Improving Fourth Grade Students’ Writing Skills With 6+1 Traits of Writing and Writer’s Workshop

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With 6+1 Traits of Writing, Graphic Organizers,
and Writer’s Workshop

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of two contemporary approaches to teaching writing, *Writer’s Workshop* and *6+1 Traits of Writing*. The purpose of the study was to help fourth grade students become proficient writers both in their descriptive writing content and in their written mechanics. The study also compares the transfer of written skills using these approaches versus the commonly taught Daily Oral Language process and grammatical textbook activities.

Throughout the study, students were actively involved in many hands-on writing activities. The lessons encouraged students to engage in discussions about their writing, as opposed to completing textbook based activities and lessons without student interaction. While traditional writing concepts were still being covered, the manner in which they were delivered and applied was much different.

The outcomes of this study indicate students’ active participation in writing lessons improves their writing skills. The data also suggests that students’ abilities to write more descriptively dramatically improved when the lessons focused on the specific 6+1 Trait known as *word choice*. 
STUDY SEQUENCE

July
- Investigated potential action research topics
- Identified an area in need of improvement: writing instruction
- Finalized the research question
- Developed Statement of the Problem
- Began research for the Literature Review

August
- Continued research for the Literature Review
- Began Situating the Problem
- Began writing Literature Review
- Researched lesson ideas

September
- Changed focus of the Literature Review
- Continued research for the Literature Review
- Continued writing Literature Review
- Continued Situating the Problem
- Collected baseline writing sample
- Researched lesson ideas
- Purchased books with lesson ideas

October
- Continued research for the Literature Review
- Continued writing Literature Review
- Finalized Situating the Problem
- Continued researching lesson ideas
- Gathered materials from the public library for the intervention
- Searched for possible journals for research paper submission
- Began implementing the intervention
- Kept a journal about the intervention
- Calculated and documented information from the pre-baseline writing sample

November
- Began writing the methods portion of the paper
- Continued implementing the intervention
- Continued journaling about the intervention
- Concluded the intervention portion of the project
- Continued writing the intervention

December
- Attended the Rebecca Sitton Conference on improving spelling in students’ writing
- Finalized method portion of the paper
- Collected the post-baseline writing sample
- Calculated and documented the results from the post-baseline writing sample
- Continued writing the intervention
- Scanned lessons, samples, and materials
- Began writing the results of data analysis
- Drafted conclusions and future plans

**January**
- Began writing the conclusion and future plans
- Finalized writing the intervention
- Continued writing the results of data analysis
- Created graphs to show project results
- Updated references to include intervention materials
- Created cover and signature pages
- Revised all sections of the research paper

**February**
- Revised all sections of the research paper

**March**
- Revised all sections of the research paper
- Wrote abstract

**April**
- Finalized all sections of the research paper
- Assembled all parts of the paper including Table of Contents and Appendixes, and References
- Created a poster presentation

**May**
- Submitted final paper
- Displayed poster presentation
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Writing is the most dreaded activity for my fourth grade students. Not only do they strongly oppose writing in all forms, they struggle to use the proper mechanics to communicate effectively with a targeted audience. My frustration with my students’ abilities to be effective writers led me to investigate the following question: “Will the implementation of selected lessons and activities taken from 6+1 Traits of Writing and Writer’s Workshop equip my students with the descriptive and mechanical writing skills they need to become proficient writers?”

SITUATING THE PROBLEM

In May of 2000, I graduated with an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a minor in English as a Second Language. My first teaching position was in a rural school district. I taught fourth through eighth grade bilingual classes, two sections of seventh and eighth grade Spanish, and worked with several at-risk students. Frustrated by the educational gains these students made, and the lack of respect for bilingual education, I applied and was hired for my current fourth grade position in a neighboring school district. After seeing many problems in students’ ability to transfer written English skills into their daily writing in each of the school districts in which I had taught, I was inclined to study methods and strategies that would improve their writing skills.

The study reported in this paper was conducted during my third year of teaching fourth grade and the fourth year of my teaching career. The study site was my fourth grade classroom in a K-12 school, located within an agricultural community. The
school’s population, approximately 850 students, consisted of lower and middle class students. The school also had a large number of migratory and settled Hispanic families. It is important to note, more than fifty percent of the students in this school district received free or reduced lunch, therefore this school qualified as a Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) School.

During the year of this study, I taught three sections of English with a total of 61 students. A wide range of my students’ abilities and the presence of English Language Learners (ELL) in my classroom presented me with many challenges. Components of my instruction included the Houghton-Mifflin textbook series, Daily Oral Language, traditional grammar activities, and other supplemental materials. After several weeks of instruction I was disappointed in my students’ inability to demonstrate proper writing skills. It was apparent the typical routine of completing daily oral language and grammar lessons was not beneficial; students had difficulty seeing the relevance.

My daily instruction routine included having students correct two Daily Oral Language sentences at their desks. After completion of this task, student volunteers made corrections on a transparency that was projected on a screen for the class to see. Each student explained his or her corrections to the class and the class proposed additional corrections as deemed necessary. Students then completed a language lesson, such as copying sentences from the textbook and identifying the subject and the predicate.

On Fridays, we had a designated block of time for writing. Writing topics included teacher selected topics, journal writing, field trip or special project reflection, and theme writing. Typically, when I announced to the students they needed to take out
their journal and a pencil, the groans began. The students openly stated that they preferred other school topics. To my dismay, students routinely asked, “How many sentences do we have to write in each paragraph? How long does this have to be? Is this good enough? Do we have to write in cursive, or can we print?” I even encouraged them to illustrate their writing, but for some students this added drudgery to the assignment.

Scoring these written pieces was disappointing and difficult for me. The students were not transferring skills from the Daily Oral Language and grammar lessons. As a professional, I began questioning my methods for teaching writing. I could not understand why students were not applying the isolated skills they had been taught and had practiced into their writing. After many recurring instances, I asked my frustrated self, “What is the problem here? How can it be resolved?” I knew I had to teach differently, but how? To answer these questions, I completed a review of literature to determine what experts in the field of teaching recommended.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Writing Instruction

Many techniques have been used to improve student writing. Researchers report that students should have ample time to write at least four times a week, regardless of the type of writing program. According to Tina Robertson, teachers are individuals with different beliefs, techniques, and expectations. There is not one exact way to teach a program (Solley, 2000). In a book written by Allington and Walmsley, No Quick Fix: Rethinking Literacy in America’s Elementary Schools, there are no instant or prescriptive solutions to improve literacy instruction for all children (Sims, 2001, p. 21).
Harris and Graham also noted, there is not a method proven to meet every child’s learning style. “Teachers should use instructional methods grounded in their individual philosophies about teaching writing” (Pollington, Wilcox, and Morrison, 2001, p. 262).

Traditional writing instruction is teacher-controlled, driven by grammar and conventions, and instruction follows a textbook and worksheet model (Pollington et al., 2001, p. 250). Instruction is typically conducted in a whole class setting, and is rarely integrated with other curriculums. Pollington et al., (p. 257) also noted that traditional instruction is conducted in a “lock-step manner,” where “Students were generally all kept at the same stage in the writing process.” Written pieces are usually intended for the teacher and turn into a form of assessment rather than a learning experience (Pollington et al., p. 252).

Another concern of traditional writing instruction is students’ inability to transfer skills taught in isolation. Experts warn that Daily Oral Language and traditional textbook instruction can be the demise of student creativity, thus causing students to have a disinterest in writing (Pollington et al., 2001, p. 252).

**Writer’s Workshop**

*Writer’s Workshop* incorporates a variety of strategies that gives students ownership of their writing, while learning the important writing skills. Often times, teachers avoid Writer’s Workshop, because they fear classroom chaos.

I did not know how to share responsibility with my students, and I was not too sure I wanted to. I like the vantage of my big desk. I liked being creative, setting topic and pace and mode, orchestrating THE process, taking charge (Atwell, 1998, p. 13).

By affording students the opportunity to choose their topic and genre, Atwell (1998, p. 15) discovered that students’ written skills leaped to a completely new level.
Researchers agree that student writers need “regular assigned periods of time when writing is done, suggested as well as original subjects for writing, time when mechanics are taught within the context of the assignment, good adult writing models to use as a guide and time to read as well as write” (Adams et al., 1996, p. 17). Enthusiastic modeling by the teacher is contagious to students (Olbrych, 2001, p. 11). Teachers need extensive training in order to be successful at teaching writing according to Graves (Jackson, 1996, p. 8). Following the training, teachers must demonstrate the new technique for the class. As students show gains, the transfer or the ‘hand-over phase’, termed by Jerome Bruner is evident. This is a time “when an adult intervenes and gradually provides less assistance to a learner” (Atwell, 1998, pp. 19-20).

A main component of the Writer’s Workshop is a twenty-minute interactive mini-lesson (Atwell, 1998, p. 151). Atwell defines a mini-lesson as “brief lectures at the start of class about procedures, conventions, craft, genre, and topic development” (p.15). Most often, mini-lessons are conducted as an entire group. However, there are times when small groups of students need specific instruction and Atwell encourages these small group teachings. She also stated, “Mini-lessons reach more than one writer at a time, provide frames of reference when writers and I confer, and grow from what I see my students doing, not doing, and needing next” (Atwell, 1998, p. 24).

Atwell (1998) has students join together in a circle to share aspects of their writing as a post-writing session mini-lesson.

Today I’ll ask you to listen to leads. The lead of a piece of writing is its introduction. The lead section is probably the most important. It sets the tone and subject, introduces the style, and establishes the voice. Would you look at your draft-in-progress and lightly mark with your pencil what you consider your lead—the sentences or paragraphs that introduce your piece?
Now, would you read your lead, one right after another, around the circle? There’s no discussion today—no critiques or congratulations. Let’s just listen to and absorb what the writers in this group are doing. Watch the face of each writer as we go around the circle and listen to what he or she tells. (pp. 143-144).

Atwell summarizes the ideas for all of the students and uses this session as a conclusion to Writer’s Workshop.

Students maintain a folder for written pieces that are unfinished, unedited, or have not gone through the final publishing phase. Once a piece has been published and presented to the targeted audience it is placed in a portfolio (Atwell, 1998, pp301-302). Atwell (1998) recommends that students write a self-evaluation of the piece and include it in the portfolio. This portfolio is another organizational tool used by participants in the Writer’s Workshop (Atwell, 1998). Adams (1996) states “A portfolio is very useful to a teacher because it is a collection of student work that reflects the students’ efforts and progress.” Burke adds, “A portfolio contains several separate pieces that may not mean much by themselves, but when compiled together, they produce a more accurate and holistic portrait of the student (Adams, 1996, p 20).

6+1 Traits of Writing

6+1 Traits of Writing “is a vocabulary teachers use to describe their vision of what good writing looks like” (Culham, 2003, p. 7). It is also a model for assessing student writing. Culham’s book gives an in-depth explanation of the 6+1 traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation and explains the advantages of using the trait-based writing model (Culham, 2003, pp. 11-14). “As students learn the traits, they find that the first five deal with revision, the last two with editing” (Scholastic Instructor, Oct. 2003, p. 14). She also designates a chapter for each trait in which she shares writing samples, explicit lessons and activities
that can be conducted with a class, and writing assessment rubrics (Culham, 2003, pp. 33-260).

The 6+1 Traits of Writing Rubrics shift the focus from traditional instruction and letter grade assessment to improving writing skills and providing specific feedback on the student’s work, instead of the final project (Scholastic Instructor, Oct. 2003, p. 14). The rubrics provide the students with specific criteria of achievement by taking the guess work out of assessment and providing a clear explanation of why the student received the letter grade they did (Culham, 2003, p. 10).

Just the Right Mix

Culham (2003) reiterated the point of many researchers when she stated “The traits are flexible and should be a cornerstone of your writing program, but they alone aren’t the whole package” (p. 19). Writer’s Workshop is a format for teaching writing and 6+1 Traits of Writing are most effective when taught as mini-lessons. The 6+1 Traits of Writing rubrics can play an integral part in assessing student’s writing within the Workshop (James et al., 2001, pp. 31-33).

James, Abbott, and Greenwood (2001) reported in their article, How Adam Became a Writer: Winning Writing Strategies for Low-Achieving Students, teachers used strategies from the Writer’s Workshop and 6+1 Traits of Writing to help all students achieve their highest writing potential. Graham and Harris noted several drawbacks with the Writer’s Workshop that makes success difficult for students with learning disabilities. Writer’s Workshop uses an implicit form of instruction, where skills are taught as the need arises instead of direct instruction “around a sequence of skills” (James, et al., 2001, pp. 31-34).
My review of literature indicates the “melding” of 6+1 Traits of Writing and Writer’s Workshop models will improve students’ writing skills and attitudes (James, et al., 2001, p. 34). This approach will be the major theme behind my class action research project.

METHODS

Participants

During the year this study was conducted, I taught English to 61 fourth grade students. Eighteen of those fourth graders were the target participants in this study. These students were selected from three separate sections of English class, six students from each class. Student selection was based on writing ability as demonstrated by achievement test scores and grade level performance. Two students from each of the high, middle, and low ability groups were selected.

Data Collection

Two methods of data collection were used in this study. Pre- and post-intervention data was collected using a creative writing piece (see Appendix B and Appendix G). As a pre-intervention assignment, students were given a lined piece of paper with the words “Late One Night…” at the top of the page. They were asked to continue the story based on personal experiences or make believe events. For the post-intervention assignment, students continued the story that began “Early One Morning…”

Methods of Data Analysis

Each pre- and post-writing intervention sample was assessed for its descriptive and mechanical writing components. Descriptive writing was analyzed by comparing
the number of times students used an adjective or an adverb with the total number of words in each piece. I then divided the total number of written words by the total number of adjectives and adverbs to calculate a percentage. I counted the total number of words in the piece instead of the total number of sentences, as to ensure I was only calculating the percentage of descriptive words, not sentences.

Mechanics of each sample were also analyzed. I tallied the number of punctuation, spelling, grammatical, and capitalization errors and then divided the total number of errors by the total number of words and determined the number of errors per word for each student.

**Intervention**

The intervention was conducted over a five week period. Due to interruptions caused by state standardized testing, it is difficult to explain the intervention in the exact sequence it was delivered. I have, however, highlighted the important lessons and activities I conducted.

**Lesson One**

We began the intervention by exploring writing topics and characters. Each class read aloud and discussed *Amelia’s Notebook*, (Moss, 1995), a journal written and illustrated from the point of view of an upper elementary student. I used this journal as an introduction to writing. In the past, students had great difficulty choosing a topic for journaling, so I required each student to keep a list of writing topics. This list was adapted from the “Writing Territory List” titled and defined by Atwell in her book *Writer’s Workshop* (see Appendix A). I modeled the ‘quick write’ brainstorming activity for the students by listing writing topic that came to mind during a one minute time period.
Examples from my list were as follows: house, trip to Florida, husband, family, vegetable farm, niece and nephew, horses, 4-H, among others. Students listed their ideas for five minutes and shared several topics from their list. During the sharing process, students added topics as they came to mind, even if it was another person’s idea. Using the same process, a list of characters was created. Students were advised to refer to this list when they were having difficulty identifying a topic or characters to begin the self-selected writing assignments. Students were encouraged to add to the topic list and character list throughout the intervention.

_Creativity: Detail, Fluency, and Originality_

To clarify the meaning of creativity, students were directed to add details to partial drawings on the blackboard that lacked detail: a drawing of a person wearing a skirt and T-shirt, a person wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and a landscape horizon with a fading roadway. Students came to the board one by one and added a detail to the drawing (see Appendix C). The concluding discussion defined for students the components of creativity: originality, fluency, and detail. We discussed the implementation of these concepts into our future writing pieces to achieve the same results we experienced in this drawing activity.

_Defining Adjectives and Adverbs_

Next, I used the books _What Is an Adjective?_ and _What Is an Adverb?_ (Cleary, 2000) to teach students about adjectives and adverbs. After reading each book, students were directed to write a list of adjectives and adverbs in their English journals. This activity defined the function of adjectives and adverbs, demonstrated appropriate usage, and raised students’ awareness of exciting words they may incorporate into their
writing.

More Adjectives and Adverbs

Then, I read aloud Toad (Brown, 1997). This picture book gave students a visual and literary representation of how the use of adjectives and adverbs (see Appendix C) produces outstanding writing that intrigues audiences of all ages. Again, after hearing this story, students added adjectives and adverbs to their journal lists started in the previous lesson.

Overused Words

After reading the story, Toad, I focused my next lesson on reducing the number of overused words. I read aloud Stellaluna (Cannon, 1993). Students identified words that had strong and weak characteristics as defined by 6+1 Traits. Students brainstormed uneventful, overused words and we listed them on the whiteboard. Drawing on a lesson from Writer’s Workshop, I drew a two column chart on a large sheet of paper and labeled one column ‘Salsa’ and the other column ‘Rice Cake.’ We discussed the meaning of each title and then categorized each word into one of the two categories (see Appendix D). Students then copied the chart into their English journals. They were encouraged to use the ‘salsa’ words in future writing assignments; however, they were no longer able to use the ‘rice cake’ words in their writing. As an extension of this lesson, students chose a word from the ‘rice cake’ column, looked it up in a thesaurus, and wrote alternative ‘salsa words’.

More Overused Words

As a follow-up to the previous activity, we continued our quest of using vibrant words, instead of the overused, redundant words. This activity was adapted from the
lesson, “Using Vibrant Words” (Appendix E). During this activity, students were placed into groups of four. Each group was given an index card with a verb written on it. Their task was to brainstorm as many adverbs and alternative verbs as they could within three minutes and then demonstrate their words for the class. For example, the card one group received said ‘walk’, so students walked around the room slowly, quickly, quietly, and loudly. They also trudged, sauntered, and meandered. Each group was then given a noun and had to describe the noun with great detail. For example, the card said, ‘house’. Students described their word as being large, purple, ancient, a mansion, tiny, crackerjack box sized, among other descriptive words. This activity provided students with yet another opportunity to expand their lists of adjectives and adverbs and to replace previously overused words.

Using Your Senses to Improve Your Writing

“What Do Your Senses Tell You?” was a lesson that ranked high with students. During the activity, students were divided into groups and then rotated through five sensory stations. They experienced adjectives and adverbs in a very tactile manner and noted their experiences at each station in their English journals (see Appendix F). After experiencing these stations, students wrote a paragraph explaining how sensory information helped them become descriptive writers. As a conclusion to this activity, student volunteers read aloud their paragraphs.

Expanding Sentences

Having had an abundance of experiences with adjectives and adverbs, we began writing sentences. Each student wrote a simple, non-descriptive sentence. For example, “The dog sat.” Students were directed to pass their paper to the person
seated behind them who added one detail to the sentence. The sentence became, “The yellow dog sat.” Papers continued to be passed until all were returned to the original author. Finally, student volunteers shared the transformation of their sentence with the class.

**Photo Description**

For the final writing lesson, students brought in a picture from home. They drafted a paragraph describing their photo in great detail. Students were encouraged to paint this picture in the reader’s mind as opposed to telling which photo they were describing.

One student painted the photo for the reader by writing, “This is a picture taken late in August at a very popular county event. I am in a show ring with many other 4-H members, and we are demonstrating our showmanship ability. There are many people, including my parents, watching and waiting to see what the placing will be. What picture am I?” Another student described the same picture by writing, “This is a picture taken at the county fair. I am showing pigs in a show ring. What picture am I?” The first sample exemplifies ‘showing’ and the second sample exemplifies ‘telling’. This was discussed with students.

After students drafted the paragraph, they read it aloud to a partner. Then, they read it again while their partner simultaneously illustrated what their mind’s eye saw. If the drawing closely matched the student’s picture, the students edited the paragraph for grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. If the drawing did not match the picture, the partners worked together to improve the paragraph with my direct mentoring. When the editing phase was complete, students wrote the final copy.
Lastly, each section was given a paragraph from another English class. With all of the pictures posted at the front of the room, students read the paragraph and then matched it to the picture that was described.

Finally, after five weeks of instruction, my writing intervention ended and I assessed the students to determine its effectiveness.

RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The pre- and post-intervention writing samples were obtained from eighteen fourth grade students. The pre-intervention writing sample was titled, “Late One Evening,” and the post-intervention writing sample was titled, “Early One Morning.”

The percentage of adjective and adverb usage in the studied group of high ability students ranged from a 2.2 % to a 14.4 % increase of descriptive words in a sample. All six of the students in this focus group showed improvement.

Five out of the six students in the middle ability group showed improvement. The range of improvement for these five students was 2.6 % to 16 %. (The student who did not show improvement from the pre-intervention writing sample to the post-intervention writing sample scored a 16.2 % on the pre-intervention. While this student did not show improvement, this score fell within the range of scores all eighteen students received on the post-intervention writing sample. It is important to note the percentage was the second highest on the pre-intervention sample and significantly higher than the majority of percentages.)

All six of the student percentages in the low ability group showed significant improvement ranging from 5.1 % to 17.1 %. The summary of the results are recorded in the graphs and charts below.
Descriptive Writing Results
High Ability Group

Pre-Intervention
Post-Intervention

Percentage of Descriptive Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High A</th>
<th>High B</th>
<th>High C</th>
<th>High D</th>
<th>High E</th>
<th>High F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Intervention</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>11.20%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Intervention</td>
<td>13.90%</td>
<td>13.90%</td>
<td>15.80%</td>
<td>22.20%</td>
<td>19.80%</td>
<td>22.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Increase in Frequency of Descriptive Word Occurrence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High A</th>
<th>High B</th>
<th>High C</th>
<th>High D</th>
<th>High E</th>
<th>High F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Increase</td>
<td>11.40%</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptive Writing Results
Middle Ability Group

Percentage of Descriptive Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Middle A</th>
<th>Middle B</th>
<th>Middle C</th>
<th>Middle D</th>
<th>Middle E</th>
<th>Middle F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Intervention</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>13.50%</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Intervention</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>15.50%</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
<td>13.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Increase in Frequency of Descriptive Word Occurrence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Middle A</th>
<th>Middle B</th>
<th>Middle C</th>
<th>Middle D</th>
<th>Middle E</th>
<th>Middle F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Increase</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>8.80%</td>
<td>-2.40%</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>11.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each sample was also analyzed for mechanics, which included spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammatical errors. In the high ability group, student mechanical errors per word ranged from .05 to .16 on the pre-intervention writing sample. Five out of the six students showed improvement on the post-intervention writing sample, where the range of errors per word was .03 to .15. In the middle ability group, the range of errors per word was .07 to .23 on the pre-intervention sample and .04 to .18 on the post-intervention sample. Four out of the six students showed improvement from the pre- to the post-intervention. Lastly, the students in the low
ability group had a range of .10 to .30 errors per word on the pre-intervention sample and a range of .09 to .29 errors per word on the post-intervention sample. Like the middle ability group, four out of the six students in this group improved from the pre- to the post-intervention writing sample.

Mechanics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT</th>
<th>PRE-INTERVENTION ERRORS PER WORD</th>
<th>POST-INTERVENTION ERRORS PER WORD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>H6</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSIONS

This study proved traditional writing and grammar instruction are in need of revision (Pollington et al., 2001). While most professionals would agree there is not one prescribed method or philosophy to improve students’ writing skills, there are an unlimited amount of resources to aid students in becoming proficient writers (Sims, 2001). As proven in this study, lesson ideas and instructional methods taken from Writer’s Workshop and 6+1 Traits of Writing improved the transfer of skills into students’ writing (James, et al., 2001).

As I implemented lessons and activities, and shared suggested literature from the 6+1 Traits of Writing, I found a renewed vigor in students’ desire to learn. The plethora of lesson ideas challenged me to deliver the lessons enthusiastically and effectively (Olbrych, 2001). I discovered the trait I implemented was “flexible” and I experienced first-hand Culham’s statement that the traits should be the “cornerstone” of one’s writing program (Culham, 2003).

The majority of students showed improvement in their written mechanics. While very little of the instruction during this study focused on mechanics, student were given
more opportunity to write and were more apt to transfer the mechanical skills learned during class discussions and activities into their writing (Atwell, 1998). This proved that Daily Oral Language and worksheet based instruction are not as effective as advising students on mechanical skills when they are relevant to their writing. Teaching mechanics in isolation does not allow students to have the adequate practice they need in a meaningful context in order to be successful writers (Pollington, et.al., 2001).

I, along with Graham and Harris (James, et. al., 2001), found Writer’s Workshop to have several drawbacks for my students as well as myself. I struggled to give students the opportunities to choose the focus of the lessons just as Atwell (1998) had indicated was a common feeling among teachers implementing this philosophy. While I experienced the inability to give students the control of choosing the lesson topic, I was successful with the implementation of the self-selected writing topics.

I found the methods discussed in the article entitled How Adam Became a Writer, written by James, Abbott, and Greenwood (2001), to be very helpful in my classroom. By incorporating strategies from the Writer’s Workshop and 6+1 Traits of Writing, students became more proficient writers. Not only were students able to express their ideas more descriptively as indicated in an article by Adams (1996), they transferred the grammatical skills learned during the Writer’s Workshop and 6+1 Traits of Writing activities into their writing.

FUTURE PLANS

Due to the positive outcomes from this study, I plan to continue implementing the 6+1 Traits of Writing and concepts from Writer’s Workshop. I have budgeted for additional 6+1 lessons and supplemental activity materials with plans to develop units
for each one of the traits. I will begin, as I did during my intervention, by having students create a list of writing topics. Then, I will review paragraph and story organization, teach students the conventions of writing and the importance of editing every piece, and focus on descriptive writing in early November. These components of organization, conventions, and descriptive writing will provide students with the much needed preparation for the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE). Upon the completion of the WKCE, I will implement the other 6 + 1 Traits of Writing, not yet covered.

Having attended the Rebecca Sitton Spelling Seminar, I would also like to implement the spelling and phonics philosophy and the materials into our curriculum. I have budgeted for this non-consumable spelling and phonetic series and will pilot it during the 2004-2005 school year.

I would also like to research Four Block Writing. Many colleagues outside of the district have highly recommended it. They report Four Block Writing’s step-by-step process is much easier for students to understand. They also believe its implementation is easier than Writer’s Workshop.

This research project has confirmed my belief: Change is good. I will continue to read, research, and then implement these educationally sound materials and philosophies to aid students in becoming proficient writers and well-rounded students.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES CONTINUED


APPENDIX A
Writing Territories

**Writing Territories**

Figure 5-2 shows the latest version of the running list I keep of my territories as a writer. These include subjects I've written about or might like to, genres I've written in or would like to try, and audiences for whom I write or would like to. The list of territories represents my self-portrait as a writer. Because I use it as a model for kids to learn from, I try to make it personal, specific, diverse, and unpretentious: ideas of mine that might generate ideas of theirs.

I reproduce the list on overhead transparencies and talk from it in the first writing minilesson of the school year. Students come to the circle with their new writing-reading handbooks, and we begin. Last fall I started like this:

> I'm ready to start. Make sure you can see the overhead from where you're sitting and also write in your new notebooks at the same time. You may want to write in your lap, or you can get a clipboard over here.

To people who are new to the group this year, my students often take notes during minilessons. What you're creating with the notes you take during our time together at the start of class is your own writing-reading handbook. It's a place for both recording information that we create and keeping track of ideas you might want to use in your writing: dreams, topics, goals, projects, genres, audiences, places you might get published.
APPENDIX B

“Late One Night” story starter

Writing Sample
Late one night...
Late one night...  

Late one night I heard a rustling noise in the bushes. I thought it was a bear. I decided to go investigate. First, I had to go inside to get my detective kit. Because if I don't know what it is I can't test it. When I got in the house I had another mystery. Everything from the house was gone! All but one hidden object was gone. I picked up the board and grab my detective kit. I found ten clues. Five inside and five outside.

I went into the basement to study my clues. The rest of my family was tied up on chairs. I quickly untied them when all of a sudden Boom! There was a loud crash that could be heard for miles. It was a semi-trailer truck. With all of my family's belongings.
I walked to the end of the trailer. I found two people sitting outside. I called the cops. The criminals were taken away and we got our things back. And that's how I solved the mystery of the rustling in the bushes.

The End
APPENDIX C
Results from “The Adding Detail Activity”
Toad

Summary: Here’s the story of a toad—gooey, yucky, sticky, odorous, and so much more. Lively, appropriately gruesome (but intriguing, never scary) illustrations help children follow this lively story of a toad who is nearly eaten alive. The vocabulary is highly descriptive, original, and diverse. Almost every student will pick up a new word or two with this one, and have a good time doing so.

Lesson Idea: As a class, brainstorm words to fit one other animal that is well-known to your students. Then, after modeling this warm-up, invite them to do their own brainstorming in small groups on an animal of their choice. They can then use this word “cache” to create a short story or poem of their own. The writing can be done in groups, too; or students can write individually, following the group brainstorming.
Look for the unusual. See it your way. Remember. Look closer...closer still. Choose the most interesting details. Don’t say, “The clouds were fluffy white.” A million other writers have already said that. Find a new way. Look closer and see the real colors: oyster shell gray and pink, elephant-tusk white, swan silver, stone gray. Look and listen for the little things other people miss.

My Example:
My computer desk is green glass with chrome legs, while the rest of the office is wood, mostly oak. I like the contrast of old and new. The warmth of the wood coupled with the function and clean line of the desk is a pleasing look and feel.

Paint a picture. Use words to make it all come alive for the reader. Be specific. Don’t say, “The big tree was tall and nice.” That’s too vague. No one can picture anything but a lot of leaves with a trunk. Say “The giant oak shot up more than eighty feet and cast a shadow so huge, our whole fifth-grade class could picnic inside it.”

My Example:
This room is so filled with my working valuables, that I could spend a whole day describing the significance of each to people on a house tour. Imagine telling others how I gathered all the Walter Hook pictures of cats—flat cats and fat cats, cats with oranges, cats with eggs—and got them framed so they fit in just the one open space on the wall by the light switch. Each picture was found separately; each has a story to tell of its own.

Rice Cakes or Salsa? As students discover some of the less interesting words in their work, teach them to ask, “Is this a ‘rice cake’ word or a ‘salsa’ word?” Every paper should have salsa words! Use this analogy frequently, and students will begin to use it every day. One teacher shared that at the end of the day, as she was dismissing class, she said, “Have a nice afternoon and evening.” To which a few students replied, “Nice is a rice cake word!”
Using Vibrant Words

Objective
Given the basic characteristics of the Word Choice Trait, the student will compile lists of words that make writing more interesting, as well as words that do not fit the trait of word choice, and put these words in the appropriate places on a poster(s).

Standards
• Standard 1A: Uses prewriting strategies to plan written work (e.g., uses story maps, groups related ideas)

Materials
• Two large sheets of poster board
• Word cards and tape
• Character pattern for classroom display (page 7)
• Police-related items, e.g., cap, badge, whistle

Preparation
Decorate one sheet of poster board to look like a jail cell. Decorate the other sheet as a “free zone.” Enlarge and decorate the character pattern as a police officer.

Lesson Opening
Wear one or more police-related items. Direct students’ attention to the “jail” poster displayed in room. Tell students they will be sending words to jail today.

Lesson Directions
1. Teach the students that effective word choice means using the following:
   • Words that evoke strong visual imagery
   • Words that are accurate and precise
   • Action verbs that give writing energy
   • Words that sound natural
   • Words that evoke sound
2. Explain that some words are too general or overused in student writing. Ask students to write such words on cards to place on word jail poster.
3. Ask students to brainstorm a list of words that fit the positive qualities of this trait (see list of sample words below). Have students record words in their notebooks; they will keep their own word lists for later use. You might also want them to write some words on cards and place visually opposite the jail poster in the free zone.

Sample words
• Amused
• Barley
• Beckon
• Carbon
• Cliff
• Dare
• Flimsy
• Gypsy
• Hailstones
• Petrified
• Raven
• Seize
• Shatter
• Splashed
• Sneak
• Tease
• Thunder
• Translucent

Lesson Closing
Review qualities of the Word Choice Trait, with student input. Call on students one at a time to fill in a characteristic of word choice on the police officer poster.
What Do Your Senses Tell You?

Objective
Given things to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste, the student will write about his or her observations using clear writing in such a way as to show, rather than tell, the reader of his or her experience.

Standards
- Standard 1E: Writes stories or essays that convey an intended purpose (e.g., to describe, to explain)
- Standard 1J: Writes expressive compositions (e.g., expresses ideas, reflections, and observations, uses an individual, authentic voice; uses relevant details; and presents ideas that enable a reader to imagine the world, the event or experience)

Materials
- Objects to look at, touch, and smell (cotton balls, shells, flower petals, spices, etc.) for three centers
- Upbeat cassette or CD of instrumental music for listening center
- Small snack (e.g., mini-marshmallows, chocolate chips, raisins) placed into paper cups for taste center
- Blank word cards and pencils for imagination center

Preparation
Set up the six centers, one for each of the five senses, plus the sixth sense of imagination. Be sure to check for food allergies or to get parent permission before passing out any food.

Lesson Opening
Remind students that scientists experiment by observing data and recording their findings, stating, “Today, you will have the opportunity to be ‘scientific’ authors.”

Lesson Directions
1. Review characteristics of the trait. Ask students what is meant by “show, don’t tell.”
2. Ask students to name the five senses and what they do. (They give us information about the world around us.) How can this help in our writing? (The use of sensory information helps writers to focus on a topic and use specific details.) Discuss with class the concept of a sixth sense, that of imagination.
3. Divide class into six groups and send one group to each center to experience using one of their senses. The imagination center group will receive “imagination” word cards; each student will write about the word on his or her card.
4. When the students have experienced each center, have them do one of the following exercises:
   - Write about their favorite sensory experiences and why this is so
   - Write one sentence about each sensory experience
   - Write a paragraph telling how sensory information helps us be better writers

Lesson Closing
Once more, relate the scientific process of gathering data and generating ideas to the writing process. Remind students that just as scientists must present their conclusions in an article, writers must present their work in a logically written piece of work.

APPENDIX G
“Early One Morning”
Early one morning,
Early one morning, I woke up and I heard a loud boom. Everything was shaking a very lot. We all where scared no horrified. It was really bad because my friends Erick, Jed, Dawson, and Marshal where at my house.

We got out army shields and ran outside with our paintball gun and looked around to see who it was and you will not believe who it was. It was Sadom. So Dawson went inside to call the police and army to help us. They got there in about three mins.

We finally caught Sadom and put him in jail. Ha and well we where rich we all got 100 Million dollars and we partied like we were crazy.