CHILDREN'S BOOK PROJECT

by

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

Ferris State University
School of Education
College of Education and Human Services

August, 2014

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August, 2014

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ABSTRACT

This project involved working with kindergarteners at Crossroads Charter Academy in Big Rapids, Michigan to plan, write, illustrate, and publish a children's book. The project was comprised of five phases: 1) develop lesson plans to introduce writing a book to kindergarten students; 2) identify the kindergarten Common Core State Standards (CCSS) this project will address; 3) assist the students in choosing a topic and developing the content of the book; 4) work with students to illustrate the book; 5) and produce and publish the book.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For my capstone project, I chose to complete a project in which I wrote a children's book with my kindergarten class. The idea was given to me by a former colleague, friend, and classmate. I really loved the idea but, at first, I thought it would be too simple to turn into a capstone project. After discussing this topic with my professor, I realized that it was not! This project was not only going to be personally satisfying to my students and myself when we become published authors, but it was also an educational, meaningful experience. It proved to be a great motivator for these little ones and will perhaps help them to develop aspirations to become writers.

Community Background

Big Rapids is a beautiful town located in the western part of Michigan, with the Muskegon River running through it. It is a rural community and is the largest city in Mecosta County. According to the 2010 census, the population of Big Rapids was 10,601 (R. Cline, personal communication, October 14, 2013). The City of Big Rapids website estimates it as being closer to 12,000 now. Big Rapids is also the home of Ferris State University, established in 1884, which has around 13,000 students enrolled (www.ci.big-rapids.mi.us). Many of those 13,000 students make up the population of Big Rapids.

According to the Big Rapids Historical Timeline located on the City of Big Rapids website, the first settler came to Big Rapids in 1851 and from there the town grew. Leonard was the original name of the city until it was changed to Big Rapids in 1859, and formally recognized by the state in 1865 (www.ci.big-rapids.mi.us). Big Rapids started out as a logging community. Now, the economy in this area revolves around agriculture, retail, manufacturing, and higher education (www.mecostacounty.com).

School District Background

Crossroads Charter Academy (CCA) is a tuition-free, K-12 public school academy in Big Rapids, Michigan. It is chartered by Grand Valley State University and is one of the top ten charter schools in Michigan. CCA is supported by state aid funding and other grants. When CCA was first founded in 1998, it only offered grades K-8. Each consecutive year, a grade was added until becoming a K-12 district in 2002. In 2003, a building to house the high school students was built across the street and students were moved over (Bennett, 2013). Now, the original building houses grades K-6, along with a pre-school program from the Mecosta/Osceola Intermediate School District, and the new building houses grades 7-12. This past school year, there were 363 students enrolled in the elementary school and 319 enrolled in the middle/high school (Bennett, 2013). In 2003, the first graduating class consisted of 23 students (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Crossroads_Charter_Academy). Now, over ten years later, that number has doubled.

According to Charissa Talsma, Curriculum Director, (personal communication, October 3, 2013) CCA's elementary student population for the past school year was 80% Caucasian and 20% a blend of other ethnicities. The gender ratio was pretty even with

51% of the students being female and 49% being male. Sixty-five percent of the students received a free or reduced lunch. As a result of this percentage being so high, CCA was able to take part in the free Universal Breakfast program offered by the state. In 2011, CCA became a school-wide Title I school with the ability to provide assistance to all students in meeting the state standards, especially in the areas of math and reading. This past school year, a Latchkey program was added after school that many families took advantage of.

Statement of Need and Benefits of the Project

I teach kindergarten in the elementary building and have done so for five years now. Last school year, there were 44 kindergarten students attending CCA, split into three classrooms. In my classroom, there were 15 students. This past school year we were designated as a Focus school due to our achievement gaps in writing. The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests students in writing in fourth and seventh grades. According to our contract performance review (see Appendix A), for the 2012-2013 school year, 16.4% of our fourth graders and 32.1% of our seventh graders scored as proficient. As a school, we planned to improve our writing scores through the use of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) Writing Units, 6 + 1 Writing Traits, and research-based teaching methods. To view CCA's 2012-2013 annual report, visit http://www.ccabr.org/downloads/reports_and_notices/ cca_elementary_aer_corrected_2013_20130909_112314_8.pdf.

The MAISA group is comprised of administrators from all of the intermediate school districts in Michigan. The members of the MAISA English Language Arts Leadership group worked collaboratively to develop the MAISA Writing Units. These

units are aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and offer educators a writing curriculum to follow that embraces the writing workshop design. Administrators understood that it would be very costly for every school to purchase new curricula to use to meet the rigorous demands of the CCSS, so they pooled their resources together and created these units for Michigan schools to use cost-free. Oakland Public School has been a leader in this project and houses the writing units documents at their Rubicon Atlas database site. See Appendix B for a complete listing of the units and lessons details. For more information, follow this link: http://gomaisa-public.rubiconatlas.org/Atlas/Browse/View/Map?CurriculumMapID=889&YearID=&.

The 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment has been used for over 20 years and was developed by Ruth Culham with Education Northwest. It helps guide instruction through the teaching of seven components, which are essentially concepts. They are ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation. "With a foundation for writing built on these traits, young writers are better able to communicate with readers" (Culham, 2005, p. 9). There are also rubrics and scoring guides included to help educators analyze their student's writing performance and provide additional instruction where needed. "The traits give us a basis for assessing student work very precisely and talking to students about how their writing is progressing" (Culham & Coutu, 2009, p. 7). Culham (2006) states, "From this information, thoughtful instructional lesson plans can be created that support students as they move from one developmental level of the scoring guide to the next" (p. 9). Education Northwest has created crosswalk documents for educators for the writing standards that address argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative writing to show

how they align with the CCSS. "Beginning writers benefit from trait-driven instruction because the traits are specific, are easily taught and reinforced, and make sense" (Culham, 2005, p. 15). See Appendix C for more details of each trait. You can also visit http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/949 for more information on 6 + 1 Traits. "The trait model empowers young students to think like writers, talk like writers, and write like writers because it gives them the language to do so" (Culham, 2005, p. 297).

As a staff, we have found through our discussions that our students retain the knowledge about writing we teach them but they struggle to apply it. Writing a children's book with my students allowed them to apply the skills we were learning to accomplish a real-world goal: become published authors. Not only was it motivating, but it met a lot of the Common Core standards. The students got a first hand look at the steps authors have to go through to publish their books.

Johnson (1999) discusses how writing enhances readiness and pre-reading skills, benefits a child's thinking process, benefits communication skills, encourages responsible decision making, enhances self-esteem, helps all areas of your curriculum, vents emotions, leads to creativity, and is fun.

Purpose and Phases of the Project

The purpose of this project was to work with kindergarten students at Crossroads Charter Academy to plan, write, illustrate, produce and publish a children's book. The project consisted of five phases:

- Phase 1 – Develop lesson plans to introduce writing a book to kindergarten students.

- Phase 2 – Identify the kindergarten Common Core State Standards (CCSS) this project will address.

- Phase 3 – Assist the students in selecting a topic and developing the content of the book.

- Phase 4 – Work with students to illustrate the book.

- Phase 5 – Publish the book.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concerns in the area of writing development have persisted for more than 25 years. Over those years, researchers, along with educators, discovered that there needed to be a change in the way writing was taught (Calkins, 1985). This section of the project contains a review of the pertinent information that has come about due to the changes that were and are still being made in the area of writing development. The literature in the following section focuses on developmentally appropriate writing instruction (that would prepare kindergarten students to write a book), explains how writing instruction goes hand-in-hand with reading, and supports writing workshop in kindergarten.

Developmentally Appropriate Writing Instruction for Kindergarteners

"Many teachers believe meaningful writing must be delayed until students know the entire alphabet or until mastery of several basic sight words is attained" (Davidson, Wuest, & Camp, 2010, p. 6). Wrong! Keep reading to see why!

Rog (2001) believes, "Developmentally appropriate practices may be described as procedures and routines that are consistent with children's natural course of development" (p. 7). Children set their own pace through the stages of development. "The teacher's job is to set challenging but attainable learning goals for her students,

based on her assessment of what they know and can do, and then to support and guide them as they progress toward those goals" (Rog, 2001, p. 7).

When Calkins (1985) published "I Am One Who Writes," teachers thought children did not start writing until first or second grade but research has shown that children begin writing much earlier, prior to coming to school. It just may not be considered writing to most adults, or recognizable for that matter. Emergent writers use pictures to communicate their ideas and may add pencil marks or scribbles to represent their writing. "Drawing enhances children's abilities to organize their thoughts, helps them decide what to write, and enables them to remember details they might have forgotten" (Johnson, 1999, p. 92). Many believe that children's writing develops through stages or phases as they are ready.

> At first preschool children [or younger] playing with writing materials will produce random scribbling. This develops into mock handwriting which does not contain any identifiable letters. Then before producing conventional letters, they will go through a stage of writing mock letters. Once they are able to write their letters, they will proceed from invented spelling through guessed or phonetic spelling before they learn conventional spelling. (Hebert, 2012, para 3)

Johnson (1999) states, "The fact that the writing experience allows the children to enter at their own developmentally appropriate level gives children a feeling of competence because their performance will be well within their capabilities" (p. 16).

"Literacy is developing from the time that a child recognizes that the golden arches represent a fast food chain or that the octagonal red sign tells Mom to stop the car" (Rog, 2001, pp. 8). The understanding that print carries meaning and that spoken

language can be represented in written form begins at an early age, which allows writers to create pieces long before their ability to read and write traditionally. It may look like scribbles and blobs of color but, when asked to tell you about their story, one will see there is purpose present because children will "read" their pictures (Kissel, Hansen, Tower, & Lawrence, 2011).

Educators need to have a scope and sequence of writing lessons that guide and support writers through the stages of writing development. Writing instruction should begin by exposing children to print and its many purposes. "As the child takes part in language experience stories and listens to stories, (both early stages of writing), he receives exposure to print as a natural part of the learning environment" (Johnson, 1999, p. 10). During the process of children becoming great storytellers, they learn that they can also be story writers. Kramer-Vida, Levitt, & Kelly (2012a) believe "when kindergarten students "turn and talk" (Calkins, 2003), they discuss their interests, their own experiences, and what they know about a particular topic" (p. 94). When children realize they have stories to tell, they also realize they have many ideas for story writing. Hearing what other children are going to write stories about helps children that are struggling to find ideas for their own stories.

As children learn about letters, they will transition on their own from scribble writing to letter writing, guessing what letters they think make up a word. Then, as they learn about letter sounds, they will transition into phonetic spelling (also called invented spelling), writing the sounds they hear. "Invented spelling frees children to express themselves in writing without worrying about the exact spelling of a word" (Trehearne, 2011, p. 36). Also, as they learn about frequently used words and how they are spelled,

they will start spelling those correctly in their writing. It is important that during this process, educators do not try to correct everything students are not doing correctly. "If the teacher is always correcting the students' spelling and punctuation errors, the children will stop guessing and trying" (Johnson, 1999, p. 33). Trehearne (2011) states, "If they stopped to worry about the exact spelling of every word, they would become inhibited, write very little, write only simple or "safe" words, and progress very slowly" (p. 36). "Because children will be at different stages of development in writing, it is important to legitimize the writing they are doing, while providing structures to scaffold them to the next level" (Rog, 2001, p. 77).

Johnson (1999) discusses language-experience stories as a way to foster children's writing. This is where a teacher and his or her class write a story together about something they experienced as a group and practice reading it or use it for letter/word work. She modified this strategy from a group one to an individual one in her classroom. The author of the day would get to have his/her story written and get to share it with the class, taking questions or choosing what skill they work on with it. They would also get to take it home. Referring to this same strategy, Cormier (2011) states, "They were invested in these stories and could see the direct relationship between the spoken word and written word as I scribed their stories on the chart tablet" (p. 32). Johnson (1999) also identifies journal writing as an effective writing strategy to promote writing development. "Feelings of competence grow as the children freely choose their own content and their own symbols to communicate their very worthwhile ideas" (p. 80). Draw-and-Write is another strategy that she proposes. Children draw, dictate, or write about a topic they learned about and then trace the teacher's writing underneath their

story. She believes, "An obvious advantage of this teaching method is that children can enter any of the four levels that best meets their current ability" (1999, p. 94). A wonderful strategy that Johnson uses to connect writing from school to home is mascot journal writing. She has the class adopt a stuffed animal and give it a name. The children take turns taking it home overnight and journaling their adventures, sharing it with the class the next day. Using a wordless book is another strategy that she suggests starting later in the year. "Wordless books are published stories that contain illustrations but no written text" (Johnson, 1999, p. 118). The illustrated pages can be laminated so the students can add their own text to create their own story to go along with the pictures.

Rog (2001) shares three strategies she believes are important tools in a teacher's instructional toolbox: modeled, shared, and interactive writing.

Modeled writing is "writing out loud." The teacher demonstrates for students the processes involved in putting ideas down on paper and vocalizing thoughts while writing. The students are merely observers. **Shared writing** involves students in generating ideas for writing, but the teacher is the scribe, talking through the process while recording students' ideas. **Interactive writing** takes the process one step further by allowing students to share the pen with the teacher. They collaboratively record ideas on paper, with the teacher scaffolding the student who is writing and demonstrating for the remainder of the students who are watching (Rog, 2001, p. 70).

Morning message is an example that she gives for modeled writing. It draws student's attention to the process, style, and conventions of writing. The language-experience stories Johnson (1999) discusses would fall under the category of shared writing. Shared

writing "is the ideal time to reinforce what you have demonstrated during modeled writing" (Walther & Phillips, 2009, p. 19). Jones, Reutzel, and Fargo (2010) believe that with interactive writing, "Teacher guidance focuses student attention on applying letter-sound correspondence, segmenting and blending, letter identification and formation, and high-frequency word recognition" (p. 328). An example of interactive writing would be writing a letter together as a class to someone. "Interactive writing is a wonderful tool for modeling. The students are able to take the 'supported' writing and carry what they have learned over into their independent writing" (Behymer, 2003, p. 85).

Trehearne (2011) discusses guided writing and independent writing as being important instructional strategies to use, too. She observes that with guided writing, "Children with a common need are brought together in a small group for a mini-lesson and are supported as needed" (p. 86). This is a great strategy because the children are allowed to then try it on their own, being aware that the teacher is right there to support them if needed. Independent writing is simply letting children write on their own after the whole-group mini-lesson has occurred. "Young children need many of these daily opportunities right from day one of preschool and kindergarten" (Trehearne, 2011, p. 87). Independent writing could also take place during centers time at a writing center.

Schulze (2006) shares many strategies she believes are important when supporting children's progression through the stages of writing. For writers in the precommunicative and picture writing stages, she suggests using words in context, using a name or word wall, listening for same and different sounds, using Elkonin sound boxes, lining up by sounds, promoting writing's usefulness, "be" the alphabet, taking an alphabet walk, and manipulating the ABC's. For writers in the semiphonetic and picture and label writing

stages, she suggests using name sorts, making a list of class names, shared labeling, using Elkonin sound boxes to make words, developing the concept of directionality of print, developing a concept of letter and word directionality, differentiating between concept of letter and concept of word, understanding concept of word, understanding directionality on the page, drawing lines for words to demonstrate concept of word, writing notes, modeling articulation, and introducing word families with the same short vowel. For writers in the phonetic and "taking inventory and adding description" stages, she suggests introducing high-frequency word tent cards, playing the game Wordo, building a sight word vocabulary, reviewing sight words, pointing out reversals and adding visual reminders, working with initial consonant digraphs, introducing word families with different short vowels, and using rebus print for posting word families.

"Writing development is also dependent on the children's background knowledge and understanding, as well as on the support they receive at home" (Trehearne, 2011, p. 64). Reading at home is seen more often than writing at home. Educators need to encourage parents to do both with their children. "Parents/caregivers need to understand how writing at home can occur in authentic situations (for example, a grocery list, a note to grandma), can take very little time, and can be fun" (Trehearne, 2011, p. 64).

Calkins (1985) notes that if "we let young children learn to write like they learn to talk, their growth in written language will be as spectacular as their growth in spoken language" (p. 28). Many young children love to write, as they love to talk. Schulze (2006) comments, "They leave evidence of their desire to write on walls, pavements, books, and newspapers with crayons, pens, markers, chalk, and stones-and anything else that makes a mark-long before they enter formal schooling" (p. 6). "If children are invited

to write each day and if you actively and assertively teach into their best approximations, their development as writers will astonish you, their parents, the school administrators, and best of all, the children themselves" (Calkins, 2003, p. 3).

Writing to Read

When children begin to "write," they "read" their pictures. Johnson (1999) comments how researchers are "stating that children who were taught to write before they learned to read became better readers later on" (p. vi). She found this to be true through her own implementation of teaching the writing process to her kindergarten students. She was able to conclude that pre-reading and readiness skills were improved through teaching kindergarten students writing. According to Glenn (2007), "Being treated like real writers and having opportunities to actively engage in the process, students developed reading skills with high levels of motivation and authenticity, often seeking out texts likely to serve their needs as authors" (p. 18). Immersing children in many of the strategies discussed in the previous section clearly not only benefit their writing ability, but their reading ability as well. "Descriptive studies have suggested a positive impact of interactive writing instruction on the acquisition of reading skills among young students" (Jones, Reutzel, & Fargo, 2010, p. 328).

There are many reasons why we read. One of them is to understand and make sense of things. When writers are composing, they are continually reading and re-reading what they have written to make sure it makes sense. Glenn (2007), referring to one of the participants in her study, stated "She was a better, more careful reader as a result of the act of authentic writing" (p. 16) "When writing their own stories, children are given the opportunity, time, and guidance at their point of need to gain control of literacy concepts

that help build processes, strategies, and sources of knowledge that readers use" (Schulze, 2006, p. 4).

"Writing is of value in all content areas because it makes the writer find more meaning and deeper understanding of the subject being studied. It is especially valuable in the teaching of reading" (Johnson, 1999, p. 5). Glenn (2007) remarks, "Across data gathered for each participant, it was clear that when real writers read, they had unique responses to the *why*, *how*, and *what* of the reading process" (p. 13). "Writing could enhance the learning of content material because writing involves higher level thinking" (Eaton, 2011, pp. 64-65). Walther & Phillips (2009) state, "Finally, remember that the more you can integrate a writing component into other areas of your curriculum, the easier it will be to find time to fit writing into a busy teaching day" (p. 8).

"If early-childhood education stresses writing first, rather than reading, students will learn to communicate more quickly and effectively" (Johnson, 1999, p. 12). There is less pressure to learn how to write opposed to learning how to read. Schulze (2006) notes, "Beginning conventional reading before *approximated* writing does not make sense developmentally" (p. 4). With writing, children move from pencil marks, scribbling, and pictures to writing letters they know to writing the sounds they hear to spelling correctly. They flow along this continuum in a developmental sequence. From the beginning, their writing is writing because it has a purpose and meaning. With reading, children have to know the sounds letters make and how to segment and blend them together to read the word. Until this is learned, they will not be successful readers.

However, with all of this information, it is not being said that reading should wait to be taught after writing has been learned. Essentially, both subjects should be taught in

conjunction with each other. It is that writing becomes the first out of the two that is understood the best and used. "Young children, on the other hand, have a very limited range of words they can *read*, but they should be able to *write* any word they can say because they are using their own symbols or form of writing" (Rog, 2007, p. 3). Reading usually evolves shortly after when students are entering the phonetic spelling stage of writing development. Schulze (2006) believes, "Writing with invented spelling is the "stepping stone" to early reading" (p.18).

Writing Workshop in Kindergarten

"Calkins is one of the original architects of the 'workshop' approach to teaching writing to children, which holds that writing is a process, with distinct phases, and that all children, not just those with innate talent, can learn to write well" (Feinberg, 2007, p. 27). The typical writing workshop model starts with a connection to the prior day's lesson, introduction of the current day's lesson, minilesson on that new concept/skill with modeling, guided practice, independent practice, conferring, and share time. Referring to the minilesson component, Rog (2001) states, "Begin with a read-aloud, shared reading, or modeled writing activity to generate interest in writing and to demonstrate a specific learning objective" (p. 77). Minilessons should be anywhere from 5-15 minutes in length. "Some minilessons do not require immediate application by all students. It is important to realize that all students may not be in a place in their writing where they can use a particular minilesson" (Schulze, 2006, p.186). Schulze (2006) groups minilesson topics into four categories: procedures, content, strategies, and skills or conventions. "Writing workshop components support young writers in developmentally appropriate ways" (Kramer-Vida et al., 2012a, p. 94).

Writing workshop minilessons are also organized into units of study. Calkins (2003) structures units to be about a month long. The units of study are Launching the Writing Workshop, Labels and Label Books, Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing, Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies, The Craft of Revision, Authors as Mentors, Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports, Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages, along with two optional units: Fiction and Writing for Many Purposes. See Appendix D for more details about each unit of study. "The units of study…allow teachers to plan and organize a sequence of instruction so that over time students successfully tackle new and often increasingly difficult challenges" (Calkins, 2003, p. 19). The MAISA Units of Writing that my school just adopted is organized into units very similar to these. Refer to Appendix B to see a listing of the units and their lesson details.

"The workshop approach allows children blocks of time to write, focusing not on a finished product, but rather on the act of writing itself. Children do not have to complete a piece every day" (Brown, 2010, p. 25). Children keep their finished and unfinished writing in a folder and can continue working on their unfinished writing the next day. When they finish a piece of writing, they begin a new one and start all over again. Calkins & Mermelstein (2003) teach, "When you're done, you've just begun" (p.13). For some, this is an initial hump to get over, in which they all do. "When young children write independently, they demonstrate that they are capable of composing and are motivated to do so" (Kramer-Vida et al., 2012a, p. 94). Children are also given the choice of what they want their story ideas to be. Schulze (2006) comments, "When students select their own topics that have personal value to them, they are more likely to

use learning strategies rather than shortcuts such as copying or guessing. Choice allows students the chance to make decisions about organizing information and creating unique products" (pp. 25-26).

At the end of each unit, or at the end of the year, teachers usually have celebrations that acknowledge the hard work and quality pieces their students have produced. Ehmann and Gayer (2009) believe, "This could be as simple as reading a well-crafted line to the class or as big an event as inviting parents to an author's tea to hear their students' published books" (p. 29). In my classroom, we have an author's celebration after every unit. They start off as simple events and increase in size to the last one being an "open mic" event. "Through this activity, the kindergarteners were honored as authentic, accomplished authors" (Kramer-Vida et al., 2012a, p. 104). Calkins (2003) calls them author celebrations and places them at the end of every unit. "Young or old, when a writer sees his or her name under the title of a piece that has been through the process of writing, the emotions crash together like colors in a kaleidoscope-satisfaction, contentment, surprise, and of course, pride" (Eaton, 2011, p. 68).

Providing time for children to share their writing each day to conclude writing workshop is important. Jensvold (2010) states, "Children learn best from listening to other children's writing" (p. 8). Many suggest having an "Author's Chair" but I have an Author's Stool. "Author's Chair, along with guidance from the teacher, can help children develop a sense of self-esteem and good social skills that are often hard to develop in the classroom context" (Schulze, 2006, p. 179).

"The writing workshop is based on the premise that writing does not always follow the same sequence, time frame, or process for every writer or for every piece of

writing" (Rog, 2007, p. 19). Conferencing with students is where educators can meet every student where they are at along the writing development continuum and support their needs. Johnson (1999) remarks, "Since the conference encourages eye-contact, active listening, response, and affirmation of the child's efforts, it assures the child of the teacher's full attention" (p. 16). "While a few students may pick up an idea after one lesson, others benefit from multiple teacher-guided rehearsals before the skill or concept becomes a part of their own writing repertoire" (Walther & Phillips, 2009, p. 8). These rehearsals can be done through conferencing. Some say children should be met with everyday and some say at least once a week. "It should be a place where as much as possible the teacher-student relationship be more of a reader-writer relationship. By asking questions about a student's writing rather than telling that student-writer what to fix or change, the writer remains the one with *authority* over the piece" (Eaton, 2011, pp. 66-67). Feeling that sense of ownership is huge for students.

Partnerships are another positive aspect to writing workshop. According to Johnson (1999), "When children serve as resources for one another, they learn about the writing process as they help each other generate ideas, spell words, invent spelling, and revise their writing" (p. 34). Sharing their writing with their peers, children start developing that sense of writing for an audience. "As they work with each other, they learn how to listen, analyze, describe, support arguments, and learn how to assist other children in their uses of oral and written language and to profit from the feedback given by their friends and colleagues" (Blake, n.d., p. 6).

"Reading aloud to students and discussing books from a writer's perspective help build students' repertoires of writing possibilities" (Walther & Phillips, 2009, p. 16). The

writing workshop approach uses picture books as mentor texts. Mentor texts are also used with the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing, which can be incorporated with the writing workshop approach easily. Children study these works by other authors to become better writers. "They see how all the pieces of the writing puzzle fit together to make stories and informational text clear and enjoyable" (Culham & Coutu, 2008, p. 5). Cormier (2011) states, "They learned different writing techniques from seeing it used in actual published writing pieces" (p. 48). They study many different elements that are considered an author's craft. "We believe that any purposeful and meaningful technique that an author uses to capture the reader's attention may be considered an element of craft" (Ehmann & Gayer, 2009, p. 4).

"Research demonstrates that writing workshop is not only flexible enough to adapt to different grade levels, including kindergarten, but also flexible for use with diverse learners. Primary-grade students in special education [and English language learners] also benefit from a writing workshop" (Kramer-Vida et al., 2012a, p. 95). Writing workshop presents many opportunities to create anchor charts to go along with minilesson content. These anchor charts are very useful to all students but especially helpful to special education students and English language learners because they provide a great visual.

Some teachers are apprehensive to implement writing workshop because they are afraid of losing control of the class and chaos ensuing. Kramer-Vida, Levitt, and Kelly (2012b) found, "Modeling, conferencing, and circulating while students wrote kept children actively engaged and eliminated teacher worries about that concern" (p. 182). In my experience of using the writing workshop approach, this time is the calmest part of

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our day because the students are so engrossed in their writing. Goofing or off-task behavior is not even a desire for them because they are enjoying their writing time. "Because they were so engaged in telling their own stories, students wanted to write beyond the allotted time" (Kramer-Vida et al., 2012b, p. 183). Almost on a daily basis I have students groan when I ring the bell to signify writing time is over because they don't want to stop!

"Based on our research of this endeavor, we maintain that writing workshop, effectively supported by informed and engaged teachers, provides structures for kindergarteners to not only meet the new national standards for their grade level, but to exceed them" (Kramer-Vida et al, 2012a, p. 93). Each group of students I have each year, continue to blow me away with the work they produce. When you hold high expectations for them, they will meet them, if not, exceed them.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In this section, the project plan is discussed in the order of the five phases as follows: Phase 1) discuss the lesson plans that were used to introduce the kindergarten students to writing a book; Phase 2) identify the kindergarten Common Core State Standards that this project addressed; Phase 3) describe how I worked with the students to assist them in choosing a topic and developing the content of the book; Phase 4) discuss how I worked with the students to create the illustrations for the content; and Phase 5) share the process I went through to get the book published.

Phase 1: Writing Instruction

The result of Phase 1 of the project will be a discussion of the lessons that were taught in order to write the book. At this point in the project, it was anticipated that the following MAISA units would be included in the instruction:

- Unit 1: Building a Talking Community & Lessons on Drawing

- Unit 2: Launching the Writing Workshop

- Unit 3: Label and List in a Content Area

- Incorporate 6 + 1 Writing Traits where they fit

See Appendix B for the lessons that each MAISA unit includes and Appendix C for the 6 + 1 Writing Traits.

Phase 2: Common Core State Standards

The result of Phase 2 of the project was a list of the English language arts common core state standards that this project addressed. The standards that each MAISA unit covered was listed and the ones that corresponded with this project were coded in yellow.

Phase 3: Choose Topic & Develop Content

The result of this phase of the project was identifying the focus of the book. It was important that the students worked collaboratively to choose a topic and develop the content of the book. Kindergarten students are very creative and I structured a series of lessons to identify these important components of the project. I anticipated that the following steps would be completed:

- Brainstorm a list of possible topics and choose one.

- Decide whether we want to write a fiction or non-fiction story.

If fiction story…

- Decide who the characters will be.

- Decide where the story will take place.

- Decide what the problem and solution will be.

- Decide what will happen in the beginning, middle, and ending of the story.

If non-fiction story…

- Research topic and decide what information to use to compose story.

Phase 4: Illustrations

The result of Phase 4 of the project was the illustrations for the book the children had written. In order to complete this phase, I…

- Discussed with the students whether we wanted to create our own illustrations or find an illustrator to do so for us.

- If we chose to find an illustrator, I planned to contact Julie Tillman or Adriana Mallett.

Phase 5: Publishing

The result of Phase 5 was the published book. In order to complete this phase of the project, I…

- Contacted Studentreasures Publishing to request a publishing packet.

- Figured out costs involved in getting our book published if there were any.

- Would contact PTO if we incurred any funds to see if they would help.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PLAN RESULTS

Phase 1 Results: Writing Instruction

The first unit of MAISA is titled Building a Talking Community and stresses the importance of children being able to tell a story before they can write one. I used mentor text and my own personal stories to show students that everyone has a story to tell, which then leads to everyone has a story to write. Students learned that they could talk their stories out to help them figure out what to write and how to write it so it sounded right and made sense. They were taught to think, picture, and say what they wanted to write. Students learned the roles of storyteller and listener and also how to respond when they were the listener. Unit 1 did not invite the students to write at all. They began writing in the next unit. Along with improving their storytelling and listening skills, I incorporated lessons on how to draw. Many students begin kindergarten without the know-how or confidence to just draw! I started by teaching them about all the different kinds of lines we could draw (straight, curvy, squiggly, etc.) and then showed them how they could be put together to make different shapes or objects. I did this by leading the students through many step-by-step drawings.

The second unit of MAISA is titled Launching the Writing Workshop. In this unit, students were encouraged to share their stories through writing. They were taught routines to follow so they could write independently, for example, how to sketch their stories the best they could, label their pictures, add more to pictures, words, or start a new piece, stretch words to write letters for the sounds heard, and use an alphabet chart to find and write letters. This unit allowed students to transition from telling their story on a single page to across many pages in a booklet.

The third unit of MAISA is titled Label & List in a Content Area. In this unit, children are taught how to study objects like a scientist would and include all the details that are observed in their writing to teach readers about them. They learned how to use scientific words that teach, how to write using patterns, how to ask questions in their writing, and how to compare and contrast things or compare objects to what they already knew about. Previously taught skills, such as stretching words to write all the letters for the sounds heard, were revisited to provide scaffolding.

See Appendix B for the list of lessons each unit includes.

The 6 + 1 Traits of Writing that I incorporated into these three units of MAISA were ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, and presentation. To view a definition of each of these traits, see Appendix C.

Phase 2 Results: Identify Kindergarten Common Core State Standards

Unit 1: Building a Talking Community

Writing
W.K.8. With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

Speaking & Listening
SL.K.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
SL.K.1a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).
SL.K.1b. Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.
SL.K.2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.
SL.K.3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.
SL.K.4. Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
SL.K.6. Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Language
L.K.1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
L.K.1f. Produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities.

Unit 2: Launching the Writing Workshop

Writing
W.K.3. Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.
W.K.5. With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

Speaking & Listening
SL.K.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
SL.K.1a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).
SL.K.1b. Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.
SL.K.3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.
SL.K.4. Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
SL.K.5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.

Language
L.K.2d. Spell simple words phonetically, drawing on knowledge of sound-letter relationships.

<u>Unit 3: Label & List in a Content Area</u>

Writing
<mark>W.K.2.</mark> Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.
<mark>W.K.5.</mark> With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.
<mark>W.K.7.</mark> Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of books by a favorite author and express opinions about them).

Speaking & Listening
<mark>SL.K.1.</mark> Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
<mark>SL.K.1a.</mark> Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).
<mark>SL.K.1b.</mark> Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.
SL.K.4. Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
<mark>SL.K.5.</mark> Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.
<mark>SL.K.6.</mark> Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Language
L.K.1d. Understand and use question words (interrogatives) (e.g., who, what, where, when, why, how).
<mark>L.K.2a</mark>. Capitalize the first word in a sentence and the pronoun I.
<mark>L.K.2c</mark>. Write a letter or letters for most consonant and short-vowel sounds (phonemes).
<mark>L.K.2d.</mark> Spell simple words phonetically, drawing on knowledge of sound-letter relationships.
L.K.5a. Sort common objects into categories (e.g., shapes, foods) to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.

Phase 3 Results: Book Topic & Content Development

After the excitement of having been told that we would be writing our own book to be published like the famous authors that we have read stories by calmed down, we brainstormed a list of topics we could write about. After the list was compiled, we decided to write about the topic that accrued the most votes, which was dinosaurs. I then asked them to decide whether they would like to write a fiction or non-fiction story. We voted again and non-fiction was the winner.

With our topic chosen, we began the research process. We read books about dinosaurs and discussed the information we were finding. Also, we visited a few websites to gather additional information. I used the projector so they could see what I was seeing. We found so much information about dinosaurs, it was overwhelming! We discussed the fact that our book would be outrageously long if we chose it all to include so we decided to just choose a couple of facts to include about each dinosaur. The facts that we decided to include were the dinosaurs' names, where they lived, and whether they were an herbivore, carnivore, or omnivore.

After we had completed enough research and were ready to begin writing the content for our book, I allowed each student to pick a dinosaur from a list I created and then I went over the information we were including with them. I guided them in getting the information written on the text pages I created. I reminded them along the way that our sentences needed a capital letter at the beginning, spaces in between our words, and punctuation at the end. I also helped them make sure they spelled words correctly by sounding them out, using the word wall, and telling them the parts they haven't learned about yet.

The information we retrieved from the internet came from dinodirectory.com and the Natural History Museum's Dino Directory website, which sometimes directed us to Wikipedia for more information. These sites are listed on our references page at the end of our book.

Phase 4 Results: Illustrations

I informed the students of the two options we had available to chose from for our illustrations. They were to either contact an illustrator to do them for us or we create them

on our own. At first, they said they would like someone to do them for us but then I showed them pictures they could use as a guide if they were to create them and they decided they could do it. This made me extremely happy because I wanted the book to be solely their work.

After that decision was made, we got to work right away! I gave every student a picture of their dinosaur to use as a guide as they illustrated a picture to go with their informative page. The only two stipulations I had to give them was to make sure there was no white space on their page and their illustrations were the true colors they were supposed to be. They did an excellent job! Our dino expert illustrated the book cover and title page for us. The pictures I gave them as a guide I shrunk down and attached to their informative page so the reader could see an accurate picture of what the dinosaur really looked like. I retrieved the pictures from the Natural History Museum's Dino Directory website. I made sure to list them on our reference page at the end of our book.

Phase 5 Results: Publishing

I contacted Studentreasures after hearing about them from a colleague and requested for them to send me one of their free publishing packets. The packet I received included manuscript pages, an example of a published book, order forms to send home to the parents to give them the opportunity to order a published copy of the book when complete, and a pre-paid return label.

After the students completed their text and illustration pages, I copied them onto the manuscript pages using a color copy machine. There were special pages for the book cover, title page, dedication page, text pages, and illustration pages. I had our dino expert illustrate the book cover and title page. I filled out the dedication page. We dedicated the

book to our family and friends at Crossroads Charter Academy. At the end of the book, I added a Meet the Authors page with our picture in which we all signed, after that a page with a short synopsis of our experience, and finally a References page. During this time, I sent home the order forms to see who wanted to purchase a copy of the published book when complete.

Using the pre-paid return label, I returned our manuscript packet, originals packet, parent order forms, and any un-used materials. The publishing process did not cost a penny, however, an actual copy of the published book did. There were two options: standard binding or deluxe binding. The standard option was $19.95 plus shipping and handling and the deluxe option was $24.95 plus shipping and handling. As the teacher, I was given three coupons to order the book for $10.

To view a digital copy of the published book titled Dinosaurs, see Appendix E.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT REFLECTION

I can not tell you how excited my students were to write this book. It is awesome when you can raise your student's excitement level to match yours! After telling my class that we were going to be writing and publishing our own book like the famous authors David Shannon, Laura Numeroff, and many others, I had one student exclaim, "Yes! I have always wanted to be famous!" Everyday, one of them would ask me if we were going to work on our book.

Writing time during each school day has become a time that many students dread. It is the teacher's task to find a way to motivate their students and encourage them to become successful writers. I have found increased success using a writer's workshop approach, but I still usually have a couple of students every year that still struggle writing independently. Taking part in this project with my students made me realize that I need to do more projects like this to reach those students, providing them with more frequent opportunities that boost their motivation and support their writing development.

If I were to do this project all over again, there are some things that I would choose to do differently. The student's choice was to write an informational story, in which we did, but we hadn't been through the MAISA writing unit that would teach us

how to do so yet. That was the last unit and we did not get to it until the end of the year. However, I used the knowledge from my teaching toolbox to teach them what they needed to know in order to successfully write an informational story. Reflecting back, I guided the research process heavier than I should have. Next time, I will make sure to let them have more control over that process and I will sit back, stepping in when needed. My grade level team and I are in the process of rearranging the MAISA writing units to better suit our pacing needs. We are scooting the informational writing unit up a couple. For this project, I should have just made the decision to scoot the informational unit to then when we needed it and adjusted the others accordingly.

Compiling all the pieces to complete the manuscript to send in for publishing was very time consuming and tedious. I did not have access to a color copier before or after school office hours and these were the times I was able to do so. Although the struggle and stress was well worth it, I will definitely take advantage of the new online publishing option they are now offering.

I strongly suggest to all educators to take part in some type of meaningful writing experience like this with their students. There are so many options to bring students' writing to life. Aside from publishing like we did, where every student created a page to be put together into a book, each child could publish their own separate book. Publishing does not have to take on the form it did when we published our book. Publishing could simply be typing up your student's story, binding it, and having them illustrate it. The decision is yours. Explore your options!

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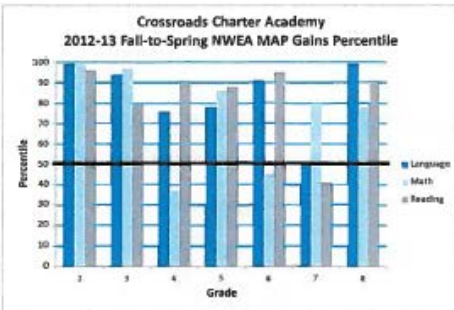
APPENDIX A

CONTRACT PERFORMANCE REVIEW

CONTRACT STANDARD 4

The Fall to Spring growth rate of each grade and subject for all groups of pupils for which the administered nationally norm-reference test is designed will fall at the fiftieth percentile or higher.

Crossroads Charter Academy
MAP Gain Summary
2012-2013 Fall-to-Spring Season

Crossroads Charter Academy
2012-13 Fall-to-Spring NWEA MAP Gains Percentile

5

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

	10-11	11-12	12-13	
Enrollment K-6th Grades	Total: 666	409	412	363
Enrollment 7th-12th	—	301	293	319
Special Education (%)	14%	12%	14%	
FRL PK-6th Grades (%)	62%	59%	60%	
FRL 7th-12th Grades (%)	54%	65%	55%	
African American (%)	7%	9%	8%	
American Indian (%)	1%	1%	1%	
Asian (%)	3%	3%	3%	
Hispanic (%)	2%	2%	0%	
Multiracial (%)	0%	0%	0%	
Native Hawaiian (%)	0%	0%	0%	
White (%)	87%	85%	85%	

2012-2013 Board Governance Averages

Occupancy Rate	
The percentage of seats filled with active board members.	100%
Attendance Rate	
The percentage of board members in attendance at board meetings	86%
Quorum Met	
The percentage of meetings during the year that meet quorum standards	100%

2012-2013 State Wide School Reporting	State Ranking	
	K-6th	27th Percentile

6

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFICE

Contract Performance Review
Crossroads Charter Academy K-8th
2012-2013 School Year Data
Presented Fall 2013

October 1, 2013

Colleagues,

This report will provide the academy's board and administration with vital demographic data, enrollment figures, and audited financial statements. It was prepared by the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Charter Schools Office and explains in some detail the standards that GVSU uses to evaluate the charter academy's accomplishments.

We look at the charter school's academic performance on Michigan's MEAP Test, as it compares to the host school district. Our office also evaluates the academy's finances and efficiency on compliance matters as well as student academic growth on the Measures of Academic Progress or MAP Test.

Additionally, this Contract Performance Review or CPR indicates the status of your school relative to the contract standards established by your board with GVSU. These contract standards are the expectations GVSU employs to provide critical accountability to our school communities.

Sincerely,

Timothy H. Wood, PhD
Special Assistant to the President for Charter School

Grand Valley State University
Charter Schools Office

201 Front Ave., SW, Suite 310
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
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616-331-2085 ~ Fax
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![Grand Valley State University logo]

Crossroads Charter Academy K-8

Status Report	
Standard 1	Not Met
Standard 2	Not Met
Standard 3	Met
Standard 4	Not Met

Academic Performance

Metric	Standard	Status		
STANDARD 1: Comparison to Select Peer District (MEAP/MME)	Equal to or better than overall Proficiency	Crossroads		40.7%
		Big Rapids		47.7%
STANDARD 2: Comparison to Composite School District (MEAP/MME)	Equal to or better than overall Proficiency	Crossroads		40.7%
		Composite		45.2%
STANDARD 3: Comparison to Similar SES Demographics (Regression)	Green or White Zone	MEAP		White
STANDARD 4: Evaluation of Academic Growth Fall-to-Spring (NWEA/MAP)	50th Percentile or Higher for each grade/subject	NWEA		Not Met

Organizational Performance

Metric	Standard	Status
12-13 Compliance	100% On Time	100% On Time
	100% Complete	100% Complete
12-13 Finances	Without Significant Deficiency/Material Weakness	Not Available
	Balanced Budget	Not Available
12-13 Enrollment	Complies with Contract	Did Not Lose 25% of Student Population
Teacher Certification/Criminal History Check	Level 1 or 2 Rating	Fall: Level 2 Winter: Level 2 Spring: Level 2

2

CONTRACT STANDARD 1

On the average of all MEAP tests administered, the public school academy will meet or exceed the performance of its select peer district. A select peer district is the school district Grand Valley State University identifies as a reasonable comparison district for the public school academy.

Crossroads Charter Academy vs. Big Rapids (Select Peer)

Fall 2012 MEAP Performance Comparison: Percent Proficient

CONTRACT STANDARD 2

On the average of all MEAP tests administered, the public school academy will meet or exceed the performance of its compositional peer district. The comparison scores for the compositional peer district are populated by the weighted total of MEAP scores from those districts in which the PSA's students physically reside.

3

CONTRACT STANDARD 3

The public school academy will not average more than one-half standard deviation below GVSU's MEAP/FRL regression model for all grades and subjects included in the model.
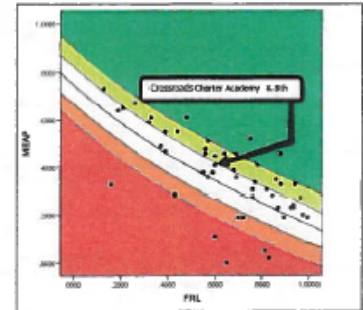
Statistical modeling software allows us to understand how MEAP performance changes relative to FRL. As FRL or socio-economic status is understood to be a strong predictor of academic performance, we use this model to help control for socio-economic status' effect on a school's performance.

This graph indicates a school's performance relative to other schools with similar FRL populations.

GVSU requires schools to be within 0.5 Standard Deviation (white) of their predicted performance.

Color Legend

Dark Green—Excellent Performance (1 Standard Deviation Above)
Light Green – Above Average Performance (0.5 Standard Deviations Above)
White – Within Average Performance (-0.5 to 0.5 Standards Deviations)
Orange— Weak Performance (Below -0.5 Standard Deviations)
Red—Weakest Performance (Below 1 Standard Deviation)

MEAP, FRL, special education, and enrollment data contained herein are publicly available from the Michigan Department of Education. Regression, financial, NWEA MAP, teacher certification, and board governance data are available from the GVSU Charter Schools Office. All data is from the previous school year and deemed reliable but not guaranteed.

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(Grand Valley State University, 2013)

APPENDIX B

MAISA UNITS OF WRITING

Unit 1: Building a Talking Community

- Immersion Session 1 – What Do Authors Do? & Library Mouse
(Study mentor texts to notice they write about things that have already happened, true events, things the author knows and can do, etc.)
- Session 1 – Writers tell a story about things they know.
- Session 2 – Writers use a voice people can hear and look at the audience when they tell stories about things they know and do. (Speaker/Listener Concept)
- Session 3 – Writers actively listen when others tell stories.
- Session 4 – Writers take turns being a speaker and listener.
- Session 5 – Session 4 cont.
- Session 6 – Writers listen and respond to the speaker.
- Session 7 – Writers use sources to generate story ideas. (Mini-Lessons 46-49)
- Session 8 – Writers choose and think about a meaningful experience and share.
- Session 9 – Writers plan their story by thinking about their story idea and orally rehearsing to self.
- Session 10 – Writers think, picture, and say their stories to themselves and partner.

Unit 2: Launching the Writing Workshop

- Immersion Session 1 – Writers can learn from mentor texts how authors sketch and label their stories to convey a message.
- Session 1 – Writers think, picture, and say their stories to themselves and partner.
- Session 2 – Writers sketch their stories.
- Session 3 – Writers label their sketches.
- Session 4 – Writers keep working by adding more to their picture, words, or by starting a new piece.
- Session 5 – Writers use supplies independently.
- Session 6 – Writers sketch and do the best they can.
- Session 7 – Writers put their story into words.
- Session 8 – Writers stretch and write sounds they hear first.
- Session 9 – Writers spell the sounds they hear and keep writing.
- Session 10 – Writers use an ABC chart to find and write letters.
- Session 11 – Writers have a system for organizing their writing.
- Session 12 – Writers progress to writing longer stories.
- Session 13 – Writers select and improve a piece to share with others.
- Session 14 – Writers share their finished pieces with a partner.
- Session 15 – Writers share their finished pieces.

Unit 3: Label and List in a Content Area

- Immersion Session 1 – Writers read, study, and chart noticings about label and list books. Writers begin to learn how to observe like scientists.
- Session 1 – Writers are like scientists writing down many observations.
- Session 2 – Writers capture what they see the way they find it.
- Session 3 – Writers plan their writing across pages.
- Session 4 – Writers decide on titles for their books (main idea).
- Session 5 – Writers stretch their words writing down all the sounds they hear.
- Session 6 – Writers/scientists sort their objects to help them organize their writing.
- Session 7 – Writers/scientists use books to learn more about the topic.
- Session 8 – Writers make plans to teach all about their topic.
- Session 9 – Writers use patterns to write information about a topic.
- Session 10 – Writers/scientists use scientific words to teach others.
- Session 11 – Writers/scientists ask questions.
- Session 12 – Writers need to look closely at their objects to add to the picture and words.
- Session 13 – Writers/scientists look closely to notice what is the same and different about objects.
- Session 14 – Writers compare what they are writing about to something they already know.
- Session 15 – Writers are in charge of their own writing.
- Session 16 – Writers reread and make their writing readable for an audience.
- Session 17 – Writers improve their writing to go public.
- Session 18 – Writers celebrate their amazing work.

(Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, 2013)

APPENDIX C

6 + 1 TRAITS OF WRITING

6 + 1 TRAITS OF WRITING

Ideas: the central message of the piece and the details that support it

Organization: the internal structure of the piece

Voice: the tone of the piece-the personal stamp of the writer

Word Choice: the specific vocabulary the writer uses to convey meaning

Sentence Fluency: the way words and phrases flow through the piece

Conventions: the mechanical correctness of the piece

Presentation: the overall appearance of the work

(Culham & Coutu, 2009)

APPENDIX D

UNITS OF STUDY FOR PRIMARY WRITING: A YEARLONG CURRICULUM

A Recommended Curricular Calendar

September	Unit 1	
	Launching the Writing Workshop	In this unit, we help all children see themselves as authors. We ensure that each child can carry on during the writing workshop, choosing topics, planning for writing, and drafting as best as he or she can. It is essential that during this first unit of study, writers learn the rituals and structures of a writing workshop so they can carry on with some independence while their teacher moves about, conferring with individuals and small groups. The only way to be sure all children can carry on with independence in the first month of the school year is for us to lower our expectations for the actual writing students will do.

We begin the year by telling children they will all be authors. Then we help all children think up stories to tell, to draw, and perhaps to write. All children revise, if only by adding details into their pictures. Within a week or two, they revise also by drawing what happens next on a second page (which creates the very exciting chance to staple and literally grow books). Soon we point out that picture books have a place for drawings and a place for words, and we nudge every child to write words as best they can. (Some will have written words from the start, others will need our scaffolding.) We then use the Pathways (from Chapter 2) to inform us as we nudge writers from scribbles to random strings of letters, from random strings to labels, and from labels to stories.

Whether writers write just a few labels on items in their pictures or write paragraphs, by the end of this unit all children know that in order to write, a writer fills him or herself with an idea, plans how the text will go, and then draws and writes as best he or she can, working to make the page match the writer's vision.

Optional Unit	
Labels and Label Books	This is an optional unit recommended for some kindergarten classes and for some classrooms filled with English language learners. The unit provides a way to help children focus both on the fact that writing represents the world and has real-world purposes and on the graphophonics involved in turning oral language into print. We launch the unit by saying, "Now that you are writers, I wonder if you'd help me fix up this room. We need to write labels on our meeting area and our library and our math area so people know what these places are for." The actual amount of writing required in a label is limited, so this gives children an opportunity to focus on recording sounds they hear in a word. Children first write functional signs for their classroom. They label the block area, perhaps labeling even the big blocks and the little ones. They might write a sign for the hamster's cage, or a sign saying "Please throw trash away" beside the trash can. These pieces are put to immediate use. The sign telling the hamster's name is prominently displayed beside the cage, the rules for using the trash can or the paints are prominently displayed.

Children are soon also labeling pictures in their own books. You may decide for a time to continue steering them to write (tell) about real events in their lives, labeling the objects in their pictures as they do so. Alternatively, you may shift to writing label books in which they name, page by page, the parts of something bigger. These books resemble many of the very earliest books children read. Now their books might proceed like one of these:

- *My Family:* Mom/Dad/Joline/Tiger/Me!
- *The Baseball Game:* the players/the fans/the ball/the game
- *A Firetruck:* wheels/ladder/hose/firemen/I love firetrucks.

In this way, students learn that writing serves a purpose and matches the picture, and they also receive intense help with sound-letter correspondence.

October (November)	Unit 2 — Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing	We help children value tiny moments from their lives and know that writers hold these moments in their minds and hearts, then make a story out of them, one that stretches across a sequence of several pages. Instead of writing about the whole move from the old house to the new one, a child writes about saying good-bye to Annie. The story begins with the writer knocking on her friend's door, then the good-bye, then the writer's feelings as she walks away. We encourage writers to reread what they've written, to see details they may have overlooked or confusions they may have created or feelings they want to bring out. Writers revise as part of writing, easily and in an effort to tell the truth and to put life onto the page in ways that match reality and make sense. This unit of study emphasizes certain qualities of good writing, including focus, detail, sequence, and writing with a sense of story. Alongside the emphasis on content and craft, there must be ongoing work on hearing and recording sounds, using known words, tackling words, leaving spaces between words, and being a risk taker with spelling.
November (December)	Unit 3 — Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies	This study begins with us confessing to our children that we had a hard time reading their writing. Prior to now, we will have acted as if children's invented spellings are fine and dandy. We've reveled in their approximations. Now, we let the cat out of the bag. "I took your wonderful books home last night," we say, "And I sat down to read them. But do you know what? I read a bit and then I got stuck. I couldn't figure out what the story was supposed to say! Has that ever happened to any of you?" Until now, we've so wanted our children to feel good as writers that we have hidden our struggles to translate their spindly letters into meaning. The problem with this is that the only reason children will care about spelling, punctuation, or white space is that these conventions make it easier for others to read and to appreciate their texts! It's *crucial*, therefore, that as soon as a child can conceivably stretch himself or herself enough to be able to write in ways that others can read, we let kids in on the truth. If we're going to let kids in on the fact that sometimes we can't read the writing that we've until now accepted with such open arms, we need to do this in a way that doesn't cause children to despair. Our goal is to spotlight the importance of spelling and punctuation by designing a unit of study that makes word walls, blends, and capital letters into the talk of the town—and to do this while safeguarding children's focus on meaning and their love of writing. In this unit, the child first aims to write for the teacher, who tries mightily to read what children are writing and asks them to help by writing left to right and top to bottom, by including more sounds, by leaving spaces between words, and by incorporating word wall words into their texts. Children soon write also in hopes that *they* can reread their own writing. When writers are ready, we encourage them to write in a way that a partner can read their writing.
December (January)	Unit 4 — The Craft of Revision	A commitment to revision is part and parcel of a commitment to teach writing as a process. Writing is a powerful tool for thinking precisely, because when we write, we can take fleeting memories, insights, and images and hold them in our hands. When we talk, our thoughts float away. When we write, we put our thoughts onto paper and can stick them in our pocket. We can come back to them later. We can reread our first thoughts and see that we have more to say. We can look again and see that our story has gaps or that our points are undeveloped. We can see that our sequence "jumps all over the place," or that our readers will think, "Huh?" Through rereading and revision, writing becomes a tool for thinking. Watch a child at work making something—anything—and one sees revision. The child pats a ball of clay into a pancake to make a duck pond, and then revises the duck pond by creating a fingertip rainstorm that dapples the water surface. Young children revise block castles to add protected hiding spots for archers, and they revise pictures of spaceships to add explosions. They revise clay rabbits to make one ear droop. Young children can revise their writing with equal ease and enthusiasm—as long as we don't expect their revisions to look like those a grown-up would make. First graders can revise—as long as we expect their six-year-old best! In this unit, children learn that revision is a compliment to good work. They select their best pieces from the fall and put these in a special revision folder and then revise one after another. They learn to use strategies (cutting, stapling, adding into the middle of a page, resequencing) in combination with goals (making sense, answering the reader's questions, showing not telling, adding detail, developing characters). The unit ends with children learning that they can revise writing also by thinking, "How else could I write this?" and then by turning their narratives into poems, stories, directions, or letters.
January (February)	Unit 5 — Authors as Mentors	The most important message we give to children during a writing workshop is this: "You are writers, like writers the world over." It makes sense, then, that for at least one unit of study, children are invited to look closely at the work of one writer and let that writer function as a mentor. When deciding on the whole-class mentor author, a teacher needs to decide if he or she wants this unit to continue the emphasis on writing personal narratives (or small moments) or to broaden the class's repertoire and launch other kinds of writing. Many teachers in our community decide to select an author who has written a few texts that are rather like the Small Moment stories the children have been writing, so that the author serves as a mentor in this work. But it is wonderful if the author writes other kinds of texts, too. The unit of study, then, can begin with studying an author's Small Moment stories and then move to studying other kinds of writing the author has written, opening the doors to the children, also, to create a whole range of kinds of writing. We especially recommend K–2 children study Angela Johnson, Ezra Jack Keats, Joanne Ryder, or Donald Crews, although there are other wonderful possibilities. It is important to search for an author whose texts seem to children to be within their zone of proximal development. In an author study, the class explores how this author lives as a writer, the themes the author tends to write about, but above all, the author's craft techniques. We first encourage children to look very closely at one text, pointing to sections they like and then asking, "What did the author do to create this nice part?" Soon children can also ask, "Did the author do that same thing anywhere else in this book? In another book?" Children find it thrilling to find three or four places in a text where an author uses the same craft technique differently, and these different instances in which one technique has been used help children see that they, too, can put the techniques into effect. Children tend to notice and emulate first the very concrete, obvious techniques, such as ellipses, but good teaching can help children realize that the ellipses creates dramatic tension (although we don't necessarily use that term!), which is a fundamental feature in effective stories. After participating in a shared author study, each child is invited to choose his or her own mentor author, again noticing not only the author's writerly life and topic and genre choices but also her or his craft techniques. Students then develop their own writing projects, nourished by their own mentor author. The final portion of this study especially encourages independence.

This unit opens with us inviting children to become not only writers but also teachers and then suggesting that they use writing as a way to teach others. First, we help them teach others how to do something by inviting them to write books in which they draw and then tell a sequence of steps they hope their readers will take. Procedural writing requires explicitness, clarity, sequence. This is a genre that requires writers to write with an especially keen attention to their audience, anticipating what their readers will need to know and when they'll need to know it.

Then the unit shifts so that for the remaining few weeks each child writes just one, very long All-About book on a topic of his or her choice. The experience of writing these books will introduce children to the format of information books and lead them toward report writing, but we think it is best for children to write in this genre first around topics in which they have personal experience (soccer, baby brothers). Some teachers bring children through this unit twice, with the second cycle supporting each child writing on one instance of a whole-class theme (for example, each writes on one insect).

When children write non-narrative texts, we need to teach them to impose an organizational structure on their "pile of stuff." These books are written in chapters, with children sorting information by means of tables of contents. If a child is writing "All About Dogs" and one page is on "Training Your Dog to Heel," we teach the child to use paper formatted to support procedural texts. Other pages will be formatted differently to support other ways of organizing informational writing. Teachers also teach children to notice and emulate a few text features of nonfiction writing (diagrams, charts, a table of contents, sub-headings, etc.).

In the poetry genre study, children practice and consolidate all they've learned so far, and do so while working with more independence. They find significance in the ordinary details of their lives, draft pieces that are filled with specific detail, employ revision strategies in the service of qualities of good writing, emulate techniques other authors demonstrate, and edit their work so that others can read and enjoy it.

Meanwhile, much of our instruction is designed to help children explore and savor language. We encourage them to live as poets, seeing the world with fresh eyes and reaching for the precisely honest and carefully chosen word. We stress that poets write for the ear and listen to the music in their words. We help children realize that language can create images and that there's a world of difference between *fry* and *sizzle*, *shine* and *sparkle*, *cry* and *weep*. We also try to find child-appropriate ways to introduce children to figurative language, knowing that some of them use metaphor and simile naturally and could benefit from using them deliberately as well.

Optional Unit

Fiction

The urge to write fiction begins when children are very young. Allowing children to satisfy this urge taps an energy source that is something to behold. In this unit, we help children tell and plan stories, perhaps "across their fingers" or as they turn five or six pages in a book. We help students internalize the rhythm and structure of stories and anticipate how stories tend to go. "Usually your story has a character who feels something and tries for something, but then there's trouble and the character has to work, to try, to struggle," we say. And then we let students draft a bunch of stories, selecting their best to revise.

Optional Unit

Writing for Many Purposes

In this unit, we remind children of all the kinds of writing that exists in the classroom, the school, and their homes. "You can write in all these ways!" we say, issuing a grand invitation for them to write for a variety of purposes, including recipes, invitations, pamphlets, songs, book reviews, etc. We add new varieties of paper to accentuate the new possibilities and hope that the writing projects children do in school spill over into their homes. The emphasis is on learning how genres look and sound and on writing all day long, across our whole lives, for real purposes. ("Look at what you read in your life and let it inspire you to write in similar ways.")

Children in this unit may begin to keep a class mailbox, to write a real magazine that is published for the whole school, or to take on a service project that involves real-world functional writing.

This unit comes at the end of a yearlong study of writing and it reminds children that they can be the authors of their own writing lives. The year ends with us saying to children, "You all are writers—go to it!" and then encouraging youngsters to imagine and pursue writing projects of their own.

(Calkins, 2003)

APPENDIX E

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