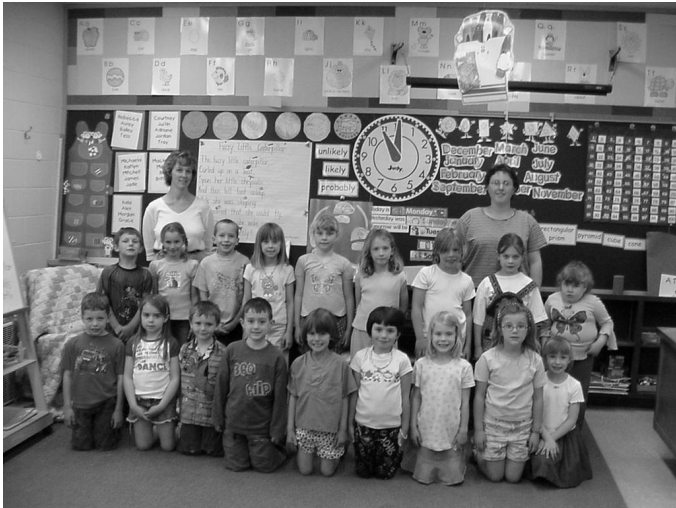


How can I effectively use the First Steps Writing program in my classroom?

Jennifer Savage

Biography



Grade One Teeterville Public School, 2003-04.

After graduating from McMaster in 1999 with an Honours BSc. degree, Jennifer found herself at Northern College in Aberdeen, Scotland, completing a teaching degree. Upon returning to the Norfolk area, she was able to complete a Computer Specialist Degree as well as taking Special Education courses. Most of her career has been spent at Teeterville Public School, where she has been a Computer, Grade 3, and currently, Grade 1 Teacher.

Abstract

An Action Research team was formed, which focused on writing and improving student learning. Although researchers investigated separate topics of interest, the goal of the team was to network together and share

ideas that would benefit all. Through personal journals, data collection and reflection, improvement of student learning and professional practice are documented.

Background

When I began teaching Grade 1 last year, I found myself struggling to keep up with the demands of non-independent workers and the need to turn them into students who had the ability to read and write. I found myself discouraged at the end of my first year of Grade 1. All of my students went on to Grade 2 reading and writing, however I felt that I needed to improve my teaching skills in order to better serve my students.

When I was approached to be involved in an Action Research Project with a group of other teachers, I didn't hesitate to accept the offer. Not knowing what was really involved, I felt that if there was an opportunity for me to extend myself as a teacher, it needed to be done. Fortunately, I had worked with Deb Operkso, Primary Consultant for the Grand Erie District School Board (GEDSB), for a few years and knew that working with her would be extremely beneficial.

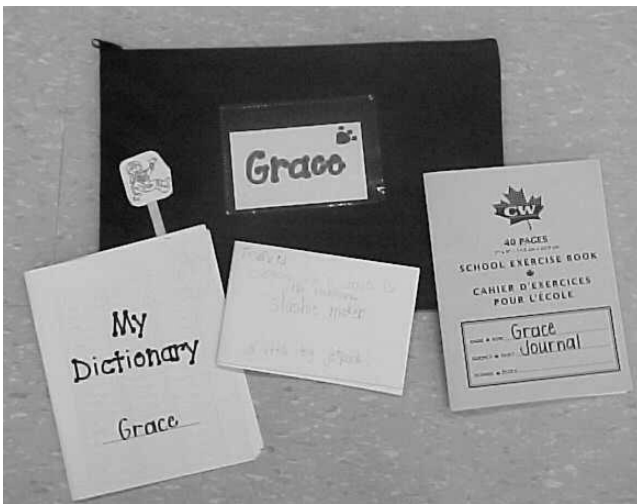
Initially, I had decided to focus my research on English as a Second Language (ESL). I had an ESL child in my room who was very reluctant to speak and interact with others. I wanted to learn how to best help this child succeed, not only in his writing, but in becoming a successful student to the best of his ability. Unfortunately, by mid-November my student moved and I was left without a focus for my research. While fumbling to discover a new topic to research, I became ill. This unforeseen interruption pushed my research problem into December.

When I first started teaching five years ago, the former Norfolk Board of Education provided various workshops with First Steps. This Australian based program was new to the area and was being introduced by trained instructors. Knowing that this was a professional growth opportunity, I became involved with the First Steps Reading,

Writing and Spelling workshops. Over the years, I have occasionally referred to the documents, however I never really investigated and used them to the degree that was intended. Knowing that using First Steps in my classroom would benefit my children, I decided to turn my focus on the writing document and investigate its content. This finally led me to my research opportunity.

How can I effectively use the First Steps Writing program in my classroom?

Environment



Writing Folder Contents

Ever since I can remember, children have been a focus in my life. Entering the teaching profession, I wanted to give my students every opportunity to succeed and feel confident with themselves and their learning ability. I believe that my classroom belongs to my students. They need an environment that is comfortable, encouraging, and non-threatening. Everything in my room has been thought about and planned around the children. I want my students to have fun and enjoy being in the classroom. I believe that happy children are more motivated to learn and have a greater opportunity for successful learning.

My classroom strives to be an environment that is capable of sustaining and enhancing learning. All equipment and notebooks are labelled and stored in an area that

is easily accessible to all students. Writing folders have always been an issue; the children inevitably drop them and lose their work. I was able to find vinyl bags with zippers that I used as their writing folders. Inside each folder, every child was given a name tag, personal dictionary, think pad, journal, and doodle book. Their personal dictionary is filled with Dolch words and extra room for them to add new vocabulary. After taking the First Steps course, I immediately adopted the 'Have-a-go', or what my children refer to as a 'Think Pad'. The Think Pads are used for jotting down attempts to spell unfamiliar words. I have a tub of scrap paper available to the children for their writing. At the beginning of the year, we talk about the two most important writing tools - dictionary and think pad. Although it takes months of practice, my children now know that before I help them with any word they must try it on their own and bring me their dictionary and their spelling attempt. It is my expectation that the children be able to spell all the words on the word wall. They know that I will not tell them the spelling; motioning to the word wall is usually enough. It has proven to be an excellent strategy.

For early writers, I believe that drawing their story is as important as the words. I chose journals that incorporated an area for pictures as well as print. After reading Donald Graves, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, I found the concept of a 'doodle book' interesting. In September, I gave each of my children a notebook to be used when they wanted an opportunity to write. I compiled a box full of stickers, stamps, cards and pictures that the children could use at any time to inspire independent writing. While this idea excited some for the first while, it generally did not inspire my students to explore independent writing. In hindsight, I believe that at the beginning of the year it was too open-ended for my children. I will attempt this idea again, however I plan to wait until the third term, when the children are more confident in their writing ability.

I knew that there would be many letter reversals and that there would be some that would begin writing from the right side of the paper. I was able to incorporate their name tags into a functional source of information. Not

only did their name tags have the alphabet, but also a green and red symbol to indicate where to begin printing. Although these were not used for very long, the students are aware of their purpose and know to use them when it's needed. There are a few students who still get their tags out before beginning a writing exercise, to ensure they are writing from left to right and correcting letter reversals.

When I first started teaching Grade 1, I had no idea where to start. The GEDSB Early Literacy (Reading and Writing) documents have provided me with a great deal of support. From the documents, I was able to compile a



Word Wall



Flashcard Buddies

list of weekly spelling words taken from the Dolch word list. My word wall grows weekly with each set of spelling words. My spelling activities are developed to complement my reading and writing program, focusing on reading rules, punctuation/sentence structure, alphabetical order, syllables and nouns. To help tie into my reading and writing program, my students have 'Flashcard Buddies'. At the beginning of each week, the children find the current spelling words and add it to the growing pile of words that they know. Students were paired together to practice reading and spelling the words. This has proven to be an excellent way for the children to practice their spelling and sight reading.

My children are aware of their environment, and although some children will take advantage of the punctuation and writing posters that are displayed, it has become a part of our room for reference. Reminders about self-editing (Capitals, Overall sense, Periods, Spaces), story starters and tracking story progress have become secondary. Once my children were introduced to the concept of my tracking system, they were able to see their progress on a piece of



The Writing Process

work. Using a small picture of each child on a popsicle stick, the children were able to move themselves to the appropriate step in their writing progress (planning, rough draft, conferencing, editing, final copy). It took a while to introduce each of these to the students, however once they were taught, they enjoyed using this tool to see their progress with a writing piece. It also made it easier for me to keep track of those students who needed the extra attention. Although I kept a paper track of progress, a glance at the tubs was a quick way for me to check progress.

September

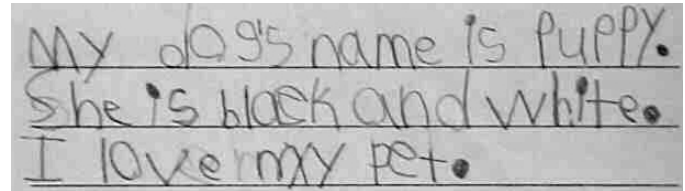


Spaceman

Grade 1 is a huge adjustment during the first few months. In September the children and I spent a lot of time making class books, identifying friends and printing names. I found that the easiest way of beginning writing was their journals. I knew that those students who were not confident writers would be able to draw their stories successfully. As a class we did many sample entries, learning how to listen for letter sounds. After the first couple of times the children were asked to write, I realized that letter formation and spacing were huge problems. To help with letter formation, the children had their traditional printing books. They also had opportunities to use wipe-off printing sheets, which they enjoyed.

Word spacing became the major issue. I tried the finger space and popsicle sticks. I even tried to tell them that ‘words can’t kiss’! It became a favourite saying in our room, although some children continued to crowd words. During a meeting, Deb Opersko shared her idea of the spaceman. Once I returned to my classroom and used him during lessons, the children were eager to get out their spaceman when writing. For most of my students, this was a great tool.

Our focus for September was ‘Myself’ and our first writing project was about pets. It was at this time that my students were introduced to a story planner. The planner was picture-based, with key words that I had given them. Although it was a short writing piece, the children were excited to see their final product.



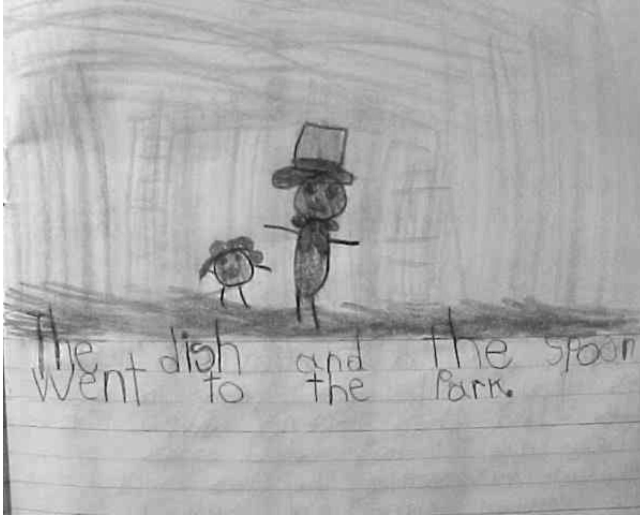
My Pet

October

Throughout the month of October, I had a student teacher. This was the first time I had the opportunity to have a student teacher in my room. Although I enjoyed the experience, I would not have another student teacher during the first term, especially at the beginning of the year. I found that the children were just becoming adjusted to my style and rules and some of them found it very difficult to adjust to a new teacher. During this time, I was able to help my students incorporate more writing into other curriculum areas, specifically math and science.

November

As the month began, I found myself almost re-teaching my children behaviours and expectations that I had worked hard to achieve in September. As one of our first personal books, we choose to make ‘Rainbow Books’. Making one as a class, we were able to look at the colours of the rainbow and construct simple sentences (An apple is red, The sun is yellow. The grass is green). It was very reassuring to overhear a student conversation: “*That isn’t a sentence, you don’t have a period!*” (personal journal entry, November ‘03) Although it contained a simple sentence pattern, the chil-



The Dish and Spoon went to the park

dren were excited to create and share their books with their friends. Not only did it teach them the concept of a period and capital, it was also a book that they were able to read to each other.

By this time, I began getting sick and found myself away from the children quite a bit. During my time away, the children focussed their writing in their journals. I have always found it interesting to get a chance to see another side of my children. I have many children who are shy and reluctant to speak, so reading their thoughts became my way of getting to know them better. While I was ill, my ESL student moved, leaving me without a focus for research. I spent November desperately trying to find another research focus. During the end of the month we became enthralled with nursery rhymes. This topic

gave us many opportunities for reading and sequencing text as well as extending the rhymes. One of the activities the children enjoyed was answering the question, “What happened to the dish and the spoon?” This became great fun for the children.

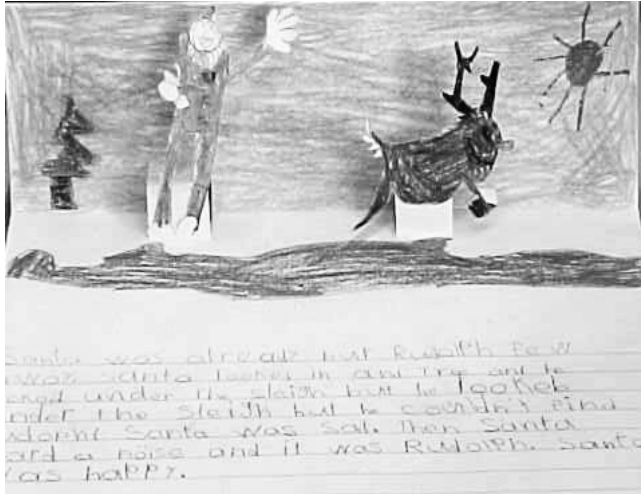
December

It was in December that I decided to focus my attention on First Steps. Having been introduced to the documents years previously; my first task was to review the philosophy of the program. Three main underlying themes are developed in the program:

- Linking Assessment to Teaching
- Effective Learning (PEWIT) (Problem Solving; Embeddedness; Working Memory; Interaction; Time)
- The Three R's (reflecting, representing, reporting)

My first area of focus was Linking Assessment to Teaching. I began by reviewing the phases of writing development (Role Play, Experimental, Early, and Conventional). After reviewing the overall indicators for each stage and viewing my own student work samples, I was able to quickly place most of my students into the Experimental Phase, and some into the Early Writing Phases. Using the Indicators tracking system, I decided to re-work the phases into something I was more comfortable working with. I focussed my work on only the two phases, re-creating an assessment tool that could be used as a term-by-term checklist (Appendix 1a, 1b). My original intention was to have an assessment package that would be useful during reporting periods as well as a document to pass on to the following teacher for additional information regarding writing ability. Personalizing the indicators took more work than I had expected; there was always something to be modified.

While working on the indicators, I began to look at the foundation of Effective Learning. The First Steps programs believe that “children are constantly learning about their environment, by trial and error and through ‘having a go’ at things” (Writing, Developmental Continuum, pg. 6). Embeddedness (Contextualisation) is another aspect of Effective Learning. “If the context and the problem are embedded in reality and make sense to the learner, then the learner can engage in productive problem solving.” (pg. 7). Children must be given as many real-life experiences as possible. When students are given too much information, their Working Memory (mental space) becomes too crowded. Over time and with practice, a child will become better at combining bits of knowledge. “Interaction is of fundamental importance to human beings” (pg. 8). Children need the opportunities to interact



Santa was already but Rudolph flew away. Santa looked in a tree and he looked under the sleigh but he couldn't find Rudolph! Santa was sad. Then Santa heard a noise and it was Rudolph. Santa was happy.

ate their own story map. Before doing the map, the children were paired up and asked to verbally tell each other their stories, adding suggestions and ideas (thus using the Interaction strategy of learning). Once the children had formed their maps, they were required to re-share their thoughts with others. I found that the children enjoyed this opportunity to share with others and get productive feedback. Since this was our first major writing project, I wanted to make sure they were done well. With each student, I was able to sit and conference about his/her story. Using their edited copy, I was able to transfer their story to the computer. Using the computer print-out as their guide, the children were able to easily copy their story into a final product. Since this was a huge undertaking, we decided to illustrate the stories with pop-up pictures. The children were very excited about their finished product and enjoyed sharing them with each other. The children, in the rest of the school, often came down to read the stories, which were posted in the hall.

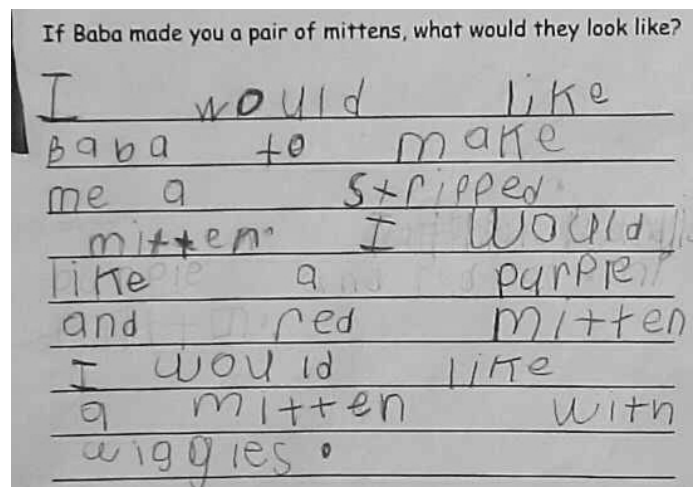
January

I used the rest of January to complete my Indicators Assessment records. My intention was to prepare a writing package for each student, evaluating the transitions into phases, and pass the information on to the following teacher. Unfortunately, it became a huge undertaking for each student. I found that I was spending more time on paperwork than with the children.

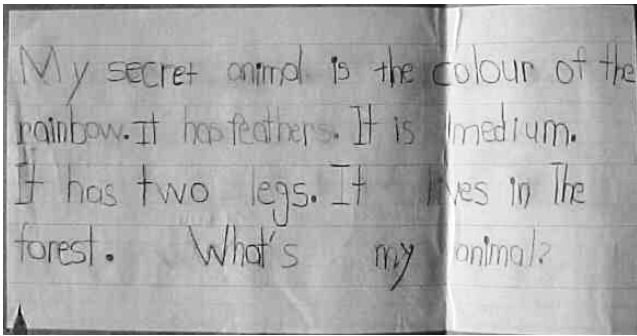
I decided to select a few weaker students to track using the First Steps Indicators. I felt that this was more manageable and allowed me to focus more on the strategies to improve writing. With the development of writing abilities, I introduced my children to 'sticker stories'. I provided the children with a variety

with adults and their peers. The final concept in Effective Learning is time. Children need the opportunity to practise and consolidate their learning. Having re-investigated these factors, I was able to use these concepts to help broaden my writing program. I looked at the First Steps Narrative Stories section. I decided to consolidate the suggested ideas into a quick-glance page that was easy for referral as well as Narrative and Recount Indicators for Beginning and Developing phases (appendix 2a, 2b). Knowing that grammar was an important aspect, I also condensed a quick reference guide for grammar activities (appendix 3) and a punctuation checklist (appendix 4). I knew that these would be useful for interview discussions with parents.

As our major writing focus in December, I decided to introduce story maps as a writing planner. Having modelled a simple winter story, the children were asked to create their own story map.



I would like Baba to make me a striped mitten. I would like a purple and red mitten. I would like a mitten with wiggles. (Independent)



My secret animal is the colour of the rainbow. It has feathers, It is medium. It has two legs. It lives in the forest. What is my animal?

of stickers and they enjoyed creating mini-stories and using the stickers in their illustrations. For those students who enjoyed this, I also provided a bin of various stencils to use for their illustrations. It was rewarding to see the improvement in students' writing ability. Their confidence in using the think pads and dictionaries was becoming evident. When a student gave me her Think Pad with the word *magik* - I knew that this was progress (personal journal entry, January '04). As we were involved with winter-related activities, the children were required to sequence events in making a snowman and write about the corresponding pictures. During weekly spelling activities, I was able to focus on different writing components. The children are often asked to use their spelling words in sentences, fix mixed-up sentences, and use learned reading rules to spell words (ie/ c _ _ t — coat).

February

By this point, I had turned my attention more towards math journaling as a source of writing. Utilizing Jan Brett's *The Mitten*, the children were able to design and construct a writing piece revolving around a mitten. After modelling many examples, the children were given an opportunity to create a new mitten and answer the question, "If Baba could make you a pair of mittens, what would they look like?" Similarly, as a math activity, the children were asked to create a mitten, using a growing or extending pattern and write about their creation. Even though I had modelled and provided key words, I found that math journals were an area of weakness. However, I knew that they were an important aspect of my math and writing program. My only option was to provide the children with more opportunities and more time to practise this form of writing (Effective Learning strategy). With the successes that I was noticing with regards to problem-solving unfamiliar words and development of ideas, I was still frustrated with the students who were able to verbalize a sentence, yet put periods in random spots. I knew that with the average students, more practise would be needed and more specific lessons were required. However, I was truly discouraged by the few students who I had been tracking. I was not seeing any progress; it seemed they weren't moving forward, despite my best efforts. "*What am I doing wrong?*" (personal journal quote, February 18, 2004).

March

Before I knew it, seemingly overnight, my selected students were beginning to write in understandable sentences! True, periods were not always where they needed to be and there were usually capitals intermixed within a sentence, but they were writing nonetheless. I knew then that they had been receiving so much information that their learning capabilities were not ready to combine and use all the tools they had been taught (PEWIT). With this great achievement, we were off again, composing and publishing great writing pieces. Knowing we had focused on narrative and journal writing, I thought about the up-coming Writing Exemplar and how to expose the children to non-fiction writing. I was able to share an extensive collection of Beanie Babies-mammals, amphibians, and birds. Secretly, with their story planner, the children were asked to select one for his/her writing project. Given specific planner requirements, a child was required to write information about his/her specific choice (ie/ lived in the jungle, had a long neck, lived on land). Keeping everything a secret, the children created their final drafts. Using a digital camera, I was able to attach a photo of each student with their mystery animal. The children enjoyed sharing and



I used a spoon and put some soil in a pot.

develop instructions for each step in the planting process. While this is still in progress, the children had a wonderful time constructing the books and will enjoy their books even more when they are shared with the other classes.

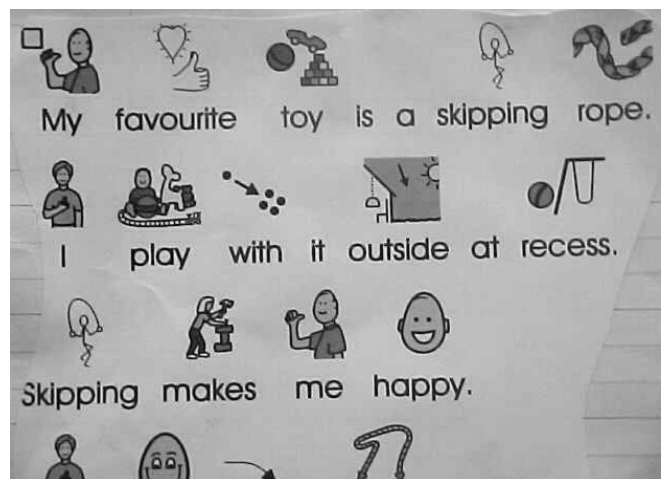
The Exceptional Student

I was fortunate this year to have an exceptional child in my room. With extremely limited communication skills, I found it difficult the first few weeks knowing what she wanted to express and how to best help her. Her Educational Assistant (EA) was very familiar with her needs, as she had been with her for three years. It was during the first month of school that I became introduced to various computer devices and programs which gave her the opportunity to communicate with others. I was quickly introduced to the program Writing with Symbols. Used as a word processor, the program adds appropriate picture cues with each word. With the help of her EA, this child was able to participate in all writing activities. Even with limited communication skills, this child was able to share her stories with her peers, happy that she could communicate through the pictures. ("Success is different for each one of us, so who are we to put unrealistic expectations

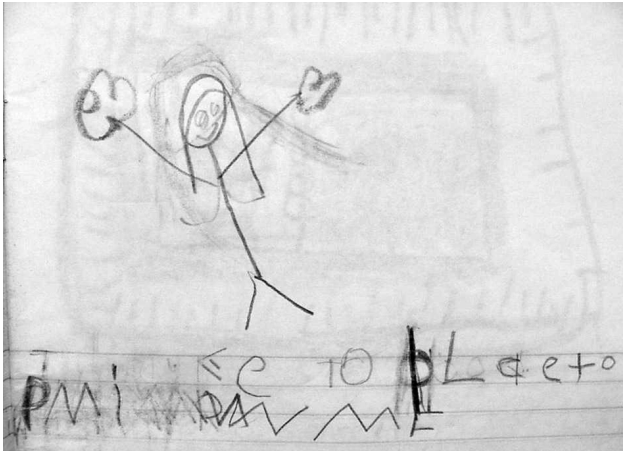
guessing with their peers. They especially enjoyed their work displayed in the hall for the other students in the school to discover. "M enjoyed this writing activity. She was eager to get her ideas down." (personal journal quote, March 10, 2004). I found this activity was a great motivator, even for those who weren't eager to write.

April

Knowing that my research was quickly coming to an end, I tried various activities to help promote the general writing needs of my children. One area that was a general concern was the placement of punctuation in a sentence. I gave the class a few sentences without any punctuation. As a class, we would read a combination of words to discover its sense. As I continue this activity until the end of the year, my hope is that it will become easier for the students to recognize where punctuation needs to be placed. In celebration of our plant life cycle unit, the children planted bean seeds. I wanted a fun way to turn this activity into a writing assignment. After a lot of mess, each child had created an "A Seed Grows" book. Each page was a different step in the development of a flower, from putting soil into a pot, to the final blooming flower. The children were then asked to



Writing with Symbols



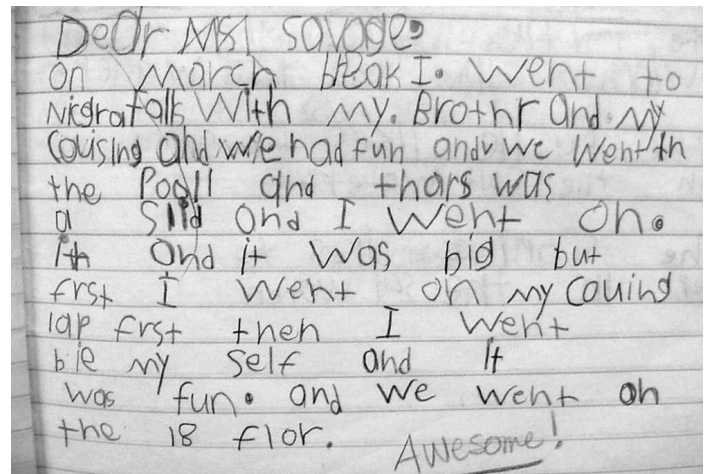
I ke to pla e t o p mi wmf

on this student, but we need to challenge her. The growth of this student may seem small to most, but in working with her for the past 3 years, I can tell you the success and growth has been huge. J (student) has learned to demonstrate self-esteem and pride in her accomplishments” (R. Durrant, May, 2004.).)

Once I had become familiar with the program, I found that I was using it in my room. I added picture cues to poems, charts and word problem activities. I knew that adding the picture cues with certain words would allow for more independent readers. I believe that every primary class should have access to this program and every student be entitled to learn from its capabilities.

Reflection

As I look back over the last 8 months, I realize that only half of my time was spent expanding my knowledge of the First Steps Writing program. I knew in September that I wanted to improve my writing program, finding a better way to help my students. I realize that Grade 1 is an extremely important year. At times I have been discouraged because I feel that I have not been able to reach those students that need the encouragement and extra support (frustration noted in my personal journal throughout January-February '04). On the other hand, after being reminded of the First Steps philosophy, I know that I have tried to provide my students with a solid foundation. With the expectations of reading, writing and the ability to perform mathematics (as well as other curriculum areas), some students have been able to use their working memory to make sense of the things they have been taught. I know that other children are still trying to organize the information into something they can handle. Through the Think Pad, I have taught my students to become problem solvers. Although, it is occasionally overwhelming to look at and discuss the writing a child brings to me on a think pad, I have realized that I am providing them with an opportunity to expand on their problem solving abilities. Even by having my students write notes in their planner about how much milk they have remaining, I know that this is useful. I am in no way an expert on First Steps. I know that after my research is completed, I will be continuing to use the document to become a better teacher. I know that my layout of the indicators will change continually as I use it, adapting to new-found teaching strategies and techniques. As I question myself at the end of each year, as to my effectiveness as a teacher, all I need to do this year is look at the words of one of my students and smile...



on March break I. Went to Nicagra Falls with my. Brothr and cousins and we had fun and we went in the pooll and thars was a slid and I went on. it and it was big but frst I went on my sousing lap frst then I went bie myself and it was fun. and we went on the 18th floor

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Experimental Writing Indicators	Term One Term Two Term Three
Content, Organization and Contextual Understanding - reads back own writing; attempts familiar forms of writing (lists, letters, recounts, stories, messages); writes using simplified oral language structures; uses writing to convey meaning	
voices thoughts while writing	
writes to communicate messages, direct experiences or feelings	
assumes that the reader shares the context so may not give sufficient background information (may tell 'who' but not 'when')	
often begins sentence with 'I' or 'We'	
is beginning to use written language structures. Has a sense of sentence (writes complete sentences with or without punctuation)	
repeats familiar words when writing (cat, cat, cat)	
generates writing by repeating the same beginning patterns (I like cats, I like dogs, I like birds....)	
recognizes some words and letters in context	
recognizes that people use writing to convey meaning	
Concepts and Conventions - realizes that print contains a constant message; uses left to right and top to bottom of orientation of print; demonstrates one-to-one correspondence between written and spoken words	
uses upper and lower case letters indiscriminately	
distinguishes between numerals and letters	
leaves a space between word-like clusters of letters	
dictates slowly so teacher can 'keep up' while scribing	
Strategies - relies heavily on the most obvious sounds of a word	
tells others what has been written	
asks others what has been written	
traces and copies letters with some successful formations	
points to 'words' while reading own writing	
voices thoughts while writing	
reads back what has been written to clarify meaning	
experiments with, and overgeneralizes print conventions (puts a period after each word)	

uses knowledge of rhyme to spell words written	
uses print resources in classroom (charts, signs, word wall...)	
Attitude	
listens attentively to the telling or reading of stories and other texts	
writes spontaneously for self or chosen audience	

Appendix 1b

Early Writing Indicators Name:	Term One Term Two Term Three
Content, Organization and Contextual Understanding - uses a small range of familiar text forms; chooses topics that are personally significant; uses basic sentence structures and varies sentence beginnings; can explain in context, some of the purposes of using writing (shopping list, telephone messages as a memory aid)	
uses a partial organizational framework (simple orientation and story development)	
often writes a simple recount of personal events or observations and comments	
uses time order to sequence and organize writing	
is beginning to use some narrative structure	
is beginning to use some informational text structures (recipes, factual description)	
writes simple factual accounts with little elaboration	
includes irrelevant detail in 'dawn-to-dusk' recounts	
attempts to orient, or create a context for the reader, but may assume a shared context	
rewrites known stories in sequence	
includes detail in written retell	
includes several items of information about a topic	
is beginning to use 'book' language (By the fire sat a cat)	
joins simple sentences (often overusing the same connectors - and, then)	
uses knowledge of rhyme, rhythm and repetition in writing	
repeats familiar patterns (In the jungle I saw...)	

Word Usage - experiments with words drawn from language experience activities, literature, media and oral language of peers and others

discusses word formations and meanings; noticing similarities and differences

transfers words encountered in talk, or reading, to writing

highlights words for emphasis (BIG)

Editing - begins to develop editing skills

deletes words to clarify meaning

adds words to clarify meaning

begins to proof read for spelling errors

responds to requests for clarification

attempts the use of a proof-reading guide

Language Conventions - attempts to use some punctuation

sometimes uses periods

sometimes uses a capital letter to start a sentence

uses capital letters for names

attempts use of question marks

attempts use of exclamation marks

sometimes uses apostrophes for contractions

overgeneralizes use of print conventions (overuse of a postrop hes, periods, com mas)

often writes in the first person

attempts writing in both first and third person

usually uses appropriate subject/verb agreements

usually maintains consistent tense

writes a title which reflects content

Strategies - talks with others to plan and revise

re-reads own writing to maintain word sequence

attempts to transfer knowledge of text structure to writing (imitates form of a familiar big book)

shares ideas for writing with peers or teacher

participates in group brainstorming activities to elicit ideas and information before writing

in consultation with teacher, sets personal goals for writing development	
discusses proof-reading strategies with peers and teacher and attempts to use them in context	

Summary: Narrative Stories

Story Reconstruction

- ~uses oral language
- ~each child gets a number
- ~variety of pictures in centre of circle
- ~1st child picks a picture and describes
- ~group must agree and discuss
- ~continue around the circle to make a story

Story Makers

- ~character - pink paper
- ~setting - yellow paper
- ~problem - green paper
- ~can work as a group to create a story

Story Telling

- ~tell stories to others before writing

Literacy Letters

- ~write a letter to a character in a book

Map a Story

Journals

- ~favourite part of the story
- ~choose a favourite illustration and write about it

Guiding Questions

- ~Orientation
 - ~How will you start your story that makes the reader want to read on?
 - ~What will your first sentence be?
 - ~When and where will your story begin?
 - ~What will the setting look like?
 - ~What words will you use to describe the setting and how can you help the reader paint a mind picture?
- ~Characters
 - ~Who are the most important characters in the story?
 - ~What do they look like?
 - ~What are they like?
 - ~What sort of personalities do they have?
 - ~How do they talk in the story?
- ~Complication
 - ~What problems does the main character need to overcome?
- ~Story Structure
 - ~What events happen first, next, last?
 - ~What does the main character do? Does he/she act and react in believable way?

- ~How will you describe the actions?
- ~Resolution
 - ~How will things work out?
 - ~What loose ends will need to be tidied?
 - ~How will your story end?

Sentence Manipulation

- ~make a sentence, add in descriptive words
- ~example: There was a man sitting on a chair. (Include old, green)
- ~sentence combining - take a few short sentences and make them into one (example: Sam had a dog. It was big. = Sam had a big dog)

Word Study

- ~Synonym / Antonym Substitution
 - ~change part of the story - changing synonym or antonym, compare to original text
- ~word to replace said - read a text and make a list of useful words

Narrative Indicators: Beginning

Narrative Indicators: Beginning	
Purpose	
-the writer discusses why stories are written	
Text Organization and Content	
-writes a series of loosely connected events or actions concluding with a simple ending	
-included partial information about story context expecting that the reader shares background	
-finds it difficult to describe characters as separate beings with emotions	
-writes a sequence of events that do not seem to be leading to a complication	
-focuses on one or two characters with no elaboration or description	
-includes characters that only perform actions but generally gives no details of reactions	
-has difficulty expressing information that is generally conveyed in face-to-face conversations (absence of punctuation)	
-writes a simple ending (I woke up.)	
-finds it difficult to write an ending	
Language Features	
-uses a few basic connectives (and, then)	
-changes from writing in the third person to writing in the first person	
-rarely uses direct speech	

-has some difficulty in maintaining consistent tense	
Narrative Indicators: Developing	
Purpose	
-the writer discusses why stories are written	
Text Organization and Content	
-introduces the characters and settings and focuses on a series of actions that lead to a complication and simple resolution	
-writes a title	
-attempts to orientate the reader with some details of setting	
-includes essentials of time, place and characters with little elaboration or description	
-writes about stereotypes (the wicked witch, brave prince)	
-includes initiating event leading to limited development of complication	
-includes particular features of well-known narrative forms (fairy stories - rhyme, rhythm and repetition...run as fast as you can)	
-copies stories from well-known stories	
-relies almost entirely on actions of the characters to develop plot	
-introduces characters without indicating where they came from or why they have appeared	
-attempts resolution of story, ending is often predictable and not very successful (It was a dream.)	
-uses recurring themes (good over evil)	
Language Features	
-uses a limited number of adjectives and adverbs to provide description	
-writes conversation but the reader has difficulty in deciding who said what	
-attempts direct speech, exclamation and question marks to enhance meaning	
-uses casual conjunctions (so, because, if...)	

Recount Indicators: Beginning

Purpose	
-the writer uses recount to tell of a past experience	
Text Organization and Content	
-writes a simple account with little description	
-provides little information about setting or the context in which the events happened (tells who and where but not when)	
-uses oral language structures, gives all events equal attention and importance (I got up. I went to the zoo. I came home.)	
-links events chronologically	
-writes an evaluative comments as a conclusion	
Language Features	
-uses oral language structures	
-usually writes in the past tense	
-uses little variety of linking words (and, then)	

Recount Indicators: Developing

Purpose	
-the writer uses recount to reconstruct past events	
Text Organization and Content	
-establishes time, place and participants of the recount and includes events in sequence	
-writes additional information about more important events	
-includes only characters of significance to the recount	
-writes a satisfactory conclusion	
Language Features	
-begins to use structures of written language	
-uses some adverbs and adjectives to clarify meaning	
-maintains tense	

-uses action verbs and generally shows agreement (I went, I saw)	
-uses a limited number of linking words (and, so, later, soon)	
-writes complete sentences	
-uses a variety of sentence lengths	

Summary: Teaching Grammar

~Environmental Print

~Teachers can extend the foundation provided by environmental print by demonstrating the use of environmental print as a resource for learning about conventions.~
(First Steps Writing, pg 149)

~**Shared book experience** - variety of books/text styles..

~**Poems** - a variety of punctuation

~**Modelled Writing**

~**Daily Writing (15-20 min. uninterrupted)**

~**Sentence Manipulation**

~**Sentence Makers**

~basic - Kyle lost his tooth this morning

~expansion - while eating breakfast

~reduction - Kyle lost his tooth

~**Physical Reconstruction** - children holding cards and make sentences

Punctuation Checklist

Period

-to end statements

-initials (W . D.; Mrs.)

-abbreviations (Mon.)

Capital Letters

-begin sentences

-proper nouns (days, months, places, titles, streets)

-I

-book titles, first word in a line of poetry

-emphasis (HAPPY BIRTHDAY!)

-special days, names of institutions (Valentine's Day, Teeterville Public School)

Question Mark

-end of a sentence that asks for information

Exclamation Mark

-show strong feeling

Commas

-separate items in a series/list (The flower is red, pink, yellow and green.)

Apostrophe

-contractions (can't)

Quotation Mark

-identify direct speech

Sentences

-write a sentence containing a main verb (The boy hit the ball.)

-join sentences using and, but, then, because, so, yet, or

-adjectives to enhance meaning (The little boy hit the white ball.)

-avoid repetition (The ball was big. It was blue. It was red. It was in the basket.)

-add words to enhance meaning

-re-arrange words to enhance meaning

Additional Information

I found these to be useful:

- During sharing time, our star reader was asked to fill out a recount planner, using pictures or words (First Steps Writing: Resource Book, pg 52)
- Sentence Manipulation (First Steps Writing: Resource Book, pg 153...). The children enjoyed fixing-up sentences as well as adding in descriptors to make sentences more interesting
- Using the Grammar- Punctuation guides in the First Steps Writing: Resource Book, I was able to construct an assessment tool as well as a teaching reference (see appendix)
- I compiled the Narrative and Recount activities into an easier-to-read format, more for my personal use (see appendix)
- Joanne Duns, Early Literacy Teacher for the Grand Erie District School Board provided me with great lesson ideas for writing
- www.CanTeach.ca - little poems about punctuation

● Punctuation Marks (www.CanTeach.ca)

The period is a busy man.
A small round traffic cop.
He blocks the helter-skelter words
And brings them to a stop.

The question mark's a tiny girl,
She's small but very wise;
She asks too many questions
For a person of her size.

Of all the punctuation folk,
I like the comma best.
For when I'm getting out of breath
He lets me take a rest.

Quotation marks are curious.
When friendly talk begins
You'll always find these little marks
Are busy listening in.

The exclamation mark's an elf,
Who is easily excited.
When children laugh or cry or scream
It's then he's most delighted.