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# WRITING FICTION DURING WRITING WORKSHOP IN FIRST GRADE

by

Maureen Kelly Rowan

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Reading Education  
at  
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December 6, 2017

Thesis Chair: Dr. Stephanie Abraham

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## **Dedications**

This paper is dedicated to my husband, Chris, and daughters, Amanda, Christina, and Emily, who cheered me on, kept the family running, and kept me going when I was discouraged. Thank you, and I love you!

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my overwhelming gratitude to my sister, Caitlin. Her insights during our conversations led me to viewpoints that may have been otherwise overlooked.

Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to my school principal, my colleagues, and my students and their parents. Without their trust and support, this study would not have been possible. I look forward to our continued work together.

## **Abstract**

Maureen Kelly Rowan  
WRITING FICTION DURING WRITING WORKSHOP IN FIRST GRADE  
2017-2018

Dr. Stephanie Abraham  
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study is to examine how first graders respond to and perform within the writing workshop model. The workshop model is used during the writing of fiction pieces. One goal of this study was to determine how the students would respond to choosing their own topics. A second goal of this study was to determine if students would be successful in composing fiction pieces through the use of this model. The third goal of this study was to determine if there would be gender differences within the choice of topic. The findings showed that the students were enthusiastic about choosing their own topics, most were successful composing fiction pieces, and there were gender differences in the topics chosen.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

I was a teacher for eight years before leaving the classroom. After a six-year hiatus, I was back in the classroom teaching preschool, then assisting in an elementary school, and now I am teaching first grade at a parochial school. After years of teaching children in multiple grade levels, in a variety of environments, and in taking time to raise my own children, I noticed the significant variances in writing abilities of children and was unsure of how to even the tables for all children. As I taught children in three different states, and at home, I started to notice some commonalities. It seemed as if writing tasks were dictated by the teacher and often gender specific. As the curriculum was dictated, I had little freedom in choosing writing prompts for the kids. Now, with returning to the classroom, I still found I had issues, because I was a long-term substitute, daily sub, or a classroom aide. This year was different; this classroom was my own. I was responsible for writing instruction in my classroom.

In setting up the lesson plans for teaching writing to my class, I had the previous teacher's basal series in addition to recommendations from the incumbent principal to branch out from the basal series. We first discussed whether or not the basal series was the most efficient means of teaching and assessing student's academic achievement in the area of writing. Once we decided that there were better ways to implement writing in the classroom, we started discussing the options. We narrowed down the options to 6+1 Trait and Writing Workshop. Before making our final decision on which program would be the most beneficial, we reviewed the pros and cons of each. 6+1 Trait provided common language between instruction and assessment, a pre prepared rubric that allows students

and teachers to be on the same page as to what the expectations are, as well as a clear understanding of grading. The rubric is also specifically designed for beginning writers. The downside to 6+1 Trait Writing is that although it provides a clear rubric for assessment, it is not an actual writing program. Therefore, there are important components to writing that must be taught to young learners that are not covered in the 6+1 Trait.

Writing Workshop strongly focuses on the writing process as a whole. It also encourages students to become more involved in their writing and take more responsibility for their writing through the use of self-chosen writing topics. Writing Workshop does not have a rubric, however conferences are used to review writing pieces, allowing one to one instruction time with each student. These one on one conferences allow teachers to differentiate instruction as needed per individual child and meet them in their zone of proximal development. It was discussed that although there was not a pre-made rubric, one of the cons of Writing Workshop, we decided we could still incorporate the 6+1 Trait rubric within Writing Workshop. One other positive aspect of Writing Workshop was that I have had experience using it in the past. With this and all of the research/discussion, we decided Writing Workshop was the appropriate program for me to use in the classroom. After solidifying this path forward, I was given the opportunity to roll this out for my particular classroom, and potentially, the whole school. I thought of this as an opportunity to not only put my mark on school curriculum, but also to help students across grade levels become better writers and learn to enjoy writing, as opposed to becoming anxious, as was my experience as a young student. One question remained; how would my students respond to this model of instruction?

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to discover how successful students would be in completing a writing piece after using the Writing Workshop method. When given freedom of choice of topic for their first fiction pieces, would my students thrive and find within themselves a desire to write? The Writing Workshop model was used to provide instruction and time to work through the writing process while creating fiction pieces. The students had never been exposed to a workshop model for writing instruction and development. As opposed to confining the children with specific writing prompts, such as write about what your family did last night or write a book review for *Owl Moon*, I opted for an open method, giving the children free reign with the topic of their own choosing. I was hopeful that allowing students to choose the topic on which they would write, based off of their interests, they would be more willing and eager to express themselves than with prompted writing pieces. With this in mind, I asked myself, “What happens when first grade students participate in Writing Workshop to create fiction pieces?” Hodges (2017) noted, “Students thrive on the ability to choose their own assignments and activities” (p. 143). As stated previously, this coincides with the notion that students are able to take more responsibility and ownership over their work when they have been given a choice. Hodges expands on this talking about not only students choosing the topic, but also being given an option on how to present their writing piece. For example, students may be given the option to presenting an informational piece in the form of a brochure, an essay, or possibly even a PowerPoint presentation. Would this ability to choose prove to be the case in my classroom? After all, the workshop model champions student choice.

## **Statement of Research Problem and Question**

Once the decision was made to focus on my first-graders in a self-prompted writing task, the writing workshop study focused on the writing of fiction pieces within the workshop model. Part of the evaluation was to see if my students would need additional assistance to develop writing topics and enjoy completing their fiction writing pieces, as opposed to when they are provided topics. I had a mix of eager and reluctant writers in my classroom. Would self-choice have an effect on these feelings? This line of inquiry and the composition of the class led to a series of subquestions. Having a class that is two-thirds boys, I wondered if this would impact my observations. Would there be gender differences in choice of topics? Would the girls choose the same types of topics as the boys and vice versa, or would girls pick “traditionally female” topics such as horses, dolls, etc., and would boys choose “traditionally male” topics such as war themes, police, cars, etc.? Additionally, would there be gender differences in opinions about the task of writing? Would girls and boys have similar opinions of the assignment, or would they express different viewpoints on writing and the writing process? I have noticed that children, when being forced to write as a classroom task viewed it exactly that way, a task. With the introduction of self-prompting for topic decisions, would the students view themselves as authors?

## **Story of the Question**

Writing is a vital component of learning and communication. Just as teachers should strive to develop a love of reading, they should strive to develop a love of writing. After all, the two go hand-in-hand. Students should see the connections and take ownership of their writing and the processes used to develop it.

Writing was not my strong suit in school, so I took personal interest in this study. I wondered if I, myself, would have been more eager to engage in writing activities, had I been given the opportunity to be more involved in the decision making process as to what my writing topic should be. I feel like allowing students to have more control in their writing, will in return allow them to be more invested and self-expressive. They may show more confidence in their writing, if they feel more control over the process. Writing Workshop also allows time for students to have a one to one meeting with the teacher in order to discuss their writing. I have always felt like verbal discussion was a stronger suit for me personally, and wondered whether these meetings and discussions would help improve the quality of the student's written work.

A negative view of writing is not what I want to impart upon my students. I want them to view writing in a positive light. I portray an attitude of love and excitement for writing in my classroom. I understand there are writing assignments that will be teacher-centered. After all, curriculum frequently demands it. However, I strive to provide student choice as much as possible. It is my hope that the Writing Workshop model will support this goal.

Writing Workshop has the potential to become an important component of literacy education in my school. I wondered if this instructional model would impact the way students view writing and themselves as writers. I wondered what would happen when this model is used during the writing of fiction pieces. My first grade class was never involved with Writing Workshop. They were used to journaling and teacher prompts. How would they react to this model? Would the gender composition of the class impact my observations?

With these questions in mind, I needed to plan how I would conduct my research. What data should I collect, how would I collect it? I would need to document my thoughts and observations. Student work samples would also need to be collected. Journaling, note taking, and student work became key components of my research data collection.

This paper documents this research study. Chapter Two reviews the literature pertaining to writing instruction and Writing Workshop. Chapter Three gives context for the study, including information about the community, school, students, and research design. Chapter Four provides research data and analysis. Chapter Five summarizes the study and provides the conclusions.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Writing is a complicated process that relies on internal and external factors to be successful. There are theories and instructional models that drive writing instruction in the elementary classroom. Writing Workshop was influenced by the theories of many important philosophers and educational researchers. These include, but are not limited to Yetta and Ken Goodman (1983), Dewey (2015), and Vygotsky (1987). Hodges (2017) provides an overview of four key theories in writing. These four keys include, the cognitive process of writing, sociocultural theory of writing, social cognitive theory and self-efficacy in writing and the ecological theory. Graves (1975) and Calkins (1986) provide us with the workshop model of writing instruction. There are four key elements to this model. These elements are, the mini lesson, the writing process, conferencing, and sharing.

#### Theories of Writing

There are many theories on writing and writing instruction. Writing Workshop pulls different components of different theories and blends them into its' hands on model that meets students within their zone of proximal development. Although there are many theories, in her paper, Hodges (2017) focuses on four key theories in writing discussed below.

Two of the theories that Hodges focuses on are Sociocultural Theory and Ecological Theory. The Sociocultural Theory stems from Vygotsky. Both the Sociocultural Theory and the Ecological Theory focus on the importance of social interactions in writing development. Behizadeh (2014) reported that previous studies

found that “sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of cultural and linguistic variation in relation to defining writing” (p. 127). In their study on Ecological Theory, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) discuss the progress of human development when there is consistent back and forth interactions taking place between two or more people, and these interactions become, “progressively more complex,” (p.996). Therefore, writing is a social practice that takes root in the author’s personal experiences. As Gee (2008) wrote, “New information that cannot be tied to any prior knowledge is not learned well or at all” (p. 77).

With Writing Workshop allowing students the flexibility of choosing their writing topic, they are also being given the opportunity to mesh both in school and out of school experiences and social interactions. This may include experiences stemming from cultural, familial, social, or academic situations. Choosing to write about a topic of an out of school experience, opens the door to more social interaction out of school in order to enhance the writing piece. During Writing Workshop in the classroom, students are also given ample opportunities to interact with both teachers and peers. Conferences allow students to interact on a one to one basis with teachers. Peer conferencing allows students to share their work with one another and provide constructive feedback to improve and expand their writing.

The cognitive process theory of writing focuses on the mental processes and cyclical nature of the writing process. According to Flower and Hayes (1981) there is a hierarchy and interaction among the components of the writing processes. The development of a writing piece is a non-linear process. Writers need the ability to work through the processes in their own way and simultaneously. During the writing process

component of Writing Workshop, students are practicing the different skills of the writing process including, brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, editing, etc. However, Writing Workshop allows students to not always do these different components in one necessary order. Especially during one to one conferences, the writing process components can and may be practiced and reviewed in different orders. Students may also independently circle through these writing components if and when they deem it necessary. This is supported through the idea of the writing process being nonlinear.

Social cognitive theory deals with creating a meaning for your writing and understanding your personal abilities as a writer. Self-efficacy is a major component of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as a person's beliefs in his/her capabilities to manage prospective situations. In 2002, Maimon performed a study in an attempt to explain the connections between self-efficacy and the functions of writing. "The objective of this study is to examine the relationships between functions of writing and expectations of success or failure of both in school and non-school writing," (Maimon, 2002, p. 36). Maimon wanted to discover in her study, if students had a better understanding of the importance of writing and how it would impact them directly, would that raise their expectations of themselves, and in return would it increase their self-efficacy.

Young children may find motivation in the excitement and appreciation of writing more as a means to sharing their imagination, personal interests, and creativity. If students know that at the end of their writing process, they will be able to publish their own book, of which they are the author, they may have a higher motivation to complete

the task. Writing Workshop allows this motivation to students through sharing with peers, teachers, and eventually publishing their work for a wider audience.

### **Writing Workshop in the Elementary Classroom**

So what is Writing Workshop? Writing Workshop is a model of writing instruction that allows students to work through the writing process with topics of their own choosing. It is consistent with the works of John Dewey. There are four key components to the workshop model (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1975). They are the mini-lesson, the writing process, conferencing, and sharing. Each component plays a critical role in the development of the writer within the Workshop model.

The mini-lesson is a five to ten minute lesson that addresses a skill or topic for the whole class, such as adding details, revising for imagery, or editing for proper punctuation (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). The use of the mini lesson is supported by the social cognitive theory and the ecological theory. The writing process encompasses rehearsal, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The stages of the writing process are cyclical, not linear. Students work through them individually, at their own pace. This is supported by the cognitive process theory of writing. Conferencing is an essential part of the workshop model. The feedback provided during conferencing supports the student's growth and development as a writer. In their 2007 article, "The Power of Feedback", Hattie and Timperley found that providing learners with feedback influences their rates of achievement. Incorporating specific strategies such as clarifying the learning intentions and success criteria and matching the level of feedback with the task "put more power behind feedback and thus improve students' learning" (Hattie, Fisher, & Frey, 2016, p. 21). In addition to conferencing with the teacher, students may conference with a peer.

The use of peer conferences is supported by the sociocultural theory of writing. This sharing allows students to showcase their writing to a partner, small group, or the whole class and reinforces the social aspect of writing and writing for an audience.

Writing Workshop provides students with authentic writing experiences that allow them to develop their personal identities and self-efficacies as a writer (Ghiso, 2011; Hodges, 2017; Snyders, 2014). As a component of a balanced literacy approach, Writing Workshop cultivates critical thinking skills and creates experiences that support academic and social development and is a positive atmosphere that allows for the formation of the students' writing identities (Snyders, 2014). As individual writing identities are developed, the students begin to see themselves authors (Graham et al. 2017; Olinghouse & Graham, 2009; Seban & Tavsanli 2015).

Hertz and Heydenberk (1997) concluded, “that process writing instruction allowed [the students] to show appreciable, measurable gains in their writing skills.” (p. 212). Such a finding is also supported by the work of Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, and Harris. In their 2012 work, “A meta-analysis of writing instruction for students in the elementary grades”, they found that when students were taught and applied “strategies for planning, drafting, or revising different types of text [it] resulted in a positive effect.” (p. 889). Additionally, their meta-analysis revealed that effectiveness of Writing Workshop in the elementary classroom, stating that, “implementing a process approach to writing had a positive impact on writing quality in typical elementary grade classrooms” (p. 890).

### **Student Choice**

Giving students the ability to write about topics of their choice helps them develop as independent writers. The ability to choose the topic leads to more writing and

longer writing (Graves, 1975). Students write about what they know best when given the ability to choose their topics (Calkins, 1986; Gradwohl & Schumacher, 1989; Graves, 1975). Barry and Nielsen (1996) found that student selection of topics was particularly valuable to the beginning writer. As such, Martin and Thacker (2009) found that when given choice, first grade students who started the year by filling in the blank to complete sentences grew into writing multiple sentences, and by October, were filling the page, front and back. Giving the students choice developed their independence. This choice also benefitted those who struggled with reading and writing (Martin and Thacker, 2009). Gradwohl and Schumacher (1989) found “By allowing students frequently to choose their own topics, we enable them to use a richer knowledge base that may increase the likelihood of their producing more sophisticated writing” (p. 193).

### **Enthusiasm**

In their mixed methods study, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) found that Writing Workshop led to an enthusiasm for writing among the students that led to an enjoyment of writing. This growth of enthusiasm stemmed from the students’ understandings of purposes for writing, such as communication with others, notes to oneself, and lists. In addition to the process, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) noted that the students enjoyed working with one another for both peer revision and peer editing conferences. This observation speaks to the social cognitive aspects of writing.

### **Conferencing and Self-Efficacy**

Conferencing has a positive effect on students and their writing. Hodges (2017) noted that students who confer with teachers receive valuable concrete feedback that was more impactful than the teacher writing notes or making revisions on a piece of writing

and handing it back to the student. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) talk about the importance of students taking an active role during conferencing. They explain that essentially, the teacher's role is to ask questions, and be an active listener. This is especially important because as the writers, the students know more than what they have just simply written on the paper. Questioning during conferencing "will draw words out of the writer and they will find themselves saying things they did not know they knew," (Jasmine and Weiner, 2007, p. 133). Additionally, conferencing strengthens the rapport between student and teacher and allows for the social interactions necessary to develop self-efficacy. Calkins (1986) states that while conferencing is taking place there is a "magnetic force between writer and the audience" (p. 232). Graves (1975) observed that many variables impact writing, including developmental level, stating that "the writing development level of the child is the best predictor of writing process behaviors" (p. 235). Additional factors that impact writing development include the students' environments, available materials, and the utilized teaching methodologies.

### **Gendered Writing**

Gender may also impact writing development and interest. Farris, Werderich, Nelson, and Fuhler (2009) noted that some of boys' favorite genres are not included in the curriculum, such as fantasy, graphic novels, and graphic nonfiction. DeFauw (2016) believes that teachers need to incorporate boys' interests into the classroom, including the use of mentor texts that reflect genres of interest such as those noted by Farris, Werderich, Nelson, and Fuhler (2009). DeFauw (2016) goes on to state, "Boys need to see themselves and their interests in the stories they write and read so they will be motivated to create and share their writing" (p. 53). In his 1975 work, Graves noted that

at the primary level “boys write more about themes identified as in secondary and extended geographical territories than do girls...Girls write more about primary territory” (p. 236). In other words, boys tend to choose to write about topics beyond themselves and their immediate environments and experiences, such as superheroes, video games, and sports. This is contrasted by the fact that girls tend to choose to write about topics that are a part of their experiences and their immediate environments, such as friends, family, and school. The incorporation of topics and genres found to be of greater interest to boys needs to be thoughtfully planned. Davies and Saltmarsh (2007) caution that “popular culture texts pose some problems, for instance, through the ways in which they construct gender stereotypes” (p. 14). They go on to suggest that popular culture texts utilized in the classroom should be thoroughly vetted to ensure that they do not “undermine the work that is undertaken as part of a critical literacy exercise” (p. 15).

However, the exact impact gender plays on writing development is debated. McMaster et al. (2017) found that findings regarding gender differences in writing development have been mixed. They cite studies (Berninger et al., 1996; Kim et al., 2015; Olinghouse, 2008; Troia et al., 2013) that demonstrated a difference in topic choices and studies that found no differences in the ability to compose.

Among the concern for boys’ literacy performance, Barrs (2000) challenges teachers to determine what girls are doing better in their writing than boys and use that knowledge to help boys develop those skills. Further, Davies and Saltmarsh (2007) caution that there are greater within-group differences than between-group differences when breaking down the data for girls and boys. This information should not be ignored when literacy comparisons are made.



## **Conclusion**

Implementing Writing Workshop in the elementary classroom provides for the incorporation of multiple educational and psychological/sociological theories. These theories need to be considered to analyze the data collected during the study. Although Writing Workshop has not been studied as in depth as other aspects of literacy instruction, the research supports positive outcomes of this instructional model. Self-efficacy and enthusiasm for writing are positive outcomes that go beyond the classroom and encourage students to continue to write through modeling real-world applications. Such positive outcomes make the use of writing workshop more valuable than a basal series that incorporates writing in the elementary classroom.

## Chapter 3

### Context

#### Community

The study site was one of twenty-eight elementary schools in a parochial school system. It was located in a large suburb in South Jersey with a population of over seventy thousand residents. As of the 2010 census, the municipality's population was 78% white, 6% black, 11% Asian, and 5% Hispanic/Latino. The median household income was \$88,183, and 4% of the population lived below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

**School.** The school was built in 1960 and opened a newly constructed combination gymnasium and auditorium in 2016. At the time of the study, the school had an enrollment of 391 students, one hundred ninety-four boys and one hundred eighty-five girls, in grades Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade. The student body was 64% white, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 15% Asian, 6% black, 3% multi-racial, and 1% other. 11% of the student body had diagnosed learning disabilities. There are multiple tuition plans for this school (see Tables 1, 2, 3). The faculty was comprised of twenty-four full-time teachers and seven part-time teachers, twenty-eight female and three male.

Table 1

#### *Diocesan Rate Tuition Plan*

Number of Children	Catholic Family	Non-Catholic Family
1	\$4,200	\$5,250
2	\$3,200	\$5,250
3	\$2,700	\$5,250

Table 2

*Fair Stewardship Tuition Plan, Catholic Families*

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>&lt;\$40,000</b>	<b>\$40,000-\$55,000</b>	<b>\$55,000-\$70,000</b>	<b>\$70,000-\$85,000</b>	<b>\$85,000-\$100,000</b>	<b>&gt;\$100,000</b>
1	\$3,775	\$4,050	\$4,200	\$4,735	\$5,025	\$5,250
2	\$2,775	\$3,050	\$3,200	\$3,735	\$4,025	\$4,250
3	\$2,245	\$2,550	\$2,700	\$3,235	\$3,525	\$3,750

Table 3

*Fair Stewardship Tuition Plan, Non-Catholic Families*

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>&lt;\$40,000</b>	<b>\$40,000-\$55,000</b>	<b>\$55,000-\$70,000</b>	<b>\$70,000-\$85,000</b>	<b>\$85,000-\$100,000</b>	<b>&gt;\$100,000</b>
1	\$4,950	\$5,100	\$5,250	\$5,550	\$5,850	\$6,150
2	\$4,950	\$5,100	\$5,250	\$5,550	\$5,850	\$6,150
3	\$4,950	\$5,100	\$5,250	\$5,550	\$5,850	\$6,150

It was stated in the school mission statement that the school provides a “rigorous and challenging curriculum that enables students to achieve academic excellence through problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration” (RCS, 2016). This was evident in the curriculum provided, the teaching methods utilized, and the opportunities provided to the students within the classroom.

**Classroom.** The study took place in my first grade classroom. The large classroom was equipped with a SMARTboard and laptop, two desktop computers, a large chalkboard, and a large whiteboard. The bulletin boards were resources for sight words, spelling words, and subject-specific vocabulary. Student work was showcased in the

hallway, on some bulletin boards, and on the “clothes line” that ran the length of the room. The desks were arranged into table groupings of four students, and there was an arc-shaped table for individual and small group work. There were multiple areas throughout the room where students could choose from a variety of texts for reading and reference during writing. It was an inviting space, complete with a welcome mat at the door.

Writing Workshop opened each morning with a whole group mini lesson. The mini lesson varied based on the needs of the students as writers as observed by the teacher. Following the mini lesson, students worked on a writing piece or conferenced with a peer or the teacher. Peer conferencing allowed students to receive feedback and answer readers’ questions. Teacher-student conferencing provided time to tailor feedback to each student’s needs. Depending on where the students were in the writing process, some workshops ended with sharing time. Other days, workshop ended with the cleaning up of materials.

**Students.** The class was comprised of fifteen students, ten boys and five girls. They were six and seven years old. Three students were receiving compensatory education for English language arts. Three students were receiving compensatory education for mathematics, and three students were receiving speech therapy. At the time of the study there were no students with IEPs.

All fifteen students were invited to participate in the study. Twelve students returned the necessary paperwork signed by their parents for participation. For this reason, the study consisted of eight boys and four girls (See Table 4). The four

participating girls were Ann, Sarah, Stella, and Grace. The eight participating boys were Aiden, Alex, Brandon, Brad, Chris, George, Matt, and Patrick.

Table 4

*Student Participants*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Services</b>
<b>Ann</b>	Girl	6	Counseling
<b>Sarah</b>	Girl	6	Comp. ed. math
<b>Stella</b>	Girl	6	None
<b>Grace</b>	Girl	6	None
<b>Aiden</b>	Boy	7	Comp. ed math, ELA; speech
<b>Alex</b>	Boy	7	Comp. ed ELA; speech
<b>Brandon</b>	Boy	6	None
<b>Brad</b>	Boy	6	None
<b>Chris</b>	Boy	6	None
<b>George</b>	Boy	6	Comp. ed. ELA; speech
<b>Matt</b>	Boy	6	None
<b>Patrick</b>	Boy	7	none

Ann was a six-year-old reading above grade level, performing on grade level in all other areas, and receiving counseling services. She had impulse control issues and

struggled to stay on task when working independently. Ann was an only child who loved Disney Descendants and playing with her friends.

Sarah was a six-year-old who was very bright, but struggled to maintain focus on any task. Academically, she was performing on grade level and received compensatory education for mathematics. She was the third of four girls in her family and an avid dancer.

Stella was a six-year-old who was new to the school. She was reading below grade level and performing on grade level in all other areas. Stella was the older of two girls who loved everything Disney Descendants and taking care of her sister.

Grace was a six-year-old who was reading and performing on grade level in all areas. She was easily distracted by activity in the classroom, particularly at her table. Grace was the oldest of four who loved dressing up and Disney Descendants.

Aiden was a seven-year-old only child, diagnosed with NF-1, and received speech therapy and compensatory education for English language arts and mathematics. He was performing on grade level in all areas except writing. He was a hard worker who always put forth his best effort and enjoyed reading.

Alex was a seven-year-old only child who received speech therapy and compensatory education for English language arts. He was performing on grade level in all areas and was constant motion. Alex loved video games and creating things.

Brandon was a six-year-old twin who was performing on grade level in all areas. He was a hard worker who enjoyed drawing and Minecraft. Brandon had an older sister who he looked up to.

Brad was a six-year-old who was reading above grade level and performing on grade level in all other areas. He was a bright boy who worked well independently and with a partner. Brad was an only child who loved Mo Willem books and SpongeBob.

Chris was a six-year-old twin who was reading just below grade level and performing on grade level in all other areas. He worked hard, but had trouble transitioning within the classroom. Chris enjoyed creating things and drawing military scenes.

George was a six-year-old who was below grade level in reading and writing and performing on grade level in all other areas. He was very quick in math and received speech therapy and compensatory education for English language arts. George was the middle child and enjoyed playing zombie at recess and drawing.

Matt was a six-year-old reading just below grade level and performing on grade level in all other areas. He was a kind and quiet boy who worked hard and often needed extra time to complete his work. Matt was the oldest of three boys who enjoyed Mo Willems books and playing with his friends at recess.

Patrick was a seven-year-old who was performing on grade level but occasionally needed additional support to develop independence with concepts. He was a hard worker and kind to his classmates. Patrick was an only child who loved all things wrestling, especially John Cena.

### **Research Design/Methodology**

This study was based on a teacher research framework. Shagoury and Powers (2012) define research itself as, “a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing it to answer those questions,” (p. 2) and teacher research as, “research

that is initiated and carried out by teachers in their classrooms and schools” (p.2). They go on to discuss the importance of teacher research in order to evaluate data and discover a wide range of information. This information includes, but is not limited to, the most effective teaching strategies, the best ways to organize activities, and the different ways boys and girls react to the curriculum and teaching strategies. Through using teacher research, I would be able to find the answers to my questions. I would have an understanding of what worked best for my students as individuals, as a whole, and as a boy or girl in the learning process.

This study analyzed the data collected in an attempt to answer the questions: What would happen when Writing Workshop was used in a first grade classroom to write fiction pieces? How would the students respond to having open choice for their topics? How would the students respond to having control over how their stories were told? I was curious to observe my students and confer with them about their writing. Would there be a difference between boys and girls in how they viewed writing fiction? Would there be a difference between boys and girls in their interest for writing fiction? Would there be a difference between boys and girls in their performance and ability to stay on task while writing fiction?

### **Procedures of Study**

I recruited students during the month of October. All students that returned the necessary forms signed by their parents were included in the study. However, students that were not participating in the study still participated in the creation of fiction pieces as a required piece of the first grade curriculum. The study continued in January with the writing of personal narratives during writing workshop.



I used qualitative research design that included observations, conferences, student work samples, and a teacher journal to collect data. (Shagoury & Power, 2012). The teacher journal was started in late September as preparations for the study began. The study itself ran from late October through late November and again in January. Writing Workshop was held daily from 9:15 to 10:00. Each day Writing Workshop opened with a whole group mini lesson. Mini lessons included brainstorming ideas, choosing an idea, drafting, revising, peer conferencing, editing, and publishing. Table 5 and Table 6 outline the mini lesson topics and the student objectives for each day. Mentor texts were not directly used for fiction; however lessons referred back to the books the class had already studied together, such as the works of Mo Willems and Kevin Henkes. Two mentor texts were used for personal narrative, Roller Coaster by Marla Frazee and The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats. Following the mini lesson, students were given independent writing time. This was also used as a time to confer with the teacher or a peer. Most days Writing Workshop concluded with a quick share time, sometimes as a whole class, but typically with a partner or in a small group.

Table 5

*Fiction Lessons/Objectives*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Mini Lesson</b>	<b>Student Objectives</b>
10/30/17	Introduction/brainstorming	Create a list of topics
10/31/17	Choosing a topic/beginning, middle, end	Choose a topic Begin charting a beginning, a middle, and an end
11/1/17	Adding details to the beginning, middle, end	Add details to the beginning, middle, and end
11/2/17	Drafting	Begin the first draft
11/3/17	None	Continue/complete draft
11/6/17	Revising-read for flow and details	Choose a draft to use Begin revising draft
11/7/17	Revising-add details and descriptive words	Continue revising
11/8/17	Peer conferencing	Conference with your partner
11/9/17	Peer conferencing	Conference with your partner-switching roles from yesterday
11/10/17	Revising-add details and descriptive words	Continue to revise-keep in mind the feedback from your partner
11/13/17	Editing for grammar	Edit your work-Does it sound "right"?
11/14/17	Edit for spelling	Edit your work-Is everything spelled correctly?
11/15/17	Editing for capitalization/punctuation	Edit your work-Did you use capitals at the beginning of sentences and for proper nouns? Did you put punctuation at the end of your sentences?
11/21/17	Publishing requirements-best handwriting, illustrating	Publish your piece
11/22/17	Publishing and covers	Finish publishing Create cover

Table 6

*Personal Narrative Lessons/Objectives*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Mini Lesson</b>	<b>Student Objectives</b>
1/3/18	Sequencing	Sequence the main events of a story
1/8/18	Personal narrative introduction- Definition Brainstorming	Brainstorm writing topics
1/10/18	Choosing 1 <sup>st</sup> topic/drafting	Choose a topic Begin drafting
1/11/18	Picking a 2 <sup>nd</sup> topic/drafting	Continue on first draft Choose a second topic Draft for second topic
1/12/18	none	Continue drafting
1/15/18	Revising-adding details, using more descriptive words	Choose a draft to revise
1/16/18	Revising/editing-checking spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar (Does it sound right?)	Finish revising Begin editing
1/17/18	none	Complete revisions/edits
1/18/18	Publishing expectations-on paper, best handwriting, illustrate	Publish
1/19/18	Covers-author/illustrator, title, picture	Create cover

**Data Sources**

The data collected included observations, conferences, student work samples, and the teacher journal (Shagoury & Power, 2012). The teacher journal provided a place to record my anecdotal notes and reflections leading into and during the course of the study. It was used sporadically before the study in the classroom began. When the study commenced, it was used daily to jot notes of my observations and impressions.

I observed the students' five times during fiction writing workshop. Observations took place on October 30 and November 2, 8, 14, and 21.

I conferenced three times with each student while composing the fiction pieces. These conferences provided opportunities to talk with students individually about their writing pieces. They provided the ability to tailor my line of questioning to the needs and abilities of each student. It was interesting to hear the thoughts of the students as they explained their writing choices.

I analyzed students' published work samples to determine the level of success each student attained. Formal analysis was performed using the 6+1 Traits rubric for beginning writers. Informal analysis included assessing handwriting, topic choice, and illustrations.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data by reviewing each piece and thinking about the abilities and needs of my students. Each of the data sources was utilized in an effort to answer the questions posed in this study. Observation and conference notes were used to look for commonalities, patterns, and anomalies in the behaviors of the students (Shagoury & Power, 2012). Additionally, conference notes were used to document student thinking during the writing process. The rubric analysis of student work utilized the 6+1 writing traits rubric (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2011). This provided information on the developmental level of each student's writing. The analysis of journal entries gave insight to my thoughts and actions during the study (Shagoury & Power, 2012).

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis

“The murkiness of data analysis is what scares any researcher. If it doesn’t spook you at least a little, you’re not opening yourself up enough to the new learning that can come during analysis” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 142). As analysis of student data began, there was certainly a feeling of excitement, yet anxiousness. I had a heightened sense of eagerness to dive into my journal, conference notes, observation notes, and student work samples accompanied with rubrics. Shagoury and Power were correct in stating that there was a “spookiness,” to diving into the unknown, yet a strong desire to see what the students were going to teach me through their individual work samples.

While reviewing the various forms of data I had acquired, it was apparent that the Writing Workshop model had in fact been beneficial for the students in my classroom. The ability to choose their own topics appeared to be an important aspect to their success. This was observed during side conversations about their writing pieces during various times of the day, as well as an openly expressed desire to work on writing pieces even outside of the assigned time slot. Topic choices did show patterns of being correlated with gender.

During conferences, students shared their work and the background knowledge as to why this was what they were choosing to write about. This transferred to me that the students’ ability to pick their own topic, increased the eagerness to write and engage in writing activities. One to one conferencing also allowed time to really zone in on students’ current individual abilities and how to best push them to the next level.

## Self-Choice of Topic

Graves (1975) and Martin and Thacker (2009) found that providing students with the opportunity to self-select topics leads to longer and better quality composition. Even with this knowledge, I was apprehensive about self-selecting topics. My concern was that students would struggle with the transition from being given writing prompts, to selecting a writing topic on their own. However, when evaluating the data, it was apparent that the students flourished when given the opportunity to write about topics they themselves had chosen. During the first day of the study, students engaged in brainstorming topics. Not one student was unable to come up with at least 3-4 topic ideas. It was a great beginning to the new journey we would all be engaging on.

Topics ranged from completely new, created by the student, to very familiar, with the student using known characters and/or settings. Some students chose to create characters, while others took familiar characters and created new stories for them. For example, Alex created the character, Spaceman Bob, for his book. He also set his story in Mars, space, and Earth, and the plot was Spaceman Bob flying through space looking for his Earth friend to play. See Figures 1, 2, and 3. It reads:

Bob flys in a rocit. He is flying too erth. He was on a planit cod mars. Kus he has a fed on erth he just wuit to have fun. Bob is on erth play grounday. Bob too lew bykuhis dir is redy. Bob was up the nes ban he wants going so he could see a friend. His rocit... his rocit crach on a planit cod Joopidr and he thot it is Erth... he lookt for fiend and he cundit fid his friend but he... cudifly go back too Mars.

Through the use of choice, Alex was able to let his imagination control his writing.

Graves (1975) noted that the ability to choose the topic led to longer writings. This was

evident in Alex's six-page work. Being able to write about a topic of interest, allowed the stamina and the perseverance to continue expanding his writings. Additionally, Writing Workshop validated his desire to write completely from his own mind and did not limit him.

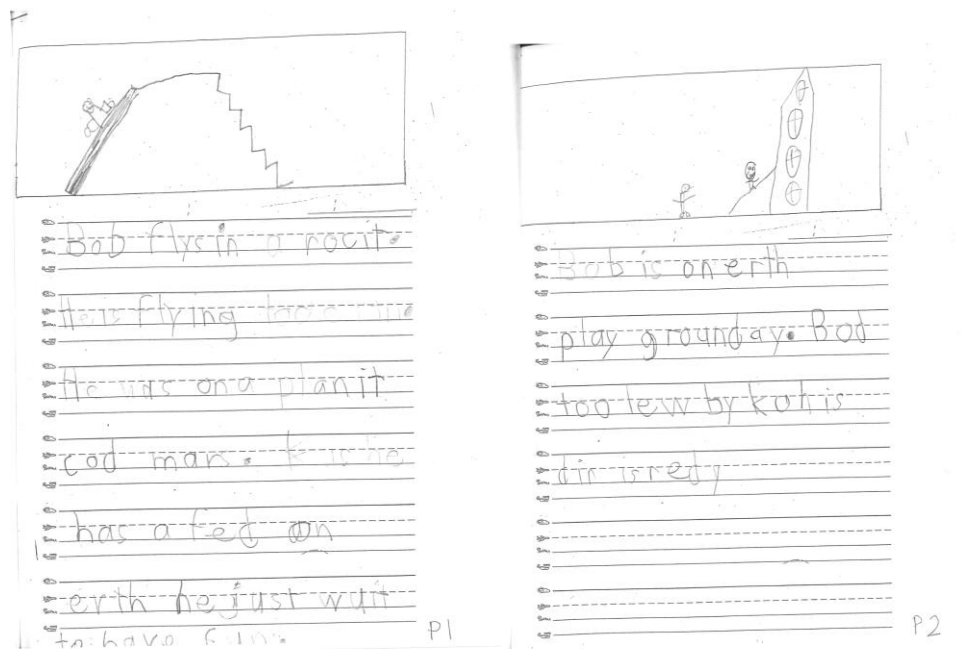


Figure 1. Alex's fiction work, pages 1 and 2





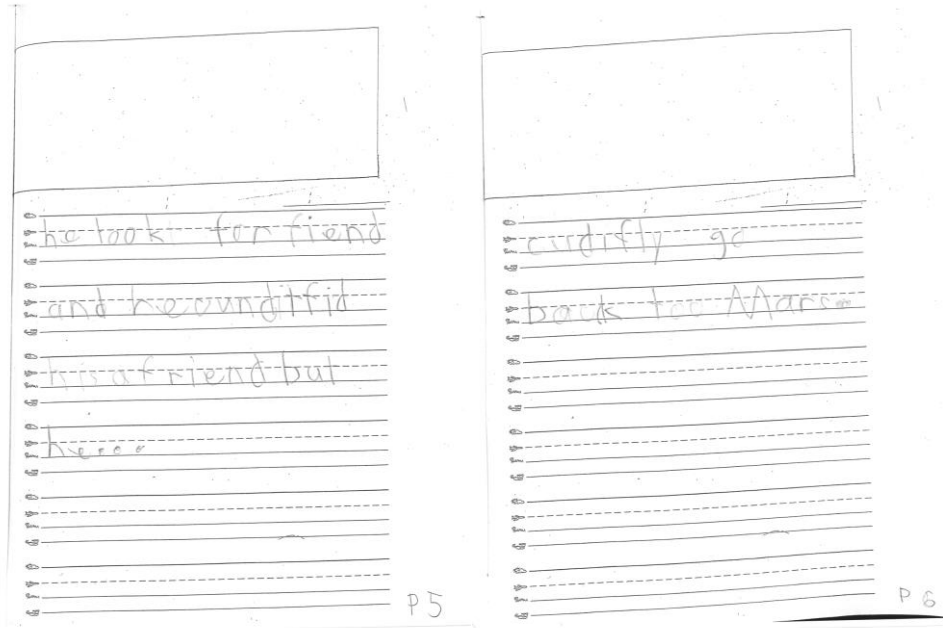


Figure 3. Alex's fiction work, pages 5 and 6

Brad chose to write a story where: The Pigeon and SpongeBob SquarePants eat cereal together. He chose a fan fiction format using familiar characters, SpongeBob SquarePants and Pigeon; the familiar setting of SpongeBob's town and home; and provided his own plot. Figure 4 shows Brad's story about SpongeBob and Pigeon. It reads:

Spongebob sees a rocket. Insid is Pigeon Spongebob. will show Pigeon his house.

Spongebob said Hi to Pigeon. Spongebob got Pigeon to his house Pigeon got

cereal. Gary said meow. Pigeon gos Home. The End.

Choice of topic provided Brad with an outlet for his ideas showcasing a beloved television character and a beloved literary character and allowed him to write about what

he knew best (Calkins, 1986; Gradwohl & Schumacher, 1989; Graves, 1975). As with Alex, Writing Workshop validated his ideas and imagination.

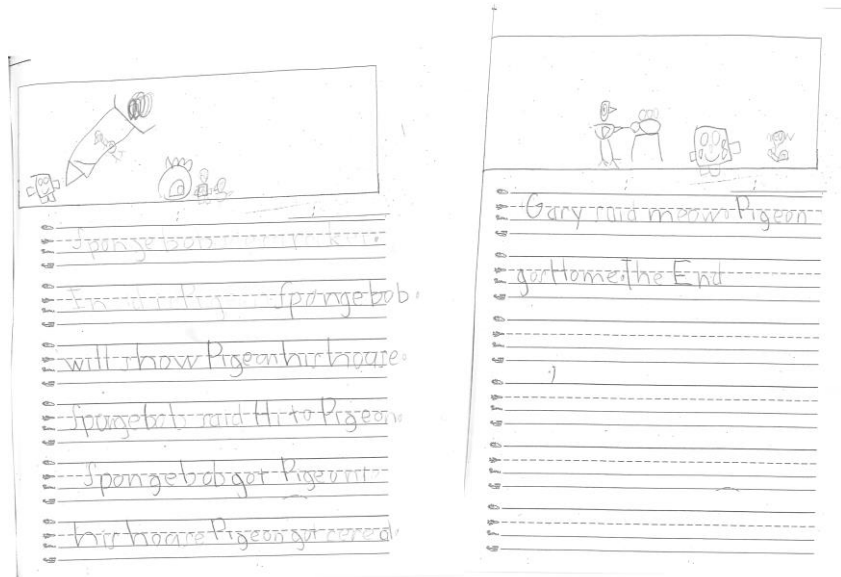


Figure 4. Brad's fiction work

As outlined in Table 7, three of the four girls used Disney Descendants characters in their stories. These topic choices were consistent with Graves' (1975) findings that girls tend to write about topics that are a part of their experiences and immediate environments. Stella used the familiar characters of Mal and Evie and provided her own plot about the secret fairy the girls watch. Grace used the familiar characters of Mal, Evie, Ben, Carlos, and Uma and provided her own plot of a secret Uma was keeping from the others. Ann used the familiar characters of Mal, Evie, and Ben and provided her own plot about the secret shared by the girls. See figure 5. It reads:

Once upon a time! Their war too best frohoe and their name war Mal and Eive  
 and they had a big sekret Mal had a cruch on been she was sigig and been was  
 swimig in the lake and Mal stopt singig an Been she cod not find him war are you  
 Been

Ann was able to use her own literary experiences to create her own story. She used the comfort of familiar characters, allowing her to focus on the plot and setting. Writing Workshop allowed her to mirror the work of authors she has read in her own writing, such as using “Once upon a time”. This ability to build new skills upon those already known puts into practice Gee’s (2008) findings that this connection is necessary to learn well.

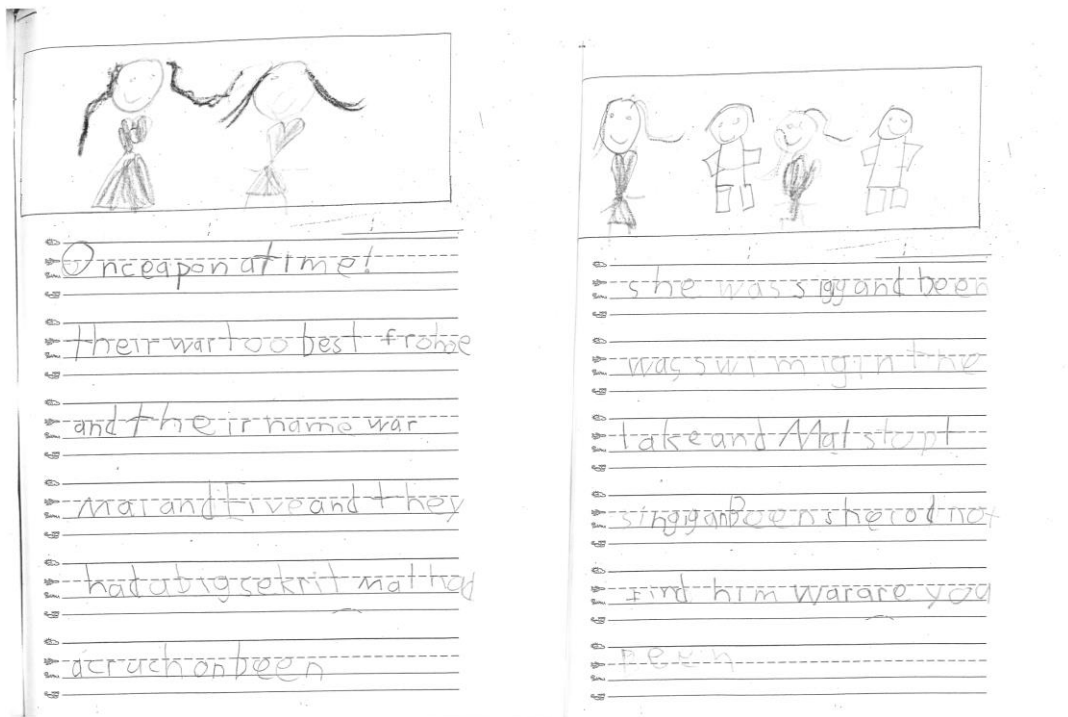


Figure 5. Ann’s fiction work

Sarah was able to display some more original writing pieces. Her characters consisted of her friends, a ghost, and a monster. Sarah also created her own plot which was about the ghost and the monster scaring the girls while they engaged in activities at the park.

Sarah's work is showcased in Figure 6. It reads:

One day there was four litl gilrs there nams are Mackenzie and Mia Sabrina  
Emma. They was on a play date but There was shraeg Things happening and  
sawns but ges wut hapind They sole a ghost and a monster ao They rund down  
The Steps and Boo The end

Sarah readily took advantage of Writing Workshop and the flexibility and freedom to write a piece completely of her own. Sarah's work is a prime example of Graves' (1975) findings that "girls write more about primary territory." In this work, Sarah builds a plot around the familiar experience of a play date with friends.

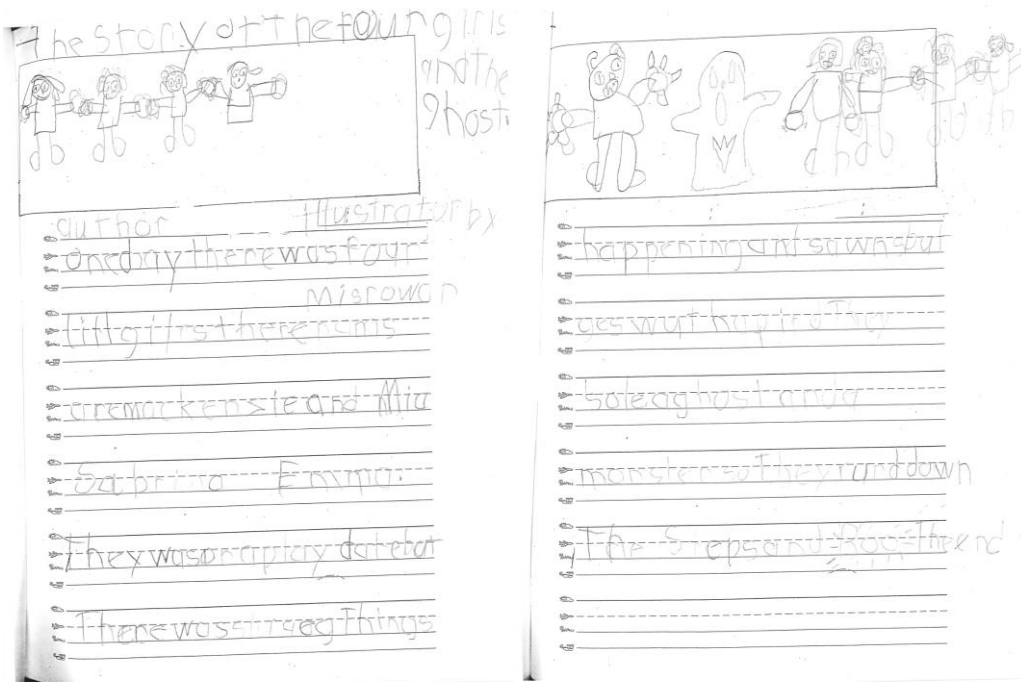


Figure 6. Sarah's fiction work

## Gender

Keeping in mind the study by McMaster et al. (2017) that showed a difference in topic choices between boys and girls, I was interested to see what topics my students would choose. True to the study, boys predominantly chose stereotypical “boy” topics, whereas girls chose stereotypical “girl” topics (See Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7

*Students' Published Fiction Works*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Ann</b>	Girl	Friends, a girl's crush	Mal, Evie, Ben	The Secret
<b>Sarah</b>	Girl	Friends playing, ghost	Mackenzie, Mia, Sabrina, Emma, ghost, monster	The Story of the Four Girls and the Ghost
<b>Stella</b>	Girl	Friends' secret, fairy	Evie, Mal, fairy	The Fairy Secret
<b>Grace</b>	Girl	Princesses' secret	Mal, Evie, Ben, Carlos, Uma	Descendants 1 through 5
<b>Aiden</b>	Boy	Friends playing, an argument	Two boys	Whee!
<b>Alex</b>	Boy	Spaceman's travels	Bob	Bob Books
<b>Brandon</b>	Boy	Friends fighting	McPufferson, Bart Reynolds	McPufferson Beats Bart Reynolds
<b>Brad</b>	Boy	Friends meet and eat cereal	The Pigeon, SpongeBob SquarePants, Gary	No title given
<b>Chris</b>	Boy	Plane crash	Pilot	The Airplane Story
<b>George</b>	Boy	A fight	Dogman, Catman	Dogman vs. Catman
<b>Matt</b>	Boy	Getting mail	The Pigeon, narrator, Knuffle Bunny	Pigeon Got Mail
<b>Patrick</b>	Boy	Wrestling	John Cena, Ryback	John Cena vs. Ryback

Five of the eight boys wrote about a topic that dealt with violence in some way. Aiden, Brandon, and George wrote about boys fighting. Patrick wrote about a wrestling match. Chris wrote about a plane crash where the pilot was able to parachute to safety. Three of the boys wrote about nonviolent topics. Matt wrote about getting mail. Alex wrote about the travels of a spaceman from another planet. Brad wrote about meeting a new friend and having him over for cereal. As outlined in Table 7, all eight boys wrote strictly about male characters. Four boys, Aiden, Alex, Chris (Figure 5), and George,

created their own characters for their compositions. Brandon used GoNoodle characters- McPufferson and Bart Reynolds (GoNoodle). Matt used characters created by Mo Willems-The Pigeon and Knuffle Bunny. Brad (Figure 5) mixed together The Pigeon (Mo Willems) and SpongeBob SquarePants and Gary (Stephen Hillenburg). Patrick (Figure 5) used living people, and professional wrestlers, John Cena and Ryback, in his wrestling match. The choice of such topics and characters is consistent with DeFauw's (2016) statement that boys require the ability to write about their own interests. The boys in this study certainly wrote about topics and characters of interest to them.

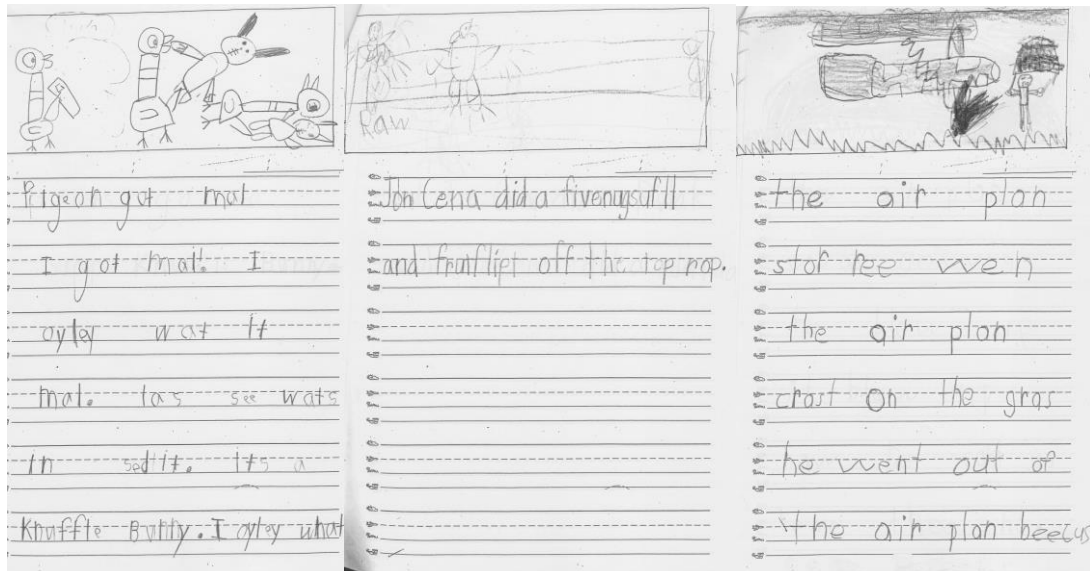


Figure 7. Brad, Patrick, and Chris write about familiar and created characters with illustrations that show the action of the story.

All four girls wrote about friends. Three of the girls wrote about secrets. As noted in Table 7, two of the girls, Sarah (Figure 7) and Stella, wrote about only girl characters. Ann (Figure 7) and Grace (Figure 7) included boy characters. Ann included a male

character as the main characters “crush”. Ann, Stella, and Grace used Disney Descendants characters for their stories. Sarah was somewhat of an outlier in the girls, because she used friends as the characters and wrote about a playdate. However, this is still within the bounds of “girl” topics as defined by Graves (1975).

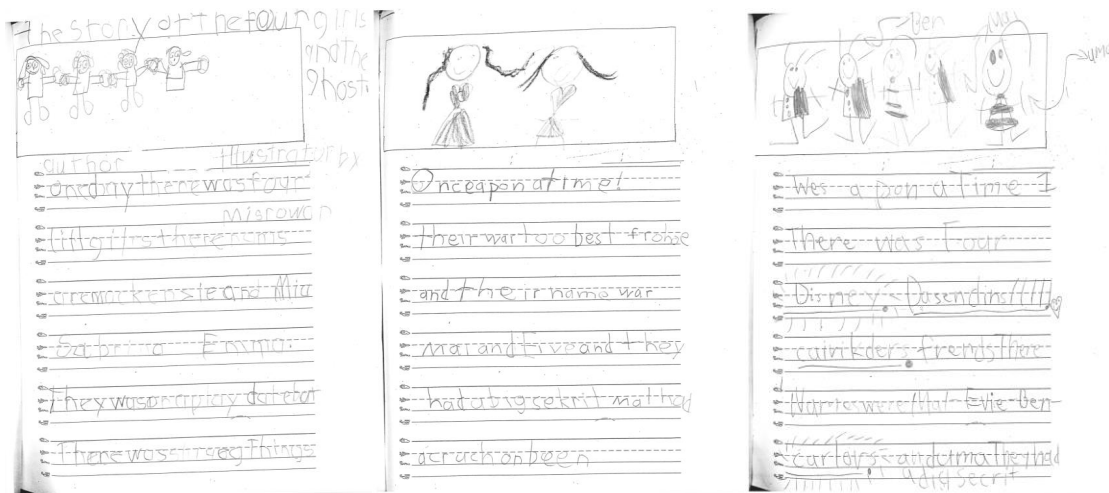


Figure 8. Sarah, Ann, and Grace write fiction about friends and familiar characters with illustrations that show the characters with no action.

Topics were not as divided when it came to personal narratives. As illustrated in Table 8, ten of the twelve participants, four girls: Ann (Figure 8), Grace, Sarah, and Stella (Figure 8), and six boys: Aiden, Alex, Brad, George, Matt, and Patrick (Figure 6) wrote narratives that featured their families in part or whole. The other two boys, Brandon (Figure 6) and Chris, wrote about playing in the snow with friends and playing Minecraft respectively.



Table 8

*Students' Published Personal Narratives*

Student	Gender	Topic	Title
Ann	Girl	Visiting her aunt in NYC	New York is the Best
Sarah	Girl	Christmas day	Christmas Spirit
Stella	Girl	Breakfast with Santa	Breakfast
Grace	Girl	Christmas morning	No title
Aiden	Boy	Going out to eat with Mom and Dad	Dinner at Uno's
Alex	Boy	Christmas morning	Christmas Gifts
Brandon	Boy	Playing in the snow	The Snowy Story
Brad	Boy	Christmas morning	Christmas Gifts
Chris	Boy	Playing Minecraft	Minecraft
George	Boy	Family vacation to Vermont	No title
Matt	Boy	Meeting his baby brother	No title
Patrick	Boy	Going out to eat with Dad	Chipotle

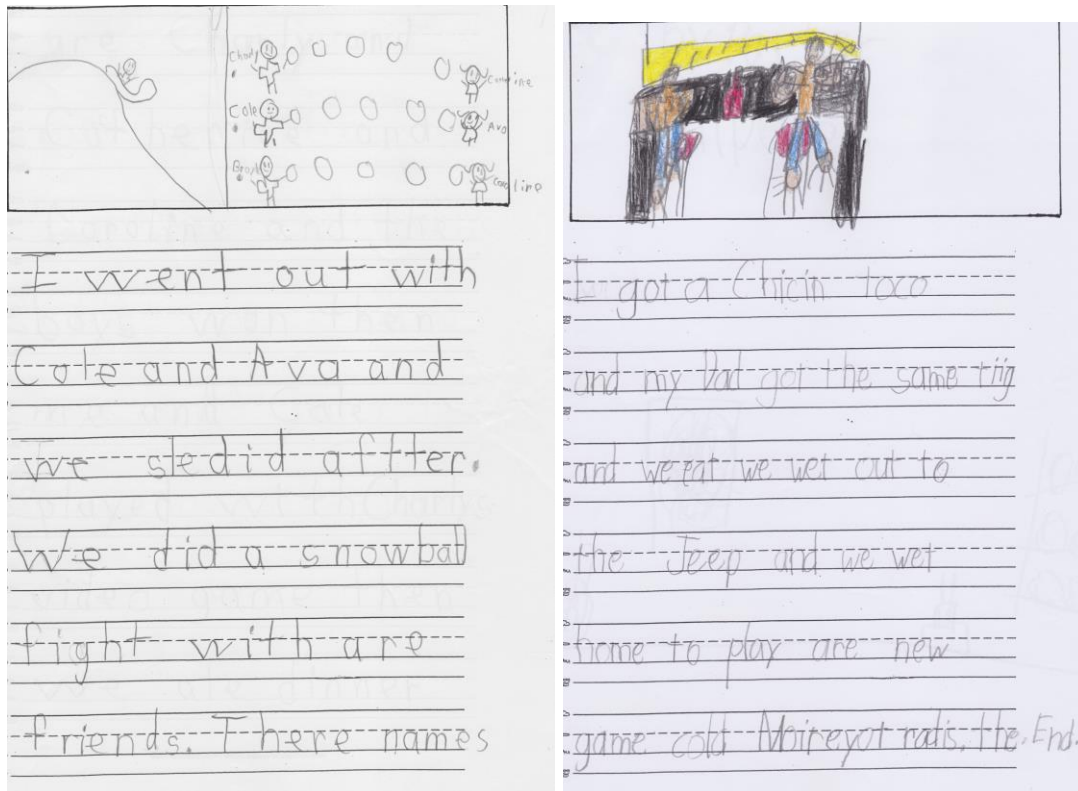


Figure 9. Brandon and Patrick write personal narratives with illustrations that portray actions from their stories.

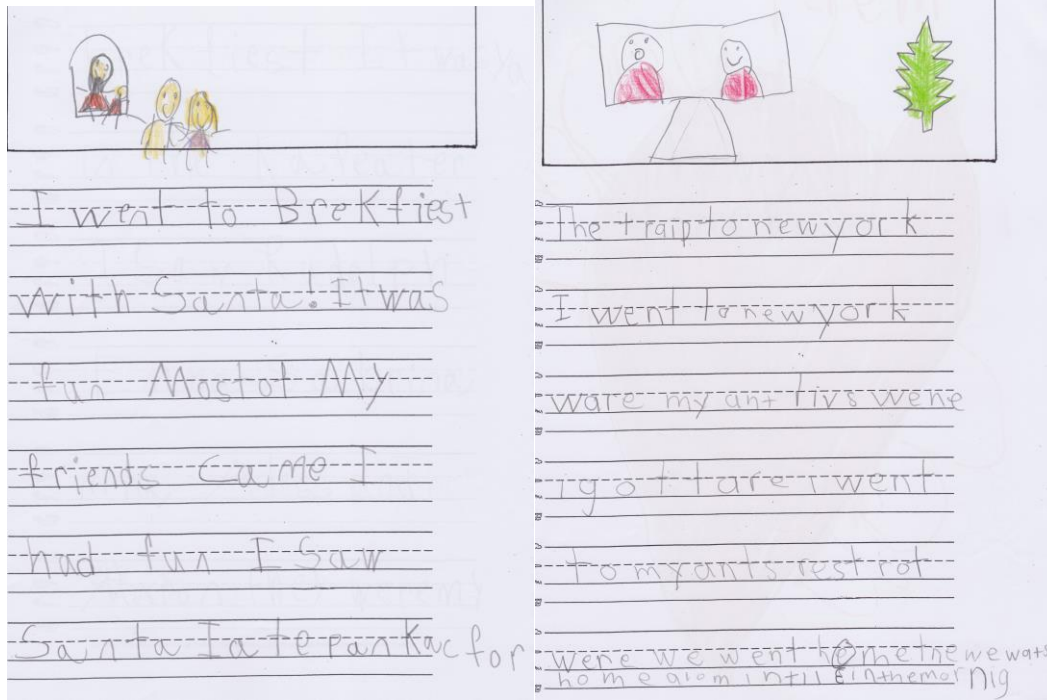


Figure 10. Stella and Ann write illustrated personal narratives.

I was surprised to find personal narrative topics were not as divided by gender as the fiction topics. The mentor texts for personal narrative, Roller Coaster and The Snowy Day, featured a girl and a boy respectively. Although mentor texts were not directly used for fiction, the authors referenced: Mo Willems and Kevin Henkes, incorporated animals and boy and girl characters. Did genre contribute to the disparity? When given choice of topic for the fiction pieces, the topics selected mirrored the work of Graves (1975). The boys wrote about topics beyond themselves, whereas the girls wrote about topics close to them. When given the choice of topics for the personal narratives, the topics selected highlighted the personal lives of the students and their connections to their families and friends. The use of personal narrative allowed for greater connection of topic among the boys and girls. This is evidence of the importance of self-choice of topic and the

introduction of multiple genres to students. Both allow students to convey their thoughts and interests in different ways.

### **Enthusiasm**

Jasmine and Weiner (2017) noted that Writing Workshop led to an enthusiasm for writing among the students that led to an enjoyment of writing. This was certainly the case in my classroom. The students, both boys and girls, were excited to begin Writing Workshop each day. This was apparent when Alex, who was writing about “Spaceman Bob,” came into the classroom each morning and asked immediately, “Are we writing today?” Even students, such as Grace, who had a more difficult time with writing overall, quickly began working on her writing piece when it was time.

Students’ ability to concentrate and their stamina increased as the days went on. Because students were excited and openly expressing verbally their desire to work on their writing pieces, I was able to make the connection between their interest, enthusiasm, and their ability to work harder and for more extended periods of time. Once it was time to share their writing pieces, students again displayed their enthusiasm through hands quickly shooting in the air and waving around, all wanting to be the next to share their writing piece with the class. Even students who previously had no desire to even share their writing with me, were now eager to read aloud to the class what they themselves had created. Parents even reported students discussing their writing pieces at home, and a desire to share what they had written with members of the family.

### **Conferencing**

During the study, I conducted writing conferences with the students. I held approximately 36 conferences. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) talk about the importance of students taking an active role during conferencing. They explain that essentially, the

teacher's role is to ask questions, and be an active listener. They claimed that conferencing "will draw words out of the writer and they will find themselves saying things they did not know they knew," (Jasmine and Weiner, 2007, p. 133). In each conference I asked students to tell me about their piece. Most of the writing conferences consisted of the students reading their writing to me, and I was actively listening. For instance, Brad read: Spongebob sees a rocket. Insid is Pigeon Spongebob. will show Pigeon his house. I prompted by asking, "Did Spongebob said anything to Pigeon?" This led to Brad adding: Spongebob said Hi to Pigeon. The students also discussed their topics; for instance Sarah said she picked her topic of a play date because, "I like playing with my friends." When I asked why she chose to include the ghost and the monster she responded, "I like scary stories. That's why I put BOO at the end. The ghost and the monster scare the friends." While reading their writing aloud, the students identified errors in their writing. Alex, Brandon, and Ann were apt at discovering spelling and grammar errors as they conferenced with me.

Responsiveness to my questions varied from student to student. The responses did not seem to be based on gender, but by personality. My students, both boys and girls, that strive to be pleasers and do exactly what I ask where very eager to answer questions I had or add details I mentioned I would like to know. Stella loved to add details that answered the questions I asked her, yet Grace would ask if she had to add details. If I told Grace it would help her reader, she immediately added them. Aiden frequently commented, "I didn't know you wanted to know that." He knew what he was saying, but needed my questions to understand that it was not coming across to the reader. My students that are more independent in their thinking were not always receptive to my questions when

trying to lead them to see a weak area on their own. For example, Sarah and Alex did not always see the need to add details that stemmed from my questioning. When asking Sarah questions to elicit more details in her writing, she frequently said, “I don’t need that.” or “I’m not comfortable adding that.” She was very resistant, almost to the point of defiance, to add anything to her work that was not in her plan. Alex sometimes commented, “I like it the way it is. The reader knows what I mean.” Again, this illustrated that some students hold tight to their ideas and visions for their writing.

The both the willingness to add details and the resistance to other’s ideas were seen across genders and writing ability. It was truly dependent upon personality. By giving my students the ability to take ownership within the writing conference, I was able to learn more about the students as people and writers. Additionally, the students were able to make their own connections and have their unique voices heard. These results are a benefit to them as writers and learners.

### **Composition Quality**

Berninger et al. (1996) found no gender difference when focusing on the ability to compose a writing piece. Graves (1975) found that “the writing development level of the child is the best predictor of writing process behaviors” (p. 235). In the same study, Graves (1975) found that gender did not impact the ability to compose. To determine the quality of my students’ compositions, I utilized the 6+1 Writing Traits for Beginning Writers Rubric (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2011). This rubric allowed for the assessment of the pieces based on seven categories: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. These categories are rated as one of five levels: experimenting, emerging, developing, capable, and experienced.

Table 9

*Students' Fiction Rubric Results*

<b>Trait</b>	<b>experimenting</b>	<b>emerging</b>	<b>developing</b>	<b>capable</b>	<b>experienced</b>
<b>Ideas</b>	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 7 Girls 4	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Organization</b>	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 7 Girls 4	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Voice</b>	Boys 1 Girls 1	Boys 6 Girls 3	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Word choice</b>	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 1 Girls 2	Boys 4 Girls 2	Boys 2 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Sentence fluency</b>	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 3 Girls 2	Boys 3 Girls 2	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Conventions</b>	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 1 Girls 2	Boys 6 Girls 2	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Presentation</b>	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 1	Boys 2 Girls 2	Boys 3 Girls 1	Boys 2 Girls 0

The rubric results for the fiction pieces are outlined in Table 9. Based on the results of the rubric assessment and analyzation, there were no marked gender differences in composition quality, which was consistent with the literature (Berninger et al., 1996; Kin et al., 2015; Olinghouse, 2008; Troia et al., 2013). As for the individual students, their composition quality was consistent with the growth demonstrated to this point.

Table 10

*Students' Personal Narrative Rubric Results*

<b>Trait</b>	<b>experimenting</b>	<b>emerging</b>	<b>developing</b>	<b>capable</b>	<b>experienced</b>
<b>Ideas</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 6 Girls 4	Boys 2 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Organization</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 1	Boys 8 Girls 3	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Voice</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 6 Girls 2	Boys 2 Girls 2	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Word choice</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 1 Girls 0	Boys 7 Girls 4	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Sentence fluency</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 2 Girls 1	Boys 6 Girls 3	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Conventions</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 1	Boys 6 Girls 3	Boys 2 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0
<b>Presentation</b>	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 0 Girls 0	Boys 2 Girls 1	Boys 4 Girls 3	Boys 2 Girls 0

The rubric results for the personal narratives are outlined in Table 10. Based on the results of the rubric assessment and analyzation, again there were no marked gender differences in composition quality. Again this was consistent with the literature (Berninger et al., 1996; Kin et al., 2015; Olinghouse, 2008; Troia et al., 2013). As for the individual students, their composition quality was consistent with the growth demonstrated to this point and was consistent with Graves' (1975) observation that developmental level is a factor in writing. Individual and small group lessons will be planned for all of the students based on the rubric results.

Presentation was where the scores became surprisingly interesting with the fiction pieces and the personal narratives. In both genres, boys focused on creating illustrations that matched their stories and showed action, and on writing with their best handwriting. In the fiction pieces, the girls used fairly good handwriting, but did not always illustrate

their stories with action. As Figures 5 through 8 show, the girls' illustrations were simply pictures of the characters. This carried over to the illustrations in their personal narratives.

Calkins (1986), Gradwohl & Schumacher (1989), and Graves (1975) found that students write about topics they know best when given choice. This was evident in the students' writings, both fiction and personal narrative. Although the fiction topics were divided by gender, the personal narratives allowed students to focus on common topics, regardless of gender, and showcased commonalities.



## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the data from this study, there were gender differences in topic choices, which was consistent with studies by Berninger et al. (1996), Kim et al. (2015), and Olinghouse (2008). However, there were no marked gender differences in composition quality, which was also consistent with the literature. As Graves (1975) found, composition quality was primarily dependent upon individual development level. When evaluating the individual students, their composition quality was consistent with the growth and learning they have demonstrated to this point.

Calkins (1986) states that while conferencing is taking place there is a “magnetic force between writer and the audience” (p. 232). The data from this study pointed to conferencing being impacted by personality and investment in the piece, not by gender. The students who were more open to adding to their writings based on questions from the audience were able to produce writing that was better understood and enjoyed by the reader.

In their mixed methods study, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) found that Writing Workshop led to an enthusiasm for writing among the students. This was evident in the classroom during the course of this study. The positive effects are still being felt. The students cheer when it is time to write. Giving students the ability to write about topics of their choice helped them develop as independent writers.

Overall, I found that the Writing Workshop model benefitted my students. I witnessed engaged writers sharing their work with their peers and me. Students asked to

write outside of the required time defined by our Workshop. In this study, Writing Workshop was a positive and beneficial experience for all students.

### **Limitations**

Although this study provided some promising results, it does have some limitations. The time frame was limited to a three week period in November and a two week period in January. This only allowed for the use of only two genres and the creation of only two published pieces per student, one in each genre. I would be curious to see if the observations made would be the same over a longer period of time and with a wider variety of genres.

The size of the study was another limitation. Only twelve of my students received parental permission to be included in this study. I would be interested in continuing to conduct this study with a larger sample of students to see if there are any outliers to the data gathered so far.

A study is only as good as the data collected and the analysis of data. My lack of expertise in both of these areas is an additional limitation to the scope of this study. This is something that I will need to continue to develop in order to answer my questions and solve problems in my classroom. By doing this I will be better able to help my students grow and develop to the best of their abilities.

### **Implications**

This study may hold implications for the use of the Writing Workshop model in elementary classrooms. My findings were similar to what I found in the literature in relation to enthusiasm for writing and the successful composition of pieces within an assigned genre when choice of topic is given.

In the area of gender, this study showed that gender impacted topic choices. However, gender did not seem to be a factor in the areas of composition, enthusiasm, and conferencing. Further studies of a longer time frame and encompassing a greater amount of students would be beneficial.

This study holds implications for my classroom in the future. Questions are a valuable key in providing the best learning experience possible for my students. Questions are the best way to begin crafting solutions to problems within my classroom. Additionally, looking for the answers to questions opens the asker to learning beyond the answers themselves. There is great value in curiosity and exploration. If this is truly something I want to foster in my own students, it is something I must foster in myself.

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# Appendix

## 6+1 Traits Rubric

6-Trait Assessment for Beginning Writers				
1 EXPERIMENTING	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPING	4 CAPABLE	5 EXPERIENCED
<p><b>IDEAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Uses scribbles for writing</li> <li>— Dictates labels or a story</li> <li>— Shapes that look like letters</li> <li>— Line forms that imitate text</li> <li>— Writes letters randomly</li> </ul>	<p><b>IDEAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Some recognizable words present</li> <li>— Labels pictures</li> <li>— Uses drawings that show detail</li> <li>— Pictures are supported by some words</li> </ul>	<p><b>IDEAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Attempts a story or to make a point</li> <li>— Illustration supports the writing</li> <li>— Meaning of the general idea is recognizable/understandable</li> <li>— Some ideas clear but some are still fuzzy</li> </ul>	<p><b>IDEAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Writing tells a story or makes a point</li> <li>— Illustration (if present) enhances the writing</li> <li>— Idea is generally on topic</li> <li>— Details are present but not developed (lists)</li> </ul>	<p><b>IDEAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Presents a fresh/original idea</li> <li>— Topic is narrowed and focused</li> <li>— Develops one clear, main idea</li> <li>— Uses interesting, important details for support.</li> <li>— Writer understands topic well</li> </ul>
<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Ability to order or group not yet present</li> <li>— No sense of beginning or end</li> <li>— Connections between ideas are confusing</li> </ul>	<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— No title (if requested)</li> <li>— Experiments with beginnings</li> <li>— Begins to group like-words/pictures</li> <li>— Transitions or evidence of sequencing are haphazard</li> </ul>	<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— A title is present (if requested)</li> <li>— Limited transitions present</li> <li>— Beginning but no ending except "The End"</li> <li>— Attempts at sequencing and transitions</li> </ul>	<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— An appropriate title is present (if requested)</li> <li>— Attempts transitions from sentence to sentence</li> <li>— Beginning works well and attempts an ending</li> <li>— Logical sequencing</li> <li>— Key ideas begin to surface</li> </ul>	<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— An original title is present (if requested)</li> <li>— Transitions connect main ideas</li> <li>— The opening attracts</li> <li>— An effective ending is tried</li> <li>— Easy to follow</li> <li>— Important ideas stand out</li> </ul>
<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Communicates feeling with size, color, shape, line in drawing or letter imitation</li> <li>— Work is similar to everyone else's</li> <li>— Unclear response to task</li> <li>— Awareness of audience not present</li> </ul>	<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Hints of voice present in words and phrases</li> <li>— Looks different from most others</li> <li>— Energy/mood is present</li> <li>— Treatment of topic predictable</li> <li>— Audience is fuzzy—could be anybody, anywhere</li> </ul>	<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Expresses some predictable feelings</li> <li>— Moments of individual sparkle, but then hides</li> <li>— Repetition of familiar ideas reduces energy</li> <li>— Awareness that the writing will be read by someone else</li> <li>— Reader has limited connection to writer</li> </ul>	<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Writing is individual and expressive</li> <li>— Individual perspective becomes evident</li> <li>— Personal treatment of a standard topic</li> <li>— Writes to convey a story or idea to the reader</li> <li>— Attempts non-standard point of view</li> </ul>	<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Uses text to elicit a variety of emotions</li> <li>— Takes some risks to say more than what is expected</li> <li>— Point of view is evident</li> <li>— Writes with a clear sense of audience</li> <li>— Cares deeply about the topic</li> </ul>

1 EXPERIMENTING	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPING	4 CAPABLE	5 EXPERIENCED
<p><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Writes letters in strings</li> <li>— Imitates word patterns</li> <li>— Pictures stand for words and phrases</li> <li>— Copies environmental print</li> </ul>	<p><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Recognizable words</li> <li>— Environmental words used correctly</li> <li>— Attempts at phrases</li> <li>— Functional language</li> </ul>	<p><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— General or ordinary words</li> <li>— Attempts new words but they don't always fit</li> <li>— Settles for the word or phrase that "will do"</li> <li>— Big words used only to impress reader</li> <li>— Relies on slang, clichés, or repetition</li> </ul>	<p><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Uses favorite words correctly</li> <li>— Experiments with new and different words with some success</li> <li>— Tries to choose words for specificity</li> <li>— Attempts to use descriptive words to create images</li> </ul>	<p><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Everyday words used well</li> <li>— Precise, accurate, fresh, original words</li> <li>— Creates vivid images in a natural way</li> <li>— Avoids repetition, clichés or vague language</li> <li>— Attempts at figurative language</li> </ul>
<p><b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Mimics letters and words across the page</li> <li>— Words stand alone</li> <li>— Patterns for sentences not in evidence</li> <li>— Sentence sense not yet present</li> </ul>	<p><b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Strings words together into phrases</li> <li>— Attempts simple sentences</li> <li>— Short, repetitive sentence patterns</li> <li>— Dialogue present but not understandable</li> </ul>	<p><b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Uses simple sentences</li> <li>— Sentences tend to begin the same</li> <li>— Experiments with other sentence patterns</li> <li>— Reader may have to reread to follow the meaning</li> <li>— Dialogue present but needs interpretation</li> </ul>	<p><b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Simple and compound sentences present and effective</li> <li>— Attempts complex sentences</li> <li>— Not all sentences begin the same</li> <li>— Sections of writing have rhythm and flow</li> </ul>	<p><b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Consistently uses sentence variety</li> <li>— Sentence structure is correct and creative</li> <li>— Variety of sentence beginnings</li> <li>— Natural rhythm, cadence and flow</li> <li>— Sentences have texture which clarify the important idea</li> </ul>
<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Writes letter strings (pre-phonetic: dmRxzz)</li> <li>— Attempts to create standard letters</li> <li>— Attempts spacing of words, letters, symbols or pictures</li> <li>— Attempts to write left to right</li> <li>— Attempts to write top/down</li> <li>— Punctuation, capitalization etc. not making sense, yet</li> <li>— Student interpretation needed to understand text/pictures</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Attempts semi-phonetic spelling (MTR, UM, KD, etc.)</li> <li>— Uses mixed upper and lower case letters</li> <li>— Uses spaces between letters and words</li> <li>— Consistently writes left to right</li> <li>— Consistently makes effective use of top to bottom spacing</li> <li>— Random punctuation</li> <li>— Nonstandard grammar is common</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Uses phonetic spelling (MOSTR, HUMN, KLÖSD, etc.) on personal words</li> <li>— Spelling of high frequency words still spotty</li> <li>— Uses capitals at the beginning of sentences</li> <li>— Usually uses end punctuation correctly (!?)</li> <li>— Experiments with other punctuation</li> <li>— Long paper may be written as one paragraph</li> <li>— Attempts standard grammar</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Transitional spelling on less frequent words (MONSTUR, HUMUN, CLOSED, etc.)</li> <li>— Spelling of high frequency words usually correct</li> <li>— Capitals at the beginning of sentences and variable use on proper nouns</li> <li>— End punctuation is correct (!?) and other punctuation is attempted (such as commas)</li> <li>— Paragraphing variable but present</li> <li>— Noun/pronoun agreement, verb tenses, subject/verb agreement</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— High frequency words are spelled correctly and very close on other words</li> <li>— Capitals used for obvious proper nouns as well as sentence beginnings</li> <li>— Basic punctuation is used correctly and/or creatively</li> <li>— Indents consistently to show paragraphs</li> <li>— Shows control over standard grammar</li> </ul>



1 EXPERIMENTING	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPING	4 CAPABLE	5 EXPERIENCED
<p><b>PRESENTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Letters and words are strings with no spacing</li> <li>— There is no consistent shape to letters</li> <li>— Letters are scattered randomly on the page</li> <li>— Pictures are placed randomly on the page</li> <li>— There is no connection between words and pictures</li> </ul>	<p><b>PRESENTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— An attempt is made to group letters into words</li> <li>— Many letters are consistent shape, with few that are unreadable</li> <li>— There are some examples of letters grouped to make words</li> <li>— An attempt is made to group pictures with text</li> <li>— Some words are used to enhance the meaning of pictures, e.g., captions</li> </ul>	<p><b>PRESENTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Most letters and words are readable with an attempt at spacing</li> <li>— There are some discrepancies in letter shape, but they are easily identifiable</li> <li>— Letters are grouped to make distinguishable words and phrases</li> <li>— Placement of pictures reflects the meaning of the text</li> <li>— Pictures are placed with an attempt to connect them to captions or text</li> </ul>	<p><b>PRESENTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Words are easily readable with a consistent attempt at words spacing</li> <li>— Handwriting begins to show style, with consistent letter shape</li> <li>— An attempt is made to group words into identifiable sentences</li> <li>— Pictures are used to clarify meaning in text</li> <li>— Most pictures are located with meaningful text or captions</li> </ul>	<p><b>PRESENTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Style of handwriting is consistent and words evenly spaced</li> <li>— Letters are well-formed and easy to read</li> <li>— Words are grouped by sentence or paragraph for easy understanding</li> <li>— Pictures and maps are used effectively to enhance understanding</li> <li>— Pictures are located with text to create alignment and flow of meaning</li> </ul>