WRITER’S WORKSHOP IN PRESCHOOL: THE EFFECTS OF INTRODUCING WRITER’S WORKSHOP FOR 5 YEAR-OLDS ON STAMINA, EMERGENT WRITING SKILLS, AND WRITING ENJOYMENT

A Research Project

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of adding writer’s workshop to a 5 year-old preschool program on students’ writing skills, stamina and enjoyment of writing. Five year-old preschoolers from a Midwestern Christian preschool were introduced to writer’s workshop journals and mini-lessons. The growth in their writing skills was measured before, during, and after the intervention of writer’s workshop. Their time on task was measured daily as individuals and as a whole class. The children were given a survey to measure their writing enjoyment before and after the intervention. The results indicated that time on task, emergent writing skills scores, and writing enjoyment improved with the implementation of writer’s workshop in the 5 year-old preschool setting.

Introduction

Preschool teachers often witness the following scenario: a 5 year-old preschooler, eager to finish quickly, scribbles a few circles on paper with one color of crayon, and screams, “I’m done!” within 30 seconds of starting a writing activity. They then get up from the seated position to once again find the cars in the block area to zoom around. This is very typical of 5 year-olds who are uncomfortable with written expression. This was troublesome to me because of the literacy skills they will need in increasingly academic kindergarten classrooms. “Teachers report that as many as half of all children have difficulty in their transition to Kindergarten” (Stormont, Herman, Reinke, King,& Owens, 2014). Studies indicate high-quality early childhood settings prior to formal schooling need to be language-rich and incorporate both phonics work and written text as they are equally important and necessary in order to achieve success (Campbell, 2014). Campbell’s study (2014) suggests these language-rich environments have a major determining factor for positive outcomes for children, especially children from disadvantaged
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backgrounds. Kramer-Vida (2012), feels kindergarten classrooms are more than ready for the Common Core Standards. Kramer-Vida (2012) also believes moving from traditional basal-based, isolated skill worksheets to a workshop approach makes writing more authentic and meaningful. Therefore, it is important for preschoolers to develop emergent writing skills they will need for kindergarten.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

As a teacher of 5 year-olds in the preschool setting, my goal is to challenge these students to their full potential. I want to adequately prepare them for Kindergarten which means they need to be engaged in writing instruction during preschool. Research indicates that early social skills as well as academic skills in children are an important indicator of kindergarten readiness (Robinson & Diamond, 2014). Robinson also states that teachers need to provide children opportunities to follow directions, be independent workers, and work with their peers. In giving my best efforts, I find my 5 year-olds showing signs of disengagement during my current informal and irregular writing instruction style.

According to Cress (1998), journal writing is an integral part of kindergarten and peer interaction. It is an excellent way to build a sense of purpose in their writing as well as learn to organize, evaluate, and tell stories. After reading the research of Cress (1998) and Robinson and Diamond (2014), I chose to introduce writer’s workshop to my teaching practices because of its academic and organizational focus through mini-lessons, its independent journal writing time, and it’s social aspect of peer sharing, and its author’s chair component in which children are invited and encouraged to share their free-writing progress. The purpose of this action research study was to determine the effects of adding daily writer’s workshop in the 5 year-old preschool classroom on beginning kindergarten writing skills.
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Research Questions and Sub-questions

The primary research question that guided this action research study was: What are the effects of using daily writer’s workshop on emergent writing skills for 5 year-old preschoolers? In addition to the primary question for the study, I identified and posed two sub-questions that included: (a) What are the effects of daily writer’s workshop on writing stamina? (b) What are the effects of daily writer’s workshop on students’ enjoyment of writing?

Limitations

My first limitation was that this action research was a small sample of convenience. Because the research had the ten 5 year-old participants in my classroom, this is not generalizable to all 5 year-old preschoolers who use writer’s workshop. An additional limitation was that the duration was only 4 weeks long. Such a short duration could affect the results of the study. Collecting data for a longer period of time, which also means more experience with writer’s workshop, means the possibility of more skills learned and overall more positive results with this implementation.

Definitions

- **Emergent writing skills**- In this action research study emergent writing skills are identified as the stages of writing that children go through. As children begin to write, their marks are identified as one of the stages of writing. The seven stages include scribbling, picture drawing, mock letters, conventional letters, invented spelling, phonetic spelling, and eventual conventional spellings (Macomb Projects, 1994).

- **Writing stamina**- In this action research study writing stamina is defined as the ability to sustain physical and mental effort in their writing over time.
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- *Writer’s Workshop* is a method of writing instruction which coaches students to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. This method of instruction is designed for all writers and all grade levels with direct instruction mini-lessons. In this study I will be launching writer’s workshop with the direction from the works of Denise Leograndis (Leograndis, 2008) and Lucy M. Calkins (Calkins, 2003).

**Review of Literature**

**Introduction**

Writing is one of the components of literacy that is necessary for learning how to read. (National Association for Teachers of Young Children, 2015). Many times this important piece is left out of literacy instruction. Our preschool program does a fantastic job of supporting students in learning to write letters and learning letter sounds. But beyond simple consonant and vowel sounds in story writing, other emergent writing skills are not added until Kindergarten or later. Teachers need to give more opportunities for story writing in preschool (Hovland, Gapp, & Theis, 2011).

**Kindergarten Readiness Skills**

Literacy instruction varies in all areas of the Midwest and throughout the United States. With the Early Learning Standards that have been provided to us by our Midwestern state, we make sure that our children are exposed to print-rich environments, provided content-rich age appropriate books, children are read to, provided opportunities to discuss the texts, make connections, express themselves through writing, are taught the letters of the alphabet, and when ready, taught phonics instruction. With the children who are developmentally ready, especially our 5 year-olds, we provide instruction similar to that of a Kindergarten classroom. Midwestern preschools are exposed to basic phonics instruction, quality read-alouds, and emergent writing.
Emergent writing should include all levels of writing from scribbling, random strings of letters, invented spellings, and conventional writing as valued pieces of writing (Cress, 1998).

**Writer’s Workshop**

Writer’s workshop has been around since the 1970’s when Donald Murray and Donald Graves’ early works at the University Of New Hampshire created a style for teaching writing. It has been made more popular by Lucy Calkins for her work with the Lucy Calkins Reading and Writing Project which she began in 1991 (Feinberg, 2007). Writer’s workshop is way to teach children how to write. It includes mini-lessons, free writing time, conferencing time, and then author’s chair for sharing finished writing. Beecher (2008) states that even after the many years that writer’s workshop has been in our primary classrooms, 21st century preschool classrooms still don’t include this effective literacy strategy. Although many preschool classrooms provided a dedicated writing center, other materials, such as writing portfolios and written words/labels/word walls, were absent in half of the classrooms, and studies suggest that these early childhood classrooms only provide children with basic print and writing resources (Guo, 2013).

Adding writer’s workshop is also a way to support diverse writers in a 5 year-old preschool setting (Dennis, 2013). Adding traditional writer’s workshop gives the children a voice through writing (Kissel, 2008). Writer’s workshop is empowering for emergent writers (Jones & East, 2010). Since the journals have spaces for drawing and writing, preschoolers can all be involved in their written expression from day one from wherever their writing skills stem. All levels of writers are writing at the same time, but working at their own pace. Daily journal writing, such as that included in writer’s workshop, increases writing confidence, inventive spelling, and reading ability (Jones & East, 2010). Children get to practice writing skills while
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writing daily in their journals. All areas of literacy improve as children are working on letter formation, letter sounds, and emergent word formation (Kissel, 2008).

Implementing Writer’s Workshop

Writer’s workshop combines differentiated writing process instruction with social communication instruction, cognitive instruction, as well as cognitive strategy instruction (Sturm, 2012). Writing instruction is split into three components. These three components (journal time, sharing time, and conference time) made up the structured writing time within the classroom (King, 2012). King refers to this structured writing time as writer’s workshop in which she believes uncovered a new feature of her preschooler’s development in the understanding of writing (King, 2012). This concept of structured writing is well-established in teaching practices for kindergarten and beyond.

Along with this method of writing, it has been found that writing for 5 year-olds is best done in a journal (King, 2012). These journals are made by teachers with drawing space at the top of the page and lines at the bottom to write on. Brown (2010) makes a statement in her piece on young authors to “not expect perfect penmanship, spelling or a well-crafted story. A kindergarten book will most likely have some illustrations with a line or two of approximated [children’s representations of adults’ conventional writing] writing. Teachers have to look beyond what may or may not be there and see how the children have made kindergarten versions of books” (Brown, 2010, p.27).

Implementation Effects on Emergent Writing Skills

Writing workshops for young children aligns well with “developmentally appropriate teaching practices, which recommend daily opportunities and teacher support to write many kinds of texts for different purposes and writing experiences that allow the flexibility to use
nonconventional forms of writing at first (invented or phonic spelling) and move to conventional forms” (Brown, 2010, p.25). The students who were new to the writing workshop talked about the writing processes and practices in more detail. The writing workshop created spaces for students to grow as writers (Saban, 2015, 230). Not only can writer’s workshop grow children in their nonconventional and conventional forms of writing, it can create spaces to improve stamina and enjoyment of writing as well.

**Writing Stamina**

A goal in writing that all teachers want for their students is to see children actively engaged in their writing for an appropriate amount of time. The appropriate amount of time will vary from student to student and by the age of the child. “The preschool period is marked by both substantial development of as well as increasing expectations for children’s self-regulation, particularly in the areas of emotion, behavior, and cognition” (Williford, Whittaker, Vick, Vitello, & Downer, 2013). 21st century educators use the phrase “self-regulation” interchangeably with “stamina” when referring to one’s ability to focus attention, manage emotions, and control behaviors to cope effectively with environmental demand (Williford, et.al, 2013). With increased demands coming from our local and federal government with common core, working on stamina was one of the things I noticed I needed to do with my 5 year-old preschoolers. The stamina of many preschoolers is at risk when children are not confident with their writing skills (Hovland, et al, 2011). Preschool teachers need to include writer’s workshop in the 5 year-old preschool setting to improve the stamina and comfort in their writing. Including mini-lessons, concepts of print and beginning story writing will encourage children to feel comfortable enough to begin story writing (Hovland, et al, 2011). A structured daily writing process will increase writing confidence which will lead to longer time on task (Jones & East,
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2010). Once children feel more confident, they will be more willing to go into more depth in their written expression (Kissel, 2008).

Some educators may ask what an appropriate time on task is for 5 year-olds during writing instruction. While King (2012) was beginning her writer’s workshop, the students were spending just a few minutes at a time to complete their writing. As the children progressed and their knowledge of the writing process grew, they would spend longer time on their daily writing. Brown (2010) felt that she was not as concerned about the finished product, but the process of writing. She stated that they were continually writing, and when one piece was finished, they were beginning a new one. Brown’s (2010) research also concluded that writer’s workshop helped with increasing stamina.

Working on writing stamina is age-appropriate. Brown (2010) was concerned that 5 and 6 year-olds would struggle with remembering their writing from the day before. She worried they would also not want to work on, make changes, let alone continue writing the same story. What she found was that some worked on the same book for several days. She had not expected the confidence in their writing and ideas (Brown, 2010).

**Enjoyment of Writing**

In order for children to continue a life-long love for writing, they need to be interested in learning to write. Using writer’s workshop increases morale and children enjoy being engaged in writing (Brown, 2010). “Incorporating writing instruction into the curriculum, through implementing the writing workshop, was greatly beneficial. Students counted on the daily and predictable opportunities they had to pursue their self-selected writing endeavors. They were willing to write when writing opportunities were related to their own experiences, thoughts and interests: this made them grow to love learning” (Hachem, Nabhani, & Bahous, 2008, 330).
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Making writing enjoyable is necessary at the 5 year-old preschool level. “It is necessary to value reading and writing, to want to explore different literacy situations, and to use them in a meaningful way. In order to value writing and reading it is essential that one must have reasons to use and to feel the importance and necessity of written language” (Mata, 2011, p. 288).

Another key component in free writing opportunities is the availability of various writing materials, such as novelty pens and pencils, and changing writing centers (Neslihan-Bay, 2015). Teachers can also go the extra step in making a writing center or a dramatic play center into a post office, a business office, or even a newspaper office. This could attract children to want to be in the writing center and in turn, learn to enjoy the writing process for their whole lives.

Becoming life-long lovers of writing is a goal I have for my preschoolers. I feel learning to write early is equally important as learning to read, in fact, they go hand in hand. Early writing best predicts reading success (Cabel, 2013). In order for children to have a better chance at literacy success, we as educators would want to make writing something children love to do in order to cure as much success in learning to read. Using writer’s workshop is one way to assure writing enjoyment. When children are allowed to self-select a writing topic, they are more inclined to be more creative, complete the story, and share with others (Dennis, 2013). Writing is more meaningful when a young child self-selects.

Writer’s workshop is for all levels of writers. Some children draw their stories before they attempt to write. Teachers who implement writer’s workshop are very careful to treat all levels of writers equally, and encourage children to progress at their own pace (Dennis, 2013). With writer’s workshop being used with all students in the classroom, everyone has an equal opportunity to enjoy the process, and share at their own level. Children will write for enjoyment when given time for it (Chamberlain, 2014). When allowed to choose their own writing topics,
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children own their writing which can increase confidence and create a more confident writer (Chamberlain, 2014).

**Benefits of Writer’s Workshop**

“The purpose of the workshop for young children, like those for older children, is to create environments in which children become authors, see themselves as writers, and begin to learn the writer’s craft. These purposes for early childhood Writer’s Workshops adopt a sophisticated set of academic goals reflecting the assumption that young children become writers in much the same way older children and adults do. In fact the discourse of Writer’s Workshop is permeated with the notion that young writers do what ‘real writers’ do – albeit in less developed ways. They draft, revise, edit, publish, and shape a sense of themselves as writers” (Lysaker, Wheat, and Benson, 2010, p.211).

Allowing children time and place to write encourages the use of the imagination and growth of a child’s spirit (Snyders, 2014). Knowing the aforementioned, there are benefits to making writing enjoyable. Self-selecting a topic during writer’s workshop can help writers learn more of the structure of the English language, help them share their culture and traditions of their home lives, and all children, including English Language Learners may feel more comfortable writing what is familiar to them (Dennis, 2013). When we provide an opportunity for young writers to show their writing to others, it is a way to encourage others to try something new in their writing as well (Brown, 2010).

**Conclusion**

My research aimed to find out the effects of writer’s workshop using the practices of Lucy Calkins’ Writer’s Workshop approach on 5 year-olds in the preschool setting. The literature suggests that there are benefits to including writer’s workshop in the 5 year-old
preschool classroom. Emergent writing skills will improve, stamina will improve, and children will find writing more enjoyable.

**Methods**

**Introduction**

This quantitative action research study examined the effects of using daily writer’s workshop on 5 year old’s emergent writing skills. I also researched (a) the effects of daily writer’s workshop on writing stamina, and (b) the effects of daily writer’s workshop on 5 year-old students’ enjoyment of writing.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were members of my classroom in a private Christian preschool. It is located in Midwestern suburban town. There were ten children, all 5 years of age with birthdays between May and September. There were three girls and seven boys. These children were eligible for Kindergarten by state law, yet parents decided to give them one more year in the preschool setting for academic and/or social/emotional reasons. None of the children were identified as at risk, with special needs, needing special education, or needing other formal interventions. All of the participants spoke English as their first language.

**Procedure**

Previous to the intervention, writing lessons that were given to the 5 year-old preschoolers were not regular or systematic strategies. None included story-writing opportunities, no thinking time was given, and no involvement from their peers was a part of creating their pieces. Their writing was never shared with the class by me or themselves. Occasionally, I would create a collaborative book from their individual pieces to send home as a school to home connection.
The intervention of writer’s workshop included reading a story, doing a 5 minute mini-lesson explaining the writing assignment related to the reading, modeling the assigned activity, having the children turn to their partner to share their ideas for writing, and then giving the children 10 minutes of uninterrupted writing time. Daily, after the children were finished with their writing, they were invited to sit in the author’s chair and share their writing activity (Chamberlin, 2014).

I created a rubric (Appendix A) and measured emergent writing skills on the introductory day of writer’s workshop, after the first two weeks, and then at the end of the four weeks. The emergent writing skills measured were (a) verbalizing a picture for teacher dictation (b) creating a picture and writing at least one phonemically correct letter to represent a word describing a picture (c) using more than one phonemically correct word to describe a picture (d) demonstrating emergent knowledge of concepts of print.

I also created a stamina log (Appendix B) to record how long the 5 year-olds were able to stay engaged during independent writing time. I used a log to measure how long each individual child stayed interested in the writing activity each day. I used individual student stamina times from the introductory day as baseline data.

I also created a Likert-type survey for children (Appendix C) to measure the enjoyment of writing. I administered the survey prior to implementing writer’s workshop and again after the four week study. I administered the survey by reading the survey to the 5 year-olds and having them color in the appropriate face representing their writing perception.

**Research Design**

After scoring their writing with the rubric, I compared introductory day scores and scores after the 4 weeks. I compared scores for each child and the class average to find out if there was
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growth in emergent writing skills. With the stamina logs (Appendix C), I tracked the changes in daily writing engagement. I compared timed engagement on the first day to timed engagement of the last day for each individual student and as a class to see if time on task (stamina) had increased. I also compared the scores on the Likert-type survey to measure children’s perception of writing before and after the implementation of writer’s workshop. The students had 3 faces to choose from based on their feelings of the questions being asked. A smiling face was worth 5 points and represented liking or agreeing with the comment. A neutral face was worth 3 points and meant that the child didn’t really have an opinion or thought it was just “ok”. A sad face was worth 0 points and represented that the child disliked the comment or had negative feelings towards the comment. I did this for each individual and the class average.

Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics to analyze all the quantitative data in my study. I used the differences in individual and class average rubric scores to show individual and whole class growth in use of emergent writing skills. I used the daily differences in the stamina log to show an individual and whole class change in writing engagement. I used the Likert-type pre and post survey to measure the differences in individual and whole class enjoyment of writing after the intervention. I also compared each question on the survey at pre and post survey. For individual students, I am merely measured growth numerically, by subtracting. And for the class averages, I compared means.

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative action research study was to challenge 5 year-olds to their fullest potential in one area of literacy. I introduced writer’s workshop to a group of
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preschool students in the preschool setting. Ten students participated in this action research study. The children were measured with rubrics for emergent writing skills, their time on task was measured to show change in stamina, and they were given a Likert-type survey to measure enjoyment of writing.

Effects Influencing Students’ Emergent Writing Skills

Figure 1 identifies the factors influencing the emergent writing skill scores on Day 1, Day 10, and Day 20 of the action research study. All ten students showed growth in the areas of emergent writing skills. One student did not consistently grow from Day 1 to Day 10, but on the 20th day did show growth. A score of 1 indicated the student was able to create a picture and verbalize a statement for teacher dictation. A score of 2 meant that students were creating a picture and writing at least one phonemically correct letter to represent a word. A score of 3 meant that the preschool students were creating a picture and using more than one phonemically correct word to describe their picture. A score of 4 meant that the preschoolers were demonstrating emergent knowledge of concepts of print. All ten preschoolers were scored at a 3 or a 4 on the last day of the study.
Figure 1. Individual emergent writing scores scored from a rubric. Day 1, Day 10, and Day 20 show overall growth. (N=10)

Figure 2 shows the class average scores from the rubric on day 1, day 10, and day 20. There were 4 points possible on the rubric. Most students scored a 1 which meant they could create a picture and verbalize a statement for teacher dictation. In the middle of the study, on day 10, most of the students were able to score between a 2 and 3. This score indicated that the students were starting to use their own writing to either put the correct sound and letter to represent a word, or multiple sounds and letters to create a word.
Figure 2. Average scores from emergent writing rubric on days 1, 10, and 20. Scores from day 1 to day 20 show improvement. (N=10)

Effect of Writer’s Workshop on Students’ Writing Stamina

Figure 3 shows individual students’ growth in writing stamina from the first day, the tenth day, and the last day of the action research study. For a majority of the students, their time on task, or stamina improved. Some students showed an unsteady growth from the beginning to the end, and two students showed a decrease in time on task.
Figure 3. Individual student growth in writing stamina. Days 1, 10, and 20 show growth for most students. (N=10)

Figure 4 shows the class averages on the first, the tenth, and, and the last day of the action research study. The first day showed an average of 7 minutes of staying on task from the opening of their writer’s notebook to the ending of their writing time for the day. The average minutes recorded for the tenth day of the study increased by 3 minutes. The last day of the study shows a full 4 minutes of time on task increased from the first day to the last day of the study.
Figure 4. Class averages showing stamina growth on days 1, 10, and 20. The figure shows growth through the study.

Effects of Writer’s Workshop on Students’ Enjoyment of Writing

Figure 5 shows individual writing enjoyment scores for each preschool student. The total points possible were 25 per survey. Each face the child could color in was worth, 5, 3 or 0 points. Most students showed an increase in enjoyment of writing from the first day to the last day of the action research study. Two students remained at the highest score throughout the action research study.
Figure 5. Individual writing enjoyment scores.

Figure 6 shows writing enjoyment average scores per survey question. There were 5 questions. Each question was given 5, 3, or 0 points. Four of the five questions showed growth. The only question that did not show growth, “I like drawing pictures” was steady at 50 points for the duration of the action research study.
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Figure 6. Writing enjoyment class averages.

Conclusion

The purpose for this quantitative action research study was to investigate the use of writer’s workshop in a 5 year-old preschool classroom to show growth within emergent writing skills, stamina, and writing enjoyment. The result shows an increase from 1.3 average points scored to 3.4 points scored out of 4 possible points from the beginning of the study to the last day. The stamina recorded shows an average of time on task increasing from 7 minutes to 11 minutes. Individual time on task does not reflect the same results as some students actually lowered their amount of time on task during the duration of the action research study. During the course of the study, students’ writing enjoyment improved. The greatest increase on the survey was enjoying writing stories, and enjoying making words. Most students felt the same about drawing pictures in the beginning of the research study to the end of the research study.

Discussion

Introduction

The motivation behind my choice for using writer’s workshop in a 5 year-old preschool classroom was primarily a need to add more academics into the 5 year-old preschool curriculum. With our local school district increasingly adding academics into kindergarten classrooms, with the adoption of the Common Core, and with my own person feelings that these children in this particular class were not being challenged to their potential, I was ready to try something new with them. I knew they enjoyed doing writing when we worked on stories together. They loved to draw as well. After reading about different literacy topics, I ran across the writer’s workshop process by Lucy Calkins (Calkins, 2003) that I had used earlier in my elementary teaching
assignments. My goal was to follow her process to improve emergent writing skills, to increase writing stamina, and to create a classroom full of students who enjoyed writing.

Effects of Writer’s Workshop on Students’ Emergent Writing Skills

The results showed that every student’s emergent writing skills improved after the intervention of writer’s workshop. This result is important because they improved despite varying abilities. Additionally, I observed the following, more specific, results during this process.

The 5 year-old preschoolers had varying abilities. Prior to the introduction of writer’s workshop, all of the children in the class had upper case letter recognition, but two of the ten children were still learning the names of the letters of the lower case alphabet. Seven of the ten students were still mastering their letter sounds. Only one student knew all consonant and all vowel sounds. They were all attempting to put letters with words, but only one student was consistently using the correct beginning, middle, and ending letter sound when writing phonemically correct words. By the end of the writer’s workshop intervention, all of the children had grown in their emergent writing skills. All of the students showed growth on the rubrics.

These emergent writing skills are important, but I also discovered other important results such as increased conversation about their writing. The first day of the writer’s workshop process, the children were very eager to get working in their own journals. I then asked them to tell me what they were thinking of writing about. Their hands flew in the air! I had them share their idea with someone near them. They were so excited. I then dismissed them to begin writing. As they were writing, I observed the classroom. As I suspected, most of the finished work for the first day was drawing pictures, and then I wrote their dictation. Each day the children would have more details to share with me. During our daily conferences, I encouraged the children to write
more letters or even label their pictures. Each day they were labeling more of their pictures, and writing some letters and strings of letters together to make words. I know one child who could not wait to share his writing as he had written his first word “BTM” (Batman).

Additionally, the children were also encouraging each other in regards to their emergent writing skills. And like a domino effect, more and more children were sharing their successes and ideas with one another during their free writing time. The average scores of emergent literacy scores kept increasing with daily writer’s workshop. Children were now writing letters on every page they were doing, and some were stringing large amounts of letters together. They were writing sentences. Each day after I would meet with them individually, I would tailor my mini lesson to push the children into the directions in which they were headed. I believe this excitement is what has caused the emergent scores grew from an average of 1.3/4 on day one to 3.4/4 on the last day.

Effects of Writer’s Workshop on Students’ Writing Stamina

The results indicate that writer’s workshop increased students’ writing stamina. This was exciting because there were many other good things happening while their stamina increased, however, the increase in stamina did not always correlate to a higher quality of writing.

Before I began the research, I had preschoolers who would do the least amount of writing expected of them. My goal was to record their time on task, or writing stamina during the 20 day process to see how many minutes they would spend writing. In the first few days, students were just drawing pictures, and not a lot of conversation was happening in the classroom while the children were writing. The amount of time it took for them to think of something to draw, and then to finish a piece, was an average of seven minutes on the first day. Between the first and 10th days, this increased to 10 minutes. What I noticed was that the children were
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communicating, sharing their ideas, and sounding out letters aloud. It would get fairly noisy in
the classroom, but it was all very productive.

What surprised me, though, was that time on task didn’t always correlate to the quality of
writing I was seeing. There was one child who drew the same picture for quite a few days in a row. At the conferencing time, she would tell me different stories about the picture for dictation, but the picture was always the same. It was her back yard, but it looked no different from day to day. So even though her time on task was long, her picture was the same, and she still wasn’t doing a lot of writing. Her individual conference time was spent trying to get her to think of other ways she could draw her ideas or what new details she could include. It took a few days, but eventually she would add some new details.

On the other hand, some students’ daily time on task would be very minimal, yet their emergent writing skills were very good. What I noticed was that these students had thought about what they were going to write about even before coming to school. They were making connections to the writing at home, and getting ideas to have when they sat down to write each day. The scores increased with a beginning average of 6.8 minutes which increased on the last day to 10.4 minutes. Although writing stamina did increase over the course of the 4 week action research study, I discovered that time on task was not a direct correlation to the quality of writing.

**Effects of Writer’s Workshop on Influencing Students’ Enjoyment of Writing**

The results of the pre intervention writing enjoyment survey showed that children had a love for drawing pictures, but their two lowest scores on average were enjoying writing stories and enjoying writing words. I believe that it is possible that they scored these the lowest because they had never written their own stories in class, nor had they had much practice writing words
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on their own. I knew these were the two things I needed to focus on when I was doing my mini-
lessons. The results of the post intervention showed an increase in enjoyment of writing stories
and writing words. There are number of reasons why I think writer’s workshop had that effect.

   I believe the part of writer’s workshop that helped the preschoolers grow in their writing
enjoyment was by listening to each other read their stories. Each day after writing, the children
would have an opportunity to sit in the author’s chair to read their stories. I brought my office
chair in for them to sit in, and they loved it. After reading, I let the audience ask a question or
give a compliment. I know this helped with writing enjoyment because the other children kept
asking when it would be time for author’s chair. One day, we had to move our author’s chair to
the very first part of the day. That meant that the writing that had been written the day before was
shared before we had a mini-lesson. I noticed that the children were eagerly waiting to get their
journals and to start writing. I also noticed that the conversations during the writing time this day
were about liking their stories, asking each other what they were writing about, and showing
each other what they were drawing and writing. They were all so engaged. I decided to wait
again and do author’s chair the next day. And I did notice the same things happening. I enjoyed
observing the children’s conversations, sharing of ideas, and learn how to enjoy their writing. It
is no wonder the writing enjoyment scores moved from 15.8/25 points on average to 22.4/25
possible points.

   Conclusion

   My original assumption was that children would show growth in their writing in regards
to emergent writing skills, their time on task would improve, and their enjoyment of writing
would improve. All three areas of my action research did show improvement, and this is
important because children improved no matter what level they were at, and writer’s workshop seemed to have other positive aspects as well.

**Conclusion and Future Implications**

**Importance of the Study**

After discovering that many of the children in my 5 year-old preschool class were not working to their full potential in writing, I developed a quantitative action research study to conclude if adding writer’s workshop to the curriculum would help with emergent writing skills, time on task or stamina, and improve writing enjoyment. While researching, I discovered a piece of literature that stood out to me throughout the writer’s workshop intervention. It is a piece from Hachem, Nabhanik and Bahous’s “We can write!” which I quoted earlier on how predictable writing opportunities helped to develop a love of learning (Hachem, Nabhanik, & Bahous, 2008).

As an educator, I want my students to love to learn. I didn’t want my students to just become good emergent writers; I wanted them to learn to enjoy it, too. So when I stumbled upon this research, I knew that writer’s workshop was the way in which I wanted to work on writing with my 5 year-old preschoolers. As a result of implementing writer’s workshop, emergent writing skills improve, stamina increases, as well as enjoyment of writing. Writing is something the students will be doing for their entire academic careers. Learning how to enjoy writing will hopefully grow their love of literacy as a whole, and possibly this love of learning will trickle into other, and possibly all, areas of learning.

**Lessons Learned**

What I learned from this project was so much more than I ever could have imagined. The process of the writing was, at times, more important than the finished product in regards to how
the children were learning. During writing time, I assumed the preschoolers would be quietly involved in their writing. But what happened was far more wonderful than I could have imagined. They learned so much from each other. They got ideas and motivation from their peers during their free writing time, their author chair time, and when they had informal conferencing with each other. Their emergent writing came at its own pace, and not only from the mini lessons, but from being so excited for each other’s writing that they wanted to try more. They sounded out words together, and debated the sounds they were hearing. My assumptions were correct in that the children would show growth with writer’s workshop, but I was so pleasantly surprised when they also learned so much from each other in the process of writing.

Future Implications

Through this action research study, I have discovered that adding writer’s workshop to a 5 year-old preschool classroom helps improve emergent writing skills, stamina, and enjoyment of writing. Knowing this, I plan to keep using writer’s workshop in my 5 year-old preschool classroom each year. I have also decided that since a majority of our preschool children in our 4’s program will be going to kindergarten, I will also add this in to the program at the end of the year, when most of them have turned 5. Also, I plan to create a staff development for the 4’s and 5’s teachers.

I believe that using the writer’s workshop approach uses authentic writing practices. Any child can be successful in writer’s workshop, even the child who can only make a single mark on a page is able to be actively involved in working in a writing journal. When every child can be successful in the classroom, it is obvious that it is a successful approach to teaching writing, even in the preschool setting. Writer’s workshop is much more meaningful for the students to practice writing words and sentences by using their sounds in a story that comes from their own ideas or
imaginations. This is much more enjoyable than literacy instruction from basal-based skill and practice worksheets that do not fill the children with long-lasting joyfulness. My goal as an educator is to create a life-long love of learning. Using the writer’s workshop approach to learning to write is my approach of choice due to the overwhelming supportive research results including the action research I have just concluded. With everything else we are doing to prepare children for the 21st century learning outcomes, the common saying is, “start ‘em young!” Why not start that love of learning with enjoying the writing process as early as preschool?
WRITER’S WORKSHOP IN THE PRESCHOOL SETTING

References


Chamberlin, L. (2014). Imagine a day when you can ride on a dragon and touch a cloud with the tip of your fingertip: Rediscovering writer’s workshop. English 4—11, 51, 2-4.


WRITER’S WORKSHOP IN THE PRESCHOOL SETTING


WRITER’S WORKSHOP IN THE PRESCHOOL SETTING


## Rubric

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<td>Creating a picture and demonstrating emergent knowledge of concepts of print.</td>
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Your teacher will read you the sentence written in blue. You will color in the face that represents your feelings.

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- I like writing stories.
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  - 3
  - 0

- I like drawing pictures.
  - 5
  - 3
  - 0

- I like to write my letters.
  - 5
  - 3
  - 0

- I like making words.
  - 5
  - 3
  - 0

- I like telling stories to my friends.
  - 5
  - 3
  - 0