WRITE ON: IMPROVING STORY WRITING SKILLS IN A GRADE THREE CLASSROOM

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Dedication

For my husband, Dwight.

For my advisor, Robin.

For my students.

Abstract

Utilizing action research methodology, this study addresses the following research question: What were the effects of professional development experiences with a "balanced literacy" approach to teaching story writing over a three month period on Grade 3 students' writing development? The study reviews methods of writing instruction, in particular the writing process as described by Donald Murray; conditions for effective writing; direct versus indirect instruction; scaffolded learning as defined by Vygotsky; and the connection between reading and writing. A case study design was used to investigate the impact of this program on three individual students with different levels of writing development. Data were collected from audio taped writing conferences with individual students; videotaped class sessions showing various teaching strategies were used; samples of students' writing were collected; and a researcher's journal was used to record teaching strategies, students' responses, and the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and reflections. Four themes emerged as relevant to effective writing instruction in a primary classroom: provision of teacher support (scaffolded learning); use of quality children's literature to help students understand story structure and the qualities of good writing; use of a graphic story organizer; and the importance of using metacognitive talk to instill in students an ability to demonstrate and understand their development as writers. The study concludes with a discussion regarding the role of professional development experiences.

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Chapter 1: Beginnings

When I came to the elementary school where I now teach, the school was renowned for its exceptional writing program. The theory held by the teachers in the school was that, if students were given the opportunity to write, they would write. The program involved the scheduling of daily 30-minute independent Creative Writing periods that seemed undirected and unstructured. As I look back now, I believe that this theory was perhaps based somewhat on the ideas and practices of Donald Graves (1983, 1994) and his theory of writing as a process, but a gap existed between theory and practice. I needed to know *how* to implement a process approach to teaching writing. As a Grade 3 teacher, I also felt compelled to address the issue of story structure and writing, as we were required to participate in the Provincial Achievement Tests in June. This was a frustrating area of my teaching assignment.

In 2001, I began a professional development focus that consisted of an in-depth study of a literacy model known as "Balanced Literacy," as created and authored by Anne Brailsford (2002). From the September 2001 to June 2003, I was a Balanced Literacy Team Leader for my school jurisdiction. The training I received in order to enable me to deliver this program to teachers in my jurisdiction was extensive. It required participation in two graduate level courses at the University of Alberta titled "Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading and Writing Difficulties – Part 1 and 2." I also received training as part of the Outreach Program offered through Edmonton Public Schools. Our team worked to facilitate implementation of reading, writing, and word work skills in all schools across the division. We provided ongoing workshop sessions for teachers, as well as individualized demonstration and coaching sessions for teachers in their own

classrooms. This was a timely opportunity for me, as I had been struggling to implement an effective Language Arts program in my own Grade 3 classroom. Having put into action the components of this program in my own classroom, I became aware that it contained a toolbox of strategies that could be used to improve student learning.

This study addresses the issues and concerns I had about students' story writing. It illustrates how the introduction of a writing program, contained within the comprehensive literacy program known as Balanced Literacy, has promoted development in my students' knowledge of story structure and their ability to write "great stories." It also incorporates knowledge I have gained in studying the works of prominent language theorists such as Donald Graves (1983, 1994), Lucy Calkins (1991), Nancie Atwell (1987), Frank Smith (1982), and others. I have also explored other writing programs through professional development activities that introduced me to the work of local Alberta teachers, as well as the writings of local authors of professional books on reading and writing instruction.

Writing instruction has become primarily a process approach (Graves, 1983) in its operation in my classroom with two additions: daily writing demonstrations that preface every writing lesson, and the use of graphic text structure organizers as planners prior to students' writing their accounts. In this approach, the teacher frequently chooses the topics for writing, providing the students with a balance of different purposes for writing and exposing them to a variety of text structures and genres.

Daily writing lessons, or mini-lessons, are used at the beginning of each writing period. They are intended to be brief, addressing everything from lessons on Writers Workshop procedures to writing strategies and skills, or concerns that might rise from the

reading of a student's writing. They may also include reading trade books to show students how published authors use writing skills and strategies.

Graphic text structure organizers are alternatives to the traditional "webbing" organizer, as they assist students in structuring and applying their ideas for specific topics and genres. They are a pre-writing organizer that fits the type of writing we are expecting the students to produce, depending on genre. They are used by the teachers and students and are displayed around the classroom. The graphic organizers are scaffolds and are not intended to be permanent. They are genre specific. For the purposes of this study, only Story Organizer A will be used (see Appendix A).

Research Question

Utilizing action research methodology, this study explores the following research question: What were the effects of my professional development experiences with a "balanced literacy" approach to teaching story writing over a three month period on my Grade 3 students' writing development?

I also chose to address the following sub-questions as a way to shed light on my overall research question: Does moving from total teacher support, through supported activities, to total independence develop more confident and effective writers? Does the "write-aloud" or a metacognitive approach utilized by the teacher help students to better understand what is expected in good story writing? Through the use of quality children's literature, can the knowledge of how authors construct stories help students to understand the writing process? Does the use of graphic organizers help students to better plan and organize their thoughts in order to produce good story writing?

Definitions

Story Organizer: a graphic text structure organizer used to aid students in analyzing narrative text

Read Aloud: teacher-selected material which is read aloud to students

Write Aloud: teacher's demonstration by modeling what writers do when they write; teacher talks aloud while writing

Shared Writing: teacher's participation with students in constructing text (collaborative writing)

Guided Writing: clustering students in a group to work with the teacher on common needs

Substitution Writing: for purposes of this study, substitution of story elements (characters, setting, problem, events, resolution) following the Read Aloud of a patterned book

Author's Chair: time when students share their writing with the class

Turtle-talk: saying a word very slowly to enable the student to hear the "chunks" to aid in spelling

Circle Story: a story that begins and ends in the same place (Moore, 2000)

Switch Story: a story in which two items, people, positions, abilities are switched and sometimes later switched back (Moore, 2000)

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The traditional notion that writers have a topic completely thought out and ready to flow onto the page is ridiculous. If writers wait for ideas to develop fully, they may wait forever (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). Writing, by its nature, is a "messy" task (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997). Graves (1994) states that "Writing is a sweaty business.... The act is so painful that most delay writing a class paper until pure terror takes over" (p. 31). At the same time, Graves (1994) shares this story:

> A few years ago I was asked to give an address at a well-known New England prep school during morning assembly. Sensing that the audience might be more than a little intimidating, I delivered my first lines from the very edge of the stage apron: "I hate writing," I thundered. The entire audience of nine hundred instantly leaped to their feet and cheered. Though somewhat taken aback at their unanimous declaration, I finished the line: "but I love *having written.*" (p. 31)

Smith (1982) describes writing as a complex, demanding, yet rewarding act:

> The brain must orchestrate an intricate symphony of muscle movements to ensure that we operate our pencil, pen, or typewriter in a coordinated way, at the same time ensuring that the delicate tapestry that these movements produce contains appropriate patterns of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and organization on the page. (p. 139)

So why would anyone want to learn to write? As Graves (1994) states, "Our own sense of authorship as teachers will strongly influence the way our own students view writing" (p. 45). Teachers must learn to write themselves and learn to be reflective about their own writing in order to understand what it is that they are asking of their students

when they invite them to participate in the writing process. Our attitude towards writing, our willingness to write in front of children, our desire to witness children experience success as writers, all lead to our students' ability to see themselves as authors with something to say. In order to accomplish this, students must be presented with a safe learning environment, conducive to their becoming part of the writing process.

The Writing Process

In recent years, writing instruction has shifted from focus on the finished product to focus on the process that students use to organize and express their ideas (Tompkins, 2001). Similarly, the teacher's role has changed from assigning and evaluating writing to working with students through the process of writing. Bright (1995) states:

> With publication of Janet Emig's (1971) study of the composing processes of 12th graders and Donald Graves's (1975) work with 7-year-olds, researchers began focusing on writing as a process, observing "how it is done." The old emphasis on product over process began to be criticized by researchers, and professional writers began to speak out on their own creative writing processes. (p. 8)

The writing process involves five steps. The first step is planning (prewriting), or what Graves (1983) refers to as "rehearsal." Here the students plan and organize their ideas for writing. In the drafting step, the students write a rough draft, focusing on getting the flow of their ideas on paper rather than on making the writing perfect. Perfecting the draft occurs during the revising and editing steps. When revising, students reread their writing to make sure it makes sense. Sometimes they share their writing with classmates to get feedback on meaning and revise their writing accordingly. When editing, students proofread for conventions and spelling errors. Finally, students put their papers into a

final draft, publishing their work to share with an audience. These steps are not meant to be sequential, and not all students will proceed through all steps all of the time. For example, not all drafts are taken to final copy. The terms "prewriting," "drafting," "revising," "editing," and "publishing" are used in order to introduce students to writing as an ongoing cyclical process.

Conditions for Effective Writing

The Writing Environment

Tompkins (2001) states, "Effective teachers establish a community of learners in which students are motivated to learn and are actively involved in reading and writing activities" (p. 8). Students become part of a "family" where they learn to respect each other and support each other's learning. In this environment, students value culturally and linguistically diverse classmates and recognize that all students make important contributions to the classroom (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992, cited in Tompkins, 2001, p. 8). Teachers who work towards creating a predictable classroom environment with familiar routines and literacy procedures allow children to feel safe and to feel more willing to take risks. A well-structured, predictable environment can increase a student's writing productivity.

In 1983, Graves published *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, which became a standard teaching reference for those interested in a process approach as well as a conference approach to writing. Graves inspired teachers to create writers workshops in their classrooms, where students move through the processes of writing – basically planning, composing or drafting, revising or rewriting, editing, and publishing. The focus in the writing process is on what students do as they write. The labeling of the five stages

does not mean that it is a packaged step-by-step process. Research shows that the process involves "recurring cycles" (Tompkins, 2001, p 58). By providing students with structure for the writing process, teachers can expect them to develop confidence in their ability to take risks in their thoughts and subsequent writings.

Time

One common theme that runs through the literature examining the writing process is that writing involves time. As Graves (1994) observes, "Time is a first condition" (p. 107). Similarly, Atwell (1987) argues that the primary principle that provides a foundation for the teaching of writing in her school is that writers need regular chunks of time. Fletcher and Portalupi (1998) feel that "Students need regular, sustained time to write" (p. 8). Although a Writers Workshop may begin with a mini-lesson and end with sharing time, "The most important time is probably the precious time you carve out for students to write" (p. 8).

Researchers argue that the writers workshop process should happen daily. Daily writing puts students in what Graves (1994) describes as a "constant state of composition" (p. 107). He advocates 35 to 40 minutes at least four days a week for students in Grade One. Graves claims that, if students miss these daily writing times, they will lose the "structure and continuity" they need to maintain the flow of ideas and creativity in their writing. For Tompkins and Hoskisson (1995), Writers Workshop should consist of a 60 to 90-minute period scheduled each day, and students should be engaged in independent writing 30 to 45 minutes each day. Brailsford (2002) states that writing should be a 35-minute daily block in a balanced literacy program.

Students need large chunks of time to participate meaningfully in reading and writing activities. Students need daily writing time in order to accomplish what they set out to do. Also, teaching requires us to show students how to write and how to develop their skills in order to improve as writers, and showing students how to write takes time.

Choice

When students are given the opportunity to make choices about what they write, within the parameters set by the teacher, then they are often more motivated to write and they value their learning experiences more because they are more meaningful (Tompkins, 2001, p. 9). Students need to feel ownership over what they write. Choice leads to voice. As Graves (1983) states, "Our data show that when a writer makes a good choice of subject, the voice booms through. When the voice is strong, writing improves as well as all the skills that go to improving writing.... Teachers should never assign what children choose to do when they find their own voices" (p. 229). Conversely, Graves (1994) states that sometimes topic assignments are helpful and even necessary: "Students do make bad choices and experience writer's block, or they need to shift to new topics after exhausting their usual few" (p. 108).

Direct and Indirect Instruction

Excellent teachers find a balance between direct and indirect instruction (Strickland, 1994-95). Strickland states that, "Even during direct instruction, these teachers do not rely on the lecture method alone but constantly interact with students, demonstrating, modeling, and helping students rehearse the strategies and skills they will be expected to carry out independently" (p. 298). Besides demonstrating specific writing strategies in a demonstration manner or a collaborative manner, direct teaching can also

take the form of a mini-lesson, a valuable demonstration lesson that might teach how to create more creative sentences or how to use conventions properly. Writing conferences are perhaps the most valuable form of indirect teaching, and providing students time to share their writing with their peers affords all students the opportunity to celebrate.

Understanding Metacognition

Explanations are not enough. Allington and Cunningham (1996) note that explanation is probably the most common method of instruction used by teachers to help children learn to read and write. They describe how explanations can become "wordy and often require specialized language" (p. 46). Teachers tell children, for example, what good summaries should look like and that they should contain the most important ideas, but many children are left wondering what ideas are considered important.

Demonstrations and modeling. Much of the literature supports the belief that children cannot write independently until they have had demonstrations from experienced writers and opportunities to share in the writing process. Strategies for writing development are not created by explanation alone. One must take explanation to another level. The concept of demonstration can begin with the opportunities teachers take to talk about authors of children's literature and read the literature aloud in order to share examples of good writing with students (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). The teacher works to build the "metacognitive abilities" of students. Tompkins, Bright, Pollard, and Winsor (2002) define metacognition as "the knowledge children acquire about their own cognitive processes" (p. 592).

Demonstration is a strategy used to develop this process. Demonstration is "teacher talk" about what mental activities are occurring during the reading and writing

process (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). The teacher demonstrates by modeling what writers do when they write. The teacher talks aloud, verbalizing what thought processes are involved in creating a summary, thinking aloud about how the main idea is determined. The teacher thinks aloud during the composition, creating a readable summary for the students to see. Brailsford (2002) comments:

> Teachers sometimes find this an uncomfortable aspect of Balanced Literacy at first, because it requires them to talk aloud and make their own thought processes explicit. However, it is vital that we provide literacy apprenticeships for children and that includes modeling and demonstrating how we write. (p. 4)

All children benefit from this form of instruction; in particular, at-risk children need a careful, clear and repetitive demonstration of how readers and writers go about reading and writing (Allington & Cunningham, 1996).

As Smith (1982) argues, "Teachers must play a central part if children are to become writers, ensuring that they are exposed to informative and stimulating demonstrations and helping to encourage them to read and write. Teachers are influential, as models as well as guides" (p. 200). By modeling or demonstrating, teachers give students the language to use to think and talk about their writing processes, all based on the development of metacognitive and metalinguistic skills. Just as students need a definitive discourse to talk about how to play baseball, they also need a discourse to talk about effective writing skills. As children become able to reflect on their own learning processes and understand which learning strategies work best for them, they develop a better understanding of what they know and don't know and are better able to articulate

this understanding. Teachers can maximize on this understanding to create meaningful teaching situations.

> Graves (1994) notes that children rarely have the opportunity to see adults write:
>
> Students can go a lifetime and never see another person write, much less show them how to write. Yet it would be unheard of for an artist not to show how to use oils by painting on her own canvas, or for a ceramist not to demonstrate how to throw clay on a wheel and shape the material himself. Writing is a craft. It needs to be demonstrated to your students in your classroom, which is a studio, from choosing a topic to finishing a final draft. They need to see you struggle to match your intentions with the words that they read on the page. (pp. 109-110)

Graves claims that one demonstration is not enough, that students need to see and hear teachers do this many times. He recommends weekly demonstrations in the form of a mini-lesson.

Teachers can use examples of their own writing to make aspects of the writing process clear to students. If teachers put a draft of their own writing on an overhead transparency and demonstrate the revision and editing process, using carets (^), adding strong words, or using arrows to move sentences to different areas of the text, children can begin to understand how they themselves can undertake the process.

Teachers can model writing in a very different way by demonstrating to students that teachers are writers too. Graves (1994) goes so far as to say that it is fine to tell the class, "I'll be working for the next ten minutes on that piece I was telling you about the other day. I'm not to be disturbed" (p. 365). Although moving around the room while engaging the children in mini-conferences about their writing is important, Graves argues

that, "When the teacher writes instead of moving around the room conducting conferences, the children write even more intensely" (p. 365).

Collaborative writing. Another way to introduce to students the metacognitive process involved in writing is to create a collaborative or group composition (Tompkins et al., 2002). The teacher models the process, and students have the opportunity to practice the process approach to writing in a supportive environment, together with the teacher. Tompkins et al. consider collaborative writing to be an essential part of any writing process, especially when students are learning a new writing form.

Collaborative writing with students is not a novel teaching strategy. It has perhaps been lost to us over time. However, it is very effective, as Graves (1983) illustrates:

Leo Tolstoy, in his journal kept for the school he ran at Yasnaya Polyana, tells of a day when he asked the children to take out their paper to prepare to write. To his surprise the children said, "We're sick of writing, it's your turn." Tolstoy thought for a minute, and then decided the children might have something in their request. He sat down at his desk and asked, "Well, what should I write about?" The children said, "Write about a boy who steals." Excitedly the children gathered round his desk while the don of Russian intelligentsia, admired writer of *The Cossacks*, began to compose. Immediately, these peasant children corrected him saying, "No, a boy wouldn't do this; he'd do that." "You know," said Tolstoy, "they were right." Tolstoy was so astonished at the children's insights that he wrote his memorable essay, "Are We to Teach the Peasant Children to Write, or Are They to Teach Us?" (p. 50)

Mini-lessons. Brailsford (2002) indicates that daily writing demonstrations should preface every lesson (p. 79). These are often referred to as mini-lessons, which can be defined as brief, direct instruction on lessons designed to introduce, practice or review particular writing skills or areas of concern that arise from samples of students' writing (Tompkins et al., 2002). Mini-lessons are a time for "teacher input" (Calkins, 1991, p. 152). They allow teachers to provide brief lessons on writing strategies and skills, such as generating topics, organizing ideas, rereading, proofreading, or using quotation marks in marking dialogue.

Bright (2002) states that, "By beginning [a] writers workshop with a mini-lesson, you focus the students' attention on writing and provide direct instruction on some aspect of writing. This time also sets the mood or tone for the period" (p. 39). Calkins (1991) finds that "The ritual of beginning every writing workshop with a whole-group gathering brings form and unity to the workshop" (p. 150) and argues that there is nothing wrong with "the three-minute lecture." Avoiding the question and answer technique in a mini-lesson keeps it just that, a mini-lesson. Calkins (1991) says, "It is a way of adding information to the pot" (p. 152). The lesson may only be relevant to a few students at that time, but others will draw on it when they need it. Those students who are developmentally ready for the information will embrace the lesson. Fletcher and Portalupi (1998) refer to the mini-lesson as a "craft lesson." They visualize the writing process as follows:

conceive → craft → correct

For Fletcher and Portalupi, "The middle element – craft – gets the least attention. During this part of the authoring cycle, students are left on their own to make a thousand

decisions in their texts about leads, voice, structure, supporting detail, setting, mood, character, and so on" (p. 3). They note that students will not learn from fifteen or twenty lessons, that we should choose a few issues considered important to the students' growth as writers, lessons that we believe they are ready to learn, and focus on those.

Writing Conferences

The writing conference is a special kind of dialogue between the student and the teacher. Good writing teachers are good listeners and validate students' ideas (Elbow, 1981). Both Graves (1994) and Tompkins (2001) advocate time spent moving about the room, stopping to ask questions about what students are writing, listening to students read some of their writing, and in particular, helping those students who find it difficult to select topics. Many teachers find it difficult to make the time for individual writing conferences. Although it can be tempting to omit them from the workshop process, these one-on-one interactions are crucial. These are more formal conferencing sessions where teachers model the kinds of responses that students can learn to give to each other.

Graves (1994) argues that the purpose of the writing conference is to help children teach the teacher about what they know about writing, so that the teacher can help them more effectively with their writing and help them gain a clearer picture about what they will write next. He states, "I concentrate on flow for the student and learning for me" (p. 59). Skills are also most effectively taught in a conference setting because they last the longest when taught within the context of the child's own paper.

Sharing Time

Sharing at the end of the writing sessions is a time to celebrate (Elbow, 1981). This is a time for "Author's Chair," a time for students to read their work aloud to their

classmates. Although this can also be a time for comments and suggestions, the focus should be on celebration (Tompkins, 2001). Calkins (1991) takes a different approach to sharing time, suggesting that it be used as an opportunity to introduce peer-conferencing. For example, the teacher could say, "There are thirty-two writing teachers in this room. Every one of you must be a writing teacher" (p. 161). After a student has read a piece out loud to the class, Calkins suggests asking the class to respond to the piece by asking questions of the writer, thus guiding the class to learn how to ask important questions. In this way students can learn to be good listeners and to respond appropriately in a peer-coaching setting. Brailsford (2002) suggests that it is not always necessary for students to share their entire story. They may share an interesting introduction or ending. This sharing time should be short, fast-paced, and as Calkins (1991) recommends, should include the teacher modeling how to ask questions and make meaningful comments.

Zone of Proximal Development

A great deal of the literature about children's ability to learn refers to the works of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his concept of the "zone of proximal development" (1978). This term refers to the range of tasks that a child can perform with guidance from others but cannot yet perform independently. Vygotsky believed that children learn best when they attempt to learn within this zone. Vygotsky used the term "scaffolding" as a metaphor to describe a teacher's contribution to a child's learning. Scaffolds are support mechanisms that teachers provide for children as they learn within their zone of proximal development. Teachers model or demonstrate a strategy and guide the students through a task. As children gain knowledge and experience about how to

perform that task, teachers gradually withdraw their support and the students make the transition to internalized independent learning (Tompkins et al., 2002).

Brailsford (2002) refers to literacy learning as "apprenticeship" (p. 2). As children learn something new in the process of learning to read and write, they need to be supported as they gradually gain enough knowledge to take over the independent application of literacy concepts. Consistent with Vygotsky's thinking, Graves stresses the importance of teachers leading students towards independence (cited in Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997).

Reading and Writing Processes

Children should be taught to read their own writing so that they learn to see for themselves that it needs improving. Elbow (1982) believes that students should have opportunities to read their writing aloud, so that they can hear if their writing needs revising. "I'm not a writing teacher," Murray has said. "I'm a reading teacher. I teach my students how to read their own writing" (cited in Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998, p. 13).

One must always consider the process of writing as one with that of reading. Reading and writing are both processes of making meaning, and readers and writers are involved in many similar activities (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). It is important that teachers plan literacy activities so students can connect reading and writing. As students read and talk about literature, they learn how writers craft stories. They draw from stories they have read as they create their own stories, weaving several story ideas and adapting story elements to meet their own needs (Atwell, 1987; Graves 1994). Shanahan (1988) states that, unless children are provided with opportunities to learn to write, they will not write as well as they could. In addition, unless they learn to write, they will not be able to

apply writing knowledge to reading development. Hoskisson (cited in Tompkins, 1982) states that writing stories is also an effective means of helping students to learn to read. Learning to read helps them to understand literary devices and grammatical structures that they can use in their own writing.

During reading discussions, students examine the basic elements of a story and how they are organized. Story sense will vary for each student, and it is not something that can be relied upon to happen automatically. A teacher can reinforce a sense of story by reading a story to children, but most importantly by the discussion that follows (Essex, 1996). Looking at story structure is one way of analyzing literature to see how stories are constructed. As students and teachers share literature, they delight in the expressive encounter. Children come to realize what an important tool words are for writers (Au, Carroll, & Sheu, 1997). Students use the writing process to write new versions of familiar stories, sequels, and original stories because they have read stories and developed interpretations as they read and responded to them.

Finally it is important to emphasize that good literature is as important to the Writers Workshop as it is to the Readers Workshop. As children enjoy and explore the imaginative, artistically created books of professional writers, their appreciation of literature grows. When children value and take ownership of fine literature, those works can serve to foster their own writing development (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997). We can use the good writing in the trade books that students are reading to show them how professional authors create setting, develop characters, and handle dialogue. In addition, teachers need to become familiar with a large body of children's literature appropriate to

the age level and interests of their students. They will want to carefully select good

literature that is suited to the particular goals and purposes they have in mind.

Taberski (1987) emphasizes the importance of reading "good fiction" (p. 587).

Taberski identified a number of qualities of good fiction that her students could attempt

to integrate into their own writing. She found that good fiction deals with universal

themes that invoke feelings in the readers when written about skillfully and honestly.

Good fiction leads the reader to care about what happens to the characters, even if they

don't like the main character. It allows the main character to change in some way to solve

the problem, and it satisfies the reader by its sense of completion (p. 587). Tompkins

(2001) states that the most important guideline is that the teachers should choose books

they like themselves. Children's books that have received awards such as the Caldecott

Medal for excellence in illustration and the Newbery Medal for excellence in writing

make good reading selections. Quality books are often reviewed in literary publications,

and lists of award-winning books are available online.

For Tompkins (2001), "The goal of both reading and writing is to construct

meaning, and the two processes involve similar activities at each step. Researchers

recommend that teachers connect the reading and writing process because they are

mutually supportive processes" (p. 276).

Conclusions

The literature on how to teach students to write is extensive and includes a variety

of opinions and methods. Listening to how students think about writing, listening to them

read what they have written, and celebrating the writing process can all be powerful

experiences for students who are learning to write. There must also be a place for humor

in the process. As Graves (1983) states, "Humor relieves tension, and provides distance from the composing process. Writing is not approached as a tedious, grueling attempt to avoid sinful error. Rather, there is a sense of surprise of joyful pursuit of the writer's own intentions" (p. 280). Graves refers to humor as reversible, that teachers should make light of their attempts to write in class: "Good humor treads on the thin line of very hard work, work that intends a serious work of craft" (p. 280).

The research reviewed here reveals some important considerations for instruction in writing in elementary classrooms. In order for students to write effectively, a safe and desirable writing environment must be established. Students must be given large "chunks" of time to write, and they must be provided the opportunity to choose their topic in order to take ownership of their writing.

Teachers need to find an effective balance between direct and indirect instruction, ensuring that they work towards developing students' metacognitive processes by using demonstrations and modeling, and participating as writers "in front of" and "with" students. Research shows us that mini-lessons, writing conferences and sharing time in every writers workshop all work to strengthen a writing program. Teachers need to scaffold or support students' writing development. If we consider writing instruction as a continuum, then teachers must provide students with total support in areas of writing development and need, gradually withdrawing these scaffolds as students move toward becoming independent writers.

Research also shows that students learn to read and write when the two processes are connected. Teachers must integrate the reading and writing processes in their literacy programs, ensuring that quality children's literature is an integral part of their writing

program. The writing process is discovered by 'doing' it. "Process" (Graves, 1983) refers

to everything writers do, from the time when they first contemplate the topic, to the final

moment when they complete the paper. Students can be taught the stages of the process,

but they will only come to understand the process fully by doing the writing.

Chapter 3: The Process

Action research methodology is a method of research used by many classroom teachers to examine a problem within their classroom, study it, find a method of improving it, and then test it to see if it worked. Teachers should then be willing to share their processes and their findings with their colleagues.

In a monograph on action research authored for the Alberta Teachers' Association, Townsend (2001) defines a model that he has developed which many Alberta teachers have used in a collaborative manner. I chose to follow the methodology that Townsend outlines: define the focus of the problem, collect information (review the literature), make sense of the information, report and discuss, plan action, take action, collect information, analyze and evaluate in a continuous way, assess achievements, publish results and conclusions, celebrate, and take future action.

Using this action research protocol, I wanted to ascertain if a specific writing program, which I have studied through extensive professional development activities and then implemented in my Grade 3 classroom, would improve the story writing skills of my students. I carried out the research in my own third grade classroom. While all my students engaged in the writing program, I limited data collection to three students in order to fully understand the impact of this program on three individual students representing a variety of levels of writing development. I chose a "case study" design because I wanted to engage in an in-depth research project related to the implementation of this particular story-writing program. Creswell (2002) would define this as a collective case study, since I chose to use the data collected from three individuals in order "to provide insight into an issue or theme" (p. 485).

I set out to identify a struggling writer, an average writer, and a writer considered advanced for Grade 3. The three students did not know that their work, in particular, was being focused upon, although their parents were notified and consent was sought in the manner outlined by the Human Subjects Research Ethics Committee of the University of Lethbridge (see Appendix B). This approach was taken in order to treat all my students in an equitable manner and discourage the "halo" effect (Draper, 2002) where students may perform better because of their knowledge that they are under study. Students' names were changed in order to maintain their anonymity.

The study was carried out over a three-month period. Samples of students' writing were stored in students' portfolios. Portfolios are meaningful and systematic collections of students' work that document learning and development over a period of time. Students usually choose the work that is included in the portfolio, with guidance from the teacher. Portfolios provide an opportunity for students to engage in self-evaluation and goal setting with regard to their own growth (Tompkins et al., 2002). All student work was collected and stored in their portfolios during this three-month study. The research steps and data collection are described below:

1. At the beginning of the study, I gathered baseline data from a collection of students' writing samples, which were then evaluated according to the criteria used for the Grade 3 Provincial Achievement Tests: Language Arts – Part A: Writing (see Appendix C).

2. Based on these writing samples, three students were chosen for participation in the study.

3. I proceeded with an Implementation Plan for instruction in story writing.

4. I kept a researcher's journal, making entries in the journal following each day in which story writing activities took place in my classroom. I recorded teaching strategies, students' responses and quotes, my thoughts and feelings, and my reflections as I moved through this journey of 'teacher as researcher.'

5. I audiotaped and videotaped teaching sessions.

6. I collected samples of students' writing at the end of the three-month period and compared these samples to those collected at the beginning of the study, using the same criteria for evaluation.

Collection of Baseline Data

As mentioned, one form of data collected for this study consisted of samples of students' writing gathered in writing portfolios. I believe the initial collection of baseline data is best described by using an excerpt from my journal:

Day 1 (late September). Today I did something that was perhaps the most difficult thing I have ever done in my teaching career. Today was the day I collected a story-writing sample from my new class of Grade 3 students.

I explained to the students that I wanted to know what they knew about writing a story – what could they remember from Grade 2. Each student was given a copy of a picture prompt (to be used only if they needed an idea) and plain lined paper. Students were told that extra paper was available on the table and that plain paper was provided for them if they felt they needed it for anything (I put it there in case any students wanted to plan their story).

I had not done any pre-teaching. We have read stories since the school year began, but I have not talked about what elements make a good story. Today,

I did not review what my expectations were, what they might include in their story, or discuss what they might use as ideas. I simply asked them to "write a story" – cold! I had no idea that this would be so difficult for me!

Many students were slow to begin. Some students required encouragement, not guidance – encouragement! Only one student failed to produce something. She was a home-schooled student last year, very shy, and she did not write a single word.

Tonight I have read the stories, and I have to admit that I am alarmed at the overall results. Very few stories demonstrated any knowledge of story structure and stories were generally void of detail. But I must remember that they have not had any structured writing experiences since last June. I must remember that I provided no pre-teaching. I must remember that they are at the beginning of Grade 3! I always have to do a "reality check" at the beginning of each year and remember that the students I begin with in September are not like the students I said goodbye to at the end of June.

Selection of Students for Case Studies

These early writing samples were graded using the rubric for marking of the Grade 3 Provincial Achievement Tests: Language Arts – Part A: Writing. This rubric is comprehensive and follows rigid standards with respect to all valued components of students' story writing (see Appendix D). The stated criteria for each level of achievement are designed to match the Learner Outcomes of the Alberta Learning Program of Studies (2000). The components are content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary, and conventions. Content and organization are double weighted in scoring.

I selected the three students whose writing displayed evidence of a variety of levels of development: a struggling writer, an average writer, and a writer considered advanced for Grade 3. It will become apparent how quickly these 'labels' changed, and subsequently became irrelevant.

I interviewed each of the three selected students using the Writer's Survey (Bright, 2002) (see Appendix E). I omitted Questions 8 and 9 for this initial interview because they asked students to examine their writing portfolios, which were not yet established. Each interview was subsequently transcribed and became part of my collected data for future analysis. I wanted to determine the students' current level of understanding about the writing process, the language they used to express themselves when talking about writing, as well as their current attitudes about themselves as writers.

Implementation Plan

This implementation plan describes the step-by-step teaching process I used with my students to build knowledge about story structure, to develop an understanding of substitution writing, and to develop story-writing skills. All of these goals were achieved using Vygotsky's (1978) model of "support to independence." This model entails a progression from teaching writing by first controlling most aspects of the learning, to supporting the learning as students take over some aspects of the learning, to giving students independence over all or most aspects of the learning.

Applied to the writing program in my classroom, the three parts of the process consist of, first, a stage in which students receive total teacher support; second, a stage in which students engage in a variety of supported activities but do not receive total teacher support; and third, a stage in which students engage in independent activities.

Total Teacher Support

In the "total teacher support" stage I provided initial instruction using demonstration and modeling, building a metacognitive process within students. This stage included my talking aloud, explaining the "thinking process," and giving the students the vocabulary and language to use in order to talk about their writing. As I modeled, using the overhead projector, I also provided a visual image of how the process unfolds as I completed the Story Organizer (see Appendix A), provided my substitution ideas, and wrote my story, all in front of the students.

Supported Activities

"Supported activities" took the form of "shared writing" and "guided writing." "Shared writing" still involves a high degree of teacher support. I invited participation from the students, and it becomes an interactive writing occasion. I used student suggestions but still talked aloud, reinforcing the thinking processes required. A "guided writing" session was required when I identified a small group of students with a common area of need and pulled this group to work together.

Independent Activities

In "independent activities" students had the opportunity to engage alone in the process of story writing. The timing for this step varied. Some students were ready to embark on this step sooner than others.

Implementation and Application

Using the three-step process described above, I worked to develop students' knowledge of story structure, substitution writing, and story writing in my classroom. Table 1 indicates the teaching strategies associated with each of these areas. The level of

description that follows will allow the reader to visit my classroom and experience step by step the instruction I provided to my Grade 3 students.

Table 1. Teaching Strategies for Support to Independence in Story Writing

	Story Structure	Substitution Writing	Story Writing
Total Support	• Read Aloud • Write Aloud of teacher's Story Organizer	• Read Aloud • Write Aloud of Story Organizer • Teacher generated substitutions on Story Organizer	• Read Aloud • Write Aloud of story
Supported Activities	• Shared writing of Story Organizer • Guided writing	• Shared writing of class generated substitutions • Guided writing	• Shared writing of story • Guided writing
Independent Activities	• Independent completion of Story Organizer • Author's Chair	• Independent creation of substitutions • Author's Chair	• Independent writing of story • Author's Chair

Application 1. Developing Knowledge of Story Structure

Total Teacher Support

For the first week, I read many picture books to the class and followed each reading with a discussion about characters, setting, the problem or main idea, and how it was resolved. These are the elements of story structure. It was important to have my students begin to hear the discourse that we would subsequently use as they came to

understand how stories are constructed. Simple narrative picture books that met

Tompkins' (2001) criteria for choosing exemplary texts (see Appendix D) and that

involved only one problem became my criteria for choosing books that would be used for

discussion as we explored this pre-writing activity.

Then I moved to the overhead projector where I modeled the next step of

introducing the Story Organizer to the students. I modeled aloud how our discussions

could be transferred to a written, sequential form that reflects the strategies good writers

might use to organize their thoughts (see Figure 1).

Story Organizer A
Title: Hedgie's Surprise by Jan Brett

Characters: Hedgie Henny Tomten	**Setting(s):** a farm

Problem: Henny wanted a family of chicks but the Tomten kept stealing her eggs.

Events:
1. Henny was upset and Hedgie offered to help her.
2. Hedgie tricked the Tomten by taking Henny's eggs and replacing them with surprises instead.
3. The Tomten got angry and threatened to eat Henny.

Solving the Problem:
Hedgie had been putting all Henny's eggs in his nest. He made sure that Henny got her family.

Figure 1. Overhead used during Write Aloud demonstration

We were learning how to plan for writing! I used complete sentences, recognizing

that one sentence is often all that is required for each section of the Story Organizer. I

always spoke in the first person, which helped the students to follow the mental processes

that I was using to formulate my writing. The use of first person language eliminates the aspect of demonstration and introduces metacognition. Through this step I hoped to instill in students an understanding of the elements of story structure. This step involved total teacher support. This was not an easy process when used with a class that is not accustomed to listening to the teacher talk to herself! The following journal entry describes this first experience:

Day 5. I began the total support process of "self-talk" as I worked to complete the Story Organizer. It was amusing how many of them wanted to answer my rhetorical questions. I audiotaped my "self-talk" and listened to it on the way home from school. I have identified where I need to be more explicit, in particular, to provide more explanation surrounding "why" I made changes to my initial thoughts. I deliberately talked my way through how I changed my mind regarding my selection of the three MAIN events so that they could see that this is "okay." I had to explain and remind them six times that they were to just *listen* to how my brain worked, what my thoughts were as I completed the organizer. It is an interesting experience to try to maintain a verbal flow of one's thoughts when interruptions occur. It is also a difficult experience to "think aloud" in their language. Although I have done this many times in the past few years as I demonstrated in workshops for teachers and modeled for students in other teachers' classrooms, I still find this an onerous task -- to verbalize in some organized fashion what we so randomly think when we write as adults.

During the next Write Aloud session, as interruptions continued and my rhetorical questions continued to be answered, I had to ask the students (politely) to "get out of my

head." I had to tell them that this was *my* story and they had to let me think. It becomes a matter of training students to be active listeners, and of thinking and writing in a manner that engages the students. As I began another Write Aloud session, not long after the "get out of my head" request, this time modeling the actual writing of a story introduction but still asking myself rhetorical questions, I heard a student whisper to the other students, "Shhh! Remember, stay out of her head! This is *her* story!"

I audiotaped this Write Aloud session and later transcribed it for future analysis. I also videotaped a subsequent Write Aloud session. This process of listening to or watching oneself teach is a powerful personal professional development activity. Analysis of my teaching strategies for writing may have been the initial purpose for the process, but I also took away from the experiences a better understanding of my questioning techniques, how I interact with students, the tone of voice that I use with students, and other observations about who I am as a teacher.

Supported Activities

I then involved the students in a shared writing activity following another Read Aloud where I elicited student responses as to how the Story Organizer should be completed. I recorded their ideas. Students were asked to identify characters, setting, the problem, three main events, and the solution of each story we encountered. This was a supported activity since we worked together to achieve our goal.

At this point I found myself modeling how to retell the story orally using the information written on the Story Organizer. For Brailsford (2002), "Retellings illustrate how we have internalized and understood our experiences as we have to reconstruct events and demonstrate how we have 'made sense' of an event or text" (p. 198). The

Alberta Learning Program of Studies (2002) indicates that Grade 3 students should be able to "identify the main idea or topic and supporting details in simple narratives and expository passages" (p. 19). I wrote this journal entry the day this occurred to me:

> Day 8. I am realizing that this process is two-fold. I am teaching two concepts simultaneously here. Besides helping students to understand story structure, I am also helping them to learn how to 'retell' stories, by making decisions about what is considered important information. I had not realized this when I wrote the proposal for this project. I have to make sure the students understand that this is what we are doing as well. We must 'name' it as retelling. I modeled how we might retell the story by using what I had written on the Story Organizer. Also, I have been using the metaphor of "bare bones" and they are relating well to this.

> Next, after a Read Aloud, students were given their own Story Organizer, and together, as a shared writing activity, we completed the organizer with all students contributing to the discussion. Not all of the students' organizers looked the same, as more competent writers began to explore independently. This activity was repeated four times following the Read Aloud of assorted books. By the fourth time, I felt that even my at-risk writers understood the process. I repeatedly called on students to "retell" the story orally, using their organizer for support.

Independent Activities

Students were eventually able to complete the Story Organizer independently following a Read Aloud story. Although most students were able to identify the problem and resolution with ease, some had difficulty independently identifying three main events. My journal entry from that day expresses the experience:

Day 12. Today was the day the students *independently* completed their own

organizers following the reading of *The Mitten* (1997) by Jan Brett (see Figure 2).

It was not without "pain." At the time, the number of questions and lack of

understanding frustrated me. I decided to keep Post-Its© in my pocket so that I

could jot down comments as they come up because I know I will not remember

them all later. I had everything from "I don't get it!" to "What do I do next?" Yes,

I was frustrated. But in retrospect, after reading my notes, those questions came

from the same eight students!

I had this group of eight students work with me in a Guided Writing session, and we

worked through the Story Organizer together. I was able to address their individual

concerns and provide them with more individualized encouragement.

The Mitten
Story Organizer A

Characters: Nicki Animals.	Setting(s): fram/Winter.
Problem: Nicki loust one of his snow white mitten's.	
Events: 1. A hole bounch of animals went into the mitten. 2. Then a BIG bear came and went in. 3. A little fram mouse set on the bear's nose. the bear snesed and the mitten went flying.	
Solving the Problem: Nicki found his snow white mitten.	

Figure 2. Tim's first independently completed Story Organizer

Application 2. Developing an Understanding of Substitution Writing

Substitution writing is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate to children

how they can begin to make stories their own. Brailsford (2002) states that substitution of

the original text structure provides a scaffolded language pattern on which to base

students' own writing (p. 196). She also proposes that as substitution writing becomes

more advanced with facility, analysis and higher levels of abstract thinking are required

(p. 197). Read Aloud stories should support this step. Substitution writing involves

changing one or more of the story elements. For instance, the main idea may be retained,

but the setting or the cast of characters may change, or the main idea may be retained, but

the events may change. Also, the ending may be rewritten. In this way, students are able

to create a story of their own by manipulating the Story Organizer created from any

original text. Again, my teaching of substitution writing will be described according to

the main steps: total teacher support, supported activities, and independent activities.

Total Teacher Support

Following the reading of the original story of *The Three Little Pigs* by Marie Gay

(1994), I completed a Write Aloud of the Story Organizer. This process progressed more

quickly than before as the students appeared to be better listeners the second time around

and as I became aware that they could more readily follow the steps. Also, the process

needed to move more quickly. Although repetitive teaching with varied text reinforces

the strategies desired, one must always be aware of the 'fidgeting' level of one's

audience! We then read *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* by E. Triviza and

H. Oxenbury (1993), and using the Story Organizer, I modeled how these authors used a

traditional fairy tale to write their story but switched the characters and the events. I then

modeled how I would change my characters, setting and events but still keep the problem

the same (see Figure 3). The problem is always the most difficult one for students to

experiment with.

Story Organizer A

Title: The Three Little Chicks and the Big Bad Rooster

Characters:
Rocky the Rooster
3 little chicks

Setting(s):
a farmyard

Problem:
Rocky the Rooster kept destroying the chicks' homes.

Events:
1. The mother hen sent the chicks out to build their own homes.
2. The chicks built homes made of straw, sticks, and feathers.
3. Rocky the Rooster kicked down the homes made of straw and sticks.

Solving the Problem:
But Rocky the Rooster liked the feel of the home made of feathers. It changed him! He didn't destroy the home made of feathers. He moved in and became a friend to the chicks.

Figure 3. Story Organizer for substitution writing

Supported Activities

Using my completed Story Organizer for *The Three Little Pigs* and a shared

writing strategy, we brainstormed ways that they could substitute the characters, setting

and events, modeling our ideas as E. Triviza and H. Oxenbury did in *The Three Little*

Wolves and the Big Bad Pig.

Independent Activities

The students used their own organizer and created their own substitution writing,

still based on *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig.* As the students worked

towards independence in their work, I noticed that they were using too many details. I continued to stress that the Story Organizer is the "bare bones" of a story.

This was an opportune time to introduce "Author's Chair," a sharing time when students can share their ideas with the class in a supported environment. A comfortable, non-threatening environment must be created in a classroom for this activity to succeed. Only those students who volunteered shared their ideas for their substitution stories.

Application 3. Developing Story-Writing Skills

Now that I felt that students understood story structure and how to manipulate the Story Organizer to develop original ideas, it was time to introduce the process of turning the Story Organizer or outline into a real story. I repeated that their Story Organizer was the "bare bones" or "skeleton" of their writing. It was now time to add "the meat"! Like any teacher, I am always looking for the "hook" that will engage my students, that will provide the "aha" moments that make teaching so magical.

Total Teacher Support

With the Story Organizer completed with my own substituted version of *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, I used a Write Aloud strategy again. However, this was the first time I was going to write an actual story. I took some advice from Moore's (2000) *Writing With Results* and decided to write only my introduction.

I introduced the characters, setting, and problem. I talked aloud as I chose my words carefully, discarding what didn't sound right, verbalizing how I made my decisions as to my word choice. I do lots of "turtle-talking" in my classroom when I model the spelling of any word. This means slowly breaking down the word syllabically so students can hear the "chunks," and writing the sounds I hear. At the Grade 3 level I incorporate

the illogical spellings and explain them aloud, to myself, demonstrating how I remember

the spelling patterns in these words. For example, in the introduction of my story, I turtle-

talked the illogical spelling of "especially," explaining that I can hear the "e," and the

root word was "special" and I knew how to spell that because it was a Word Wall word

(frequently used words that are displayed on the wall for student reference). I stated that I

know that I must have a double "l" because I need to add the suffix "ly." I enjoy using

alliteration when I write, so when I described the rooster, he was "big, bold, and bad." I

also found that, by writing the introduction only, I was able to keep the students'

attention longer. Figure 4 shows the introduction I modeled in this activity.

Figure 4. Modeled introduction to story

Independent Activities

For the purposes of this story, I chose to rearrange the format, omitting

"Supported Activities." We did not write an entire story together first, as "Supported

Activities" would indicate. As classroom teachers will recognize, it is important to be flexible and to recognize the teaching strategies that will best work with the group that is sitting in front of you at the time. These students were anxious to write, so I let them write. They wrote introductions to *their* stories – only the introduction! I moved about the room and encouraged the use of descriptive language, making sure that they had included both the characters and the setting. I encouraged them to follow their Story Organizer and reminded them that, if they changed their minds, they needed to record that change in some way on their organizer so that they would not become confused later.

We did lots of sharing. Either the students or I would read our introductions aloud. They were excited, enthusiastic, and many did some excellent writing. Figure 5 shows an example of one student's introduction written on the day I introduced story writing to my class.

> Once upon a time there were three
> little wizard, and the big bad lava. They lived
> in the center of the earth. The little wizard.
> ^^Their names were
> Elves, Egor and Ember. The center of the
> earth is called the core and it is
> very hot indeed. One day the wizard
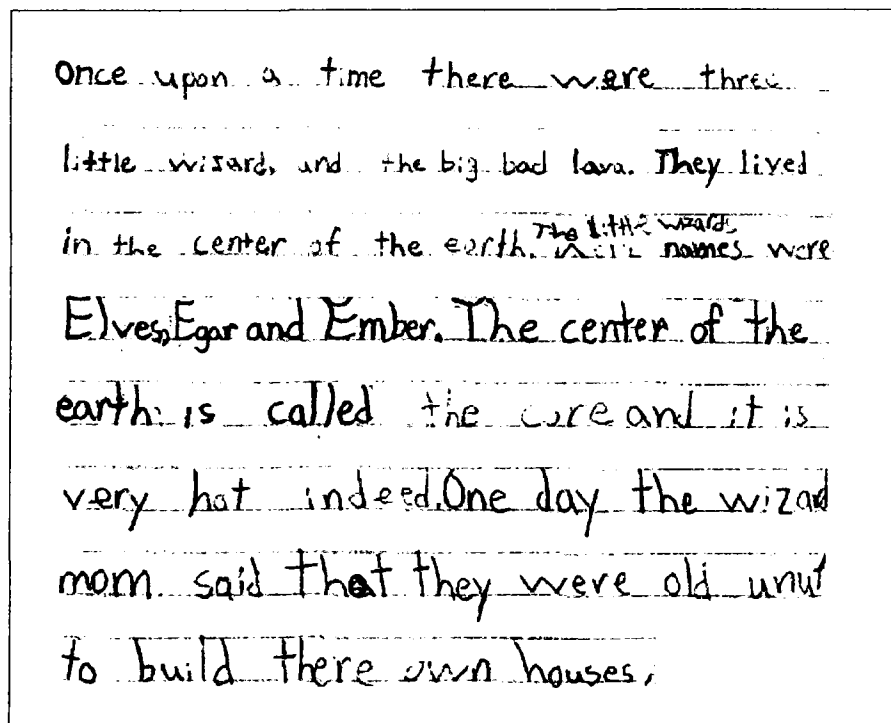> mom said that they were old enuf
> to build there own houses,

Figure 5. Adam's introduction to his first story

The next day, I modeled how to write the three events. For this story, this meant describing how the "chicks" built their three homes and Rocky kept destroying them. The students then wrote their events, and because they were anxious to complete their stories, they also wrote their endings.

Overall, I was disappointed with the results. Although some provided interesting events with some use of descriptive words, others simply rewrote what they had written on their Story Organizers. Because I had not yet modeled how to write an ending, most students' endings were simple or incomplete. It was time to reevaluate the plan. This was the journal entry that I wrote after I read their stories:

> Day 17. I have decided that they need more structured stories, so I turned to JoAnne Moore's (2000) story model of writing a circle story. It is still substitution writing but more patterned. I have been to a number of her workshops and found her presentations interesting. I have tried to use her method as outlined in her book *Circle Story Writing with Results* but I find it confusing. I adapted it to my teaching style and have been reasonably successful in past years. I remind myself that these structured story ideas like "circle stories" or "switch stories" will only appeal to certain students, but I believe in all students having the experience, even though I know only a few will use the format again. I do not have time in this study to develop her strategies to the degree that she does, and I have learned from past experience that I cannot maintain students' interest in one story for as long as she suggests taking to learn this type of story.
>
> I read *I Miss Franklin P. Shuckles* (1998) by U. Snihura and L. Franson and *Pigs* (1989) by Robert Munsch. We talked about what made them circle

stories, basically emphasizing that the characters end up back at the place where they began.

Application 4. Using the Circle Story Organizer

Total Teacher Support

I returned to the role of providing total teacher support. This story genre needed to be modeled. During the next few days we read more circle stories, always discussing what makes them a circle story, that the story always ends up in the same place it started.

Next I read *Edward the Emu* (1996) and *Edwina the Emu* (1998) by Sheena Knowles, two of my favorite children's books that I use as springboards to writing circle stories. The problem is obvious, the writing is patterned, and the illustrations are delightful. Because the students had become quite proficient in their understanding of how to complete the Story Organizer, we did this activity together. Although the circle story is a patterned story, the pattern works best in the new story if the model is followed closely. If the character doesn't like being herself or himself, like Edward in *Edward the Emu*, then it is important to know why and what the character would like to try to be instead. Although Moore (2000) provides a graphic organizer specifically designed for a circle story, I find that the Story Organizer used in this study is very adaptable. The character tries to be three other characters (three events) before deciding that being oneself is the best of all (the solution).

I modeled my version (see Figure 6) of how I would substitute the characters, setting, events, and solution. The problem remained the same. Following is my Story Organizer, as created that day.

```
                        Story Organizer A
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Title: Ella on the Move                                       │
├───────────────────────────┬───────────────────────────────────┤
│ Characters:               │ Setting(s):                       │
│   elephant named Ella     │   rainforest - Kapok tree         │
│                           │                                   │
├───────────────────────────┴───────────────────────────────────┤
│ Problem:                                                       │
│    Ella the elephant did not like her home in the rainforest.│
│    (too noisy)                                                 │
├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ Events:                                                        │
│   1. So Ella moseyed to the desert. It was quiet but           │
│      there was no water.        There                          │
│   2. So Ella ambled to a farm. It was water to drink           │
│      but there were too many strange animals.                  │
│   3. So Ella meandered her way to a city. There were no        │
│      strange animals but it was too busy.                      │
├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ Solving the Problem:                                           │
│    Ella was tired of moving so she plodded her                 │
│    way back home. She talks nicely to the Chief Toucan         │
│    and asks him if he would take his flock of noisy            │
│    birds and go live in another Kapok tree. He does.           │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 6. Modeled Story Organizer for a circle story

I gave very little advance thought to what I was going to write for a story –

deliberately! The modeling of how I developed my ideas was "authentic" thinking. As

teachers, if we can be spontaneous and get past the sense of being unprepared or self-

conscious, then our orally expressed thought processes are more valid. And students

sense this! As Graves (1994) says, "They need to see you struggle to match your

intentions with the words that reach the page" (p.110). We rarely give students an

opportunity to think ahead. When we ask students to write, it is from an authentic

beginning. If students are stuck and unable to come up with a topic, I often tell them to go

home and "sleep on it." Some do and are happy to report the results the next day. I model

this opportunity to change my initial writing when I demonstrate the revision process.

Supported Activities/Independent Activities

As a class we brainstormed suggested substitutions, and then the students were off

to create their own story and complete their organizer. Figure 7 shows Michelle's

completed organizer from that day's lesson.

Figure 7. Michelle's first independently completed Story Organizer

Application 5. Writing Circle Stories

Total Teacher Support

This time I took the time to model the writing of the whole story. Although this is

meant to be a Write Aloud, there were times when students wanted to offer suggestions. I

allowed this in order to keep them engaged. The writing of the whole story took

approximately 25 minutes. I was surprised at how engaged they were in my thinking

process. I had explained that I wanted them to see the story from beginning to end, and in

particular, I wanted them to watch carefully how I was always rereading what I wrote in order to maintain the flow of my story.

Supported Activities/Independent Activities

I was pleased with the enthusiasm I felt within the classroom. They were ready to begin. I began this day's lesson with a mini-lesson that addressed "titles" because this was a "teachable moment." More than one student felt they needed a title before they could begin writing and were asking me what they should use as a title. Mini-lessons are brief lessons that focus the students' attention on writing and provide direct instruction on some aspect of writing (Bright, 2002). Most writing lessons to this point have had their own built in mini-lessons that were based on the modeling activity of the day. During this time I addressed such topics as organization, sentence structure, conventions, or spelling. Following is an excerpt of my journal on the day I talked about "titles."

> Day 20. I began today's writing session with a mini-lesson about "titles." I told students that they can use a title to focus their story and begin with it, or they can wait until they are finished the story and then decide what would make a good title. I also used the analogy of the title as representing the door to their story, that it should in some way make the reader wonder what the story is about. They worked on their stories. I wandered through the class and there were fewer questions except for, "Do you like this, Mrs. B.?" or "Read this, Mrs. B."

For the writing of this story I wanted to make sure that I re-emphasized how I had modeled the ending of my story. I felt that these students needed to work on developing an ending, and to learn how to maintain their reader's interest right to the "end" by remaining creative and enthusiastic. Children often just want to "be done" and do not

carry the development of their ideas to a dramatic, clever or well-written ending. The following is an excerpt from my journal following the mini-lesson on "endings." I also took some time to reflect on the characteristics of young writers as they share their writing with the class.

> Day 22. Today I reworked the ending to my story. To make my students understand that the ending is the most important part in a piece of writing has always been difficult. The final words are what leave the most lasting impression and this is where students seem to "run out of steam." They just want to be done. Most students finished their stories and we did some sharing. It is interesting to watch them share. I have always been amused how often what is "read aloud" is not always what is written on the page. It amazes me how a better word or phrase might come to them so quickly as they read, or how they read words that should be in the story but aren't. I usually keep them company as they read. Many students need the encouragement and my verbal endorsement that what they have written is worth being heard by the other students.

It was now time to have students work through the whole writing process from beginning to end. It was time to have the students complete their own organizer and write their own story – independently! I suggested they write a circle story because this was the patterned story that we had just learned, but in the end I accepted whatever they produced. I made sure to review all Story Organizers to ensure that the story solutions fit the story problems, a problem that persists if students are not making a conscious effort to think of a story's flow, even in the pre-writing steps.

It was time for another mini-lesson, this time on quotation marks. Although I had been aware for some time that this needed to be a mini-lesson, I waited until this point to formally address how to place quotation marks around dialogue. I have always discouraged the use of dialogue in stories because I find writers at this age tend to misuse conversational writing. I teach that, unless the conversation works to move the story along, it has no place in the story. I had modeled using conversation in the writing of my story (see Figure 4), and some students were experimenting with using it, so it was time to teach them how to use it properly. For the next few days, the mini- lessons focused on the use of quotation marks. I would take sentences that students volunteered and we would work with them together.

I was coming close to the end of my study. To summarize, we had talked about revising and editing in an informal manner, related to how I modeled these processes in my own stories. We had talked extensively about rereading to make sure our story "made sense." In addition, we had talked about how to introduce great vocabulary words to describe our characters, setting and events. We had talked about how to make sure we looked for good sentences, corrected capitalization and punctuation, and how we must pay close attention to the spelling of the Word Wall words. These are frequently used words that are displayed alphabetically on the wall that I expect students *always* to spell correctly in their everyday writing. I felt it was time now to address revising and editing by creating a student generated "checklist" using the story they had just completed. My journal entry from that day follows:

Day 26. All students have now completed their second "circle" story. There were very few format questions, and upon reading the stories I am impressed at how closely they stayed true to their plan.

I took down the commercial poster I had on the wall related to Editing and Revising that we had been referring to until now. To date, I realized that although I have talked about editing work as a process, I had not made a concerted effort to focus on this part of the writing process. I have been more concerned with an uninterrupted flow of ideas. Students have completed a *personal* review of their writing, revising and editing as modeled by myself, and some have referred to the poster. Now we needed to make a Revision Checklist for the class.

I went out on a limb. I asked for a student volunteer to give us permission to review his first draft and use it to help us make our own checklist for the class. The first point brought to our attention by the author of the story was, "Wow! You can sure see mistakes when it is read out loud!" BINGO! So first on our list was "Read my writing out loud – softly!" (their words, not mine). As a class, we brainstormed the things that should be including in revising and editing. We first discussed the difference between revising and editing. From their first list, they recognized that adding descriptive words did not belong in the "editing section." Following is the checklist, using the students' own words:

FIRST: • Read my writing out loud – softly!

Revising: • Does it make sense?

                  • Will my reader understand my story?

                  • Did I use interesting words?

Editing:	• I read my story to make sure I used punctuation marks right: periods (.), question marks (?), exclamation points (!), quotation marks (" ").
	• I use capital letters at the beginning of a sentence, for the first letter of a name, for the word "I"
	• I spelled all the Word Wall words right.
	• I tried to fix other words that I think are not spelled correctly.

After we finished this activity, I gave the students back their stories, and they self-edited their writing using our list. One boy edited his writing for one thing at a time – first for capitals, then for punctuation, and so on. He worked so hard!

I write a "Morning Message" on the board first thing every morning. This is a short letter from me to the students that usually outlines something that might be happening that day. In the message I make errors for the class to find and correct. We do this as a collaborative activity. In September, I focus on finding the sentences based on my reading of the passage. We insert capitals and punctuation. In October, I add spelling errors, usually based on our Word Wall words or other frequently misspelled words. I may also omit or add in extra words. I continue doing this until Christmas. I find that it is also an opportune time to reinforce concepts introduced in some of my mini-lessons.

Application 6. Writing Switch Stories

"Within the *Balanced Literacy Program*, writing moves from total teacher support through scaffolded activities towards independence" (Brailsford, 2002, p. 180). With this in mind, I wanted to show the students one more story genre, providing teacher

support as needed. I wanted them to become able to choose how they might write a story independently. Again, I knew this story genre would not appeal to all students.

I read some "switch" stories with the class. "Switch" stories have characters that change the way they think, feel, or act. Often there is an underlying message or moral in the story (Moore, 2000). I read *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse* by Leo Lionni (1969). Many students later wrote very creative stories using this model, where the character longs to be something else and through magical powers the character's wish comes true. In *Julius, the Baby of the World* by Kevin Henkes (1990), the character Lily has "an attitude adjustment" about how she feels about her new baby brother. This appealed to many students who have younger siblings. Two of our students have recently had babies added to their families, so there was some real "relating" taking place. Following is an excerpt from my journal the day I introduced how to write 'switch' stories:

> Day 29. Today I read *Sheila Rae, The Brave* by Kevin Henkes. I modeled a Story Organizer. We worked together. It had been a while since they had done one independently. I then modeled how I could make some simple substitutions for the characters and events (not the problem) and I would have my own story to write. Students began to create their own Story Organizer. They were encouraged to share ideas and help each other if they wished. I celebrated inside when I heard, "Man, I can do these things really fast now!" "I have so many ideas for stories now!" "This is so easy now!" I have to remind myself to carry the Post-Its© and a pencil so that I can capture students' verbalized thoughts.

In the final days of this study, I realized that I wanted somehow to obtain more data on how the metacognitive abilities of my students had developed. I would be

interviewing my three case study students at the very end of the study, but I wondered

what I could do to have the class demonstrate that they had developed the language to

talk about what they had learned about the writing process. I use the following excerpt

from my journal to illustrate my solution:

> Day 31. It came to me today to have the students pretend they are expert authors
>
> and write down everything they now know about what makes a good story. We
>
> have been studying Rocks and Minerals in Science, and I have read them a book
>
> called How to Dig a Hole to the Other Side of the World by F. McNulty (1979).
>
> We called ours "How to Write a Great Story."
>
> I decided not to do any brainstorming, as we had just reviewed many of
>
> these points before our last story writing session and I wanted to see what they
>
> remembered about all our lessons on story writing. I wanted to see the
>
> metacognitive process in action. My assignment to them was this: Pretend you are
>
> a famous author of children's books and you have been asked to tell Grade 3
>
> students all the things that go into writing an interesting and exciting story. Start
>
> from the very first thing you would do, and write down everything you can think
>
> of until you get to the last thing you would do. Oh, it's all in the presentation, isn't
>
> it? They took me seriously! I was very impressed with most of the responses.
>
> Also, their imagination never ceases to amaze me – they came up with many
>
> things that I certainly have never talked to them about!

To take this process one step further, I decided we should do some collaborative

writing, an opportunity to pool everyone's ideas about what "good writers do." I guided

the writing of the steps so they would be sequential. We created our own book, titled

How to Write a Great Story by Grade 3. The students have illustrated it, and it is now part of our collection of books that the class has published. This theme of using a metacognitive approach in teaching writing and this particular collaborative writing activity will be further explored in Chapter 4.

<div align="center">

Collection of Final Data

</div>

I had the students write their final story independently. They were given a picture prompt to use, and they were told they could use it only if they needed it because they might be having trouble choosing a topic.

I interviewed my three case study students again, using the Writer's Survey (Bright, 2002). These interviews were transcribed and became part of the data for future analysis. These interviews became more of a writing conference than a survey. Although I elicited a response to each question for comparison to their initial response to the same question at the beginning of the study, I explored some of their answers in greater depth.

Writing conferences are an important aspect of the writing process in my classroom. For the purposes of this study, I had all students working on the same stage of writing stories at the same time. For example, they would all be planning and creating their Story Organizer on the same day. Another day, they would all be writing the introduction to their stories. This would not normally be the way the Writers Workshop would look in my classroom. Students would be at various stages of the writing process as they move towards independence on the writing continuum.

Throughout this three-month study, I wanted to ensure that I engaged in a formal conference at least once, sometimes more often depending on need, with every student in my class. This required some record keeping strategies, such as recording anecdotal

comments in each student's file regarding individual students' issues and successes so that when I returned to that student again, I could evaluate his or her progress.

It is important to walk about the room, ensuring that students are engaged in the writing process, and interacting on a less formal conferencing basis with those that need advice and encouragement. This is when I make valuable use of my Post-It© system. I stick these in students' files for future reference. This 'assess-on-the-go' strategy serves me well when it is time to report on the writing development of each student.

Final Thoughts

In this study, I explored one way of teaching story writing to Grade 3 students, from whom I collected five stories over 32 days. One must remember that story writing cannot be taught every day during Writers Workshop and that there are many other kinds of writing to explore. In order to maintain my students' interest, I also had to introduce and allow students to explore other writing genres during this time. This three-month period was an intense time of writing for my students. They worked hard to meet my research needs by providing me with interesting and enlightening data in the form of writing samples and conversation.

Chapter 4: Examining the Data

The findings of this study result from an examination of samples of students'

writing, my researcher's journal, transcripts of audio taped interviews and conferences

with case study students, together with a review of videotaped direct teaching sessions.

My examination of the data was influenced by the action research tradition, as described

by Creswell (2002):

> The aim of action research is to address an actual problem in an educational
>
> setting. Thus, action researchers study practical issues that will have immediate
>
> benefits for education.... Research is not undertaken to advance knowledge for
>
> knowledge's sake, but for an immediate, applied goal. (p. 614)

The goal of this project was to determine how instruction using a particular writing model

would affect the story writing development of Grade 3 students.

Action research is a dynamic, flexible process and no blueprint exists for how to

proceed except in very general terms. As I analyzed the data I collected during this study,

I noted that my teaching methods changed based on the reactions of my students or the

results I was achieving. During every writing session, a teacher faces issues of method,

management and motivation. My teaching of writing was decidedly a reflective process

in which reflection on the success of a previous day's lesson often changed the intended

direction of the next day's lesson.

Action researchers engage in an iterative dynamic approach (Creswell, p. 630).

This dynamic process allows researchers to "spiral" back and forth between reflection

about a problem, data collection, and action. For example, after I read the stories written

on Day 16, it became clear that my decision to "just let them write" was impulsive and

that they clearly required more modeled instruction, particularly in how to write an ending. Here is my journal entry from that day:

> Day 16. I modeled how to elaborate on the briefly stated events as outlined on my organizer. I used "putting the meat back on the bones" for lack of a better metaphor (these are mostly farm kids so they relate well to this analogy!). As I modeled, I realized that they were very unsettled and anxious to get started writing their own stories. I made two mistakes here. I made the mistake of just letting them go! I stopped and let them write. And I realized that many of them had difficulty writing an ending.

When I conducted the final Writer's Survey with my three case study students, I decided to explore each question further. At the beginning of the study, I identified Tim as a struggling writer, Adam as an average writer, and Michelle as an above average writer for Grade 3. I interviewed these three students again, hoping that they had acquired the "discourse" to talk to me more about how they viewed themselves as writers. This provided me with the incentive to explore their answers further and journey with them as they expressed their thoughts.

Emergent Themes

Thematic development plays a central role in grounded theory analysis, in which one generates themes or categories of information from one's data (Creswell, p. 267). As I explored the data collected over this three-month study, four predominant themes continually presented themselves. These relate to the initial research questions that I set out at the beginning of my study: Does moving from total teacher support, to supported activities, to total independence in writing develop more confident and effective writers?

Through exposure to quality children's literature, can knowing how authors construct stories help students to understand the writing process? Does the use of graphic organizers help students to plan and organize their thoughts better to produce good story writing? Does the teacher's use of a '"write-aloud" or metacognitive approach help students to understand what is expected in good story writing?

The first theme reflects my strategy of providing scaffolded learning for the students. I feel that using a learning model in which students move from total teacher support, to supported activities, to total independence develops confident and effective writers.

During this study I used two supporting strategies to aid the scaffolding process. Two themes emerging related to these strategies. One related to the use of quality children's literature to show students how authors construct stories and thus help them to understand story structure. Appendix F includes a sample listing of children's literature used during this study. Included in this book list are my favourite children's stories as well as books suggested by Moore (2002) that illustrate, for example, circle or switch stories. Another theme related to graphic organizers, which help developing writers to plan and organize their thoughts and thus to demonstrate their understanding of story structure.

The fourth theme to emerge concerned the power of using a "write-aloud" or metacognitive approach in writing instruction. I felt my students were better able to understand what is expected in good story writing because they developed their own metacognitive abilities. They became independent writers.

This chapter explores the evidence that supports the emergence of these four

themes: 1) scaffolded learning, 2) use of quality children's literature, 3) use of graphic

organizers, and 4) the importance of developing metacognition. The interconnected

nature of these themes is represented in Figure 8.

Metacognition

↓

Teacher Supported Activities

(Scaffolded Learning Activities)

↙ ↘

Children's Literature   Graphic Organizers

↓

Students who understand story structure

Students who can organize their thoughts

Students who have developed metacognitive abilities
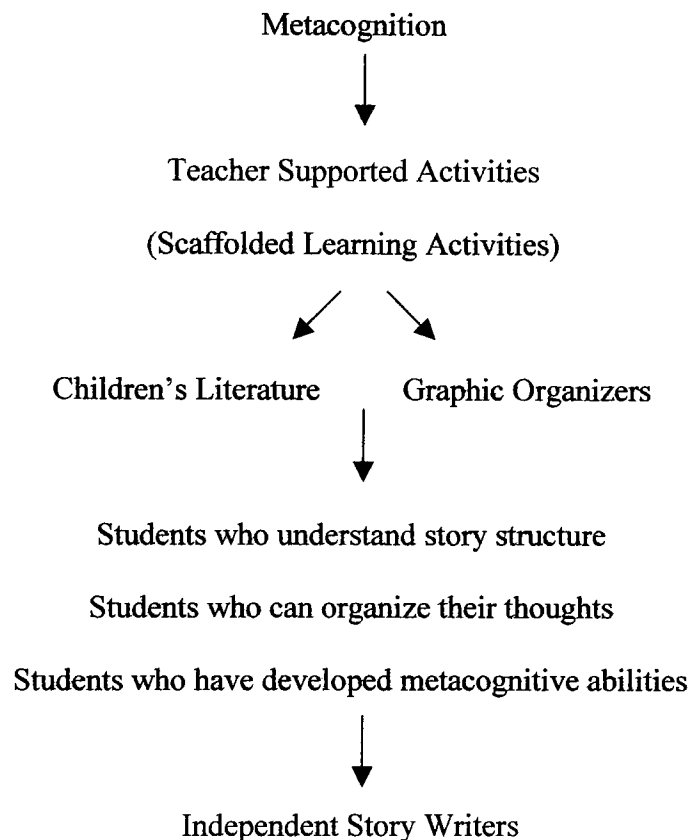
↓

Independent Story Writers

Figure 8. Visual representation of interconnected themes

As I reviewed the data, particularly the audiotaped interviews and conferences

and the videotaped teaching sessions, I became increasingly aware that my students have

developed an ability to express themselves more clearly when they *talk* about their

writing. I used a "write aloud" process, or what could also be referred to as a "think

aloud" process, in my approach to teaching writing. Although I was using this strategy

with the intention of enabling students to activate their own "thinking" abilities to

progress through the steps of the writing process, I wasn't expecting them to have

developed the ability to verbalize their thoughts when they talked about their writing.

I next discuss each of the four themes, explaining and illustrating how these

Grade 3 students learned as a result of the writing instruction they received.

Theme 1: Teacher Support

Brailsford (2002) provides a visual representation of the "Writing Continuum"

(see Figure 9).

The Writing Continuum

Support

Write Aloud

↓

Shared Writing

↓

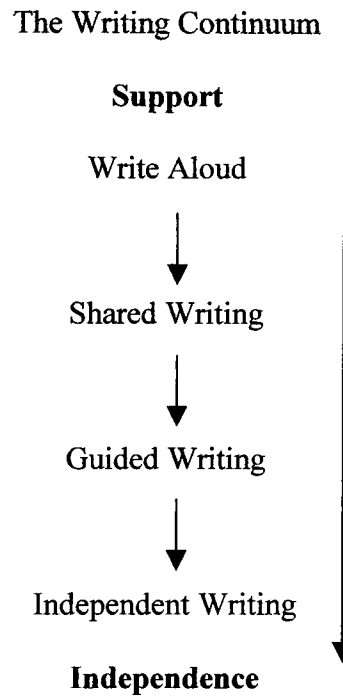Guided Writing

↓

Independent Writing

Independence

Figure 9. The Writing Continuum

Writing demonstrations provide students with concrete visual images as well as

oral presentation of what the writing process entails. Asking a student to write without

some form of demonstration is like asking a child to tie his shoes without demonstrating

the task. We may tell students what good writers should do and what good writing looks

like, but many learners cannot truly understand the process until they see it happening.

At the beginning of the study, I asked my three case study students the following questions from the Writer's Survey (see Appendix E): "Is there something I can do to help you with writing?" and "What is it?" During our final interview I changed the questions to "Have I helped you to become a better writer?" and "How?" I believe that their answers (see Table 2) reflect a change in their ability to speak knowledgably about their writing and also demonstrate the impact of a supported learning approach.

Table 2. Student Responses to Question 12 of Writer's Survey

Initial Questions: Is there something I can do to help you with writing? What is it?"

Michelle: No. I'm a good writer, I've been in school lots.	Adam: Yep. Teach me handwriting. Teach me capitals and periods.	Tim: Yes, help me get ideas.

Final Interview Questions: Have I helped you to become a better writer? How?

Michelle: Yes. Lots of things. I know how to do more planning – how to do the barebones – how to make sure it makes sense.	Adam: Yep! Yep! You teached me how to write good.	Tim: Yes! By telling us all these stories.

I was somewhat taken aback in September when Adam responded, "Teach me handwriting!" I recall thinking that if this student's perception of writing equates it with handwriting, then we had work to do! I was also concerned when he added that he wanted to learn about capitals and periods. I would have to help him understand that writing is not just about mechanics. At the end of the study, when asked the same question, Adam said most powerfully, "You showed me how to organize my ideas."

"Showed," not "told!" This was the expression of understanding I was looking for. Yes, I

showed them how to write a story.

As I moved down the Writing Continuum (see Figure 9) to analyze the shared

writing activities we participated in as a class, I began to notice that some students were

developing a sense of ownership over their writing, while I modeled the completion of a

Story Organizer following the Read Aloud of *The Hat* (1997). This is the first Story

Organizer that we completed together in a collaborative environment.

Story Organizer A

Title: The Hat by Jan Brett	
Characters: Hedgie Lisa Some animals	**Setting(s):** On a farm winter
Problem: Hedgie had a stocking stuck on his head.	
Events: 1. Lisa hung her woolens on the clothesline and they kept disappearing. 2. The animals all put clothing on their heads. 3. Lisa had to chase Hedgie and the animals all around the farmyard.	
Solving the Problem: Lisa pulled the stocking off Hedgie's head and he felt better.	

Figure 10. Modeled Story Organizer for *The Hat*

Tim completed his Story Organizer at the same time as I was modeling mine. He attempts

to get the same ideas down as I do but often misses words. Notice how he copies

spellings from my model and yet approximates other spellings on his own.

The Hat
Story Organizer A

Characters:	Setting(s):
Hedgie Animals Lisa	on a from Winter
Problem: Hedgie Couldn't get a Stocking Stuck on his head.	
Events: 1. Lisa hung woolens on the clothes line. 2. The animals all put clothing on their head animals 3. Lisa had to chais Hedgie all aroned the fram yard	
Solving the Problem: Lisa pull the Stocking off Hedgie's head and he felt better.	

Figure 11. Tim's completed Story Organizer for *The Hat*.

In Adam's version of the Story Organizer for *The Hat*, although the ideas he

expresses are similar to those in my Story Organizer, his language is sometimes different.

He is using his own words to express the same ideas.

The hat
Story Organizer A

Characters:	Setting(s):
Hedgie Lisa the animals	on a farm winter
Problem: Hedgie got stuck on a stocking.	
Events: Lisa hung her woolers on her cloths line 1. they kept disppearing 2. they animals all put a woolen clothing each one of them 3. Lisa had to chase all the animal to get her clothing back	
Solving the Problem: Lisa ran to Hedei and pulles it off hedgie an hedgie felt happy	

Figure 12. Adam's completed Story Organizer for *The Hat*

In her Story Organizer, Michelle demonstrates her ability to be an independent

thinker and formulates her own thoughts about the story. She was listening to the class

conversation, but at the same time she chose to record her own thoughts.

The Hat

Story Organizer A

Characters:	Setting(s):
Hedgie Lisa Some animals	on a farm Winter

Problem: Hedgie could not get the stocking on his head.

Events:
1. Lisa hung up her woolens on the cloths line.
2. The animals got ther own woolen because Hedgie led.
3. Lisa had to chase all the animals even Hedgie all around the farm.

Solving the Problem:
Lisa came out looking for the other stoking. Hedgie's Hat was gone.

Figure 13. Michelle's completed Story Organizer for *The Hat*

As the class and I worked to complete our first Story Organizer collaboratively,

the students began to ask questions. One questioned why there were only three events. I

explained that, although the problem we state can also indicate the "main idea," we are

also trying to identify the main events in the story that will provide the supporting details

(Program of Studies, 2000). It was a valid question. When confusion arose over what the

third event should be, a student exclaimed, "I know an easier way to do it – solve the

problem first." This student seemed to be indicating that we could work backwards by

first considering how to solve the problem in the story we were writing. Then we could

consider other aspects of the story. I felt, at the time, that this was a valid strategy and

positively reinforced this student's suggested approach.

As teachers, we are always anticipating the "teachable moment." The Alberta Learning Program of Studies (2000) states that in developing comprehension strategies students will "apply a variety of strategies, such as setting a purpose, confirming predictions, making inferences and drawing conclusions" (p.19). Again, one student commented, "We don't put that Lisa caught the animals and took their hats, do we?" Another student answered for me, "We don't *know* if she did." I took this opportunity to talk about making inferences. This was a "teachable moment" when I could talk to students about information that we know from what is "on the page" and information we know because it is "in our head." Although I named it for them as "inference," and some students came to use this word correctly as the year progressed, many students continued to refer to an inference as "in my head" information.

My goal was to work towards developing more independent, confident and effective writers by providing varied levels of teacher support. On Day 27, I audiotaped a formal Writing Conference with each of my case study students. I had other Writing Conferences with them before this regarding completion of their Story Organizers or sections of their stories, but this was the first time I sat with each of them individually and talked in-depth about the revising and editing process. It is an arduous task to conference at length with every student in my class on a regular basis. For the purposes of my research, I had to ensure that during this study I met with *all* students in order to avoid having my case study students feel singled out for special attention. Following is my lengthy journal entry from the day I met with these three students:

Day 27. Today I had a Writing Conference with each of my three students regarding the editing and revising process. It always amazes me how little it takes for them to see some mistakes and how other glaring errors just pass them by!

Revising and editing is not an easy task for anyone, least of all eight and nine year olds. It is my observation over my years of teaching that most students consider their writing finished when they insert the last period. It is difficult for them to return to their work to review for "Does is make sense?" or to review for capitals and punctuation when they essentially consider the job "done"!

Although it's not exceptional, Michelle's writing is improving. Her ideas are average, the story elements are all there, her writing flows, but her "voice" is missing. Michelle catches almost all of her errors when we work together and we read slowly and purposefully. She "hears" her periods – realizes the natural pauses and puts in periods. She is an exceptional speller. When she examines her work closely with me (not independently) she will recognize misspelled frequently used words (although there are not many), reversals, and words that do not "look right." She can hear verb tense errors. She reads it the way "it should sound," realizes that is not what she wrote, and fixes it. For the most part, she has mastered how to use quotation marks.

Tim continues to have problems with organizing his ideas. He knows he needs to always be rereading what he wrote in order to ensure that his ideas are flowing (he verbalizes this), but some sentences continue to be out of place. His ideas flow faster than his pencil. Also, although most of his thoughts are there somewhere, he often leaves out words for the same reason. He does not always

see the missing words as he reads them into the text. I have shown him how to use a pencil, watching for one-to-one correspondence with what he reads to what he has written on the page. He seemed to understand this better when I compared it to using your finger to track text when reading (which he does!). I have realized that Tim can spell better than his independent writing would indicate. Although many students have difficulty transferring their knowledge of spelling from studied lists into everyday writing, Tim is particularly challenged in this area. He will spell "come" wrong, but when we stop and I ask him to think and visualize, he knows! It is apparent that this transfer is only beginning for Tim.

Last night Tim was waiting for his parents to arrive for our parent conference. He asked if he could finish his story while he waited. I sat at my desk and he sat at the table. What a marvelous opportunity! He talked out loud to himself as he wrote. Oh, how I wish I could have turned on a tape-recorder while he worked. I did take notes though. He ended his session saying that he couldn't think of a good ending, so I told him to go home and sleep on it. Today he told me he did and he came up with only one sentence, but it is Tim's "voice" – "Home is the best place to be!" Tim's "voice" is heard in his writing. He has a turn of phrase that I find appealing. How does one "teach" voice?

Adam was not happy with this story. I could tell by the look on his face as he was writing. He had a good plan but he varied from it. I tell the students that the plan is just a guide and that their final story may not turn out the way they had organized it on the plan. At the same time, I encourage them to go back and change their plan so that they do not become confused. I have modeled this and

seen other students in the class do this. They will say, "I have another idea." I have them articulate whether or not it is something that will change the whole story or something they just want to add. Adam's new idea changed his story and he got confused. He didn't know how to bail himself out. I have to admire the fact that he was not happy with what he wrote, that even he recognized that it was not his best writing. Here I introduced the idea of "cut and paste." He had a good beginning and a good ending. I had to laugh at the look on his face as I took the scissors and told him to cut his story apart. With some guidance he went back and rewrote his last two events on the organizer, went away and rewrote the middle of his story, and came back smiling!

Adam is not patient with the revision process, or at least the "Does it make sense?" part. He is hung up on adding descriptive words or on making individual sentences sound better. He still has no sense of correct placement of punctuation. This is how he reads if not reminded to "read the periods." He still has many sentence fragments. I can see that he has a long way to go before this is mastered.

I continue to be reminded of the connection between reading and writing. Working with individual students and knowing how they approach their reading and recognizing the connections to how they write is a new revelation for me.

As I reread this journal entry, I am reminded of the effectiveness of reflective thinking. Journal writing has not been part of my daily teaching practice. In recording my practices and thoughts about daily lessons, I have provided myself with a window into how I interact with students, how I help them to solve problems, and how I work to help them understand that their writing is valued, even though we work to make it better. As I

reread this journal entry, I am reminded how each student approaches writing differently, that one "recipe" does not fit all. As teachers, we must be cognizant of taking each student from where the student is on the Writing Continuum (see Figure 9) to the next level, providing support for as long as it is needed.

Following the individual writing conferences with all my students, I asked them to participate in a goal-setting activity to prepare for the last story writing session. I gave them a form asking what two things they did well in a story and what two things they could do better. Their responses were unaided. Michelle, an above average writer for Grade 3, filled in the form as follows:

Two things I did well in this story:

1. I give characters personality.

2. I'm a good speller.

Two things I could do better:

1. I will try to do " " marks better.

2. I will try to write a chapter book.

Although Michelle is not particularly verbal in her interview responses, her written responses reveal how she views herself as a writer. At the beginning of the study, when asked "Is writing sometimes hard for you?" Michelle responded as follows:

Michelle: Well, sometimes.

Teacher: What makes it hard?

Michelle: I don't know.

Michelle seems to be much better at expressing herself in writing than in speech.

At the end of this study, I began to use a more "free writing" approach in my teaching. I gave students time to write stories, poems, or letters of their own choosing during writing time, while I participated in individual writing conferences. Michelle immediately began work on her "chapter book." Each May, our school celebrates writing with Publishing Day. This is intended to be a culminating writing activity where every student in the school publishes a story in the form of a book, complete with title page, dedication page, illustrations, and an "About the Author" page. Michelle is determined to write her chapter book, and I believe she will. She views herself as a successful and motivated writer. Figure 14 represents Michelle's first story writing sample collected at the beginning of the study. Figure 15 represents her final writing sample collected at the end of the study.

Taking a hike

Alisha and her father were
taking a hike, Because Alisha
wanted to go on an Adventure,
There was a warning sign that
Said "beware of the boars".
but Alisha and her father
did not read the sign. They just
Kept on walking. Alisha said that
she saw smock but her Dad did
not hear her. Her father said that
it was geting late but Alisha
wanted to check it out but
She did not know that
They were mouiving away
because she had no friends (at the new
house) But now She had friends and forgot
about the smock Her and her friends
played and played all day long
forever and ever and they lived
happaily ever after the end.

Figure 14. Michelle's first story

1 Macks Experence ? ?

There once was a little girl named Lucy-Lou. She was only eight years old. She and her friends John and Sam had a school pet named Macks. He was a wonderful turtle. He had great experences. Once apon a time on a cold winter day Lucy-Lou and her friends biked to school. When they reached the school, they ran into the classroom Art and nothing in Macks cage. "Oh no Macks escaped!" Do you know where Macks went?" "Macks is in the janitors room, I'm scared" cried Macks. Macks didn't know where he was going. So he ~~slowly walked~~ to this room. He read the sign JANITOR'S ROOM. So he was able to creep under the door. When he got in there he climbed up a yellow bucket of water. "SPLASH!" Macks got a bath. So he walked to the door and started to walk out of the janitors room. "Boom!" It was foot steps, "Ah!"
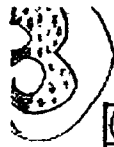
"Oh, I'm So worried" wispered Lucy-ou.

"It's okay" announced Sam. "Macks was

tired so that night he crawled out

of the room and into Grade 3 and in-

to his cage. The next day when Lucy

Lou got to school she waked into

the classroom and saw Macks, "Oh

Macks I was worried sick!" I think

Macks had a great experince of

his life, "I love you Macks! You're

my favorite turtle in the hole

entire universe!"

The End

Figure 15. Michelle's final story

Clearly Michelle now has more ideas for her stories. This final story is well organized,

creative, and more expressive in language use than the first example.

Tim, who is a struggling writer, also worked on the goal-setting activity and

completed the form giving the following responses:

Two things I did well in this story:

1. When someone was talking I put "" marks.

2. I wrote a good beginning.

Two things I could do better:

1. Turtle talk the words.

2. When I edit I go with my pencil so I can stop at the words that need fixing.

At the beginning of the study, Tim wrote the following story.

Figure 16. Introduction to Tim's audio-taped conference story

Tim, who is a below average writer, is aware that his spelling sometimes interferes with the meaning he is trying to convey. It also interferes with the flow in his writing. He often gets preoccupied with the spelling of his words, and consequently he appreciates using the Story Organizer (see Appendix A). When asked in the final interview if the Story Organizer helped, Tim agreed:

> Yes! Cause I can write all the names and where it is and the problem and the events and the solution to it. Then I can look back and tell what happened and stuff, and then I can write it down.

Tim is perhaps the least independent or confident writer of the three, but he is effective. What he writes is entertaining and a pleasure to read. Note how he has chosen two very effective strategies to work on to improve his writing – "turtle talking" his words so they are more phonemically accurate and easier for his reader to understand, and rereading carefully to make sure that his sentences are in the right order and that he doesn't leave out words and therefore cause confusion for his reader. Although Tim is usually very proud of his writing and anxious to share his ideas with others, I would not yet call him a confident writer. In my conference with Tim, he told me what a writer should do who is experiencing difficulty.

Teacher:	What advice do you have for someone who is having hard time writing?
Tim:	Ask help – ask for help.
Teacher:	Tell them to ask for help? Is that what you do?
Tim:	Yeah.

Figure 17 represents Tim's first story and Figure 18, his final story.

The Hicking trep.

Once upon a time, there was two boys
named Hulkman and Siperman. they
Klimeing mounteverst ther was
a sing sed warning long drop down.
Sudnle Hulkman sen smoke
Siperman laphed. Sudnle Siperman
sen smoke to. They when to bed.
The next morning the smoke was
gun they when home. The End

Figure 16. Tim's first story

The Missing Gecko

In the school of mexico.
the Mexicen students named Tyson,
Kingsley , Grga and there threer
all gato School
Mr. Ewok. That night it was prairt Tehcer
Itavu The Teachers pet a gecko
named gechy got very very very
scared. He got out of
his box. first Gechy went to
the Principals room. He saw a cand
buringbritly with a prsin reading a book.
He got scared he scampered to the stogreg

It was to dark. Then he went to the gym

he got steped on by a fteen year old.

He zoooooomed out of the gym

and into the library. And hid under

a book the libraen lifed up

the book. And shout it. gecky

was still a lit bet skared. As

so as Gecky was in his box

but oley the teacher was there.

So Gecky was not scared. Mr Ewok

stared to cry.
The End

Figure 17. Tim's final story

Tim's story has been transcribed for clarification.

The Missing Gecko

In the school of Mexico the Mexican students named Tyson, Kinglsey, Grga and their teacher Mr. Ewok all go to school. That night it was parent teacher interviews. The teacher's pet a gecko named Gecky got very, very, very scared. He got out of his box. First Gecky went to the principal's room. He saw a candle burning brightly with a person reading a book. He got scared. He scampered to the storage. It was too dark. Then he went to the gym. He got stepped on by a 17

year old. He zoomed out of the gym and into the library and hid under a book.

The librarian lifted up the book and shut it. Gecky was still a little bit scared.

Soon Gecky was in his box but only the teacher was there. So Gecky was not

scared. Mr. Ewok started to cry.

Clearly Tim has acquired a better understanding of developing his story between his first

story and this one. Although he has done what I call "leaving parts of the story behind in

his head," he still tells an entertaining tale.

Following are Adam's responses on the goal setting activity mentioned earlier:

Two things I did well in this story:

1. I have a good imagination.

2. I'm a good speller.

Two things I could do better:

1. I need to organize my thoughts.

2. I need to watch punctuation.

Adam, considered an average writer for Grade 3, has perhaps demonstrated the

most growth as a writer. He is also the most confident. He is like a sponge during direct

teaching sessions. After every session, whether a "write aloud" demonstration or a mini-

lesson, I always observed that he attempted the strategy I was teaching. Figures 19 and 20

represent the before and after examples of Adam's writing, the story he wrote at the

beginning of the study and the story he wrote at the end.

There were two kids. They were named blpth per. They went up a mounttan one of them seen something he yelled out smoke!!! But then they heard something. It was an avelanch they got cauht but the fire spread it came to them it melted the snow the snow terened into water. They went into the forest and figered out that it was just a fox with mactes.

Figure 18. Adam's first story

Fredo The lizard (1)

Once upon a time in Africa in a warm
warm house there was a lizard named
Fredo. And there was another lizard
that was a wined up mouse that was named
Willy. Fredos problem was that he wanted
to be a wined up mouse just like Willy.
Because Willy was loved by the children
and was special to the children. When
Freda got at of his tree in the house
he saw a child sweeping the floor
the child saw the lizard and pretty soon
the child was attacking Fredo. Freda
dogde the broom Fredo jumped on the
broom and bit the broom in half. The
child ran away. Fredo heard that there
was a mouse named Ookoo in a bush that could charge
anything into an animal. So Freda went
to the mouse. Freda asked the mouse if
he could turn him into a wined up lizard and
the mouse cried If you find me a yellow
                I will change you into a wined
peice of cheese When Fredo was trying
to find the peice of cheese he found

Figure 19. Adam's final story

Adam's story has also been transcribed for clarification:

Fredo the Lizard

Once upon a time in Africa in a warm, warm house there was a lizard named

Fredo and there was another lizard that was a wind-up mouse that was named

Willy. Fredo's problem was that he wanted to be a wind-up mouse just like Willy

because Willy was loved by the children and was special to the children. When

Fredo got off of the tree in his house he saw a child sweeping the floor. The child

saw the lizard and pretty soon the child was attacking Fredo. Fredo dodged the

broom. Fredo jumped on the broom and bit the broom in half. The child ran away.

Fredo heard that there was a mouse named Ookoo in a bush that could change

anything into an animal. So Fredo went to the mouse. Fredo asked the mouse if he could turn him into a wind-up lizard and the mouse cried, "If you find me a yellow piece of cheese, I will turn you into a wind-up mouse." When Fredo was trying to find the piece of cheese he found Willy in the garbage can because the kids didn't like him anymore. Sitting right by Willy was the piece of cheese. Fredo grabbed the piece of cheese and hurried to the mouse. Fredo gave the mouse the piece of cheese and Fredo wished that Willy could be a real mouse. So the mouse used his magic. With a big shine of light the mouse was gone. Fredo went back to the house. There was Willy, the good perfect mouse. THE END.

All three of these students aspired to write longer stories. I feel that this desire demonstrated their motivation and independence in the writing process. When asked, "What do you think you need to learn in order to become an even better writer than you are now?" Michelle responded, "Make my stories longer." This explains her desire to write a chapter book and her view that good writers are able to write longer pieces. Adam responded, "Write a longer story by adding lots of detail and writing better sentences. By making all the story parts better." Here Adam verbalizes what he considers to be the most important aspects of good story writing.

When I asked Tim, "Which piece of writing do you think is your best so far?" he chose his circle story:

Teacher: What makes this one the best?

Tim: Because I like long stories.

Teacher: Oh, so you wrote a longer story. Why is that better?

Tim: Because you get more into the book.

Teacher:	More into the story that you've written?
Tim:	Yeah.
Teacher:	Why do you think this one ended up longer than the others?
Tim:	Because I had more ideas for it.

As demonstrated, all three students have come to believe that the length of their stories is an important aspect of good writing. This was an unexpected but important finding for me. Teaching young writers how to develop their ideas is often difficult. To have these students articulate that writing longer stories is one step in this direction was very rewarding. Perhaps they recognize that when they have a good idea they have more to say, which results in a longer story.

As I reviewed this goal setting activity and the final interviews with my three case study students, it was apparent that all three were viewing themselves as "writers," a view very different from the one they held at the beginning of the study. Following teacher support in the form of direct teaching, conferences, interviews, and goal setting, these students demonstrated a clearer understanding of themselves as writers.

Theme 2: Quality Children's Literature

Students learn about story structure by coming to understand how authors construct stories. Kercheval (1997) explains:

Readers and teachers are like visitors who've paid money to tour a famous home. Ah, readers say, what lovely rooms. Yes, the teacher says, notice the artful placement of the windows. Writers look at a story the way a carpenter or architect looks at a house: They see the surface but also the structure under the paint. They know how the house is put together and how much work it was to build.

The most effective way to teach the concepts of story structure is through

literature, because the stories serve as models. Moore (2000) believes that children's

authors use six story plots, two of which I modeled for my students during this project:

the circle story and the switch story. I presented these story plots to my students as a

writing framework for substitution writing. Story plots can show students some

interesting choices they could make when writing. Students need first to recognize and

then to imitate the plot patterns in a story of their own.

The following is an excerpt from the interview with Michelle as we worked

through the Writer's Survey (see Appendix E) at the end of the study.

Teacher: What do you like to write about?

Michelle: (no response)

Teacher: You said you liked to write about horses. That's what you said last

              time. Now have you changed your mind?

Michelle: No.

Teacher: Is there anything else you like to write about?

Michelle: People. Like switch stories.

Teacher: Okay, we did a basic substitution story using *The Three Little Pigs*,

              right? We did a circle story and we did a switch story. Which one

              was your favorite?

Michelle: The circle story.

Teacher: Why?

Michelle: Because it sort of flows. It has a pattern I can follow. I like that.

Michelle's comments are an example of the general talk within the classroom. The students had developed an understanding of the structure of stories, and instead of asking each other "What are you going to write about?" now they asked, "What kind of story are you going to write?" They had developed an understanding that stories have structure, as a result of experiencing many examples of quality children's literature. In this excerpt, Michelle also expressed an idea that I often used when modeling. I always read and reread what I have written when I am modeling, because I want to make sure that my writing maintains a flow of ideas. Michelle recognized that when she writes a circle story, she is able to maintain a flow of ideas.

Tim also mentioned the value of having story models for his own writing. In his final interview, he recognized the value of listening to stories when he stated that I helped him become a better writer by "telling us all those stories." Although Adam did not verbalize how my reading of children's literature directly affected his writing, when examining his stories I realize that it did. Each his self-selected stories is reflective of the literature read to him. One was a circle story, and his final story (see Figure 20) was a switch story, modeled after *Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse* by L. Lionni (1969).

I asked Michelle, "Do you like writing real stories or made-up stories?"

Michelle: Made-up.

Teacher: Why?

Michelle: They're more funner and they can have book magic.

Teacher: Hmm. You said that last time. You really like that book magic

                   thing, don't you? Why do you call it book magic?

Michelle: Because that's what you call it sometimes when you read us

                stories.

I recall the first time the term "book magic" came up, in September. We were reading

The Velveteen Rabbit (Williams, 1995) and a boy in the class wanted to know what

becoming "real" meant. The students had the answer for him, but he persisted, saying,

"That can't happen, right?" That's when I used the words "book magic." I indicated that

we enjoy stories because anything can happen in a story. Michelle remembered this

explanation. Using quality children's literature as springboards to writing not only

illustrates for students how story structure is developed, but also shows them how

imagination can be limitless.

Theme 3: Graphic Organizers

Students in Grade 3 are required to write a story for the Provincial Achievement

Tests each May. They are required to write a story in one hour, based on a story prompt,

using the planning page of the test only if they choose to organize their writing before

they begin. By May, my students are able to plan their stories before writing using their

own version of the Story Organizer (see Appendix A). One of the most important keys to

good story writing is planning or prewriting, as Tompkins (2001) explains:

Prewriting has probably been the most neglected step in the writing process;

however, it is as crucial to writers as a warm-up is to athletes ... At least 70% of

writing time should be spent in prewriting. During the prewriting step, students

choose a topic, consider purpose, audience, and form, and gather and organize

ideas for writing (p. 61).

Planning before writing a story involves organizing thoughts and ideas so that they make sense. In my experience many children begin writing stories with a great idea and lose interest after a few short paragraphs because they don't know how to expand their idea or end up in trouble because they got off topic. A plan helps children determine if their story will make sense. If it doesn't make sense, an outline is much easier to change and manipulate than a whole story. One way to help students through this planning stage is to provide them with a graphic organizer (Brailsford, 2002).

There are many varieties of graphic organizers available to teachers these days. For the purpose of this study, I chose the one recommended in *Balanced Literacy* (Brailsford, 2002). The graphic organizer is meant to be a scaffolding tool. It is not meant to be permanent. Once students have a good understanding of story structure, many move on to writing stories without such a support. Less skilled writers may require a graphic organizer for extended periods of time because they continue to require the support.

After reviewing the data provided by my three case study students, I believe that the use of a graphic organizer helps students plan and organize their thoughts to produce good story writing. During our writing conference, Michelle indicated that she liked using the Story Organizer and that it helped her to write a better story because, "If you don't do them it makes it hard to write a story. They help you think it out if you have to plan it." When I interviewed Michelle at the end of the study using questions from the Writer's Survey, she had this to say:

Teacher: Is writing sometimes easy for you?

Michelle: Yes.

Teacher: Why? What makes it easy?

Michelle: Because you should, you sometimes don't but you should, write a plan before, and that sort of makes it easier. Before I write my story I'll write a plan.

Tim was very honest in discussing his writing during our last interview. He presented some insight into ideas that had not occurred to me, as well as providing me with some direction for further writing approaches.

Teacher: Is writing sometimes easy for you?

Tim: A little bit.

Teacher: Why just a little bit?

Tim: Because I don't like writing.

Teacher: You don't like writing? Okay. Now, I'm going to ask you something here real quick. Last time I asked you if you like to write, you said "Kind of," and now you're saying "No." What's made you change your mind?

Tim: Because it's getting a little boring.

Teacher: For the reason you told me? [He had told me earlier in this interview that he would rather write real stories because "I know it's real and then I can relate to it in life."] I want to ask you something though, and I want your honest answer. This here [I tap the Story Organizer], does it help you with your writing?

Tim: Yes!

Teacher: Okay. So using a Story Organizer helps you. How?

Tim: Cause I can write all the names and where it is and the problem and the events and the solution to it, and then I can look back and tell what happened and stuff, and then I can write it down.

Adam's opinion of the Story Organizer provides a powerful argument for why beginning writers need to "stick to the plan." Adam was writing a story about two dragons, the story that we edited together on Day 27. The story had a good beginning and a good ending, but Adam had decided to change the events, and doing that appeared to confuse him. After considerable discussion with him as I tried to understand his original intentions, I sent him to rewrite the middle of his story independently. The next day I sat with him again.

Teacher: How do you like your story now?

Adam: I didn't feel good about my first story. I had it all mixed up.

Teacher: What did you do better?

Adam: It flows!

Adam had discovered that rewriting the organizer when he wanted to change his ideas allowed him to write a better story. Time spent coaching Adam at this point led to much better organization in the next story. When we talked again, he was smiling:

I memorize the Story Organizer now so I don't have to look back and waste time.

I like using it because it leads you to the opening and you know what you have to do in the story. I'm better at them now because I've done a lot of them.

Planning is just one step in the writing process, but it is a crucial step. Using a graphic organizer supports young writers by helping them to understand story structure.

Theme 4: Metacognition

These students, each at a different writing level, demonstrated their ability to use metacognitive talk to discuss their development as writers. The process of developing and discussing the themes that emerged from the data has helped to answer the research questions of this study and increased my understanding of metacognition.

I used a metacognitive approach while modeling for my students how to complete graphic organizers following a Read Aloud. I used a "think aloud" approach to show them how an expert reader makes sense of text by identifying the problem (main idea), the events (supporting ideas), and the resolution of the story. I used a "write aloud" approach as I completed the Story Organizer, modeled interesting introductions, developed events by adding "meat to the bare bones" of the Story Organizer, and finally, created an interesting or innovative ending. With each writing experience, I verbalized my thinking process aloud, reminding myself of the things I needed to do to complete each task. I allowed the students to see themselves in what I do – that I struggle with some of the same issues they do as they learn to become writers. I now believe that the central phenomenon that underpins my research findings is that, as a teacher of writing, I am teaching students to develop their metacognitive abilities.

By providing scaffolded teaching, using quality children's literature to develop students' understanding of story structure, and teaching the students to use graphic organizers, I note that I utilized a metacognitive approach in my instruction. I also provided examples of how the students could develop their own metacognitive abilities.

To understand students' own abilities to use a metacognitive approach in writing, I asked them to create a point-form list titled "How to Write a Great Story." As I recorded

in my journal on Day 31, "I wanted to see what they remembered about all our lessons on story writing. I wanted to see the metacognitive process in action." Following are the lists generated by each of my three case study students.

Figure 20. Adam's list for "How to Write a Great Story"

Adam's list has been transcribed for clarification:

How to Write A Great Story

1. Get an idea.

2. Use an organizer.

3. Make sure you've got a title.

4. Always have lots of punctuation in a story.

5. Always have lots of capitals.

6. Always have a start, middle and end.

7. Characters, setting, problem, events and solution.

8. The opening of the story.

9. Said is dead.

10. Always turtle talk a word that you can't spell.

11. Make your story flow.

12. Add details.

13. Make sure you read the story carefully.

14. Always remember your name.

15. Make sure you always skip lines.

16. Always edit your story.

17. Don't confuse the reader.

18. Think, don't talk.

19. Always say them when you introduce the characters.

20. Always memorize to not waste time.

21. And you'll have a great story.

22. And the readers will be reading.

I was fascinated by the way students chose their own words to express ideas that were discussed in class. For example, I caution students not to use too much dialogue. Adam writes, "Think, don't talk." I was impressed with the way they chose to express the important ideas in their own language. Adam writes, "Don't confuse the reader," and he ends his list with "And the readers will be reading." Adam has grown as a writer. Although, at the beginning of the study, I had identified him as a struggling writer, he is now very perceptive about his writing and able to articulate in his own words and in great detail how to write a good story.

Figure 21. Michelle's list for "How to Write a Great Story"

Michelle's list shows that she understands the writing process, but at the moment her focus appears to be on the mechanics of her writing. Twelve of her 25 points are related to the editing process. Perhaps this reflects a component of a writer's development, and awareness and knowledge of conventions becomes important to the writer at various times throughout the writing process.

How to Write a Great Story

- Get an idea.
- Use a story organizer.
- On the organizer write the ideas.
- Always have characters, setting, title, problem, solution and events.
- The title opens the door to a story.
- Use punctuation marks.
- Revise the story and edit.
- Read the story.
- Fix the words.
- Use spaces.
- Right your ideas down.
- Make shir there are people sentences.
- Name the story.
- Name your people.
- Use draped langha.
- Make it flow

Figure 22. Tim's list for "How to Write a Great Story"

Tim highlights the main ideas. He is not a "detail" writer, as is also apparent in his story writing (see Figure 18). His list is also very randomly ordered which is acceptable given my instructions. Interestingly, Michelle, Adam and others in the class generally seemed to think the process through from beginning to end.

As I reviewed these results, I decided to investigate how others in the class understood the writing process. What if we participated in a collaborative writing activity in which all students contributed to the final product? I modeled this activity after the format in *How to Dig a Hole to the Other Side of the World* by F. McNulty (1979), which we were reading at the time in connection with our Science Unit. My role was to direct the organization of this writing by asking leading questions that would organize all their contributions into a sequential description of the writing process. To hear one's own "think aloud" words echoed in the students' expressions of what good writers do provided me with an occasion to celebrate my teaching. Here is our final product.

How to Write a Great Story

Planning:

- Find a good idea.

- Get a Story Organizer because it is important to plan what you want to write about.

- Create and write down who your characters will be.

- Decide where and when your story will take place (setting) if you think these are important to your story!

- Decide what the main problem will be in your story and write it down. Remember to keep it simple.

- Decide what the three MAIN events will be.

- Remember to just write the "bare bones" on the organizer.

- Write down how your problem will be solved. Make sure it matches the problem!

Drafting:

- Start writing your introduction.

- Make sure you tell some things about your characters. Make them sound interesting.

- Make sure you describe the setting, if it is important to your story.

- State very clearly what the problem will be.

- Tell at least three things that will happen to your characters that explain the problem. You can do this any way you want.

- Add the meat "back on the bones" by writing details.

- Write an interesting ending.

- Make sure it includes the solution to the problem!

- Don't run out of steam before you write your ending. It is a very important part of the story.

- It can be a happy ending, a sad ending, or a surprise ending. Don't just say, "The End."

- While you are writing all of these things, make sure that your ideas flow.

- You should be okay if you made sure that you followed your plan!

- Remember that "said" is "dead"!

- Give your story a title. Remember it is the doorway to your story. Make sure it is a "grabber"!

Revising:

- Now it's time to revise your story. Reread it! Out loud! Read exactly what you have written on the paper. It's amazing how many little mistakes you will catch by doing this.

- Ask yourself, "Does it make sense?" Fix it if it doesn't. That may mean rewriting a sentence, or making sure the reader knows who you are talking about by writing their name instead of just "he" or "she" or "they" (by the way, spell "they" right!). It may mean erasing extra words or adding in words that you forgot. BE PICKY!

- Add some more descriptive words if you think you need them.

Editing:

- Edit your story.

- Look up those words in the dictionary that you didn't look up before. Fix the other words that you now think just don't *look right*. BE PICKY!

- Check for capital letters and good punctuation. If you decide that maybe it should have an exclamation mark (!) then put one in!

- Watch carefully to write in complete sentences.

- Use varied sentences, like write some that are short in with some that are very long and descriptive.

- Use capitals and punctuation marks when you write sentences.

- Don't forget to use a question mark if you ask a question. Right?

- Remember that someone is supposed to READ your story, so it can be okay to talk to your reader with something like, "Did you know ..." or "Can you believe it?"

- Make sure you do your best to spell frequently used words correctly.

- Use a dictionary to look up words you don't know how to spell. If you really need to get your ideas down before you forget them, you can leave this part until the end.

- Turtle-talk words that you really don't know how to spell. Don't be afraid to use big words just because you don't know how to spell them. Take a chance! They make the story interesting!

- Try to use quotation marks correctly. At least remember to put them around the words that are actually being said.

Publishing/Celebrating:

- Publish your story by making a good copy.

- Share your story with a friend and see if they like it as much as you do.

We published this list as a classroom book. It also hangs as a poster in our classroom. The students are very proud of it, and I notice they often refer to it when they are writing. I hear the students in my classroom using the language I used in my Write Alouds. They are "talking the talk." I believe that my instructional approach has provided them with the language to talk about the story writing process.

Other Findings

Two sub-themes prevailed throughout the examination of the data collected for this study; one was the students' preoccupation with spelling, and the other their difficulty with creating interesting beginnings and endings.

Spelling

In the audiotapes and videotapes, all three case study students frequently referred to either their ability to spell (Michelle and Adam) or their inability to spell (Tim). Concerns about spelling were prevalent in the dialogue of whole class. Embedded in any Write Aloud process I modeled was the thinking process I engaged in, as I articulated how I spell words. I said, "Oh, that is a Word Wall word, I know how to spell that." Or I used "turtle talk" as I spelled a word. I modeled getting a dictionary and looking up a word that I could not remember how to spell. I modeled the strategy of asking, "Does it look right?" Although I modeled these steps within a broader modeling process, along with many other writing strategies, perhaps I inadvertently overemphasized the importance of correct spelling. I believe that spelling must be accurate enough that it does not jeopardize communication between the writer and the reader.

To illustrate, I present Tim's experience with spelling and his writing during this study. Tim wrote this sample in his second story, on Day 16:

The mothr bat tod her yldt togo out and desover the wold. It may be a wlde ride dut it well be fun. So they pack up quit!

[The mother bat told her young to go out and discover the world. It may be a wild ride but it will be fun. So they packed up quick!]

It didn't take Tim long to realize that when people, and in particular, his friends, tried to read his stories and had difficulty, his spelling was an issue. As I passed his desk one day when he was writing, he told me that he was a "lousy" speller, that no one could read his writing, that he always had to tell them what it said. Here was a student making a remarkable "self-discovery" statement. He asked what he could do to become a better speller because, in his words, "I know I have great ideas for stories, but if nobody can read them, then what's the use?" We talked about the strategies he could use, such as "turtle talking" the word, remembering to use the Word Wall, or asking, "Does it look right?" He appeared to listen more carefully as I continued to model spelling strategies in my Write Alouds.

Tim's spelling began to improve. At first he was constantly at my side asking me how to spell a word. I would take him back to his desk and have him talk out loud as he walked himself through the strategies he could use:

Is this a Word Wall word?

Do I know how to spell another word that rhymes?

Can I turtle-talk this word and put down the sounds I hear?

Following is a passage from the final story that Tim wrote on Day 32:

That night it was pairent teacher intervus. The teacher's pet gecko named Gecky got very very very scaired. He got out of his box. First Gecky went to the princpel's rom He saw a candel birning britly with a persin reading a book.

Although many words in this passage remain incorrectly spelled, the spelling approximations are closer, and errors do not interfere with Tim's intended meaning.

Although both were above-average spellers for Grade 3, Adam and Michelle

seemed preoccupied with ensuring that they spelled words correctly. Confidently,

Michelle and Adam both stated in the goal-setting activity that they were "good spellers."

Beginnings and Endings

Another sub-theme that emerged through examination of the data was the

problem surrounding beginnings and endings of stories. I worked often with my students

on creating interesting beginnings and endings for their writing. Fletcher and Portalupi

(1998) refer to third graders as always being in the middle:

> They're in the middle of trying to be responsible in school. Parents expect them to
>
> know all the conventions of perfect spelling in their writing, but they're caught in
>
> the middle of understanding the art of good writing and trying it out. They also
>
> *write* in the middle. They really don't use a beginning or ending when they *tell*
>
> their stories, either. (p. 68)

This difficulty provides another reason why students should plan and organize their

stories before they begin to write. Then at least the "bare bones" of an introduction and

ending are available for the writers to elaborate on.

I explained to my students that the first few sentences are what "grab" the reader

and set the stage for the reader's understanding the rest of the story. Regarding endings, I

taught and modeled the message that the final words of a story leave a lasting impression

on the reader (Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998). It is difficult for some young writers to

maintain interest in their own stories long enough to develop interesting endings.

However, my three case study students demonstrated increased skill in developing

endings to their stories. The complete stories for these three writers are represented in

Figures 15, 18, and 20. It is interesting to compare the last few sentences of each writer's first and last story.

Michelle's first story ended with, "Her and her friends played and played all day long forever and ever and they lived happily ever after." Like Tim, Michelle enjoys being dramatic; this element of her writing was present from the beginning. Michelle began to develop a relationship with her reader in her writing and, in her later writing, would often speak directly to the reader. This was the ending to one of Michelle's later stories:

> I think Macks had a great excperence of his life, "I love you Macks! You're my
>
> favorite turtle in the hole entire universe."

Tim's first story ended, "The next morning the smoke was gon they when home." Over the three-month period of the study, Tim seemed to enjoy becoming dramatic in his writing. He began to learn how to incorporate his sense of humor into his writing, as in the ending of his last story: "So Gecky was not scared. Mr. Ewok stared to cry."

Adam worked hard at his writing but often became impatient toward the end of his stories. He needed encouragement to carry his imagination through to the end. This is the ending to his first story: "They went into the forst and figerd out that it was just a fox with mactes." Although finding the right descriptive words was a challenge for Adam, he was beginning to learn how powerful the right choice can be. Consider the ending to his last story: "So the mouse used his magic. With a big shine of light the mouse was gone. Freda went back into the house. There was Willy the good perfect mouse."

Summary

My purpose in this study was to examine how a particular approach to teaching story writing to the students in my Grade 3 class would affect their development in story

writing. Over a three-month period, I considered the writing of three students at varying levels of writing skills, as well as the whole class, since they all were involved in my instructional program. Through analysis of the data and subsequent discussion of this approach, I conclude that this approach to teaching story writing has created more confident and independent writers. Because this instructional approach is multi-leveled, it encourages all students to grow as writers. From the instructional methods used, individual students take away what they can use at their own level of writing readiness. Although there will always remain "at-risk" writers within a classroom, I believe that I have given the students in my classroom some strategies from my "toolbox" that will continue to increase their understanding of the story writing process.

This study demonstrates the importance of providing students with opportunities to talk about their understanding of writing and the writing process. My conferences and interviews with the students contributed greatly to my instructional decisions. In summary, the approach described in this study, which involved using a variety of teaching strategies together with talking with the students, facilitated these students' growth and development as writers.

Chapter 5: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the writing development of young children in my Grade Three classroom as they engaged in story writing under my guidance using a particular teaching approach. As Fullan (cited in Creswell, 2002, p. 631) has stated, one dimension of educational change is the possible use of new teaching approaches. This action research project illustrates a practical form of inquiry teachers might conduct in order to understand and implement a new story-writing program in their classrooms.

When I embarked on this study, I wanted to examine my current teaching practice in order to become a more effective educator. I believe that increasing a teacher's effectiveness results in better learning for the children in the class. I assumed the role of teacher-researcher; identified an area of educational concern for me, in this case how a "balanced literacy" approach to teaching story writing might affect the writing development of my students; and used an action research model (Townsend. 2001) in order to answer specific research questions. The major findings of this study can be organized according to the following areas: professional development, specific teaching strategies, metacognition, classroom environment, and unanticipated outcomes.

Professional Development

Professional development begins with the "self." Teachers have a personal and professional responsibility to work towards the development of new knowledge, skills, curriculum, technologies and methodologies that ultimately ensure growth and improvement in student learning. Professional development requires time and resources if it is to be effective. It can involve a broad range of interventions and formats that are tied

to specific curricular aims and may unfold over a one-to-three year cycle, with clearly defined short-term and long-term goals. The literature shows that professional development is both a crucial element in school reform and a catalyst for change in building a school culture that supports a high level of learning for students (Nagin, 2003).

Tompkins (2001) encourages teachers to stay abreast of the latest research and to find ways to implement the research in their classrooms. Suggested strategies include subscribing to professional journals and magazines about reading, children's literature, and writing; attending conferences sponsored by local professional organizations; attending writing workshops; and visiting local children's bookstores and libraries to preview newly published children's books. Effective teachers of reading and writing understand how children learn. As Smith (1982) stated, "Writing is fostered rather than taught, and what teachers require is not helpful advice about 'methods' of writing instruction, not an outline of appropriate 'programs,' but an understanding of the task a child faces in learning to write" (p. 200). As a teacher, I needed to learn about writing.

Professional development takes enormous amounts of energy and time, but it is vital to success in teaching. Teaching is a demanding and complex profession, and it influences children's lives in many ways. It is important to make the effort. Effective teachers are life-long learners.

Teaching Strategies

This study addresses one way of teaching story writing, an approach described by Brailsford (2002). Some of the strategies I have implemented and discussed in this study came from other professional development experiences, such as attending workshops or in-service training, but also from the literature about how children learn to write.

One significant finding of this study was that using a specific program does not necessarily meet the needs of all students. One must never lose sight of the "teachable moment." One must always be aware of how receptive the class is to certain teaching strategies and adjust accordingly. Each student approaches writing differently, and one "recipe" does not fit all. This is the very nature of action research – that to be effective it must be reflective and flexible. Schon (1983) coined the phrase "reflection-in-action." For example, when using a Write Aloud strategy in which the teacher models what writers do when they write by "thinking" aloud as he or she writes, the teacher participates in a "reflective conversation with a unique and uncertain situation" (p. 130).

Metacognition

Another important finding was that building students' metacognitive abilities amounts to teaching them to understand their cognitive learning abilities, regardless of subject matter. Once children learn powerful problem-solving strategies such as "thinking aloud" in one subject, for example in Math, they apply the same strategies in other problem-solving situations. This study also shows that it is important for a teacher to demonstrate the writing process aloud in front of the class, from the beginning. As teachers, we must do what we ask our students to do. As we verbalize our thinking process, students hear from the beginning the confusion and turmoil that result in the formulation of ideas on the page. Students who learn to articulate and apply their understanding of the writing process demonstrate the development of their metacognitive abilities. For example, in this study, all three of the case study students believed that the length of their stories was an important indicator of their being good writers.

Classroom Environment

As explained earlier, teachers need to develop a safe and trusting environment in which students feel comfortable enough to share their writing with their peers. Just as it is important for teachers and students to become a classroom community, it is also important for them to become a community of writers. Together we learn to share a common language with which to discuss writing. We begin to see reading and writing as the flip sides of the same coin, and we begin to read differently – with what might be called an "author's eye." We look at literature not only to experience the sheer joy of "falling into a book," but also to see how the author has crafted the story to entertain and move us in some emotional way, to make us laugh, to make us cry, to make us think. A kind of magic occurs when one's thoughts and feelings are translated into symbols that can be read and understood by others. Writing and reading, therefore, are inextricably connected, and both are necessary for completion of the magic spell.

Unanticipated Outcomes

At the end of the study period, the opening comments in my journal's final reflections were steeped in negativity:

> Oh, how I wish I knew at the beginning what I know now – but then we wouldn't call it research, would we? In rereading this journal, I find myself second-guessing many of my initial decisions. I should never have started a study like this in the fall, especially so early when I didn't know the students. Although many researchers would not necessarily know their subjects, I think I would have had better results if had I waited until January, when I would have known my students better and I would have been able to choose students who would have been able

to give me more verbal feedback. Their writing abilities would have been similar, but I know now that there were other students who would have been better able to articulate their understandings of the writing process. Also, if I had started in January, I could have had three months of uninterrupted study. How did I think I was going to get anything from 8 and 9 year olds in December?

There are always aspects of the research process that are beyond one's control and can affect the results. For example, my Grade 3 class demonstrated writing abilities that I would describe as average. There were no "exceptional" writers to be identified as I had intended when proposing my research. I originally identified one student whom I considered to write above program standards for Grade 3, one student considered an average writer for this grade level, and one student considered an "at risk" writer. Interestingly, this labeling became irrelevant, because the students' growth as writers did not parallel their initial placement in the study. Nonetheless, substantial growth occurred in the writing skills of all three case study students. This was an important but unanticipated outcome.

Summary

Participating in a study that used an action research methodology was a powerful learning experience. I identified a focus for my research, to study how my professional development experiences related to teaching writing might affect the writing skills of my students. I found it a valuable experience to engage in a research project in my own classroom. The opportunity to observe how my students grew as writers as a result of implementation of writing strategies from my "toolbox" was exhilarating.

This study has triggered in me additional questions for future study. As I work to develop my skills as a teacher of writing, I hope also to continue the process of inquiry, not only to learn myself but to enrich the learning experience of the students in my classroom. Effective teachers are life-long learners.

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Appendix A

Story Organizer A[©]

Title:	Characters:	Setting(s):	Problem:	Events: 1. 2. 3.	Solving the Problem:

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Appendix B

Information and Consent Letter to Parents

Dear [parent]:   Date

I am a student at the University of Lethbridge working towards completion of my Master of Education degree. As part of the requirements for completion of this degree I have chosen to participate in a research project where I will study the development of students' writing, using instruction of a particular writing model, over a three-month period.

[Student] is invited to be involved in my study because I believe that I can learn more about teaching writing by focusing on [his/her] skills in writing. I will be collecting samples of [student's] writing and conferencing often with [him/her], both about how [he/she] views [himself/herself] as a writer and about how [he/she] views the writing process and the writing activities in which [he/she] participates. [Student] will not miss recess/playtime to participate. All conferences will be held during school time, and [he/she] will not be singled out for participation in any way.

I would like to have your permission for [student] to participate. Participation is voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. You can have access to progress or results at any time. Students may withdraw at any time.

All information will be held confidential. [Student's] name or any other identifying information will not be attached to the information obtained. [His/Her] name or any other identifying information will not be identified in any research presentation or publication of the final Master's project. Conversations will be audio taped, and my teaching practices will periodically be videotaped. These tapes will be kept for five years after the study is complete. They will be kept in a secure environment and then destroyed. Only my advisor and I will have access to this original data.

Please indicate your willingness to allow [student] to participate, by signing the attached form in the space provided and returning it to me at the school.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at the school or at home (349-6645). Also feel free to contact my supervisor of this study, Dr. Robin Bright at (403) 329-2443, or Dr. Cathy Campbell, Chair of the Human Subject Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge at (403) 329-2459.

I would appreciate your cooperation and [student's] assistance in this study. I hope to improve my skills as a teacher of writing through this process.

Sincerely,

Gail Berkner
Grade 3 Teacher, Dapp School

INFORMED CONSENT

Part I (Researcher Information)

Principal Researcher: Gail Berkner, Grade 3 Teacher, Dapp School

Title of Project: Write On: Improving Story Writing Skills in a Grade 3 Classroom

Part II (Consent)

Do you understand that your child has been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the information letter?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved for your child in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you had the opportunity presented to you to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time? You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect future educational delivery.	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you undertand who will have access to your child's study data?	Yes	No

This study was explained to me by: _____

I agree to take part in this study.

_____   Date   Witness
Signature of Parent/Guardian

_____   _____
Printed Name   Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

_____   Date
Signature of Reseacher

Appendix C

Scoring Guides

Appendix C1. Content

Focus

When marking **CONTENT** appropriate for Grade 3 writing, the marker should consider how effectively the writer

- establishes the relationship between events, actions, and the context (situation)
- uses specific details
- demonstrates the reader/writer relationship (voice)

Note: Content *and* Organization *are weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the other categories*

Meets the Standard of Excellence **5**	• Events, actions, and/or ideas are consistently appropriate for the context established by the writer. • Details are specific and consistently effective. • The writing captivates* the reader's interest and presents a well-supported main idea.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence **4**	• Events, actions, and/or ideas are appropriate for the context established by the writer. • Details are specific and generally effective. • The writing engages** the reader's interest and presents a supported main idea.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard **3**	• The majority of the events, actions, and/or ideas are appropriate for the context established by the writer. • Details are general and may be predictable, but are appropriate. • The writing generally holds the reader's interest and provides some support for a main idea.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard **2**	• Some of the events, actions, and/or ideas are appropriate for the context established by the writer. • Details are few and/or may be repetitive. • The writing does not hold the reader's interest and the main idea is vague.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard **1**	• There are few events, actions, and/or ideas. • Details are scant. • The writing is confusing and/or frustrating for the reader and the main idea is lacking.***
INS INSUFFICIENT	• The student has written so little that it is not possible to assess the content.

*captivates—it captures/grabs hold of
**engages—holds attention of
***lacking—deficient

Appendix C2. Organization

Focus

When marking **ORGANIZATION** appropriate for Grade 3 writing, the marker should consider how effectively the writer

- introduces the beginning
- establishes the connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and/or characters
- brings closure to the writing

Note: **Content** *and* **Organization** *are weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the other categories*

Meets the Standard of Excellence **5**	• The beginning captures the reader's attention, clearly establishes events, characters, and/or setting, and provides direction for the writing. • Connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and/or characters are consistently maintained. • The ending ties events and/or actions together.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence **4**	• The beginning clearly establishes events, characters, and/or setting, and provides direction for the writing. • Connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and/or characters are maintained. • The ending provides an appropriate finish for events and/or actions.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard **3**	• The beginning directly presents information about events, characters, and/or setting. • Connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and/or characters are generally maintained. • The ending is predictable and/or may be contrived but is connected to events and/or actions.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard **2**	• The beginning presents information about events, characters, and/or setting; however, this information is confusing. • Connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and/or characters are unclear, missing, or inconsistent. • The ending is predictable and/or may be contrived.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard **1**	• The beginning provides very little information. • Connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and/or characters are missing. • The ending, if present, is unconnected to the events and/or actions.
INS — INSUFFICIENT	• The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Appendix C3. Sentence Structure

Focus

When marking **SENTENCE STRUCTURE** appropriate for Grade 3 writing, the marker should consider how effectively the writer

* controls sentence structure
* uses different sentence patterns and length
* uses a variety of sentence beginnings

The length and complexity of response must be considered.

Meets the Standard of Excellence **5**	• Sentence structure is consistently controlled. • Sentence type and length are varied and effective. • Sentence beginnings are consistently varied.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence **4**	• Sentence structure is controlled. • Sentence type and length are usually varied and effective. • Sentence beginnings are often varied.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard **3**	• Sentence structure is generally controlled but may occasionally impede the meaning. • Sentences may vary in type and length. • Some variety of sentence beginnings is evident.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard **2**	• Sentence structure is sometimes lacking control and this often impedes meaning. • There is little variation of sentence type and/or length. • There is little variety of sentence beginnings.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard **1**	• Thought units are difficult to recognize, and this severely impedes the meaning. • There is no variation of sentence type and/or length. • There is no variety of sentence beginnings.
INS INSUFFICIENT	• The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Appendix C4. Vocabulary

Focus

When marking **VOCABULARY** appropriate for Grade 3 writing, the marker should consider the extent to which the writer uses

- words appropriately *
- expressions effectively**
- words and expressions to enhance the writing

The length and complexity of response must be considered.

Meets the Standard of Excellence **5**	• Well-chosen words are used effectively. • Expressions are consistently precise and effective. • Words and expressions are used to create vivid images and enhance the writing.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence **4**	• Well-chosen words are often used. • Expressions are generally specific and effective. • Words and expressions are descriptive and often enhance the writing.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard **3**	• Words used are clear. • Expressions are usually more general than specific. • Words and expressions generally enhance the writing.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard **2**	• There are misused words. • Expressions are simple and/or ineffective. • Words and expressions are basic and may detract from the writing.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard **1**	• Words used indicate a lack of vocabulary. • Expressions are lacking. • Words and expressions are simple and/or ineffective.
INS INSUFFICIENT	• The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

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* appropriately—suitably
** effectively—is a way that produces a strong impression or response

Appendix C5. Conventions

	Focus
	When marking **CONVENTIONS** appropriate for Grade 3 writing, the marker should consider the extent to which the writer has control of • end punctuation and capitalization • spelling • clarity **Proportion of error to length and complexity of response must be considered.**

Meets the Standard of Excellence **5**	• End punctuation and capitalization are correct. • Most words, familiar and unfamiliar, are spelled correctly; spelling errors are understandable "slips." • Errors that are present do not affect the clarity or effectiveness of communication.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence **4**	• End punctuation and capitalization are essentially correct. • Familiar words are spelled correctly; spelling errors are "slips"; unfamiliar words may be spelled phonetically. • Errors that are present rarely affect the clarity of communication.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard **3**	• Conventional end punctuation and capitalization are usually correct. • Many familiar words are spelled correctly; errors suggest uneven control of spelling rules; unfamiliar words are generally spelled phonetically. • Errors are sometimes intrusive and may affect the clarity of communication.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard **2**	• End punctuation and capitalization, when present, are inconsistent. • Many familiar words are misspelled and/or spelled phonetically. • Errors interfere with the clarity of communication.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard **1**	• There is little, if any, evidence that the writer understands correct use of end punctuation and capitalization. • Words may be difficult to discern and are generally spelled phonetically. • Communication is not clear.
INS INSUFFICIENT	• The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Appendix D

Criteria for Evaluating Quality Children's Stories

1. Do you like the book?

2. Is the book a good story?

3. Is the plot original and believable?

4. Are the characters real and believable?

5. Do the characters grow and change in the story?

6. Does the author avoid stereotyping?

7. Does the story move beyond the setting and have universal implications?

8. Is the theme worthwhile?

9. Does the book exemplify the characteristics of a genre?

10. How does the book compare with others on the same subject or in the same genre?

(Tompkins, 2001, p. 358)

Appendix E

Writer's Survey

1. Do you like to write?

2. What do you like to write about?

3. Do you like to write first and then illustrate, or do you like to illustrate first and then write?

4. Is writing sometimes hard for you?

5. What makes it hard?

6. Is writing sometimes easy for you?

7. What makes it easy?

8. Which piece of writing is your best so far? (examine portfolio together)

9. What makes it your best?

10. What advice do you have for someone who is having a hard time with writing?

11. Do you like writing "real" stories or made-up stories? Why?

12. Is there something that I can do to help you with writing? What is it?

13. What to you think you need to learn, in order to become an even better writer than you are now?

14. If you woke up tomorrow morning and everything was the same except for one thing – you could not write anymore – would it matter to you?

(Bright, 2002, p.118)

Appendix F

Sample Listing of Quality Children's Literature

Baumgart, K. (1997). *Laura's star*. Waukesha, WI: Little Tiger.

Brett, J. (1991). *Berlioz the bear*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Brett, J. (1997). *The hat*. New York: Scholastic.

Brett, J. (1997). *The mitten*. New York: Scholastic.

Brett, J. (2000). *Hedgie's surprise*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Cooper, S. (1991). *Matthew's dragon*. New York: Aladdin.

Fox, M. (1985). *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*. Brooklyn, NY: Kane/Miller.

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Henkes, K. (1987). *Sheila Rae, the brave*. New York: Greenwillow.

Henkes, K. (1990). *Julius, the baby of the world*. New York: Greenwillow.

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