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Inquiry 2006

"*I want students to write with passion and ease. I want them to be motivated, confident writers who see writing as an everyday, useful tool.*"

Routman

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"I want students to write with passion and ease. I want them to be motivated, confident writers who see writing as an everyday, useful tool." (Routman, 1)

Inquiry Abstract

What are the effects of incorporating the beliefs and practices of noted educator Lucy Calkins on the writing performance of first-grade students? Students in elementary schools are expected to write a significant amount daily. I wanted to explore how I could lay a foundation in first grade, based on Lucy Calkins' theories that would positively affect how students write and how they view themselves as writers. This was my inquiry. I stepped into the unknown with trepidation but also with anticipation and excitement. What would I learn in this process? More important, how would my students change as writers?

Description of Teaching Context

My first grade classroom consists of eleven females and eight males. I have a culturally diverse class including eight Caucasian students, one African-Caribbean student, four African-American students, four Asian students, one Hispanic student, and one Middle Eastern student. The classroom population is made up of at least three world religions. Six students speak a second language at home. There are three English as a Second Language students (ESL); three students who have been presented to an Instructional Support Team (IST); five students with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), one who has multiple handicaps, one who receives emotional support, and three students who receive speech-language support. I have three students who live with a single parent and two students (that we are aware of) who have experienced a significant trauma within their lifetime. The classroom consists of a variety of socioeconomic groups; they range from upper middle-class families to families receiving public assistance. Our school's population is transient: fourteen of the students have moved at least once in their lifetime, and eight of the students have attended other elementary schools.

We have a wide range of academic achievement within our student population. There are three students who attend enrichment classes twice weekly. We have four language arts groups within the classroom. The highest achieving group has five students (four girls and one boy), the second highest has four students (two girls and two boys), the next level includes four students (two girls and two boys), and the lowest achievement level contains four students (two girls and two boys). Two students (one girl and one boy) are not included in our language arts groups because they receive services (IEP and ESL) from support teachers during this time. This classroom is typical for our school.

Inquiry Plan Description

My goal was to teach writing twice a week for 45-60 minutes. I was not able to reach this goal because of snow days, in-services, and unit related activities. Over the course of thirteen weeks I was able to teach seventeen lessons. Of these lessons, eleven were directly from the Calkins books, which the State College Area School District (SCASD) uses in the primary grades, and six lessons were non-Calkins, although aspects of Calkins' philosophies were included to varying degrees in each of the lessons.

Writer's Workshop:

Each 45-60 minute lesson included a 10-20 minute mini-lesson on the carpet, where I modeled the writing process for my students. I would then give them an opportunity to think of an idea before they returned to their seats. Once they returned to their desks, they had 25-35 minutes to write. I made an effort to conference with a number of students during each Writer's Workshop. During eight of the lessons, I was able to have formal conferencing time with students. Formal conferencing included listening to each student read his or her writing, finding a positive comment about the work, and identifying one focus area. I was also able to include informal conferences, which were less structured, such as a student raising a hand with a question. I would assist the student in answering the question then move on to the next student's question. During these times I dealt mostly with spelling words and helping students formulate an idea. At the end of a few of the writing lessons, we had Author's Chair. Students would gather on the carpet and take turns sharing what they had written. Near the end of my inquiry project, the students picked one of their stories and together we edited, word processed, and published the story for the classroom book bin and parent teacher conferences.

Rationale, Main Question, *Wonderings*, and Literature

Main Question / Wondering: What are the effects of incorporating the beliefs and practices of noted educator Lucy Calkins on the writing performance of first-grade students?

As a mother of two elementary school students, I have watched my children write more and more each year. They have struggled with ideas and convention. I have watched as they are expected to write more across all areas of the curriculum. I have struggled with how to encourage my sons to write and to enjoy writing.

When I returned to graduate school a few years ago, I was uncomfortable with and insecure with my own writing. As a returning adult, I believed that I could read the assigned literature, actively participate in class discussion, and with a fair amount of confidence, present information orally to small and large groups.   It was the written component of graduate school that made me doubt my abilities as a student. I have always felt unsure of my ability to express myself clearly through the written word.

Observing my children as they learned to compose and become writers and my own insecurities as a writer greatly influenced my interest in the writing process that was discussed in Language and Literacy Education (LLED) classes at the Pennsylvania State University. The instructor, who taught my LLED classes, stressed the importance of teaching students to see themselves as authors. The literature we read by Regie Routman and Ruth Culham, and the philosophies of Cambourne, explained the importance of providing an environment where students are encouraged to write through immersion in the process. The instructor spent little time on grammar and sentence structure and instead encouraged us to explore ideas, revision, sharing, and editing as Ruth Calham did in the 6+1 Traits of Writing. The instructor stressed that there was more to writing than just convention.

This classroom experience opened my mind to the written word, and I began to see myself as a writer. It also made me reflect on *why I was such an anxious writer*. I realized that in the past, every time I had written, the only comments I ever received, other than a grade, were negative. My feelings were echoed in Routman when she wrote, "Teaching writing is a serious problem in many schools. We are overfocused on procedures, process, genres, and testing and underfocused on communicating, inquiring, and exploring language" (5). When the instructor marked our papers, she put more positive comments than negative on the paper. She acknowledged where my grammar and spelling had fallen short, but this time I did not take it personally. This was because there were other comments on the paper. She praised me for my ideas, my word choice, and my organization. I began to feel that I could be a writer. It made me wonder *how my own children viewed writing. I wondered if today's students were being rewarded for the positive things they were doing in their writing. How was the writing process taught in schools? What did it look like in a classroom? Were the 6+1 Traits considered?*

With a new interest in the writing process and how it could be taught in a classroom, I began exploring some of the literature. Over the summer, before I began my student teaching internship, I read more of Regie Routman's writing and through these readings learned about the work of Lucy Calkins. Both of these educators stress modeling in front of students, providing daily writing opportunities for students, and creating an environment where students feel like writers.

In the first few weeks of my internship year, I spoke with my mentor about my interest in writing in first grade. He informed me that he would appreciate my taking the lead on writing, because it was an area he was not as comfortable teaching to young students. He has taught first-grade for only two years. He informed me that the district used Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Year Long Curriculum, by Lucy Calkins. During my mid-term conference with my mentor and supervisor, a Professional Development Associate (PDA), we discussed my interest in children's writing and my future inquiry project. I had many wonderings:
- *How does young students' writing develop?*

- *How does a teacher work with struggling writers? Competent writers?*
- *How do students with no sound-syllable relationship write?*
- *How do teachers foster a love of writing in their students?*

Following the mid-term fall conference, my PDA encouraged me to read through the Calkins program over winter break.

With the wonderings from my conference, I read literature written by a number of significant writers in the field of early student writing: Donald H. Graves, Regie Routman, Lucy Calkins, and Ruth Culham. First, all of these educators stress the importance of the writing process or the steps a writer takes when he or she is writing (Routman, 15; Graves, 45; Calkins & Mermelstein, 1). This includes choosing or thinking of an idea, writing about the idea, rereading, adding details, editing, and perhaps publishing. These educators believe that students do not see the writing process occur in their daily lives, so it is important that teachers model the process for the students. Second, they believe that students should feel like writers (Calkins, 3). All attempts made by the student need to be acknowledged and praised, for as Graves explains, "When we notice and approve what is in students' text, we demonstrate what they need to appreciate in their own writing" (*xiii)*. Praising students' work efforts is a way for teachers to scaffold students in their writing. By consistently identifying what the student is doing well, the teacher is strengthening the student's understanding of the writing process and showing the student that what he or she writes has value. The third common thread in the literature is that students should write about what they know. Graves explains that through practice and modeling, students can learn to pick their own topics on things that they know (21). Through experience, the student's voice will speak through the topics that they choose. As I encountered these three themes over and over again in the literature, I reflected on my own experiences as a student learning to write. This writing process was not stressed in my education. *I wondered how might I be able to teach this way given that my experience was so different. How would I encourage my students to feel like writers if I do not feel like a writer myself?* The idea of writing in front of the students made me nervous.

Culham outlines the history of Writer's Workshop and its evolution over the last thirty-five years (43). She states that in the early 1960's the National Council of Teachers of English commissioned a study to better understand how writing was taught. At that time there was little information on how to teach writing, "grammar, conventions and modes of writing were stressed" (43). Few opportunities existed to learn about "a multiple-step approach that included prewriting, revising, and editing." (43) The ideas of modeling the steps of writing and scaffolding with the students to be successful were described in academic journals. Unfortunately, there was no literature explaining how this was to be implemented in practice, so a majority of teachers continued to teach writing through convention and prompts. During the 1970's and 1980's, the writing process was stressed in research as being the best way to teach writing to students. In the 1980's, Graves and Calkins were pioneers in describing for teachers how the writing process could be incorporated into a typical classroom.

The State College Area School District (SCASD) implemented the Calkins program two years ago. As a novice teacher, I was swayed by the literature that stated how beneficial it was to new writers. I believed that it could be highly effective. Reading about a theory or method is completely different from putting it into action. *I had many wonderings and some doubts about how successful this program would be in my class. I also realized that with our limited time schedule, I would not be able to fit the program into our everyday schedule as Calkins and many others recommend (Routman, Graves). I also worried that because we were starting the program in January, I needed to determine what would be the most important concepts to teach and how to build on what the students had learned so far in the year. How, as a beginning teacher, would I make those decisions? How could I be true to the Calkins philosophies in a real learning environment?*

My inquiry stemmed from a belief in the Calkins philosophy and my wonderings and concerns about how I was going to be able to implement it into a real classroom and how it would affect my students' writing.

Data Collection

I collected data from a number of sources, including student work, PDA observations, student surveys and comments, my weekly reflection journals, and questions and notes from meeting with a Curriculum Support Teacher, a first grade teacher, and an ESL teacher. The data was collected over a thirteen-week period, beginning on January 5, 2006 and ending March 30, 2006. During this period, I tried to have Writer's Workshop twice a week for 45-60 minutes. Due to snow days, in-service days, and spring break, it was not possible to adhere to this schedule.

Prior to January, my first grade students had only written independently a few times. Most of the writing they did consisted of worksheets and copying. They had written an assessment for the district in September and November. To start off the program, I gave the students a writing assignment at the beginning of January. The goal was to establish a baseline that identified where the students were with their writing at the start of my inquiry.

For the baseline, I specifically did not follow the Calkins method. I did not model writing or conference with them during their writing. I wrote words on the board for them, so they would know how to spell specific words. I provided them with a prompt: "What I would like to happen in 2006". I did this after we had read a Time for Kids, which discussed the previous year's events. I then had them discuss things that had occurred in their lives throughout 2005.

The Calkins program introduces a single topic every lesson. I began each lesson with a mini-lesson in which I introduced the idea that was to be focused on that day. After the mini-lesson, I would model the specific steps involved in the writing process. I began with three steps and over a number of weeks worked up to five steps. These steps included thinking of an idea, drawing pictures, adding words, rereading, and adding details and missing words. The process stayed the same whether we were doing a

Calkins lesson or a non-Calkins lesson. The only exception was the district writing assessment.

Specific Types of Data

Writing Samples:

I have an average of ten writing samples per student, including a pre-Calkins assessment, a pre-district assessment, and a district assessment. I collected writing samples from seventeen students.

Conference Sheets:

I used a standard sheet to record the conferencing information (Appendix 1). It consisted of a three by six array of squares. Each square had a student's name in the top left corner. I collected eight formal conferencing sheets. When I conferenced with a student, I wrote a few comments in the student's box. The notes included comments on the student's drawings, ideas, attitudes towards the assignment, attitudes towards writing, on task behaviors, any suggestions that I made to the student about his or her writing, and ideas for future lessons. I did not conference with every student during Writer's Workshop. I kept track of those students that I did not meet with and conferenced with them during the next Writer's Workshop.

Reflection Journal:

Over the thirteen-week period, I reflected in my weekly journal nine times about Writer's Workshop. The journal reflections included what I taught, how I believed it went, whether it was a Calkins or a modified lesson, how the students responded, what I would do differently, the next steps I planned to take, and wonderings. The wonderings included thoughts about my students, the Calkins program, and my teaching. My PDA commented on my weekly journals.

Formal Observations:

At the end of January and the end of March, my PDA formally observed my Writer's Workshop lesson and wrote observation notes about my lesson. Included in these observations are comments on my teaching steps and the students' responses to writing.

Mentor Notes:

In March, my mentor wrote comments and observations about the students' attitudes and achievements in writing since January. He has also made individual comments regarding seven of our students: four of our lower achieving students, two mid-range achievers, and one high achieving student. I asked that he make notes on students of varying academic achievement. There are more comments regarding the lower language arts group because they were originally the reluctant writers in Writer's Workshop.

Student Surveys:

At the beginning of the inquiry project, I conducted a student survey. I asked the students questions about why they were learning to write, what kind of writing they would like to do, whom were they writing for, and if they saw anyone at home writing. At the end of March, I interviewed the students again, and I asked them what their favorite subject in school was, how they felt about writing, what their favorite part about writing was, what their least favorite part was, and what their favorite thing to write about was.

Discussion with Colleagues:

During the inquiry, I conferred with people outside of my classroom. I began by consulting with the ESL teacher. She made suggestions on how to help the ESL student who is a reluctant writer. Throughout the inquiry, I consulted with a first-grade teacher in my division. She has used Calkins and is involved with the district's writing assessment committee. I met with a Curriculum Support Teacher on March 22, 2006 to ask him how I should proceed with the Calkins program now that I had finished the first book in the series. I also asked his advice on incorporating other ideas into the program,

such as fictional writing and how to teach beginning, middle, and end in a story. I asked
his professional opinion on how I had dealt with my reluctant sound spellers.

Comments and Quotes;

The final piece of data was personal notes I took. The notes contained statements with
dates from the paraprofessional in the room and from the students regarding their writing.

Data Analysis

To evaluate the students' samples, I used "The Primary Writing Traits Scoring Guide" (Culham, 36) found in 6+1 Traits of Writing; The Complete Guide for the Primary Grades. I used the five levels that are outlined, and took into consideration first grade standards (Appendix 2). I graded all the students' papers against the rubric. With 6+1 Traits, the rubric includes ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and convention. The grades ranged from 0.5 to 5. If a student had no detail in the picture with no words or the words were scribble writing and there was no picture, the paper received a "0.5". If the author tried paragraphs, used adjectives, added extra detail, made a good attempt at convention, and had a beginning, middle and an end, the paper received a 5. Even with a rubric, writing is subjective. I tried to be unbiased when grading. The students wrote three-four papers per month. I compared the students' average scores from each month to see if I could see a pattern: had the quality of writing improved, not changed, or declined? (Appendix 3) From the results, I wanted to see if there was any correlation between students' writing scores and their language arts group. I compared student writing between Calkins and non-Calkins lessons to see how the students responded to the different lessons.

I also looked at the three assessments that the students had written during first grade. I wanted to see if the assessment scores were affected positively or negatively during my implementation of the Calkins program.

I looked at my conference notes to see the types of comments that appeared regularly, which ones had decreased over time, and which ones increased. I looked at the comments I was writing about individual students. Did the comments change over time or did they stay the same? Did suggestions later become compliments? I looked to see which language arts group my reluctant writers were in. I also looked to see how my conference notes changed after my meeting with the Curriculum Support Teacher. Prior to the meeting, I was worried about time issues. He reminded me to keep the conferences brief and to keep to one compliment and one suggestion. After our meeting, I read

through my observations to see if I conferenced with more students during Writer's Workshop and did I giving clearer compliments and suggestions?

I reread my reflection notes and looked for wonderings, claims, and evidence. I highlighted the three different items and marked them with a W, C, or E. I then reviewed the wonderings and placed them in a corresponding section. I then evaluated the evidence that I had highlighted. I looked to see if there was evidence of the program's impact on students' writing or attitudes. I looked to see which lessons worked well and if there appeared to be a reason why one lesson worked better than another, specifically if how I presented or modeled the writing process had an effect. I looked to see what types of steps I took to help my reluctant writers and my lower achieving students. I tried to determine if there was anything specific which had made them take more risks with their writing.

The next pieces of data I analyzed were the comments from my PDA. I looked for the difference between the January and March comments. I wanted to see if my PDA commented on the students' attitude or quality of writing. I wanted to see if she noticed a difference with my reluctant writers. I reviewed her comments on how I taught the writing process.

When I analyzed my mentor's comments, I looked to see what he had observed with the class as a whole in their attitude towards writing and their ability to write. I looked at his opinions about the process I used to teach. Did he believe it had an effect on the students' writing ability or their attitude towards writing? I also noted his opinion about our reluctant writers. Did he think they were writing more or did it have no effect?

I reviewed my notes from the interview with the curriculum support teacher. While reflecting on his answers, my conferencing notes, and my reflection papers, I looked to see if his comments and suggestions had influenced me as a teacher, I looked to see if they helped how I conferenced or interacted with the students.

With the student surveys, I was looking to see if any of the students experienced the writing process at home, and if they did, were they more successful writers? I examined the surveys to see if the students who like writing were doing well or if they improved? I also wanted to determine if the students who did not improve were those who did not like writing initially?

The final piece of data I looked at was the personal observations I had made. They consisted of quotes from the students over the thirteen weeks. Did any of their quotes support or dispute the other data I had collected? Did the paraprofessional's quotes support or dispute my findings?

Claims and Evidence

1. **Students are more successful writers when the writing process is modeled through slow sequential steps.**

   - Evidence 1: Reflection journal
     - As I read through my reflection journal I found that the lessons that were the most successful were the Calkins lessons. I believe this is because the Calkins program models the writing process in a developmentally appropriate way. Calkins begins with three steps: think of the idea, draw the idea, and write the idea. After the first lesson, one new step is added at a time. For example, after Calkins first lesson she has the students add more detail to their pictures and then in the following lesson, the students add more details to their words. I noticed in my reflections that lessons I was the most frustrated with were the ones in which I gave the students too many steps. The students then became confused and were unable to follow the instructions (Appendix 4).

   - Evidence 2: Student writing scores
     - When I compared the students' writings over a three-month period, I noticed an improvement in fourteen out of the seventeen students (Appendix 3). I graded approximately ten papers per student, an average of three papers per month per student. I took the student's average score in January and compared it with his or her average score in March. Fourteen students improved. Of these fourteen students, nine improved by over one whole point. One student's mark stayed the same and two students' marks fell by one point. I believe that the students who did improve did so because they were shown the writing process and therefore were more successful with writing.

   - Evidence 3: Student six's change in attitude towards writing
     - One of my students, student six, was a reluctant writer who avoided writing. In my conferencing notes, I noted that student six's attitude

changed over time as he experienced the writing process (Appendix 5). In January, student six was "anxious about writing" and "reluctant." In February, I wrote that student six was "very upset about writing." In March, I wrote "writing more, not resisting as much" and "excited to share."

- o The student's work shows how he began to see himself as an author. In January, he copied the ideas and words from the flip chart at the front. In February, he was still nervous and was unable to get much on paper. In March, he began to take more risks. In his writing, he shared what he was doing with his friends and family. During his free time in March, he would add more words to this story. (Appendix 6)

- o In my mentor's notes from March, he notes that student six was a reluctant writer in January (Appendix 7). My mentor stated student six is, "<u>Extremely</u> deficient in language arts skills – Reading, writing, and spelling. Had 'avoidance' behaviors when asked to write anything. Now [student six] asks to write and focuses on the writing process …[this program] has been instrumental in inspiring [student six] to want to write."

- o In my journal reflection, I stated student six was more successful in following directions on the days I added a single step to the process. (Appendix 4 and 8)

- Evidence 4: Mentor's comments
  - o My mentor's notes from March indicate that students have become more comfortable and more successful with writing through the lessons I have taught (Appendix 7). The comments he wrote state that students have been writing more and asking to write more. He noticed a difference, especially with the students who are below the language arts benchmark.

- Evidence 5: PDA comments
  - o My PDA watched a lesson in March and noted the way I modeled the writing process steps. Afterwards, my PDA spoke with student twelve

about the writing process. The student described the writing process clearly to my PDA. The PDA noted that the student spoke about the process clearly and confidently: "She was self assured and pleased!" (Appendix 9)

2. **As a teacher, I can change the Calkins lessons and still experience success when I structure the lessons around the writing process.**

- Evidence 1: Reflection journal
  - o In my sixth journal, where I reflected on the lesson: "*Winning the Gold Medal*". In the lesson, I varied from Calkins but stressed the familiar writing process. I only added one new variable: fictional writing. I modeled the process: I thought of an idea, drew a picture, and wrote out my idea. With this single variable the students experienced success. (Appendix 10)
- Evidence 2: Reflection journal
  - o In my fourth journal, I reflected on the number of steps that I gave my students and their inability to process them successfully. (Appendix 4) Through the reflection, I realized that I had a given a number of unfamiliar steps. The students were told to reread all of their work, find one piece to edit, and then edit the piece. The students became overwhelmed and were not successful. This is evident in my reflection when I noted the students' confusion.
- Evidence 3: Reflection Journal
  - o In my ninth reflection, I wrote about my meeting with the Curriculum Support teacher. In the meeting I had asked him his opinion on how I had handled the ESL student and the reluctant writer. In my reflection I wrote, "He validated my teaching by telling me that it [was] more important to read my students than follow the directions word-by-word." (Appendix 8)

3. **I need to consider individual students' needs and learning styles when using a teaching program like Calkins and adjust the program so that it benefits each student.**

- Evidence 1 – English as a Second language (ESL) student (reflection journal, students' work, conference notes)

  o In my lessons, I was not able to stay true to the Calkins sound spelling philosophy. I had a few students who were not willing to write or draw if they had to sound spell. In my reflections, I describe how one ESL student cried and shut down when I told him that he needed to sound spell. I spoke with the ESL teacher in our building, and we "devised a separate plan for this child." (Appendix 11) We decided there were two reasons why it was unfair to expect him to sound spell. First, as an ESL student, he did not have the letter-sound connection, and it was unfair to expect him to sound spell. Secondly, we discussed cultural expectations, specifically how his family expected him to write perfectly. This external pressure stopped him from writing. Since my main goal was to create a positive writing environment, I chose to create a plan for this child. The ESL teacher and I decided that he would learn the steps of the writing process, but when he asked for the correct spelling of a word, an adult in the room would provide it for him. During the first month, the student dictated his story to an adult. In the second month, he began writing a few words independently. In my conference notes, I stated that he was drawing details in his pictures. In March, I wrote: "[He] took a long time to start. Now [he] has a lot [written on his paper]." (Appendix 5)

  o In March, the student became more independent. My mentor provided the student with a "word list". It consisted of a number of commonly used words listed alphabetically. Under each letter of the alphabet there were blank spaces where students could add words that they used. My ESL student depended on this list regularly. He would ask an adult in the room for the correct spelling of certain words that he

knew he would need for his story. He would add them to his word list then get down to work. This word list was not part of the Calkins program but it allowed him, and many other students to be successful.

  o At the end of March, I consulted with one of the first grade teachers in my division. I expressed my frustrations with the number of times I had to stop during a conference with one student to spell a word for another student during Writer's Workshop. She suggested a method that worked with her students that allowed more independence. She had told her students that when they were stuck on a word they should write as many of the sounds they knew and then draw a line. When they would conference with me later, I could then give them the correct spelling. During the next Writer's Workshop, when my ESL student approached me about a word, I decided to try this method with him. He took the suggestion well, and he used it in his writing. (Appendix 12). He also taught it to another student who sits at his set. This would not have been something he would have been open to earlier. I believe by scaffolding him throughout the process at his comfort level, he became more confident and was more willing to take risks.

- Evidence 2- Student with emotional support (reflection journal, conferencing notes, student's work)

  o In my conference notes I stated that my student who receives emotional support seldom followed the directions that were given (Appendix 5). When comparing my lesson plans to his writing samples, there were no examples where he followed the writing topic for that day. He would usually have a small element of the assignment in his writing. In his writing samples, he did follow the writing process; he drew a picture and then wrote about the picture. I think that he benefited from my flexibility with the Calkins program. For example, he usually wrote fiction, although the Calkins program asked writers to write about real life stories. His writing scores have not

changed over the three months, but I am pleased that he has not become frustrated and quit. He was always the first to raise his hand to share. I believe that he benefited because he would proudly show his work during Author's Chair, and he was willing to take risks with his ideas and his vocabulary.

- Evidence 3 – Lesson plans
  - In the beginning, I felt that I needed to follow the lessons in <u>Launching the Writing Workshop</u> chronologically. As I progressed through the inquiry project, I chose to skip over some of Calkins lessons. I did this because I believed they were too simple for my students. I spoke with the curriculum support teacher, and he indicated that selecting lessons that met the needs of my students was appropriate.

4. **Student independence in writing needs to be nurtured over time through a variety of avenues.**

- Evidence 1 – Conference notes
  - In January 30, I noted that five of the students were "scared to take risks, hesitant to write, [and] needed teacher assistance" when writing (Appendix 5). I called these students my "reluctant writers". I tried a number of techniques through my inquiry project to help these students take more risks in their writing. The techniques were mentioned in my journals and lesson plans; they included: encouraging more details in their drawing, having adults spell words for them, a word list containing frequently spelled words, and students dictating the story to an adult which the student then rewrote. In my conference notes, I noted how my reluctant writers progressed. Some of the comments were:
    - He "added" to his written work.
    - He was "excited to share" what he had written.
    - He had a "good opening sentence"
    - She said "can I do another because I love writing"
    - He "shared [his] story. [It was] good. [He] started a new one."

- o He tried "sound spelling"
- o She is showing an "excitement about learning"
  - Evidence 2 – Student work
    - o Through the Writer's Workshop lessons and conferencing, the students were encouraged to write through various avenues. At the end of my inquiry project, I graded the students' writings based on six traits: ideas, word choice, convention, sentence fluency, voice, and organization. Twelve out of the seventeen students' writings improved between January and March (Appendix 3).
  - Evidence 3 – Mentor's notes
    - o My mentor comments in March: "students who would/could not initiate ideas for writing began [through Writer's Workshop] to formulate their ideas into more meaningful sentences and paragraphs." (Appendix 7)

5. **Writer's Workshop helped my students and me to learn more about one another and to develop stronger personal connections.**
   - Evidence 1 – What the students have learned about me
     - o In my writing, I have discussed my interest in skiing and biking. Through the modeling of my stories, the students have learned about my family and me. I believe that this makes them feel that they can be more open with me. They ask questions about my children and my life. I believe that this shows we have created a stronger connection.
   - Evidence 2 – Student writing
     - o The students have written about many personal issues. I feel that I understand the students more as a person. Ideas that they have shared with me include:
       - One girl described her feelings about her pending move across the country.

- A girl shared her stories about a vacation she took with her parents.
- A number of students discussed the relationships they have with their siblings.
- One girl expressed how sad she was that she saw so little of her father due to the dissertation he had to write.
- One boy, whose family we have little contact with, wrote about the activities he does with his mother.

- Evidence 3 – Mentor's notes
  - My mentor states in March: "Students [have] become more willing to discuss ideas including information about themselves, their families, [and] interests." (Appendix 7)

Conclusion and New Wonderings

The child approaches writing with eagerness and confidence, conveying the impression that he finds writing doable and worth doing. He may not write with conventional spelling or even with alphabet letters, but he does write with confidence and enthusiasm. He shares his writing with confidence and expects others to study his marks with interest in their content.

"Attitude", Assessment Rubric for <u>Launching the Writing Workshop</u>

Calkins and Mermelstein outline their expectations for the student-writer in the above quoted rubric. Their goals, which I set for my students, were a leading force behind my inquiry. Did I create an environment where students felt more confident and excited about writing? I believe that I began the journey by introducing the students to the writing process. I am excited about what I have accomplished and where this can lead me in this classroom and in future classrooms.

My inquiry project focused on how students' writing and attitudes were affected when they were introduced to the writing process. There are many steps that I was unable to expand on because of the limited time of this inquiry. The literature that I reviewed discussed the value of conferencing, presentation, and editing. Many of my future wonderings deal with how I can provide a fuller, richer Writer's Workshop through the incorporation of these elements. My new wonderings are:

 ➢ *How can I improve my conferencing techniques?*
 ➢ *How can I introduce peer sharing and peer editing?*
 ➢ *How can I introduce Ruth Culham's "6+1 Traits" to my students? How can I integrate it into the Calkins program most effectively? Can the students use Culham's rubric when they are independently editing or peer editing?*
 ➢ *What activities can I incorporate into Language Arts that would benefit or help the students in Writer's Workshop?*
 ➢ *How can I incorporate Author's Chair more frequently into Writer's Workshop?*

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Appendixes

1. Example of Conference Sheet (1 page)

2. "The Primary Writing Traits Scoring Guide" from *6+1 Traits of Writing : the Complete Guide for the Primary Grades*, by Culham (1 page)

3. Students' average marks and their individual marks from January, February, and March. (4 pages)

4. Weekly *Reflection 4*, written February 5, 2006. (3 pages)

5. Formal conference notes from January 26 – March 30. (9 pages)

6. Student 6's work. (4 pages)

7. Mentor's Notes and Comments (3 pages)

8. Weekly *Reflection 9*, written March 24, 2006. (5 pages)

9. PDA Observation Notes (2 pages)

10. Weekly *Reflection 6*, written February 14, 2006. (2 pages)

11. Weekly *Reflection 1*, written January 10, 2006. (2 pages)

12. Student 2's work from February 2 and March 28. (4 pages)