Oh no! I don't want to do this *again!* **Self-esteem, motivation for**

writing, and writing instruction in a first-grade class

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Description of Teaching Context

Panorama Village Elementary School is located just outside of State College,

Pennsylvania, in the town of Boalsburg. This small K-3 school is situated in a very rural

locale and houses students from the surrounding area. There are nine academic

classrooms: two kindergartens, three first-grades, two second-grades, and two third-

grades. Boalsburg Elementary is Panorama's sister school, housing grades four and five.

Socioeconomic status among the students' families ranges from low to high, and our

school has a large population of students whose families came from Russia and who may

still speak Russian at home.

My class shares most of these characteristics; however there are no students who

are English Language Learners (ELL)/first language Russian. I do have a student whose

first language is Korean, but she does not receive ELL services. She is, however, one of

the students I have targeted in this inquiry. Another student, adopted from Guatemala by

a middle class, White family, is out of the classroom the majority of the day and is also

excluded in the data analysis. Neither did I include the other student who receives

learning support outside of the classroom almost the entire day—a White male. Besides

the little girl whose first language is Korean, and the other girl originally from

Guatemala, the class is composed of only White students, so no real connection to

ethnicity was considered in the analysis. Of these 17 first graders, there are nine girls and

eight boys, but sex also appeared unrelated to the findings. We have one female student

who receives Title I reading support each morning for twenty minutes, who was included,

but not targeted for interviews. Two of our students (one male and one female) attend math learning-enrichment.

The classroom includes a half-time instructional paraprofessional who works with students primarily in word study during the morning hours. The skill instruction she provides lays some of the foundation for writing fluency in terms of spelling. In addition, the majority of my students come from middle class backgrounds; only two are clearly from families of lower socioeconomic class. Socioeconomic status (SES) is often linked to difficulties with writing fluency (Head-Dylla, 2004; Hart & Risley, 1996) and fluency can be related to motivation.

As far as grouping goes in our classroom, we have homogenous reading groups (based upon ability) and heterogeneous math groups. Four students (one boy and three girls) are in our highest reading group while two boys and two girls make up our second highest reading group. There are three boys in our third highest reading group, and our lowest reading group is composed of one boy and three girls. The students are reading at levels anywhere between E and M in the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system. At this point in first-grade, students are expected to be at level G. I felt that it was important to understand at the outset of the project the possibly varying relationships between expressive (writing) and receptive (reading) skills as well as their strengths in other academic areas.

In our classroom, our students participate in writing many times over the course of a day. Writing instruction takes place at language arts centers when the students are in their ability-based reading groups. Due to the fact that two of my students receive most of their language arts and writing instruction from the teacher who provides learning

support (in the learning support classroom), my inquiry focuses upon the remaining 15 students in our class who are present for our language arts centers. Each language arts center rotation lasts approximately 20 minutes, and they spend most of that time writing. Outside of direct handwriting instruction, most of the instruction during this time occurs one-on-one during editing. The only formal lessons students have received yet in regard to writing include how to write a letter, how to write a tall tale, and how to write a narrative.

Rationale

I have been facilitating instruction at the writing center in our language arts rotation since the beginning of the school year. My mentor and I ask the students to participate in several types of writing experiences throughout the week. The students write two journals per week: one they address to Mrs. Tubbs (*Dear Mrs. Tubbs Journal)* and one to their families (*Family Message Journal*). On Wednesdays during center time, they write two sentences using their spelling words. Finally, we also assign other writing as related to activities that we ask them to do.

Toward the middle of the fall semester, I began to observe something about my students that worried me. As I worked closely with the students, I could not help but notice how several of them developed a pattern of making negative remarks about themselves. I also realized that this generally occurred whenever we asked the students to complete a task that involved writing. Through my observations, I began to see an assortment of other behaviors (heads down, lack of eye contact, soft voices, eye-rolling),

which, to me, indicated low self-esteem. For the purposes of this inquiry, self-esteem shall mean a child's view of his or her self-worth.

Given that my students are only 6 or 7 years old, this worried me; I wondered why, at this age, students might already have a negative self-image. I began to consider why I typically noticed this behavior and speech when it came time for the students to write at my center. Does how my writing instruction have any relationship to the students' self-esteem? I believe my questions concerning the relationship between self-esteem, motivation, and writing are very important. After all, these students will be expected to write more and more each school year. If there are any connections between these three elements, I believe that the earlier we address them, the more likely it is that I can help my students develop the most positive outlook on writing.

Question

What is the nature of the relationship between self-esteem, motivation for writing, and writing with regard to my first-grade students?

Sub-questions

What is the relationship between motivation for writing and self-esteem?

Which students are exhibiting low motivation for writing?

What is their academic ability?

What is the relationship between academically weak writers and their motivation for writing? Self-esteem?

What is the relationship between academically capable writers and their

motivation for writing? Self-esteem?

How can I better understand how students feel about themselves (their self-

esteem)?

What can the students tell me about how they see themselves?

How do the students express their self-esteem?

What are the verbal and nonverbal ways students indicate how they feel

about themselves?

What kinds of statements/nonverbals are they making about themselves?

How often do they communicate this and in what contexts?

How do my students feel about writing?

How do they respond in different writing situations (writing center vs. journals vs.

as part of activities)?

What are my mentor teacher's observations of our students' self-esteem?

Inquiry vs. Project

This is an inquiry and not a project because I am *investigating* the relationships

between self-esteem, motivation for writing, and writing; my intention is not to simply

carry out a preconceived solution or plan for improvement. I have many wonderings in

regard to these factors in my classroom and my goal for this inquiry is to begin to shine

some light on these questions through research and analysis. I hope that through my

teacher research, I will be able to gain a better understanding of any connections I may

find. As I look for any patterns to emerge in the way my students relate to writing, it

should help inform my classroom instructional practices with this group of first-grade students and perhaps with my future students as well.

Inquiry Plan Description

I began to consider my inquiry topic in November, when I started to observe several of my students making negative comments about themselves and engaging in other non-verbal behaviors (eye-rolling, not looking me in the eye when discussing work, hanging heads, etc.)[1], especially during writing. Beginning in December, I took observational notes (see Appendix A and Appendix B) over the course of several weeks on both students who were exhibiting confident behaviors and students who were not exhibiting confident behaviors. When I chose to explore this further as my inquiry topic, I decided to collect several forms of baseline data. During the last week of February and the first week of March, I surveyed my students concerning their feelings about writing, and recorded the results (see Appendix C). At the same time, I sent home a parent survey (see Appendix D), asking how they perceive their child's writing strengths and weaknesses. On the week of March 5th, our class began a new writing project, where each student was paired with a penpal from England. They wrote their first letter to their new penpal during this week. Two weeks later, I conducted one-on-one interviews with several students (see Appendix E), asking them to elaborate on their answers to the survey and describe what they liked and disliked about writing in a general sense. Then,

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[1] I understand that these nonverbal behaviors have a cultural component, however I decided to focus on the behaviors as determined by the cultural majority of my class. While I was focusing on these behaviors, I also attempted to keep in mind the possible cultural differences that may have affected the student in my class who has a different cultural background that the rest of the class.

our class began a mini-unit on poetry the week of April 2nd, which engaged the students in exploring and writing multiple types of poetry. Finally, during this same week, I analyzed journal entries from the students' Family Message Journals, one from the beginning of the inquiry period and one from the end of the inquiry period (see Appendix F). I also conducted a subjective rating of my students (see Appendix G), which included self-esteem, mentor's commentary, general comments, and objective ratings of their self-esteem and writing. Finally, I conducted a follow-up survey (see Appendix H) with my students during the second week of April.

Data Collection

For my inquiry, I collected data in the following forms: anecdotal notes, student surveys, parent surveys, student interviews, a writing checklist, and a subjective rating system. Descriptions of each type of data follow.

Anecdotal Notes

I began making notes on my students' verbal comments and some non-verbal behaviors (eye contact, head position, voice volume) regarding their self-esteem when I noticed this trend in mid-December. My notes continued sporadically throughout the inquiry period, but concentrated most heavily in December and January. These notes included the initials of the child making the comment, the statement made (or behavior), the context, and my inferences/judgments. I recorded my observations of both instances of what I perceived as confidence and instances of what I perceived as self-doubt, for the purpose of comparing and defining the latter. I also included other dialogue if it was relevant to the statement the child made.

Student Surveys

At the beginning of my inquiry, I surveyed my students about their thoughts on writing using a likert scale based on the popular cartoon character, Garfield.[2] The survey covered how they feel about writing outside of school, each type of writing assigned in the classroom, sharing their writing, writing in different contexts, and their writing content. They completed the surveys in small groups of four or five, using dividers between the students for privacy. I instructed the students to circle the Garfield that best represented how they felt with regards to the question, read the questions to the students, one question at a time, and waited for all students to complete the question before we moved on to the next. At the end of the inquiry period, I conducted a second but more limited version of the survey, covering the topics of specific writing assignments, their feelings on writing in school, sharing writing with others, and their writing content. This survey was conducted in a whole-group setting, where students used privacy dividers to complete the survey as I read each question.

Parent Surveys

During the week I conducted the student surveys, I also sent an open-ended survey home with my students for their parents to fill out. The survey asked their opinion about their student's view of writing, as well as their perception of their child's strengths and weaknesses. I asked the parents to share their thoughts by filling out the survey and

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[2] Originally from The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, McKenna and Krear, 1990. Jim Davis is the Garfield comic creator/illustrator.

returning it to me after the weekend. At the end of the survey, they also had the

opportunity to provide any other comments about their child's writing (see Appendix D).

Student Interviews

Looking over the surveys my students completed, I decided that I needed further

explanation for some of the answers they were giving. Individually, I took each student

and conducted an interview, which I recorded on my laptop. I first asked the students to

share any thoughts they had on writing, including what they liked about it, and what they

do not like or thought was hard. Then, I went through their survey with them, asking

them to elaborate on their answers, especially regarding the different types of writing

assignments. The interviews typically lasted between four and ten minutes. After

completing the interviews, I chose nine students' interviews to target and analyze further.

I chose these students because they represented the bottom half of all scores on the

student surveys or my initial impression of their interview was that it could give me

significant insight into the child's views of writing.

Writing Checklist

One of my wonderings for this inquiry centered on determining if there are any

relationships between academic achievement, motivation, and self-esteem. In order to

analyze their academic strengths and weaknesses, I reviewed two journal entries from

their Family Message Journals. As I read the entries, I looked at six elements: capitals,

punctuation, sound spelling, vowels, following the topic of the assignment, and

substantial details. I rated each of these categories for each student, assigning a number,

one through four, with one indicating that this element was never present in the sample, two meaning the element was present sometimes, three most times, and four always.

Subjective Rating System

My final form of data collection is a table consisting of several, primarily subjective, elements. These include the child's initials, a numerical count of the general classroom statements of confidence versus statements of self-doubt, my general impressions of the student, my mentor teacher's general impressions of the students, a subjective rating (one to five, with one being the lowest) of each child's self-esteem based on my observations, and a subjective rating (one to five, with one being the lowest) of each child's overall writing ability based on the writing checklist and my observations.

Data Analysis

As I began to analyze my data, I found that although I had a lot of data on many of the interrelationships among the three factors I was interested in (self-esteem, motivation for writing, and writing instruction) I did not have a lot of linking data that demonstrated relationships between all three factors. Most of my data, rather, focused on one of the factors or a relationship between two of the factors, such as self-esteem and writing.

Anecdotal Notes

I typed my notes into two Excel workbook pages and then counted the instances of confidence and the instances of self-doubt. An example of a statement I would code as *confidence* would be "I know, I'm an artist!" Statements I would code as *self-doubt*

would be similar to this: "I'm not a good writer." Overall there were thirty-three entries of self-doubt and seventeen occurrences of confidence. Next, I examined the comments to identify patterns in the non-verbal behaviors that accompanied these moments. I found that when students communicated confidence, they also used specific non-verbal behaviors such as: using a higher pitch in their voice, making eye contact, singing or dancing, and raising hands straight up and fully extended. Conversely, when expressing self-doubt, students' behaviors included: not making eye contact, using a quiet voice, not answering, clenching teeth, growling, blushing, having watery eyes, staring, and sighing. Finally, I looked through the actual statements to determine patterns in the kinds and content of statements they were making. When making confident statements, students mentioned what they can *do* sixteen times ("I remembered to indent!") and drew conclusions about *who they are* ("I'm an artist") twice. On the other hand, when students verbally demonstrated self-doubt they talked about what they cannot *do* twelve times and drew conclusions about *who they are* seven times[3].

Student Surveys

For each possible answer to the survey, I assigned a point value: four to the Garfield with the largest smile, three to the one with the next largest smile, two to the slightly frowning one, and one to the frowning Garfield. Then, I added up the points for each student, assigning an overall total. Out of a possible sixty-eight points, scores ranged from thirty-one to sixty-eight. The median score was forty-nine; seven students scored lower than the median, two had scores equal to it, and nine scored above it. When

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[3] The other statements did not fall into a distinct category

I initially started analyzing the data for the specific questions, I was interested in the distribution of how many students chose each point value for each question. What I found was that half of the questions had answers that were closely split between positive and negative responses. Therefore, as I examined the data, I began to wonder if there are core groups of students who answer generally the same on all questions, or if the students' answers were dispersed without patterns.

For the post-inquiry survey, I analyzed the data in a similar fashion. Out of a possible forty points, scores ranged between eighteen and forty, with a median score of thirty-one and a mean score of thirty. Seven students scored below the median, one was equal, and seven students scored above the median. The distribution of answers to the individual questions was in favor of the positive (scores of four or three) than the negative (scores of two or one) this time.

Parent Surveys

My intention for the parent surveys was to gain a new perspective with different insight. After reviewing the responses, I am not sure that I asked the right questions. Additionally, I compared the parent survey responses to the student survey responses and learned that the parents' responses did not match that of their children. Of the twelve families that returned the survey, only one said that they did *not* perceive that their child enjoys writing, whereas on the survey the students' responses to questions of enjoyment were more evenly split between positive and negative.

When responding to the question about their student's strengths, eleven of the parental comments focused on mechanics and nine focused on content. On the other

hand, when describing their student's weaknesses, fourteen comments focused on mechanics and two focused on content. The fourth question on the survey asked what the parents thought would help their child become a better writer; answers included, but were not limited to: reading, one-on-one teacher time, more time to write, growth, speaking, and focusing on creativity. Interestingly, half of the parents who responded cited practice as being important to a child's improvement as a writer.

Student Interviews

To analyze the nine targeted student interviews, I reviewed the transcripts looking for patterns in responses. I made notes in the margins about topics that the students mentioned, as well as their general impressions of writing. Several themes emerged in the interviews; some I anticipated and some I did not. Seven of the nine students began their interview with a negative outlook on writing, stating that they did not like writing or talking about what is hard about writing. Seven of the students also cited mechanics as a stumbling block to producing good writing. Length of writing time or required length of assignment was another popular theme and common obstacle to their enjoyment of writing. Other common (four to five students discussing) elements included: feeling joy at finishing a piece of writing or wanting a piece to be finished, preferring to share with everyone or anyone, hands hurting as a reason for disliking writing, and desire to write and enjoyment of writing having a connection to their mood.

Writing Checklist

The writing checklist was helpful in identifying my academically strong and weak writers. The first step I took to begin to analyze my writing checklist was to look at overall scores by adding up the numerical values I assigned to each child in each of the six categories. Scores ranged from nineteen to twenty-four, with the mean and median score being twenty-two. Next, I looked at general patterns between class performances in each of the areas, followed by patterns in the fluctuation of specific skills for each child. Across both evaluations (from the beginning of the inquiry and at the end of the inquiry), all students correctly used the six conventions at least some of the time, and each student was always able to maintain the assigned topic.

Over the inquiry period, students maintained or improved their ability to sound spell, use vowels in every word, and incorporate substantial details in their writing. Surprisingly, correct use of capitals, punctuation, or both declined in fifty-three percent of my students over the course of the inquiry period. When I looked at individual children, I focused on the children whose overall total fell below the median score. In the initial pre-inquiry collection, I identified five students who had scores of nineteen, twenty, or twenty-one. One of these students maintained her score, one declined by two points, and three students' scores increased. From the second collection, I added two students to my focus whose scores had declined to drop them below the median. In all cases of decline, the change was in an area of mechanics (use of capitals, punctuation, sound spelling, use of vowels in all words), rather than an area of content (maintaining the assigned topic(s) or including substantial details). Three students showed an increase, though only one improved to the level of his higher-functioning peers and thus moved out

of this focus group due to that increase. Two of these students' improvements came in

both areas of mechanics and content. Students whose scores were at or above the median

were students I considered to have academic strengths in writing. At the initial collection

there were seven students above and three at the median. When I collected this data for

the second time at the end of the inquiry period, five of these students had declined, with

two dropping into the aforementioned focus group. Again, all but one of these students

declined in one or more areas of mechanics. I also added a student to my writing strength

focus group, and her increase came in an area of content.

Subjective Rating System

My hope with the rating system was that it would give me an overall picture of

each student in my class and help me to compare my thoughts with my mentor's thoughts

on each student. To analyze this data, I entered the information in a spreadsheet, adding

my mentor's commentary and comparing the subjective ratings. I found that my mentor

and I had very similar thoughts on our students, with only one major difference (I

perceived one student as acting very passive with me, and my mentor perceived her as

being more assertive and defensive with her). It also helped me to compare my subjective

ratings, from which I observed that of the fifteen students I rated, there were only three

with a discrepancy of more than one point between my rating of their self-esteem and my

rating of their writing skills.

Table 1: Summary Data

Student	Motivated	Not Motivated	Strong Writer	Weaker Writer	High Self-esteem	Lower Self-esteem
AD		√		√		√
RK	√		√		√	
WY	√		√			√
MK		√	√		√	
MH		√	√		√	
LJ		√		√		√
MS	√			√		√
MJ	√			√		√
BI	√		√		√	
CF		√		√	√	
EC	√			√	√	
MN	√		√		√	
AV		√	√			√
PJ		√	√		√	
SJ		√	√		√	

Table 2: Overall data summary

	Motivated/Strong Writer/ High Self-esteem	Motivated/Strong Writer/Low Self-esteem	Motivated/Weak Writer/High Self-esteem	Motivated/Weak Writer/Low Self-esteem
Number of Students	3	1	1	2
	Not Motivated/Strong Writer/High Self-esteem	Not Motivated/ Strong Writer/Low Self-esteem	Not Motivated/Weak Writer/High Self-esteem	Not Motivated/Weak Writer/Weak Self-esteem
Number of Students	4	1	1	2
	Total			
Number of Students	15			

Claim one

In my classroom, students with strong writing skills also exhibit evidence of higher self-esteem.

Evidence one

Using the writing checklist that I created, along with the subjective rating system, I determined that there are nine children in my classroom who had stronger skills in the area of writing. In the same way, I also noted six students who seemed to be struggling writers. Then, I looked at the data I had for self-esteem (the student survey, interviews, subjective rating system, and anecdotal notes) to determine which students appear to have higher self-esteem. When comparing these two sets of students, I found that of the students who have strong writing skills, seven of them also seem to have higher self-esteem, whereas only two of them seem to have low self-esteem. This seems to fall in line with educational researcher Frank Pajares' (1996) summary of reciprocal determinism, in which he claims the way "individuals interpret the results of their performance attainments informs and alters their environments and their self-beliefs, which in turn inform and alter their subsequent performances" (¶ 3).

Claim two

Some of my high-achieving students were not highly motivated to write, and some students in my class who had lower self-esteem were highly motivated writers.

Evidence two

I continued my comparison of the overall data to determine if there was a relationship between these students who had high self-esteem and strong writing skills and their motivation for writing. When I began this inquiry, I expected motivation to be strongly related to my students' writing skills and self-esteem, specifically that students who seemed to have higher self-esteem and writing skills would also be the students who were highly motivated to write. What I found as I compared the data between these sets was that this was certainly not the case. When I isolated this set of seven students, I found that four of them actually seemed to be less motivated for writing, while only three seemed to be highly motivated for writing. I was surprised to learn that some of these seemingly high-achieving students do not appear to be motivated to write.

I also anticipated that those students who had lower self-esteem or writing skills would be less motivated to write. In other research that I read, this seemed to be the case, as in that conducted by researcher Penny Oldfather (1994). According to her study, "students reported lacking motivation in situations in which they felt less than competent and/or highly anxious" (Students' feelings when lacking motivation section, ¶ 4). However, according to my data the relationship was neutral in my classroom. Three of the students in my class who had lower self-esteem were highly motivated writers and three also showed less motivation to write. Of the students with lower writing skills there was also a fifty-fifty split, with three of these students highly motivated and three appearing less motivated.

Looking at the complete set of motivated versus less motivated students, I was surprised to find that there was not necessarily a relationship between the highly skilled writers and motivation to write (only four out of nine highly skilled were highly motivated). Also, when looking at the set of less motivated writers, there was an interesting relationship with self-esteem that I did not anticipate. Five of my eight students who appeared less motivated to write showed evidence of having high self-esteem, whereas only three of the eight less motivated students appeared to have lower self-esteem.

Claim three

Students in my first grade class demonstrated an accurate understanding of the technical issues that made their writing less effective.

Evidence three

Targeted students in my first grade class identified the same mechanical problems during interviews that I had noted on a writing checklist. Students mentioned neatness, including handwriting, as a major problem in their writing. In response to the question "Is there anything hard about writing," one student responded by saying "Yeah, because you don't really know if you're doing a backward letter or something." The students' comments covered all of the areas from my checklist, including capitals, punctuation and spelling and many of them spoke about neatness, handwriting, and making mistakes in general. One student expressed his belief that good writing was writing with no mistakes, while another connected mistakes with how she feels about her writing.

When I analyzed the writing checklist, I found that my students were correct in their understanding of the effect mechanics can have on the overall quality of their writing. All seven students who scored below the mean on the writing checklist struggled in one or more areas of mechanics. Additionally, of the six students whose scores declined between the first and second writing samples, each did so in an area of mechanics. Through looking at these numbers, it is clear that mechanics truly hinders my students' overall writing scores. The students are most certainly correct that this is an important concept in writing that can help to make writing clear and effective.

Claim four

When verbally communicating their self-esteem, my first-graders express their self-confidence mainly through statements about what they can do, whereas they communicate their self-doubt heavily through both statements of what they can do and statements that tell who they are.

Evidence four

I found through analyzing student statements that expressions about who the children are included declarations such as "I'm not good at writing", "I'm not smart", and "I'm an artist!" Statements about what they can do included some of the following: "I keep on making bad letters", "I can't do this", and "I made a house!" In the collection of statements I recorded, my students expressed confidence through acknowledging *what they can do* sixteen times and talking about *who they are* twice. When expressing self-doubt, the students used statements about *what they cannot do* twelve times and statements about *who they are* seven times. I found this interesting, especially in light of

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statement by Duquesne University faculty Susan Brookhart and Diane Bronowicz (2003) that "[in order] to make these judgments [about their own self-efficacy], students must weigh task characteristics like difficulty, amount of effort required, and amount of assistance available against their perceptions of their past performances and accomplishments" (p.224). The other statements did not fall into a distinct category. Both types of statements also appeared in my student interviews; however as the interviews were centered primarily on the act of writing, the proportions of statements are not the same. Expressions of who they are did appear more in statements of self-doubt in the same way as in the anecdotal notes.

Claim five

My students communicate confidence and self-doubt using specific, but different, sets of non-verbal behaviors.

Evidence five

Although I have only one major form of data to support this claim, I believe that it is strong and consistent enough for me to be able to make the claim. By observing students, I found that when expressing self-confidence, students make eye contact, fully extend arms when answering questions, use a louder voice, and that they occasionally dance or sing. When expressing self-doubt, students engage in a wide set of behaviors, including: lack of eye contact, lack of hand-raising, quiet (low-volume) voice, not answering when spoken to, staring, blushing, growling, clenching teeth, watery eyes, looking at other students' work, and moving to be alone (isolating self).

Conclusions

This data and the relationships I found will impact my future practice in several ways. First, I will be more cognizant of they way my actions, words, and assessments communicate a student's value. I think that the students have trouble discriminating between their performance and their value, as exhibited by the students who attributed their performance to their self-worth through statements such as "I'm not a good writer" and "I'm not smart." This is in line with the findings of Brookhart and Bronowicz who report "self-efficacy is associated with effort, persistence, and performance" (2003, p. 223-224). In the future, I will attempt to draw more of a distinction between my assessments of a student and the value I place on them as individuals. I do not want my students to think that their worth in my eyes depends on their performance in my classroom.

Second, I will also attempt to find ways to teach writing skills, including mechanics, in a way that helps my students master these issues. I know now that students with strong writing skills also exhibit higher self-esteem, therefore my goal will be to help students become the strongest writers they can be. I will begin to work on mechanics at the beginning of the year, stressing their importance and teaching the basics while constantly assessing my students' understanding and re-teaching as necessary. I agree with Pajares' assertion that "people engage in tasks in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not" (1996, ¶ 4), therefore I will do my best to set my students up for success in this area. I believe now that when students master the technical aspects of writing, they can focus more on the content and overall effectiveness of the writing, which in turn increases their confidence in writing.

Finally, in my future practice, I will attempt to assess my students' motivation for writing and find out what drives their desire to write, as well as their avoidance of writing. I concur with Oldfather's research findings indicating that "students' lack of motivation [cause] them great discomfort unless or until they [are] able to feel motivated" (1994, Summary of analysis of findings section, ¶ 1). For this reason, I think that motivation is very important to a successful writing experience, including achievement and enjoyment, and I should certainly be concerned enough as a teacher to figure out what could motivate my writers so that writing will not be something that they dread in my classroom.

New Wonderings

Through my inquiry process, I was able to answer several of my initial wonderings, but the data that I collected also contributed to new wonderings.

What motivates my first-graders to write? As I found little relationship between motivation and either writing or self-esteem, it caused me to wonder more about the role motivation plays in the classroom. There is a lot of theory and research on motivation, so it makes me wonder what role motivation has in my classroom. What determines the motivation, or lack-thereof in my classroom, and how can I understand its effect on my students?

What roles do technical issues (such as mechanics in writing, computational fluency in mathematics) play in how students learn? After finding that my students experience some amounts of stress over mechanics in their writing, it caused me to wonder if this happens in other subject areas. I think that it would be important to

investigate how fluency in different areas helps students to learn or hinders them from learning. It seems that mechanics plays a significant role in writing, so I wonder if that would transfer to other subject areas.

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Appendix A: Observational Notes for Confident Children

Date	Initials	Quotation	Comments and Observations
8-Dec	AV	I already know what I'm going to write about	Writing center - family message journals
	LJ	Can I write about my new job!?!	Writing center - family message journals
11-Dec	SJ	I made a house!	Exploring math manipulatives
	LJ	I'll show you what exploring is! Exploring is playing!	Exploring math manipulatives
	??	I'm almost done!	Manipulating/cutting shapes - sing song voice
	LJ	Actually, I'm getting better at being at home because I don't get popsicle sticks anymore!	Answer when asked to clarify earlier statement
			During math, most students have hands straight up and fully extended when acknowledging that they can choose a block that fits the rule
14-Dec	MH	Look Miss Sorber! I remembered to indent!"	Writing center - family message journals
18-Dec	MJ	"D-E-A-R" "Iknow how to spell stuff!"	Writing center - at beginning, eye contact
	MJ	"I already know where the b's go"	which way they go
	MJ	"I knew it, I knew it"	with a little dance
19-Dec	MJ	"Look Mrs. Tubbs! I spelled 'Sunday' all by myself"	Writing center
	MJ	"How am I doing this?"…"I never knew I was this smart!"	In between I said "You're smart, that's how you're doing it!"
11-Jan	AV	"Is this how you spell favorite?" ["yes"] "I knew how to spell that word in Kindergarten"	Writing center - family message journals
	MJ	"I know it's a silent 'k', then n"	Writing center; looking me in the eyes
	PJ	"I know, I'm an artist"	In computer lab; response to "Nice picture J!"
15-Jan	AV	"I don't know what to write because there are two things I'm goot at"	Writing center
5-Mar	LJ	"I really wanna write"	Spontaneous; while getting ready for indoor recess, although she did not write during this time
6-Mar	AV	"Why are we writing to pen pals? "…"It is fun!	In between I said "Because I thought it would be fun"; at centers while writing to

Even though I really don't like writing"	pen pal

Appendix B: Observational Notes for Self-Doubt

Date	Initials	Quotation	Comments and Observations
8-Dec	EC	"I know what I want to write , but I don't know how to start"	Writing center - family message journals
	LJ	"All these things? I can't do that!"	Writing center - family message journals; I said "I want you to be finished with all these things before you leave"
	AV	"I don't like writing"	Spontaneous, during writing center
11-Dec	AV	"I'm bored"	Writing center
	MH	"Does this look good to you?"	Cutting shape cards for math
	AV	"Does this look good to you?"	Cutting shape cards for math
	SJ	"Does this look good to you?"	Cutting shape cards for math
	MS	"Does this look good to you?"	Cutting shape cards for math
	AV		During math-guess my rule: asked to raise hand if you can put a block in that fits my rule - doesn't raise hand and looks down X2 (others have hands straight up and fully extended)
14-Dec	LJ	"I'm not a good writer"	Writing center - family message journals; at very beginning
	LJ	"I'm not very good at being at home"	Writing center - family message journals; followed by confident statement reversing this one
	MK	"Is that how you spell about? I helped her with it"	Writing center - family message journals
	MJ	"No I can't"	Writing center - family message journals; response to "You can finish it today"
18-Dec	MJ	"This is going to be hard"	Writing center; soft voice
19-Dec	MJ	"I can't do this"	Writing center - Dear Mrs. T journals; not exact statement but basically a paraphrase
	AV	"Ugh.	Spontaneous; drawing in D.M. T. journals

Date			
	AV	"Those are the worst hands ever" "Aw man, I can't even draw a horse"	Spontaneous; drawing in D.M. T. journals
	AV	"I'm not good at drawing horses"	Spontaneous; drawing in D.M. T. journals
	CF		Math BB, I asked how much a nickel is, dime: head down, no answer, looking at floor
5-Jan	LJ	See attached writing	
9-Jan	AV	"I can't do this"	Math - surveys
1-Feb	AV		Moves to back of rug to sit by self during read-aloud
8-Feb	AV	"I'm not smart"	Writing center
	MS	"Why do I even bother"..."I keep on making bad letters"	Writing center; I said "Why?" in between
9-Feb	AV		Forcefully tapping pencil in middle of forehead while thinking
	AV	"I'm not good at writing"	Writing center
	MS	"It's so much pressure"	Writing center
20-Mar	AV	"This is hard"	Writing center; clenching teeth, big sigh
	AV	"This is so hard"	Paleontologist notebooks
	LJ	"Everyone thinks this is the hardest question"	
	WY		Sitting and staring off into distance/at paper, looking at VL's paper
	MS	"Do I have to write it again?"	I said "yes" and in response growl, blushing, watery eyes (asked him to copy something he had written before - 1 phrase)
	MS	"boy that was very long"	

Appendix C: Initial Student Survey

Name_____

How do you feel about writing for fun at home?
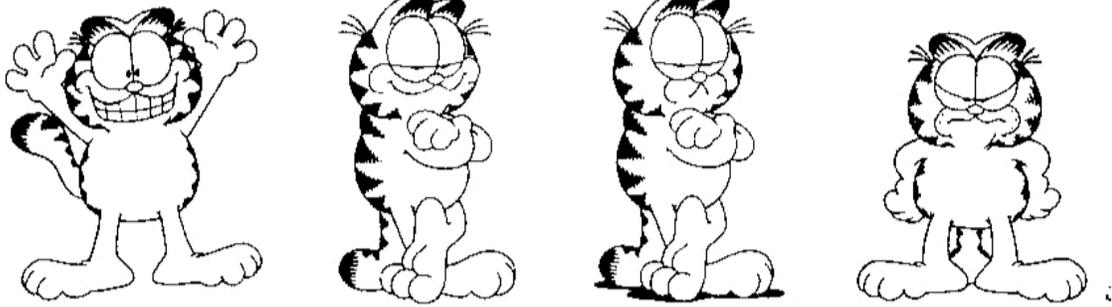
How do you feel when you write in school during free time?
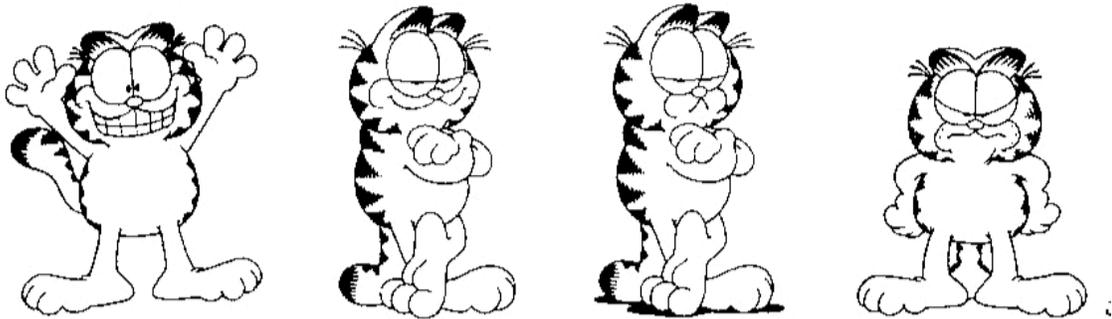
How do you feel about starting a new piece of writing?
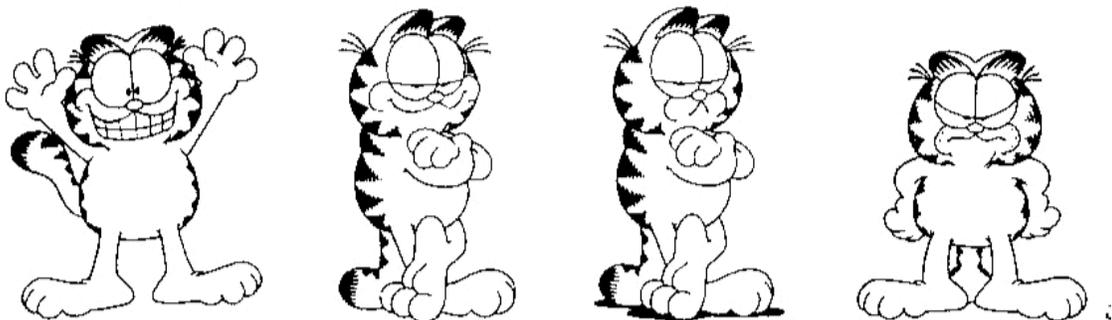
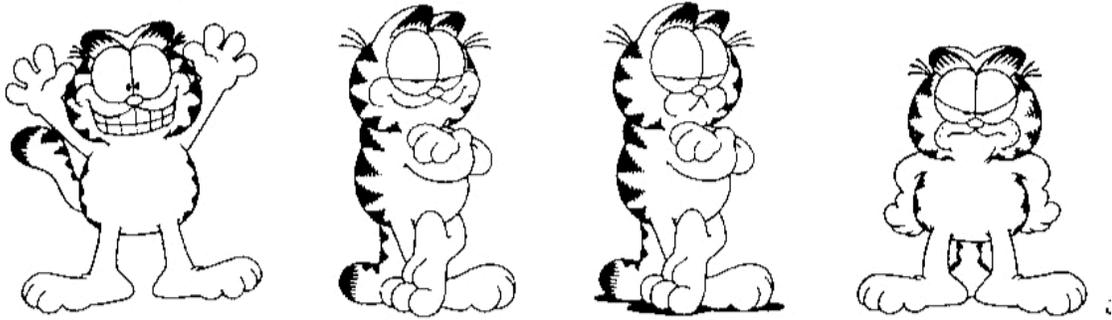How do you feel about writing during summer vacation?
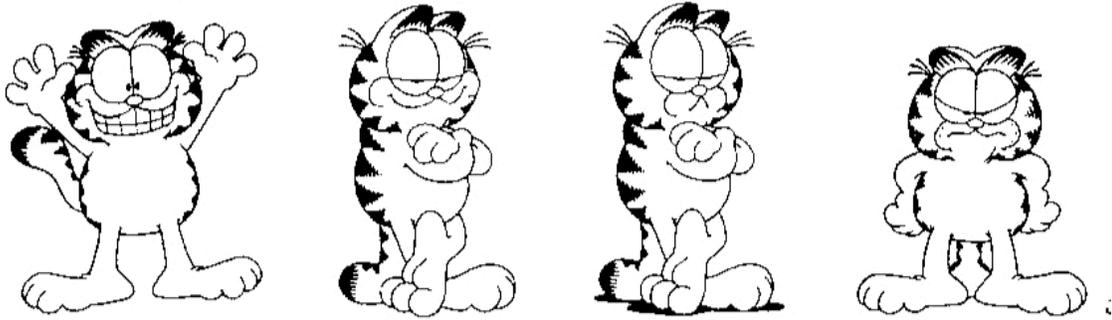
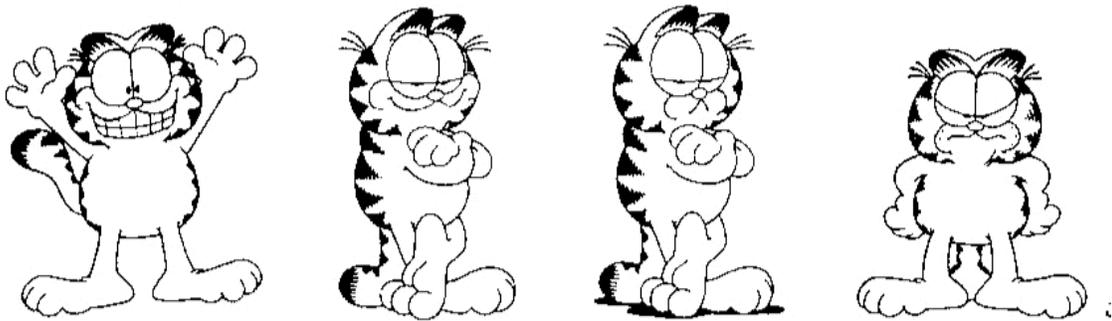How do you feel about writing different kinds of stories?
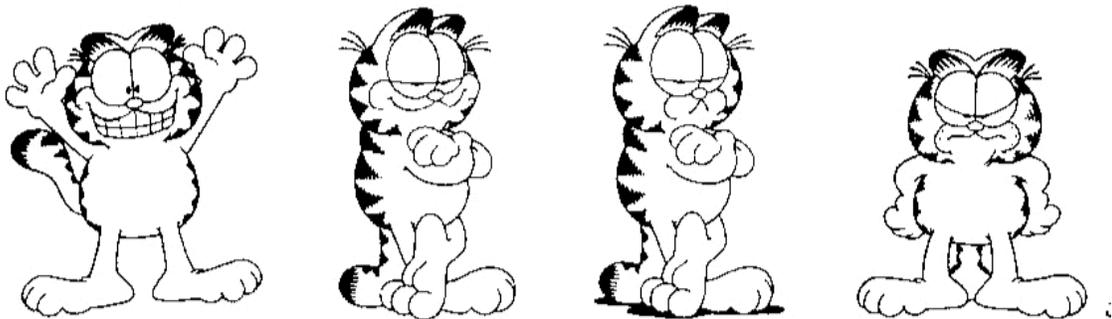
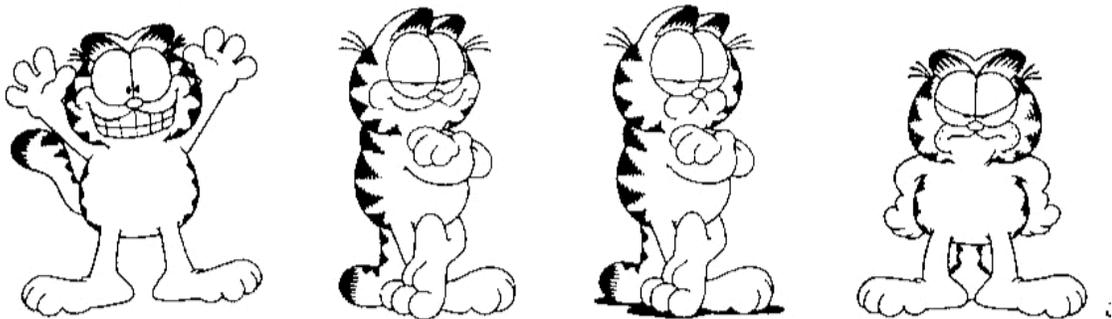How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about your writing?
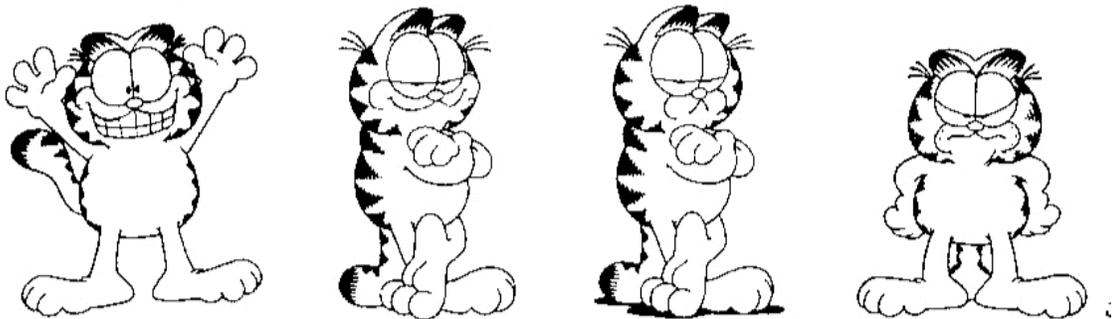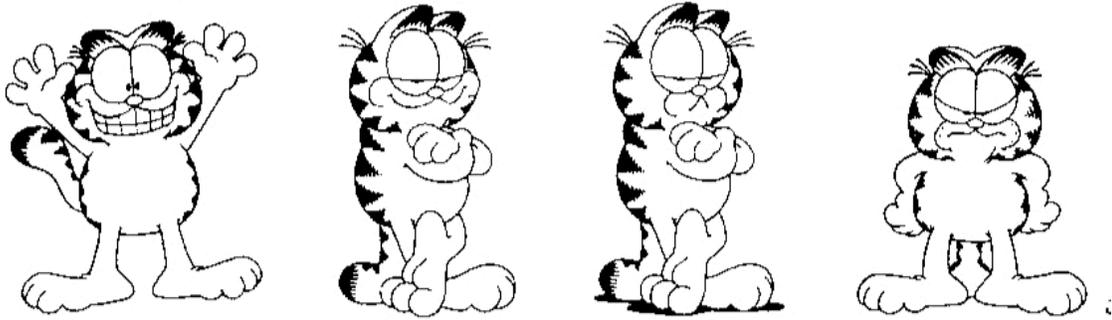
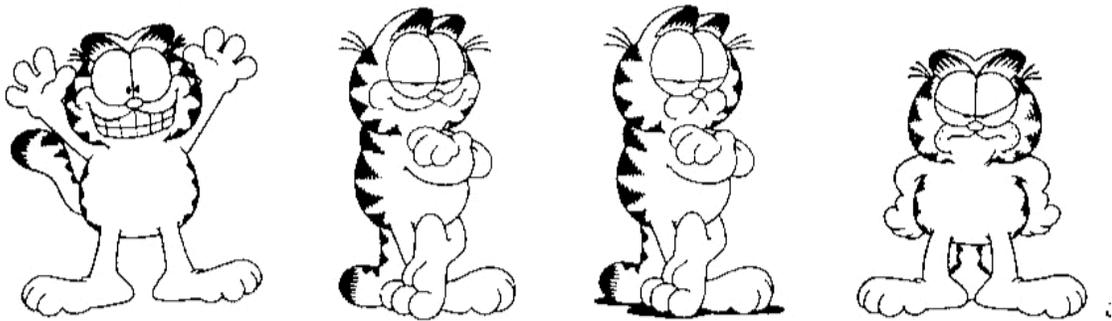How do you feel about writing Dear Mrs. Tubbs journals?

How do you feel about writing Family Message Journals?

How do you feel about writing spelling sentences?

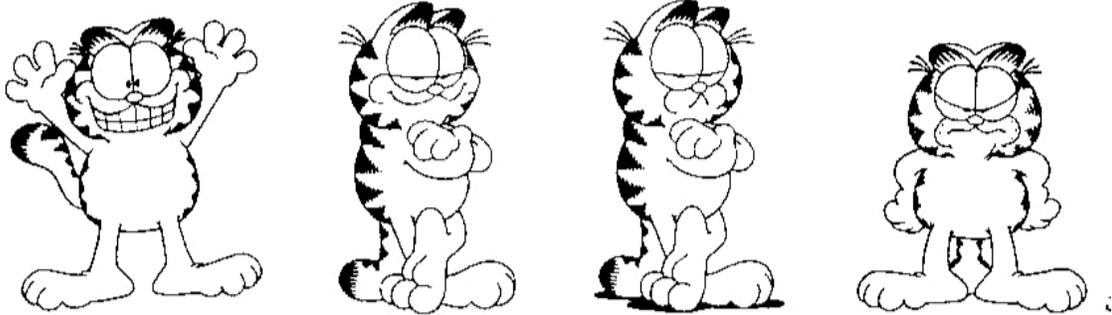How do you feel about writing in your Paleontologist's Notebooks?
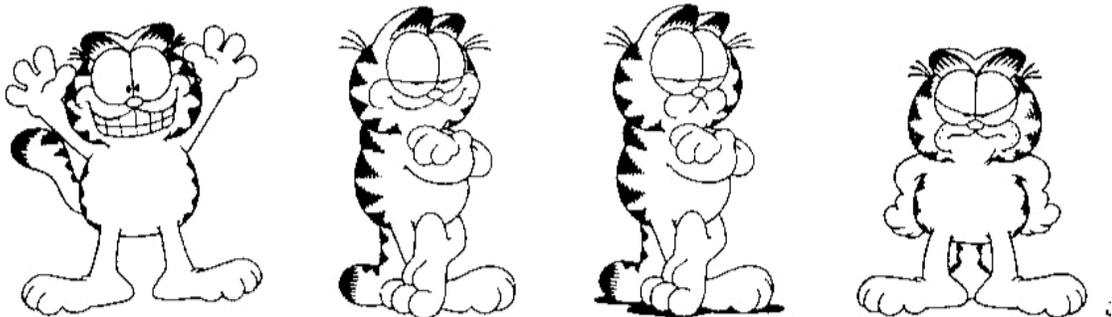

How do you feel about writing thank-you letters?
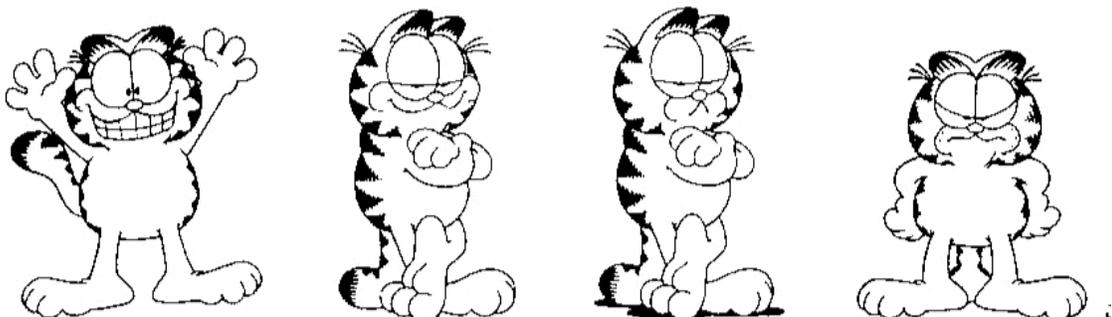

How do you feel about writing in school?
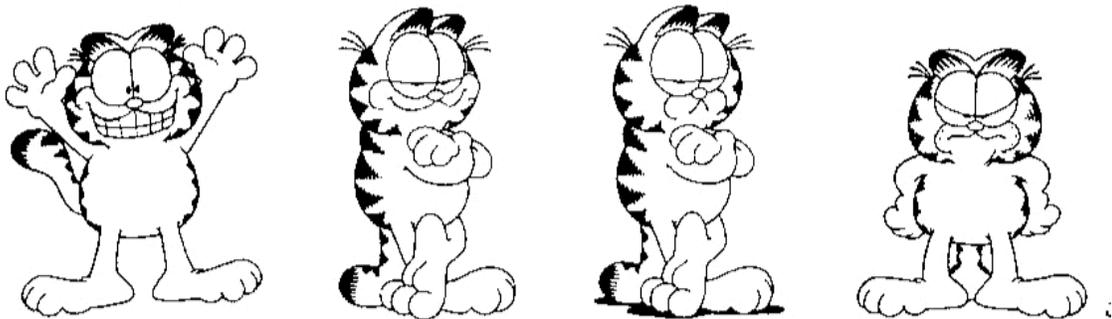
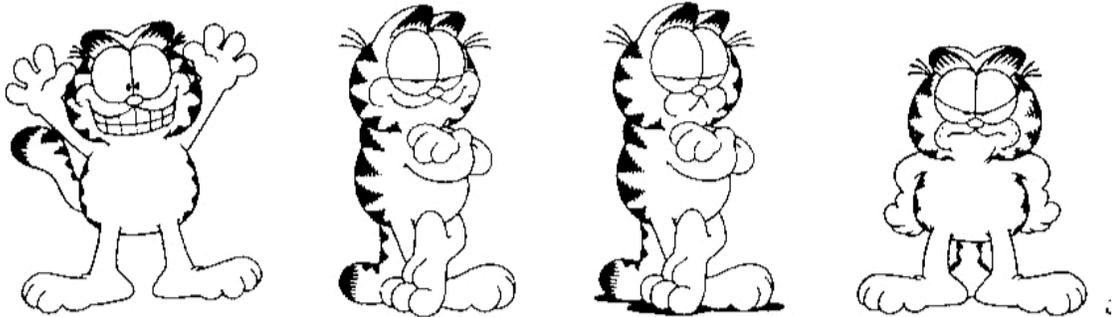How do you feel when it's time for the writing center?

How do you feel when it's time to write at your desk?
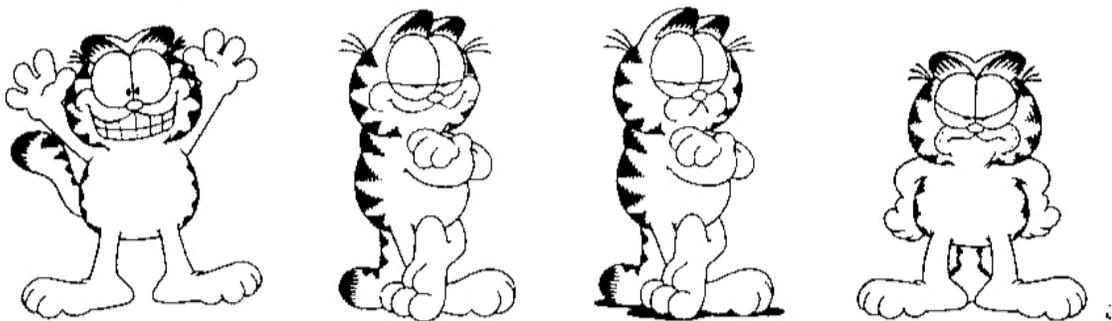

How do you feel about sharing your writing with others?

How do you usually feel about what you write?

How do you feel when you read your writing out loud?

Appendix D: Parent Survey

Dear Families,
    For my inquiry project, I will be studying how our students relate to writing. I would very much appreciate your insight on this topic. Please fill out the following survey and return it with your student by **Monday, March 5th**. Thank you very much for your time and consideration!
Sincerely,
Megan Sorber

1.) How frequently does your child write at home?

      Often   Sometimes   Never

2.) Do you think that your child enjoys writing?

      Yes   No

3.) What are your child's strengths in writing? weaknesses?

4.) What do you feel would help your child become a better writer?

5.) Please share any other comments you have about your child's writing:

Appendix E: Student Interviews (available upon request)

Appendix F: Writing Checklist

Initials	Date	Capitals	Punctuation	Sound Spelling	Vowels	Topic	Substantial details
LJ	8-Feb	2	2	4	4	4	4
WY	22-Feb	4	2	4	4	4	4
BI	22-Feb	4	3	4	4	4	4
MN	22-Feb	4	4	3	4	4	3
MK	22-Feb	4	4	3	4	4	4
SJ	22-Feb	4	3	4	4	4	4
AV	22-Feb	4	3	4	4	4	3
CF	23-Feb	4	4	3	3	4	3
RK	22-Feb	4	4	3	4	4	4
MS	8-Feb	2 or 3	2	4	4	4	2
MH	22-Feb	4	4	4	4	4	4
PJ	22-Feb	4	4	4	4	4	3
EC	8-Feb	3 or 4	3	2	3	4	4
MJ	22-Feb	4	4	3	4	4	4
AD	22-Feb	3	2	2	4	4	4
		1=never	2=some	3=most	4=always		
LJ	Mar-07	2	2	4	4	4	4
WY	29-Mar	3	3	4	4	4	4
BI	29-Mar	4	3	4	4	4	4
MN	Mar-07	3	3	4	4	4	4
MK	29-Mar	4	3	4	4	4	4
SJ	29-Mar	3	3	4	4	4	4
AV	29-Mar	4	3	4	4	4	4
CF	29-Mar	2	2	3	4	4	4
RK	22-Mar	4	4	3	3	4	4
MS	29-Mar	3	3	4	4	4	4
MH	29-Mar	3	4	4	4	4	4
PJ	29-Mar	3	3	4	4	4	3
EC	28-Mar	3	3	3	4	4	4
MJ	29-Mar	2	2	3	4	4	4
AD	29-Mar	3	2	3	4	4	4

Appendix G: Subjective Rating System

| Initials	Observations	General Notes	Mentor's Commentary	My subjective rating of self-esteem 1-5	My subjective rating of writing 1-5
LJ	4C, 5D	Instances of extremes - confidence and self-doubt	Extremes; also does not listen to or follow directions	3	2
WY	0C,1D	Very quiet, moments of self-doubt, especially when questioned	Very quiet, self-doubt	2	3
BI	0C, 0D	Talented, afraid of being wrong - only seems to answer when positive	Talented, afraid of being wrong	3	4
MN	0C, 0D	Willing to offer answers, sometimes shy	Agree	4	3
MK	0C, 1D	Seems confident, questions self however at times	Agree	5	4
SJ	1C, 1D	Seems confident, answers often, seems surprised when incorrect	Agree	5	5
AV	4C, 14D	Very unsure of self, ready to point out flaws in self and everyone else, focus on negative	Agree	1	4
CF	0C, 1D	Talkative, always right, seems confident in her opinions	Agree	4	1
RK	0C, 0D	Seems confident, laughs a lot	Silly, immature, baby talk	4	4
MS	0C, 5D	Struggles with writing more than other subject areas, especially flustered when questioned, puts self down when struggling, often blames task	Agree	2	2
MH	1C, 1D	Seems confident, surprised when wrong	Agree	5	4
PJ	1C, 0D	Very confident, asserts self often	Agree	4	4
EC	0C, 1D	Quiet confidence/contentment, broken when questioned however	Agree	3	1

MJ	6C, 3D	Generally puts self down, moments of inspriation however when glimmers of strong confidence, mostly unrelated to academics	Works hard but slow, eager to please	2	2
AD	0C, 0D	Quiet, seems to take criticism in stride, however not willing to assert self, very passive	Gets defensive and assertive with me	2	2
			Megan, you have most of these right on		

Appendix H: Follow-up Survey

How do you feel about writing in school?
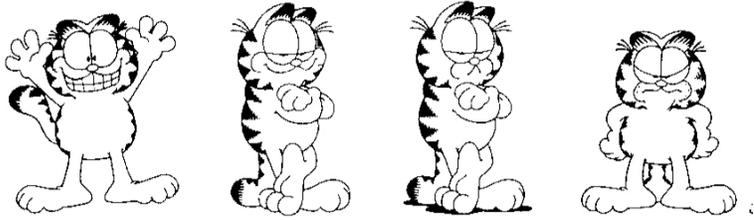
How do you feel about writing Dear Mrs. Tubbs journals?
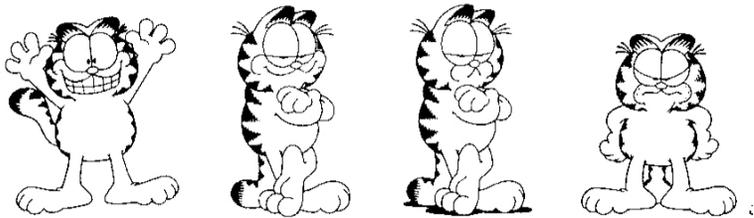
How do you feel about writing Family Message Journals?
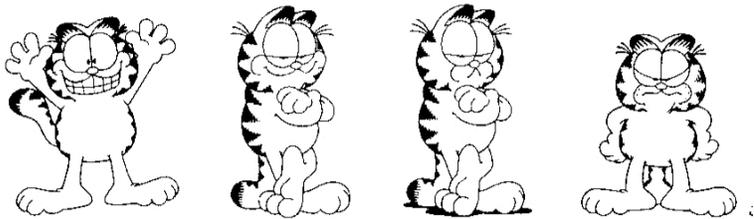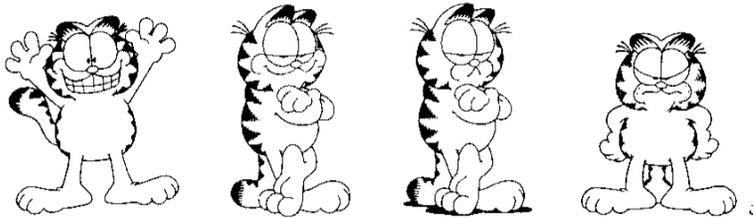
How do you feel about writing spelling sentences?
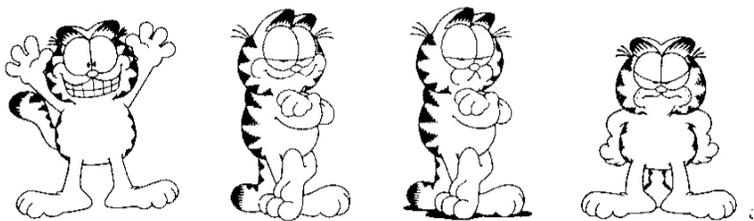
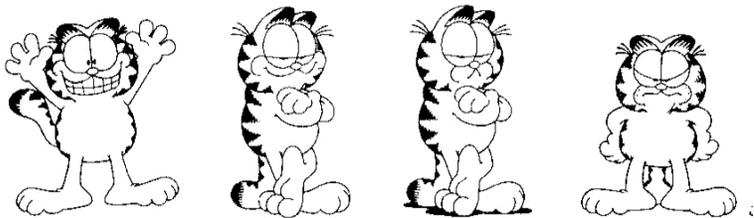How do you feel about writing in your Paleontologist's Notebooks?
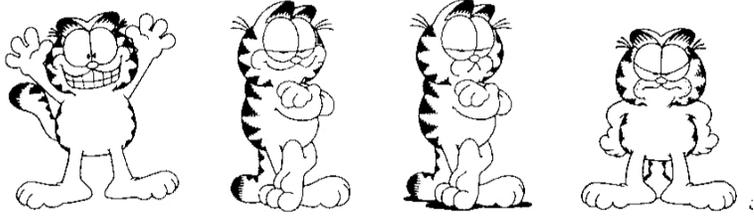
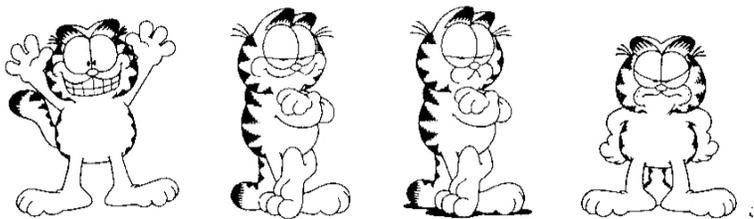How do you feel about writing thank-you letters?
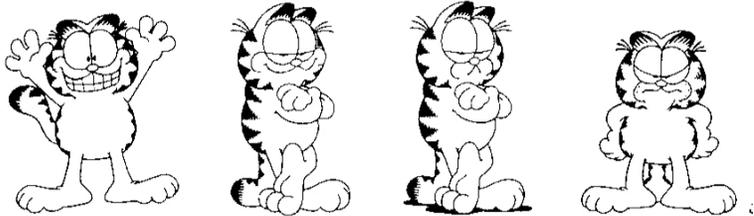
How do you feel about writing to your pen-pal?

How do you feel about writing poetry?

How do you feel about sharing your writing with others?

How do you usually feel about what you write?