THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF USING
INTERACTIVE WRITING IN A WRITERS’ WORKSHOP

By

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Abstract

In the fall of the 2013 school year I started teaching first grade at a new school. I had the freedom to use any writing curriculum that I chose. I had done some teaching using a Writers’ Workshop in my classroom but felt that this approach alone left gaps in my curriculum. I had learned about an approach called interactive writing. I wanted to see if and how I could implement the two writing approaches in my first grade Title I classroom. Throughout the 2013-2014 school year I implemented Writers’ Workshop and interactive writing in my classroom. I discovered many challenges and advantages to using the combined approaches. I taught four different interactive writing lessons. I collected data using a teacher journal, student observation log, and student work samples. Through my research I found that interactive writing and Writers’ Workshop combine well together. The two approaches make for a thorough and comprehensive approach to writing instruction. Some of the challenges that I faced were managing lesson time and content, and keeping my students engaged in the lessons. I also found many advantages. My struggling students showed great growth in their independent writing ability. I found that the use of personal white boards enabled strong student engagement in the interactive writing lessons. I also found that many of my students showed growth in the use of writing conventions, spelling, and grammar.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

When I first started teaching I knew I wanted to spend time teaching writing every day in my classroom. I believe strongly that writing provides a powerful link to reading ability and comprehension. When I started to teach writing, however, I found it to be more challenging than I thought it would be. It is difficult to teach young children how to compose a text with meaning when they are still learning how to write all the letters in the alphabet. I was also faced with time constraints in the classroom. I did not have enough time to teach every subject every day; I had to make choices about how to spend my instructional time and which subjects to teach. As I talked with other teachers and administrators I found that many teachers were choosing to not teach writing on a daily basis. Writing was being pushed to the side to make room for other “more important” subjects. On top of that I was also told by the administration of the school I was working at, that the fifteen minutes a day my students were spending at a writing center was enough writing instruction. I thought that there had to be a better way to teach writing for meaning, while still using my valuable instructional time wisely.

While attending a writing instruction course I learned about interactive writing, a teaching technique designed for young children. Interactive writing seemed to meet all of my writing needs. It is time efficient, designed for young children, and is an effective way to teach the mechanics of writing and writing for meaning. However, I wanted to learn more about how to implement it in my classroom in a way that would be the most beneficial for my students.
Statement of Topic

Interactive writing gives teachers a way to engage in effective literacy instruction through the construction of texts that have personal and collective meaning to students (Button et. al 1996). Writers’ Workshop is an instructional approach to teaching writing in which the teacher teaches a ten to fifteen minute mini lesson followed by independent writing practice. Both approaches have shown significant student growth in writing ability throughout a school year. My purpose in this study was to examine the advantages and challenges of using interactive writing in a Writers’ Workshop within my first grade classroom. I was curious to see how the two approaches to teaching writing affect my students’ independent writing abilities.

Framework

Interactive writing was designed on Marie Clay’s model of responsive teaching (Brotherton & Williams, 2002). The theory is that the teacher is able to provide students with immediate instruction based on their current needs. Interactive writing also has roots in the language experience approach to teaching (Button et al., 1996). The language experience approach and interactive writing still share the same process of creating student generated text, however, when using interactive writing the students create the text, whereas with the language experience approach the teacher is writing for the student. In my study I will be using the observational learning theory.

Statement of Researcher

I have been teaching young children for three years. I have taught as a reading interventionist for K-3 students, a teacher of pre-school, kindergarten, and now first grade
students. In my classroom I currently use a Writers’ Workshop approach to teaching writing. I have found that I do not have the ability to teach directly to my students’ needs while using this approach. With Writers’ Workshop I spend the majority of my time teaching writing for meaning and have little time to teach the mechanics of writing. My students need help with correct letter formation, how to hold a pencil, spacing, and basic punctuation such as capital letters and periods. For this reason I wanted to spend more time teaching the mechanics of writing. However, the new common core standards require first graders to spend time learning about broader topics such as writing narrative, fiction, non-fiction, and persuasive writing. By combining the two approaches I was able to truly teach to the needs of my students while still implementing common core standards. I feel that this is a bridge between the complex skills that first graders need to master.

**Potential Significance and Limitations**

While conducting my research, I was able to find only one article exploring the link between Writers’ Workshop and interactive writing, Roth and Guinees’ (2011) study. The study found the two teaching strategies linked well together. Roth and Guinee found positive results of combining the two teaching styles. In her yearlong writing continuum Lucy Calkins (2003) urged teachers not to combine the two strategies, however, she did not elaborate why she felt this was important. The two different views on the combination of the teaching styles and the lack of research on the subject imply that more research is needed.

The potential limitations and advantages of my study were that I conducted the research in only my classroom. I work at a school with a diverse group of learners; many
of my students are English Learners, and my students also bring a wide range of background knowledge and experiences with them. This diversity impacted the results of my study. Current studies have found that ELs respond very well to the use of interactive writing. Due to the large number of ELs in my class, my students might have shown greater gains over the year when compared to a class with a lower number of EL students. Throughout the study I collected data on how I interact with my students during the interactive writing lessons. I work alone so this data was based on personal reflections rather than how others observed my teaching.

Summary

I explored the advantages and challenges of using interactive writing in a Writers’ Workshop. I collected data through a student observation log, teacher journal and student writing samples. Research was collected using the observational and social development learning theories. The lack of research in the field especially with regards to using both Writers’ Workshop and interactive writing together could lead to interesting results. However, the limited study size and population of students may have impacted the study outcomes.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The Importance of Writing

Writing is an essential life skill; it allows us to communicate our thoughts, feelings and needs. Writing has always been a social process and it is becoming more so as technology changes the way we interact with each other. Unfortunately, educators are often not spending the time in our practice to teach this essential life skill. Roth and Guinee (2011) state, “The great majority of children in the USA do not write well enough to meet the demand placed on them by education or the emerging workplace” (p. 1). Students who are not proficient at writing in their primary years are less likely than their more skilled peers to benefit from the use of writing activities later in their schooling (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2007). If writing instruction in our schools is lacking and is not preparing students for the demands that will be placed on them as teens and adults, then how can educators of young children do a better job of teaching the essential skill of writing?

If children are invited to write each day and if they are taught lessons that meet their current instructional needs, their development as writers will astonish the teacher, their parents, the school administrators, and best of all, the children themselves (Calkins & Parsons, 2003). Is it enough for educators to take the time each day to just allow students to write? When educators do teach writing, how can they be sure that they are truly actively and assertively teaching to students’ needs? Before collecting data for this study, I worked with a group of students, all with unique needs. Some of my first grade students were learning English, some were already advanced in writing, some had learning or speech difficulties, and some were still learning letter names, sounds and
formation. How could I effectively teach writing in a way that addresses all of the different needs in my classroom at one time?

**Interactive Writing**

One instructional practice that addresses various needs of young writers is interactive writing. “Interactive writing is an instructional context in which a teacher shares a pen - literally and figuratively - with a group of children as they collaboratively compose and construct a written message” (McCarrier, Fountas, & Pinnell, 2000, p.7). The teacher and the students work together to construct a piece of text. The role of the teacher is somewhat limited while that of the student is dominant. The students generate the ideas for the writing, take turns going up to the board and writing letters, words, or sentences while the class supports the writer. The teacher provides scaffolding and support for the young writers when necessary. When a student is writing on the board the rest of the class supports the student by sounding the word out or writing on their own white boards. The text is read and reread as the students add to the story. “Because children actively participate in the writing of the text and reading it many times in the process, the intention is that they create a text that is accessible and readable” (Roth & Guinee, 2011, p. 335). Upon completion of the text, the teacher displays it in the classroom to be used as a reference tool for the students later in their independent writing.

While reading through the literature on interactive writing it became clear to me that it was formed in many different places around the same time. “Interactive writing was developed by Ohio State University educators as part of an early literacy program that would provide rich experiences for young children, particularly those who are at risk (Rubadue, 2002, p. 38). However, Button et al. (1996) state that interactive writing has its
roots in the language experience approach and was developed with the help of British teachers as a form of the shared writing approach to teaching (Button et al., 1996).

Brotherton and Williams (2002) state that it was based on Clay’s responsive model of teaching in which the teacher provides the clearest examples of instructions in response to the learners’ needs at that particular moment. One point that is apparent is interactive writing was born out of shared writing and became prominent around the time of the balanced literacy movement in the late 1990’s to the early 2000’s.

**Skills Taught in Interactive Writing**

One of the advantages of using interactive writing is that it allows the teacher to teach multiple writing skills in one lesson. The teacher helps guide the students using conventions of print - space, direction, capitalization, and punctuation (Williams & Lundstrom, 2007). Interactive writing also improves spelling knowledge, provides a letter-sound connection, and links the decoding process to writing (Patterson, Schaller, & Clemens, 2008). These skills are necessary to be able to write fluently and effectively.

When Craig (2006) researched the effects of interactive writing on kindergarten students she found that the students’ phonological awareness and early reading abilities improved as well. “A greater percentage of children in the interactive writing-plus group had reached a level of word reading in which they could fully analyze a word into phonemes, map letters onto phoneme, and then blend the phonemes to produce the word” (Craig, 2006, p. 726). Button et al. (1996) also found that the students they worked with showed significant gains in reading progress throughout the year as a result of using interactive writing. “Although the focus of Furgerson’s curriculum was not to teach her
children to read, but to immerse them in meaningful print-rich activities, most of them were reading by spring of their kindergarten year” (Button et. al, 1996, p. 452).

Not only does interactive writing teach essential skills when working with a class as a whole group, it has also been found to improve students’ independent writing as well. Roth and Guinee (2011) argue that interactive writing is an efficient daily practice that improves the quality of young children’s independent writing ability. After teaching for six years, Rebadue (2002) found that her kindergarten students were reluctant to try writing independently. She decided to implement interactive writing in her classroom for a year. She found that her students had an ownership and felt encouraged at the possibility of recreating writing independently (Rubadue, 2002).

**How Interactive Writing Supports Young Writers**

Writing can be challenging for young children. The mechanics of simply holding a pencil and sounding a word out can be incredibly difficult. On top of that is the added pressure to spell words correctly, use spacing, and add periods, commas and various other skills. This can all be overwhelming for young writers. Interactive writing can help to bridge these difficult skills. Roth and Guinee (2011) explain, “Interactive writing is specifically designed to teach young children who are just developing an awareness of reading and writing” (p. 335). As a first grade teacher I wanted to explore more about how interactive writing can be tailored to meet the individual needs of my students.

For young writers, finding just the right words or phrases to use and putting them in a logical order that is sequential can be challenging, adding to the struggle of trying to deal with the mechanical limitations of transcribing the message (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Many authors argue that this is one of the great strengths of using interactive writing; it
takes the pressure off the student and provides a space where they are supported in the transcription process.

Young writers are often faced with the issue of not knowing how to write or what a writer does. When using interactive writing students are taught specifically what it means to be a writer and how to go about the writing process (Williams & Pilonieta, 2012). With the support of their peers and the teacher, the students learn what is expected of them. Students know what they will be writing before they come to the board to write, and if they get to a point where they do not know what to do next, they can rely on their peers and the teacher to walk them through the process. Craig (2006) explains, “One reason for its accessibility is that children begin writing with a full understanding of the message to be conveyed, thus freeing their attention to create alphabetic representations of known words” (p. 726). The student can focus on the important task of actually writing the words. The pressure to find the correct word and what to say next has been eliminated.

One of the greatest strengths of interactive writing is that it allows the educator to engage in instruction precisely where the student needs it (Button et al., 1996). For some students this might be letter formation, for others it might be the silent “e” spelling pattern. All students are exposed to the different levels of learning in the classroom; it might be review for some but for others it will be a first exposure to the concept. The teacher has the ability to change and adapt the lesson for what the learner needs right now.

One particular aspect of interactive writing is that it works within the child’s zone of proximal development, or ZPD. ZPD is a theory that was developed by Vygotsky
(1978); the idea is that the educator or more knowledgeable peer/adult is working with the child in the area that is appropriate for their needs at that moment. The adult pushes the child to work at the outer most limits of their abilities so that the most learning can occur (McCarrier et al., 2000). Working with a child in their ZPD was emphasized by numerous authors Williams (2002, 2007, and 2012), Roth & Guinee (2011), Craig (2006), Button et al. (1996), and McCarrier et al. (2000) all cite Vygotsky’s (1978) work on ZPD in their papers. In all papers, the ability to work with a child in the ZPD was mentioned as one of the greatest advantages of using interactive writing.

**Effects on English Learners**

One of the struggles that many educators face on a daily basis is how to meet the needs of all of the individual students in the classroom. Many teachers face the challenge of working with students that have variety of different learning needs. Finding an instructional practice that meets the needs of all our students at one time is somewhat limited. Because interactive writing is so versatile it can be changed and adapted to meet the needs of various students. Rubadue (2002) notes that interactive writing gave her the opportunity to individualize instruction. In my classroom I have the added pressure that the majority of my students are English Learners. These students all vary on their academic ability as well as their English proficiency. This makes it even more vital that I am able to individualize instruction.

Interactive writing can be a particularly useful instructional strategy for EL students. Patterson et al. state (2008), “In regard to ELs, we have observed an increase in vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills as well as an increase in confidence from the continued use of interactive writing” (p. 496). Williams and Pilonieta (2012) studied the
effects of interactive writing on EL students specifically. They found that their EL students were more engaged in the content and motivated to write because they were familiar with the topic. They also noted that the explicit modeling and inner dialogue that the teacher uses when teaching interactive writing is necessary for the types of thinking that allow for all students to write independently.

There is a need for more research on the topic of interactive writing and how it could support ELs. With Williams and Pilonieta (2012), and Patterson et al. (2008) finding positive results for ELs it seems like a deeper study of the subject is necessary. Many other authors note that interactive writing is easy to mold to fit the needs of individual students in the classroom, thus leading me to believe that it could be an effective way to teach EL students. There was also little research on how interactive writing affects students with disabilities. Many of the studies took place in schools where students needed more strategic instruction, but they do not note special needs, or learning disabilities in particular. Button et al. (1996) notes the positive effects of their study on one particular student who was struggling, but they do not elaborate on the subject.

**Using Interactive Writing in a Writers’ Workshop**

The Writers’ Workshop is a structured process for teaching writing. The teacher teaches a mini lesson for ten to fifteen minutes on a specific skill. After that, the students write independently to practice the skills that were taught in the mini lesson. The teacher’s role is to confer with students one on one or in small groups to further teach skills (Calkins & Parsons, 2003). I have implemented the practice of a Writers’ Workshop in my classroom in the past. In this study I focused on the effects of using interactive writing as part of my Writers’ Workshop approach to teaching writing.
Interactive writing is designed to complement and improve typical writing instruction (McCarrier et al., 2000). Interactive writing also works best when it is paired with journal writing and/or independent writing time directly following the lesson. Williams and Pilonieta (2012) recommend that the lesson be followed by an open ended composition period. This leads me to believe that the two practices could and should be paired together.

While conducting their research, Roth and Guinee (2011) chose to focus directly on using interactive writing in their own writers’ workshop. They share, “The findings from this study suggest that interactive writing, in conjunction with writing workshop, can be an effective approach to writing instruction for young children” (p. 352). However, Calkins states just the opposite in her units of study. She strongly advises the teacher to not conjoin the two practices. She suggests “that interactive writing be kept far away from the writing workshop and urge[s] teachers to avoid using interactive writing to provide a story structure for children’s own writing” (Calkins & Parsons, 2003, p. 78). The question I am left with is why does Calkins feel this way? She did not offer any additional information on the topic. If Roth and Guinee (2011) found such great success then why is Calkins so adamant about keeping the two practices separate?

**Conclusion**

Through my study I hope to further explore the results of using interactive writing as part of a Writers’ Workshop. From the research that I have conducted thus far, there seems to be no strong evidence to suggest the best and most efficient way to implement interactive writing in the classroom. The practice of interactive writing seems to lend itself perfectly to be implemented as a part of a Writers’ Workshop.
Chapter III: Methods

Approach and Rationale

I conducted a qualitative action research study. I looked at the advantages and challenges of using interactive writing within a Writers’ Workshop, the very nature of the study makes it qualitative research. Rossman and Rallis (2012) state that qualitative research takes place in the natural world, uses multiple methods, focuses on context, and is fundamentally interpretive. In regards to action research, practitioners may study their own practice in order to improve it (Mills, 2011). I focused my study on how I implemented interactive writing in my classroom, and the results of incorporating a new teaching strategy within Writers’ Workshop.

Setting

I conducted my research in my first grade classroom in Salt Lake City, Utah. The school is considered to be an urban school. Our student population is diverse; 58% of the students are Hispanic, 18% White, 10% Pacific Islander, 5% Asian, 5% Black, 2% American Indian, and 2% of other races. We are a Title I school with 80% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. The school is the largest in the Salt Lake District, serving over 723 students in Pre-K through 6th grade. While conducting my research I had 25-22 students in my class; the numbers vary slightly due to student mobility. The majority of my students are Hispanic, three students are African, two students are African American, and two students are White.

Participants

All of the students in my class participated in six interactive writing lessons from September to January. In my teacher journal and my student observation log, I collected
data on my class as a whole. I specifically looked at the effects on four of my students: Jaxson, Carla, Jessica and Jose. I collected four different independent writing samples from these students throughout the year. I chose to study these four students because they are all at different reading and writing levels. Some of them speak Spanish and some of them only speak English. All of these students have different needs and abilities. The following are descriptions of these students.

Jaxson is one of the highest readers in my class. He is currently reading at a level 20 according to the Direct Reading Assessment (DRA); level 4 is considered on grade level. Jaxson’s reading level is a year advanced placing him on a second grade reading level. Jaxson writes in complete sentences and can write long stories. He often spends more time working on his pictures than adding to his writing. Jaxson’s grandmother has told me that he loves to write and it is his favorite part of school. Jaxson is an English only (EO) student. Jaxson is of mixed race; his mother is White and he is part African American, however, Jaxson has been raised entirely by his mother and her family.

Carla is Latina and speaks Spanish as her first language. She is at a level 4 according to UALPA testing, meaning that she is almost fluent in English. Carla reads on grade level 4 (DRA) on grade level. Carla struggles in school; she has a hard time focusing on her work. Carla gets distracted easily and spends a large amount of her writing time walking around the classroom, or looking for the writing supplies she needs. Carla’s writing is very minimal, she writes short one or two line stories. Carla has a hard time staying on topic when she writes and rarely completes her stories. When working with Carla one on one it is a struggle to get her to stay on task long enough to complete her thoughts while writing.
Jose is Latino and speaks Spanish as his first language; he is a level 4 according to UALPA. He is reading on a level 6 (DRA), a little above grade level. When he writes he stays on topic, uses punctuation, and writes about a variety of topics. Jose struggles with a language transfer in his writing. He often uses an f in place of a th, which is common for Spanish speaking students. Jose works hard in school and is well liked by his peers, he works well independently and completes his class work easily.

Jessica is Latina and speaks Spanish as a first language; she is a level 3 according to UALPA. She can understand when spoken to in English but has to think about the vocabulary she wants to use when speaking in English. She is reading on grade level a 4 (DRA), but struggles to keep up with her peers. Carla has made very little progress over the year. While she has not been admitted into special education she is pulled out of the classroom for thirty minutes a day for Tier II instruction in reading. Her writing is limited to single sentences at a time. She writes about a variety of topics but has a hard time expanding her stories. She can clearly communicate her stories when I ask her to share but struggles to get these thoughts down on paper.

Data Gathering Methods and Rationale

“Action research gives us a systematic and rigorous way to view this process of observation as a qualitative data collection technique” (Mills, 2011, p. 74). I used three different methods for gathering my data: student writing samples, observations of student behavior during lessons, and a teacher journal. I chose these three methods as a way to log and demonstrate decisions I made while I was teaching and preparing for writing lessons. Throughout my study I was an active participant observer in my classroom. Mills (2011) states that daily journals kept by teachers are a valuable data source. I wrote in my
journal about my rationale for my actions while teaching and planning the writing lessons. Students’ behaviors during the writing lessons were tracked in a student behavior log. Writing samples were collected at the end of each unit to provide a way of seeing how the interactive writing lessons have impacted my students’ independent writing abilities. These writing samples are a visual source of data collection and helped me to understand what was happening in my classroom (Mills, 2011).

I collected students’ writing samples from four points in my study: free writing time, scary stories, Thanksgiving books and how-to books. I collected a writing sample from each of the participants at the beginning of the school year as a base for where they are starting as writers. I also collected samples at the end of each interactive writing unit. This helped me to see how the lessons affected students’ independent writing abilities. Through these writing samples I was able to see if students were implementing the techniques that we learned throughout the lessons.

At the end of each writing lesson I logged what I did during the lesson and why. This helped me to be able to look back and have a clear picture of what each lesson looked like and the different decisions that I made while teaching. In interactive writing lessons there are many teachable moments and I would not be able to explain or remember what I did if I did not write it down. Journaling gave me the ability to look back and see what I had taught and why I made specific teaching decisions. When I encountered points of interest in students’ writing I was able to go back and check if I had taught these skills during a lesson. I kept track of the topics that I taught and why I chose to teach these particular lessons.
While teaching and working with my students I tracked their behavior during the actual writing lesson. I recorded what students responded well to and what did not work. This helped me see the type of errors that were made while students were writing and how they were fixed. I saw how students were working during the independent writing time that followed the interactive writing lessons. This allowed me to see how the writing lessons impacted their independent writing abilities. I was able to look back and see when the students got right to work and when they struggled with their writing. I was also able to see what kinds of issues my students faced in their independent writing. I logged the questions that students had, if they used the words wall, and how long they were able to write following a lesson.

**Data Analysis**

To analyze my data I became familiar with it by reading through my teacher’s journal, student behavior log, and student work samples several times. I organized my data by type and by date so that it was possible to look at my findings in a continuum from the start of the school year to the present. Next I identified categories and coded the data by type. Once I found my categories I then broke my data down and filed it by type, i.e. all of my notes about conventions went into a conventions file. Once all the data was coded I generated themes in my findings. I read through each group and found smaller subgroups of interest. Finally, I interpreted my data and searched for alternative understandings and unexpected results (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

To ensure that my study is trustworthy and valid I used the following techniques as described by Rossman and Rallis (2012).
- Triangulation: I used multiple sources to collect data at different points in time. I used three different methods of data collection: teacher log, student observations, and writing samples.

- Being There: I was working in my own classroom, which meant that I was present the whole time the study was taking place. I taught every lesson and worked with my students.

- Using a Critical Friend: I conferred with other elementary teachers throughout my research. I worked with these teachers to ensure that my study was thorough.

**Ethical Considerations**

Confidentiality is a big concern for my research. I worked with the students in my class and discussed their progress throughout the year. I have used pseudonyms for all of my students and have not revealed any identifying information about them. Interactive writing has been studied with EL students and has been shown to be particularly helpful for these students. I am not studying the effects of my EL students. However, many of the students in my classroom are ELs who speak Spanish. I chose EL students and English only students to ensure that my study is not biased to the EL population in my school.
Introduction

In the fall of 2013-2014 school year I started a teaching job at a new school after teaching kindergarten and pre-school for three years in a different school district. While teaching kindergarten I was only allowed to teach writing using the Four Square writing technique. I was not allowed to use any other forms of writing instruction in my classroom. The restrictions on writing instruction that I had faced the year before were no longer a concern for me. I now was in the opposite situation where I had ultimate freedom to develop my own writing instruction. As stated earlier, I decided to implement interactive writing as part of my writing instruction because it has been shown to be an effective strategy with young writers and EL students. I decided to investigate the advantages and challenges of using interactive writing within the structure of Writers Workshop (Calkins & Person, 2003). In the following chapter I will explain how I teach writing in my classroom, and the changes I made introducing interactive writing as part of my instruction. I will also discuss the results and findings of teaching four interactive writing lessons.

Process and Procedures

How I teach writing.

Each day in my classroom all of my students write for a total of thirty-five minutes. This is achieved through two separate writing time blocks. The first time of the day is during small group instruction. Each of my students is expected to participate in Work on Writing (Calkins & Person, 2003) as one of their fifteen minute centers. Work on Writing is free writing time for my students and during this time students choose what
they would like to write. They can pick from a variety of papers in our writing center or they can work on a piece of writing from their writing folders. At this time of the day students enjoy writing notes to friends, illustrating pictures, or writing personal narratives. I do not collect this writing and there are no restrictions on what students can write about; it is simply writing for enjoyment. My students are allowed to sit by friends at this time and I encourage them to share their writing with each other.

The second writing time in my classroom is the more formal and traditional Writers’ Workshop. Each day I spend ten to fifteen minutes introducing a new skill or writing style through a ten-minute mini lesson. Once the mini lesson is complete, students head back to their desks for Quiet Ten (Jacobson, 2010). During Quiet Ten students work on the specific writing task or skill that we have previously learned in the mini lesson. Students are expected to quietly write for ten minutes with no disruptions. At this time I work with small groups of students or one on one with students who need additional help with writing instruction. Once Quiet Ten is over, my students are expected to write for another ten minutes. Students are now encouraged to talk with neighbors about their writing or start a new piece. During these last ten minutes of writing time I have one on one writing conferences with two of my students. My students decide when they would like to have a conference with me. I keep a list to ensure that I meet with all of my students periodically. When our conferencing time is over, we then move on to author’s chair. Students are allowed to sign up for author’s chair when they feel they are ready. During author’s chair two students share their writing with the class; the author then calls on three students to share questions and comments about their writing.
Interactive Writing.

Throughout the year I have used interactive writing as an alternative to a traditional mini lesson during the Writers’ Workshop portion of my writing instruction. I have collected data on four of these different interactive writing lessons. One of my goals was to implement interactive writing as a part of my Writers’ Workshop. McCarrier et. al (2000) states: “As with any instructional approach, interactive writing is intended to be used in combination with other learning approaches” (p. 181). This signifies that interactive writing alone is not a truly comprehensive approach to teaching writing but enhances a writing program by offering hands-on writing instruction that is meaningful for the students. This is true of implementing Writers’ Workshop as well. I wanted to see if it was possible to seamlessly combine the two approaches into one effective and dynamic approach of writing instruction.

To achieve this goal it was important to me to keep as close to the same schedule when using interactive writing as when I teach using a mini lesson. I wanted my students to have the stability in their daily schedule, and to not add additional work with scheduling when implementing the two different styles of teaching. My goal was to be able to switch between the two teaching styles from one day to the next without it impacting my students or our daily routines.

Data Collection.

While teaching with interactive writing I kept a log of my students’ behaviors and responses to the lessons. I also kept a teacher reflection log about my personal reflection and decisions while teaching. I collected artifacts from four of my students’ independent writing and the writing that we completed as a whole class. Through these artifacts, logs,
and journaling, I discovered three main themes about the strengths and challenges of using interactive writing in a Writers’ Workshop. These themes are: student engagement, the teaching of writing conventions, and writing content.

**Student Engagement**

**Advantages and challenges.**

Patterson et. al (2008) states, “A primary concern of many teachers is that a lack of engagement is the root of the many problems they face in teaching” (p. 496). One of the greatest advantages of using interactive writing in my classroom was my ability to truly engage my students in writing instruction. This was accomplished through two major approaches: the use of white boards while working as a whole class and the ability to motivate and empower students. I discovered that classroom management while teaching interactive writing was difficult at times. I also found that the pacing of my lessons had a large impact on my students’ abilities to engage in the lesson. I found that if the lesson was too long or difficult for my students I would lose the attention of the class.

**White board use.**

When explaining how to teach using interactive writing Button et. al. (1996) starts off by saying, “Typically the children are seated on a carpet facing an easel holding unlined chart paper, a marking pen, correction tape, and a pointer” (p. 449). When starting an interactive writing lesson my classroom looks similar to this. Each of my students sits on the carpet facing the easel with a small white board in their lap, an expo marker, and an eraser ready to get started on the writing for the day. I found that the use of white boards in the classroom was powerful for my students because they were
engaged and active in the writing and learning process. My students were not just watching me teach but they were helping me teach.

One of the biggest issues I faced with teaching only using a mini lesson was gaining and keeping the attention of 24 six-year-olds for more than a minute or so. My students would be playing with their shoes, chewing their sleeves, or poking their neighbors. Idealistically, I thought that once I started teaching with interactive writing my students would instantly be engaged in the lesson. Unfortunately this was not the case. One student might be engaged while the others were off task and bored while watching their peer write. By the time we were on our second interactive writing lesson of the year, I was desperate for a way to engage my whole class in the writing process. I needed a quick and easy way to engage my students in the lessons. Distributing and managing the use of all the supplies Button (1996) refers to seemed overwhelming to me. I have always used personal white boards with my students during math instruction and thought that this might be a way to engage my students in writing instruction as well.

The use of white boards dramatically changed the interactive writing process for my class. While a student was writing at the easel, the rest of the class was writing on their own white boards. My advanced students were able to quickly and accurately write the sentence on their boards while their peer was writing on the easel. They were then able to use their writing as a reference to help their peers with spelling or punctuation. My students who were not as advanced were able to use the writing on the easel or the writing on their peers’ boards as a reference for their own sentence.

One of the most remarkable observations I had was watching my students work together to complete the task. My students were collaborating to help each other. They
would point out misspelling, missed punctuation, and missing words to their neighbors. Even when they were not writing on the easel they were still teaching their peers the writing process. My advanced students were acting as teachers, spelling and respelling difficult words, and editing their peers’ writing. Students who struggled with writing were successfully composing sentences. They had a safe place to look for help, and could keep up with the working pace of the rest of the class.

Another advantage of using white boards was my ability to see what my students were writing. I could quickly spot misspelling or grammatical errors by my students. The white boards enabled my students to quickly erase and fix a mistake so that there was not as much stigma with the error. It was incredibly easy for me to manage the use of white boards. There was never a broken pencil or missing eraser, and my students never ran out of room to write.

A key component of interactive writing is the reading and re-read of the text. When my students were using white boards, they had the text in their laps. They could follow along and point to each word as we re-read the text as whole class. All of my students were tracking and reading, they were not just listening and watching me read the text to them.

**Motivation.**

Throughout my teaching career, I have found that some students are easily motivated to work hard and do their best work while others are not. Motivating struggling students has always been a challenge that I have faced with writing instruction. I often teach a lesson and then find a handful of students that are just sitting at their desks doing...
nothing. Interactive writing has greatly increased active participation in my classroom for all learners.

An advantage of using interactive writing has been the ability to work with all of my students at their level. Button et. al (1996) states “Although the children varied in their control of the conventions of print, they all thought of themselves as readers and writers” (p. 452). I have found this to be especially true of the lowest students. They are empowered to write and motivated.

When teaching interactive writing lessons my students were not just engaged in the activity but they were also being successful. For example, students who normally struggled with keeping up with the class were not lost in the lesson, but they were following along and completing the same level of work as my students who are the most advanced. The ability to change and adapt a lesson to meet the needs of my students as opposed to following a set sequence ensured the success of all my students (Roth & Guinee, 2013).

Interactive writing was particularly empowering for those students who struggle with writing. While the lessons were engaging and useful for every student in my class, my students with the most need gained the most from the lessons. This is due largely to the way the lessons are designed. The students were encouraged to use their peers and their teacher to help scaffold them through their writing. There was no shame in students asking their peers for help or looking at a neighbor’s board for the correct spelling of words. This behavior was encouraged and guidance was readily given. Rubadue (2002) also found this in her work with interactive writing. She states that her students “were not afraid to take a risk,” but were willing to try (p. 59).
Young authors are often limited in what they can write by their ability level. They are bogged down by the tasks of sounding words out, correctly forming letters, using punctuation, and remembering what it is they are trying to say. With interactive writing a lot of the pressures are taken away. The students have a whole classroom full of learners who are ready to help them with all of these tasks. This allows students to compose more complex and thoughtful text.

**Management.**

A challenge that I found while teaching with interactive writing was the way it impacted my daily schedule at times. I discussed this in my teacher observation log:

> We had to slow down a few times today because kids were yelling out how to spell words and it was confusing to others because so many students were spelling at the same time. (Teacher reflection log, 11.20.13)

I found this to be an issue more than once while using interactive writing. Interactive writing changes the traditional structure of the classroom. Students are expected to be engaged with the lesson and help with the writing process. They are not just sitting watching and listening while the teacher models an idea, but instead they are expected to help with the process. For young students this freedom can sometimes be overwhelming. The simple spelling of a word can quickly and easily erupt into a classroom full of yelling students.

As all teachers who work with young students know, it is incredibly easy for them to become excited and get out of control. When there are not clear boundaries it is difficult for students to remember what behavior is accepted and what is not. When using interactive writing the lessons change from day to day; no two lessons are the same. This
lack of routine and structure was difficult for some of my students. At first, it was truly
difficult for me to manage my classroom while teaching with interactive writing.

A trial and error process is necessary when introducing any new teaching style to
a classroom. I had to become comfortable with teaching the process and my students
needed to become familiar with it as well. The freedom and flexibility of interactive
writing could be described as a double edged sword. On one hand I was able to change
the lesson midway through to meet the needs of the students, but on the other a set
process, structure, and routine was difficult to achieve.

**Pacing.**

I quickly found that the pacing of my lessons was essential to my students’ level
requires that the lesson move along at a fast pace” (p. 189). The pacing of interactive
writing lessons depends on many factors: the type of text you are composing, the length
of text, and the content of the text. It quickly became apparent to me that if I chose a text
that was too long or difficult for my students that their level of engagement dropped. My
students would be wiggling around on the carpet, drawing pictures on their white boards,
and asking if we were done yet.

It is crucial for the success of the lesson that the text selected be appropriate for
the students. I found that I could only hold my students’ attention for about ten to fifteen
minutes, and that we needed to be able to complete the text within a week. When we
worked on composing texts that were longer than this, my students often became lost in
the process of writing. My students would forget what we were writing about, or were
unable to think of sentences that would make sense in our story. McCarrier et al., (2002)
The Advantages and Challenges of Using Interactive Writing in a Writers’ Workshop

states, “Pacing is also important in helping children keep track of the message that is being produced” (p. 189).

When I first started teaching with interactive writing, I was overly enthusiastic about what I thought my students would be capable of doing in a single lesson. I quickly found that the shorter the lesson was, the greater the impact it had on my students. My students are able to keep track of what they were writing and what they needed to remember when the lesson was short. When they went back to write independently, they were more successful because they had stayed on-task and could remember what they needed to do. I found that in order for a lesson to be successful, I needed to keep them short and concise.

Content

Advantages and challenges.

One of the things I liked most about using interactive writing in my classroom was the ability to really teach to my students’ needs. With interactive writing I was able change and adapt a lesson to meet the needs of my students in that moment. I could teach content that was meaningful and useful.

Modeling.

Interactive writing provides meaningful opportunities to teach different writing strategies essential for young writers (Brotherton & Williams, 2002). I found this to be especially true in my ability to teach my students different types of writing. Throughout my four interactive writing lessons, I introduced four different types of writing: personal narrative, non-fiction, how-to, and fiction. By using interactive writing I was able to teach my student different writing styles that challenged them but were made accessible
through this style of teaching. In my personal reflection journal, I describe my decision making process:

I chose to write a scary story because it is close to Halloween and I thought that the students would think it was fun. I also wanted to give them a topic that would be a little challenging for them. They often write narrative, this is a fiction piece which is more difficult for them to write. (Teacher reflection log, 10.28.13)

The goal of interactive writing is to focus students’ attention on the different kinds of strategies, concepts, and process that they are still learning (Williams & Pilonieta, 2012). When using interactive writing I was able to model for my students the proper way to compose a text without distracting them from the meaning. My students were exposed to more complex levels of thinking and writing.

I was able to model for my students what they needed to know for their writing in that particular moment:

Today we had a lot of chances to fix things up as we were writing. We talked about when we start with a capital letter and when you use lower case. This came up as we had to go down a line, the students wanted to put a capital because it was a new line and we talked about why this is not correct. We worked on finger spacing between each word. We also talked about starting a new sentence and when and where to do this. (Teacher reflection log, 10.22.13)

In this excerpt from my student observation log, I described how I modeled the process of continuing a sentence from one line to the next. This is a difficult skill for young writers. Through interactive writing, I was able to teach this valuable skill to my students in an authentic manner.
Independent writing.

Williams and Pilonieta (2012) recommend that interactive writing be followed by independent writing so that students can try out the new skills they have just learned (p. 148). Each day at the end of an interactive writing lesson my students had ten to twenty minutes for independent writing time. This is where I saw one of the greatest impacts on my students’ writing abilities. When only teaching with mini lessons, I found that my students were often off task when it came time for independent writing. They were lost and did not really understand what they needed to do. When I teach using interactive writing my students get straight to work and stay on task longer. Roth and Guinee (2001) also found that students who participate in interactive writing did a better job on independent writing than their peers (p. 350).

I found that my students who tend to be off task the most (my EL students and struggling students) were on task and working independently. After teaching with interactive writing my students that need the most help from me are able to work independently and compose their text more accurately. These students had a clearer understanding of what they needed to do. Breaking down the writing process step by step and explicitly modeling for these students what they needed to do had a huge impact on their writing ability. In this quote from my teacher’s log, I am referring to when I introduced how-to books to my students.

I have started my class on how-to books. I have been working with them for a week now and I am concerned about their level of understanding. I have been doing only Writers’ Workshop to teach how-to. I really like how quickly the lessons go and the time that my students have to write. I have been working with
a few of my lower students every day at my table. I really feel like they are not understanding what they need to do. My high kids are doing just fine but it is my low kids and my ELs that are having a hard time. (Teacher reflection log, 1.10.14)

When I introduced this skill, I spent the first week teaching only with mini lessons. I then went back and re-taught the skill with interactive writing. I found that after re-teaching the skill, my students were much more successful. I found that taking the extra time out of my day to introduce a new skill through interactive writing has had the biggest impact on my students’ writing ability. My students had a week of guided practice with me before they were asked to write on their own. Each day we worked on one page of our *How To Eat an Oreo* book together. They then went back to their desks and wrote the same page independently. My students knew exactly what they needed to write. They could add more to their stories or change it to be more personal. For those who were not ready for this step but had the story in their heads, they had already had practice writing it with help from me and their peers. This allowed for students to be able to focus more on the content of what they were writing and not be lost wondering what they should be writing about.

**One-on-One conferences.**

Interactive writing lessons should be about ten to fifteen minutes in length. However I found that once all of my students had their supplies and were ready to start the lesson it was taking twenty or more minutes to truly complete a lesson. This was not a problem for my students’ engagement in the lessons, but it did impact the Writers’ Workshop component of my study. I used those extra ten minutes a day to do writing
conferences with my students and to allow for my students to share their work through author’s chair. I found that I no longer had the time in my day for this component.

It is important that students have a purpose for writing (Calkins & Parsons, 2003). Knowing that they are going to share their text with the whole class gives students a purpose and encourages them to do their best writing. Conferencing with my students one on one is important for me to be able to track my students’ growth and to meet their individual needs. In order to incorporate both interactive writing and author’s chair/conferencing in my classroom I started using interactive writing as a way to introduce a new writing style that we will then continue to work on for several weeks. I have to found this to be ideal for my students.

I introduce my students to a new writing style through interactive writing. This approach gives students hands-on step by step instruction so that they can later be successful. The lessons are short, focused, and manageable for my students. I then continue the following weeks with the Writers’ Workshop approach and mini lessons. I focus the lessons on struggles that I have noticed my students having through writing conferences or when we were using interactive writing. I have a better idea of what my students needs are, and my students have the skills to be successful. I have found that this is a successful blend of the two teaching styles.

Conventions

Advantages and challenges.

One of the most challenging parts of teaching writing is teaching the conventions of writing to young authors. When to use punctuation, proper grammar, and spelling are all difficult skills for children to master. When details, word choice, and content are
added, it can be overwhelming for teachers and students alike. Interactive writing lends itself well to teaching these skills in an easy accessible manner.

**Spelling.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Jaxson</th>
<th>Jose</th>
<th>Carla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misspelled words</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Student Writing Growth

The table above shows data from four different students in my class. The first set of numbers shows word count, misspelled words, and number of sentences from a writing sample taken in September and the second from a writing sample taken in January. The data demonstrate students’ spelling ability has greatly increased over the year. In September, Jessica misspelled five out of the six words she used in her story. By January she only misspelled two out of the twenty-eight words she used in her story.

The repeated modeling of sounding words out as well as the repeated spelling and re-spelling of words in an interactive writing lesson better equips students to be successful in their independent spelling. Williams and Pilonieta (2012) also noted this in their research, stating this targeted instruction supports children’s acquisition of letter sound correspondences and alphabetic principle (p. 148). I also found that students have an easier time spelling independently because they have just practiced spelling and writing the words that they will need to use in their independent writing. For example, when writing a how-to book on eating an Oreo we practice writing the word “drink” during interactive writing. None of my students knew the correct spelling of the word. I
modeled the correct spelling for drink and my students practiced spelling the word on their white boards. My students then went to work on their independent Oreo books, all having just spelled the word drink correctly and now having a reference (the class book) to refer to when needing to spell this word independently.

When teaching with only a mini lesson my students do not have the ability to practice their spelling and then get direct guidance on the correct way to spell words. I was able to teach spelling patterns like the silent “e” and long vowel sounds before I explicitly taught them in spelling. The higher students in my class are learning and using more complex spelling patterns correctly, while my lower students are being exposed to different spelling patterns. I have found that my students who struggle with writing and spelling the most (like Carla and Jessica, refer to table) are able to accuratelyspell words in their independent writing. Williams and Lundstrom (2007) also note this in their research, saying “they were solving the spelling of words as they were writing continuous text, which is exactly what students must do during independent writing activities” (p. 210).

Another spelling advantage has been my ability to explicitly model the use of the word wall in my classroom. While teaching an interactive writing lesson I am able to use the word wall when my students get stuck on the writing of a sight word. In the past I have felt like my word wall was rarely used by my students. Through the use of interactive writing I was able to teach how and when to use the word wall in a practical way. This has enabled them to be able to use it independently. I also have a better understanding of the kinds of words my students are using in their writing. I can do a better job of posting the sight words that my students need the most.
The only challenge that I have found has been how spelling has impacted my students’ independent writing time. I have found that my students are very concerned about their ability to spell words correctly. I have always told my students that I do not care how they spell words, I just want them to try. This year, however, I have found that my students continually ask for help when spelling. I wonder if this is due to the fact that my students have seen the words they are trying to write spelled correctly and then have a hard time recalling the exact spelling for the word. I also wonder if part of this is due to the fact that we have spent so much time sounding and stretching words out as a group. My students might be more aware of different spelling patterns and sounds; they know they are not spelling the word correctly. Button et al. also found that students were better able to hear sounds in words. “The children improved the most in their ability to hear sounds in words” (Button et al. 1996).

Grammar.

One of the most difficult skills for me to teach is proper grammar usage in writing. This is a difficult task for any teacher of young children, but I have the additional factor that the majority of my students are ELs. This means that the typical grammatical errors made by young authors is compounded with the fact that students are having to write in a non-native language. I wanted my first graders to have more control over grammar than the simple understanding of using a period and a capital letter.

I found that using interactive writing gave me the perfect space for grammar instruction that was on the level of my students’ needs. Through interactive writing my class was able to quickly master the basic tasks of using a capital and a period in their writing. Through the explicit modeling of how to edit a text I have found that my students
are able to fix the mistakes in their own writing. While working with students one on one, I have found that I only have to point out that there is a mistake in a sentence and the majority of my students are capable of finding and correctly fixing this mistake.

Not only are my students capable of fixing their own mistakes but they are also more aware of different conventions in writing that they may not be able to implement on their own yet. When we were working on scary stories in October the students wanted to have the ghost in the story say something. This meant that we had to use quotation marks in our story. While this is not a typical first grade skill I decided to help my students add them to the story. It is important that all of the stories be written correctly because students then refer to them in their independent writing. While my students still cannot accurately use quotation marks, they can point them out in a story, and explain what they mean. This ability to expose my students to new conventions in writing has made a great impact on their ability to understand the writing process.

A challenge that I have encountered when teaching convention using interactive writing has been the choices that I have to make as a teacher. I have found that it is at times difficult to decide what to teach and what to not teach. I do not want to overwhelm my students by teaching them skills that they are not ready for, but at the same time I do not want to be composing texts as a class that are not properly written. This has not been a huge issue in my teaching, but it is something that needs to be considered.

**Summary**

In conclusion I have found interactive writing to be a valuable teaching tool in the instruction of writing with young children. My students are more independent writers, they have better control over grammar and spelling in their writing, and they are more
engaged in writing instruction. I have also found that apart from a few time constraints when using interactive writing, it works well and fits into a Writers’ Workshop. Interactive writing is a valuable resource that provided the means necessary to teach essential writing skills. The combination of the two approaches to teaching writing provides a well-rounded approach to teaching writing. I have found that each approach on its own has gaps in the curriculum, but the two approaches combined complement each other well.
Chapter V: Action Plan

Summary

After spending the first half of the school year incorporating interactive writing into my Writers’ Workshop, I discovered many advantages and challenges. Through the process of trial and error I have found an effective and efficient way to use interactive writing that benefits my students. Interactive writing alone is not enough to help my students truly develop as writers; this is also true of Writers’ Workshop. Both teaching styles have strengths that make them valuable and worthwhile approaches to writing instruction but they are stronger when combined.

Interactive writing provides students hands-on learning experiences that are fun and engaging. This teaching strategy allows for students to form a deep understanding of writing mechanics and conventions. Writers’ Workshop is an excellent teaching strategy where students can become comfortable and confident in their independent writing abilities; it allows for students to master different styles of writing. Through the process of trial and error, I have found that interactive writing and Writers’ Workshop are two teaching strategies that complement each other well. The two strategies alone leave gaps in the curriculum, but combined they become a well-rounded approach to writing instruction.

Action Plan

After completing my research I have continued teaching with the combined approach of using interactive writing and Writers’ Workshop. Through the continued use of these teaching strategies I have been able to become more familiar with this style of
teaching. In the next section I will discuss how I am currently using interactive writing in my classroom and my intentions for its use next year.

When I was teaching using only Writers’ Workshop in my classroom I found that many of my students had a hard time understanding new topics. This was true when I would introduce a new style of writing such as how-to writing and when teaching new conventions such as contractions. I have found that when I use interactive writing to introduce a new topic my students are much more confident in their understanding, and seem to master the new skill more quickly.

I introduce the new skill or genre by having students work with me for a week or so composing a new piece of writing. This allows for my students to have hands-on exposure to the new topic. Once we have completed our interactive writing lesson I then spend the rest of the unit teaching through Writers’ Workshop. The step-by-step instruction that my students get through interactive writing allows for them to master the skill. I am also able to work with my students in their ZPD. I can see where they need more or less instruction and can truly focus my time on my students’ needs. I then have time to polish these skills through follow up lessons during Writers’ Workshop.

While using interactive writing as a way to introduce a new topic I have found that I need to spend more time developing a continuum of writing lessons. In the future I hope to develop a more thorough and thought out continuum for my interactive writing lessons. This year I was caught up in the process of introducing and using interactive writing; I did not have time to develop lessons that complement the curriculum well. Now that I know how long my lessons should be, how to engage my students in the
lessons, and what levels of learning I can expect from using interactive writing, I can focus more on the kinds of learning I would like to see from my students.

One of the most difficult parts of teaching interactive writing for me was my ability to manage time in my classroom. I would often find that my lessons took double the time that I had allotted. Now that I have taught several interactive writing lessons, I have a better idea of how much writing I can expect for my students to be able to complete. I now know that I can only expect for my students to be able to write one or two sentences in a lesson. This has led me to scale back the size for the writing projects that I want to complete with my class. I have been working on having shorter, more intensive lessons with my students. This way I have the attention of my whole class for the duration of the lesson. I believe that my students gain more from having shorter lessons followed by a longer independent writing time. This allows more time for my students to practice the skills that they just learned.

While conducting my research I would often skip conferencing and author’s chair time with my class. I have found that these two components of Writers’ Workshop are key to the success of the program. Author’s chair gives my students a purpose when writing and conferencing allows me to check in with my students and give them one on one instruction. My students love having conferences; they are always eager to sign up for conferencing and often ask if they can have a turn. They enjoy sharing their work with the whole class. I have made it a priority in my writing instruction to make sure that these two elements are a part of writing time each day. To accommodate for this I will stop a writing lesson early, or cut off a few minutes of Quiet Ten. I feel that the benefits of being able to share writing with others is incredibly powerful and motivating for my
students. Author’s chair gives my students a purpose for writing and a motivation to write well.

Throughout the year I have been following Lucy Calkins’ Writing Continuum for Primary Grades (2003). I really like this continuum and feel that it has some very powerful suggestions for teachers, and when followed correctly helps students become strong writers. However, this continuum was developed before the implementation of the Common Core. I am required to follow the Common Core in my writing instruction. Because of this my goal for next year is to develop my own continuum. I need to spend more time working with my students on the specific writing skills that they will be expected to have by second grade. Calkins’ writing continuum focuses on topics like small moments and poetry. The Common Core requires that students have a mastery of non-fiction writing. I need to focus more on different non-fiction topics for my students.

**Recommendations for further research**

I feel that there is still a need for more research on the combined approach of interactive writing and Writers’ Workshop. One area where further research is needed is on the effects of ELs and struggling students. These students benefited greatly from using interactive writing. It would be interesting to see how the targeted use of interactive writing impacts these students’ independent writing abilities.

The nature of my study did not allow me to have a control group. It would be interesting to see the differences in learning between a class that uses interactive writing and one that only uses Writers’ Workshop. A large majority of the research on this topic uses interactive writing with a small subgroup of students. I believe that there is more research that is needed to explore the effects on a whole class of students.
I would highly recommend the use of interactive writing to any teacher of young students. The flexibility of interactive writing lends itself well to be implemented into many classrooms easily. The growth that my students have made in their writing abilities over the year have been amazing. I believe that this is due largely because of my decision to use interactive writing throughout the year. I have never been able to truly target writing instruction to meet the immediate needs of my students and this allowed for gaps in my instruction. I now have a way to meet the needs of my class as a whole.

Conclusion

Through the four interactive writing lessons that I taught in this study I found many advantages and challenges of using interactive writing as part of my Writers’ Workshop. I found the majority of my results were positive and beneficial for my students. My students are more independent writers, they have a command of grammar and writing convention, and they are more aware of their spelling. I believe that interactive writing and Writers’ Workshop are two approaches to writing instruction that benefit young writers. The two approaches combined make a well-rounded and comprehensive approach to writing instruction.
References


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