

Improving the Motivation and Performance of Struggling Writers
Using the Write More Program

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May 1, 2010

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Abstract

This project gathered data to support the idea that providing struggling writers with daily opportunities to write and giving them a model to follow, will not only increase their writing ability but will make them confident and motivated writers. We began with the research question, “To what extent does using the Write More Program increase students’ writing ability and motivation to write?” Data were gathered, at all levels: elementary, middle, and high school, from student motivation surveys, pre and post essays (using the Write More rubric as an assessment tool), and teacher reflection journals. The research indicated that the motivation and writing ability of most struggling writers (in elementary, middle, and high school groups) improved using the Write More Program.

Aims and Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact the Write More Program had on student writing ability and motivation. As English/Language Arts teachers, our biggest complaint about student preparedness is focused primarily on their inability to write effectively, which seems to effect their motivation to write. Because we live in a world of high stakes testing, the pressure to “teach to the test” perpetuates sub-standard writing in students. We are forced to cover so much material, that writing seems to take a back seat to other, seemingly more important skills. It is a fact that students need to pass these high stakes tests, but they also need to know how to write effectively if they are to be successful beyond the classroom. Urban students are especially at a disadvantage due to the unique problems and challenges they face daily (examples: hunger, poverty, lack of parental support, etc.). It was our goal with this research to collect data that supports the idea of providing struggling writers with daily opportunities to write, while giving them a model to follow. Our goal was not only to increase their writing ability but also make them confident and motivated writers.

Literature Review

Improving the Motivation and Performance of Struggling Writers

Using the Write More Program

We live in a time when there is a public outcry for change when it comes to the educational system as we know it. Joe/Josephine Taxpayer is screaming accountability, wanting to know that his/her tax dollars are going toward a system that works; a system that is actually educating students and preparing them for college or the workforce

(Ohmann, 2000). The three schools we used in our research are all urban, Title I public schools, and are all set in Baltimore City. They are also public schools, two of which are under restructuring, because they have failed to meet the standards of AYP under the No Child Left Behind Act. With this in mind, we as teachers are especially conscious of the need for our students to have mastered adequate skills for them to be successful after they leave our classrooms. One of the major inadequacies we find at all levels, K-12, is the inability of our students to write effectively and confidently due in part to a lack of motivation.

Writing in the 21st Century

The importance of written instruction and student mastery in writing has become of major importance in the current educational culture. “National, state, and local school reform efforts have raised expectations for what readers and writers should know and be able to do” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). The “No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 mandates that states use competency exams to prove that all students are proficient in reading, math, and science in grades 3-8” (Troia 2009). Written instruction has now focused less on sequential steps that produce a product without opportunity for revision to “writing instruction [that] emphasizes engaging children in authentic, meaningful composing activities using the writing process, for example, through a writers’ workshop” (Troia 2009). Writing instruction has become a “process approach” which allows for revision of written pieces over time, and allows the teacher to assess the writing over time so that “teachers can use the assessment results to modify instruction if students are not making adequate progress in specific aspects of writing” (Troia 2009). The Write More Program is designed to allow children to use the writing process over time, revising and

evaluating their own work while allowing the teacher to assess over time and better individualize student instruction and measure student progress. The Write More Program is aligned with the modern approach to writing instruction that is thought to help students meet the high demands and expectations of written language.

Why Writers Struggle

When working with struggling writers, it is important for teachers to consider the reasons behind the students' struggle, both academically and socially. "Knowing learners as individuals, who come to the classroom with well-defined influences on their lives is equally (if not more) important than paper and pencil screening devices designed to yield information about children's knowledge of letters, sounds, and words" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Students might come from "homes and communities in which cultural beliefs, understandings, and conventions or everyday practices are different from those typically valued and reinforced in school settings (Troia 2009). Struggling writers might be "children with a history of preschool language impairment, children from homes in which a nonstandard dialect of English is spoken, children whose parents had difficulty learning to read, children with ADHD, children who lack motivation to read, children from poor neighborhoods, and children who attend schools in which the classroom practices are deemed ineffective" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Other socioeconomic factors also could affect the writing of struggling students such as limited English proficiency in the home and poorly educated parents. "Many children who have limited English proficiency come from homes where their parents are poorly educated and the family income is low. Similarly, African American students who speak a nonstandard dialect are apt to live in

poor neighborhoods and attend schools in which achievement is chronically low. In such cases, co-occurring group risk factors, such as the socioeconomic circumstances of the child's family, the child's home literacy background, the neighborhood where the child lives, and the quality of the instruction in the school the child attends, must be taken into account to fully comprehend the problem" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). In observance to the outside struggle that may be affecting the students' writing struggles, it is critical for teachers to intervene with a strong, solid, individualized writing program to ensure student success. "For students who possess weak literacy skills, especially those who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the odds of academic and, ultimately, life success are low. Thus the role of teachers in ensuring that students become proficient writers and proficient writers and literate students and citizens is critical" (Troia 2009).

Motivating Struggling Writers

If the role of teachers is teaching struggling writers how to succeed in writing, then a teacher must consider how to best motivate struggling writers with their writing. "As teachers plan lessons for students who struggle with reading and writing, they need to think about motivation as well as instructional objectives" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). "Many factors contribute to children's motivation in learning to read and write- their interest, attitude, and engagement... for struggling readers and writers the bases for motivation maybe their interest and familiarity with a topic, the ease with which they can understand what they are reading, and the classroom circumstances in which they are reading" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Because struggling writers often view writing

as an immense challenge, it is important for teachers to consider forms of extrinsic motivation as a motivational start, which hopefully would lead to the students becoming intrinsically motivated with their writing. “Struggling readers and writers may initially need purposes beyond their own self-satisfaction to motivate them... current research suggest that outside sources of motivation can play a role in bringing students to read and write” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Other ideas of motivation stem from the way in which instruction should occur for struggling writers from the classroom environment, from the set-up of groups, to writing choices, to the method of publishing written works to help spark motivation. “Focus is put on language arts instruction that considers the appropriateness of the task, offers instructional support, and encourages students to internalize what they have learned” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). “Being able to publish for an audience beyond the classroom is motivating for many student writers... students who resist revising and editing class assignments are often willing to polish a piece of writing in hopes of having it selected for publication” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002).

Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

The environment in which a struggling writer writes is also extremely influential on their motivation to write. Teachers who set up an environment that is safe, accepting, and literacy based are more likely to motivate students who find writing challenging. Teachers who serve as a model and set an example in writing are more likely to motivate student writing in their classroom. “Teachers who serve as inspiring models of reading and writing are passionate about their own literacy. They read aloud to students from their own

writing and reading; they talk with their students about the importance of literacy in their own lives... teachers who explicitly model and encourage literate behaviors help many of their students develop a personal interest in reading and writing that stays with them long after they have left the teachers who first inspired them” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Social interaction is another environmental setup that teachers can use to help motivate their struggling writers, for collaborating with others allows for ideas about writing to be shared, and the work load shared so that the task of writing doesn’t seem so daunting. Being an equal part of a community of learners also helps spark motivation in struggling writers. “In classrooms where opportunities are provided for these social interactions, students who struggle, benefit from the motivation that comes from being part of a community of learners” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). The small group environment also creates motivation for struggling writers because it ensures that their individual needs will be easily addressed and supported by both their peers and the teacher. Gathering together a small group of students who have similar needs is the most effective and efficient way to provide extra support. As Roller (1996) so aptly says, ‘We must remember that ability grouping and special pull-out programs arose as a solution to the real problem of variability in children’s acquisition of literacy” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Teachers must also create an environment of “unconditional acceptance” in order to best motivate struggling writers. Because so often struggling writers in the intermediate elementary school years carry a heavy load of emotional baggage based upon the struggles they’ve had with writing over the years, it is important that students within the class feel safe to explore their ideas and take the risks that produce writing. “Only the child who feels safe can park the accumulated baggage at the classroom door and begin to

take the risks that are necessary to produce writing. This means that the initial writing efforts of this student, no matter how meager and flawed, must be accepted unconditionally” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002).

Instructional Practices

How writing is presented and taught is perhaps the biggest influence on the writing success of struggling writers. Because reading and writing is so closely connected, students who struggle with fluency and decoding may find spelling and grammar major frustrations in writing. To alleviate this frustration, some instructional strategies for small group are suggested. “Teach students effective strategies for taking words apart, teach students effective ways to spell words, work with students’ writing to draw their attention to conventions, and target one or two conventions in each lesson and teach them explicitly” (Fountas, Pinnell 2001). The Write More program uses the writing workshop format to help improve writing, and many suggestions for the instruction of writing workshop include learning through social interactions, personal reflection, independent projects, and writing investigations that are made to support each individual struggling writer. “Reading and writing come together in writer talks, writer’s notebooks, writing projects, and investigations to support the writer’s journey” (Fountas, Pinnell 2001). Writing journals seem to be particularly important in allowing students to freely write down their thoughts, which could later become topics for written pieces. They can also use writing journals as a tool for reflect on their own learning processes in writing. “The use of various types of journals enables students to write their way into thoughtful reflection” (Fountas, Pinnell 2001). “Journal writing is typically self-directed writing that expresses one’s own ideas

without the goal of adapting the writing to the needs or desires of others” (Troia 2009).

Enabling students to choose their own topics in writing helps students become invested in their writing and the message they are sending to a reader about their chosen topic.

“Teachers can also help struggling writers learn to select topics. Discovering students’ interests is an important part of this” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Suggested ways of helping struggling writers choose topics include student surveys, generating lists of topics, talking with students about potential topics, and modeling the decision-making process” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Teaching organization is also important in writing workshop, for it allows the ideas of the students to be organized into a sequence that can then be constructed into a writing piece. “Students need to categorize their information so they can understand and present it... students can use categories as guides as they establish sections, main headings, and side headings.” Graphic organizers used with writing is especially emphasized as being a tool that can be especially helpful for struggling writers to plan out their writing. “Graphic organizers support writing performance by reminding students of the topically relevant information that must be generated and by visually diagramming the hierarchical patterns and associations among the component elements” (Troia 2009). Audience and purpose is also emphasized as an instructional suggestion with struggling writers for it is “an essential aspect of making the social function , purpose, and requirements of informational writing apparent to the writer” (Troia 2009). Writing workshop is also deemed successful as a teaching tool when it is set up purposely and explicitly. Gary Troia in his book, “Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers”, suggests that writing workshop is the most successful for struggling writers when key elements are included. Those key elements are: “Mini lessons

on workshop procedures, writing skills, composition strategies, and craft elements; sustained time for personally meaningful writing nearly every day to help students become comfortable with the writing process; teacher-and-student led conferences; and frequent opportunities for sharing with others.” Troia views a successful writing workshop as having three essential features, “Student work, instructional approaches, and routine.” Each “essential feature” must be well thought out and purposefully planned to best ensure success for struggling writers. Instructional strategies can also be conducted using this step-by-step process that, for a struggling writer, must be “insistent, consistent, and persistent.” “Identify a strategy worth teaching, introduce the strategy by modeling it, help students try out the strategy in a writer’s workshop, and help students move towards independence in the use of the strategy through repeated practice” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002) .

Intervention Strategies

Because struggling writers need more individualized support with their writing, some intervention strategies are suggested that can be infused with the writing workshop model. Some intervention strategies that are suggested by Fountas and Pinnell (2001) are: using text examples with writing, using the writing of others to help students in their own writing, writing, sharing, displaying and illustrating written poetry, conferencing with students during investigations, assess students’ reading, writing, and spelling abilities frequently and analyze their strengths and needs. In the book, “Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers” (2002), Strickland, Ganske, and Monroe suggest come key considerations when using intervention strategies in the classroom: Extra uninterrupted

time, organization/management (flexible grouping), a variety of materials, the nature of instruction (direct, indirect, individual, small-group, multilevel assignments), and documenting and monitoring learning (rubrics, checklists, conferences, observations, individual goals, group goals, etc.) “Instruction that is rooted in the writing process, a predictable structure to the writing instruction, (and) ready access to the ‘tools of the trade’ and instruction in how to use them (writing center materials)” (Fountas, Pinnell 2001). Modeling is mentioned as especially important for struggling writers. “By actually showing students how to use a particular strategy, the teacher helps the student create a mental picture of how it works. Of course, modeling also demonstrates for the student that all writers, even the teacher, need to use strategies to guide their writing” (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Using “mentor texts” is also mentioned as a strong intervention strategy for struggling writers. “For struggling writers, guidelines need to be clear and concrete...a mentor text is simply an example of writing in the mode the student has chosen.” Gary Troia believes that struggling writers need two critical agents to have a successful outcome: “systematic and integrated teaching of transcription skills and a focus on self-regulation in writing through goal-setting, progress monitoring, and self-evaluation” (Troia 2009).

Assessment

Finally, assessment in writing is crucial in the writing development of struggling writers, for it allows for teacher to monitor progress, writing strengths, and writing weaknesses. “Monitoring progress is at the heart of a successful program in which instruction is differentiated. Teachers who respect and respond to variability are

constantly alert to individual needs and the implications for instruction. They use assessment to focus on students' strengths rather than just their weaknesses' and that, 'Students' progress must be documented on an ongoing basis' (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Assessment in writing is thought to consist of "conventions, spelling, organization and development of ideas, the writer's craft (voice, word choice, etc.), and the student's interests and categories are rubrics, writing records, and writing checklists" (Fountas, Pinnell 2001). Some other suggestions for assessment in writing is to track written records of each students by using their "writer's notebook and writing projects" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002). Writing checklists are also seen as a good assessment for written work. Portfolios are also seen as good assessment tools when tracking progress in writing. A portfolio is "a carefully selected sample of a student's work." (Fountas, Pinnell 2001) Student self-assessment is seen as a productive assessment for the individual student to become aware of and track their own progress in writing. It "forces everyone to set a goal in the three areas of process, content, and mechanics... (it is) referred to over the next several weeks as the teacher helps the student(s) focus on the areas that were identified as needing greater attention" (Strickland, Ganske, Monroe 2002).

Effective and Ineffective Strategies

As I begin this review of literature, I started by looking at what the earliest research on the subject had to say. I began by looking at a meta-analysis report put out in the spring of 1984. The article by George Hillocks, JR. covered research done from 1963-1982. His findings "indicate that the dimensions of effective instruction are quite different from what is commonly practiced in schools and colleges on the one hand" (the presentational mode

which is instructor dominated) and “what is recommended by...the National Writing Project on the other (the natural process mode)...In the natural process mode, the instructor encourages students to write for other students, to receive comments from them, and to revise their drafts in light of comments from both students and the instructor.” Data showed that the instructor dominated mode is the least effective mode of those examined. Students tended to respond better to feedback from their peers than they did to feedback from their instructors, making peer reviews and peer critiques critical to the writing process and ultimately to student achievement. He also stated that the study of traditional school grammar, which many were emphasizing, had “no effect on raising the quality of student writing.” While putting an “emphasis on the presentation of good pieces of writing as models,...asking students to write freely about whatever interests or concerns them,...and the practice of building more complex sentences from simpler ones is significantly more useful...” and this is echoed by others in the field.

In the article, *Writing across the curriculum: Research on the Effects of Writing Practice on Standardized Tests* Ms. Bomengan states that “English teachers who went about teaching students specific strategies to engage in writing activities and to reflect on and monitor their performance posted increased student achievement outcomes on high-stakes reading and writing assessments.” She also made it clear that “simple incorporation of writing in regular classroom instruction does not automatically yield large dividends in learning.”

Also, Ms. Reaves in her article, *Effects of Writing-to-Learn Activities on the Content Knowledge, Retention, and Attitudes of Secondary Vocational Agriculture Students*, gave a list

of writing activities associated with the write-to-learn method that teachers can use in the classroom. Some of the activities included “(1) enactive-learning by doing, (2) iconic-learning by listening, and (3) representational or symbolic-learning by restatement in words” (1993). The results of the research showed that “students taught by writing-to-learn activities appeared to have lower scores on the initial achievement test, but higher scores on the retention test administered three weeks later.” (1993). This makes sense because students retain more by writing than they do by simply hearing something. I always make my students write something down that I want them to retain for a test, etc.

Methodology

Procedures

The research methodology for this study is both quantitative and qualitative. We are three teachers in different school settings: one at the elementary, one at the middle, and one at the high school level. In all three settings, as part of this action research project, we have implemented the Write More Program to attempt to improve our students' writing ability and motivation to write. At the elementary school, the 3rd grade teacher has selected 7 struggling writers to participate in this study, and she addresses these students in a small group setting during the class time. At the middle school, the 7th grade language arts teacher has also chosen 7 struggling writers who were able to stay after school to participate in this study. At the high school, the 10th grade English teacher is using the Write More Program with all of her students but has selected 7 writers who exhibited signs of struggle in the area of writing to analyze the data. Each teacher has followed scripted daily lessons and objectives from the Write More Program to achieve their component of

this project, with the hope that student writing ability and motivation improves. As teacher-researchers, we coordinated the before and after results of student essays by analyzing the effects, both intended and unintended, by utilizing the Write More Program. In addition, we evaluated the results from surveys given to students before and after the use of the program. Finally, teacher reflection journals were used to track student growth or lack of, from the teachers' perspectives. **Our question is, "To what extent does using the Write More Program increase students' writing ability and motivation to write?"** The primary goal would be to increase student writing ability, as well as impact students' motivation to write. Teachers will also be given the opportunity to use and share Write More materials and teaching strategies within their classrooms and with fellow teachers. This project will most likely benefit the writing ability and motivation of the selected group at each school, but could potentially have further impact on all three of the schools' emphasis and attitude toward teaching writing. This could in turn have a positive impact on many students, in the future.

Research Design

The primary research design method used for this study was mixed method research, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches by including both quantitative and qualitative data in this single study. More specifically, the QUAN-QUAL Model is utilized, in which quantitative and qualitative data are equally weighted and are collected concurrently throughout this study. The independent variable is the Write More program. The dependent variable is the improvement in student writing ability and motivation to write as a result of the use of this writing program.

Selection of the Subjects

The primary method for selecting the subjects for this study varies between three schools and three different levels: elementary, middle, and high school. At the elementary school, the teacher conducted her study selecting 7 struggling writers from her 3rd grade class. She analyzed their writing throughout the year and decided it would be helpful to select these students. For convenience purposes, she chose to work with these students in a small group situation. Likewise, at the middle school, the teacher chose 7 struggling writers for this study and met with these students after school. The 10th grade teacher, at the high school level, directed instruction to all students during the regular class time and the 7 chosen for the research study was based on convenience.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this action research study consists of student surveys, essays, and teacher reflection journals. Prior to implementing the Write More program and lessons, students were given a motivation survey. The same survey was given at the conclusion of the study to measure the level of motivation, whether an increase, decrease, or little change. The survey consisted of 15 questions, with four options for students to circle: Always, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. Each option is worth points and the points were added up to give a score. If the students scored above 25 points, they were considered “motivated” to write. If they scored below this amount, they were deemed “unmotivated”. In addition, teachers kept reflection journals throughout the study, recording notes, comments, reflections, and other information that could be evaluated that would contribute to the study. Pre and post essays were used to gauge improvements in

student writing ability after participating in the Write More Program. The Write More Program included an effective 16 point writing rubric, which was used to evaluate the essays, both pre and post. The data from the pre and post essays, based on the rubric scale, was evaluated and analyzed to determine if there were improvements in writing ability. This data will be presented in the data analysis section of the paper.

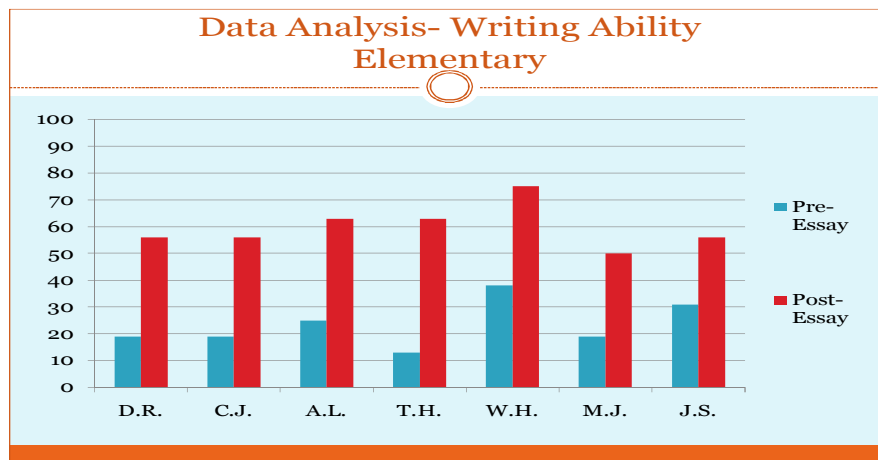
Intended Outcomes

Predicted results indicate that students will benefit from receiving help using the Write More Program. The program contains valuable writing strategies and useful techniques that will be of great use for students to improve their writing. The expectation is that students' writing ability will improve, and their motivation will increase due to improved confidence. Furthermore, the Write More Program will prove to be a very rewarding experience for the students, as young writers and will provide the teachers with fundamental effective writing strategies for future teaching. The elementary teacher and high school teacher are both using the classroom Write More curriculum, while the middle school teacher is using a 6 day camp with additional activities. It is predicted the curriculum that is implemented by the elementary and high school teacher, which is used for a longer period of time, will have greater results. However, the camp includes additional activities which will reinforce strategies taught during the 6 days. The camp is focused and addresses pertinent skills that are helpful for students to improve their writing.

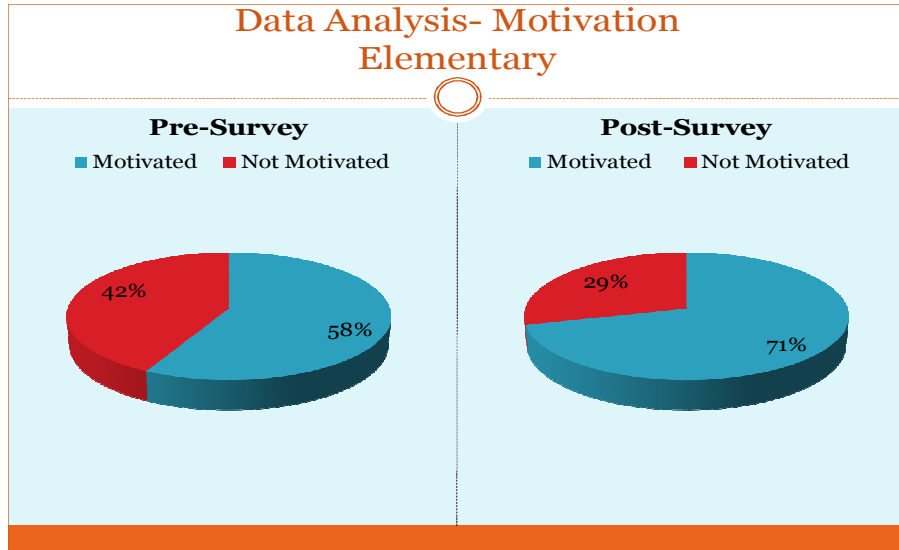
Statement of Results

Our data for all 3 academic levels (elementary, middle, and high school) consist of both qualitative and quantitative samples. The students for our research project were small groups of 7 writers that were identified by the teacher (using previous written assessments throughout the school year) as struggling writers. The students used the Write More writing program for about 4 weeks in the elementary and high school level. At the middle school level, the students took part in a 6 day adventure camp. The students were given pre and post surveys to measure their motivation for writing. The students also wrote pre and post essays to assess and measure writing ability. Finally, each teacher wrote a teacher reflection journal either weekly or daily to anecdotally reflect on the Write More Program and the improvements on their students' motivation and writing ability. The data was graphed and represented separately for each grade level. Both writing ability and motivation were recorded and graphed.

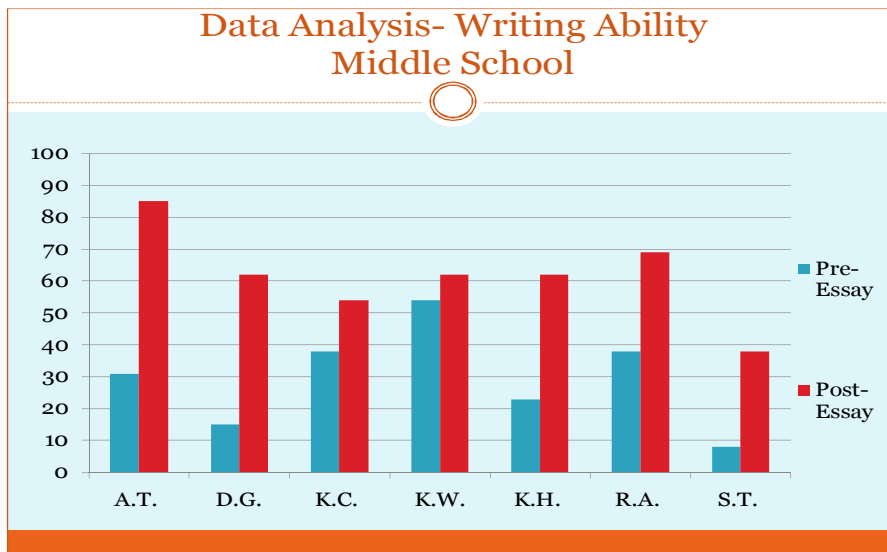
This graph shows the results of the pre and post essay determining writing ability for the elementary school level.



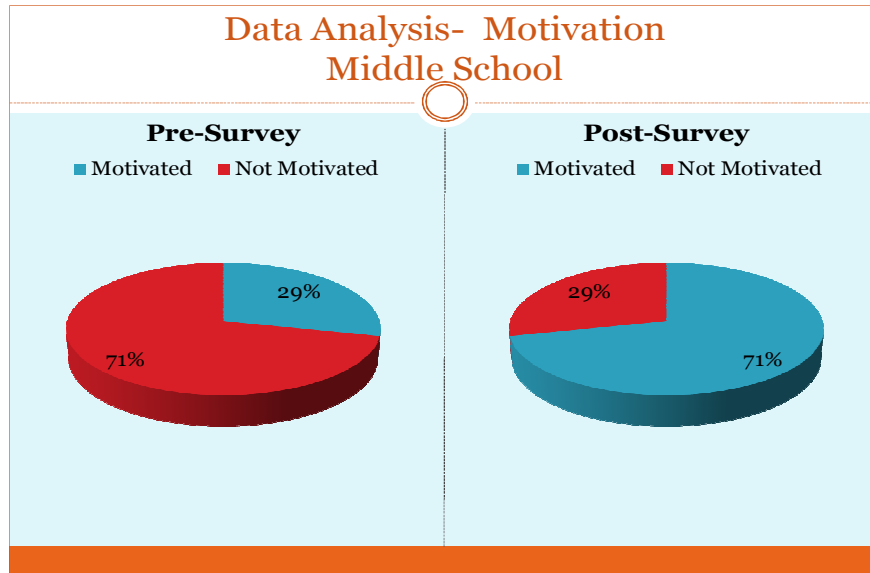
This graph shows the results for the pre and post survey given to the elementary students to determine their level of motivation.



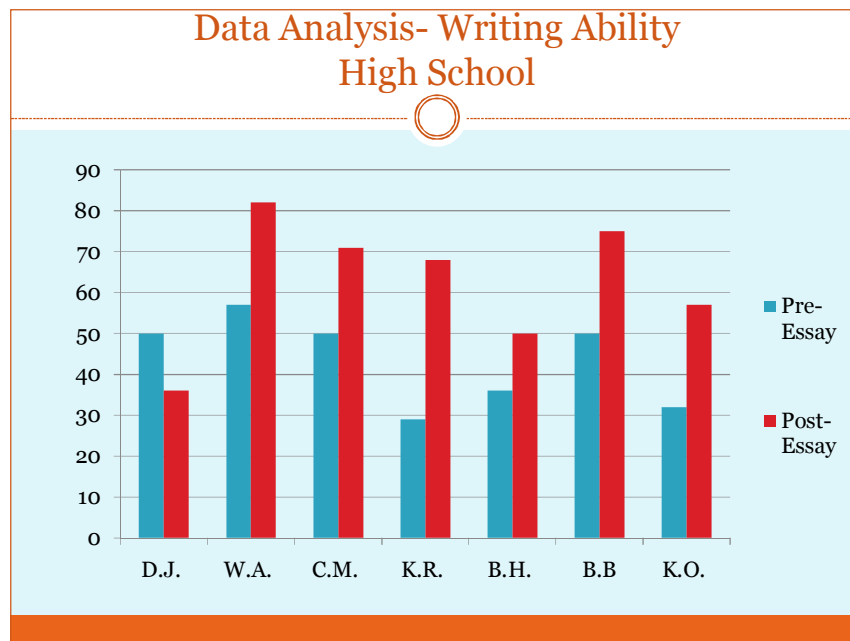
This graph shows the results of the pre and post essay determining writing ability for the middle school level.



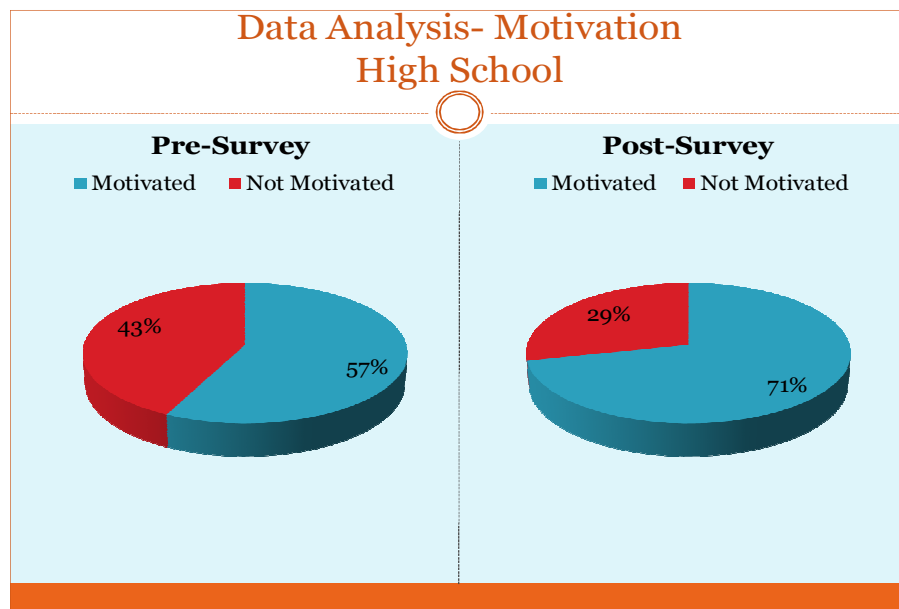
This graph shows the results for the pre and post survey given to the middle school students to determine their level of motivation.



This graph below shows the results of the pre and post essay determining writing ability for the high school level.



This graph below shows the results for the pre and post survey given to the high school students to determine their level of motivation.



Teacher Reflection Journals: See Appendix

Data Analysis

Elementary Level

The results of the data in the small elementary writing group were extremely positive. Both the writing ability and the motivation levels increased dramatically for the small struggling group of writers. All seven of the students in the in the writing group improved their writing ability, and the motivation level percentage went up for the entire group of students.

Writing Ability:

There were seven students that participated in the Write More writing program. Their writing ability was measured using the Write More writing rubric provided to the teachers to measure ability. The rubric was on a 16 point scale, each point representing a different writing skill. If the students represented the writing skill in their essay, they were given a point. Total points were then divided by the total possible points (16) to get a percentage out of 100. The students wrote both a pre essay on their “Favorite Season”, and their post essay was written on “What Would it be like if Winter Never Came Again?” Students improved dramatically on their written ability from pre essay to post essay. The results were the following: Student D.R. went from a 19% on his pre essay, to a 56% on his post essay. Student C.J. also went from a 19% on his pre essay, to a 56% on his post essay. Student A.L. went from a 25% to a 63%. T.H. went from a 13% to a 63%. W.H. scored a 38% on his pre essay, and a 75% on his post essay. M.J. went from a 19% to a 50%. J.S. increased from a 31% to a 56%. All students in the writing group improved in their writing ability.

Motivation:

The motivation level of the students was measured using a survey that the students filled out by circling answers to questions about writing that were asked. The students were each given 4 choices of answers, each answer worth a different amount of points. If the students chose “Always” they received 3 points. The answer “Sometimes” was worth 2 points. “Rarely” was 1 point, and “Never” was worth 0 points. The points were then added up for each student, and if the students scored 25 points or higher, they were considered

motivated. The pre survey indicated that 58% of the elementary students were motivated, while 42% were considered not motivated. After the program was completed, the number of students that were motivated increased to 71%, while 29% were still considered unmotivated to write.

Middle Level

The results for the study done at the middle school level indicate that the Write More Program has produced positive data. Specifically, all students improved in writing ability and in motivation. Prior to the implementation of the Write More Program, the students lacked motivation to write, as seen in the above pie graph (middle school level). The pre-survey indicates that only 29% of the group was motivated when writing, while 71% were not motivated. The post-survey results illustrate the increase in motivation by 71%. The post-survey shows that after the application of the Write More camp, 71% are now motivated to write while only 29% of the students claim to be unmotivated to write, according to the survey.

The bar graph above, for the middle school level, shows the data for writing ability; it also indicates an increase. All 7 students showed a measurable increase in writing ability. The student A.T. showed the greatest improvement with a 55% increase. She scored a 30% out of 100 on the pre-essay and then an 85% out of 100 on the post essay. All of the students scored below passing standards (60%) on the pre-essay. Following the participation in the Write More program, 5 out of 7 students scored above the passing standard, while only 2 students scored below. Even though these students scored below 60% on the post-essay, they still showed an improvement based on the rubric used.

Student K.C. scored a 38% on the pre-essay and then a 54% on the post-essay. Again, she still scored below standard, but was able to increase her writing ability by 16%. S.T. also scored well below 60% on his pre-essay with a score of 8%. He made remarkable improvements increasing by 30%, scoring a 38% on the post-essay.

High School

I used the Write More Program in all three of my classes, two English II classes and an SAT Prep class. I set up a unit plan of five weeks and began each class period with a drill that focused on some kind of writing activity. I began with the goal of giving students at least ten minutes of writing daily and some days we did more writing. I started small by using the Write More everyday organizer to get students to be able to quickly organize their thoughts and get them down on paper. Then I had them write three paragraph essays and then five paragraph essays using the 5-Paragraph Essay Graphic Organizer from Write More. The difficult part of the whole process was in collecting the data. When you have 60 students on your role and only about 60% of them show up on any given day and it is not the same 60%, it is hard to get a pre-test and post-test writing sample and a pre-survey and post-survey sample from each. Of the 60 students I was only able to get all 4 pieces of data from 7 students which is why there is not data for all 60. The analysis of the collected data did show marked improvements in both student writing ability and student motivation and I feel that if I was able to collect all the data from each student the results would still be the same. Student ability rose as much as 30 points on one student's paper and at the low end a student lost about 15 points between the pre and post assessment. I believe in this instance it is a fluke and the student just didn't try (which goes back to his lack of motivation). This

is the same student who showed a couple of points increase on the motivation survey but still didn't fall into the motivated category. When it came to overall student motivation I saw an increase of 14%. I think students ended up being more confident than motivated. Just because someone is confident doesn't mean they will be motivated to write. They may do what needs to be done but not necessarily like it. Maybe future research could focus on confidence rather than motivation.

What the data does not show is that after students began using the Write More Program's rubric, they wrote with more confidence and showed more excitement about their writing. An example of this is after I assigned a writing prompt, one student came up to me all excited, she just had to read to me her "attention grabbing" opening sentence. This happened more than once, which led me to believe that when students are given the proper tools they need to get the job done, they go about the task with more enthusiasm and confidence. The tools the Write More Program provides, students can take with them wherever they go, college or the workplace.

Summary and Conclusions

Elementary Level

Elementary students increased both in writing ability and motivation. After observations of my students' improving writing ability, I believe that the students truly improved in the organization of their writing. In the pre essays, every student had difficulty focusing and staying on topic. Their essays were all one paragraph essays, and their writing seemed to be "stream of consciousness" writing, with little or no organization

of thoughts on a given topic. After using the Write More program, however, their organizations of the essays improved drastically. Students were able to organize their thoughts using the Write More graphic organizer, and were able to produce 4 paragraph essays. Each paragraph in their essay was focused and addressed one concept of a given topic. Student motivation also dramatically increased. At the start of the program, the students were less than thrilled about being part of a small writing group where they were asked to write every day. However, the topics that my students write about everyday were exciting and fun. Pressure was alleviated when my students learned not to worry about spelling and grammar, and that they wouldn't be asked to create essays out of every topic they wrote about, and did not have to write several drafts of every writing piece. The extrinsic motivation provided by the program also helped to increase motivation such as the colorful pencil holders and the chance to take Woody the Pencil home and write about the adventures they had with him at home or over the weekend.

There were some aspects of the projects that either didn't produce much improvement, or hindered improvement altogether. One aspect of writing that did not show much improvement but was assessed by the Write More rubric was spelling and grammar. Despite this being measured by the rubric, there was little to support the growth of these writing skills in the program such as mini lessons and activities. Therefore, sentence structure, grammar, and spelling did not show much improvement in the students' writing pieces. Another aspect that hindered progress was time. A 4-6 week period of time to begin a writing program, and assess written work is too short of a time to really show true improvement- especially at the elementary level where learning is at a

slower pace and more detailed explanations, modeling, and practice is needed. I felt that my students were just getting used to the routines of the program, when it was time to assess them and end the program for the project. Another reason why more allotted time was necessary to really show improvement was that student attendance was irregular, and therefore hindered the progress of some students because they were not given a lot of time to learn what they had missed and catch up. In fact, one student was dropped from the research because she had missed too much instruction and practice to really demonstrate true progress.

Middle Level

The middle school level study was unique in the sense that it involved the use of the Write More 6-day adventure camp. The students were exposed to key writing strategies such as, using multiple sentence length, using a variety of types of writing (exclamatory, interrogative, declarative, and imperative), paragraph structure, using transition words, using descriptive adjectives, and using powerful verbs. The students were very receptive to the strategies on paragraph structure. In the post-essays, they clearly demonstrated the use of proper paragraph structure, and all of the students were able to write five paragraph essays. The graphic organizer, provided by the Write More program, was crucial in teaching the students how to effectively organize the paper during the pre-writing process. The students were able to understand that each paragraph needed to start with a main idea or topic sentence and then follow it up with supporting details. The graphic organizer was structured in a way that students could grasp this concept during the pre-writing stage and carry it over to the drafting step. In addition, the

post-essays showed that some of the students were able to apply transition words and descriptive adjectives in their writing, whereas in the pre-essay, there was no evidence of this knowledge.

The students were very eager to start the program, and overall, maintained a positive attitude throughout the process. Some students were able to recognize their own improvements with certain writing skills. They particularly liked to compare their pre-essays to some of their writing throughout the process. Furthermore, the program contained activities during the 6 days that reeled the students in, motivationally. Day 4 the students sculpted statues of Greek Olympians and then wrote structured paragraphs about the Olympian that they created. The students were very motivated to write following the project, and they learned strategies on how to give a main idea and then support it with details within the paragraph.

Overall, the program was a success for the facilitator and for the students. The students showed an increase in writing ability and an increase in motivation to write. The camp itself was a fun and meaningful intervention that showed positive results.

High School

This was an interesting project and I wish I had more time to use the program. I plan on sharing the results with my English department colleagues in a professional development and encourage them to make use of the Write More Program as a department next school year. My hope is that the department will give their support and then I will take it to our principal to see if there will be money in the budget to purchase the program for

all 9 teachers in the department at a cost of about \$2,500.00. If he can't or won't buy the program I plan on taking it to Alma Hoffman, president and founder of Write More, and see if she will supply the products if we, as an English department, do our own action research project, keep data, and then give her the results of our findings to use in promoting her products. I believe this program, which gives students daily opportunities to hone their writing skills, build confidence as students gain skills, and motivates students to write more, could revolutionize our school academically.

On a different note, one thing I did learn that should not have surprised me but it did, was the fact that a lot of students seemed to have a false sense of security about their writing ability. What I mean is that some of the worst writers in my classes felt they were good writers. I don't know if it had something to do with how they defined "good" or how they defined "essay writing" but it left me scratching my head a little bit. If I could do the survey over I would ask an open ended question about what they felt was good about their writing and see if they could pinpoint what gave them the confidence they had. Frankly, I think it had to do with their false definition of essay writing because most of these same confident writers wrote one paragraph essays.

Recommendations

Indeed after implementing the Write More Program in 3 different grade levels, data has shown that students' writing ability and motivation has improved. However, in order to fully see if the Write More writing program can have long term effects on student motivation and writing ability at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, the group recommends that the program be utilized for an entire year. Even though the data showed

growth in ability and motivation, the group felt that using the program in a 6 day camp and for the period of about 5 weeks or less was too short a time span to really develop strong data and evidence to adequately support whether or not the Write More Program improves motivation and ability for struggling writers. A full year is needed, because the program develops writing ability in a slow progression, and the complex design of the program would be best introduced slowly and methodically to the students. The group also feels that future research could focus on collecting data to see if there is a correlation between motivation and writing ability. The group was left wondering how big of an effect one had upon the other, and the group thought an interesting research project would be one that would collect data designed to see if more motivated students improve their writing ability faster or if a high writing ability creates more motivation for students to write. In addition, the group felt that the use of all of Write More's "extra" activities, that were included in the program to help increase motivation and writing ability, if used would show stronger data in support of the program. The group felt that not using these extra activities and games may have hindered what could have been more compelling data for the use of the entire program. The group also felt that parental involvement would be beneficial for the students in creating better motivation for the program and for writing itself. Having parents work on writing projects with their children allows for learning and fun to occur for both the student and the parent, and it would also truly communicate to the student the importance of learning and practicing writing.

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Appendix A

Elementary School

Samples of 2 students

Pre-survey, post-survey, pre-essay, and post-essay

Appendix B

Middle School

Samples of 2 students

Pre-survey, post-survey, pre-essay, and post-essay

Appendix C

High School

Samples of 2 students

Pre-survey, post-survey, pre-essay, and post-essay

Appendix D

Teacher Reflection Journals

Elementary, Middle, High