BOYS MAY BE BOYS
BUT DO THEY HAVE TO WRITE LIKE THAT?

A Project

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by
Heidi Gwen Witter

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Department of Teacher Education
Abstract

of

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Statement of Problem

Current research establishes that there is a significant gap in writing achievement for boys at the fourth through eighth grade levels as compared to girls of the same grade levels. The State of California requires fourth and seventh grade students to take a writing exam in the spring. While many students struggle to attain proficiency, boys have a more difficult time than their female peers in achieving competence in this area.

This project focuses on strategies to develop the idea of boys seeing themselves as writers in the first place. Many girls use journals or diaries to express their thoughts and ideas, often writing to one another, whereas boys might consider it a waste of their time, and choose to play video games or even physical activities with
their male peers. By using specific strategies (giving boys choices for writing, for example), educators could lessen the gap of performance with their female peers.

Finally, included in this project is a teacher’s guide with lessons that are specifically created to support the varied needs of male and female students. These lessons are geared towards students in the intermediate grades, and can be modified to work with both older and younger students.

__________________________
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INTRODUCTION

Background

A report issued in the fall of 2004 by the U.S. Department of Education cites findings that boys score 16 points lower in reading and 24 points lower in writing than in girls. The National Assessment of Educational Progress Writing Tests revealed that three-fourths of the gap has opened up by the fourth grade (Newkirk, 2003). “Closing this gender gap first requires awareness—by teachers, principals and parents. Only then can targeted solutions be developed. Among them: reading interventions that start early enough to reverse boys’ academic slide” (Boys Academic Slide, “Recognizing the Problem,” para. 2).

Purposes of the Project

The purpose of this project is to provide gender-sensitive and gender equitable writing instruction by incorporating Promethean Board and PowerPoint technologies into the classroom. The primary audience will be sixth graders in a multicultural, Title I school. An equally important purpose of this project is to foster in all of the students an appreciation for the use of good writing techniques and programs (Step Up to Writing, for example), while also enhancing the process of writing with the use of technology. In doing so, it will be critical to be aware of the stereotypes that may be perpetuated with beliefs about writing that are already apparent with students at this age.
Statement of the Issue

All students are given ample opportunities and are encouraged to write much and often, yet the divide in the development between pre-teen boys and girls in this area continues to be apparent and this disparity should not be ignored or dismissed. Year after year, male students seem to struggle more than their female counterparts with the process of writing, from start to finish, requiring almost constant supervision to stay on-task and to increase the content and quality of their work. Furthermore, many of these students have little or no experienced help at home after school with assignments, and it is at school where most of the real writing instruction and experience takes place.

This gap arises for a number of reasons, including a student’s physical, psychological and social development, the latter of which appears to be the most critical, as the student moves up the grade-level spectrum (Sax, 2007. This gap is exacerbated among boys, especially those of low socio-economic status, where a student would “rather be seen as bad rather than stupid, when confronted with educational adversity” (PBS behavior programs, 2008).

Significance of the Project

In the intermediate grades, students transition from learning to read to reading to learn, with writing a natural component in that equation. They are expected to produce organized paragraphs which by the end of their tenure in elementary school become essays (California Dept. of Education, 2010). This developmental step is a
critical part of the report writing process necessary for later success in high school and beyond.

**Limitations**

This project is designed for sixth grade students in a suburban K-8 Title One school and focused on the State of California Writing Standards. The materials may need modifications to be used by another population. In addition, as technology is an important piece of this thesis, limitations are also present with the inequity in ability to access technology at different sites.

**Definition of Terms**

*Equal*: that which is the same or alike in characteristics.

*Equitable*: that which is fair and just despite differences in characteristics.

*Gender*: a socially constructed characteristic among people which includes not only one’s biological sex but also the sex role socialization behavioral patterns that impact one’s self image, social status, and goals as a male or female person.

*Gender Equitable*: that which is fair and just to both males and females despite differences between and among males and females.

*LA (Language Arts)*: reading, writing, grammar and speaking.

*Sex*: a biological characteristic among most plants and animals as well as people, which is determined by reference to one’s anatomical structure for reproduction as either female or male.

*Sex Role Socialization*: the process that occurs in people beginning at birth and continuing in every social setting to which they are exposed; a set of expectations,
messages, rewards, and punishments that individuals receive based upon their sex and impacting their self-image, social status, and goals in life.

*STAR*: California Standardized Testing and Reporting: The California Standards Tests in English-language arts, mathematics, science and history/social science are administered only to students in California public schools.

*Strategies*: Long-term plans of action designed to achieve a particular goal or goals.

**Organization of the Project**

Chapter 1 of this project provides an Introduction, which includes Purposes of the Project, Statement of the Problem, Significance of the Project, Limitations, Definition of Terms, and Organization of the Project.

Chapter 2 is a Review of the Relevant Literature. Specifically, the literature review examines current research specific to gender and literacy. Included are the varied theorist’s views and how they play a role in the studies and results attained. It further features differences within cultures and expectations from teachers and families, as well as the way peers view one another in the area of writing.

Chapter 3 is the Methodology of the project’s components. The chapter contains a comprehensive description of the materials in the Appendix with directions for implementation and assessment. Chapter 4 is the summary, recommendations, and conclusions.

The Appendix contains the researcher-developed teacher’s guide for improving the writing and reading of all students, and additional strategies for reaching more
reluctant writers, specifically males. It includes research-based strategies used to overcome underperformance while incorporating some of Bloom’s Taxonomy’s principles to engage and enrich the learning process. It also includes a list of books geared specifically to inspire male students to read and write in addition to a list of Web sites for both teachers and parents as helpful resources.

The last section, the References, contains an alphabetical listing of all sources used in the research and development of this project.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This review of literature will discuss the growing achievement gap in writing between males and females in elementary school. Following that is a discussion of the need to broaden the definition of literacy, with a background of cultural influences,

**Cultural Influences**

A number of recent books and studies have explored how boys often want to read and write. Works such as Smith and Wilhelm’s (2002) “Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys, Literacy in the Lives of Young Men,” Maynard’s (2002) “Boys and Literacy: Exploring the Issues,” Booth’s (2002) “Even Hockey Players Read,” and Newkirk’s (2002) “Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture,” have asked thoughtful questions about how boys, responding to the dominant culture, engage in literacy practices in and out of the classroom. In different ways, all of these authors maintained that boys who seem disinterested in literacy in the classroom may be enthusiastic readers and writers in different contexts. Yet the literacy practices that appeal to some boys have not always valued in the context of institutionalized school literacy and often have been overlooked, to the frustration of both student and teacher.

The issue of gender in and of itself plays larger roles than have been regularly addressed in classroom curriculum (Williams & Bronwyn, 2004). The kinds of literacy practices to which boys are often drawn--connected to violence, action and popular culture, have usually been prohibited in the classroom where the emphasis has been on “high-culture” literature driven by character and nuance (Newkirk, 2002). Such
literature, and writing about such literature, as Newkirk (2003) noted, is often considered not only intellectually superior to other forms of literacy, but also morally superior.

Yet it has been texts that privilege mystery, suspense, plot and action that boys often found most compelling (Maynard, 2002). The violence and emphasis on action in boys’ writing, and in the books and popular culture they chose, often make teachers and others involved in schools nervous about the underlying messages that were being delivered in an educational setting (Williams & Bronwyn, 2004). Schools have traditionally assumed a civilizing mission as well as an academic one, and socializing boys away from violence, unruly behavior, and de-emphasizing the popular culture that celebrated such actions has been part of that mission. Violent reading and writing brings with it the fear that such violence might erupt beyond the page into the classroom. Newkirk (2002) maintained that, “When violence is banned in boys’ writing, the argument, though rarely spelled out, is that the representation of violence (even when fictional) causes more violence” (p. 15). Even as overall instances of violence in schools has declined, these concerns have intensified in the wake of well-publicized school shootings (Blair & Stanford, 2003). The underlying fear has been that boys cannot distinguish between the violence in a story and the violence in real life, or that they are unable to process imaginative work but instead absorb it and are molded by it without thinking (Williams & Bronwyn, 2004).

Newkirk (2002) also noted that educators rarely worry that the violence in Hamlet, Beowulf, or The Great Gatsby will lead to real-life violence. He noted that,
although the boys are drawn to books, writing and popular culture that place an emphasis on action and, at times, violence, they can in fact distinguish easily between the page and reality and do not read and write about violence for its own sake. As Newkirk (2002) maintained that “Suspense, not random violence, is the engine for the fictions boys truly like” (p. 130).

**The Widening Gap**

In an analysis of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 study, in which literacy skills were the main component (Thorpe, 2006), Thorpe found that girls in both public and private schools performed better in reading than did boys in all the OECD countries (England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, excluding Wales) which participated in PISA 2000 (Thorpe, 2006). Similar trends also held true on other measures and for other countries as well. The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) results showed, “In 2002 on the grade 10 test, 55% of boys passed the reading and writing components (compared to) to 70% of girls” (Freedman, 2003). In studying 32 countries, Topping, Valtin, Roller, Brozo, and Dionisio (2003) found “Females were more reflective and evaluative in the approach to reading and spend much more time reading for enjoyment than did males” (King & Gurian, 2006; Topping et al., 2003).

The 2000 results of a meta-analysis conducted by the Educational Testing Service showed that in 15 difference assessments, the largest gender gap occurred in the area of writing. Here, the eighth grade girls performed 0.6 standard deviations
better than boys; this gap was six times larger than the gap in math concepts, where boys held a very small edge (Educational Testing Service, 2000).

Another way to view the magnitude of this gap has been to compare it to the differences in writing performance of racial groups. The difference between whites and racial/ethnic groups who have suffered systematic social and economic discrimination in this country is comparable to the gender gap of females to males in an assessment for eighth grade students given by the NAEP in 1996. On a 500 point scale, white students outperformed black students by 29 points and Hispanic students by 21 points; females out-performed males by 25 points (Campbell, Ubelki, & Donohue, 1997, pp. 14-17).

This gender gap in literacy is equivalent to about one and a half years of school (Gurian, 1998). In 1985, the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) investigated writing achievement across 14 countries and found gender to be the most powerful predictor of performance. In a 1988 IEA study involving 32 nations, girls achieved higher total reading scores in all literacy areas (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Further research from the IEA reported that the gap in writing between eighth-grade males and females is more than six times greater than the differences in mathematical reasoning (Newkirk, 2003). While these results are more than twenty years old, the continuing achievement gap in writing lends credibility to the basic findings.

Findings of the Educational Testing Service (2003) reveal that this gap between the writing performance of males and females “is comparable to that between
Whites and racial/ethnic groups that have suffered systematic social and economic discrimination in this country” (p. 295). It is clear that schools are failing to meet the literacy needs of the majority of boys in the United States.

Schools and curricula have generally not embraced literacy as it has been broadly defined and have given little notice to pedagogical issues of gender. Classroom activities center largely on print text literacy (i.e., traditional forms of reading and writing). This is not surprising given the gaps between teacher’s experiences and those of their students (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

**Broadening the Definition of Literacy**

There is an increasing gap between the types of literacy activities being practiced in and out of school. Beyond the classroom walls, out-of-school activities involving texts such as the Internet, email, text messaging, Facebook, Twitter and digital video are being rapidly taken up by more and more students at younger ages (Blair & Sanford, 2003. However, there is a marked gender difference in the engagement with new technologies and the willingness to explore, read, or write using these alternative texts (Sanford, 2006).

Coles and Hall (2002) stated, “If we were to broaden current definitions of school literacy, we might find that boys’ vernacular literacies are actually serving boys rather well, although the school system is failing to recognize or capitalize on this” (p. 219). Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, and Lankshear (2002) further stated that when schools redefined what it meant to be literate in modern times, “what children and young people are able to do successfully with language and literacy is given a wider purview,
which automatically includes out-of-school literacy practices not normally valued in schools” (p. 93). This “valuing” by the schools would not only change the way statistics report boys’ literacy acts, but would increase their literacy skills by broadening their own definitions of literacy.

When this broader definition includes what boys are already doing with literacy, it would increase their sense of self-efficacy with reading and writing, encourage them to read and write more, and promote the image of reading as a masculine, as well as a feminine, act. What boys are already doing would provide an entry point from which to scaffold new understandings and build more nuanced reading and writing. They would begin to see themselves as readers and writers in the way that Coles and Hall (2002) described:

Sustained literacy habits are based on the confidence and independence which come from seeing yourself as a reader and writer, someone who has the power to use literacy as a tool, as a means of self-expression and as a means of enjoyment. (p. 220)

If school definitions of literacy were broadened to promote the kinds of literacy that are valued in the home and in the workplace, such as reading for information and computer literacy, boys would be motivated to succeed and improve in these areas (Coles & Hall, 2002). In addition, Probst (2003) made the point that:

Considering why and how students read those other texts in their lives, those texts in their lives, those texts that lie outside the books we present them, may give us some ideas about the motives they bring-or fail to bring-to the texts we
hope they’ll read for us in our classes and afterwards, when they’ve escaped our clutches. (p. 41)

**Defining Gender**

The term “gender” requires some thought in planning for instruction. The term “gender” denotes a social distinction among people rather than a biological determinant—“the fact or condition of being a male or a female human being, especially with regard to how this affects or determines a person’s self-image, social status, goals, etc.” (Webster-Merriam, 2003, p. 561). Therefore, this thesis uses the term “gender” to refer to, not the biological sex of an individual, rather the set of sex role socialization patterns that often are attached to people because of their biological sex.

As such then, there are many intersections between literacy and gender, some are developed and exploited, while others are entirely overlooked. If students are to become capable, functioning members of society, it is important to examine the intersections of these two powerful constructs critically and explicitly (Sanford, 2006).

**Developmental Issues**

In a report presented at the “Teaching Boys, Developing Fine Men” conference, Rowe (2000) explained that the verbal reasoning and literacy requirements of school curricula are beyond boys’ developmental capacities because boys’ fine motor skills are slower at developing than those of girls entering school (Daly, 2002; Kleinfeld, 2006). Writing can become laborious for those whose fingers are struggling just to be able to grip a pencil-vital in the role of the writing process. With academic
standards becoming more rigid, kindergarten is no longer a year for socialization. Years prior, these children would dabble in rhyme, paint and learn through play. Today’s kindergarten curriculum looks much like the first grade curriculum of 1977 (Sax, 2007). Many educators are doing a disservice to a number of male students by asking them to sit still and read when they are just not developmentally ready to do so.

**Differences Within the Gender of Boys**

In recent years, American culture began to shift its efforts toward recognizing the emotional difficulties males face in educational environments (Hebert, 2002). Educators began to notice that years of neglecting the emotional needs of males in the classroom has had detrimental effects (Pollack, 1998).

Kindlon and Thompson (2000), in *Raising Cain*, noted that North America has assigned relationship work to women and this has turned emotions into a non-valued language for men. “As a result, most men have limited awareness or understanding of their feelings of others…instead, they tend to fall back on what they have been taught to do with other men—namely, compete, control and criticize” (p. 5). The authors reported an inverse correlation between the ease of verbal expressiveness and the ability to have impulse control in young men.

Achievement and participation data indicate that there is a wide range of achievement among boys. The gendered impact begs the question: Which boys are in trouble? Socio-economic factors play a critical role. The lower socio-economic status of boys, the less likely they are to succeed. Researchers from the Harvard Graduate School of Education investigated differences in gendered aspects of academic
achievement in low-income students. The boys and girls in the study were evenly matched in literacy levels at the beginning of the study, and aptitude as measured on standardized tests tended to remain constant from preschool to middle school. Over time, however, boys’ literacy attitudes and practices fell behind those of the girls (Williams & Bronwyn, 2004). As income and status rise, these gendered differences in literacy are minimized. Upper-social-status boys out-perform lower-social-status boys with the resulting gender differences declining slightly at the high socio-economic-status (SES) range (Freedmon, 2003).

For males who are identified as gifted, the issues surrounding literacy are complicated. The disconnect between abilities and interest and what is considered “manly” among mainstream society, often leads to ridicule from peers. As Herbert (2002) noted, educators must develop an awareness of opportunities such as journal writing, for example, to allow these students to safely express who they really are in response to mainstream society.

**Physical Issues**

Another layer of the writing process in boys is their inability to sit for long periods of time. In her book, Why Boys Don’t Talk and Why We Care, Susan Shaffer (2000) states that “Teachers perceive boys as problems, difficult, and taking up more than their share of room in the classroom” (p. 34). Part of the reason behind these perceptions is that the typical 10-year-old boy needs five recess periods per day, but typical punishment for misbehaving in the traditional classroom is to take away recess.
The irony of this is that the break is likely one that would otherwise facilitate writing (Shaffer, 2000).

A second issue, overlapping with the one above is the disproportionate over-representation of boys in special education programs (Conference on Minorities in Special Education, held in 2001), especially minority boys. On average, boys learn their letters later than do girls, but this has not been widely recognized as an issue of acceptable development differences between boys and girls (Shaffer, 2000). In his Education Week article, “The Quiet Crisis in Boys’ Literacy,” Newkirk (2003) discusses the idea of a developmental delay. He states that although it is accepted knowledge that boys generally develop the skills necessary for reading and writing later than girls, no accommodation is made. Instead, the early childhood curriculum grows ever more academic and pays less attention to critical issues of child development. (Newkirk, p. 245)

As Schaffer (2000) queried, “What happens to boys when they don’t do well in school? They feel shame, and when they feel shame, they disengage. As a result, boys become less emotionally connected to their families and schools” (p. 17).

**On the Minds of Boys**

Vygotsky (1978) referred to reading and writing as ways of talking, thinking, living and working on paper. As ‘psychological tools’, he felt that they aided how people interacted. The reading and writing choices a student has been exposed to and supported within has been the core of this process at work. “Books and other texts
affect children’s views of themselves including their view of gender identity” (Booth 2002).

When choosing literacy activities, boys tend to produce more writing when they can choose narrative type writing, drawing upon experiences they have had first-hand (Gurian, 2006).

There are so many curriculum mandates that writing has become so much more content driven and less about choice. Kids are moved quickly through genre studies—the five point essay, a magazine article, crafting a persuasive argument. Boys rarely get the chance to write what they want. (p.46)

In a study of elementary students conducted in the Durham School District (2002-2003), boys interviewed said that although they saw their mothers read and write, they seldom saw this in their fathers. “My mom likes to read and she writes on the computer all the time, but my dad only reads when he has to, and I don’t think he ever writes” (Freedmon, 2003, pp. 94-95). Only 5% of boys said their fathers did read books, but even they said it was not on a regular basis (Freedmon, 2003).

In the same study, boys felt their teachers did not give them choices for writing and reading, although they did express enjoying read-alouds if they considered the books interesting. Nearly every boy surveyed felt that boys do not write and read the same things as girls. When given a choice of language arts or doing another activity, 70% of the boys in the same study said that they preferred another activity including (a) physical activities, (b) playing outside, and (c) working/playing on a computer (Freedmon, 2003).
Boys who did not perform well in writing and reading assessments did not see themselves as readers, “my dad doesn’t read and I don’t too.” They saw themselves as non-writers and slow readers, questioning its value, “it takes a long time to read, and I want to do other stuff like hockey”, “what good is it,” or “it’s girl stuff,” were some responses (Freedmon, 2003).

In a gender-based research study in Jamaica by Froschl and Sprung (2005), the underachievement of boys was apparent. The results showed boys’ low literacy rate and high rates of learning disabilities to be major problems, similar to the United States. The researchers noted that boys and girls have developed very definite gender roles which have been perpetuated from a very young age. By sixth grade, boys began to score very low on literacy tests. Girls were encouraged to stay in school and go on to college but upon entering the workforce, boys were more likely to get the jobs (Froschl & Sprung, 2005).

Newkirk (2002) argued that part of the appeal for boys and of action-oriented writing was that—in the same way young boys pretended to be superheroes on the playground and adolescents role-played board and video games—it offered a way to transcend the often powerless world of children, moving them into a fictional world where they could “claim power and privileges they could never claim in ‘real life’” (p. 88). Behind the action and violence in the stories were themes of loyalty, courage, and the ability to face and transcend danger without fear and the help of close friends. In these stories, whether as readers or writers, boys could be bigger, braver, and –most
important—in more control than in a world where adults were really still very much in charge.

Another appeal of action-oriented literacy practices for boys has been the way males use them to make social connections. Research by Newkirk (2002) and Smith and Wilhelm (2002) reported that friendships that developed among boys through stories and problem solving were as tight as those that developed through verbal expressions of friendship.

Teacher’s attitudes toward boy’s writing practices have varied from direct prohibitions on certain genres or characteristics of writing to encouragement to pursue subject matter within their knowledge base. Teachers who are able to see that boys are using literacy practices when they seek out websites about video games or argue over the plot of a movie or television program, can help the engagement process for boys (Blair & Sanford, 2003). Teachers can use the examples of violence, suspense, and comedy in boys’ writing to acknowledge and engage all students in thoughtful considerations of the complexity of such actions/stories in print and popular culture (Newkirk, 2002).

Strategies to Consider

Giving students choice and control in reading material and writing options can play an important role in involvement with and enjoyment of literacy activities. Brozo (2002) stated, “Choice and control are two ingredients commonly missing in instruction to adolescent boys who are not performing as would be expected in areas of literacy and who are reluctant writers” (p. 18). The opportunity for students to have
choice in their writing and reading promotes increased positive feelings about literacy and improved achievement (Worthy, Turner, & Moorman, 1998). Smith and Wilhelm (2002) reported “boys almost universally felt that school denied them choice and control and therefore any sense of personal agency or competence” (p. 109). The boys in their study did not see literacy as a way to develop new interests but rather as a way to explore existing interests. They also found that, despite all that, boys still believed in the importance of school. This means that teachers have less of an obstacle to face when trying to engage learners if they can tap into existing student interests, build on them to develop new interests, and show students the connection of learning to their lives (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

To engage boys emotionally, discussions and debates on issues affecting them are excellent strategies to get boys involved. Offering a time when they can collaborate, as in gender specific literacy circles would encourage writing. This process could act to get boys to inspire one another and raise self efficacy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002)

Lessons for boys should be experiential and kinesthetic with instruction limited to no more than one minute (Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Boys seem to be more inclined to be visual and spatial learners. For that reason, lessons should be presented using visual aids as much as possible. Teachers should use and give their students opportunities to use flow charts, computers, and projectors, which would aide in their motivation and understanding of a lesson. The use of technology taps into boys’ visual spatial and visual motor abilities (Sax, 2006).
By nature, boys are competitive. The results of a study by Gneezy and Rustichini (2010) confirmed that competition provides an incentive for males to do better, but not so for their female counterparts. This was a study that involved 140 fourth graders (75 boys, 65 girls) between the ages of 9-10. During their physical education class, they ran 40 meters, twice around a track with speeds being measured by their teacher. On their first lap, students ran independently, however, on the second lap, they were paired with another student. The study showed that when boys ran against another boy, their performance improved by a large margin, but the case was not the same for the girls. Developing lessons and allowing boys to compete in areas such as spelling, writing and reading might push those individuals who might not otherwise be inspired to work their hardest or try their best.

Schools that have worked to focus on how boys and girls learn differently and have moved to address those differences have shown marked improvement in their scores. One such school, Douglass Elementary had a 10% gap between boys and girls in their writing scores (Gurian, 2006). After two years of implementing “boy-friendly” strategies, the gap had been reduced to 3%. Similar gains were made with reading with remarkable gains in special education students reading progress.

As the definition of literacy is broadened, educators need to provide numerous opportunities for hands-on learning and problem-solving situations to address the needs specific to boys, as students (Pollack, 1998). Coles and Hall (2002) found that boys’ literacy choices tend to give greater emphasis to taking information from the text and analyzing it rather than analyzing motivation or characterization. Teachers
can take advantage of this desire to analyze by explicitly teaching boys how to read and write. Pirie (2002) explained, “When reading and writing activities are made explicit through think-alouds and other forms of classroom instruction, poorer readers and writers suddenly have a chance to see these secret habits and try them out for themselves” (p. 82). If teachers expand their teaching styles to address boy’s specific needs as readers and writers, they can become “mediators between boys and a richer world of literacy” (p. 87). He also suggests that boys may be engaging in literacy practices outside school that are not reflected in their poor literacy test results, and that “the boys may be advantaged with electronic forms of literate practice useful in the changing post-industrial labor market” and educators need to take advantage of this (p. 23).

Finally, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) note that, with respect to achievement: (a) boys take longer to learn to read and read less than girls, (b) girls tend to comprehend narrative texts and most expository texts significantly better than boys do, and (c) boys tend to be better at information retrieval and work-related literacy tasks than are girls (pp. 10-11).

**Conclusion**

This research provides some insight and understanding as to the differences and complexities of teaching and reaching boys, with respect to literacy. There is, indeed, a growing crisis in boys’ education. Early childhood, a high-risk time for boys, is an opportune time to intervene (Williams & Bronwyn, 2004). At a strategic planning meeting, a collaborative number of educators and psychologists provided a
two-pronged strategy in an effort to meet the unique needs of boys and literacy. This strategy combined a research-action agenda and a broad communications campaign with the goal of applying lessons learned to teacher training, educational practice, and continuing research. Participants noted that changes in attitudes and beliefs most likely take place incrementally over several years. In order to successfully do so, however, this would need to include a diverse community (Froschl & Sprung, 2005).

The literature suggests that boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds, minorities and boys who are learning disabled are more likely to encounter difficulty with schooling, in general, and reading and writing in particular (Hey, Leonard, Daniels, & Smith, 2003). Understanding the issues facing boys in the classroom as well as incorporating practices that take advantage of the natural interests of boys in reading and writing is an approach that is quite promising. The true litmus test for educators, administrators and parents will be the success of their efforts to vary curriculum modalities, listen to what goes on both in and outside the classroom with boys and girls, while still adhering to district mandated standards.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Boys’ reluctance to engage in school literacy tasks and their lack of interest in reading and writing has raised many concerns and questions about how this problem might be addressed (Gilbert, 1998). This guide is developed for the purpose of engaging boys in the area of literacy, specifically writing, although in the process, students also involve reading and other skills. Too often, boys lack the understanding of themselves that they are writers and that what they think is meaningful enough to become permanent (by writing these musings). In an effort to meet the specific needs of boys, this guide will contain a series of lessons intended to focus on skills to support them. These lessons are based on research stemming from what is known about the structure and function of male brains, in addition to their added interests.

Along with lesson plans, the guide provides information regarding the classroom environment and ideas to create an optimal environment for all students to thrive. Included also is a reading list geared to engage and motivate male students, giving them tangible examples of quality writing.

Organization of the Guide

This guide for teachers is organized in a traditional fashion, with objectives in each lesson and the California State Standards that are addressed, as well as materials needed and any other added elements. The researcher has implemented each of these lessons and has included any helpful ideas that would enhance the lessons.
Lessons provided may be modified to meet specific grade levels, although these were primarily designed to be used in the intermediate grades. Many male students tend to favor themes of nonfiction and comics, so these were included in the construction of the guide. Although the lessons target boys and their learning styles, the materials should prove to be motivating for all students. It is suggested that educators conduct an interest inventory at the onset of the school year in an effort to specifically focus the writing materials on the needs/interests of their students, both male and female. A sample inventory is included in this guide.

**Strategies to Consider**

Due to their biological nature, boys need to move (Froschl & Sprung, 2005; Gurian & Stevens, 2004). By incorporating movement as a strategy to keep boys actively learning, lessons can become more engaging. Movement can be incorporated into many of the lessons presented, both fine motor and gross motor movements.

Lessons also include activities meant to address the differences between genders in learning styles. Specifically, boys tend to be competitive and compartmentalize their learning, while girls can better handle multitasking and are more group-oriented and inclusive (Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Using an assignment such as a research report (included in the guide), students are encouraged to gather and organize their information for a report using a file folder system. In doing so, this supports organization of research, both what has been obtained and what still needs to be done. Having students physically put the information into envelope helps ingrain a process that sets students up to be able to conduct research in the future.
As is mentioned previously, the competitive nature of boys necessarily opens up opportunities for using learning games in some of the lessons. These games would have boys moving more often than doing seatwork for extended periods of time.

This guide is provided as a tool for teachers to increase the quantity and quality of writing, but it should be mentioned here that reading is also an integral part of a student’s ability to write well. Time spent reading independently has a positive impact on reading and writing achievement. Therefore, finding the motivating factors that encourage boys to read will be an important aspect in their support of good writing. Knowing that motivated readers will read more often (Baker & Wigfield, 1999), the list of resources for students is provided in the project.

**Classroom Learning Environment**

When setting up a classroom, or in rearranging it, one should consider the audience and the teaching style of the educator. To males and females, classrooms can feel like different spaces. Considering the collective nature of many girls and the competitive nature of many boys, putting desks in cooperative groups might work well with girls, while it may frustrate some boys.

Depending on the school itself, it would be beneficial to create a literacy center (A “Lightbulb Lab”, for example), complete with supplies readily available for all to use. If possible, the use of a parent volunteer table somewhere in the room would be useful for students to get support in their revision and editing of their work. Finally, gathering some cushions or beach chairs can provide students with a casual place to read or write, using clipboards as desks.
Some schools are fortunate enough to have parent volunteers that can help lessen the number of students in a room by taking small groups to a bench outside the room. Not only does this help with the level of noise in the room, but it gives the educator more opportunities to confer with students about their work in progress.

**Implementation**

In an effort to increase awareness about the issues boys face with writing, a school staff (including aides and support staff) might want to consider reading literature about gender differences and how these factor into designing a curriculum that will support the ideas discussed here. “Why Gender Matters: What parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences,” by Sax, (2006) would make an excellent year-long discussion piece.

At the onset of the school year, teachers could meet to discuss the implementation of a focus for boys in writing. This could start by choosing a school-wide writing prompt to use as a baseline of where to begin, and continue each trimester (or quarter), as these ideas and lessons are implemented and ingrained within the daily lessons educators teach. Discussion topics could center on assessments from one grade to the other (articulation, for example), or modifications that are currently working in the varied classes and those that are not proving to be effective.

Finally, closing the school year, teachers could plan for a reflective discussion about what they had learned as a result of this altered approach and how to improve upon their teaching for the coming year, or to change and enhance what was working. Comparing student work side-by-side (perhaps in small groups at a staff meeting),
educators could make solid decisions regarding strategies to keep for the following year and those to modify.
Chapter 4

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

While it is important to note that not ALL boys are struggling as writers and that not ALL girls are not, the numbers speak for themselves. There is a gap between males and females in intermediate grades into high school, and there are strategies that work to minimize this factor and enable all learners to be successful. What might not work for one student may in fact work for another, or it may work at another time. It is important for educators to be aware of the differences in their students in an effort to reach them as best as they can.

With all that is known, what is it that educators can and should do to facilitate growth for all students in the area of writing? What needs to be changed in the delivery and support specifically to help young boys become proficient and willing writers? Many factors play a role, but up front is the idea of enabling them to believe that they can improve their work and provide the materials (the engaging lessons), and the consistent opportunities for them to be successful. Allowing them to get to the level of self-efficacy, of knowing that they can complete assignments given and rise to the levels of expectations without needing to rely on anything outside of themselves.

Recommendations

Like boys and action, reading and writing go hand-in-hand. Both are critical skills for literacy. It is through writing that boys will learn to formulate thoughts and improve their creativity and thinking skills (Newkirk, 2002). Unfortunately, boys who
are reluctant to do writing, usually resist reading as well. Here are five ideas, that utilize activities and interests that most appeal to boys, to get them writing:

1. **Involve Their Interests**

   “Write what you know” is one of the basic guidelines. This is especially important to remember when encouraging boys who are reluctant to write, since pushing them outside of comfort zones can be overwhelming. Place value on boys' interests and the knowledge, which they already have by encouraging them to write about their hobbies, favorite topics or other activities.

2. **The Wonder of What-ifs**

   Boys often think of “make-believe” and “playing pretend” as “girl” activities. Since they encourage imagination, boys who resist those activities are missing out on creative opportunities. With a game of “what-ifs” boys can be encouraged to explore their imagination too. After reading a book or watching a movie together, ask your student, “what do you think would have happened if...” and present him with a different plot development. Encourage him to ask his own “what-if” questions and then write down his thoughts. The freedom to change a story to his liking will make it fun!

3. **Involve Technology**

   Projects that include computers and technology are an instant hit with boys. While they are on chat and game sites, encourage boys to explore the writing opportunities that are just a click away. The internet provides communities, inspiration and motivators that can engage boys with writing.
4. Utilize Artwork

Pictures and images can be great motivators for boys who are visual learners. The images give them a concrete beginning to build on, which is less frustrating for them than abstract ideas. Ask your student to draw a picture of an activity he enjoys or his favorite characters from a comic, movie or book. Next ask him to tell the story of what is happening in his picture – encourage him to include backstory and what he thinks will happen next. Artwork can also be utilized for boys who are resistant to drawing. Ask them to find a picture they like in a magazine or book and to write about that instead.

5. Genres Rule!

If boys do not enjoy reading fiction, they most likely will not enjoy writing it either. Make it okay for them to write other genres – non-fiction, science fiction, and mysteries. Include the sports they like to play or watch. Encourage them to be a Sports Writer and write a recap of the baseball game they watched on Saturday afternoon. If your student enjoys mysteries, ask him to be a Detective (complete with a Detective hat and notepad) and find something that is missing. Most likely the initial search mission will take him on an adventure that he will be eager to write about and share later.

These ideas can be adapted for the age and writing level of each child. The possible variations are endless. Once the student’s interest in writing in engaged in the classroom, capitalize on this by involving reading. Recommend books and short stories with topics similar to the ones about which they wrote.
Conclusion

It is vital that educators create an environment of trust and value prior to any mention of academics, if they are to get students to feel as though they can reach their personal levels of excellence. Students come to school with many experiences, both positive and negative, and these issues cannot be ignored or dismissed as unimportant in their growth in and out of the classroom. Time spent initially during the school year in team-building activities is crucial in the success of academic programs in all subjects, and it is also important in the educator’s role of leader and, at times, member. Teachers want students, especially boys, to share of themselves in their writing, and in getting there, they themselves also need to be willing to value what is offered and share from their own personal experience.

The researcher pursued this area of teaching in an effort to help her own students become life-long learners. The lessons, strategies and handouts compiled in this project are simply to help fellow colleagues continue this process, and begin to understand that the differences that do exist within the two genders walking through the door each day are important in their work. Even in the stages of lesson planning, the researcher makes note of the variations she can make in teaching to each gender, and it is literally less work for classroom management.

Every student the teacher comes in contact with during the course of their careers has the ability to grow and become whom they are meant to become. The teacher is simply a facilitator. As one of the researcher’s students pointed out this year, the base word there being “facil” means “easy.” The teacher’s job is to facilitate or
make this learning process easier on students, which in turn, will hopefully make the learning experience meaningful and memorable.
APPENDIX

The Teachers Guide to Improve the Writing Skills of Boys
# THE TEACHER’S GUIDE TO IMPROVE THE WRITING SKILLS OF BOYS

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Unit A

Narrative Writing
RATIONALE

Boys need to see learning as relevant, specifically writing and telling of themselves. When they can see a clear purpose and reasoning for their work, the response will be positive and productive. The more educators make it important to meet students where they are, the better off everyone will be.

As earlier mentioned in this project, boys have a brain structure that needs to use compartmentalization in learning. Graphic organizers are a great visual to use as a learning strategy for these specific needs. They can be used in reading as well as a means to aid in comprehension skills. In writing they are a representation of information that organize ideas and thoughts prior to writing.

The following lessons incorporate graphic organizers to help boys organize their learning as well as topics that will motivate them to write and let us in on their worlds!
Lesson 1: Zooming In

Grade: 4-7

Whole Group

Content Area: Writing

Materials: Overhead projector (ELMO), writing materials, and large photographs.

Objectives: Students will use a new technique to see their writing come to life, moving it from a small thought to an expansion of a thought. Students will write out what they have created as a result of the lesson.

With a technique like this students are writing details, giving a clear picture for the reader, like a zoom lens does on a camera. Students write their own “telling sentence/showing” paragraph about a time in their life (getting a pet, winning, losing, etc.), a hobby, or just describing something and it is restated using detail and sensory language.

Anticipatory Set

Tell the students that they are going to work with a picture in a moment. Ask them about reading or listening to stories that have no pictures. How do you see what is happening in the story? Yes, we use the details and descriptions that are provided by the author. Today, we are going to paint pictures in our heads doing just that. By taking a small thought or idea, we will build upon it to create a small story.
Procedure

**Telling:** *California was really beautiful.*

Then, Show the class a picture of the California Coastline or another of the Redwood forests. Discuss the picture(s) and come up with a list of details of which to build upon.

As a group, write the following on the overhead:

**Showing:** *I loved how the ocean met the mountains as we drove along the Pacific Coast Highway. We were right on the edge of the curvy road high above the rocky coastline below us dotted with the white foam of the waves. On the other side of our car were the jagged mountains, standing tall and proud above the crashing sea. It was a beautiful, warm California day, and to me it was the most magnificent place on earth.*

**Telling:** *Brian was upset because his basketball team lost.*

Then, again, show the class a photograph of a somewhat discouraged basketball player and a scoreboard in the background.

**Showing:** *Brian looked up at the scoreboard and shook his head slowly. He couldn’t believe his team lost the basketball game by only two points. The players on the other team were celebrating their victory, jumping up and down and chest butting each other. Brian bit his lip to stop it from quivering. His eyes teared up, and the crowd looked all blurry. He blinked the tears away because he didn’t want anyone to see him cry. Mark, a player on his team, came up and patted Brian on the shoulder. “Don’t worry about*
missing that shot,” he reassured Brian. “Without you, our team would never have even been in the game at all.”

**Telling:** *My best vacation was when my family and I went to New York City.*

**Showing:** The lights of Broadway glittered in the night as I looked out of my hotel window. My family and I were on vacation in New York City, and I couldn’t wait to go out on the town. We had tickets to “The Lion King” – one of the biggest shows on Broadway, and I was so excited I could hardly stand it!

**Procedure**

Students will then take a sentence that they will create at the top of their page with which to use for the paragraph they will write. Students will be given approximately 20-30 minutes to write, with encouragement for them to illustrate these to share with the class.

**Assessment**

Check to see that students have followed directions, adding descriptive details to their single sentences. As these are considered first drafts, suggestions for improvement will be positive and encouraging. Look for descriptive language as was modeled, using adjectives and adverbs to paint pictures in reader’s minds!
Lesson 2: Narrative Writing

Grade: 3-7

Whole Class/Small Group

Content Area: Writing

Objectives

- Students will use Step Up to Writing format to organize a narrative writing piece.
- Students will include descriptive language and will explain their ideas, telling the ‘small moment’ of the piece.

Materials

- Student Handout (see next page)
- Three crayons, one green, one yellow, and one red.
- Writing paper with outline marks for coloring dots.

Anticipatory Set

Tell students that if they were planning on taking a trip someplace they had never been, what would be important to have? (a map or directions) So, knowing that, it would be really beneficial if we are going to write (and write well), we need to begin with a plan. We are going to use our colors to keep our narratives telling our small moments in an organized way. We are in the process of telling our stories, not explaining or informing others. Narrative writing is just you putting the reader in your
moment that you are discussing. We (the reader) want to experience what it is that you did, first hand, so we need your colorful details and examples. Remember that topic sentences are “green,” details are “yellow,” and examples are “red.”

**Procedure**

Students will begin by using their papers that have dots to color(either green, yellow or red). These papers are merely their outlines for the writing they will eventually complete in days to come, as this is an on-going process. When students have been given ample time to create these outlines (or maps) of their narratives, they will be encouraged to partner-share these in small groups.

**Evaluation**

Student work will be evaluated by their final drafts for procedure and content. A series of revisions and a final edit would also factor in with this step. Students are encouraged to pick their best writing pieces from their folders to have published for our class library.
Guidelines for Writing a Narrative

1. Remember a narrative is telling about a series of events in chronological order (moving the reader through time from the first event to the last).

2. Starting a story with the words “One day” or “One time” or “One sunny day,” for example aren’t necessarily going to hook the reader. Try to think of an exclamation or a sound that is made by a character or event instead. Also, try not to end a story by writing “Then I woke up and it was all a dream.” Just jump right in and start telling it, using your outline as your guide.

3. Make sure your point-of-view stays the same throughout the story.
   - **First** person (using the word “I”) is a good point-of-view to use for narratives (*I ran down the hallway*). It reveals what you - the main character - has experienced or knows.
   - **Third** person (using the pronouns she, he, someone’s name) can also be used. (*Sam/He ran down the hallway.*)

4. Good narrative stories stay focused. Giving unnecessary information can lead the reader down the wrong roads and are difficult to follow. Using your outline from your planning stage will help!

5. Your beginning can start with a hook (a way to grab the reader), but make sure it also gives information about the setting and your main character. Get to the prompt in the beginning or soon afterwards. Make sure your middle has two or three events that to build the plot. Your ending should repeat the prompt and conclude the story so the plot is finished and makes sense. Your reflections (about what happened) also make a strong ending. *Wrap it up!*
6. To paint a picture for your reader, try showing instead of telling.

“She was sad” (telling)
“She frowned as her lip quivered and tears filled her eyes.” (showing)

7. Use verbs that are exact. “Stared” or “gazed” are better than “looked”.

8. Don’t forget to show your (the character’s) REACTION to major events.

9. Stories should have varied sentence length and structure.

10. Proper paragraphing and good transitional words will make your story easier to read and understand.

11. Use dialogue to move the story along or reveal something about the character. Use quotation marks around what the characters say. Try not to use too much dialogue, though.

12. Read your story out loud if possible to see how it sounds. This is often a good way to see if sentences need to be varied, if something’s not clear, and/or if word choice or transitions need work.

Other Tips for Narrative Writing….
1. A note on endings to stories: good phrases to wrap up or look back and reflect at the end of story may include:
   - Since that day…
   - Since that time…
   - Looking back…
   - Now I understand that…

2. Quotation Marks- Put quotation marks around the exact words that are said by someone:

   “Don’t go outside!” she screamed.

   (The words she and screamed are not inside the quotation marks because they were not said by the speaker.)

   a. Periods go inside quotation marks. But when you put “said” or other (who said it) after the dialogue, then put a comma inside the quotation marks instead of a period.
Jason told his teacher, “My grandparents are coming to visit next week.”
“No, I couldn’t get tickets,” Tommy replied.

b. If the dialogue is a question or exclamation with attribution after it, then question marks (?) or exclamation marks (!) replace them

“Are you going to the big game tomorrow night?” Megan asked.

“Man, would I love to go!” Tommy exclaimed.

4. Don’t use too much dialogue in a narrative – maybe two or three quotations at important or exciting parts (the ‘wow’ or ‘zoom’ moments).

5. To make a story really come alive, put in quotations and add what the person is doing while they’re saying it.

“Time to go to bed,” my dad reminded me while he was reading the newspaper.

“Aww, Dad, do I have to?” I complained, frowning at him.

“It’s late,” he replied firmly as he switched off the television.
Unit B

Personalizing Writing
RATIONALE

It has been found that when given more choice, boys will have buy-in and attach themselves to an assignment or group (Gurian, 1998; Sax, 2003). Whether students like or dislike an assignment, throughout their tenure as students, they are not left with much choice there. In the lessons that follow, they learn of writing techniques that require them to select things (words) that enhance their writing and personalize the assignments. Students are encouraged to express their ideas and thoughts, while choosing varied methods of writing to come up with well-written, meaningful paragraphs, essays and poems. Boys can be more empowered to see themselves as writers instead of passive students waiting for the bell to ring.
Lesson 1: Word Choice

**Grade:** 3-7

**Whole Group**

**Content Area:** Writing

**Standards:** W 2.2, 3.1

**Objectives**

- Students will understand the benefits of varied vocabulary.
- Students will compose a multiple-paragraph paper to write a narrative.

**Materials**

- A narrative story to use as an example (Grandfather Tang’s Story was what this lesson used).
- Student Handout of words to consider.
- Large lined butcher paper and pens.
- Writing paper for student use.

**Anticipatory Set**

Ask students how many different ways that we can say “said?” Spend some ten to fifteen minutes compiling a list of these using a web, placing the word “said” in the middle of the butcher paper, and listing suggestions for alternatives around it. Discuss why and how varying the use of words would enhance and improve writing.
Procedure

Tell your students that they will make a draft of their narratives using a graphic organizer to get started. Once they have a clear plan of what they will be writing, they can show me how this will be told in their words.

Modeling

Show the class a prepared simple paragraph of a personal narrative you have written that is very plain, using very little if any descriptive and interesting language. With the class, underline and change several of the words together and make this revision an example of what they will be creating within this lesson.

As soon as there appears to be a clear understanding of the directive and the expectations, students begin their work with their graphic organizers, and subsequent writing narratives.

Evaluation

During the revision process, it is beneficial for boys especially to feel positive about their efforts with their writing. Make sure to separate “revision” with “editing.” The goal of this writing is process based, and going over a student’s work with a red pen to cite mistakes would only serve to keep them from attempting to express their stories. Often, educators use rubrics to grade student work, and there are specific and necessary situations for these. However, with this process, one would be better off considering the individual and their learning goals.
afraid – frightened, scared, fearful, alarmed, terrified, horrified, petrified, frightening, scary, alarming, terrifying, horrifying, spooky.

a lot – many, plenty, numerous, quite a few, a variety of, a plethora of.

bad – terrible, horrible, horrendous, awful, wicked, catastrophic, tragic, disastrous, horrific

big – enormous, huge, large, gigantic, massive, colossal, towering, mammoth.

brave – courageous, bold, daring, fearless, showed a lot of courage

cold – freezing, frigid, chilly, frosty, icy, nippy, (bitterly cold)

confused – bewildered, puzzled, perplexed, baffled, mixed-up

cried – sobbed, wept (weeping), sniffled, whimpered, teary-eyed, bawled, blubbered, whined

cried-(the other meaning) : shouted, yelled, exclaimed, screamed, shrieked, bellowed, boomed

dangerous – risky, unsafe, perilous

embarrassed – humiliated, mortified, ashamed

excited – enthusiastic, eager, thrilled

exciting – thrilling, suspenseful, adventurous, heart-pounding

fantastic - fabulous, terrific, wonderful, excellent, exceptional (incredible, thrilling if in the right context)

flabbergasted - thunderstruck, dumbfounded, floored

funny – hilarious, amusing, humorous, comical, hysterical, witty
great - splendid, spectacular, super, stupendous, superior, superb, stellar, supreme

happy – thrilled, delighted, elated, ecstatic, joyful, glad, cheerful, jolly

hard – difficult, tough, challenging

heartbroken - crestfallen, devastated

hot – scorching, sweltering, steaming (blazing hot)

hungry – starving, famished

interesting – intriguing, fascinating

interested – intrigued, fascinated (if the character is very interested and can’t take his/her eyes off of something, then you might want to use ‘captivated’ or ‘mesmerized’)

laughed – giggled, chuckled, snickered, howled, cackled, chortled

like – adore, admire, enjoy (such as a sport), prefer, treasure, cherish

mad – angry, upset, furious, enraged, fit-to-be-tied

nice – kind, thoughtful, gracious, considerate, courteous, cordial (wonderful, etc. as in a nice day or beautiful, etc. as in a nice house)

pretty – lovely, beautiful, attractive, gorgeous, stunning,

ran – raced, dashed, jogged, trotted, hurried, rushed, darted, sprinted, bolted, scurried

sad - depressed, disappointed, miserable, dejected, glum, gloomy, sorrowful

said – remarked, responded, demanded, warned, replied, whispered, asked, moaned, groaned, stated, declared, announced, claimed, exclaimed, suggested, mentioned, explained, begged, pleaded, agreed, confirmed. (Also refer to the handout we made as a class).

saw – spotted, glimpsed, spied, noticed, discovered

sensational- outstanding, remarkable, extraordinary, magnificent, marvelous
smart – intelligent, bright, wise, brainy

spine-tingling, exhilarating, thrilling

surprised – astonished, astounded, amazed, stunned, startled, shocked,

very – extremely (other choices like ‘exceedingly’ or ‘remarkably’ might work, but this word works in virtually every case)

walked – trudged, strolled, staggered, stumbled, paraded, hiked, tip-toed, stalked.

Other good words to learn to spell and use in student writing: nervous, proud, realized, decided, important, emotional, inspiring, experience, grateful, exhausted, achievement (achieved), accomplishment (accomplished), several, frustrated, understand, rewarding, overwhelmed, absolutely, definitely.

** The word ‘stuff’ as in “My best friend and I did lots of stuff,” doesn’t give the reader enough detail to fully understand what you are trying to show them in your writing, and something to try to avoid.

✓ After selecting a synonym to use for a word, read the sentence to make sure it works. Sometimes another synonym will fit into a sentence better and more smoothly than others.

✓ Also, sometimes a word has several different ways to be used, such as: 

  *important* “It is important that we win the next game.” Here we can replace the word ‘important’ with the word ‘crucial’ or ‘vital’ or ‘essential’.

✓ In the next sentence these two synonyms don’t work as well:

✓“The speaker at the ceremony was a very important person.” In this sentence, it’s better to replace the word ‘important’ with ‘prominent’, ‘powerful’, ‘respected’, or ‘distinguished’.
Lesson 2: Instant Poetry, Just Add Words!

Grade levels: 5th-12th

Whole Class

Content Area: Writing Poetry

Time: 30-45 minutes (can combine with lesson 2 if time allows)

Objectives

- Students will be able to write a poem that doesn’t necessarily rhyme, but has personal meaning for them.
- Students will choose six words from six lists, which are specific to them.

Materials

- Six lists of words provided by the teacher, posted up on the promethean or white board in a flipchart format.
- Paper, pencils
- Worksheet to organize writing and word choices, (if combining with lesson 2, watercolors and black sharpie markers as well).

Anticipatory Set

Without any statement as to how students will use the words, post the six lists of words (combinations of adverbs, nouns, verbs and adjectives). Have students write down one word from each list and have them write these at the top of their papers.

Allow a maximum of two minutes for this, less time for older students.
**Procedure**

Next, have the class examine their chosen words and ask students reasons behind their choices. Have students “turn and talk” to do this, allowing about 1-2 minutes for this *vital* dialogue. Following this, get the class “back” and tell them that they are going to take their six words to use to write. You will want to veer away from using the word “poetry” as most students tend to associate poetry with rhythm and rhyme. Today, they are putting these words into a series of thoughts to tell the reader something. Tell them also that they will have a limit of time, and it is less important that it is long or written with proper grammar, but that they use their six words in their writing. Explain that these words are their guides for this process.

**Discussion:**

After 10-15 minutes, begin to ask students to read their work to you and to explain what they are trying to convey in the process. When students have a written paper, put them in groups of three. Assign them roles: The talker, the reviewer, and the questioner. Model this process by asking students to participate with you as the class watches. Each student will play each role once. Post this on the whiteboard.

**Talker:** Your job is to **read** your written poem/paragraph aloud.

**Reviewer:** Your job is to **comment** on anything you noticed or related to in his/her writing.

**Questioner:** Your job is to **ask the reader** about the words, the thoughts or their ideas and what they might have meant. HOWEVER, the questions are NOT to be answered. (e.g., “I wonder about the word _______?”)
Evaluation

When all three members of the group have had the opportunity to read their work and play each role one time, ask them if this writing was challenging and why. Then ask if it in fact helped in their process. Remind them that their thoughts and ideas have great value and sharing of themselves on this level can be great opportunities to learn about themselves and each other as well. Finally share your writing with the class, as you will provide to share. When students are able to see their teachers and other educators provide insight and personal lives, they are more likely to do so themselves, especially those reluctant writers!

(My poem that I wrote and shared with my sixth grade students…the colored words were the ones I chose from lists I had from another class. I also explained my reasons for choosing the words and the way they were used.)

| As I meander through this middle-child's life |
| it's clear to see an insatiable urge to be loved, understood, accepted... |
| and as I divulge my truth and pounce on opportunities to express myself |
| the image that remains is my essence...a monkey! |
(student lists to post)

#1 kind abrupt important quickly nerdy purple

#2 doubtful glee create play middle bright

#3 wishful quick chart friend vehicle company

#4 vacation denim program blabbed stellar brother

#5 smiled likeable timid right impossible blue

#6 beach college confused toothless emotion clear
Name: __________________
Date: ________

My word choices are:
1. ____________________  4. ____________________
2. ____________________  5. ____________________
3. ____________________  6. ____________________

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Unit B (page 11 of 12)

Lesson 3: Writing Follow-up and Publishing Poetry

Genre: Poetry and Art

Grades: 5-12

Time: 30-45 minutes

Objective
- Students will rewrite poetry/paragraphs from previous day’s lesson (Instant Poetry, Just add Words) and illustrate.

Materials
- Watercolors
- Small cups
- Thick drawing paper
- Pencils
- Sharpie markers.

Anticipatory Set

Remind students of their writing yesterday and turn and talk to your elbow partner at your table to tell them what you thought about your work yesterday and the process. (1 minute). Next, explain that they will be using their work to reflect these in the form of art, namely painting.

Procedure

Their illustrations will first be drawn then painted. They will need to include the writing they did previously somewhere in their work, whether it is in the center, as
a border or someplace else on the paper. Sharpies are used as soon as the paint is dry enough and are used to outline the paintings and their writing as well. (I usually always have a handful of students who want to rewrite their work, and I tell them that their first writing will likely be their best because of the format of the lesson, and then allow them to make that choice!).

**Evaluation**

Student work should be reflective of their words and/or meaning there. Also, explain to the class (as you show your poem again), that usually with this type of writing, the last chosen word that they choose to use generally carries the meaning or purpose of their work. Kind of a revealing “tool” of sorts into their thinking.
Unit C

Expanding Writing
RATIONALE

Classroom teachers giving instruction act as facilitators or they provide direct instruction. A teacher can be a *guide on the side* or a *sage on the stage*. Strategies such as the one demonstrated here support teachers to act as the sage, however, they require explicit instruction and modeling. Teachers too often are not given the right “tools” to give students what they need to become good, independent writers.

To help students master writing strategies, using acronyms to help them remember the guidelines for an organized writing sample are extremely useful. In addition, students need lots of time to practice strategies and need to be reminded of the process, rather than the outcome. A quote I have posted in my classroom reads, “*Failure is proof that you are trying.*”
Unit C (page 1 of 3)

CODE Writing Lesson

Grade: 3-7

Small Group

Content Area: Writing

Objectives

- Students will learn skills of writing an effective essay
- Students will use ideas from a graphic reminder, posted in their classroom in their daily writing.
- They will understand: C=Clarity, O=Organization, D=Details, E=Events.

Materials

- Poster for classroom (or individual copies for student folders).
- Narrative writing sample or textbook with a narrative.
- Highlighting pens (8)

Anticipatory Set

Gather students in a small group of 6-8 students, hopefully at a kidney table or round table at a corner or quieter place of your classroom. Explain the definition of the word “acronym” Then show them the poster (or handout) they will use to help them in their writing. You might also want to further explain how we use the word code in general language (when something is “code” for something else.). Explain each of the
letters and what each area is intended to remind us of in our writing. Define terms if necessary, depending on the ages and abilities of the small group.

Procedure

Give each student a highlighting pen and a copy of a well-written narrative (Houghton-Mifflin provides a written narrative at every grade level in their textbooks). By providing a tangible example that they can use to highlight and make notes, this will encourage your passive students, and provide something for them to actively do during your work with them.

Ask students to find examples of each of the elements presented (clarity-organization-details-events), and to highlight examples of each. They could also write in the margins to specify which of the areas are being shown.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, it should be obvious to the students that MOST of the writing has been highlighted. Encourage them to explain their reasons and provide the examples by citing the exact areas they see. Real synthesis of the lesson should be evidenced in the continued growth of their abilities to tell their stories and in a clear, organized and interesting manner.
What is the CODE for a successful narrative?

**C - CLARITY**
- Make sure the ideas, events, and actions are clear to the reader
- Read the story out loud to see if something needs to be explained better

**O – ORGANIZATION**
- Stay focused on the prompt
- Have a beginning, middle, & end
- Use proper paragraphing
- Use transitional words, phrases
- Use varied sentence structure

**D – DETAILS**
- Show, not tell – paint a picture in the reader’s mind
- Use good word choice, don’t overuse the same word
- Use dialogue here and there (with quotation marks)

**E – EVENTS**
- Something must HAPPEN in the story
- There must be a PLOT (one thing happens and then another)
- Show the character’s REACTION to the events (was the character scared? happy? What did he/she do to SHOW it?)
Unit D

Actively Engaging Students with Writing
RATIONALE

If it’s one thing I have discovered both in my research and in my many years of teaching boys, it’s that they favor movement. If they are physically engaged in an activity, they will be more productive. In the lessons that follow, students will use their hands (instead of scissors) to create a writing subject, in addition to using partners to create dialogue as they move around a classroom. It is above all else enjoyable and more memorable than simply asking students to write a paragraph.
Lesson 1: Monster Paragraph Writing

Grade: 3-8

Whole class

Content Area: Writing

Objectives

- Students will create a monster using a tear art technique
- Students will write a descriptive paragraph.
- Others will be able to locate a student’s monster after reading the descriptive paragraph of their monsters.

Materials

- Construction paper and glue.
- Writing paper and pencil.

Anticipatory Set

Have a discussion with the class about monsters, and provide students with a few samples of monsters that you have created prior to the lesson. Tell them that they will be creating monsters of their own, and that they will be writing descriptive paragraphs of their creations. These need to be written clearly enough for others to be able to find yours using this description.
Procedure

This is a tear-art project, so students will not need scissors. Have students choose the paper they want for their monsters and have them begin the process of tearing shapes. They may choose to fold or curl their papers, creating a 3-D effect.

After the monsters have been created, have the students begin their descriptive paragraph. Remind them that in descriptive writing, they need to use both adjectives and adverbs, citing colors, shapes and size. They should assume the reader knows nothing about your monster.

Working with partners, have students read each other’s work to see if the writing does in fact describe the monsters they have created. Feedback from one’s peers tend to help students support one another and provides opportunities for the class to rely on one another. As students finish, have them revise their opening and closing sentences to reflect the writing content they have done.

Evaluation

These will be written in final copy form and will need to me “matched” with their monsters. Display the artwork along the classroom wall, and put paragraphs on the tables. Have students see if they can match these up by description. This is an excellent opportunity for Open House or an activity for older or younger buddies.
Lesson 2: Silent Conversation

Grade: 3-6

Partner/Tea Party

Content Area: Writing

Objectives

- Students will write sentences with periods and question marks when appropriate.
- Students will write sentences that begin with capitals

Materials

- Clipboards
- Pencil and paper

Anticipatory Set

Tell students that they will work with partners for this next activity. Let the students choose their partners after a discussion about how to politely ask someone to work with them and how feelings get hurt if someone asks you to be their partner and you really do not want to work with that person.

Let them know that for this activity, they will pretend that they cannot speak or hear. As a result, they will be writing down everything they want to say to each other.

Procedure

Provide a clipboard for each student (or a white board if you don’t have enough), and paper and pencil. Tell students to communicate with a partner using
writing, not talking. They will have to use capitals at the beginning of each sentence, and correct punctuation at the ending. (If students want to use this activity as a “tea party” format, they would need to move from partner to partner around the room).

In an effort for the activity to be most effective, remind them that both students should be writing at the same time so that time is not wasted with partners simply waiting for the other to finish. Students will hand their clipboards to each other. They must first answer the question that has been asked, again using proper punctuation (a period or a question mark) at the end.

Model this process for the students, and state expectations. It may be helpful to have a student model this with you. Also, state the time frame available to them and the fact that these papers will be collected when they are finished the activity, so it will be important for them to use their best writing, especially because their classmates will need to read their work.

**Evaluation**

As you are circulating throughout the room, check to see if students are using capitals and correct punctuation. To extend this activity, tell the students that they cannot start to answer the question until they have checked for proper capitalization and punctuation. The students should use proofreading marks to correct their friend’s paper for this extension activity.
Name: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

Reading & Writing Interest Inventory

Circle your answer below:

I enjoy reading when I’m not at school. yes no
sometimes

I have a journal that I use for writing at home. yes no
sometimes

I like having someone read aloud to me. yes no
sometimes

I read magazines that I choose. yes no
sometimes

When the teacher reads aloud, I can retell what I hear. yes no
sometimes

Writing poetry is fun. yes no
sometimes

I enjoy writing about my thoughts and ideas. yes no
sometimes

In ten years, I think I will be

The person I like spending time with is ____________________________.

and we like to ____________________________.

I like learning about ____________________________.
When I get to watch television, I watch _______________________.

I am really good at _________________________________.

I would like to be better at _________________________________.

The best book I ever read was _________________________________.
because _________________________________.
_______________________________.

I like/don’t like to read because _________________________________.
_______________________________.

I like/don’t like to write because _________________________________.
_______________________________.

Something I am most proud of is _________________________________.
_______________________________.

One thing about me that you should know is _________________________________.
_______________________________.
RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

BOOKS FOR BOYS

http://www.booksforboys.com

http://ublib.buffalo.edu/lml/comics/pages/recommended.html


http://www.parents-choice.org/article.cfm?art_id=114&the_page=reading_list

http://www.guysread.com/

WRITING INTERACTIVE WEB SITES

ReadWriteThink: Student Materials: Comic Creator

ReadWriteThink: Student Materials: Multigenre Mapper

ReadWriteThink: Student Materials: Timeline

ReadWriteThink: Student Materials: Library Doodle

http://www.starfall.com

http://teach.fcps.net/tr10/Pow'PerPoint.htm

http://pbskids.org
REFERENCES


