

Supporting Kindergartners' Writing Development Through the Use of Lucy Calkins'
Units of Study: A Self Study

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Chapter One: Introduction

At the beginning of the school year, writing instruction in my kindergarten classroom was different each day; I was never sure what to expect. Some days my students responded very well to the instruction and other days they seemed to have a lack of motivation for writing altogether. This was apparent when students sat at their tables with their writing folders closed and not focused on the task at hand. The 18 five-year-olds are emergent readers and writers; many had worked on developing confidence in their abilities and all 18 learned the rules and expectations that I had deemed important. During the first few sessions of writer's workshop, I spent a significant amount of time helping students learn what they were expected to do during writing time and teaching the expectations that are important for students who have not been in school for a long period of time and are new to the writer's workshop process.

In years past, teaching writing had always been somewhat of a struggle for me, especially in thinking about how to support my students during independent writing time. I believe that taking the time to set expectations and teach rules is important as it sets the tone for the rest of the year. We took time to learn how to handle and care for our writing materials, work independently and quietly at our tables, and how to appropriately ask questions during writer's workshop time. I encourage students to ask their peers a question during writing time as I am often working with a student or small group of students. The room is relatively quiet but I could often hear the sounds of students stretching words out to hear as many sounds as they can.

All of my students were in the emergent stages of their literacy development, and the skills they develop will become the foundation for later literacy success. Elliott and

Olliff (2008) state that, "Although children do not usually learn to read until the age of five or six, the years from birth through five are the most important for emergent literacy development" (p. 551). It was imperative for me to give my students the experiences and opportunities they needed to build a strong foundation in writing. With such a difference in ability and development among my students, especially in terms of writing-abilities I often wondered how I could use Calkins' (2013) Units of Study to the best of my ability to be sure that I was supporting their literacy development and meeting all of their needs.

There was quite a range of writing abilities among my students. Angie began the school year not knowing any of the 26 letters, however, three months into the school year, she knew 11 letters. She had been receiving one-to-one support each day with the reading teacher and I had recently started guided reading groups with her and her peers. I spent time with the students in Angie's group practicing reading and writing their names and working with letters. This extra one-to-one and small group support helped Angie gain control over the letter A and ten other letters in the alphabet. The letter A was the first letter she learned as it is in her name and is one that we worked on first.

During writer's workshop, Angie often drew pictures and wrote strings of letters in addition to some scribbles. This is developmentally appropriate for Angie, as she is still learning letters in the alphabet. There are specific stages to children's writing development, which starts with scribbling. (Lonigan & Puranik, 2011) According to Lonigan and Puranik (2011), before children are able to write in a standard way they "scribble to convey meaning through print" (p. 568). Scribbling is not writing per se, however, as Lonigan and Puranik (2011) state it does contain universal features and that

they “reflect children’s understanding that writing and drawing are different, that writing does not represent meaning directly as pictures do.” (p. 568).

Another student, Kody, is past the stage of scribbling and he wrote to convey meaning through both pictures, letters and words. He knew that letters go together to make words and words go together to make up a sentence and he took the time to stretch out the words to record the sounds he heard while writing. Kody also took the time to plan what he wanted to say before he even began writing. His pictures were detailed; he used many different colors and included the necessary details needed to make his drawings meaningful. Kody also made attempts to label his drawings. I had many students who would become frustrated during writer’s workshop. They either struggled with deciding on a topic or they could not transfer their ideas to paper. Some students also had a difficult time with understanding the concept of a “true story” from their own lives.

According to Routman (as cited in Karsbaek, 2011) writer’s workshop is “the time in which everything writers do to create a meaningful piece of writing for a reader takes place” (p. 3). The workshop model consists of a mini-lesson, in which the teacher models a specific skill, work time for the students to write independently, writing conferences, and share time (Karsbaek, 2011). My school district adopted the Lucy Calkins Units of Study (2013) writing curriculum for teachers to use for their writing instruction. A formal approach to teach writing was lacking in the school district and Calkins’ Units of Study were compatible with the already adopted and implemented balanced literacy approach. Every teacher in the school uses this curriculum as a guide for writer’s workshop time. In the Units of Study, Calkins provides specific teaching

points, content for mini lessons, and suggestions to use with students during conferences and small-group work. Calkins' work follows the format of a writer's workshop with time for explicit instruction during mini-lessons, work time for the students, and a time at the end of the workshop for students to share.

The teachers in my school district used the Calkins Units of Study last year as well, but there have been changes made by Calkins and a new version was created in 2013 that is specific to each grade level. Calkins made the changes in response to the Common Core State Standards (2012). In Calkins' (2013) *Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop*, she discusses the need for a new series. She states,

An effort to meet the standards will require a planned, sequential, explicit writing program, with instruction that gives students repeated opportunities to practice each kind of writing and to receive explicit feedback at frequent intervals. This new series offers one such program.
(p. 14)

This is one reason that I believe the Calkins Units of Study is an appropriate and beneficial resource for my students.

Writer's workshop is a very structured time in my classroom. My instruction began with the whole class. We would meet on our classroom carpet and I modeled a skill that I wanted the students to practice during their independent writing time; this is my mini lesson. We usually participated in an interactive or shared writing experience that consists of a classroom piece of writing that we worked on together. After the mini-lesson, I invited students to go back to their tables to write independently. During this time, I worked with small groups of students during writing conferences. At the end of the workshop, we came back together as a class and I would choose a small group of

students to share their work. This group of students was usually the group that I had conferenced with that day to keep things simple and consistent.

It is expected that students' literacy abilities will vary greatly, especially at the beginning of the year. Cascio (2008) believes this to be true and states "Those who have spent time in a kindergarten classroom know that there are remarkable differences in children's skills" (p. 1). Many students are at the emergent stage in their literacy development and may just be ready to learn letters, while others are already making the connections between letters and sounds and are starting to form complete thoughts that accompany a very detailed, labeled picture. I have found it difficult to plan and teach writing with such a difference in student readiness and ability. Using the Calkins Units of Study writing curriculum as a resource for my writing instruction has made the often difficult task of teaching writing much more manageable. As I read Calkins' different mini-lessons for each session of writer's workshop, I tried to think of my students and how I could use the program to help support their writing development. I often looked at a student's writing to see which suggestions and which route I should take based on my student's needs. I also took notes while reading each day's writing focus. By conducting a self-study, I hoped to be able to take a closer look at how my use of Calkins' Units of Study could support my students' emerging writing skills.

I believe that it is important for me to refer to my students as "writers" during writer's workshop because I perceive that it helps them build the confidence they need as a writer. Writing, and being part of the writer's workshop is an activity that many have not had experience with yet. I let them know how capable they are at writing; if their page only consists of a picture or scribbles...they are using writing tools and getting

something down on the page. We have also created a writing club; The Super Writers! Calkins (1994) mentions the impact that creating a club of writers can have on students. It can give their writing purpose and meaning and will help them develop the necessary skills they need to become even more successful in their writing. Calkins (2013) also discusses the importance of showing enthusiasm and excitement from the very beginning. She states, “Make sure you let your excitement show. Give children something to be wide-eyed about and proud of on their very first day!” (p. 3).

As compared to the beginning of the school year, writer’s workshop looked quite different in my classroom at the time of my study. My students sat at their tables and worked independently at their writing, although they could still tend to have difficulty at times. They had learned that they are the bosses of their writing; this is a phrase I used with my students during writer’s workshop time. Calkins (2013) discusses the importance of teaching students how to be independent during writing time and by being the boss of their own writing they are more apt to solve problems on their own without the help of the teacher. In having students take on a lot of responsibility during writing, it allowed me to focus more on writing conferences that took place with my writing groups. My students knew where writing materials were, they knew that when they think they are done they can add to their pictures and can stretch out the sounds they hear in words to write them on the page, and they knew what to do if their pencil happened to break in the middle of writing. We created class writing charts together that they can use as a resource, and we created a word wall that students could use during writing time when they need to know how to spell a sight word. Who would have thought that spending

such a short period of time in a structured writer's workshop time that my eighteen kindergartners would begin to feel like writers already?

As a teacher, I believed that all of my students were capable of great things. Calkins believes that as well. Using her Units of Study writing curriculum has already helped my students gain the confidence they need to progress in writing. I wondered how I could continue to use this curriculum to help my kindergartners develop not only their writing skills, but to build a strong foundation for their literacy development.

Significance of the Problem

I have come to realize that the curricular and instructional expectations of kindergarten teachers have changed significantly since I was a kindergartner just twenty years ago. I can vividly remember the play center, which included a kitchen that I often chose for daily playtime and my Barney sleeping mat where I spent every day laying on during nap/rest time. I learned a lot in kindergarten. Mrs. Robishaw was one of my favorite teachers and I will never forget how passionate she was about teaching and her students. Mrs. Robishaw gave her students hand written notes each week. She noted our accomplishments and stated how proud she was of us. This was something that I looked forward to every week and was excited to know that I was making my teacher proud. Perhaps what I remember most about kindergarten was how much I grew in the areas of reading and writing. At the end of kindergarten, I had developed the skills necessary to be successful in first grade.

Two decades later, teachers are required to implement the Common Core Learning Standards (2010) and students are expected to do a lot more and are pushed a

lot further. I give my kindergarten students ELA and math assessments at the beginning of the year and again at the end. There is a push for more non-fiction writing and students are encouraged and expected to complete a lot more writing in a writer's workshop time frame. When I think back to my time in kindergarten, I specifically remember spending a lot of time writing stories. Now, kindergarten students are required to write stories from their own lives in addition to different genres of writing: informational, all about, and how to. This is much more than what was expected of me during kindergarten.

When I think about some of my students and their writing experiences, I think about the perseverance that many of them have, but a lack of motivation is sometimes apparent, as well. If they are motivated to write, many want to write freely about a topic of their choice. Sometimes, they only want to draw a picture, or do not try to put words down on the page. While this is developmentally appropriate, I believe that in certain cases, those who are ready for writing more than a picture can sometimes resist writing.

Calkins (1994) discusses how emergent writers can often resist writing. They simply won't do anything during writer's workshop or will rush through their writing which often times is only a picture. This is usually because teachers place a large emphasis on the mechanics of writing. Students can resist writing because, according to Calkins, "writing has been treated as little more than a place to display—to expose—their command of spelling, penmanship, and grammar" (p. 13).

During writer's workshop, we are all part of a writing club. On the first day of writer's workshop, we met on our classroom carpet and I explained to students that as a part of the writing club, they would all need to be helpful to those who needed it. I believe that it is important for them to use their peers for help and work together. As a

part of our writing club we made a promise together as a class that we would do our best work each day and try our best to help other writers in the room when needed.

I find writer's workshop time to be extremely important. My students know what is expected of them and are aware that they must spend the entirety of writer's workshop working on their pieces. During writer's workshop, Calkins (1994) believes that, "Children write about what is alive and vital and real for them—and other writers in the room listen and extend and guide, laugh and cry and marvel" (p. 19). This is what I want my students to feel during writer's workshop, and it was through the Calkins' Units of Study that I believed that I could make that happen.

One reason why I felt that this curriculum would be beneficial is because of the language Calkins suggests to use with kindergartners and the specific suggestions she has for small group conferencing. They are specific to kindergarten students and I believe they were practical and easy to implement.

There is no denying that many kindergarten students struggle during their first year of school. Some did not go to pre-k and others are not developmentally ready for the demands of kindergarten. According to Salvat (2012) many believe that these students should spend a majority of their day playing and learning through play and creativity. In addition to feeling that kindergarten students should learn through play, some feel that it is too hard to teach them certain things; writing in particular. Salvat states, "Since when is 'because it's too hard to teach' become an excuse for not teaching someone something? Instead, it should be a driving force for teachers" (p. 54). It is a teacher's responsibility to be sure that his/her students are given the best instruction possible so that they feel successful, no matter how difficult it may be. I sometimes feel discouraged when students

had difficulty with writing, but I did not stop teaching them how to write. I also changed my style of teaching; maybe I asked them a prompting question or worked with them individually in hopes that this change would help them be successful. By encouraging them to try when things may seem difficult and teaching them that writing allows them to express their ideas through both words *and* pictures, I hoped that they would feel writing is something of which they are all capable.

Purpose of the Study

As a result of looking closely at my use of the Calkins Units of Study (2013) it was a goal that I would enhance and expand my abilities to help my students develop the skills needed to progress in their writing development and learned more about my own teaching.

Throughout the study, I used a research journal to collect data about my writing instruction, which I found beneficial as I had the opportunity to reflect on my teaching and make instructional decisions that benefited my students. As I analyzed the data, I was able to learn more about Calkins' Units of Study and how I could use Calkins' ideas to improve my teaching and help my students be successful in their writing development. My research question was: How can I use Lucy Calkins' Units of Study to support my kindergartener's writing development?

Study Approach

I designed this study as a qualitative, self-study to look closely at my use of Calkins' approach to writing and my instructional decisions as they related to writing.

During the study, I used a research journal to record detailed accounts of what I noticed, observed, felt, and wondered as I used Calkins' units to support my kindergartners writing abilities and other aspects that I wanted to consider about my students' experiences and how my writing instruction furthered their literacy development.

Each week, I read the Calkins Unit of Study curriculum and decided what lessons would work best for my students. Each writing session contained an overview of the content, a mini-lesson, suggestions for conferencing and teaching during mid-workshop, and a "share" section, which offered ways to bring the workshop to a close with students (Calkins & Hartman, 2013) After reading the daily lessons, I took notes on the important elements of the lesson and decided how I would teach the concept to my students. I also planned what strategies or skills I wanted to include in my small group conference meetings based on the needs of each student in the group. These ideas stemmed from my mini lesson, but I needed to adapt how I taught the skill in the small group setting. Some of my groups needed some guidance in how to apply the skill I taught in the mini lesson while others needed to be retaught the skill as they benefited from small group support.

For me, teaching writing has always been difficult. I sometimes felt that I was not providing enough support to each student in my class, as I could not hold a writing conference with each student every day. In my classroom this year, I had a few students who struggled to get ideas down on the page and they tended to get frustrated very easily. Although I knew that it is not realistic to meet with every student each day, I often felt that I should be doing more for these students. As they were all emergent writers, they required additional support while working independently and I was not able to provide that support for each student each day. I used Calkins' new writing curriculum that is

specific to kindergarten and targets elements of the Common Core Standards, to gain insights into how I could meet the needs of my students, especially those who were in the pre-emergent stages of writing. I looked at my personal choices during instruction such as my use of language, responses to student behavior, and what happened during mini lessons.

Using a research journal and reflective writing can help a teacher's instruction and as Borg (2001) says, it is important in "promoting both the development and the understanding of teachers" (p. 156). Doyran (2013) conducted a study in which teachers used reflection journals and found that conducting "observations in the classroom and reflecting on these observations help pre-service teachers become aware of the issues related to teaching" (p. 166). I believe that engaging in ongoing written reflection enabled me to take a close look at my teaching and lead me to ask questions about my instructional decisions and areas in which I could improve. I believe reflection and reflective writing is a crucial part of teaching. Larrivee (2013) states that "critical reflection is not only a way of approaching teaching- it is a way of life. The more teachers explore, the more they discover. The more they question, the more they access new realms of possibility" (as cited in Doyran, 2013, p. 167).

My self-study was five weeks. In conducting a self-study, Samaras (2010) states that the "research should be focused on a problem that you care about and that will help you discover ways that teaching and learning might change" (p. 118). As I stated before, writing has often been somewhat difficult for me to teach and I felt frustrated when I was not able to support students during their independent work. This is something that matters

to me and I believe using Calkins' Units of Study helped me find ways to improve my own teaching of writing.

Rationale

One of my goals while conducting this self-study was to learn how to use the Calkins' Units of Study (20013) in ways that would help my kindergartener's progress in their writing development and develop a strong literacy foundation. I recognize that one of my most important responsibilities as a teacher is to do all I can to help my students succeed. I want my students to love learning and it is my hope that by the end of kindergarten they are developing into strong readers and writers. Although it may be difficult for some kindergarten students, all students "deserve the opportunity and experience of writing" (Calkins & Hartman, 2013, p. vii). Kindergarten is a time for students to enjoy and to experience things they never have before. I believe that it is a crucial starting point for their lifelong learning.

Conducting a self-study enabled me to look closely at my own teaching, the choices I made, and gave me insight into the decisions that I made while I was teaching writing. While I followed Calkins' curriculum closely, I needed to add, modify and craft my instruction to meet the needs of my students and make decisions that would work best for them. It was important for me to continue researching early literacy development and writer's workshop and the importance of both in a kindergartner's development in reading and writing as the study progresses.

As a kindergarten teacher, I am aware of how important reading and writing experiences are and how they can support my students' growth and literacy development.

After this study, I have a clearer picture of the teaching decisions I made and how these decisions impacted my students.

Summary

Through a structured writer's workshop time, students can view themselves as writers, which can lead to a boost in confidence in their writing abilities. My students know that I viewed them as writers and they are successful when they got something down on the page and tried their best each day during writing time.

Teachers in my school district use the new Calkins Units of Study for writer's workshop. It is used as a guide for writing instruction. I found the curriculum beneficial to my own teaching and to my students' learning as it offers mini-lessons and suggestions for writing conferences with students and specific language to use with students. Because I teach writing to a group of students who differ in their ability, I found the curriculum helpful. My goal for this self-study was to understand how to use the curriculum in the most efficient way to support my kindergarten students' writing development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to Kempf (2013), some teachers believe that kindergartners are not writers; however, Kempf believes that kindergartners are capable of writing and states, "kindergartners tell stories through their illustrations and written words and are able to work through the writing process just as well as older students" (p. 22).

In this chapter, I discuss the writing process of emergent learners and how the Common Core State Standards impact writing instruction for kindergarten students. I also

describe Calkins' perspectives on writing instruction for emergent learners. I will highlight the work of Lucy Calkins and her most recent writing program for kindergarten students and how she has made shifts in the program due to the Common Core State Standards. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of strategies that teachers can implement to help support the development of young writers.

Common Core Standards Related to English Language Arts

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were adopted by New York State in 2010 as an effort to prepare students for college and their careers. According to the New York State Education Department (2011) one of the goals of implementing the CCSS was to “emphasize critical thinking, careful reading of fiction and non-fiction, writing with evidence, effective communication of ideas, and real-world problem solving in mathematics.” (Getting started with the common core section, para. 1).

Olinghouse and Troia (2013) recognize the role writing plays throughout a student's life and state “writing extends far and wide in today's society, from everyday communication to personal health” (p. 344). Therefore, it is important that teachers provide students with rich writing experiences (Olinghouse & Troia, 2013). According to the CCSS (2010), students need to “learn to use writing as a way of offering and supporting opinions, demonstrating understanding of the subjects they are studying, and conveying real and imagined experiences and events” (p. 25) in order to prepare them for college and career. If students are going to meet this goal, they need to spend an ample amount of time on their writing and dedicate the energy and effort it takes to complete many pieces throughout the year.

Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm (2013) discuss the positive aspects of the CCSS as they pertain to writing, which include an emphasis on specific types of writing, including arguments about important topics, informational texts, and narratives that help students have a better understanding of oneself, others, and the world around them. While the standards highlight such writing components, Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm highlight that “traditional approaches to teaching writing aren’t enough to meet these new standards” (p. 45). The authors state that teachers need to instruct students in five different types of writing: composing to practice, composing to plan, first-draft composing, final-draft composing, and composing to transfer.

The first type of writing, composing to practice, gives students ample amount of time to practice writing. Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm state that “writing is similar to most other human activities. If you’re going to become expert at it, you need to practice” (p. 47). Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm believe that brainstorming has become far too dominant in the composing to plan stage because “it presumes that students already know all that they need to know in order to write” (p. 47). They suggest that as a part of this stage, teachers should help students develop the knowledge they need, instead of always asking students to brainstorm. In first-draft composing, teachers help students “overcome the fear of the blank page” (p. 47) as this is something that can be difficult for more experienced writers, as well. In this stage, teachers should give multiple opportunities for students to get their pieces started.

The final-draft composing stage enables students to see the value in editing, revising, and publishing. Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm believe that in this stage students need to be explicitly taught what they should be accomplishing through revision

and how to “read their work with the eyes of their intended audience and to make the changes necessary to address the audiences assumption, knowledge, and needs” (p. 48). In the composing to transfer stage, students need to be given opportunities to reflect on their writing so that they can transfer it to writing that may take place in a different subject area or a different grade level. Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm recognize that this is the most important stage and state that “teachers need always to think about how what we do today prepares students for their next class, their other subjects, their composing outside school, their future education, and their lives outside school” (p. 48). The authors also believe that teachers should not assume students will automatically transfer their knowledge. Fredrickson, Smith, and Wilhelm suggest that teachers look at their instruction and better align it with the CCSS to help students “develop the deep and transferable knowledge about writing that students will need in college, in their careers, and in their lives as democratic citizens” (p. 48).

As it pertains to English Language Arts, the CCSS values the inclusion of more informational text, especially for students in grades kindergarten through third grade (Duke, 2013). There are standards that relate specifically to informational text for kindergarteners. They are required to ask and answer questions about key details from an informational text, describe connections, and identify the main topic; this is all done with prompting and support. There should be many opportunities for writing. Duke (2013) states that “from kindergarten on, students are expected to participate in shared research and writing projects, recalling experiences and gathering information from sources” (p. 44). The goal of the CCSS is for students to build the foundation they need in order to be ready for what they will experience in college and in their career. Kindergarten students

are pushed to do more informational writing. Kindergartners are required to “use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic”(Common Core State Standards, p. 26). Kindergarten students are also required to complete research and writing projects and answer questions by using sources to retrieve their information (Common Core Standards, 2010). Even though this is the case, there is research to prove that young children are capable of these expectations, too. (Duke, 2013)

Duke suggests that primary classrooms should immerse their students in informational writing activities. There are seven features that should be a part of informational writing instruction for young students: informational text used from the beginning, informational text read-alouds, sets of related texts, an informational-text-rich environment, a lexically curious environment, teaching about text, and opportunities to share information through writing. Duke states that informational texts are available for young readers; the majority of the information is presented through the photographs or illustrations. Children “learn *through* reading while they are learning *to* read” (Duke, 2013, p. 41).

Duke finds that although children can learn through books they read independently, there is a limit to this content knowledge. For this reason, she suggests that teachers make half of the class read-alouds informational texts. In addition to the read aloud, there should be an engaging component; “asking students questions about the text, having them discuss the text with partners, and having them fill out graphic organizers” are a few that Duke (2013) suggests. The CCSS state that using related text sets is important: “Within a grade level, there should be an adequate number of titles on a

single topic that would allow children to study that topic for a sustained period” (as cited in Duke, 2013, p. 42).

Immersing students in an informational-rich environment is important (Duke, 2013). The classroom library should contain a variety of informational texts and the walls should be filled with posters, articles, and students’ informational writing pieces. Using websites to learn new information is an easy way to incorporate technology (Duke, 2013). In a lexically-curious environment, teachers should “praise children for revealing what they don’t know—what they need to learn” (Duke, p. 42). As informational text can often times contain many unknown words, teachers should “model and praise” (p. 42) questions about words as they read. Duke (2013) also believes that young students should be talking about the texts they read, however, also believes, that it is difficult to teach text features to young students but states that “In my experience, young children most thoroughly learn many of these features by producing the features themselves, either for their own texts or to add to published texts” (p. 43). The last feature that Duke (2013) deems important to include in informational writing instruction is giving students opportunities to share information through their writing. In order for students to meet the demands of the CCSS, they need to write every day. (Duke, 2013)

Kramer-Vida, Levitt, and Kelly (2012) discuss writing shifts in kindergarten due to the CCSS and state that some believe kindergarten students are not capable of writing, but “writing process scholars have long known that writing is an important expressive practice for children across early elementary grades” (p. 93). The CCSS require kindergarten students to do more; they are expected to write narratives, opinion pieces, respond to literature, and informational texts. They also start to do research on a given

topic and answer specific questions related to the topic they are researching. While conducting a university-school district collaborative professional development study, Kramer-Vida, Levitt, and Kelly (2012) found that “kindergartners accomplished some third and fourth grade Grade-Specific Standards” (p. 94). Specifically, they were able to accomplish a fourth grade writing standard in which their writing was clear and “produce clear and articulate and the “development, organization, and style are all appropriate to task, purpose, and audience” (Kramer-Vida, Levitt, & Kelly, p. 94). The kindergarten students who were a part of this study were also able to write for extended periods of time, for different purposes and for different audiences as well (Kramer-Vida, Levitt, & Kelly).

Emergent Writers and Stages of Writing

Drawing is a crucial component of the beginnings stages of writing (Noel & Hui-Chin, 2006). The scribbling and drawing students do should not be thought as separate processes. Noel and Hui-Chin (2006) believe that “drawing supports children’s generation of ideas, which are presented later in sentences” (p. 147). Noel and Hui-Chin (2006) also believe that, in this sense, drawing is like a “memory aid” (p. 147). Children have their idea in their head while thinking of what to write on their page.

Mackenzie (2011) also believes in the connection between drawing and writing. The author conducted a study in which she challenged kindergarten teachers to make drawing an integral part of their writing program, focusing on the first six months of school. She found that, “children’s drawings showed form and content, which was as powerful as composing and writing and where the drawings and writing were combined the complexity of text was vastly increased” (p. 337). This demonstrates that drawing is

an important part of the writing process and is a “personal means of expression” which allowed students to be more confident and their ideas flowed with ease. (Mackenzie, 2011, p. 338).

Calkins (1994) discusses emergent writers in her book *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Calkins believes that young children need to be given opportunities to write and have authentic experiences with reading and writing. She states, “We can trust that children will pick up on sound-symbol correspondences if we allow them to be readers and writers from the first day of school on, immersed in real experiences with sounds and letters” (p. 72). Calkins believes that teachers can help with this by reading and writing to students but also using sounds and letters in a playful way. She gives examples of this that include writing letters into the air, or asking children to play a game in which they make letters with their bodies. Students need to understand the true meaning of writing and that it holds real meaning and purpose, according to Calkins (1994). Sharing writing pieces also holds value for teachers and for young writers. Calkins states that a share session can also serve as a conference time. Students share what they are working on and teachers, and peers; can give their feedback and when students participate “they learn how to confer with each other in one-to-one peer conferences” (p. 190). Calkins states that if students are “given the chance to share their pieces with a responsive listener, they often realize they have more to tell and someone who hopes they will tell it” (p. 99).

In the book *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, Bear, Invernizzi, Johnston, and Templeton (2004) discuss emergent writing and spelling. They, too, like Noel and Yang, state that emergent writing starts with pictures: “writing begins with pictorial representations, and then advances to labeling of

these pictures” (p. 98). Students recognize that scribbling is used to signify something but need to then “differentiate drawing from writing and representation from communication” (p. 98). Bear, Invernizzi, Johnston, and Templeton touch on the evolution of emergent writing and in the drawing phase, students move from random marks, to representational drawing; knowing that a picture has meaning, and then finally move to recognizing that there is a distinct difference between drawing and writing. This is called the drawing distinct from writing stage.

Bear, Invernizzi, Johnson, and Templeton (2004) also discuss that babies learning to talk is a lot like emergent writing. As babies begin to talk they coo and pretend to sing like their mother may do. Similar to this, children begin writing by using a “linear arrangement of print; pretend writing that has been called “mock linear” (p. 98). As children move out of this stage, they move to what Bear, Invernizzi, Johnson, and Templeton call “symbol salad” (p. 98). This is a stage that children begin to experiment with features of print and their marks begin to look like actual letters. The final stage in the evolution of emergent writing, according to Bear, Invernizzi, Johnston and Templeton, is the partial phonetic stage. In this stage, children are focusing on “specifics of letter formation and the representation of the most salient sounds of speech” (p. 98). Children will start to use single consonants for words; like ILU for “I love you” (p. 98).

Writer’s Workshop and Developing Writers

Writer’s workshop can be a time when young students can express their ideas in a structured, supportive environment (Kramer-Vida, Levitt, & Kelly, 2012). Kramer-Vida, Levitt, and Kelly believe that students are participating in meaningful writing activities

during writer's workshop and state, "Every day that they participate in writing workshop, the children learn more about the writing process and the balance between meaning making and utilizing the skills they are learning" (p. 94). These authors believe that the writer's workshop process provides students with time to show independence and one kindergarten teacher that was a part of their study said her students "wrote for readers. They worried about whether or not their classmates understood what they had put on paper" (p. 105).

Writer's workshop also has a direct connection to the CCSS, according to Kramer-Vida, Levitt, and Kelly, (2012) who state that "Writer's workshop provides what the CCSS term age and attainment-appropriate means to achieve the kinds of results expected by the new national standards" (p. 105).

Keeping workshop time predictable is important for young writers (Calkins, 1994). This includes a predictable time and structure of the workshop. With work that can be challenging and constantly changing, the writing environment should be kept "predictable and simple" (p. 183). Calkins suggests keeping rituals, activities, and structures the same for students. Along with a predictable workshop time, writer's workshop should take place every single day. Calkins (1994) states that if a student begins a piece of writing and does not see it for a few days, "he will find it hard to sustain an interest in it, and harder still to remember the questions his friends asked during a conference" (p. 188).

Having a predictable writer's workshop is important, according to Calkins (1994) as it "frees teachers from choreographing activities and allows them to listen and respond to individual students" (p. 188). The first component of a writer's workshop is the mini-

lesson. This is a crucial component to writer's workshop, and Calkins (1994) gives suggestions on what to include in a mini-lesson that will be particularly helpful to young writers. Including books and literature can, and should, be incorporated into mini-lessons. The ideal mini-lesson, according to Calkins, should "support the less able youngsters while also celebrating and raising the upper level of what children are doing" (p. 202). Effective mini-lessons that Calkins mentions is to spend time comparing student writing to that of a real author or showing writing from another classroom "encourages youngsters to move in new directions" (p.203).

The next component of writer's workshop is work time, which includes writing and conferencing (Calkins, 1994). It is more than likely that students will be working on different pieces during this time. Calkins states that not all students take the same amount of time on their work: "One may spend a week on a piece, another, two weeks" (p. 189). During work time, the teacher takes time to confer with students. Calkins (1994) states an extremely important thing about conferring is that the teachers job is "to listen to everything they see and know and hear about a child in order to develop a theory about that particular writer" (p. 225). The first thing the teacher needs to do during a conference is to listen (Calkins, 1994). As a teacher reads a student's writing for the first time, their job is to "enjoy, to care, to be reminded of their own lives, and to respond" (p. 227). Asking questions is something the teacher needs to do during a conference. The questions should focus more on the writing process rather than the details of the writing (Calkins, 1994).

Additional Ways to Support the Writing Development of Young Writers

According to Kempf (2013), conferencing is an integral part of writer's workshop and can be a motivating factor for kindergarten writers and she states "when teachers marvel at students' work, as most do in a conference, students are motivated and excited to continue writing" (p. 28). Conferencing can be a challenge with kindergarten writers, according to Kempf (2013), because "they are just beginning their lives as writers" (p. 24). While Kempf believes this to be true, she does not mean that the conference should not be done and she states that "conducting conferences is much easier when the rest of the students know what is expected of them" (p. 24). Making sure that expectations and procedures are in place can help assure students go through the writing process more smoothly.

Calkins believes this to be true and states that "conferencing is hard, but when it is done well, it can change the course of a writing life forever" (as cited in Kempf, 2013, p. 29). Calkins (1994) describes effective conferencing content and instruction so that students see it as a positive experience. Conferencing is important because "When we let writers in on what we notice about their writing process, then they can learn something that applies to this draft but to future drafts as well" (p. 229). Calkins also states that conferencing can be difficult as teachers sometimes "try so hard to be helpful they forget to be real...they often worry so much about asking the right questions that they forget to listen" (p.232).

Early writing skills can also be supported and developed by the use of a collaborative writing process between two students (Boyle & Charles, 2011). Narrative writing can put many demands on young writers. Hodges recognizes an issue with always writing independently and states "it creates tension of what to write and composing the

whole story” (as cited in Boyle & Charles, 2011, p. 10). Boyle and Charles (2011) also state that it “provides them with the most complex of intellectual challenges” (p. 10). During a collaborative writing process, children work with a peer and one is assigned to work as the “helper” and the other as the “writer” (Boyle and Charles, 2011, p. 11). Boyle and Charles believe that working with a peer can significantly impact writing development because “the child is offered access to correct word structures, coherence and story ideas” (p. 14).

Calkins (1994) states that many teachers may ask if five and six year olds are ready or capable of writing interactions with their peers like the ones described above. She feels that these interactions hold a purpose and are important and states that “With help, children can learn not only to listen, but also to help their classmates rethink what they have done” (p. 100). Children will learn how to interact appropriately and effectively with their peers when their teacher confers with them (Calkins, 1994).

Units of Study and Emergent Writers

As part of her new Units of Study, Calkins (2013) wrote a new edition to her previously written Units of Study, *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop*. This new edition is targeted to specific grade levels. Calkins (2013) states that with support in writing instruction, “it is not only *children’s* work that is transformed, but teacher’s work is also transformed” (p. 3).

Calkins (2013) states that the CCSS are a set of expectations, but they do not give explicit instructions to teachers or districts on how to reach these expectations. In order to meet these higher expectations, a writing program will need to be “planned, sequential, and explicit, with instruction that gives students repeated opportunities to practice each

kind of writing and to receive explicit feedback at frequent intervals” (p. 14). Calkins states that the new Units of Study program does just that for young writers. As the CCSS calls for students to gain the skills they need to be successful in college and in their career, these skills must begin to be taught in the primary grades (Calkins, 2013). While Calkins states that some kindergarten teachers do not feel that the higher expectations are realistic for all, it is important to realize that the “CCSS say clearly that in order for upper elementary teachers to bring children to standards, the teaching of writing needs to be a whole-school priority” (p. 19). Teachers should be moving students along in a “progressing curriculum” (Calkins, 2013, p. 19) so that they can build on the skills they learned each year. Calkins says that the purpose of the Units of Study is to support teachers in their work to guide and instruct their students so that they are able to meet the expectations set by the CCSS.

Calkins (2013) provides things that are necessary for effective writing instruction; she calls them “bottom line conditions” (p. 29). The first necessity is that writing needs to be taught explicitly and students need to write every day for fifty to sixty minutes. She compares writing to a sport or playing an instrument and says “Just as learners become skilled at playing an instrument or swimming or playing tennis or reading by doing those things, writing, too, is learned through practice” (p. 30). In addition to writing each day, children need to write real writing. They need to write in all genres and know the difference between nonfiction, persuasive writing, or story writing (Calkins, 2013). They also should be given the opportunity to write for an audience. If children get these opportunities, Calkins says that “they will feel as if the work they are doing is real, credible, and substantial” (p. 31).

For emergent writers, phonemic awareness is extremely important (Calkins, 2013). It is essential for literacy because without the ability to hear a sound, you cannot write it. Calkins suggests using interactive writing lessons in a whole group setting that is geared toward a word study concept and then allowing the students to transfer this work to their own class writing. Phonics instruction is crucial for young writers because many English words have letters that don't correlate to a certain sound, and "children who struggle with spelling are often children who remain phonetic spellers" (p. 33).

Another necessity of effective writing instruction, according to Calkins (2013), is to provide explicit instruction. While giving students time and opportunities to write, that is not enough. Students need to be explicitly taught the "qualities, habits, and strategies of effective writing" (p. 33). When this happens, their writing will become better and it will be much more evident. A final necessity is that children need to set goals and need to receive feedback frequently so that they know the next steps to take (Calkins, 2013). Calkins states that feedback is not synonymous with praise or instruction. It needs to "include an understanding of what the learner is trying to do or could do" and may include "suggestions for the learner or strategies to try at a different time" (p. 33).

In addition to these necessities, Calkins (2013) states that instruction needs to be based on a well-planned curriculum and should include "deep assessment and responsive instruction" (p. 7). Decisions made for instruction should be based on the assessments that are included in the Units of Study program.

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

During the time of this study, I was in my second year as a kindergarten teacher, and I often felt that I was under a great deal of pressure to give my students the best literacy instruction possible because they are in an important stage in their literacy development, and every opportunity and positive experience with print, text, and language could build their confidence as readers and writers. I was aware that it is important that I support each interaction they have with different aspects of literacy during this foundational stage in their development. In addition, I recognized that there were significant differences in my students' development and ability, especially in the area of writing, and I realized that there were times when I was not able to support all of my students' needs, especially during activities such as writer's workshop. This was an area I addressed through my self-study research.

While it is at times challenging to craft writing instruction to support the range of abilities of my students, I found Calkins Units of Study program (2013) that my colleagues and I used to be a helpful resource. It is a well-researched, well organized source, presented in a way that I can use to support my students' development as writers. I found the program easy to follow and I could see how I could apply the suggestions that Calkins gives in each unit to my teaching and, in turn, support my students.

As I discussed in chapter one, the purpose of this self-study was to help me gain more knowledge about the Units of Study program and learn how I could use the program to the best of my ability to support my students' writing development. This is the second year I am using the program with my students, however, this year Calkins published a program targeted specifically to each grade level. Last year I used the

program for kindergarten to second grade, so this is the first time I used the program with instruction specific to kindergarteners. I found that the results of this self-study helped me answer my research question: How can I use Lucy Calkins' Units of Study to support the writing development of my kindergartners?

Context of the Study

I conducted this self-study in my kindergarten classroom in a suburban elementary school in western New York. According to the 2011-2012 New York State Report Card, there are a total of 972 students in grades Pre-K-6 in the school. The demographics for the school population are: 92 percent White, 3 percent Multiracial, 3 percent Hispanic or Latino, 1 percent Black or African American, and 1 percent Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. Twenty six percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The most recent census information indicates that the median household income for the area in which the school is located is \$51, 336 and the median income for a family is \$57, 440.

I had eighteen students: seven boys and eleven girls. Each student came to kindergarten with different backgrounds and experiences. My students were a group of energetic, enthusiastic children. They came to school looking forward to learning and put forth effort into everything they do. This made my job that much more rewarding!

I wanted my classroom to be a place where students felt comfortable, and I strived to make it a welcoming place for them to be each day. I had arranged tables into four different groups for students to sit together and have group conversation during certain activities. I set up centers—writing, an ABC center, a specified area for art, and

listening—around the room that students participated in during our literacy rotations. We had a large classroom library, which I had organized in a way that was easy for students to find books. Each basket was labeled according to the author, genre, or subject. We also had a word wall in the room that the students and I used as a resource during reading and writing activities; we added words to the wall as we learned them. I had a SMART Board that the students and I used for lessons in different subject areas, and it was a great way for me to incorporate technology into lessons. We had a classroom meeting spot where we gathered for morning meeting activities, whole group read alouds, and discussions.

I believed that students should be immersed in an environment that was not only warm and welcoming, but also print rich. In addition to the word wall, I had posted a copy of the alphabet, a large alphabet chart that we used each day before writing instruction, colorful and bright posters, student work, and posters and charts that we had created together to use as resources.

In addition to a classroom that is visually appealing and welcoming, I strived to create a classroom community that was positive. Kent and Simpson (2012) note the importance of a positive classroom community and the impact it can have on students. The authors discuss that when students are part of a classroom community they are often more open to learning, able to solve problems more productively, and care about themselves and others in the classroom. In creating a classroom environment like this for my students, I believed I was giving them the experience and opportunities that they needed to be successful.

My Positionality as the Participant and Researcher

I am a 25 year old white female who lives in small town in western New York, a town I've lived in my entire life. My parents both worked in school districts throughout my childhood; my mother as a school secretary and my father as a teacher, principal, and administrator. I received my undergraduate degree from The College at Brockport, State University of New York in 2010 along with certification to teach grades one through six and students with disabilities grades one through six. In 2012, I received a certification extension and am now certified in early childhood education, birth through grade six. After finishing my graduate degree and passing the CST for literacy, I will be certified in literacy, grades birth through six.

Upon completing my undergraduate work and becoming initially certified, I started substitute teaching in several area school districts. I had long term experiences in grades 3, 5, and kindergarten. I am currently in my second year of teaching kindergarten as a year-long, long term substitute teacher.

As an educator, I believe that students learn best in an environment in which they feel safe and comfortable. I also think that students should contribute to the classroom environment as much as possible, as this builds classroom community. It is critical, especially at a young age, that students feel that they are a part of that community. My philosophy of education is a student-centered approach that closely aligns with progressivism. Schechter (2011) discusses progressivism and how John Dewey, the founder of progressivism, believed in social change and was passionate about the development of children. Schechter (2011) refers to John Dewey's work in her article about development as an aim of education. As the founder of progressivism, he believed

that students should have the opportunity to interact socially in order for them to develop. Schechter states that Dewey's view of progressive education was "that the guiding principles of education are derived from a system of theoretical and value commitments about the growth of children" (p. 251).

Schechter also discusses Dewey's thoughts on progressivism and how development plays a major role in education. Schechter also references Dewey by stating that when children are involved in the process of meaning making it determines the experiences they have in school, "which offer children direction and control for further inquiry. They (the experiences) are based on a child's interests, but guided by a teacher" (p. 257). As I indicated, my students sat at tables in groups and I designed opportunities for them to interact with each other multiple times throughout the day. They worked in small groups during our literacy workshop, and I encouraged them to interact with each other during writer's workshop to discuss their writing.

In my classroom, much of my attention was focused on what my students needed and were interested in. As I often had my students work in small groups, they were given many opportunities to work together and cooperate with each other. My philosophy is based on having children learn through their own experiences. This philosophy is one that fits best with cooperative learning. Alghamdi and Gillies (2013) define cooperative learning as times "when students work together in small groups to achieve shared goals" (p. 19).

I used a balanced approach to literacy instruction to support my students' emergent language and literacy development. I incorporated interactive reading and writing activities, and shared, guided, and independent reading and writing opportunities.

There is a “balance” of all activities included in each day’s work, meaning that each component of reading and writing receives appropriate instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) discuss a balanced approach to literacy instruction and how it can provide a framework for student’s literacy learning. They state, “It is a way of thinking about the range of reading and writing activities that are essential for promoting early literacy” (p. 21).

I recognize that assessment, both formative and summative, is also a crucial part of the teaching and learning processes. I believe that the bottom-line purpose of classroom-based assessments is to inform my instructional choices and improve my student learning. In my classroom, I used checklists as informal assessments to help me target areas of need for specific students and guide the work that I would do while planning for the week. During small group instruction, I took anecdotal notes while observing and interacting with students. I also reviewed the work they did each week during literacy workshop and took notes on what they were doing and the areas in which they needed further instruction. I believed that it was important for me to use a variety of assessments. I recognized that some students may not be good test takers, while others may struggle with writing. If I relied too much on one form of assessment, my students may become frustrated and I may miss some important aspects of their development.

As I conducted a self-study, I was the sole participant of my study. As a teacher, though, I interacted with my students on a daily basis. The interactions I had and the observations I made were important in determining the findings of my study.

Data Collection

In her book, *Self-Study Teacher Research: Improving Your Practice through Collaborative Inquiry*, Samaras (2010) discusses self-study methodology stating that in this type of study researchers are studying themselves “to improve their practice at the individual and instructional levels” (p. 69). Quality research, according to Samaras, requires a researcher to be open to change during the time he conducts his research; a researcher works to “understand, uncover, and reframe [his/her] understandings of practice” (p. 71).

Research Journal

In order to help answer my research question, I kept a research journal in which I documented a specific, detailed account of each day’s writing lesson. In each entry, I focused specifically on my instruction and how I made sense of and use Calkins’ (2013) lesson for each day of writing instruction. The entries included a description of the content of the lesson, the interactions I had with students, how I adapted the lesson to support student learning during our writing workshop time, the language that I used, the specific teaching strategies and the strategies that I used to manage student behavior. I also observed and documented my behaviors and interactions with students during small group writing conferences.

In addition to describing the content of the writing lesson in the entry, I created a reflection on my experience, focusing on how I felt during the lesson, and what I believed went well and any changes or accommodations I made during future lessons. I used guiding questions to reflect upon each lesson, looking at the strengths and weaknesses of

each. Maxwell (as cited in Borg, 2001, p. 160) states that the research journal is more than just a place to record thoughts and observations; it can also be a “forum for reflection where ideas are generated and explored and discoveries made in and through writing.”

Data Analysis

Borg (2001) discusses the benefits of a research journal in the process of analyzing data. He states that the process can involve, “identifying relationships between these processes, and searching for common sequences amongst them” (p. 161). Through careful reading and re-reading my journal entries, I was able to find patterns, develop codes and categories that helped me answer my research question.

It was important for me to keep my data organized. Samaras (2010) offers many different ways to keep organized and one way to do this is to reread the data as often as possible to make sense of it. This was beneficial for me as I was conducting a self-study and had both the entry and reflections of each day’s writing lessons.

Samaras (2010) highlights how the process of data analysis should not be completed separately from data collection. She suggests that it to be completed during the data collection process so “the researcher” can begin to manage them systematically, store them for easy access, and “see” and document what is happening “as the research moves forward” (p. 197).

As I read each lesson in Calkins’ Units of Study (2013), it was important for me to remember Samaras’ observation and look for relationships that existed between my approaches to the lessons as I documented my instructional choices. I recognized that as a

teacher-researcher, I not only conducted the research but was also responsible for analyzing and interpreting the data I collected. Samaras (2010) discusses the importance of uninterrupted time to process all of the information collected because “the researcher is simultaneously: an interpreter, a meaning maker, and a theory maker, albeit for purposes of improving [his/her] practice through constructing meaning rather than for the purpose of making any final claims of knowing” (p. 208).

Procedures

My data collection took place over the course of five weeks. After each writing lesson, I documented the lesson in my research journal that included detailed summaries of my lesson and I also included any information that seemed relevant to a particular day’s writing focus. In addition to summarizing each day’s lesson, I reflected upon my teaching, focusing on what went particularly well and areas that I believed I would need to modify for the next day.

Below is the sequence I anticipate following as my students and I move through Calkin’s Units of Study (2013) over a five week period.

Week One

Day One: Writing Amazing Story Beginnings

Day Two: Writer’s Work with Partners to Answer Readers’ Questions

Day Three: Writers Use All They Know to Select and Revise a Piece to Publish

Day Four: Continuation of Revision Process

Day Five: Ending with Feelings

Week Two

Day Six: Writers Make Their Pieces Beautiful to Get Ready for Publication

Day Seven: Continuing the Editing Process

Day Eight: A Final Celebration: Bringing True Stories to Life

Day Nine: Writers Study the Kind of Writing They Plan to Make

Day Ten: Writers Use What They Already Know: Touching and Telling the Steps across the Pages

Week Three

Day Eleven: Digging Deeper into the “How-To” Genre

Day Twelve: Writers Become Readers Asking, “Can I Follow This”

Day Thirteen: Writers Answer a Partner’s Question

Day Fourteen: Writers Label Their Diagrams to Teach Even More Information

Day Fifteen: Writers Write as Many Books as They Can

Week Four

Day Sixteen: Revision of a Favorite Piece

Day Seventeen: Using a Mentor Text for Features of Informational Writing

Day Eighteen: Writing for Readers: Using the Word You

Day Nineteen: Writers Picture Each Step and Choose Exactly the Right Words

Day Twenty: Elaboration in How-To Books: Writers Guide Readers with Warnings, Suggestions, and Tips

Week Five

Day Twenty -One: Balance on One Leg Like a Flamingo: Using Comparisons to Give Readers Clear Directions

Day Twenty-Two: Writers Write How-To Books about Things They Learn Throughout the Day and from Books

Day Twenty-Three: Continuation of Yesterday's Work with a Focus on Small Details

Day Twenty-Four: Writers Can Write Introductions and Conclusions to Help Their Readers

Day Twenty-Five: How-To Books Make Wonderful Gifts

Criteria for Trustworthiness

I recognized as a teacher-researcher that it was crucial that I documented my teaching and interactions with students in an accurate and concise manner. My goal during my data collection was to record detailed accounts of each writing lesson in my research journal and reflect upon my teaching and use of the writing curriculum lessons, which, in the end, hopefully, would help me support my students' writing development.

By using a self-study approach, I hoped to find ways that would improve my instructional decisions in hopes of supporting my students' literacy development. Ms. N, a teacher from South Africa, describes the self-study approach and how it can benefit a teacher. She states, "You can't learn about yourself in isolation. Working with and caring for others helps because as you reflect on your experiences, you also take into consideration other people's views and feelings" (As cited in Mitchell, Pithouse, & Weber, 2009, p. 48). Ms. N's statement directly applies to my self-study. I anticipate that

using a research journal will help me reflect on my decisions and help guide my instruction for future lessons.

Persistent observations over a five-week period enabled me to develop detailed notes of my experiences with and use of Calkin's Units of Study program. As I needed to read and re-read my lesson notes and observations for data collection and analysis, and re-read them yet another time to reflect on my lessons, this allowed for accurate data.

According to Samaras (2010) an essential component of self-study methodology is an interactive component. I collaborated with my thesis advisor each week. We emailed each other on a weekly basis to discuss the progression of my study. It was also important to maintain a transparent research process, which Samaras also states is a critical to self-study. In this case, transparent means, "you are open, honest, and reflective about your work" (p. 80).

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations of this study. As I was the sole participant of the study, there was possibility that my self-reporting could be a limitation. If I did not give enough details in my lesson descriptions or left out important pieces of information, such as an integral part of the lesson, or the language used, it could have impacted the results of my study. As a teacher-researcher, I wanted my research to be valid and unbiased, but there was a possibility that my own feelings and opinions could come into play when I was reflecting on the events of each day's lessons.

Time was also a limitation of my study. My study was five weeks long, taking place six months into the school year. I was not able to see an inclusive developmental continuum of my students' writing abilities within this narrow window of time.

I recognized that the unique characteristics of my students, my use of Calkins' Units of Study, and the other factors that shaped my teaching and my students' learning would limit my ability to generalize my findings to other kindergarten teachers and students.

Summary

Finding ways to support all of my students during writer's workshops was a priority for me. This self-study enabled me to gain insight into how to use the Lucy Calkins Units of Study (2013) to the best of my ability in order to support my students' writing development. Throughout this five-week study, I summarized and reflected upon my instruction and the specific choices I made, I gained insights into how I could appropriately utilize the Units of Study for my students' needs and how my own instructional decisions supported their writing abilities in a research journal.

Chapter 4: Findings

Day 1: Writing Amazing Story Beginnings

Lesson Summary

It was the first day of my study, which began towards the end of a narrative writing unit. My students had been working hard at writing stories that depicted real events from their own lives. My goal for the study was to determine how using the Lucy

Calkins' Units of Study would impact my students' writing development, looking specifically at my own teaching decisions and instruction.

On this day, the focus of my lesson was to teach students how to write a story beginning that would draw the reader in, making them want to read more. In a previous lesson, we had discussed what editing and revising meant and students were given the opportunity to look over their own work and make changes they saw necessary. My mini-lesson began with my explaining that as I watched them revise their stories, I noticed that none of them had looked at their beginnings. I said,

"Authors take a lot of time and effort to work on their story beginnings. They are one of the most important parts of a story and the author may spend hours on that part alone. Today, I want to teach you that one way to improve your writing is to look at the work of an author you love and think about what they did that you could try on your own."

Next, I chose a book that we had previously read and that my students enjoyed very much. I wanted to share the lead of *A Chair for My Mother*, by Vera B. Williams with my students. I stated, "Let's take a look at this story we've read once before. I am going to read the lead of this story and we will discuss the things that Vera does in her writing." I made sure I read slowly and kept eye contact with children to help them notice the way this author began her story. I read,

"My mother works as a waitress in the Blue Tile Diner. After school I meet her there. Then her boss, Josephine, gives me a job too. I wash the salts and peppers and fill the ketchups. One time I peeled all the onions for onion soup. When I

finish, Josephine says, "Good work, honey" and pays me. And every time, I put half of my money into the jar."

I asked my students if they noticed how I read the beginning slow so that they could appreciate the author's words. I read the beginning again and asked students to really think about what the author does to start her story to see if they could get ideas for their own writing. After reading again, I asked students to turn and talk with a partner about what Vera B. Williams has done that they can use in their story writing.

As the children talked to their partners I listened to their conversations. One student told his partner, "She talks about salt and pepper." I nodded and said, "You are right. So do you think all good beginnings need to tell about salt? Should your story start that way? The student replied with a loud, "NO WAY! My story is about a trip to the zoo." I laughed and generalized for him. "The author tells about small, exact actions and steps that she completes." After talking to their partners, I stopped the class to repeat and clarify what the author had done in hopes that they would apply this to their own writing. I explained that the author did not simply say, "Here I am at my mother's job. She told us exact details of what she did."

I then moved into an active engagement piece with my students and took some time to revise a class piece we had been writing together, which was about our Halloween parade at school. I asked students to listen closely as I read the beginning. "Here is our class before we walked around the school for our Halloween parade." I asked students, "If we revised this beginning and started with a small detail, what could we say?" The students took a moment to discuss and I prompted with, "Do you remember how we all felt? Feelings can be a detail that can really help at the start of a story." After giving them

another moment, I heard students saying things like "excited, nervous, and embarrassed." I explained that I heard many great things and provided an example of how to start. I said,

"What if we changed our beginning to this, "It was the morning of Halloween and many of us were excited to show the whole school our creative costume ideas.

"Doesn't this sound like a better beginning than what we originally came up with?" It was evident that students liked our revised beginning much more as I heard them say, "Yes, definitely, oh yeah!"

Before students had the opportunity to write independently, I reminded them to keep in mind that beginnings are especially important. I stated, "If you are fixing a lead or thinking about starting a new story, you may want to think about what Vera did in our mentor text or what we did as a class to revise our own story."

Students moved into independent writing and I made my way around the room to check that students had gotten started. I decided to pull a small group of students to work with. I would use this conference time to help coach my students into the expectations I have set for conference time--something not specific to any unit. I wanted to explicitly teach this group the roles that they need to take on in a conference. I said to them,

"I brought the four of you together to teach you all the same thing at the same time. Ever since we started our writing workshop, you have seen me come around and talk to students about their writing. When I confer with students, I have a job that I'm doing. But you also have a job and I want to make sure you know what that is."

I started by explaining to students what I do during conference time and that I always start by watching what they're doing. I watch the decisions they are making as a writer. Then, I ask a question like "What are you doing as a writer?" I explained that as the writer, it is their job to answer my question by telling me the topic you are writing about (for example, our Halloween parade) but they also need to tell me what you are trying to do as a writer.

After this discussion with students, I sent them back to their writing and made my way around the room for a second time. Independent writing lasted 20 minutes today. The last part of writing workshop was our class share. I decided to end our lesson today by discussing the use of transition words. I said to my students, "There are words that help a reader understand how the parts of a story fit together. They are called transition words. Transition is a fancy way to say move from one part to another." We made a chart of story transition words that may happen at the beginning, middle, or end of our stories and I challenged my students to start using these in their writing more often.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

I believe the choices I made during my mini-lesson were all good ones. Using a story that the students were familiar with made it easier for them to pay close attention to the specific words the author used. Also, reading the lead at a slow pace engaged my students from the first word. Giving them the opportunity to talk with another student about the choices the author made was beneficial, but I also knew that they might need some prompting from me. I also believe that allowing students to look at a class piece

was beneficial to them. During conference time, I believe that going back to the basics of conferencing was a good choice. I had selected the group of students I would do this with the evening prior, as I knew they needed help with this the most. Ending with transition words that students would be using was something I had decided to do last minute, but I feel it was worthwhile. I would have to see for sure if students understood the concept during the next day's writing time if students were actually using these words in their writing.

What Was Challenging

As I wanted to include many things in today's mini-lesson, it lasted a little longer than it normally does. It was challenging for students to stay attentive the whole time. As I was not making my way around the room the whole time during independent writing, I did notice that some students were not on task and I had to remind them on multiple occasions to stay focused and to continue writing.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

As the mini-lesson was longer than normal, I should have given students a short movement break to get their minds and bodies re-focused. Stopping the whole group through the mid-point of independent writing may have been a good idea to remind students of the expectations I had for the lesson and for them to get back on track if they were becoming unfocused. It also may have been a good idea for a few students to share their revised beginnings for the whole class to hear.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

During the moments I went around the room at the beginning and end of independent writing, I noticed that one of my students was turning to the student sitting next to him to ask if they could read his writing, and what they thought about the way he revised his beginning. I couldn't help but smile at this interaction between peers as I often encourage this to happen during writing time.

Day 2- Writer's Work with Partners to Answer Readers' Questions

Lesson Summary

This mini-lesson was geared toward getting students to realize that they need to make efforts to show that they can be their own writing teachers. Not only did I want them to realize that this is something they needed to work towards, but also I wanted them to know they are capable of doing this without my help. If you were to walk in my classroom during writer's workshop, you might notice some students working at their table spots with a look of perseverance on their faces, but you also may notice other students forming a line near the area where I'm working. This mini-lesson was a great way to get students thinking about what they're capable of without my help, or knowing that they do not always need me to answer questions or help with writing troubles.

I started the mini- lesson by explaining to students that I have noticed a line of students often forming behind me with burning questions or realizations. I said,

“Writers, over the last few days I have noticed a line of kids near me waiting for help. And I have been thinking about it a lot lately. Because everyone is working

hard on revising their writing, they have needed extra help. But when you wait in a line for help, you lose writing time.”

I wanted to teach children today that there is not just one writing teacher in the room, but there are eighteen of them. They, too, could help others in the room if needed. To be a writing teacher, they would need to really listen to the writer’s words, trying hard to understand what they wanted to say and notice the places that make them say “huh?” and help the writer make those parts more clear.

I next moved into demonstrating how my students could be writing teachers for each other. I started by giving them scenarios of things that may happen when they would start to be the writing teachers for others in the class. I said,

“So let’s pretend I am five years old and I come up to you with my writing and say, “Help me, help me. I’m done, I’m done!!” Do you think you would start telling me, “Do this, do that, and do it this way?” (I did this in a bossy, exaggerated way, pointing my finger and giving orders.)

The children started shaking their heads and yelled, “NO!” I then said, “You are absolutely right. Instead, to be a good writing teacher, you might say, “Can I hear your writing?” I then moved into how to be a good listener, making sure that students understood to be a good listener, they must not be distracted and they would need to be honest. I said, “If there are parts you really love, make sure to say that. And if there are confusing parts, you must tell your partner that, as well.”

Next, I asked students to be my writing teacher. I asked if they would listen to a story that I wrote and help me as best as they could. They all agreed that they would listen. I read them my story that was written on chart paper: *On Saturday, I went to pick*

apples. We had cider and donuts. Then we got two baskets for apples. We went to pick them. Then we spilled the basket and had to get more. Then we came home.

After reading the story once, I wanted students to know how to truly pay attention to the reader so I chose to read it again. I said to my students, “Listen to my story another time, and when you feel like saying, “wow” to something in my story, put your thumb in the air. If you hear something in my story that makes you say, “huh?” make a gesture like shrugging your shoulders. I started to read my story and one of my students put their thumb up right away. She said, “I like something already! I want to give a wow to the part where you had cider and donuts. I think it sounds good.” I responded with, “Why thank you. So you seemed to like the details I put in my story. I think I might add the word *cinnamon* because that’s the kind of donut I had. I hope as I continue to read, you hear more great details and give me even more “wows.””

As I continued reading, I noticed that two of my students were whispering to one another. I stopped and said, “What’s that you two are whispering about?” One said, “Well, you went to pick the apples up, but then dropped them...I don’t get it.” The other said, “Yeah, like, how did you even get the apples?” After hearing this, I said, “I am so glad that you two were paying attention to my reading so closely! Maybe I could tell you about how I had to use a ladder to get the apples that were on the highest branches...in between getting the baskets and then spilling the apples.” The two students seemed to like that answer as they smiled at each other and then me.

After reading all the way through my story, I gave students the opportunity to try this on their own. I had already assigned writing partners earlier in the year, so students would know whom they would be working with. I asked partner 1 and partner 2 to sit

near each other and said, “Partner 1, please choose one of your finished pieces and read it to your partner. Partner 2, you need to listen and pay attention to your reactions, noticing what makes you want to say “wow” or “huh?” As I listened to the students share their writing, I noticed that many of the partners who were asked to listen were not really paying attention to their reactions. They seemed to be doing little to help their partner improve the quality of their writing. I stopped students where they were: “Will everyone turn their heads this way for just a moment? I noticed that many of you partner 2s were *only* listening. Remember that you know a lot about what makes a strong story. I reminded them to use their narrative writing checklists and asked them to try again.

As I listened again, I heard some students commenting on the drawings of their partners as they said, “I love how you drew different characters instead of just one. Maybe I can try that in my own writing.” After hearing this, I immediately wanted to share this with the rest of the class. After giving students a couple more minutes, I said, “I wanted to share something before you all go off to write. Jane said something very special to her partner. She said, “Maybe I can try that in my own writing.” By saying this, Jane has realized that being a writing partner is more than just helping someone else. It can also help you learn how to make your own writing stronger! That is so cool, Jane!”

I invited students to get to their writing and reminded them that they can use their writing partner for help if they need it. I said, “Writers, now you know that you can help each other make better stories. You can go to your writing partner whenever you feel like you really need someone to listen carefully. Today you have learned a way to work with your partner so that your writing is the best it can be! Get to work!”

During independent writing time, I made my way around the room to check in with students and partnerships to see how their work was going. I noticed that some students had not used their writing partner until the very end, but other students had found their writing partner from the very beginning. About half way through, I stopped students from writing and reminded them that if they hadn't found their partner yet, they might want to check in with each other before writing time was over. With five minutes left, I gave students a warning that time was almost up. I also said, "Writer's don't forget to think about your partner as you are writing. Remember that your writing partner is your first reader. Be sure to ask yourself, "Did I do enough to make this clear? Will this wow my partner?"

To end today, I decided to give students one more strategy that could benefit their work: using post-its. I said, "Writers, a post it note can be a very powerful writing tool. It could help you read your own writing and you could put *wow* and *huh* notes in your own writing and use them to nudge yourself to improve your writing. Is this something you think you could try next time?" Thumbs up from everyone made me smile!

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

I believe that this lesson had very strong components. Any time students are allowed to work with partners, it seems to me that their confidence goes up and they really work hard at trying to please their peers. Using my own writing to introduce them to the concept of being a writing partner went well. They were able to pick up on the strong points of my writing but also gave me suggestions on how to make it better. It did

take prompting from me, though. Reading my writing a second time was a decision I thought would help students truly think about my words and with a few prompting words, it worked! I also believe that allowing students to practice with each other's writing before independent writing time helped them. Again, it took prompting, but after I stopped students and reminded them about using their writing checklists, I noticed that more of them were attentive and doing more than just listening.

What Was Challenging

Even though I believe it was a good decision to make my way around the room to check in with students, I didn't feel that I had enough time to meet with everyone. This is something that I usually feel after many writing workshops. I know it is not realistic to meet with everyone, but at times I feel guilty for not having enough time. While this is a challenge, I make sure I keep track of who I am meeting with so that it is as fair as possible.

It was also challenging to get students to really help their partners. I realize this is the first time I am asking them to take on this kind of work, but I found it difficult to get them to have constructive conversations with their partners or giving their partners feedback. While some students did this well, others had difficulty with it.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

While it was beneficial to have students meet with partners on the carpet, I should have had them sitting next to their partners from the start. I lost some valuable time when students moved around to be next to their partner and it took longer than I had hoped to

get them refocused and back on track. I stopped to remind students to use their writing checklist, and while I believe this was a good decision, it may have been a good idea to go over a few points on the checklist with the students before they continued conversations with their partner. Also, it may have been a good idea for students to sit next to their partners during independent writing time, so that it would be easier and more natural for them to talk to their writing partner.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

I noticed a few of my students were very hesitant to talk to their partners or give their advice. In thinking about the students who did this, it was not that surprising to me. These are the students who are very unsure of themselves and are not open to sharing with others. While this was the case, it made me smile that their partners showed compassion and approached them with ease. With having a partner like this, it seemed easier for these types of students to share their work.

Day 3: Writers Use All They Know to Select and Revise a Piece to Publish

Lesson Summary

I had previously talked to my students about what it means to revise and publish, but this was the first big publish day we had that would culminate our writing unit. I started the mini-lesson by talking about their accomplishments so far and that today would be a very big day for them. I said, “Writers, today is such a big day. You have worked so hard for many weeks learning many different strategies that have helped you write amazing, easy to read stories. There are only a few days left before we celebrate all

you have learned, so we really need to focus.” I drew attention to all of the resources they have used over the course of the unit, and stated “Every tool you have, you need to keep that out and be ready to do the big work of getting a story ready to be presented to the other writers in the class.” I made sure that the writing center was restocked with the supplies and tools that my students would need for a day like this.

Next, I stated the teaching point and said, “Writers, today I want to teach you that writers get ready for publishing by choosing the story they want to share with the world and then they use all they know to make their stories come to life and easy to read.” After this, I moved into modeling the revision process by reading one of my own stories out loud. I said to my students, “Let me show you a way to get started preparing a piece of writing for our celebration. Here I have my story about my weekend with friends. If I want to make this piece extra special, I first need to reread it and remember the time that I wrote about.” I read my piece aloud and then said, “I think I can add more. I didn’t put that we had a surprise guest at dinner! I should put that in.” I quickly added this into my story.

Next, I wanted to set up my students to reread their own writing. I said, “Today, writers, you are going to start getting one of your own stories ready for publication. I’m hoping you will be able to do that work without all lining up next to me saying, “Help, help.” Right now, think about the first thing you need to do to get ready to publish.” I gave the students a minute to think about this and asked them to share their thoughts. One student said, “You need to reread your story.” I reminded the student that one thing comes before this, and another student said, “You need to pick what story you will use!” I gave this student a thumbs up and said,

“Yes, you will choose a story to publish, *then* you will reread the story so that you can remember that time you are writing about. After that, you will need to think about what may make the reader go “Huh?” and you will try to make that part clearer. You may also add more details into your piece like I did for my own story.”

Before I sent students off to write, I quickly reminded them of the work they would do today and that it would be important for them to use their revising and editing checklists to help them in the revision process.

For conference time today, I wanted to be able to reach as many students as possible to make sure that they were rereading their stories and that they have their checklists out and ready to start revising. I kept my own draft with me so that I could help my students understand exactly what it meant to do the work on their revising checklist. I modeled this again for students who needed more instruction. As I sat down next to Janet, I noticed she was working on a piece about a trip to the water park. I took the staple out of her story so that we could spread her pages out in front of her. I said,

“Janet, sometimes when we are getting ready to celebrate, it helps if we spread our work out so that we can see all of it at the same time, without having to turn the pages. It might help if we put your checklist up above the pages so that you can keep looking at it to remind yourself of all the things you could be doing to make this story better.”

Janet then said, “I’m trying to make this story easy to read. I need vowels in some of my words and I can’t write all of the words from our writing word wall.” After that, I said, “For the vowel work, you can use your vowel chart to help you.” I pulled it out of her

writing folder. “For the work on the word wall, you need to read the whole wall first before you search for the words you need and then check them in your story.”

The share portion of writer’s workshop today was focused on titles. I started by reminding students that a powerful title can make a reader want to read a story. As students were all settled on the rug, I said, “I cannot believe that we will be celebrating in just a few days. Because we are going to share our stories with other classes, I have been thinking about all the little details that will help your stories make more sense for the readers.” I wanted to talk to students about titles and how they can get readers interested in a story.

I pulled out a piece that we wrote together. I said, “You guys remember our fire drill story, right? Well, if I think about a title that might help the reader know what the story is about, I could call it *Our First Fire Drill*. That title definitely tells the reader what the story is about. But I want to get the reader really excited about our story, so maybe I think of a title that is mysterious. Hmmm...”

I let my students think for a moment. As I started to say something else, one student shouted out, “What about *What’s That Noise?!*” Some students went wide-eyed, others giggled, and a few gave the student a high five and we all knew that this had to be the title of our story. “Now that we’ve found a title for our story, I want you to turn and talk to a partner about possible titles for your own story. Remember that it might take a couple of tries before you find a title that is just right for your piece.”

There was a lot of talk about different titles and I listened in a little, and then said, “So if you have an idea for a title I want you to come up here and take a blank piece of paper and write your idea on the paper right now.” Next, I explained to students that if

they don't have a title they really love, they could take the title paper and leave it in their folder. If an idea came up for them later, they could use it then at a later time."

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

As I thought about this unit and realized that it was coming to an end, it was important for me to reflect on the journey that my students took. I always make a big deal out of things and I made sure that I chose my words carefully so that students would know how important this day was and that they should also be excited and proud of all the work they have done. Calkins (2013) makes it clear that it's important for children to understand that revision is a way to "honor and care for one's writing" (p. 137). The reorganization of the writing center was also something I believed to be important as I knew students would be going through lots of paper and using our writing supplies and tools a lot in the next few days. I also believe that the modeling of the revision process went well. Explaining revision as a way to make a piece of writing extra special is an easier way for young students like mine to understand it.

What Was Challenging

Revising is something that I believe is difficult for young students to grasp. Even though the way I modeled the process worked for my students, I knew it would be challenging for many of them and knew it was something that we would have to continue to work on. Managing conference time was also a challenge. I wanted to reach as many

students as I could, and it was difficult to observe their work, have conversations with them, and give suggestions and advice in a short period of time.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

In thinking about my goal for this lesson, I believe that I would have met with small groups during conference time. While I'm not sure if this would have been more effective than meeting one-on-one, it may have been easier to check in with multiple students at once. I could have also grouped them homogenously so that I could have targeted similar needs in one conference time. I also would have taken out every checklist or resource that students would need and modeled how to use them specifically for the revising process.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

I noticed that most students were using resources appropriately to help them revise their pieces while others were not using them at all. Some students took the revision process very seriously and had their pages laid out in order and made check marks on their checklists to be sure they had all the important pieces to make their piece extra special.

Day 4- Continuation of Revision Process

Lesson Summary

I decided to take the lesson from the previous day and extend it another day. While Calkins suggests that the lessons last one day, I thought it would be best for my

students to have more time with the specifics from the lesson from day 3. I started by reviewing the previous day's lesson and highlighting the importance of revision and the time it takes. I said, "Yesterday we started revising and you chose a piece of writing that you wanted to publish. Revising is a very important process and it is important that we take the time to do it the right way. Today, we are going to continue this process."

Because I noticed that many students were not using their checklists the previous day, I took the time to model how to use these and discussed with students the importance of using them. "Writers, please do not forget that you have resources in your writing folder that will really help you with revising your piece. The writing checklist will help you be sure that your writing is extra special and that you have everything you need to make your writing easy to read."

The writing checklist has components for endings, organization, spelling, and overall aspects. I went through the checklist with my students and showed them how to "fix-up" their own pieces. Calkins provides a checklist; however, I created a student friendly one that my students could easily use independently. After modeling the use of the checklist, I reminded students to use this during their work today and continue their editing during independent writing time.

As I sent students off to write, I pulled a group of students who I knew would need additional modeling in a small group setting. I pulled these four students to my back table and had them all take out their checklists. I read each part of the checklist out loud and had students follow along with me. Then I said, "So today, I want you to work on checking off 2-3 pieces of this checklist and fix up those parts in your writing piece." I knew that these students would not be able to get to all parts of the checklist in one

session, so I set a goal for them that would be manageable. As they got to work, I made my way around the room to check in with other students. I was happy to see that they all had their checklists out of their folders! Could I be sure that they were all actually using them? No...but at least they had them out and easily accessible in case they did!

After checking in with a few students, I went back to my small group to see if they met their goal for the day. As I spoke to one student, she showed me her “fixes” as she calls them and was proud that her paper was marked up, pieces of her writing were crossed out, and that she added details to pictures and words. For this student in particular, I was beyond excited that she did this work!

I ended today’s session with letting the students talk about challenges or things that came easy to them as they used their checklists for the second day in a row. We joined together on the carpet and I said,

“Writers, I noticed a lot of really good things happening today and am proud of what you have accomplished so far. I want you to turn and talk to a partner about your writer’s checklist. Talk to your partner about the things you did and how many portions of the checklist you were able to check off.”

As I listened in to conversations, I heard one student say, “It’s hard to decide what you want to keep and what you want to get rid of. I wish I had my writing partner to help me with the checklist.”

After students spoke to each other about the revision process, I addressed the one student’s comment about wishing they had their writing partner. I said,

“Writers, I want you to know that anytime during writing time, you are free and able to find your writing partner and talk to them when you may need help.

Revising your pieces may not always be easy, please use any resource you have in this room when you feel like you need help!!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

I feel that choosing to extend the lesson from the previous day was an extremely valuable decision. Revising is not easy...not even for me! My students needed more instruction and teacher modeling on how to use their checklists and how to “fix-up” their writing to make it the best it could possibly be for publishing. I believe that the small group I worked with took their work seriously and I was so proud of what the one girl accomplished in such a short period of time. More instruction and modeling for that specific group was pertinent for them to find value in the process of revising.

What Was Challenging

It was again a challenge to confer with as many students as possible. I feel like that is always a challenge of mine as I want to be sure that my students are making the most out of the time they have for writing, but I also do not want to rush through the work we do together during conference time. I also found that some of my highly independent writers were finishing up quicker than others and became a distraction towards the end of writing time as they were talking to other students and were up and out of their seats. This behavior caused me to stop multiple times to give reminders to students about appropriate behavior.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Students know that there are multiple things they can be doing if they finish early. In writing, we have a saying “When you are done, you have just begun” and students know they can be starting a new piece, but because this lesson is all about revising, I feel that some students may have felt they couldn’t start a new piece. It may have been a good idea to address this issue before students started writing, and possibly even provided an activity for them to do if they happened to finish early.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

While some students still struggled with the process of revision, most seemed to “get it” a bit more today than yesterday. Extra modeling and instruction were key for students who struggled the first day. Students made comments like, “My piece is getting better!” or “Look at all my mark ups!”

Day 5- Ending with Feelings

Lesson Summary

Early in this unit, students ended stories with phrases like “and then we went home” or “the end.” In this lesson, I wanted to make sure students understood the power of endings as they are the last words a reader reads, and they leave a lasting impression.

I said,

“Writers, you have been working so hard on finishing up your pieces and we are getting closer to celebrating this work! Did you know, though, that it’s not only

important to write strong stories but it's important to tell and read stories well, also?"

I pulled out a mentor text that I would be using for this lesson: *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox. We had read this story towards the beginning of the year so students were familiar with it. I then described the importance of an ending and said,

"When you come to the end of a story, your voice needs to close down the story. Mem Fox says that your voice can make the end feel like the dessert to the end of a meal or the goodbye to the end of a visit. As I read the ending of Mem Fox's book, listen closely. Do you remember how Koala lost the race and went home very sad? But then her mother found her? The book ends like this: *Her mother said, "Koala Lou, I do love you," and she hugged her for a very long time.* Do you hear how Mem Fox ended her story with a strong feeling—in this case, love?" Because we should read endings like they are the most special words in the world, it's important we go back and revise them to make them better! Today I want to teach you that one way writers make strong endings is to end their stories with a feeling. Sometimes writers just tell how they feel, but other times they do what Mem Fox did...they use dialogue or action to show that feeling."

I then moved on to sharing a story written by a first grader. I told students that we could get good ideas from the work of other authors. I explained that when we look at other writers' work, we have to think about what they did well and how we can use it in our own writing. I would then read a piece by a first grade author to see if they could notice what he did at the end of his piece.

I read,

“One day me and my class went to the garden to plant bulbs. “How long do we have, Pat?” I said. I was jumping and hoping that I’d have a long time when Pat said, “Ten minutes.” I was so mad I stomped my foot. Steam came from my ears! “I want more time to plant!” “Eric, you are starting to annoy me. No other kid is annoying me, Pat said. All the kids ran to Pat, “Pat, Eric told us we only have ten minutes.” “Pat, we need more time!” And it went on and on and on.”

I asked students to think about what Eric did well at the end of his piece. I reread the last few lines again and said,

“Eric didn’t just end the story with what he did, like “I went home.” He wrote an ending that leaves the reader with a strong feeling—in this case, frustration or anger. He didn’t just say he was frustrated, he used dialogue to show those feelings.”

Next, I explained to students that they have a lot of choices when it comes to thinking about the work they will do as a writer. They are so close to sharing their stories and I also wanted them to practice reading their piece to a partner and work on revising the end so it sounds even better. I suggested they try to add a strong feeling at the end like Mem Fox or Eric did. I said, “Happy writing! Off you go!”

For writing time today, I gave students some time to work completely on their own with no support from me. I wanted to see how many would actually start taking risks and trying what we touched on during the mini-lesson. After five minutes passed, I called a small group to my back table. I told them, “I want you to reread the story you are going to publish and try making a stronger ending for it.” I reminded them to try reading the last line or page of their work with an ending voice like Mem Fox to see if they could *hear* if

their ending was powerful. “Think back and see if you can remember what you were actually feeling at this true time in your life. Then try writing an ending with those true feelings.”

I left this group alone as I walked around the room to observe what others were doing. I saw some writing, some rereading, and others who were just sitting there. As I noticed this I said,

“Writers, eyes here for a moment. I see some people who have done some work on their piece for publication and now they are just sitting in their seats, not doing much. Remember that writing work is never over until our workshop time runs out. Maybe you could go to another story in your folder and make those a little better, too!”

I checked back in with my small group and noticed that they had all attempted to write a stronger ending. I gave them praise for their efforts and told them that when they start the next day, they should reread their piece first and see if they like their new ending or if they could change it yet again with an even stronger feeling. The fact that they all tried something new was great!

Writing time ended and I called students to the carpet. I wanted to spend our last moments together talking about using more precise language to describe an emotion. I said,

“I saw many of you trying to end your stories like Eric Mem Fox. You were writing, *I was happy* or *I was sad*. Many of you were thinking about your endings in new ways. Well, happy can have many shades to it. You know how in really amazing boxes of crayons there are different shades of a color? Like there is fire

engine red or red-orange. Well, when it comes to feelings, like happy, there are shades of happy, too!”

I saw students’ faces scrunch up in a confused way so I continued my descriptions to feelings and said that if they were a little happy, someone might say they are glad. If they are really happy they might be thrilled! I did the same explanations for sad and mad. I asked if anyone could give them a different kind of word for mad. Several hands shot up in the air and I waited a moment for more. Finally, I called on a student who said, “Well, sometimes when I’m a little mad my mom calls me grumpy.” Other students shook their heads. I said,

“Wow! You are so right! Grumpy is a different kind of mad. So you see writers, we need to pay attention to and include feelings in our writing. Today we learned that there are shades to feelings. Now when you write, try to put that exact shade of happy, sad, or mad.”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

The use of a mentor text always engages my students a little bit more than usual. They are a group of students who become enthralled during a read aloud. They become invested in the text and love to talk about it afterwards. I remember that they particularly loved *Koala Lou* so it was a great text to use to portray the use of emotion. It’s really wonderful to see the growth my students have made since the beginning of this unit. They have become more focused and thoughtful and I’m seeing it more and more each day!

What Was Challenging

When presented with something new, I have a few students who shut down. When something may seem slightly too difficult for them, they refuse to try and I believe it is because they do not want to fail. I noticed this happening on a few different occasions today and it was hard to help them. Usually, a simple conversation with these students helps, but that didn't seem to happen today. It was quite disheartening.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I think if presented with the opportunity to do this lesson over, I would have made it a priority to pull those students who shut down and pair them up with a student who has a lot of confidence in their writing. The last thing I want is for my students to doubt themselves, so I think if they were paired with a student who could model not only great writing but positive and uplifting behaviors may have a huge impact on them!

What I Noticed About Individual Students

As I mentioned before, I noticed some students shutting down. In addition to this, I noticed students who had written two different endings and were rereading each to see which fit better with their stories. While it was disheartening to watch some of my students shut down, it was rather rewarding to see others fully grasp the concept of revision. It makes me think that what I'm doing is really working!

Day 6: Writers Make Their Pieces Beautiful to Get Ready for Publication

Lesson Summary

The day before our celebration! I could not believe that we had come to the end of this writing unit. The students would spend today preparing their pieces so they were ready to share. I started my mini-lesson by getting students excited. I shouted, “Yahoooo!” My students looked at each other and started laughing.

“Writers”, I said, “today is a really exciting and important day for everyone. You have all worked so hard to remember true stories from your own lives, but you also have made those stories easy for you and everyone else to read. But you have not stopped there! You have learned so many ways to revise a story to make them better. You have so much to celebrate! But before we share these pieces with other people, there’s some really important work left to do.”

Next, I used a cooking analogy to describe how beautiful presentation can lure a reader in. “Did you know that chefs who work in fancy restaurants have a saying, “People eat with their eyes first?” Every student giggled loudly and said, “What?! You can’t eat with your eyes!!” I giggled as well and continued on by saying,

“Well, not *really* with your eyes, of course. What they mean is that when food *looks* really beautiful and delicious, people can’t wait to dig in and eat! The way the food looks is the first thing that lures them in. If you had to choose between a plate where all the food was piled on top of each other or a plate where everything was carefully and beautifully arranged, you would probably pick the beautiful looking one, right?”

“Well, it’s just the same with your writing. When you take the time to make your story beautiful, when you are super careful and thoughtful, readers can’t wait to dig in and start reading! You have done incredible work, my friends, but now your stories deserve to be made beautiful, so that everyone wants to read them!”

I then moved to describing three ways writers could make their stories beautiful.

I said, “So today I want to teach you that before writers share their stories with an audience, they spend time making sure their writing is as clear, detailed, and beautiful as possible—just like chefs work hard to make a meal look as good as it tastes! Three ways you can do that are: by adding missing bits to your drawings, adding more color to your pictures, and checking words to make sure they are not too messy to read.”

Choosing a familiar class text, I said,

“Let’s pretend we are getting ready to share our fire drill story with an audience. Well, we actually could share this during our celebration tomorrow so let’s think about what we need to do to make it beautiful. I think that it would be a good idea to reread the words of our story.”

Students agreed and I invited them to read along with me because this was a piece we have worked on and gone back to multiple times. After rereading, I asked students what they thought we should do, letting them think about this for a minute or two. After giving them this time, I said,

“So what do you think? I think our story is pretty good so far, but turn to a partner now and share what you think we could add. Do you think we should add to our

pictures? Do we need more color? Are there any messy words that should be fixed?"

After discussing with their partners, I refocused them and asked, "Who wants to share?" Hands shot up. I called on a student who rarely participates during group learning experiences, he said,

"Well, me and my partner looked at the picture and saw that the tables in the room (our classroom) aren't colored like the real ones. So we should color the blue table, blue, the yellow table, yellow, and the red table, red." I saw some thumbs go up from other students.

"Wow", I said, "That is a great thing you observed! We should definitely do that so that our readers can recognize it's our classroom in the picture! Why don't you come on up and add those colors to our picture?"

"While Matt is working on that, what else could we add to our story?" Students looked as if they were thinking hard about what else was missing from our story. One student raised her hand and I called on her. She said, "Well, when there is a fire drill, we have to line up at the door. So we should add a picture of our door to this page and maybe draw some kids who are lining up at the door, too!" I gave this student a high five and started to add this to our class piece. After I finished, I said

"Did you see how we looked very closely at our own story that we were sure was finished, and were able to find many places where we could add even more? You will be doing this for your own stories today! As you get back to your table spots, think about the work you will do today. Writers always spend time making their writing beautiful before they share it with others. You can add missing bits to

your pictures, add color where it's needed, or fix up messy words or sentences.

Make sure you try out each of these three things today as you work. I am so excited to watch it all happen!"

During writing time today, I wanted to work with a small group of students who I knew had struggled with the editing process since the beginning. I also wanted to check in with all students as they began the process of fixing up their work. I met with my group to the back table and told them to get started while I checked in with the rest of the class for a few minutes. I made my way around the room and saw many students hard at work. A few of my students had taken the "adding color" aspect of editing to a whole new level as I saw some of them adding random colors just to get more on their page. I reminded them that the color they add should be meaningful, just like the drawings and words are.

After checking in with the rest of the class, I worked with the small group of students. The areas in which they struggled were very different. One student was still developing his phonemic awareness and he was having a difficult time getting letters or words on the page. Another student has a difficult time staying focused. Another student seems to focus too much on making things perfect that she crosses things out over and over. I worked individually with the students as I thought it would be more efficient. The end of this writing time came so quickly and I knew that students would need additional time before our celebration. I stopped the class after 25 minutes of writing and asked them to make their way to the carpet.

"Boys and girls I have admired your work today and I am very proud of what you have done. I did see, though, that no one has finished and I want to let you know

that we will have more time tomorrow to work on our pieces to make sure they are finished before we share with others.” I saw looks of relief on my students’ faces. It made me feel good about the decision I made to give them more time. “So tomorrow, we will spend more time revising and making our pieces beautiful. We want to be sure we have done all we can to make them wonderful! I hope you’re ready to continue this work tomorrow!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

I think using a piece that we had created together as a class was a good place to start when talking about “fixing up” our writing. This was still a fairly new concept for students so starting at a familiar place helped them. Allowing them to discuss editing possibilities with a partner took some pressure off and many more volunteered to share their thoughts after having these conversations with their partner.

What Was Challenging

The process of editing is important for students to understand. They need to know that writers and authors spend a lot of time fixing up their writing and it takes a lot of practice to find where pieces need to be revised. I knew it would be difficult for some students to grasp this concept and actually finish editing one piece in a single session of our writer’s workshop. It was challenging to see some students really struggle with managing their time. Calkins (2013) mentions trying to nudge students along during this

session and while I did that with some students, I knew it wasn't realistic for all of my students to finish. I'm glad that I decided to extend our editing session to give them more time to do this important work.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Because I already had a sense that some students would not finish, it may have been a good idea to give them two days to edit from the beginning and to have told them this before they started writing. This may have alleviated some stress, both for my students, and me and I feel that some students would not have felt the pressure to get all of this work done in one session.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

There were many differences in student writing during today's session. Writers who usually flourish seemed to edit with ease. They were able to spot areas where they could add more detail or words that needed to be written neater and they got right to work. Other students seemed to feel panicked and rushed and it showed in their work. Without thinking about their writing first, they simply made changes to places that did not need to be changed and their writing lacked detail. Their writing was also not legible and they made silly mistakes. Writers who struggle spent time trying to add more letters to their words, like extra vowels that did not need to be there, and took the time to try to get at least one whole sentence on a page.

Day 7: Continuing the Editing Process

Lesson Summary

My students were so excited to share their work with others. During the previous session, they spent time editing their pieces to make them ready for our celebration day! Many students seemed to feel rushed and none of them had quite finished. I knew that I had made the right decision in giving them an extra day to finish this work. As much as I tried to nudge them along, they were doing some great work making their pictures better, revising words and sentences, even using brand new sheets of paper to make their stories neat. I wanted to give them more time so they knew that I valued the work they were doing!

I started the lesson with a very quick whole group discussion. I didn't want to take too much of their editing time! I said,

“Writers, today we will continue fixing up our favorite pieces. Tomorrow, we will have our final celebration and we will have a publishing party! We will share our wonderful pieces with another class and you will get to show them how hard you have worked! Be proud of yourselves and remember to work hard! Off you go!”

During the first ten minutes of writing time, I decided to go around and take some notes on things that I saw. I was not interacting with students...I sat silently next to them to observe their choices and look at their writing. Because it was the second day of editing, I wanted to see their areas of strength and areas that I needed to target instruction for the next time. I noticed that many of them were collaborating with others at their tables. This made me happy, as sometimes students are hesitant to talk with each other during writing and want to come to me first. They seem to be following my reminders.

After I observed students' work, I had one-on-one writing conferences with a few students. I chose students who seemed to be having the most difficult time with editing as I wanted to be sure they finished today before we shared our pieces with another class the next day.

As I sat down and met with the first student, I had students read their piece to me. I always stress to students that if they can't read their own writing, no one else will be able to, so when I start a conference I like to have them read their piece. As we got to the last page, I noticed that the student had struggled with what she had written on this page. There was a lot crossed out and their pictures were not finished. This particular student is one who struggles with writing and often cannot maintain focus for long periods of time. I was proud of the fact that these students had worked so hard on the first two pages of their writing pieces. She was taking the editing process seriously and had done some great work.

After reading the first two pages, she got to the third page and looked at me. She said, "This page is really messy. It needs some fixing." I smiled and gave her a thumbs up and asked, "What do you think you need to fix?" She then said "Well it's pretty messy because I did a lot of crossing out so I can't even really read it. My picture's not done either!" We talked about what she wanted to put on this last page and I helped her plan her writing. Then, I had her say her sentence aloud and count the number of words. I then said, "Why don't you put some parking spaces on this page so that you can keep yourself more organized?" She started to do this immediately and I left her to work with another student.

The next student I worked with was having similar problems. He kept changing the words of his story and eventually it was very difficult for him to read what was on the paper. I was about to offer an idea when he asked, “Can I use some of our magic tape so this is not so messy?” “What a great idea!” I said. I gave him the tape and he began to cover the part he thought was too messy. After doing that, he immediately began to rewrite what he had on the page previously. I reminded him to take his time and use his best handwriting so he wouldn’t need to fix that part up again.

As independent writing time came to a close after 25 minutes, I asked students to bring their finished pieces to the carpet with them. I began by letting them know that I was so proud of the work they did over the last two days.

“Writers, I have to tell you...your pieces look absolutely beautiful! I think that when you share these with our special audience, they will be just as proud! So, your pieces *look* really great. But another thing writers do to get ready to share their stories is to make sure they *sound* really great, too. Since you will be reading your stories out loud tomorrow to our visitors, you will need to spend some time now practicing reading them to your partner so that when you read your writing, it sounds nice and smooth. Please find your partner now.”

Students picked up their writing pieces and found their partners and got eye-to-eye and knee-to-knee. They looked to me to see if they could begin. I said, “Right now, with your partner, you will take turns reading to each other. Remember to treasure each word like it was gold! Think back to when I read *Koala Lou* and how I read careful and slow.”

Students began reading their pieces and I crawled among them to listen in. I tried to coach the reading at times I felt necessary. I noticed that one pair had finished and I said, “Think about parts of your story that should be read more slowly and go back and try reading again.” As I listened to the ending of one student’s story, I said, “That was your ending? Can you let me know that with your voice? Maybe make your voice go down a little bit like I did when I read *Koala Lou*. This way, the reader will know that you are coming to the end.”

I couldn’t help but to be in awe of my students. Their writing had come so far since the beginning of the year! I couldn’t help but smile and applaud when they were done. To end today’s session I said, “Writers, can you believe we share our wonderful pieces tomorrow? I cannot wait to hear you read these pieces to a new audience! Everyone please give yourselves a big pat on the back! You seriously deserve it!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

It was definitely the right decision to give my students a second day on the challenging task of fixing up their stories for our reading celebration. I couldn’t imagine cramming all that important editing into one day. Students valued it much more and took their time. It was also beneficial for me because I could meet with students again on the same topic and help those that needed support in this area. I think they felt good knowing they had more time.

What Was Challenging

I still had two students who did not finish fixing up their pieces. At the end of the session, I noticed they seemed to feel defeated knowing they didn't finish. I would give them extra time at the end of the day to work with me to make sure their pieces were ready for our celebration! It was a challenge to be sure that every student understood the true meaning of editing and I'm not sure how to really make sure they do. I feel it's something that needs lots of practice! We have used editing checklists before, and reminding students to use these would have been beneficial to this process.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

While practicing reading to their partners, I noticed many students reading their pieces too fast or too slow. While I could correct them in the moment, I feel that it may have been a good idea to read one of my own pieces to them so that they could see a correct model of accurate pace and expression. This is something that I might do before we read to our audience during the next session. I also may have shown them two copies of my own writing: one original draft and my own fixed up piece so that they could see how adult writers edit.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

I expected there to be a wide range of writing done today. I noticed that some students were hard at work, while others seemed to be frustrated and kept putting their pencils down and sighing when things seemed difficult. Even others were not focused on the task at hand. There were two students who did not finish their editing but I knew I

would have time to work with them later in the day or the next day to be sure their pieces were ready to share. It's always disheartening to know that I'm not able to reach all students in one session, but I feel that I do the best I can!

Day 8: A Final Celebration: Bringing True Stories to Life

Lesson Summary

The day was finally here. My students were so excited to share their work with an audience other than their fellow classmates. The excitement began the moment they walked through the door. I heard them make statements such as, "Today we get to share our stories!" and "I cannot wait to show off my writing!" Hearing this made me that much more excited, as well!

When it was time for writing, I had students take their published piece from their writing folder and come to the carpet. I wanted to remind them about the growth that I've seen since the beginning of the unit. I said,

"Writers, think back to the very beginning of this unit when we started to talk about ways we could make our writing easy to read. Do you remember how we made two piles of our writing, one that you could read easily and one that was a bit tricky to read? Well, now just think about how huge your easy to read pile is now! You have all grown into writers who can really capture amazing events from your own lives. Your writing has grown into strong, detailed work because of all the effort you have put into writing time over the past few weeks. Now it's time to celebrate all that work!"

After we all gave a big cheer for ourselves, we lined up at the door and got ready to go into another kindergarten classroom to share with those students. As we walked in the hall, my students held their writing pieces like precious stones. They held their heads high and were ready to share their writing! As we walked into the room, the other teacher invited us to sit on the carpet. I worked with her as we partnered students off so that they could begin to share their work. After students were paired, I walked around the room to observe this wonderful occasion. I heard comments from the other students like, “Wow! I love your pictures” and “That was a great story!” My students were smiling from ear to ear. As students finished sharing with their partner, many ask if they could share with someone else! Many students shared with two or three different partners! I could tell that they were proud of their work and were excited to show others what they were capable of. As our sharing time came to an end, we thanked the other students and their teacher for allowing us to share our work with them. As we lined up at the door, we received a round of applause from this class...how exciting!

When we got back to our own classroom, I asked students to keep their pieces with them and return to the carpet. I said,

“Writers, I am so proud of you. I watched as you shared your writing with other people and I couldn’t help but think...can we share even more?! I was thinking that because we have worked so hard on all of our pieces, maybe we could take other pieces from your folders and put them on a huge bulletin board in the hall.

That way, people can read our writing whenever they walk by our room!”

I got thumbs up, smiles, and whispers of “Oh my gosh!” I sent them off to their seats to look through their writing folders. As they rummaged through them I said, “Remember

boys and girls, look for one piece that you would really want to share with others. Make sure it's a piece that has colorful pictures, clean pages, and sentences that match each of your pictures.”

As students began to choose their pieces, I asked them to reread their writing to be sure it was the piece they wanted to display. When everyone chose a piece, I collected them and told students that they would see their writing hanging on our bulletin board when they came into school the next morning.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

This day was a positive, wonderful experience for my students. From beginning to end, I saw excitement and pride on their faces and I could not have asked for anything more. I also believe that the bulletin board idea was a good choice. This was another way for them to feel like their work was valued and that even more people would get to see their work. As we shared with the other class, I did not want students paired in any particular way. I wanted them to feel that they were sharing their writing with many other people and pairing them with a particular student was not necessary.

What Was Challenging

I believe that this day went smoothly from beginning to end. It was, however, difficult to listen to all students share with their partners. I made sure that I got around to as many as I could, but I definitely did not hear every student share their whole story.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Because it was difficult for me to hear all students share, I could have had each student share with our own class as well. I wanted students to see that I valued their work and I was just as excited, as they were to read their pieces to others. However, this would have taken much longer than sharing with partners in another class and time for writing is limited, but an exception could have been made for today's celebration. It may have been a good idea to ask students to share what they felt after sharing their writing once we were back in our own classroom. That way, if someone did feel that they needed more time to share, we could have taken the time at that moment.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

It's always interesting to observe my shyer students when they are asked to share their work. I loved seeing these students interact with their peers and it was wonderful to see their confidence shine a bit brighter! They made eye contact with their partner and made sure that their voice was loud enough for the partner to hear.

Day 9: Writers Study the Kind of Writing They Plan to Make: Start of Our

Informational Unit

Lesson Summary

Today was the start of a new unit: informational writing with a specific focus on how-to writing. It's exciting to start something new, but for a few of my students change can be quite difficult. I have noticed that they seem to lose confidence in their abilities when they are unsure.

I started the lesson with a play on a ribbon cutting ceremony. I had ribbon around our meeting area, blocking anyone from coming in. I did not say a word about this and let students make some guesses as to why it was there before we began. While they were still in their seats I said,

“Writers, this morning I need to tell you that whenever people have built something new like a library or a sports stadium, the people put together a ribbon cutting ceremony for its opening day. Before anyone can enter, people gather for a ribbon cutting ceremony. Today, we will not only start a new unit, which is a very big deal, but we will also start a whole new kind of writing! So will you all gather at the edge of our meeting area for our ceremony?”

Some students looked excited, while others looked quite confused and unsure of what was going on. When everyone gathered near the ribbon, I asked if they would sing a writing song with me. I explained it was similar to “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” We sang, “If you’re a writer and you know it, clap your hands.” Then “If you’re a speller,” and finally, “If you’re a storyteller.” Based on their smiles and enthusiasm, I could sense that they thought this was the best thing ever! Once they had calmed down a bit, I grabbed my scissors and in a commanding voice I proclaimed, “Today marks the beginning of a brand new unit. Our class will start a whole new kind of writing.” I cut the ribbon and said, “Let us begin!” As the ribbon fell to the floor, students shouted and jumped to their spots on the carpet.

The teaching point today would be that there are different kinds of writing. To help the students make this connection, I had different pictures of dogs on the Smart Board. They all looked dramatically different. I asked, “What are these?” One student

said, “That’s easy! These are dogs!” I nodded and said, “You are right. They are dogs, but they don’t look the same do they? That’s because they are different *types* of dogs.” I then shared two different kinds of writing with them. One was a story we wrote together as a class from our previous unit, the other was a set of directions we used earlier in the year about how to write a true story. I said,

“These are both pieces of writing, but they are not the same. One is a true story we wrote together, and the other is how-to writing. Sometimes we call it directions. Starting today, we will write how-to books. Before a writer begins, they always think about what kind of piece they are writing, then they look at examples to learn how to do this new kind of writing.”

“Today I thought that you could maybe do this work on your own. I am going to read you how-to writing and then I will zip my lips. You will need to work extra hard and see if you can study this new kind of writing to figure out how it goes and how it is different from a story. Do you think you can do this?”

I got thumbs up from most students...others looked nervous to try something new. While I wanted to give them the extra support, I also wanted to follow Calkins’ unit very closely to ensure I was giving opportunities for my students to take on more responsibility!

I then encouraged the students to think about a topic they could write about. I said,

“Before you do this kind of writing, you will need to have a topic in mind that you will write about. Think about something you know how to do really well that you

could teach other people. Do you know how to ride a bike, or take care of a pet, or to play soccer?”

I left students thinking for a moment and then asked them to put a thumb in the air if they had a topic. Everyone did!

Next, I read a small part of a narrative and then moved to our “How to Write a True Story” chart. The students are familiar with this chart, as we have used it many times in the previous unit. I used words like, first, next, and then and asked children to notice that the order was important. I then told students that they were going to be starting this work on their own. On each of their tables, they had how-to books that I had created and there were some blank papers, as well. I said, “Remember, you can use the people at your table and try to help each other figure out this new kind of writing and then get going on it on your own.” I was a bit nervous to see how they would do with this, but I stuck to the unit very closely and was excited to see the turn out.

During writing time, I moved quickly around the tables and didn’t worry about the quality of the work, but rather looked closely at what students were starting to do and then target my instruction to those areas. As I sat down at one table, I noticed that some students seemed to be enthralled with the how-to books and I made it a point to acknowledge that. I stopped the class and said,

“Oh my goodness, boys and girls. Timmy is making such wise decisions right now. He is studying the how-to books very closely and noticing how these books are different than the other writing we have done before. Way to go, Timmy!”

I moved on to another table and noticed a couple of students who were not doing much reading or writing. I sat down next to one and said, “What’s going on over here?”

Are you stuck?" She replied, "I just don't know how to do anything!" I thought of something that we do together in school to help her realize she does know how to do things. "What's something we all do together every morning?" She looked puzzled, but I gave her time to think. Finally, she said, "We have morning meeting!" I smiled and said, "You're right! I bet you could write a how-to book on that! What's the first thing we do?" She replied, "Well, we all have to go to the carpet and the helper of the day is the leader of the group." I sat with her as she wrote this down the best she could, then left her to finish on her own.

Time went very quickly today and before I knew it, it was time to stop. I asked the students to put their writing in their folders and join me on the carpet. After we were settled, I said "Can someone tell me one way how-to writing is different from the story writing we did in the last unit?" Hands slowly went up and I called on one student: "These books had numbers!" Another student said, "It tells you how to do something." After hearing from a few students, we created a class chart together called *How-To Writing*. On our list we included: Tells what to do, in steps, numbers the steps, and has a picture for each step. I left room to add more as we continued the unit.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

The ribbon cutting ceremony seemed to get students *very* excited about this new kind of writing. They talked about this special event for the rest of the day and told other students about it during lunchtime! Starting something new can be scary, but using the ribbon cutting ceremony made it a special moment and let the students know we would be doing some great work in this next unit. I'm glad I followed Calkins suggestion of this

part of the lesson. I was scared to let students go completely off on their own with brand new writing, but most did a really great job. Even though some students did not get much writing done during this session, they were exploring the books left at their tables and gaining valuable knowledge they could take with them for the rest of the unit.

What Was Challenging

It was hard for me to not intervene and give students suggestions while they were exploring the how-to books and starting their own writing. It was a challenge to see some of my lower writers struggle, even though I had helped most think of topics if they were stuck. Even though this was a challenge, I believe it worked and I was able to really see which areas I may have to re-teach.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I think that having the books and paper at the students' tables was beneficial as they spent time exploring them before they got to writing; however, it may have been even more beneficial if we did this exploring together as a whole group and talked about the components before writing. This would allow students to practice the skill even more before attempting it independently. I wanted to stick to Calkins lesson exactly as she intended it to go, though, which is why I did not do this. For my group of students, though, it needed to be slightly different.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Students who tend to struggle more were really using their resources. They looked through the books at their tables and turned to their peers when they needed help. Other students really took off during this session. They started to write their own pieces after exploring the resources and were working independently on their writing.

Day 10: Writers Use What They Already Know

Touching and Telling the Steps across the Pages

Lesson Summary

I started by reading from a how-to text called *My First Soccer Game* by Alyssa Capucilli (2011). I said,

“Yesterday we made a chart of all the things that are included in how-to writing.

Today, I am going to read a few pages of this how-to text and I want you to think about the things you notice about this writing.”

As I read, I noticed students whispering to each other and pointing at the book in spots that stood out as how-to writing. I finished the pages and asked students to share their thoughts. One student said, “It had numbers in the corners. Those are the steps.” Another student said, “It tells you how to play soccer.” I gave students a thumbs up and continued with the lesson. “Today, boys and girls, I am going to read you a how-to piece that I wrote called *How to Make a Smoothie*. I want you to think about whether or not my piece has all the things we put on our chart yesterday. After I’m done reading, turn to the person next to you and you can start sharing your ideas.”

After reading my piece, students turned to each other and started sharing their ideas. After a minute I stopped them and asked to share. I said, “Did my piece tell what to do, in steps? Did I number those steps? Did I include pictures for each step?” Students’ thumbs went up in the air and they agreed that I had done all of those things.

“Today I want to teach you that when writing a how-to piece, there are lots of new things to do, but it’s important to remember all the old things you have already learned when you were writing true stories. You still have to say what you are doing, you still draw pictures, and still write words to match your pictures.”

I then moved into starting a class piece together. I said,

“Let’s write our own how-to piece together, about something we all know how to do. I’m thinking that maybe we could write a piece on how to have a fire drill since we have all done that before!

What do you think?” I heard roars of “yes” and “oh yeah” among students and we got to work.

“The first thing I have to do is the same as when I write a story. I need to think about what I want to write, and touch and tell on each page, but this time I am telling what to do, in steps. First I need to remember how a fire drill goes.” I sat silently for a moment, thinking carefully. I wrote in the air *How to Have a Fire Drill* on the first page and then moved on. I touched the next page and said, “Step 1. When you hear the loud bell, you know it’s time for a fire drill.” I moved on to page two and said, “Step 2. Then you stop what you’re doing and line up quietly at the door.” I stopped there and told students what I just did as the writer. “Do

you see how I named the steps and I just touched the page, telling what I would write?”

“So today when you are writing, after you touch and tell each page, you will need to go back to page one, say the words to yourself, then draw the picture of that step. Drawing the picture first will help you know what to write on that page! Good luck today, and off you go!”

I sat down next to a group of writers and many of them started shouting out what they were doing. I said, “Just ignore me and get going. I want to study the work you are doing for a bit.” As I watched them, I noticed that a few were already writing and I carefully reminded them to stop and go back and touch and tell for each page. “Planning your story first, makes it much easier to do the writing!”

At another table, I noticed one student who was doing her planning in a beautiful way and I mentioned this to the whole table. I said,

“Writers, may I show you what Megan is doing? Perhaps you could give it a try? Not only is she touching and telling each page, but she is saying the step aloud first. This helps her organize the steps and remember what will go on each page. I would like each of you to try that now.”

As I moved to another group, I noticed the students were all having some trouble. I brought out the how-to text we had read earlier. I re-read the pages and asked the students to talk with each other about how the text includes all the how-to “stuff.”

At the end of writing time, I stopped the students and asked them to bring their piece to the carpet, even if it wasn’t finished. I said,

“Writers, earlier we looked at my how-to piece to see if it had all the characteristics of the how-to writing we studied the day before. Look at your writing that you have in front of you and see if that has all the characteristics, too. As I read from our how-to chart, talk to the person next to you and point out all the places in your writing where you did that item from our chart. If you haven’t done some of this yet, work with your partner to do it now.”

I saw students putting numbers on their pages, circling words that needed to be fixed, and pointing out that they didn’t finish all their pictures. After their conversations, I said, “Writers, you are really thinking like how-to writers now! We will continue this work through the rest of the unit! Great job today!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

Using a piece I created helped students see all the how-to components put in action. I also think that starting a piece together on something that we have all experienced was a good choice for the start of the lesson as familiarity helps boost my students’ confidence!

What Was Challenging

This lesson was very long, about 15 minutes longer than a normal writing session. The students were on the carpet for much longer than they were used to—an extra ten minutes. It was challenging to keep their focus and attention. Many were already wiped out before the writing even began!

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I may have split this lesson up into two sessions, or given students a break to get some movement in, in between our time as a whole group and independent writing time because it was evident that they needed some sort of movement break as they were getting antsy and their focus shifted elsewhere. I also think that I should have extended the creation of our whole group writing. We stopped after step 2 and I think students would have benefited from at least having a conversation with a partner about the rest of the steps included in a fire drill so that they could have seen a whole piece completed. However, I was thinking about time and I knew that most of them were getting antsy!

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Today I noticed that some students were again having difficulty coming up with a topic. Some seemed to move right through their piece with ease while others barely got started. I need to think about how I can get them thinking about the things they can do and what they can teach others. This will need to be addressed tomorrow!

Day 11: Digging Deeper into the “How-To” Genre

Lesson Summary

I wanted to start this lesson with allowing students to explore how-to books that I created so that they got more practicing studying this writing and seeing what characteristics it has. I gave them this opportunity yesterday at their tables, but not all students took this opportunity. Giving them time to do it in a whole group setting on the

carpet would allow us to take the time to discuss what they found. The books were scattered in various places around the room and I broke the class up into groups to work with a small group. Groups would work with their how-to book for 3-5 minutes and then I would move them on to another.

“Writers, today before we do any writing, you are going to work with a small group and will explore two different how-to books. I want you to look for the characteristics of a how-to piece and be ready to share what you found with the class once we are finished.” I then split the class into groups and assigned them to a starting point. Once they got started, I walked around the room to hear some of their conversations. Without my help, groups had assigned one person to hold the book and flip through the pages. I heard things like, “Well, how-to writing needs to have numbers and this one does”, and “This book is not just a story about riding a bike, but it’s telling us how to do it.” I heard lots of phrases like “in order” and “step-by-step.” These were very important to the genre of how-to writing so I was glad I was hearing it during their conversations! After having the opportunity to work with two different books, I brought students back together as a whole group and we talked about what they noticed.

“So, writers, I had you explore these books again so that every single student got the opportunity to study this genre because I noticed yesterday that not everyone took the time to look at the books that were on your tables. What did you notice about these books and how they fit into how-to writing?” I was shocked to see every hand go up! I called on a boy who is very shy and hesitant to participate in all areas. He said, “There were numbers on all the pages.” I agreed, nodded, and then asked, “What are those numbers for?” He sat silently for a moment while other hands went up, but I gave him time to

think about it. Finally, he said, “Do they tell you the steps?” I smiled and said, “Yes! Those are the steps. They are numbered so that you know order is important. Number 1 has to come before number 3. Good work, Josh.”

I asked what else people noticed, and one girl said, “We looked at one book about riding a bike and said that it wasn’t just a story about a bike, but it was teaching us.” I responded with, “Great noticing, Anna! So you saw that these books teach us how to do something. The book you had was teaching you how to ride a bike!”

I decided to explain how-to writing in a different way so that those students who seemed to be struggling more than most over the last couple days could start to feel more confident. All of my students know how to do something really well. So if I explained it this way, and that they are writing to teach others who may not know how to do that “thing”, I would hope that ideas would start flowing! I said,

“Writers, when we write how-to pieces, we are sharing our talents with others.

We all know how to do things, well. Miss Bower can dance well, and I think I am a very good bike rider! When we write how-to pieces, we are teaching the reader how to do something they might not know how to do! It’s important we remember to number our steps so that the reader knows that order matters. If I were writing about how to make a milkshake, I wouldn’t have step number one be turn the blender on! That wouldn’t make sense! You have to think extra hard about the order!” Smiles and giggles were heard among the students and next, I moved on to making a class list of things we could teach others how to do.”

Next I said, “Since we all know how to do something, I want you to share with the class some things you know how to do and we will make a class list titled, *What Can*

We Teach Others?” I asked students to think for a moment about all the different things they know how to do. I asked if they knew how to tie their shoes or if they were good at riding their bike. I said, “Do you know how to use the computer at school? Think and be ready to share your ideas!”

Students put their head in their hands, something they always do when I give them a few moments to think. After a minute or two I had them lift their heads up and asked them to share. “Ok. So let’s make a list of things we know how to do. “Jason, what could you teach someone else how to do?” He said, “Well, I make cookies with my mom a lot so I could probably tell you how to do that!” “Great”, I said. “Let’s add that to our list.” A few more people shared more ideas like how to brush your teeth, how to get ready for school, and how to feed a dog. I added all of these to our class list and displayed it where students could see it while they work. After this, I wanted to address the fact that not all students would be able to use these ideas. I said, “Writers, remember that you will need to think about things *you* know how to do. Would you be able to write a piece on how to drive a car?” I got lots of giggles and smiles after this comment. Students responded with “No! We don’t know how to do that!” “You’re right,” I said. “So make sure that you are using topics you really know how to do. You are writing to teach other people...just keep that in mind.”

After this, I showed students that I had created a slide show of picture ideas that I would display on the Smart Board while they were writing today. That way, if they got stuck, they could look up to the board or our class chart for some ideas. Some of the ideas included tying shoes, blowing a bubble, playing a sport, making pizza, etc.

Today during independent writing, I spent some time with a couple of students who seemed to be struggling with ideas. I had heard a few students say over the last few days, “I just don’t know what to write about!” I pulled these students in a small group and worked individually with each one at my back table. While I worked with one student, we brainstormed some ideas of things he knew how to do and made a list he could keep in his folder. I said, “Anytime you are starting a piece and feel stuck, you can pull out this list and use it to help you. Sometimes it takes me a while to come up with an idea to write about, but once I have that idea something clicks and I turn into a writing machine!” We chose a topic for him, how to ride a scooter, and he began writing his first step.

As for the next student, she was stuck in the middle of her piece. I said, “So tell me what you’re writing about, Anna.” She replied with “I’m writing about how to log on to the computer.” I thought this was a great topic to choose because we go to the computer lab every week and it’s often a literacy center students go to, as well. Students have their own ID and password and use it to log on. I asked her to read me what she had so far. She said, “First, put in your username. You need to use the keys.” This was her first page. As she turned to the second page, it was blank. She said, “This is where I’m stuck.” I walked Anna through the process of logging on to the computer and had her tell me exactly what she does. I took her how-to book away from her and just had her tell me. She was able to tell me that the next step was to put in your secret password and that it is all numbers. I said, “See how easy it is when you plan what you want to say first? Make sure you do that from now on!”

As writing time ended, I asked students to put their pieces away and come to the carpet. I wanted to end our time with some discussion about how students felt now that

we had spent a few days in the unit. I invited students to turn to a partner and said, “Writers, I want you to get eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee with a partner. I want you to tell them one thing you’re feeling about this new kind of writing we are doing. I will give you a few minutes to do this.” As students talked to one another I heard different things. One student said, “I am having a hard time. I love writing stories but this is so different.” Another said, “I love this! I know how to do a lot of things, so I think it’s easy to write this way.” Again another said, “I feel okay about it. It’s not too hard but not very exciting.” What different opinions they had! I’m glad they were sharing how they felt, even if it wasn’t positive! I did a clapping pattern to bring the class back together. “So I heard many different things that you are all feeling. I hope that as we continue this unit, we can all have positive, happy feelings about the work we are doing. You are all working so hard and I want you to know that I am very proud of you!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

Anytime I can incorporate technology, even if just a little bit, my students become more engaged. Using pictures of different how-to examples during their writing time was very beneficial. I thought that it could have become a distraction for some, but I didn’t see this at all. Students looked up to the board when they were stuck, but did not spend too much time away from their writing. Creating a class list of things we know how to do was also time well spent. Brainstorming ideas together was a good way to get students thinking about all the things they know how to do! Sometimes a conversation with a partner or group can boost their confidence! Also, allowing them to explore the how-to

books even more was beneficial. They did well working with small groups and they were able to pin point the how-to characteristics of the books in front of them.

What Was Challenging

Again, there was a lot of time spent on the carpet. However, this was beneficial for students so that they could really grasp the concept of how-to writing and brainstorm some ideas. Some of my more active students did have a difficult time sitting for that long.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Honestly, I'm not sure that I would change anything from this lesson. Although the discussion portion took longer than normal, I feel that all aspects of this lesson were positive and my students gained a lot of "how-to" knowledge!

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Observing students' discussions with one another at the end of writing was eye opening. Some of my more confident writers were ones who had said it was difficult for them and that they didn't feel like they knew how to do many things. I would have to be sure to address this concern the next day so that they do not feel discouraged as we continue this unit.

Day 12: Writers Become Readers Asking, “Can I Follow This?”

Lesson Summary

In the previous unit, *Writing for Readers*, students learned that writers are also readers. I taught this by explaining that their pencils were magical. I explained that we not only use it for writing, but when we flip it to its other side, we can use it to read our work. I remember saying, “That magical side of your pencil (the eraser) will help you go back and keep track of all you’ve written.” Today, I would go back to this concept, but focus more on comprehension and monitoring their writing to see if it makes sense.

I invited students to come to the carpet and asked them to bring their writing folders with them. I said,

“Writers, yesterday I noticed that Allison was writing a step in her “How-to Brush Your Teeth” piece and then she did something really great! She flipped her magical pencil to the other end and used it as a pointer to reread her work! After she did that, she realized that she forgot a word in her sentence and she added it in. Can we all give Allison a big round of applause?”

Children smiled at Allison, clapped for her, and I heard one say, “Wow, Allison. Way to go!”

Next I said, “Now I want you all to take out the pieces you were working on yesterday. Use that magical pencil to reread just one page of your piece, and if you notice something is missing, flip it back and fix things up.” As students pulled their pieces from their folders and got to work, I noticed some fixed nothing, others added capitals or punctuation, and some crossed things out. As I noticed some were finishing up and sitting

silently I said, “If you happen to finish quicker than others, you may reread the next page, as well.” After a few more moments, I signaled the group to come back together.

I said,

“I loved what I saw just now. Some of you crossed things out and others of you realized you were missing something from your work. Using that magical pencil really helped you out! Today, I want to teach you that writers don’t just reread their words. They also do it to check that their writing makes sense. Because we write for others, it’s important for us to make sure we can follow our own writing. To do this in how-to writing, writers reread to a partner or to themselves and make sure it’s easy to follow the steps.”

Next I demonstrated working with a partner, checking directions and noticing whether or not they make sense. I said, “The best way to check if your steps make sense is to read them to someone who will try to follow along. If your partner can’t follow along, that means your steps don’t quite work and you’ll need to do some fixing. Is someone willing to help me?” Many hands shot up in the air, fingers wiggling, with “oohs” and “ahhs” begging to be picked. I called on Abby and asked her to come up with her piece. I said,

“Abby come on up and sit right next to me. You will read me your piece and I will try to follow along, okay? Her piece is not quite finished so she will read me the first part and I’ll try to follow it. Abby, it’s easiest if you read one step, then do that step, then read the next step and do it. Go ahead!”

Abby began to read her piece. “Put your hands on the floor.” Still sitting in my chair, I bent down and put my hands on the floor. I heard giggles and said, “Ok. I did it.

Keep reading.” She said, “Tuck your head and then put it on the floor.” Still sitting, I did that, but then tumbled off of the chair. Everyone, including Abby laughed loudly! “Uh oh”, Abby said, I guess I have some fixing to do!”

After laughing with my students, I did a clapping pattern to calm them down and get them refocused. I turned to Abby and said, “You’re right. That’s what happens sometimes when you go back and reread your work to a partner. You realize you might have to change some things. Today when you work, writers, think about all you have learned. What are some things you could do today?” Abby shouted out, “I could fix up my work and make a better piece on somersaults!” I agreed and said, “Definitely!” Another student said, “We should use our magic pencils and reread.” I nodded and added, “You might reread to yourself or to a partner to see if your steps are easy to follow! Don’t be afraid to try to follow your partner’s steps, too! Let’s get right to work!”

I knew that some children would need some extra support in today’s work. I pulled a group of three to my back table. These students had only one piece in their folders...and those pieces weren’t even finished, yet. As I was working with this group I had kids coming up to me with problems: “I can’t really play soccer in here!” and “I don’t have the ingredients to make a pizza!” I stopped the whole class and said, “Writers, I realize that you can’t really act out all of the steps your partner may be reading to you! You need to *imagine* you are following the steps!”

As I continued to work with my group I focused more on their individual needs. With one student, I encouraged her to go back and plan each page out because she could not specifically remember what she wanted to say. After she planned out each page, I had

her say it to the person sitting next to her. As it neared the end of writing time, I walked around the room and stopped the class to say,

“Writers....when you are reading the directions to your partner and they say something like, “Wait, I’m confused.” Or they stop and look confused, that is your cue that you have some changing to do. Don’t just leave it how it is! Revise it! Add something new! Cross out! That way you can be sure your writing is easy to follow!”

As time ran out, I called for students to stop where they were, bring their pieces to the carpet and sit next to a partner. Not all of them had read their work to another student. Some had chosen to read to themselves. And while that was fine, I wanted them to have the opportunity to share with a partner. I said, “Writers, I want you to read your piece to your partner and see if they can picture themselves doing each step. Ask yourself, “Are these directions clear? Do I know what to do first, next, last?” If not, let your partner know!” I observed as students listened and read their pieces to each other. Many eyes were closing, and hands were moving as students imagined the steps. I heard compliments and “Huh’s?” as kids were confused. The work they were doing was really great! After they shared I turned their attention back to me and said, “Writers, the work you’ve done today was not easy! You did your best to reread your writing and even gave others help! Keep up the good work!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

Going back to rereading happened at a good point in the unit. My students spent the last few days writing how-to books, exploring a new genre, and doing some really great work. I was pushing them and challenging them, but they are capable of this tough work. Rereading to check if their writing made sense was also not easy, but having the option of working with a partner was a good choice. Using a student's work as a model was also good for students to see. Making it a fun and engaging experience also made it easier for them to grasp the concept of unclear directions as they saw with the somersault example.

What Was Challenging

This new genre was not coming easily to a few students. While I didn't expect everyone to switch easily from narrative to informational writing, I had hoped the experiences they had early on in the unit would help all of them transition into this new form of writing. Tailoring my instruction to these students' needs would continue to be something I would need to do. It's difficult, though, to be conscious of how often I meet with these students so that I'm also conferring with other students, as well.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Using a student's writing for me to follow was a good model for students. However, it might have been even more beneficial to take it a step further. I might have

asked the class how they would have helped Abby revise her piece so it was easier to follow.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

My most outgoing student, McKenzie, who always wants to work with others kept to herself. She reread her writing to herself, remained quiet and focused the whole time. This was nothing too concerning, but still something worth noting.

Day 13: Writers Answer a Partner's Question

Lesson Summary

Today during writing I was observed by the vice principal. A little added stress and pressure to my plate! Today, students would be given another opportunity to experience work with a partner. I started by going back to our magical pencils and said, "Writers, I know many of you have been working hard at rereading your how-to pieces. How many of you have used that magical pencil to help?" Hands and thumbs went up!

"How many of you have reread to a partner, checking to see if they can follow your steps?" Less hands and thumbs went up this time and I said, "Well if you haven't done that yet I want you to give it a try today! You should feel lucky that there are people in the room who will not only listen to your work, but will also speak up and say "I'm confused" when they feel this way."

I had written my own how-to piece to use for today's lesson. It was written poorly on purpose so that student's would be able to help me fix it up. I said, "Writers, guess what I did over the weekend? I wrote my own how to piece on how to make peanut butter

and jelly! I was so excited to write this piece but I noticed there was no partner to help me out, so I need you to be my writing partner. Is there someone who can come up here to help me?" I would choose one person to come up and be my partner but I would ask all the students to follow along at the carpet. I said, "Even though everyone will follow along at the carpet, I need one person who will try to follow my directions and will also let me know where I might need to fix things up." I chose Julie to come up and help. "Julie, you will need to listen carefully to my writing and follow my steps *exactly* how I say them, okay? She nodded. In front of her was a jar of peanut butter, a jar of jelly, a plastic knife, and a loaf of bread. I told Julie she would be using these materials and then turned to the rest of the class and said, "Julie is my writing partner now, but all of you need to follow along. Try and pretend you have an imaginary loaf of bread, and imaginary jars of peanut butter and jelly in front of you!"

I then started to read my piece to Julie. "Step 1...Get the jar of peanut butter and put it on the bread." I was hoping that Julie would put the whole jar of peanut butter on top of the loaf of bread. She did just that! As she did it, she smiled and the rest of the class giggled. I looked at them and said, "Wait, what's so funny? Aren't my directions clear enough?" Julie and looked at me and said, "No! You need to actually open the jar and spread the peanut butter!" I said, "Oh, no! I guess I need to fix it up! Who agrees with Julie?" All hands in the audience went up! Then I said, "Well I am so glad that I have you guys to help me now. I am not going to write the whole story now but you are going to help me with step number one."

I turned to Julie and said, "So, Julie, why didn't my piece make sense?" She smiled and quickly said, "Your step said to put the jar on the bread! That is just silly!" I

thanked her for her honesty and for being a great partner then turned to the rest of the group. “So, writers, what is the very first thing I need to do to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? Think about the very first step right now. I gave students about thirty seconds to think then said, “Okay who wants to share?” Michael raised his hand nicely and I called on him. He said, “You need two pieces of bread.” I asked students to put a thumb in the air if they agreed with Michael. All thumbs went up. “Nice work, Michael. Yes, we need two pieces of bread.” I turned to my paper and wrote; *First, get out two pieces of bread.* I then called on another student to give me the next step and they said, “Open the jar of peanut butter and spread it on the bread.” I asked him, “Do I spread it with my hands?” He laughed and said, “No! With the knife!” I gave him a thumbs up and then wrote on my paper, *Then, open the peanut butter jar and spread it on the bread with a knife.* I reread what I had written and asked students what they thought. They agreed that it sounded much better than what I originally had. I then said, “Writers, thank you so much for helping me out. My writing was not clear enough and you helped me realize I needed to make some changes.”

During independent writing time, students would be sitting next to a partner, which I had chosen beforehand, and they would start by reading their stories to one another. I said,

“Today when you are working, you will first listen closely to your partner’s piece and really act it out, step-by-step, like Julie did for me. When you aren’t really sure what your partner’s writing means, you need to let them know so they can do some fixing.”

My time during independent writing would be spent moving around the room listening to partner conversations and observing their interactions. I heard some disagreements and arguments... “I can’t act this out! These directions aren’t clear!” I immediately addressed this situation and reminded the student that even though we are giving our partner advice, we need to be nice about it and do it in a way that will make them feel good about their work. I also had to give several reminders about just pretending to act it out because we would not have the objects we needed to really do it. This was difficult for some students to grasp.

As time wound down, I realized that writing time went by very quickly today. Acting out and revising took up a lot of writing time. I chose to extend it into the time we normally end as a whole group. Students would have 5-7 extra minutes to write. I said, “Writers, I’m realizing that we need some extra time to write, today. Instead of meeting as a whole group we will extend our writing time a bit more. You have 5-7 extra minutes. At the end of this time, I am going to ask that you share all you’ve done today with the person next to you.”

As students finished writing time I encouraged them to give their partner one compliment after they shared all their hard work from the day.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

The mini-lesson from today really helped students see the importance of being clear. Having the actual items there took it a step further. It was also an experience

(making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich) that all of my students have had. Conference time was positive and valuable despite some disagreement between partners.

What Was Challenging

Not all of my students seemed to understand exactly what they had to do. It was also very difficult to see multiple partners during conference time. I realized that I was spending a bit too much time with some people. This is something that I always struggle with during writing time. I hate to rush our conversations but I need to make sure I am managing my time with each student.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I would have kept a small group of students at the carpet after our whole group discussion. This would have been a group of students who needed direct instruction from me on what to do for their writing time. There were students who did not do the acting out part first and missed out on this valuable time. Given the chance to do this again, I would have reminded them of what their responsibilities were for writing time.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

As mentioned previously, some students did not seem to know what to do. I also noticed some partnerships did not go as well as I had hoped. I need to evaluate who worked together today and make changes for the next time students would be working with a partner.

Day 14: Writers Label Their Diagrams to Teach Even More Information

Lesson Summary

I started today's lesson by reminding the class of yesterday's work and how they had to try to follow my unclear directions. I said, "Remember yesterday when my peanut butter and jelly piece said, "Put the jar on the bread?"'" Students laughed with each other and one said, "Yeah that was silly!"

I nodded and agreed and said, "You're right. It didn't make much sense. With your help, though, I realized that details really matter! My piece made much more sense when we added details like, "open the jar" and "use the knife to spread it." So, today I want to teach you that one way we can add even more detail to our writing is by adding detailed pictures called diagrams. Writers use labels on these detailed pictures using the most specific words they can."

Next, I uncovered a large picture of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that would go with my piece from the previous day. "So this is a little different than a regular picture of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. This diagram shows all the parts and ingredients very clearly. It will help me add many details to my peanut butter and jelly piece, but it's missing something that can give even more information to my readers." Multiple students shouted out, "Labels!"

With a smile and a nod, I agreed and said, "You got it!" I then asked students to watch as I labeled a part of my diagram. I did my thinking out loud for them to hear. I looked at my diagram and said

"Okay, so here's my sandwich. I know it's a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and I remember when I ate it, I had nice, thick bread. Ooo, thick is a really specific

word. I'll need to use that. Hmm...I should also say what kind of bread it was. It was wheat bread. So I'll make an arrow point to my bread and write, *thick, whole wheat bread.*" I turned to my students and said, "Do you see how I first looked at my diagram, then took my time to think of the most specific words I could for just one part?"

I then asked students to help label the rest of my diagram. I reminded them to think of the most specific words they could. Some students turned to someone else on the carpet to ask what their thoughts were. Using a peer as a resource without a reminder? I was all for it! After a couple of minutes, I brought them back together. "Who has an idea for a label?" I waited a moment and called on a student who did not have his hand up "What do you think, Cody?" He was taken by surprise since he did not have his hand up. He responded with, "Uh...I don't know." I directed his attention to our diagram and asked him to think about what else we could label on our sandwich. I used that word on purpose hoping it would help him. After a moment he said, "Well, we could label the peanut butter...?" He seemed unsure as he posed his answer more as a question. I replied with, "Absolutely! On my sandwich I like creamy peanut butter. Will you come up and help me label it, Cody?" After we labeled it together, a couple more students came up and helped label *grape jelly* and the crust of my bread.

After we labeled our diagram, I pulled out our how-to writing chart. "So now I think we should add one more thing: labels!" I wrote number four on our chart: *Has labels that add information.* I ended with a reminder about the work they would do today. I said, "Writers, today I want you to look back over all the pieces you have written and find places you can add specific labels. Off you go, writers!"

I thought that I may run into trouble with students labeling diagrams if they don't know what all the parts of their pictures are. I started to check for that first in hopes of building vocabulary and language. I also ran into a few students who seemed to be writing right away instead of planning. These students were constantly erasing and getting stuck mid-sentence. I worked with them on planning their pages and explained that it is a much smoother process. I also stopped mid-workshop and addressed the fact that some students were moving right on to new pieces when they felt the need. I said, "Boys and girls, eyes here for a moment. I just noticed that Shirley finished a piece, and without saying anything to me or another student she got right up and got a new piece! Way to go, Shirley!" As writing time ended, I asked students to bring whatever piece they were working on to the carpet. I wanted to give them time to practice reading their pieces with expression. I modeled a reading of my own piece and connected this to how we practice reading fluently during guided reading groups. Then I asked students to turn to a partner and practice reading their own pieces like this. I said, "Writers, now I would like you to turn to a partner and take turns reading your pieces with expression. Remember to read like you were talking to someone, take your time and read with appropriate pace!" I listened during their readings and took notes during their interactions. I could use these notes both during writing and guided reading instruction.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

My students did well with the labeling portion of this lesson. Labels had been introduced in the previous unit so they were familiar with this concept. Carrying it over to

their own work went well, but not all of them focused specifically on this during independent writing time.

What Was Challenging

It was a challenge to ensure that all students attempted to go back and look at previous pieces to add diagrams and labels. My students tend to be hesitant to go back and fix up previous pieces that are already “done” in their eyes. While most started new pieces or added diagrams to their current pieces, not all went back to revise old pieces.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

To ensure that all students went back to old pieces I should have told them that this would be their only task for writing time. I could have taken all paper out of the writing center to deter them from starting a new piece.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Some of my students who struggle seemed to really take off with diagrams and labels. They were not hesitant to add them to their pieces. Some of my more confident writers, though, did not go back to their old pieces to add diagrams and labels.

Day 15: Writers Write as Many Books as They Can

Lesson Summary

The focus of today’s lesson was to push students to write more. With it being about a week into the unit, it seemed that the majority of students were beginning to feel

a bit more comfortable in the genre. Some students, however, still did not have more than two pieces completed.

To help children focus their attention on increasing the number of pieces they write, I decided to use an analogy—the first dance I remember learning to do. My students know that I am a dance teacher and have taken dance lessons all my life. I said, “Writers, I want to tell you a quick story about the first time I remember learning a dance. My dance teacher showed us the steps first, and then told us what to do slowly. I started doing one step, then the next, very slowly, over and over through the whole process. As she watched, my dance teacher said, “That’s it! You got it! Now do it faster, like this!” I looked at her, not understanding what she was doing! I just didn’t have it yet. She said she did the exact steps I did—she just put them together in a way that flowed smoothly.

I explained that just like my dancing story, they have learned a new genre of writing and have learned the steps of how-to writing. They have written slowly and carefully and now should start doing all the steps more quickly. The best and easiest way for them to do this, I explained, is with lots of practice and pushing themselves to do more!

Next, I modeled this with one of my own stories. I said, “Let’s look at a story I started the other day about how-to make your bed.” I went back and reread the first two pages out loud. Next, I said “I notice that I have only one sentence on each page. I’m going to push myself to write two sentences on a page!” I thought out loud to model my thinking and added a second sentence to my first page. Before sending students off to write I reminded them of the work I wanted them to do today. I said, “Writers, today I

want you to really push yourselves to write even more. Maybe it's more on a page, or maybe you'll push yourself to finish a whole piece today! Word hard. Off you go!"

Lately I had noticed a few students who were getting very frustrated with spelling harder words. Today, since the goal was to write more, I wanted to pull those students so they weren't wasting time with this. I wanted to teach them a strategy for when they are spelling these tricky words. I said,

"I've noticed that you all are starting to use some really tricky words in your writing. That is so great! I've also noticed that you are worrying too much about if that word is spelled right and you are wasting precious writing time! I want you to try this from now on. If you write a tricky word, write it the best you can and if you're still unsure about it, circle it and then go back to it later. You could check in with a partner or even go back to it the next day this way, you know you want to double check the word but you're not wasting time! Try this today if you can!"

I spent five minutes or so walking around the room checking in with students. I stopped the whole class and said, "Don't forget to keep that pencil in your hand the *whole* time! Even when you're thinking about what to write next, think with your pencil in your hand!"

I ended the lesson by sharing exciting news. Because my students had been working so hard and pushing through challenges and struggles, I would give them time tomorrow to fix up a piece that they could hand up in the room! I said,

"Boys and girls, tomorrow you will choose just one, special, how-to piece. Tomorrow, you will have time to fix this piece up and make it the best it can be and you will be able to hang it up in our room for other students to read! You

could even put it in our classroom library if you want with all of our other favorite authors! Go ahead and choose that special piece right now so that tomorrow, we will waste no time at all!”

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

Students actually did try to push themselves a bit harder. Most students finished up a piece and moved on to a whole new one. I think the analogy of my dance class was a good one to use. Their stamina increased a bit. Would it continue on past today? I wasn't sure. But I'm happy that they worked so hard during today's session.

What Was Challenging

Although many students pushed through and finished one piece to move on to the next, many of these students did not have more than one sentence per page. Their pictures and diagrams were not the best they could be, either. It was difficult to put so much emphasis on the writing, while also keeping the importance of the pictures and extra details.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I think I would have added modeling of adding to my own diagrams and pictures. Students worked hard at the writing aspect, but their pictures and little details fell short. I feel that it would have been a good idea to state that even though I'm trying to push

myself harder to write more, I still can't forget about my pictures and details that add a lot of information.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

It was a great opportunity to work with students who write a lot, but who also worry too much about the little details. I had great interactions with these students and feel that they learned a great strategy that they could easily implement on their own. They seemed to feel a bit relieved that it's okay to not have perfect pieces.

Day 16: Revision of a Favorite Piece

Lesson Summary

I decided to let students fix up a favorite piece to revise. I wanted them to feel good about the work they were doing. Some students seemed to be getting overwhelmed and this seemed to be a good time for them to focus on a single piece before continuing on to the next session of the unit.

I started with a whole group discussion and explained that students would be revising a favorite piece and would use a partner to help them do so. I said, "Writers, today you will work on revising one of your how-to pieces and they will be hung around the room for the rest of the unit. It's a mini celebration!" Next, I explained that they would have the chance to work with a partner to help them revise. I then reminded them of the lesson where Julie helped me with my peanut butter and jelly piece and helped me realize I needed to make changes. I said, "So, just like Julie helped me you will help your

partner today. You will help each other edit a piece that will be hung around the room. Everyone will start by doing the same thing—listening to a piece or reading their own.”

I decided to lead the beginning of this lesson in a whole group setting instead of letting students go off on their own. I wanted everyone doing the reading of his or her pieces first. Each of them would act out the steps and then give their partner suggestions on parts that they thought needed revising. I would facilitate this part of the lesson to be sure all students completed it and then they would continue revising with their partner. I asked students to go back to their table spots and I had them sit by their partner.

I assigned one student to be partner 1 and the other to be partner 2. I said, “Okay, writers, partner 1 will go ahead and read their piece to their partner. Partner 2, you need to be a good listener and act out the steps and also let your partner know if they are easy enough for you to follow.” I watched as students acted out their partners pieces and prompted those that needed to be reminded to stay focused and on task. After partner 1 read, I had students switch roles. After a few minutes, I noticed two students who were sitting at their seats and not doing much work. I reminded the whole class of what they should be doing. I said,

“Writers, eyes here for a moment. If you and your partner finish reading and acting out the pieces you wrote you should be talking about places to revise it. Maybe the steps aren’t clear enough or maybe you think there needs to be more detail. Tell your partner that! Don’t forget you’re there to help!”

I continued to watch students’ interactions for five more minutes and then explained that they would spend the rest of writing time revising their pieces. They would stay sitting with their partner so that if they needed support or guidance, they had

someone there. I said, “Writers, remember these pieces will hang in our room for the rest of the unit, so work hard today! Off you go!”

As students worked, I made my way around the room to observe their interactions. I anticipated that some students would interact with each other a lot and rely on their partner for a lot of support. I also knew that some students would take on the revisions completely independently and not interact with their partner. Giving them the option to use their partner as a resource is something I like to do so that they do not feel defeated if they need help...some of my students are hesitant to ask me when they need help and are more likely to use a friend. I noticed a set of partners who seemed to be helping too much.

I went over to them and said, “How’s it going?” They looked up at me and Susie said “Great! Kayla is telling me what to write!” I then pulled up a chair and let them know how they should be helping each other. I said,

“Girls, I am so glad that you are using each other as a resource to help your writing improve! However, you should not be doing all the work for the other person. It’s important that we try on our own first and then go to our partner if we think we need help.”

Then I showed them how they might help each other. I took Kayla’s piece and read it aloud to Susie. I asked if she would act it out and give me some suggestions on where I might change something. After I did this, I left the girls to work together. I also noticed that students seemed genuinely happy and excited during today’s independent writing time. They were excited to be able to work on one piece with a partner and they took pride in the fact that these would hang up in the room. Students

always push themselves a little harder when they know their work will hang in the hall or another place. We always make a big deal of displaying work and students know that their work must be the best it could possibly be!

After about 25 minutes of working, I stopped students from what they were doing and asked them to come to the carpet with their finished pieces. I said, “Writers you should be so proud of all of the work you did today and so far in this unit! You know so much about what to do as writers. As I walked around the room today I noticed that your pieces looked great! Give yourselves a huge pat on the back!” After we all celebrated for a moment, I asked students to choose where they would hang up their piece of writing and had them do it themselves. This would, hopefully, provide a sense of ownership and instill pride in my students as they watched their own piece be displayed for all to see!

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

This was not a designated lesson in the Units of Study that I follow, but I believe that it was the right choice for my students. In evaluating my instruction and my student’s work, I believe it was a good time for this lesson. Some students seemed to be overwhelmed by the work we had been doing and some had insisted that they had simply just run out of things to write about. While I knew this wasn’t true, a “break” from this was good for them. I also feel that allowing the students to hang up their own pieces was important. This gave them ownership and they felt proud of their work.

What Was Challenging

I feel that conference time is always a bit of a challenge during a day when my students revise. It's difficult for me to see everyone's work. While I know it's not realistic to be able to meet with every student each day, during revision I would love to be able to at least check in with each student to see how they are coming along. It's difficult to do this when I want my interactions and conversations with students to be genuine and beneficial for their writing.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

As I observed interactions between partners, I realized that some partners were not helping each other at all and some were being too helpful. It would have been a good idea to model effective partner work before sending students off to write.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Some of my students who usually keep to themselves and are quiet during writing were showing a lot of enthusiasm and excitement today. Everyone was putting forth a lot of effort to make their pieces better.

Day 17: Using a Mentor Text for Features of Informational Writing (Calkins

Informational Unit-Session 8)

Lesson Summary

The content of this lesson would encourage students (hopefully) to apply what other authors do to their own writing and using a simple, familiar text would hopefully

make this process a bit easier. I started the lesson by letting students know that I read all of their pieces that were hanging up and that they inspired me to read more of the genre. I said, “Writers, when I read your pieces after school yesterday I learned so many things! How to feed a dog, ride a scooter and even how to blow bubbles! Your writing made me want to read even more how-to writing, so I went to the library and looked at some how-to books!”

I then explained to students that as I was reading, I really liked what some authors did and wanted to try it in my own writing. I said, “We already know that writers study an author or book they love, but today we are going to look at a book we love in a different way.”

We would be using *My First Soccer Game* by Alyssa Capucilli (2011). This is a book we have read many times already. We would be using a question to guide the lesson. I said to my students, “As we read the book today we will need to ask ourselves—what does Alyssa do in her writing that we could try in our own writing?” I asked students to listen closely as I read a small portion of the text. After, they would turn to a partner to talk about the text features and what they noticed about the author’s work.

I read through the first page and said out loud, “So I’m noticing this is about soccer—but the topic won’t really help us understand how the author writes.” After reading a couple more pages I had partners turn to each other and discuss what they noticed about this author’s writing. As I listened in, I heard many partners say they noticed she numbered the steps and one student said, “Yeah, we do that already!” Some partners noticed the detailed pictures and that they teach the reader just like the words do.

I also heard one student talk about the bold words as they said, “Some of the words were really *dark!*” I stopped the class and brought their attention back to me. I said,

“Writers, I heard some great things that you noticed! We are going to create a new chart to go along with our *How-To Writing* chart we made at the beginning of this unit. This new chart will help us keep track of what we are learning from a mentor text.” Next, I asked students to share something they noticed that they wanted to add to our chart. The detailed pictures were mentioned and so were the “dark words”. When this was brought up, I stopped to explain why these are used and said, “When something is really important and you want the reader to notice and remember it, you use bold words.” I pointed out where this author used bold print and showed students what it looks like. I added a couple items to the chart as well—using a title, and a list of things that are needed. We reviewed the chart and I reminded students that when we want to make our writing even better, we can study authors who write well and try out what they do in our own writing. I said, “Writers you may go back to an old piece to add something or you may start a whole new piece. Whatever you do, try to use our chart to help and try out something new today!”

As students got back to their seats and began to write, I made my way around the room. I would meet with students today with the mentor text in hand. I had already placed some post-it-notes ahead of time to note places that might be helpful to students. I started with students who are the most hesitant or afraid to take risks. I pulled a chair up next to one of these students and asked how they were doing. He said, “Okay. I’m just trying to figure out what I should do on this old piece.” I pulled out our mentor text and showed this student that the book has flaps. This is not a standard feature of a how-to text

but I knew it would appeal to this student. I explained to him that authors are always coming up with their own ways to make their pieces more interesting. It doesn't have to be one of the ways we talked about but whatever was right for him should be what he should do!

Another student during writing time wanted to use bold print but wasn't sure how. I used the mentor text to read him a few pages that used bold print and talked to him about his piece. He was writing about how to ride a bike. I explained to him that bold words were used when the author wants the reader to know how important something is. I said, "What is really important in your piece?" He thought for a moment and then said that it was important to wear a helmet. He asked, "Could I make the word helmet bold?" I smiled at him, nodded and acknowledged his risk taking and encouraged him to keep going!

After 25 minutes of writing, I brought the class back together. I had students come to the carpet with their pieces in hand and asked them to sit in groups. During this time, they would share their pieces with each other. This would lead to them not only getting ideas from other authors, but from their peers as well. I said, "Writers, you are going to share a page or two from your piece with your group. As the rest of you listen, think about what the writer has done that you like. I said, "We are *all* authors and can get ideas from each other, too!"

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

The end of this lesson in which students shared a part of their pieces with their group was exciting to see. My students love to share with others and I knew that this

would be an opportunity where they could not only share with each other but learn from each other, as well. Referring to them as authors also boosts their confidence and they love to hear this! I also believe that the use of the mentor text during conference time was a good choice. As I had thought about specific students, I placed post-it-notes on pages that I thought would be helpful. This was not only beneficial to my instruction, but my students' writing benefited from it, also.

What Was Challenging

It was difficult for me to let students pick any number of things they wanted to try out in their pieces. I knew that this may have been too much for some students, but I didn't want them to feel restricted to only one text feature. Managing behaviors today was also a bit of a challenge. During the whole group mini-lesson some students were not focused and were talking to each other. I had to stop the lesson a few times because of this.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

It may have been a good idea for me to model, specifically, how to use each text feature. Some students were using them in an ineffective way. There were bold words used all over in many students' pieces while others took the listing text feature a bit too literally. Some had made a list of things they needed on one page of writing. This was not how I intended them to use it, so it should have been modeled correctly before independent writing.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

As mentioned previously, some students were overusing the text features in their writing. I feel that this was partially my fault, as I did not model it for them. I noticed some of my students who usually require more assistance were working fairly well independently today. One of them even went to the writing word wall a few times to use as a resource!

Day 18: Writing for Readers: Using the Word You (Calkins Informational Unit- Session 9)

Lesson Summary

This lesson helps students realize their audience and that they write for other people. They learn to address their audience directly by using the word you. By doing this, it should keep students from slipping back into a narrative voice. I started with a reminder about the work we did yesterday. I said, “Writers, yesterday we studied a mentor text to see if we could apply what the author did to our own writing. Today, we will look at that same text but for another reason.” I explained that sometimes writers actually write to their audience and their words need to reach their readers. I continued by telling them that when we write how-to pieces we are teaching others how to do something and our words should be directed towards them. We can do this by using the word you.

I gave an example, “Like, first you do this and then you do this.” I pulled out the mentor text to show students how she writes directly to the reader. I said,

“Writers, lets take a look at what Alyssa does in her book.” I opened the book and pointed to the section of the page and said, “Alyssa could have said, *People run around in soccer and they move their knees and stretch. Then they go play!* But no! She was very clear and wrote directly to the readers. She said, “Can you move your knees up and down like a butterfly flutters its wings?””

I made sure to emphasize *you* as I said it. To get students to practice this before going off on their own, I had them get with a partner. I asked them to think about a possible new how-to topic. After everyone had an idea I assigned one partner to start saying the first step of their piece out loud to their partner. I said, “Partner 1, you will say the first step of your piece out loud, making sure to use the word *you* so it’s really clear that you want your partner to do all the steps.”

I listened to students as they did this and everyone used the word *you* and partners seemed to be following the steps accurately. After each partner practiced this, I got students’ attention. I wanted to introduce new writing paper. After noticing during yesterday’s lesson that not all students used a title or mentioned things that were needed in order to “do” the steps of their piece, I made how-to writing paper with a title page and a page for a list of *things you need*. These items were a part of our learning from a mentor text chart. I said, “Writers, today is an exciting day because we have new writing paper! Your how-to pieces will now include a title page and a page for you to mention things that are needed.”

After this, I modeled how to complete these pages. I told students that I wanted to write a how-to piece on making pasta because I love to make it and eat it! I asked, “So what should the title of my piece be? How to cook?” Some students laughed and shouted,

“No!” One student said, “Remember yesterday? The title has to tell what the piece will teach!” I smiled at this student’s knowledge and nodded to agree with him. After thinking for a moment or two, one student said, “How about *how to make the perfect pasta?*” Students were in awe and gave this student thumbs up and “Wows!” After making this my title I moved to the next page and asked students what I need to make pasta. This seemed easy for them as many immediately said, “macaroni, water, the stove, sauce, etc.” Then I said, “Wow. You helped me come up with a great title and a list of things needed to make this. Thanks for the help!”

Next, I reminded students of the work they would do today. I told them they would need to talk directly to their readers, by using the word *you*. I added another component to our mentor text chart—talks to the reader and uses *you*. I reminded students to use the chart to help them remember all they know and should be doing. I also reminded them of the new paper and if they needed some help, they could use their writing partners. “Off you go”, I said. “Let’s work hard!”

As students learn new things, little things like neatness, proper letter formation, and strategies for spelling become less of a focus. Today, I started by observing and then pulled a group who needed some support in these areas. Their letter formation was sloppy, and they were making guesses when spelling tricky words instead of using a strategy. I reminded them that this should be a focus of theirs no matter what kind of writing they do. I had them fix up their handwriting and we talked about strategies to use when we get stuck on a hard word. I also reminded them that we have a writing word wall that has some of our tougher sight words on it and they can always use this as a resource!

The next part of conference time, I decided to meet with a group of students who overused text features in the previous day's lesson. I started by acknowledging the fact that they took a risk by using something new in their writing and then moved into the proper way to use bold words. I directed their attention to the new page where they could indicate what is needed for their how-to piece. This way, they aren't simply listing things on one of the writing pages.

After 30 minutes of writing, I asked students to put their pieces in their folders, put them away, and make their way to the carpet. I ended with a share from Alyssa's book. I said, "Writers you did a nice job of speaking directly to your readers as you wrote. Using the word you is helpful and gets your readers attention but it's not the only way!" I asked students to listen closely to the way Alyssa talks to her readers. I explained how she uses silly language—like you can really hear her speaking...it's not just a list of steps. I read, "Stretch time! Can you move your knees up and down like a butterfly flutters its wings? That's a great stretch that will get you warmed up! Hooray! Now you're ready to play!" I encouraged students to give this a try the next time they wrote!

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

Using new paper was definitely the right choice for my group of students. Each one of them had a title for their piece and they were including the ingredients or items one would need to actually "do" their piece. Creating this paper would ensure that this happened each time they started a new piece. Not only did they do well with it, but they were excited to have something new to use during writing. Conference time was also

effective today. It was the right time to discuss the small details that were being brushed to the side. I also feel that acknowledging something I noticed from the day before was beneficial to students.

What Was Challenging

Today's lesson was very manageable. However, it was, again, difficult to be sure everyone had used the features discussed in the mini lesson.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

While using Alyssa's book to show students her playful language was beneficial, it may have been even more so if I did it in the beginning of the lesson. I'm not sure, however, if it would have been too much time spent as a whole group before writing.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

While it didn't pertain to the specific instruction of today's lesson, I noticed some students were going back to old pieces to check if the word "you" was used. They were applying something I had taught previously to a new lesson! This was great to see!

Day 19: Writers Picture Each Step and Choose Exactly the Right Words (Calkins

Information Unit-Session 10)

Lesson Summary

Today's lesson taught students that writers build vocabulary and choose very specific language by picturing the steps they are writing about. In how-to writing, writers

learn to write clearly, in a way that is easy for readers to follow and understand. Today's lesson focused on slowing down to picture steps that are being written and choosing the right words to describe these steps.

I reminded students of an earlier lesson where I hadn't thought carefully about my steps. I said, "Do you remember when I asked you all to follow my peanut butter and jelly piece? My directions were not clear enough and we had a jar of peanut butter on top of a loaf of bread!" Students laughed as they thought about this. I reminded them how we went back and tried to be clearer and after revising our piece it made much more sense. Today I wanted students to know that if we want to write how-to pieces that are easy to follow, it's important to picture ourselves actually doing it. It is also helpful to stop every now and then and ask yourself what words can describe exactly what to do. To get students thinking about working hard to choose the perfect words I used an analogy of baby names. I said,

"Writers, did you know that your parents probably thought long and hard about the name they would give you before you were born? Before my parents chose my name, they told me they had gone through about 15 other names before they thought "Lora Kathryn" was the right one."

I then explained that just like this, I bet that Alyssa wrote her page about how to kick a soccer ball many times over. She probably didn't pick up her pencil and write what as on the page right now.

I demonstrated how the author might have pictured each step and tried out different words until the exact right ones are chosen. I said, "Let me show you what Alyssa probably did and thought as she wrote this page." I stood up and put my foot next

to my imaginary soccer ball. I said aloud, “Touch the ball.” Next, I shook my head and said “no” then went back to the ball and said, “Touch the ball with your foot.” Saying “no” again I stepped away and stopped, closed my eyes and thought in silence for a moment. Then I said “a-ha!” and went up to the ball and said what was written in the book, “Put the ball next to the inside of your foot. Yes, that’s it!” I then wrote that on a piece of chart paper to show students the whole process of envisioning what I would write and actually writing it.

Next, I asked students to think about what I did and chat quickly with a partner about it. After, a few students shared their thoughts. One said, “You did more than write! You pretended to kick the ball.” Another girl said, “You really took your time and even closed your eyes to picture playing soccer” I praised both of these students for noticing such great things! Before sending students off to write I reminded them, again, that we want our readers to easily understand and follow our writing. One way for this to happen is to really picture what you’re thinking or writing. It may take you a lot of tries before you come up with exactly the right words and that’s okay! I said, “You might even try using different kinds of words or saying it out loud like I did today. You could cross things out, or add new sentences! I have put post-it notes at the writing center in case you want to use those in your writing today!”

I pulled a group of students today who I knew would need extra support as they took risks to try out specific words or picturing their steps and who normally rushed through their work. As we sat down together, I explained that it is really helpful if we act out the steps we’re trying to write. This should happen after we picture in our minds what we want to say. I told them their body may give them ideas when they act it out! One

student's piece was about playing baseball. I had all of them stand out to act out the piece together. The student was working on a page that was about batting. I said, "Okay stand up now and we're going to pretend we are getting ready to bat!" I told them to act out the story in place. The first thing they said they should do is hold the bat up behind their heads. I watched as they all did this. One student said that they should bend their knees. She said, "My brother plays baseball and I have been to a game. Whenever someone bats, they always bend their knees and bounce up and down." I said, "Wow, what a great idea! You are actually picturing in your mind being at that baseball game!" We continued to work together to act this out and I reminded students that they could work together to help each other if they wanted to.

After working with this group, I stopped the class and reminded all students that they could use their partners to help them if they get stuck. I said, "Your partner is a great resource to use if you're having trouble! Remember, we're all in this together!" I decided to extend writing time into our normal whole group time at the end of our writer's workshop. I saw so many great things happening that I wanted to keep it going! I said, "Writers, we have worked so hard today and I want this hard work to continue. You will have an extra ten minutes of writing today! Keep it up!" I ended today's workshop with giving students a round of applause for the work they did while also letting them know that this would be something they continued to work on for the rest of the unit. Each time they start a new piece or finish a piece, they would need to think of exactly the right words they wanted to say and picturing it in their minds and acting it out would only make it easier!

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

When I originally taught envisioning and thinking hard about something, I taught students to close their eyes so they could picture what they are thinking about. This helped them tremendously in this lesson. I saw every student with their head in their hands as they thought about what they wanted to write. The work with the small group was also beneficial. It helped to have all students act out one's piece so they could all experience acting out one student's writing. I also feel like, although something small, the baby analogy worked well. They all seemed to agree that it would be pretty difficult to pick out a name for a baby!

What Was Challenging

Students have used post-it notes before in the beginning of a previous unit. While it is an effective tool, it was challenging to manage it. Some students were using them in inappropriate ways, and it became a distraction for others. It was also a challenge to work with the small group during conference time. The work we did was beneficial but many other students spent time watching what we were doing instead of writing.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

As the students used the post-it notes in the wrong way, I should have modeled how to use them for the specifics of this lesson. While it may not have completely fixed how students were using them, they would have known exactly what I expected had I modeled it first.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Some students took the envisioning process a bit too far. They spent the majority of the time thinking about what they would write instead of actually writing. I noticed other students could envision what they wanted to say, but had a difficult time transferring this over to a well thought out, detailed page in their writing.

Day 20: Elaboration in How-To Books: Writers Guide Readers with Warnings, Suggestions, and Tips (Calkins How-To Unit-Session 11)

Lesson Summary

As we have gotten further into the how-to unit, I felt it was important to touch on, for a second time, the impact that the use of elaboration and specific details have on this type of writing. I have taught my students that we write for other people. In how-to writing, it's important that the writer, write with enough detail that the reader can follow our steps exactly in order to complete the task they are describing successfully.

In this lesson, I wanted students to start thinking more about the audience, specifically anticipating specific tips and warnings that might be helpful for the reader. I began the lesson by telling a story about the time I got my first two-wheeled bike. I was very excited because I had never ridden a bike without training wheels. I began to get on the bike when my neighbor came outside. "I am so excited to ride my new bike", I said. My neighbor said, "That's so exciting! But, you know, with those shorts on, if you fall, you may really hurt yourself. You might want to put long pants on." I continued on with the story and told the class that I received more suggestions and tips from both my

mother and my neighbor: “The sidewalk is very bumpy. You might want to go to the school to ride in the parking lot since it's a Sunday and there will be no cars.” “Your helmet looks a little loose. Tighten the strap or else it will fall off!” I told my students that I was so glad that I got all of those warnings and tips. It made my first time on a bike much easier!

Next, I explained my teaching point to the class: In how-to books, writers do more than just teach the steps. They add little warnings and tips. They do this by thinking about how or where the reader might go wrong and then they add advice to try to keep that from happening. Then I read aloud a mentor text: *My First Soccer Game* by Alyssa Satin Capucilli (2011). We read this book before in a previous how-to lesson and the students enjoyed the book and I thought that a familiar text would be the best choice for them with a concept that was so brand new. I asked the students to put a thumb up if they thought the author was giving advice, suggestions or warnings like my mother and neighbor gave me. As I read, "It doesn't matter if you're big or small! Don't forget! In soccer you don't use your hands! I shook my finger at the class to prompt their thinking and participation. I began to see some thumbs go up in the air and the students giggled at my gesture. We had read the story before, so I did not do any debriefing of the story and I did not give any insight into what a warning or tip might look or sound like in a story.

After this short read aloud, I chose to take a class created how-to piece to see if anyone could find places in our piece where we could add advice, suggestions or tips. I had a student come up and read our piece while I followed the directions. Our piece was How-To Make a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich. I had a peanut butter jar out and as the student read, "Get the jar of peanut butter," I grabbed the jar and as I went to sit back

down I dropped the jar on the floor. The class looked back at me wide-eyed and one student shouted "Oh, no! You can't drop the jar!" I stopped there and asked the class to turn and talk to a partner about what warnings or tips we could give the reader in our own how-to piece. I walked around the circle and listened to their conversations with their partners. As I listened, I heard things like, "Be careful not to spill the jelly" and "Make sure you use a plate."

During independent writing time, I met with multiple students. I made this decision based on the fact that it was a new concept and I wanted to get an idea on how everyone in the class responded to it and to what degree they were using it in their writing, so I met one-on-one with five different students and peeked in on everyone's work during writing time. After about 20 minutes of writing was over, we came back together as a class to discuss what was easy or difficult about the new concept of adding suggestions warnings, or tips to their how-to pieces. Some students said that it was difficult to picture their piece in their head to think about things that may go wrong. Others made it clear that because they were experienced at what they were writing about, it was easy for them to think of things that could go wrong.

Reflection

What Went Well

Based on the reactions of students during my mini-lesson, I could see, after my encouragement to participate that they were able to identify a warning, tip, or suggestion while listening to the read aloud and that they did well picking up on what could have gone wrong in our own how-to piece we created together. Because I am always paying

attention to on-task behaviors, my students were definitely attentive during the mini lesson. During the time they got to talk to a partner, I noticed many of my students shaking their finger at their partner when giving a warning like I did while reading our mentor text aloud.

What Was Challenging

I knew that this lesson may be difficult for some students because in order to give warnings or tips they would need to picture what they wanted to write about and plan it before writing. Planning before writing is not an easy concept for my students and they often want to write right away. I also knew that it was not realistic to think that students would grasp the concept after one time experimenting with suggestions, warnings, and tips. Managing inattentive behaviors during independent writing time can also be a challenge. Many students tend to shut down during writing when something may be difficult for them. They are not willing to take risks with a new concept. I made it a point to meet with these students first to help them get started and going in the right direction. By re-teaching the concept to these students, they received more instruction in an area that was difficult for them to understand after the first time.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I believe I would have changed our final conversations as a class. While I felt it was beneficial to have a conversation about students' feelings, I would have also spent time talking about specific vocabulary such as "be careful," "watch out," "you might

want to.” While I would have done this at the end of the lesson, this is something I can do at the beginning of the next day’s mini lesson.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

While a few students experienced difficulty, the majority of the class seemed excited to start something new and tried their hardest to incorporate tips, warnings, or suggestions into their current writing pieces. It will be important for me to review all the students’ writing carefully to see which students grasp the concept and who needs more explicit instruction and/or additional opportunities to practice.

Day 21: Balance on One Leg Like a Flamingo: Using Comparisons to Give Readers

Clear Directions (Calkins How-To Unit-Session 12)

Lesson Summary

The content of this lesson helps students realize that writers clarify their directions by imagining their writing, like we did in the previous lesson. Then, they write comparisons to describe their actions. Students will act out these comparisons and by thinking metaphorically, students are provided with yet another way to think carefully about their directions and can be sure they are as clear as possible for their readers.

I invited students to come to the carpet with what they thought was their best how-to piece yet. I started the lesson with a recap of all we have done so far in the unit. I reminded them that back in the beginning of the unit, many of them didn’t even know what how-to writing sounded like and that it was difficult for them, at first, to write clear directions. I said, “All of that is just so hard to believe because you all have come so far!”

Next, I asked students to look at the piece they brought to the carpet. I pulled out our *Learning From a Mentor How-To Text* chart and said, “Writers, I am going to read through our chart and I want you to look at your piece while I read. When you hear something you’ve done in your piece, stand up and take a bow!”

I read through the chart and as students took their bows I smiled at them and gave a huge thumbs up! After reading through the whole chart, I congratulated all students on everything they’ve done. Next, I told them that there was a new challenge and asked, “Do you think you can handle it?” Students shouted, “Yeah!” as they always do when I present them with a new challenge. Today I would teach students that another way to show a reader exactly what they want them to do is by making comparisons. I chose a small group of students to be volunteers for me. I explained that I would give them directions and they would need to follow them. I said, “Line up!” As I shouted at the students they scrambled to try to get in a straight line. Then I said, “Try this! Line up *like* you’re a freight train. Woo, woo!” Students immediately formed a straight line that was connected by their hands, like a train car. “Next”, I said, “march in place!” Some knees were lifting high off the ground while others were just walking. “Now march like a family of penguins!” Students smiled, and started waddling and walking straight like penguins would do.

Next, I asked the whole group to be volunteers for me. I said, “Clap your hands. Now, clap your hands like your team just won the Super bowl!” Loud claps began and some students even began cheering loudly, “We won, we won!” I let the students know they did a great job with helping and when they are given a set of directions that are clear and have a comparison, they are able to do a much better job. I said, “When I asked you

to clap, I barely heard any noise. But when I said, clap *like* your team just won the Super bowl, you knew exactly what that would be like.” Next, I would use our mentor text to show comparisons in a book. I said, “Our mentor text uses this technique, too! Please help me act out her comparisons! Lift your knees high, like you’re marching in a parade!” Students were marching fiercely and I smiled as I said, “Great! You’re doing wonderfully!” I gave students yet another chance to act out a final comparison from our mentor text and read from the book, “Can you balance on one leg *like* a flamingo?” I asked students to think about what that would look like, or close their eyes to picture flamingo before doing it.

Next, I would give students a chance to try this in their own writing pieces right at the carpet. I asked them to open up to a page where they are telling the reader what to do. I explained that they would need to act out the steps and think to themselves “What am I trying to explain? What does this remind me of?” After they thought for a moment, I had them partner up with another student to work together to finish the comparisons. As they were working, I jotted down some notes about their interactions.

Before sending students off on their own to write, I reminded them that they learned yet another thing that can make their writing even clearer. This will make it that much easier for your readers to follow what you are saying. They would need to decide if they would be finishing a how-to piece from last time or starting a brand new one. I said to my writers,

“You all have lots of ways you can help your reader. You will need to decide what you have to do to make your steps clearer. Maybe it’s more detail in your picture, or maybe it’s adding labels so your reader knows what you drew. Where

might you put comparisons? You have important decisions to make today! Get to it!”

I would pull a small group of students who seemed to have trouble on the comparison portion of the mini lesson. I used Alyssa’s book as a resource to have for these students to show them exactly how she used comparisons in her own writing. One student was writing about how to use the balance beam in gymnastics. She was on the last part of her piece where she was explaining how to jump off into the ball pit. I suggested using a comparison here. I said, “You may want to use a comparison as you describe how to jump off into the ball pit. What might it look like as you jump off?” She sat in silence for a moment and then said, “Jump off like a diver going off the diving board!” I gave her a high five and praised her risk taking. What a wonderful comparison she came up with. Sometimes some extra support and small group instruction is exactly what these kids need!

After 20 minutes of writing, I asked students to come to the carpet. I asked the student I worked with during conference time to come up with her piece. I would share with the class what this student did. I said,

“Writers, Lexi is writing about how to use the balance beam because she takes gymnastics. In her piece, she was working on describing how to jump off the beam into the ball pit. She used a comparison and I wanted to share her great work with you!”

I had Lexi read her writing to the class and she received a huge round of applause afterwards. She was smiling from ear to ear! I gave Lexi a high five and asked her to take a bow.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

Calkins suggested having students stand to take a bow when they used something from our how-to chart in their own writing. I used this in my lesson and believe that it was a huge motivating factor for students and it boosted their confidence. My student's love to be recognized for the work they do and getting the chance to take a bow in front of other students was a good choice for today's lesson. Using the mentor text in my conferences also benefited a student tremendously as we referenced the book together before she wrote a comparison in her own story. Going back to Alyssa's book time and time again has been beneficial to my students as they are familiar with her writing style and enjoy the topic that her book was written about.

What Was Challenging

Getting students to think in a different way is always a challenge. Using a comparison is something they've never done before and exposing them to it in one lesson was a bit of a challenge. However, I feel that when I push students just a bit farther, they are always resilient and end up thriving. Also, while I acknowledge multiple students' efforts throughout writing time, it's always a bit of a struggle to choose just one to highlight individually. In this case, it was a student who tends to shy away from sharing, so it was good for her to have time in the spotlight.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

While Calkins suggests using the mentor text alone in this lesson, it may have been a good idea to find other books that use comparisons to share with the students. This would have shown them that many different authors we know and love use these in their writing!

What I Noticed About Individual Students

A few students had a difficult time with the task of using a comparison. I know these students are often hesitant to take risks, but they seemed especially down on themselves today. I made a point to check in with them during conference time and used a suggestion that Calkins gave. I asked them to just write the word like on their paper and think about how to use it. While it didn't help them all make a comparison immediately afterwards, I believe it may have been a step in the right direction.

Day 22: Writers Write How-To Books about Things They Learn Throughout the

Day and from Books (Calkins How-To Unit-Session 13)

Lesson Summary

Most of the work throughout the unit so far has focused on student's knowledge of how to do things outside of school, like riding a bike, brushing your teeth, cooking, etc. Today, students would be asked to think more of their experiences in school—maybe

things that they don't even realize they could teach people. These could include things they do in reading, math, PE, or music.

I set up a table with different objects from things we have done throughout the year. Some of the objects included were blocks, magnifying glasses, a center icon, and a book clip from our classroom library. I told students that I had set up a table of objects that represents things we have done in school. I would pick up an item and ask students if it makes them think of something they know how to do or something they could teach others. First, I picked up a clip from our classroom library and asked students to think what it makes them think of. Hands went up in the air and eyes went wide. I called on one student and she said, "How to take a book out of our library!" I nodded to agree with her and said, "Great!" Next, I picked up a block and got different responses with this item. One student said that it reminded them of how to play at the block center, while another said he could teach people how to build a bridge. Both were acceptable answers and I acknowledged these students' for the wonderful thinking they had done.

After students gave me these answers I said, "It's so funny...I have seen no how-to books written about these two things! We should all agree that we would start writing how-to pieces that will teach people things you have learned in school!" My teaching point for today would be that each and every one of my students has learned things at school in addition to the things they learn at home. There are many different objects around the room that can help remind them of what they've learned in school so that they can write about it for other people.

Next I would demonstrate the use of an object to get students thinking about other ideas for their how-to pieces. I held up the magnifying glass that was on the table and

asked students what we had used these for this year. Answers included that we use it in science to be an observer. I asked, “What specifically did we observe with the magnifying glasses?” Students thought for a moment and finally came up with apples and leaves. I suggested we use a leaf for our example today. I started by telling students that we used the magnifying glass to look at the small details of a leaf so that we could draw it exactly as we saw it. I would model the use of this for students and I paused for a moment to show concentration.

After a few moments of silence I said,

“Step 1(I held up my finger to show the step): hold the magnifying glass to the leaf. Step 2: look very closely and carefully at one part to see the details. Step 3: draw all of the details you see, exactly how you see them.”

I then explained to students that we first looked at an object from our display table and it gave us an idea of something we’ve done. I thought carefully about the steps and planned them on my fingers. Next I said, “Soon I better get writing and drawing so I don’t forget what I want to say!”

Students now had the opportunity to view the display table to get their ideas flowing. I would call them up in groups and have them look at our items. As they got back to the carpet I asked them to talk to a partner about an idea they have after looking at the table. As I listened I heard things like “how to log on to the computer, how to rotate through centers, how to play roll and record (a math game), and how to do the morning steps.” I was so proud to hear all of these ideas! I hoped that it would transfer to their writing. Before beginning writing time, I said to writers, “Today I want you to take your

idea and get it down on paper. Before you even start writing, plan your steps across your fingers first! Maybe you'll even plan it with a partner! Off you go!"

For conferencing today, I administered coaching conferences. This was good for some of my students, as it would put more responsibility on them. The prompts I gave them were brief—it created an opportunity for them to do the talking. I did this one-on-one and chose specific students that would benefit from this type of interaction. As I sat with one student, I asked, "What are you writing about today?" This student told me he wanted to write about how to play roll and record, a math game that we've played many times before. We sat in silence for a while and then student responded with, "I should tell what I need to do first." I replied with, "Good...keep going and tell me what would come next."

We continued this way for a while and it was evident to me that the student wanted me to support him. . I continued to ask him questions that would prompt him to think further but they were prompting questions like "Tell me more" or "What's next?" Providing proper wait time was something I kept in mind for the remainder of these conferences.

After 25 minutes of writing I asked students to put their writing in their folders and to put their folders away before coming to the carpet. As they all joined me, I reminded them that we should always be on the lookout for possible writing ideas. Using our display table really helped us today but this is just the beginning! I said, "Maybe you could be thinking about writing ideas all day long! Like when you go to lunch an idea may be how to go through the lunch line. When we go to PE, you may think of how to

play, or anytime we go anywhere in the school you might think of a how-to piece about how to walk in the hall.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

As I read through this lesson in the Calkins how-to unit book, I was hesitant about using the display table. I wasn't sure if it was a good use of time and I wasn't sure how students would respond to it. I am so glad that I decided to use this! Students loved having something tangible in front of them to help them think of how-to ideas. It sparked so many wonderful ideas and it transferred to the students' writing. Having that object in front of them helped them remember exactly what to do! Moving on to experiences the children have in school landed in a good spot in the unit.

What Was Challenging

Calkins (year) suggests doing coaching conferences during writing time for today's lesson. I wanted to ask multiple questions in a row to help my students as much as I could. Calkins suggests, however, to avoid this and says "In life, one of the hard parts of writing is that there is not another person there, continually throwing the conversational ball back at the speaker" (p. 103). While it was challenging to see students sitting in silence for periods of time, I believe it was valuable time spent.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I believe that the content of this lesson was perfect for my students and they did a wonderful job during writing time. The one thing, though, that I might do differently if I

got the chance is to have done this lesson earlier on in the unit. Using experiences we have all had and things that we have all learned may have been introduced at an earlier time.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

My writers who struggle took off during this lesson! They happen to be hands-on learners so the use of the objects in the display table really helped them. During conference time, I noticed the students I was working with were focused and trying hard on their pieces. I was pushing them to think more clearly about what they wanted to say and using the coaching conference format was how this happened.

Day 23: Continuation of Yesterday's Work with a Focus on Small Details

Lesson Summary

The mini lesson for today's work would focus on details of what makes writing easy to read. While this could be something I do during conference time, I felt like it needed to be addressed for the whole group. I also wanted to give students more time to work on pieces from yesterday before introducing a new teaching point. I noticed yesterday, as well, that not one student had finished a whole piece.

I started with a discussion of the work we did yesterday and that we would continue to work on those pieces today. I also mentioned what I had noticed about student's writing lately. I said,

“Writers, as I took a look around yesterday I noticed something about a lot of our writing. While you are writing wonderful how-to pieces with very clear

directions, a lot of the writing is not so easy to read. We shouldn't be waiting until our pieces are finished; we should be working on this all the time!"

I took out our *What Makes Writing Easy to Read* chart from one of our very first writer's workshop sessions. I reminded students that the main reason we write is so that others can read our words and enjoy our stories. If our writing is messy or sloppy and we can't even read it, how can we expect others to read it?

After discussing these important components, I modeled them in a new piece. I decided to write about how to clean the room up at the end of the day because I do it each day before I leave. This also connected to our topic ideas from yesterday. I planned my piece out on my fingers first, and then would model the writing of the first page for students. I said, "So now that I've planned my steps, I need to get to writing. I need to remember that the first letter of the first word should be capital." I said aloud to model my thinking for students, "First, you need to turn off all the computers." I started to write and told students I would need a space buddy (a popsicle stick to use between words). I explained to them, "I can't have my words smushed together and this guy will help me out!" I also modeled stretching my words out to hear as many sounds as possible as this is also a component of our easy to read writing chart. In addition to spaces, capitals, and lots of sounds in words, I modeled proper letter formation. As I wrote the word *need*, I said aloud, "n is a short letter so that starts at the dotted line. Same for my letter e's, too! But d is a tall letter and that needs to go all the way to the top!"

After writing this first page I reminded students that next I would need to draw a detailed picture that matches my words, but for the sake of time I would not draw my picture today. I said, "I want you to have as much writing time as possible! Please

continue on your pieces from yesterday but remember all of the things that make your writing easy to read! Off you go!”

As students began writing today, I was on the lookout for writing about experiences from school and for writers to talk more about their pieces and explain, in detail, what they are writing. I met with students one-on-one today. Since the mini-lesson focus was on small details that make our writing better and easier to read, I started looking for that. As I met with students who needed support in this area, I began by saying, “Tell me one thing you’ve done or are doing to make your writing easier to read.” One student told me right away, “I can’t.” He looked a bit frustrated. I replied, “And why is that?” He let out a huge sigh and said, “Well, my letters are too close together and I have no spaces in between words! It’s so messy!” I smiled at his acknowledgement of this in his work, and then suggested that he get a new page. He had written one page yesterday so I thought a fresh start would help him. I asked him what he could use to make sure he has spaces, and without saying a word he got out of his chair and went to get a space buddy. I nodded and said, “Good choice.” I continued to work with this student as he wrote the first few words of his sentence and before leaving his table I reminded him that he could always talk to the people around him or his writing partner if he needed help.

I noticed some students had finished up their pieces and stopped to remind them that they could go back to old pieces to apply the work we were doing today. I said,

“Writers, eyes on me please. I am noticing that some people are sitting at their tables with nothing in front of them. Remember, it would be a great idea if you went back to old pieces to do what we did today. Check to see if you have spaces

between words, capitals at the beginning, and neat writing on all of your pages.

We should be wasting no time at all just sitting at our tables!”

After 30 minutes of writing, I could tell that students were getting antsy and had done enough work for today. I asked them to put their folders away and come to the carpet. I wanted to end today’s lesson with acknowledging that there is a lot to remember when they are writing and that it’s okay to sometimes feel that it’s too much or hard work—because it definitely is! I said, “What’s most important, writers, is that you try your best each day and push through even when it might be a little hard. The more we write, the better we become at it!” I told them that at the end of the day we would make time for everyone to share a page or two of their writing. There were shouts, smiles, and thumbs up and I knew it was the right choice!

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

It was definitely the right choice for me to do this lesson today for my kids. While I follow Calkins’ units for writing, I need to keep my students’ needs in mind and adjust the instruction for what they need most. Focusing the mini-lesson on the small details needed to be done for them today as it was being pushed aside for many of my students. Working with students who specifically needed help in this area gave me reassurance that I made the right choice. The writing content is wonderful, but the look of their writing needs improvement and to be worked on consciously each day.

What Was Challenging

Calkins (2013) suggests spending one day on each of her lessons. Some days it is difficult to not continue a specific skill or writing component into the next day. I need to do it when it's best for my students. Looking at my students' handwriting is sometimes a little disheartening. There is no formal handwriting program, and to be honest, I'm not sure where that would fit in our day anyway. I do not put a lot of pressure on my students in this area, but it has become a bit of a struggle. Their writing content has improved so much, which is extremely important. We work on letter formation at other times throughout the day and during guided reading groups for only about 2-3 minutes at the end of a lesson. While we do this, it just doesn't stick for some of my students.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Calkins (2013) presents this lesson a bit later in the unit. As I looked it over, I noticed that she suggested doing interactive writing with the students during the mini-lesson. This may have been a good idea for me to do today, as students would get the chance to properly form their letters and think about the skills and strategies they can use to make their writing easier to read. This could be something I incorporate into another lesson or before we have our publishing celebration later in the unit. She also suggested carrying around a first grade writing sample while having conferences. I definitely hold my students to high expectations and I believe that it is beneficial to them in the long run. While this may have been too much for my lower writers, it is definitely something I could do with those who thrive in writing.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

Some students finished their pieces early and were hesitant to go back and look at other pieces to make similar changes and I wonder why this happened. I also noticed that it was easier for some of my struggling writers to write about things they have done in school. They were able to write more about these topics when compared to pieces in which they wrote about activities at home. While I don't like to choose topics for students, it may be a good idea for me to suggest to these students that they write about topics from school more often.

Day 24: Writers Can Write Introductions and Conclusions to Help Their Readers

(Calkins How-To Unit-Session 15)

Lesson Summary

This lesson would focus on the fact that students may be writing about topics that are new to others. Some students have wanted to write about games they play at home or Pokémon cards, a game called Beyblades, and other things like that. Students would need to write an introduction to these pieces that might help the reader understand their topic better. This introduction would be simple, but the writer would need to grasp that they have to write some sort of beginning to their piece. It's also important for students to realize and be proud of the fact that they know topics that others may not and they can really teach people through their writing.

I started by explaining that during a recent conversation with a student, they had told me they wanted to write about how to play Beyblades and this student explained how they would write this piece. I then said, "As Billy was explaining this to me, I just didn't

understand. I even looked at him funny and said, “Huh?” I had never heard of this game before!” I then told students that Billy had to explain to me what Beyblades are. After he did, everything made much more sense! If Billy wants to write a piece on this game, he would need to write a small introduction explaining what Beyblades are for people who may not know.

My teaching point for today would be that a lot of times, writers write a special page to introduce their piece to readers—kind of like an explanation of what they’re writing about. It’s sometimes a good idea to pretend like readers know nothing about the topic. This way, your introduction page will give the reader information or facts so the rest of their book will make more sense. I asked for a volunteer to help me write an introduction for our class peanut butter and jelly piece. I said, “Allison, will you help me?” She enthusiastically said yes and come up to the easel. I said, “Allison, you need to pretend like you’ve never had or even heard of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, okay?” She nodded and I read the first few pages of our piece. Then, I asked Allison if this piece would make sense if she never heard of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. She said no, and then I asked if she would help me with an introduction. I said to the class, “We need an introduction for Allison so that if she were reading my piece she would have an idea for what she’s doing before even reading the steps.” I thought to myself for a moment then said, “How about this: after reading this piece you will know how to make peanut butter and jelly? Yeah, that sounds good.” I noticed Allison and others were shaking their heads no. Allison said, “That doesn’t tell us what a PBJ is!” After hearing this I changed it to, “A peanut butter and jelly is a delicious sandwich that is easy to make. You use bread, peanut butter, and jelly.” The class agreed that this was a much better choice.

I thanked the class for their help and explained that an introduction will give their readers so much more information and it will help them understand what they will read even before getting to step 1. I also mentioned that they will still need to use a title and a list of things needed, because those are other little details that add information, too! Before sending students off to write, I reminded them to still do all the things that make writing easy to read. I said, “right in the beginning, you might try writing an introduction but this will not take the whole time; maybe just five minutes or less.” I also told them they could go back to the piece from yesterday, or start a brand new piece and decide what to write about or they might even choose to write introductions for every old how-to piece in their folders! I said, “Whatever you decide to do today, work hard. Off you go!”

I knew that not all students would come up with detailed or creative introductions, and that was okay with me. I would acknowledge the work they were doing and risks they were taking, no matter how elaborate or simple their introduction may be. I took a group of students who were working on the same topic. I just so happened to have three students who were writing pieces on how to brush your teeth. We would work together to write the same introduction. I would prompt to get their ideas rolling. I said, “Writers, it may be silly to think that there are people who don’t know what it means to brush their teeth, but we need to pretend!” I asked them how they would explain what it means to brush your teeth if someone asked them. One said, “Well, you’re making your teeth clean.” I gave a thumbs up and asked for another idea. Another student said, “You move the brush back and forth over your teeth.” I praised the students for great ideas and offered this as a possible introduction: *When you brush your teeth you use a toothbrush and move it back and forth to make your teeth clean.* Students seemed to like this idea but

one said, “What about toothpaste?” I responded with, “Oh my goodness, we can’t forget that!” We added toothpaste to our introduction and I helped students get it down on paper.

To end conference time, I moved to others and asked them to show me a place where they were working on making their writing easy to read. This was an extension from the lesson from the previous day. After 25 minutes of writing, I gathered students to the carpet. I would quickly mention that just like we introduce our pieces, we can also write a final page, a conclusion, to let our readers know that the book is over. I asked, “How could we do this in our peanut butter and jelly piece?” What is a final statement we could write?” I gave students a moment to think and one said, “How about: enjoy!” I loved the detailed word this student came up with but asked if we could come up with a whole sentence instead of just one word. Students thought, and I said, “What about this? I hope you enjoy your peanut butter and jelly sandwich!” Students gave me encouraging words and agreed this would work. I added it to our piece and suggested that we all try doing this tomorrow.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

I believe that accepting any sort of introduction was a good choice. Calkins (2013) suggests that the introduction should be more of an explanation to the topic, but this was not appropriate for my students. I actually thought it was a great thing that students were taking a risk and even come up with questions for their introductions! While I made it a point to go into further detail during the mini-lesson, I knew that

students would be doing great if they took a risk at all! The skills and strategies taught during the mini-lesson do not always transfer over when students do independent work so I'm glad today's did!

What Was Challenging

It is worth mentioning that I skipped session fourteen in Calkins how-to unit. I felt that this lesson in particular would have been too much for my group of students, as they don't produce as much writing as the students Calkins mentions in the lesson. I took components of the lesson that applied to what my students needed and combined them in other areas that I thought was appropriate. Today's writing time was a bit hard to manage. Students were excited about the work they were doing and were talking a lot about their work. While this is definitely something I encourage, it was often too noisy in the room for most students to be productive and I had to stop the lesson a few times to acknowledge this.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

Calkins (2013) suggests allowing students to experiment with their own conclusions at the end of the lesson. This may have been a good idea for me to do, however I made the decision based on the fact that my students had spent a lot of time sitting. It may have been a good idea to take a short movement break and then do this. Creating one together, however, was a valuable use of time.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

I realized that the students interpreted the use of an introduction in many different ways. Some had difficulties coming up with one at all, while others wrote questions for their introductions. One student was writing a piece on how to make a bed and asked me, “Do you know how to make your bed? If not, this book will teach you how!” What an incredible thing to come up with on his own.

Day 25: How-To Books Make Wonderful Gifts (Calkins How-To Unit Session 17)

Lesson Summary

The content of today’s lesson would help the students realize that their writing could be for a specific person. They could dedicate it to someone of their choice. Publishing day was coming up and people would be reading their writing. My mentioning this day would, hopefully, build motivation and enthusiasm for our celebration that marks the end of the unit.

I started the lesson with the use of a personal example of writing that was a gift. I asked students to bring their writing folders to the carpet and sit along the perimeter so they could all see what I was about to show them. I told them a long time ago my mom had received this gift from a friend and it has been one of her favorite gifts ever! I explained that my mom loves cooking, so her friend made her a homemade recipe book. Her friend wrote down lots of recipes and put them in this fancy binder. I showed students the book and heard lots of “Wows” as they looked at this special gift. Next, I showed them a dedication page in a book and explained that the author wrote the book for someone who would really love their book. Then I opened up our mentor how-to text

and showed that Alyssa had also written a dedication in her book: For the Shadowland soccer stars! The photographer who took the pictures for the book wrote a dedication, too, which said: To my dad, Ben, who coached me to shoot a soccer ball as well as with a camera! I explained that writing a dedication is like giving the book you wrote as a gift.

The teaching point for today was how-to books or any book really, can make a great gift. I explained to students that it could be for someone they care about or for someone they want to teach. Then I said we could write a dedication for our class peanut butter and jelly piece. I asked them to think about who we could dedicate the piece to. We thought long and hard and I took ideas from the class. One student said, “How about Mrs. D’s class? We shared our writing with them before!” I thought this was a great idea and I mentioned to the class that I know they are working on how-to writing, too. I modeled the writing of a dedication page and showed students the special paper they would use. I then said, “Writing a dedication is almost like writing a card for someone. You want it to be extra special. Hmm, let’s write this: To Mrs. D’s class—a nice group of kids who love how-to books as much as we do! From, your friends in room P-30.”

Comments like “great” and “how nice” came from students after hearing this. Next, I asked students to grab a piece from their folder and decide who they might dedicate it to. I said it could be someone who likes their topic or someone who doesn’t know much about the topic at all. I observed students as they thought about who to dedicate their books to and noticed they were thinking of people like mom, dad, brothers and sisters, and even other teachers!

I explained that a book or writing is a really great gift. I told them that I have saved many letters and cards with special words in them because I love them so much

and that my mom uses her recipe book after receiving it so many years ago. I said, “I hope after today you think of making books as gifts for birthdays or Christmas, or just because!” Then I explained to students that writing a dedication does not take much time at all and they would need to decide if they will go back to write dedications in old pieces or write a brand new piece with a person in mind. I ended our whole group with mentioning the publishing celebration that would be coming up, soon. I reminded students that it would be important for them to write as best they can today because soon we would be sharing our writing with a special audience.

With the end of the unit coming so quickly, I wanted to work with students who would need support finishing up pieces for our publication celebration. A few students in particular, needed support in rereading their pieces and thinking about what details to add. These students tend to not cross anything out because they say that it makes their pages look messy. I started by explaining that this was okay. I said, “Writers, as we work on our pieces today I want you to remember its okay to cross things out if you need to fix something! This just means that you’re thinking extra hard about the writing that’s already there and what will make it even better!”

With another group, I focused on the concept of changing a piece many times until it’s the best it can be. However, they are not aiming for their pieces to be perfect. If they work independently, the pieces they produce will show all of their hard work instead of teacher ideas and suggestions. In the middle of writing time, I stopped writers where they were and asked them to put their eyes on me. I said, “Right now, I want you to choose a piece for our publishing celebration so I can give you a few tips.” I asked them to pick a piece that they wanted to put on display *or* one that they wanted to give to

someone as a gift. After choosing this piece, they would need to choose the reader that it was going to—maybe it’s one that would learn a lot from their writing. I explained that the piece they choose should be one they enjoy working on because we would be spending more time on it tomorrow. After 30 minutes of writing, I called students to the carpet and asked them to bring their piece with them.

I had them sit next to a partner and told them they would be working with this person to talk about one thing to work on tomorrow as we revise and publish. I said, “Should you be working on making your writing easier to read or taking a risk to write an introduction or dedication? You make the choice that’s best for you.” Before ending writing today, I reminded students about conclusions. I said, “This is a way to end our writing and show the reader that the book is over. Talk to your partner about what you could say to end the piece you will use for the celebration.” As students talked to each other I heard things like, “I hope you learned how to make your bed!” and “This will be the best pizza ever! Enjoy it!” Again, I was proud of the wonderful ideas they were producing.

Lesson Reflection

What Went Well

I believe it’s important to mention that I skipped session 16. The components of this lesson were the lesson I had done previously with my students that focused on the small details of what makes writing easy to read. In today’s lesson, I believe sharing a personal item was beneficial for students. Choosing someone to dedicate our classroom piece was something the students thought hard about. I would make it a point to actually

give this piece to Mrs. D's class to show students the reactions of others when we give them writing as a gift.

What Was Challenging

Calkins (2013) suggests that teachers have students choose a piece of writing for publication. I decided to do this in my lesson and while it worked well for some it was difficult for others to make the jump from writing a dedication to choosing a completely different piece to work on.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

I believe that it would have been beneficial for students if I showed more books that had dedication pages in them. That way they would have seen multiple different authors who choose to do this in their writing. I could have brought in the letters and cards I had mentioned keeping so that they could have seen another personal item besides the recipe book. Some had difficulty recognizing that the recipes were actually writing.

What I Noticed About Individual Students

All the students wrote a dedication. They were excited to think of a person who may read their piece and were thoughtful in their writing. One student said, "I can give this to my mom as a gift?! She will be so excited!"

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

I believe that one of the most important responsibilities that a teacher has is to be

sure that he/she does everything in his/her power to help students succeed. As a kindergarten teacher, I wanted to ensure that my students have positive reading and writing experiences in order to develop as readers and writers. Because my school district uses Calkins' (2013) Units of Study as the writing curriculum, my intent in conducting this qualitative self-study was to look closely at the instructional decisions and choices I made during writer's workshop and how those decisions impacted my students' attitudes about writing and their development as writers. It was my goal through this self-study to find ways to better understand the curriculum and how I could use it in the most efficient ways to support my students' writing development.

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions I have made as a result of conducting the self-study, the implications for student learning and my teaching, and offer suggestions for further research in the areas of self-study and writing instruction.

Conclusions

Throughout the course of this self-study, I researched how I could use Calkins' Units of Study to support my kindergarteners' writing development? As I concluded this self-study and reflected on the research question, I came to understand how I used Calkins' Units of Study effectively and in ways that were developmentally appropriate for my students.

Crafting and Modifying Mini Lessons and Conference Topics Supported Students' Confidence and Stamina

In the Units of Study curriculum, Lucy Calkins (2013) provides mini lesson samples, which I read the night before teaching each lesson. I often noticed that the

examples of student interactions and student work samples seemed far beyond what many of my students were capable of producing at this point in the school year. I often had to tailor my instruction of these mini lessons to meet the needs of my own students, while also keeping in mind the goal of the mini lesson and not straying far from what Calkins and her colleagues suggested. Whether it was the specific language or the types of interactions or activities the students would do during the mini lesson, I made a conscious effort to ensure my instruction was developmentally appropriate for my students. Doing this enabled my students to gain confidence in their abilities and write for longer periods of time and include more detail.

For example, during our how-to unit, Calkins suggests teachers create a list of possible topics that their students could use a resource. While I did do this with my class, I took it one step further and created a list on the Smart board so that students would be able to refer to it as they were writing independently. The list provided visual support for my students without my assistance and I knew it was something they needed based on the previous day when I recognized that they were having difficulty coming up with topics to independently write about.

One component from the mini lesson that Calkins suggested was beginning the mini lesson with a recap from the day before or a discussion of the work students previously did. I generally followed these suggestions, as I believe it was important for students to review what we did the day before. I also made a point to mention the strengths of students' work and what I noticed that went well. For example, on day four when we continued the revision process, I began the lesson by reviewing what we had

done the previous day and then highlighted how important the work of revision is to the writing process.

Extending the Time Frame of Specific Lessons Enabled Students to Progress as Writers

During this self-study it became evident to me that my students needed more instruction, guided, and independent practice at various points throughout the narrative and informational units. While Calkins suggested spending one day on each of her lessons, I knew that this would not be enough time for my students, which is why I continued multiple lessons into two sessions. Most of the time the students needed more direct instruction or I decided to re-teach a topic or concept that I recognized the students had difficulty with during the first lesson. In addition to extending lessons over multiple days, I also switched the order of a few lessons and skipped over a couple completely. On day 25, for example, I mentioned that I had skipped session 16 in the Calkins' units, as I believe the content of the lesson was too complicated for my students. I decided to take components of the lesson that applied to what my students needed, which was focusing on small details of their writing and combined them in other areas that I thought was appropriate.

On day 4, continuation of the revision process, I chose to extend the lesson to the two days because I realized that my students needed more practicing using checklists, and they needed to practice editing their own pieces. I recognized that they benefited from more than just one lesson that lasted thirty minutes with explicit instruction beforehand. I reminded them that the writing checklist would help them be sure that their writing was extra special and that they would use it to be sure they included they would need to make

their writing easy to read. I also did this on day 7, continuing the editing process, as students were preparing their publication and I wanted them to feel they had plenty of time to ensure their pieces were ready for our celebration. As I interacted with and observed students on this day, I realized they were using their peers more, but I was also able to target students who needed more direct, one-on-one instruction.

Assuming a More Indirect Role Provided Students with Opportunities for a Higher Degree of Ownership and Time to Work with Peers

Based on my long term substitute experiences, I had anticipated that writing instruction in kindergarten would include ongoing opportunities for teacher guidance and support, and while that was certainly true during the self-study I did have the opportunity to teach the students how to take control of the writing process and help them to begin to solve problems on their own. I encouraged them to take risks without assistance from me and use their peers as resources when applicable. For example, on day 13, writers answer a partner's question, I provided the opportunity for students to collaborate and interact with their peers. They began by reading their pieces to each other and then helped each other clarify areas of confusion in their writing.

In addition, I assumed a more indirect role during many of the writing lessons with my main charge supporting and advising students in the right direction. These interactions often took place at the beginning of the writing conferences as I observed student behavior and interactions they had with other students. During many writing conferences I asked prompting questions like, "What more could you say?" or "How else could you explain that?" that would direct students' thinking but they often took on a more lead role in these interactions. I noticed that the students' work became more

detailed and they produced a lot more as well.

Setting High Expectations was Essential for Student Growth

I recognize that setting high expectations for my students was also important. According to Mudre (2008), teachers should not convey to students that goals they set for them wouldn't be reached immediately. She says, "I expect my students to learn important and complex things, and that's how I teach" (p. 59). My students learned routines and expectations at the beginning of the school year and I made clear what they would be expected of them each day. They know that it's okay to be wrong, but it's not okay to not try, as this was a part of our beginning of the year discussions on rules, routines, and expectations. I encourage my students to take risks; to try even what it may be hard and I acknowledge and praised them when they did. For example, Josh, a student of mine who was very nervous about writing at the beginning of the year, was becoming more comfortable in his writing after he felt comfortable in our classroom environment. When he took the smallest risk or tried when something was challenging, I made sure to recognize him for it, and stopped the class for them to recognize his efforts as well.

Implications for Student Learning

Content and Quality of Student Writing Flourished

As a result of looking closely at my approach to writing instruction, I have seen my students' writing flourish in many ways. Students, who were drawing pictures and attempting to use labels at the start of the self-study were writing at least one sentence on each page of a three page writing booklet by the end. Their stamina and independence

developed and grew since the start of the school year. Beginning writers were writing two to three sentences on their pages and often finished one piece in a single writing session.

Students have also learned different genres of writing and know the true meaning of being an author. They have learned to take pride in their work and honestly enjoyed sharing their writing with others. Some students would often ask to share writing with another student or a different teacher. By administering pre and post assessments before and after each unit, I was able to see the significant improvements that students made. At the beginning, most students had written strings of letters, or one or two words on the page. By the end of this unit, students were writing multiple page stories or pieces of writing. While these processes exemplify the developmental writing continuum that students follow in their literacy development, I believe that using the Calkins' Units of Study, and providing students with opportunities to work with peers to deepen their understanding about writing, played a significant role in supporting their development.

More Comfortable and Motivated Students

I noticed a significant and positive change in students' attitudes toward the writing process throughout this self-study. I believe my use of the Units of Study and my focused instruction helped foster an environment that helped students feel safe, comfortable, and free to take risks. Before I began the self-study I had a student, Josh, who was very nervous about writing and he believed he needed to be perfect in order to be successful. He came into school on multiple occasions with sentences that his mother or grandmother had written so that he could copy them over during writing time. After implementing Calkins' Units of Study and creating an environment in which Josh felt he

could make mistakes and know they are a part of the learning process. At the end of the self-study he was making attempts even when the task was challenging or when he knew he might not be right. I perceive that Josh was more interested in learning and growing than being right.

Implications for My Teaching

Collaborating and Communicating with Colleagues on a Weekly Basis

During this self-study, I met with my grade level colleagues on many different occasions to discuss how our writing instruction was going and how we observed about our students' development as writers through the lessons. We also discussed components of the units that were and were not appropriate for our students and ways we could implement or modify our instruction. For example, we discussed specific lessons that we were having difficulty teaching and lessons in which we saw students struggling. We brainstormed ideas to modify the instruction so that it would target our students' needs more so than the original lesson from the units.

I enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss challenges, teaching strategies, and strengths of my writing instruction with other teachers. A specific time we met happened during a very hectic time of the year. It was before we were to give a district writing assessment and we were feeling the pressure! It was relieving to know that all of my fellow teachers felt overwhelmed and it wasn't just me. We were able to discuss our feelings and what we could do to take some pressure off of us and our students. I often asked for advice on conferencing and how other teachers managed their time, as this was something that was often challenging for me.

I believe that collaborating with colleagues will be important for me to do as I

continue my career. I have found that it is beneficial to collaborate with peers, and I believe it would be helpful to help me refine my instruction to do this once a week. I realize that there is not always time to meet that often, but I believe it would be beneficial to both support my professional development and my students' continued writing development.

Differentiating Instruction and Recognizing Students' Instructional Needs

I recognize that all of my students showed significant growth during the time frame of my self-study. I believe this happened not only because of their efforts, but also because of my dedication to differentiating instruction to provide the highest quality instruction to all students. I conferred with students on an individual and small group basis to support their development as writers. I became more of a facilitator and guided their learning and development in the right direction, but addressed misconceptions when appropriate. Paying particularly attention to how I modified and crafted my instruction to fit my students' individualized needs, will be a practice that I continue to integrate into my instructional practices.

While I wanted to follow Calkins' (2013) Units of Study as closely as possible to give students more responsibility and independence in order to help them develop as writers I knew that I could not follow it exactly as it would not all be appropriate for all of my students. Differentiating my instruction helped to be sure that all students were receiving the highest quality instruction. According to Carol Tomlinson (as cited in DeJesus, 2012, p. 10) there is valid evidence that students "are more successful in schools and find it more satisfying if they are taught in the ways that are responsive to their

readiness level.” There were times when I immediately went to a certain group of students first based on my assessment of them during our whole group mini-lessons. At times, I would need to re-teach the concept that was taught during the mini-lesson. These were students who I knew needed more support and explicit instruction. I also grouped students based on similar writing or behavioral needs and met with these students together during conferences. Making instructional decisions based on my students’ areas of strength and interest and differentiating my instruction, no matter what the content or curriculum says, must always be a priority of mine.

Recommendations for Future Research

Calkins’ Units of Study in a Multi Age Classroom

The school district in which I teach has another elementary school that is a multi-age school. It would be interesting to conduct a study in one of these classrooms. As Calkins’ new Units of Study are specific for each grade level and developmentally appropriate for students, I would be interested to see how this curriculum is presented to students and how their writing develops over the course of a year. Would older students take on more responsibility and leadership roles? How would teachers group their students or choose writing partners where applicable? Looking at the instructional decisions of a teacher in a multi-age classroom and comparing it to those in a single age classroom would be noteworthy in this field of research. Different aged students come to school with different needs and require completely different instruction. The curriculum for each grade level is different and what students are expected to know is not the same. I would like to see how a teacher in this type of classroom handles differentiating

instruction.

Writing Instruction Combined with Handwriting and Proper Letter Formation

The school district in which I work in does not have a designated handwriting program for teachers to use. In kindergarten, proper letter formation is important for students to learn so that it can continue to be something they work on. I noticed that because there was such an emphasis on the actual writing students were doing and a goal was to get them to produce more, handwriting often took a backseat. I made time to address this during guided reading groups or certain mini-lessons that I taught, but it was definitely not enough time to see a difference in their handwriting abilities.

It would be interesting to research handwriting and how, if at all, it connects to development and growth in student writing. I wonder if it would be beneficial to incorporate handwriting instruction within a writing curriculum? There is no official handwriting program in the district I work in, but I tried to incorporate proper letter formation into guided reading groups and during interactive writing. In terms of an actual study, I would be interested to see what student work looks like in a class that provides a formal handwriting program to students and if it impacted their writing or their motivation to write. Over the course of a year, how does a teacher's direct, daily instruction of a formal handwriting program, impact the development of students' writing or their motivation to write.

Final Thoughts

I conducted this self-study to learn how I could support my kindergarten students' writing development through the use of the Lucy Calkins Units of Study (2013). Because

my students were in the emergent stages of their literacy development and the skills they developed lay the foundation for later literacy success, the ways I presented my writing instruction around Calkins' units and engaged the students in writing activities were very important. I believe that giving students ample reading and writing opportunities is vital for their later experiences and successes in literacy.

Teaching the writing process was always difficult for me, especially in terms of supporting my students during their independent writing time. During this self-study I found that I often had to modify and craft mini-lessons to meet the needs of my students. While Calkins (2013) provided different work samples and examples of language to use with students, I found that I needed to make changes for my own group of students, whether it was adjusting a mini lesson or providing extra instruction on specific concepts that were difficult for them.

It was also important for me to build a community of writers in my classroom. The language Calkins suggested using was something I took seriously and used her suggested language each day. I also believe that beginning writer's workshop at the very beginning of school and giving students time to practice and understand the routines and rules are essential to building this safe and comfortable community. This allows students to act and write freely without feeling judged by other students. Through my use of language and ongoing enthusiasm for their work, I believe my students knew that I viewed them as writers and that when it was time for writer's workshop, everyone would be writing. Mudre (2008) recognizes that this is a way to inspire students to write and states "when we invite our students to join a community of writers, we take time to introduce them to good writers and show them what it's like to be a writer" (p. 56).

I know that a set curriculum or program such as Calkins' Units of Study (2013) is not the sole means to instruction. I wanted to provide students with ample reading and writing experiences to support their development. In looking at my own instructional decisions, reflecting on my teaching, modifying and crafting mini-lessons, and using Calkins' work as a guide, I was able able to continuously support my students writing development.

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