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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WRITING NOTEBOOKS ARE USED IN A FIRST GRADE
CLASSROOM?

by
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A Thesis

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of
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at
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Thesis Chair: Valarie Lee, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WRITING NOTEBOOKS ARE USED IN A FIRST GRADE
CLASSROOM?
2009/2010
Valarie Lee, Ed.D.
Masters of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this research study was to investigate what happened when writing

notebooks are implemented in a first-grade regular education classroom. Writing

notebooks were used along with the Writer's Workshop curriculum in which students

learned how to revise, edit, and use professional literature as examples for writing

techniques. Qualitative inquiry strategies such as student surveys, student written work,

and observations were used to collect data. The data revealed that the students gained an

ownership of their writing notebooks which enabled students to take risks in their writing

and led to an increased motivation and interest among students to write. Implications for

teaching students who are still developing their writing abilities while using writing

notebooks are discussed.

ACKNOWLEGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

Scope of Study

Introduction

Students are expected to write poems, persuasive essays, and other types of

writing to complete an assignment but they are often not given the opportunity to enjoy

writing. Writing skills are developed and strengthened throughout school and those skills

are used in daily lives as adults for things such as making a grocery list, writing a thank

you note, jotting down a phone message, or even signing your name. There are many

tasks that people are able to complete everyday because they know how to write, but how

much do they enjoy writing?

The motivation that a student has to write as well as the value that a student puts

towards writing effects how much effort a student puts into learning how to write (Harrell

et al., 2006). As previously discussed, people use writing throughout their adult lives, so

it is important to develop a strong ability to write starting at a young age, but how can

teachers of these young students motivate them to want to write and find value in their

writing? Many teachers set up their classrooms to foster writing. They set up writing

centers, they give students a variety of writing assignments, and they encourage their

students to write, but sometimes that is not enough to motivate students to write. While

teachers take many measures to create an environment that fosters writing, students still

may not see themselves as writers. According to Graves (2002) and Calkins (1994)

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students who view themselves as writers is an important motivational factor as well as if students see writing as a way to express themselves.

Many times, people use writing to express their thoughts as a way to release feelings or relieve stress. People sometimes keep journals or diaries. This is similar to a writing notebook that is often used in an elementary classroom as well as by professional authors. This notebook can be used as a place to write down personal thoughts and ideas which can become topics for future writings. Writing notebooks also give students one place to hold all of their writings. Students can look back and see the progress they have made in their writing. The hope is that students will value their notebooks because they become the personal writing tool for that individual student. Anyone can have a writing notebook and they may find that they enjoy writing because it is a safe and personal place to explore their thoughts and ideas.

Purpose of Study

Writing can "yield lifelong benefits" (Broach, 2005, p.19). It is important for students to feel motivated to write and be given the confidence to feel good about what they are writing. Students not only need to be taught how to write, but they also need to be motivated to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Graves (2002) claims that the problem in today's classroom is that students do not see themselves as writers, and therefore they are unmotivated to write. Teachers need to show students that they have the ability to produce a well written project. They can do this by telling students that they have important things to say and by encouraging students to continuously write (Calkins, 1994). "Belief in one's competence as a writer is essential to writing motivation" (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p.28). Confidence can be built up in a student through positive

experiences (Broach, 2005). Teachers can build confidence by explaining to students that everyone makes mistakes, including teachers, and it is important in our writing to learn from our mistakes in order to improve our writing.

Writing notebooks are tools that students can use to improve their writing. Buckner (2005) defines a writing notebook as "a place to record bits of life that may serve to inspire further work" (p.4). They can use these notebooks as a place to write their thoughts and ideas and explore these thoughts and ideas further by using them as topics for their writings. Fletcher (1996) states that a writing notebook is a place to explore questions, take risk in writing, and "live in a state of creative readiness" (p.16).

Even if teachers have a problem finding time in a school day to give students an opportunity to write, writing notebooks can maximize the efforts of typical writing lessons (Harrell et al., 2006). Instead of taking time to teach a full lesson, mini lessons are often used with writing notebooks. These lessons can fit into the curriculum and be topics that the teacher has found the students are having difficulty with in their notebooks. Also, Calkins (1994) suggests giving students time in the morning to write down their thoughts or the events that have occurred that the students feel like sharing. This gives students an opportunity to express their thoughts and does not take up much of the class time because it can be done first thing in the morning as the students are getting ready to begin the day.

Writing notebooks were used in a second grade classroom in which students were allowed to write during an allotted period of time (Harrell et al, 2006). The teacher found the students to be highly engaged and focused on completing their writing. The teacher also found that "as the students became more comfortable with the use of their writing

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notebooks, many students were taking them to recess, as well as home each night to write" (Harrell et al., 2006, p.6). Harrell et al (2006) also describe a study in which a teacher used writing notebooks in a fifth grade classroom. These students used their writing notebooks as an organizational tool and divided their notebooks into sections. The teacher found that students in this study took more risks in their writing than prior to the use of the writing notebooks (Harrell et al., 2006). Also, the teacher found that writing became more important in the lives of her students (Harrell et al., 2006). In both of these studies the teachers found that through the use of the writing notebooks, students were able to view themselves as authors which gave them confidence in their writing (Harrell et al., 2006).

In another study, Fracareta and Phillips (2000) implemented writing notebooks in their classroom. In this classroom the teachers stressed the importance of using the writing notebook as a place for private thoughts and taking risks with writing. The teachers allowed the students to fold down pages in their notebooks that they did want the teacher to read. This allowed the students to feel confident that their notebooks were a place that they were free to write about any of their thoughts. The teachers also asked students to fill out surveys about their writing notebooks. This allowed the teachers to find out how students felt about the ways they were implementing the notebooks. The teachers found that using writing notebooks was a positive experience, but there were things that they would change when they use them the following year. They found these changes through the surveys that the students took.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Learning how to write is important for students to develop at a young age. The

National Writing Project and Nagin (2006) have stated that there is a lack of ability to write among elementary and high school students. The responsibility to teach writing falls on the teacher. It is important for teachers to provide a writing structure that motivates students to write in order to improve their writing. Writing notebooks are tools that students can use to build confidence in their writing, to take risks, and to practice their writing with the goal of improving their writing. What happens when writing notebooks are used in a first grade classroom?

Story of the Question

I have never been a strong writer. I have never sat down voluntarily at a table or desk just to write out of choice, but I have learned throughout my life how important it is to know how to write. I have thought back on my schooling to remember how my teachers taught me how to write and the kinds of writing activities that we did in class. I realized that writing was often used as a punishment. If you misbehaved, you had to stay in from recess and write what you did that was wrong. If you misspelled your spelling words or a word in your writing, you were asked to re-write it. Writing became more of a punishment and a chore than an enjoyable activity. When teachers would give out a writing assignment, people in the class would sigh. Since I knew that I would be receiving a grade, I always made sure to follow the teacher's instructions verbatim. I found it hard to get excited to write because there was very little room for self-expression in writing and there were not many safe opportunities to take risks.

I have never found writing to be enjoyable, as writing was always for a grade or used as a punishment, but I found that I needed to learn to write in order to be successful

in other subject areas. I found that I used writing in science when I wrote down observations, in math when I wrote my own word problems, and in social studies when I wrote reports. Because writing is needed for all subject areas, I realized that in order to be successful with writing, I needed to build a confidence with my writing. Thinking back on this, I wondered what could be done in order to help students build a confidence in their writing as well as help students find enjoyment in writing.

I was in a first grade classroom during my fall graduate year practicum placement. The classroom had a writing center that consisted of a table with posters about punctuation and common misspelled words. Each day, students were given time to write. Sometimes the teacher guided the topic that they would write about and other times they could choose which topic they could write about. The students were also given the choice of where they wanted to write. The students were able to sit anywhere around the room and use clipboards if they preferred not to sit at a table or desk. The students used journals for this type of writing, which consisted of pieces of lined paper stapled together. I would often see the students writing in these journals throughout the day, even during free time. These students were given thirty to forty minutes to write each day.

One day, the students in the class were asked to write about something they liked to do during the fall season. The teacher began the lesson by reading students a book about fall. She then asked the students to brainstorm ideas about what they liked to do in the fall, and she charted them on paper. The students were then asked to think about what they liked to do in the fall and close their eyes and think about what they saw, what they heard, and what they felt when they pictured that activity. They were then asked to open their eyes and write about it. This was the first time I had seen every student in a

classroom be excited to write. I was impressed with the enthusiasm these students showed with their writing and how excited they were to read what they wrote to me. They share their work with the teacher or a classmate every time they write. I realized at that moment, when students were surrounding me and proud to show me what they had written, that I would like to do more research into what could be done to motivate students to write and what could be done to give students confidence in their writing.

I liked that the students used journals, but I wondered whether there could be more emphasis put on individual student journals. Would the combined efforts of motivating students to write and using writing journals, or what is known as writing notebooks, be effective in improving student writing? This thinking led me to my question: What will happen when students use writing notebooks in an elementary classroom?

Limitations of the Thesis

Writing notebooks are typically used among students in older grades, who have a strong understanding of how to write and who they are as writers. Writing notebooks are often used for the purpose of working on the content and techniques in writing, but also as a place for students to keep their writing organized. I was placed in a first grade classroom, in which students were still developing writers, and some students were writing a two sentence story. I found that my research could be adapted to work with first graders by working on writing that was at their level. I was still able to view the motivational effects created by writing notebooks.

The study was conducted in a classroom in which the writing curriculum could not be changed. I had originally planned to use lessons based on what I felt was most

important to use along with the writing notebooks, but the mini lessons that were part of

the writing curriculum could not be altered. For this reason I used the writing notebooks

as the students' main tool for writing, but I used the mini lessons that followed the

curriculum as the lessons for the study.

Summary of the Study

In chapter two I will discuss the ways in which to motivate students to write as

well as the benefits of using a writing notebook in an elementary classroom. In chapter

three I will discuss the context of the study and the research design. In chapter four I will

describe and analyze the data collected during the study. In chapter five I will state my

conclusions and implications for teaching.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Writing is a vital aspect to all students' education as it can affect all other subjects. Through a well developed classroom environment and the use of tools to promote writing, students can gain a confidence that encourages them to write and possibly improve their writing. Chapter two presents a review of the literature that examines research on motivating students to write. The first section focuses on the importance of learning how to write and ways to encourage students to write. The second section discusses instructional tools that foster writing. The third section discusses the importance of connecting reading to the student's writing. The fourth section focuses on the benefits of using writing notebooks in an elementary classroom. This literature review concludes with research on how using writing notebooks in an elementary classroom can impact a student's writing.

Why is Writing Important?

Writing can "yield lifelong benefits" (Broach, 2005, p.19). The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) shows that on a writing assessment taken by eleventh grade students in the United States, only two percent were found to be able to write detailed and effective responses to the assessment questions (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p.25). State testing and standards expect teachers to develop students' writing skills by the time they are in third grade (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). If students do not learn how

to write in the primary grades, it can affect their experiences in the future. "There are young people who leave our schools with literacy skills too poor to gain them admission to regular courses in college, to fill out job applications, to analyze and deploy information, or to read stories to their children" (Hull, 1989, p.105).

In the past, educators have often viewed writing as an activity that needed to be structured and students either possessed the skills to be a good writer, or they lacked the skills to be a good writer (Hull, 1989). Hull (1989) explains that the view on writing has evolved into seeing "writing as an activity that can be studied, analyzed, and understood" (p.105). Also students need to see their writing as "authentic," or genuinely written on their own without copying (Teale, 2007, p.502). When students see their writing as having an authentic purpose, they are given the skill to be critically and functionally literate (Teale, 2007). Elbow (2000) and Hull (1989) believe that if teachers approach teaching writing in this way then they see that all students have the ability to acquire writing skills.

Broach (2005) states that "A positive experience with writing produces a level of comfort and skill with the written word that eases our passage through school and into professional life no matter what career we choose" (p.19). This points to how important it is for students to learn to write so that they can use it in their further education, their future career, and to be successful in everyday life. In a 2005 survey, the National Writing Project [NWP] and Nagin (2006) found that Americans believe that learning how to write will help students be successful in all disciplines throughout school as well as be the "threshold skill for employment and promotion" (p.17). "In a 2004 survey of 120 American corporations, respondents emphasized that people who cannot write and

communicate clearly will not be hired and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion" (National Writing Project [NWP] & Nagin, 2006, p.17). According to the NWP and Nagin (2006) there is a need to improve students' writing. In order to improve writing, students need to be motivated to write and teachers need to encourage writing in their classrooms.

Students not only need to be taught how to write, but they also need to be motivated to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Graves (2002) claims that the problem in today's classroom is that students do not see themselves as writers, and therefore they are unmotivated to write. Both Graves (2002) and Calkins (1994) see importance in having the students view themselves as authors who write in authentic contexts with real purposes which can be about students everyday lives. Independent, free writing offers students opportunities in their writing by giving them the ability to see themselves as writers, practice their writing, and being able to explore their individual thoughts (Dyson, 1986). Students should explore their experiences and their voices within their writing (Elbow, 2000). "We write to understand ourselves" (Broach, 2005, p.18). Elbow (2000) states that each student has had different experiences and different perspectives so it is important for each student to be able to express a "sense of what he or she feels and sees" in his or her writing (p. xv). Teachers can have an impact on a student's writing and even help the student like to write (Elbow, 2000). Elbow (2000) states that teacher's "can help students trust themselves, find their voices, and be more forceful and articulate in using writing in their lives"(p. xv) Teachers need to show students that they have the ability to produce a well written product and that their thoughts and ideas matter. This can be achieved by telling students that they have important things to say and by encouraging

students to write continuously (Calkins, 1994). Students know that their teachers will be reading what they write and for students, it is important to receive approval from their teachers. Calkins (as stated in Buckner, 2005, p.116) offers a recommendation to teachers that they can "lean into [their] students' writing and say WOW even if there isn't a lot of wow there." This is a way to give students confidence in their writing and motivate students to write.

People are often discouraged to write because of bad experiences that they have had with writing, but it is important for students to build up a confidence in their writing (Elbow, 2000). Confidence is built up in a student through positive experiences. A student's confidence level can have a great effect on the effort that he or she puts into school tasks such as writing. "Belief in one's competence as a writer is essential to writing motivation" (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p.28). Martin (2005) and Harell et al (2006) state that if students are given a task that is challenging, a student with confidence will attempt this task with the knowledge that he or she will most likely be successful. The teacher should stress to students that everyone makes mistakes and that it is important to learn from our mistakes and make corrections (Martin, 2005). This will maintain or build up students' confidence by having them realize that if they do make mistakes in their writing, it is a normal step in the writing process (Harell et al., 2006). Teachers can share their imperfections as writers with students and also make students aware that writers change their mind and that that is acceptable for their work too (Harell et al., 2006). Students can become discouraged when they feel they have made a mistake, so in order to help students continuously improve their writing, they must know that mistakes are

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common and that the best thing to do is to correct their mistakes and move on (Martin, 2005).

Teachers can motivate their students to write and build confidence by "providing them with challenging tasks and meaningful activities that can be mastered, chaperoning these efforts with support and encouragement, and believing in their students" (Pajares, 2003, p.162). This will help ensure that their students will develop a sense of confidence towards writing (Pajares, 2003). Teachers can also build confidence in their students' writing by giving students regular feedback on their work. Students should receive "frequent, early, positive feedback that supports students' beliefs that they can do well" (Davis, 1999, p.1). Having writing conferences one-on-one with a student is an example of a way that teachers can give their students feedback. Conferences allow the teacher to talk to the student about his or her specific strengths and weaknesses and this in turn gives each student a direction to go in when he or she is completing his or her next writing assignment (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). With the knowledge of what they do well, and the knowledge of what to improve on the next time, students can begin their next writing assignment knowing exactly what the teacher expects from them (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) wrote that "students who receive encouraging feedback from teachers may feel more personally efficacious and work harder to succeed" because they are given a purpose and see an importance in their writing (p.8).

Instructional Tools that Foster Writing

Calkins (1994) states that teachers should provide students with a structured environment and instructional tools for writing that have flexibility. Students should be

given the opportunity to choose their topic, be able to see the task they are going to complete through modeling, have the opportunity to write every day, and be able to discuss and share writing to give students a purpose. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) conducted studies that found that teachers that used these instructional tools as part of their curriculum have created a stronger interest in writing and a comfort with writing that was not seen prior to its implementation. "Calkins developed a Writing Workshop that included extensive modeling by the teacher during whole group mini-lessons, time for children to work on their own writings, constructive feedback in the context of teacher and peer conferences, and sharing and celebrating through various forms of publishing" (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p.132).

Mini Lessons and the Use of Modeling

Mini lessons were developed by Calkins. Gillet and Beverly (2001) described mini lessons as "short focused lessons in which the teacher raises an issue, demonstrates a method, focuses attention on an author's technique, or reinforces a strategy" (p.18). Often teachers read students writing, and they base their mini lessons on the topics that they find students need to work on in their writing. Graves (2004) found that using mini lessons raised the quality of children's writing by being taught the skills that they needed in order to improve their writing.

Modeling is often used by teachers during mini lessons. "Modeling refers to the process in which observers pattern their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors, after those displayed by one or more models" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.11). Jasmine and Weiner (2007) have stated that modeling can build confidence within a student for the task they are about to complete. Students' self-efficacy is raised when they are exposed

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to models (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.9). It gives students a basis for their writing and the confidence to see what they are supposed to do and then apply it to their own writing. Modeling is not meant to be used so that students copy the model, but instead students are expected to use what they have seen and make it their own. Modeling has been found to be an effective means to build academic skills and raise self-efficacy (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.7). If students see the teacher model an activity and be successful with that activity, they will attempt the modeled activity because they feel they can be successful too (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.11). Shirley, a Literature and Phonics based teacher, used modeling in her classroom because she believed it was important for the students to see the processes that she wished for them to complete (Martin et al., 2005). Shirley found that through the use of modeling in her classroom it enabled her students to become more independent and confident in the activities they were asked to complete in their writing (Martin et al., 2005).

A study was conducted by Schunk and Rice (1987) to find out if feedback or modeling was more affective in raising achievement level (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.16). One group of students received feedback instruction in which students constantly received positive feedback on how well they completed an assignment, another group received only modeling instruction in which modeling was used to teach a strategy, and the last group received a combination of feedback and modeling instruction (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.16). Results found that students that received a combination of both types of instruction "demonstrated the highest self-efficacy, comprehension, strategy use, and transfer of the strategy to the new comprehension task" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p.17). Modeling is important because it shows students how to complete a writing

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activity successfully and it raises students' motivation because they are more likely to feel that they too can be successful with that activity. Feedback builds students' confidence and gives students the motivation to complete their work. Together, modeling and feedback enables students to develop self-motivation and gives students the support to do their best writing with each assignment.

Giving Students Choices and Time to Write

Buckner (2005), Graves (2004), and Ray (2004) all agree that students should be given a choice as to the topic that they want to write about. If students are given that choice, they become encouraged to write because they will be writing about a topic that interests them. Graves (2004) argues that "writers can only write about what they know" (p.89). Therefore it is not beneficial for teachers to give students topics because they may not have knowledge about the topic and therefore have difficulty writing. Buckner (2005) feels that teachers often give students topics to write about, but it is important for students to choose their own topics and provide a way for students to become independent when it comes to choosing a topic. This can be developed by understanding that they can write about their feelings, life events, or imaginative stories. Ray (2004) feels that a student should be able to choose a topic that matters to that individual student. Students should care about what they are writing and have the opportunity to write about that topic over and over if desired (Ray, 2004). If students make their own decisions when it comes to writing, they are more likely to develop into competent writers (Ray, 2007).

When creating a writing structure, teachers need to decide how many days a week they want students to write and how much time on each of these days they want to devote

to writing. Teachers and researchers have found that there needs to be time in the classroom dedicated to writing, and not an activity that stands for writing (Hull, 1989). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress 1998 Writing Assessment, "sixty-nine percent of fourth-grade students report spending ninety minutes or less per week on writing activities (NWP & Nagin, 2006, p.12). Graves (2004), Calkins (1994), and Ray (2004) argue that it is important to give students the time to write during the school day and students should be writing no less than three to four days a week. Graves (2004) acknowledges that teachers often have a tight curriculum with little time to devote to writing, but he says that it is important for students to write every day. The more frequent a student practices writing, the more a student's writing performance will improve (NWP & Nagin, 2006). Graves (2004) and Ray (2004) agree that thirty to forty minutes should be set aside each day for writing. Calkins (1994) feels that students should be given regularly scheduled times to write, time to discuss writing prior to beginning and throughout, and time to share the students writing. Creating a regularly scheduled time to write gives students a structure that is predictable so they know when they will be expected to write (Calkins, 2004). Ray (2004) states that through the writing structure, students should learn about time. Teachers should make students aware that they do not need to finish their writing in the time frame that is set each day. It is important for them to build the stamina that is needed to stay with their writing (Ray, 2004).

"What gives children joy in learning is not just a sense of accomplishment they get from doing something well, but the sense of pleasure they get from knowing their work is appreciated" (Broach, 2005, p.19). It is important for teachers to develop ways in

which students can display or share their work. Students are motivated to do their best work when they know that someone else will be reading their work or that it will be displayed for others to view (Broach, 2005). If teachers tell students that their work will be laminated and displayed, students are motivated to work like an author, and it gives them a purpose for their writing. "Anything parents, teachers, and librarians can do to foster a child's sense of pride in his creative work-to make him or her feel like a real writer-will have a long-term positive impact on the quality of the child's writing and his or her passion for it" (Broach, 2005, p.19).

A study was conducted using first grade students in which Writer's Workshop was implemented. The study found that the use of "Writer's Workshop enabled first graders to become confident, independent writers" (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p.133). Writer's Workshop enabled students to be aware of the importance of learning to write and through learning the stages of writing, students were able to feel good and confident about their final product. By talking about their writing with peers and the teacher, students were able to create fully developed stories that they could be proud of. They were motivated to do their best work and take pride in their writing because they knew that they would be sharing their work and publishing it for others to read. After the implementation of Writer's Workshop, a first grader that participated in this study said, "I'm a good writer now. I'm a good writer because I add more details to my story after my friends ask me questions. I'm a good writer because my friends really liked my story. They clapped and they said it was good" (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p.138). This study found that Writing Workshop was successful when implemented with first graders. At the completion of this study, "students were working independently and helping each

other add detail and edit through student/student conferences" (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p.138).

Importance of Reading to Improve Writing

"I can't imagine how to teach children writing without focusing on reading, because reading is the compost that feeds the imagination and provides the basis for good writing" (Broach, 2005, p.17). Teachers should "use high-quality literature as models as often as possible so writers can learn from experts" (Gillet & Beverly, 2001, p.24). There are many ways in which students can benefit from looking at books. Books can inspire students to write by helping them understand how to choose a topic to write about. Ray (2004) tells teachers to expose students to "book jackets, authors notes, dedications, and interviews with writers" as a way for students to gather ideas about how authors come up with their topics for their books (p.102). Looking at books can often give students the vision that they need in order to begin their writing and know the direction they want to take in their writing. Books do not provide students with ideas for topics; rather they give students ideas for how to write (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004). "The way to learn to write well is to study the writing of people who write well while you're writing yourself" (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004, p.16). If students want to know how to begin a certain genre of writing, they need to look at good examples of that type of writing in order to figure out how to do it (Ray, 2004). Teachers should expose students to books and varieties of writings so that students can see the way a writer approaches his or her writing and envision the possibility of using that approach in their writing (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004).

In a study conducted in a first grade classroom, the teacher found that when her students made a connection to reading, it stimulated them to write more (Martin, 2005).

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One student named Jill made the observation to her teacher that writers are also readers and said, "I found this idea in a book in the library. Writers use books. If there weren't any writers, there wouldn't be any books and without books there would not be any information to write about" (Martin, 2005, p.243). Ray and Cleaveland (2004) exposed their students to illustrations and text work with the hope that their students would be inspired by what they saw and read and be able to use their findings in their own writing. During a lesson one student was looking at a picture book written by Joanne Ryder and illustrated by Norman Gorbaty titled *Earthdance* (1996). While the student was looking through the book she thought out loud, "Hey, I could put words like that in the wheel in my hamster book" (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004, p.83). This student saw a style of writing in a book and decided to take a risk and try that style in her own writing (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004).

Writing Notebooks

Buckner (2005) defines writing notebooks as "a place to record bits of life that may serve to inspire further work" (p.4). Writing notebooks allow children to explore their thoughts and opinions. Fletcher (1996) has described writing notebooks as the most important tool for living a writerly kind of life. It helps students express their feelings and can help them explore who they are in the large world around them. Writing notebooks give writers "space to record and explore what amazes, delights, disgusts, or appalls the student" (Fletcher, 1996, p.11). Buckner (2005) and Harrell, Pepperell, and Rynearson (2006) say that students can fill their notebooks with quotes, memories, lists, sketches, thoughts, or scraps of print. Each of these items are ways for students to save their ideas and thoughts and by putting them in a notebook, they are able to look back at

them to inspire students to write (Buckner, 2005). The words, ideas, and quotes can be

expanded by students in order to help them develop and improve their writing.

Harrell et al. (2006) describes writing notebooks as a "safe haven" for students to

write (p.4). The notebooks are a place for students to experiment with writing and be

able to express freely their ideas and thoughts. This can invoke great writings because

the students will be writing about something that they have an interest in. Students will

also be able to choose their own topic from the ideas that they have written down

(Buckner, 2005). Writing in notebooks is a process and "leads you from one thought to

another until you experience the writer's joy of discovering something you didn't know

you knew" (Buckner, 2005, p.7).

Graves (2004) knows that having the time to teach writing is in short supply.

Writing notebooks help maximize the efforts of typical writing lessons (Harrell et al.,

2006). Mini lessons are often used with writing notebooks. The teacher often teaches

lessons based on concepts that she finds the students are having difficulty with in their

notebooks. The more students practice, the better they will become with writing.

Writing notebooks give students a place to practice their writing, a place to use different

writing strategies to generate text, a place to find ideas, as well as a place to practice what

they know about spelling and grammar (Buckner, 2005). Calkins (1994) suggests giving

students time in the morning to write down their thoughts or the events that have

occurred that the students feel like sharing. This gives students an opportunity to express

their thoughts and ideas and does not take up much of the class time because it can be

done first thing in the morning as students are getting ready to begin the day. When used

in this way, it provides an opportunity for students to write every day.

When students' writings are all in one place, they can look back at their writings and see how they have developed as writers. Buckner (2005) suggests having students go back and reread what they have written in their notebooks as a way to reflect on the growth and changes that they have made as writers. The writing notebooks are also a way of building confidence within writers. Writing is improved with practice and having a notebook where writing is ongoing gives students many opportunities to practice and develop as writers (Harrell et al., 2006). Students who use writing notebooks feel good about writing because they feel comfortable to express their ideas (Harrell et al., 2006).

According to Harrell et al (2006), two studies were conducted in which writer's notebooks were implemented in a classroom. In both studies, the teachers introduced writer's notebooks by showing the students their own personal writer's notebooks. The teachers then explained how they used the writer's notebooks and they gave students examples of what they wrote in their notebook. The first study was conducted in a second grade classroom. Writing notebooks were used by the students during Writer's Workshop. Students were able to write and conference freely throughout the time frame allotted for writing. The teacher found the students to be highly engaged and focused on completing their writing. They did not abuse the freedom that teachers gave. The students would ask for help when needed and then return to their writing. The teachers found that Writing Workshop did not need to be a silent writing time, but instead time for students to explore ideas, conference with peers, and enjoy writing (Harrell et al., 2006). The teacher also found that "as the students became more comfortable with the use of their writer's notebooks, many students were taking them to recess, as well as home each night to write" (Harrell et al., 2006, p.6).

Harrell et al. (2006) explains that the second study was conducted in a fifth grade classroom. In this classroom, the writer's notebook was looked at as an organizational tool and the students were asked to break their notebooks into sections. Students were also given a list of requirements that they needed to include in their notebooks by the end of the year. After the implementation of writer's notebooks in this fifth grade classroom, the teacher found that writing became more important in the lives of her students. The students took more risks in their writing by exploring different interests and experimenting with a variety of genres. Both studies showed that writing notebooks had a positive influence on the students. The teachers in both classrooms found that "students enthusiasm for writing carried over into other areas of the curriculum" (Harrell et al., 2006, p.8). Writing is used in all subjects so the development of an interest in writing through the use of writer's notebook was found to improve other academic areas. Teachers also found that using writer's notebooks helped students "view themselves as authors, regardless of the skills they possess in relation to their peers" (Harrell et al., 2006, p.8). All students had their own writer's notebooks in which they personalized with their individual thoughts and ideas which gave the students the view that they were real writers.

Two middle school teachers named Fracareta and Phillips (2000) implemented writer's notebooks in their classroom. The teachers had three goals: "to have students realize a writer's notebook can be a source for final pieces of writing, to have students realize a writer's notebook can improve the quality of their writing, and to have students value their writer's notebook" (Francareta & Phillips, 2000, p.105-106). The students were asked to complete quarterly reflections on how they felt about their writing and how

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they viewed their writer's notebooks. The teachers found that the students wanted more feedback, so they made sure to make more comments on their students' writings as well as allowed time for students to conference with peer groups. The teachers also implemented a way for the students to feel comfortable to express their thoughts and take risks in their writing. They allowed the students to fold down any pages that they did not want the teacher to read. The teachers respected their students' wishes, but also told students that if there was anything that did concern them on pages that were not folded down, they would bring these concerns to the guidance counselor (Francareta & Phillips, 2000).

Francareta & Phillips (2000) reflected on three students and their experiences with writer's notebook. Josh was a students who used writer's notebook to express his inner thoughts and as an outlet for his anger and frustration. He had never been a strong writer, but he found importance in writing since using the writer's notebook and enjoyed writing often throughout the week. His mom read his notebook one day and it no longer became a safe haven for his thoughts. He no longer felt comfortable writing, and therefore does not write often like he used to. Ellen is a self-motivated student who wrote with the goal of impressing her teachers. She used the notebook to improve her writing and wrote almost daily. She wrote in her quarterly reflection that the notebook was a place for her to experiment with different types of writing. Writing in the notebook was not a chore, instead it was something she found to be fun and a "source of pleasure' (Francareta & Phillips, 2000, p.108). Linda was an eighth grade student for three years due to mood swings and absenteeism. Linda used notebooks for the first time during her third year. She showed success and a love for writing. Linda wrote in her reflection that

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she valued her writer's notebook and the teachers found that she wrote most often after a significant event. Her genre choice varied throughout her writing and her teachers noted that she wrote with "a strong voice which indicated growing confidence" (Francareta & Phillips, 2000, p.108). At the end of the year, the teachers reflected on the effect of using writer's notebook in their classroom. They found that "not all students became competent writers, but their writing was more detailed, leads were stronger, and their sentence structure became more developed" (Francareta & Phillips, 2000, p.112). Overall, it was a positive experience that Francareta and Phillips plan on using writer's notebooks the following year and also plan on adjusting how they are used in the classroom based on the student reflections.

How Students Feel about Writing

Sometimes teachers have asked students to reflect on how they feel about their writing's notebook, and sometimes students have written on their own about how they feel about their writing notebook. The writing notebook has impacted students' views on writing and this is what they have to say:

> "The writer's notebook has inspired me to write more. I like the writer's notebook because it makes me feel more organized" –fifth grade student (Harrell et al., 2006, p.8).

> "My writer's notebook is a cool thing to use when writing. My writer's notebook contains paper sections to keep writings, and even a list of ideas. The writer's notebook is a good way for older kids to become organized writers" –fifth grade student (Harrell et al., 2006, p.8).

"Writer's notebook is really fun. It helps me writer better stories. I write in it almost every day. I like it a lot. I get my ideas from stories I've heard or things that have happened in my life. I used to not like writing, but now I do" –second grade student (Harrell et al., 2006, p.8).

"A writer's notebook is more than a notebook, it is something that we all use as a place to write what's on our mind and not what we think the teachers will like. It's the one bit of school that doesn't have to live up to the teacher's expectations" –Jon, middle school student (Francareta & Phillips, 2000, p.112).

"My writer's notebook became something I began to appreciate having. My words are better phrased, my sentences have more structure as a whole, and basically it's my own story, one I've worked very hard on. I am definitely keeping my writer's notebook. It is a very valuable possession of mine, and not writing in it would be like ending a really great thing" –Kathy, middle school student (Francareta & Phillips, 2000, p.112).

"Keeping a writer's notebook helps me because it shows me what I might really like to write about. It also helps me become a better writer because it shows me how well I'm doing" –Courtney, fourth grade student (Buckner, 2005, p. 118).

"My notebook, to me, is the only thing I write in. Sure I never want to write, but sometimes I'm hooked. I can't stop writing. My notebook is filled with my thoughts and stories. It even has a rhyming poem" –Ashley, fourth grade student (Buckner, 2005, p.118).

Conclusion

As the review of the literature suggests, creating a writing structure that encourages students is beneficial for the students in their current academic setting as well as for their future. It is important for students to know that they are authors and that they can write just like the authors do in the books that they read. Students need to be able to choose a topic for their writing in order to have an interest in their writing. Teachers should encourage students to write and build confidence in their students' writing. When using instructional tools, teachers give their students the potential to become successful in their writing.

Writing notebooks are writing tools that have been found to be effective in increasing students' interest in writing as well as improved their writing. It can be used in all grades and with all ability levels. Mini lessons were found to be most productive when used along with a writing notebook. Many students struggle with writing and teachers who have implemented writing notebook in their classroom are still adapting the way that they are used in order to be most beneficial for all students. Having students reflect on their writing notebook gives teachers a direction to go in when deciding how to change the writing notebook process. It is hoped that this study will go further into depth on how writing's notebooks impact students' writing and how they can be adjusted to be most beneficial for all students.

CHAPTER III

Context and Methodology

Introduction

Chapter three consists of two sections. The first section discusses the context of

the school, classroom, and community in which my research was conducted. The second

section discusses the research design including the procedure and analysis of data through

the use of qualitative research. This chapter also discusses the data sources used in this

study.

Context of the Study

Loring-Flemming Elementary School was built in 1976 and is located in

Gloucester Township, New Jersey. Gloucester Township is a suburban community

located in Camden County and is within the Philadelphia Metropolitan area. Because of

this location, Loring Flemming is then defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as urban.

Loring-Flemming Elementary School educates students from pre-school to fifth

grade. There are currently 833 students in the school with a student to teacher ratio of

16:1. Out of the 833 students, 619 are Caucasian, 143 are African American, 32 are

Hispanic, and 39 are Asian or Pacific Islander. The school strives to educate the children

of Gloucester Township to become global citizens. It celebrates individual uniqueness as

well as diverse learning styles and backgrounds. The staff at Loring-Flemming has high

academic expectations in a student-centered atmosphere. Character development and

respect are common themes throughout the school community. There are six first grade classrooms at Loring-Flemming Elementary. The classroom in which this study was conducted was in one of these first grade classrooms and was considered a general education room. There were twenty-three students in this classroom.

The Research Design

This study on writing notebooks uses qualitative teacher research design. Qualitative, naturalistic research occurs in a natural setting such as a classroom with no control groups. Practitioners use qualitative research because there is a lack of information about student learning and they hope to gain new knowledge about teaching and their classroom (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The purpose of conducting this type of research is to find more information within a classroom in order to change students learning, change something within a school, or invoke educational reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The ultimate goal is to refine teaching methods or structures within a school or classroom to improve student learning. "Teacher researchers work in inquiry communities to examine their own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and gathering data and work for social justice by using inquiry to ensure educational opportunity, access, and equity for all students" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.40).

"Many educators still believe that deep and significant changes in practice can only be brought about by those closest to the day-to-day work of teaching and learning" (Cochran & Lytle, 2009, p.6). The teacher becomes the researcher who works as the insider to the inquiry process. No Child Left Behind puts emphasis on test scores which makes teachers accountable (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). There is becoming more

and more emphasis on how teachers' teaching methods affect student learning. This accountability drives teachers to conduct teacher research in order to find the methods within their classroom and within their teaching that produces the best results among their students. Teachers can use several different types of data collection for their qualitative research. These types of data collection can include observations, reflections, writing samples, and test grades. Data collection is important to qualitative research as it "shapes and embodies the work of the practitioner" (Cochran & Lytle, 2009, p.56).

Teacher research has faced many constraints in the past but Cochran and Lytle (2009) have found that in the United States today, the movement is continuing to thrive and develop. Cochran and Lytle (2009) state five themes of teacher research. The first theme is the emphasis on issues of equity, engagement, and agency in which teachers are asked to provide the opportunity for all students to have a quality education. No Child Left Behind bases the quality of education on test scores but teacher researchers aim to find ways to give all students access to this type of education. The second theme is the development of new conceptual framework in which researchers are asked to understand the methods behind teaching such as how to set up a classroom that fosters learning and understanding that each student has the ability to learn. The third theme is the continued growth and reinvention of inquiry communities. Communities provide support to researchers and can help a researcher develop and expand on their inquiries. Computers are networking communities that can be sources of data collection as well as can help researchers develop new ideas and questions. The fifth theme is the persistence of efforts to alter the relationships of research and practice in universities. Teacher research is a way for student-teachers and teachers to reflect on their own ideas and beliefs about

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teaching and enable them to look more in depth into schools and student learning in order to improve teaching.

This study examines what happened when writer's notebooks were used in the naturalistic setting of a first grade class. Qualitative research allowed for observations of how these notebooks impacted student writing. Surveys were given to students to see how they felt about writing and their writing notebooks. Collections of actual student writing were also analyzed.

Data Collection Tools

I collected students' morning journals that they had been using prior to the start of the study. I began my study by collecting writing samples. I gave students a picture prompt and asked them to create a story based on what they saw in the picture. The students were given a lined sheet of paper to write down their story. This writing sample showed me how the students wrote and how they developed a story. Next I gave students a pre-survey about how they felt about writing. I asked students if they liked to write and what they liked to write about. This data gathered ideas as to the students' perspective and feelings on their own writing.

Once students were introduced to the writer's notebook, I had them personalize their notebook covers with their name and a drawing. I looked at how each student chose to personalize his or her notebook. The first time that they wrote in their writer's notebook, I asked them to write about what they drew on the cover and what significance their drawing held to them. This data collection showed me if they valued their notebook by drawing something that was significant to them.

Throughout the study, I conferred with students about their writing. I also took notes as I observed the way in which students were approaching their writing notebook. I collected this data when I walked around the room while the students were writing, when I asked students to show me their notebooks, as I observed how they were organizing them, and when they read to me one or two of their writings. I also kept notes in my research journal as to what the students said about their writing and writing notebooks throughout their use. I wrote down the observations I saw based on the attitude students took when they were asked to write.

During the final week with the writer's notebooks I gave students the opportunity to take their notebooks home. I asked students and took notes as to who brought it home and who wrote in it at home. Also, towards the end of the study, I asked students to choose a story from their writer's notebook in which they felt they liked best. I looked at this writing sample as well as other writings in their notebooks at the conclusion of the study. Also, at the end of this study, I asked students to reflect on the use of the writing notebook. I asked students to discuss how they felt about their writing, how they felt about their notebooks, and if they planned on continuing to use the notebooks. Students were asked to write their reflections in their writing notebooks.

At the end of the study, students were given a post-survey in which they were asked how they felt about writing, how they felt about their writing notebooks, and how they viewed themselves as writers. Also, at the end of the study, there was a class discussion and I collected data through anecdotal notes on what students said about their writer's notebooks. The post-survey and the class discussion gave me an understanding of how the students perceived their notebooks.

Procedure

Week One

I began my study by collecting a writing sample from students by giving them a picture prompt and asking them to write a story about what they saw in the picture. Students were then given a survey in which they were asked how they felt about their writing and what they liked to write about. The students were given this survey together as a class and I read the questions to the students as they completed it.

Next, I showed students my writing notebook. I showed them how I personalized it, how I organized it, and I read to them some of my writings. I explained to students that the purpose of the writing notebook was to have their own thoughts and stories written down in one place. I told students that this was their personal place to write, that I would not look at unless I asked them first, and I also introduced students to the special writer's pencils. These pencils were kept in a special place in the room and when students were asked to write, I told them that if they used these special writer's pencils it would help them develop thoughts and ideas in their writing. Students then received their own writing notebooks and they were asked to decorate the covers.

Once the covers were decorated, I began teaching using mini lessons and then giving students time to write. Through the mini lessons, students were introduced to Angela Johnson and were told that she used a writing notebook and used seeds to help her write her stories. The students were introduced to "seeds" by exploring Angela Johnson's books, "Joshua by the Sea" and "Do Like Kyla." I read the books to students and we discussed the seed that helped Angela Johnson write her stories. The students also discussed the difference between a seed and a watermelon topic. Students then

created a section in their notebook for seeds. Students were given the opportunity to write seeds in their notebooks. The next time students were asked to write a story, they were encouraged to take one of the seeds that they had written as the topic for their story.

Throughout the week, students were given several opportunities to write in their notebooks. They were asked to write in the morning when they first arrived at school, during the writing lesson, and throughout the day as they completed an assignment early.

Week Two

The students continued to follow the Writer's Workshop curriculum and learned about Angela Johnson and the techniques that she used in her writing through mini lessons. For each new technique learned, I showed students an example of that technique from a writing that I had in my writing notebook. The students were also introduced to story elements. I read students a story from my writer's notebook and had student discuss each story element that was in my story. The students created a new section in their writing notebooks which became their reference section. This section was in the middle of their writing notebooks and it was a place that they can go to if they needed help remembering such things as the elements that they needed to include in their stories. The students were reminded each time they wrote to include these elements in their stories.

Throughout the week, students were continuously encouraged to write down their ideas and thoughts in the "seeds" section of their writing notebooks. Each morning, students were either given the option to choose a new topic to write about or told to continue working on a story in their writing. As students were working, I walked around the classroom and took notes as to how the students approached their writing.

Week Three

Students chose a story that they liked best from their writing notebook. They were asked to edit this story. They were given a list of things to look for when editing and they placed this chart in the reference section of their writing notebook. I showed students stories and as a class we edited them. The students were then asked to edit one of their stories that they had completed in their writing notebook.

The students then followed a similar process with revising. They received a revising checklist. Students placed this checklist in the reference section of their writing notebooks. They took the story that they had edited and revised it. We again looked at stories that needed to be revised and as a class we discussed ways that we could make the story better by using our revising chart. The students worked on revising their stories. As they did this I will walked around the room and conferred with them. Students were also given the chance to work with a partner and be revising teachers.

Each morning, the students continued to be encouraged to write down their ideas and thoughts in their notebooks and use these ideas and thoughts as topics for their writing. They were also encouraged to do their best work and write neatly in their special writer's notebook. I continued to walk around the classroom while the students were writing and I took notes on the approach that students took with their writing.

The stories that students revised and edited were written down on lined paper and the students created a cover for their writing. They were then given the chance to share their stories with the class. At the end of the week, I discussed with students how they felt about their writing notebooks and how many students chose to take their writing notebooks home. Students were also given a post survey about how they felt about their

writing and using their writer's notebook. I collected the students' writing notebooks at the end of the week.

Data Analysis

I reviewed the students' original writing sample prior to the use of the writing notebooks and I determined the ability level of the students. I looked at their approach to the writing and the motivation that they had to write. I determined student motivation based on the time and effort that students put into their writing sample and their previously used morning journals.

I compiled the surveys and analyzed the results. There were surveys given on the first day, prior to the students writing in their notebooks and surveys on the last day when the study was completed. I looked at these surveys to see if they showed a change in the students' perception of writing and their writing notebooks over the course of the study. I also looked to see how the students felt about their notebooks. I looked for areas they could change and areas that they would like to have done differently when they used their notebooks.

I read over the notes that I wrote down while I walked around the room as the students were writing. I compared the final notes that I took with the post surveys that students completed at the end of the study to see if the students' perceptions and feelings about writing and writing notebooks matched the observations I had made.

I looked at the students' writing in their notebooks and compared this writing to the writing sample taken on the first day. I also compared their writing in their writer's notebooks to the writing from their morning journals. I looked for changes in the students writing by looking at their content, sentence structure, story elements, and

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development of a story. I also looked at their handwriting. It was emphasized to students the importance of writing neatly and the importance of keeping their notebooks organized. A skill that students are expected to practice in first grade as they are learning to write is handwriting, so this was an area of focus when using the writing notebooks. I looked to see if students took the time to practice writing neatly and I compared it to their handwriting in their morning journal.

Conclusion

The way in which the data was determined to be collected was based on research previously conducted by Francareta, Phillips, and Harrell. I looked at the way that their data was collected in which they observed students writing samples. I also decided to collect research in which I could get a true understanding of how students felt about writing and their writing notebooks through the use of surveys. With this procedure of data collection it was hoped that students would become motivated to write and show an attachment to their writing notebooks.

What's Next?

In chapter four, the results of the surveys, writing samples, students' writing notebooks, and notes written in my writing notebooks are presented. In chapter five, the conclusions, implementations, and recommendations for further research are discussed.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

The classroom lights were off. All of the students were sitting together on the front carpet facing the white screen. I was telling the students about a new writing technique. This technique was using comeback lines and I was showing students examples of this technique in Angela Johnson's writing. The lights were turned back on and the students were asked to go back to their desks and take out their writing notebooks. They were asked to work on an old story, start a new story, or write new seeds. The students were also encouraged to use the technique discussed in their own writing. The students quietly walked back to their seats, took out their writing notebooks, and began to write in them. This was independent writing and the students immediately started writing as soon as they got back to their seats. The only sounds that could be heard were the scribbling of pencils as students focused intently on their writing. I conferred with Todd and I noticed that he used comeback lines. As I praised him for using this writing technique, other students shouted from around the room, "I used comeback lines too" and "Can I read you my story and my comeback lines?" I took a quick look around the room and realized that students were excited about writing and felt confident in their writing because they wanted to share it. All of these steps were part of the typical writing lesson that I used with the first grade class while implementing my study.

The mini lessons came from Lucy Calkin's Unit of Study in which a writing

technique was introduced or reviewed. The independent writing was a time for students

to work on their chosen stories. Prior to the use of the writing notebooks, students would

use writing folders which would contain various papers that the students had a hard time

keeping track of. The use of the writing notebooks became a place for them to keep their

ideas organized and keep all of their writing in one place. Students were given privacy

and a choice as to what they wanted to write and how they wanted to write. Through the

use of the writing notebooks in a first grade classroom, it was found that students

developed an attachment to their notebooks and their motivation to write increased.

Chapter four further discusses the results of the data collected through surveys, students'

writing notebooks, writing samples, and the notes taken in my writing notebook.

Wanting Time to Write

The students were excited about their writing notebooks from the initial

introduction of them in the classroom and they often had a hard time putting them away

when they were asked to. The students previously used a morning journal in which they

were asked to write from the time they arrived in school until it was time for the morning

message which was about 9:15 A.M. When using the morning journals, I observed that

students would write quickly and want to move on to another task. Most students were

done with the writing by 9:00 A.M., but that changed when the writing notebooks were

introduced. When students were using their writing notebooks, most students were still

working at 9:15 A.M., and they had a hard time following directions when I asked them

to put them away. Ever since the first week of the implementation of the writing

notebooks, students would ask during free time if they could go back to the stories that

they started so that they could continue working on them. This told me that students enjoyed writing in their notebooks and that they were motivated to write. Students, who previously rushed through their writing, were not only writing in the time allotted to them, but they also wanted more time to write.

Early Attachment to the Writing Notebook

The way in which the writing notebook was introduced to the students turned out to be a vital part of using this tool in a classroom. I began by showing students my writing notebook. I told students that many famous writers use a writing notebook. The students saw how careful I was with my notebook and how I drew something that was special to me on the cover. The students were excited to draw on their own notebook. I told students that they would be given the opportunity to write their names on the cover and draw something that was special to them. They were not given any other guidelines or restrictions. When I gave students their blank writing notebook, there was silence in the room while they were drawing. I saw that students worked with determination to make their covers special. Some students began by writing their names in a special font or in bubble letters. Several other students asked me if they could draw their picture in pencil first in case they messed up because they wanted their picture to be perfect. Other students began by drawing their picture with crayons and they drew with neatness. All students worked intently on their writing notebooks and the only time there was talking in the room was when students finished a part of their covers that they wanted to share with me or a friend.

When the time period given to draw was finished, many of the students still had not completed their covers so I told students that they would be given more time to

complete them later in the day. For the rest of the day, when there was ever a break between subjects, the students asked me if they would be able to complete their covers at that time. This showed me that the students were excited to make their notebooks special. Many students commented throughout their writing what they thought about their covers:

"I drew a picture of a beautiful garden. I put a lot of work into it and all of a sudden...my writer's notebook felt a whole lot special."

"I drew a picture of my family. I love my family so much. It is perfect. I love it and everybody else will love it too. I am proud of myself for drawing the picture."

"I drew my garden on the front of my writing notebook. It is special because I like to do gardening with my mom so that is why I drew that on my notebook."

Many of the students were proud of their drawings on the front and they were given time to share what they drew with a partner. They were then asked to put their writing notebook away and I noticed that one student had it on her desk and I asked her why she did not put it away like I had asked. She said, "I like to have it right on my desk so that I can look at my special picture any time I want."

In the post survey, students were asked what they liked best about their writing notebook and several students commented on their cover:

"What I like best about my writing notebook was writing on the front cover."

"I like my drawing on the front of my writing notebooks."

These comments showed that by beginning the writing notebooks with students drawing their special pictures on the cover began the connection that students developed for their

notebooks. Students grew attached to their notebooks throughout their use, but by starting the notebooks in this way, it began that attachment as well as created a sense of excitement of ownership and a sense of excitement to write among students.

Learning How to Write Through Sharing

Students shared their covers with their peers, and they often shared their writing with peers too. I found through anecdotal notes and looking at the students writing notebooks, that students would often look at each other's writing and then try to use a similar technique or style in their own writing. A student brought his notebook up to me and asked me what I thought of his writing. I complimented him saying that his writing was neat, he had a good opening and closing, and he wrote a long story. The students around me heard what I said and I noticed that they began to add more to their stories to make them longer. After this happened, when I conferred with students, I had ten students ask me if I noticed and liked how long their writing was. One student wrote a seven page story. When comparing the students' previously used morning journals to their currently used writing notebooks, there was a great difference in the length of their stories. The average length of the students' stories in their morning journals was about one paragraph, comprising of about four sentences. The average length of the students' stories in their writing notebooks was about a page and a half, consisting of about four paragraphs. In the morning journals, the setup of the journals would not allow students to write for longer than one page. This showed that the students were more motivated to write in their writing notebooks than in their previous morning journals because the writing notebooks provided students with a place that they could comfortably expand their writing. Harrell (2006) states that writing is improved with practice and having a

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notebook where writing is ongoing gives students many opportunities to practice and

develop as writers. The notebooks succeeded in giving students a place to continually

practice their writing.

Writing with Confidence

Through sharing stories with a peer and having a safe place to practice their

writing, students also gained confidence and a feeling a pride in their writing. There was

one time when students were asked to choose a story that they were working on and share

it with the class. Only one student raised his hand. I then told students that before they

shared, they should turn to a partner and share their story with a partner. I then asked

students again who would like to share with the class and six students raised their hands.

This showed that sharing their stories from their writing notebook gave students

confidence in their writing. The writing notebooks also gave students confidence as

writers. In the writing notebooks, students were able to write with many freedoms and

topic choice, and develop themselves as writers.

Choices in Writing

I found that students were motivated to write when they were not expected to

work on one story until it was completed, but instead work on one topic for one story,

and be able to "scrap it" and begin a different story that showed more potential. The

students previously were asked to brainstorm a topic and they had to write about only that

topic. Students were expected to write one story, develop that story, revise that story, and

get it approved by the teacher before they could move on to a new topic. I found that

using the writing notebooks gave students a place to develop different stories instead of

having to work on one story at a time. I was impressed with the maturity that students

showed with this responsibility. Most students took their writing seriously and remained focused on their writing instead of being immature and off task. Students were given freedom to move from one story to the next when they decided they were ready instead of the teacher giving them permission. With this freedom, students were able to write about what they wanted to write about and move freely from one topic to the next, rather than being stuck on one topic at a time. Just like writers in the world, they write about several different topics and choose one to become their book or their completed writing. The students were given the chance to experiment with their writing without it having to be looked at and revised. One student said is his survey that he, "likes that (he) can make up many different stories." Graves (2002) claims that the problem in today's classroom is that students do not see themselves as writers, and therefore they are unmotivated to write. When the students use the writing notebooks they are able to feel like real writers. In the post survey, students were asked whether they felt that they were good writers. I found that sixteen out of the twenty-three students felt like they were good writers after using the writing notebooks for three weeks.

The students seemed to show an interest in their writing when they were able to choose one of their topics that they had written in their seeds section of their notebook. In the post survey, when asked what they like best about their writing notebook, one student said, "I like that I can write about anything." Everyday students were given the option to write seeds, write a story based on one of their seeds, or I gave them a topic based on a relevant holiday, season, or event. I found that giving students an option allowed students to write about something that they had an interest in and for students who had trouble developing their own topic, they had a topic that they could use.

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Students showed a great interest in making their writing better when they really cared about what they were writing. Elbow (2000) and Broach (2005) agree that students should explore their experiences and their voices within their writing in order to understand themselves.

Writing notebooks gave students a place to write about topics that they cared about. They were able to develop thoughts and ideas to be used as topics by writing seeds in their notebooks. Elbow (2000) states that each student has had different experiences and different perspectives so it is important for each student to be able to express a "sense of what he or she feels and sees" is his or her writing (p. xv). Writing down seeds is part of the Lucy Calkin's Unit of Study. I decided to have students write their seeds in the back of their notebook. I thought that the seeds were a great way to help students organize their thoughts and it diminished time that students would previously take to think about the topic that they wanted to write about. When students were asked to write a story, they could easily turn to the back of their books and choose a topic that they had written down as one of their seeds.

I found that the students took their seed writing very seriously. Students had the opportunity every day to write down seeds and use those seeds for their stories. Six students wrote over thirty seeds. Eleven students decided to put an x next to the seed if they realized that the seed was instead a watermelon topic. These students also put a check mark next to the seed if they used it in one of their stories. In the post survey, when asked what students like best about their writing notebook, one student said, "I like to write seeds in the back of my notebook." Another student said, "I like writing seeds and stories." On several days throughout the study, students asked me throughout the day

if they could write down seeds in their notebook because they thought of them outside of the writing block.

Providing a Secure Place to Write

Since students were given choices in their writing, it was important that they felt that their writing notebooks were a place to write and express their ideas in a comfortably, and privately. First grade is a vital year in which a student develops an understanding and an ability to write. If students are constantly getting their writing checked, they may become insecure about their writing. Students showed an attachment to their writing notebooks because they were a private place where they could write and experiment with writing. One student wrote on his post survey that he liked that "no one is allowed to look in my writing notebook." When I conferred with students I would always ask if I could look at what they were writing before I started reading it. When I looked at the data and the students writing, I also noticed that students were more likely to take risks with their writing. Most all of the students took an attempt at the technique that was discussed in the mini lesson. For example, we were looking at Angela Johnson's writing and how she used a technique called dot, dot, dot. Sixteen out of the twenty-three students in the class tried this technique in their writing. They did not always use it correctly, but they attempted it and when I conferred with students, they were proud to show me. This gave me the opportunity to show them the correct way to use it or praise them on their correct use, therefore reinforcing the lesson. The privacy and security of the writing notebook was also viewed by the students using different forms of writing. Six students wrote a poem in their writing notebook, three students

chose to write with a slant, and two students separated their words in an artistic way.

Motivation to Write

The students felt that they were good writers and had an attachment to their writing notebooks, but did students like to write? Students were asked if they liked to write in both the pre and the post survey. In the pre survey, given prior to the use of the writing notebooks, fourteen students said they liked to write and nine said they did not like to write. In the post survey, given after the students used their writing notebooks for three weeks, eighteen students said that they liked to write and five students said that they did not like to write. The students showed a slight increase in the amount of students that liked to write after the implementation of the writing notebooks. Although many students liked to write before using the notebooks, the increase showed that the notebooks may have affected several students' view of writing. Also, eighteen out of the twenty-three students in the class liked to write in their writing notebook. This showed that the writing notebooks were a likeable place in which students could compose their writing.

Immediately after the writing lesson, students worked in centers. Throughout the study, there were four students who completed all of their centers ahead of time. I gave them the option of either reading from their browsing boxes, working on a bonus assignment, or writing in their writing notebooks. All four students chose to write in their writing notebooks. Towards the end of the study, I gave students the option of taking their writing notebooks home. On the day that I told students that they could take their notebooks home, three students chose to do so and all three wrote in their notebooks. At the end of the study I conducted an informal survey and eleven students chose to bring their writing notebooks home and nine students said that they wrote in the

notebooks at home. This shows that students enjoyed writing in their notebooks and wanted to continue writing outside of the assigned writing time in school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the writing notebooks were an effective way to motivate and encourage students to write. It gave students a private place to write and a special place for their individual and unique writing. In the post survey, when students were asked what they liked best about their writing notebooks, students wrote:

"I like that is it is special."

"I like that it is specially made by me!"

Students showed a strong attachment to their writing notebook from beginning to end of its implementation. I found that writing notebooks were effective tools in a first grade classroom to motivate students, give students the confidence to write, and provided them with an organized place to view their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find a way to motivate students to write.

Through the data collected from surveys, students' writing notebooks, writing samples,

and notes taken in my teacher research journal, it showed that writing notebooks did have

an impact on students' perception of writing. Students grew attached to their writing

notebooks and their interest and excitement for writing increased. In chapter five the

conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further research are presented.

Conclusions

As discussed in chapter four, I have found that writing notebooks were a place for

students to keep their writing organized and take risks in their writing. Prior to the use of

the writing notebooks, students' writings were found on several miscellaneous pieces of

paper that were hard to keep organized. Writing notebooks gave students one place to

keep all of their writings organized. As discussed by Buckner (2005) I also found that

this was important because it gave students the ability to improve their writing by being

able to look back at past writings which were all in one place. Graves (2004) found that

using mini lessons raised the quality of children's writing by being taught the skills that

they needed in order to improve their writing. I learned that mini lessons were important

in helping students understand different writing techniques through modeling.

Calkins (1994) stated that teachers should provide students with a structured environment for writing that has flexibility. The writing notebooks did just this. The writing notebooks were an organized and structured area for students to write down their ideas and stories. The students knew when they were expected to write because I set aside two times throughout the day for the students to write: in the morning when students were arriving and during Writer's Workshop. Students would also always write in the same place. When it was writing time, the students always knew to take out their writing notebooks and begin writing. They did not have any questions as to where they were expected to write or when they were expected to write. The students also knew what they were expected to write. They were given the option of writing seeds, working on an old story, or new story, but they knew that during this time, they were expected to write and write the entire time.

While the environment was structured, the students had the flexibility in their own writing. They had the option of what to write about and how they wanted to write it. This is said to be important by Buckner (2005), Graves (2004), and Ray (2004) who all agree that students should be given a choice as to the topic that they want to write about. Students grow in their writing when they feel like writers who have a choice as to what they want to write. This gave students the opportunity to be individuals and feel that they have control over their writing. Therefore giving them something to be proud of because they know it was their own decisions and work.

After looking through my teacher research journal, student surveys, and students' writing notebooks, I found that writing notebooks succeeded in motivating students to write and giving them a confidence to see themselves as writers. Students often become

frustrating with their writing, but with the writing notebooks, students were given a private place to practice their writing and build their confidence. Just as described in a study by Harrell et al (2006), I also found that the effect of the writing notebooks was that students became engaged in their writing and when their writing notebook and special writing pencils were put in front of them, they became excited to write.

Limitations

There were two main limitations to this study. The first was time. I conducted the study in three weeks when realistically writing notebooks should be implemented over the span of an entire school year. There also was a limit in the amount of time that I had for each block of writing each day. The typical morning in the first grade classroom consisted of four hours of teaching without a prep period. There was a half hour set for writing workshop, which fell between reading workshop and guided reading. With a continuous morning of teaching, subjects sometimes went over the scheduled time and writing workshop was often cut short. With only a half hour sometimes becoming more like fifteen to twenty minutes, it made it difficult to conduct a full writer's workshop session with a mini lesson and time for students to write. The second main limitation was the age of the students. First graders are developing their writing skills and writing notebooks are typically used with writers who are older who have a more developed ability to write. Francareta and Phillips' (2000) study was conducted with eighth grade students and Harrell et al (2006) conducted studies with both second graders and fifth graders. The impacts of both time limitations and age limitations are discussed further.

Impacts of Time Limitations

Realistically, writing notebooks should be implemented over the span of an entire school year. The students need time to adjust to their notebooks. It is hard to see a great difference in a student's writing ability in three weeks. The students did develop an attachment to the notebooks in three weeks, but over a year a teacher could truly see if the notebooks would result in a growth of writing by the students. Francareta & Phillips (2000), Harrell et al (2006), and Buckner all conducted their studies over the length of the entire school year. The writing notebooks are continuing to be used in the classroom even after I completed my implementation because the students did show attachments to them and a desire to write in them. Teachers who viewed the implementation of the writing notebooks said that they are going to use them in the upcoming school year.

Because of the limit of time, I look at my implementation as an introduction to writing notebooks, because there are many ways that writing notebooks could be used by students that I could not do in three weeks. I believe that there are many activities that could be done with the writing notebooks that would further motivate the students to write. For example, Gillet and Beverly (2001) have said that teachers should "use high-quality literature as models as often as possible so writers can learn from experts." I was following Lucy Calkin's Unit of Study for First Grade so I used Angela Johnson as a literature model for the students. I also read students a story about leprechauns and April Fool's Day and I was impressed with how the students used these books as a basis for their stories. The students looked at Angela Johnson's writing techniques as well as the holiday texts but this was the extent of which I used high-quality literature in the classroom. I would have liked to use more examples of literature and look at different

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techniques. If I were to use writing notebooks again, I would add on to the Unit of Study to broaden the use of professional literature in the classroom.

While there was a lack of time to use more professional literature, there was also a lack of time to conference with students. While the students were writing in their notebooks, I was taking notes as to what the students said or what I observed during the mini lesson and while they were writing. I did not have a prep time until the end of the day, so this was the time when I had to write down my notes. This would have also been the time that I would have conferred with students about their individual writing, and although I did this sometimes, I would have liked to do this more often. Each student has a different writing style and they each have different strengths and weaknesses and I believe that this conference time is important for student growth in their writing. The conference, whether it is with a teacher of a peer, is a way for students to share their writing.

Impacts of Age Limitations

One way that I added to the Lucy Calkin's Unit of Study was that I included a reference section in the middle of the writing notebooks, but I never got a chance to see if the students looked at them as they were writing. I had student glue in charts for editing, revising, and story elements. I did not observe students using this reference section as they were writing, but I did tell students during conferences to use that section. If I was able to use the notebooks over a longer period of time, would I see the students use this reference section or should this section be left out? Would the writing notebook have the same effect if this section was excluded? This section might be more useful in among older students. Older students might be more likely to look for a reference or some help

in their writing. Therefore I would like to examine further if a reference section was used in the older grades, and if it might have more use than in a first grade classroom.

I would have liked to get a broader understanding of student's reaction to their writing notebooks. Since I was working with first graders, I was limited in the type of survey that I could give the students. I would have liked to have students complete a more formal final response and reflection to the writing notebooks, but I was not able to get these types of responses because the students were all developing writers. Also, with this group of students, there were a few students who did not like to write, but most did like to write prior to the use of the writing notebooks. I wonder what the effects of the writing notebooks would be if they were used with students who did not like to write. In the end of my study, I found that out of the students who said that they did not like to write, many still thought of themselves as good writers. This is the feeling that I was hoping to build in young writers. I did not expect all students to like writing, but I wanted them to build a pride and confidence in their writing ability.

Remaining Questions

Jasmine and Weiner (2007) state that by talking about their writing with the teacher and their peers, students are able to create fully developed stories that they can be proud of. The students were proud of their writing. Prior to the implementation of the writing notebooks, students were proud to show me their writing, but they did not show me the same enthusiasm as they did when they were showing me their writing from their writing notebooks. Students, as they finished their stories, would ask me if they could read their writing to me. They were excited to share their hard work. This enthusiasm was shown over three weeks, but would this same enthusiasm be viewed as the students

continued to use their writing notebooks over a longer period of time? This pride that

students had for their writing and their writing notebooks showed that they had

confidence in their writing. As Bruning and Horn (2000) stated, "Belief in one's

competence as a writer is essential to writing motivation."

Another question that still remains is if students continued the use of their writing

notebooks, would they use them to further express themselves in ways other than

writing? Fletcher (1996) stated that "a notebook can be a place where you can be alone

and content as you play with outrage and wonder, details, gossip, language and dreams,

plots and subplots, perceptions and small epiphanies" (p. 5). Would I see these various

types of writing over time or if the writing notebooks were used with older students?

Suggestions for Further Research

Due to the limitations of time and being in a first grade classroom, further

research needs to be studied on the effectiveness of writing notebooks in a classroom. I

would use the writing notebooks in a group of students who struggle with writing and a

group of students who are more developed writers in order to gather the motivational

aspect of the writing notebooks in these various settings.

The students wrote for a longer time and they worked hard to write longer stories,

but the length of a story does not always mean that it is a well developed story. The

writing notebooks gave students a place to work on content of their writing, but it was not

a place to work on grammar which is something that many of the students in this first

grade class struggled with. Therefore, grammar lessons are still necessary and during

individual writing conferences and mini lessons, the grammar that needs to be fixed

should be focused on. I would use the reference section as a place to remind students of the correct grammar usage.

When it comes to conferencing with students, there was a limit of time to meet with all of the students. I was able to meet with several students over the course of this study, but I saw a need for there to be more conferences. There needs to be further research conducted to see whether conferencing, with the teacher, with a peer, or with a writing group would further improve student's writing.

Conclusion

Writing notebooks had a positive impact on students' perception of writing. As a teacher, I will use writing notebooks and I would recommend to other teacher to try writing notebooks in their classroom. There is often difficulty getting students to have a motivation to write but writing is such a critical skill to develop for future successes in life. In order to be motivated students must feel that they like what they are writing about and confident in their writing. Instead of having the perception that writing is for punishment or just for a grade, students should be able to get excited for writing and the writing notebooks gave students a reason for this excitement. They provide a secure place for students to express themselves and take risks in their writing, therefore improving themselves as writers.

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APPENDICES

Pre-Survey

Name: _____

1. Do you like to write?

   Yes   No

2. Do you like to draw pictures before you write?

   Yes   No

3. Do you like to share your writing with others?

   Yes   No

4. Do you write at home?

   Yes   No

What do you like to write about?

_____

_____

_____

Post-Survey

Name: _____

1. Do you like to write?

   Yes   No

2. Do you think you are a good writer?

   Yes   No

3. Do you like to write in your writing notebook?

   Yes   No

4. Do you like to share what you wrote in your notebook?

   Yes   No

What do you like best about your writing notebook?

_____

_____

_____