

Improving Students Attitudes

Improving Student Attitudes about Writing Using Writer's Workshop

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to increase students' attitudes toward writing in the classroom through the implementation of Writer's Workshop. The research question addressed, Will the implementation of Writer's Workshop improve students' attitudes toward writing in the classroom? The goal of this study is to determine if using Writer's Workshop in the classroom three days a week will increase students' attitudes toward writing in general and motivate students to write more. Three students who were performing at above grade level, on grade level, and below grade level were studied. The results show that implementing Writer's Workshop in the classroom increased students' attitudes toward writing for two of the three students studied. The results of this preliminary study suggest that students' attitudes toward writing in the classroom will increase with the implementation of Writer's Workshop.

Keywords: Writer's Workshop, student, attitudes, writing

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Problem

In a time when formative assessments are being pushed into the classroom, students' motivation to write seems to be declining. Teachers are trying so hard to teach their students how to properly answer Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) questions with details, that we, teachers, are forgetting to teach students to learn and grow by implementing a Writer's Workshop and teaching the writing process as well as different forms of writing. We are teaching our students to answer TRC questions with supporting details, we are not allowing our students to allow their creativity to bloom and flourish through their writing. Teachers are teaching the students how to answer test questions, teaching to the test.

Evidence explaining the cause of the problem

Writing is the way students communicate, express themselves, question, persuade, synthesize and teach. (Fletcher, 2001) I often hear groans of displeasure when I suggest to my students that we are going to write. Students have been forced to endure lesson after lesson on how to write the written comprehension answers, which they will have to score a level 2 or 3 on in order to increase text reading levels. With the MClass assessments, writing instruction in my school has centered on ways of improving writing where the students will pass the TRC and move up in reading levels. The students in my class have been stressed and appear to have a negative attitudes towards all writing, due to this emphasis on answering comprehension questions in writing. In the classroom, teachers noticed that students are hesitant to write, they lack the confidence and writing abilities. These writing skills take years to acquire and mature in written language. (Flecher, 2001; Kuby, 2015; McKenna, 1990) Through the implementation

of Writer's Workshop I will teach my students the steps of the writing process and improve their motivation to write. Instead of forcing students to only write to answer written comprehension questions, Writer's Workshop will allow students to love writing through the opportunity to choose what to write about and allow the students to write at their own pace.

Research Question

Will the implementation of Writer's Workshop in my multiage 1/2 classroom help to increase my students' attitudes towards writing?

Methods

- 1-17-16 Initial Reflection
- 2-4-2016 Context
- 2-25-2016 Problem Identification
- 3-17-2016 Literature Review Due
- 3-21-2016 Collecting Baseline Data

Students will be given The Writing Attitude Survey. (See Appendix 1) This survey asks 28 questions about writing in both the classroom and at home, and uses the character, Garfield, with four different faces: very happy Garfield, somewhat happy Garfield, somewhat upset Garfield, and Very upset Garfield. The students will color the Garfield which corresponds with how they feel about writing in different situations.

- 4-4-2016 through 4-14-2016 Intervention Implementation

Writer's Workshop will be used in my classroom three days a week. Writer's Workshop will consist of a 5-10 minute mini-lesson, 10 minute share time using the author's chair, and 20 minutes for students to work on their writing. The teacher will conference one on one with students during the writing time.

- 4-15-2016 Post Test Given

Students will be given the Writing Attitude Survey. (See Appendix 1)

- 4-19-2016 Student Interviews

The teacher will interview three students, one reading above grade level, one at grade level, and one below grade level after two weeks of using Writer's Workshop in the classroom to determine their attitude towards writing. Interviews will be videoed and transcribed. (See Appendix 2)

- 4-19-2016 through 4-21-2016 Data Analysis

The Writing Attitude surveys will be scored and results entered into an excel spreadsheet. (Table 1) Data will be analyzed and compared. Also, student interviews will be transcribed and coded. (Appendix 2)

- 4-21-4-21-2016 Writing of the Results/Preliminary Findings
- 4-24-2016 Submit paper for Peer Review
- 5-1-2016 through 5-4-2016 Revisions
- 5-5-2016 Final Paper Due

Preliminary Findings

Preliminary findings of the data show that the implementation of Writer's Workshop has a positive impact on students' overall attitudes toward writing. Students' scores on the Writing Attitudes survey was compared using the pre- and post-survey results. Student A (reading above grade level) showed a decline in attitude towards writing after two weeks. This student's score decreased by 8 points. However, student B (reading on grade level) and student B (reading below grade level) both showed significant positive results in their attitudes toward writing.

Student B (on grade level) increased their overall score by 43 points. Student C (below grade level) increased their overall score by 22 points.

Further analysis of the student interviews also show that Writer's workshop has a positive impact on students' attitudes toward writing. One theme that consistently showed in the interviews is that students like having a variety of topics to write about. All three students stated that they like writing about themselves and their families. Two stated that they liked writing about topics they know about, like bowling. Students A and B specifically stated that they liked being given the opportunity to draw illustrations with their writing. They also liked being able to share their work in the author's chair and publishing their writing. Students also stated that they liked Writer's Workshop because it helped them to learn more. All three students interviewed stated that they would like to continue to have Writer's Workshop in their classroom.

Another theme throughout the research project was that students like writing, they just don't like writing for the sole purpose of the written portion of the Text Reading Comprehension assessment. Student A specifically stated that she gets frustrated when she is trying to answer the TRC questions. She said that she just can't think. Student C stated that his hands hurt when he is writing for the purpose of answering the TRC questions. Student B stated that it writing for the TRC was too difficult. Students expressed their frustration at just not being able to answer the TRC questions correctly and this frustrates them. This frustration is what is leading to their dislike of writing in general.

Conclusion

Writers' Workshop can help to increase students' attitudes toward writing through teacher modeling, structure, independence, sharing, and publishing of their writing. (Fletcher, 2001; Jasmine 2007; Kissel, 2013) Does the implementation of Writer's Workshop increase students'

attitudes towards writing? The preliminary findings of this research project show that for two out of three students Writer's Workshop can indeed increase students' attitudes toward writing. This research shows that students on grade level or below can have a negative attitude towards writing due to the demands of the State testing. However, for those students, Writer's Workshop can offer an opportunity for students to choose topics that they know about to incorporate in their writing. Writer's Workshop offers these students an opportunity to share and shine. It allows students to feel successful with their writing, in turn motivating them to write in and out of school, and increasing their attitudes toward writing.

For the future, more time will be needed to fully gain an understanding of the impact that Writer's Workshop can have on students' attitudes toward writing. This preliminary research only consisted of a two week study. This would be a great research project to monitor for at least a few months to an entire school year with a class. This project showed that Writer's Workshop worked negatively for Student A, an above grade level student. It would be interesting to actually follow Student A or a group of above grade level students for a year and see how Writer's Workshop would impact her attitude towards writing if given a longer amount of time. Also, it would be interesting to see the impact that Writer's Workshop could on a group of below grade level students, if given longer than a few weeks to study.

Reflection

As an elementary school teacher in North Carolina, I am definitely worried about the attitudes that I see my students having towards writing. This research project is helping me to see that what is best for my students is not to just teach to the test, TRC, but to teach them to love learning. Writer's Workshop is something that I did not have in my daily routine, but I know that it should be there. This project has helped me to see that through Writer's Workshop students'

negative attitudes toward writing can be changed to a more positive one. Writer's Workshop allows students to write about topics students know and love. It allows students to share their writing in a safe environment where they are not told they don't have enough details. Writer's Workshop allows students to progress in the writing process at their own pace, this is what can help to change student's attitudes toward writing. During Writer's Workshop students are not told that they do not have enough information or details in their answers, they are told what they are doing well and through the teacher mini-lessons students are taught how to improve their writing. Writer's Workshop seemed to give my students an overall feeling of success while it was being implemented in my classroom.

In the future, Writer's Workshop is definitely something that I will continue to investigate further. Next year I plan on starting Writer's Workshop as soon as I can get the beginning of the year assessments behind us! I will also continue to use the Writing Attitude Survey, perhaps at the beginning, middle, and end of the year to measure students' attitudes toward writing. I love that Writer's Workshop allows for mini-lessons, sharing through the use of the author's chair, and allows students to successfully work at their own pace instead of rushing. I am also very interested in seeing if Writer's Workshop will successfully impact my above grade level students, challenging them to be their best and grow. I look forward to learning more about Writer's Workshop changing students' attitudes towards writing through a longer study next year.

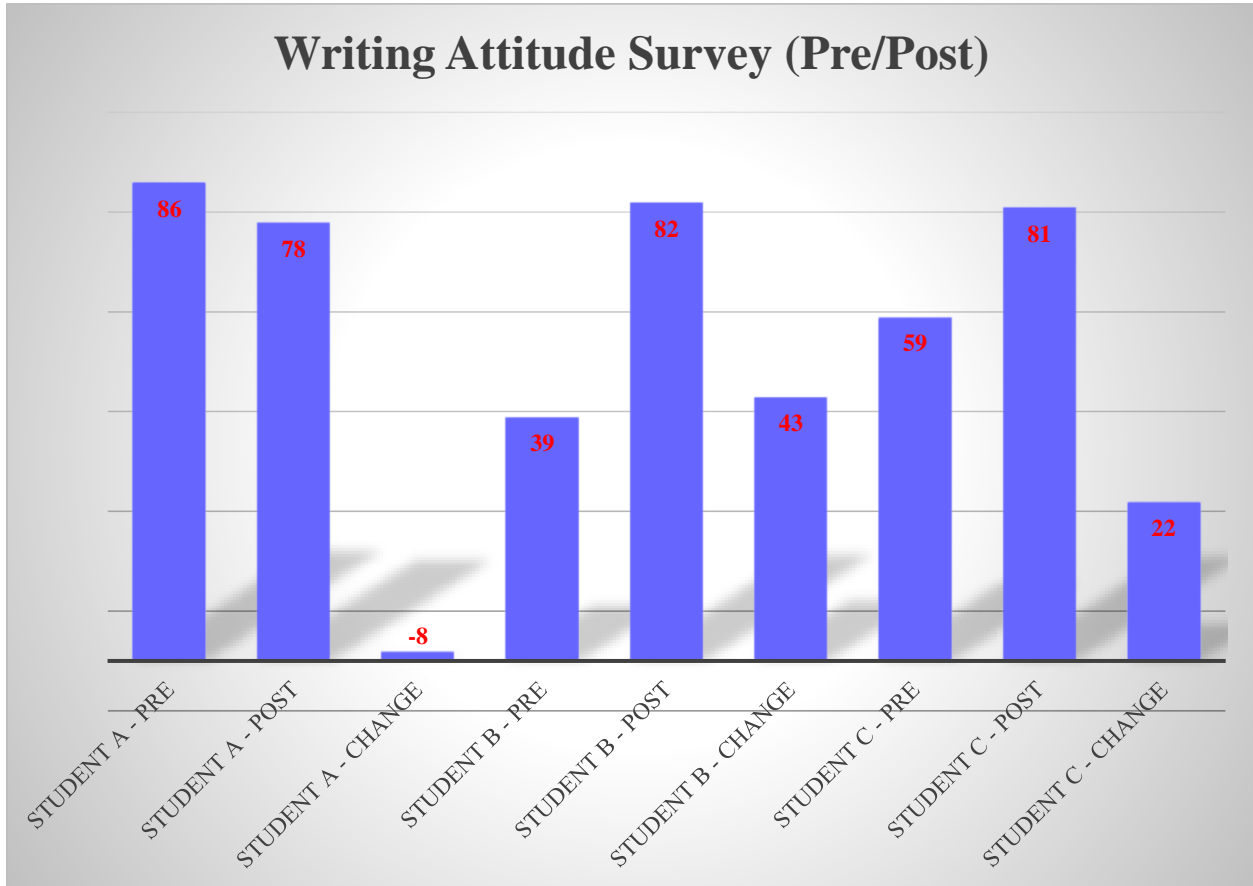
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Tables

Table 1

Writing Attitude Survey



Note: The table shows the data collected during a pretest, posttest, and the change between the two tests.

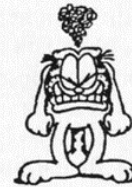
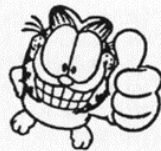
Appendix 1

Writing Attitude Survey

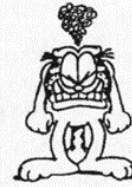
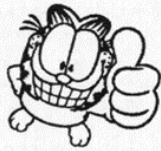
Name _____ School _____ Grade _____

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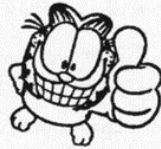
1. How would you feel writing a letter to the author of a book you read?



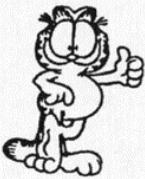
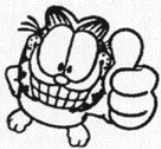
2. How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?



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



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



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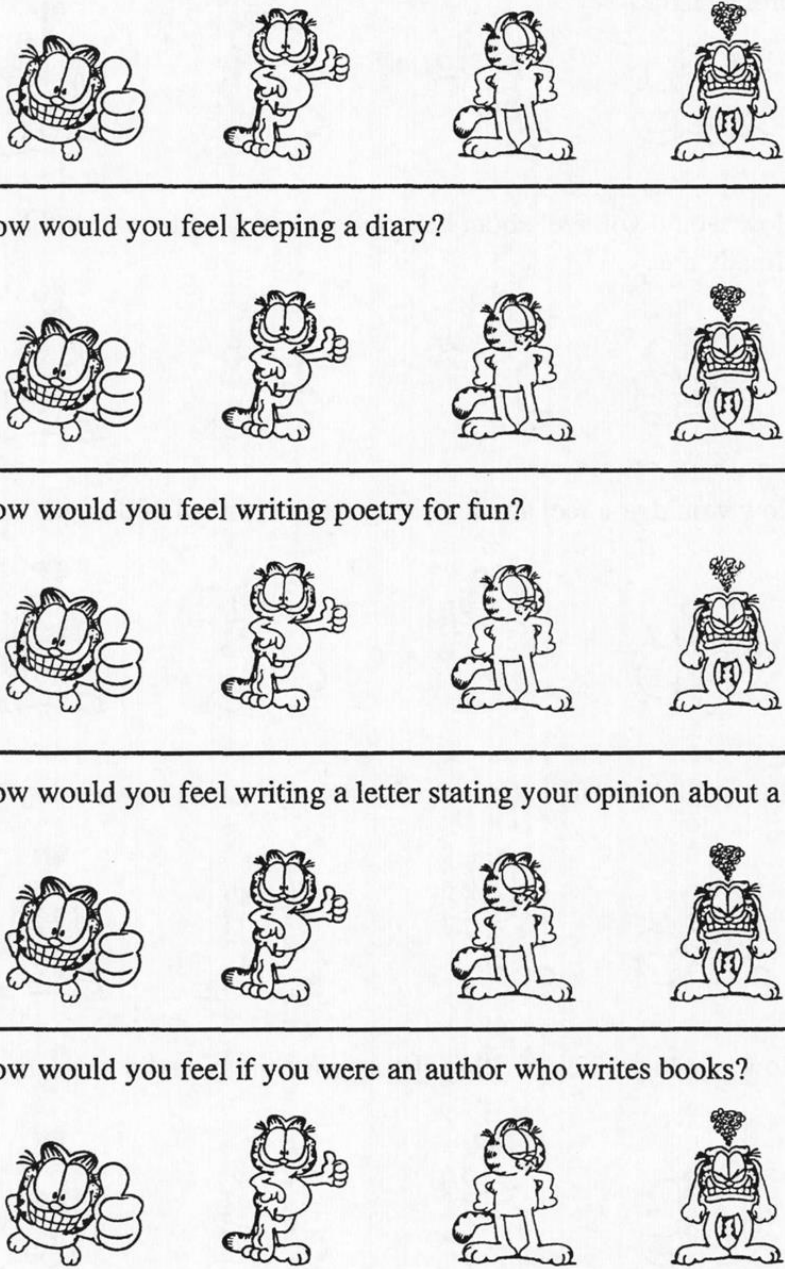
5. How would you feel writing to someone to change their opinion?





















6. How would you feel keeping a diary?





















7. How would you feel writing poetry for fun?

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

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



<small>GARFIELD: © PAWS. All rights reserved.</small>	10. How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?				
	11. How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?				
	12. How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?				
	13. How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?				
	14. How would you feel writing about something you did in science?				

GARFIELD: © PAIN. All rights reserved.	15. How would you feel writing about something you did in social studies?				
	16. How would you feel if you could write more in school?				
	17. How would you feel about writing down the important things your teacher says about a new topic?				
	18. How would you feel writing a long story or report at school?				
	19. How would you feel writing answers to questions in science or social studies?				

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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**Writing Attitude Survey
Scoring sheet**

Student's name _____
Teacher _____
Grade _____
Administration date _____

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

Item scores:

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

Full scale raw score: _____
Percentile rank: _____

Writing Attitude Survey
Directions for use

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

Administration

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring

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

Interpretation

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

Appendix 2

Student Interviews Coded

Student A

Code	Description	Quote/Example
FAW	Feelings about writing before Writer's Workshop	I feel good because it helps me learn how to write better and helps me sometimes get to a better grade, level.
FAW	Feelings about writing before Writer's Workshop	I write stores at home.
FAW	Feelings about writing before Writer's Workshop	Sometimes I get frustrated.
LTW	What students like to write about	My favorite thing to write about is myself and my family.
WTQ	Writing TRC Questions	Sometimes I get frustrated.
FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	Yes. But I just thought about my story and read it.

Student B

Code	Description	Quote/Example
FAW	Feelings about writing before Writer's Workshop	Kind of happy and kind of sad.
FAW	Feelings about writing before Writer's Workshop	It's because the sad part is because it worry's my hand. The happy part is that I get to learn how to write more.
WTQ	Writing TRC Questions	

FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	Kind of no. Because it is kind of too difficult.
FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	Yes I like writing with Writer's Workshop. I can't wait for the book to come out. The picture. (Like's the best)

Student C

Code	Description	Quote/Example
FAW	Feelings about writing before WW	Because it is fun to write.
LTW	Like to write about	About my dogs, my family, and bowling.
WTQ	Feelings about writing TRC questions	No. (To writing TRC questions) because my hands hurt when I'm writing.
WTQ	Feelings about writing TRC questions	I don't like to do TRC questions because it keeps me bored.
WTQ	Feelings about writing TRC questions	Hard because you always have to write a lot of stuff.
FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	That I like to write, read and I always get some stuff right on it.
FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	I write pictures and I write a little bit of stories.
FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	Because it's fun and fun activities to do.
FWW	Feelings about Writer's Workshop	It's easy for me. All the stuff you give me is easy for me except for the TRC questions.

