

The Goldilocks Approach
Too Much ~ Too Little ~ Just Right

What happens when I implement a process driven writing curriculum versus a product driven writing curriculum?

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Context

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What happens when I implement a process driven writing curriculum versus a product driven writing curriculum?

I am conducting this research as a third year teacher; therefore, when I was given the task to come up with a research question I actually had many places to begin. Since my teaching journey has just begun I am constantly tweaking and revamping my teaching methods, reorganizing my space and trying new approaches with the children. There are several areas in which I could focus my research, however, as I reread my journal and reflected on my teaching practices I discovered that teaching writing is the area that causes me the most frustration.

I teach in a diverse, suburban elementary school in Central New Jersey. This includes various races, religions and socio-economic positions. The borough has one elementary school, one middle school and one high school. It is approximately an hour drive to New York City, Philadelphia, and the beach, therefore, a desirable area for many. We have 811 students housed in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, including two multi-grade autistic classrooms.

I am currently teaching the second grade inclusion class which is supported by a Special Education Teacher. We have four classified students, five students who qualify for Title 1 services and one student who is in the process of neurological and psychological testing for classification purposes. We have

nineteen students, nine girls and ten boys; hence the gender ratio is relatively balanced.

Academically speaking, our class is very diverse. We have four students performing above grade level, reading at a fourth grade level and to the other extreme we have ten students performing below grade level, with reading levels varying from kindergarten to beginning second grade. The remaining five students are somewhere in between.

As I began to explore my writing program I was extremely unhappy. Our district writing curriculum is vague and provides little direction as to how writing should be taught. My current writing program, "The Writer's Workshop", was implemented in my classroom through my mentor. Basically during my first year of teaching she told me what I should use for a writing program, gave me some materials and this has been my approach ever since. I like "The Writer's Workshop", but I feel that I have much room for improvement. Hence, this is a great time to explore my options and implement a program that works for me.

When students enter my classroom they complete their morning responsibilities such as getting two pencils, placing homework in designated baskets, signing up for lunch, etc. Once they have completed all morning responsibilities students proceed to their desks and begin morning journal writing. Students respond to a predetermined prompt while I do attendance, lunch count and address any notes or questions presented that morning. After the announcements a few students share their journal entries orally and then we

move on to whole group reading. During this time we read the weekly basal story and do activities that compliment the story.

Next, students participate in literacy centers. The students are divided into four groups according to their reading level. One group is meeting at the back table for guided reading with a teacher, the other groups are doing either reading response (an activity based on the story read during guided reading), poetry or word work (phonics based activities) centers.

Thus far, I am very confident in the morning curriculum. I feel that I am meeting the students' needs and making learning exciting and meaningful for the students. However, next is where the problem begins.

It is very difficult to arrange the centers to take the same amount of time as guided reading group, since, during guided reading you are assessing students as they are reading. Consequently, when a student is finished with his or her center they move on to "The Writer's Workshop", therefore, students are beginning writing at all different times. This is my first problem because I do not have an organized way to teach the mini-lesson (a 10-15 minute lesson focusing on a writing skill). Implementation of a mini-lesson at this time would interrupt student writing.

Mini-lessons are an essential part of "The Writing Workshop" since this is the time each day that writing skills are taught and modeled. Therefore, I feel that my students are not improving as writers as much as they could be because I am not consistent with the lessons.

Another issue is conferencing. I feel that peer conferencing is not working. The students are not taking it seriously and spend the time giggling and talking about things other than writing. Student-teacher conferences are not very effective either. I have come to realize that I am working with the students to focus on the writing product rather than the writing process. I suppose this occurs because I constantly feel that the clock is haunting me. I feel rushed during writing, thus I help students make the paper perfect and move on. I noticed these feelings in several journal entries such as the one below.

November 16, 2006

I am feeling very frustrated during writing. I truly feel that my students are not becoming better writers. I wonder if it is because writing is so unorganized. I try to get everything in at one time and focus on the end product rather than what the students are writing. I seldom feel a conference goes the way it should. Writer's Workshop has so many components. I am not sure how to get it all in.

Another aspect of "The Writer's Workshop" is "Author's Chair". This is a time in which students can share their writing orally with the whole class. I usually incorporate "Author's Chair" when I look at the clock and realize that I have five minutes remaining so I end writing and we share. I am very unhappy with myself! I value my students writing and the hard work that they do daily. I should make "Author's Chair" a big deal, but since I feel so cramped for time, I rush.

Based on the snapshot of my writing class, my overarching issue is finding a structured, process driven writing approach that I can implement into my

classroom to make me a proficient writing teacher and, in turn, generate flourishing writers.

I came up with the research question, “What happens when I implement a process driven writing curriculum versus a product driven writing curriculum?” My goal is to discover a writing approach that works for me and my students and to teach writing “better”. Essentially, I would like to explore what is *too much* for my young writers, what is *too little* and what is *just right* – *The Goldilocks Approach*.

“Writing is a craft before it is an art; writing may appear magic, but it is our responsibility to take our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked up in the magicians sleeve.”

- Donald Murray

Literature Review

Ralph Fletcher, a Writer's Workshop guru, states that "good writing happens when human beings follow particular steps to take control of their sentences – to make their words do what they want them to do" (Culham, 2005). Throughout my research I plan to explore those steps and find the structure and strategies that will work for me in order to focus on the process of writing. There is an overabundance of available information pertaining to writing. The books, articles and websites existing have a variety of opinions based on how writing should be taught, the length of time that should be spent on each stage of writing and which writing traits should be emphasized at particular ages. However, the consensus between all of the researchers, writers and educators is that writing should be process driven not product driven.

I began my research by steering toward the writing authorities or the big names in writing. Lucy Calkins, Ruth Culham, Donald Graves and Ralph Fletcher have written about the importance of implementing mini-lessons, revising, editing, peer conferencing, teacher conferencing, sharing and publishing into the Writer's Workshop curriculum. Each researcher has their own spin on the mentioned strategies as to how the method should be implemented and how much time should be spent on each.

"Best known for helping bring reading and writing workshops to schools, districts, and cities, Lucy Calkins is a professor of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, and author of many books including *The Art of Teaching Writing* and *The Art of Teaching Reading*" (Caralee, 2006).

Calkins emphasizes the importance of reading aloud to students. She “asserts that hearing books read aloud gives children insights into the writer’s craft.

Children gain an understanding of descriptive language—how an author writes a great lead-in to a chapter or a paragraph, or how to use a “flashback” to take the reader to another place and time. So, reading aloud introduces children not only to the world of reading, but also to the world of writing” (Reutzel, 2001). Calkins suggests conducting a morning read aloud daily during the first 15 minutes of school and connecting the story to the writing mini-lesson.

Lucy Calkins also expressed that teachers should write with their students by allowing students to see the teacher working through the process of writing including brainstorming, revising, editing and even publishing. She explains that “the best antidote to the insecurity writers feel is to work with a teacher who will share his or her own work, even when it seems less than wonderful” (DeLisle-Walker, 1996).

In her book, “6 + 1 Traits of Writing”, Ruth Culham indicates that teachers should build a foundation of writing based on seven traits: ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, organization, voice, conventions and presentation, while Calkins believes lessons should be based on assessments. Ruth Culham is an advocate of sharing or “Author’s Chair”. She suggests that “when students have real audiences, they invest more heavily in writing. When students think of someone else – the principal, their schoolmates, their parents – might read and react to their writing or if they think it will be hung on the bulletin board, they do their best work (Culham, 2005). “Author’s Chair” is a time for the students to

share their work. This can be a work in progress, an idea for a new story or the finished product. Culham declared that only three students should share per day. She indicated that if more than three students share you would be moving beyond the average attention span of a student and the work will not be valued.

Donald Graves is considered a master writing teacher by most elementary school teachers. He is an advocate of using peer conferencing and teacher conferencing as a central component to the creative process of writing. He encourages teachers to confer with each student once a week at a minimum. He also believes that teachers need to share their work. "I probably demonstrate writing about once every 10 to 14 days. But it's important for children to know that I write, even when I don't share it with them. Being a writer yourself is perhaps the most important thing you can do to help children learn to write" states Graves (Graves, 1994).

Ralph Fletcher agrees with Graves's enthusiasm for peer conferencing, however, Fletcher's approach to peer conferencing is more detailed than Graves. Fletcher believes each writer should have a 4-5 minute peer conference per writing period. He also believes there should be an area in the classroom which is dedicated to conferencing. During a peer conference writers should indicate what type of help is needed and read the piece aloud. Then the partner should tell the writer what is working in their piece thus far and then make a suggestion.

The Teacher's First website identifies the main components of Writer's Workshop as "a mini-lesson, status of the class, writing and conferring, and peer sharing and Author's Chair" (Teacher's First, 2007). The mini-lesson should be a

5-10 minute activity such as guided writing, as Graves explained, or conventions such as spelling or grammar. The students writing should drive the mini-lesson topics. Status of the class is a 2-3 minute check-in. This allows the teacher to track the student's progress. Writing and conferring should take 20-40 minutes. This is when students quiet write and also when teacher conferencing takes place. Finally, sharing or "Author's Chair" is about 10 minutes. During this time students share a final copy with the class or share their work in pairs.

The National Writing Project coauthored the book Because Writing Matters with journalist Carl Nagin. This book focuses on "the status of writing instruction in America". Nagin compares two scenarios, what a classroom looks like "when writing is assigned" and what a classroom looks like "when writing is taught". I showed a part of this comparison on the chart below. The comparison clarifies the difference between a product driven and process driven writing approach. (Nagin, 2007)

When Writing is Assigned: (Product Driven)	When Writing is Taught (Process Driven)
Students are asked to write only on the teacher's topics.	Students have opportunities to create topics that matter to them.
The teacher selects writing topics for papers without consideration of audience and purpose.	Audience and purpose for papers are specifically identified in assignments.
Most of a teacher's time is spent correcting papers.	Most of a teacher's time is spent in class teaching writing skills and strategies.
Students are not aware of significant improvement in their writing.	Students reflect on significant growth – or lack of it – in specific writing skills.
Students are required to write without much forethought.	Students think about what they write through brainstorming, free writing,

	role-playing, discussion or other prewriting activities.
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My first step in the research process was to find out what the professionals are saying about teaching writing. My next step was to find out what primary elementary school teachers are saying about teaching writing. I visited numerous second grade teachers' websites; however, there were two that really stood out.

Mrs. Madden's Second Grade Class Website is filled with ideas, strategies and a workable approach to teaching writing. She also has links to other teacher's websites that she gained ideas from, consequently, leading me on an inspiring journey of classroom programs from committed writing teachers across the globe. Mrs. Madden seems to be an advocate of "The Writer's Notebook", a concept introduced by Ralph Fletcher. "The Writer's Notebook" is basically a space in which students can write down anything and everything. Quite literally, this means anything that makes you happy, sad, hungry, itchy, curious, etc. It is a notebook of words, phrases and paragraphs that can turn into a story in the future. These notebooks are personalized and cherished by students. Mrs. Madden chooses to provide students with a three-ring binder neatly, organized into sections. Ralph Fletcher seems to believe these notebooks are a student's private place to just write and not worry about organizing, spelling, grammar, handwriting, editing, etc. Mrs. Madden seemed to take the concept of a "Writer's Notebook" and make it her own (Madden, 2007).

Beth Newingham, a second grade teacher at Hill Elementary School in Troy, Michigan also grasped my attention. While her entire website was rather inspiring, she has an interesting approach to “The Writer’s Workshop”. As the research suggests she teaches a mini-lesson daily. However, like Mrs. Madden, her students use a “Writer’s Notebook”. Her students write entries that could be published later in their “Writer’s Notebook”. Once a month students review their notebook and choose one piece to publish on good paper or type. She states that these “notebooks become a place for students to ‘grow’ ideas and develop their writer’s craft.

She also implements a “Writing Club”, an approach that is entirely new to me. “When students are part of a writing club, they meet in groups of four to read their chosen stories aloud and help each other improve the stories before taking them into first-draft form. Students are placed into teacher-assigned writing clubs with a checklist of questions for the authors to ask of their club members after reading their stories aloud to their group. As the year goes on, students will continue to work with different students in ever-changing writing clubs to share and revise the writing they do in their notebooks. Students use the feedback they receive in their writing clubs to begin a first draft of the story they are taking out of their notebooks. The drafts are turned in to me, and I meet with each student to discuss and further revise the stories before they are published and added to the students' writing portfolios” (Newingham, 2007).

My question focuses on taking all of these approaches, sorting out what I like and dislike, and making it work in my classroom. I am trying to find out what

is too much for my students, what is too little and what is just right – hence, the Goldilocks Approach. The suggestions put forth by the above writing experts are inspiring, but are they workable in every classroom? Will a detailed schedule work for me (and my students) or will it feel overwhelming? Can I actually get all of this into my writing period, or does this pedagogy only work in a perfect writing world? Will an organized process result in an organized product? How much focus should go on the product?

I believe in the Writer's Workshop. I truly feel that the students benefit from a process driven writing experience. Although the information and resources are immense, how do I find what works for me? And when I am trying to find what works for me, what happens to my students?

The points being made from all of the writing connoisseurs is that writing is a process and that too many teachers are focusing on the final product. Unfortunately, as I reflect on my teaching practices, I concentrate on the product more than the process.

Methodology

I began my data collection by conducting a student survey. The purpose of this survey was to find out how my students felt about not only writing, but the way I teach writing. I also asked my students to suggest one change that could be made to writing time. The results were astonishing! My students certainly did not hold back. They explained that they would like more time and not as many mini-lessons. Amazingly, 63% of my students indicated that they feel conferencing “is a downer”, as one child put it. This source of data plays an important part in my findings.

Once I read and internalized the results of the survey and completed my literature research I formulated a new structure to my “Writing Workshop”. I decided to start with the basics. I implemented a 50 minute writing block that begins after bathroom break. I decided that I would no longer allow students to begin writing immediately following their center as I explained earlier.

My new writing structure begins with a 10-15 minute writing mini-lesson in which I teach a new skill, explore an issue that I notice in many students writing, model a technique or reinforce a previously learned strategy. Once the mini-lesson is complete the students participate in “quiet write”. This is a ten minute writing block in which the students and teacher write. The class is silent. There are no bathroom breaks, drinks from the water fountain, questions, etc. It is basically ten minutes in which the students focus only on their writing. A timer indicates when “quiet write” is over. At this time students continue writing, but are free to move about the classroom to sign up for conferences, get materials, etc.

This is when I begin conferencing. Students sign up on a white board for teacher conferencing, peer conferencing and "Author's Chair". When five minutes remain, students clean up their area and move to the carpet for "Author's Chair". At this time two students share their writing orally with the class.

I created a "Writing Progress Checklist" and "Conference Sheet" (see Appendix) to track my student's progress. The students use the "Writing Progress Checklist" to track their daily accomplishments. I use this tool to assess my student's progress in creating stories. I use the "Conference Sheet" to keep track of my conferences. This sheet allows me to track how often students conference and what writing techniques we work on. I also use these records to reteach strategies to students and plan mini-lessons.

Now that I had gained information from my students, read many literature sources and implemented a new structure to my writing block, I took the next steps to gain more data through observation and interviews. I conducted three observations in the same classroom. I observed a third grade teacher, Ms. Martin, who has a great passion for teaching writing. She is very confident in her writing program and was willing to share her findings with me. I had the opportunity to see how "The Writing Workshop" works in her classroom and gained many ideas that I was able to implement into my classroom such as mini-lesson ideas, terminology to use with the students during conferences and classroom management. She was a great resource as I tweaked my writing program offering advice, resources and feedback.

During the interview, Ms. Martin shared this advice, “you can read hundreds of books on writing and observe hundreds of teachers, but in the end you need to take all that you like and make it work for you”. She went on to explain that there are many parts of the “Writer’s Workshop” that she does not like such as peer conferencing. She explained that all that means is that it does not work for her, but may work for me and many other teachers. She also argued that only children who “publish” a story should be allowed to participate in “Author’s Chair”, however, the research suggests that students should share stories that are in progress and even share ideas for a story as well.

I also surveyed ten classroom teachers to gain another source of data. The survey requested information such as teaching tensions, methods of organization, self-assessment techniques, and mini-lessons. Surprisingly, 100% of the teachers surveyed indicated that time constraints is the most frustrating thing about teaching writing. The surveyed teachers also unanimously voted that focusing on the process of writing is far more important than the product.

Another data source that I utilized was my research group. I had the unique opportunity of working with two of my group members. This proved to be convenient and advantageous since we were able to communicate new ideas and strategies and share resources and findings. During our research group meetings we discussed our progress and shared constructive criticism for focusing and sometimes refocusing our research.

Once my data collection was complete I began the arduous task of coding. This seemed very overwhelming at first since I collected more data than I could

handle. Every book and article that I discovered seemed to fit snugly into my question. I found myself surrounded by books, articles, stacks of graphic organizers and other writing resources, not to mention student surveys and teacher surveys. I found myself feeling inundated with paperwork, yet quite satisfied with the amount of teacher research that I completed in just three months.

As I evaluated my accumulation of information, I repeatedly detected the same words: conferencing, mini-lessons and structure. As I thought about my question, “a process driven writing curriculum”, I realized that the three words that seemed to bombard my research were the key components of a process-driven writing curriculum. As a result my findings include the power of an assessment driven mini-lesson, individualized conferences and the structure of the writing time block.

Findings and Implications

“We must resist the urge, even in the primary grades, to place product over process. When we emphasize finishing the work and making it look neat, students don’t become writers. They become task-completers” (Culham, 2005).

I have discovered three major findings in my research. First is the importance of implementing a structured writing time block. Next is the value of mini-lessons driven by assessments during conferences and finally the significance of individualized conferences.

Before conducting my research and implementing a new writing plan I felt as if my writing time was not as successful as it could be. I found myself focusing on the product, therefore creating “task completers” as Ruth Culham stated in the above quote. It was as if my students were Nascar racecar drivers speeding through this vigorous cycle leading to nowhere. Each time they pass the finishing line they ‘publish’ another story. In the end they did not go anywhere in their writing, they just had a few “laps” under their belt.

Make a mental picture of me sitting on my living room floor with writing books and articles, copies and pictures of other teachers writing program downloaded from the Internet, observation notes, surveys and a rainbow of Post-Its. This is how I began to figure out my new writing structure. I sampled countless approaches, devouring the ideas and strategies that I thought would work for me. Finally, I had determined a new approach.

I decided to begin writing with a ten to fifteen minute mini-lesson. This is a lesson in which I focus on a particular writing skill that students should try to use in their writing. The mini-lesson can take different approaches. For instance, it

could be modeling a new skill or using literature or a sample of a students' writing to illustrate a point. The students' writing indicates which skills and strategies that need to be taught or reinforced.

Next students participated in a ten minute quiet write. This is a strategy that I actually discovered in many of my resources. It is a time in which the class is completely silent. There is no shuffling around the classroom for any reason (besides an emergency, of course). The students (and teachers) just wrote. We wrote anything we could think of such as a story, friendly letter, shopping list or we could even explain that we had no idea what to write about. The latter, of course, never seemed to happen to me since I used this opportunity to do journal writing. Most of my students seemed to really respond to "Quiet Write". They were focused on their writing and I actually had the unique opportunity to learn which students worked better in silence. However, when I conducted the student surveys I learned that five of my students dislike "Quiet Write".

When I discovered that five of my nineteen students disliked "Quiet Write" I actually was depressed. I thought it was such a wonderful strategy. My co-teacher shared, "you can't win them all Staci. You are never going to make all of the students 100% happy". Her words resonated, but I still wasn't happy that 26% of my students felt that this new approach that I researched for hours was "boring".

I decided to talk with these five students individually. This would help me learn what I can do to make "Quiet Write" better for them. Surprisingly, two of the students feel that it is a waste to write things other than the stories they are

working on. When I explained that they can work on the stories they are in the process of writing, but are not limited to that, they seemed more willing to accept the idea of “Quiet Write”, but were still adamant about canning the whole idea. The other three students basically shared that such a quiet atmosphere actually makes them a little nervous and distracted.

After our discussions I decided to do a mini-lesson on “Quiet Write” basically reiterating the concept and explaining that you can definitely work on on-going stories during this time. I also came to realize that “Quiet Write” was not the appropriate time for me to do my journal writing and that I should be in the same situation the kids were. Each day I began to write stories, friendly letters and shopping lists along with the students. I even shared my writing with them.

Two weeks later I pulled the same five students and asked them how they felt about “Quiet Write” now. The three students that were sensitive to the quietness in the classroom still expressed their sensitivity, but also stated they really enjoyed when I shared. The other two students gave me the impression that they are enjoying “Quiet Write” a little more now that they realize they could be working on their stories. They also indicated that they like that I share what I wrote”.

After the ten minute quiet writing time students move into independent student writing and peer and teacher conferences. At this time students can move about the room to collect materials that are needed, sign-up for peer and teacher conferences on a conference board and work on their writing. The room still remains relatively quiet. This is a major chunk of the “Writer’s Workshop”

consisting of about 25 to 30 minutes. Students are completing the writing process at their own pace using self-selected topics most of the time.

Finally, the last five minutes of the writing block is designated for sharing. "Author's Chair" is when students can share published stories. Some of my research indicated that students can share unpublished work as well. I tried this, but it ended up failing. Students were acting judgmental and mean, basically chopping down student's ideas. I decided to still allow students to share unpublished work, but this should be done during peer conferences.

I have been using the above structure for approximately two months and it has been great! My students know what we are doing at all times and are at the point that I do not even have to tell them to take out their folders. They are excited to do "Writer's Workshop" and actually ask to do it during their free time. There are many other ideas that I learned as far as setting up their writing folders and the writing center. I am keeping a notebook of ideas to implement into next school year.

My next finding is the value of mini-lessons. Ralph Fletcher stated "while teachers may determine what gets taught, only the student can decide what will be learned" (Fletcher, 2001). This is incredibly important in planning mini-lessons, the element of "Writer's Workshop" that I feel is the most difficult. Basically you have a short, focused time period to teach a new skill that you expect students to use in their writing. This lesson needs to be engaging, interactive and diverse, a daunting task in my opinion since there is only so much you can do in such a short period of time. As a matter of a fact, one of my major

emerging questions is, “how can I plan mini-lessons that fit snugly into a short and focused time block?”

While I feel that planning and executing mini-lessons can be a challenge, I have learned the value of them. I use the notes I took during conferences on the “Conference Sheet” (See Appendix) to plan many of my mini-lessons. Below is an excerpt from one of my conferencing sheets.

Conferencing Sheet

Name	Date	What did the student do well?	What should the student work on?	Mini-lesson Ideas
*Max	04/11	Good use of dialogue	Student used the word “said” over and over	Said is dead – other words than said
*Stephanie	05/17	Sequencing	Avoid short and choppy sentences	Combining sentences

By meeting with the two students indicated above I was able to plan two mini-lessons. The first mini-lesson was throwing out the word “said”, but this led to throwing out other overused words such as big, small, loud and quiet. During the mini-lessons we made charts of synonyms for these words.

The other mini-lesson was combining sentences. I did a whole group mini-lesson on combining sentences through direct instruction, but then I created an interactive center using the same concept to be completed during guided reading centers, consequently targeting the same skill cross-curricularly.

I have found a variety of resources to utilize when planning a mini-lesson such as Ralph Fletcher and Joann Portalupi’s resource Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8. In addition, I attended a Jennifer Jacobson workshop, “6 Trait

Writing: Beyond the Basics". This workshop was very valuable to my lesson planning since I received a myriad of useful resources that I had the opportunity of implementing into my writing program.

My final finding is the importance and value of individualized, student-driven conferences. While the class is writing independently I am conferring with individual students. Before I made the changes to my writing block, many of my students felt that conferences were a "downer" as indicated in the survey. I knew I had to change my approach. Instead of picking apart their writing (as I now will admit I used to do) to make it publishable I listen and polish what the students already have written. I now allow the students plenty of choices and I ask questions to guide their writing, placing the student in charge of his or her own writing.

This was very difficult at first since it is much easier to go in with my purple pen and mark up their stories. I decided to make a cheat sheet (See Appendix) for myself. This cheat sheet lists the guidelines for conferencing and the types of questions I should be asking. I keep the cheat sheet next to me during each conference and thus far it keeps me on track. Many of the ideas listed on my cheat sheet are from the 6-Trait Writing: Beyond the Basics workshop (Jacobson, 2005).

During a conference I listen to the writer read his or her story once before we discuss his or her writing. After listening to the story I retell the story back to the writer. At this time the writer may fill in details he or she missed. I then focus on one or two areas with the student. This could be punctuation, adding details,

using synonyms, etc. It is basically any strategy I feel will help this child's writing improve. Sometimes students return to their seats to continue working on their story, other times students may choose to put the story to rest for a while and sometime students may move on to publish the story. This is basically decided by the student and teacher. If I feel the story was rushed and not ready for publishing I no longer will sit with the child and make their writing perfect. I give them the options just listed and the student makes their own choice. Ruth Culham writes "many of us expect students to hit a home run on every assignment. This is ridiculous. It will never happen in baseball and certainly not in writing" (Culham, 2005).

I have come to realize that every piece of writing my students create is not going to be perfect writing with perfect pictures ready to be perfectly displayed in the hallway. I have learned that it is more important to focus on their needs during a conference than creating this fake piece of writing that does not complement the student's individual abilities.

Throughout my research I have learned my role in "The Writer's Workshop". My job is to give the students plenty of choices and plenty of time to write. It is to take a step back and see what my students are capable of doing and to keep my purple pen away from their paper!

I have also learned what is way too much for my writing curriculum. I now realize that I cannot do it all and that although there is a plethora of resources available, I do not need to read and use them all. I also learned what is too little... basically what I was doing. Focusing on the product is too little for my

young writers and it is too little for me! Goldilocks has found the just right! I am very comfortable and pleased with my new approach to teaching writing. I have found what works for me!

Now that I have completed my research and implemented new techniques into my classroom I still have some emerging questions. Will this new structure work for future classes? How can I organize the materials I have collected so they are easily accessible for mini-lessons? How can I remember what materials I have? Will the creativity I have implemented into my writing curriculum have a negative effect on my students writing for state testing? How can I be sure to cover the curriculum?

Conclusion

So as you can see I have come a long way. I began this research process as an unconfident, despondent writing teacher. In just a few months I have implemented a new writing approach that focuses on my students needs in the writing process with little attention on the final product. My students are no longer “task completers” (Culham, 2005) they are explorers of their own writing abilities. My Nascar race track has been disassembled. My students now travel in an RV, stopping to see all the sights. Some reach a destination, some do not, but they all enjoy the journey!

Appendices

Implementation

I feel I have gained very valuable information and tactics about the teaching of writing. I now know that focusing on the process of writing is beneficial for the students and that making students responsible for their own writing process results in a well-written product that is meaningful to the students. I have also come to the realization that I can do this! The looming idea of “The Writer’s Workshop” is now an exciting part of my day, rather than the part I dread. Now it is time to pay it forward! I have this constructive information and workable writing plan and I want to share it with my colleagues. Then my colleagues can take the information and make it work for them. I can do this in a few ways:

- **Informal sharing with my colleagues**

This can be done during lunch discussions, grade level meetings or during a random conversation. My colleagues and I continuously discuss things that are working and not working in our classrooms. We share ideas and resources. During these discussions I can share the research I just conducted and share my findings. I can also distribute the resources that I created that I have found to be useful such as the “Conferencing Sheet” and “Conferencing Questions”.

- **Mentor / Student Teacher**

As I have mentioned, I have a co-teacher this school year. This is her first year teaching so she needed a lot of guidance throughout the year. I really enjoyed helping her and teaching her the “secrets” of teaching that I have discovered. I have decided that I would like to be a mentor for a new teacher or a student teacher some time in the future. I actually plan to apply to be a mentor for next school year. As a mentor, I can share my research, resource suggestions and materials. I can explain my philosophy of teaching writing and, of course, encourage my mentee to make it his or her own.

- **Professional Development Academy**

My school district runs a Professional Development Academy each year. The Professional Development Academy consists of a group of teachers who teach other colleagues something that is working well in their classrooms. It is usually an hour seminar after school. Those in attendance gain professional development hours for attending and usually leave with several ideas and a packet of resources. I am thinking of sharing my findings in this manner, however, I would like to wait until I implement the new techniques for one full school year.

- **“Live as if you are going to die tomorrow, Learn as if you are going to live forever” – Gandhi**

Although my research has technically come to an end, my learning has not. I plan to continue visiting the websites of the inspiring teachers I discovered early on in this process. I also plan to continue to try new

things, such as “The Writer’s Notebook”. There are numerous strategies I learned about during my research that I chose not to implement right away. Since my young students respond to structure so strongly I felt that I did not want to uproot everything they knew and felt comfortable with. I will learn from these experiences and hopefully continue to strengthen my teaching abilities.

- **Reflection**

Finally I plan to use this new information for reflection. I would like to continue journaling next year and track my experiences with the teaching of writing. I plan to ask myself the questions: Have I noticed a vast difference in my attitude toward teaching writing? Am I excited to teach writing? Am I focusing on the process or the product? Do my students enjoy writing? I have learned that asking myself questions and reflecting is the ticket to becoming the teacher I strive to be.

Subjectivity

This journey is more than a research paper. It is more than context and literature reviews. It is more than methods and implications. It is a self-study. It is a diary. It is an exploration of you as a learner, researcher, teacher, philosopher and questioner.

During this voyage I have learned a lot about myself. I suppose I always asked a lot of questions, but I do not believe it was consciously. I realize that I have the power and ability to make changes from “the inside”. Although I have a set of standards and a curriculum, my decisions (and questions) as to how the information is presented is in my control. I have learned that if I do not like the way something is working in my classroom...change it!

When I chose my question I decided to research the time of my day that caused me the most tension. There was no question in my mind that I needed to explore writing. Writing is one of the most important subjects I teach. I knew that I needed to become more confident in my approach. I have come to realize that I am very aware of what is working and not working in my classroom.

Something else that I have learned about myself as a thinker and decision maker is that I am very impatient. I am a task-completer and thrive on checking off what I have completed (and I wondered why I focused on a product driven writing approach). I found it very difficult to just collect research. I needed to type! I needed to get my paper done! I did not care that the paper was not due for three months, I had to get started. So, I revised my context paper and the

literature review. I researched five more literature sources and completed the literature review. This did not satisfy me so I decided to start my methodology. I sat at the computer at a loss for words. I had no idea what to write. And then, I had a revelation. I could not write anything because I had not completed the research and data analysis. I was forced to stop and breathe (something that I do not do very often as you can probably tell).

I finally made it to June. I collected my data and analyzed it by coding. I sat back down at the computer and the words began to flow. The moral of my story is that I learned that I need to slow down. I learned that I need to focus on the process in everything and not just the product.

During my self-study I learned a lot about myself:

- I love lists!
- I am very concerned with what I see and not always willing to figure out why I am seeing it. For instance, I see a student dazing off into space, but why is she dazing off into space? Is she bored? At a loss for words? Thinking about lunch? Does she hate me?
- I hate deadlines. But not for the reason most people hate them. I like to get my work done ahead of time so I can cross it off my list.
- I love listening to my students read me their stories. I enjoy hearing the excitement in their voices. I also like when the students did not write the words on paper. I extend their thinking and I can actually see the wheels turning as they tell me more. Their eyes drift from side to side, they stutter and laugh bashfully. But eventually, this amazing trail of words come out that they created!
- I'm a looker. I enjoy going into other teachers classrooms and just looking. I do not even have to talk to them. I just like to look around and see how they display the same things I have displayed in my classroom. Each teacher's "Writer's Workshop" look different.
- I am more willing than I have ever realized to change what I do not like about my teaching to better myself and then, consequently, better my students.

I suppose this list can go on and on since I feel that this course has

inspired me to think differently about my teaching. Before I began this course I had the perspective that the teaching of writing was a daunting task that I had to get through and that I had to get the children through. I felt that as long as their writing looked nice in the end that I would be happy, the children would be happy and their parents would be happy. Boy was I wrong! I was standing with the wrong perspective. My attitude toward teaching writing has changed vastly. I am excited to read my students writing and I constantly search for remnants of the mini-lessons and conferencing strategies in their stories. I get very excited when I students says "Look Mrs. Delese, I used a synonym for said" or "look at my amazing lead".

My research question was "What happens when I implement a process driven writing curriculum versus a product driving writing curriculum?" The answer: my young writers flourish!

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Appendix

Week of: _____

Conferencing Sheet

Name	Date	What did the student do well?	What should the student work on?	Mini-lesson Ideas

Writing Progress Checklist

Name: _____

Week:	What did you accomplish today?	Teacher Notes
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brainstorm ○ Sloppy Copy ○ Revise ○ Conference with teacher ○ Peer Conference ○ Publish / Illustrate ○ Authors Chair 	
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brainstorm ○ Sloppy Copy ○ Revise ○ Conference with teacher ○ Peer Conference ○ Publish / Illustrate ○ Authors Chair 	
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brainstorm ○ Sloppy Copy ○ Revise ○ Conference with teacher ○ Peer Conference ○ Publish / Illustrate ○ Authors Chair 	
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brainstorm ○ Sloppy Copy ○ Revise ○ Conference with teacher ○ Peer Conference ○ Publish / Illustrate ○ Authors Chair 	
Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brainstorm ○ Sloppy Copy ○ Revise ○ Conference with teacher ○ Peer Conference ○ Publish / Illustrate ○ Authors Chair 	

Conferencing Guidelines

1. Listen to the students read their entire story once before conferencing.
2. Retell the story back to the writer.
3. Give the writer time to add or change anything.
4. Point to what is working first.
5. Focus on one or two things during each conference.
6. Don't forget to record notes on the "Conferencing Sheet".

Conferencing Questions

- Why did you choose this idea?
- What happened when...?
- Where did this happen...?
- When did this happen...?
- Can you tell me more about...? I want to picture what happened in my mind.
- Is there another way that you could begin your story?
- What happened next?
- How did you get from here to there?
- Did you try any new words in this piece?
- I have a hard time seeing the word "went". Can you come up with another word that creates a picture in my mind?
- Do you know other words that mean the same thing as _____?
- Have you ever tried writing dialogue?
- Did you know this sentence can be divided into two? That will give the reader a chance to take a breath.
- Could this sentence provide more details? That way I could picture what is happening in my mind.
- What mark would you like to place at the end of this sentence?
- How would this sentence change if you placed an exclamation mark here?
- Do you know the marks we use to show that someone is speaking?
- Listen as I say this word. What sounds do you hear?
- Can you use a sparkle word here?
- This word is a proper noun. Would you like to change anything?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Writing Survey

Directions: Please answer the following questions about writing as honestly as possible.

1. Do you enjoy writing? YES NO
2. Where do you enjoy writing? Home School Both
3. Do you have a special place you like to write? _____

4. What do you like about our writing time in class? _____

5. What don't you like about our writing time in class? _____

6. If you could change anything about our writing time in class, what would it be?

7. What type of writing do you enjoy? Circle as many as you enjoy.

Fiction (made-up) stories

Poems

Mysteries

Personal Journal

Reports

Letters
