

Kindergarten Writing Workshop

Introduction

Nevada's Academic Content Standards (NVACS) place an extraordinary emphasis on writing. Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) noted "writing is treated as an equal partner to reading" (p. 102). Furthermore, they go on to state "writing is assumed to be the vehicle through which a great deal of the reading work and reading assessment will occur" (p. 102). Correspondingly, writing is the vehicle of learning and assessment for all academic subjects. Thus, a focus on writing workshop (Calkins, 2013a) in the early grades benefits students' ongoing learning needs and incorporates NVACS. The outcomes of this learning opportunity for Local School (LS, a pseudonym) kindergarten teachers are:

1. Students will move forward as writers at least one grade level by writing daily in a workshop structure.
2. Teachers will collaborate in a team to refine their writing workshop teaching skills and include daily writing workshop and instruction (4 or 5 days weekly), the mini-lesson, and analysis of student writing using learning progressions.

LS kindergarten teachers are supported in learning writing workshop methods through structured Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, as well as collaborative discussions, reflection on practice, and supported implementation of writing workshop. Improved student writing outcomes did result from this intentional professional learning. Writing workshop (Calkins, 2013) consists of a systematic daily writing structure. The basics of the structure include student assessment and analysis, teacher mini-lessons, student independent writing, conferring with writers, and sharing writing. Teachers use this framework to move writers forward in their writing ability based on individual needs.

Instructional Context

Northeastern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program (NNRPDP) supports the professional learning needs of teachers in northeastern Nevada. The Northeastern region encompasses a large geographical range with many small towns and rural areas. LS, a Title I school in the region, requested support from NNRPDP coordinators. LS serves an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student population. Based on prior low achievement scores (all subjects), LS kindergarten teachers (five teachers) and their local administration team requested support from NNRPDP coordinators for improving student writing outcomes through use of writing workshop.

Initial Data and Planning

LS kindergarten teachers' current content knowledge of writing workshop was informally assessed. Overall needs included the ability to analyze student writing, identify students' writing levels based on learning progressions, and improve student writing growth. LS kindergarten teacher team strengths included professional communication, team support, and a belief that writing is extremely important for kindergarten learners. These strengths demonstrated a readiness and willingness to learn and begin implementation of new learning, in this case the writing workshop. Based on teacher responses to questionnaires, specific writing workshop

learning needs included overall structure of workshop, use of learning progressions, analysis of student writing, assessment, mini-lessons, independent writing time, and management of workshop model. The professional learning was designed to address these needs and support teachers in writing workshop implementation.

Learning Design

The learning design of the writing workshop professional learning was informed by Guskey’s Five Levels of Professional Development and based on Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning. This learning opportunity also incorporated readings, discussions, and reflections encompassing the NVACS-Writing. The professional learning was delivered by a regional coordinator through regularly scheduled PLC meeting times and teacher prep times with some time outside the contract day needed for content reading. There was one initial half-day PLC meeting, and then monthly 45-60 minute meetings throughout the school year. Implementation of writing workshop occurred in each teacher’s classroom. In-the-moment coaching and co-teaching experiences occurred in multiple classrooms on a rotating schedule.

Measurement

LS kindergarten teachers’ learning was measured using pre- and post-questionnaire responses and responses to *I used to think...Now I think* prompts. Student learning outcomes were measured using beginning-of-year and end-of-year writing samples.

Results and Discussion

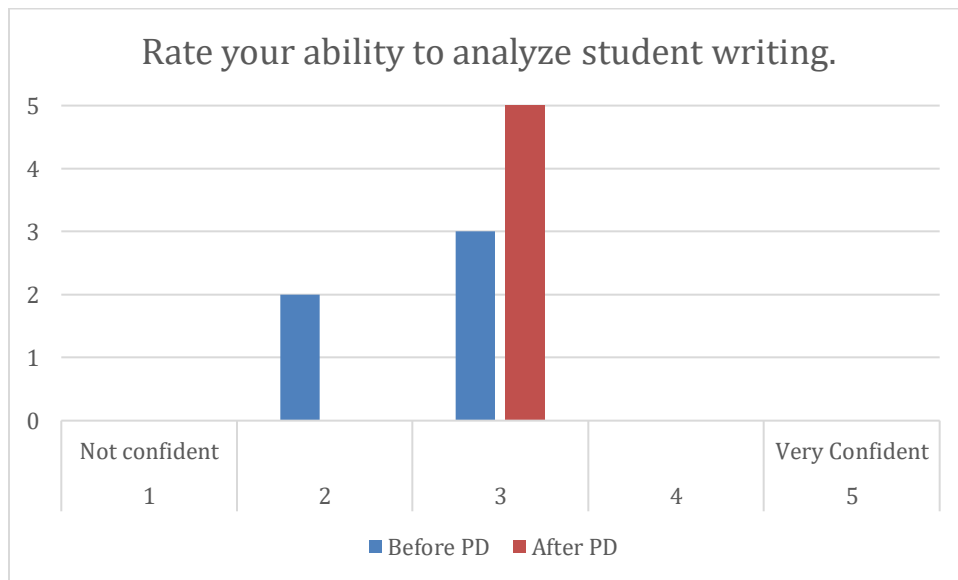


Figure 1: Ability to Analyze Student Writing

The ability to analyze student writing results indicate LS kindergarten teachers’ level of confidence following the professional learning. Clear growth is noted, growing from less confident to feeling more confident in their abilities.

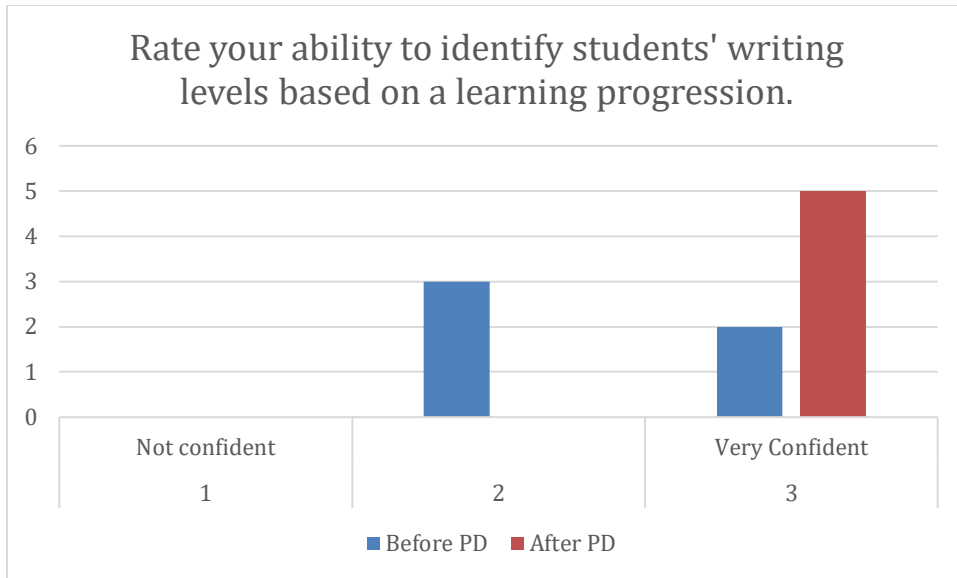


Figure 2: Ability to Identify Students' Writing Levels

The ability to identify students' writing levels based on a learning progression results indicate LS kindergarten teachers' level of confidence following the professional learning. Clear growth is noted with all LS kindergarten teachers in the very confident category.

The post assessment responses collected from *What collaboration strengths does your team have?* included:

- They were able to see the positive of progression that the students made.
- We are good at sharing ideas of implementation.
- Since all this material is new to us this year, we have just been trying to work together and figure it all out.

The collaboration strength responses post assessment noted both growth in student writing analysis (progression of students) and implementation of writing workshop (sharing ideas). Post assessment responses collected from *I used to think...Now I think...* prompt indicated a significant change in perception.

- I used to think my class would do better with writers' workshop but not as good as they have done. Now I think writers workshop helps every student progress at whatever level they are at.
- I use to think writing was hard now I think I can guide my students through various genres of writing.
- Kindergarteners can really learn to write if they are taught proper techniques with a lot of examples and reinforcement!
- I used to think that I was not getting the point of the lesson across. Now I think some kids just came to the spot where they are ready for that lesson later than others.

Results and Discussion, continued

Personal communications with LS kindergarten teachers at end-of-year PLC meetings noted overwhelming surprise at the increased writing abilities exhibited by their students which they attribute to implementation of writing workshop. Personal communications with LS

administrators indicated an overwhelming increase in kindergarten assessment scores (all subjects) which they attributed to the kindergarteners' growth in writing this school year.



Figure 3: Kindergarten Writing

Student A Beginning-of-Year Analysis

Student A's writing sample (Figure 3, labeled 8-29) was in response to an on-demand, narrative assessment prompt. For example, "I'm eager to understand what you can do as writers of narratives of stories so today will you please write the best personal narrative that you can write?" (Calkins, 2013b, p. 182). The narrative learning progression was used to determine writing level. Student A was in the pre-kindergarten level (or earlier, the writer struggled with

his name and did not label the pictures). The writer was able to draw and had some “writing.” Student A wrote a number and random letters in her text. The writer used periods that appear to be random. The writer filled all three text lines available. Student A seems to understand left to right progression in text as well as the importance of text to communicate a message. The illustration appears to be hearts and something else, but it lacks the detail needed to determine context.

Student A End-of-Year Analysis

Student A’s writing sample (Figure 3, labeled 5-15) was in response to an on-demand, opinion assessment prompt. For example, *“Think of a topic or issue that you know and care about, an issue around which you have strong feelings. You will write your opinion and tell some reasons why you feel that way”* (Calkins, 2013b, p. 86). The opinion learning progression was used to determine writing level. Student A wrote an opinion. “we shund not cut a lot of papr.” (We should not cut a lot of paper.) Reasons included “and it whil whast the tree and then we whont breeth.” (It will waste the tree and then we won’t breathe.) Another reason, “by cus it whil hrnt the tree.” (because it will hurt the tree). The writer went from one-page (fall) to a three-page booklet (spring). The writer used the transition word “because” and included details in pictures and words. The writer wrote letters for the sounds she heard, used appropriate developmental spelling, put space between words, and ended sentences with a period. Based on learning progression analysis and placement of this sample on the progression, this writing sample level would be kindergarten.

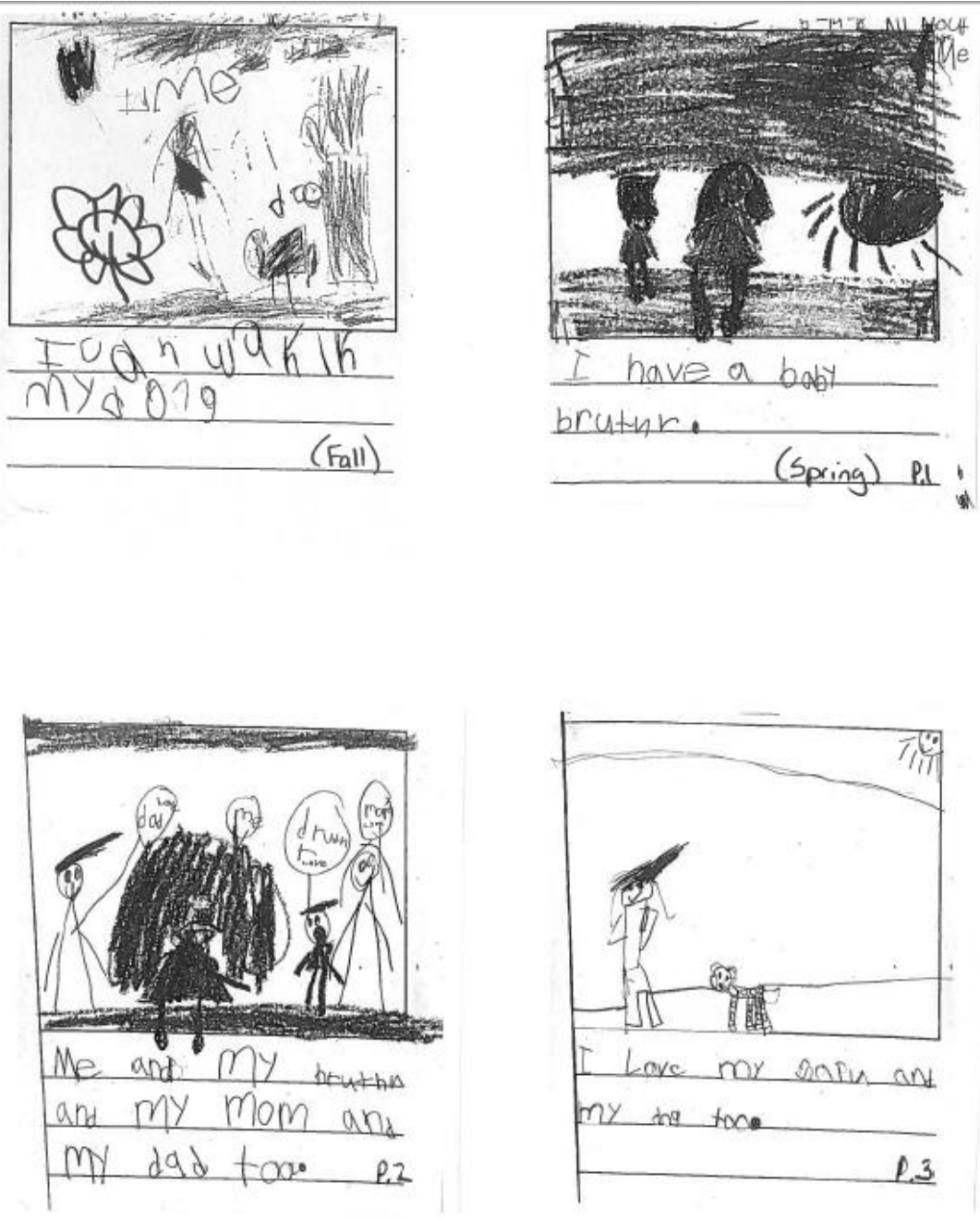


Figure 4: Kindergarten Writing Sample

Student B Beginning-of-Year Analysis

Student B’s writing sample (labeled fall) was in response to an on-demand, narrative assessment prompt. For example, “I’m eager to understand what you can do as writers of narratives of stories so today will you please write the best personal narrative that you can write?” (p. 182, Calkins, 2013b). The narrative learning progression was used to determine writing level. Student B was in the pre-kindergarten level. The writer told a story with a picture and words. “I can walk

my dog” (with no spaces). The picture is labeled with “me” and “dog” and an illustration of each.

Student B End-of-Year Analysis

Student B’s writing sample (labeled spring) was in response to an on-demand, narrative assessment prompt. For example, “*I’m eager to understand what you can do as writers of narratives of stories so today will you please write the best personal narrative that you can write?*” (p. 182, Calkins, 2013b). The narrative learning progression was used to determine writing level. Student B went from one-page (Figure 4, fall) to a three-page booklet (Figure 4, spring). “I have a baby bruthr (brother).” (Figure 4, p.1) “Me and my bruthr (brother) and my mom and my dad too.” (Figure 4, p. 2) “I love my grandpa and my dog too.” (Figure 4, p. 3) The writer told, drew, and wrote a whole story. The writer wrote a letter for the sounds she heard. The writer used the word wall to help her spell. The writer put spaces between words and wrote capital letters to start every sentence. The writer ended sentences with punctuation. Based on learning progression analysis and placement of this sample on the progression, this writing sample was at the kindergarten level.

Conclusion

Based on these data the LS kindergarten teachers met the outcomes. Evidence is provided for each outcome:

1. Students will move forward as writers at least one grade level by writing daily in a workshop structure.
 - a. *Beginning-of-year and end-of-year student writing samples analyzed with learning progressions indicated clear growth of at least one year in the majority of students.*
2. Teachers will collaborate in a team to refine their writing workshop teaching skills, include daily writing workshop and instruction (4 or 5 days weekly), the mini-lesson, and analysis of student writing using learning progressions.
 - a. *The team consistently collaborated about implementation, analysis of student writing, student progress, and use of learning progressions.*
 - b. *Teachers implemented writing workshop basic structure into their classrooms, encouraging daily independent writing and the management techniques needed to ensure the effective use of independent writing at the kindergarten level.*
 - c. *Writing instruction occurred at minimum 4 or 5 days per week.*
 - d. *Teachers refined their use of a writing mini-lesson including pacing of the NVACS.*

LS kindergarten teachers indicated a need for follow-up professional learning about writing workshop in the areas of “conferring with students” and “management of student data” as they continue with implementation of the writing workshop into the next school year. Further professional learning opportunities are imperative to support LS kindergarten teachers as they learn and apply strategies, skills, and develop pedagogical expertise in writing that benefits student achievement.

References

Calkins, L., (2013a). *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L., (2013b). *Writing Pathways*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Hehman, L. (2012). *Pathways to the Common Core*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.