

# **Writer's Workshop: Implementing Units of Study, Findings From a Teacher Study Group, and Student Success in Writing**

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By Sandra Lynne Chaney

Committee Approval

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Tim Sundeen

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Olga Winbush

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Kimberly Labinger

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### Personal Statement

Interest in children's writing reaches far back to my earliest memories. Those memories were centered on me long ago in nursery school. That is what people called it back then. Chunky puzzles that were smoothed by many little hands over many years, sand boxes (it once swallowed a bracelet of mine), finger paint (do you remember the puddle of starch and the delight of powdered tempera sprinkled on?), singing in circles, wooden cubbies to put your stuffed bear and sweater, green play dough – I can still smell it, graham crackers with icing- I can still taste them, and nap time – I resisted those wholeheartedly - these are just some memories.

Those memories are etched deep in my mind and center around where I spent time in the afternoon at a big long table in a room with warm afternoon sunshine streaming in through large windows. To this day, I can still see my brother outside digging in the sandbox or climbing the apparatus. As inviting as the outdoors was, I often preferred to stay inside where I could make pictures and do pretend writing. A helpful teacher would staple little books for us if we folded the paper. I knew something had to go on a page, and could easily spend hours scribbling and making stories which were mostly pictures with a word or scribble here and there. Talking always accompanied my 'writing' then.

Around the edges of the room were nearby shelves stocked with assorted papers, fat pencils for little fingers, waxy crayons, and wooden stencils. On special occasions the teacher would bring out glitter and I could hardly wait my turn to put it on my glue globs. Those early books were always presented to my mom after a hard day's work to show her how much I loved and missed

her. It always worked like magic too. Her mood would lift, the worry lines would soften, and she appeared flattered as though I'd given her a precious diamond necklace or some exquisite perfume. Observant as I was, I could see the power that my books had over my mom and I felt very special for accomplishing something with such power. Reflecting back, I know I felt very capable as a three and four year old, and all I needed was pencil or crayon, paper and an occasional sprinkle of glitter to change my world. Many of those 'writings' are yellowed with age and fragile to the touch, yet, have been carefully saved by mom though I'm quite past grown up. I guess I was quite perceptive as a nursery school child about how meaningful my early writing attempts were to her.

Elementary school was pretty unremarkable in terms of writing projects or creative writing. Mostly, I remember writing letters to my grandmother who lived out of the country, and to friends I'd made there during long summer visits. These letters were many and, unbeknownst to me at the time, provided me numerous opportunities to develop skill in writing. My friends wrote in Spanish, and I in English. Though we were not fluent in each other's language, our letters continued for many years, and the power of our written words bound us together and kept us connected despite distance and language.

At home no one told me what to write about, or corrected my writing. I was free to do what I wished. I kept a diary with a lock, guarding my writing from nosy older brothers who might tell my very personal secrets to the whole neighborhood just to upset me. I knew the very words which held power over my mother could easily be used against me as a pre-adolescent if my brothers disclosed my secret crush that lived a block away. I would never be able to step outside in the circle of neighborhood friends and enemies if they knew my inner thoughts – the prospect was terrifying, yet I continued to keep a diary. Those were the days!

Fifth grade brought me Ms. Hagberg who created a very accepting and safe atmosphere that was tangible to the class. Like many girls, I became self-conscious at this time, and so having her and a supportive learning community allowed my creative juices to flow into a composition in which I wrote through the eyes of a leaf being tossed about by the fall breezes. She made a comment in the margin in blue pen in which she stated she felt she was the leaf as she read it. To this day, I remember that comment. How well I remember, too, that my best friend imitated my story once she saw how the teacher liked it. The power of the written word was a pattern that was beginning to emerge in my life. This time it held power not only over my mother, but over my friends and teacher as well. It felt good and I thought myself influential within the circle of the classroom. I'd be lying if I said it didn't matter.

Middle and high school do not bring fond memories of writing or anything school related. Mostly I remember awkwardness and I longed to drop out and begin working for money. I was eager to escape the school scene for several reasons. The tipping point was an oral presentation in English class. Could I have done the work? Absolutely. Did I have the confidence to present? Nope! Expectations felt rigid in the regular high school and it seemed as though no teacher tried to connect to me in any way. I felt isolated and completely unimportant to anyone there and wanted to get away from friends who were making poor choices. The habit of skipping classes to avoid school, and the lack of connection with the overwhelmingly large high school community landed me in continuation school. Though I felt safe in my new and smaller setting - as though I mattered to the teachers- I realize now I was academically unchallenged. I think if I'd had the opportunity to express myself through the written word, I'd have loved that. Continuation school was where I felt safe and cared about, yet there was no writing going on or anything to challenge me. Only reading

textbooks, taking chapter tests, again and again, until you completed the requirements. Here is your diploma – you are now a graduate. It felt safe, but meaningless.

College was where I really began to write for many purposes. It was the first time I think I really went through the all the steps of the writing process and I felt challenged and motivated to improve. Again, I felt the creative juices flow and I felt a sense of release of energy and tension through writing what I cared about and it was a wonderful way to express feelings, and viewpoints.

It was in English 101 where I was first challenged to revise an explication of a poem called, Meadow Mouse. A few short verses it was, yet so much could be said about it. I wrote, and rewrote, and revised, and rewrote until finally, with the trash can full of unsatisfactory drafts, I had my best interpretation of it on paper. In the end, I got a B plus on the assignment. All that work for a B? In the end, I was excited by the challenge and determined to do better on future writing assignments. After all I'd had a several year break from writing and was just beginning to find my way around new academic demands.

The importance of writing well, or at least clearly, was essential on the road to becoming a teacher as there were so many essay types of tests to pass for my teaching credential. During the process of applying for a job in my school district I had to write a page about working with students' diverse language backgrounds and abilities. Getting a job, or not depended on that writing test. Could I describe on one page the complex issues one encounters in working with students? I got the job, and was thankful; someone determined I had passed that part of the employment process.

In retrospect my early years of teaching writing were pretty comical. I would always give a prompt to write to, and then wasn't quite sure what to do with all the writing students turned in. I took stacks of papers back and forth from school to home, and back again not sure of what I should

do with it. Was I supposed to grade all of it? Give individual feedback? I had no clue, and an experienced writing teacher would have, no doubt, laughed at my methods. It was evident to me that I had no idea of what to do. On the one hand I loved reading students' writing, but, felt ill-prepared to teach and assess it, and develop individual students' unique strengths and effectively address weaknesses. Writing is a very tender area to give feedback to and I was afraid if done incorrectly, I'd create permanent damage. My thinking during that early career stage was that it was better to do nothing than to risk harm to developing writers.

Questions continued to arise for me as I traveled down my career path, and I knew I needed answers. Sooner rather than later would have been best, yet that is not how it turned out. How would I seek out opportunities to improve my knowledge in teaching writing, and how did other teachers teach writing in their classroom? How would I be able to consistently provide feedback and confer with students? With parents? With other teachers? Would the writing activities from idea books purchased from the local teacher supply store really be enough for a yearlong curriculum? What exactly would I teach for a whole year anyway, when I couldn't think beyond a week or two at most?

Years later, our school selected writing as its instructional focus. Thinking Maps, and graphic organizers were chosen by the Instructional Leadership Team for the use of structuring writing, and I implemented them. They proved helpful for some students and some purposes, but not for all. Sometimes it even slowed down a writer who had story structure internalized and sometimes affected creativity and voice in the final product. When some staff members were selected to attend, Write from the Beginning, (which incorporated Thinking Maps) more professional development around that program was scheduled, and again I incorporated some of those ideas/lessons into my writing program that still looked like Swiss cheese. It surely wasn't

complete or solid and it didn't feel right to me. Somewhere along the line came The Seven Traits of Writing, and again some brief school-wide professional development. More binders full of ideas, more lessons and - you guessed it- I tried incorporating that as well.

Before I knew it my writing lessons looked like a patchwork quilt of materials, and lessons yet it didn't feel connected. My book shelves were overflowing with thick binders with too many ideas and strategies for one teacher to use in a lifetime. I had many resources, but was unsure of how to fit them together in a meaningful way. I was dizzy with trying to figure it all out – it was as if the more I learned, the more I got lost in the 'stuff'. Most importantly, I saw that all of these maps and binders full of lessons did not particularly motivate the students to approach writing, nor did they improve the content of their writing. Much of their writing was formulaic, following very predictable patterns with one piece of writing sounding much like the others - especially around writing benchmark time when students were asked to all write to one topic. This ritual took place four times per year, a baseline writing sample, and one thereafter for each trimester.

It was about this time that I yearned for a writing program that would teach skills and content in such a way as to inspire and motivate the students and not inhibit them the way that assigned topics and graphic organizers tended to do. One that could stand the test of time, and not be swayed by what comes into style one year, yet is out the next. Long ago I had read The Art of Teaching Writing, by Lucy Calkins, which spoke to me as a teacher. Her well- thought-out ideas, approach, and philosophy of writing was complex and made a lot of sense to me. Unfortunately, it left me with questions of management and I felt I couldn't do it justice due to time constraints. Donald Graves also had a wonderful book which described a writer's workshop and dealt with very specific issues. It was inspiring, yet left me with many more questions than I had before I started reading it.



Why was it so hard to develop a writer's workshop in my classroom I asked myself? I've come to believe the reasons are complex and varied, at times driven by individual teachers and their own lack of professional development or interest in writing, or fears of managing a workshop setting along with pressures of time. After all, who does prepare a teacher for the art of teaching writing well, for inspiring the natural writer, for supporting the struggling writer, and all the possibilities that lie in between? In the three most recent years, my neighbor teacher has implemented her version of writer's workshop as part of her language arts program. She has even hosted students from Cal State LA in an ongoing series of writer's workshop observations. She makes it look easy, yet I know from experience it is not.

As I look back on my earliest days of teaching, I can laugh now about how little I knew about the teaching of writing and I hope those early students, some now graduated from college, can forgive my naiveté and lack of skill.

These were my past experiences with personal writing and some of my teaching experiences which now lead to my present. These days I teach third grade, and the primary way I really get to know the details of students' lives is through their stories: oral and written.

I have managed to acquire a few skills in the teaching of writing over the years and experience has taught me a few fundamentals. From the first day of school each year, I work at creating a community feeling, and model respect towards all students and I expect it in return. It is a safe place for all of us, and we become a learning community in which all are accepted. We are all so very different yet so much alike. We are all important to the learning community and need to get along. Everyone has something to contribute, and they do. I am always amazed by my students' observations, opinions on life, and conclusions. I clearly see they write best about self-selected topics.

On a shelf in my classroom, in plastic covered sheet protectors to safeguard the treasures within, I have saved many samples of student writing, and several student-made books from years past. The binder is thick. One student- made book, written by a boy about three years ago while in third grade, is entitled, How to Understand A Boy/Man. I have shed tears of laughter from his words as he captured the essence of boyhood through his eyes. The companion piece, How to Understand a Girl/Woman, was written by a third grade girl, whom I envisioned being interviewed by Oprah Winfrey as a guest author for her natural talent with words at such a young age. To this day, I am awestruck by her maturity and ease with written language. These stories are shared with succeeding classes to inspire, and to open up the range of possible topics they might want to write about.

The background story of how these stories came to be written is pretty funny, and both of these books have become third grade classics that have entertained and delighted succeeding classes of third graders. Little did the young authors know when they wrote those books that they would inspire other students to write about the smallest moments of their lives with humor, and a keen sense of observation of their world and all that it contained. Third grade students are amazingly perceptive and they usually write with heartfelt honesty and those books reflected truths about the people in their lives as well as themselves. The ‘classics’ on my shelf, though unedited, are as good as any published writing sitting on a bookstore shelf, and my colleagues and I have laughed ourselves silly as well as have been thoroughly entertained.

I still don’t feel like I have a smooth writing workshop program down, and I struggle with the problem of how to schedule significant daily writing time, about an hour at least four times per week, while facing ongoing demands to focus on areas that come from standardized testing. I desperately see the need for students to write and write well. Their future depends on it. Therefore I

wish to implement a writer's workshop in my classroom based on Units of Study by Lucy Calkins from Teacher's College. The series of six units are complex, and are high level units for third grade, but only include only one of three genres I am required to teach. Can I adapt this curriculum for my students? Can I fit it all into one academic year? Will I be able to adapt the units to my students' needs? Will my participation in the teacher study group be support enough to figure out how to put it all together? I don't know the answers to those questions. I am willing to give it a good try though. I continue to be in search of strategies to help my students become better writers, and to approach writing tasks with confidence, which is often half the battle.

At my school site, I am fortunate to have two colleagues who have attended Calkins' Writing Institutes at Teacher's College as well as my UCLA Writing Project neighbor who are well versed in the philosophy which surrounds the writer's workshop approach. Double lucky for me, is that one of those colleagues is leading a study group twice a month in order to support the teachers who choose this approach to teaching writing. Triple lucky for me is that this approach really does engage and motivate students, as evidenced by the complaining I overheard when we had to pack up for home: "Oh, Ms.Chaney, why do we have to stop writing? This is fun!" This is exactly what I want to hear. That is a great problem for a teacher, don't you think?

Though my past has been filled with a mixture of failure and success in writing, especially as it relates to Thesis Development, P.O. style, I am hopeful that I will find the answers to my research questions about writing workshop. The near future of the 2010-2011 school year holds many challenges which I am eager to tackle. The implementation of the Units of Study, the development of my thesis, data collection and analysis, and the review of literature, is overwhelming when I think of all I must do. I will focus on one part at a time, one day at a time, put one foot in front of the other, and so on. I need a lot of focus (keep an eye on me if I start

staring out the window!), and a little *buena suerte*, that is good luck, and a lot of positive thinking (something I do naturally). I am challenging myself to take some risks with writing, and am asking my class to do the same. Sounds fair to me. I look forward to the future to see how the power of our writing and learning unfolds together.

### Problem Statement

“What strategies and supports do my students and I need to successfully implement a writer’s workshop in my classroom based on Units of Study, by Lucy Calkins?” One part of the research will focus directly on the impact in students’ writing from September through February. The other aspect of this study will focus on the successes and challenges experienced by teachers who implement writer’s workshop.

I have been drawn to research around Writer’s Workshop for several reasons. First, I have seen how engaged children appear when they have choices in general, and writing in particular. I also have a deep personal interest in wanting to teach writing well to meet all the needs of my class. Third, to place writing instruction side by side with reading as it has been a long neglected subject at my school. Most importantly, in this time of overemphasis on standardized testing, to provide adequate time for students to receive and develop writing skills which will have a long term impact on their education, and perhaps quality of life.

### Significance

During the past 15 years of teaching, I have seen the rise and fall of an emphasis on teaching writing, not only in my own class, but school- wide as well. Where do these fluctuations stem from, and why would I or a colleague, devote more or less time year to year teaching skills necessary for writing well?

Should the importance placed in the teaching of writing really change that much from year to year? Decade to decade? Should writing be considered less important this year than reading is? Should teaching writing be compared to magazine fashions which carousel with the season: you're in or you're out? Definitely not in my opinion – yet the reasons for the rise and fall in importance given to writing can be likened to the ebb and flow of ocean tides.

Districts, grade levels, individual teachers, and students' weaknesses and strengths are punished or praised as a result of standards-based multiple choice tests. Areas in which groups of students score low in standardized testing always trigger more emphasis placed upon the teaching of the low content area. Schools with large English Language Learner populations are the most likely to miss target areas, and those targets are ever increasing unrealistically each academic year. Emphasis on certain curricular areas changes frequently in education for political and social reasons. Rarely, do we stay the course, even when we have something that feels right, or we in the field, know is working for students though test scores may not reflect it that academic year. Since writing is not tested at the national level yearly, it is also not emphasized in the grades it is not tested. When it is tested, it is likely the only genre emphasized for an entire year right up to the testing date. Teachers rarely stand up to demands by administrative forces, and defend something as valuable as regular time for writing instruction despite our experiences that show us the value of it. Even when administrators don't dismiss writing, teachers themselves do as they want their class scores to look as good as possible.

A few years ago, our school developed an instructional leadership team which selected writing as a school wide instructional focus. The tide of writing had come in and was put front and center. Each grade level developed prompts to assess mastery in the district's tested genres. Once a month, each teacher assessed progress towards mastery of grade level writing in all genres and data was

compiled to inform our teaching. During that time period, the tide of writing was at a high, and we had ongoing professional development from UCLA's writing project fellows who came in to share bits and pieces of their expertise in the area of teaching writing. There was frequent, ongoing discussion of student writing, and exchange of lesson ideas. There was a newfound energy and excitement about teaching writing across the curriculum. This energy and excitement lasted for two years until it all of a sudden came to a stop without much discussion as to why. When members of the Instructional Leadership Team made a case to keep writing as an instructional focus alongside reading comprehension, it was seen as too much to be taken on though as a staff, we had begun to see the increased success of students' writing even if test scores didn't reflect gains made.

The year our district switched to testing one writing genre for each grade level with the new addition of a baseline writing sample, marks the year I realized many at our school site had gone to sporadically teaching writing, and only then one genre. How did we get there? The tide of writing had gone out, and we fell into Program Improvement for not meeting key growth targets with our English Language learners in reading comprehension. Had we focused too much energy on writing? Never mind that some of those students were new to English or came from poverty, or that many parents of our English Language Learners never finished high school in their native country.

The focus on writing was officially taken off the table, and in its place was reading comprehension. Program Improvement hung over the school heavily and brought urgent demands to raise reading comprehension scores or face increasing sanctions from the state.

Our school had three years ahead of reading comprehension as its instructional focus. Everything you ever wanted to know, and everything you didn't want to know about it was pretty much all we discussed in the instructional leadership meetings. No longer could we have

professional development around writing as it was off the table. No longer could we attend a workshop in that area. DENIED. Forces around us demanded our concentration and professional development strictly around reading comprehension. No longer could we display bulletin boards of child created art or writing unless it specifically related to reading comprehension. Whatever we posted had to somehow relate to reading comprehension. While our staff learned a lot during those years about reading comprehension, our writing lessons began to collect dust as we marched to the drum beat of reading comprehension. Once again, writing took a back seat. You were in writing, and now you are out of fashion. We were at low tide in the area of writing for reasons over which we felt we had little control.

My life's experience has taught me many different lessons. In order to have a chance at succeeding in this society and to support yourself and possibly a family, people must be literate or you are most likely doomed to low paying jobs with little to no benefits. Literacy to me includes going beyond reading. Every job position I ever held required at the very minimum, rudimentary writing skills. Even when I worked in fast food as a cashier, I needed to write orders (long before computers) as well as fill out applications to acquire a position. In college, writing was emphasized and was at least equal to, and in some cases, carried more weight than did reading assignments. Also, as a former teaching assistant, I needed to read, write, and do basic math to become hired. In order to become a teacher, I needed to write an essay about my strengths, challenges, and experiences in working with children as a part of the hiring process.

I have known several people in my life who struggle to read, and especially to write. For everything that requires the written word, they require assistance. Simple tasks for you and me such as a DMV application for a license, or a health insurance policy, or creating an invitation to a party become impossible tasks which strikes dread in their hearts due to an inability to read and

write. Imagine for every small writing task we take for granted, someone with poor writing skills needs to ask for assistance, or avoid it altogether. The implications for an individual's life are enormous and underscore the need for public schools to consistently teach and nurture young writers from the day they step into a classroom. My classroom study explores what students and I need to do in order to make writing a success, and could inspire colleagues at my site to put writing at an equal level of importance to reading skills, and perhaps even to keep it there despite the voices inside us that stem from our own insecurities, or the forces outside of us that would move it to less importance due to social and political reasons.

The significance of this study could be that writing at my school site could once again be equal to reading. They are complementary processes, and cannot, nor should be thought of as one more important than the other. Ideally, teachers could find their voice and speak up with conviction and strength, when next they are asked to set aside writing for some passing trend in education or for consequences doled out as a result of No Child Left Behind. I can assure you that if the past is an indicator of what will come around again in the future, that day will surely come. If we as professionals consider the long-term potential for a poor quality of life due to limited literacy skills, then why could we not also stand together to create writers who are empowered to lead lives of their choosing? As teachers we have the influence of our position to help develop communities of writers who are not limited due to a lack of motivation and weak skills. Then we truly help prepare students for the adults who are ready to enter college, or a trade, and to contribute to society by enabling them to care, at the very least, for themselves. This is the significance of the research I will undertake for the upcoming year.



## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to document the obstacles and successes of students' writing as measured by formative assessments, pre/post writing samples, end of unit checklists, and writing benchmarks and particularly the role of Writer's Workshop in overcoming challenges & contributing to successes. Through anecdotal records of students during writer's workshop, supports they need as well as adaptations for individuals and the specific problem/s they encounter, will then inform next steps for individuals/groups. Once obstacles are identified or emerge, adaptations can be made for the individual/group of students as well as the teacher. Successes (as measured by improved attitudes towards writing, and about the writing process, increased ability/fluency to write) along the way will be celebrated all the while having records about what led to those improvements.

Information gleaned from this study will inform my practice and will be shared with colleagues at my school site in the hopes that we can all learn from it. Writer's workshop is widely believed to inspire and motivate, yet some critics of it, have identified issues of management, documenting progress, and time as roadblocks to fully and regularly implement it.

The study will help support and justify the use of writer's workshop methods in the primary and upper elementary classroom as well as develop strategies to overcome hurdles with the range of ability, management, and the amount of daily time recommended by experts to implement the writer's workshop. Ultimately, the purpose is to open the dialogue about teachers as writers, the methods we choose when teaching writing, and how we adapt curriculum for diverse needs, and create supports within a community of writers knowing that writing well is a valuable life skill.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

At its best, writing has helped transform the world. Revolutions have been started by it. Oppression has been toppled by it. And it has enlightened the human condition. American life has been richer because people like Rachel Carson, Cesar Chavez, Thomas Jefferson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. have given voice to the aspirations of the nation, and its people (The National Commission on Writing, 2003, p.10).

When I undertook the idea to research the supports and adaptations that I would need to fully implement a writer's workshop in my classroom, in the hopes of inspiring my young classroom of writers, little did I know that a tremendous amount of research has been done in the area of writing. The results of investigation left me having to confront a plethora of books, journal articles, and websites all devoted to the teaching of writing at all levels of education. My interests and research questions lie in adapting Writer's Workshop curriculum for my students and their particular needs at the elementary level, and so present within the review a look at writing achievement in public education at the elementary, as well as a cursory look at writing achievement at the secondary level.

Part of the motivation I have to implement a Writing Workshop in my class is to help negate the consequences of basic and below levels of writing which hinder students as they enter the workforce. A majority of our nation's adults have only basic writing skills and I believe this can be addressed as early as the elementary years – the age of focus for my investigation. The other part of my motivation is that quite simply I love to read children's writing as it is a form of self-expression and it allows me to know each child as the individual they are. Children have much to say about their lives and need opportunities to express themselves on a regular basis. Over the years my students have shown me again and again that they are capable of learning more than what is expected of them according to the state standards or sometimes even my expectations. Writing is a

vehicle for them to be heard, to give voice to their feelings or novel ideas, how they are constructing knowledge of the world around them, and even shaping the lives of others.

Ultimately it is my hope that there is enough evidence which suggests that utilizing methods such as a Writer's Workshop, and devoting ample time to writing instruction that has been lost due to the national emphasis on testing and narrowing of curriculum, can improve the writing skills of students, as well as help them think of themselves as writers, authors, valued members of a community, and future contributors to our society.

### Children's Writing Development

In order to know how best to teach writing effectively and to know which methods will increase children's skill development in appropriate ways, it is helpful to understand how writing in children begins as well as the developmental stages they go through in order to best support them. Knowing this can help a teacher understand if writing skills are falling within a range of developmental time lines and to know if additional supports might be needed, as well as perhaps what those supports might entail.

Researcher Mei-Yu Lu, reviewed the work of other well-known researchers of children's writing and described some of the common patterns which suggest early stages of writing development. In her review, she highlighted some of the findings of notable earlier researchers in the field particularly the idea that play characterizes children's early writing development (Dyson & Freedman, 1991; Newman and Roskos, 1997). Also, play is thought of as an activity in which children can grow and practice with symbols that represent activities, and later on imaginary worlds which ultimately they will draw upon when writing and reading begin to emerge (Lu, 2000). Routman calls this first stage drawing or picture writing. Children can draw shapes and pictures which express their feelings, yet the shapes are often unrecognizable (1995).

Mei -Yu Lu concluded that learning to write is a “socio-cultural, generative, and developmental process” (p.3). She found that through active exploration of forms and functions of writing, interactions with competent writers, and various literacy experiences that children become literate members of society.

In her review of research, Lu found patterns or themes which came from grounded theory, and were useful in describing similarities across cultures that mark typical development of children and their early writing experiences. However, Lu did not include a review of research which described how children’s writing development might be affected if active exploration was denied or was not valued within a family, community, or society, or even how a lack of access to tools and materials might hinder or negatively shape that development. It could prove useful to know what hinders such development as well as what supports it. Clearly, communities provide the tools, the feedback or lack of, and ultimately provide a foundation of support for a child’s early writing to emerge, develop, and hopefully flourish. I hope to uncover in my study some of the strategies to make Writer’s Workshop curriculum accessible to students through scaffolding techniques, and to consider adapting writing lessons and materials for specific needs in the class.

In naturalistic settings where adults see children’s first attempts at drawing such as scribbles, marks, and shapes as the beginning of writing and a pre-emergent form of communication, then their attempts at communication can be validated and supported by adults trained in emergent literacy techniques – they can listen to the ‘stories’ and ‘ messages’ (Maher, 1991). Writing researcher, Tolchinsky, reported on findings in a review of earlier studies (Gibson and Levin, 1980) in their research on reading which concluded that by age four children possess a ‘mental space’ for the “linearly arranged strings of distinctive marks separated by regular spacing” (Tolchinsky, p.87) as evidenced when they were asked to ‘write’ with the stated purpose to help them remember

something. These findings about young children and their innate capacity for written language spanned socioeconomic status and were similar across language as well as cultural backgrounds. This second stage of early writing development is called scribbling and may entail some recognizable shapes. The child may be able to tell about their picture as well as imitate the act of writing (Routman, 1995).

Tolchinsky also argued that children who grow up in literate environments will not wait to explore features of their writing system. As children grow, they will become more selective of sound/symbol relationships and the experiences they are exposed to will help influence their learning of more formal systems of writing which are discovered within the system (p.94). This third stage is known as random letters and the child may put strings of letters with their picture. They may attempt to read it, but it may still be unrecognizable (Routman, 1995).

Again, I was left wondering about the children who do grow up in literate environments, and still develop a failure to select increasingly sophisticated sound/symbol relationships as they write. As well, how do the children from non-literate families develop and grow when they are only exposed to print and tools to write or draw within the limits of the school day? Groups of children who fall outside of developmental milestones in writing that might suggest possible developmental delays or learning differences would need strategies and adaptations implemented within a Writer's Workshop to ensure their specific needs which might be much different than the majority of the group are met.

Tolchinsky does not discuss what adults or teachers can do to improve outcomes for children whose early experiences may be from non-literate, or of low socio-economic groups whose literacy skills tend to be less than those of educated and literate parents. It is helpful for teachers to have

strategies for the range of learners and stages of normal or delayed development that present themselves within a given class.

Depending upon earlier experiences at home and possibly pre-school, kindergarten is generally where many children formally learn letter recognition, formation, handwriting practice, and sound/symbol relationships. During the course of the school year, most children roughly proceed over a couple of stages. Routman calls this stage four writing, which is characterized by semi-phonetic letter/sound relationships, and sometimes only the initial letter is present in the writing which may represent an entire word. Stage five is phonetic with beginning and ending sounds present in words, with high frequency words sometimes spelled correctly (Routman, 2007).

Berninger and Winn (2006) state that, “The journey to skilled writing involves many small steps, false starts, plateaus, and regressions, along with some leaps forward and a few major developmental transitions along the way: The processes contributing to writing development cascade (overlap) and show developmental discontinuities” (pp. 108-109). While this is something I agree with, what they don’t discuss within their review of research is what their understanding or developmental perspective they believe to be true, or even what those major developmental transitions are. I also wonder what factors trigger a regression, or if it is considered a normal state for most developing child writers.

Throughout first and second grades children progress further through a couple of more stages as they begin writing instruction. The sixth stage known as transitional spelling follows and children spell words the way they sound. Vowels are used, yet they are often wrong. Punctuation is sometimes used and correctly, and they can produce one or more sentences. The final stage of early writing development is known as conventional spelling, and most children will spell most

words correctly though phonetic spelling still is used especially with longer words. Capitalization is beginning to be used correctly (Routman, 1995).

McCutcheon states that writing is a social and a cognitive act (2000). Discussed in *Cognitive Factors in the Development of Children's Writing*, are the contexts provided by teacher instruction as well as social supports within the learning community which can help or limit writing development of young children. She discusses the role that working memory plays in writing, the limited planning skills of a young or less skilled writer might possess, and how the awareness of audience develops over time. Spelling, transcription (physical act of writing), and text generation (turning ideas into words, sentences, and larger units within working memory) are but some of the considerations that make writing a complex act. Mc Cutcheon concluded from reviewing published research that, "... novice writers benefit from supports such as explicit instruction of the writing process, and by utilizing more skilled members of the classroom community" (p. 126).

As children begin formal writing instruction in school, it is important for teachers to know what the best practices are for nurturing writing development in ways that are developmentally appropriate and which motivate children while keeping in mind their individual needs. Carl B. Smith quotes Martha L. King of the Ohio State University, who states "young children can and will write very early if they are in a positive writing environment and if parents and teachers recognize that their early efforts contain a real message (Smith, 2000). The question of which methods and teacher practices lead to the best possible outcomes for children leads us to consider the impact that process writing, which has now evolved into the modern day Writer's Workshop and how that came to be.

## The Need for Balance: Process & Product

Writer's workshop is sometimes also referred to as process writing, following the idea that professional writers follow sequences or stages as they write for an audience. Process writing first emerged in the 1970's as a pedagogical approach in which the teacher's role was described mostly as what not to do – a stark contrast to earlier methods. Mostly it was applied to narrative writing and used terms such as prewrite, write, and rewrite. In their review of the history of research available from the early days of writing process, Pritchard and Honeycutt concluded that process writing, as it was implemented in the classroom, initially had minimal effect upon raising writing achievement as the process was emphasized over product and virtually no direct instruction was implemented (2006). Smith (2000) reviewed the literature on different writing approaches, and stated that process writing was of little value unless it made a real difference in student writing. Brigham Young University researchers reviewed the work of author-researcher, S.K. Smuin, who concluded his study of writing by stating, “ the single most important ingredient of an exciting, creative, stimulating classroom is ...the teacher” (Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001).

Today, process writing entails much more than phases of writing – it includes:

“...both procedural knowledge and many other kinds of strategies that can be nurtured and directly taught, including activating schemata to access prior knowledge; teaching self-regulation strategies; helping students understand genre constraints; guiding students in re-visioning and in editing surface errors; providing structured feedback from teachers and peers; teaching the differences between reader and writer-based prose; developing audience awareness and effects of audience on style, content, and tone; and dealing with emotional barriers, to name a few (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 276).”

As cited in Pritchard & Honeycutt's review of process approach, they stated that since the 1980's, the process approach has even been mandated as the gold standard for instruction in K-12



classrooms (Patthey-Chavez, Matsummura, & Valdes, 2004). Problems exist surrounding teachers' beliefs of what constitutes process writing. Process writing can mean many things to many people with all sorts of variations in between. As a result of Honeycutt and Pritchard's review of the literature they found that they were in agreement with R. Cramer, author of *Creative Power: The Nature and Nurture of Children's Writing* (2001) who made the following statement:

“It is best to face this truth: the writing process has its weaknesses; it is poorly implemented in many instances; it is not a panacea. But it is a better candidate for improving writing performance than the traditional approach. ... We must listen to the critics; we must be willing to adjust our theories, procedures, and practices. But there is not sufficient evidence to cause us to abandon process writing (p. 39).”

In classrooms where writing process is valued, all phases explicitly taught, as well as strategies for everything from topic generation to spelling, and regularly implemented, the quality of writing and amount produced has positively influenced the achievement of writers. Pritchard & Honeycutt (2006) reviewed the research of Scannella (2004) in a yearlong experimental study of the effects of writing process on 121, average and above average, ninth and tenth grade students. Students in an experimental group who were taught process writing were compared to a traditional textbook, grammar in isolation, assigned topics, due dates, and handouts type of instruction students in a control group. The outcomes suggested that the students who participated in the writing process classroom had higher achievement in their expository writing, but not their creative writing. Students in the experimental group exhibited a significantly higher increase in positive attitudes towards writing while the students in the control group had a decrease in positive attitudes towards writing (Scannella, 2004).

The study did not describe the amount of time, or lessons devoted to a particular genre in either the control or experimental group, therefore it is hard to say why the control group may have performed better on creative writing than the experimental group. I offer that since process writing takes considerable time, perhaps more in-depth study of expository writing took place in the experimental group which could have led to the increased achievement in expository writing; while relatively little time might have been devoted to generating and the study of creative writing.

In another study of first grade teachers who implemented a yearlong Writer's Workshop within their classrooms, Linda Martin of Ball State University conducted a participant/observer study of the classrooms as she led them through the steps to develop curriculum appropriate to the developmental level of the children, meet needs of individual students, and support each other throughout the process (2005). Martin modeled components of Writer's Workshop within the classrooms, conferenced with students and teachers about writing, and made observations once per week from October-April. Through professional readings, study of Lucy Calkins' book, The Art of Teaching Writing, twice per month after school study sessions to discuss writing, the teachers, whose experience ranged from 8 through 29 years of teaching, developed a course of study for their first grade writing curriculum.

Though writing samples were collected which demonstrated the process the students went through the actual writing achievement wasn't discussed. Instead the findings of the implementation of Writer's Workshop was that first graders were excited to write and eager to show what they'd learned over the course of the year and could remark on their own growth from pictures with a few words in the fall to sentences with details by the end of spring. Additionally, students and teachers found that learning to write is a messy and complex process, but worth the risks they all made to implement the workshop as evidenced by the excitement surrounding writing. Third,

implementing a Writer's Workshop imparted a sense of empowerment with teachers which in turn rubbed off on the children. Children had choices over many things within the workshop and this engaged them and made school more interesting (2005). Martin concluded that teachers need to consider their own needs as it comes to professional development when undertaking a complex task as a Writer's Workshop. She found as well as the importance of collaboration with peers for support, problem solving and generating ideas. Teachers have always been valuable resources for each other and the study group at my school will be an ongoing source of motivation, support and problem solving while maintaining a Writing Workshop which will positively impact our students' ability to write well and for many purposes.

Lucy Calkins is a professor of Children's Literature, founding director of the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project, and author of several books about reading and writing. She is a notable contributor in research surrounding children's writing development, and main author of the recently published, *Units of Study for Teaching Writing*. The units are designed for Kindergarten through fifth grade students and are based on a writing workshop approach. Calkins believes that students' lives and abilities are starting points for writing (2006). In *The Art of Teaching Writing*, she describes some of the necessary conditions which help to create classrooms of children writers. Calkins feels it is "essential that children are deeply involved in writing, that they share their texts with others, and that they perceive themselves as authors." (p.3) Calkins further believes that children's investment in writing is higher when it is personal and this creates a connection with pieces of writing. She also acknowledges the need for children authors and perhaps all authors to share their personal experiences, or to simply be listened to. She states, "As writers, what we all need more than anything else in the world is listeners, listeners who will

respond with silent empathy, with sighs of recognition, with laughter and tears and questions and stories of their own. Writers need to be heard.” (p. 15)

In *Living Between the Lines*, Calkins uses the metaphor of how she once thought of her role in writing workshop as that of a circus performer, or ‘plate spinner’. She thought it enough to keep various plates spinning as students cycled through the writing process. Now she sees that it is not enough to keep students progressing through the cycle, she has come to realize that, “...we also need to send them off onto important endeavors... They need to do work that is gigantic in scope and consequence” (pp.2-3). Calkins now sees the writer’s workshop as launching children like ships, into their future lives. She states, “...writing is meant to unfold, stretch into, and disturb every aspect of a writer’s world. ...The challenge we’ve taken on in establishing reading-writing workshops is not only to help children write well, but also to help them live well. That’s huge. That’s bigger than a school’s yearly goal. It’s bigger than a district’s five year plan” (p.7).

The importance of having hands on involvement and ownership in their classroom to make it their own is discussed by Calkins in *Living Between the Lines* as a necessary condition for involved learners who are invested deeply in their work. Calkins says having classrooms in which children are active participants in helping to organize spaces such as the library, and letting them bring their ‘lives’ into it is of great importance to let them know they are valued and increase investment. She discusses a study by John Goodlad in 1984 in which he studied American classrooms and found that they are “... characterized by a flat, unemotional tone and a sense of passivity” (p.13). Calkins further described his study which suggested that emotional neutrality and student passivity were the norm. Furthermore, students become trained to have someone tell them what to do as they go through endless activities automatically, and it is only at the end of the day that, “they burst through the schoolhouse door and into their lives” (p.13). Calkins suggests

that these typical conditions do not create conditions in which children will write well, with meaning, or about matters of great significance.

Teachers working with children, such as myself, are drawn to Calkins' philosophy about teaching, learning, and making meaning of the work they do. As long ago as 1990 when she wrote, *Living Between the Lines*, she stated,

“What we’re tired of is the clutter that gets in the way of teaching. We’re tired of the tests that turn days, weeks, and months into a wasteland, of being told we can’t use the duplicating machine to make copies of our record keeping because it’s reserved for important things, of the new mandates that say we’re supposed to teach “thinking skills” for twenty minutes a day, as if we haven’t always taught thinking. We’re tired of the way all this curriculum clutter drains us of our energy and distracts us from our dreams” (p.302).

Her words, though written more than twenty years ago, ring true today and in her effort to continue keeping teaching and learning alive for teachers she now has recently published *Units of Study for teaching writing workshops, grades K-5*. Through the publication of these, Calkins demonstrates support for teachers in their efforts to increase skills in developing a year-long writing curriculum, *Units of Study for Teaching Writing*. In her introduction to the *Units of Study*, Calkins states,

“We’ve written this series because writing matters. Demand for professional development in writing has far outstripped the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project’s abilities to provide this support. These books reflect our effort to hand over what we know so that more children can be given opportunities to grow as strong writers and more teachers can experience the extraordinary benefits that come from participating in a community of practice that involves shared inquiry into the teaching of writing.” (p.3)

The structure of each workshop session is predictable and clear, and includes an introduction, a mini-lesson, writing/conferencing time, mid-workshop teaching point, and finally,

sharing of work. One of the earlier critiques of writer's workshop is the lack of attention to mechanics, and so within the units, lessons on punctuation, grammar, and tips on revision are explicitly dealt with.

Calkins deep rooted philosophy about teaching writing, the result of many years of experience, permeates the text. The richness of her work is both a treasure and an obstacle to those new to her philosophy. The question now is: how do teachers at my site implement these very complex units of writing while supporting each other when we are teaching different grade levels, different languages, possess varying levels of comfort in teaching writing, and years of experience with teaching?

### Teacher Inquiry & Professional Development

Teachers have many questions about the best way to teach writing and as a result have developed a 'bottom up' support network. The National Writing Project has been leading the way to address national, state, regional, and site issues of how writing is taught within the public system of elementary education and has resulted in teachers-teaching-teachers approach of professional development. The creation, development, and influence of teacher led writing projects have extended out to many schools across the nation. Many teachers have felt its effects even if they have not directly been affiliated with a local writing project personally. The genesis of these networks arose partly from teacher inquiry about "theorizing about teaching and learning in a way that frames future interpretation and decision making (NWP, 2009).

The National Writing Project is a nationwide professional development network whose origins began in 1974, and whose mission is devoted to improve the teaching of writing in the nation's schools (AED, 2002). The project believes that writing is a basic skill for learning across content

areas, and that written communication needed for success at work and in adult life. In the final evaluation report released by NWP, the work they do is based on a “teachers-teaching-teachers” model of professional development. Some of the services they provide include sponsoring invitational summer institutes for teachers at their local writing project sites to examine theory and practice as it relates to writing, learn writing in communities of writers from kindergarten through university-level teachers, conduct research, and develop their own writing (p. i).

One aspect of the work the NWP does is research in children’s writing. They commissioned a three year-long study to determine how student writing is developed in classrooms, the conditions that support students’ writing achievement, and outcomes of students who participated in NWP classrooms. Teachers of the Writing Project were selected at grades 3-4 and were affiliated with the project ranging from a few years through several years. NWP teacher-participants remained in the study for three years, while the student-participants changed year to year as they entered a participating teacher’s class. Overall the demographics of the student population stayed the same with the median low SES was 80% over the three year time span.

Data sources included qualitative and quantitative methods of research design such as teacher assignments, and students’ final drafts, timed baseline and follow-up writing prompts collected in fall and spring, teacher interviews and surveys, and background data such as teachers years of experience, size of school, free and reduced lunch eligibility, etc. The authors of the study reported that 82% of third grade students reached adequate or strong achievement in conventions (grammar, punctuation, etc.) and rhetorical effectiveness (focus/coherence, elaboration, and style), while 85% of fourth grade students reached adequate or strong achievement in conventions and rhetoric from participants.

The same study of the NWP reported side benefits from teacher participants such as how partaking of the intense, ongoing professional development (five week summer institute and continuity at site) helped to expose writing teachers to new practices, the latest thinking, and staying on top of latest research which then caused many to seek further training or information than colleagues who did not participate in the study. Further support was created within the ‘continuity’ programs which were tailored to site needs, and professional networks, “Both formally and informally – that provided teachers with mechanisms to share and learn new information and served as sounding boards and support systems” (AED, p. iv).

Strengths of this study are that it took place over three years, included 36 teachers from five states, and was representative of the student diversity of writing project sites across the nation. The teachers whose classes participated in the study had a range of years of experience and were not included nor excluded for expertise in the field of writing. A critique of this study might be that teachers who participated were most likely already interested in the area of writing, and knowing that their classes were participating, were more conscientious of their teaching of writing, and perhaps spent more time on writing activities than those who did not participate. They were given extensive, ongoing professional development as well, and that no doubt had an ongoing, positive cumulative effect on their ability to plan writing. While those are positive factors and an advantage for the students, they could have influenced study outcomes.

Under the umbrella of the National Writing project is the California Writing Project whose mission is stated to “...improve student writing and learning by improving the teaching of writing” (CWP, 2004). It is comprised of seventeen regional sites housed on CSU and UC campuses. According to their home page, they conduct 1900-2300 programs each year from professional development for teachers, to workshops for students, as well as for families. As with the NWP,



they believe that the best kind of professional development occurs when successful teachers of writing teach other teachers.

The South Coast Writing Project is an example of a local writing project which serves a three county area since 1979 in Southern California. SCWriP, as it is also known offers summer institutes for teachers, on-site professional development by its fellows, classes, and even teaches UC Santa Barbara teaching credential candidates in writer's workshop. As a response to increase demands to raise student achievement school districts in the areas they serve have asked for help from this local writing project. SCWriP's response has been to "make long-term commitments at a single school site or within a consortium of schools, where groups of teachers volunteer to reflect on teaching practices and experiment with alternative practices supported by expert practitioners and informed by current theory and research" (NCTE, 2008). The components of the in-service program include: full day workshops, modeling by expert and veteran teachers, practice/reflecting in research logs, and coaching/classroom demonstrations.

This type of comprehensive support for teachers is an example of real-life practical support that teachers could benefit from. My past experience is full of professional development days which were dictated by the whims of the site administrator and their perceptions of what our staff needed. Sometimes we got lucky and those days were well spent, but mostly they were out-of-touch with what we needed and did not relate to pressing needs we experienced in the classroom such as how to teach writing. One golden year, we had a series of writing workshop activities that were presented by UCLA's writing fellows. Sometimes we were grouped by primary and upper grades, and sometimes we were all together as a staff. Topics centered on writing, assessing, conferencing, and teaching. Sustained focus on our students' writing, our writing, as well as having the opportunity to share with our colleagues brought us together as a staff. We were able to connect

with our grade-level as well as across a span of grade-levels through the ongoing look at student work, discussing what worked with students and what didn't, and admitting our weak areas in the hopes of finding support from each other. Mostly I remember feeling better to know that others struggled as I did to teach writing. I was no longer alone behind a closed classroom door. This writing project's work reminded me of the importance of what I now have at my school site if only in a very small way – a collection of 10 teachers with diverse strengths and weaknesses, willing to roll up sleeves and consider as well as reflect on the work we do in writing. It is a start from the bottom up.

With all of this teacher initiated work and professional development going on through the NWP, the CWP, and local projects, then an ordinary person would think that perhaps schools and districts would have embraced writing as part of the foundation of a basic education and consider it a non-negotiable item when ranking it with reading and math. Let's see what the current facts are in our nation's report card and what the data suggests. I will also consider why writing may not be valued with the same importance given to reading and math, and where possible areas of need are for future researchers.

### Current Writing Achievement in the Schools

Despite the fact that national organizations exist that promote professional development in writing, and how much attention process writing has been given over recent decades, there remains a clear and pressing need to carry on and continue to give attention to writing as the results of the National Writing Assessment suggest.

Writing achievement data of eighth and twelfth grade students was last presented from the National Assessment of Educational Progress Report entitled, *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2007* and detailed a nationwide effort to assess the current writing achievement of fourth, eighth,

and tenth grade students across the nation ( Salahi-Din, 2008). The report was published by the National Center for Education Statistics, a government agency under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Education. Writing genres tested were persuasive, narrative, and informative and were administered by districts across the nation whose participation was voluntary. I have chosen to discuss only eighth grade data due to the volume of information.

140,000 students at eighth grade level participated in the 2007 assessment, and were from public and private schools from 45 states. Prior administrations of the writing assessments took place in 2002, and 1998. Students participating in the assessment were scored on a scale of 0-300, with the average score on the eighth grade 2007 exam being 154, or half of the points possible (Salahi-Din, 2008).

Of the eighth grade sample from 2007, 69% were described as either basic and below basic, while only 31% of students in eighth grade were described as proficient or above in a test of writing. The assessment data found the Basic group represented the largest group at 57%. It was interesting to note how the same data was presented in a PowerPoint presentation by the Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics who stated that, “88% of students scored at Basic and above” (Schneider, 2008).

The National Commission on Writing (2003) states, “Basic writing itself is not the issue; the problem is that most students cannot write with the skill expected of them today (p. 16). At the local level, Los Angeles Unified School District raised from 10% Proficient and Advanced in 2002, to 13% in 2007 (NCES, 2008). The results of the report were stated in terms of positive language, such as the upward trend for eighth graders from the 2002 report though we are far below the national average. It is generally understood that large urban districts face challenges that may not present themselves in other places such as large populations of English language learners, yet that

leaves still leaves 87% of students as having basic or below writing skills. The dilemma this issue presents us as a society is tremendous, and the questions these dismal passing rates raise, are many.

Strengths of this study include that students are given writing tasks which reflect three genres of writing – narrative, informative, and persuasive – which then allows for the possibility that students may possess clear strengths in one or more of the genres. Students were also encouraged to use the writing process or at least some of the stages of it. The large number of students tested helped make the sample random and therefore more valid. Administration of the test was standardized and teachers have procedures to follow to ensure uniformity from directions to environment to the amount of time given. Scoring of writing assessments were done by a testing company who uses trained scorers to use guidelines/rubrics for performance levels. Some of the weaknesses of this study might be that since process is allowed and encouraged, students who are unfamiliar with pre-planning or who are in classrooms where it is not practiced, may have a disadvantage. Students who are English Language Learners who were beginning through intermediate levels of English proficiency were included in the data. Since it can take several years to develop proficiency in a second language, especially in academic writing, this population is unfairly measured against students for whom English is a first language. This could help to account for the large Basic group, especially in urban areas such as Los Angeles School District which has large immigrant populations for whom English is a second language. Further research into how much the L.A.U.S.D. has sought help from UCLA Writing Project would be interesting, and if they did, how did that impact individual sites or consortium of schools? I wonder as well, if due to the enormous size of the district limit discourage potential support from local writing projects?

As a result of the data from the Nation's Report Card, a news release from the California Department of Education, Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, stated that

“The NAEP writing results illustrate again, California’s and the nation’s challenge to close the achievement gap” (CDE, 2008). He noted the minorities who make up our subgroups, actually are the majority of our state’s students, and are the promise for our future. At the state level, only 24% of students were proficient or above. This leaves an enormous challenge for the 76% who are basic and below and all the possible implications of having large numbers of low achieving writers.

### Writer’s Workshop and the Genre of Test Taking

Another type of wide-scale, standardized writing assessment takes place each year across the nation in the spring which is a part of the English Language Arts test at the state level. In California, it is called the STAR assessment and measures writing strategies, as well as conventions of the English language. The multiple choice format on state assessments leaves much to be desired. It does not measure how much a student has learned over a course of a year. Experts in the field of writing say it is not an authentic measure of growth. Clearly, we need to reconcile standardized assessments to measure what we really want to know: Can students write well? This can really only be done through authentic tasks which are not dependent on reading skills, allows process, and takes into account the language proficiency of the student.

“Machine-scorable questions in writing are appropriate in certain situations – to see, for example, if a student can identify parts of speech, correct grammatical errors, or sort out meaning. But an authentic assessment of writing depends on requiring students to create prose that carefully trained people read, and evaluate in a fair and consistent fashion (National Commission on Writing,2003, p. 29).”

The strength of measuring writing in this way is that it is easy to get a snapshot of a large sample of students on a given day of a particular standard and could provide useful information about conventions of language such as punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, etc. A weakness is that when students are presented with the best choice for a topic sentence or a detail

that might fit best within a particular paragraph, it gets confusing especially when some choices are very similar. Typically, this is not how constructing paragraphs and essays are taught.

As I began to read the pages and pages of scholarly research, and opinion on the subject, I clearly saw that it affects not only the third grade students I teach today, but the adults they will one day become. If by adapting curriculum for my students, and by working side by side with teachers at my site who are eager to inquire and learn how to teach writing better, we prevent unforeseen costs that stem from basic and below levels of writing, then our job is done.

From my experience over recent years, I have seen how writing has once again taken a back seat due to many time constraints and is not a focus of instruction at my school site. We may not personally know how costs to society from poor writing skills of the students we have today will in the future exact a price from the individual as well as to the larger community. On a positive note, the review of this topic not only informed me, it has also instilled a newfound determination to share information with colleagues and to advocate for ample time to teach an essential skill which can help to provide a gateway to higher education, and a place of their choosing in the modern workforce.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

Inquiry is at the heart of my investigation. This inquiry is multi-faceted and complex just as the teaching of writing, our lives, and the lives of our students are complex. As for the teacher study group, my inquiry focuses on how to implement the Units of Study, how to adapt/modify lessons to our various grade-levels, learn and understand how teachers see themselves as writers (or how they may not), and see how our collaborative efforts in the writing study group can support us and help us grow together as teachers and life-long learners. Can we define our beliefs, our pedagogy about teaching and defend it if questions arise from administration and parents? We spend much of our lives at work as do our students at their work of learning and integrating skills, and so I wonder how do we make this writing endeavor meaningful and useful for the purpose of empowering the lives of all it touches?

The other facets of my inquiry revolve around children. How do my children feel about writing? Do they love it or have they already learned to dislike it, or perhaps even hate writing? Do they see writing as something done only in school, or do they write at home as well? In the places they spend their lives, do they write for authentic purposes or do they feel they only write for teacher assignments? Are they familiar with writing workshop procedures from earlier grades? What do I need to support them and will this approach work with the diversity of learning styles and developmental levels presented in the class? What will I have to leave out in order to devote the forty minutes a day of sustained writing (aside from the mini-lesson) that Calkins suggests? Will I be able to measure their success based on their increased skill, purposes for, and love of writing?

I envision answering these questions with qualitative and quantitative research methods. The desire to research this question began last year as a result of a wish to fully implement Units of Study:

Writer's Workshop by Lucy Calkins, as the materials had been bought for interested teachers at our site. After trying to implement Writer's Workshop lessons from these units, teachers who used them agreed they needed to be broken down and in some cases simplified, or stretched out over the course of two or three days instead of rushed through in one day.

I purposely chose my classroom to be my 'research laboratory' because this is where I teach writing, and selected the teachers in our writing study group due to a common interest in improving our skills in implementing this particular curriculum and writing in general. I have taught in Glendale, California for the past 15 years, and for the past 10 years have been teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. My school is located in an urban neighborhood, and serves a diverse community. 48% of students are of Hispanic or Latino background, 34% are White, and 15% are Asian/Pacific Islanders. 50% of our students are English Language Learners, and 76% are eligible for free and reduced lunches.

From the start of the last trimester of 2009-2010, teachers had many issues with the complexity of the lessons within Units of Study which were interwoven with Calkins' deep rooted philosophy of teaching writing. We were easily bogged down by all the language, ideas, tips, and 'stuff' which were embedded in each lesson. Yet the same group of teachers who expressed frustrations and those new to the group this year, expressed a strong desire to collectively and individually continue the work we'd begun last year because we saw the life in our students' eyes which shone through their writing. We were hooked.

In order to answer the research questions, the study design consisted of pre/post student surveys, pre/post teacher surveys, baseline, trimesters' 1 and 2 writing samples, end-of-unit assessment checklists, anecdotal records of Writer's Workshop, anecdotal records of Writer's Workshop Teacher's Study Group, and teacher interviews.



The research sample was purposeful and was comprised of my third grade class of 22 students who come from diverse backgrounds. The range of ages was from seven through nine years of age. The majority of my students are English Language Learners who are at intermediate to advanced stages of language development. The class population reflected a range of academic achievement and ability. One student with special needs was excluded from the sample due to a language disorder. Though he participated in Writing Workshop, he needed such modification at times, that I could not say it followed the Units of Study.

#### Quantitative Research:

From the start of the year a baseline writing sample (benchmark) was taken with the intent to measure writing growth over several pieces of writing throughout September-February of the 2010-2011 school year. The Narrative Writing Continuum developed by Teacher's College (1-12 point scale) and the Glendale Unified School District Descriptive Writing Rubric (0-4 point scale) were the tools used to measure writing growth. Additionally, Calkins' Units of Study provided an assessment rubric at the end of each unit to assess the level of each child's acquisition of key concepts. This tool was utilized approximately every 6 weeks. A pre/post survey was given before implementing the workshop and then at the conclusion of the study to determine students' knowledge about writing process, self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses in writing, as well as to measure general attitudes towards writing at home and school.

A Writer's Workshop study group was formed in early September of the 10-11 school year at my school site with the purpose of providing a forum for teachers to develop skills in the implementation of Calkins' Units of Study. This group was purposely selected for research since participation in the group meant participants were all interested in implementing writing workshops in their self-contained classrooms. The group was comprised of as many as ten teachers, K-6, with

teaching experience in the classroom ranging from beginning to more than twenty years.

Participation in the study group was voluntary and any teacher from our site could join at any time, and likewise, withdraw at any time.

From this group which met twice per month for ninety minutes, I collected pre/post surveys to determine their before and after levels of comfort with implementing a writing workshop, the importance they placed on the teaching of writing before and after the formation of the study group, as well as to measure their attitudes towards teaching writing. Additionally I wanted to know how competent they felt to implement a writing workshop, and determine the reasons they chose to participate in the group initially.

#### Qualitative Research:

In order to obtain data which actually answered my original question of what adaptations and strategies were required in order to successfully implement a writing workshop, I decided to have some open-ended questions on my pre/post student surveys in order to elicit their thinking on items such as their past experiences with writing conferences, the importance of writing in their life at school as well as home. The classroom is a setting that naturally lends itself to the collection of anecdotal records and so I took these during and after writing workshop time. Individual students' writing was analyzed for strengths and weaknesses based on records taken as I walked around to conference with individuals and/or groups. Finally, students had journals with which to collect ideas, and folders with which to develop drafts, and finally a choice to publish. These materials provided rich sources of qualitative data, and places to begin to note adaptations needed to meet all the diverse needs within the class.

The teacher's writing study group at my school site provided another rich source of qualitative data. As a group under the direction of a National Board Certified teacher with first -

hand training from Teacher's College where the curriculum was developed, we practiced select lessons as student writers to see firsthand the challenges that lessons might present. As a group we dissected the parts of lessons to become familiar with the structure by watching lessons on DVD which came with the curriculum. Together, we brainstormed ways to design our own writing lessons based on our students' needs. Later on as we grew more comfortable with each other, we presented demonstration lessons for each other for practice and feedback. Part of each study group time was devoted to planning, and helping each other move forward in the curriculum. Field notes were collected at each of these meetings and analyzed for themes. Individual interviews were held with the participants of the teacher study group as well which allowed me to explore on a deeper level the gains and benefits of this select group of teachers who chose to grow and learn together.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

The teachers at my site who were selected to be interviewed for this study were those who participated in the writing study group. Ten teachers in total made up the sample and had a range of years of experience – from first year to twenty-four years of experience. Their grade levels ranged from Kindergarten through sixth. Participation in the study group was completely voluntary (which met every two weeks for approximately 90 minutes throughout the school year). The purpose of the group forming was to provide ongoing support for Writer’s Workshop, gather ideas, collaborate, share student successes and improve our own teaching skills through demonstration lessons, and watching videos that demonstrated lessons from Lucy Calkins, Units of Study. The facilitator of the group arranged for us to observe each other over the school year during Writer’s Workshop time to provide feedback to each other, and to gather ideas for our own classes. All of this was enabled by the support of our administration and our teacher specialists who helped provide coverage in our classrooms.

The idea for the study group started with a National Board Certified teacher who is well versed in providing and facilitating staff development for teachers. The administration at our site has been supportive of this group and our professional growth. They demonstrated that they were supportive in many ways and even lobbied for funds at the Board of Education to pay for attendance at the bi-weekly meetings.

## Quantitative Data: Teacher Study Group

### Teacher Writing Study Group: Pre/Post Survey Results

Question	Very True		Somewhat True		Not Very True		Not True	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1) I like to teach writing.	7	6	2	3	1	1	0	0
2) I feel competent to teach WW.	3	3	5	5	1	2	1	0
3) I need support to use UOS.	4	3	5	5	0	1	1	0
4) I know how to adapt lessons.	4	7	6	2	0	1	0	0
5) Writing well is as important as reading well	9	10	1	0	0	0	0	0
6) Writing study group helps me with Writer's Workshop.	9	7	1	1	0	2	0	0
7) My grade level meets regularly to discuss writing.	1	3	4	2	3	3	2	2*
8) My grade level meets regularly to plan writing.	3	3	2	1	4	4	1	2*
9) My students know all phases of the writing process.	1	2	6	7	2	0	1	1
10) Students write every day in my class.	8	8	2	2	0	0	0	0
11) My administration supports Writer's Workshop.	10	8	0	2	0	0	0	0
12) Reason for attending this study group is pay.	0	0	0	0	2	1	8	0
13) Reason for attending study group is Support.	7	8	3	2	0	0	0	0

-Ten participants from the writing study group completed the survey in early September, and again in mid-February at the half-way mark of the school year.

-The same ten respondents completed the surveys both times.

-On the post survey, for question number 3, 1 respondent wrote N/A

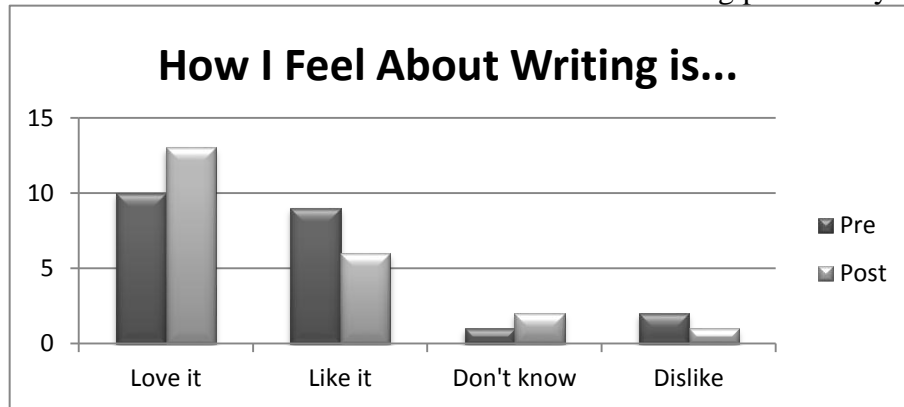
-Though largely unchanged from the pre-survey, the findings indicate that teachers from this group consider **writing equal to reading** in importance.

-Post-survey results also indicate that three more teachers chose very true about their ability to adapt lessons by the mid-point of the year, while four less marked very true about the study group helping them with writer's workshop in their classrooms.

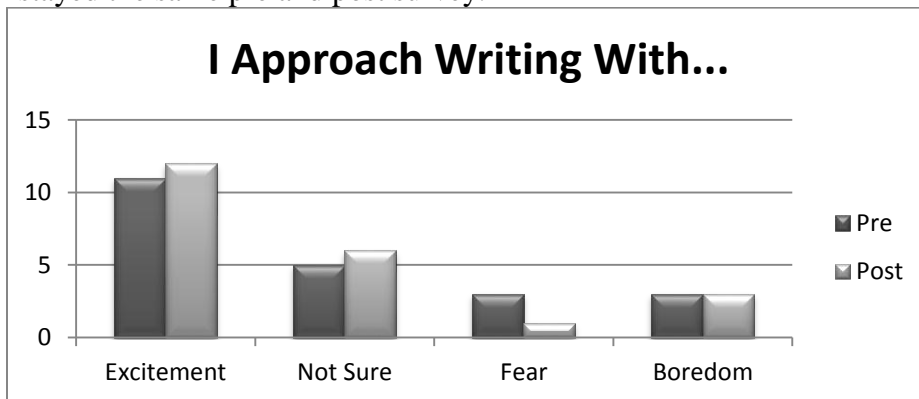
\*On the post survey, one respondent noted on questions 7 and 8, that dual immersion teachers at that grade level meet and plan regularly, but not teachers of English program for their grade level.

## Student Pre/Post Survey Results

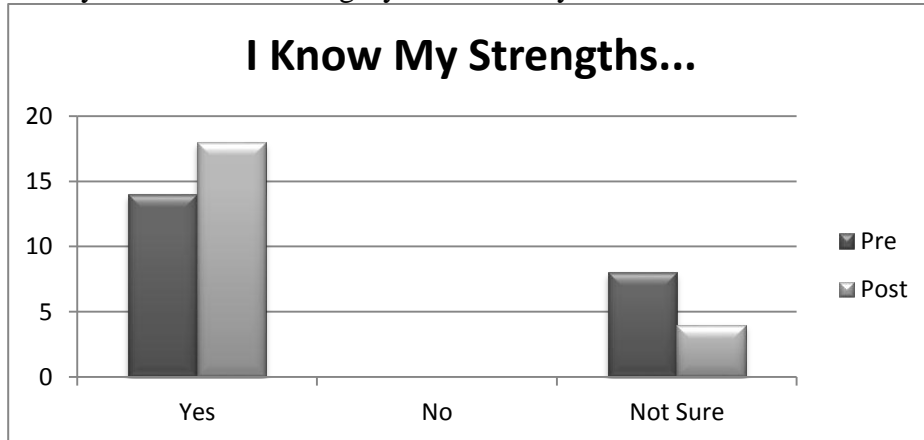
The following question was asked of third graders at the beginning and conclusion of the eighteen week study to assess how they felt about writing. Three more students felt they loved writing at the end, while the uncertain increased. One less student disliked writing post survey.



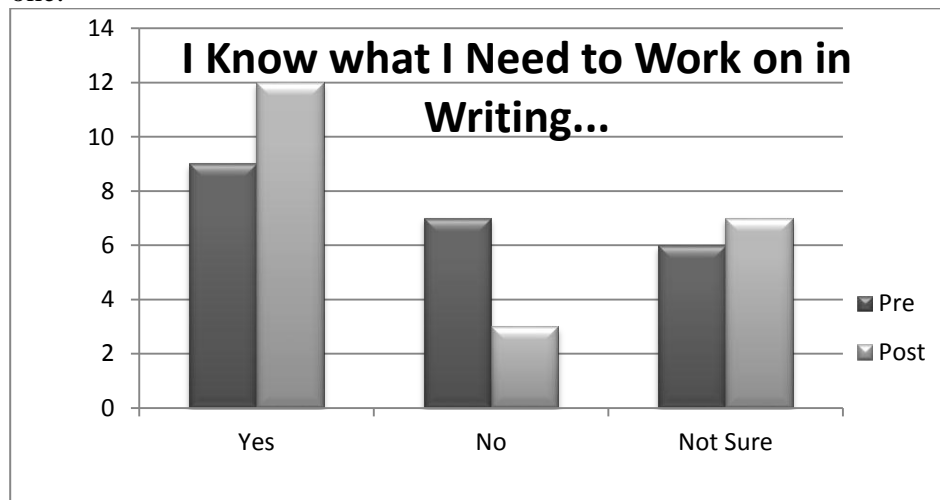
I wanted to see the emotional state students feel when faced with writing. Excitement only increased by one more student, not sure increased by one, while fear decreased by three students. Boredom stayed the same pre and post survey.



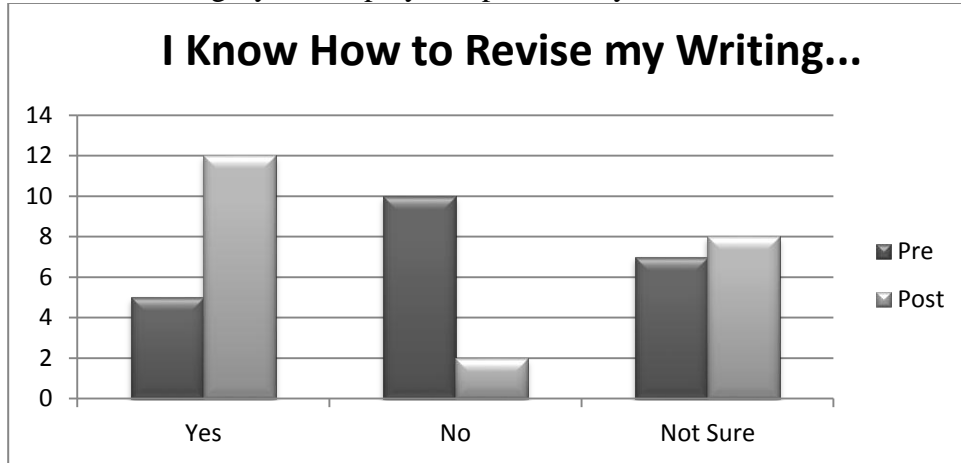
I wanted to see how students saw themselves as writers. Three more claimed they knew their strengths post-survey as compared to the pre-survey. The not sure category decreased by four students.



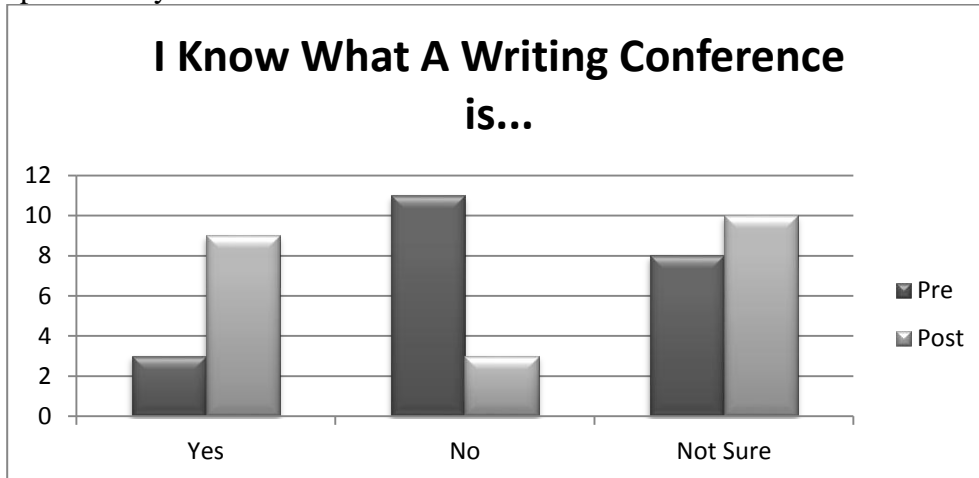
This question was intended to elicit responses that might reflect some self-awareness about what they needed to work on in writing. Increased awareness was reported by three more students post survey and the no responses decreased by four, while the not sure increased by one.



I intended this question to see if students were at all familiar with revision of their written work. Only five stated they knew at the beginning of the study which increased to twelve post-survey. The students who stated they didn't know pre-survey was ten and decreased to two post-survey. The unsure category went up by one post survey.

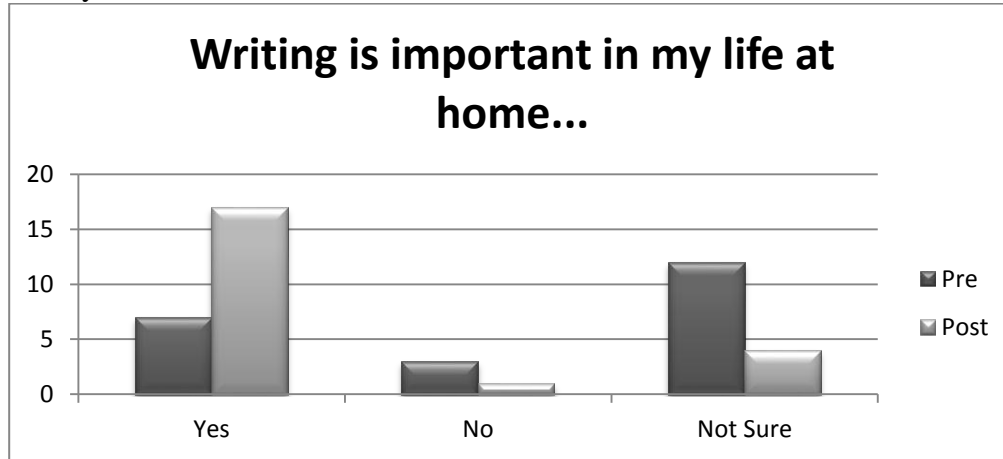


I wanted to know if students understood what a writing conference was and if perhaps they had been exposed to it in prior years. Significant changes include how only three stated they knew what a conference was pre-survey which rose to nine students post-survey. Those who selected no, went down by eight students. Eight students were unsure pre-survey and it was interesting to note it went up by two students post-survey.

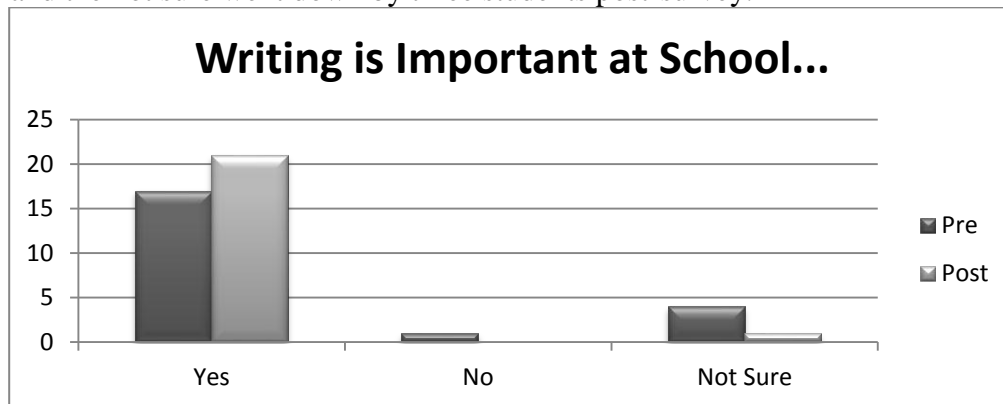




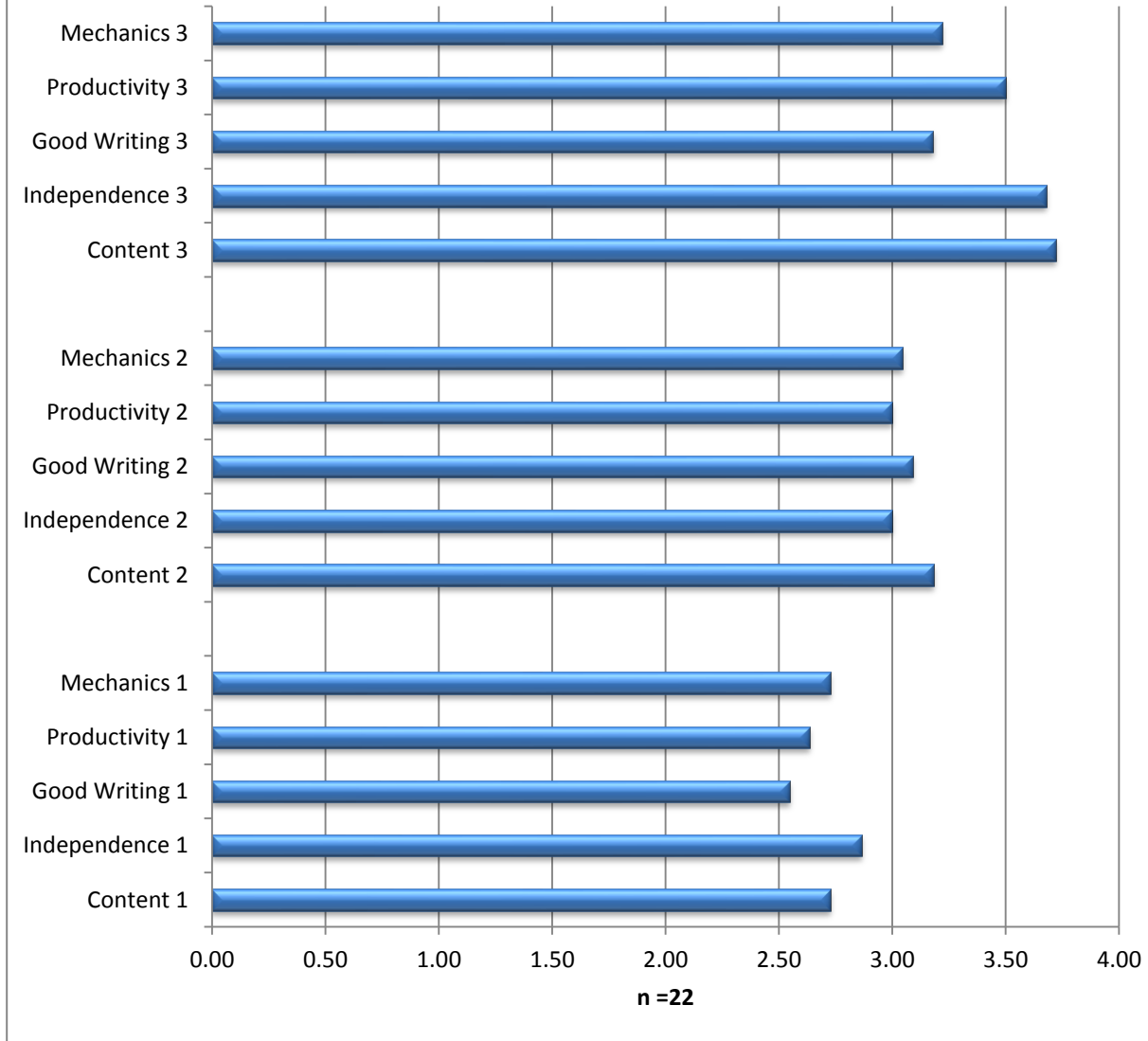
It was important to know if students consider writing outside of school important in their personal lives. Seventeen students said they engaged in writing activities at home post-survey which was a significant change from seven pre-survey. The not sure category decreased by six students post-survey.



The primary place where students write is school, and I wanted to see if the importance they attached to it pre and post survey. Four more students said it was important post-survey. The no category went down to zero post-survey and the not sure went down by three students post-survey.



## End of Unit Assessments: Units 1-3 Class Average



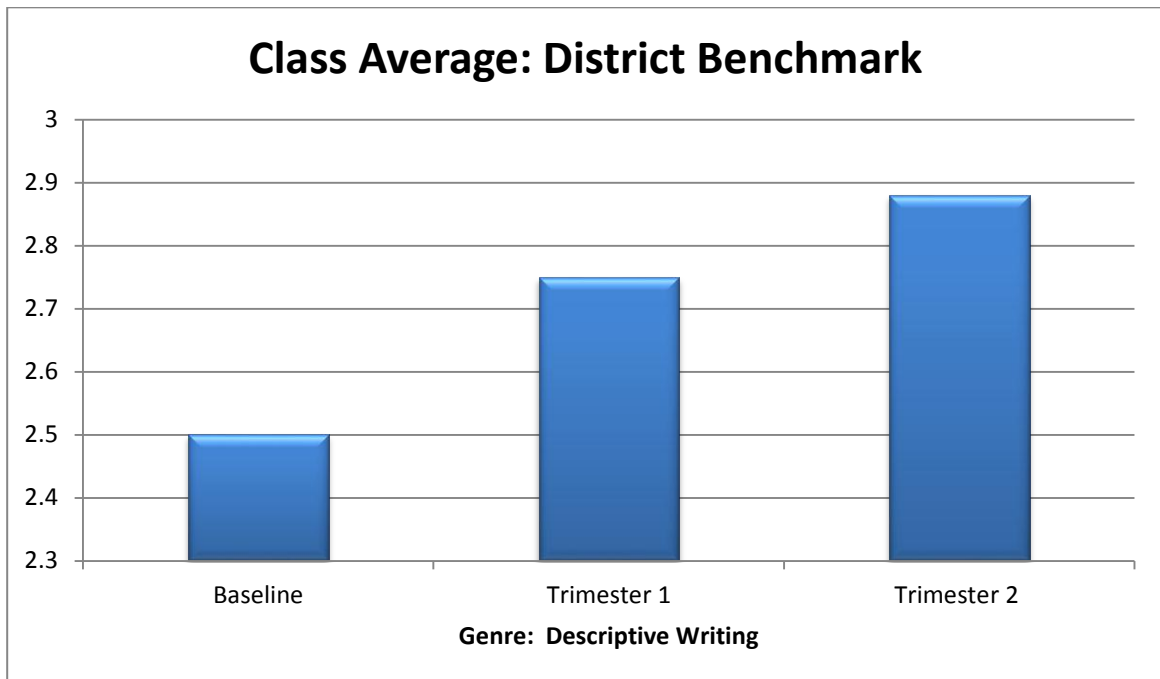
The first set of graphs above refers to Launching the Workshop: Narrative Writing

The second set of graphs above refers to Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing

The third set of graphs above refers to Breathing Life into Personal Essays

Each unit was assessed at the end of approximately six weeks based on published writing, the number and quality of drafts in folder, and journal entries.

Significant growth occurred over the three units considering the units are designed for grades 3-5. They are considered to be difficult for third grade.



The above graph displays the class average of the district writing benchmark on which significant growth was demonstrated towards grade-level standards. A score of 3 or above is considered proficient. The district rubric for third grade was the assessment tool utilized and included normed scoring practices using anchor papers to delineate levels 0-4. Students wrote to a prompt with a time limit of 45 minutes and could use a personal dictionary, thesaurus, or any room environment aid if it was part of the normal environment. The standard for third grade is to be able to write a single paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting details, conclusion, with the use of sensory language throughout.

On the baseline writing sample, 7 of 22 students scored 3 or higher.

On the Trimester 1 writing sample 11 of 22 students scored 3 or higher.

On the Trimester 2 writing sample 14 of 22 students scored 3 or higher

Of those not yet proficient, 5 of 8 are at a 2.5 which is nearing proficiency.

## **Qualitative Data**

### **Findings: Teacher Interviews**

Interviewing the teachers in the study group was a rare opportunity for me to sit one on one with colleagues around a subject near and dear to my heart. For the newer teachers on staff, I had the pleasure of getting to know them as well as learning about their beliefs surrounding teaching. For the ones I've worked with for years, it was an opportunity for us to deepen friendships and listen to stories about their lives that might otherwise go unheard because there never seems to be enough time. As a result of spending individual time with this group I feel as if I have ten comrades that trusted enough me to share their personal stories and beliefs about teaching. It was invaluable as we together reflected on experiences which brought us to this place in our personal and professional lives around writing and teaching. What *is* the use of doing without reflecting on *how* and *why*? These findings might then guide us in directions of future inquiry, growth, self- discovery about teaching, what we value, and have power to effect in positive ways.

### ***Feelings towards writing***

Feelings about interviewees' own writing experiences, past and present, were categorized as being positive or negative towards writing. A few teachers had early negative experiences which shifted towards more positive experiences as they gained control over their own writing through the development of skills. All but one experienced a shift in a positive direction, and reported these occurring sometime during college. Turning points for individuals appeared to have remained vivid despite the fact that many years had passed. All interviewees acknowledged feelings which developed early on in childhood towards writing and which had a lifelong impact on their lives – positive or negative.

### *Negative Feelings*

Five of nine teachers interviewed expressed negative memories during elementary school about writing. Negative experiences largely centered on rote exercises which lacked creativity, and most importantly, meaning. One stated,

“I remember just writing pages and pages with sometimes not making sense. We would have to write a page because the teacher said we needed to turn in a whole page. Sometimes I knew the teacher would not read the paper, so sometimes I would write knowing it did not make sense. The paragraphs would not even connect.”

Another teacher commented, “I hated writing. I remember writing my spelling words over and over. ...creative writing didn’t happen until sixth grade.”

In one case the negative perceptions surrounding writing stemmed from insecurities related to being bilingual and moving around a lot. She revealed,

“My family was a migrant family. I moved a lot. ...I had a lot of holes in my writing...but no one ever told me I had grammar issues...a professor found it in his heart to tell me the truth. I was really embarrassed and I appreciated it at the same time.

### *Positive Feelings*

The teachers who had positive memories associated pleasure of some sort with writing. Weekly letter writing was described by one teacher as that of necessity to maintain relationships with distant relatives. She described the anticipatory pleasure below,

“My memories were writing home from India to the U.S. to my grandparents, and of getting letters back...a huge deal to get letters back. We wrote back and forth weekly...details and details of our experiences in India to the family because they wanted the family back in the U.S. to know all about it. Waiting for the mail to come each day was very, very special...it was the connection between the families.”

Another teacher told of a never-ending story written with her classmates cast as characters as her first pleasurable memory of writing. Another experienced teacher described fondly memories of her father placing his handwritten poems and notes in her lunch box where she would discover them during snack or lunch while at school. This inspired her to approach writing with pleasure as she associated it with love and caring for someone. Another teacher stated from a young age she wanted to be a children's writer and that is why she chose teaching so she could write during summer vacations.

### *United to nurture young writers*

Those who had negative early writing memories were motivated to learn how to create classroom environments, lessons, and strategies that supported students in their writing development. Even though they lacked confidence in their own writing abilities or lacked professional development in writing, they hoped to remediate that and improve teaching skills through the support they felt with our study group facilitator and colleagues with a common interest in teaching writer's workshop. Those who had positive early experiences expressed desire to impart enthusiasm and pleasure they had associated with writing to their students. A teacher reported that there were two writing things she remembered,

“In seventh grade my teacher picked my story out to read to the class. Well I know what that feels like now, and when I do it with my students, I know how it feels. I was a quiet and shy student and didn't participate much. But my teacher heard me and it made an impact. ...it made a difference and I had a place in class. I figured if she shared it, I'd better save it. I remember what it was about to this day. That is what I try to do for my students now.”

Both categories were united in the goal of developing their own teaching skills to a higher level, maintaining enthusiasm for teaching writing, and in some cases sustaining passion for teaching

writing. They all wanted to nurture children's writing development and create spaces for that to happen within the classroom. One teacher summed it up when she said,

“I want it to be totally different from the way I was taught, and the feelings I had about writing, and that is why I want to change that – for them. ...I want to push them to succeed and to like writing. That was not done for me. I'm going to change that because it wasn't done for me.”

### ***Communication in the workplace: electronic mail and newsletters***

Teachers teach writing and one would think they would engage in it for pleasure or perhaps for demonstration in the classroom, but their primary form of writing consisted of emails. Almost all teachers reported as receiving and composing numerous emails each week to parents and colleagues. This form of writing was discounted by one teacher as not counting as actual writing. Seven of the ten writing study group members created monthly newsletters either collaboratively or individually to the parents of the dual immersion program. It was described as a new expectation of teaching in the dual program this year due to parents wanting to know what was going on in the classrooms.

Two teachers reported using social media as a way of releasing frustration and joys related to teaching. One used social media daily and the other stated that though she enjoyed blogging on the internet it was hard to keep up due to time constraints between both personal and professional responsibilities.

All teachers said there wasn't much time for their own pleasurable forms of writing due to a lack of time from personal/professional demands. A first year teacher who takes great pleasure in writing said that demands from teaching, and her own ongoing pursuit of a Master's Degree was taking a toll on her ability to write for pleasure. Only two teachers reported journaling on a regular basis as a form of self-expression and one described the therapeutic benefits she derived from doing so. The other

reported that she writes for half an hour alongside her husband and school age children as part of a nightly ritual they have done for years.

***Developing identity; empowering the voice within; developing thinking skills***

All of the teachers in the writing study group recognized the great importance of developing skill in writing for several reasons aside from the obvious need to write for school assignments. Reasons given were that writing is a form of self-expression, develops identity, and could be seen as a tool which develops and reflects logical thinking. Another teacher expressed her opinion that attaining writing skills was a reflection of social justice, especially as it relates to underserved minority students. They acknowledged how acquiring skill in writing had impacted their own lives positively - especially in college. All teachers recognized the increased demand for a variety of writing skills as students advance through school. For one, it delayed her attainment of a B.A. degree as well as her choice of college to have limited writing skills at the end of high school. They all stated that while it was not of greater importance than reading, it was at least equal to the development of reading skills.

***This is who I am...***

One teacher stated that every child has a story and the written expression of that is vital to their identity. She said,

“...if students are comfortable expressing themselves in writing it gives a good face to themselves when they have to show their writing. It gives them an edge when they have to explain themselves verbally. I think everybody needs a way to find values within themselves and what kind of person they want to become, where they’re from, their history, it all comes out in their writing.”

Another participant stated,

“If they don’t know how to write, they can’t defend themselves and speak their opinions. It’s empowering to create your own newsletter or book...It’s powerful to



have your voice going through a piece of writing...For my students to create a novel means they won't be passive, they'll be active."

A teacher said, "Denise found her voice. She wrote a poem that was a response to questions. This was a student who was in the Resource Specialist Program, as well as Speech and Language, and whose peer relationships were at times difficult. The poem reflected the difficulties she faced at home with a single mother who was under constant pressure and worry. Her teacher and peers acknowledged her difficulties, and her ability to capture her experience in words. It is hard not to see her through a different set of lenses when she allowed others to peek into her difficult home life.

### ***Writing develops and reflects critical thinking skills***

A teacher pointed out how we share ideas with others and that students need to be able to think critically. Defending ideas and voicing an opinion based on logic was cited by another teacher as being reflected in writing skills. Another teacher stated that it is important for students to be able to put something in writing first because it gives them an edge when presenting ideas to another person or group. Content areas such as social studies and science have writing assignments throughout which help construct learning and develop critical thinking skills. An upper grade teacher stated how increasingly important those become as students study social studies which are full of cause/effect, summaries of main ideas and supporting details, sequencing of events, are all types of thinking which help analyze and describe events in history. Logical thinking, or a lack of, is reflected in student writing.

### ***Student engagement and empowerment***

All teachers in the writing study group expressed interest in creating conditions in which all students could develop their potential. With the exception of one, each teacher interviewed expressed

the amount of engagement their students appeared to have during writer's workshop time. They acknowledged how students embrace the sense of freedom which permeates writing workshop.

### *Students respond positively to writing workshop*

One teacher of upper elementary stated,

“They enjoy writing and sharing their stories. They enjoy the freedom. ...this is an opportunity to write about themselves and where they are, and where they're going. They have a voice and at this age, their voices are beginning to go away.”

Another teacher echoed the sentiment and said that, “...they have a lot of freedom...I see that they are really engaged.” A teacher of first grade stated, “They love it...I have a few kids who may be struggling, but with the way we set it up, they love it because it's discovery. And they want to teach others.”

### *Students engage in construction of assessment tools*

All of the teachers interviewed used the Glendale Unified School District (GUSD) writing rubric for district benchmarks. It is interesting to note that all of them also develop checklists which become a scoring rubric for assessing published pieces of writing. In primary grades, the teachers along with their students work to collaborate on a list of criteria to score a three or a four, both of which are considered passing. The list gets typed up and handed to the students when they are close to publishing. This list helps students check off what they see (hopefully) as they reflect upon their own writing. Teachers then grade the paper with the same rubric and conference with the student during which the final grade is applied together. Teachers report they are developing the ability to self-assess (very hard to teach) and are responsible for the checks they mark. There are no mysteries as to why a student received a certain grade and teachers report it really helps with accountability. Students in

writing workshop classrooms were engaged in the creation of assessments and self-evaluation which becomes something done *with* and not *to* students.

### ***Success in Writer's Workshop***

An indicator of success seems to be the amount of writing produced through regular writing workshop activities. One teacher stated, "The naturals write a lot, and the strugglers have an increased amount." Similarly another said, "I have a couple of kids who are so resistant to writing, but through the writer's workshop they write more." A pattern which also developed was that the students inspire each other to write more. A teacher described how they want to teach each other and help each other. She said, "I asked her (a student) if I could share and then other students get the idea, and so other books are getting made. The successes come from each other."

Teachers reported that even though they did not teach descriptive writing because they were focusing on personal narrative writing, many students were passing or near to passing the genre-specific district writing benchmarks by the second trimester. The primary teachers reported that the majority of students in their classrooms are almost proficient in writing a descriptive paragraph. Instruction in narrative writing appears to transfer to good descriptive writing. All teachers reported that the writer's workshop approach enabled them to encourage and nurture all the writers in their classes from reluctant or struggling to the talented or natural writers. A final pattern of success which emerged from interviews was that of community building in which peers get to know, help, and trust each other through the sharing of their writing, writing alongside each other, and forming relationships.

### ***Talented writers***

Some children seem to be born with a pencil and paper in hand and teachers reported that the workshop setting allows those writers to develop to their potential. A first grade teacher reported that,

“One of my high kids had four extra pages in his book where he researched specific fish.” Another first grade teacher said, “There’s a bunch of them...a whole bunch of them are just on it. They fill up the paper, they know what to do, they take their notes, and put it into sentences. They’re off and running!” Another teacher stated that a student was quite proud of himself when he saw that he had written quite a lot. During conferences with students, teachers reported being able to give the talented writer a pointer and stated that they apply it right away. “These writers go the extra step” as one teacher said. Yet another teacher stated, “The higher students with stronger writing skills will publish two books or stories...they will have longer pieces of writing with more details.”

### *Struggling writers*

For students who appear reluctant to write for a variety of reasons the writing workshop approach helps to increase writing skills due to the supports given through small group and one to one conferences. One teacher said if she doesn’t have a writer’s workshop one day then one of her struggling writers shouts, “Maestra, we didn’t have writer’s workshop!” He looks forward to it and with great disappointment notes when it doesn’t happen. The same teacher credits his attitude to the fact that despite his difficulty in writing, she keeps it positive in the classroom as she realizes motivation to write is much of the challenge for some. A very experienced teacher of primary discussed the reading-writing connection with one of her struggling students,

“The writing drives the reading. They go hand in hand. Sometimes it’s the other way around, but I often see the writing driving the reading. I have a little girl who has written more than she can read. But now her reading has come along. I just tested her today and she has come up two levels.”

### ***Getting to know you – building the classroom community***

A major task for any teacher is to build a functional community from a group of students with diverse interests, cultural backgrounds, and learning needs. This aspect of success in writer's workshop cannot be understated especially when upper grade teachers routinely have thirty or more students. Learning writing takes place within the teacher-student and peer relationships and writer's workshop enables teachers and students to meet individual and group needs while getting to know everybody. Several of the teachers interviewed stated how the sharing of ideas through partnerships and in the whole group seemed to connect students to each other, and allowed the teacher to get to know each student through their writing and conferences. As students and the teacher shared their stories, trust and acceptance developed which in turn allowed relationships to grow and learning to move forward.

A teacher described a pre-writing activity in which students were asked to bring in a box to share a few objects that represented meaningful parts of their lives. She said it was, "...a great way for me to get to know them, to build community, to share. The box was really successful in generating writing." Another teacher said, "you get to focus on their personal needs." Overwhelmingly, teachers said that through their writing, they get to know the children and details of their lives which would otherwise not be possible.

### ***Challenges***

All teachers reported numerous challenges they faced to implement and maintain writer's workshop within their classrooms. Some challenges came from intrusions in their schedule from outside sources over which they had little control, others came from the students, but perhaps the major challenge came from the teachers themselves.

### *The challenge of significant time to write daily - external*

Each teacher is asked to create a weekly schedule to share with administration and parents at the beginning of the year. The schedule - from my personal experience - reflects an ideal and rarely reflects reality. Who can possibly account for all the assemblies, fire drills, lockdown drills, special events, unforeseen events, torn and tattered papers, lost and undone assignments, behavior issues, hurt feelings, hurt legs, fingers, arms, and heads which necessitate filling out a pink nurse slip, birds which may find their way into the classroom, freak weather, and teeth which fall out in the middle of a lesson? By the way, teeth never fall out during recess or lunch. They always fall out during a lesson. These are but some of the challenges which eat away at time to write - I didn't even mention testing!

All of the dual immersion teachers reported that a couple of the celebrations which are traditions at our school affect the routine of everything they do. Though writer's workshop was not the only subject area affected, it was often taken out of the schedule due to special events. They plan these events together and have parents who expect them to participate. While they value the singing and celebratory aspects of these events, they all state how hard it is to keep writer's workshop moving forward during the three or so weeks of performance rehearsal leading up to the event and each year these celebrations are becoming more time consuming to practice for. As a result, in some cases the writing workshop comes to a halt. A teacher shared,

“The Festival of Lights really impacted our writing for three weeks, and it's really frustrating. It's hard to leave off, and come back to something and remain excited about it. Time is the biggest challenge. Uninterrupted time.”

For teachers who had split classes, writer's workshop was challenging to schedule. Upper elementary teachers also have instrumental music, P.E, and sometimes grade-specific activities to

consider. If you add special needs students who participate in RSP and Speech, then it becomes even more of a challenge. Another very experienced teacher said, “Are they writing with rethinking? Time is the challenge, time to get to everyone.” Time then seems to be against teachers who wish to have time for a meaningful writer’s workshop.

### ***Student challenges***

Even with the supportive atmosphere of the writer’s workshop, some students resist writing. This can be frustrating for even the most experienced teacher. Teachers report getting ‘trapped’ at their work table by students rather than freely moving about the room. One teacher stated, “I need for them to be able to solve their own problems. I need for them to develop independence.” Some teachers deal with this by pairing the student with a writing partner who can provide support or by conferencing with the student to uncover the area of need. Some students who haven’t experienced a writer’s workshop until this year take a while to learn the structure and learn the expectations when it’s time to practice the workshop lesson.

### ***It doesn’t add up!***

Each of the teachers interviewed were asked, “How much time do your students spend in writer’s workshop?” They all had described just how important writing is for students and equal to the development of reading skills. The range of actual time dedicated to writer’s workshop ranged from thirty minutes (twice a week) up to forty-five minutes a day (five days a week). Only four of the workshop teachers were able to make that work for them as they felt there were too many other things to fit in. Even though we as a collective writing study group say we want to create justice, empower students, allow for creative expression, and develop academic writing skills across content areas, the question I have is: Can we do all of that in a meaningful way twice a week for thirty minutes?

( A) Yes B) No C) My Pencil won’t even be warmed up D) Coffee, Tea, or Red Bull?)

*Writer's Workshop presents a learning challenge for the teacher*

A major challenge faced by all of the teachers who used the upper grade units was the complexity of each of the units. Calkins writes in a very thorough manner and includes her thinking, or inner dialogue, on the side of each writing lesson much like a clipboard in Microsoft Word. Her philosophy of teaching, and children's literature background, as well as personally knowing many children's authors have all shaped the creation of the Units of Study and the richness of her experiences permeate the text. I have had to pre-read them carefully, and whenever I have spare time, simplify them in writing so I can focus on the main idea of the lesson. A new teacher put it so well when she said,

“...the text itself. The way the units are written. One of the reasons I got stuck is I realized I haven't gone through all those steps, and I haven't done all this, and it's a lot. There are so many things to do in one lesson, I was trying to do all these things. ...she (mentor teacher) told me to break it down.”

Echoing the sentiment was a colleague who said, “For me being a first year teacher in WW, it's learning how to implement it. When I first started, I really got stuck. I had to restart and get the momentum going again. ...it's my personal issue with it.” Yet another revealed, “...at this school it's a bit more structured. It's kind of hard because I don't feel like I'm an expert at it.” This was a repeated theme from all of the new teachers (less than four years) as well as some experienced ones using the upper grade units of study. This is all another layer which adds to the fact that some teachers don't feel confident in their abilities to teach writing to begin with. It is hard to persist at something you might perceive as a weak area.

Aside from the fact that the upper grade units are difficult to learn, during the interview with the study group leader, I asked about resistance to use a writer's workshop approach, and she stated,



“I think people get overwhelmed; they get into their rut, their routine of how they do things. You’ve got to get out of that mold, expand your horizons, and take on the challenge of something new and uncomfortable. It’s going to be uncomfortable. It’s going to be a struggle. It may not turn out the way you’re used to...It’s going to be messy. Not everyone will be in the same place on the same day. They’ll be in different places, with different needs, and at different stages.”

The same person stated that she felt challenges despite twenty-four years of experience in teaching writer’s workshop. She said, “Every now and then, everybody needs help at the same time.”

### ***Adapting/modifying/supporting students in the curriculum***

All teachers interviewed use some kind of graphic organizer at some point to help students plan or structure their writing. In first grade a tree map was used to plan a non-fiction animal book. In second and third grades the teachers described using tree maps to develop a main idea and supporting details in developing paragraphs. Upper grade teachers did not specifically state how they use graphic organizers, but said they prove useful to organizing ideas.

### ***Modifications – student supports***

Teachers described many modifications for students who need them as the workshop progresses. Working in close proximity at the teacher table for those with attention difficulties, using spelling/sound cards, personal dictionaries, writing partners, and using an assistant or parent volunteer. Upper grade teachers provide copies of mentor texts for student journals so they can study and revisit the genre of writing they are immersed in. Writing checklists, instructional charts, and editing checklists were a common support used in all the classrooms.

## *Professional Development*

All teachers unanimously reported that they felt they needed support and ongoing professional development to implement writer's workshop regardless of the amount or kinds of training they had already participated in the past. Types of training already received were described as useful, yet they all expressed the need for ongoing ideas, strategies, and problem solving with colleagues to help them overcome issues which arise.

### *New teachers have a say...*

All of the dual immersion teachers at Edison have to participate in GLAD, or Guided Language Acquisition Design; a collection of strategies tailored to the needs of students acquiring another language which relies on visuals, vocabulary development, and oral language. One part has an emphasis on vocabulary development through the use of visuals as well as some exposure to reader's and writer's workshop principles. One teacher shared that, "I've gone to training for GLAD, and they promote reader's and writer's workshops but they don't go into depth."

One of the teachers had the opportunity to have extensive early training in writer's workshop while teaching in New York and had firsthand professional development from Teachers College. This training was comprehensive and ongoing throughout her two years there. The training included workshop leaders who would come into the classroom, model first-hand lessons, and coach throughout the year. Workshops were part of the training, and teacher's had release time to plan their own units of study. She said, "I can't imagine learning the approach without that support." She even credited her ability to obtain her current position due to being familiar with reader's and writer's workshop. Despite her good fortune and hard work she also stated, "...there is no way I see myself as an expert on it."

Some of the new teachers have had pre-service courses from the university where they received their teacher preparation, but felt it didn't fully prepare them for the reality of the classroom. One said, "I would have really loved it if in my classes at UCLA, we would have learned more. The lab school is where I was exposed to writer's workshop...they are really into it." Another from the same university stated, "In general, I still feel like I'm learning." And yet another said, "There are a lot of things I need to feel successful. It's still trial and error. There are a lot of things I need to modify for next year. This is a learning year for me. I don't think I've received as much (training) as I think I can absorb, but it's not done yet."

All of the new teachers stated that the facilitator of our study group was an invaluable resource. They each credited her in some way with one on one assistance and ongoing support outside of the biweekly meetings. One said, "It is helpful to go to her and see if I'm on the right track." Another said, "I'm always going to her to bounce things off of her." Yet another said, "She is my professional development."

### *Veterans speak...*

Of the teachers who have five or more years' experience in the classroom, a couple of them have had notable leadership roles in the area of writing in particular. Those roles came out of self-initiated development opportunities which stemmed from a desire to increase knowledge in teaching writing. Both have the same length of teaching experience – twenty four years. One has taught in different countries, in different languages, and was a literacy coach. Now she is a National Board Certified teacher, and like the less experienced (though very knowledgeable) teacher, obtained her current position due to her reader and writer's workshop experience. She is the study group facilitator. She understands the supports teachers need throughout various stages and especially when they are taking on the difficult task of implementing writer's workshop. Though she didn't say it during the

interview, I sensed her need to share her successes with the group as well as her frustrations, and on occasion will ask the group for ideas about problems she's encountering with particular students or groups in her class.

The other equally veteran teacher has presented over 150 writing workshops for teachers through UCLA Writing Project, the school district, opens her door to Cal State LA pre-service teachers observing writer's workshop in her room on a regular basis, was involved in research on writing over a three year period through the National Writing Project, is a former California Teacher of the Year, Disney Teacher of the Year. She traveled to Japan as part of the Teacher of the Year, and spent time observing and teaching in Japanese classrooms. In short, she has had many notable professional accomplishments. She is a model of learning and inquiry and follows closely the politics of education. When asked about having enough training, she stated she, "felt there was never enough training. I don't think there's ever enough time to be complete. I've certainly been lucky enough to have experiences with the Writing Project and here at Edison, and though I certainly feel comfortable, I don't always do it well."

### ***What do you need?***

In order for any professional development to be meaningful, teachers need to have a say in how that looks and what activities will be presented based on what they struggle with. Part of my own inquiry was to find out what others felt they needed more of, less of, or something else altogether. I felt that in order for it to be of value, it also needed to be responsive of the needs of the group. This is what I found.

### ***Sharing ideas/lessons***

Only three of the ten teachers stated they liked the sharing at the beginning of the sessions. One teacher called it 'connecting' but described that she, "liked seeing what you made (journals) with

your class, and how you made it. I think because the way I was doing narrative writing was a little different. I like being able to ask someone who has done something, how they've done it." Another member shared she liked, "...the teachers sharing their successes and watching the spark take place in those teachers who weren't quite sure."

*This is what we want...*

There were a variety of wants/needs/wishes from the teacher group. One wanted us to write each time so that we could develop as writers ourselves and continue to share. Another felt she needed to talk specifics about the curriculum itself and that would help her. Yet another said, "...having the more expert teachers doing the sample lessons." The only pattern that developed was the desire to see the DVD demonstration lessons that came with the Units of Study as evidenced when one said, "that video was very helpful to me. When I'm told something, my brain doesn't make sense of it. I feel I need more – this is how you do it." Another said, "... she'd love to watch those."

In conclusion, the interviews provided rich personal backgrounds of teachers. To know that is to know the fabric of this group and it is diverse, warm, and full of strength. It was one thing to hear them in person, and then again as I transcribed their interviews. Their responses to my questions seeped into my thoughts, and now I carry bits and pieces of their words, thoughts, feelings and expressions in my mind. I am now 'connected' and invested to this group of teachers.

## **Teacher Writing Study Group**

The primary purpose for the formation of this group was to provide support for implementing Units of Study as a curricular framework to the teachers who chose to use it. The structure of each meeting was similar much of the time, yet was also responsive of requests from teachers at prior meetings. I didn't keep records of who attended each meeting, but noted that teachers who did not attend often had other professional responsibilities that kept them away. At times it was the conflict of multiple roles that teachers have which kept the full group from meeting each session. Other times, only a handful of teachers were present with no clear reason for missing members. This was most notable around the busy months of November and December. It largely resolved itself by January after the winter break.

The first few meetings, and periodically thereafter, began with a ten to fifteen minute writing session. Teachers would sometimes share their writing with a partner, and sometimes with the whole group. On occasion, the group facilitator would ask listeners to analyze techniques that the writer employed in the piece and a discussion would follow about how to use it in a mini-lesson. Generally speaking, teachers are much like the students they teach. Some like to share their writing, and some are hesitant. No one was ever put on the spot as it came to sharing writing and over time, you could tell that most teachers felt more comfortable to share.

After the writing sessions, there was often a grade-level sharing of successes and challenges around what each teacher was working on. Teachers brought self-selected pieces of ongoing or completed writing from students and this provided an opportunity for others to gain ideas to lift the level of writing, help problem solve if something wasn't going well or the teacher felt stuck, and provide recognition to the efforts of the teacher and their students' work.

DVD lessons from the Units of Study were watched during a couple of meetings for the purpose of modeling good teaching. As we watched, we were given a form with the steps of a mini-lesson in order to note them when we saw them. It proved useful to watch the lesson to analyze the components and to see transitions between the parts. It wasn't as easy as it seemed and many of us didn't catch all the subtleties of it. The group had the option of watching the lesson with or without Lucy Calkins voice over as the teacher taught the lesson. We overwhelmingly agreed to watch the lesson with no commentaries by Calkins as we wanted to focus on the lesson. This is much like the clipboard on Microsoft Word which, while very useful, could be distracting and too much to take in during one viewing.

One memorable DVD moment was that of Calkins conferencing with a child over her writing. We had all asked for conferencing tips at previous meetings and had begun discussions and readings over this aspect of writer's workshop. We watched as Calkins skillfully navigated her way through a conference with a young child to get at the heart of her story. It was very masterfully done and the group analyzed the manner in which Calkins approached it with the child- a reflection of Calkins many years of experience. It was notable that Calkins had done this in an amphitheater type of setting with what looked like hundreds of onlookers. Possibly they were Teachers College Writing Institute Participants. Our study group acknowledged the level of confidence and experience a teacher would have to risk it not going well in front of a large audience.

Once we started with a strategy designed to develop our own mini-lessons based on our students' writing. The facilitator provided her student work for the lesson and asked us to list strengths and weaknesses based on the writing. Once patterns emerged, we grouped the most common findings and decided many students were overusing the word 'and' to begin a sentence. As a whole group we then went through the structure of a mini-lesson to create a lesson designed to teach students

other ways to begin sentences. This process was relatively quick and easy as well as useful to complete. All teachers reported how they could easily look over their class writing for patterns and work on group issues in this way to create their own lessons. It was interesting to note that although the facilitator's student writing was in Spanish, none of the English teachers resisted trying to analyze it due to it being first grade writing. If this were done with upper grade writing, it would have been more difficult, but the intent of learning skills worked well across languages.

One meeting was largely devoted to the topic of developing independence in students which is a necessary condition to meeting the range of individual needs within a writing workshop setting. Many teachers struggle with 'needy' students who always come to their teachers with questions. Behavior management and brainstorming about how to deal with that ensued. We discussed how our own behavior unknowingly reinforces the needy student by giving them the attention they desire. This meeting was largely a meeting of self-reflection, and therapeutic in nature. We all have struggled with this issue and it was good to not be alone in that.

About January we decided it would be good to get into each other's classrooms to observe writing lessons with the purpose of learning and providing supportive feedback. We got off to a good start with the first couple of rounds of observations, but our schedule had to be put off due to our support staff's increased workload as a result of transitioning to a magnet school designation. These will resume with support staff when time permits. We debriefed the lessons with each other at the next study group meeting, and discussed what went well and shared suggestions for situations encountered during the lesson. Overall, there was much enthusiasm and interest in stepping out of one's own class to peek into another and see what writer's workshop looks like there. It was a rare treat.

Before I got deep into my own thesis writing, I had shared some of my simplified lessons from the first two units. I had a student teacher at the time and was able to write, organize, and copy some



of those lessons and student writing checklists I put in journals largely due to sharing responsibility with her. They were much appreciated by the new teachers to upper grades and stated how it helped them to move forward and feel less stuck. The primary teachers liked how I placed copies of mentor texts in my students' writing journals. It gave them ideas for placing artifacts or main points of lessons for students to reference as a unit of study progresses and is supportive of all students.

One offshoot that came out of our writing study group was my grade-level collaboration day. Since three of us taught writing with a workshop approach, the other two colleagues expressed interest in what we were doing, and so we spent a whole day discussing the beginning of the first Unit of Study. We retreated to a private room in our nearby library for a quiet work session during which we continued some of the work I had started alone in simplifying the lessons. I wanted to pick up where I'd left off and carry forward the process of simplifying the lessons so that I could say a whole unit was complete. My grade-level colleagues though expressed they wanted me to work with them in 'digesting' the unit from the beginning. How could I say no? Step-by-step we 'talked' the first four lessons out loud. Engaging in this group process in an auditory fashion helped all of us capture the structure of the lesson and discuss ways to adapt it to our needs.

To sum up the writing study group and my own grade level day is to say that many aspects of teaching writing and these units in particular remain a work in progress.

### **Student Work Samples**

In order to capture the growth that took place from September through February, I've selected a representative sample which highlights four developmental levels of writers from the study and captures their growth. They are categorized and presented in the following order: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced using the California standards for third grade and the district writing rubric. It is difficult for me to say one is Below Basic while the other is Advanced, especially knowing that

we all proceed in our own ways or not, largely based on our innate abilities, personalities, environmental influences, etc., yet for the purpose of describing the ranges and to illustrate the path that an individual's growth could take during sustained and regular writing workshop time, I am perhaps most proud of the students on the 'Below Basic' end as his growth is rather dramatic.

I could have typed all of the writing collected, but the way students write with pencil or pen in hand captures some piece of their personality and I choose to have that come through. Lucy Calkins and other writers who present samples within their texts, always do so with the children's handwriting whenever possible, and I modeled the following presentation of work in the manner of Calkins, with the exception of the last writing sample from the advanced writer, they are presented in their handwriting. A couple of student samples are lengthier pieces, and for those I have chosen to show excerpts which illustrate certain markers of growth in writing, thinking, and perhaps most importantly, offer us a peek into their lives.

**Joseph: Baseline Writing Sample, Below Basic Level**

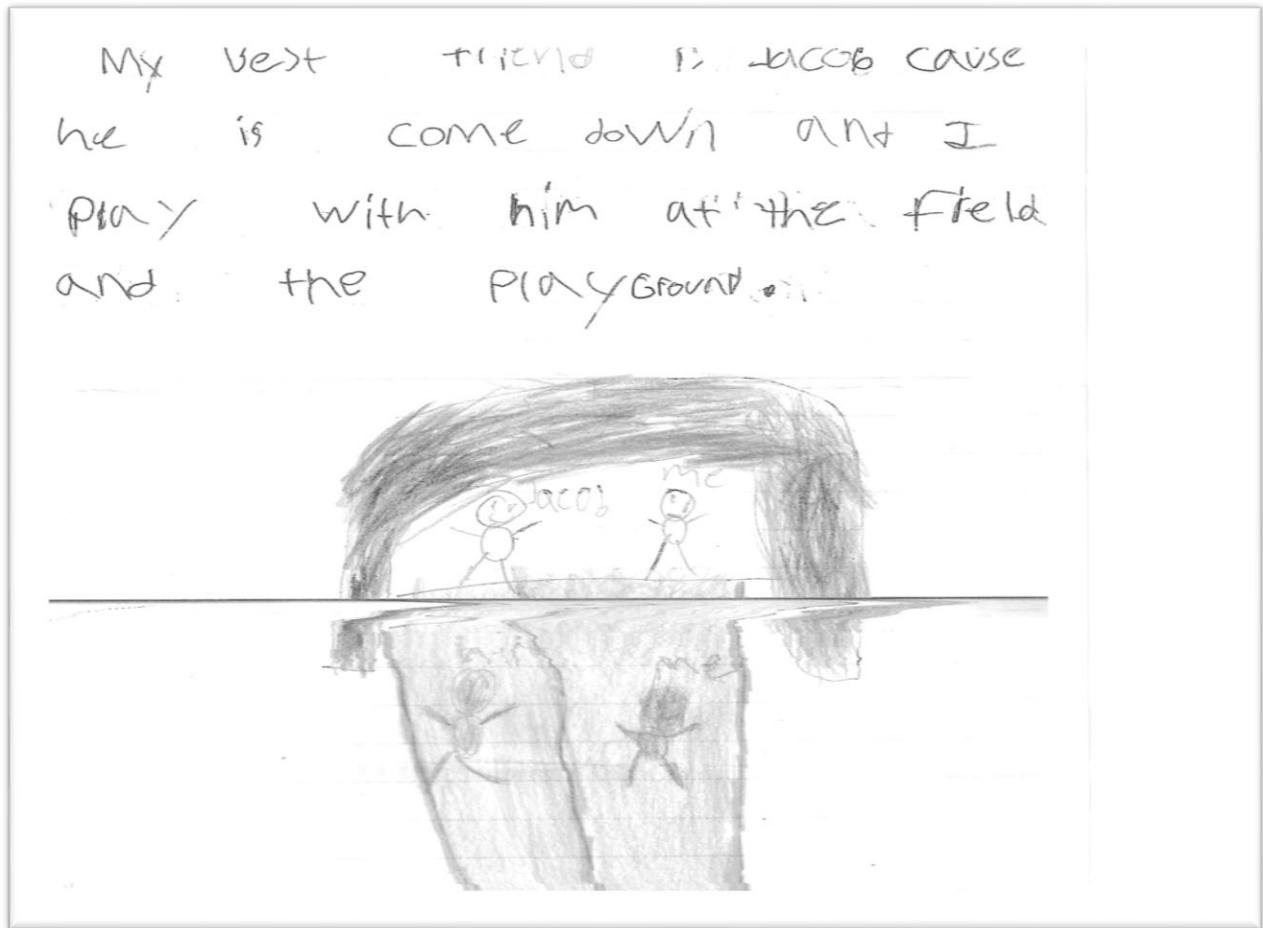


Figure 1

Joseph writes about his favorite person, Jacob, whom he likes to play handball with every day at school. At this stage, his picture tells as much as his words, and in fact perhaps more. Note the shadows on the handball court which mirror the human figures against the wall. He took the full forty-five minutes to produce this text.

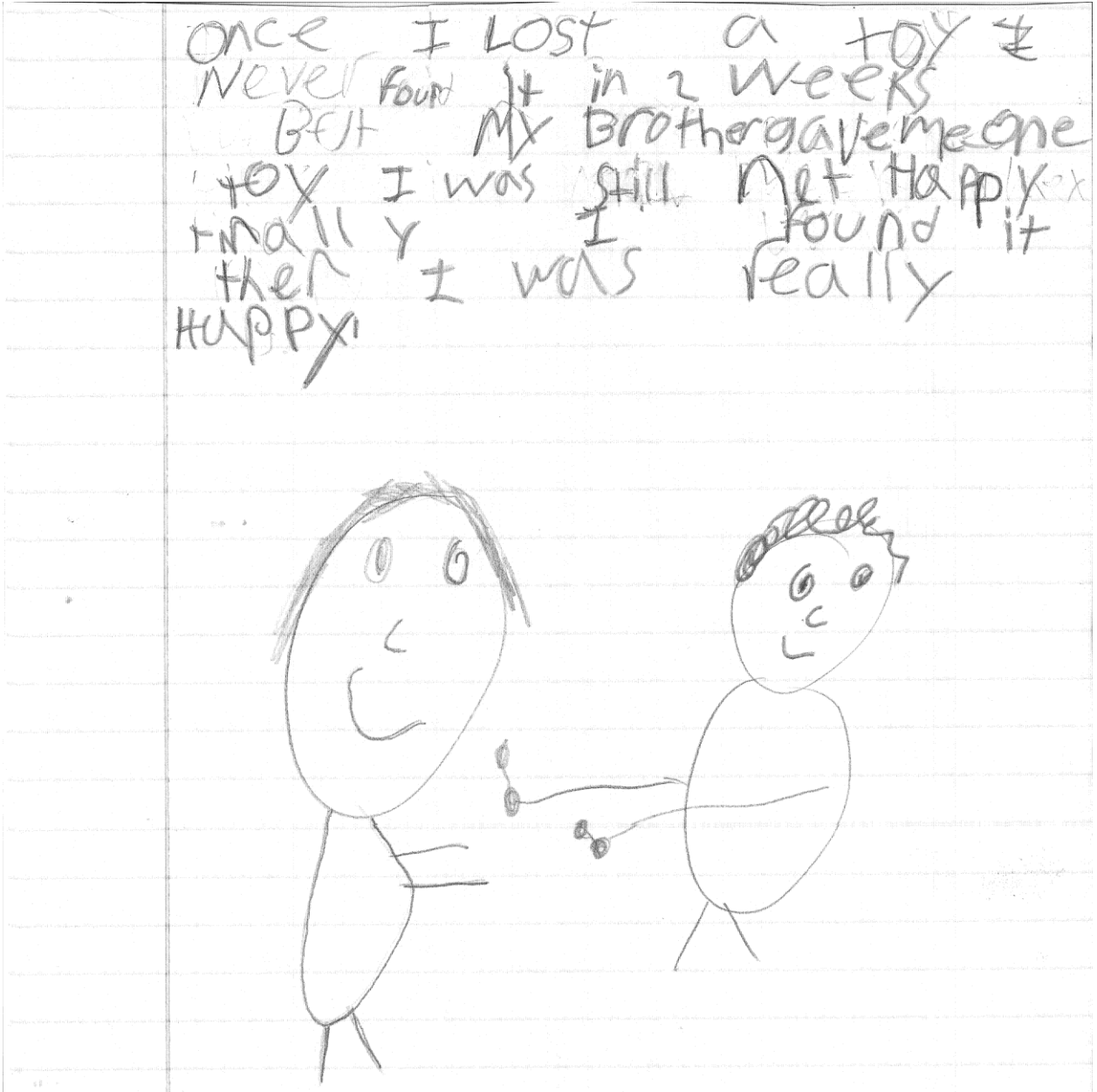


Figure 2

Joseph, two months later describing his favorite toy which he states he was unhappy to lose in response to a benchmark test. Though he has several thoughts, he uses one period at the end. As before, his picture supports the text. He is pictured in the foreground as his brother, in the background hands him a toy. Pictures appear relatively young for third grade.

Joseph: Unit 1, Launching the Writing Workshop

Koko's 10-1-10  
The first time we got my  
dog he had 8 month old. His  
name is Koko he was really smart.  
he sniffed all the house it was  
my dog knows how to do tricks. I  
do not know what he is is it a  
Chihuahua or a weiner dog. I found  
out what he is he is a Chihuahua.  
his so cute. sometimes my dog barks  
but theres noone. I always check  
outside theres noone. My mom  
said we were going somewhere.  
I went with them we went to  
target and I saw a shadow  
it looked like my dog. finally  
we left and we had fun  
at the house and we  
saw a movie.

Though this was completed before the piece on the previous page, it was his first published piece of narrative writing from the workshop.

This piece reflects his thoughts, feelings, and observations about Koko, his 'chiwawa'.

Though his story takes place across home and Target, and is not focused on one small moment, it captures the meaning Koko has in his daily life.

For Joseph, this is a generous amount of writing when you consider where he started at the beginning of the year.

He signals the end of His story with the word 'finally'.

Figure 3

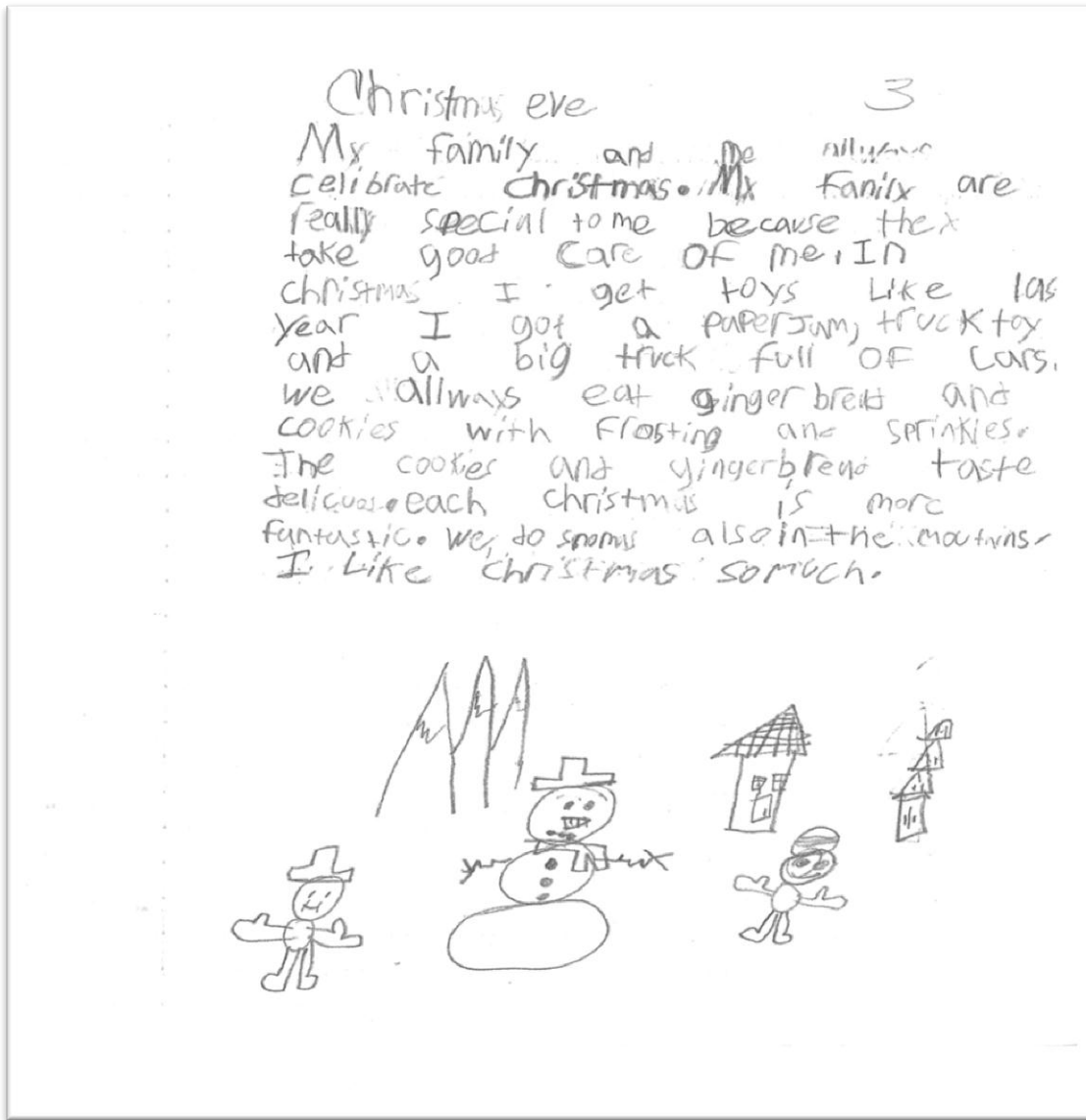


Figure 4

By February, Joseph has developed a paragraph in response to another district benchmark asking to describe his favorite holiday. He has the minimum to attain proficiency: a topic sentence, supporting details, and a conclusion. He stays on topic. According to the scoring criteria of the rubric, the errors do not interfere with meaning and so he has moved from a score of 1 to a 3. Notice he still likes to include pictures to support the writing, and now his people are no longer stick figures, and include details such as fingers. I noticed that he had presented me with many of his drawings before this period of time as gifts which I promptly fussed over and displayed! Were his numerous pictures a rehearsal for this now more developed writing?

6<sup>th</sup> graders think there are ~~boss~~ <sup>play fair</sup> of handball but you know what that they are boss of handball and there not boss of me. they think there boss of handball but I will tell you the most important about this story that they cut in line they cheat when they play but they don't play fair but most important is that they say referee is first but it is last. they ~~lie~~ to others and they lie to me I hate it when they lie to me and to others.

For example, when they do slices they do double bounces and they say it's not out.

They cheat all the time, they cheat by not playing fair.

They don't play fair that's how they cheat. They don't have good sportsmanship.

They boss me around all the time but most of the time they boss everyone - plus me.

Joseph now develops an idea or thesis about fairness:

**“6<sup>th</sup> graders think they are the boss of handball, but you know what? They are not the boss of handball and they are not the boss of me.”**

Students had been asked to collect ideas their lives at school or home and this essay grew from his life on the handball court – a well known topic for him!

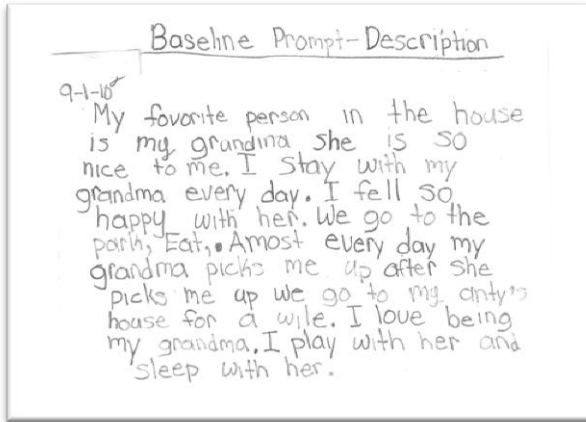
He is now trying to break apart ideas into paragraphs.

Though it may seem repetitive, one of the lessons in the workshop dealt with parallel construction. Was this repetition on purpose?

Joseph's voice rings loud and clear and I dare not cheat or boss him around if I play handball with him.

Figure 5

## Barbara: Baseline Writing Sample, Basic Level

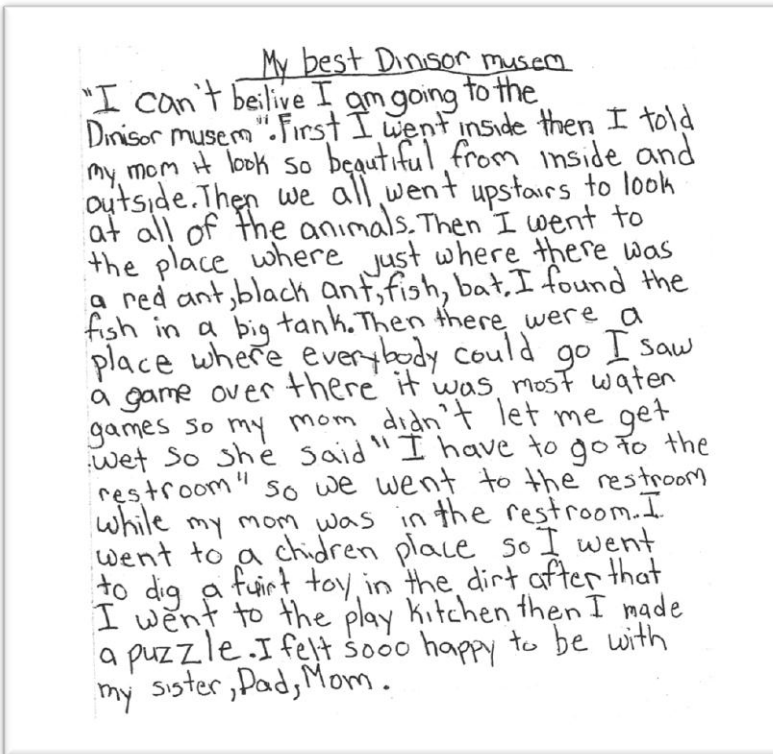


Barbara started with a score of 2.5. She has some problems with sentence structure and this lacks a definite conclusion, though some may argue that, "I play with her and sleep with her." is an adequate conclusion.

It seemed that she could wrap it up more definitively, and coupled with some of her sentences placed her in the basic, but near proficient level.

Figure 6

## Barbara: Unit 1, Launching the Workshop: Narrative



Barbara's first published piece of writing reflects lessons learned in the writing workshop.

Note that she opens with dialogue, to create interest in her lead. Though she does not include who is saying it, we guess it is her. Later she uses a direct quote which shows her mom doing the speaking.

She is developing awareness of strategies author's use to create interest. This has more of a conclusion than the baseline.

Figure 7



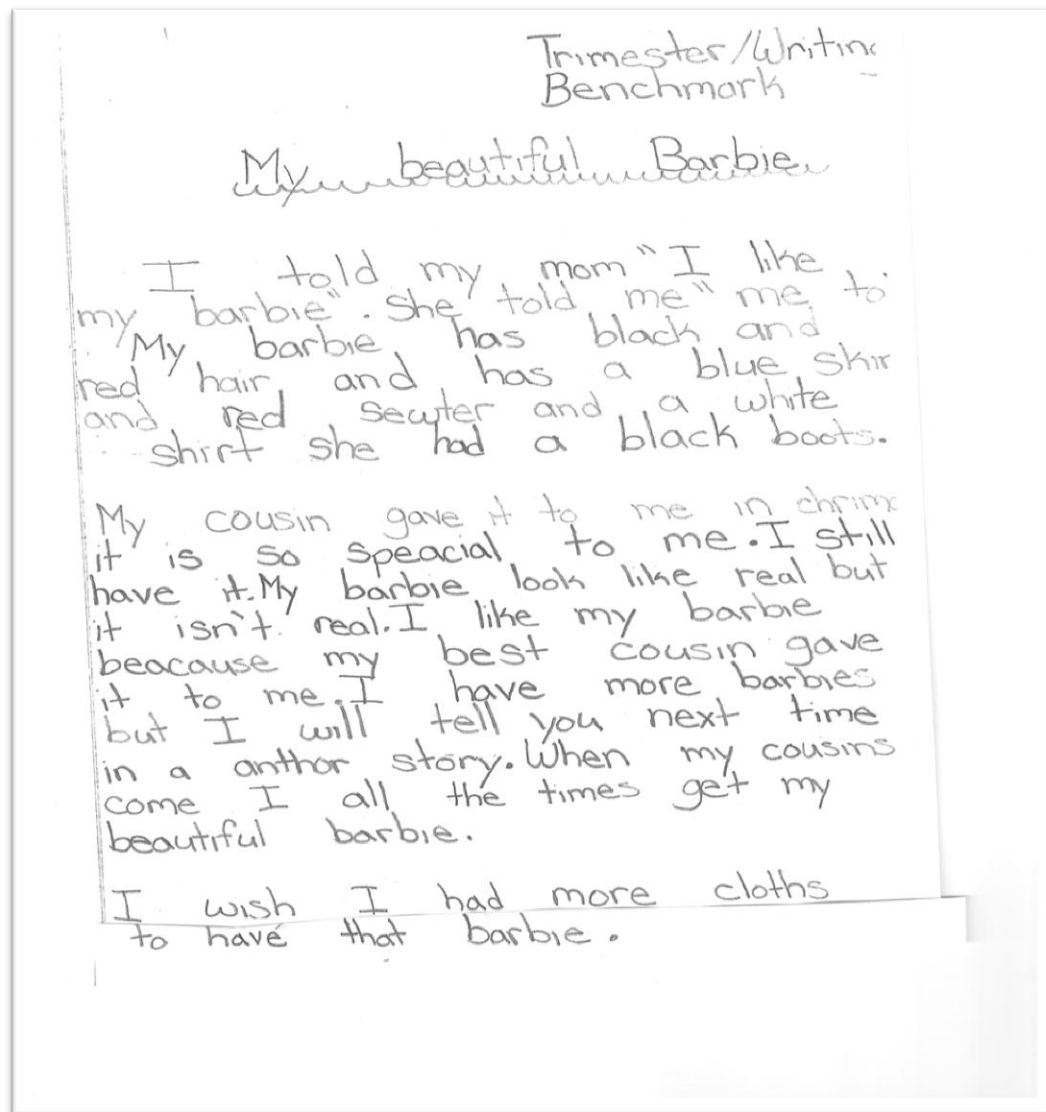


Figure 8

The benchmark writing sample about a favorite toy reflects Barbara's attempt to paragraph her writing. Writing workshop lessons had addressed why and how to break up writing, and students had reference material to support them in their efforts to do so. She was still working on sentence structure. Strengths include the description of colors of clothing for her Barbie.

12-20-10 Halloween Hoopla

Ms. Chaney walks us to the silver gate while [redacted] goes to ASES. I saw my mom standing there waiting for me. We were walking fast as we can go to our white house. I was walking to the bathroom to quickly shower. After I took a bath I quickly dress up to my Diva costume. I thought I looked horrible. "You look pretty, [redacted]" Mom said.

Knock, knock, knock. As I walked to the door I said "Who is it?" "It's me Makaila!" I opened the door. Makaila said "Can I change here?" I said "Yes!"

I ran to the car like a speeding bullet. It smelled like vanilla ice cream. My mom arrived as fast she could. Makaila and me were eating Snickers it tasted like Carimel.

My mom, Makaila and me were waiting in line to get the tickets.

I went to this game called the Spinning wheel and the Spinning wheel showed to get a candy so I got a card from the purple basket. I played this game called rock climbing the steps were colorful it was kind of hard.

My mom went to drop Makaila went running to her house. Makaila said "Thank You for taking me!" I said "Your welcome!"

I had the best day with my mom, Makaila I felt very excited and very happy to go

By the end of unit 2, Barbara shows some nice growth in her sentence structure, and step-by-step description of events as she tries to capture feelings about the much anticipated, Halloween Hoopla.

She attempts to show and not tell with the "Knock, knock, knock."

As the story proceeds, she correctly paragraphs as the setting of the story changes, or as characters are introduced.

She uses sensory language to help the reader make pictures in our minds (or evoke familiar smells and tastes).

Overusing a new skill such as quotes is common. As her awareness grows, she will be more selective of how she uses or doesn't use dialogue.

She sums up her story reflecting on the feelings she had about this event.

Figure 9

Barbara: Unit 3, Excerpt of Personal Essay

Excerpt of essay 2/16/11

because she is bossing me. For example if you do something to my sister she would get mad. Big sisters shouldn't boss little. I think sisters shouldn't tease little sisters. Big sisters think their cooler than little sisters but it sometimes true but sometimes its not true.

Well my sister and me sometimes fight about who is cooler. So sometimes we stop and I leave from the room and I go to the kitchen and we forget about it. My mom sometimes say we fight like cats and dogs. I felt sad when they tease me. For example, would you like it if someone told you that you weren't cool? I am ~~gon~~ going to be right you would not like it. Well my sister does boss me but I

This piece from Barbara's personal essay is an excerpt due to its lengthy, at times rambling nature.

Her thesis was:

***"Big sisters shouldn't boss little sisters around."***

She discusses teasing and all sorts of insults inflicted upon her from the older sister such as being told she's not cool.

Barbara asserts, "Would you like it if someone told you that you weren't cool?"

Earlier in the piece she wisely pointed out that her sister had two arms and two legs which *could* and *should* be used to do things for herself.

Note the transition into cursive handwriting.

Figure 10

Barbara: Trimester 2 Benchmark, February

2-22-11

MY Favorite Holiday

Hi my name is [redacted] my favorite holiday is christmas because I get new clothes, toy, teddy Bear. I love to get new toys. Last christmas I got a teddy Bear from Build A Bear Workshop.

I love Christmas because I also get to eat yummy food. Last christmas I ate spagete, chicken but it had chili in it. it felt soft. it taste mostly chili you would also see red chili. Christmas is fun because you get to decorate your own christmas tree. In christmas we dance.

I love christmas and I love my family. I wish it would be the same thing.

Barbara's trimester 2 benchmark is all over the place, though one can see she clearly likes Christmas for several reasons.

She continues to paragraph her writing, and most of The sentences are structured correctly.

Her last sentence muddles the ending.

Figure 11

**Catrina: Baseline Writing Sample, Proficient Level**

Base line Benchmark/Descriptive 3

I love my mom.

My mom is very special to me. She is special to me because she does so much for me, she takes care of me, she buys so much for me and she takes me places. She takes me to a Sushi restaurant. She takes me to the mall to eat Chinese food. That is why I love my mom.

Figure 12

Catrina's baseline sample has all the elements of a simple paragraph. This is reflective of her ability to write in a proficient manner to a prompt with a time limit of forty-five minutes.

October 6 2010

My sandy cousin

One hot day in Glendale my mom, aunt, grandma, cousin, and I went to the beach. It kind of took a long time to get there. Then after we arrived at the beach it was kind of foggy. I thought we were going to get to swim but we only got to put our feet in. Then, I saw a hole and I knew my cousin Anna would be perfect, so me and her went to that hole. She sat in the hole and I buried her so that only her head was sticking out. That was so funny. My mom came and took a picture of her. Then, Anna wanted to get out but she was stuck. Then, she started to whine. I told her it was not like I was going to leave her here. Then, I finally took her out of the hole. I thought it was cool to bury my little cousin and I hope she liked getting buried too. She looked like a head that popped out of a volcano. I felt great about going to the beach. I can't wait to go again.

Figure 13

Catrina took great delight in describing a time she went to the beach and buried her little cousin. She was able to focus tightly on a small moment and clearly describe it step-by-step so the reader can picture it in their mind. She also captured why this was significant to her though she may not have directly stated it.

Feb. 16, 2011

Too Much Technology

I think people should not use too much technology, it's not only bad for you but people get mad because you never listen to them and you only care about technology and they feel ignored.

Another thing is that if you use too much technology it wastes money and energy and you have enough money now but when you use too much technology you won't have enough money for school or food or clothes for you or your family and you will be poor with nothing to drink or to eat and you will not survive and you will eventually freeze cause you don't have money for clothes.

When you use technology you don't get to go outside and play and oversize with your friends and get vitamins.

Figure 14

Catrina's personal essay is about a topic she has interest in: Too much technology. I'm not sure about the logic which ultimately leads to freezing to death, yet she attempts, in a third grade way, to convince the reader about the negative aspects of too much technology. This is a very serious topic for her, and here she expresses those feelings.

3 10:55 February 24, 201

Christmas

My favorite celebration is Christmas. Christmas is a time for joy and cheer and happiness, it's also god's birthday. My favorite celebration is Christmas because it brings joy and cheer to your family. My favorite celebration is Christmas because you get to eat lots and lots of food. My favorite celebration is Christmas because you get presents from Santa. I love Christmas. and I love celebrating it with my family.

I love Christmas because it brings families together and families eat together, pray together, dance together, sing together, watch a movie together, go to the mountains together, and hang Christmas lights together. When my family dances together and prays together and eats together I can feel the love in my family. I love Christmas and celebrating it with my family, and I know they love Christmas too!

Figure 15

In the trimester 2 writing benchmark, Catrina describes quite well, the many reasons she has for Christmas being her favorite holiday. She lists many events which mark the traditions her family experience together, and notes, "I can feel the love in my family." in the second paragraph. This is more detailed than her baseline sample.

**Isabella: Baseline Writing Sample, Advanced**

Baseline Prompt - Description 9/1/10

My favorite person is my mom. Her name is Aggie. My mom has dark brown hair and green eyes. My mom is very beautiful and nice. Sometimes my mom and I go biking together with our own bikes. It is very fun going biking with my mom. My mom and I also go shopping together. My mom is also very tall. At night my mom tucks me in my bed and sometimes she also reads me a bed time story. So in the morning when my brother and I wake up my mom makes breakfast for us and she drinks coffee and gets ready to go to work, on Saturdays and Sundays but on week days she takes me to school first. Some days at night my mom takes me to Americana. We go and look at the stores and then she'll ask me "Do you want to go to pinkberry?" I say, "Yah sure!" So we go and order some yogurt. Some days we go get our nails done. It is so fun. I love my mom and I always will.

Figure 16

Isabella started the year by writing with many details about how her mom looks, favorite activities they share, and she even uses dialogue. She has a variety of sentence types within her description, as well as a topic sentence and a conclusion.



October 6, 2010

### The coconut icecream

"Can we go to grandma's house?" I asked my mom. She replied "Yes I also want to go!" I got some of my icecream. I had a pomagranet flavor in a lemon, a pineapple flavor in a minnie pineapple shell and my favorite coconut flavor in a minnie coconut shell. I took them to my grandma's house and put it in the freezer. I wachted a little t.v. untill it was perfectly frozen because on the way it melted. I went and took them out of the freezer. Then, I took it to the table. My mom got the pineapple flavor and my grandma got the pomagranet. I got my favorite the coconut flavor. I opened it and got a little spoon and started to eat my coconut. My mom and grandma ate theirs. I loved it so much, it was delicious. After, when I was done I took the spoon and put it in the sink. I loved the shell of the coconut so I decided I want to keep it. So I went and washed the coconut shell. Then, it was dean, it also smelled good. From now on I am going to collect every shell I get. I love my shell!

Figure 17

Isabella's first published piece of writing reflects in detail eating ice cream at her grandmother's house. She opens with a question and uses the phrase 'perfectly frozen' to precisely describe the condition it was after refreezing. She is careful to describe the sequence of events.

Trimester 1 Writing Benchmark November 19, 2010

Lulu the teddy bear of  
my life

"What is your favorite toy?" asked my mom  
I said, "I don't know, I have lots of  
favorite toys."

My mom said, "Think about which one  
you like the most."

I looked all around, but I couldn't find  
anything. Then I knew it. My favorite toy is my  
stuffed teddy bear Lulu.

She is pink with black dots on her. She  
has dark blue eyes. She also has many cloths.  
But the best one is her jeans looking skirt with  
her hot pink flamingo ting-top. With her All Star  
black shoes.

She is my favorite toy because my  
memories are with her. I had Lulu since I  
was two years old.

I learned, and faced my fears with

Isabella's Trimester 1 benchmark, continued

Lulu.

Lulu was made by me at Build-a-Bear. I picked her, and the man put a heart in her, and stuffed her with cotton.

I always slept with her when I was little and now when I am  $8\frac{3}{4}$  almost turning 9 I still sleep with her.

My whole life is with Lulu. I slept with Lulu (still sleep with her), eat with her, do things that is scary with her (because I know nothing will happen because she is with me) and more.

Lulu is my life, and she will always be with me.

My mom asked me, "Have you decided yet?"

I said, "Yes, and it is Lulu my stuffed animal."

Figure 17

This trimester 1 writing benchmark was produced in 45 minutes and reflects Isabella's developing skill in leads and closings. She skillfully begins with a question, then describes all the ways that Lulu has been there for her, and closes by answering the question which was asked at the beginning. Isabella gets at the heart of why Lulu is an important object of safety and comfort to her. Note too, that she uses parenthesis to explain she still sleeps with Lulu. Writing stories like this appears effortless for this advanced student.

The School Cafeteria

All kids and students at every school should take care of their school cafeteria. Students everywhere should take care of their school cafeteria. Students everywhere should have manners while they eat in their school cafeteria too.

Students should keep their school cafeteria clean because it is where all the other students eat at that school (community area). For example if someone is spitting food out on the floor, that is basically not caring about the community area. Another example is that students make the cafeteria dirty and just say "Tim the school custodian will clean it."

Students might lose their appetite if another student does something gross or disgusting. For example when I was eating at lunch, I saw this boy go to a girl and he spit out his food near her foot. The girl yelled "Ewww!" I felt sad for the girl. Another example while he was eating, he said "Ewww I lost my appetite!"

People don't like it when other people do these things. This is important because when other people are eating, and they see you do this, they will lose their appetite and not eat. Many people think it is ok to do this, but I think you should never ever do these kinds of things.

Sometimes how people, and students are reflects how the cafeteria is. Keeping the school's cafeteria clean is a big thing for the students.

How the cafeteria looks reflects how students are. For example if a boy got a piece of food, and threw it on the lunch area, it will make me think he doesn't care about the community area. One example is when I was eating at the cafeteria, this little second grade girl purposely dumped her food on the floor and started to laugh. Everyone yelled, "Ewww!" All of a sudden other second graders were throwing banana peels on the floor and other students were saying "S T O P!"

Lots of people do these things, but it is not okay. I feel tired of telling people stop doing that. Even if I tell them to stop, they just continue doing the same thing maybe even worse things.

Figure 18

Isabella expresses her thoughts about something she knows well – eating in the cafeteria. She would like to see some change as she is tired of telling people to stop, and is concerned that it could lead to other undesirable behaviors. Can you hear the wisdom in her words, "...How people, and students are reflects how the cafeteria is."

The growth evidenced in student writing by showing it in their hand whenever possible, with the exception of the final essay, is in every case unique to the student. The samples were captured at regular intervals, and reflect changes in student writing after being exposed to regular instruction in class, time to write in school, and at home. From this small sample, the differences in writing from baseline through the sequence of writing samples were at times dramatic.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### Teacher Study Group

Data collection for this study began with teacher surveys to collect a variety of information and was a starting point for me to develop an interview schedule. Pre and post survey data remained largely the same. The data was collected at the beginning of the year and then eighteen weeks later. Not all research questions could be answered adequately with surveys, and so this discussion has combined the most relevant interview themes as appropriate with the survey responses as the interviews contained deeper, and more thought provoking responses.

The interviews and surveys confirmed my belief that all teachers within the group consider writing a valuable skill. All the participants recalled personal experiences around writing which enabled them to gain skills. Ultimately, those skills led to the attainment of a degree and a teaching credential. Teachers also acknowledged how their writing helped or hindered their education. They wanted their students to benefit from knowing how to write well realizing how influential it was in reaching their educational goals as well as for work related writing, or writing for pleasure, or for releasing feelings.

The contradiction I found was in seeing what relatively little time was spent on writing workshop from some participants in the study group. In the guide to the Units of Study, Calkins suggests that volume and stamina for writing do matter, and that, "...students should write day after day...for long stretches of time-for something like forty minutes of each writing workshop- and they need to write for almost the same length of time at home most evenings (p.8)." She further stated that, "...success in writing directly relates to the amount of time spent writing and

rewriting a person does (p.8).” I found that teachers who had the most writing workshop experience was reflective of how they devoted more time to writing, and in some cases, guarded it to the extent it was in their power.

Another idea about why a minimum of time is spent in some of the writing workshops is that some teachers try diligently to cover all of the textbooks provided them. This may hold particularly true for newer teachers who have not yet earned permanent status and may be held to account for not covering subject matter in final teacher evaluations. Teachers are given pacing guidelines which emphasize breadth over depth. District Reading Benchmarks are coordinated with the pacing guide, and some teachers, especially less experienced ones, may not know what could be eliminated and how to most effectively juggle the demands.

Perhaps yet another idea is the fact that we set goals for reading school-wide but not writing. Emphasis on one aspect of literacy such as reading reflects a lack of balance. This imbalance may come from teachers who are unable to articulate their beliefs around a balanced program. We used to have ongoing conversations about a decade ago, but now I believe leaving listening, writing, and oral language development out is a direct result of increasing pressure to raise test scores which has been ongoing since No Child Left Behind. Conferences sprung up overnight when schools began to fall into Program Improvement to highlight strategies to get out of school improvement. At my school site, goal setting by teachers and students in reading is now common practice as a result of administrators who attended several of these conferences.

For the past four years, we have been asked to use the Baseline Reading Benchmarks to ‘predict’, or set goals for the final, or Trimester 3 Reading Benchmark, as well as the California Standards Test which takes place in late spring, for grades two through six. We do this for our individual classroom as well collaboratively for our grade level. Like teachers, students also

engage in goal setting around the Reading Benchmark each trimester. They are asked to identify discrete skills which are low or non-existent, and describe exactly how they will meet their goal by developing or increasing that skill. While this may have value and I have no personal problem with goal setting, it is yet another way that the Reading Benchmark takes prominence over the writing benchmark. The unspoken message not directly stated to teachers and students is: *reading is more valued than writing*. As a result, we spend more time reading than writing in many of the classrooms – even teachers who have writing workshop classrooms.

For those of us involved in the teacher study group, I offer that a contributing factor for a lack of regular dedicated time for writing instruction is that teachers get stuck in the Units of Study. We tend to avoid what is difficult, and the Units of Study are complex and tedious (if rewarding) to work through. It is easier to move forward in this work with a group than to go it alone and we are only together twice a month. This pace takes patience and the difficulty of the work takes perseverance. In reflecting on teacher support groups in the book, *Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners*, Regie Routmann, says, "...the teacher support group has been one of our best staff development efforts. It is relevant, teacher-centered, and voluntary, and development occurs slowly and deliberately over long periods of time (p.472). The work of making writing workshop work in our classrooms will be slow and deliberate as well, and it will take time to make it our own. It cannot be hurried no matter how much we wish it.

The data from the groups' responses show that the study group was seen as a much valued source of support for improving knowledge as they attempt to implement the Units of Study. Though they liked the sharing of student work, they felt it could be cut in order to focus on actual teaching strategies and the presentation of lessons whether by study group members or



DVD lessons from the Units of Study. Again, due to our limited time, the teachers wanted to use it in the way they felt was most beneficial to them.

Regardless of frustrations or wishes expressed by group members and what they want to do differently, it may especially be of value to new teachers and those struggling with their own feelings about writing as well as to hear other teachers voice their concerns. Routman described a first grade teacher in a study group at her site who reflected on her group as well as personal process,

“At first, as a new teacher, I was too self-conscious to ask questions and speak up at our meetings. When I heard other people talk about their concerns and what wasn’t going well, it helped to know I wasn’t the only one. Probably what was most helpful were the other colleagues at my grade level who were so willing to be supportive (p.471).”

However we spend our time, we have gained priceless trust and collegiality within this group as a direct result of our bimonthly meetings. Relationships have developed across grade levels, between veteran teachers and new teachers, as well as across the Dual and English Programs. The benefits are many, but are summed up by Routman who relayed her own experience with a whole language support group, and though it was long ago, is relatable to the feelings I captured through interviews with my colleagues and observations of our group process,

“...teachers talk frankly about issues and concerns in their teaching and try to integrate theory and practice. Many of us have found that meeting with our peers has lessened our anxiety, fostered collegiality and collaboration, and promoted and confirmed professional growth. Perhaps above all, we find out we are not alone; others have struggled along with us (p.465).”

Our writing study group is a much needed forum for us to learn, practice, get feedback, and apply new learning.

From the interview data, a reoccurring theme was that a few of the teachers see the study group leader and the depth of her experience as an invaluable resource. Informally, three of the newer teachers sought out the study group leader for assistance in planning due to her extensive background knowledge. At the end of each group, she offered to assist any and all teachers who wished to learn how to plan their own unit of study. Teachers generally feel safer to ask someone they are comfortable with and who remembers how it is to be new. They know they won't be viewed as incompetent, just as new to the profession and in need of help. New teachers tend to not want to ask for help from just anybody, but getting to know the leader of the group in this setting created a sense of trust for most group members. Along the lines of learning together, Calkins shares her thoughts about grade level collaboration which could also be applied to across grade level collaboration as well,

“When teachers across a grade level collaborate in this way on the teaching of writing, we provide one another with important support. Decades of work in the teaching of writing have convinced me that wise methods of teaching do not emerge *sui generis* from a single gifted and talented teacher. Wise methods of teaching do not come from our genes alone, but from communities of practice (p.23)

This study group is the beginning of a community of practice in which new and veteran teacher relationships have provided the very support that Routman and Calkins both say is needed.

Teachers in the group who reported they like to teach writing remained the largely the same pre and post survey. This coupled with the fact that a majority of teachers reported their motivation for attending the group was to gain support in teaching writing indicates that we have a dedicated core of teachers who are genuinely wanting to improve themselves as teachers of writing using progressive methods which rely on child centered practices.

Though Dual Immersion teachers (seven of the ten study group participants were dual) may have been expected to implement writing workshop, they were not required to attend the study group. The fact that so many of them did attend supports the idea they were, and remain genuine in their quest for learning writing workshop methods. All writing study group participants wanted their students to experience having a voice and a valued place within the classroom through the writing workshop. Sometimes this was a result of their own insecurities around writing which led to strong feelings about creating environments which nurtured writers. I feel this could be explained by personal motivation to create some ideal we wished we for. If we had good memories of writing, perhaps we wish to recreate as much as possible those nurturing circumstances for our students. Either way, teachers' personal memories of earlier writing experiences played a significant, influential role in wanting to learn methods to support their students' writing based on the interview themes.

Whether or not teachers devoted the minimum of recommended time to writing workshop, I feel they were sincere in their belief that writing is as important as reading. I think each teacher struggled in their own way to find how to carry out writing workshop methods - even if imperfectly. Teachers new to the profession have much to take in, and although they have the support of the group, are pretty much on their own to implement it day to day. In light of the fact that each teacher is left to create their own schedule, the resulting wide variety of time allotted to the writing workshop makes it difficult to sustain the energy and interest when days go by without working on a piece of writing. Calkins' idea around grade levels, and entire schools sharing a yearlong writing curriculum has evolved from teachers selecting their own unique units of study, to one in which a grade-level travels roughly in-sync with each other and

is more planned. This leaves less room for chance that writing will happen regularly, and increases the likelihood of collaboration, or communities of practice.

The survey data also suggests the writing group has helped two more of the members to feel more confident in adapting lessons from this curriculum to meet their class needs and a total of three of the ten teachers meet now regularly with their grade-levels to discuss writing. This is outside of the study group time and may or most likely includes teachers outside of the study group. This also suggests that at least two more teachers from the group see the value of using each other as sources of support for teaching writing

All of the interviewees liked how students appeared to respond to writer's workshop time. Teacher beliefs about the writing workshop include increased levels of engagement, and interest in their work. They believed it developed, if not demanded, higher levels of independence. Teachers reported feeling a sense of community within their classrooms, and liked how students became appeared to be engaged during the construction of their own assessments. I think teachers who use this approach, allow space for children to bring their voices to the classroom, and the workshop is a forum for everyone to be heard each day. It validates the importance of each individual and students know when they matter to the teacher and each other.

Writing workshop as written by Lucy Calkins is deeply embedded in a philosophy of what children can do if taught and allowed, and as one of the study group teachers said, "It can take over your whole way of teaching." It can do that because it feels right, is not rushed, has structure, and places children's needs and literacy front and center. Adults do not impose topics about which children may not have experience with, rather they are encouraged to write about

the moments they know best from their lives. This allows for children to bring their life in to the classroom, and engage in what they know best – themselves.

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that this method was supportive of all of the developmental ranges in the classroom. Those who wrote with ease, wrote many journal entries and drafts in folders, while those less able to do so, wrote what they could with support from the teacher and/or peers. All groups of writers were nudged onward in this method and even reluctant writers wrote. When the majority of students appear to look forward to and ask for writing workshop, teachers know something is working right. When students, even struggling ones, act disappointed when writing workshop doesn't take place, we know they are engaged and invested in their work. I believe it is because the atmosphere writing workshop teachers create is safe, and supportive of all writers' efforts. On many levels teachers have also succeeded in having children feel as if the work they produce is of great importance.

Conferences were ways to meet individual and small group needs, and I learned that this is not easy to do for any of us. Teachers, both experienced and new, to the workshop approach tend to spend too much time with a struggling student and before you know it, you haven't gotten around to as many as you wanted to. My thoughts about this are that most of us are in various learning stages about how to conference and need continued support to learn and practice this skill. Finding alternative methods aside from the teacher to support students should be an ongoing area of inquiry.

All teachers in this group were receptive to ongoing professional development in writing. Regardless of whether or not they felt their needs were being fully met, they were invested in meeting every two weeks, and participating in the group. Why? I think the group did meet some needs to grow and develop skills in teaching writing. It provided the forum to discuss student

writing samples brought. Those sharing sessions were inspirational for all of us. We were able to express frustration or ask for help in a forum where it would be seriously and sensitively considered without negative comments about students. It was a place to receive as well as give. This is the only forum of its kind at my school to do this that I am aware of. I think we all benefit from the shared learning and inquiry in collaboration with peers

### Student Surveys

The most exciting part of the student survey for me was to see the dramatic change about how writing was important to students in their life at home as that is where they can engage ( or not) in writing activities. An increase of 10 students reported post survey that writing was important to their home lives. A possible explanation is that the message from the beginning of the year is that they *are* writers and authors, they have important things to say, they have power over their words, and their words have the power to affect others, and perhaps effect change in their world. I see the spill over into the classroom of their writing from home as they now come in daily with student made books of various topics of great interest to third graders. Students are now creating handmade and word processed books. Several recent events confirm this: paper disappears overnight in my room, pencils have become much valued commodities, and my electric pencil sharpener has gone out for service. Student- initiated, and peer- inspired writing has ‘bloomed’ over the past month. I am standing by, with the watering pail, enjoying the explosion of writing.

### End of Unit Assessments

Students were assessed at the end of each Unit of Study in the following areas: content, independence, good writing, productivity, and mechanics. The class average was reported on the graph which showed a steady progression of growth in these key areas on published pieces of

writing. *Content* refers to the strategies the writer has learned throughout a unit in order to capture small true details of their lives. *Independence* is defined as gathering materials for writing quickly, with initiative, after the mini-lesson, and sustaining writing for thirty-five minutes. When a student finishes a piece, they begin another. *Good Writing* refers to writing within a structure (for narrative it is chronological, sequenced, detailed) and story tells rather than summarizes. For Unit 1, it introduced openings with dialogue or action. *Productivity* is actually very related to *Independence*, because it is defined as writing without teacher prompting, but also includes at least *ten pages* of journal entries throughout the unit in addition to *two drafts* in the writing folder which leads to *one published piece of writing* with revisions and editing. *Mechanics* refers to sentence ending punctuation, high-frequency words, unfamiliar words with inventive spelling which are later fixed, use of quotation marks, and with support, paragraphs. The areas defined above were from the Launch, or Unit 1. Each unit had a progressively higher level of expectation for the same areas and built on prior units of study.

Students demonstrated steady growth on the end of unit assessments. As I documented the progress of each individual as each unit ended, I analyzed each journal and writing folder for the criteria above. Each student received an individual score for each of the five categories. This process allowed me opportunities to note patterns for individual students, and in some cases reteach skills that were weak or not present to them. This was a valuable opportunity for me to assess not only my students and their learning, but my teaching of this complex material as well. I am still relatively inexperienced with this, and know with time, practice, reflection, and adjusting, I will increase my ability to teach this material as I become more familiar and comfortable with it.

When I carted the journals and folders home, I was struck by the sheer volume of work that took place throughout each Unit of Study. It was really a heavy load. Graph aside which displayed specific areas of writing, if I could only measure the amount of writing produced each unit, then I could say students grew if only because of the amount they produced. I feel that perhaps on some level quantity of work may be important for the following reasons. Expecting a certain amount of written text each day may increase the speed with which a student writes or transcribes. Speed may positively affect sentence fluency in that ‘flow’ is present. Students who get too stuck, or fail to get into a rhythm of composing produce very little text. Students who get into a flow mode regularly are apt to produce more, and therefore have more to revise, and ultimately choose from when selecting from drafts of writing for publishing. Imposing a certain expectation for amount of writing in the beginning may be beneficial while remaining sensitive to the learning differences, emotional responses, or learning styles present in the class

#### District Writing Benchmark

Students’ ability to write descriptively was evident due to the growth demonstrated from the baseline to the trimester two sample. The baseline showed the class average as being 2.5, or 7 of 22 students passing the benchmark. By the second trimester, 13 of 22 students were able to pass the benchmark assessment. The fact is that I have not focused on description in writing, but it has been a big part of our study of mentor texts in the first two units of writing, as we see how writers use description to create images in the reader’s mind. My idea about this is that through our immersion in narrative texts (Units of Study relies heavily on mentor texts) which contained rich descriptions, this helped students with writing their descriptions of people, and things. Exposure to, sustained reading, and re-reading of quality



literature transfers to writing skills is my finding as I have seen it in students' use of descriptive language in their benchmarks.

### Student Writing Samples

Perhaps the most exciting part of this for me was to present a timeline of growth and development for different writers present in my classroom. I presented the work of Joseph, Barbara, Catrina, and Isabella to represent different levels and directions of growth that may take place in one class over the three units of writer's workshop.

In my opinion, Joseph made the most dramatic growth and perhaps an explanation for this is that he connected to the idea that he had important things to say, felt accepted, and had lots of opportunity to practice, practice, practice. I also noted that he loves to draw, and this seems to have assisted with his writing development. On a weekly basis, I've been presented with his artistic creations which seem brighter and more detailed by the week. Generally, by third grade students don't ask to include drawings on benchmarks, and when he did so, I responded by saying if he wanted to include pictures it was fine. Some students clearly still need to, and may continue to benefit from using this form of communication as they progress through their unique paths of writing development. Writing for Joseph is tedious, and painful to watch at times as he transcribes very slowly. He appears to enjoy drawing and coloring pictures and takes his time with those also. Lately, he has begun to find his 'flow' and is beginning to write with increased speed.

Barbara has grown from writing simple pieces to more complex. It seems as if for some students, the more they stretch, the less clear they become as they want to put everything into one piece of writing. She went through a phase of that, but through conferencing was able to focus more tightly, and not overuse new skills such as dialogue. Catrina is proficient and has

remained so as evidenced by her writing samples. Some of her student made books which are not part of the earlier data presentation, are actually some of her most clever works and reflect a dry sense of humor. My guess is that she is applying her best efforts to those topics she cares most passionately about. Isabella is an effortless writer, and can churn out anything you ask, anytime you want. Though her writing is considered advanced, both at the baseline and the second trimester, perhaps she had the least dramatic growth and the changes in her writing were subtle. Why? I am not sure, but one possible explanation is that I didn't confer with her as regularly as there were others who I thought needed it more? Did I use her too much to help with struggling peers which could have resulted in less time to practice her own writing? Do advanced writers have their own writing plateaus, and maybe I will see more growth in her later? Perhaps more of the growth happened in pieces of writing she didn't publish and I need to go back to re-see her work. Surely, one reason, is my lack of experience with the Units of Study and that like my students, I am learning. Knowing this will cause me to reflect how to better meet all needs, not just the needs of basic writers.

## **Chapter 6: Recommendations & Conclusion**

Recommendations for this research begin with the teacher study group because I believe teachers wield enormous influence over what takes place in the classroom and over the lives of children, day to day. Donald Graves, in *A Fresh Look at Writing* states, “The art of teaching is the art of continuing to learn. Teachers are the most important learners in the classroom. It is the quality of our learning, it is our continual engagement in new approaches to help the children, that are the source of our greatest influence (p.361).” This has held true for me: that continuing to learn about teaching has engaged me, and caused me to remain reflective of my practice as a teacher-learner, now researcher. Writing workshop, well implemented, consistently, with a structured curriculum (whether it is Units of Study or teacher created) is the best hope we have to improve writing achievement in my school.

Based on the interviews and my own experience, it would be helpful to have the teacher study group experiment with a couple of different formations to better meet needs. One way could be to organize around teacher planning needs for writer’s workshop. For example, if grade levels planned collaboratively once a week as they progress through units of writing it could prove useful to help each other not get stuck in the texts. Teachers could also commit to practice the genre of writing which they expect students to write to in class, share resources for teaching writing, study literature, and assess student writing together.

Another task of the grade-level group could be to simplify and adapt the lessons to their grade level. When I have typed up simpler forms of the lessons, read them, collected mentor texts, and prepared student handouts in advance, it has helped me maintain a smoother path in implementing the units. The primary teachers could work towards developing Units of Study

which are ‘just right’ for their grade level. They began the year with only two sets of the units for several teachers, and the Units were thought to be too simple for second grade. Their work could be tailored to the specific needs they have in their classroom and they could develop their own units of study. Once a week meetings would double the amount of time we meet now, and help increase the pace, while not being overly demanding. Meetings could be reduced or eliminated during December which seems to be an especially busy time for our staff.

In the Guide to the Workshop, Calkins suggests that teachers might ask themselves at the beginning of their collaborative grade-level efforts, “What big ideas will underlie my idea – our idea – for how this curriculum will unfold? What ideas will take preeminence in this curriculum (p.23)?” Weekly grade-level meetings would be helpful in carrying the work forward, help meet specific needs, and do so with support from colleagues. Calkins further states, “...we find that when all the teachers across a grade level in a school agree to plan and teach in alignment with one another, this relatively simple decision can do more to improve the professional learning lives at the school than almost any other decision teachers and school leaders could possibly make (p.22).”

The beauty of the cross grade-level, and cross English and Dual Language programs, as they come together for the purpose of writing study group lies in the collaborative efforts which span grade-levels and offers a forum for large group support, inspiration, inquiry, and problem solving. We have been busy building bridges with each other and pockets of supportive networks have sprung up throughout the school. This is priceless. Our school has experienced a divide in the expectations for English and Dual Immersion programs, and the writing study group has been a bridge to walk across towards each other to lessen that divide which threatens to create separate systems of education within one school. The Dual program is now beginning

to work in sync with teachers from the English program towards a common, worthwhile effort – writing workshop.

Another reason for maintaining a large group forum, revealed by my research, is the value of different grade levels coming together. The large group while at times frustrating, also means more sharing of ideas, collegiality and develops support among teachers as we learn, share and grow together. Calkins uses the term ‘friendship groups’ which are formed for the purpose of cross grade-level teachers coming together to teach a specific genre in sync across a unit and in doing so become active in a community of practice. The large group is also where we could have cross grade-level sharing and offer demonstration lessons. I envision it as a place to come together a couple of times in the first weeks of school, to inspire the work of the year to come, breaking out to our grade levels, then coming together at least once a month while the grade-level specific work takes place on a more frequent weekly basis. It would truly be the best of both worlds: grade-level specific work and large group support.

Teachers should engage in their own writing for the purposes of helping them teach the Units as well as for placing themselves through the process they expect their students to go through. I think if we are reluctant as writers to tackle what we are asking of our students, it will reveal itself to our students. In, *A Fresh Look at Writing*, Donald Graves found through his research that teachers who spend even ten minutes of writing as students write, have students who write more intensely. The bonus is you can keep students informed from time to time of what you, the teacher, are writing and they have a powerful model of what is expected of them in addition to examples of writing.

Another recommendation for my school, given the wide variation of dedicated time to writing instruction and time for writing in class, which was revealed during the interviews, is to

develop and articulate a common expectation school wide. Writing instruction should be a non-negotiable subject. This would help new and veteran teachers in the creation of daily schedules if it was a school wide expectation. Though it would be ideal if all teachers consistently used a common curriculum for writing, I also feel that our school has experienced teachers with extensive background knowledge of writing workshop, and would be able to carry out a year-long curriculum while keeping in mind the grade level plan for writing. Teachers who have rich and deep experiences, as we have at my site, with backgrounds in writing need not be beholden to a planned curriculum if they have the background needed to go a path of their own. The rich diversity of workshop experiences will only serve to benefit those students fortunate enough to have those teachers. The idea of providing students with regular writing time, daily instruction in writing, learning the writing process, and offering students choices over what they will write, will go a long way to strengthen our writing achievement school wide.

From the interviews, I found that the teachers of the writing study group were very interested in the lives of their students and valued getting to know them as individuals. They also valued the sense of community they perceived within their classroom, and the amount of engagement students appeared to display especially during writing workshop. They are each sensitive to children's needs and demonstrate respect towards them because of their beliefs about children. Though we are unique in our teaching styles, we should develop a school wide, common pedagogy around writing which is child centered and values children as authors, writers, and unique individuals – all with something to offer. Professional readings, and open conversations about what drives our beliefs should be ongoing and should include every staff member. I believe, in fact I know, that Miss Hagberg who offered a compliment on my writing so long ago, had that great natural sensitivity towards her students, and created necessary

conditions for writing in her classroom which included trust, safety, encouragement, and freedom to choose topics. Otherwise, why would I still have fond memories of her and that paper today, some forty years later?

If students need to set reading goals, then writing goals should be the norm as well because teachers believe it is of equal importance. Writing workshop teachers have natural opportunities for goal setting with students as they reach the end of a unit of study, and could help students articulate reasonable expectations for themselves for the next unit of study. Teachers could state clearly to the student what they now do independently, and what they could be reasonably expected to do with teaching, scaffolding, and release of responsibility towards independence. In *Mind and Society*, psychologist Lev Vygotsky terms this the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. He describes this as, "...those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. ...permits us to delineate the child's immediate future and his dynamic developmental state, allowing not only for what already has been achieved developmentally but also for what is in the course of maturing (pp. 86-87, 1978)." As we have such a range of learners, we could expect more of the advanced writers in our groups by looking at all of the skills and strategies for writing within a unit. We could let those students know through conferences and unit assessments that they have additional expectations so that they can grow to their capacity. This keeps in mind each child's unique path in language development and provides the teacher and student with appropriate expectations for all students' growth, not just basic and proficient students.

Another recommendation based on my findings is to continue to use our veteran teachers as sources of support for those with less workshop experience as well as new teachers. Each year

we have at least a couple of new staff members and it is clear that the Beginning Teacher Support Program (BTSA) while worthwhile, is not always the ideal method to support a new teacher, nor should it be the only source for a new teacher. Our BTSA mentor is not part of the writing study group, and while she gives much needed support, is currently unfamiliar with Units of Study. Our veteran teachers have extensive background knowledge to assist new teachers with and are willing to do so in writing endeavors.

In the spirit of developing teaching skills and providing useful feedback to each other, and because the writing study group was energized by observations of each other, I recommend we continue to find ways to observe each other do demonstration lessons. If this proves difficult as we do more with fewer resources, and as we evolve more towards technology at my school site, we can utilize the newly arrived flip- cameras to film ourselves teaching lessons, or conferring with students, and debrief those lessons at a later time when the group convenes.

Interviews again suggest that we never know enough about the teaching of writing. I recommend we continue to professionally develop around writing and seek outside speakers, staff developers from the UCLA Writing Project, and site fellows to assist with writing presentations around specific topics such as boy writers, special needs, technology and writing, etc. It is clear that Lucy Calkins is an expert on the teaching of writing, but as she evolved in her methods, and knowledge base she drew from a variety of inspirational sources of expertise and credits them throughout every text she has written. We do not need to marry ourselves to one curriculum, and should be open to other pools of writing expertise that are local, and available for staff development. Additionally, we also have several UCLA writing fellows on- site who have experience with the Writing Project's work and can help us with professional development



in writing. A side benefit might be their own self-renewal in their interest of writing and teaching it.

At the heart of this research, I wanted to capture students' growth and success in writing. As I pieced together the work of my students' writing, I was really amazed at how putting it side-by-side in a timeline fashion helped me to capture, if only on a surface level, the development of skills and maturation. Currently we are required to score a baseline and three trimesters' worth of writing for each student's assessment portfolio. I suggest we also collect samples of writing which reflect a child's self-selected topic, and which may or may not be published pieces of writing. These writing samples could become part of the student portfolio to mark milestones in their development and could be used in conferring with students, parents, or for Student Study Teams if there is a concern over progress. English Language Learners are a large part of my student's population, and writing samples help to reflect the level of language acquisition. Students like to marvel over their growth and it is valuable to have concrete evidence of their progression in writing skills.

As this research has progressed over the course of the year, my school site has been making dramatic moves towards technology as we evolve into becoming a magnet school. The resources we have now, such as laptops, document cameras, SMARTboards, school website with links to students' digital portfolios, has heretofore unseen potential to provide new and exciting ways to engage our students around writing as well as opportunities to publish. As teachers grow their skills around these new and exciting ways to communicate, we need to utilize the technology to help all students succeed in their writing endeavors knowing that they have the potential to reach many audiences. As of this writing, and due to my limited experiences with

technology, I myself do not know all the ways this will impact instruction, and most importantly affect students. How it will impact our instruction is yet to be revealed.

It has always been a dream of mine to have a student writing club which meets after school. In the past we've had intervention for struggling students and GATE classes for high achieving students with teachers creating their own curriculum, and being paid a stipend for this. While I understand the concept of focusing on low-achieving and high-achieving students, I also see the effects of labeling. I'd like to do away with these 'categories' of ability and open it up to any student who wishes a *place* and *time* to write, free from assessment or a pre/posttest for the sole purpose of reporting to the Board of Education. I'd much rather begin with an eye towards individual choice (perhaps within a genre) and end with choices in publishing, such as a hand-made book or digital version of a book. The only limitation on this class would be the number of students. Our students do need supportive places to write where they will be nourished and I recommend strongly that we begin to provide those places with teachers and volunteers who understand basic principles of writing workshops.

Another recommendation, perhaps with the most potential for impact on the writing lives of children, is to involve parents and community members in the philosophy of writer's workshop as students have rich lives outside of school and potential opportunities to write. It would be helpful to have sessions after school in which parents could come and learn about writer's workshop. To have parents understand the philosophy of this approach could extend the work that is going on in the classroom. Just as writer's workshop invites the lives of children into the classroom, it would be wonderful to include parents and any community members interested in understanding the various aspects of the writing workshop.

To illustrate the importance of writing for authentic purposes and for other than the teacher, and its potential for influence within the larger community, I remember vividly the time I had a phone call to my classroom from the office after I'd dismissed my students for the day. A community police officer assigned to our school neighborhood had come to speak to me. The officer stepped into my room clutching a few handwritten letters from some of my students which had been sent two months before and with great seriousness asked for the writers of the letters. Since several weeks had passed since sending the letters, I had somewhat forgotten about them, and was pleasantly surprised they got a reaction. Our class had become concerned over the vandalism, and the trash left behind by teenagers who came after-hours to our campus. We'd picked up many bits of trash left behind from this group, and students wanted to get the message out that we needed to have some help to keep our school clean and lessen the damage done by vandals. A few students had decided to write to our local police department describing the problem, and the letters, though slow in getting to our community officer, got a quick response once the letters were in her hand. She came back later in the week, again with the letters, and spoke to the class to thank them for the communication and ended with promises to vigilantly patrol and left with practical suggestions for them to help keep the neighborhood safe. If I was surprised and pleased by the officer making an effort to come twice over letters, students were even more so. That year the students got the idea, that writing has the potential to get support from those who can provide it. Our school's litter and vandalism dramatically decreased for a time, all because of a few letters.

Parents can encourage their children's writing efforts in many different ways at home, and this one example of activism at school can be applied across a variety of circumstances outside of school. Just as I once wrote many letters to my grandmother and friends in another

country and kept them informed of my life, they no doubt have people in their lives to write to in distant places. Some of my most compelling writing as a child was when I would visit my grandmother and I would write weekly to my mother. Those letters contain rich descriptions of my life in another country as well as much begging for mother to send me this or that. In the timeline of letters I sent to her, you could see my begging turning into outright demands if she didn't comply with my requests in a timely manner. Childlike impatience, outright jealousy of my brothers, as well as love for mother and grandmother and friends alike, was forever captured in those letters, and those papers now yellowed with age, reflect a piece of my personal story and the people and places which influenced my development. I don't think my mother or grandmother set out to make me write; rather I chose to do so because I felt I had messages of great importance to communicate to them. They listened, and responded. Unknowingly, they led me to believe I had something to say. Ms. Hagberg did the same for me with one nurturing comment. I believe I've done for many students what was once done for me.

## **Conclusion**

I end this endeavor with relatively few recommendations directly connected to students, while many connect to teachers, and leadership at my school. Experience tells me our actions as teachers and the Instructional Leadership Team will hold the greatest influence in the writing lives of our students. Writer's workshop is clearly a strategy to support and increase success in students' writing. Great writing comes from lots of opportunities to read quality literature and I suspect the exposure to mentor texts throughout the units have helped to invest children in their work. Writing data from benchmarks support the success in my own students' writing, and published pieces from the units indicate it has the structure to scaffold writing development. Each unit builds on prior units, and is repetitive enough to provide predictability for students and

teachers alike. So as more is expected of students, it is within a predictable structure. Repetition of big ideas in the teaching of complex concepts, are helpful and the Units of Study have repetition within a lesson, a unit, and across units. It is clear from this study of my students' writing that this curriculum holds great promise for leading them along a path of writing development and future successes.

Of great value to those who desire to implement a writing workshop curriculum such as Units of Study by Lucy Calkins is that teachers have the benefit of her wisdom, experience, and clear articulation of how lessons can be modified throughout to meet different needs in their class. Though she lays a path for us to follow in this curriculum, it is a difficult path to go, and easy to give up on if teachers don't have peer support. Calkins sets the expectation high for what students can do and teachers need each other to work through her lessons. I have seen the power of our writing study group have a largely positive influence on the teachers who participate. I need their support and input to rethink how I may not adequately address the needs of natural or advanced writers in my class and this is a topic I'd like to address within the teacher study group. I trust the answers are there, I just don't know them yet. We will find them together. Of that, I'm sure.

My study has concluded and has been a large part of my life these past several months, but, many actions will now come from it. I choose to see it as a new and exciting beginning. I have found my writing workshop 'legs', and shaky they may be, they are there. Word of this study has spread throughout my site, and teachers who are not yet part of our writing workshop are trickling into to my classroom to see for themselves the explosion of writing for which I've almost run out of room to display. My replacement pencil sharpener, though not in great condition to start with, is now en- route to fix-it shop for repair – that's two this year! Recently,

I cannot get students to line up at the bell because they are at the computers typing their stories, or their heads are bent over deep in concentration, clutching tiny stubs of pencils which are racing over papers folded, and stapled to their liking. Does this ring a bell? The patterned tile floor is full of pencil shavings, lead pencil tips and marks beneath chairs when they scrape the fallen tips across the floor. I have to beg my students to go out to recess and lunch and then turn off the lights in desperation to get them out to other nourishing things such as sunlight, air, and lunch. How can I be upset at them when they are so engrossed in their stories? These are great problems for a teacher - don't you think?

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions: Teacher

- 1) How long have you been teaching?
  - a) Grade currently teaching
- 2) What is your favorite subject to teach and why?
- 3) Least favorite and why?
- 4) What are your earliest memories of writing?
- 5) What kind of writing do you do in your personal life?
  - a) How often do you write?
- 6) Do you write in your professional life?
  - a) Types of writing?
  - b) How often?
- 7) How long have you been using the Writer's Workshop approach in your classroom?
- 8) How often do your students engage in Writer's Workshop?
- 9) How are your students responding to this approach?
- 10) What successes, if any, are you or your students experiencing with Writer's Workshop?
  - a) In general:
  - b) Specifically:
- 11) What challenges, if any, are you or your students experiencing with Writer's Workshop?
  - a) In general:
  - b) Specifically:
  - c) Modifications you have made:
- 12) Are you using any other writing programs strategies in your classroom?
- 13) Describe a writing activity you've recently done in your class?
- 14) Do you feel that you are able to challenge gifted writers as well as meet the needs of struggling writers in your class?
- 15) How often do you assess student writing?
- 16) What tools do you use to analyze writing?
- 17) How is feedback given to individual students?
- 18) How is feedback given to parents?
- 19) How important do you consider writing?
- 20) Do you feel you've received enough training to implement a successful Writer's Workshop?
- 21) Does the writing study group meet your needs?
  - a) If so, how is it of value?
  - b) If not, what do you feel you need?
  - c) Any changes you'd like to see made?
- 22) What other types of professional development have you had with writing?
- 23) How often does your grade level discuss writing?
- 24) Anything you'd like to add?

Appendix B

Name

Date

Student Survey about Writing

1) The way I feel about writing is:

I love it    I like it    I don't know    I dislike it

2) I approach writing assignments with:

Excitement    I'm not sure    Fear    Boredom

3) I know how to gather ideas for writing:

Always    Sometimes    This is hard, but I try    Not at all

4) When writing, I know what I am good at.

Yes    No    Not Sure

5) When writing, I know where my weaknesses are.

Yes    No    Not Sure

6) I can write a story that is clear and makes sense to a reader.

Yes    No    Not Sure

7) When I write, I know how to edit.

Yes    No    Not Sure

8) When I write, I know how to revise.

Yes    No    Not Sure

9) I know what a writing conference is.

Yes    No    Not Sure

Explain if you marked

yes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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10) Writing is important to my life at home.

Yes                  No                  Not Sure

List examples of when you write at home\_\_\_\_\_

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11) Writing is important at school.

Yes                  No                  Not Sure

List examples of when you write at school:

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## Appendix C

### Parent Letter of Consent

September 19, 2010

Dear Parent,

I am a third grade teacher and a master's degree candidate at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, California. The focus of my thesis involves the kinds of supports and adaptations that my students and I need to successfully implement a yearlong writer's workshop curriculum in the classroom?

Since your child is in my classroom, I would be very interested in surveying how he/she feels about writing now, and at the end of the study. Also, I would use ongoing writing samples from your student to assess the effectiveness of the workshop, and to create future lessons/adaptations and create supports as needed to reach every writer in the classroom. At the end of each unit of study, I would formally assess each student's writing to note progress in the curriculum, and again, make adaptations to ensure mastery of the lessons taught as well as reteach when necessary. Additionally, the district's baseline, trimesters' 1 and 2 writing benchmark data would be utilized as I am already required to do so. I will be recording anecdotal records during the writing workshop as well to look for individual needs and group needs or note progress. The information I collect would be invaluable to me in the development of the thesis.

Your child's participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw them from the study at any time. If you agree to let your child participate, be assured that their identifying information will be kept confidential, and the information gleaned is only for the purpose of improving the classroom writing instruction. There would be no additional time commitment from participating in the study, as it is a regular part of our day already.

I do not foresee any risks to you or your child by participating in the study. If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at [schaney@gusd.net](mailto:schaney@gusd.net), or 818 241-1807.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign both copies of the informed consent and keep one copy for your files. I will retain the other copy. If you are interested in the results part of the study, indicate by checking the box below, provide an address and I will send it to you upon completion of the thesis.

Thank you,

Sandra Chaney

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I have read and understand the above letter and agree to let my child participate in this study.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Yes, I wish to receive a copy of the results of the study to be sent to the following address:

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Letter of Consent

September 19, 2010

Dear Colleague,

I am a third grade teacher and a master's degree candidate at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, California. The focus of my thesis involves the kinds of supports and adaptations that my students and I need to successfully implement a yearlong writer's workshop curriculum in a public school classroom?

Since you are in the writer's workshop study group, I would be very interested in surveying how you feel about teaching writing now, and at the end of the study, particularly as you implement the Units of Study. Also, I would be interested to know how you rate the success of the workshop in your classroom as measured by students' interest in writing, and how you adapt this curriculum to reach all students. Additionally, I would like to know the kind of supports you and your students need to be successful in this endeavor. I will be recording anecdotal records of our process during the writing workshop study group as well to look for individual needs and group needs or note progress in the implementation. The information I collect would be invaluable to me in the development of the thesis.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you agree to participate, be assured that any identifying information will be kept confidential, and the information gleaned is only for the purpose of improving classroom writing instruction as well as to ensure support for writer's workshop in the classroom. There would be no additional time commitment from participating in the study, and will only consist of a pre/post survey and notes from the study group that are relevant to the research questions.

I do not foresee any risks to you by participating in the study. If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at [schaney@gusd.net](mailto:schaney@gusd.net), or 818 241-1807.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign both copies of the informed consent and keep one copy for your files. I will retain the other copy. If you are interested in the results part of the study, indicate by checking the box below, provide an address and I will send it to you upon completion of the thesis.

Thank you,

Sandra Chaney

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I have read and understand the above letter and agree to participate in this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Yes, I wish to receive a copy of the results of the study to be sent to the following address:

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix E

### Teacher Survey

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. If any of the questions below cannot be answered by the categories below, then explain on the back of the page and place the corresponding number next to it. Thank you for your time in completing the survey.

	Very true	Somewhat True	Not very true	Not true
1) Writing is a subject I like to teach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) I feel competent to teach writer's workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) I need support to use the writer's workshop UOS.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) I know how to adapt lessons for various needs in my class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) Writing well is as important as reading well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6) The teacher study group helps me with writer's workshop in my class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7) Teachers at my grade level regularly meet to discuss student writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8) Teachers at my grade level meet regularly to plan writing.

9) Objectives for writing are communicated to my students.

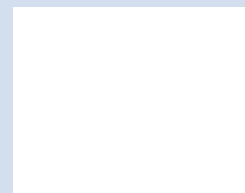
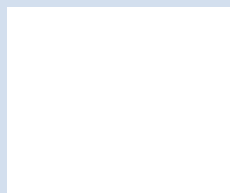
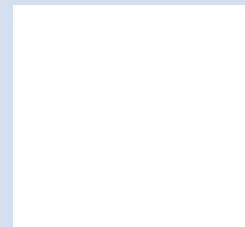
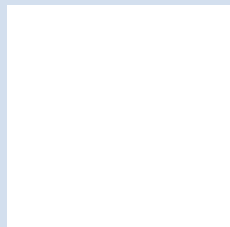
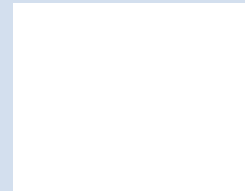
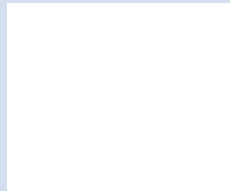
10) My students conference with each other about writing.

11) My students are familiar with all phases of the writing process. .

12) Students in my class write every day.

13) The administration at my school is supportive of writer's workshop.

14) My primary reason for attending this study group is because I am getting paid.



15) My primary reason for attending this study group is for support.

16) I am required to attend this writing study group.