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Implementing a writing program in grade two

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Abstract

Writing is a process to create meaning. This process consists of many components: prewriting, drafting, redrafting, editing, and publishing. Children need the following support measures: oral storytelling, genuine audiences, teacher modeling, literature experiences, the reading-writing connection, time to write, and emphasis on the use of one's own voice. The connection of instruction and assessment is another important aspect of a children's writing program. The following qualitative assessment techniques provide this connection: journaling, student-teacher conferences, checklists, and portfolios.

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Abstract

Writing is a process to create meaning. This process consists of many components: prewriting, drafting, redrafting, editing, and publishing. Children need the following support measures: oral storytelling, genuine audiences, teacher modeling, literature experiences, the reading-writing connection, time to write, and emphasis on the use of one's own voice. The connection of instruction and assessment is another important aspect of a children's writing program. The following qualitative assessment techniques provide this connection: journaling, student-teacher conferences, checklists, and portfolios.

The implementation of a writing program in a second grade involved establishing a print-rich environment to support the components of the recursive composition process. Literature-based experiences supported writing activity. Writing experiences were also presented within the content areas, thus helping children understand the functions of language in the peer conferences and extended the students' responses in the writing process. Several qualitative assessment techniques were used to describe the students' progress in writing.

Writing is a process to create meaning. It has several components: prewriting, drafting, redrafting, editing, and publishing (Graves, 1983). Young writers see writing as a one-draft process, or a linear process. Older children begin to see their writing as recursive, going back and forth through the components as they progress toward their goal to create meaning (Calkins, 1981).

Components of the Writing Process

The writing components are described by Graves (1983): Writers involved in the *prewriting*, or rehearsing component, select a topic and consider the purpose for writing the piece and the structure in which the ideas will be presented. Control and responsibility for writing a piece should be left with the authors. Children should be allowed to choose their topics for writing. These choices will come from their own experiences and interests. Because the topics have meaning for them, they can write freely and enthusiastically. Children through trial and error select good topics. They soon learn that a topic may be too broad or that they know little about it (Graves, 1983).

Drafting is the author's first attempt to put ideas in sentence form on paper. *Redrafting* involves expanding, deleting, and combining the ideas of the first draft to create a more interesting, clear meaning. The teacher and other students can collaborate with the author in redrafting by listening, asking questions, and making suggestions.

In owning the experience, the author then makes whatever changes he/she believes to be necessary to make the ideas of the piece more complete and clear. The component of *editing* focuses on refining the piece through the correct use of written form elements, such as punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and sentence patterns.

Children may wish to polish a piece with others. This component known as *publishing* provides the author with a purpose for producing a quality work. Publishing can take many forms; it can be as simple as displaying a work on a bulletin board or as elaborate as making a hard cover book. Publishing has many benefits: It contributes to a sense of audience and as a result can provide feedback from others. Published pieces can help parents to see the progress that their children are making in the writing process.

Support Measures for Children's Writing

School programs can offer many support measures to encourage children in the writing process.

Oral Storytelling

Telling stories orally can support writing. Such activity can lead to a belief that one's story is important and interesting, thus nurturing a sense of self-confidence. As children tell stories orally, they can have the experience of ordering ideas in a sequence and following the

pattern of stories - - beginning, middle, and ending. After the story is told, they can then receive feedback from the audience that can assist them in clarifying and elaborating on ideas and deleting unnecessary details (Houston, 1997).

Genuine Audiences

Audiences can support the components of writing. Membership in an assigned small peer group and peer conferences can assist children in extending each others' writing abilities. Student-teacher conferences can encourage children in developing ideas through the writer's process and also can offer informal instruction (Graves, 1983; Blake, 1992). Sharing time, a whole class experience, can offer a publishing experience in which children can read their polished pieces and receive constructive comments and ideas for sharing their compositions with wider audiences (Gallas, 1992). Examples of sharing are class books on a specific theme to be placed in the library; a booklet or class newsletter to be shared with their families; and a school newsletter. Also, stories can be converted into oral monologues, dramatizations, reader theater scripts, and puppet dialogues.

Teacher As a Writer

Teachers need to write with their students and to discuss their

involvement in the components of the writing process (Routman, 1994). Teachers are influential models of writing for their students because many children have experienced little writing activity in their life experience outside of school. Teachers can show their students unfinished writing and writing that does not work as well as writing that works (Murray, 1985).

Literature Experiences

Children's literature can also provide models of language and content for students' writing. Studying authors can supply children with information about how story ideas are found and how the authors engage in the writing process (Morrow, 1997). Listening to literature read aloud can foster children's sense of story. Discussion of literature experiences can assist children in becoming aware of story elements. Then, they can apply these experiences with language in their own writing (Morrow, 1997; Huck, Helper, Hickman, & Kiefer, 1997; Butler & Turbill, 1984).

Reading–Writing Connection

Reading is a companion of writing. Much reading is involved in the writing process (Murray, 1985). "We can read without ever having written, but we cannot write without having read" (Butler & Turbill, p. 19). As children are engaged in the writing components, they are

reading. As writers draft, redraft, and revise, they are reading; then, they may read the completed piece (Graves, 1983).

Time to Write

Writers need time to develop a piece. They need time to think about and talk about their writing (Butler & Turbill, 1984). Calkins (1983) suggests that students need 45 minutes to one hour at least three times a week to develop their writing.

Emphasis on Using One's Own Voice

When writers have control over their writing and have adequate time to develop their ideas, their writing voice becomes strong. Voice is an individual human being speaking from the page to the reader (Murray, 1985). Graves says "The voice is the dynamo of the writing process, the reason for writing in the first place. The voice starts with the choice of the topic" (1983, p. 31). Although it is important for children to select their own topics, the teacher can assist them in choosing topics that have particular meaning to them. A writer's voice will only be as strong as his/her knowledge of a chosen topic. Calkins (1983) gives an example of helping children to find their own voices through a sharing activity: The children brought a treasure to share with the class. After each child shared their treasure, the

class asked questions about it to help develop the oral accounts into writing pieces.

Connection of Instruction and Assessment

Qualitative assessment techniques describe children's progress and instructional needs in the writing process and connect instruction and assessment. The use of several descriptive techniques can support each other (Valencia, 1990).

Journaling

Journaling is a way to involve children daily in commenting about significant experiences and problems. It provides a private, non-threatening way of exploring and reflecting on ideas, feelings, events, and language. As a result, children come to understand that everyday events are what writers write about (Routman, 1994). Journal writing is also a means of assessing children's progress in writing. The teacher and each student can assess how the child has progressed in using ideas and the conventions of writing over a period of time (Graves, 1986).

Student-Teacher Conferences

Student-teacher conferences can be periodical checks of children's engagement in the writing process, their application of instruction, and their goals for writing (Calkins, 1991). Children should know

what to expect during a conference and what to bring with them to the conference. Effective conferences let children speak first. By letting children speak first, the teacher can listen and learn about information in children's writing activity. The students need to know that the teacher is truly interested in what they have learned while engaged in the writing process. When children can initiate the conference with their ideas, they gain ownership not only of their writing piece but of the conference. A teacher should look for the potential in the conference rather than what children are unable to do at a given time. In conferences, teachers should ask questions rather than tell children what should be done to improve their writing. The questions should be challenging enough to help children to think about how to improve their writing. Conferences should be held at least once a week with each conference lasting a few minutes (Graves, 1983).

Checklists

Checklists can also be used to record children's progress in acquiring the elements of form, such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (Graves, 1983). This assessment technique can be used as teachers observe children engaging in the writing process and during student-teacher conferences, and portfolio collection sessions.

Portfolios

Portfolio collection is another means of assessing writing. Portfolios are usually large folders that contain a collection of an individual child's writing samples. The pieces are selected by the children in collaboration with the teacher, over a period of time and can chronicle the children's progress in the writing process. Students can reflect on a particular piece, their progress, and future writing goals (Valencia, 1990; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

Implementation of a Writing Program in Grade Two

This school year I implemented a writing program for my second grade class. In beginning the writing program, I scheduled time for the children to engage in the writing process. During this period, I wrote with the students. Instructional sessions to take care of the writing needs of specific children as evidenced in their writing was conducted. These sessions usually involved small groups. The students spent the rest of the period in conferencing with peers and the teacher.

The students developed folders in which they stored their work. These folders had four pockets representing the components in the writing process: One pocket held the list of topics and the others were for drafts, redrafts and revisions, and publications. Another folder was provided for portfolios in which they could keep selected exhibits

from their writing folders that would represent their writing activities, interests, and progress throughout the year. Each student also had their own spelling books. Words that were important for them to spell were added to this book as needed.

Introducing the Writing Components

To introduce the writing program, I began by modeling the components of the writing process. I helped the children create a topic list for their writing. Several activities were initiated to help children develop this list: I had the students bring a treasure from home to share with the class. They were to tell what the treasure was, how they acquired it, and why it was so special to them. For example, Jake shared a plush dog that he got from his doctor right before he had surgery. It had a hospital band just like his. Will shared a picture of his cat, Oreo. Oreo was special because he was the first pet that he and his brother were allowed to have.

The children helped each other extend their topic lists by sharing family stories. The students and the teacher shared a story that either happened to them or one that they have heard told over and over by members of their family. For instance, Allison told a story about her dad. One day as he and his sister were playing outside in the summer, it became very windy. He stood in the driveway and held

his arms out to the side because he said that he would be able to fly just like all of the comic characters that he liked reading about. Jenna told about her great-grandma who went to a one-room school. She had to either walk or ride a horse six miles to school. One winter it was so cold that she passed out. Having each child tell about the piece that they were working on at the moment was also a help for those students who needed some ideas to add to their list of topics.

The next component that I modeled was how to develop a topic for writing, or drafting. I began to write my ideas for a story using a graphic organizer. The one that worked well for my students was a web. We called it a "circle page." The web starts with the topic written in a circle in the center of a piece of paper. Lines are drawn from the word in the circle to other circles that contain related ideas to support the development of the piece. It was somewhat difficult at first for the students to state their ideas in words or short phrases for these small circles.

When the web was completed, I began the first draft of my piece. I took each idea that was in the small circles and wrote them into complete sentences on the chalkboard. I stressed to the children that it was not important at this time to worry about such elements as spelling, punctuation, or neatness. It was more important to get their

ideas down.

In modeling the second draft, or redraft, I began to demonstrate how to refine a piece by expanding my sentences and by selecting strong verbs to strengthen the meaning of my ideas. Redrafting and revising, which focuses on form elements, such as capitalization and punctuation, were difficult for the second graders, but I continued to model and to encourage them to expand their ideas and to improve their use of written elements.

Publishing was the component that the children seemed to enjoy the most, probably because it offered a genuine audience for the students' writing. I demonstrated how the children could make their own books by sewing pieces of writing paper inside a folded piece of construction paper. These books were completed with a title page that included our publishing company name, Ambrose and Sasse Publishing Co. (the teachers' last names). The children's books were included in the listening/reading center. The children also published their works through the author's chair experience. During this time, the children read their writing pieces aloud to the entire class.

Providing Other Support For the Writing Process

Other support for the children's writing experiences, in addition

to providing teacher modeling of the writing process, adequate time to engage in the writing process, and genuine audiences, was given.

Print-rich learning environment. To provide for a print-rich learning environment, I developed sustaining centers that were offered throughout the year. They assisted in maintaining a secure, predictable learning environment that supported writing activity. Their content reflected the study in the school program. The *listening/reading* center provided a place for the children to hear and to read literature from many different genres. These literature experiences provided content and models of language. The *poetry* center offered experiences in the elements of the genre and activities to encourage the children to write poetry. The *author* center focused on a particular author giving the students opportunities to become familiar with how an author develops ideas into stories, poems, plays, and other types of literature. We studied several authors and read many of their works. One of the favorites was Jan Brett. The students delighted in how she extended the fairy tales through her colorful illustrations and book designs. We discovered her website on the internet and enjoyed getting to know her through this information. The *writing* center provided writing paper, pencils, markers, crayons, and other materials for writing. The

bookmaking center offered directions and materials that the children could use to publish their writing projects.

Quality literature read aloud from the different genres and related expressive activity. Reading good literature aloud to the children provided the best model for writing in the various genres. These experiences encouraged related expressive activities and gave the children opportunities to explore different forms of writing, thus connecting literature experiences with writing and other forms of expressive activity. From their literature experience, the second graders wrote stories, poems, and reports, and presented puppet plays that were performed for their classmates.

The folk tale unit was especially enjoyed by the second graders. After I read aloud several stories, I led a discussion about the literary elements of this genre. The class then wrote a folk tale together, and then the children wrote their own stories. One of the students wrote an entertaining story that combined The Three Billy Goats Gruff and Jack and the Beanstalk.

To model the elements of fiction, I read aloud Julius, the Baby of the World (1990), by Kevin Henkes (New York: Mulberry). This story has a clearly delineated problem and solution. After reading the story, the students and I filled in a story map. The map consisted of the title, setting, list of characters, problem, solution, and plot.

In writing a class-generated fiction piece, I found presenting a familiar story as a plot model was helpful. The class seemed to enjoy the Black Lagoon books (1994), by Mike Thaler (Jared Lee, Il., New York: Scholastic). These works provided an easy format for the children to follow in composing their own Black Lagoon stories. After the story map was completed, the students began writing their own versions. The children needed practice in developing a story map. After this group story was written, I divided the class into small groups for another session. Each group collaborated in a story that was based on a story map. When the stories were completed, the groups shared them with the entire class. Then, some of the students wrote fiction pieces on their own.

Several students showed an interest in writing poetry. Different types of poetry were read, for example, couplets, cinquains, and haikus. I guided the students through the process of writing poetry forms. For couplets, I provided the first sentence. Then, the children suggested a list of rhyming words. I wrote their dictation of the second line on the board. A similar format for introducing the cinquain and the haiku forms were followed.

Experiences with the functions of language. Experiences in the content areas of the curriculum can provide children with opportunities to engage in the functions of language. I made a concerted effort to provide many opportunities for the children to

write in different curriculum settings. For example, during a study of metamorphisis in science, I read Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1987, New York: Philomel Books). I then led the children in a discussion about how the author wrote this story by noting a progression of events and how he wove elements of nonfiction as well as fiction into the story. Next, we wrote our own version entitled The Very Hungry Tadpole using the writing pattern of Eric Carle and supplying illustrations. During this unit of study, I provided a center specific to the unit that contained material for them to research other animals that go through metamorphisis.

During a bear unit in science, I modeled how to do a report. I read aloud parts of several nonfiction books about bears. Each student chose a bear on which to do a report. I provided them with a notetaking form to support their research. After they took notes, they wrote a rough draft of their report. After I conferenced with each child about his/her report, the children wrote their final report and scanned pictures into the reports.

Peer conferences

To promote further understanding of the writing process and its components, the students were assigned to small groups for peer conferences: I began by doing what Graves calls receiving a piece. I read a piece that I had written to another teacher before the children. She retold my story and asked me questions to clarify some

parts of my story. She then said, "I would like to know more about..." trying to lead me to include more details. I stressed to the children when they were offered comments and questions to their fellow writers during a peer conference that they needed to respect the writer's ideas and efforts. With guidance from the teacher, the students began to contribute constructive assistance.

Assessing Students' Progress and Needs

Assessment of the children's writing seemed overwhelming at first to me. As the program developed, I found that checklists and anecdotal records helped me monitor the children's day by day language activity. By using checklists, I recorded the children's use of form elements, such as punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structures. The information gathered from these qualitative assessment techniques assisted me in conducting conferences with the children. These sessions were scheduled once a week and more often when additional support was needed (e.g., a child had difficulty finding a topic or a child needed assistance finding sources for a report). I summarized each scheduled conference on a form that had the date of the conference, what was shared, why the piece was shared, what progress was noted, what assistance was given, and what future goals were set.

Each child developed a working folder and a portfolio. The children kept all of their writing in the working folders that had

labeled pockets - - topic, list, graphic organizer, rough drafts, and final copies. By keeping all of their work in these folders, the children could see their progress from the beginning of the year to the end. Periodically, I would choose a story to check for a particular aspect of writing that had been taught to the whole class or a small group from the individual folders.

Approximately, once a month I assisted the children in choosing a story from their working folder to be included in their portfolios. During the conferences, the students shared with me their reasons for selecting specific pieces for inclusion in their portfolios. For the children, the process of thinking about why a piece was chosen seemed to be a positive growing experience. The children reflected on their involvement in the writing process and their progress, instructional needs, and goals for future writing activity.

Conclusions

The members of this second grade class had a wide range of writing abilities. Stories that were written at the beginning of the school year ranged from well developed narratives to stories that only had one or two sentences and beginning sounds written for words. It was amazing to see how far even the most academically-challenged students progressed as they were encouraged to express their ideas in meaningful writing experiences. Some students progressed from barely being able to write a single word to writing complete sentences to forming a

story with a logical sequence of ideas. As the children became aware of their audience and how important it was for others to be able to understand their ideas, they found a meaningful reason to redraft their writing. Revisions to improve their use of the elements were more readily engaged in. This self-monitoring promoted much improvement in form. For example, their penmanship and spelling improved.

The process of portfolio collection connected instruction and assessment. The children had an opportunity to examine their progress and instructional needs and then to set future goals for writing. From the portfolio conferences, the teacher was able to offer instruction, often in small groups, that extended the children's writing abilities.

At the end of the year, I spiral bound their writing pieces collected in their portfolios into a book for them to keep. I also entertained them with an author's tea. The students and myself were very satisfied with the work that they had accomplished.

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