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Qualitative observations of increasing levels of engagement in
nonfiction writing and increasing length of students' compositions
implies the effectiveness of the strategies employed. Findings imply
that nonfiction writing instructional strategies may increase
students' writing, enthusiasm, and writing quantity. (Contains 28
references and 2 tables of data. Appendixes present daily learning
activities using nonfiction texts, writing prompts, and rubrics.)
(Author/RS)

Running Head: MODELING NONFICTION TEXT STRATEGIES

A Qualitative Study: The Effect of Modeling Nonfiction Text Strategies

on Third and Fourth Grade Student's Nonfiction Writing

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative pilot study was to investigate the influence of nonfiction learning activities upon the level of student engagement, writing growth,and the quantity of students' nonfiction compositions. The participants were 19 third grade students and 19 fourth grade students, plus the two teachers of the respective classes. Nonfiction writing instruction consisted of modeling high-quality nonfictional texts, semantic mapping and writing conferences. The level of student engagement and the quantity of their nonfiction compositions increased during the five-week treatment period. Qualitative observations of increasing levels of engagement in nonfiction writing and increasing length of students' compositions implies the effectiveness of the strategies employed. Findings imply that nonfiction writing instructional strategies may increase students' writing, enthusiasm and writing quantity.

It is becoming more crucial that students are able to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. Effective written communication requires an extensive vocabulary and the ability to organize and to develop ideas. High-quality nonfiction texts present extensive vocabularies, models of well-organized writing, and interesting explanations of factual matters which students can utilize in their own writing. Nonfiction writing provides elementary students with meaningful and interesting subjects which encourage learners to write (Martin, 1994). Teachers encourage students to emulate high-quality nonfiction writing by mediating students' interactions with nonfiction texts, organizing ideas with semantic mapping, and by holding writing conferences with individual students. Teacher mediation of students' interactions with high-quality, nonfiction texts should encourage students to want to avidly read and write in the nonfiction genre. Having opportunities to write descriptive, persuasive and informative essays, stimulates students to want to write in the nonfiction genre.

Incorporating learning activities that encourage students to read high-quality nonfiction texts leads students to emulate high-quality writing in the nonfiction genre. Encouraging elementary students to avidly read nonfiction texts and to write in the nonfiction genre will improve vocabulary and build competence in reading. Students' writing of nonfiction texts and their awareness of important factual matters is improved. The apparent lack of students' experiences with nonfiction reading and writing materials in the classroom as well as the consequences that result led the researchers to investigate the effects of increased exposure to nonfiction textual models and related writing

strategies. The effects of this increased exposure to nonfiction texts and strategies that are appropriate for writing in the nonfiction genre were investigated.

<u>Review of Related Literature</u>

<u>The Writing Process</u>

Developing a writing program is not an easy process nor is it short in duration. The writing process is often defined as having four steps or levels including prewriting, drafting, editing and revising, and publishing. Writing stages can overlap.

According to Gardner (1983), human beings possesses multiple intelligences, involving different levels of achievement, abilities, and multiple learning preferences. Therefore, different reading and writing approaches may be appropriate. Traditionally, common sense and a variety of writing techniques appear to have been lacking in instructional approaches to writing; therefore, as a consequence improvement in writing capbilities have been thwarted (Turbill, 1982; Graves, 1983).

Whenever possible, looking at writing through the student's eyes can help avoid making the writing process unintentionally difficult (Labbo, Huffman, & Roser, 1995). Since the writing process is not automatic (King, 1995), students require instruction and application.

While students are discussing their readings in a collaborative reading format around writing issues, their generation of questions, justification of ideas, and consequences of the discussions can be stimulating and thought provoking (Waggoner-Bonilla, Chin, & Anderson, 1995). If discussions are encouraged as part of the prewriting

sessions, students may obtain new insights into writing and personal experiences, and from these new insights develop better critical thinking. Such discussions will encourage an in-depth study of authors' writings, and, in turn, these discussions will encourage students to analyze and discuss their writings.

Another technique to encourage students' writing is the use of response journals, which can assist in the recognition of how to process their ideas, sentences, and paragraphs. These response journals can give positive and informative feedback to both the students and the teachers (Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995).

The writing phase requires that students bring structure to the ideas they generate during the prewriting session. Ideas without organization, connectedness, and flow are dissipated.

Graves (1983) and Goldberg (1992) emphasized that editing or revising is an essential part of the writing process. Current writing research promotes a set of enhancements for writing development which include modeling, reprisal-free attempts, constructive feedback, sustained practice, and engagement in the task of writing. Without the implementation of these steps in the writing process, the student's development will be diminished. Such steps allow the student to be directly involved at all levels of the writing process and to progress at a rate suitable to the student's needs (Murray, 1982).

Having a finished product as a part of the over-all goal, enables many students function better as a writers. This way, writers can periodically assess their progress according to their goal of a finished product (Graves, 1983).

Writing Conference

Graves (1983) ushered in a radical change in views concerning writing development which recommended a change from emphasizing product to emphasizing the process. This paradigm shift has resulted in the need for the writing conference as a means of facilitating students' writing through the stages of the writing process.

According to McCarthey (1992), the writing conference is a central feature of the contemporary view of writing instruction. It is a time for students and the teacher to engage in dialogue focused on negotiating meaning from the students' texts. The strength of the writing conference lies in the interaction that occurs between the teacher and students as they work to clarify texts. The ultimate goal of the writing conference is to prepare students to become critical readers of their own texts.

The role of the teacher (McCarthey, 1992; Graves, 1993) is to listen genuinely to the students and not to impose a particular structure on their creations. The teacher and students may reverse conversational roles during the writing conference. Allowing the students to lead writing conferences distinguishes this approach from traditional classroom formats in which the teacher chooses the topics as well as the content and conversational strategy of the discourse.

According to Graves (1983), students should assume the role of leader in the conference while the teacher should function as a consultant, reading without criticism. The teacher's tendency to dominate the conference and turn it into a unilateral lesson

with red marks correcting mistakes is a difficult problem to overcome (McCarthey, 1992). Interactive conferences are dialogues between students and teachers instead of the traditional teacher-dominated monologues. Face-to-face interactions energize writing conferences between students and teachers.

McCarthey's (1992) study found that teachers should balance their roles between supporting and editing students' writing. Concern for mechanics and finished products needs to be interwoven with encouragement for students to write. The teachers in McCarthey's study discovered the necessity of having authentic exchanges with students about their texts.

Hatch (1991) stated that positive experiences during the writing process enhances students' writing ability and their desire to read and write. Just as reading should not be divided into isolated skills, so should writing not be divided into "chunks" such as penmanship, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The writing conference should enable students to recognize the relationship between subskills and the meaningful whole. The formal structures of language (i.e.g, spelling, grammar, and punctuation) are important aspects of writing instruction, because they provide the framework for meaning to be derived from written communication.

According to Hatch (1991), handwriting drill and worksheet activities are a hindrance to writing improvement and result in a postponement of fluency in writing. If the writing process is to be internalized, students should progress in a gradual pace

spending more and more time on editing and revising their manuscripts. An atmosphere that values creative effort and risk-taking is necessary for students to become energetic, fluent writers.

Modeling writing everyday, genuinely listening to what the students have to say, and serving as a consultant during meaningful one-on-one discussions contributes more to writing fluency than pointing out or analyzing errors (Graves, 1993). According to Hatch (1991), writing conferences allow teachers the opportunity to show students how conventions of written language, such as punctuation, improve their power to communicate through writing. The one-on-one interaction provides the opportunity for students to improve their ability to convey a message as well as direct a message to a specific audience.

The writing conference's diagnostic purposes allow the teacher to recognize common strengths and weaknesses which may signal a need for direct instruction on a particular convention or writing strategy. Instruction may incorporate the whole class, small group, or individuals during the writing conference which is immediate and relevant to context and students' needs.

The most effective lessons in generating text kindle an interest and create an ownership of literacy. Through inner motivation, students take control of their learning and learn naturally and willingly.

Treatment Protocol

Semantic Mapping

Up to 50 % of upper-grade students cannot read their content area textbooks (Estes & Vaughn, 1986). Many of these students who are good readers of narrative text in basal readers during elementary school have difficulty understanding the expository style of content area materials which are written to inform. Passages of expository texts can be made more comprehensible by activating prior knowledge, recognizing unknown facts, ideas, or vocabulary, and identifying the passage's main idea, along with its connections with supporting ideas and their details. Organizing content according to main ideas, subtopics, and details clarifies and interrelates the passage's important ideas (Vacca & Vacca, 1986). A writing strategy that is particularly effective as a means of graphically organizing nonfiction material from texts and other sources is semantic mapping.

Relationships between ideas in expository text can be clarified by semantic mapping, which graphically depicts categories of information and their relationships; therefore, a semantic map facilitates students' understanding of expository text structure (Pieronek, 1994). In Australian schools, semantic mapping coincides with other innovative approaches being implemented to increase elementary students' skills in reading and and writing nonfiction texts. For example, Australian teachers have used semantic maps as one means of motivating and enabling students to skillfully read and write nonfiction texts. Students read nonfiction texts to extend details about the subtopics.

This approach makes nonfiction texts more accessible for young students (Dana, 1996).

Teachers can create an environment that enhances comprehension and learning through semantic mapping. Semantic maps may assume the forms of vocabulary or discussion maps which not only involve writing and reading, but involve all components of language arts-- listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking. It is an effective way for teachers and students to organize ideas. Norton (1993) stated that mapping is a method for graphically and visually displaying relationships among ideas and concepts. The strategy encourages higher thought processing, stimulates oral interaction, and cultivates ideas.

The mapping strategy (Pieronek, 1994) can be incorporated in prereading and prewriting activities, post-reading and writing activities, or comprehension guides while reading. As a prereading strategy, mapping guides discussion of confusing vocabulary or story grammars the students will encounter while they read. A semantic map can enhance comprehension and provide students with a purpose for reading (Pieronek, 1994). As a prewriting strategy, mapping can be used as an outline or to encourage discussion of the written product in nonfiction writing tasks. Semantic maps are more flexible than the traditional linear outlines, because they allow students to write about subtopics in the order of their choice. This adaptability allows students to include spontaneous thoughts generated while writing (Dimmitt & Van Cleaf, 1992).

Metacognition

During the past three decades, extensive research (Graves, 1983; Hatch, 1991; Pieronek, 1994; Vacca & Vacca, 1986) has investigated the writing process, writing instruction strategies, and their implementation and evaluation. Metacognition, which refers to students' abilities to monitor their learning and control their writing (Cullen, 1991; Kuhrt & Farris, 1990), is one strategy that has received much attention.

Metacognition is composed of students' understanding of their cognitive processes, and the plans students implement when preparing for different writing tasks (Palinscar & Brown, 1987). Both factors involve monitoring the effectiveness and evaluating the outcome of the plan. Three elements of the metacognitive strategy include the task's demands, the necessary phases for task completion, and instruction in application. Kuhrt and Farris (1990) described four elements in the learning/writing process: (a) establishing the problem/topic, which encourages the writer to rehearse and clarify ideas, (b) searching for alternatives from writing models, (c) listing, and (d) evaluating the chosen alternatives. This process develops a strong foundation for decision making and evaluation, which are two cognitive skills. Through this process, students make connections between writing and discussion strategies, which allow students to control and take responsibility for their learning and writing (Cullen, 1991; Kuhrt & Farris, 1990).

Other researchers (Graham, Harris, & Sawyer, 1987; Stevens & Englert, 1993)

have stated that it is necessary for students to understand metacognitive strategies and the meaning and value of using such strategies. Teachers must ask students several questions regarding their overall knowledge of strategies, their use, and outcomes when they incorporate them. Students following this plan will be challenged and motivated to repeat the identification and implementation of effective strategies.

Gordon (1990) stated that it is necessary for students to understand both expository and narrative text structures. Combining the text structure strategy with self-questioning techniques and reinspection of the text, assists students in monitoring and controling their writing. This two-fold benefit enables students to read expository text much easier, and assists students in writing in the different expository genres.

Metacognitive strategies are not without their obstacles. Herriman (1991) made the following statements: (a) it is difficult to separate metacognition from general language functions; (b) there is a tendency to merge metacognitive knowledge, skills, and tasks; and, (c) it is difficult to determine the amount of consciousness involved in metacognition. These statements indicate that teachers must be cognizant of their use, effect, and goals in evaluating students' writing progress. In addition, research has indicated that some students develop metacognition without direct instruction; however, that is not true of all. Therefore, metacognitive strategies should be taught and demonstrated during the writing process.

Methodology

Subjects

The selected site for the pilot study was an urban school located in a low- to middle-socioeconomic area in close proximity to a major university. The school, serving kindergarten through the fourth grade students, had an enrollment of 782 students.

The third- and fourth-grade subjects were enrolled in a racially-diverse elementary school in a small, southern Mississippi town. The distribution of subjects (Table 1) among the two classes are as follows: (12) third grade females, (7) third grade males, (12) fourth grade females, and (7) fourth grade males. Three ethnic groups were represented in the two classes, which were composed of Caucasian (13.16%), African-American (81.58%), and Asian (5.26%).

The classroom teachers hold bachelors' degrees and have teaching experiences ranging from three to 13 years. Both participant observers, who modeled strategies, hold at least a master's degree and have experience ranging from 20 to 28 years. Each participant observer was experienced in the implementation of the strategies both with elementary students and preservice teachers.

Table 1

Distribution of Subjects by Gender and Race Among Grades

	Grade		
	3	4	Total
Gender			
Males	7	7	14
Females	2	12	24
Total	19	19	38
Race			
Caucasians	3	2	5
African-American	14	17	31
Other	2	0	2
Total	19	19	38

Instruments

Students' initial writing samples and samples that were collected at at the end of the study were examined and compared to determine writing effectiveness in the nonfiction genre. Rubrics, based upon the First Steps Writing Continuum Scoring Guides (Raison, 1992), were utilized to evaluate the specific writing assessments which include procedural, information, and descriptive essays.

Assessment prompts incorporated the arts, authentic experiences, multisensory stimuli, multimedia (i.e., charts, posters, pictures, poetry, audio tapes, and overhead transparencies) and writing props. Developmentally and experientially appropriate topics were selected for the instruments, including topics from history, civics, geography, cooking, environment, and science. Writing prompts (Appendix B) and scripts were written by the participant observers and used for the study. Classroom teachers collected the initial and final writing samples on the first and fifth weeks respectively. Each classroom teacher was presented a binder containing all the materials items, assessment dates, instruction/observation dates, and the strategies to be taught.

Procedure

Permission for the research was granted by a committee of university professors. The professor supervising the study made initial contact with the school principal. One third-grade and one-fourth grade teacher volunteered for this study. Participant observers explained the details of the study and the schedule of the classroom learning activities to

the teachers.

The research was conducted during March and April of 1996. Writing instruction was scheduled by the two participant observers and the classroom teachers. The third-grade modeling period (1 P.M.-2 P.M.) was consistent for each day of instruction, while the fourth grade modeling period (11 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.) varied on one day of the week. On Wednesdays the modeling period was brought forward one hour due to school scheduling conflicts.

High-interest tradebooks used for modeling strategies by the instructors were selected on the basis of content, genre, and appropriate topic. Additional books were borrowed from the school library to provide further information. Books were written by authors of various ages, including children who had published their own works.

The learning activities consisted of (a) sharing a variety of nonfiction books, (b) modeling nonfiction strategies, such as *List-Group-Label, Interactive Storybook, Brainstorming, Word and Topic Banks,* and *Cooperative Learning Activities,* and (c) *outlining the writing conference procedure.* Learning activity formats included a shared-book experience, (i.e., oral reading, whole group discussions, nonfiction text format, author's purpose, and nonfiction genre), a brief explanation of specific writing tasks, followed by independent student writing application. During independent writing experiences, the students were engaged in a self-selected task, which included illustrating, writing, thinking, conferencing, and reading. Active writing periods commenced with a 5-

minute writing session and increased in 5-minute increments until a maximum of 30-minutes total writing time was reached.

Writing journals were kept by classroom teachers and students. Classroom teachers were encouraged to record writing strategies and to note changes in students' attitude as well as writing behaviors. Third grade students were directed to reflect on and write about what they had done during the daily learning activities. Fourth grade students were expected to answer two questions: (a) What did I learn about writing? and (b) How did I learn it?

Individual writing conferences were conducted during independent writing applications. Students were expected to follow specific steps during the writing conference:

1.   Read the piece of writing to two other students before conferencing with the participant observer.

2.   Bring colored pencils or markers to the conference for the purpose of self-editing.

3.   Read the writing passage to the participant observer.

4.   Listen to the participant observer read the writing passage to the student.

5.   Self-correct for accuracy (e.g., punctuation, grammar, word omissions, word substitutions, capitalization, and spelling) and clarity.

6.   Spell the best they can, thereby, giving them the freedom to focus on the

content of their writing.

Qualitative Analysis

The results of this qualitative pilot study indicated that the influence of learning activities upon the level of engagement during nonfiction writing lessons and independent writing sessions with elementary students enhanced their growth in writing. Students' writings increased in quality and quantity, while attitudes, applications of strategies, and reading habits improved.

Using categorical topics reflecting regularity of response patterns, qualitative data from the third- and fourth-grade students and their teachers were analyzed. The following categories were (a) attitudes, (b) quantity, (c) quality, (d) application, (e) reading habits, and (f) writing versus illustrating. The researchers viewed the students strictly from a nonfiction reading/writing perspective.

The students' attitudes towards nonfiction writing improved over time and with practice, as their texts became longer and more detailed. The classroom teachers supported the nonparticipant observers' conclusions that the students' writings were becoming more involved by their on-task behavior, and the students appeared to be more confident about their writing. Individual students willingly shared their writings with their peers. During writing sessions, students' questions and observations about the contents of the books indicated their interest in nonfiction writing, by focusing their attention directly on the contents of the reading materials.

During the study, the quantity of students' paragraphs increased from three or four sentences in length to approximately twice that amount of writing. Time spent by students engaged in nonfiction writing increased as the study progressed. The students' knowledge of the procedures of the writing conference allowed them to focus immediately on their personal writings as they did not have to wait for instructions.

Students' receptiveness to writing across the curriculum became more evident to the classroom teachers as the study developed. This was evidenced by some students taking pride in writing notes to their peers and family members, both at school and at home.

The observations of student reading behaviors were restricted due to time constraints and personal interactions among students, participant observers and objective observers. Due to the paucity of reference materials, the students were limited as to the choices of nonfiction reading materials. However, the students did not hesitate to use their textbooks or classroom encyclopedias for additional nonfiction information.

At the beginning of the writing activity, the participant observers emphasized reading, writing, illustrating, and thinking about the nonfiction readings. Much of the students' focus gradually changed from a predominance of illustrations, drawings, and doodling to written compositions. Questioning appeared to follow after high engagement in some of the readings and written compositions as the students had more awareness of importance of the material to them.

Student choices and the interactive process of nonfiction reading/writing activities generally had a positive influence on student engagement. Initially, the majority of the students, having had no previous experiences in conference writing, were confused with the participant observers' expectations. Other students demonstrated confusion by spending time in task avoidance behaviors (e.g., pencil sharpening and looking out windows). Some actions normally associated with off-task behaviors were actually related to the task, (e.g., miming the story). As the study progressed, a number of students were willing, sometimes eager, to share their writings at various stages with their peers.

Findings From Journals

The student's response journals revealed an ever-increasing awareness of the writing process as well as the unique features of nonfiction text and how to write to a specific audience. Student perceptions regarding the role of an author and of themselves as authors were reflected throughout the journal writings.

The importance of reading to their peers as a means of making improvements and gearing their writings to a specific audience were mirrored in the students' journals. On the other hand, features of nonfiction texts, such as glossaries, tables of contents, and indexes were cited in their journals.

Table 2

Awareness of Audience	The Writing Process	Use of Sources in Nonfiction/Accuracy of Facts	Statements Regarding Content	Awareness of Features of Nonfiction	Books as Models	Concept of Author
	"You can writing at any age." "I learned that if you read your story to a friend, you will find some mistakes in your story." "Before you write anything, you always have to get ideas first."	"Every time you write, your author is always looking up information in an encyclopedia or a dictionary." "You can read a book to get good information."	"I learned different things about ants."	"I learned that if you need a title always look on the contents and words can be found in the index." "I learned about table of content and index."	"You get lots of ideas from reading."	"I learned how to be an author today." "We learned that every time you write, you're an author."
	"I learned that in writing you have to proofread to make sure that everthing in your writing is good."		"Ants are insects. They have three body parts."	"The contents tell what page the chapter is on. The index is in a, b, c order."		"I learned about writing that you can be a writer."
	"When you write you'll need to proofread. If you see something that does not belong, you can take it out."		"Birds are birds because they have feathers."			

"Writing will be in your life no matter what, because when you grow up and you have children they might need help in writing and you won't now how." "I learned how important information is to writing. I learned that writing helped me to get better at writing. I am a good writer if I put my mind to it." "We learned that you can invent spelling words."			"Volcanoes are caused by pressure and heat from plates that move under the ground."	

24

The students' response journals were replete with commentaries on the writing process and enjoyment of the nonfiction materials used in the study. The impact that the writing process had upon the learners was evidenced by the positive, in-depth responses which centered around the following elements of nonfiction writing: (a) awareness of audience, (b) uses of nonfiction texts as sources of accurate facts and ideas for topics, (c) awareness of the features of nonfiction texts, and (d) awareness of the concept of author.

Glossaries, tables of contents, and indexes, were cited in the journals as being fundamental parts of nonfiction prose. Some of the students' comments were as follows:

(a) "I learned that if you need a title always look on the (table of) contents, and words can be found in the index," and (b) "The (table of) contents tell what page the chapter is on. The index is in a,b,c order."

Examples of students' views regarding the use of nonfiction materials as sources of factual information and ideas for topics were depicted in the following excerpts:

(a) "Before you write anything, you always have to get ideas," (b) "Every time you write, (the) author is always looking up information in an encyclopedia or in a dictionary," (c) "You can read a book to get good information," and (d) "I learned how important information is to writing."

These opinions signal the importance of supplying a classroom with a wide variety of nonfiction texts as well as using strategies such as semantic mapping for assisting students in generating ideas.

The students made the following consistent references to the content of the nonfiction big-

book readings:

(a) "Ants are insects. They have three body parts," (b) "Volcanoes are caused by pressure and heat from plates that move under the ground," and (c) "Birds are birds because they have feathers."

This aspect of the nonfiction learning activities was interwoven throughout the students' journal entries indicating their appreciation for nonfiction prose.

Several students alluded to the fact that writing is an ongoing, lifelong process in the following statements:

(a) "Writing will be in your life no matter what, because when you grow up and you have children, they might need help in writing and you won't know how," (b) "I learned that writing helped me get better at writing," and (c) "I am a good writer if I put my mind to it."

Revising, editing, and rewriting were cited as being important aspects of the writing process as illustrated by the following students' comments:

(a) "I learned that in writing you have to proofread to make sure that everything in your writing is good," (b) "When you write, you'll need to proofread. If you see something that does not belong, you can take it out," and (c) "We learned that you can invent spelling words."

"I learned that if you read your story to a friend, you will find some mistakes in your story," was an example of a student's opinion regarding the importance of an awareness of audience.

A few students perceived the fact that "the concept of author" includes anyone who writes. Their comments were as follows: (a) "We learned that every time you write, you're an author," (b) "You can (write) at any age," and (c) "(What) I learned about writing (is) that you

can be a writer."

Discussion

Students who have been exposed to meaningful, interesting, and high-quality nonfiction texts are inclined to incorporate similar writing techniques in their own writing. Nonfiction texts provide students with effective and challenging examples of effectively used grammar, style, vocabulary, and descriptive strategies. Support was provided for Martin's (1994) theory that nonfiction texts stimulate students' interest by presenting meaningful topics which are abundant in content-rich vocabulary (e.g., volcanoes). Support is also provided from McCarthey's (1994) findings that providing opportunities for students to write in different genres about nonfiction topics, which include personal experiences, increases their quality and quantity of their writing and level of engagement.

The power of the written word, according to Goldberg (1993), can release a writer's personal experiences and feelings. These third- and fourth-grade elementary students discovered that their written words can be as powerful as their illustrations. In their writing development, the students progressed from drawings to words, because the initial products employed much more drawings and doodles than the final products which were comprised of prose.

Recommendations for future research include lengthening the period of time for the study and starting the study earlier in the school year. Increasing the number of consecutive school visits would improve the effectiveness of observations.

Conclusions

Elementary school students can handle much more complicated nonfiction texts than many

educators had previously thought. Students will rise to the challenge when provided with a safe, comfortable, nurturing environment conducive to learning that meets their learning preferences. The conditions and the materials provided during this study motivated students to write about topics which intrinsically interested them.

As the study evolved, the students generated a more positive attitude toward writing as they felt more comfortable in following the lesson format, especially the writing conference. The results of this study may indicate that a well-formulated format and teacher modeling offers increased confidence to the students.

Over time the students wrote longer and more detailed expository compositions as they realized that they could draw upon more internal and external resources. As the writing progressed, the students recognized the value of the writing conference and peer review-- audience. The eagerness that some exhibited in reading their compositions to others showed that these students perceive themselves as authors.

Summary

Using nonfiction texts to stimulate students' writing in the nonfiction genre with selected instructional strategies enhanced the growth of their writing capabilities. Students have an interest in nonfiction materials as illustrated by the longer, more detailed writing they produced. The high-quality textual selections were paramount in promoting the students' ability and engaging in nonfiction writing.

Growth in proficiency of the written compositions emerged despite a short time period and breaks between some of the writing sessions. These results may indicate that writing ability increases when students' are provided with a well-formulated writing format. Furthermore, the

modeling provided by participant observers'supplied examples which promoted the students'

increased confidence.

In sum, underestimating elementary students' capabilities, especially in the nonfiction

genre, appears to be the norm. Interesting and meaningful nonfiction instruction offers possibilties

for improving students' vocabularies and nonfiction writing capabilities. This approach motivates

them to learn from reading about important factual matters. Students, who are increasingly

stimulated to read and write about instrinsically interesting factual matters, are empowered to

utilize writing strategies and vocabularies, which produce progressively better nonfiction writing.

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Appendix A

The Learning Activities
using Nonfiction Texts

FIRST DAY:

I.   Read **If you were a Writer** by Joan Lowery Nixon

II.   Discuss the fact that we are all writers

    A.   What do writers do?
    B.   What do writers write about?
    C.   Where do writers get their ideas?
        1.   Have students think about a topic they know a lot about.
        2.   Have them write their name and the topic on the top of a sheet of paper. Then pass the paper around for each student to write his or her topic on the paper. The finished product--a list of topics (for each student) to use as a "Topic Bank."

SECOND DAY:

I.   Discuss the different features of Nonfiction   Texts as compared to Fiction.

    A.   Table of Contents
    B.   Index
    C.   Glossary of terms
    D.   Topics and subtopics keyed to index
    E.   Comparison to Fiction texts.

II.   Discuss what a writer does.

    A.   Have the students decide upon a topic (something they already know about) to use as a topic.
        1.   Tell them they have **5** minutes to work. They can use the five minutes to:
            a.   Draw illustrations about the topic.
            b.   Think about the topic.
            c.   Look up information--read about the topic.

        d.   Discuss the topic with someone else.

               Guidelines:

               --Talk in soft voices

               --Be considerate of your friend's time

        e.   Write on your topic.

    2.   They will be working each day on this topic.

THIRD DAY:

I.   Discuss what a writer does.

II.   Have the students use the topics they chose yesterday.

    A.   Tell them they have **10** minutes to work. They can use the time to:

        1.   Draw illustrations about the topic.

        2.   Think about the topic.

        3.   Look up information--read about the topic.

        4.   Discuss the topic with someone else.

            a.   Guidelines:

                  --Talk in soft voices

                  --Be considerate of your friend's time

        5.   Write on your topic.

    B.   Use this time to have "Roaming Conferences."

FOURTH DAY:

I.   Discuss what a writer does.

II.   Have the students to work on the topic they chose.

    A   Tell them they have **15** minutes to work. They can use the time to:

        1.   Draw illustrations about the topic.

        2.   Think about the topic.

        3.   Look up information--read about the topic.

        4.   Discuss the topic with someone else.

            a.   Guidelines:

                  --Talk in soft voices

--Be considerate of your friend's time
    5.   Write on your topic.

    B.   Use this time to do "Roaming Conferences."

FIFTH DAY: ·

I.   Discuss what a writer does.

II.   Have the students to work on the topic they chose.

    A   Tell them they have **20** minutes to work. They can use the time to:
        1.   Draw illustrations about the topic.
        2.   Think about the topic.
        3.   Look up information--read about the topic.
        4.   Discuss the topic with someone else.
           a.   Guidelines:
               --Talk in soft voices
               --Be considerate of your friend's time
        5.   Write on your topic

III.   Use this time to have writing conferences with students spending approximately ten minutes for each.

SIXTH DAY: ·

I.   Discuss what a writer does.

II.   Have the students to work on the topic they chose.

    A   Tell them they have for **25** minutes to work. They can use the time to:
        1.   Draw illustrations about the topic.
        2.   Think about the topic.
        3.   Look up information--read about the topic.
        4.   Discuss the topic with someone else.
           a.   Guidelines:
               --Talk in soft voices

--Be considerate of your friend's time

5.   Write on your topic.

III.   Use this time to have writing conferences with students spending approximately ten minutes for each.

Appendix B
Descriptive

I. Read <u>Volcanoes, Stage 2</u> to the students and selected portions of <u>Fascinating Facts About Volcanoes</u>. Emphasize the parts of the book that the author includes to help us read factual material, e.g., Table of Contents, Glossary, Subtopics, and Index.

II. List as many descriptive words as the students can using the List-Group-Label strategy in reading. These words can become the word bank the students use to their description.

III. Topic: volcanoes
1. The purpose of this assignment is to use descriptive words to make a picture to allow the reader to share their thoughts.
2. The writer uses he/her five senses to describe their visual picture. A good description uses as many of them as possible.
3. Plan the report.
4. Be as clear as possible.

How to...

I. Read the book, <u>The M & M's Counting Book</u>.

II. Ask the students what their favorite cookie is. Ask them if they have ever followed the directions in a recipe to make their favorite cookie. Why was their cooking successful? What is so unique about a recipe? List categories that make up a recipe, e.g., ingredients, utensils, measures, and so forth.

III. Brainstorm cooking terms and ingredients that will become their data bank for vocabulary terms for cooking and alter the original recipe.

IV. From a given list of ingredients and their added ingredients, the correct measurements, and the utensils needed to bake M & M cookies, have the students write a new and innovative recipe.

As the students write, remember these points:
1. Plan the steps before you begin.
2. Write words that tell exactly what you mean.
3. Use step-by-step words to make your steps clear.

Informative Report

I. Read: **I Wonder If I'll See a Whale** by Frances Ward Weller.

II. Give each student a copy of "**Whale Notes**."

   A. Have the students to read the whale notes and write down three to four main facts.

   B. Have the students form groups of three to four and discuss their main facts for the purpose of consolidating the facts to come up with a combined list of at least five.

   C. Have a representative of each group read their group's lists.

   D. Have the students make any changes they so desire to get their individual list of facts like they want it to be.

   E. Have the students plan their report according to the following guidelines:
      1. Include at least four of the facts from their list.
      2. Put the facts into your own words and not copy directly from their list.
      3. Be as clear as you can in writing your informative report.

Appendix C

ID #: _____   **DESCRIPTION RUBRIC**

LEVEL FIVE

□   * descriptive framework incorporated within another form

□   * use of an elaborated description that includes a variety of literary devices

□   * a conclusion that may interpret or evaluate

LEVEL FOUR

□   * use of descriptive framework

□   * use of introduction signaling what is to follow

□   * summarization of features

□   * use of a variety of linking words to provide cohesion

LEVEL THREE

□   * some use of description framework

□   * simple introduction

□   * description of some features

□   * simple conclusion

□   * use of additive linking words to provide cohesion, e.g., and, as well

LEVEL TWO

□   * lack of organizing framework

□   * use of few descriptive words

□   * evaluative concluding comment

□   * use of language resembling speech

41

ID #: _____   <u>**HOW TO RUBRIC**</u>

<u>LEVEL FIVE</u>

☐   * meeting of all organizational requirements of form

☐   * procedural order providing much of the cohesion

☐   * effective use of subject-specific vocabulary

<u>LEVEL FOUR</u>

☐   * inclusion of goals, materials, and procedures

☐   * signal words such as after, next, while used to develop coherence

☐   * use or implied use of generalized 'you'

☐   * adaptation of text t suit purpose, e.g., recipe

<u>LEVEL THREE</u>

☐   * inclusion of goal and most equipment needed

☐   * inclusion of most steps

☐   * linking of steps by a variety of temporal signal words, e.g., first, when, finally, after

☐   * use of generalized 'you' attempted

<u>LEVEL TWO</u>

☐   * goal briefly stated

☐   * steps linked using 'and then'

☐   * use of first person, e.g. 'We mixed..'

☐   * inclusion of most steps of procedure

ID #: _____   <u>**INFORMATIVE REPORT RUBRIC**</u>

LEVEL FIVE

☐   * successful classification
☐   * use of report framework to organize text
☐   * use of impersonal, objective language
☐   * use of precise vocabulary

LEVEL FOUR

☐   * adequate classification
☐   * use of report framework
☐   * organization of topic into paragraphs
☐   * effective selection of information
☐   * use of timeless present

LEVEL THREE

☐   * attempt to classify
☐   * attempt to use some report framework
☐   * inclusion of main details
☐   * use of some objective language and timeless present, e.g., suckle, fight, teach

LEVEL TWO

☐   * classification vague or lacking
☐   * lack of organizing framework
☐   * lack of important information
☐   * subjective language

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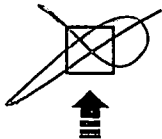
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