided to pick some average students and look more closely at their progress. From the Workshop group I chose to look at student E and student J. (See Table 1 for all individual results)
Student E was a Caucasian foster child who was living with a middle class family. She was also physically affected by mild Cerebral Palsey. She had a raw score of 19 out of 37 (stanine 2) on her Hearing and Recording Sounds assessment in January (Clay, 2002). She was writing only beginning and ending sounds and most of those were consonants. (See Figure 7) In May, her raw score increased to 30 out of 37 (stanine 3). In May, in addition to beginning and ending sound, she also wrote medial vowel sounds and was beginning to write basic sight words conventionally. (See Figure 8)

Figure 7

[Image of a child's handwriting sample]
Student J was a Caucasian male from a lower income family comprised of both his birth parents. On the January Hearing and Recording Sounds Assessment, he had a raw score of 19 out of 37 (stanine 2) (Clay, 2002). He too wrote primarily beginning and ending consonants. (See Figure 9) His score in May increased to 33 out of 37 (stanine 4). In addition to beginning and ending consonants, he wrote medial vowels and had control over some word chunks (i.e., -ing, -ay). (See Figure 10)
Today I am going to the museum. IHV a PG is at HM. TD at MKQT KHMTSKO.
When the writing Vocabulary assessment was scored in January, student E had written only six (stanine 3) words correctly within the 10 minute time limit (Clay, 2002). Her words consisted of her name, “mom”, “dad”, “I”, “no”, and a friend's name - all very basic words. (See Figure 11) In May, she wrote 39 (stanine 5) words correctly within the 10 minute time limit. The words that she wrote included her first and last name, names of siblings, content words from the curriculum including “egg”, “zoo”, “owl”, 
"pig", etc., and many basic sight words such as "the", "it", "and", "like", "you", "up", "yes", "going", etc. Her handwriting was much clearer and she seemed to write her words with more ease and fluidity. (See Figure 12)
When the Writing Vocabulary assessment was scored, student J had written 16 (stanine 2) words correctly within the 10 minute time limit in
January (Clay, 2002). His words consisted of his name, teacher’s name, nickname, and basic two and three letter sight words - “no”, “mom”, “dad”, “is”, “to”, etc. (See Figure 13) In May, he wrote 34 (stanine 4) words correctly with the 10 minute time limit. His words consisted of names of family and friends, basic sight words, and word families such as “pig”, “wig”, “fig”, “dig”, etc. His writing was more organized, his handwriting was more legible, and he was able to complete the task with more ease than in January. (See Figure 14)
Figure 14

Student J

first name

last name

5-6-03

34
Student E's writing sample in January consisted of a picture and two words. The picture had a stick person and an animal. The text was composed of two words - "My dog". I asked student E to read her story to me and she said, "My dog is catching with me." I compared this sample to the Council Bluffs Community School District (2002) writing rubric and although it contained some of the criteria needed for a level B, it was more aligned with a level A. The writing went from left to right, but it did not begin at the left side of the paper. She did not have any spaces or punctuation. Finally, when she "read" the story it was a complete thought, but the written sample contained only a very small portion. (See Figure 15)

Figure 15

[Image of a drawing with the text "My dog" and a picture of a stick figure playing with a dog]
In May, student E's writing sample was more complete and I scored it as a level B on the Council Bluffs Community School District's (2002) writing rubric. The picture had one stick person. The writing was as follows: "MYDaD like MY BrotherJeFFer and he like MYBrothel Mikl and he like MYBrothe Justin". I asked her to read her story and she said, "My dad likes my brother Jeffery, and he likes my brother Michael, and he likes my brother Justin." She used conventional spelling for the simple sight words and phonetic spelling for the more difficult words. She began her writing at the left side of the paper, wrote towards the right, and had a return sweep when beginning a new line. She did not have any punctuation, but was spacing between her words more evidently than in January. Finally her writing was more representative of her thoughts and followed a simple pattern. The content of her writing had definitely improved, her spelling of sight words was more accurate, her phonetic spelling was more complete, and she had more control over mechanics. (See Figure 16)
Student J's writing sample was primitive in January as well. His picture had five stick people. His text was as follows: "MoMMeIdadand". His reading of his story was, "Mom, me, I, dad, is." Even though he had conventional spelling and he wrote from left to right, he did not have any punctuation or spacing between his words, and the thought was very incomplete. I scored this sample as a level A on the Council Bluffs Community School District (2002) writing rubric. (See Figure 17)
Student J made tremendous improvement during the semester. This sample did not have a picture, but did have a title - "The Last day of school". His text was as follows: "Tomorrow is the Last day of school it will be Fun because I will celebrate my Birthday on June 1st." Here is how he read the story to me, "The Last Day of School. Tomorrow is the last day of school. It will be fun because I will celebrate my birthday on June 1st." This sample has the necessary criterion for a level B and a few of the criterion from level C. He used sound/symbol spelling and forms many recognizable words. His directionality is good (left to right/top to bottom/return sweep), he has greatly improved his use of spacing between words, and this story had two complete thoughts. This writing uses more conventional capitalization, has complete units of thought, and included personal experiences, which are all needed for a level C. However, he didn't use punctuation, include many details, or extensive development of the topic so I scored the sample as a level B. Student E has really come a long way with the development of his writing skills. (See Figure 18)
Figure 18

Student J

I see that we are going to celebrate because

[Handwritten notes]
Table 1
Stanine Scores for Workshop Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>January (stanines)</th>
<th>May (stanines)</th>
<th>Recording Sounds (stanines)</th>
<th>Writing Bands (letter scores)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A - boy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - boy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C - boy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D - boy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E - girl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - girl</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G - boy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9 B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H - girl</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9 B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - girl</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J - boy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K - girl</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9 B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>7 B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O - girl</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P - girl</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6 B C</td>
</tr>
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Conclusions

Research by Graves, Calkins, and others affirmed that the writer's workshop model is beneficial for older students, but does implementing writer's workshop in the kindergarten classroom provide a framework for children to develop their writing skills? According to the data generated by this study, yes. The Workshop group maintained and/or improved their abilities according to all three assessment tools. At the end
of the semester, they were able to hear more individual sounds and record them correctly, they were able to increase their writing vocabulary, and they were able to compose a more developed and complete writing sample with more accurate conventions than they were at the beginning of the semester.

The children from the Workshop group progressed through the range of beginning writing behaviors as described by Fisher (1991). The students were writing for their own purposes, which I believe was a critical contributing factor to the motivation of each student. As important as the development of writing skills is, the significance of their emotional reactions should not be overlooked (Clay, 1987). I observed student enjoyment and a high level of engagement during each and every writing session. The children looked forward to writer's workshop time and often groaned when time was up and they were told to put writings away. They all developed a sense of confidence that they were writers. Their sense of accomplishment and pride was evident every time they shared a completed story with their peers.

The children in the Workshop group worked through the steps outlined by Poindexter and Oliver (1998-1999), they understood the process,
and they were able to manage their materials with minimal support. These steps and strategies helped the students attack the complex writing process. The Workshop students were successful with a proper level of support and appropriate expectations.

Throughout the semester, I was able to closely monitor the skill level of each student. With each individual student, I was able to conference one-on-one and develop learning scaffolds (Lipson et al., 2000). As a child gained control over one skill, I was able to nudge them on to another, more complex skill. Since I met with each child, I was able to see trends and commonalties across the entire class, which, in turn, helped in my planning for large group mini-lessons. All of this information allowed me to effectively plan lessons and report the strengths and weaknesses of the group as a whole and for individuals during parent-teacher conferences and on progress reports.

Other questions, however, have been raised by this study. Many kindergarten classes do not have independent writing time every day. So was the writing improvement caused by the writer's workshop experience or simply because the students were given the opportunity to write every day? Half-day programs do not have as much instructional time, so was the fact
that the students were at school all day a factor in this time allotment?  

Some students from the Classroom group actually regressed during the semester. Why did that happen? Why didn’t that happen in the Workshop group? A difference between the two groups’ progress was evident, but was this enough of a difference to determine that it was significant? More research could be done with this age level to find answers to some of these questions.

References


Appendix A

Council Bluffs Community School District
Language Arts Assessments

District Writing Bands and Anchor Papers
Bands A through E

Attached is a copy of the Council Bluffs Community School District Developmental Writing Bands that have been developed and refined over a period of several years. The bands are meant to guide teachers, parents, and students to understand the typical characteristics of the stages of writing students go through as they develop as writers. The bands are best used to describe an individual student’s stage of development when based on several current pieces of writing. The descriptions within the bands can be used to show the skills that have been mastered and the skills that must be developed to move to the next stage.

The district uses the bands for purposes of scoring samples of writing from kindergarten and grades 1, 3, and 5 as well. This data shows growth over time. In order to help make scoring more reliable, the Language Arts Assessment Committee has created the attached set of annotated “anchor papers” to show what papers look like that demonstrate each of the levels. (Level F still to be completed.)

When scoring, teachers are reminded that:

- Few student papers will be exactly like a performance level described at a particular level. The bands are not a checklist that means every single piece has to be there or it goes down to the next lower level. Look for the level that describes most nearly the quality and nature of the work. What is the best match?

- It is best to score with others. Time spent on learning to score the same way (calibrating) pays off with more reliable scoring and faster scoring in the long run.
Appendix A (con't)

Council Bluffs Community School District
Writing Bands (revised June, 2002)

A Uses some recognizable symbols
Uses mixture of drawings and writings to convey meaning
Makes random marks on paper
May experiment with random word selection from the environment (words may not relate to prompt)

B Uses sound/symbol spelling and forms some recognizable words
Writes left to right/top to bottom
May experiment with punctuation
Print awareness - spacing between words
May reproduce words from the environment
Intended meaning relates to prompt
Writes words in logical order - may be a complete thought or fragment
Content may be a very simple pattern of repetition of words

C Uses sound/symbol spelling and conventional spelling
Uses some conventional punctuation
Uses upper/lower case conventionally
Puts words together as complete units of thought (beginning to write sentences)
Uses personal experience to convey meaning
Includes details (i.e. listing and common descriptors)
Simple recounting of series of events in sequence and/or some sentences loosely related to a topic
May have some elements of repetition, but it is mixed with expressing different ideas around the same topic
Shows some attempt to organize writing

D Control of simple punctuation and spelling - errors often related to attempts to make writing more complex
Writing shows organization - concept of time and order
Narratives show attempt at beginning, middle and ending
Smooth connection of ideas
Topic shows some development
Audience awareness
Beginning to show ownership through emotions, perceptions, and feelings

E Indicates paragraphs by indenting or spacing
Few distracting errors in spelling, punctuation, and usage
Passages have clear meaning
Narrative has a beginning, middle and ending - flows logically
Message can be identified
Elaborates through use of descriptive details and information
Experiments with sentence variety
Evokes emotional response in reader

F Few, if any, errors in conventions (may result from attempting sophisticated structures)
Original treatment of ideas
Strong voice
Complex ideas attempted
Uses variety of sentences to reinforce purpose
Vocabulary enhances purpose and meaning
Uses vivid figure of speech and descriptive language
Unified paragraphs
Introduction, complication, resolution with narratives
Introduction draws attention to purpose
Conclusion reinforces purpose
Appendix B

COUNCIL BLUFFS COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Anchor Papers for District Writing Bands (6/02 revision)
Bands A Through E

A Uses some recognizable symbols
Uses mixture of drawings and writings to convey meaning
Makes random marks on paper
May experiment with random word selection from the environment (words may not relate to prompt)

Random environmental print and symbols

String of random letters

String of random letters

The turtle was sunning in the sun

Mixture of writing and drawing. Random environmental print, but no left to right.

The bird thought it was a war.

The birds thought it was a war.

Some recognizable symbols but they don’t relate to the story.

2 glowing eyes.

Some recognizable symbols but they don’t relate to the story.

The apple fell on the turtle.
The fox bit the turtle.

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Appendix B (con’t)

Anchors for District Writing Bands – Level A continued, Level B

String of random letters

String of random letters

B — Uses sound/symbol spelling and forms some recognizable words.

- Writes left to right/top to bottom
- May experiment with punctuation
- Print awareness - spacing between words
- May reproduce words from the environment
- Intended meaning relates to prompt
- Writes words in logical order - may be a complete thought or fragment
- Content may be a very simple pattern of repetition of words

The group of writing samples below represents rather low B’s. They attempt sound/symbol writing consistently.

Form recognizable words. Some have spacing, logical order, fragments.

He went to climb.
Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands - Level B continued

This group uses sound/symbol relationships to form recognizable words. Uses left to right. There is spacing, logical order and complete thoughts.

I'm glad that Dorda could swim.

This sample is a B because it is most like a B even thought it does not have left to right.

This group consists of fairly high B's. They have all of B and a few things from C, but are more like B's. They do not have enough development for a C.

The pig is in the mud.

The magic string fell off.

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Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands – Level B continued

This group is consists of fairly high B’s. They have all of B and a few things from C, but are more like B’s. They do not quite have enough development for a C.

The two papers below use sound-symbol relationships and sight words. They are written in logical order and have complete thoughts. They show very simple repetition only. There is no message or development of ideas around a topic or sequence of events.
Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands – Level C

C. Uses sound/symbol spelling and conventional spelling. Uses some conventional punctuation. Uses upper/lower case conventionally. Puts words together as complete units of thought (beginning to write sentences). Uses personal experience to convey meaning. Includes details (i.e. listing and common descriptors). Simple recounting of series of events in sequence and/or may have some sentences loosely related to a topic. May have some elements of repetition, but it is mixed with expressing different ideas around the same topic. Shows some attempt to organize writing.

A low C. Uses quite a few conventions but thoughts are run together into one long sentence. Recounts a coherent simple series of events. No development.

Conventions are strong, but simple. No detail or flow. Several ideas about one topic but no organization or development.

The following have some elements of B, but are more like C's. They use sound/symbol and simple conventional spelling punctuation. Mostly correct upper and lower case. Contains some repetition, but the writers are using some detail and are attempting to develop several ideas around a topic.

While this is a very low C, it is considered a C because the conventions are very good and there are a number of sentences related to the same topic.
Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands – Level C continued

This is a strong C. Good, but use of simple of conventions but has some repetitious content like a level B. Some detail and personal experience. Is beginning to organize as in a paragraph.

My special friend is Taylor. She comes to my house once a week when she comes to my house we play with toys, we play with dolls, we play with my play kitchen, we play my tea set, we play with my Barbies. We have fun. It is a good time.

Good conventions. Some detail. No flow or organization beyond series of events.

I'll never forget the day I got hit by a truck. But the truck was slowing down to pick up somebody. I fell on my elbow and the truck was blue. I wasn't so hurt because I could walk.

Many conventions. Personal experiences with some organization and some detail. Sequence of events.

I like to go to the zoo and see the really big elephant. I like to go to the zoo and see the elephant. When I went to the zoo I saw all the elephants. I love the tigers. Then I went back home and I had fun.

A good C with all of the elements of a C. Lacks consistent use of conventions but note apostrophe for possessive. Some flow, mostly a recounting of events. Some detail and sentence variety emerging.

The tale of Shawn

Once upon a time there was a little boy. His name was Shawn. He lived with his mother. Shawn's mother told Shawn to clip his nails he had he had good play with his friends so he did. Shawn's mom was apart. Shawn's mom told him that he could play with his friends. His mother and Shawn hated that they had a mother and mother that had a mother and mother in bed the bed.
Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands - Level C continued

This paper and the one below use sound-symbol and conventional spelling. Use mostly conventional punctuation and case. Complete sentences. Some detail. Simple series of events.

I went out and found a garbage can by the dump. I found a bunch of things. I found some that can be recycled and recycled it in the recycling center. It was fun really fun.

My friend had a party at Chuckie Cheese. Her name is Laurie. Her favorite present is dolls. She took them home. She wanted to blow out the candles.

(cut off)
Appendix B (con’t)

Anchors for District Writing Bands - Level C continued

Has poor conventions. Mix of phonetic and conventional spelling. Little organization beyond recounting of events, but has some detail and flow.

My Dog

When I went outside, my dog came around me. He helped me dig a hole. So I put in a seed. And then I had to whole. Then the plane my dog and I went in a car and he helped me dig the tree. So...

And then we were all done with our work. And then we had a nap. And then we look up. We went back. And then we went to the field. And then it started to snow. We had to go in. And then we had to go to bed.

A rather high C. Good simple conventions. Some repetition but also detail, personal experience and beginning to organize as a paragraph with an ending.

This paper shows some elements of a B. It is mostly like a C because of the lack of control of simple conventions. There are several sentences on one topic. Some development but not yet well organized. Some detail. Complete thoughts.

I have five pets at my house.

Here is a picture of my pets.

But I see the next one.

And I see the next one.

And I see the next one.

And I see the next one.

And I see the next one.

Here is my white.

And yellow and blue.

And this is big.

And this is fat.

Go out Front Sun.

Time and take sun.

Time and give on

And Troy plays in

And they chase.

Each other.

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Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands continued - Level D

D Control of simple punctuation and spelling - errors often related to attempts to make writing more complex

- Writing shows organization - concept of time and order
- Narratives show attempt at beginning, middle and ending
- Smooth connection of ideas
- Topic shows some development
- Audience awareness
- Begins to show ownership through emotions, perceptions, and feelings

A low D. Has control of most simple conventions except spelling. It goes beyond a simple recounting of events. It shows sequence, some development of the topic, and ownership through feelings.

Some simple words are misspelled, but most errors in conventions are from trying more complex sentences or from experimenting with dialogue. Attempts to organize with paragraphs. Shows some ownership and some connections of ideas. Some sentence variety.

A mouse in my house.

The day el astrology move in my house.
I told to catch it. But it was too fast.

It ran all around the house and then under my bed silly fast. I said hey! When
my mom saw it she screamed silly loud.

I ran up stairs and dad what. I said: Hey! My mom said there's a mouse in my
house. She said.

I said: Can I keep it? She said: Not! Why not? My mom said because you have
ever been. But it went back you

I made that she said. But el want it for a pet. I look at her. She said: Yes! Then the next week
he was still alive and it lived happily ever after.

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Appendix B (con't)

Anchors for District Writing Bands continued - Level D

The following D has some spelling errors though mostly on less common words. The mechanics are mostly okay. Has some run-on sentences but also attempts to control with commas. Some attempt to organize the writing using paragraphs. Uses detail and has some development.

The next day Fred decided he was brave enough.

Once there was a guy named Fred. He had red hair and freckles all over his face. Fred lived in the country. He went down stairs. He opened the door. The thing that was haunted. All the windows were turning. The rob was his older sister that ran away. From home when they were little!

One day Fred was just getting home from work and he went down in the basement for the first time. Suddenly

the had a door. Fred went over to the door, but he was too scared to open the door. Fred decided to go back up stairs.

The Taco That Liked Swimming

Once there was a small chip. He liked to go swimming. But there was one problem. He went his parents would fall out of his shell. When that would happen, he always would have to clean out the pool and make everyone wait for it. He felt. He felt embarrassed. He felt to think of a way to stop his parents from falling out. When he went swimming with them, he only a sure he would buy a really big blow out on the bottom and put it on the top of his shell. His best if the next time he went swimming and it worked. And now that he solved the problem. He liked swimming more than ever.
Appendix B (con't)

Hauschildt - 55

Conventions are okay but used only simple sentences. Some development. Beginning to show some ownership through feelings. Ideas flow and they are easy to follow.

The Elevator

I was riding on an elevator. The bell kept on ringing. I jumped when I heard the bell. I was really afraid. The bell was a fire alarm. Then I heard voices in the hall. They seemed to think somebody was gone and they had forgotten all about me. They would probably let me burn with the school. I didn't want that to happen. The problem was, I dropped out of the elevator when I came in. I had a idea I thought if I tried pushing every button to the elevator door it would open. I tried but the door still wouldn't open.

There wasn't any hope of getting out of the elevator in time. I heard my stomach start to growl. I looked down at my watch. It was 11:26 A.M. I heard voices in the hall. Suddenly it occurred to me that there was supposed to be a practice fire alarm. I started bouncing the elevator door. Finally, the janitor opened the elevator door. The principal told me not to worry about the elevator and to have a nice day. I did have a nice day after all.

The Best Circus Ever

The best circus ever that was performed was the circus in Wisconsin. There were clowns, tightrope walkers, elephants, lions, tigers, bears and tightrope walkers. I really enjoyed it. When I was there I went with my friends and family. The bears were dancing. The clowns made me laugh. Then the circus was over and I talked to the animals. He said I could be an acrobat, I was really happy. The next day the circus went on I was ready to do my tricks. There was a loud applause when I was done. They started to talk. The big tent came down. I was so I went home. There weren't any more circuses after that in Wisconsin. The End.
Appendix B (cont')

Anchors for District Writing Bands continued — Level E

E Indicates paragraphs by indenting or spacing
Few distracting errors in spelling, punctuation, and usage
Passages have clear meaning
Narrative has a beginning, middle, and end — flows logically
Message can be identified
Elaborates through use of descriptive details and information
Experiments with sentence variety
Evoques emotional response in reader

The Royal King

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Mike. Mike "was a very good student..."

Grizzly and Me

They say bears are very..."

When it was raining money

Once upon a little little boy was really really bored..."

Hauschildt - 56

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