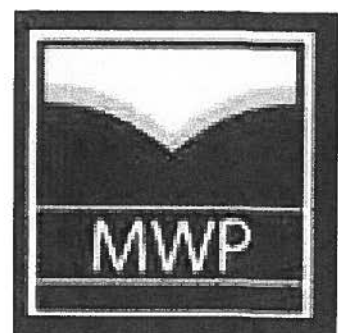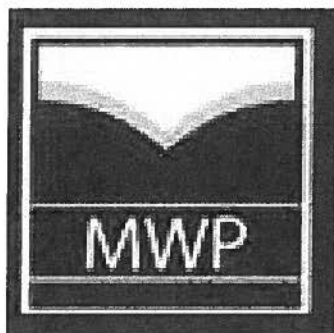# Morehead Writing Project

Summer Institute

2013-2014

Professional Inquiry Showcase

March 8, 2014

Adron Doran University Center

Use of Free writing in Classroom to Enhance On-Demand Writing

Jessica Feltner

Powell Middle School

Context/Background:

While narrative writing as a whole is utilized throughout the year, it is treated like a red headed stepchild in the sphere of writing acquisition in the 6th grade. Effective test results require practice on test-like questions. Test-like questions fall into the argumentative/informative category. The arguementative/informative category not only encourages a formulaic writing event, it impedes the voice of the writer. Thus, the students knowledge of 'quality' writing is embedded into their schema as: *writing to convince a ficticious principal to move the boys urinals two feet higher off the floor or to plant a new flower garden in the teacher designated smoking area is real world writing.* None of which convey the authenticity of the writer.

Guiding Question:

Will 'Free to be me'/'Start the day off write'/'Pick your switch Time' enhance writing comfort/quality on state simulated on-demand writing prompts?

Method/Process:

I focused on my entire student body for the inquiry as I wanted all of my students to 'squeel like a guinea pig'. The results presented representation from my G.T. kids, my on-grade level students, and my special needs population(I had to use those indicators for the purposes of this inquiry. Writer's side note: I believe ALL students are a culmination of the above categories).

We slowly begin to incorporate 'Pick your Switch' time into the academic Friday. Writers were first given tight parameters by me to gain a comfort level in writing and sharing (very contrived writing prompts were presented during the initial lessons). From this beginning came the organic experience that can be described as educator's nirvana. Students began challenging 'the box' (the prompts)and eventually forgoing 'the box' to instead write about 'things'--'Things' important to them. 'Things' that began to connect them to the written word. 'Things' that established voice and purpose for THEM; 'Things' that led the questioning of the writing perceptions of others (thus establishing counter claims).

Results/Findings:

During each unit of student, common assessments are given to students. Within that assessment is a constructed response. Tied to that constructed response is an intimidating scoring rubric. This scoring rubric sets finite definitions of what distinction, proficiency, apprenticeship, and novicity (not

sure that's a real word) look like.

We began *Pick your Switch* time shortly after the first common assessment was administered. While I modeled a 'mock' constructed response with the students prior to the first assessment, I noticed hesitation and limited writing during their alloted time: they simply did not feel comfortable to put ANYTHING down. Shortly after the assessment, we conducted a Q and A session regarding their opinions about the prompt and how they did on it. In all 3 classes, approximately 80% of students paraphrased 'comfort level' as a reason they didn't write as much. They were not used to writing so they didn't even know where to start.

After approximately one month of *Pick your Switch* time students were polled on the same question, a Q and A session which consisted of asking students about their opinion of the last constructed response portion of the common assessment. Approximately 25% of students paraphrased 'comfort level' as a reason they didn't write much. Student input focused on the fact that they 'knew to write about stuff, cause you let us write about different stuff all the time. We just had to figure out how to fit it into the SPAT model you taught us (SItuation, Purpose, Audience, Task, ;)). '

Students ultimately said that being about to free write gave them the courage to write. Period. The more experience you have with writing, the more comfortable you are in doing so. If you write, write, write everyday or utilize any free time to write , it will build that writing confidence. Writing confidence is writing comfidence-- regardless of the mode, audience, task, situation, etc.

Conclusions/Implications:

One student suggested a post-Q and A after all constructed responses. This was their opportunity to communicate their concerns regarding the prompt, questions about the audience, and suggestions THEY made in their own answers: WRITING FOR A PURPOSE.

Through reading their Q and A papers (which were loosly templated) students began to gain insight into their writing which spilled over into other writing genres (not just poetry, story telling, script writing, etc.). It was a super b vitamin for their writing. And this all started with the little seed that could: building a community of writers.

While this inquiry had little scientific data to prop it up, it certainly solidifies a universal fact: writing in any content/genre area requires students who have engaged in the act of writing over a sustained period of time for an authentic purpose. The test scores may not support the growth and confidence my students experienced during their free writing time in the classroom, but let us say a special prayer that state mandated test scores do not prophesize a student's potential on the blue and green ball we all have to rotate on.

Effects of Digital and Blended Assessments on Quality of Student Writing

Dustin Grooms

Mason County High School

Context/Background/Problem –

The purpose of this inquiry was to measure student achievement – specifically, the final product of certain formative and summative assessments – when students are given options of the following: A digitally-created assessment, a blended assessment (defined as "mixed" between traditional paper assessment and digital components), and a traditional paper assessment. This project was conducted to measure how students who, for years, have been accustomed to a largely paper-based classroom, would perform in a transition to an all-digital environment and how this transition would affect performance and motivation on assessments.

Method/Process –

This project was conducted with two classes of Honors Freshmen. I chose these sections for two reasons: I wanted to measure the results of intrinsically motivated students against those of students who need outside motivation; I also wanted to see if the quality of student writing was different between digital and traditional mediums. Furthermore, for freshmen students, this is the first year that they have dealt with a mostly digital learning environment. During last year's implementation, management issues were a concern and have mostly been remedied.

The process was conducted by using the same assessments in different manners between the two classes: Provide an all-digital assessment via Edmodo or similar software, a "blended" version (assessment digitally *available*, but students complete assessment on paper), or giving traditional paper-based assessment. This was conducted over several months over different units.

Results/Findings –

The results proved that while intrinsically motivated students perform equally well on digital assessments – sometimes, even better than the same assessments on paper – many students showed little change performance-wise, though the group of students as a whole was more engaged with digital content.

Data was gathered by compiling the work of students over the course of the year, either digitally or physically. The digital responses were archived or kept online for access. This gave me a reference point for their writing throughout the course of the year. For paper work, student data was logged through scanned copies of their work, or at times, typed version of their responses.

Conclusions/Implications –

These findings imply that student work in a digital medium is largely dependent on their familiarity with the technology, and at times, a confidence in their own writing abilities. While digital mediums can make students feel more comfortable with the writing process – which may indeed boost their abilities and engagement with the process – giving student option gave no notable effect on the quality of the writing. This has taught me that, especially with freshmen, keeping a blended learning environment tends to work the most beneficially.

Self-Reflection in Math

Suzanne Haberek

East Jessamine High School: Grades 10-12

Context/Background/Problem –

I teach at a very progressive school; we have fully integrated Standards Based Grading in all classrooms, we have an online class supplement for the majority of our classes to prepare students for online learning they will experience in college or the workforce, and have experimented with targeted students using iPads to increase their interest in school. Something I have come to appreciate about much of these changes is the amount of responsibility and accountability we are putting back on the students. After all, the person who can benefit most from investing in their education is the student, themselves. So in an effort to keep the responsibility on the students I wondered how beneficial it would be to require students to begin to self-assess their progress and performance in class. I teach math, so I knew it would take a while to get them used to writing about math; however, I thought that if they wrote about their experiences in math it would also benefit them to verbalize their abilities and possibly identify some of their struggles.

Method/Process –

To begin to answer this question, I started with a simple survey of 3 questions that each student would answer after every summative exam.

1. How do you think you did on the test?

    This first question not only asks them to verbalize their perception of their performance on the exam, but is also given back to them when they receive their graded tests. I felt this gave them the opportunity to see how they felt after the test, and how that compared to what grade they received. As I continued in this project, I expanded on this concept in an effort to force students to think at a deeper level comparing how they felt and how they performed.

2. How prepared did you feel?

    The second question was also two-fold. This gave me an idea of how much effort the student had put into preparing for the test. I would often hear the phrase, "I didn't study, so I don't think I did very well." Not only am I having a better understanding of the efforts, but it was my hope that the students would realize the importance of preparing for a test, and that it can make a difference in the ending result. I also expanded on this idea as the project progressed, as you will see later.

3. How did you feel about the way this unit was taught?

    The last question originally was for my purposes in adjusting my teaching strategies and styles to fit my students' needs. However, I begin to find that many students were able to realize the different styles of teaching that were beneficial to them, and what styles did not work as well for them.

Results/Findings –

As the project continued throughout the semester I began to expand the concept of self-reflection to continue past just the few minutes after taking the exam. As I had mentioned previously, I gave these surveys back to the students with their graded tests. At first I just asked them to look at what they had thought they had done on the test compared to the grade they received. But as they began to get comfortable with the idea of reflecting and writing in their math class, I then asked them to go further and examine their results to create a game plan for what would be needed to bring up their grade. Since students have the ability to retake tests in Standards Based Grading, student's reflections were more important because they could learn from their mistakes and apply that to that specific test.
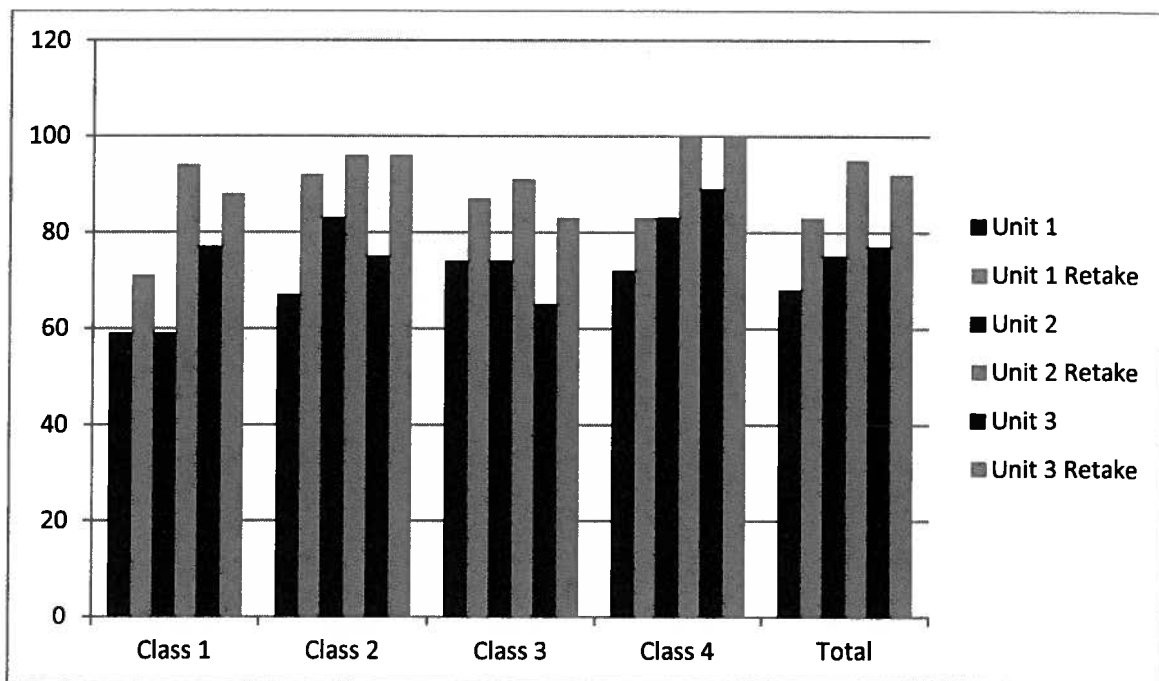
Conclusions/Implications –

Based on the data above, I have found that self-reflection in math class is a very beneficial practice. This allows students to look at the effect that effort, or a lack thereof, impacts the results on a summative exam. This can be carried forward into other disciplines, and can result in a more productive and self-sufficient life-long learner. I plan to continue this implementation throughout the rest of this year. There may be a few adjustments made for the following years, but I feel that students have to be slowly introduced to the concept of self-evaluation before jumping in head first.

To "FLIP" or NOT to "FLIP" my classroom, THAT is the question!

Ben Hawkins

East Carter High School – French & Humanities Teacher (9-12)

Context/Background/Problem –

Being a teacher of elective courses in French and Humanities, I sometimes have to work extra hard to get students to enroll in my classes (especially for my upper level French courses!) and to keep them engaged and motivated to learn! Noticing that this is a CONSTANT battle, I have continually sought ways that I can revamp and reinvigorate my instruction in ways that will excite and captivate my students. So when I heard about this whole idea of "flipping" my classroom, I was immediately intrigued and wanted to know more. In learning more about what it means to "flip" my classroom, I knew that this was something that I wanted to implement right away and thanks to the people who led the training on this subject, I had a bunch of web 2.0 tools and resources for me to try and use to help me make the "flip". So the basic questions that I wanted answer with my endeavor to "flip" my classroom were thus: *What if I built or designed my units of instruction to where more control of the day-to-day activities shifted to the students? What would happen if I were to truly "flip" my classroom?*

Method/Process –

I set out with this idea of "flipping" my classroom by first experimenting in my two French Level II classes right from the beginning of the school year back in August. I gave the students all of the materials they would need to study and practice on their own for homework outside of class, resources containing the necessary vocabulary and phrases that they would need to know and be able to use on their summative performance assessments that they would take at the end of the first unit. So for a couple of weeks, I gave my students almost complete autonomy to learn the content and practice speaking and communicating with each other, staying close by in case they needed any assistance and also to formatively assess their progress to give them feedback on how to improve. At the beginning of November, at my school we changed over to a new trimester and with that I had a whole new schedule and new sections of courses, including an Arts & Humanities: Drama course. In my drama course, I also decided here to abandon the traditional lecture format and instead used a website called "Edmodo", which is basically a school-friendly Facebook, in order to post all of the resources that the students would need in order to access the content for each unit of study. After allowing for enough time for the practice and learning phase, it was then time for the summative assessment phase and this is where we, my students and I, would see if this new format worked for us, or not.

Results/Findings –

In order to reflect on the impact of "flipping" my classroom, I used the results from the students' summative assessments to gage the overall effectiveness of our efforts. Forgetting that the results would be more telling if I had a control to compare with, I still feel that the students' scores on the summative assessments show well enough that there was a marginal effect, so small and minute, making it very clear to me that there were "holes" or "kinks" in this system.

Conclusions/Implications –

After reflecting upon the results, there are several much-needed improvements to the process and methods that I used. In contemplating the experience, I feel that these results show that giving the students complete autonomy, while it may work for some, for most students it allows them the choice to slack off instead of work hard. Only some students will be "self-directed learners" whereas most need guidance and constant "encouragement" from a mentor or teacher. Learning is work and it has been my experience that most students shy away from it because it will require effort and risk. Students will gladly put forth the effort and take risks for something that they personally want and desire deeply. Getting students to want to learn something and to work for it is the age-old question of teaching. On the "flip"-side, on my end as the teacher there are always improvements that I need to make in order to be more effective in getting students to learn. I desperately need to provide more "hooks" in each of my courses. What I mean is, in order to make my subject matter more relevant to students, I need to find a way to connect my classroom to the real world. For me as a world language teacher, there are some ways to accomplish this task. One is by using more authentic resources such as reading more texts from the target culture like newspaper or magazine articles, watching videos of native speakers and/or listening to recordings of native speakers communicating on a certain topic or just having an everyday conversation. Another is by getting students signed up for some kind of pen pal program where they either write letters back and forth with a native French-speaker or use email to communicate. Skype can be an awesome tool to connect my classroom with the outside world. This is the direction I must go if I am to captivate my students, causing them to want to acquire words and phrases in French in order to communicate with another human being from another part of the world.

How to Mold Kindergarteners into Confident Writers

Michelle Hildebrandt

McBrayer Elementary: Kindergarten

Context/Background/Problem –

How beneficial will it be to my student's writing if more instructional time is spent on writing, reflecting, and creative writing? Also, will frequent journaling and sharing build confident writers who are able to write more descriptive and detailed sentences?

Method/Process –

This school year, I have focused more instructional time, whole group and small group, on writing instruction within my classroom. Furthermore, I incorporated a 30 minute block dedicated specifically to writing instruction such as learning more sight words, vocabulary words, and different parts of grammar and syntax that help students build stronger sentences. We have also spent a significantly greater amount of time writing, reflecting, and sharing to build confidence.

Writing Activity	2012-2013 School Year	2013-2014 School Year
Journals	Began in Mid-November	Began in early October
Frequency of Journal Writing	2-3 Times a Week	Every Morning
Duration of Journal Writing	Interrupted by Specials Classes	30 Minutes Uninterrupted
Frequency of Sharing	Once a Week	Every Morning
Reflecting, in Writing, about Show & Tell	N/A	Every Friday
Sharing Reflective Pieces	N/A	Every Friday
Creative Writing Pieces	N/A	Once every 2 Weeks
School-Wide Writing Assessments	N/A	Once every 9 Weeks
Instructional Writing Block	N/A	30 Minutes Every Day
Reflective Writing	N/A	Writing to Reflect on Programs, Field Trips, Social Studies and Science Experiments
Sight Word, Vocabulary, Grammar, & Syntax Strategies	Worksheets & Limited Instruction	Focused Instruction, Small Group Activities, Manipulatives, Interactive Reading Games

Results/Findings –

Note: Each year we receive an entirely new and different group of students. I had many more accelerated students enter my classroom last year as opposed to this year. Therefore, I compared individual students from the two classes whose cognitive and social behaviors were very similar.

I chose three students from last year's class and three students from this year's class and compared their writings found in their communication folders. When choosing the students, I chose one above level student from both classes, one on-level student from both classes, and one below level student from both classes. I made sure to choose students that were closely related in their writing experiences coming into my classroom. I

had my students this year complete the same writings as last year's students so that I could compare their writings side by side. I looked at their word count, the number of sight words and known words used, and overall quality of the work based upon the number of adjectives and number of sentences written by the students. The following are the results that I found:

Word Count

Fall Writing

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	1	3
On-Level	1	2
Below Level	1	1

Winter Writing

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	15	20
On-Level	13	19
Below Level	7	13

Number of Sight Words/Known Words Used in the Whole Writing

Fall Writing

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	0	2
On-Level	0	1
Below Level	0	0

Winter Writing

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	7	20
On-Level	9	16
Below Level	4	7

Overall Quality of Work

Number of Adjectives used in the Fall Writings

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	0	1
On-Level	0	1
Below Level	0	0

Number of Adjectives used in the Winter Writings

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	0	4
On-Level	0	1
Below Level	0	1

Number of Sentences Written in the Fall Writings

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	1	1
On-Level	1	1
Below Level	1	1

Number of Sentences Written in the Winter Writings

	2012-2013 Students	2013-2014 Students
Above Level	3	3
On-Level	3	3
Below Level	1	1

Conclusions/Implications –

Word Count Conclusions

The fall writing was just a fill in the blank because that is where the students are at that time of the year. Therefore, the biggest difference is that more of my students used adjectives and more than just one word to finish the sentence. The sentence was, "I am going to be _____." It was a Halloween piece. Last school year I just got an attempt at spelling the one word that they were going to be. This year I received pink princess, a blue ninja, etc.

The winter writing does show an increase in word count at all levels! In this writing, the students write about a cat or cats. Last year some of the students wrote multiple sentences, but they were repeating. For example, last year my on level student that I used for this analysis wrote. "My cat lieks my bol. My cat liks my fod. My cat liks my draks." There were only two periods used and the sentences were repeating with only one word changed at the end. He even spelled the word "like" differently as he wrote. This year I got the same number of sentences from most of the students, but they were much more descriptive and the word count was much higher. My on-level student this year wrote, "The cats run to the mose. They like to kel the mose and play. It is a black cat." They used an adjective and the sentences were more descriptive and varied.

Sight Words Used

This area also showed great growth between last year's students and this year's students. We have been writing much more frequently and the students have used the sight words many more times in their writing this year as compared to last year. Therefore, it is not surprising to me that there is a significant increase in the number of sight words that my students are comfortable with using this year as compared to last year's students. Again, their opportunities for the fall writing were somewhat limited, but their winter writings show a great difference in comfort and frequency of using these words.

Quality of Work

I tried to find a way to analyze the results of this section without being biased. Therefore I looked at the number of adjectives and sentences written. These two categories did not show a significant difference between the 2012-2013 students and the 2013-2014 students. However, if you refer to the work of my on-level students, I feel that the overall quality has increased this year. I mentioned that last year's on-level student (and many others) used the same repeating sentence and changed only one word. This year I had a variety of sentences that told a well-developed story with adjectives, multiple cats, and an overall more confident sense of writing and storytelling. So, the amount of adjectives and sentences written were not very different, but I still feel that this year's writings were much better developed than last years.

Overall

Overall, I am confident to say that I have more confident and well developed writers in my classroom this year as compared to last year. The students have practiced writing and reflecting so many times that it is now natural to them to express themselves through writing almost as easily as they express themselves verbally. I believe that is a great accomplishment for five year olds. When we have participated in the school-wide mandatory writing pieces, I have been told that my class is the only primary class that writes for the entire 30 minutes. They may not fully grasp how to express their opinions to the fullest extent in writing, but they are confident enough to write for that length of time. My students this year are much more familiar with the sight words and adjectives that we have discussed for months and they freely use them in their writing even without prompting.

This process has helped me to see that it is just as important to spend time writing as it is to teach math or reading. I have always loved writing, but my expectations of my kindergarteners as writers were not high enough in previous years. I love seeing the students enjoy and ask to write in order to tell the class about various events in their lives!

The Genius Project

Mallory Howard

Montgomery County Intermediate School: Grade 6

Context/Background/Problem –

Montgomery County Intermediate School is a very standards-based school, in which our curriculum is specifically aligned to the Common Core Standards. We also use standards-based grading for students in each content area. Each student has three block classes (90 minutes each), a College Career Readiness class, which rotates between art, music, media, P.E., and lab, as well as an enrichment/RTI class each day. I teach three blocks of English Language Arts and a reading intervention class for struggling readers. Classes are ability grouped, and I have one high-average class, one average class, and one co-teaching below average class. Students are flexibly grouped based on the previous year's K-PREP data, and are moved as necessary. My students love having choices in their learning and I try to give them as much freedom as possible, while staying true to our standards. I teach writing every day, most of which is preparation for K-PREP. Both writing for information and reading for information is very important in 6th grade, which lead me to my Inquiry Project this year. Many of the students had trouble dissecting informational text, as well as writing for information and argument. In sixth grade writing changes from opinion to argument writing, and the biggest difference is that students present their point of view based on the **facts**, instead of personal opinions. My question developed from my desire to help students acquire the skills they need to become better writers, while giving them choice in their educational experiences. I decided to research some methods when I found "Genius Time," or the "Genius Project" online. This is a method based on the Google company, which allows their employees 20% of their time to pursue a "passion project." Many schools implemented the same idea wit their students, which I also decided to try. It allows students 20% of their weekly time with me, to pursue their passions. They choose their project, research it, write about it, and create an original presentation based on their findings. With the Genius Project, students are learning valuable knowledge that is aligned to the Common Core Standards, and pursuing their own interests and passions. When students at this age get the chance to choose what they learn about, they are much more interested in reading and writing, which in turn allows them to get the very best learning from this experience. I thought that by giving them choice, they would improve their informational and argumentative writing skills.

Method/Process –First Six Weeks: Baseline Data

At this point I collected some baseline data to judge my project against. Over the remainder of the year, I have tried several different versions of the Genius Project to assess what works best for my students in the area of writing. To being with, I gave students a timed on-demand assessment, as well as a working writing piece, which they edited and worked on over the course of the six weeks. I took each class average to compare with the rest of the year's data. This data allows me to assess how the implementations of the project are contributing to student growth and achievement.

Second Six Weeks: The Original Genius Project

In the first six weeks, I implemented the project as I had researched it. I allowed students to choose their own topic to research either alone, or with a partner (again, their choice). Each Friday, during 20% Time, students researched their topics through books and online, and gathered information for their project. Students

decided on the project they wanted to do. These ranged from Prezi, Powerpoint, Powtoons, mocks talk shows, and self-made videos. At the end of the project students reflected on what they had learned.

During this six weeks, students worked on a piece of informational writing which they edited and worked up to their best product. At the end of this time frame, students also did a timed on-demand piece. This data was compared to the baseline data.

Third Six Weeks: Writing Reflections

At this time I saw that writing score had definitely improved, but there was still room for further improvement. I thought that to keep the project fresh, I needed to add some elements for my students. So, during our second round of the project, I added the concept of weekly research reflections. Each week, after their 20% Time, each student reflected on what they had learned, where they were at in their projects, and what their next steps would be for the following week. I also added guidelines for the project in which each final project needed to incorporate the following elements:

1. Why did you choose this project?

2. Start with some questions. (Each student developed 3 - 5 questions to lead their research.)

3. What was the most important or interesting thing that you learned?

As before, students had a working writing piece and a timed on-demand piece. I gathered class averages of each to compare with the previous twelve weeks.

Fourth Six Weeks: Themed Projects and Group Meetings

I kept the guidelines implemented in the third six weeks, and added group meetings and a theme for the projects. At this point it seemed that several students were finding it difficult to choose a project, so I added a the theme "Inventors and Inventions" for this round of projects. I also implemented group meetings to jump-start the projects, and to help one other as the project progresses. Each week before research time, students would meet in groups of 4 - 5 students to discuss what they had found so far, where they were at in the projects, and any problems they were having with any aspect of their project (I.e. getting started, where to research, what to include in writing, etc.).

As with the previous round of Genius Projects, students had a working piece and a timed on-demand piece. I collected class averages, and compared each to the previous scores.

Results/Findings –

In the following charts you can see the results of the implementation of this inquiry. Every class improved throughout the year, and have made great gains. I was most interested in the growth that my students made. The greatest growth came between rounds one and two. This was the point that I added guidelines and writing reflections. according to this data, those implementations made the most impact on my students achievement and learning. Writing to learn and reflect has made a huge impact on my students' learning, especially in the area of informational and argumentative writing.

Between Round 2 and Round 3, when research groups were implemented, students also showed significant growth in writing. Being able to discuss their research and writing allowed students to see their errors, and discover how to improve from students just like them. They saw what their peers were doing and developed new ideas through these powerful discussions.

Working Writing				
	Baseline	**Round 1**	**Round 2**	**Round 3**
Block 1	72%	78%	87%	94%
Block 2	65%	68%	76%	82%
Block 3	54%	56%	65%	73%

On-Demand Writing				
	Baseline	**Round 1**	**Round 2**	**Round 3**
Block 1	67%	73%	89%	93%
Block 2	60%	66%	71%	80%
Block 3	45%	47%	58%	66%

Conclusions/Implications –

The Genius project not only made my students better writers, but it has empowered them to be in charge of their own learning. In this relatively short amount of weekly time, my students became masters of their own learning, and became excited about informational and argumentative writing. Their passion for these projects was something that I must admit, I did not expect. I knew that they loved having choices in their learning, but this project took that excitement to new levels.

I will definitely continue this project in my class. Throughout the numerous snow days when students often forget all about education, the first thing that many of my students asked when we came back was, "When do we get to start our Genius Projects." Their gains in writing, reading, and their passion for learning has convinced me that this is something my students not only want, but they need. I will continue to try new version of the Genius Project, keeping the best implementations from each round, including writing reflections and research groups. In our next round I plan to have each research group decide on their own theme, and research a different aspect of this theme. I am interested to see how their writing and research continues to evolve over the next six weeks.

How to Increase Student Value for Writing

Natasha Mora

Botts Elementary - 4th Grade

Context/Background/Problem –*Please provide the audience with information about your teaching/classroom and the initial question that you wanted to answer.*

In previous years students in my class have been hesitant writers. They have seen writing as a burdensome task, only to be used when writing about what was learned in class. I had a difficult time getting students to invest in the writing they were producing, whether it be coming up with initial ideas or editing and revising. They weren't developing their writing like I wanted them to, and I was at a loss about what to do. My inquiry project centered on strategies and tools that would promote student interest in writing. My hope was for students to develop a newfound value for writing that they hadn't had before.

Method/Process – *Provide a description of the method/process that you used to find the answer to your question.*

In Steven L. Laynes book "Igniting a Passion for Reading" he discusses teachers modeling themselves as readers. After reading that sentence it was clear that in order to create a passion for writing in my classroom, I would have to model myself as a writer. On the first day of school students were given a writing interest inventory that measured their thoughts about writing. My next step was to show my students that I was a writer. I allowed students to view journals that I had written in, showed them the different forms of writing, and read aloud a few of my writings. Students then set up their own writing journals. At the beginning, we wrote for short amounts of time, gradually increasing, in order to build stamina. Picture prompts and cliffhanger type story starters were used in the beginning, but it quickly grew into free write. Volunteers share their writing and afterwards their peers commented or made suggestions. When reading aloud to my students I would pull out interesting vocabulary and imagery the author used, making sure I noted I wanted to use something like that in my future writing. Throughout the year my students were broken into writing communities. Each student had a job based on the skill we were learning. Various other strategies were used as well. Students were given the exact writing inventory later in the school year to see how their views had changed.

Results/Findings – *What were the results of your project? What data did you gather and how did your method lead to these results?*

As a result of this effort to increase student value for writing, through exemplifying myself as a writer. Student have changed their mindset about what writing is. I have seen an increase in student involvement during writing instruction and less students giving subpar efforts. Writing interest inventories given on the first day of school and mid-year indicate that students have increased their confidence in writing and actually like doing it.

- 93% of my fourth grade students have increased their love for writing stories.

- 67% have increased their confidence as a writer.

- 80% wished they had more time in school to write.

This evidence suggests that students have made progress in valuing writing. These changes in attitude can be attributed to the conscientious efforts of the teachers and students to point out strengths in students writing and collaborate for writing improvement during writing groups and conferences with the teacher. Giving students

the opportunity to choose their topic during morning writing time paired with a vast array of picture and cliffhanger story starters allowed students to experience styles of writing they hadn't experienced in previous school years.

Conclusions/Implications – *What are the implications of your data? Where can you go from here? What did you learn as a result of this process?*

This process has defiantly thought me that my attitudes toward a subject area effect student's attitudes. In the future, in order for students to see the value of any sort of learning, the teaching has to display the value the subject has in his or her personal life. From here, I can only hope to continue improving my writing instruction by discovering ways for students to fine tune their writing skills. Passion first then technique. Student have a greater ownership over material they are invested in. With the students have the ability to choose the topic to write about they are given ownership of their writing and become proud and excited to share.

Positive Feedback and its Powers

Lori Staggs

East Carter Middle School – 6th Grade

Context/Background/Problem –

I have taught English/Language Arts for four years. I am tested in the three areas of Writing, Reading, and Language Mechanics. My classroom environment contains tables for easy student grouping. I also have a separate area available for student conferencing.

My guiding question for this project was:

If I provide only positive feedback and no grade (only participation points), will the quality & quantity of writing improve in my classroom?

Method/Process –
To begin with, I gave a self-efficacy survey to students about their writing. Next, I monitored journal writing providing positive feedback for the study group and both types of feedback for the control group. Each writing assignment, I provided a rubric and means for feedback. I used a tracking tool to help with grades and points in infinite campus. Finally, I gave another self-efficacy survey to students at the end of February. I compiled data from surveys and infinite campus for analysis.

Results/Findings –

The self –efficacy of my study group and control group increased, although the study group had a greater increase overall. The quantity of assignments completed did not increase in my study group over time. The quality of work did increase in both groups, but I saw no clear distinction in quality from groups.

Conclusions/Implications –

I found that there is more of a direct link to quality and quantity based upon what the subject/format the student is using to write. I feel that feedback of any kind is helpful. From here, I need to focus less on what kind of feedback I am giving and focus more on meaningful and engaging writing tasks.

Building Writing Confidence Among Middle School Students

Megan Thurman

Lewis County Middle School, Grade 8

Context/Background/Problem –

I transferred from Lewis County High School to Lewis County Middle School in the fall of 2013, and everything about my teaching style changed. Specifically, I wanted to put an emphasis on writing, because I realized how critical writing is to a child's confidence. My research project sought to answer this question: Is there a difference in impact on student writers who experience one English teacher twice each day and student writers who experience two different English teachers each day?

This question came up for debate during a discussion about different teaching styles. I couldn't help but wonder if students being exposed to two different teaching styles, specifically dealing with the concept of writing, would influence student confidence when it came to writing.

Method/Process --

Brittany Moore and I both teach 8th grade Language Arts at LCMS, however, I also have a group of eighth grade students that are participating in English I (the 9th grade English course.) This group of 25 students is a mix between Brittany's Language Arts students and mine. They became eligible for English I based on MAP data from the end of the 2012-13 school year. At the beginning of the year, I gave these students a survey to gauge their writing confidence. I gave them the same survey again in January. I have also monitored MAP data and writing engagement during class exercises.

Results/Findings –

Students who have two different English teachers each day demonstrate more confidence in writing than students who have the same English teacher twice a day. Based on MAP data and survey results, 50% more students who have two different English teachers demonstrated confidence in writing than those who had the same.

Conclusions/Implications –

Writing confidence increases when students are exposed to two different teachers and teaching styles for writing instruction. Therefore, if possible, students who participate in English I in future years should not have the same teacher for Language Arts.

Building Community: The Key to Student Achievement

Leslie Workman

Bath County High School

Context/Background/Problem –

For the project, the focus was two 9th grade English classes. Both of the classes are composed of males and females from predominately low socio-economic backgrounds. At the beginning of the year, very few of the students were considered at "grade level" in reading. This rings true of their test scores from as far back as 7th grade.

Research Question:

What impact does community building have on student achievement?

Method/Process –

I chose one of the classes as the control group and the other as the experimental group. With the experimental group, I spent a week doing community building activities before ever starting the content of the course. In addition to this, I shook every student's hand as they entered the door and greeted them personally. Finally, I instituted classroom "cheers" that the students could do for their classmates if they felt that it was deserved. Other than the community building activities, all of the content and lesson objectives for the classes were the same. The control group did all of the same lessons, but did not do the community building activities.

Results/Findings –

It would seem that my project was a success and that community building does have a positive influence on student achievement. In order to determine this, I used the mock PLAN results given at the beginning of the school use as a baseline. At Christmas, I administered another mock assessment and gathered data from it as well. I did not determine growth overall, only if they had met the benchmark to begin with and if whether or not they met the benchmark at the end of the semester.

With the control group, I had a total of 3 students that met the benchmark with the baseline assessment out of 26 students. At Christmas, I had a total of 8 students in the control group meet the benchmark. This was a 19% increase in the number of students meeting benchmark.

With the experimental group, I had a total of 2 students meet the benchmark on the baseline assessment out of 28 students. At Christmas, I had a total of 11 students meet the benchmark. This was a 32% increase in the number of students meeting benchmark.

Conclusions/Implications –

My data shows that community building does have an impact on student achievement. I am going to complete this process again to see if the impact in more than what I suspect. I only determined the students meeting benchmark, but I want to look at overall growth next time. I may find that my data is not as accurate if I look at overall growth. Whether or not community building has an impact on student achievement aside, I felt more connected with the class as a whole and felt like a more invested and connected teacher with the experimental group than I did with the control group.