The Use of Graphic Organizers in Supporting Primary Aged Students in Genre Specific Writing Task

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to examine the impact that graphic organizers have on the writing process and product for primary aged students. The graphic organizer functions as a tool for meaning making within the context of school writing. The research questions that will be explored in this study focus on how graphic organizers capture teacher scaffolding, the relationship between graphic organizers and the final product, and how the use of graphic organizers encourage natural ways of writing. Research will be based in Anne Dyson's (1981) study of cultural factors in writing and storytelling, and Sarah Michaels' (2008) attention to strategies that non-mainstream children use in academic writing.

Three focal children representing diverse backgrounds are examined in the classroom setting. They attend a public school in Upstate New York. They participate in a literacy curriculum that includes writer's workshop, 6 + 1 Traits of writing instruction and opportunities for writing with in the science and social studies content areas. These students have access to computer lab once every other week. Data collection took a variety of forms including observations, interviews, and student work samples. The duration of the study was four weeks.

The findings from this study have tentatively suggested that a graphic organizer can make the writing structure more accessible to students when coupled with appropriate teacher scaffolding and opportunities for authentic content area related experiences. Recommendations for teachers include providing a variety of graphic organizers for student to choose from and extensive modeling of their use.

Chapter One

Introduction

During the first grade year, children move across the writing spectrum from preliterate writers, those who draw picture to express their ideas, to emergent and transitional writers, those who use some invented spelling and some standard spelling. At the beginning of the year the teacher's emphasis is on creating motivation and purpose for writing. Writing at this time looks very much like the spoken language children use to communicate their thoughts and feelings orally. However, by mid-year the expectation is that children will utilize writing structures that are genre specific and less reflective of spoken language. Clear communication of ideas relies heavily on knowing the expectation for a given written format. When writing in the procedural genre, the format includes an introduction and conclusion that are reflective of one another. Beverly Derewianka (1990) identifies the steps in writing in the narrative genre as the following, orientation, complication, and resolution (p. 41).

The readiness that students have upon entering their first grade year varies greatly. Cultural factors play a role in the wide range of readiness seen by primary school teachers (Heath, 1982). Mainstream, white middle class female teachers, provide a curriculum that is shaped by their experience. Students from nonmainstream backgrounds, primarily student of African American descent and from low income families, often experience curriculum access issues. It is critical to provide explicit instruction on academic genres for these diverse students' academic success. Graphic organizers play a role in providing access within the context of a

problematic social situation. Accessibility and cultural implications will be explored in this study.

Problem Statement

Early writing is reflective of spoken language. Children write statements such as "I like puppies" and do not realize that more details must be added for this to be considered a story. As a spoken statement this form is considered acceptable. However, it does not translate well into writing. Students often experience difficulty clarifying and expanding on their ideas. The following is a transcript of a writing conference that occurred early in the school year. The class had discussed writing about personal interests and known experiences. After allowing students to write for several minutes, the teacher researcher initiated an informal writing conference. The following ensued.

Transcript of early writing conference:

T: Tell me about your writing.

St: Butterflies are beautiful.

T: I like your topic. What details are you going to be adding?

St: None, I don't know.

T: Hum. Why do you think Butterflies are beautiful?

(Pause, student does not respond)

T: Can you tell me about a time you saw one?

St: I don't know.

As this writing conference demonstrates, the student had generated a writing idea. However, expansion of the idea failed to occur. The student was unable to move past the introductory sentence, "Butterflies are beautiful". Movement beyond topic selection takes a variety of forms in the early academic writing stages. Students work to blend their known forms of oral communication with the expectations that are a part of academic writing. The writing conference, oral rehearsal, and graphic organizer use create a guideline for the completion of an academic text (whether it is narrative, report, or of another genre). An example of a student preparing to write by talking about their idea follows. The student is not yet truly rehearsing what they will write, but rather demonstrates that they have selected a topic and have identified some possible subtopics.

Transcript of early oral preparation for writing:

T: I notice that you haven't started writing. What you thinking about writing?

St: Well, my dad and I, we raked leaves yesterday. I jumped in them, and then guess what? I found a big ol' bug. I just kept jumping, and jumping, and jumping. I helped my dad with picking up sticks too. We got a bunch of them, they are heavy.

T: It sounds like you had a great time helping you dad. I can't wait to read about your day working with dad to clean up the yard.

St: Yea. (Student looks a paper and begins drawing a leaf pile).

In this particular instance the student was unable to move forward with recording their ideas. The student reported that they "just didn't know what to write".

This shows that potentially, the student is aware that a format for recording a personal narrative exists. However, without further support they were not sure how to access this genre.

When providing instruction this teacher researcher begins with what is already known as a foundation to build upon, this is referred to as the asset model of teaching. The Asset Model of literacy development always begins with what the child knows, and builds on it further. This is closely tied to the concept of funds of knowledge. According to Neuman, Khan, and Dondolo's Libraries in Nepal (2008), "...the model is based on the premise that people have "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and life experiences that can be harnessed for positive pedagogical actions (p. 514). Oral expression is a fund of knowledge that first grade students bring to school. Oral expression is the building block for written work. Gradually writing attempts will move toward the use of more genre specific writing forms. That transition will be accelerated with the scaffold of graphic organizers. Graphic organizers work to break down genre specific writing tasks into more accessible forms.

In addition to oral expression, students have a vast ray of experiences that they find engaging and want to share. Authentic writing experiences have the potential to emerge from listening to students talk about their lives and helping them harness their ideas in order to express them in written form. Expressing interest in the day-to-day experiences students have and showing support for the topics they find interesting are important foundations for jumpstarting a positive writing career.

Students from the very beginning of their lives have learned to communicate within a certain context. Students from a mainstream background have learned how to communicate in a context with people that employ a topic centered approach to communicating. Students from the mainstream background will be unaware of how beneficial exposure and practice with this communication form will be for them (Michaels, 2008). Students from a nonmainstream background may use a theme based approach to communication. This communication form is very useful for them in the context of home and community. However, in the school setting this communication form is not valued. Access to curriculum through the use of graphic organizers will be explored with communication differences in mind.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to investigate student use of two types of graphic organizers in genre specific writing. Students are provided with two types of graphic organizer tool as a scaffold to genre specific writing tasks. Students will use a web (See Appendix D) in order to collect and organize information for their animal reports. Students will also use a graphic organizer to structure a procedural writing of choice. The graphic organizer will have the key words, "first, then, next, last" (See Appendix E). The procedural writing will give instructions to a classmate to complete a given task (e.g., how to build a snowman). This study will be addressing the following questions:

- What is the impact of graphic organizer on genre specific writing tasks?
    - How do graphic organizers capture teacher scaffolding?

- What is the relationship between graphic organizers and the final product?
- How does the use of graphic organizers encourage natural ways of writing?
- How do students feel about the use of graphic organizers?

A series of lessons will be taught which will include how to use various graphic organizers and prepare students for the writing process. Two genres will remain central to the research, narrative genre and report genre. These two genres will be explored in depth. Through attitude surveys, observations, anecdotal notes, transcripts of writing conferences and student work samples evidence of the impact of graphic organizer usage is examined. The teacher researcher is curious about the student's ability to use and select graphic organizers for use. The teacher researcher is also curious about the cultural and social implications for shaping student writing through the use of graphic organizers. Issues concerning accessibility and cultural sensitivity will be explored.

Rationale

The rational for this study is to examine the impact of the graphic organizer tool as a scaffold for genre specific writing tasks. Two types of graphic organizers will be integrated into the writing workshop prewriting experience. Students will have flexibility in graphic organizer selection and use. Genre specific writing events will be used to motivate students to write. An example of a genre specific writing event would be, a teacher bringing in a cat to inspire investigation before beginning animal

research reports. Graphic organizers will be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. Students will be able to record prewriting thinking with pictures, bulleted lists, and sentences on their selected graphic organizer.

The ability to use a variety of writing genres is essential for academic achievement. As students progress through their K-12 education and beyond they must possess the ability to communicate their ideas clearly through writing. As an adult, writing forms seem natural and almost second nature. Children need to understand that purpose, audience, and form vary between writing genres. The format used to write an email to a friend is different from the format used to write a persuasive essay. In order to use different writing forms, the writer must consider the purpose of writing and the structure of writing, which is a challenging task for emergent writers. Graphic organizers create a visual representation of an otherwise abstract structure. The tangible graphic organizer scaffold promotes understanding and practice using the writing structure.

Readiness and cultural factors need to be considered. Students arrive at school with a vast array of experiences. As both Sarah Michaels (1981) and Shirley Brice Heath (1982) suggest students who are a part of the mainstream culture come to school with experiences that parallel and support the experiences they will have in school. Many of the home practices that students from mainstream culture have are supportive and reflective of academic practices. Access to curriculum is not a concern for these students because they have been shaped in ways that will allow them to

quickly see and utilize the connections between the home and school practices in which they have engaged.

Conversely, students from nonmainstream backgrounds often have experiences that are incongruent with the expectations and experiences in the school setting. Access to curriculum is a concern for these students. The ways in which ideas are expressed are structured differently from the schools expectations. For this reason, academic writing needs to be taught explicitly. Genre structure can be taught through the use of graphic organizers. When teaching the mainstream valued writing forms, cultural sensitivity needs to be maintained.

Organization of the Thesis

In Chapter one, entitled "Introduction" the teacher researcher sets a purpose for the research study. The problem is identified; the teacher researcher is interested in student's ability to use a variety writing genres. The rational for the study is to examine the impact of the graphic organizer tool as a scaffold for genre specific writing tasks. The significance is that writing in various genres is an academic skill used through one's life time. Readiness is also a significant issue and is shaped by cultural factors that will be considered.

In Chapter two, conceptual framework and relevant studies are explored. The context in which students communicate their ideas, current trends in teaching approaches, and the ways that teachers scaffold the writing process will be explored. Implications for using a genre-based pedagogy will be identified in past research.

In Chapter three, the teacher research establishes the method used in the action research study. Data collection will occur through writing conference transcripts, student work, and student interviews. A detailed outline of classroom activities is given. The sequence and scope of the research study will be displayed in a table. The community, school, and classroom context are revealed. Three focal students who represent nonmainstream cohorts are identified and their backgrounds are explained.

In Chapter four, research results and findings will be presented. Two types of graphic organizers in genre specific writing were explored. Teacher scaffolding, final writing products, and the support of natural writing tendencies by diverse students were examined. How students felt about the use of graphic organizer was also considered. Students work samples, interview data, survey results, and daily observational notes were collected. Research questions are divided into themes and focal students will be examined in relation to themes.

Research results establish that the use of graphic organizers requires teacher scaffolding in order to build up appropriate vocabulary and experiential knowledge in a topic area. Extensive modeling occurred in order to help students understand how to use the graphic organizer. Students were instructed on how to use the graphic organizer in a variety of ways. This contributed to the successful use of the tool. Students were shown how to use graphic organizers by drawing pictures with labels, discussing with a peer before writing, and writing and rereading. Each child then chose a method from those presented that works well for them.

Chapter five includes a discussion of conclusions and recommendations with the understanding that the research study has certain limitations. Based on this study the teacher researcher recommends that graphic organizers be used to support primary aged students through the writing process. Scaffolding is necessary for students to use the graphic organizers in ways that are productive for them. Field trips, mini lessons that include teacher modeling, and ample opportunity to explore the subject area content before writing are recommended. Limitations include that the study was only four weeks long and that only seventeen participants were included in the study.

Summary

This research study will assess the impact of graphic organizers in genre specific writing tasks in the first grade classroom. Impact of the use of graphic organizers, accessibility of the writing task, and independence in writing with the graphic organizer scaffold will be examined. Various writing genres will be visually represented in graphic organizers and presented to students. Direct instruction on how to use the graphic organizer tool and choice in several different graphic organizer tools will be provided. The graphic organizer used to write the animal report will also be used to create an animal glog (similar to a blog) on the school program glogster. Data collection will take a variety of forms including, attitude surveys, observations, anecdotal notes, transcripts of writing conferences and student work samples. These data forms will be analyzed to determine the impact of the graphic organizer tool on genre specific writing tasks. Culturally factors will be considered. Future practices will be recommended.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The path to writing proficiency that school aged children take includes transitions in style and format as writers explore genres. Theories of social constructivism and linguistic approaches to writing shape the current models that are utilized to teach school aged children how to write (Gee 1988). Currently, there is a lack of research on the use of graphic organizers; therefore this research study is important for understanding how graphic organizers can make the writing process accessible to primary aged students. In a literature search, few articles referenced graphic organizers, much less explored is the impact of this important tool on children's educational experiences. Given the dearth of literature, this review will explore the research relevant to graphic organizer use. These include cultural and social aspects of the school writing experience and the context for the emergent writing experience. Programs such as Units of Study for Primary Writing by Lucy Calkins (2007) formed the way writing is taught in schools, and will be investigated. Accessibility to genre specific writing, scaffolding independent writing and the impact of graphic organizer use on the writing experience remain central to this research study.

The need for writing instruction research at the elementary school age level continues to grow. In their study, "Writing into the 21st Century: An Overview or Research on Writing from 1999 to 2006" Juzwik et al. (2006) found that of writing

research conducted between 1999 and 2006 only 24% pertains to elementary school level children. Furthermore, only 9% focused on genre specific writing tasks and the way that children approach these tasks. The beginnings of writing lay the foundation for future writing success. It is important that educators continue to reflect on, and grow our understanding of writing processes in the early stages of writing development. In the next section I will explore how young children develop their writing skills.

Communication Context: Situated Literacy

When thinking about communication of ideas, educators must consider three structures that influence how communication is understood. John Paul Gee (1988) defines these three structures as the referential, contextualization, and ideology system (p. 2). The referential system is the literal meaning of the words, it is simply what is said. The contextualization system relates to who communicated the idea and in what environment. The third and final system is the ideology system. This system frames communication in belief, values, and culture. Every communication is impacted by the three aforementioned systems. An easy way to think about the impact of these three systems is to consider instances in which people have been quoted out of "context". A quote taken out of context often results in a change in the speaker's message. Context and the three systems are one in the same. When children enter school writing, the expectations for their written communication shift. Children at first apply their home communication context rules to school writing until they develop an understanding of this new context and the expectations that go with it. In

her article "Sharing Time: Children's Narrative Styles and Differential Access to Literacy" Sarah Michaels (1981) states that, "...that children from different backgrounds come to school with different narrative strategies and prosodic conventions for giving narrative account" (p. 423) and that variations in their understanding of school literacies can either positively or negatively impact their transition into school literacy discourse.

Sarah Michaels (1981) describes the shift from informal oral language that is used in the home to academic oral sharing as an understanding of discursive prose. That is to say, a context needs to be created at school for the listener that in the home is implied. To write or to speak with discursive prose at school means the person speaking considers their audience and provides the necessary details for them to understand what is being communicated. Some children come to school more prepared for this transition than others because their home language reflects that of the language of school.

Sarah Michaels' (1981) research also indicates an important literacy difference between children from mainstream backgrounds and children of African American descent. She describes this stylistic difference as speaking in a "topic centered" approach as opposed to a "thematic" approach. Children from the mainstream culture use a topic centered approach in which ones focus is selected and described in a way that provides background and details for the listener. The thematic approach used by African American students in Michaels study is more like a free association in which several topics are linked by a theme (p. 7). In academic settings a topic centered

approach is used. The difference in how children are prepared for academic literacies is significant for the research on graphic organizers by the teacher researcher. Children who come to school already familiar with a topic centered approach access the written narrative structure quickly because it matches the home literacy they have used all along. Children who use a thematic approach are put in the position of having to learn a new structure in order to adhere to the rules of academic written communication. Sarah Michaels states that, "group specific differences in discourse strategies or style can assume great importance because misunderstanding frequently results in denial of access to some social opportunity" (p. 3). For example, during a show and tell time a student who uses a thematic approach may be asked to cut their show and tell short because it is does not fit the topic centered approach and socially accepted way of speaking and therefore is misunderstood. This is true of writing experiences as well. During a writing conference the teachers clarifying questions are based on the understanding that the student writing will fit the topic centered writing approach. Thematic elements will be erased and the writing will be restructured. This becomes problematic for both the teacher and the child as meaning is construed and lost.

It is up to the teacher to be aware of cultural implications and provide appropriate supports for students while maintaining cultural sensitivity. When genre specific writing is required, teachers must make the writing tasks accessible for student through a variety of modalities, including the use of multiple graphic organizers.

Similarly, Heath (1982) points to the fact that a part of mainstream culture is reading a bedtime story. In this literacy event, children are read to and asked to label and discuss pictures and words in a conversation style that mirrors a school based literacy discussion. Heath states drawing on Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Griffin and Humphrey (1978), and Mehan (1979), stating that, "Before the age of two, the child is socialized into the "initiation-reply-evaluation sequences" repeatedly described as the central structural feature of classroom lessons" (p. 4). Heath states that when children from non-mainstream backgrounds attend school, their ways of communicating and interacting are not valued. They are required to contribute to conversations in ways that are unfamiliar to them. "They are asked as individuals to identify items by name, and to label features such as shape, color, size, number. The stimuli to which they are to give these responses are two-dimensional flat representations which are often highly stylized and bear little resemblance to the "real" items "(p. 22). The rigidity of the literacy event interactions that occur in schools creates a situation in which non-mainstream children are denied access to what is considered a successful literacy event.

Age is an important factor in looking into the development of academic written communication. In the first grade, the demands of writing begin to intensify and it becomes an expectation that children can effectively use this communication register. Children develop oral and written literacies before they begin their school experience. From the very early stages of life oral literacies are necessary for meeting basic needs, including expressing hunger, pain, and happiness. Written literacies are

often congruent in that they resemble oral literacies for quite sometime. Marie Clay (1977) states, "Somewhere between three and five years most children in a literate culture become aware that people make marks on paper purposefully" (p. 334). At the ages of six and seven, first grade children begin to explore purposeful writing in more depth through the use of a variety of formats. These formats become increasingly incongruent from the oral literacies in which children have always communicated. Writing starts to sound less and less like spoken language. This is especially true for children who are not from the mainstream background, which is the white middle class.

Children from non-mainstream backgrounds have often used oral traditions of communication rather than their middle class counterparts who use "literate style" or academic style communications (Gee, 1985). Gee argues that the social cultural differences in home language practice, impact a students readiness for literate style communication, therefore giving purpose to the pursuit in making writing accessible for all (Gee, 1985). The transition into school writing can be difficult for young children. In her article, "Staying in the (Curricular) Lines: Practice Constraints and Possibilities in Childhood Writing" Anne Dyson (2008) writes, "If they [children] are to stay within the lines of the curriculum, children have to learn the normative expectations of school, including about the interactional and thematic substance of practices and, indeed, about their orientation in classroom time and space" (p. 6). Part of the process of orienting children to the curricular expectations is providing them meaningful frameworks in which to express themselves. The process is similar to

learning to write a professional document such as a thesis. A framework or structure is provided and explicitly taught in order for students to formally communicate their research.

Approaches to Teaching Writing:

As a classroom teacher, supporting students through the transition to academic writing takes many forms. The use of graphic organizers is one way in which the academic writing tasks can be made accessible. In 1983, Donald Graves developed process writing, which is defined as way of thinking about writing through stages (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Process writing has since been used in schools. However, through the initial drafting, editing and revising, the efficacy of graphic organizer use as a scaffold to the writing process is not seen as an integral part of the writing process.

When determining how to approach a specific writing task one must consider the genre in which they will be writing. The definition of genre that will be utilized throughout this research study of first grade writing comes from the works of Maite Taboada. In her article, Stages in an Online Review Genre, Maite Taboada (2011) cites James R. Martin's book Language, Register and Genre, using his widely known definition of genre which is "...genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (p. 3). Taboada goes on to say that, "A given text is perceived as belonging to a genre because of its structural characteristics, that is, its staging. For that recognition to happen there must be established consensus that certain texts develop in a certain series of stages" (p. 3).

Access to genre specific writing begins with an understanding of the structural expectations. A series of writing stages are utilized in specific genre writing tasks. For example, when writing in a narrative format, the sequence of the story is important. Through a series of drafting stages the story develops within the "First, then, next, and last" structure. This structure is one of the defining characteristics of this genre and without it something is amiss.

During the primary school age years, children move across the writing spectrum from preliterate writers, those who draw pictures to express their ideas, to emergent and transitional writers, those who use some invented spelling and some standard spelling (Calkins, 1986). The writing that students engage in at the beginning of the year reflects the spoken language children use to communicate their thoughts and feelings orally (Gee, 1985). The focus at the beginning of the year is on building confidence and motivating students to write. Later in the year, the expectation is that children will utilize writing structures that are genre specific and less reflective of spoken language. Clear communication of ideas relies heavily on knowing the expectation for a given written genre. Attention to format and sequence are that distinguish one genre from another is required. When writing in the procedural genre, the format includes an introduction and conclusion that are reflective of one another. When writing in the narrative genre the format includes orientation, complication, and resolution.

When first graders begin to learn about the narrative genre, they start with the understanding that the narrative genre stages include a beginning, middle, and end.

Movement through these stages progresses in a linear sequential style. It is widely accepted that authors cannot start at the middle of their story and work back to the beginning and then to the end when writing in the narrative genre. The narrative genre is topic centered and relies on sequence to maintain meaning. The details of the narrative genre include what happened, why the event took place, and how the child felt about the event.

The report genre is structurally very different from the narrative genre (See Table 1). Sequence is less important to making meaning. The author establishes a topic and then proceeds to tell important details or facts about the topic. Although the writing does not progress through beginning, middle, and end, it does rely on a structure. Each paragraph begins with a subtopic and three or four details are explored within the subtopic. Report writing tends to be more difficult for elementary school children. In their article, "Supporting Informational Writing in the Elementary Grades Donovan and Smolkin (2011) state that, "Given the importance of the information report genre for school success, it is essential for teachers to understand elementary school students' writing development and to utilize a framework for instruction that is varied, purposeful, and, at times, quite explicit" (p. 11). Part of the way that teachers can be explicit in their teaching of genre specific writing tasks is by providing a graphic organizer that serves as a structural outline.

Table 2.1: Genre Features

Genre Characteristics	
Narratives	Purpose: Entertain or inform Structure: Orientation, events, complications, & resolution Linguistic Features: Recount of east event. Action verbs used.
Report	Purpose: To inform or persuade Structure: Introduction to topic, related sub-topics explored, conclusion. Linguistic Features: Specialized vocabulary, present tense, descriptive and generalized (e.g. - penguins, not Holly the penguin).

Teacher's Scaffolding of Genres in Class Activities:

Through the structure of Writer's Workshop, which is currently embraced by many schools, the student-teacher writing conference acts as the scaffold to move children through deeper understandings of the way a specific genre is written. Calkins (1994) puts the student-teacher conference at the middle of writing development. A shift towards using graphic organizers to promote genre understanding may free up writing conference time for more idea development conversations, rather than structural and format corrections. The graphic organizer may help children pinpoint what aspect of the writing genre they are having difficulty with. In this way, graphic organizers work to promote a more productive conversation between the writer and the teacher.

In his article, "Promoting Writing and Preventing Writing Failure in Young Children", Brian Kissel (2008) states that, "The purpose of exposing children to different kinds of writing is to show them that people write for many reasons (e.g., to entertain, inform, communicate, respond, remember)" (p. 54). When educators focus on genre specific writing tasks, children learn new ways and reasons for

communicating their ideas. Purpose driven writing is authentic; children need to know how to utilize writing structures appropriately. Graphic organizers reflect the genre structure and allow children to focus on communicating their ideas without getting bogged down in structural technicalities. As children use graphic organizers, their understanding of the genre develops, resulting in a shift in the way the written piece is discussed and understood.

Another precursor to writing in a genre is oral rehearsal. Myhill and Jones (2009) discuss the social piece of writing, specifically oral rehearsal as a part of the prewriting stages. Myhill and Jones write,"...a significant and very observable characteristic of oral rehearsal is that it sounds very different from natural dialogue; its prosody is deliberate, with slower than usual speech patterns and it is more akin to reading aloud" (p. 280). Oral rehearsal coincides with the use of graphic organizers. In the writing process, both oral rehearsal and graphic organizers are used to clarify ideas and move from informal oral forms of communication to written forms.

Both oral rehearsal and the use of graphic organizers allow the writer to put their energies into developing their ideas rather than the process of physically writing in a completed form. Graphic organizers usually require the writer to use a short hand that helps them remember what it is they want to say in their final written draft. For example, instead of writing "A full grown Labrador retriever can weigh close to sixty-five pounds" a child would record "Adult Labrador: 65 pounds". Similarly oral rehearsal is idea driven and although closer to everyday speech than the final written form, an important step towards the writing task.

In her book Exploring How Text Work Beverly Derewianka expresses the importance of modeling genre specific writing tasks until students are so familiar with them that they are able to use the genre themselves. Derewianka (1991) writes, "When modeling a text, Rasheeda usually starts by reading it to the children and then drawing their attention to its overall structure so that they can see "the big picture" (p. 50). The modeling of genre use and the overlearning of the structure leaves room for students to focus on their topic, rather than how it should be written up.

Modeling is a tried and true form of teaching. Students gain clarity on assignments when teachers define and model expectations. Part of the model process in report writing is defining the genre and then explaining its structure. When looking at the report genre, Derewianka (1991) defines the function as, "organize and store factual information on a topic… [To] classify and describe the phenomena of our world" (p. 51). This definition is child friendly and provides a rationale for creating an informational report. Coupled with an authentic interest in a topic and a graphic organizer to support the structural use this genre becomes accessible.

Genre-based Pedagogy and Creativity

The writing process is at a basic level a communication channel. When teachers begin to shape and constrain the ways in which children write changes to children's natural communication forms are made. It has been argued that a structuralist approach to writing stifles children's creative expression and is therefore detrimental. In her article, "Staying in the (Curricular) Lines: Practice Constraints and Possibilities in Childhood Writing" Anne Dyson (2008) describes children's formal

writing experience in the following way. "They worked to regularize their products to fit within perceived boundaries of official practices: They grappled with page design, appropriated the desired communicative voice, and made use of multimodal tools" (p 137). She goes on to say that much of their meaningful writing is ignored as academically valuable. Dyson writes, "There were practices other than making "lisiss" that the children themselves deemed appropriate for recess time, not for writing time" (p. 139). This is to say that when educators teach children the "appropriate" writing structure it is imply that there are less valuable writing structures, some which are meaningful to them. When teaching writing genres and graphic organizer use, it is important to validate other less formal writing experiences for children as well.

Furthermore, there are cultural considerations to be examined. When mainstream culture, that is the white middle class, controls and shapes the school discourse, are the voices of those who are culturally non-mainstream being silenced? In what ways are the expectations for genre specific writing catering to the mainstream and devaluing other cultures? Anne Dyson cites Bakhtin as saying, "Official practices thus exerted a centripetal—a "homogenizing"—influence on what the children did, as they worked to regularize their texts and fit within the curricular lines" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 425). It would be irresponsible to ignore the bigger picture in which non-mainstream culture is undervalued when strict ideas about what is considered academic writing is defined by mainstream culture.

When genre specific writing tasks are defined by the mainstream cultural group, the diverse ways people communicate, and the cultural difference therein are constantly devalued and removed from the academic setting. This practice although most times carried out without an awareness that it is even happening, is still demoralizing and damaging to students from non-mainstream cultures. According to Larry Ortiz and Jayshree Jani (2010) in their article, Critical Race Theory: A Transformational Model for Teaching Diversity, "Race is a social construction, race permeates all aspects of social life, and race-based ideology is threaded throughout society" (p. 176). Ortiz and Jani go on to discuss race in institutional settings. Ortiz and Jani (2010) state, "...it is natural and effortless for most members of the dominant group to fit into existing institutional arrangement; this is not so for members of nondominant groups" (p. 180). As educators it is critical that access to academic writing is obtained for all students; this entails defining and explicitly teaching guidelines for specific writing tasks. Derewianka (1991) writes, "One of the functions of school in our culture is to take the child beyond the personal, commonsense world of particular instances and into new worlds of generalized phenomena" (p. 55). However this should not diminish the importance of sensitively to cultural differences. This can still be obtained by providing space for non-mainstream writing and communication. Positive feedback and an air of curiosity are paramount on the teacher's part.

Chapter Three

Study Design

Introduction

This action research study is designed to explore how the use of graphic organizers work to support or hinder student writing of specific genre text. The setting for the research is a suburban school district in upstate New York. A large portion of the school population receives free and reduced price lunch which indicates a low socioeconomic status. The teacher researcher will be examining a group of seventeen first grade students. The teacher researcher will explore the impact of graphic organizer on genre specific writing tasks. She will investigate how educators foster independence with the use of graphic organizers for students who are learning to write. The research will examine how graphic organizers are used to make writing tasks accessible for students. The writing process components, form, structure, and style will be viewed as venues for impact. In the next section community, school, and classroom demographics will be explained.

Contextual Information & Participants

Community

According to the town of Bloomfield government website, the population of Bloomfield in 2006 was 44,933 people. The median household income in 2005 was 52,100. Bloomfield is a suburban area within Flower County. The county demographics according to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2009 are as follow. Eighty percent of the town identifies as Caucasian, fourteen percent identify as Black or

African American, 6.2 percent identify as Latino, and 2.8 percent identify as Asian. The Bloomfield community has five elementary schools that feed into Violet Middle School. The high school, Spring High School, has a graduation rate of 94% which is 14% higher than the state average. Bloomfield has one public library and several parks available for community use.

School

Francis Elementary School is one of five elementary schools in the Bloomfield Central School District. This school is a Title I school and is in good standing. This means that the school is not up for restructuring or corrective action. In the 2009-2010 school year, 460 students attended Francis Elementary. Eighty-three of those students were in first grade. The average class size at this particular school is fifteen students. Francis school serves both ethnically and economically diverse population of students. The school community is not representative of the Bloomfield community. During the 2009-2010 school year, 45% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Six percent of the school population has limited English proficiency. Fifty-nine percent of the students identify as Caucasian, twenty-nine percent as Black or African American, fourteen percent as Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and seven percent as Hispanic or Latino. Attendance rate for the 2008-2009 school year was ninety-six percent in attendance.

There are many resources utilized at Francis Elementary school. Each classroom is equipped with wireless internet and a projection unit. Elmo's, a type of document camera used for projecting student work, are shared by three or four

classrooms. The school has three playgrounds and a large sports field. Technologies such as the play away (similar to books on an ipod) are available in the school library. Two laptop computer carts are housed in the school and available for checkout and computer lab. In addition a content area book room was constructed this year with science, social studies, and math literacy resources.

English language arts instruction is guided by several programs at Francis Elementary school. In writing two programs are utilized. They are Units of Study for Primary Writing by Lucy Calkins and the 6 + 1 Writing Traits. The Units of Study for Primary Writing provides specific lessons to launch and maintain a writer's workshop. The 6 + 1 Writing Traits is used to teach writing characteristics such as voice and organization. Formal writing assessments are based on the 6 + 1 Writing rubric from the upper elementary grades.

The Daily Five program by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser is used to structure the independent reading, writing, and word work portion of the day. The program teaches independent literacy practices so that teachers can focus on guided reading groups. Fountas and Pinnell Continuum of Literacy Learning is used to target specific needs in guided reading. Fountas and Pinnell running records are used to assess growth in reading at each quarter. Three other assessments are used to guide instruction. The Development Reading Assessment is used every five weeks to assess reading growth in students who are reading below the expected benchmarks. The primary spelling inventory is used to assess word pattern understanding. This assessment informs the types of word work that is given to individual students.

Lastly, a sentence dictation is given at every quarter to determine spelling pattern and punctuation rule understanding.

Class

The classroom in which the study will take place has a large library that is organized both by reading level and by subject. The carpet area lies within the library and is used for a meeting place at the beginning of the day and at the beginning of most lessons. Students sit at four tables arranged in a square. Writing supplies and high interest texts are stored in the middle of each table. Three computers line the back wall of the classroom. The eastern most wall is lined with windows that overlook the school sports field. Under the window there are student cubbies that contain math, language arts, poetry, social studies, and science supplies. On the western wall a bathroom, sink, and drinking fountain are available. Student book boxes, classroom games, and student coats and backpacks are stored in a wall storage unit. At the front of the room a listening center is set up at a low table. Student mailboxes and a storage unit for math supplies are nearby. The "turn in basket" and the "unfinished work basket" sit on a table next to the pencil sharpener and an aquarium housing a frog and snail. Two spaces are reserved for teacher student meetings and teacher work space. The teacher's desk is in the corner near the listening center and the kidney shaped table is adjacent to the Eastern wall.

The first grade class in this study is comprised of seventeen students. The class gender ration is nearly equal having nine females and eight males. Twenty-nine percent of the first grade class is ethnically diverse. Twelve students identify as

Caucasian, three identify as African American and one identifies as Asian. Four students are bilingual, three students in American Sign Language and English and one student in Vietnamese and English. For this study all students will be considered participants. Three students will serve as focal students. Student work, interviews, and surveys will be collected from the three focal students.

Participants

The first focal student is a female who is bilingual in American Sign Language and English. She is of African American descent and lives in a single parent home. She is currently reading above grade level and enjoys literacy activities in reading, writing, listening, and word work. She is enthusiastic about the writing process. For the remainder of the study she will be referred to as Lilly (this name is a pseudonym). Lilly can independently generate story ideas and especially enjoys writing about events from her life.

The second focal student is a male student who speaks both Vietnamese and English. He lives with both parents and a younger sister. He is currently reading at grade level and enjoys writing and word work activities. For the remainder of the study he will be referred to as Tim (this name is a pseudonym). Although he is shy, he will share his learning and discoveries with the teacher one on one. He is able to generate story ideas, but struggles to expand upon them. He typically writes about activities and people he likes.

The third focal student is a Caucasian female who is trilingual in American Sign Language, English, and Russian Sign language. She is currently reading above

grade level and enjoys reading early chapter books. She enjoys the writing process and is eager to share her work with peers and teachers. For the remainder of the study she will be referred to as Sadie (this name is a pseudonym). Sadie enjoys is developing her computer literacies and enjoys working in the glogster program that the school uses.

Teacher Researcher

The teacher researcher, Lauren Hawkins herself identifies as Caucasian and is in her mid-twenties. As a first year teacher she is interested in genre specific writing tasks. She conducts a writer's workshop daily in which students have explored nonfiction, poetry, personal essay, report, and many other writing genres. She works closely with her students as they navigate the writing process. She currently holds a Bachelors of Arts with a major in Education from Michigan State University. She is currently pursing her Masters Degree in Literacy and Students with Disabilities certification at the College at Brockport SUNY.

Class Activities

The Daily Schedule is consistent and follows the routine shown below.

Table 3.1: Daily Schedule

Subject	Duration
Morning Work	10 minutes
Morning Meeting	10 minutes
Phonics Instruction	10 Minutes
Specials	40 Minutes
Daily Five Rotations ❖ Minilesson: Focusing on word work or writing 10 to 15 minutes maximum. ❖ Guided Reading ❖ Reading to Self ❖ Read to Someone ❖ Listening - Books on Tape with Written Response ❖ Word Work ❖ Writing ❖ Computers - Storyline online & Bookflix	60 minutes Three twenty minute rotation through centers occurring daily
Lunch	30 minutes
Science/Social Studies	30 minutes Social Studies occurs twice weekly, Science occurs three times weekly
Writers Workshop	45 Minutes
Math	1 hour 15 minutes
Computer Lab and Library	Alternating weeks for approximately 30 minutes.

Parental permission for participation in this study will be collected from each of the seventeen members of the first grade class. A letter to parents and or guardians was sent home. This letter explained the study and asks for a signature in order to secure consent. There will be no recourse or reward for opting to participate or opting out of the study. Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Names identifiers will be blacked out on any student work that is collected.

Research will take place during the writing workshop and centers work time. This first grade class uses the process approach to writing through the use of the 6 + 1 Traits and Lucy Calkins programs. Prewriting, revisions, and students conferences are collaborative experiences between the teacher and her student. Students work with peers and the teacher utilizing the linguistic approach to writing. Verbalization of written work helps cue students to places in their writing in which sentence structure needs to be reworked in order to convey their message effectively.

Data Collection Instruments

Data will be collected in several different ways in order to triangulate evidence of findings. Informal observations accompanied by anecdotal notes will function as tools for recording student conversations around writing, both in informal and peer conference settings. Field notes will provide a space for observations of the atmosphere during writing and student demeanor during the writing process. Field notes will also include my reflections on writing lessons and the writing workshop time. Student work samples will be collected at each step of the writing process including filling in the graphic organizer and writing the first draft. Student interviews will be given at the beginning and end of the study in order to collect data on attitudes surrounding writing and writing tools across time. Student interviews will be conducted through out the research study in order to gauge understanding of the use of graphic organizers as a part of the writing process.

Table 3.2: Data Collection Method

Types of Data/ Data Collection Method	*Purpose*
Informal Observation	To collect data on student conversations, student on task an off task behaviors, student graphic organizer selection and use. The graphic organize for narrative writing will include the language first, then, next, last to support a sequential retelling. The report graphic organizer will include topic area headings such as characteristics, habitat, and food.
Anecdotal/Field Notes	Reflection on daily writing workshop experience and graphic organizer use.
Interview	Firsthand information about student understanding of the writing process and graphic organizer use and function.
Work Samples	Writing samples will be collected before and after the use of graphic organizers. Any graphic organizers, drafts, and final copies will be collected if they connect meaningfully to the research study,
Attitude Survey	Firsthand account attitude change and growth across time.

The teacher researcher will be careful that survey questions and interviews will pertain directly to the research questions that are being investigated. In this way student time and energy will be respected. Field notes and student work samples will also be selected based on their relevance to the research questions. Questions, transcripts, observations, and work samples will provide valid information because they will be carefully formed and executed in order to remain relevant and related to research questions. Data analysis will include citation and references of sources from

previously published resources. Data analysis will be carried out objectively and with careful attention to reliability.

Procedures of Study

This study will begin with the collection of student work samples to establish baseline data. Work samples will be analyzed for structural and content accuracy assessed through a rubric rating scale. Student interviews and parent surveys will be administered prior to the study to assess attitudes towards writing and knowledge of the graphic organizer tool. Two graphic organizer tools will be used to model approaches to organizing ideas for genre specific writing tasks over the course of four weeks. Lessons will begin with a *read aloud* accompanied by *think alouds* pertaining to noticing key ideas and interacting with nonfiction texts. Explicit instruction on how to organize information in a graphic organizer during the research process will be carried out. During independent practice the teacher researcher will meet with individual students to conference about their writing. Students will discuss difficulties, successes, during whole group share at the end of each writing period. After four weeks, transcripts, student work, and student interviews with be complied and analyzed.

Table 3.3: Weekly Research Schedule

Weekly Research Schedule	
Week 1	❖ Collect baseline data using student attitude surveys, parent questionnaires and notes from student writing conferences. ❖ Collect student work samples from free write time. ❖ Students and parents will be informed that research will be conducted over the next four weeks.
Week 2	❖ Teach graphic organizer used for narrative texts. ❖ Practice time provided. ❖ Students choose a topic for their "How To" book and use graphic organizer to write up information.
Week 3	❖ Students finalize final draft of their "How to" book. ❖ Teach graphic organizer used for animal report. ❖ Send graphic organizer home for homework. ❖ Conference with students about graphic organizer use and writing. ❖ Peer editing activities will be used as students prepare to write the final draft of their papers.
Week 4	❖ Students will edit and draft of their final paper. ❖ Students will use the graphic organizer and first draft to think about a final copy. ❖ Teacher will type report. ❖ Students will use graphic organizer to create a glog using glogster. ❖ Students will reflect on their use of the graphic organizers through surveys and student conferences. ❖ I will once again collect student work samples and allow students to use graphic organizers for writing topics of their choice.

This study will last a total of four weeks. Students will participate in writing activities five days a week for 30 to 60 minutes daily. During the first week of the study, baseline data will be collected using student attitude surveys, parent questionnaires and transcripts from student writing conferences. Student work samples from free write time will be collected in order to examine student writing that occurs without the use of a graphic organizer. Students and parents will be informed that research will be conducted over the next four weeks.

During week two the students will be taught how to use one graphic organizer to aid in the process of writing a narrative text. Students will be given time to practice with the graphic organizers after their use has been modeled. Students will choose a topic and use the graphic organizer to record their thoughts. The second mini-lesson pertains to transferring information from the graphic organizer to the first writing draft. Students will be provided with scaffold such as verbal directions and modeling as needed.

During week three students will finish the final draft of their writing. A third mini-lesson will focus on the use of a second graphic organizer. This graphic organizer will be used to write a report on animals. Students will be given two days to fill in their graphic organizer with their animal report information which will be collected as homework. Students will then use the graphic organizer to record their thinking in their rough draft. The teacher researcher will meet with students and have conferences with them about their writing and future steps to be taken. Peer editing activities will be used as students prepare to write the final draft of their papers.

The four week of the study will be comprised of editing and drafting of the final paper. Students will use the graphic organizer and first draft to think about a final copy. The final project will be a typed report and a blog online using the program Glogster. Two graphic organizers will be used to complete each of these assignments. In the fourth week of the study the blog will be created and the final draft completed. In the fourth and last week of the study students will reflect on their use of the graphic organizers through surveys and student conferences. I will once

again collect student work samples and allow students to use graphic organizers for writing topics of their choice.

Data Analysis

The study will be carried out during the 2010-2011 school year beginning the last week in May continuing for four weeks. Prior to instruction beginning, students will be given a survey to assess their attitudes towards using a graphic organizer. Student interviews will be reflected upon through the lens of multiple intelligences and writing development theories at the primary school age level. Field notes and student work will be used to identify patterns of writing style, form and completeness. Through the use of field notes, student work, surveys and student conferences findings will be triangulated to ensure that findings are valid and reliable.

Themes that may arise include the similarity to early writing to spoken language, the need for sequence and structure in writing and the difference between written genres. These themes will be examined through the research questions proposed.

Coding systems that will be used include highlighting of themes in student work samples, transcripts of writing conferences, and observational notes. Writing rubrics will be analyzed using a rating scale of one to four. Analytical codes that will be used across domains of data include adherence to genre, mechanics, sentence structure, and overall cohesiveness of the written piece.

Summary

This action research study examines how the use of graphic organizers support or hinder student writing of genre specific writing tasks. Research will be conducted in a first grade class room in Upstate New York. The student population is largely from a low socioeconomic status. The school is a Title I school and is in good standing, 460 students attended Francis Elementary. Research will be conducted in a first grade classroom with seventeen students during their writer's workshop time. Data collection instruments include student work samples, transcripts of writing conferences, attitude surveys, observational notes, and interviews. Three students will be examined more closely for writing development. The study will last four weeks. Students will be taught how to use two graphic organizers for two different genre writing tasks. Data will be triangulated and analyzed student work samples, student interview data, observation notes and coding for themes.

Chapter Four

Findings

Through this research study, student use of two types of graphic organizers in genre specific writing was explored. The purpose of this study was to discover the impact graphic organizer use had on students' writing. More specifically, graphic organizers were explored in relation to teacher scaffolding, final writing products, and the support of natural writing tendencies by diverse students. How students felt about the use of graphic organizer was also examined. In this section, three focal students' work samples, interview data, survey results, and daily observational notes will be looked at to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. Background information on each focal student will be provided before delving into the research questions. Research questions will be divided into themes, or reoccurring ideas and focal students will be examined in relation to themes.

Three focal students provided interview data, work samples, and survey results. The first focal student, Lilly, is a female who is bilingual in American Sign Language and English. Lilly uses several strategies when writing. The most common strategy is rereading her work to check that it makes sense. Nearly every instance of writing she completed was coupled with this strategy. The second focal student, Tim, is a male student who speaks both Vietnamese and English. Tim often approaches writing by first drawing a picture with labels. His thoughts are usually captured most accurately in his pictures. The third focal student, Sadie, is a Caucasian female who is

trilingual in American Sign Language, English, and Russian Sign language. Sadie approaches writing as a social event. She benefits from discussing her thoughts with a partner before writing.

How do graphic organizers capture teacher scaffolding?

In this section I will look at the scaffolding that came prior to the use of graphic organizers for the animal glog. Scaffolds include mini-lessons, field trips, reading of nonfiction texts, and a unit on organisms. The function of these scaffolds is to provide meaningful background and vocabulary for students prior to graphic organizer use. It is also to provide an authentic context in which writing can occur.

Creating a Meaningful Context:

Prior to writing animal reports students experienced several activities aimed at creating a meaningful context from which they could write. The goals of these activities included engagement with the topic, vocabulary knowledge building, and audience expansion.

The first activity that occurred before the written report was the study of organisms in our classroom. As a part of the first grade science curriculum, students had snails, millipedes, guppies, and pill bugs for observation across several weeks. The students had the opportunity to observe these organisms in isolation and in the habitat created for them. By engaging in this activity students learned through inquiry and observation. As a class similarities and difference between the organisms were charted. Students learned about how the organisms interacted with one another and the environment.

After three weeks of studying organisms, students participated in a field trip to a local park. Here students observed snails and millipedes in the context of the natural environment. They discussed similarities and differences between the snails and millipedes in the park and the ones we housed in our classroom. They also were able to observe interactions between these organisms and others that were not present in the environment we created at school. This activity led to meaningful questions and comparisons.

The following is a transcript of Tim and a classmate upon discovering a snail in the marsh environment at the park.

Student 1: Look Tim! Tim! There is a snail.

Tim: Whoa! He is just sitting on the leaf. Oh! He is close to that frog. Do you see the frog? Look! Look!

Student 1: Wow. Do you think he will get eaten up?

Tim: I don't know. He is slow. The frog isn't moving.

This interact shows students thinking about additional predators and out comes that the snail might experience. Seeing this organism in its natural habitat worked to bolster the study that we conducted in class. Students learned to think about these animals in a larger context.

When we returned to the classroom students had the opportunity to write and draw about their experiences at the park. The following is a work sample from the field trip writing packet. The first sample is from Lilly's packet. This sample shows how meaning is conveyed in both the picture with labels and in writing. The

recording of observations at this point looks a great deal like list making. This type of writing also gives students the opportunity to think about animals in the larger context of an ecosystem. The second sample belongs to Tim and shows what he recorded about the frog he saw at the Marsh. In this instance the meaning is conveyed through the writing and the interaction between Tim and a classmate about the frog and the snail is not shown.

Illustration 4.1: Lilly's Pond Writing

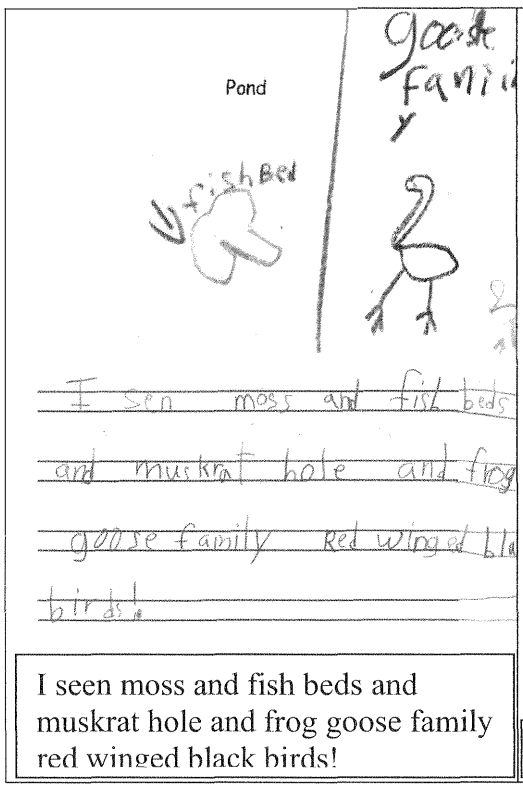
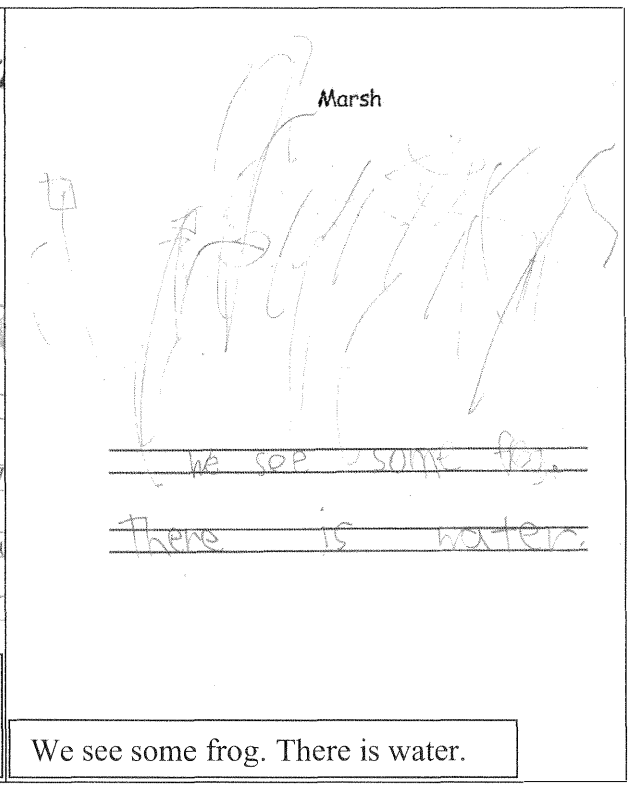


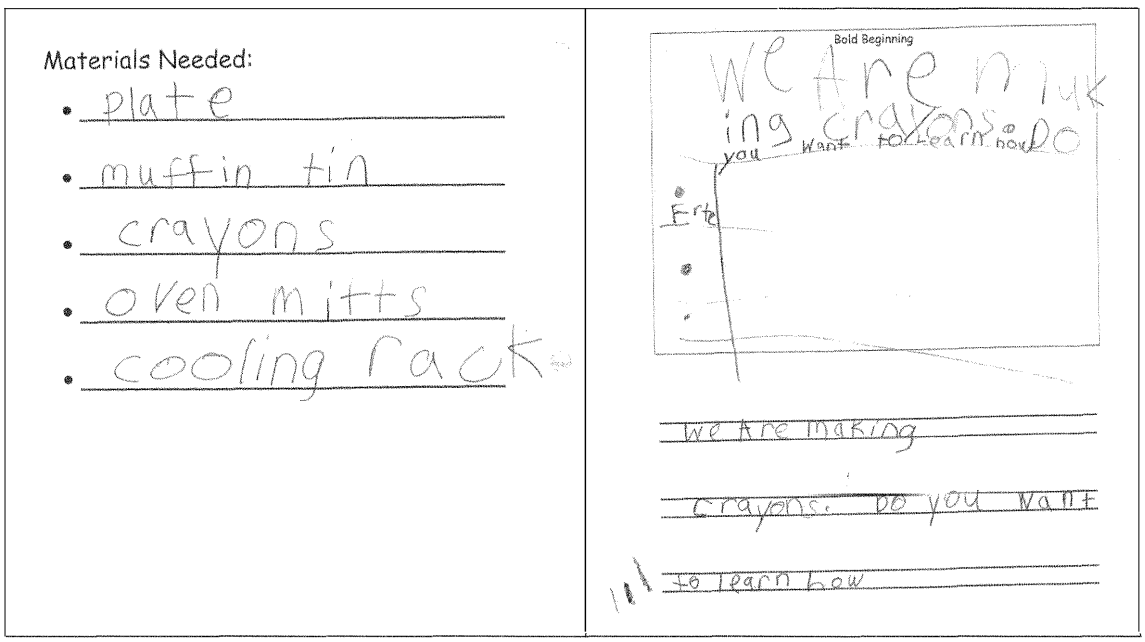
Illustration 4.2: Tim's Marsh Writing



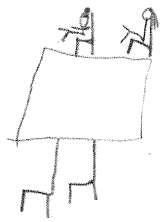
A meaningful context for writing in the narrative form is created by giving a sense of purpose. When students were invited to share their knowledge by writing how to books acted as both a motivator and also prompted students to choose a topic area in which they already had background knowledge and the necessary vocabulary

to speak about a topic. Sharing information in the form of a how to book parallels the oral process fairly closely. The graphic organizer provided students with the sequential order prompts and room for natural language use. The following, illustration 3, is an example of Lilly's how to book on making crayons.

Illustration 4.3: Lilly's How to Book on Making Crayons

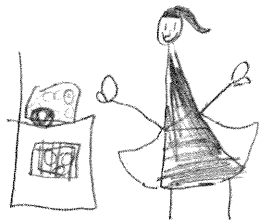


Mighty Middle



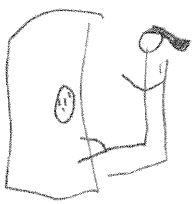
First choose ten crayons
They should be one or two
colors.

Mighty Middle



Then peel the paper off
the crayons. you dont want
paper in your crayn

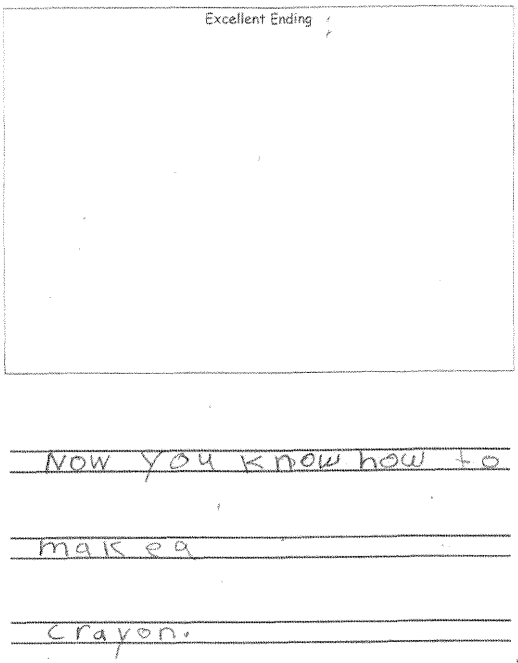
Mighty Middle



Next break the crayons
into smaller piesls

Mighty Middle

Last bake the crayns until
they melt cool and
use for coloring



First row upper right: We are making crayons do you want to learn how.
Second row left: First choose ten crayons, they should be one or two colors.
Second row right: Then peel the paper off your crayons you don't want paper in your crayons.
Third row left: Next break the crayons into smaller pieces.
Third row right: Last bake the crayons until they melt cool and use for coloring.
Fourth row left: Now you know how to make a crayon.

Lilly's book shows how students used the format, first, then, next, and last, independently on this writing task. Lilly's experience making a crayon informed her writing and within the structure provided she was able to record a sequential account of the steps needed for making a crayon. The procedural genre resembles spoken language and is therefore more natural for students.

Multiple Entry Points

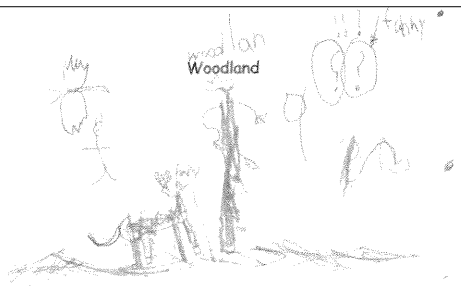
Throughout the duration of my research study it became apparent that students access writing from multiple entry points. For example Sadie often uses oral rehearsal before recording her ideas. She can be seen talking to a neighboring student about her observations and thoughts before recording them. Tim on the other hand often thinks for a while and then begins with a picture with labels. Lilly begins by immediately

recording words on her graphic organizer and often rereads to check for meaning. This flexibility in strategy use in the prewriting stages could be seen in both narrative and procedural genres. The following are examples from these approaches.

The first sample (See Illustration 4) is Tim's writing about the woodland animals the students saw at the park. Tim was very surprised to see a deer so close up. His surprise is conveyed through the exclamation and question marks in his picture. Tim saw and thought about how to record his surprise for a while. It seems that it was easier for him to express his surprise through the picture, rather than in words.

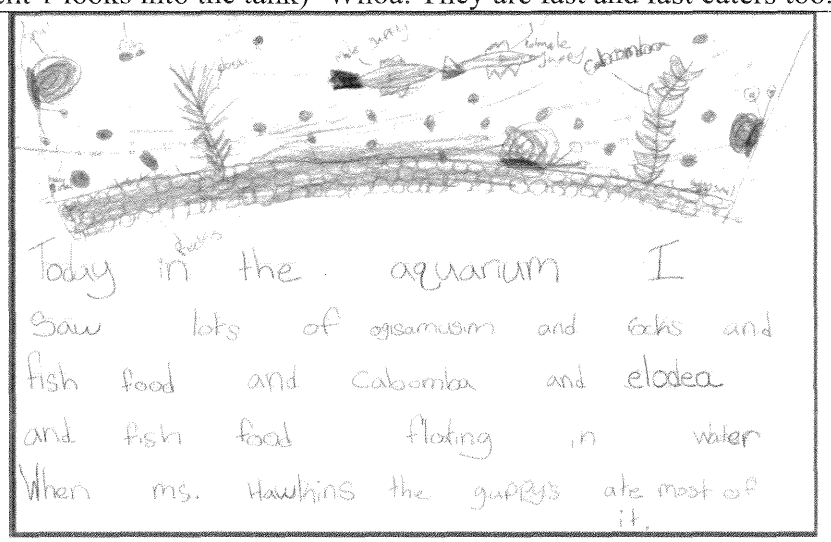
The second and third samples are from Sadie. The first is the transcription from the conversation she had with her classmate before recording her ideas. The third sample, Sadie's tank observation (See Illustration 4) is the written piece that has a similar tone and speech like quality.

Illustration 4.4: Tim's Woodland Writing, Sadie's Conversation Transcript, Sadie's Tank Observation



We saw box animal. We saw a deer.

Sadie: Ok. So I was looking in the tank and I saw lots of stuff.
Student 1: Me too!
Sadie: Like the elodea, and cabomba, and the fish, and snails,…and that's everything.
Student 1: Yup. The fish were swimming fast today.
Sadie: Yea, cuz when Ms. Hawkins feed them they had to swim fast to eat that food up. (Sadie looks at the tank) Wow, they were hungry the food is gone!
(Student 1 looks into the tank) Whoa. They are fast and fast eaters too.



Today in the aquarium I saw lots of organism and rocks and fish food and cabomba and elodea and fish food floating in the water. When Ms. Hawkins (fed) the guppies ate most of it.

When thinking about creating a meaningful context it is important to consider the systems that John Paul Gee (1988) uses to define communication. The referential system or literal meaning of the words is informed by experience. The contextualization system, which in this case is both the school setting and the genre used, shaped the way in which ideas are recorded and conveyed. The ideology system, or system based on belief, values, and culture shaped access points, modes or writing and the ways in which students understand the writing process.

As shown above, the graphic organizer can be used in a variety of ways. Students use the same graphic organizer but access the information and begin recording through a variety of methods including, oral, illustration, and write and reread methods. The three systems of communication that Gee speaks to, shape the choices students make about their writing, including the points in which they access the genre specific writing tasks. When teaching writing this teacher researcher considers the registers in which students function and tries and teach in a way that creates space for a variety of approaches. Lessons often begin with a discussion of ideas. Possible approaches such as drawing a picture with labels are demonstrated. The modeling is accompanied by voiced thinking so that students may understand the related thought process. Writing and rereading for sense making are also modeled. In this way the graphic organizer were presented with a variety of methods for use. Students were given choice on how to use the tool. The emphasis was always on how the tool can be used best to support the writing that would follow.

What is the relationship between graphic organizers and the final product?

In this section the relationship between the graphic organizer and the final product will be examined. In this study there were two kinds of final products. The first was a written report about animals. The second was a glog. The findings from this study suggest that the relationship between the glogster and the graphic organizer is different than the relationship between the graphic organizer and the written report because the final product is structurally different and approached in two different ways. These differences will be explored in terms of student accessibility and teacher scaffolding.

Academic Writing Structure

Research conducted by Sarah Michaels brings to light the differences between the ways children understand and communicate ideas. Michaels' (1981) research shows that children from non-mainstream backgrounds use a different way of speaking at home than what is valued in schools. In their way of speaking at home, background information is not provided, because it is understood that the listener already has this information. At school, and especially in regards to academic oral sharing, background knowledge must be provided. The formal, academic style is called speaking with discursive prose. The field trips, read alouds, and the study of organisms were techniques used to compensate for the lack of discursive prose by providing a common experience for all children. By providing these experiences, home language use and discursive prose become more similar. The community of

students in my class had shared experiences focused around the content area and therefore already had the necessary background to have a discussion.

Discursive prose that is based on a common academic experience allows for students to rely on implied meaning because everyone has had a shared experience and is "in the know". In addition, time for discussion and vocabulary use was provided. These factors act as meaningful precursors to writing and support the transition from home language to academic writing style.

During this study, students had to access three different academic writing structures, graphic organizers, academic writing, and web based writing. Although the topic remained the same, the writing formats and ways of thinking about these types of writings underwent several transitions. Writing with the graphic organizer took several different forms. Students could draw pictures and provide labels. Students could also write in shorthand their ideas and key vocabulary. Some students used this as a space to get down the majority of what would be written into the final draft.

Below are samples of Sadie's graphic organizer and completed glog. Sadie opted to write all her ideas out on the graphic organizer. Her ideas were somewhat maintained as they were transitioned over to the graphic organizer. Some details were lost during the transition. It is interesting to see that she did not change topics. For example her graphic organizer reads, "My favorite part of studying organisms what pill bugs mostly do and I really really really want to know for sure how many legs they have". Sadie's glog reads, "My favorite part of studying organisms was knowing what pill bugs do". In another section Sadie recorded "Did you know pill bugs may

have 12 legs". This change suggests that Sadie views glogs as a space to provide information not to ask questions. It also indicates that Sadie sees that glogs provide her with an expanded audience. In the transition from the graphic organizer to the glog her question was transformed into a fact.

Illustration 4.5: Sadie's Graphic Organizer for Organism Glog

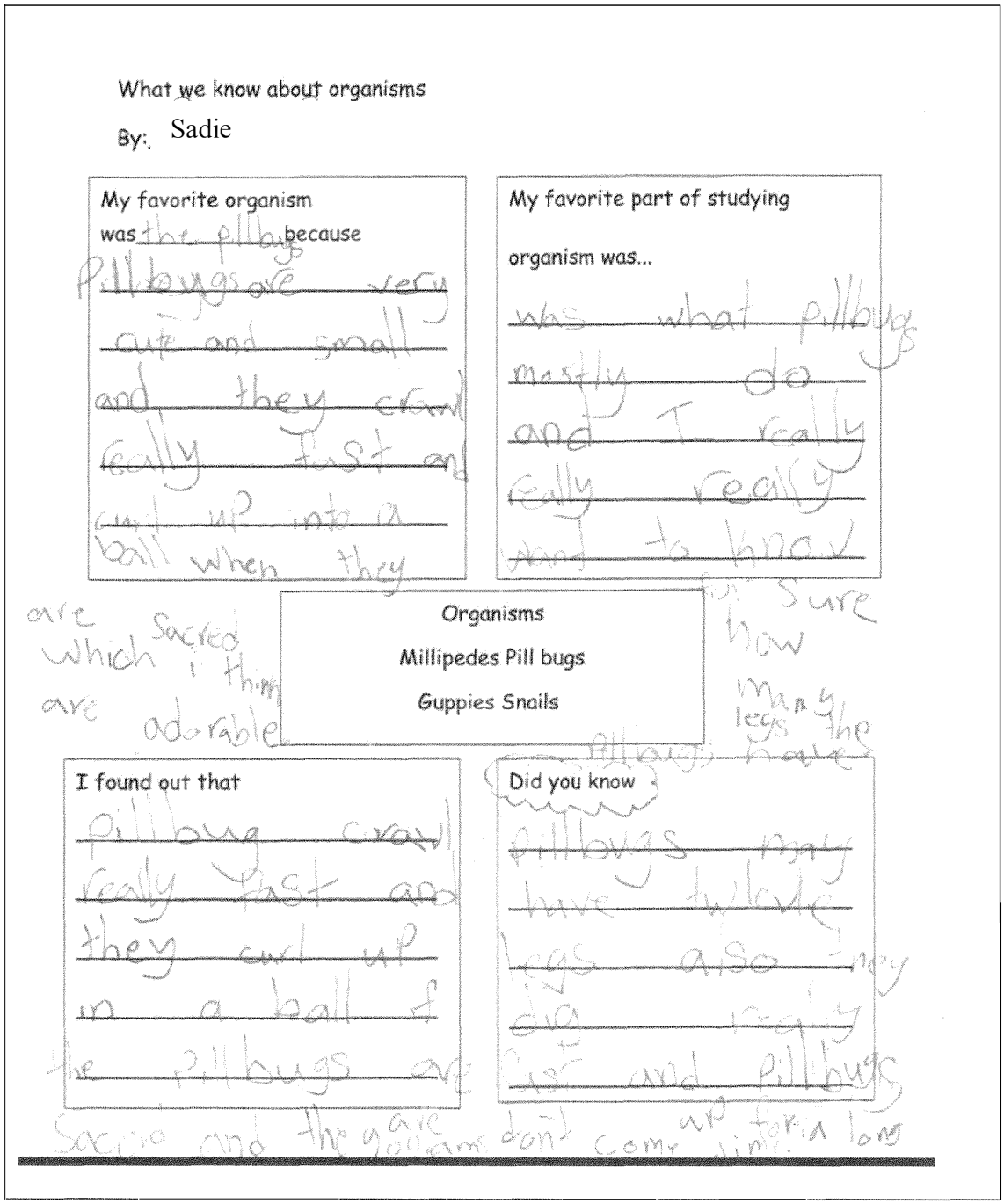


Illustration 4.6: Sadie's Organism Glog

Access to the types of writing done for the graphic organizers were provided through mini lessons, discussions, and modeling. As shown above, students accessed graphic organizers in ways that worked well for them.

When moving from the graphic organizer to the academic writing students were reminded that they had already done the necessary thinking. The content was present in their graphic organizer. The only shift that needed to be made was the format. Individual conferencing that included editing helped students make this transition. Moving from the graphic organizer writing mode to the academic writing mode was difficult. The content was present in the graphic organizer. The format shift was the hurdle to be crossed. The primary problem that students needed support with was turning shorthand into complete sentences. This was done through modeling and talking to students on an individual basis.

Conversely, highlighting the fact that there is a difference between glogster writing and report writing, moving from the use of a graphic organizer to the use of glogster was much more natural. The academic language used online and in a glog is less formal and more closely resembles both home language and the graphic organizer. Shorthand, content focused language is used. The emphasis is on getting the ideas onto the glog in a way that is easily understood by a wide audience. Students could be seen using their graphic organizers to write their glogs by copying them nearly word for word.

One issue that was present across the use of graphic organizer with first graders in this class was that some students had difficulty seeing the link between the

graphic organizer and the final product. A few students needed extensive conferencing in order to see that what was written in the graphic organizer needed to be used to write the final piece whether it was the glog or the final animal report. A transcription of one of these conferences is below.

Teacher: Tim, what was your favorite part about studying organisms?

Tim: I liked watching the pill bugs roll.

(Tim starts to type this on the glog in the section labeled "favorite part")

Teacher: Tim, on your graphic organizer, you said your favorite part was that the millipedes were fast.

Tim: (Looks at the teacher, and then at graphic organizer) I liked that part too.

The transcript above shows that Tim does not yet understand that the graphic organizer is a tool to be used to support writing rather than a completely separate written piece. Although it may seem obvious to an adult in the academic field, the link between graphic organizers and the final written piece is not obvious for children. It needs to be made explicitly clear to students through modeling and conferencing.

Conventions and Fluency

Although there are similarities between the findings of this study in writing structure and conventions and fluency, there are slight differences. For clarity, both will be discussed with the understanding that there are significant overlaps. In this section a discussion of how access to conventions, fluency and the ability to write in

ways that are not a part of the cultural approach used at home is bridged by teacher scaffolding and the use of graphic organizers. Heath (1982) informs us that children come to school with a wide variety of culturally created communication forms and those students outside of the mainstream use communication forms that are vastly different from the ones used in the academic setting.

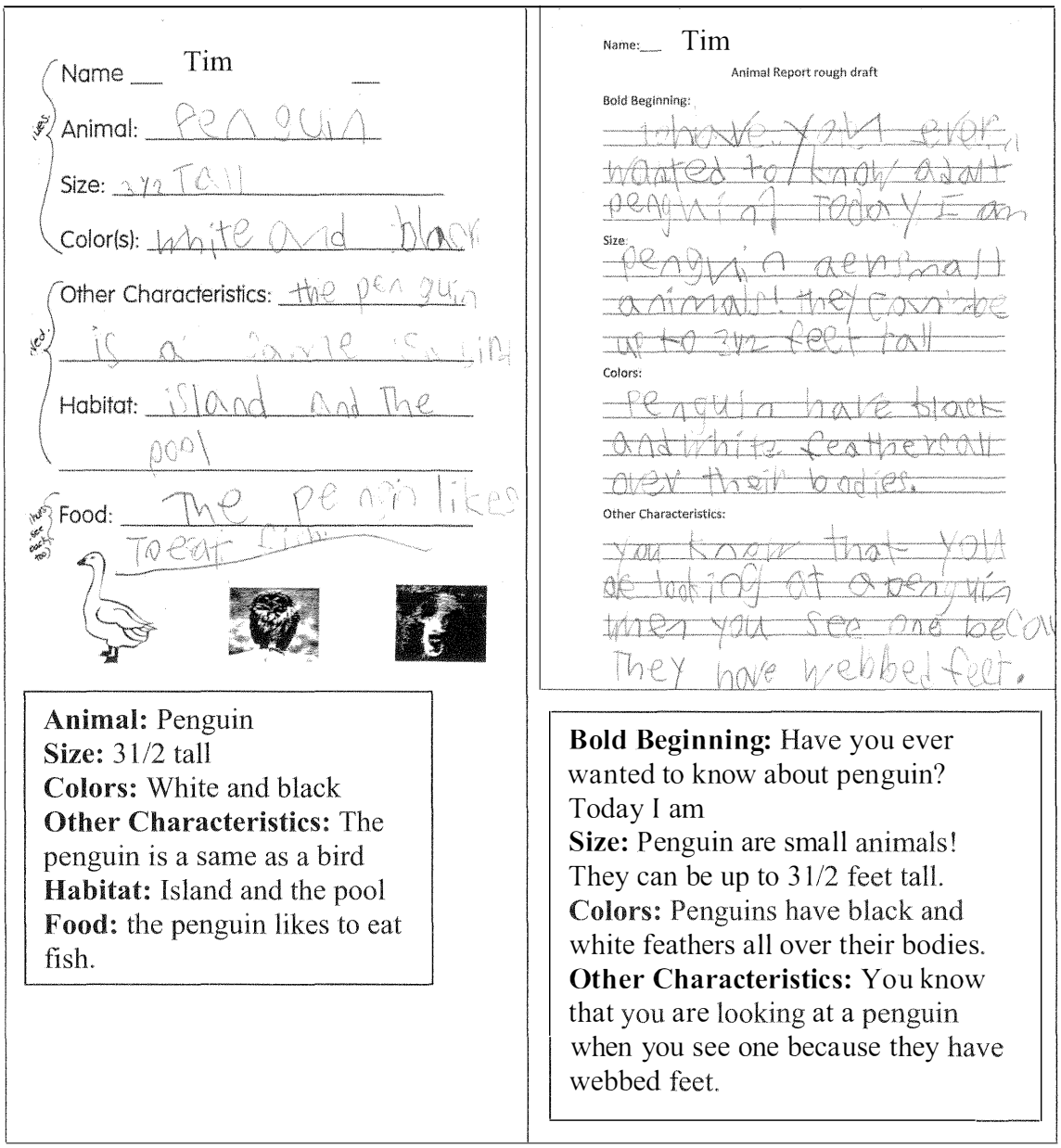
When asked to make the transition from the graphic organizer to the final animal report, students found it difficult to access the conventions. The content was present in the graphic organizer, however the conventions were not. For example, instead of writing Size: 100 lbs. Students needed to write, "A cheetah weighs nearly 100 pounds". This transition was supported through student conferencing and modeling. Otherwise, the transformation in conventions did not occur naturally.

However, when writing the narrative instructional piece access to the conventions seemed less difficult for students. When giving directions, the graphic organizer provided a structure "first, then, next, and last". Students were able to fill in the gaps in a sequential order and with appropriate sentence structures and conventions. The writing was much more fluid because it matched their natural ways of speaking. When giving oral directions and writing them down, the differences are minimal. When compared to how one might speak about factual information about an animal and how a report would be written a larger difference can be seen.

The first four writing samples in illustration 7 belong to Tim and show the process for writing the animal report and the glog. The difference between the first graphic organizer and the final writing report is significant. The following two work

samples in illustration 8 belong to Lilly. That work sample is a procedural book for making cookies. Lilly writes "Today I am making cookies, do you want to learn how?" The similarities between this piece and spoken language are noteworthy.

Illustration 4.7: Tim's graphic organizer for glog, Tim's graphic organizer for animal report, Tim's glog, and Tim's final animal report.



Animal: Penguin
Size: 31/2 tall
Colors: White and black
Other Characteristics: The penguin is a same as a bird
Habitat: Island and the pool
Food: the penguin likes to eat fish.

Bold Beginning: Have you ever wanted to know about penguin? Today I am
Size: Penguin are small animals! They can be up to 31/2 feet tall.
Colors: Penguins have black and white feathers all over their bodies.
Other Characteristics: You know that you are looking at a penguin when you see one because they have webbed feet.

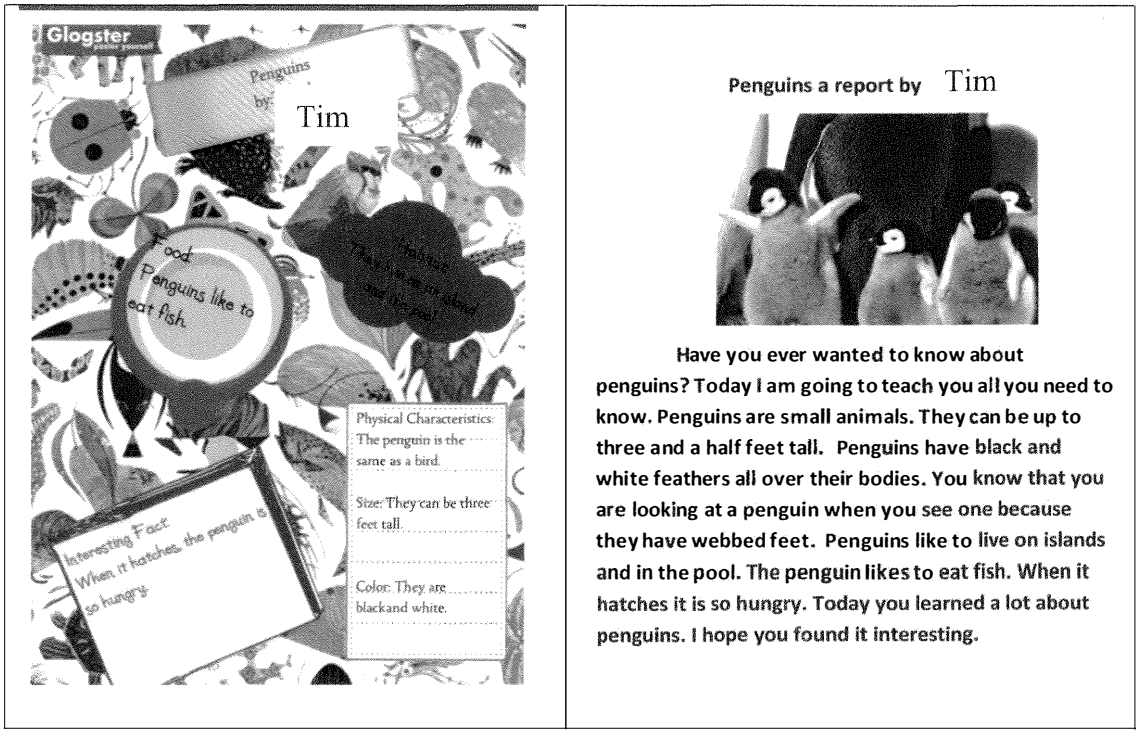
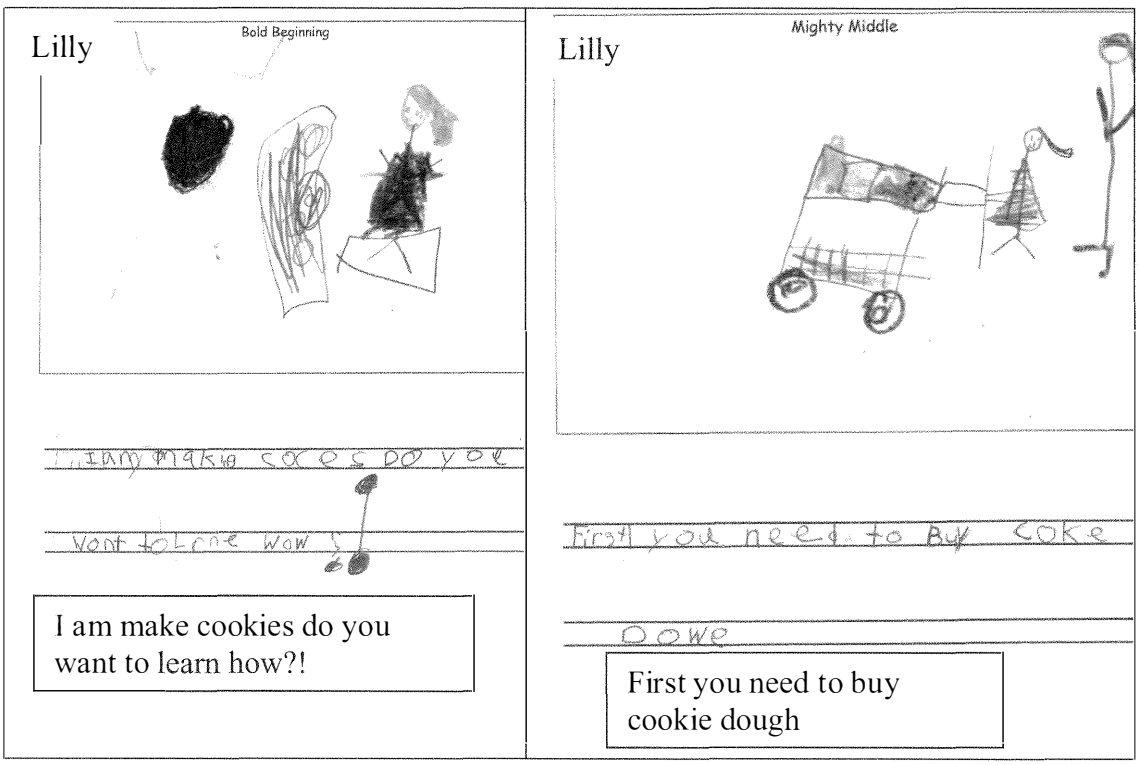


Illustration 4.8: Lilly's Procedural Book for Making Cookies



How does the use of graphic organizers encourage natural ways of writing?

In this section the ways in which graphic organizers allow for nature ways of writing to occur will be discussed. The approaches used by the three focal students to fill in their graphic organizers are unique to them. As mentioned above, providing a variety of access points into the writing process allows for students to transition from the language forms they use at home to the academic writing structure used in school.

Cultural Factors

Each of the three focal students that were involved in this study speaks a language other than English as their primary language at home. Along with language differences there are values, belief systems, and cultural factors that shape the way students communicate orally and in written forms. Although a deeper study of the specifically cultural factors is beyond the reach of this study, it would be beneficial for researchers to examine cultural factors in a more targeted way in the future.

Through the observation notes collected for this study, it became apparent that the focal students accessed writing in variety of ways and understood writing expectations in different ways. Sadie for example, often discussed with a partner before writing. When she did start writing she would write continuously in a focused manner. Tim on the other hand spent a great deal of time sitting and thinking. His energies were focused on his picture and labels rather than the writing that followed. Although these differences can be attributed to factors unrelated to culture it is likely that the ways of communicating at home shaped the approaches used in the

classroom. In table 5 below observational notes over the course of this study depict the approaches the focal students used.

Table 4.1 : Observational Notes

Observations Focal Child 1(Lilly):	Interpretations
Week 1 Field Trip **May 23:** Students free write **May 24:** Lilly observed at her table there were four healthy guppies. She spoke excitedly to her neighbor stating that "They move so fast, Oh! The orange ones are fastest". **May 25:** Lilly was enthusiastic about the creatures she saw on the field trip to the nature center today. During her writing Lilly cataloged everything she saw. Her writing was very list like. Lilly reread often to make she didn't forget any details. **May 26:** Upon arriving to school Lilly checked the tank for changes. During writing she finishes her writing about our trip to the park. She checks with a neighbor about details she may have forgotten. **May 27:** Lilly chooses to share her observations of the park during whole group share. She reads her writing and is sure to show each picture. She offers explanation to go with her pictures but not her writing.	Lilly is concerned with accuracy. She spends a great deal of time rereading her writing. Lilly's picture contained labels and held part of the meaning. Lilly's share demonstrates that she views writing as a stand-alone piece but feels her picture needs explanation.
Week 2 : How to books created **May 31:** Lilly participates in crayon making activity **June 1:** Lilly writes about her experience. She brings her writing over to be checked by me. She exclaims, "Look Ms. Hawkins, first I am writing that you choose two colors, or three, just like we did". **June 2:** Lilly continues to work on her book. She sits at her table. Each time she finishes a page she rereads. She holds up fingers saying "first, then, next…." She uses self-talk to coach her way through book writing. **June 3:** Lilly's book on crayons is finished. She starts writing a how too book about cookies. This is an experience she has had at home.	Lilly was extremely excited to share how to make cookies. I believe the role of knowledge sharing is new to her. She reread her writing and orally rehearsed the parts of a procedural book (first, then, next, last).
Week 3 Animal report **June 6:** Today students selected books for their animal reports. They took these home and completed the first	Lilly is still learning about how to access the report genre. She is able

graphic organizer with a family member. We reviewed each step before beginning. Lilly asked questions about using shorthand vs. writing full sentences. Lilly selected a lion as her animal. **June 7:** Today during our discussion about the animal report graphic organizer Lilly asked if other sources of information may be used to collect data. Lilly visited the library to collect more books. **June 8:** Lilly began the second graphic organizer today. Sentence starters were provided. During individual conferencing I talked to Lilly about her use of voice. She did a nice job with this on her graphic organizer. **June 9:** Today we used graphic organizers about guppies, snails, millipedes and pill bugs. I noticed that Lilly recorded her graphic organizer writing verbatim in her written piece. She left of the sentence starters. She was careful to include anything she had recorded. Some fluency was lost. Her graphic organizer served her well for writing the glog. The format was easy to access.	to use a graphic organizer but her writing is not very fluent without a sentence starter.
Week 4 Glog on animal report **June 13:** Lilly picked out a picture to go with her final report. I typed it up and had her check it. I copied it exactly frorn her graphic organizer. Together we checked for sentence fluency. Lilly did not suggest any edits. **June 14:** Lilly used her graphic organizer from home to complete her animal glog. She spoke to how much easier this was than the written report. Lilly referred to the graphic organizer, her information matched on the glog and graphic organizer. Some of her descriptors were lost when typing the glog. For example instead of saying "lions have beautiful shiny tan fur she said, they are black and brown.	Lilly's understanding of how to use the different graphic organizers was excellent. Her use of the graphic organizer from home to write her glog shows she can access this format of writing easily. Through conferencing and the use of sentence starters she was able to access the academic written report as well.
Observations Focal Child 2 (Tim):	Interpretations
Week 1 Field Trip **May 23:** Students free write **May 24:** Tim observed the new guppies that were added to the tank. Tim talked to a neighbor about the size and color of the female guppies (larger and drab color compared to the male guppies). **May 25:** After the field trip Tim worked on his Park packet. His pictures had exclamation marks and question	Tim relies on his pictures to carry the majority of his meaning. Tim was surprised to see a deer on our walk and recorded this in his picture by using

marks. **May 26:** Tim finished his writing today. He seemed distracted and recorded less details. When reflecting on the trip, I noticed that the rich conversation he had about the frog and the snail did not appear in his writing. **May 27:** Tim chose not to share his writing today. This is fairly typical. He is very shy.	expressive punctuation.
Week 2 How to books created **May 31:** Tim participated in the crayon making activity. **June 1:** Tim spent some time sitting and thinking today about writing his how to book. When he did start his writing he began by completing the pictures. He started at the beginning of the book and looked at each picture before drawing the next one. **June 2:** Tim started his writing today. He examined the pictures and asked a classmate about the order of steps. **June 3:** Tim continues to work on his how to book today. He seems to be settled in. He does not ask for assistance from his neighbors. He works on his writing for the entire writing block.	Tim continues to emphasize the pictures for meaning making. His content area vocabulary is good, but he is less interested in using the writing section. He is able to communicate his ideas in a sequential manner. He uses the prompts on the page to ask for help in remembering the order. He knows that the bold beginning is "first" for instance.
Week 3 Animal report **June 6:** When I introduced the animal report graphic organizer Tim asked how he would know what to write. We talked about the headings on the graphic organizer and I went through an example. Tim selected the penguin for his animal and chose several books. **June 7:** Today during read to someone Tim got out his penguin books and shared them with a friend. I could hear them saying, "Wow! Look here!" **June 8:** While working on his second graphic organizer Tim shows his enthusiasm for the subject area with several exclamation marks. Tim refers to the books and often pulls me over to see what he is learning. Tim needed a good deal of support to use the sentence starters. We talked about sounding like we were talking in the written report. Together we completed the graphic organizer. **June 9:** Tim watched the tank with a classmate and close friend of his. Together the boys counted the animals in the tank. After filling in their graphic organizers both boys recorded the number of guppies and snails in their written work. Tim spent most of his time on his picture. He	Interestingly Tim used his graphic organizer to inform his glog writing, but did not use it for his written piece. I wonder about the connection he sees between the graphic organizer and the online writing.

included labels of plants and animals. Tim did not use his graphic organizer to inform this writing. During computer lab Tim experienced difficulty recording his ideas into the glog program. Tim finished the writing the next day and did use his graphic organizer to inform the glog.	
Week 4 Glog on animal report **June 13:** Tim continues to be interested in penguins, he ask to visit the library in order to collect more books. He went through our nonfiction animal books today checking our classroom for more information. **June 14:** Today Tim and I read his typed report. I helped him with some grammatical errors. I.e. – he had "when it hatch is so hungry". We changed this to, "when it hatches it is so hungry". Tim picked a picture to accompany his report.	Tim's content is very detailed. He has learned a lot about penguins and is very engaged in this topic. He needs support accessing the written report genre. The sentence starters and some individual conferencing worked well for this.
Observations Focal Child 3 (Sadie):	Interpretations
Week 1 Field Trip **May 23:** Students free write **May 24:** Sadie found that one of the snails in our tank had babies. She asked questions about the babies shell and whether or not the parents would eat it like the guppies. **May 25:** After the field trip Sadie exclaimed, "We saw everything! There were so so so many plants and animals. Sadie utilized a list we made as a class to help her get ideas down. Sadie's pictures and writing reflected what we saw at the park. **May 26:** Sadie shared her writing with me today stating that she had recorded everything we saw. During writing she added to her pictures but not to her writing. Sadie's writing included detailed vocabulary such as "jack in the pulpit" a plant we learned about on our trip. **May 27:** Sadie opted to share her work with the group. She stated by saying, this is everything we saw.	The field trip we took worked to engage Sadie and also to help her develop accurate vocabulary around the topic or organisms. Sadie does not use labels in her pictures but views the writing as the area in which the most meaning is held.
Week 2 How too books created **May 31:** Sadie participates in crayon making. When a second grader from next door visits, she pulls her over to the table to see what she is working on. She explains that this can be done at home with your mom and starts tell the child the steps. Sadie begins writing her book. **June 1:** Sadie works independently on her crayon book	Sadie enjoys interacting with classmates. She enjoys sharing her knowledge with people in our class and from other classes. Sadie likes to talk about her

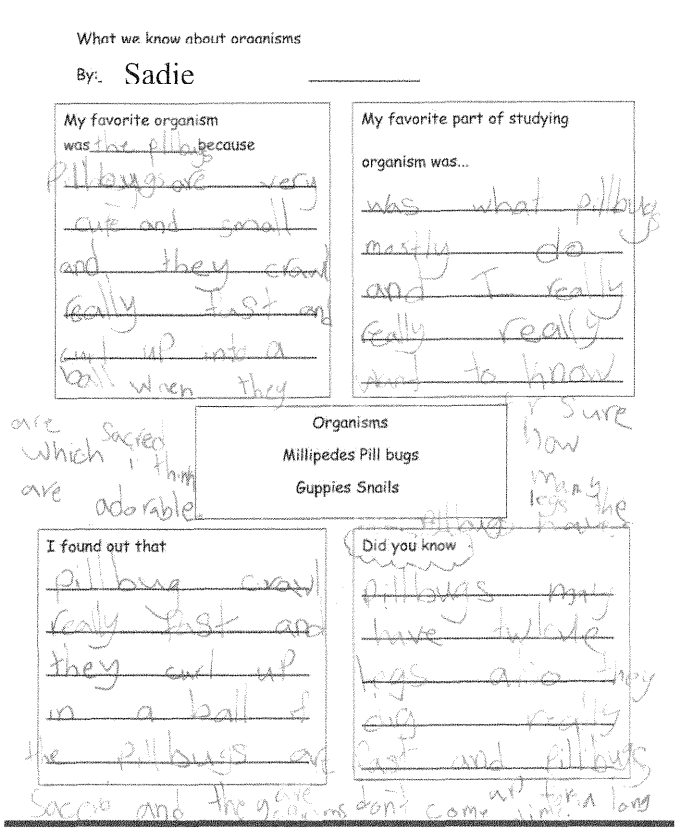
and finishes without many interactions. When finished, she presents the book to a classmate and reads the steps. Then she brings it to me to read. **June 2:** Sadie writes her own how to book on building a snowman. She draws quick sketches and talks to a classmate about building a snowman at home. There is an argument about what can be used for a nose, a carrot or coal. The girls decide that either is fine. **June 3:** Sadie approaches me asking how to make a pizza. She states that she cannot do it because she doesn't know what is first. She says she likes pizza but hasn't made it. I ask her if there is a way to figure out how pizza is made, she scans the classroom and asks a classmate who sits at her table how pizza is made. The girls talk, but a book is never put together.	writing before it occurs. Sadie grapples with wanting to make a book about pizza. However, having never made pizza this is difficult for her to do. She is able to find a resource for this information when directed by me.
Week 3 Animal report **June 6:** Today Sadie decided to research pug puppies. She explained that the reason she wanted to research this animal was because her neighbor had one and she wanted one. Sadie demonstrated that she had a fair amount of background knowledge about this animal based on personal experience with it. Sadie did not ask any questions about using the graphic organizer. **June 7:** During our discussion Sadie shared what she learned the night before about her animal. She explained that they make good pets and that they are very hyper. **June 8:** When writing out her second graphic organizer Sadie simply copied the first one that was to be used for the animal glog. She ran over excited to be finished. We discussed the difference between the two types of writing and I helped her with the sentence starters. After working on the first two categories with me Sadie returned to her seat to work on filling in the rest of the graphic organizer. She was able to do so independently. **June 9:** Today we used graphic organizers about guppies, snails, millipedes and pill bugs. Sadie asked good questions about the organisms as he recorded her ideas. She spent a great deal of time talking to her neighbor about the topic. Sadie wanted to know how many legs the pill bugs had, this came out in her graphic organizer. Interestingly this question did not appear on her glog or in her writing. Sadie also shortened her explanations when typing her glog.	On Thursday Sadie demonstrated that she believed that glogs and written reports are places for dispensing knowledge, not for asking questions. When I think about how material was presented this makes sense. It is something I need to be aware of. In this genre is it appropriate to ask questions?
Week 4 Glog on animal report	Once Sadie and I

June 13: Today I showed Sadie her typed report; we discussed any ideas she had. We discussed how the way she had edited her graphic organizer to make it sound like talking we a good choice. Her report was fluent and easy to read. Sadie chose a picture for her report. **June 14:** Sadie used her graphic organizer to write her glog. Although she referred to it, she paraphrased some of her statements. For example her graphic organizer read, "Eyes get wide when you come in they jump on you when they come in". He glog read, "They get wild when people come in their houses".	discussed how the two graphic organizers were different and why she was able to access this genre with greater ease. Sadie talked to her classmates a great deal through this process, both sharing information and listening to what others were studying.

When thinking about the importance of making writing accessible for all primary aged students, consideration needs to be given to cultural and socioeconomic factors. Flexibility and sensitivity contribute to student access. Graphic organizers allow for natural ways of writing to occur because of the wide range of approaches that can be used with them. Pictures, labels, shorthand phrases, and oral rehearsal all work to move the child through the writing process. Many literacy educators (Dyson, 2008; Heath, 1981; Michaels, 1981) advocate for teaching that is sensitive to the diverse ways that student speak, write, and communicate.

Illustration 9 shows examples of student work from the procedural genre that show a variety of writing approaches used by students in this study. The significance of these samples is that there are differences and that each of these approaches is productive for the writing process, natural to that particular student, and valued in the academic setting.

Illustration 4.9: Variety of Writing Approaches by Sadie and Lilly

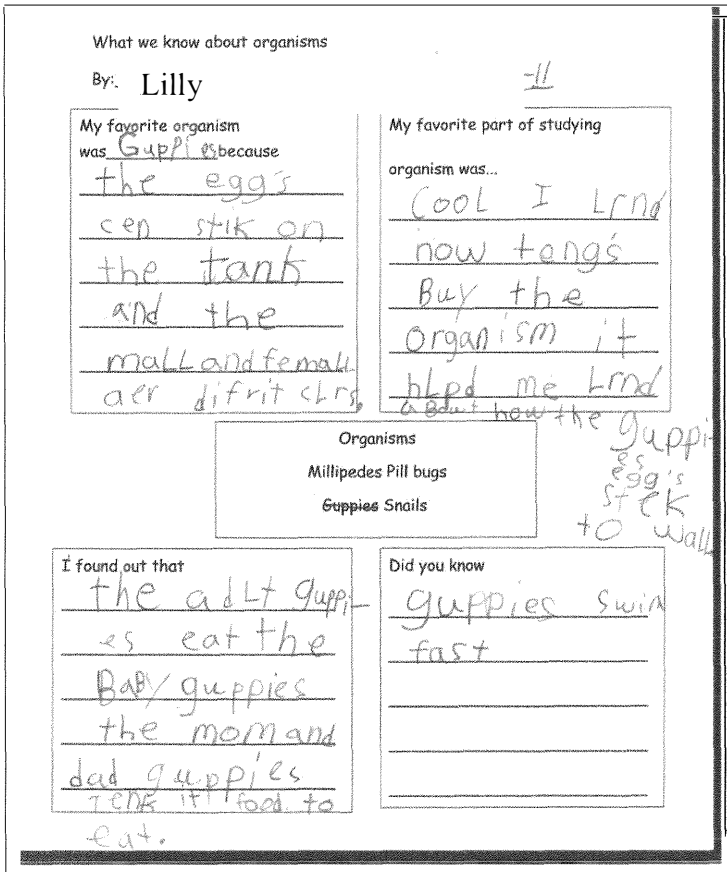


Box 1: My favorite organism was the pill bug because pill bugs are very cute and small and they crawl really fast and curl up into a ball when they are scared which I think are adorable.
Box 2: May favorite part of studying organisms was what pill bugs mostly do and I really really really want to know for use how many legs the pill bugs have.
Box 3: I found out that pill bugs crawl really fast and then curl up in a ball if they pill bugs are scared and they are organisms
Box 4: Did you know pill bugs may have twelve legs also they dig really fast and pill bugs don't come up for a long time.

Sadie

Pillbugs are very cute and and they crawl really fast and they curl up into a ball when they are sacred. was what pillbugs do one reason

Pill bugs are very cute and and they crawl really fast and they curl up into a ball when they are scared was what pill bugs do one reason



What we know about organisms

By: Lilly

My favorite organism was Guppies because the eggs can stik on the tank and the mall and femall aer difrit clrs.

My favorite part of studying organism was... Cool I Lrnd now tangs Buy the organism it hlpd me Lrnd about how the guppies eggs stick to wall

Organisms

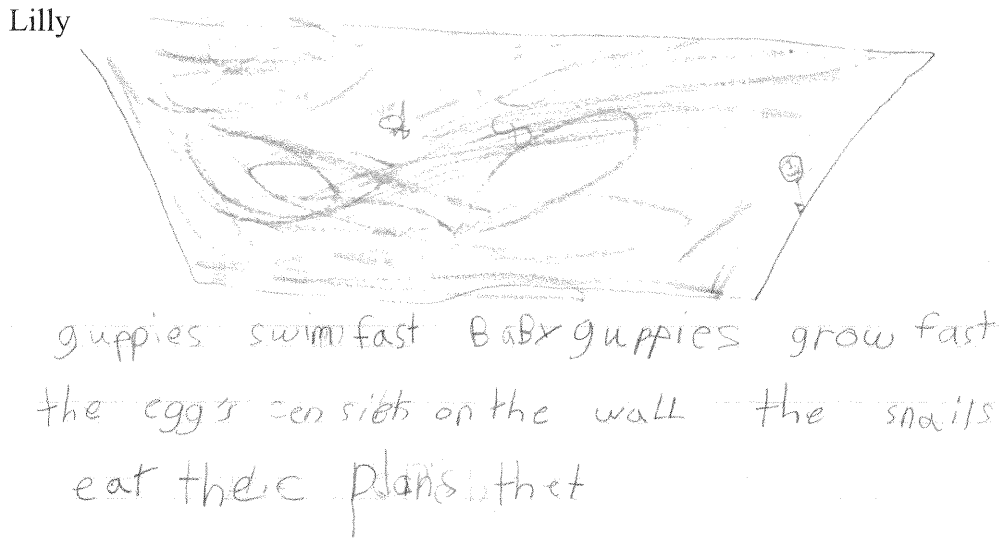
Millipedes Pill bugs

~~Guppies~~ Snails

I found out that the adLt guppies eat the BaB/ guppies the mom and dad guppies Tenk it food to eat.

Did you know guppies swim fast

Box 1: My favorite organism was guppies because they eggs can stick on the tank and they male and female are different colors.
Box 2: My favorite part of studying organisms was cool I learned how things about the organism it helped me learn about how they guppies eggs stick to wall.
Box 3: I found out that the adult guppies eat the baby guppies the mom and dad guppies think it food to eat.
Box 4: Did you know guppies swim fast



Guppies swim fast baby guppies grow fast the eggs can stick on the wall the snails eat the plants that

How do students feel about the use of graphic organizers?

In this section the focal student's feelings about the writing process will be examined. This information is based on the attitude survey they completed and also classroom observations. The student interview data and what students reported about graphic organizer use will also be informative. The focus of this section will be on how students thought of an idea and organized information.

Positive Feelings about Writing

In conducting the Writing Attitude Survey it became apparent that the focal students had overall positive feelings about writing. The Writing Attitude survey has four choices for students to make. The first picture indicates the child feels very happy about the writing task. The next indicates that they feel mostly happy. The third picture indicates that they feel mostly unhappy, and the last picture depicts feeling very upset.

Tim has an overall positive attitude towards writing. On his writing attitude survey his raw score was 83 out of 112. A raw score of 83 puts him in the 58th percentile for writing attitude when compared to students in his same grade level. Tim's score indicates that he feels somewhere between "very happy" and "mostly happy" about writing. Lilly raw score was slightly lower, a 75. This put her in the 36th percentile for her age. Sadie scored an 87 and percentile ranking of 68. All three students were within the same rating scale of very happy and mostly happy. It should be noted that this positive attitude is in regards to writing in general, not specifically

the use of graphic organizers. However, a positive attitude does have an impact on motivation and perseverance.

Thinking about the Topic

The student interviews and observational notes have the common theme of thinking about the topic. The following is a transcript of how each of the three focal students answered the question "Do graphic organizers help you with your writing?"

Student 1: Tim

"It helps me because I copy it. It is better than you might think it is. It is easy to write and easy to think of".

Student 2: Lilly

"Yea, they are much better for me, I can think, think harder".

Student 3: Sadie

"They help you think and write down what you are going to be putting on your paper. They help you think about what you are studying".

Each of the three focal students spoke to the access graphic organizers provide to the writing tasks by speaking about how they were able to generate ideas or "think". The structure provided by graphic organizers gives children a direction.

During his interview, Tim was asked if graphic organizers helped him with his writing. Tim report that, "It helps me because I copy it. It is better than you might think it is. It is easy to write and easy to think of". Tim's answer indicates that the graphic organizer makes writing easier. He speaks to his ability to access the writing structure when he says, "I just copy it". The structure is not something Tim has to

think about when he writes his final draft because the graphic organizer provides it and he only has to copy it.

In my observations of Tim, it was noted that he spent a great deal of time thinking before writing. During writers workshop free writing time the teacher researcher would check in with Tim when he was sitting and thinking. Often, he would first report, that he was thinking, then would say that he really did not know what he was supposed to do. His statement above, "It is easy to write and easy to think of" shows that graphic organizers may have made the writing process more enjoyable because thinking of an idea was easier. However, his statement that he did not always know what to do shows that further scaffolding was needed.

Sadie spoke to how graphic organizer help students stay on topic when she says, "They help you think about what you are studying". Graphic Organizers support on topic idea generation and development. When completing her glog Sadie set her graphic organizer out next to her and reread each section before typing it. The graphic organizer provided a structure and allowed her to relax as she worked on the computer. In this way the writing task is made more enjoyable for her.

The following is the complete transcripts of the interview and the focal student answers.

Interview Questions: Sadie

1. What is a graphic organizer?
   A big circle, and two big circles, the middle is both, one side is just about one thing you are studying. Write two things you are studying and the middle is both.
2. Do graphic organizers help you with your writing?
   They help you think and write down you are going to putting on your paper. They help you think about what you are studying.

3. How do you organize your thoughts before writing your final draft of writing?
   I memorize what I wrote on my graphic organizer. I get it all in my head and then write it down.
4. What steps do you take when writing a story?
   First, I get my paper, I write on the graphic organizer, then we write the draft, then we can share it.

5. What steps do you take when writing instructions for someone?
Get paper, how to make pizza, or cookies, then I teach them how. Tell the steps. Then they can use what I wrote to make it.

Interview Questions: Lilly

1. What is a graphic organizer? I don't know what it means. It is a little different to me. It has boxes about the animals. The all about me one, is like, it has lines and the animal report, it has lines.
2. Do graphic organizers help you with your writing?

Yea, they are much better for me, I can think, think harder.

3. How do you organize your thoughts before writing your final draft of writing?
   The graphic organizer helped me so I can write on the computer for the animal glog.
4. What steps do you take when writing a story?
   First do the title, then start writing, draw pictures then I am done.
5. What steps do you take when writing instructions for someone?

The how to books were kind of tricky but I got use to it.
How were they tricky? They were long because you have a lot to write. Why so much to write? It's like a book and you have to write your own ideas about it.

Interview Questions: Tim

1. What is a graphic organizer?
   They help people how to learn write and learn on computers
2. Do graphic organizers help you with your writing?

   It helps me because I copy it. It is better than you might think it is. It is easy to write and easy to think of.
3. How do you organize your thoughts before writing your final draft of writing?
   First you write the words down on graphic organizer, then you wait for the computer lab, the computer will be there. Then you write down what you have on your paper.
4. What steps do you take when writing a story?
   It is hard work.

How do you get your idea? I sometimes write first, sometimes I do the picture first.

5. What steps do you take when writing instructions for someone?

First you write the words then you draw the picture of how you make it or how you do it.

Graphic organizers support positive feelings about writing and thinking about the topic. Students reported in their interviews the ability to access and think about a topic. Students utilized the graphic organizers effectively to support their final writing. Students appeared calm and engaged, rather than frazzled and lost. Students self-reported general satisfaction with writing and the use of graphic organizers.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The focus of this study has been to address the accessibility of academic writing within specific genre writing tasks. The genres of procedural and report writing were examined. The findings from this study suggest that graphic organizers support students through the writing process and are most useful when teacher scaffolding, modeling, and content related experiences are precursors to the writing process. Through the observations of the three culturally diverse focal students involved in this study, it was discovered that the graphic organizers can be accessed in a variety of ways. Students used prewriting strategies that were most comfortable for them as individuals. Graphic organizers are a culturally sensitive tool in that they allows for students to use modes of communication that are natural for them.

Conclusion

Teachers need to remain aware of the power relationships they engage in each day with children. As adults and as the "dispensers" of knowledge teachers have the power to define what is valuable and what is not within the context of school. Dyson (2008) reminds teacher educators and researchers that the children are aware of the values we assign to their writing and ways of communicating. By broadening our emphasis from the final written product to the process and various approaches to writing and by assigning value to the different ways students access the specific genre writing task, a culturally inclusive writing space can be created. Graphic organizers and the scaffolding that is involved in teaching the use of this tool, can be a part of

the culturally inclusive writing space.

Teaching children to write for different reasons, whether it is to entertain, inform, or persuade creates flexible and purposeful writers. Brian Kissel (2008) speaks to the motivation found in writing for a purpose. When students know their writing will be read by others and is useful, they feel more motivated to write. The use of "How to" books gave the children participating in this study a reason for writing. As the expert, children dispensed knowledge through a procedural writing task that created a sense of meaning for writing. Often students are in the position of receiving information, rather than sharing it. Their opinions' and personal knowledge is assigned less value than the teacher. Giving students the opportunity to write in the procedural genre about a topic they feel knowledgeable about instills a sense of value in their writing. The graphic organizer used to support this writing provided structure and access into the genre. Fluent sharing of knowledge occurred within the guide of the graphic organizer.

Graphic organizers are valuable in that they provide access opportunities that are varied and can be taught explicitly. Donovan and Smolkin (2011) speak to the importance of varied and explicit teaching especially when considering the weight given to a child's ability to write within a specific genre. It is a responsibility of the teacher to provide differentiated instruction that reaches out to students from all backgrounds. Explicit instruction works in conjunction with practice to support genre access. Teacher scaffolding, modeling, practice, and conferring allow for a variety of approaches to be used. When teaching graphic organizers it is important to always

demonstrate several ways in which they could be used. Pictures, short hand writing, structured sentenced recording, and oral rehearsal should all be deemed appropriate approaches to the writing task at hand. Each one should be modeled, discussed, and practiced so that it can be used independently.

Implications for Future Teaching

The findings and the conclusions drawn from them will inform my future work as a teacher in several ways. First, I will continue to use graphic organizer for writing within genre specific tasks. Graphic organizers work to make academic writing accessible to all students and therefore are valuable tools.

When thinking about how to best teach graphic organizer use it is significant to think about the context in which they are taught. The use of graphic organizers is much more productive when coupled with authentic experiences such as visiting a local park and discussing the animals there before writing about them. Reading about topic areas, having classroom discussions, first hand experiences with the topic area, all work to support a deeper understanding of the content. For example, before writing a procedural book on how to make a gingerbread house, students in my class made a gingerbread house. Before writing animal reports and glogs about snails and millipedes students in my class observed them in our classroom for several weeks and visited a local park to see them in their natural environment.

My findings also suggest that students can use ways of thinking about writing and communicating that is natural to them. Through the use of graphic organizers students can use oral rehearsal, discuss ideas with a classmate, or draw and use labels

to organize their thoughts. Accessibility is improved when students' natural tendencies are integrated into the writing process. When teaching the use of a new graphic organizer, I will begin by modeling how it could be used in a variety of ways. I will remind students to find the way to use the graphic organizer that is most meaningful for them. I will also be sure to conference with students about the ways in which they are approaching their writing during individual conferences.

In order to provide authentic writing experiences and to motivate students to write, I will use purpose driven writing experiences in the future. Community outreach and education is one facet of writing that primary aged students do not typically have an opportunity to participate in. In the future, I will provide opportunities for students to use their graphic organizers, and writing to communicate with the general public online and in local settings. For example, student work that urges people to learn about the role snails and millipedes play in wetland ecosystem could be posted in the local park. Or students may use their glogs to communicate with parents about the research they have conducted. With an expanded audience the value students perceive in their writing is increased.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Researchers

This study examined the use of graphic organizers in the primary aged classroom. There are several areas in which this study could be expanded upon and continued. The first aspect of graphic organizer use that holds promise for future research is a closer examination of the cultural factors that shape how children engage

in academic writing. When thinking about the reason for the choices students made in how they accessed writing, it was beyond the reach of this study to examine which cultural factors played a role. For example, did Tim choose to draw pictures as a result of the style of writing used in Vietnamese culture? How did the use of discussion as a precursor for writing align with Sadie's American Sign Language and Russian background? Observations of student in the home and conversations with them and their parents about the potential links between their access choices and culture would be necessary.

The second area in which this study could be expanded is the age at which this type of research is conducted. Genre specific writing is an integral part of the school experience kindergarten through college. It would be interested to study the change and growth students make across their school careers. Due to the emphasis that is placed on state testing at this time in schools, the focus that schools place on coherent writing and genre access is expansive. A study of students writing growth across time and also in each grade would be beneficial to this field of research.

Limitations for this study include the small population size and the limited time in which the study was conducted. This study focused on three focal children through which results were generalized. Data collection across an entire school year and comprising of several first grade classes would yield more accurate results. In addition, following the participants through their writing developed across grades would be ideal.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Practitioners need to be mindful of the ways in which graphic organizers are taught and utilized. Using graphic organizers in a way in which a variety of access points are deemed valuable and acceptable will support student success in their use. Accessibility should always be at the forefront of the practitioner's thinking.

Graphic organizer use should be taught in a rich context of experience and understanding. Students need the opportunity to discover content area topics in authentic ways. This may include field trips, online research, hands on experiences in the classroom, and discussions. Interactions with peers and teachers around the content and a common experience, helps to build a deeper understanding of the topic. Part of creating context is also putting students in the position to dispense knowledge from a place of expertise. Bolstering of knowledge and refinement of communication of ideas can occur through individual conferencing and peer editing for clarity.

Successful use of the tool relies heavily on the scaffolding that comes in the form of modeling and thinking out loud about the function of the graphic organizer. Teachers need to provide many examples of ways to access the genre specific writing task and the graphic organizer. Teachers have the power to communicate to students that the ways in which they naturally approach writing are valuable. Modeling of a variety of "access points" will help students to find ways to access the writing that work for them. In addition, building content area vocabulary through experience and discussions is important to promoting the student's ability to write about the topic.

One problem area to be aware of is that some children view the graphic

organizer as a separate writing piece. In this case, the graphic organizer is used to organize and record ideas, but is not used to inform the final draft. New ideas and thinking make up the final draft. When used this way the graphic organizer serves to get the child motivated to write and to create a space in which they are comfortable writing, but the true purpose of the graphic organizer is lost. Both content and format are altered in this use of the tool. Support for students who do not see the connection may come in the form of additional modeling, individual conferencing, and explicit instruction on the purpose of graphic organizers.

It is my belief that the aforementioned recommendation will prove valuable to both practitioners and teacher researchers in their future work graphic organizers in the elementary school classroom. Through proper scaffolding and flexible use of graphic organizers, students can benefit from the use of this tool in their genre specific writing.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Observationnel Notes

Observations	Interpretations

Writing Attitude Survey

Name _____ School _____ Grade _____

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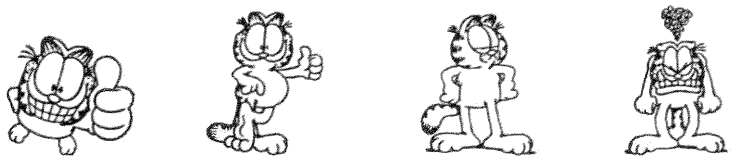
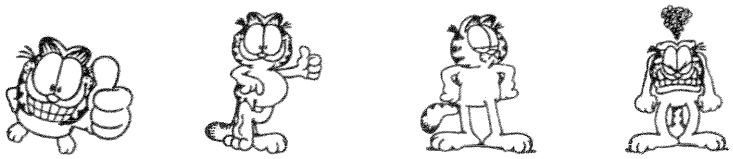
1. How would you feel writing a letter to the author of a book you read?

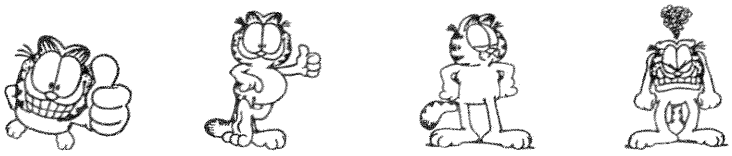


2. How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?

3. How would you feel writing a letter to a store asking about something you might buy there?



4. How would you feel telling in writing why something happened?



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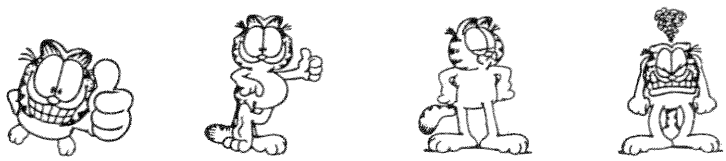
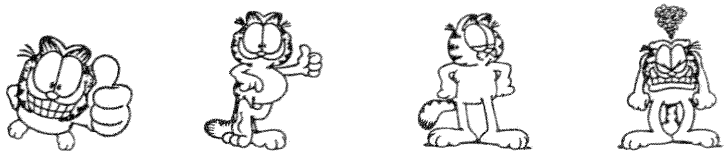
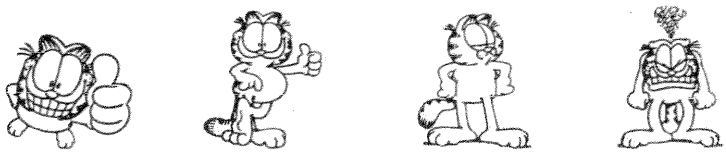
5. How would you feel writing to someone to change their opinion?



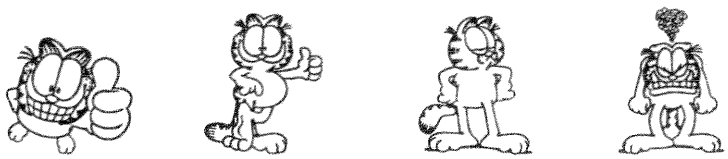
6. How would you feel keeping a diary?



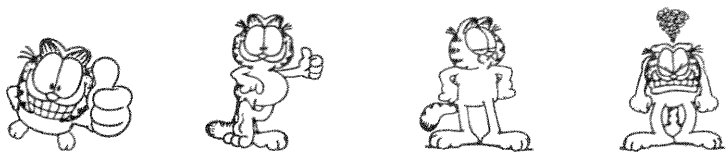
7. How would you feel writing poetry for fun?



8. How would you feel writing a letter stating your opinion about a topic?



9. How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?



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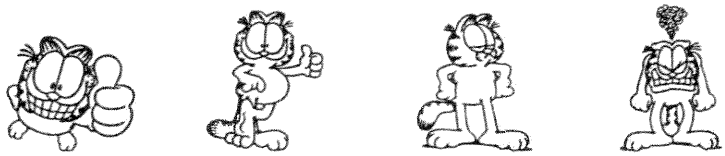
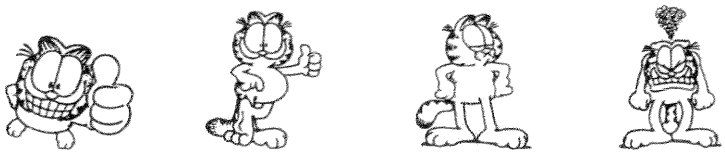
10. How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?

11. How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?

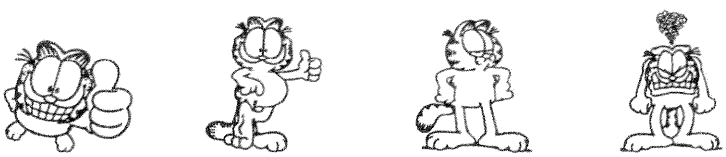


12. How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?



13. How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?

14. How would you feel writing about something you did in science?



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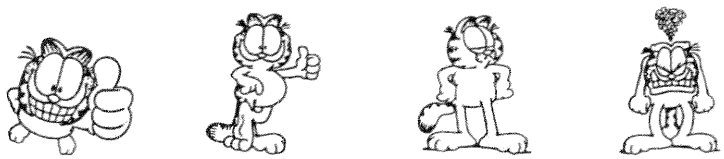
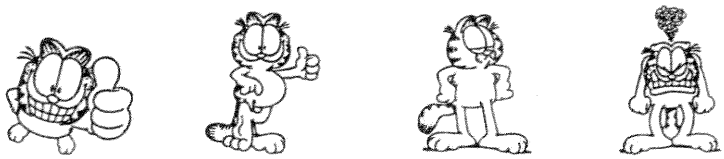
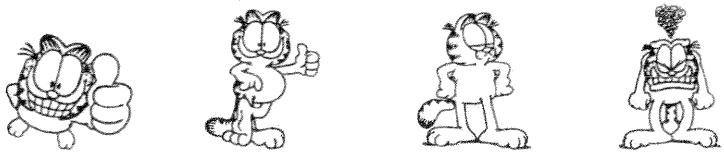
15. How would you feel writing about something you did in social studies?



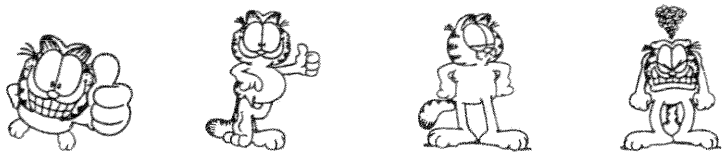
16. How would you feel if you could write more in school?



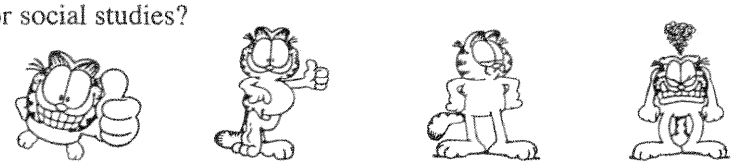
17. How would you feel about writing down the important things your teacher says about a new topic?



18. How would you feel writing a long story or report at school?



19. How would you feel writing answers to questions in science or social studies?



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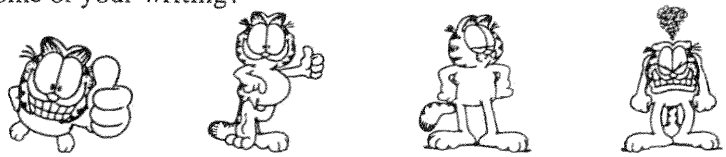
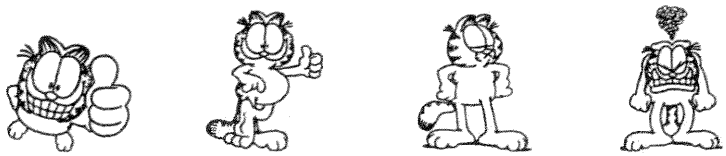
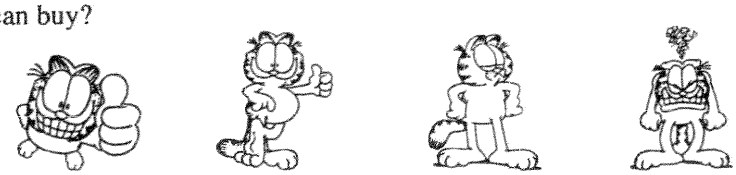
20. How would you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?



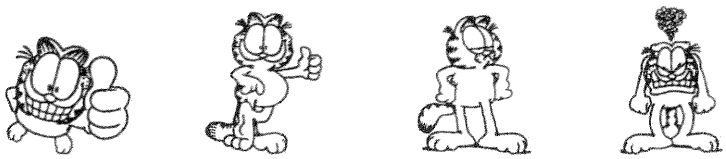
21. How would you feel if your classmates talked to you about making your writing better ?



22. How would you feel writing an advertisment for something people can buy?



23. How would you feel keeping a journal for class?



24. How would you feel writing about things that have happened in your life?

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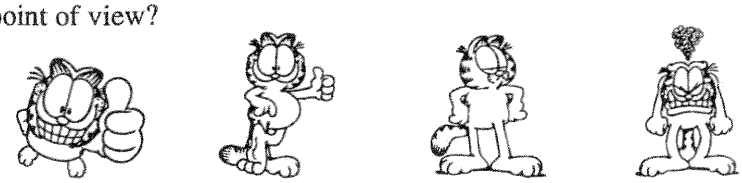
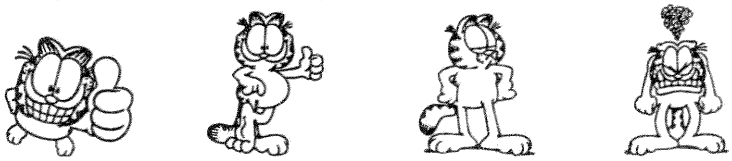
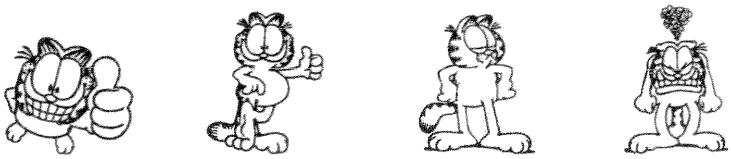
25. How would you feel writing about something from another person's point of view?



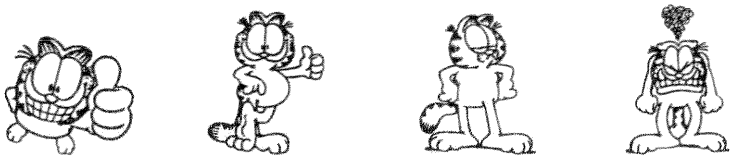
26. How would you feel about checking your writing to make sure the words you have written are spelled correctly?



27. How would you feel if your classmates read something you wrote?



28. How would you feel if you didn't write as much in school?



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Writing Attitude Survey
Scoring sheet

Student's name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____

Administration date _____

Scoring guide		
4	points	Very happy Garfield
3	points	Somewhat happy Garfield
2	points	Somewhat upset Garfield
1	point	Very upset Garfield

Item scores:

1._____	15._____
2._____	16._____
3._____	17._____
4._____	18._____
5._____	19._____
6._____	20._____
7._____	21._____
8._____	22._____
9._____	23._____
10._____	24._____
11._____	25._____
12._____	26._____
13._____	27._____
14._____	28._____

Full scale raw score: _____

Percentile rank: _____

Writing Attitude Survey
Directions for use

The Writing Attitude Survey provides a quick indication of student attitudes toward writing. It consists of 28 items and can be administered to an entire classroom in about 20 minutes. Each item presents a brief, simply worded statement about writing, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each pose is designed to depict a different emotional state, ranging from very positive to very negative.

Administration

Begin by telling students that you wish to find out how they feel about writing. Emphasize that this is not a test and that there are no right answers. Encourage sincerity.

Distribute the survey forms and, if you wish to monitor the attitudes of specific students, ask them to write their names in the space at the top. Hold up a copy of the survey so that the students can see the first page. Point to the picture of Garfield at the far left of the first item. Ask the students to look at this same picture on their own survey form. Discuss with them the mood Garfield seems to be in (very happy). Then move to the next picture and again discuss Garfield's mood (this time, somewhat happy). In the same way, move to the third and fourth pictures and talk about Garfield's moods—somewhat upset and very upset.

Explain that the survey contains some statements about writing and that the students should think about how they feel about each statement. They should then circle the picture of Garfield that is closest to their own feelings. (Emphasize that the students should respond according to their own feelings, not as Garfield might respond!) In the first and second grades read each item aloud slowly and distinctly, then read it a second time while students are thinking. Be sure to read the item number and to remind students of page numbers when new pages are reached.

In Grades 3 and above, monitor students while they are completing this survey. It is not necessary for the teacher to read the items aloud to students, unless the teacher feels it is necessary for newer or struggling readers.

Teachers should review the items prior to the administration of the survey to identify any words students may need defined to eliminate misunderstanding during completion of the instrument.

Scoring

To score the survey, count four points for each leftmost (very happy) Garfield circled, three points for the next Garfield to the right (somewhat happy), two points for the next Garfield to the right (somewhat upset), and one point for the rightmost Garfield (very upset). The individual scores for each question should be totaled to reach a raw score.

Interpretation

The scores should first be recorded on the scoring sheet. The scores can be interpreted in two ways. An informal approach would be to look at where the raw score falls related to the total possible points of 112. If the raw score is approximately 70, the score would fall midway between the somewhat happy and somewhat upset Garfields, indicating the student has an indifferent attitude toward writing. The formal approach involves converting the raw score to a percentile rank by using Table 1. The raw score should be found on the left-hand side of the table and matched to the percentile rank in the appropriate grade-level column.

Appendix C:

Interview Questions:

6. What is a graphic organizer?
7. Do graphic organizers help you with your writing?
8. How do you organize your thoughts before writing your final draft of writing?
9. What steps do you take when writing a story?
10. What steps do you take when writing instructions for someone?

Appendix D:

What we know about organisms

By:_____

My favorite organism

was_____because

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My favorite part of studying

organisms was…

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Organisms
Millipedes Pill bug
Guppies Snails

I found out that

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did you know

_____

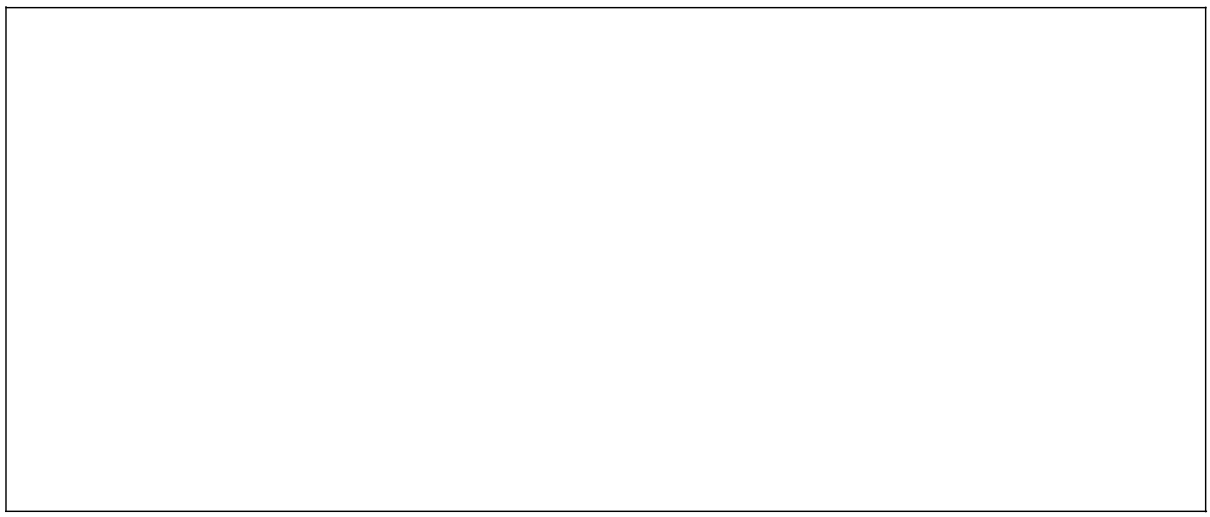
_____

_____

_____

Appendix E:

How to:_____ By:_____

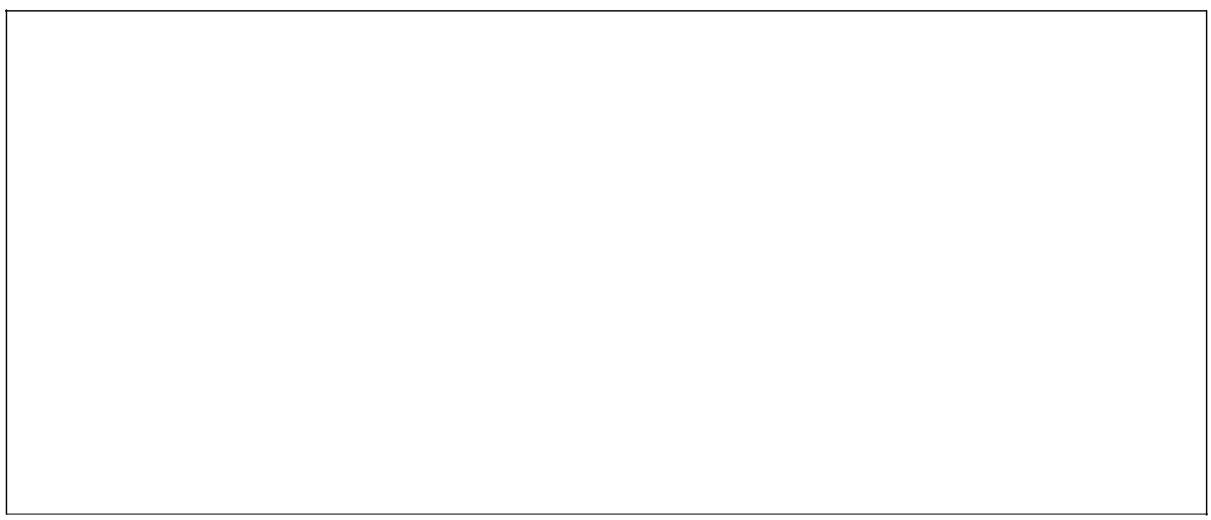


Then:_____

_____

_____

_____



Next:_____

_____

Last: