

**Writer's Workshop vs. Writing Prompts:
The Effect on First Graders' Writing Ability and Attitude towards Writing**

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Abstract:

In the county schools, students are assessed every nine weeks based on a writing prompt using a rubric supplied by the county, but the students are often taught using Writer's Workshop. This action research attempted to determine if Writer's Workshop and the use of writing prompts have different effects on first graders' writing ability and attitudes. Eighteen students (N=18) in a first grade class were randomly split into two groups, and during a 5-week period each group was taught writing in a different method. One group received instruction on writing a persuasive paper using a prompt, and another received instruction on writing a persuasive paper with a free-choice of topic. The students were then assessed on their writing ability and attitude towards writing at the end of instruction. A series of t-tests and item analysis was conducted to compare writing ability and attitude between the two groups. The results showed that both Group A (prompted) and Group B (free-choice) experienced a decline in overall attitude about writing over the course of the study. Group A (prompted), however, experienced more of a decline than Group B (free-choice). It appears that students get slightly more enjoyment out of choosing their topic than being told what to write. The overall scores on the final persuasive writing showed that students taught using a prompt scored better than those with free-choice (11.56 > 9.78). The only subcategory where Group B (free-choice) scored higher than Group A (prompted) was in conventions. (Ideas: 4.89 > 3.56; Organization 2.56 > 2.11; Style 2.22 > 2.00; Conventions: 1.89 < 2.11). It also shows that students who write better enjoy the writing process more. Overall, the scores on the Writing Assessment were better from those students receiving a prompt. When students are given the freedom to write what they choose, they have a more positive attitude towards writing. This study indicates that free choice writing and prompted writing both have a place in the classroom. In order to teach a specific type of writing (i.e. persuasive, narrative, informational) students need prompts and clear instructions. However, if we are to foster a life-long love of writing, classroom teachers need to set aside time for students to write what they want to write about and share with others.

Introduction and Problem Statement

“Writer’s Workshop is an interactive approach to teaching writing in which students learn and practice the importance of rehearsal, drafting/revising, and editing their own work” (Jasmine, J., & Weiner, W., 2007, p. 131). In Writer’s Workshop, students learn creative writing through mini-lessons and conferences. Teachers begin each Workshop with a mini-lesson on topics such as expressive sentences or adjectives. In the Writer’s Workshop program, students are not given writing prompts but choose their own topic that is meaningful to them. They brainstorm, draft, and revise work that is personal to them. In addition, the teacher’s responsibility in Writer’s Workshop is to meet with students individually to help them with the mechanics of writing based on what each student needs at the moment. This could be capitalization, punctuation, or subject/verb agreement. Finally, students are able to share a piece of work with the class in the Author’s Chair.

In a study by Jasmine & Weiner (2007), Writer’s Workshop was found to increase enjoyment of writing in first graders. “The Writing Workshop model has proven to be an effective instructional method to support first graders in learning the writing process by choosing a topic, revising and editing drafts, and sharing their work” (Jasmine, J., & Weiner, W., 2007, p.138).

In stark contrast to the Writer’s Workshop, public schools in this region still require writing assessments to be given using writing prompts. Prompts can be as vague as “My first time _____” to something specific such as “If I was invisible for a day I would _____.” County benchmark writing assessments and state writing assessments all require students to write from a prompt. “During written expression instruction with young children, teachers often use writing prompts to produce a facilitative priming effect on children’s writing” (Hudson,

H.B., & Mercer, 2005, p. 473). These activities are often separate from Writer's Workshop and are used to gauge learning. "It is thought that writing about a topic helps people to understand it better, and writing is the primary way students are asked to display their knowledge in school" (Hudson, H.B., & Mercer, 2005, p. 473).

So the question arises, does the use of Free Choice/Writer's Workshop or writing from a prompt have different, if any, effect on first graders' attitude towards writing? Also, does the writing process, free choice or writing from prompt, have different, if any, effect on students' writing ability? The purpose of this study was to determine if students perform better on prompt-based writing assessments when they have experience with prompts, or if they perform better when writing from the free choice writing experience that Writer's Workshop offers. Also, does writing from prompts and Writer's Workshop have different effect on students' attitude towards writing?

Review of the Literature

Writer's Workshop has become a respected and much touted method for teaching writing to all age groups. It incorporates not only the freedom to choose what you write, but it provides the length of time students need in order to get ideas down on paper (Eitelgeorge, J.S., & Barrett, R. 2004).

In the study conducted by Jasmine and Weiner (2007), it was determined that the Writer's Workshop program fosters independence and confidence in elementary students. In the study, similar in sample size to my research study, focused on one classroom comprised of 12 boys and 9 girls. "Due to the nature of the study, generalizations were difficult to achieve since [the] researcher was the teacher and the study was limited to 19 children" (Jasmine and Weiner, 2007, p. 136). Similar to my research study, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) used a Likert scale

that consisted of 12 closed-ended questions to determine the students' attitudes towards writing. The survey was given both pre- and post-study.

In a year long ethnographic study, Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2001) stress the importance of student identity in Writer's Workshop. They determined that students find voice and power when given the opportunity to write what they choose and read it to the class. "Children and teachers draw from the resources provided by their multiple affiliations (e.g. family, religious, professional, gender, and age-related communities) as they participate in what [is called] the official classroom culture which is the set of events that is planned and approved by the teacher for the purpose of 'doing school'." (Rowe, Fitch, and Bass, 2001, p.427). In order for writing to be meaningful to a student, he has to decide what he wants to share of his life, affiliation, and community.

Unfortunately, regardless of current research, Georgia continues to assess student writing ability using writing assessments where students write from prompts. "During written expression instruction with young children, teachers often use writing prompts to produce a facilitative priming effect on children's writing" (Hudson, Lane, and Mercer, 2005, p.474). Hudson, Lane, and Mercer (2005) found that writing prompts have some slight effect on writing fluency. The study they conducted, however, had considerable limitations. It was "unclear whether the differences seen in writing fluency due to occasion are a result of the occasion they were written on or due to how well the students liked the story topic" (Hudson, Lane, and Mercer (2005, p.491). It is possible that prompts are only helpful if the topic appeals to the students who have to write.

McMaster, Xiaoqing, and Petursdottir (2009), however, took prompts a step further with students with learning disabilities. They provided pictures and photos in addition to story

prompts to determine if students that were struggling might benefit from these visual aids. They found that in students with disabilities, some had an easier time when provided the different prompts.

Countless studies have been conducted on the utilization of both Writer's Workshops and writing prompts, but studies comparing the two are limited. The purpose of this study was to determine if one type of writing instruction is superior to the other, and if it has any affect on student enjoyment of writing.

Research Method

Overview of the Project

This was an action research project that was conducted primarily by the classroom teacher. Prior to the study, all nineteen students in a general education first grade class were given a survey that asked them to gauge their attitudes towards writing. The survey was a Likert scale similar to the scale used to determine attitudes towards reading in the study conducted by McKenna, M.C. & Kear, D.J. (1990).

Next, the students were randomly placed into two groups. The selection was conducted so that students served in the Early Intervention Program (E.I.P.) and those served in Special Education were randomly selected to form two groups. Then the remaining students were placed randomly into the two separate groups. The groups were separated before randomly placing them to ensure the number of struggling students in either group was proportionate to the number of typically developing students. The purpose of this study was to determine if writing prompts or free choice has any different effect on writing ability or attitude towards writing.

All students were instructed how to write a persuasive letter. The initial prompt was used to instruct the students how to write a persuasive paper. The prompt was “You should really visit...”

With Group A, the traditional writing process was used, teaching writing using writing prompts, graphic organizers, and the traditional writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, evaluating, and publishing. Both groups received conferencing time with the teacher, and both had the same amount of writing time. Once the study was complete, the students were asked to complete another survey to determine if their attitudes towards writing had changed.

For Group B, the structured Writer’s Workshop was implemented, as seen in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the daily schedule for first-grade Writer’s Workshop recommended by Wagner, L., Nott, J.G. & Agnew, A.T. (2001).

Figure 1.

Typical time allotted	Activity	Teacher Responsibility	Student Responsibility
5-15 Minutes	Mini-lesson	Direct instructions in whole group about strategies and skills.	Children participate in whole group instruction.
5 Minutes	Group rehearsal for writing	Brainstorming and topic discussion	Children suggest writing topics.
10 Minutes	Individual rehearsal for writing	Teacher models brainstorming her/his selected topic	Children draw a picture of selected topic.
15-45 Minutes	Individual writing and informal peer discussion	Teacher writes and then circulates as children write	Children begin new writings or continue with past work.
5-15 Minutes	Sharing of writing by one fifth of the students	Students are allowed to share.	Children share in a predetermined rotation.

Research Questions

1. Do the Writer’s Workshop and writing from a prompt have different effect on first graders’ attitude towards writing?

2. Do the Writer's Workshop and writing from a prompt have different effect on first graders' writing ability?

Hypotheses

1. Writing from a prompt will have a more positive effect on first graders' writing ability;
2. The Writer's Workshop will have a more positive effect on first graders' attitude towards writing.

Description of the Sample

The participants are part of a general education, first-grade classroom. The group consists of eight girls and ten boys (n=18). Seven students are served through the Early Intervention Program (E.I.P.). Two students are served in the Special Education Program. One student has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. One student has Cerebral Palsy which affects her fine motor skills. One student is served through the school's gifted program. The class consists of 10 white students, 5 multiracial students, 2 black students, and 1 Hispanic student. The school is a Title 1 school which met AYP in the previous school year. In the participating class, six of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

Data Collection

Data on attitudes toward writing and writing ability of participants was collected at beginning and end of the program implementation. The study took place over the course of two months from February 9, 2010 to March 25, 2010.

On February 9, 2010 the students were given the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey. This was done to pilot the survey and to test for validity, reliability and ease of use. Students

were given the survey. I read the survey questions to them as they answered. They were asked not to look at each other's papers and were provided generic coversheets.

To collect the data on the students' attitude towards writing, a Likert scale (Appendix Figure 2.) similar to the one used by McKenna, M.C. & Kear, D.J. (1990) was used. Students were asked to answer questions about their attitude towards writing. The answers were leveled from Wonderful (worth 4 points) to Bad (worth 1 point). The students were asked to circle their feelings about a specific aspect of writing. On March 25, 2010, the students retook the survey to determine if their attitudes had changed overall.

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Bad 1



At the end of the study, a word of persuasive writing from each student was assessed using the Carroll County Persuasive Writing Rubric for Grade 1 (Appendix Figure 3).

Data Analysis and Results

A total of 18 students participated in the study. To collect the data on the students' attitude towards writing, a survey using a Likert scale (Appendix Figure 2.) similar to the one by McKenna, M.C. & Kear, D.J. (1990), was administered to students at both beginning and end of the study. Students were asked to answer questions about their attitude towards writing. The answers are leveled from Wonderful (worth 4 points) to Bad (worth 1 point). The students were asked to circle their feelings about a specific aspect of writing.

Attitudes

A paired t-test was conducted comparing the pre and post-study attitude of Group A, the group that received the writing prompts. The two-tailed P value equals 0.4230. By conventional criteria, the difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's Attitude Pre Study minus Group A's Attitude Post Study equals 1.67. 95% confidence interval

of this difference: From -2.63 to 5.96. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.8223. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 2.027.

Though not significant, Group A (prompted) had a decline in attitude over the course of the study (16.44>14.78). It could be that the students were not fond of the style of writing. In order to get more significant data, the students' attitude should be measured at the beginning of the school year and then at the end. This way, the research would show how students feel about writing overall. It is quite possible that Group A (prompted) did not enjoy persuasive writing, but would have had a more positive outcome had the assignment been narrative or response to literature. Traditionally, persuasive writing is the most difficulty writing assignment for first graders. At this age, the ego of the child is still very self-centered. It is difficult for children of this age to see someone else's point of view with is a crucial component of persuasive writing. This fact can be frustrating for a young child, which can affect the students' attitude.

Table 1: Group A Writing Attitude

<u>Group A</u>	<u>Attitude Pre Study</u>	<u>Attitude Post Study</u>
Mean	16.44	14.78
SD	4.33	4.27
SEM	1.44	1.42
N	9	9

A paired t-test was conducted that compared the pre and post-study attitude of Group B, the group that was allowed free choice of topic. The two-tailed P value equals 0.7499. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group B's Attitude Pre Study minus Group B's Attitude Post Study equals 0.67. 95%

confidence interval of this difference: From -3.99 to 5.33. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.3299. The degree of freedom (df) = 8. The standard error of difference equaled 2.021.

The Pre- and Post Study Attitude of Group B (free-choice) showed only a very slight decline ($17.89 > 17.22$). As with Group A (prompted), this could be from the students not responding well to the persuasive style of writing. Unlike Group A, Group B was allowed to choose who they were trying to persuade and ask for what they wanted. This could be why, even though their attitudes declined due to the difficulty of the assignment, they found more enjoyment than Group A because they were able to personalize their topics.

Table 2: Group B Writing Attitude

<u>Group B</u>	<u>Attitude Pre Study</u>	<u>Attitude Post Study</u>
Mean	17.89	17.22
SD	3.41	3.60
SEM	1.14	1.20
<u>N</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>

An un-paired t-test was conducted that compared the pre-study attitude of Group A, the group that was given the prompt, and Group B, the students that were allowed free choice of topic. The two-tailed P value equals 0.4433. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's Attitude Pre-Study minus Group B's Attitude Pre-Study equals -1.44. 95% confidence interval of this difference: -5.34 to 2.45. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.7861. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 1.838.

Although not significant, the pre-study Attitude survey showed that Group B (free-choice) began the study with a more positive attitude towards writing ($16.44 < 17.89$). This

could mean that Group B were more successful writers and thus were more confident and found more enjoyment in writing before the study began. This would, in turn, affect the outcome of the post study attitude survey.

Table 3: Comparison of Pre-Study Writing Attitude

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A's Attitude Pre Study</u>	<u>Group B's Attitude Pre Study</u>
Mean	16.44	17.89
SD	4.33	3.41
SEM	1.44	1.14
N	9	9

An un-paired t-test was conducted that compared the post-study attitude of Group A, the group that was given the prompt, and Group B, the students that were allowed free choice of topic. The two-tailed P value equals 0.2073. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's Attitude Post-Study minus Group B's Attitude Post-Study equals -2.44. 95% confidence interval of this difference: From -6.39 to 1.50. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 1.3142. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 1.860.

The study showed that both Group A (prompted) and Group B (free-choice) experienced a decline in overall attitude about writing over the course of the study ($14.78 < 17.22$). Group A (prompted), however, experienced more of a decline than Group B (free-choice). This can be some indication that students get slightly more enjoyment out of choosing their topic than being told what to write. The hypothesis, that free-choice Writer's Workshop would have a more positive effect on first graders' attitude towards writing, was supported but, due to the overall decline in Group A and Group B, only when compared to the prompted writing.

Table 4: Comparison of Post Study Writing Attitude

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A Attitude Post Study</u>	<u>Group B Attitude Post Study</u>
Mean	14.78	17.22
SD	4.27	3.60
SEM	1.42	1.20
N	9	9

The results show that prior to the study, Group B (free-choice) had a more positive attitude towards writing. After the study, both groups had a less positive attitude towards writing. Group A received the writing prompts whereas Group B was allowed free choice of topic. Group B's attitude towards writing had showed less of a change that Group A. The study shows that students have a more favorable attitude towards writing when they are allowed to choose their own topic. Both groups, however, showed a decrease in their attitudes towards writing. The mean attitude of Group A, the prompted group, changed from 16.44 pre-study to 14.78 post-study. Group B, the free choice group, went from 17.89 pre-study to 17.22 post-study. Even though Group B was allowed free choice of topic, they were still expected to write a persuasive paper. It is possible, that the decline in the students' overall attitude reflected the students' attitude towards writing a persuasive paper. A clearer picture of how free choice and prompted writing affects attitude would be gained from conducting a longer study using different writing concepts such as narrative, persuasive, response to literature, informational, and instructional. It is important to note, however, that the students that were allowed free choice of topic had a less significant drop than those that were prompted. This indicates that students enjoy picking their own topics rather than having to write what they are told.

Overall Writing Results

Writing samples were collected at the end of the study. The students' final writing samples were assessed using the Carroll County Persuasive Writing Rubric for Grade 1 (Appendix Figure 3). All students were given the prompt, "Convince your parents to let you go to bed when you want."

An un-paired t-test was conducted that compared writing sample of Group A, the group that was given the prompt, and Group B, the students that were allowed free choice of topic. The two-tailed P value equals 0.3578. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's writing score and Group B's writing score equals 1.78. 95% confidence interval of this difference: From -2.20 to 5.76. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.9469. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 1.877.

Based on the overall writing score, Group A (prompted) were more successful than Group B (free-choice) based on the Carroll County Schools Persuasive Writing Rubric. Although not significant, the hypotheses that writing from a prompt will have a more positive effect on first graders' writing ability was supported. The study indicates that first graders need to be given prompts in order to perform well on assessments geared towards a specific type of writing (i.e. persuasive writing). Group A (prompted) were provided with quality prompts that were more geared towards a persuasive paper. For example, students were told to convince the principal to let them wear anything to school. Another example was for the student to convince their teacher to let them chew gum in class. There are valid reasons for each point of view so the papers came more easily. The students that chose their own topics, however, had to spend a great deal of time trying to come up with an argument. For example, one student wanted to

convince her mother to let her eat lunch. The student did not understand that she would not have to persuade her mother to let her eat lunch because there were no valid reasons against it. So, Group A (prompted) were able to spend more time formulating a position while Group B (free-choice) were busy trying to decide on a topic.

Table 5: Comparison of Overall Writing Scores

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A (Prompted) Overall Writing Score</u>	<u>Group B (Free-choice) Overall Writing Score</u>
Mean	11.56	9.78
SD	4.03	3.93
SEM	1.34	1.31
N	9	9

Writing Subcategory – (Ideas)

An un-paired t-test was conducted compared each scored section of the students' writing samples. In the Ideas subcategory the two-tailed P value equals 0.1736. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's ideas, the group that received the prompts during the study, and Group B's ideas, the free choice group, equals 1.33. 95% confidence interval of this difference: From -0.65 to 3.32. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 1.4241. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 0.936.

On the Carroll County Persuasive Writing Rubric, the Ideas category focuses on a main position and supporting details. Group A (prompted) was more successful than Group B (free-choice) in this area. As was indicated earlier, this could be because Group A was able to spend more time constructing an argument rather than trying to come up with an arguable position.

Students in Group A were able to spend more time formulating supporting ideas for their position.

Table 6: Comparison of Writing Scores in Ideas

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A (Prompted) Ideas</u>	<u>Group B (Free-choice) Ideas</u>
Mean	4.89	3.56
SD	2.03	1.94
SEM	0.68	0.65
N	9	9

Writing Subcategory – Organization

An un-paired t-test was conducted compared each scored section of the students' writing samples. In the organization subcategory the two-tailed P value equals 0.3464. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's organization, the group that received the prompts during the study, and Group B's organization, the free-choice group, equals 0.44. 95% confidence interval of this difference: From -0.53 to 1.42. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.9701. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 0.458.

Organization means that the student's sentences are in a logical order and they support a position. There is a very insignificant difference between Groups A and B. This particular section of the rubric focuses on complete and incomplete sentences as well. This skill has little to do with formulating an argument. The one part, supporting a position, could be the only reason that Group B scored lower than Group A.

Table 7: Comparison of Writing Scores in Organization

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A (prompted) Organization</u>	<u>Group B (free-choice) Organization</u>
Mean	2.56	2.11
SD	1.01	0.93
SEM	0.34	0.31
N	9	9

Writing Subcategory – (Style)

An un-paired t-test was conducted compared each scored section of the students' writing samples. In the style subcategory the two-tailed P value equals 0.5025. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's style, the group that received the prompts during the study, and Group B's style, the free choice group, equals 0.22. 95% confidence interval of this difference: From -0.46 to 0.91. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.6860. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 0.324.

The style of the paper means how well effectively the lead in states the point of view, the successful use of transitions, and the use of a conclusion. This particular subcategory was one of two where the two groups scored the closest ($2.22 > 2.00$). The reason they were so close is because this is an area that focuses less on persuasive writing as a specific style of writing and focuses more on how to write a paragraph. Up until this study began, the students in Group A were taught how to write a paragraph exactly the same way as Group B.

Table 8: Comparison of Writing Scores in Style

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A (Style)</u>	<u>Group B (Style)</u>
Mean	2.22	2.00
SD	0.83	0.50
SEM	0.28	0.17
N	9	9

Writing Subcategory – (Conventions)

An un-paired t-test was conducted compared each scored section of the students' writing samples. In the conventions subcategory the two-tailed P value equals 0.5086. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant. The mean of Group A's conventions, the group that received the prompts during the study, and Group B's conventions, the free choice group, equals -0.22. 95% confidence interval of this difference: From -0.92 to 0.47. Of the intermediate values used in the calculations the t value = 0.6761. The degree of freedom (df) = 16. The standard error of difference equaled 0.329.

The only subcategory where Group B (free-choice) scored higher than Group A (prompted) was in conventions. (Ideas: $4.89 > 3.56$; Organization $2.56 > 2.11$; Style $2.22 > 2.00$; Conventions: $1.89 < 2.11$). Conventions focus on spelling and punctuation in the students' writing. This was not a major focus in the mini-lessons and conferences. These needs were addressed as needed. Group B's success in the area of conventions indicates that they were more successful writers before the study began. This might also have been the reasoning behind their more positive attitudes. They were always more successful writers thus they enjoy the process more.

Table 9: Comparison of Writing Scores in Conventions

<u>Group</u>	<u>Group A (prompted) Conventions</u>	<u>Group B (free-choice) Conventions</u>
Mean	1.89	2.11
SD	0.60	0.78
SEM	0.20	0.26
N	9	9

Discussion

The first hypothesis was that writing from a prompt would have a more positive effect on first graders' writing ability was proven true, but only by an insignificant margin. The p value was 0.3578 which means that there was a possibility that these results happened through chance. Although not significant, the hypotheses that writing from a prompt will have a more positive effect on first graders' writing ability was supported. The study indicates that first graders need to be given prompts in order to perform well on assessments geared towards a specific type of writing (i.e. persuasive writing). Group A (prompted) were provided with quality prompts that were more geared towards a persuasive paper. The students that chose their own topics, had to spend a great deal of time trying to come up with an argument. Group A (prompted) were able to spend more time formulating a position while Group B (free-choice) were busy trying to decide on an arguable topic. Due to the small number of students, the duration of the study, and the limited writing style, these findings may not carry over into other writing scenarios.

The second hypothesis was that Writer's Workshop would have a more positive effect on first graders' attitude towards writing. While the attitudes of both groups declined after the study, the group that received free choice declined significantly less than the group that received the prompt (Group A 16.44>14.78 versus Group B 17.89>17.22). The results show that prior to the study, Group B (free-choice) had a more positive attitude towards writing. After the study,

both groups had a less positive attitude towards writing. Group B's attitude towards writing had showed less of a change than Group A. The study shows that students have a more favorable attitude towards writing when they are allowed to choose their own topic. Both groups, however, showed a decrease in their attitudes towards writing. The mean attitude of Group A, the prompted group, changed from 16.44 pre-study to 14.78 post-study. Group B, the free choice group, went from 17.89 pre-study to 17.22 post-study. Even though Group B was allowed free choice of topic, they were still expected to write a persuasive paper. It is possible, that the decline in the students' overall attitude reflected the students' attitude towards writing a persuasive paper. It is important to note, however, that the students that were allowed free choice of topic had a less significant drop than those that were prompted. This indicates that students enjoy picking their own topics rather than having to write what they are told.

Group B, the free choice group, however, was more successful in the area of conventions. This particular area, that centers on spelling, subject/verb agreement, and punctuation, has little to do with whether or not the students received a prompt or not. This area demonstrates that Group B, the free choice group, was most likely more successful in the area of conventions before the study began. Group B's success in the area of conventions indicates that they were more successful writers before the study began. This might also have been the reasoning behind their more positive attitudes. They were always more successful writers thus they enjoy the process more.

Conclusion

Overall, the scores on the Writing Assessment were better from those students receiving a prompt. It is difficult to determine if the students in Group A were more successful because they were taught using the prompts, or if Group B was less successful because they did not like the

prompt they were tested on (Hudson, Lane, and Mercer, 2005). It is clear, however, that when students are given the freedom to write what they choose, they have a more positive attitude towards writing.

The goal is to help students to become lifelong readers and writers. It is important that they have a positive attitude towards writing in order for them to become successful. I often feel we are teaching for the test but forgetting that we are supposed to be teaching them for life.

This study indicates that free choice writing and prompted writing both have a place in the classroom. In order to teach a specific type of writing (i.e. persuasive, narrative, informational) students need prompts and clear instructions. However, if we are to foster a life-long love of writing, classroom teachers need to set aside time for students to write what they want to write about and share with others.

Due to the small number of students participating in the study, generalizations were difficult to determine. Also, the study was conducted in a relatively short amount of time. Had the study taken place over the course of the entire school year more data could be collected, thus the outcome might yield more concrete results. There is also an inherent threat in the study because the person conducting the study was also the classroom teacher. This means that there is the possibility of bias throughout the study. There is also a threat due to the young age of the participants. It is difficult to get an accurate reading of attitude because of their lack of understanding in regards to confidentiality. It is possible that the students mark what they think I want to hear on the attitude survey. This is apparent on the few surveys that were marked with all "Wonderful." Plus, the survey itself was created by the classroom teacher who was also the researcher. The survey, although piloted, was not studied independently before it was used as a tool in this study.

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Elementary Writing Attitude Survey

1. How do you feel when you write a letter to a friend?

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Bad 1



2. How do you feel about writing at home for fun?

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Bad 1



3. How do you feel about getting a new notebook, journal, or diary as a gift?

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Bad 1



4. How do you feel about writing in your free time at school?

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Bad 1



5. How do you feel when it is time for writing in school?

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Bad 1



6. How do you feel when you have to write about what you just learned?

Wonderful 4



Good 3



Okay 2



Okay 1



Persuasive Writing Rubric Grade 1

	Exceeds Expectations 4 points	Meets Expectations 3 points	Approaching Expectations 2 points	Expectations Not Met 1 points
Ideas (Double Score)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position is clearly stated 3 or more supporting reasons present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position is stated and 2 supporting reasons are given 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position is stated and 1 supporting reason is given 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only a position statement is given with no supporting reasons
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete sentences are written Sentences are in a sequential order to tie thoughts together Sentences convince the reader toward a position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete sentences are written Sentences are in sequential order to tie thoughts together Sentences do not convince the reader toward a position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student states a point of view but supporting sentences do not fully support the point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentences are random and unrelated to the point of view
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing has a strong lead, natural effective transitions and a definitive conclusion Writing has a smooth flow, reflecting point of view and a conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustains reader's attention Sentences consistently fit the purpose. Some creative words are used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing sometimes holds reader's attention with little to no use of creative words Sentences sometimes fit the purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student repeats many words and thoughts. Student does not hold reader's attention Sentences do not fit the purpose
Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has only one or two spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors Adequate spacing Consistent subject/verb agreement Sentence structure is complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has three or fewer errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization Adequate spacing Subject/verb agreement most of the time Experiments with compound/complex sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than four errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization Some errors in spacing Rare subject/verb agreement Sentence structure basically complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improper spelling, punctuation and capitalization prevent understanding Inadequate spacing No subject/verb agreement Illegible handwriting Incomplete sentences

((Ideas *2) + Organization + Style + Conventions) = 20 possible points

0-7 Does Not Meet

8-10 Approaching

11-15 Meets

16-20 Exceeds