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## Writing process and program for second grade

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## Writing process and program for second grade

### Abstract

Recently the research on children's involvement in the writing process has prompted educators to revise school programs to extend thinking-language abilities and to capitalize on the potential for personal-social development as children create meaning through writing (Murray, 1985; Graves, 1983). For this study, the writer reviewed the recent research on the development of children's composition abilities and then formulated an instructional project to facilitate writing in her second grade classroom.

Writing Process and Program for Second Grade

A Graduate Project  
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by

Lorene Knutson Geiselhart

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has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for  
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Recently the research on children's involvement in the writing process has prompted educators to revise school programs to extend thinking-language abilities and to capitalize on the potential for personal-social development as children create meaning through writing (Murray, 1985; Graves, 1983). For this study, the writer reviewed the recent research on the development of children's composition abilities and then formulated an instructional project to facilitate writing in her second grade classroom.

#### CHILDREN AS EMERGING WRITERS

Children as writers gain more sophisticated composition abilities as they grow and learn from their experiences in the language processes. As children progress through the elementary school years, their thought processes become more flexible, allowing them to move back and forth among the ideas in their compositions. As a result, they begin to value one idea over another leading to excluding and reorganizing information (Graves, 1983).

#### VALUE OF WRITING

Through writing, children can reflect on their lives and order their thoughts, therefore creating meaning by making something of the ordinary. Writing provides children with the opportunity to learn from their experiences and to realize the power of their thoughts and feelings as expressed through language. These learning experiences foster children's self-confidence (Calkins, 1983).

## WRITING - A RECURSIVE PROCESS

Traditionally writing has been treated as a linear process; writers supposedly moved progressively forward from one composition step to another. The recent research on writing suggests that the writing process is recursive. As writers formulate ideas while writing, they move back and forth among the different aspects of composition--rehearsing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Children approximately seven to eight years of age and older can move naturally and independently among rehearsing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing; they can regulate their own pace. They also extend their writing abilities through interaction with peers and the teacher (Calkins, 1983).

## OWNERSHIP OF THE WRITING PROCESS

Graves (1983) suggests that writing takes on meaning when the author assumes ownership of the entire process. The writer chooses the topic of the composition, the course taken in drafting, the modifications if any are done in terms of content and mechanics in revising, and the means of publication if this aspect is part of the process. Children think about their lives and interests and decide on a topic. They satisfy their own voice by controlling the subject, limiting themselves, sequencing the information, and changing their language. They learn to trust their own judgements by writing and revising (Calkins, 1983).

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO NURTURE CHILDREN'S WRITING ABILITIES

The teacher can play a significant role in nurturing children's thinking-language abilities. A teacher must be knowledgeable about linguistic and cognitive development, insightful in monitoring the progress of learners as they acquire the ability to express meaning through written language, and able to plan experiences to help children develop their writing abilities (Goodman, 1986).

### Teacher as a Writer

The teacher's writing can serve as a model of involvement in the recursive process. As the teacher manipulates ideas through language to create meaning, the children can begin to understand the role of the writer and the audience (Graves, 1983 and Calkins, 1983).

### Literature as a Model of Language

Children use elements from their literature experiences in writing (Graves, 1983). Listening to stories introduces children to the patterns of language and extends vocabulary and meaning. Knowledge of story structure enables children to anticipate the meaning and action in writing their own story. Exposure to much good literature appears to make a difference in children's developing writing abilities. Whether consciously or unconsciously, children pick up words, phrases, parts of plots,

even the intonation patterns of dialogue from books they know. Children exposed to whole language that has the style and complexity of literary prose write more complex sentences. The content of children's stories also reflects the literature they have heard (Huck et al., 1987).

#### Writer's Workshop

It was once largely accepted that children's language learning was fostered through instruction offered by a knowledgeable teacher who carefully presented appropriate lessons. The recent research on children's writing suggests that they also can learn from each other. Through interacting in small peer groups, children can assist each other in progressing through the recursive process of writing and in generating knowledge about composition. Children can help each other find and limit their writing topics, can offer suggestions as writers seek to clarify ideas in their draft and refine their use of mechanics, and can serve as an appreciative audience as the work is published by the author in some form (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1983).

Children's interaction in a peer workshop initially needs to be modeled and then monitored by the teacher, for children's responses to peer group experiences reflects their social development. Through the workshop experience, children can learn to make thoughtful comments and helpful suggestions and to ask pertinent questions while allowing the author to retain ownership of the writing experience (Calkins, 1983).

### Teacher Conferences

Children's writing abilities can also be extended through interactions with their teacher. By listening closely to children as they read their drafts and then reacting with suggestions and questions, teachers can assist children in developing confidence in their thinking-language abilities, in creating meaning through writing, and learning more about language. Through conferencing with the teacher, children can be assisted in finding topics and the appropriate genre for the message. After children have drafted their compositions, their teacher can serve as an appreciative audience and also as a source of individualized instruction. At this time, teachers can assist their students in creating meaning with more ease (e.g., handwriting, spelling, and paragraph form), in presenting ideas in a more interesting way (e.g., plot structure and different types and lengths of sentences), and in making their ideas clearer to their audience (e.g., punctuation and agreement of subject and verb) (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1983).

### Evaluation of Children's Writing

In evaluating children's writing, teachers need to know the nature of the problems solved by children through the writing process, how important these problems are for promoting thinking-language abilities, and how to facilitate these abilities in the classroom. Graves suggests that teacher observation is the most

fruitful way to assess where the children are in their writing. Assessment checkpoints can be the way children choose topics, their oral statements about their writing, and the ways in which they respond to other children's writing and evaluate their own writing (Graves, 1983).

Records help create a system of accumulated information but must take a minimal amount of time and must be done consistently. They can take the form of collections of papers, published books, check-off lists, anecdotal records, conference sheets. Conference sheets can list child's name, date of sharing, what shared, and how collaborated by teacher (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1983).

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF A WRITING PROGRAM

From the studies of Graves (1983) and Calkins (1983), the writer developed a writing program in her second grade classroom. Her major task was to create a predictable learning environment in which children were free to engage in the writing process.

##### Initiation of the Program

For each child the teacher prepared a writing folder from shelf paper with four pockets labeled Ideas to Write About, Writing in Progress, Writing to Revise, and Writing Completed. As the children progressed in their writing activity, they stored their work in these pockets.

The teacher organized the children into four writing workshop groups with four to six children in each heterogeneous-ability

group. In creating the membership of the workshops, each group was assigned a child with leadership potential and then the rest of the group was composed of children generally congenial to each other and with differing abilities.

At the beginning of the year, the teacher worked with each workshop directly for a week modeling the recursive nature. This introduction of the writing process took two weeks as she met daily with one group for thirty minutes in the morning and another for the same length of time in the afternoon. With each group, she shared her list of ideas for writing and her compositions in different stages and wrote with them. She helped them make lists of ideas for writing and select a topic and assisted them throughout the drafting, listened to their compositions, and then made suggestions for revision and publication. The teacher also modeled helpful considerate ways to respond to others' writing through comments and questions so that peer interaction could become a valuable learning experience.

When all the children had been introduced to the writing program, they wrote at regularly scheduled periods of one hour two times a week. Writing activity also occurred within the other areas of the curriculum. Because the children became so excited about writing, they often chose to write during periods in which they were free to select their activity. Many children took their writing folders home on a regular basis to continue their work.

## Support for the Writing Program

Children need a rich predictable learning environment in order to own their writing activity. The teacher supported her students' writing by providing models of language, sustaining centers, centers for specific units of study, sharing time, and conferences.

### Models of Language

Each day at a regularly scheduled time, the teacher read aloud to the children primarily for enjoyment but also to provide models of language through works representing the different genres and literary elements (e.g., characterization, different plot organizations, and imagery). Other opportunities were also available to experience models of language throughout the school program, for example, read aloud sessions presented in other areas of the curriculum and experiences in the Listening/Reading Center.

### Library Visits

Children experienced models of language from their own selection of books to read. The teacher each week accompanied her students as they all selected books for personal reading and then allowed time for reading when they returned to the classroom.

### Teacher as a Writer

The teacher was continually writing and sharing her progress in the recursive process with the students so they could come to

understand the different aspects of the writing process. Many of the students at the beginning of the year wrote in a linear fashion without concern for redrafting and revising. They wrote until they were finished; they had not discovered that writing is always in progress. As the teacher shared her writing, she encouraged them to offer suggestions for revision.

### Sustaining Centers

These centers were maintained throughout the school year providing a predictable structure for the learning environment. The content of these centers changed as the themes in the reading program and the social studies and science units were introduced.

Listening/Reading Center. This center presented whole language experiences representative of the different genres. To accompany most of the books, the teacher had prepared cassette tapes for a listening experience as well. Some of the books were packaged with pellen pieces to allow children to portray in a concrete way the story's characterization and plot organization such as linear and circular plots and patterns of three and cumulative structures. Other stories had puppets that could be manipulated as a story was listened to on tape or could be used for retelling the story. This center provided a rich resource for story retelling that fostered childrens' sense of story.

Poetry Center. This center housed poetry volumes and multiple copies of poems collected on a topic by the teacher. These

collections represented the concepts of weather (e.g., snow), a season, a holiday, growing up (e.g., emotions), and the social studies and science units. They were presented in the center when they were pertinent to the interests of the students and to the instructional program.

Author/Illustrator Center. This center focused on authors/illustrators, their works, how their life's experiences influenced their writing, and how they engaged in the writing process. Biographical sketches were presented along with their works and sometimes a bulletin board with blow-up characters and book jackets and puppets and pellen pieces for story retelling. A favorite author/illustrator was Marc Brown, creator of the Arthur series.

Creative Writing Center. Centers presenting literature experiences and suggested expressive activities were valuable in maintaining an interest in writing. Several of the centers from Jeanne McLain Harms' unpublished booklet Literature and Expressive Activity were used.

Student Author Center. A Publication Board housed on a bulletin board was available for children to present their stories, poems, and illustrations. Also their compositions were developed into bound books and placed on a shelf constructed especially for these volumes by one of the boys in the class. This center was very popular among the children. They enjoyed reading each others' compositions.

Picture File. A collection of mounted pictures offered suggestions for writing. Sometimes the children contributed pictures they thought would make interesting story starters.

Reference Center. Ways to retell a story and publish one's own composition through speaking, writing, dramatizing, and art activity were suggested on cards in packets. Also a packet of cards was available explaining different poetry forms and giving example poems.

Bookmaking Center. Step by step directions and materials for making simulated bound books were provided for children who were ready to publish their compositions.

Writing Materials Center. All kinds of paper and pencils and markers were available on a shelf for the children.

#### Centers Related to Specific Study

Literature-based centers with related expressive activity that extended the study of recurring concepts and the units in social studies and science were presented throughout the year. From working in these centers, children could engage in the functions of language and respond through different types of writing.

#### Sharing Time

As the year progressed, children presented more and more of their writing activity done as individuals or as a workshop to the teacher and the other students during Sharing Time. Through

reading their compositions to the class, they received feedback for revision and ideas for further writing. This sharing gave the teacher an opportunity to direct children to worthwhile activity and to assess their progress.

### Conferences

The teacher sometimes conferenced with a workshop to assess the effectiveness of their interaction. Individual children signed up for conferences, and sometimes the teacher requested a conference with a child. The children enjoyed conferencing and would have engaged more in this activity if there had been available time. The teacher met at least once a week with each child. These sessions provided valuable information about pupil growth and the instructional needs of the children. From conferencing, the teacher frequently gave individual or small group instruction on an aspect of writing.

The children were asked to make some preparation for a conference with the teacher. From their folder, they were asked to select a composition that could be shared with the teacher and then kept in a folder that the teacher was developing of their writing activity. (Sometimes a child presented a duplicate copy, either xeroxed or copied by hand.) The child explained to the teacher why that particular piece had been chosen for the conference. On a conference sheet with headings, the teacher recorded the date of the conference, a description of the work,

the child's reason for choosing the work for conferencing and the folder along with how this piece reflected the school program and how the teacher collaborated with the student in extending the child's language knowledge. As the record of the conferences developed, the teacher could show parents how their child was progressing in learning to write, how the school program was facilitating the child's language development, and how the teacher was offering particular attention to their child's needs.

As the teacher observed children in the process of writing and during Sharing Time and conferences, she used a check sheet of specific writing mechanics generally attended to in grade two to record children's knowledge or need for instruction. Alongside the list were two columns labeled Understands and Needs Instruction. As the teacher observed a child's use of a particular skill, she placed the date in one of the two columns. This sheet helped the teacher in planning lessons and was also shared with parents.

#### SUMMARY

These second graders accepted the ownership of their writing experience and extended this concept of learning in responding to the total instructional program. They identified with their learning with pride and intensity. When visitors came to the classroom, they were eager to show them their writing and the learning centers. One child worked all day on a Saturday in a neighbor's workshop to construct a shelf for the students' books.

The rich environment created by the literature base fueled the children's writing activity. They never seemed at loss to find worthwhile ideas for stories, poems, and illustrations. The literature base provided models of language that appeared in the children's compositions. Little off-task behavior was exhibited during the year because the children had found too many meaningful activities to engage within a predictable learning environment. They found rewards directly related to their involvement in the learning processes.

Through the workshop groups, the children extended their knowledge of language and their awareness of others' rights and feelings. This experience fostered their personal-social development as well as thinking-language abilities.

Through conferencing, the teacher was able to model the writer and the reader for the children; to support them in finding, developing, and refining their compositions; and to assess their emerging literacy. From these encounters, lessons were planned.

Parents throughout the year reported their children's enthusiasm for writing and also their progress in writing whole units of meaning and their ability to use written language mechanics. Several parents indicated that their children did a great deal of writing at home.

The teacher has been richly rewarded by her students' enthusiasm for writing and their growth in thinking-language

abilities and personal-social development. But one day she received a most unexpected reward: The principal informed her that a gift had been given to the school by an anonymous donor to recognize her efforts in establishing a literature-based writing program. This donation was to be used to purchase literature works for the library. Only the superintendent knows the name of the donor. The writer wonders a parent, a grandparent, who?

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