

Journal Writing in a Kindergarten Classroom: Promoting Literacy at an Early Age

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Abstract: How does the use of journals in a kindergarten classroom promote the development of students' reading and writing abilities? I was intrigued by the immediate introduction of journals in my kindergarten classroom. My students began drawing pictures in their journals in September. These pictures developed into much more intricate illustrations, then words, and finally sentences! The growth in my kindergartners' reading and writing abilities throughout the year has been amazing. My inquiry project attempted to understand the contribution of journal writing to this remarkable growth.

Classroom Profile

During the 2005 – 2006 school year I have been working as an intern in Mrs. Debbie Patrick's kindergarten classroom at Park Forest Elementary. In a kindergarten setting, it is not unusual to have many different personalities and many different levels of students entering the school environment. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of my students have been to preschool but the remaining students have not. I have seen a large difference between some of these students, who have not been to preschool, and those students who have, however the family situation also needs to be taken into account. One of my students has very involved parents and a mother who attempted to teach her daughter the knowledge that a child would learn in preschool. This student has done very well and is one of the higher-level students. Other students who do not appear to have parents who are very involved in their schooling are significantly behind the other students in the class.

The majority of my students are from middle to high income households, while about a third is from low income households. In reference to my students' family situations, about half have divorced or single parents while the other half come from traditional family situations. My class is not very culturally diverse. It consists of two African American students, one Chinese student, and 20 Caucasian students. I would characterize Park Forest Elementary as a suburban school.

In regards to academic ability, there is one group of students significantly above grade level. Two of these students can read fluently, while others are making great strides in their ability to read. These students are intrinsically motivated to learn. They have a strong desire to read and to learn in general. These students also have an advanced mathematical understanding. They are able to count in meaningful ways and

have also showed an in depth understanding of addition and subtraction. There is another group of students on the other end of the spectrum who are below level. These students do not know all of their letters and letter sounds yet. They still have difficulty with some motor skills such as coloring, cutting, and tracing. Many of these students are able to count, however, they don't really understand what numbers mean and represent when they are counting. This group contains three students. The remaining students are either academically at the average kindergarten level or are slightly advanced. They can count with meaning, they are beginning to add and subtract meaningfully, and they know their letters and letter sounds. They are also showing the ability to use their knowledge of letters and letter sounds to begin reading and writing words.

Rationale

I was very intrigued when my mentor introduced journals to our kindergarten class very early in the year. All of the students began drawing pictures when they first began to work in their journals. The majority of students have shown a great deal of improvement in their illustrations, making them much more detailed and clear. During the first half of the year, the students' journals consisted of blank pages; they did not contain specified lines for writing. After we came back from Christmas break the students received new journals containing specified areas for drawing and writing to encourage their beginning attempts with the written word. The students were still at the beginning steps of writing after working with these journals for more than a month. Progress was not made as quickly as it was made with their illustrations. I was not surprised by this fact; however I was surprised by the strong disparity between some of my extremely high level readers and their writing abilities. One student entered the year

reading at a level that was most likely more advanced than many first graders; however his writing abilities mirrored those of the majority of students at a pre-emergent reading level. I was aware that reading and writing were very different processes; however, I associated these processes with each other and assumed that a student's reading ability would be correlated with their writing ability. The purpose of my inquiry project was to understand the processes involved in bridging the gap between reading and writing that existed within various students in my class and to introduce an appropriate writer's workshop to my kindergartners' use of journals to foster the development of their pre-emergent writing abilities.

Throughout the year, writing has been implemented into the classroom in various ways. We began each day with the morning letter and news and announcements. The students took turns filling in words and/or letters that were missing from the letter, which remained the same each day. This was implemented into our classroom in December of this year and the students mainly relied on their sight recognition of the words to fill in the blanks. They have recently transitioned into using sound spelling more readily. "News and Announcements" has been a daily practice that was introduced into our classroom in late January. I chose two students each morning to write down 3 to 4 pieces of information that they wished to share with the class. Since September, we have also had a handwriting center each morning during our literacy center rotation. This center mainly focused on the actual handwriting of the students. In the afternoons following lunch we had journal time.

The above were all daily tools used to integrate writing into my classroom. Other writing lessons included the students writing stories, class books, usually using rhyme

chunks, and class journals such as “Room 120’s favorite places,” where students were given a prompt such as “My favorite place is…” and they were to fill in this prompt and draw an illustration.

My students also were exposed to reading in many ways each day as well. Each morning we read the morning letter together. On some occasions, the students were given index cards containing the vocabulary from the morning letter. They then worked with each other to put the morning letter in the correct sequence. At least 2 mornings per week, students met with a guided reading group. Read alouds, especially those using big books were another means of exposing the children to the reading process. The students were also encouraged to “book look” during their free time. During this time they chose a book from the classroom library or their assigned book boxes, with books grouped according to their level, and read, or picture walked through the book.

I have seen the student’s literacy skills improve throughout all of the aspects of my kindergarten classroom. Throughout the year, literacy has been an imperative part of the majority of the day; the use of journals was only one aspect of the literacy program we created, however, I feel as though it has been one of the essential factors in bridging and developing the processes of reading and writing.

My inquiry project has affected my teaching this year in helping me to analyze the process of journal writing and the effect that it has on my students’ writing abilities. Through my inquiry project, I was embarking on a journey, searching for a successful and effective means of introducing writing to beginning writers and fostering literacy in my classroom.

Inquiry vs. Improvement Project

My inquiry project began with a wondering concerning literacy growth in my classroom. I was intrigued by my students' use of journals; this was something I had never seen before. My advisor once replied to one of my journals commenting, "What is the purpose of journals when kids can't write?" Through my experiences in kindergarten, I have seen that students will read and write when they are ready. The point in time when this readiness occurs varies with each child; however the process usually begins in kindergarten.

I was astounded by my first hand experiences with the reading and writing processes that developed within my kindergartners. As a teacher, I served as a facilitator in this process. My role was to find ways to promote these literacy processes and motivate students to want to learn to read and write. I found that there were so many different ways to approach reading and writing at the primary level. Throughout my inquiry project, I was constantly trying new ways to implement the writing process effectively in my classroom to all of my students. As you can see from my inquiry plan, I would pose a wondering, for instance, *I wonder what will happen if I write responses and questions to my students in their journals. Will they be more likely to write responses back to me? I wonder what will happen if I meet with the students during morning centers. Will this give me more time to speak with each student and understand their journal entries?* I was embarking on a quest for the unknown throughout this endeavor. I wanted to know how journal writing would affect a student's writing development and how this was associated with his or her reading development. However, I was unsure of the amount of growth that would take place and how the growth of writing was associated with that of reading. I also feel that my inquiry project is not over at this point

in time. I have many new wonderings that have developed, and wonderings that I did not find answers to. This quest for the unknown is likely to continue throughout my entire teaching career. My experiences with this inquiry project have reaffirmed that inquiry is an ongoing process.

Literature and/or Experts

I accumulated a variety of research on writer's workshop. A great deal of this research supported journal writing as an effective means of introducing the writing process to beginning writers. Through my research I found many different ways to implement journals into a kindergarten writer's workshop.

Bea Johnson (1999), an expert on the Kindergarten and first grade writer's workshop, feels that "cute story starters" (p.74) will not result in successful young writers. Johnson states that, "The free-writing experience of journal writing is perhaps the most productive component in terms of language development and student interest in the early grades. When your students write in their journals *they write about what is important to them*" (p. 74). If a student is writing about something that is important to them, the writing process is much more likely to be meaningful.

Dr. James Levin, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education and Director of Advising for the Eberly College of Science at Penn State University and Dr. John Shanken-Kaye, a Pennsylvania licensed psychologist and Director of Associates for Counseling and Educational Services discuss the idea of intrinsic motivation. "Students who value activities which provide them with opportunities to develop new competencies, to satisfy a personal interest, or to meet personal goals, are said to be intrinsically motivated" (Levin & Shanken-Kaye, 2002, p.98). If students are

intrinsically motivated, motivation comes from within the student. A writer's workshop that gives students the opportunity to write about topics of their choice fosters intrinsic motivation.

Jim Henry (1999), a first grade teacher at Lomond Elementary School in the Shaker Heights School District also sees the importance of journal writing. Henry states that "Children need opportunities to write, just as they need chances to read, talk, problem solve, finger paint, or work with wood. Practice makes the doing better" (p. 9). Henry supports the widespread use of journals from kindergarten through twelfth grade. He feels that journals are easy to use and are a genuine means of expressing oneself. Henry feels that "...journal writing in the classroom can be the most joyous experience you can offer children" (p. 9).

TeachersFirst (2001), a website resource for classroom teachers, discusses the purpose of journaling at the kindergarten level:

"For Kindergarten students, whose skills will greatly vary, the goal is to move pre-emergent/emergent readers to the writing process by eliciting a story from a drawing, recording the student's words in dictation form on the drawing and encouraging the student to move from drawing to writing by guiding the student in the use of phonetics to sound out words. Ideally, students become enamored by the power of their words, and will strive for the independence of fluency"

(Para. 2).

This research discusses the connection between reading and writing, a large part of my inquiry wondering. My students will tell very elaborate stories about illustrations they

have made. The purpose of journal writing is to transfer these stories to the written word in a way that is effective at the kindergarten level.

Many sources find the journal writing process to be extremely effective in their classroom. Jim Henry, a veteran teacher of twenty years states that he has struggled to make journal writing a successful tool in his classroom. Through his years of experience and work with Regie Routman, a teacher with over thirty-five years of experience and author of *Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results While Simplifying Teaching*, Henry came to find "...that one of [his] greatest challenges [as an educator] is to engage and provide [his] students with meaningful experiences" (p. 11). Routman helped Henry to realize the key to his success with journal writing, to "... provide an environment in which students are making decisions [and] writing about topics that are of high interest to them. Through my research I have found that many teachers, such as Jim Henry have gone through an inquiry process with the use of journals in their classroom. I feel as though my interest in journals has led to an inquiry project that will be ongoing for much longer than these last few months of my student teaching experience. This will be an inquiry project that will continue throughout my many years of teaching to come.

Wonderings and Questions

My inquiry project focuses on two main wonderings:

- *How do journals help to bridge the gap between reading and writing in the kindergarten classroom?*
- *How can journals be used in a kindergarten writer's workshop to foster the growth of beginning writers?*

Within these main wonderings I also have several subquestions:

- *Does drawing a picture prior to writing aide in the writing process?*
- *Where is the connection between reading and writing?*
- *Is partner work beneficial when it comes to journal writing?*
- *Why is it sometimes difficult for students to recognize and distinguish between the various sounds in words?*
- *Are writing prompts beneficial or do they create a repetitive nature in journal entries?*
- *How can I create a concise, but effective writer's workshop*
- *How does a unit across the curriculum affect student journal entries? Will students write about topics in the particular unit, or continue to write about personal experiences that are unrelated?*

Inquiry Plan Description

I began the process of inquiry by doing research. I searched the Internet, read through various literature resources, and asked other teachers how they use journals in their classroom. Prior to the introduction of my inquiry project, we held a journal writing period for about twenty minutes each day after lunch. During this time, students had the opportunity to make journal entries of their choice. My mentor teacher and I circulated the room during this time observing, questioning, and discussing student journal entries. Following this ten to fifteen minute journal writing period, my mentor teacher or myself gathered the students on the carpet and shared three or four entries from that day. All of our students were always eager to share their entries, but we usually only shared three or four entries due to the sake of time.

Through my research, one of the most valuable ideas I gathered was writing back to students in their journals. I began to take the journals home every weekend and wrote a message to each student responding to his or her latest entry. The messages I wrote to my students served multiple purposes. Most importantly, they demonstrated to my students that I value their writing and what they have to share with me. My responses also served as a means of motivation and direction. I often asked students questions that would bring their attention to specific details I wanted them to add to their journal entry, or give them a new idea for a new journal entry. This was a very time consuming process, however, it was well worth my efforts. My students were extremely excited that I had written to them in their journals. There was just one problem however, at times my students had trouble reading the messages I wrote to them. During the designated journal time, I had trouble meeting with each student to help them read what I had written.

Through my discussions with other teachers and interns, I found that journal time or some other form of writer's workshop was included in their morning literacy centers. I thought that if I could lead a writing center each morning it would give me more time to work with small groups of students, making sure I was able to read what I had written to all of my students in their journals and work for a short period of time with them on their journal writing. At that time my classroom did not have a specific writing center in the morning. Our morning centers focused on handwriting, reading, phonics, and several other independent centers. The handwriting center was solely for the purpose of improving the students' conventional handwriting ability. It was not an opportunity for creative writing.

At this period in time, I was leading the phonics center each morning. After leading the students in this center for a number of weeks, I felt as though this could be transferred to an independent center. Each student had a phonics workbook that they worked on independently. The phonics center became independent or aided by a volunteering parent and I began to institute a journal writing center in which I would meet with small groups of students each morning.

During this small group journal time, I read any writing I had written in each student's journal and then gave the students a few minutes to begin a new journal writing entry, or pick up where they left off on a previous entry. I took notes on the various students in file folders that held their journals as I observed their work. I then took a few minutes to discuss the particular entry the students were working on. I encouraged or helped each student to label the pictures they were drawing, and sound out words they were attempting to include in their entries.

Although this time with small groups gave me a great deal of information, I found that it was not a long enough period for the students to complete an entire journal entry. If the students found that they had time to go back to their journal later, they often forgot what they were working on. Another obstacle to my inquiry plan was the new solar system unit we were about to begin. During this unit, the writing center focused on the students recording facts they had learned about the planets. In most cases they copied these facts from another source. This writing center was not means of creative writing in comparison to my previous journal writing center. I needed to make another change, but I wasn't sure what direction to move in next.

During this period of time where I met with students during morning centers, I also led a whole class, longer version of the writer's workshop at least once a week. This writer's workshop would include a teacher demonstration period lasting between five to ten minutes, an independent journal entry time lasting about fifteen minutes, and finally a five minute wrap up period where students would find a buddy and share their entry they made on that particular day. I modeled this sharing time after an idea on the TeachersFirst website. In the original idea, TAG, students were asked to "tell one thing [they] liked about the story, ask one question, and give one suggestion" (para. 8). My students were always eager to share their work, however, it takes up a great deal of time to share each journal and my students just could not sit for that long. Therefore, TAG seemed like an efficient way to have a productive sharing process.

I held a class journal-writing workshop prior to spring break. During the demonstration I shared with my students that over spring break I would be going on a cruise ship and I would also be seeing my family. These were things that I was very excited about. During the demonstration period, when I was drawing a picture for my journal entry, my students sat around a small white board that served as my new journal page for that particular day. As I was making my picture for my spring break entry, I drew myself and then two thought bubbles. Inside one thought bubble, I drew a large boat with many little people aboard. Inside the other thought bubble, I drew my family. During this period of time, my students excitedly called out aspects of my picture that I may have forgotten or details they wanted me to add. I drew my mom, dad, and brothers, talking through this process as I drew. After I drew all of the human members of my family and acted as if I was moving onto the next portion of my picture, my students

began to yell, “You forgot your dog Ramona!! You can’t forget Ramona!” They also questioned, “Which brother is Michael, which is Matthew? Can you write their names on top so we know who is who?”

Henry (1999) discusses that he has come to value a quiet classroom while he is doing the demonstration portion of his journal writing workshop. I however found that the student responses while I am doing my journal entry mirrored my responses to them when they were developing their entries. I enjoyed having my students involved in my demonstration. I felt as though their input was very valuable and helped me to assess their understanding of the various aspects of the journal writing process. After I was finished with my demonstration, the students moved back to their seats and began working in their own journals. Some of the student’s entries mirrored mine. They used my entry as a template. Others chose to write about other topics that were unrelated to the topic I had written about in the demonstration. I found that the demonstration was an important modeling tool; however, students were encouraged to write about a topic of their choice. I have found through this process that students will write about their interests regardless of the teacher’s demonstration. This introduction in the writer’s workshop is an effective means of helping to motivate students in the journal writing process.

I found that the writer’s workshop time allotted during literacy centers was not enough time for me to have a quick meeting with each student and for each student to finish a journal entry. Having solely a whole group journal session once a week would not give the students enough exposure the journal writing process. I began to brainstorm other ways I could make sure that the students had a chance to work on one journal entry

each day. I came to the conclusion that I would try to meet with students each morning between 8:30 and 8:55. Some students arrived at school very early and worked in their extra work folder or read on the carpet for this span of time until we had our specials at 8:55. I decided to open each student's journal to a new page each morning and sit the students in their literacy center groups. I thought that this would allow me to continue to work with students in an orderly fashion and meet with each student at least two times a week to discuss their journal entries with them.

I soon found after the institution of this strategy that the mornings were too hectic to have a productive meeting with each student at least twice a week. At this point in time it was early March. We would soon begin our Space Unit. I no longer could have journal writing be a morning literacy center and having time for journal writing in the morning was not very successful either. Therefore, I reinstated journal time after lunch. Students worked independently at their seats on their journals as I walked around questioning and attempting to motivate them. At least once a week I continued to do the whole group demonstrations and usually these demonstrations were related to the space unit. Our Space unit will end in two weeks. After the unit has ended I will begin to again lead the students in a journal writing center.

Data Collection

The data collection process began in September when my students made their first journal entry. My students' journals beginning in September and ending at the beginning of April are my main sources of data collection. While carrying out my inquiry plan, I was also continuously collecting and analyzing data. Each change I made in the way I carried out my inquiry plan was due to collection and analysis of data. I began my

official data collection by doing research to familiarize myself with data that other professionals and experts had collected. I then took action based on my research. After writing back to my students in their journals, I recorded my observations of their reactions. These reactions were very positive; therefore, I continued to write responses to my students' journal entries on a weekly basis. I then began to work with small groups during literacy centers. I was able to collect data by watching a small group of students as they worked on their journals. This was a short period of time where I met with each student and was able to make notes on their progress. Each time I attempted a new technique in the journal writing process, I would collect data on the effectiveness of this particular technique. For instance, I often would write under students' writing so that I could look back in their journals at a later period and remember what the focus of their entry was (Appendix G.1). Even though this aided in my records, student reactions were not always positive. They would often erase their writing and correct it so that it looked the same as mine (Appendix G.2). It was apparent that I was not validating their writing by writing the "correct" writing underneath. Therefore, I discontinued this technique in my data collection efforts. With some lower level students however, I found that labeling their pictures helped me to understand the organization of their thoughts as they drew them on paper, and also exposed these students to writing. *Neil, who is currently at the preconventional writing stage, was drawing a response to a book that was read in class, *Diary of a Worm*. Neil told me about each aspect of his picture and as he explained his picture, I labeled each part (Appendix G.3). I could then look back at the illustration as a whole and know that Neil was making a meaningful response to a piece of literature. He was not just scribbling randomly on his blank page. I also was constantly collecting data

based on student responses to the various techniques I was using to improve the journal writing process. One example is the implementation of writer's workshop as a morning literacy center. I felt as though my students and I were rushed during this period. There was not enough time in this 10 minute period to collect an abundant amount of data on each student. In order for the center to be highly affective, I needed to spend at least twenty minutes with my students.

Each observation I made served as an informal means of data collection and as a result of the collection of this data, I either continued to carry out a certain attempt, or altered my practices to attempt a more successful technique. I was constantly writing observations down on random pieces of scrap paper that were nearby.

While carrying out my inquiry plan, I was constantly moving during the majority of the day and I often did not have time to sit and formally write down in depth, each observation I made about my students. This was just not realistic in my classroom of twenty three very active kindergartners. In the beginning of April, I collected data based on the SCASD reading levels to find the levels of 7 students who were a representative sample of the entire class. As I stated above, I also compiled all of the journal entries of these seven students since September. The reading and writing levels of these students were the main collected data that was analyzed following the completion of my inquiry plan.

Data Analysis

The majority of my data analysis process consisted of a careful study of my students' journals. I chose a sample of students who I felt were representative of the ability levels of the entire class. This sample included seven students, Sam and Evan,

high ability students, Hillary, an advanced student who is easily distracted, Neil, a low level student, Jeff and Anthony, low to average students, and Melissa, a student who is above average and very conscientious. I gathered a sample journal for each of these students that included work from the beginning of the year, the middle of the year, and finally the end of the year. I then charted the developmental level of each student based on the skills that were evident in September, February, and April (Appendix A.1). I did not formally assess the students' reading levels in the beginning of the year; however I did assess their levels as of April and organized this information into a chart. I developed three charts that included the characteristics of each developmental writing level according to the State College Area School District's (SCASD) *Language Arts Continuum (2003)*. The first chart included the preconventional writing level, the level that a student usually enters kindergarten with. A preconventional student "uses scribble writing or sometimes writes random letters, relies primarily on pictures to convey meaning, tells about his or her own writing and illustrations, copies names and words, and writes his or her own name"(SCASD, 2003).

The second chart included the emergent writing level. At the conclusion of the kindergarten year, the average student should be at the emergent writing level. An emergent student "takes risks in writing activities, draws pictures and may 'label' these, 'reads' his or her own writing, but may not match words to print, writes left to right most of the time, forms most letters so that they can be recognized, and attempts sound spelling, often with assistance, using beginning and/or ending consonants"(SCASD, 2003).

The third chart included the developing level. By the end of the first grade year, average students should be at the developing level. A student writer at the developing level

“Begins to demonstrate confidence as a writer, writes stories with a beginning, middle and end, writes informational pieces with teacher guidance, begins to respond in writing via graphic organizers, letters, poems, descriptions, and/or journals, reads his or her own writing, matches words to print most of the time, uses sounds spelling (beginning, middle, and ending sounds) to write new words, writes benchmark, frequently used words using conventional spelling, leaves spaces between words, writes simple sentences, and forms all letters so that they can be recognized” (SCASD, 2003).

Each chart included a section for each student and a section for each characteristic displayed by a student at that particular level. I included each set of charts for each month on which I focused my analysis, September, February, and April.

I developed three more charts focused on the students’ reading levels at the beginning of April (Appendix A.2). These reading levels were also based on the reading standards from the State College Area School District’s *Language Arts Curriculum*. Based on these standards, the preconventional reader “holds a book and turns the pages of a book correctly, identifies the start and end of a book, chooses books and has his or her favorites, listens and responds to literature, recognizes some letters, especially in names, and recognizes his or her own name” (SCASD, 2003).

The emergent reader:

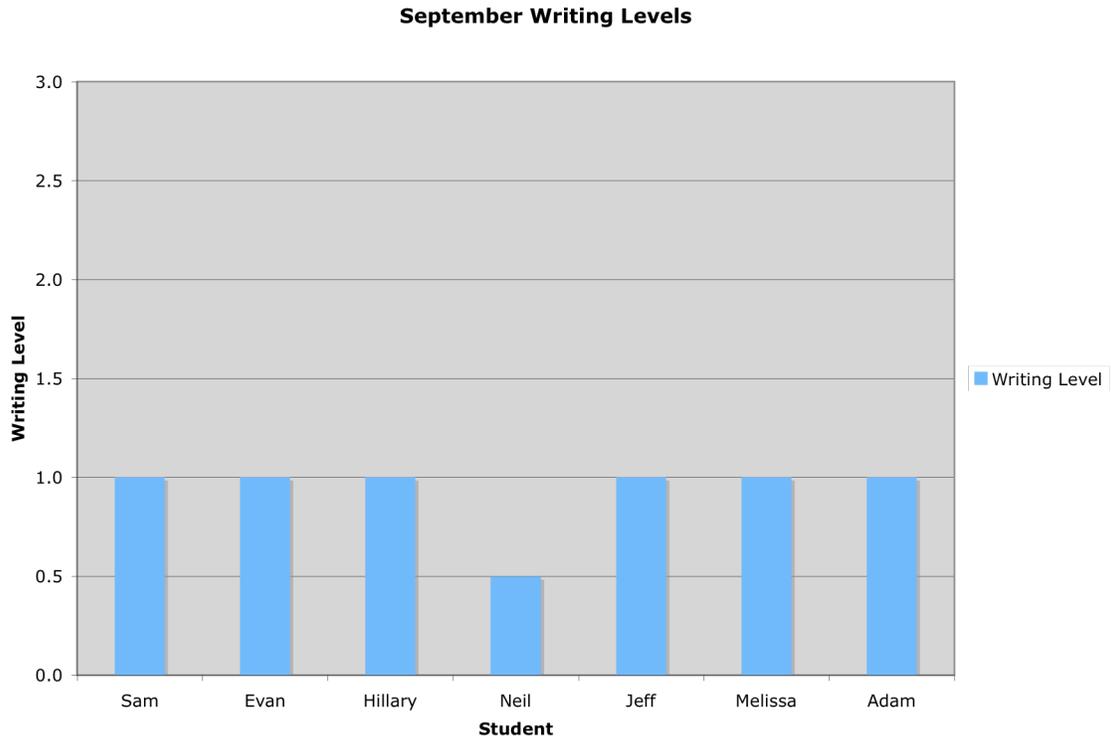
“participates in guided literary discussions, begins to understand the concepts of letter, word, sentence, and other conventions of print, including punctuation and capitalization, begins to develop a desire to read for pleasure, relies on book illustrations to tell stories, participates in reading of familiar books, recognizes some names/words in context, identifies sounds in words, especially rhyming words, syllables, and initial/final consonants, and memorizes patterns and rhymes in familiar books” (SCASD, 2003).

The developing reader

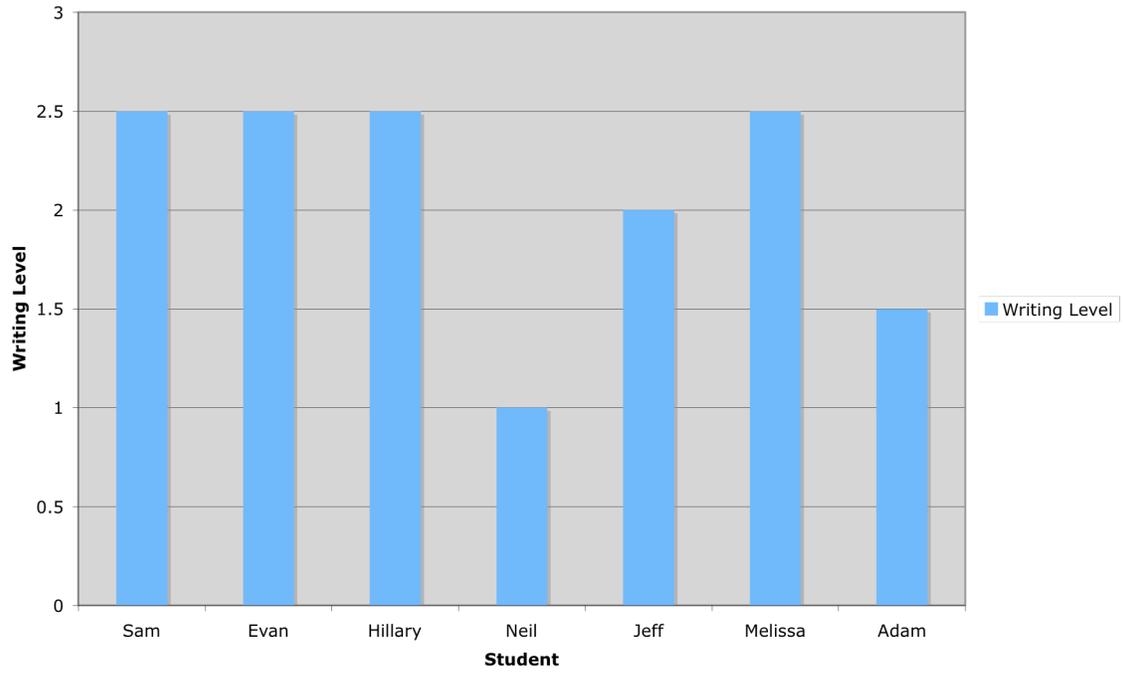
“begins to apply, with adult guidance, word study strategies such as phonics, meaning, word and sentence structure) to identify and understand new words, begins to read ‘silently’ and maintains a reading log for the Cumulative Portfolio, reads predictable pattern books independently, relying on print and illustrations, recalls main ideas of stories, demonstrates comprehension through participation in guided literary discussions about various genres (non-fiction, fiction, poetry, and drama), and uses informational materials to share with an audience” (SCASD, 2003).

After compiling the above charts, I created the graphs that are shown below, one showing the writing level of each student beginning in September, then again in February, and finally in April. The preconventional reading and writing levels are equivalent to a level 1, emergent are equivalent to a level 2, and developing are equivalent to a level 3. In the final graph, I charted the student’s reading level as of April in order to compare the final levels of the students in both reading and writing. If a student exhibited at least half of the indicators for the next level, I would graph them at a

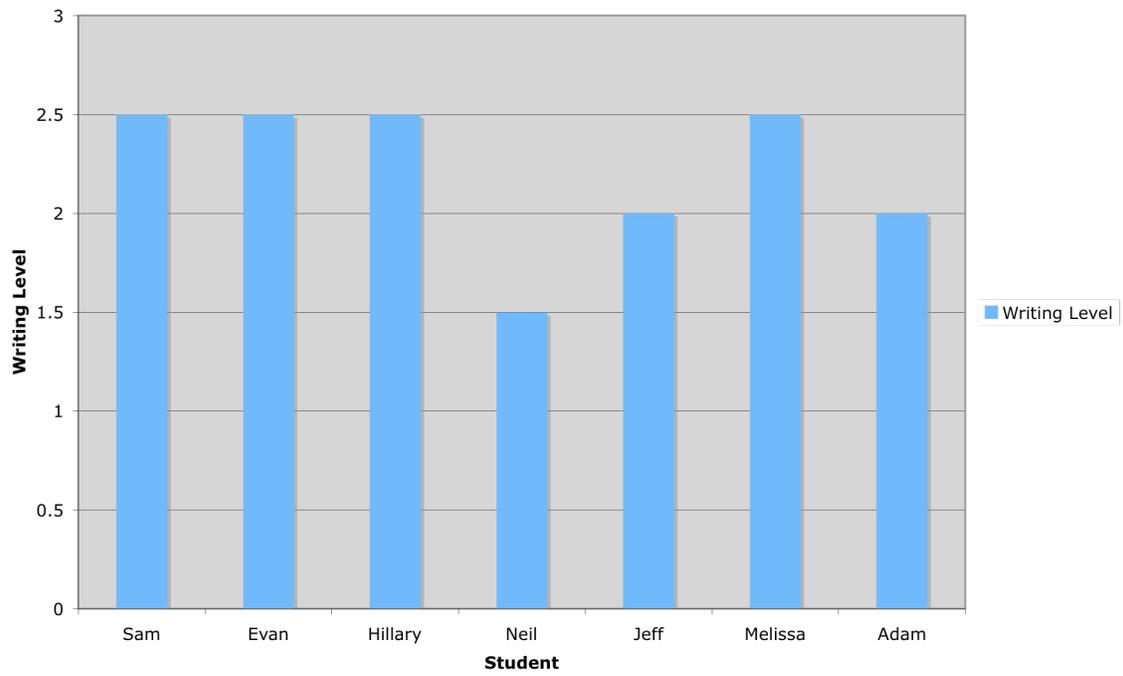
level between the two. For instance, many of my students were at the emergent level for both reading and writing. They also however, exhibited in some cases 7 out of 10 of the developing indicators; therefore, they were graphed at a level of 2.5.



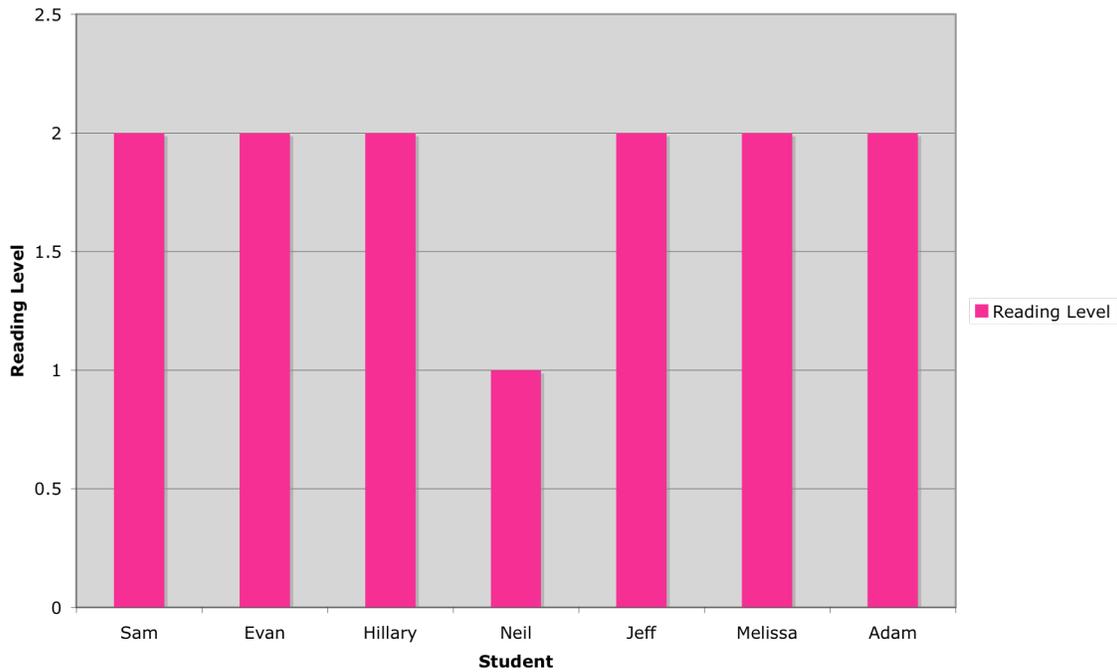
February Writing Levels



April Writing Levels



April Reading Levels



Claims

1. *Journals help to bridge the gap between reading and writing in the kindergarten classroom when they are used on a daily basis, beginning in September.*

- ❖ Evidence: The graphs below chart the growth of the sample students' writing abilities beginning in September and ending in April. The majority of the students entered the classroom in September at the preconventional writing level. Each of the students show a large amount of growth based on their journal entries in February and again in April. Many of the students exhibit some of the characteristics of a first grade student by April.

❖ Evidence (Appendix A.3 & A.4): Sample entries from Sam's September and March Kindergarten journals. Sam entered my classroom in September most likely being above the emergent reading level. However, as his journals display, his writing level was far behind. The disparity between these two journals and the tremendous growth that took place between the months of September and April is obvious. Sam's pictures have become much more detailed and recognizable along with his writing. He writes coherent sentences and readily responds to questions that I may have asked him in my responses. Sam also elaborates on entries he may have already written. He is now at a level of writing that is beyond emergent and exhibits many of the qualities that indicate a developing writer. Sam's reading level is still more advanced than that of his writing, however, the gap between the two is rapidly closing.

2. A writer's workshop including three main parts:

- Teacher Demonstration – The teacher does a sample journal entry on a particular topic, drawing an illustration and telling the story behind the illustration as she draws. She then writes words to accompany her illustration. A minilesson may be included in this demonstration.
- Independent student writing time – Students work quietly writing their own journal entries.
- Sharing – Students share their journal entry with their peers and the teacher.

is effective in fostering the growth of beginning writers

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix B.1): This is a lesson plan that I created for the writer's workshop I held prior to spring break (B.1.1). The lesson plan outlines the three main parts of the writer's workshop. There is also a picture included (B.1.2) which shows the sample entry I made during my demonstration portion of the lesson. It shows me with two thought bubbles. One thought bubble contains a large boat, symbolizing my cruise ship that I went on during the break. The second thought bubble shows my mom, dad, two brothers, and my dog. I shared with the students that during spring break I would go on a cruise and I would also see my family whom I missed very much. They shared the excitement of my vacation with me through this demonstration portion. The third portion of evidence (B.1.3) is sample student entries from this lesson which resulted from the independent work period. Many of the students wrote about their spring break, however not all of them did. The students did not simply copy my demonstration; they individualized their entry to make it meaningful to them.
- ❖ Evidence (Appendix B.2): In the third week of March, we kicked off our cross curriculum unit on space. In the afternoon the students had time to write in their journals. Prior to their independent writing time, I did a sample entry where I told a short story and drew a picture of me visiting the sun. The students were very excited for the space unit and I feel as though their journal entries demonstrated this motivation and excitement. My evidence includes the notes that I made following the

journal writing period (B.2.1) and the sample journal entries from this particular day (B.2.2). The students' journal entries demonstrate their excitement towards the new unit. These entries may be similar to the one I created during my demonstration; however, they are all individualized to the student. Many of the students added words and sentences to their entries and all of the students created very elaborate pictures.

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix B.3): We visited the planetarium in the first week of April. In the afternoon following our visit, we had a whole class writer's workshop during which I did a demonstration discussing and drawing my favorite part of the planetarium. This demonstration also included a grammar mini-lesson. My evidence includes my PDA's observation of this writer's workshop (B.3.1) and student journal samples that followed the demonstration period (B.3.2). My PDA's observation demonstrates the effectiveness of this journal writing lesson containing the above three components as observed by someone who is not in the classroom on a daily basis. Many of the students drew elaborate representations of the planetarium visit and indicated why they enjoyed the planetarium, or simply wrote that they did enjoy the planetarium.

3. A writer's workshop as a part of small literacy centers allows the teacher to focus her attention on a specific group of students and observe their interactions more closely

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix C.1): These are notes I took on February 22nd while working in morning literacy centers with one group of five average level students. I made several important observations during this period that I most likely could not have made if I was working with the entire class. During this time period I made several important observations. I was discussing an entry one particular student was making about her and her father. During this discussion I turned to another student and I found that he had begun making a new journal entry about his father. It was apparent that he had been motivated by a conversation that was going on between me and one of his peers. Soon after this observation, I overheard another student asking her peer if she could see her journal so that she could copy the word “play.” This student was aware that her neighbor had used a word that she wanted to use, so she used her friend as a writing tool.
- ❖ Evidence Appendix (C.2): The notes below are again from the same group of students during a morning literacy center (C.2.1). Prior to center time, the students always have about five minutes to have a snack. This is largely a time for students to socialize with each other as well. On this particular day one of my students brought in a bag of popcorn for snack. I told the girls that I ate an entire bag of popcorn the night before. Melissa found this to be hilarious. Following snack time, I worked with Melissa’s group in

my journal writing. She wrote an elaborate entry about how I had eaten an entire bag of popcorn on the previous night (C.2.2). It was amazing to see how influential this one discussion was for Melissa. I may not have noticed this and connected it with the prior comment I had made about the popcorn had I not been working with the small group of students.

4. Teacher written responses to student journal entries increase student motivation, confidence, and feeling of value as a writer.

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix D.1): On President's day we did many activities to familiarize the students with various presidents including Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. The students did an activity observing each side of a penny. Following this activity, Zeke asked me if he could look at a penny while he was making his journal entry. While writing in the student's journals the following weekend, I found that Zeke had begun drawing the Lincoln Memorial from the back of the penny I had given him to look at while he was writing in his journal. I wrote to Zeke telling him how much I liked his drawing of the Lincoln Memorial. After I read him my response to his drawing, he wrote a few answers to my questions and then immediately got to work adding to his drawing. He again asked for a penny to look at while he was continuing his drawing. I was working with the students in the morning journal center at this point in time. Within this fifteen-minute period, he

added a tremendous amount of detail to his depiction mirroring the Lincoln Memorial on the back of the penny and also added writing. If I had not written a response to his beginning attempts at this drawing, it is highly unlikely that he would have added such a great amount of detail to this picture.

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix D.2): Evan is the brightest student in our classroom. I feel as though at times, he does not work to his fullest potential due to the fact that the remaining students are at a level that is significantly below his. His journal entries are evident of this lack of effort. His entries often mirror the simple sentences that his peers create, such as “I like school.” I have found that my responses and questions to his journal entries are a means of motivating Evan to work to his fullest potential. These sample journal entries demonstrate his ability to elaborate on his journal entry as a result of my questioning.
- ❖ Evidence (Appendix D.3): The students had overwhelmingly positive responses to my writing in their journals. This piece of evidence contains observations that I made following the introduction of my responses in students’ journals.

5. Particular student writers benefit from the socialization that occurs during the independent writing period of the writer’s workshop.

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix E): On an academic level, Neil is significantly behind the majority of the class. He has just

recently demonstrated knowledge of all the letters and letter sounds. Neil's illustrations have become much more detailed and clear from September until the present time. Throughout this growth period, the majority of cohesive writing found in Neil's journal has been the names of other students in the classroom. Although Neil is behind academically, he is very well liked and successfully socialized into the classroom community. During independent journal writing time, Neil often sits near his friends and will draw a picture containing him and these friends involved a particular activity. I have found that Neil is motivated a great deal by the friends that surround him. His journal entries often develop as a result of his conversations with those who are sitting around him. My evidence includes sample entries from Neil's journals. Due to confidentiality I have covered the majority of the names that Neil has written, with the exception of the first letter.

6. One of the main reasons student journals are so effective is that they allow students to write about their interests and topics that are meaningful to them.

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix F.1): Jeff is extremely interested in football, especially Penn State football. All of his journal entries are about football (F.1.1). The main components are usually two or three football players from two opposing teams, a football field, and a scoreboard. Jeff sees journal writing time as an

outlet for his interests. He knows that journal writing time is one part of the day where he will always be able to discuss and record his thoughts about football for the day. I have seen an immense period of growth in his journal writing even though all of his entries are focused on the same topic. Just recently, Jeff drew one of his usual football journal entries. Following this entry, I wrote a response to Jeff, asking him some questions in efforts to get him to write some words in addition to his usual illustration. He wrote back, answering all of the questions I asked him and elaborating on his entry (F.1.2). Jeff was intrinsically motivated to share his knowledge of football with me. This intrinsic motivation and interest in football fueled his drive to respond to my questions concerning his entry.

- ❖ Evidence (Appendix F.2): Academically, Adam is exactly where he should be at the end of kindergarten; at the emergent writing level. This academic level has just recently become fully developed. This portion of my appendix includes journal samples from Adam's September (F.2.1), February (F.2.2), and March journals (F.2.3). Many of the students demonstrated the most growth from the period of September to February. Adam however, did not show a great deal of development during this period of time. Adam's February journal entries contained drawings that were somewhat more detailed than those in

September; however, there was not a drastic change like many other students. His illustrations were still fairly simple for the most part and he wrote very few words. Upon the introduction of our space unit in March, Anthony's journal entries 'blasted off.' His illustrations became much more elaborate and detailed and an intricate space story accompanied this illustration. In the beginning of March, Adam's journals still did not contain many words or sentences. Just recently I have been encouraging Adam to write words in addition to his pictures. He works extremely hard to sound out his words and has been writing simple sentences to explain his illustrations. Since we began our space unit, Adam has been extremely excited and engaged in everything that has to do with space. It has become evident to me that Adam is intrinsically motivated to write about space in his journal due to his inherent interest. Adam's interest in the topics we have been studying has pushed him to become an emergent writer in the recent months.

Conclusions

I am a strong advocate of the use of journals in the kindergarten classroom. The reading process preceded writing as students first entered school. Reading was on the minds of both kindergarten students and parents as we progressed through the beginning months of school. Therefore, we immediately began immersing students in opportunities to grow as readers. Writing follows this process, however, I feel as though journal

writing was a constant part of the day in kindergarten where students had the opportunity to express their voice and be absorbed in the writing process.

In my future classroom, regardless of whether I am teaching kindergarten, grade 1, grade 3, or grade 5, I will practice a daily journal writing program where students will have at least 10 minutes each day to take a pencil, some crayons, and their thoughts, and express themselves through some means of “writing.” Whether this writing is pictures, words, sentences, or scribbles. I also plan to include journal writing as a daily literacy center in my classroom and will ensure that I meet with students for at least twenty minutes in this literacy center. These literacy centers will be supplemented with biweekly writer’s workshop periods that will consist of a teacher demonstration, an independent writing period, and finally time for students to share their writing with me and their peers.

In the beginning of the school year I will introduce the journal writing process by explaining my definition of “writing.” In my classroom (especially if it is kindergarten), there are many different types of writing that are all appropriate for journals. These forms of writing include pictures, magic writing (lines where students aren’t sure of letters or words), letters, words, and even scribbles. I will also explain to the students that just like they sometimes can’t read my writing, I may sometimes need help reading their writing and that is why I may write next to their pictures or words. I have found this year that this introduction and attitude towards the writing process is necessary because my students are so concerned with whether or not their spelling is correct. At times it seems as though students immediately felt as though their writing was “wrong” when I

would write underneath their writing to clarify their thoughts and make their entry something that I can understand.

There has been a large focus on handwriting throughout this year in my kindergarten classroom. Handwriting is one of the daily literacy centers. I do not think that I will put such a large emphasis on handwriting in my future classrooms. The journal writing center will take the place of this handwriting center. I definitely see the importance of having the students practice their handwriting each day, however, I feel that there are other times to have this practice time going on, for example when the students come in first thing in the morning, and before the students leave at the end of the day. Handwriting is also practiced while the students are doing journal entries.

New Wonderings

- 1. If I approach the writing process from the introduction of journals validating all forms of writing (pictures, scribble, magic writing, etc.), would this create more confident writers who do not constantly question whether their words are spelled correctly and lead students to focus more on the process of writing and making it meaningful to them.*
- 2. Where is the connection between reading and writing?*
- 3. How can I create a concise and effective writer's workshop?*

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