



Just write one more sentence! : A Cognitive Tools Approach to Teaching Literacy in the Primary Classroom

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Abstract

This action research project explores a cognitive tools approach to teaching literacy, specifically, the skill of writing in the primary classroom. Grade two students were presented with writing lessons and activities that align with the theory of Imaginative Education (IE). In addition, students had the opportunity to explore various cognitive tools to inspire their imaginations. New concepts were scaffolded and mediated for students inspired by Lev Vygotsky's theories of development. The fieldwork phase was conducted over eleven weeks. Data was collected through surveys, focus group interviews, the collection of artefacts, and observations. Survey results at the end of this project demonstrated that several students had a more positive outlook towards writing tasks after engaging in IE-inspired lessons. Overall, students displayed interest and enthusiasm towards paper-and-pencil-based writing tasks when they were enlivened using a cognitive tools approach. At the end of the study, students' work samples indicated that they were able to independently use cognitive tools such as similes, onomatopoeia, and humour to make their writing more creative and imaginative. This project might be of interest to primary grade educators who desire to teach their students to use their imagination in their writing.

Introduction

Teaching Literacy During a Global Pandemic

During the 2020-2021 school year, I collaborated with some colleagues to revise a School Growth Plan in the area of writing. Our group noticed that many of our students in both primary and intermediate grades struggle to convey their ideas clearly and coherently through their writing. Several teachers noted that many of their students were less motivated to read during their leisure time and speculated that this might have an impact on their writing abilities. It is important to note that our students have been deeply impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. My own students who are currently in grade two have had a unique start to their schooling experience. They spent the latter half of their Kindergarten year learning remotely and several students were enrolled in online learning programs during their grade one year.

A Very Vygotskian Summer

In May 2021, I was enrolled in a course at Simon Fraser University (SFU) titled Lev Vygotsky's Theories in Education. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Russian Psychologist who studied the psychological development of children. He held the belief that learning is a social and cultural experience rather than an individual phenomenon. Vygotsky (1986), stated that effective teaching involves explicit instruction, modelling of skills, and joint activities with students before they are able to independently complete a task on their own. In other words, a Vygotskian teacher meets a child where they are at and takes them on a journey. A Vygotskian teacher does not assume that exposure to learning materials alone will suffice nor wait passively until a child is developmentally ready.

Personal Vignette – Just Write One More Sentence!

The following took place at the end of May 2021. My students were working hard towards publishing a class book about Outer Space through the Student Treasures publishing company. My students had chosen the topic of Space democratically and were excited to learn more about Space and engage in the writing process. They were also motivated by the fact that their writing would be published in a beautifully-printed hard-covered book that their parents would be able to purchase. The room buzzed with activity. Various students pored over non-fiction books about Space, while others added details to their illustrations of planets and constellations and edited their written work.

One of my students sat at her desk with her head down. She had started to write a sentence about the sun and then dropped her pencil in exasperation. “I don’t want to do this anymore!” she sobbed with tears streaming down her face. A well-meaning colleague who was visiting my classroom witnessed this moment and wanted to help. She walked over to my student and encouragingly said “you can do it, honey...just write one more sentence!” This seemingly ordinary moment captivated my heart because it made my learning about Vygotskian Theory and Imaginative Education come to light.

In that moment, I recognized that this particular student was struggling, not because she lacked motivation or was being stubborn, but because she had very limited knowledge about Outer Space. She also lacked the literacy skills to be able to form a proper sentence. Despite my colleague’s best intentions, this particular student *couldn’t do it on her own*. I was reminded of an analogy that my Faculty Advisor Aimee Boyer (2017) used during my teacher training years: “if you plant some lettuce seeds and they don’t grow, you don’t shrug your shoulders and assume something is wrong with the lettuce seeds. You pay attention to its environment and nourish its

soil so it can grow and flourish” (personal communication, SFU). This experience moved me to approach teaching literacy in a different way. Inspired by my knowledge of Vygotskian theory, I aspired to help each child in my class grow and flourish in all areas of their academics, especially in literacy. Literacy is one of the most powerful psychological tools and has the ability to facilitate the appropriation of many other important tools (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Having strong literacy skills allows a child to partake more fully in culture and society.

Things have not changed much this school year (2021-2022). Teaching literacy in a grade two class is still a challenging task. I have a diverse group of learners with various learning abilities and social-emotional needs. When I began this action research project, many of my students had gaps in their foundational literacy skills and inherently feared and/or disliked the process of writing (both the mechanics of writing and communicative aspects). Despite these challenges, I embraced this school year as an opportunity to approach literacy instruction, specifically writing, from a Vygotskian perspective in the hopes of engaging *all* my learners in the writing process.

Personal Background and Context

I have always been fascinated by the workings of the human mind. I began my journey in the post-secondary world by pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree with a Major in Psychology at Simon Fraser University (SFU). Soon after, I pursued a Bachelor of Education degree at SFU and had the opportunity to be in the Imaginative Education (IE) cohort. I remember being apprehensive about the title of *Imaginative Education*. Being an introverted soul, I feared that I would be required to wear costumes and conduct lessons akin to theatrical performances. Much to my surprise, I learned that IE is deeply rooted in educational theory. I also learned that IE

honours the embodied nature of students. In other words, Imaginative Educators strive to teach students by engaging their minds, bodies, and emotions in the learning process. These positive experiences inspired me to pursue a Master of Education degree in IE and delve deeper into Dr. Kieran Egan's (1997) theories.

During this time of pursuing my master's degree in education, my life-long passions for both teaching and literacy coalesced. I was a child who grew up reading everything from the backs of cereal boxes to every book that I could get a hold of. I still think that libraries are magical places; holding the spine of a book against my palms and getting lost between its pages brings me deep joy. I have always been an enthusiastic writer as well and have maintained a journal since I first learned how to write. Our program director Dr. Gillian Judson taught us the importance of being engaged in a topic or lesson before teaching it to our students. Egan (2006) states that Imaginative Education "asks you not only to engage your students' feelings, but also to find *within yourself* an emotional connection to the topic" (p. 3). This action research project challenged me to use my passion for literacy to "stimulate and develop the imaginations of my students" and help them flourish in the area of writing (Egan, 2016).

Research Site Context

The School Community

The school where I conducted this action research project is Cloverdale Catholic School (CCS) located in Surrey, BC. The school is a part of the Catholic Independent Schools of the Vancouver Archdiocese (CISVA). As stated on the school website, "Cloverdale Catholic School (CCS) is a place where we focus on the development of the whole child; academic, spiritual, physical, and social-emotional. This holistic development takes place in a family-focused

environment in which parents, teachers, and students work together with common values and common goals” (<http://cloverdalecatholicschool.ca/about>, ND). The school has a diverse student population representing many cultural backgrounds. This is my second year working at CCS.

Mr. Clive Heah, our school principal, encourages teachers to pursue our passions and supports us by providing us with the necessary resources and access to workshops. Each year, teachers write a personal growth plan and are given the opportunity to seek professional development in their chosen area of passion. The school also collectively works on a school growth plan each year. A culture of collaboration is prevalent at the school and teachers are given time during staff meetings to collaborate with other teachers and colleagues.

The Classroom Community

I conducted my action research in my grade two classroom composed of 25 students: 12 boys and 13 girls. I taught a grade one and two combined class last year and I am delighted to have seven of my students from last year remain with me as grade two students this current school year. Halfway through the project, one of my students left the school as her family was moving to Ontario. During the last few weeks of this project, another student had to take an extended leave from school due to medical reasons. One student in my class is on an Individualized Education Plan (category Q – learning disability). This student also has unilateral hearing loss and is diagnosed with ADHD. I have three students who receive Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) instruction to develop their articulation and fluency of speech. Three of my students receive pull-out support from our learning resource teacher and are being closely monitored in reading fluency and comprehension. One of my students attends sessions with our school counsellor to work on social-emotional regulation and coping skills. I am very fortunate to have two part time Educational Assistants (EAs). These EAs support several different classes.

When they are in my classroom, they collaborate with me to provide remedial help for students who require extra support in the areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, and written output.

In February 2022, prior to beginning my action research project, I assessed my students' writing skills for the term two reporting period. I followed the rubric used by all the primary teachers at our school ([see Appendix A](#)). Consistent with the expectations of the B.C. Ministry of Education, a proficiency scale with the terminology of emerging, developing, proficient, and extending was used to assess students' writing skills. As demonstrated in Figure 1, I identified that the majority of my students struggled with using the proper conventions in their writing. As well, several students struggled with developing ideas, using their voice confidently in their writing, organizing their writing in a way that makes sense to the reader, and using interesting vocabulary.

Figure 1

Assessment of students' writing skills – February 2022

	Ideas	Voice	Fluency	Conventions	Organization	Vocabulary
Emerging	01	01	01	00	00	00
Developing	14	15	11	19	14	13
Proficient	08	09	13	06	10	10
Extending	02	00	00	00	01	02
	Number of students (out of 25)					

Research Questions

My inquiry focused on applying both Vygotskian Theory and Imaginative Education to explore how using cognitive tools can help students in primary grades flourish in their literary abilities with a specific focus on the skill of writing.

A Cognitive Tools approach to teaching Literacy in the Primary Classroom.

In addition, I focused on the following sub-questions:

- How can imaginative cognitive tools engage all my students in the writing process?
- What specific mediations and scaffolding experiences do my students need? What skills do I need to teach and re-teach explicitly?
- ~~What cognitive tools specifically can help my students have a better understanding of the conventions and mechanics of writing?~~
- How can cognitive tools empower my students as storytellers and encourage them to take risks in the writing process?

A few weeks into my project, my focus shifted from the conventions of writing to the creative, imaginative aspects of writing. This shift was inspired by students' comments during my focus group interviews in March as well as my initial student surveys. As such, I did not take time to explore the third sub-question as originally planned. Instead, I focused on the following sub-question:

- How can students grow in their imaginative capacities through IE-inspired literacy instruction?

Inquiry Rationale and Methodology

Why Imaginative Education?

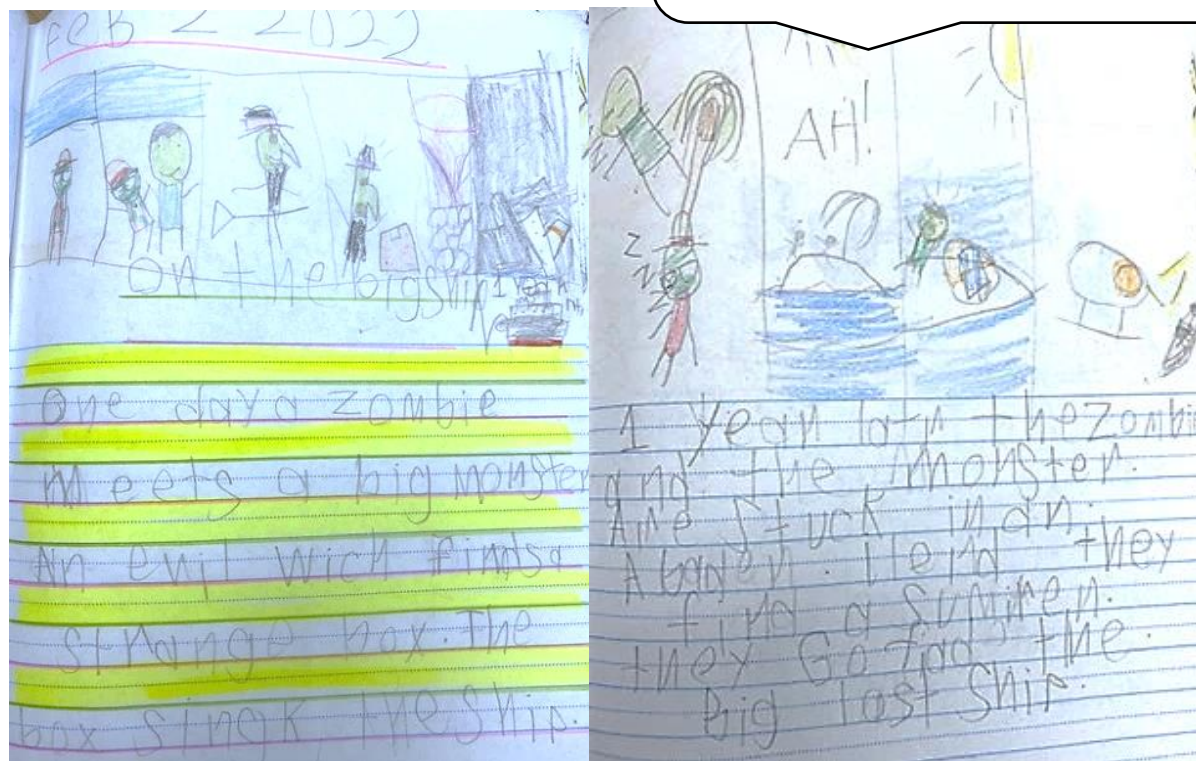
“Once there lived an angry alien named Bob. Bob was angry because he dreamed of having his very own Lego set, but nobody would buy him one. One day he met a friendly wizard...”

As I wrote the above story starter on the whiteboard, my grade two students roared with laughter. After many failed attempts to effectively teach my students how to develop characters in their story-writing, I resorted to humour. At the end of this lesson, my most reluctant writer who would typically give up after a sentence or two wrote a humorous story complete with a simple plot and some very comical characters (see Figure 2). Needless to say, I was elated!

Figure 2

My previously reluctant writer's story

One day a zombie meets a big monster. An evil witch finds a strange box. The box sinks the ship. One year later the zombie and the monster are stuck in an abandoned island. They find a submarine. They go find the big lost ship.



In Imaginative Education (IE), “jokes are learning tools, not distractions from learning, nor mere entertainment” (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 49). Furthermore, jokes and other forms of humour “vivify meaning in the topics we are teaching and can contribute directly and effectively to enriching the meaning of what we are teaching” (Egan & Judson, p. 54). The story of Bob the alien was a powerful experience in my classroom because my students were emotionally engaged with the character of Bob and eager to develop his character and tell a story about him.

Jokes and humour are only one example of a vast array of cognitive tools used by Imaginative Educators to enrich their teaching and maximize learning in the classroom. Imaginative Education is based on five distinctive kinds of understanding that enable individuals to make sense of the world in different ways. The five kinds of understanding are Somatic Understanding (prelinguistic), Mythic Understanding (based on oral language), Romantic Understanding (based on written language), Philosophic Understanding (based on theoretical aspects of language), and Ironic Understanding (based on reflexivity of language). Since I am conducting action research in the primary classroom, the kinds of understanding most relevant to my project are Somatic understanding, Mythic Understanding, and Romantic Understanding.

The theory of IE is inspired by Vygotskian theory and rooted in the concept of cultural recapitulation. In other words, Egan and Judson (2016) propose that “we have invented a range of cultural tools [in our cultural history], each of which, when it is learned by an individual, becomes a cognitive tool for that person” (p. 6). The very tools that enabled human cognition to develop historically can have a deep impact on our learners in our classrooms today. In particular, cognitive tools used in oral cultures such as storytelling, forming mental imagery, binary opposites, and the use of metaphor can help teachers create a strong Language Arts program in the primary school years. The cognitive tools in the Mythic Understanding toolkit are

closely connected with children's imaginations and how they engage with the world. For example, toddlers have worlds that are rich in fantasy and they understand the story form by the age of two (Egan, 1987). Young children are enthralled with stories that include fire-breathing dragons, magical worlds, and talking animals. It is precisely these imaginative aspects of Mythic Understanding that I hope to introduce to my students in grade two in the hopes of engaging them in the writing process.

Listed below are some cognitive tools in the Mythic Understanding toolkit that are relevant to my action research project and are greatly beneficial when teaching Language Arts in the primary classroom:

- **Stories:** “forms of language that [...] engage human minds by tying up our emotions and imaginations with their content” (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 19). While any teacher will acknowledge the importance of children's books and literature, Egan proposes that we can use the story form to make our teaching more effective by asking the story behind a particular topic or event, much like a news reporter.
- **Binary opposites:** “children [...] bring some order into their world by dividing everything into opposites. Binary oppositions are emotionally charged, abstract concepts that frame and give meaning to the content of the story” (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 29). For example, good/evil, just/unjust, and rich/poor.
- **Metaphors:** “[establish] connections and new ways of seeing things that were not there before our metaphoric power created them” (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 43). Young children are especially skilled at using metaphors.

- **Mental imagery:** “words that can be used to evoke images in the minds of their hearers” (Egan, 1997, p. 60). Egan (1997) states that the “capacity to think and feel in terms of images has important, and somewhat neglected implications for early education” (p. 61).
- **Rhyme and rhythm:** the musicality of oral language such as alliteration and onomatopoeia.

As children begin to develop literacy, they begin to lose interest in fantasy and are drawn towards aspects of the real world (Egan & Judson, 2016). “Literacy [...] is primarily responsible for the radical change that we see in children starting at about age seven” (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 70). As children acquire literacy, they begin making sense of the world through the tools of Romantic Understanding.

It is important to note that these kinds of understandings in IE are not stages and individuals do not acquire them “naturally” at a given age (Egan, 1997). The goal of IE is to empower our students to develop all five kinds of understanding and “[equip] our students with the maximum number of these sensemaking cognitive tools available in our society” (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 6). In fact, a successful Language Arts program can utilize students’ cognitive tools associated with orality in order to make instruction in literacy (reading and writing) more meaningful, engaging, and imaginative (Egan, 1987). Egan (1987) states that “The fullest achievement of literacy requires the fullest achievement of oral capacities as well” (p. 469). Although my aim is to help students gain a strong grasp of literacy (writing skills), I plan on doing so by maximizing their Mythic Understanding toolkit.

Literature Review

A Vygotskian Approach to Literacy

As a young child approaches school age, learning written language is one of the most important aspects of their education. Living in a literate society, the ability to read and write offers a child the opportunity to fully partake in their culture and society. Several theories and educational philosophies influence our approach to teaching literacy in the early elementary school years. However, Jean Piaget's (1896 – 1980) ideas and approach dominate our North American school systems (Egan, 2002). Even in British Columbia, teaching practices we commonly see in classrooms such as '*child-centred*' curricula, beginning with tasks that are familiar to the child, and offering knowledge to the child once they are '*developmentally ready*' are a result of Piaget's theory on the development of children. One such example is the Whole Language (WL) movement. In a WL classroom, the teacher does not intrude on the learning process of the child. The teacher's task is to simply provide the appropriate resources and materials. The classroom is designed in a manner where the child is able to make self-discoveries about language and construct language independently through exposure to literature, manipulatives, and opportunities for play (Egan & Gajdamaschko, 2003).

On the other hand, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) proposed a social constructivist theory for development where the mind is viewed as a cultural and psychological organ. A Vygotskian approach to learning and teaching is centred around the appropriation of psychological tools. Psychological tools "are symbolic artefacts – signs, symbols, texts [...] that when internalized help individuals master their own psychological functions of perception, memory, attention, and so on" (Kozulin, 2003, p. 15). According to Vygotsky, the child is not simply introduced to the mechanics of writing in school, but rather, the "whole new system of cognitive psychological

tools that literature has historically stored in itself” (Egan & Gajdamaschko, 2003, p. 87).

Vygotsky considers literacy to be one of the most powerful psychological tools because it has the ability to facilitate the appropriation of many other important tools (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

The Teacher’s Role

According to Vygotsky, the teacher has an important role in helping young children master the psychological tool of writing in the classroom. Unlike a Piagetian approach where children are viewed as independently acquiring knowledge, a Vygotskian model for education consists of mediation and scaffolding. As a human mediator, the teacher provides the child with a secure learning environment, encouragement, challenge, and feedback (Kozulin, 2003).

Teachers following a Vygotskian approach also model writing skills explicitly and engage in joint activities with young children. When teachers provide children with joint activities, the children can be involved in tasks that are more complex than what they can achieve independently. This process is known as scaffolding. Vygotsky (1986) states that imitation is indispensable in the instruction of written language and leads the child to new developmental levels – “what the child can do in cooperation today [they] can do alone tomorrow” (p. 188).

Vygotsky also theorizes that instruction precedes development. In other words, an educator following a Vygotskian approach does not simply wait until a child is ready. Vygotsky (1986) asserts that “the only good kind of instruction...marches ahead of development and leads it” (p. 189). In doing so, an educator considers the upper threshold of what a child is able to achieve with mediation and scaffolding and guides the child until they learn how to perform the task or skill independently.

The Merits of Inner Speech

Inner speech has an important role as children transition from orality to literacy around the age of seven. Toddlers typically talk to themselves to self-regulate while engaging in play and other activities. This form of speech is known as egocentric speech. Eventually, around the age of seven, egocentric speech turns inward and transforms into inner speech (non-vocal speech) (Karpov, 2003). It is important to note that the development of inner speech is essential in order for the development of written speech to take place. In fact, Vygotsky (1987) stated that “written speech follows inner speech and presupposes its existence” (p. 182). For young children, it is challenging to find the motivation to write because the motives for writing are more abstract, intellectualized, and further removed from immediate needs. In short, children often do not understand *why* they are writing (Vygotsky, 1986). Inner speech is invaluable to young learners who are beginning to write. Inner speech assists the young child to plan their writing by allowing the child to create a mental draft of what they want to write (Vygotsky, 1986). Inner speech also helps the child overcome difficulties in writing because it is intimately connected with the child’s thinking.

Let Them Play!

Another important factor that leads to development of written language is unstructured play. According to Vygotsky (2007), real play involves imaginary situations, roles/role playing, and children following rules determined by specific roles. Each of these components plays an important part in the development of children’s minds and subsequently, their ability to read and write (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). In particular, play teaches the child to suppress the need for instant gratification and also teaches them to be motivated towards attaining a specific goal – a key factor in the process of learning how to write. For example, a child who wants to play ‘zoo’

has to gather materials, create tickets and other props, and place their stuffed animals in the appropriate places before they can take on the role of a zookeeper. In doing so, children learn how to coordinate between short-term and long-term goals. Play also allows children to consider multiple perspectives which later turn into reflective thinking - the ability to consider mental representations, and symbolic thinking. For example, a child might pretend that a box is a spaceship thereby learning the important skill of abstract thinking. When a child follows rules and monitors others during play, they develop deliberateness, planning skills, and metacognition (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Play can also serve as motivation for writing. A child could be motivated to share their play plans with a peer by drawing images or by producing proto-writing. Often, when children are allowed to choose their own topic for journal entries in the early elementary years, they tend to write about their playtimes. In my experience as an educator I have noticed that play is often considered a privilege or reward for children instead of a fundamental right. For children in primary years, the opportunity for unstructured play with their peers at school leads to the development of many important social and academic skills including written language.

The Conventions and Mechanics of Writing

Scaffolded writing is an excellent strategy for helping emergent writers gain important writing skills while preserving their individual writing styles and creative spirits. For a child in the early elementary school years, writing involves a process of planning a sentence, using phonetic skills to spell out words, and applying conventions such as spacing and punctuation. Carrying out these multiple tasks simultaneously tends to be a significant challenge for young writers. For emergent writing exercises to be beneficial for a child's literacy development, they have to be initiated by the child and include the child's self-generated messages. However, the

child also needs the teacher's assistance in order to grasp the conventions of writing and learn how to phonetically represent sounds and words (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Formal instruction of writing often tends to diminish a child's individual style of writing. On the other hand, it is detrimental for the child's development of literacy to simply wait until a child is ready to write independently.

In scaffolded writing the teacher helps the child to remember the words they are planning to write by drawing lines as placeholders for each word (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). It is a valuable technique for young children as it provides them with the necessary support for writing and builds on the cognitive psychological tools that they already possess – private speech (inner speech) and external sign mediators (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Private speech assists the emergent writer in the following ways: it helps the child remember more words from their initial message. It also helps the child develop voice-to-print correspondence and the concept of a word. Finally, private speech gives children the opportunity to repeat a word as many times as necessary in order to produce phonemic representations (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Some other advantages of scaffolded writing include the ability for children to write in a more advanced manner and include interesting details in their writing.

Furthermore, scaffolded writing gives young writers independence as they internalize the process. At first, a child may have to dictate their message to the teacher who will draw lines for them. However, over time, a child is able to draw their own lines and eventually learn how to write without the assistance of lines as placeholders as they become more confident in their writing skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Scaffolded writing is aligned with the Vygotskian principle that good instruction precedes development. In a classroom setting, I propose giving children ample time to plan and formulate their messages prior to writing. Since working

independently with each child might be a challenge due to the number of students in a classroom, teachers could facilitate scaffolded writing in small groups and ensure that they group children who require similar interventions together. Children will also benefit from having the opportunity to add detailed drawings and illustrations to go with their writing. Vygotsky states that “young children’s drawings are a unique graphic speech” (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 193). A safe environment during writing sessions where a child feels free to vocalize their thoughts and repeat words/phrases to themselves without being penalized is also crucial.

Imaginative Writing

As educators, we desire to nurture the beauty, distinctiveness, and vivacity of children’s language and writing capacities. As children gain more confidence in presenting their thoughts in writing, it is vital to help them develop their creativity and imagination in order for them to flourish as young writers. According to Vygotsky (2004), human beings have the unique ability to be oriented toward the future and alter the present. This creative capacity is known as imagination (Vygotsky, 2004). Both Vygotsky (2004) and Egan (2003) hold the belief that young children do not have the innate ability to be creative. Rather, children need to gain knowledge and the appropriate psychological tools in order to grow in their imaginative capacities. One of the best ways for young children to grow in their imaginative capacities is to engage in unstructured play. When children play, they do not simply reproduce what they have seen or heard. Instead, they combine their experiences to form a new reality that represents their needs and desires. Children use these same creative capacities when they create stories and drawings (Vygotsky, 2004).

There is a popular belief among educators today that one shouldn’t lead their students to boredom by teaching them useless facts or knowledge. However, Egan (2017) asserts that the

imagination can only work with the knowledge that one has gained. Therefore, accumulating knowledge and knowing about concepts in depth is crucial for the development of students' imagination. Vygotsky (2004) further states that if we desire a child to be creative and imaginative, we must broaden the experiences we provide the child with. If we desire our students to write creatively, we must give them the opportunity to write about topics that they know much about and feel deeply about. Forcing our students to write about topics that they do not care about leads to superficial, mechanical writing and the child fails to see the beauty in the process of writing (Vygotsky, 2004). Opportunities for unstructured play and affordances to learn deeply and curiously about the world around them are necessary in order for students to be creative and imaginative writers.

Why Action Research?

Action Research involves “focusing with intentionality on specific questions and issues [we face as educators], and determining links between effective practice and student learning” (Parsons et al., 2013, p. 2). Action research is also a cyclical process that involves reflection and action followed by further reflection (Parsons et al, 2013).

Educational change is a swift raging current, and educators seldom have the opportunity to focus on one topic or theme of their interest for a significant amount of time. Conducting this action research project allowed me to focus on teaching writing skills and become an ethnographer within my own classroom. Teaching literacy in an effective manner is a challenging task. This process allowed me to dig deeper and examine why students often claim to dislike writing. I quickly came to realize that students did not inherently dislike writing but rather found it challenging and overwhelming due to difficulties with spelling words, coming up

with ideas, encoding their ideas, and remembering the correct conventions and grammar rules. Due to the cyclical nature of action research, I had the opportunity to try out various IE-inspired lessons, reflect on them, and make the necessary changes along the way.

Imaginative Educators in previous cohorts of this program have conducted action research in the area of literacy through the utilization of iPads and blogging. While I find their work to be inspiring, I was curious to learn if imaginative methods of teaching literacy can invigorate mundane activities like journal writing and pencil-to-paper writing tasks. Our school currently does not have a class set of iPads and writing instruction in the primary grades is mostly conducted through pencil-to-paper tasks. This research is intended for educators who teach literacy in primary grades and are interested in teaching literacy in a more engaging and motivating manner for their students.

Research Design

This action research project was conducted over an eleven week period from February 22nd 2022 to May 6th 2022. This included a two week school closure for spring break from March 14th to March 25th. Data was collected using triangulation. The methods of data collection included student surveys, teacher surveys, focus group interviews, collection of artefacts and photographs, analysis of student work, and observations.

A student survey and analysis of the survey served as baseline data at the beginning of the study to determine my students' skill levels, their own perceptions about writing, and their motivation to write. Teacher surveys were conducted to help me understand the perspectives of other primary teachers and their varying approaches to teaching writing. Throughout the action research project I took opportunities to observe my students both with and without interaction.

For observation with interaction, I created small groups consisting of 3-6 students for writing interventions and mediation. I conducted focus group interviews with small groups of students to learn more about their experiences and their reactions to the writing interventions and various cognitive tools used. I used voice recording as it allowed me to focus on students' responses, emotions, and body language. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim. Focus group interviews were conducted at the beginning of my fieldwork phase as well as towards the end. Observation without interaction was carried out during writer's workshop blocks. Photos of students engaging in various writing activities helped me to capture their emotions and reactions while they were working. Student work samples were also collected and photographed. Voice recordings and photographs played an important role during the data analysis stage along with field notes that I had recorded.

This action research project aligns with the big ideas, curricular competencies, and content areas outlined in the redesigned B.C. curriculum (2006) ([see Appendix B](#)). The IE-inspired lessons and fieldwork components were incorporated into my daily Language Arts lessons.

Research Ethics

In January 2022, our cohort participated in an ethics workshop led by Candase Jensen from the SFU Office of Research Ethics. In addition, I completed the TCPS2:CORE22 course on research ethics ([see Appendix C](#)). I obtained the permission to conduct action research from my school district and school administrators prior to conducting any fieldwork ([see Appendix D](#)). Following ethical practices as a teacher-inquirer, I also informed my students and their families of my research project and sent home a letter of notification ([see Appendix E](#)). I received

permission from students' families to collect photographs, voice recordings, and work samples. I also obtained permission from students and colleagues prior to conducting each interview, sending out surveys, and collecting work samples. Students' names have been anonymized throughout this paper. Since my deep desire was to help my students blossom into confident writers, names of flowers have been used as pseudonyms to represent students. Students' names have been removed from work samples. Any photographs containing students' faces have an emoji covering their face in order that they may remain anonymous.

Implementation and Fieldwork

Initial Student Survey and Baseline Data

Before I began implementing any IE-inspired lessons, I wanted to find out how my students felt about writing in general and what aspects of writing they found the most challenging. I conducted an initial survey ([see Appendix F](#)) and asked my students the following questions. Students responded by circling images and emojis that corresponded with their thoughts. A total of 22 students participated in the survey.

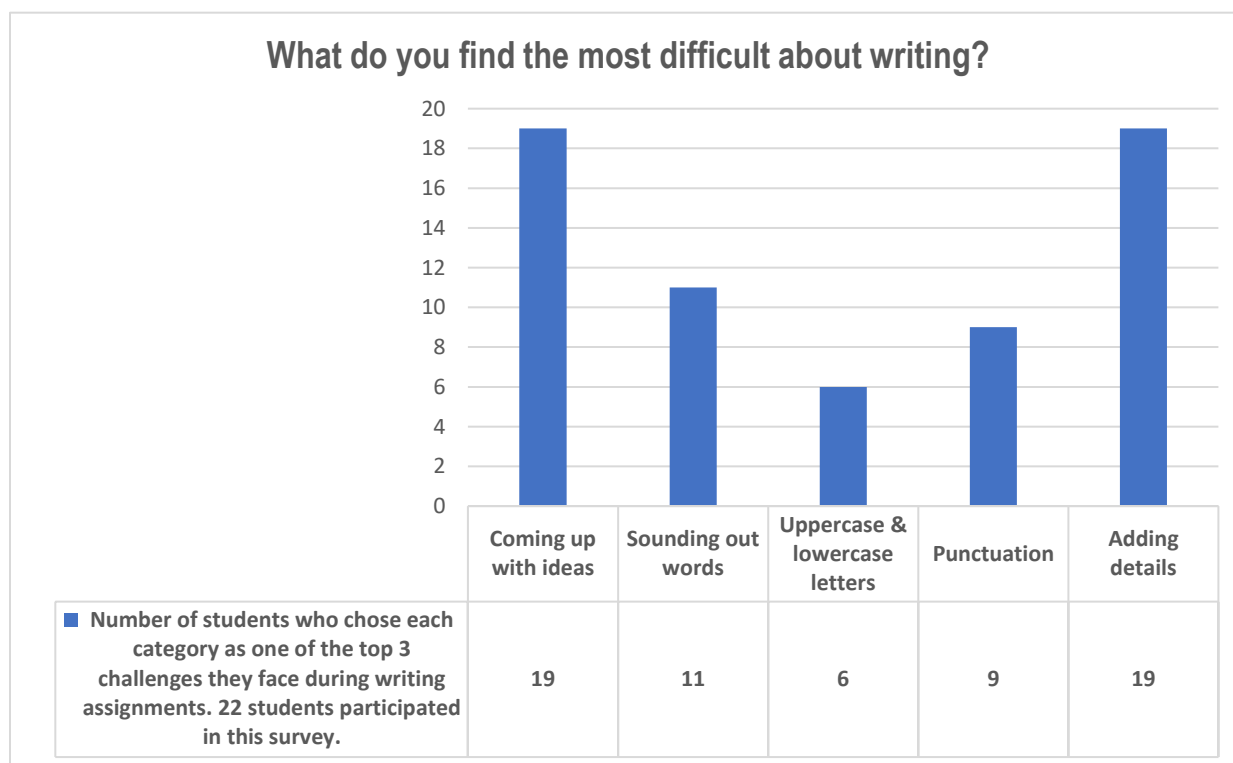
1. What do you find the most difficult about writing? (students were invited to circle the top 3 areas that they find challenging).
2. How does writing stories or writing in your journal make you feel? (students were invited to circle an emoji representing various emotions).

Before I handed out the survey, I explained to my students how this project was homework for my classes at SFU. My students were eager to help out. I spoke to them about the importance of telling me their honest opinions so that I could teach them more effectively. Students were asked to complete the survey anonymously so they felt comfortable about writing

down their thoughts. I stood in the back corner of the classroom and our Educational Assistant Mrs. Wong circulated the room. As I analyzed the results, I was not too surprised by my students' responses (see Figure 3). A majority of my students stated that coming up with ideas and adding details were the most challenging aspects of writing.

Figure 3

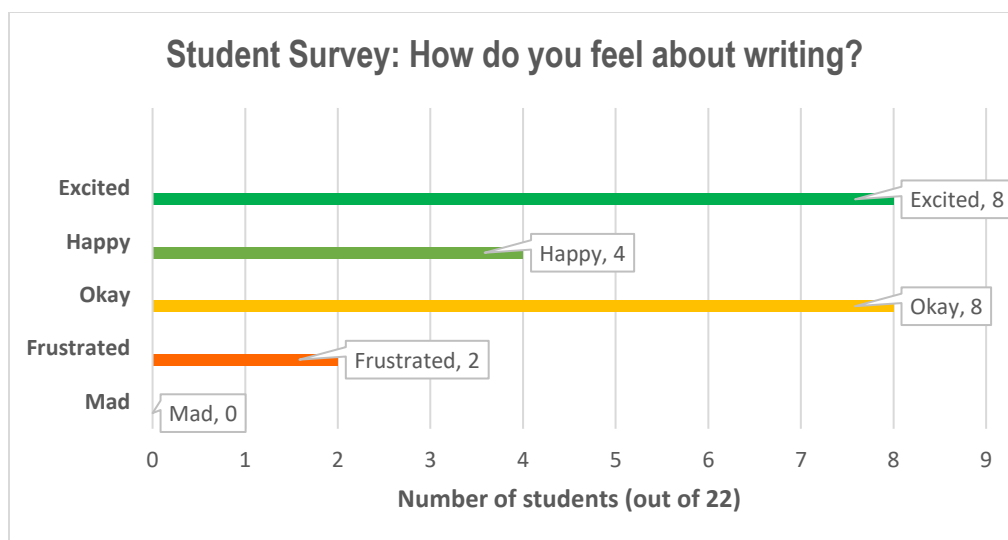
Student survey results: what do you find the most difficult about writing?



In response to “how do you feel about writing?”, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that many of my students found writing to be a positive experience and that only 2 out of 22 students found writing to be a frustrating experience (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

Student survey results: how do you feel about writing?

**Figure 5a and 5b**

A few survey responses

What do you find the most difficult about writing? Please select the top 3 things that you find the most challenging.

Coming up with ideas	Sounding out words	Using uppercase and lower case letters	Using punctuation	Adding details to my sentences

Is there anything else you want to tell Miss A. about writing?

I find writing exiting and it even makes my hand tired.

How does writing stories or writing in your journal make you feel?

Mad Frustrated Okay Happy Excited

What do you find the most difficult about writing? Please select the top 3 things that you find the most challenging.

Coming up with ideas	Sounding out words	Using uppercase and lower case letters	Using punctuation	Adding details to my sentences

Is there anything else you want to tell Miss A. about writing?

writing is sometimes hard because I don't have ideas

How does writing stories or writing in your journal make you feel?

Mad Frustrated Okay Happy Excited

Moreover, I gave students the opportunity to tell me any other thoughts they had about writing. Here are some of the responses from my students:

- I wish we could make more books.
- Writing is hard for me.
- I love story time.
- I wish we could write more silly stories.
- I find printing pretty hard.
- Writing is hard because I don't know the difference between b and d.

Teacher Survey

In addition to student surveys, I conducted a teacher survey with Mrs. Kimberly Butler, our other grade two teacher at CCS, Mrs. Cheryl Hosein, the grade three teacher at CCS, and Ms. Kristy Sveinson, a grade two teacher at Katzie Elementary in Surrey, B.C. I also conducted a survey with two primary grade teachers in Surrey, B.C. who requested to remain anonymous. I have included their full responses in [Appendix G](#) and have identified themes that emerged below.

Question 1: *What do your students find challenging when it comes to writing?*

All five teachers identified that coming up with ideas was a challenge for their students. The teachers also identified that students found it challenging to add details to their writing and struggled with conventions. One teacher mentioned that using their imagination was a challenge for students. Another teacher mentioned that some students struggle with fine motor skills and pencil grip and that these factors make writing a tiring task.

Question 2: *What are some strategies that you use to motivate students? Are there any writing activities that your students particularly enjoy?*

- Giving students the opportunity to discuss a prompt with a partner.

- Creating stories as a class with the intention of modelling how to write a story.
- Using gestures to learn new vocabulary.
- Explicitly modelling specific writing skills (sounding out words, using punctuation, etc.).
- Finding topics that students find interesting and have an emotional connection with.
- Offering student choice (allowing students to choose their own topics for writing).
- Praise and encouragement by teachers and families when students upload their work to their digital portfolios.

Question 3: *What are some strategies that you use to motivate students who struggle with writing?*

- Inviting students to verbalize their thoughts and ideas for writing.
- Providing one-on-one support and small group interventions.
- Building students' confidence and helping them believe that they are writers.
- Extrinsic motivation – rewards and stickers.
- Engaging with students' writing by showing interest in their topic and asking follow-up questions.
- Identifying areas that students struggle with and providing interventions to help students overcome these struggles.
- Giving students small, achievable goals to work towards.
- Celebrating students' growth and progress by sharing their work with their peers and publishing their work.

Question 4: *What do you notice about students who particularly enjoy writing?*

All five teachers identified that students who enjoy writing loved reading, loved collecting words, and had great imaginations.

Identifying the Next Steps

Based on the feedback that I received from my students and fellow educators, I recognized that students needed support mostly in the areas of generating ideas, adding details to their writing, and using the proper conventions. I designed the following lessons and supported my students by providing them with the appropriate scaffolding and mediations. The teacher survey identified that students who enjoyed writing had a great imagination. I utilized cognitive tools in my writing lessons with the hopes of engaging my students and inspiring them to use their imagination in their writing.

Activity 1: Families and Similes

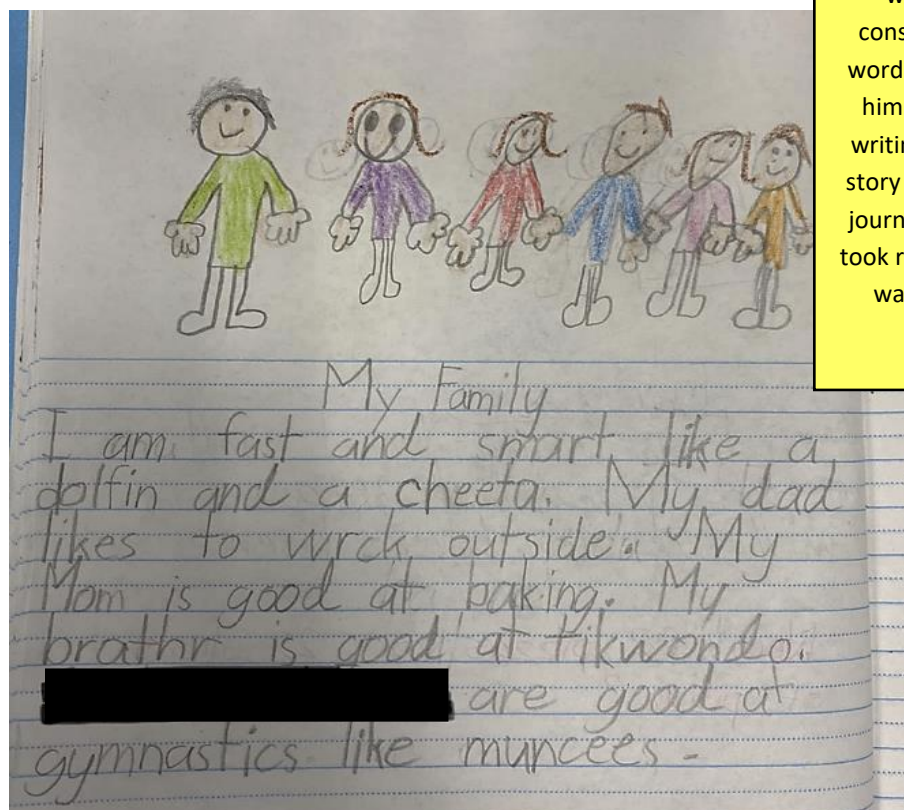
February 23, 2022

Since this was our first writer's workshop session after the Family Day weekend, I decided that our journal topic would be "My Family". I chose to use similes as a cognitive tool to enrich my students' writing. Similes are a form of metaphor and "invite us to see one thing in terms of something else" (Egan, 2006, p. 34). I wrote down the word simile on our whiteboard and explained that a simile compares two things and can be used to make our writing more interesting. This was our first attempt at using similes so I encouraged students to think of one descriptive word for each family member and then think of an animal that represents that characteristic. I found that all my students were engaged in this task. Many of my students were

eager to tell the story of their families. Egan and Judson (2016) define the story form as “the unit of language that can fix the affective meaning of the events that compose it” (p. 11). I was pleased to notice that students were engaging both their emotions and imaginations during this writing process and not overly concerned about spelling every word correctly. In the past, the fear of spelling words incorrectly has been a barrier for many of my students and has prevented them from adding creative details to their writing. A few of my students also used elements of humour in their writing and several students took creative risks by adding descriptive words. I noticed that my students added many details in their illustrations as well.

Figure 6a

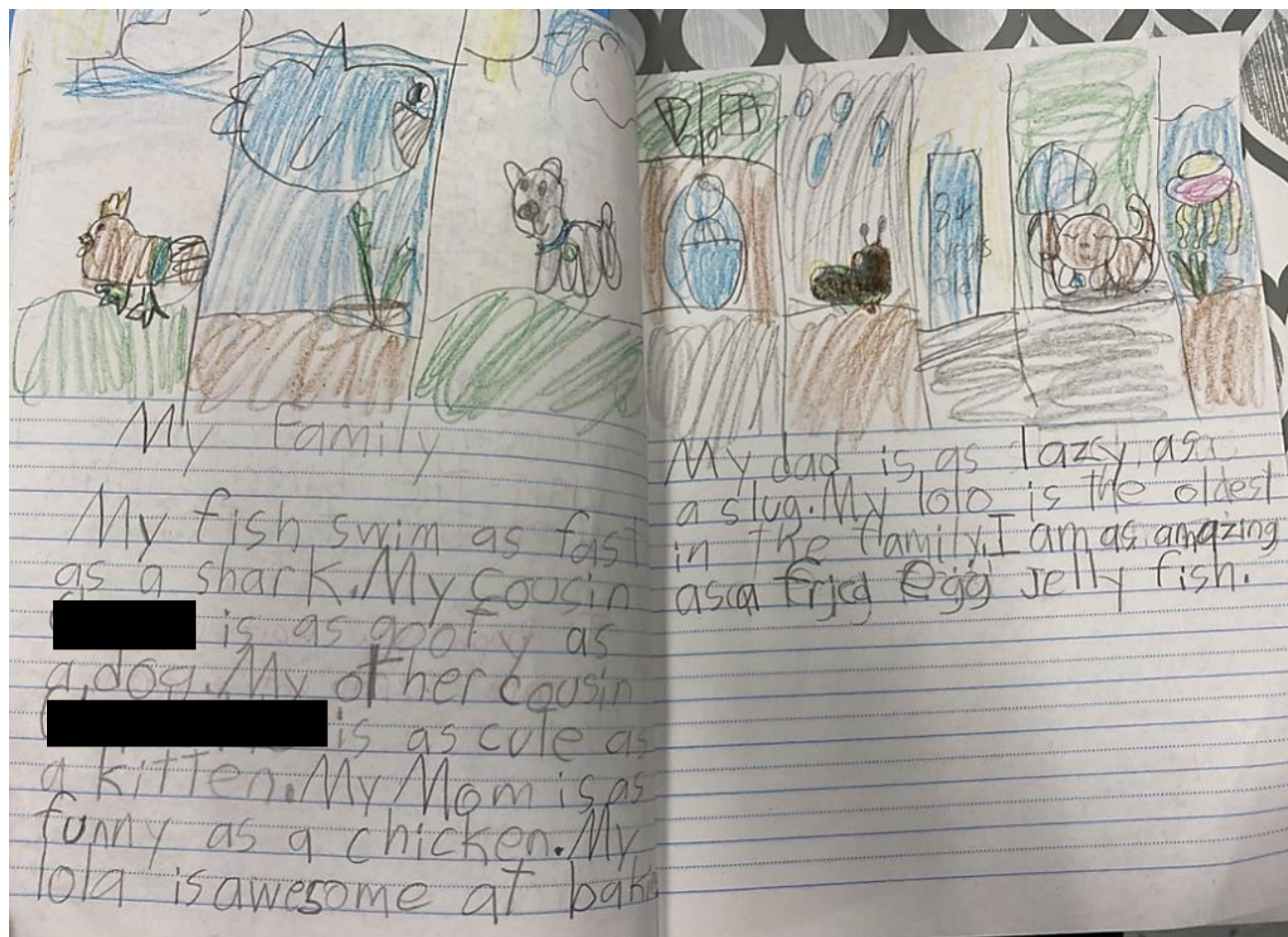
My Family writing sample



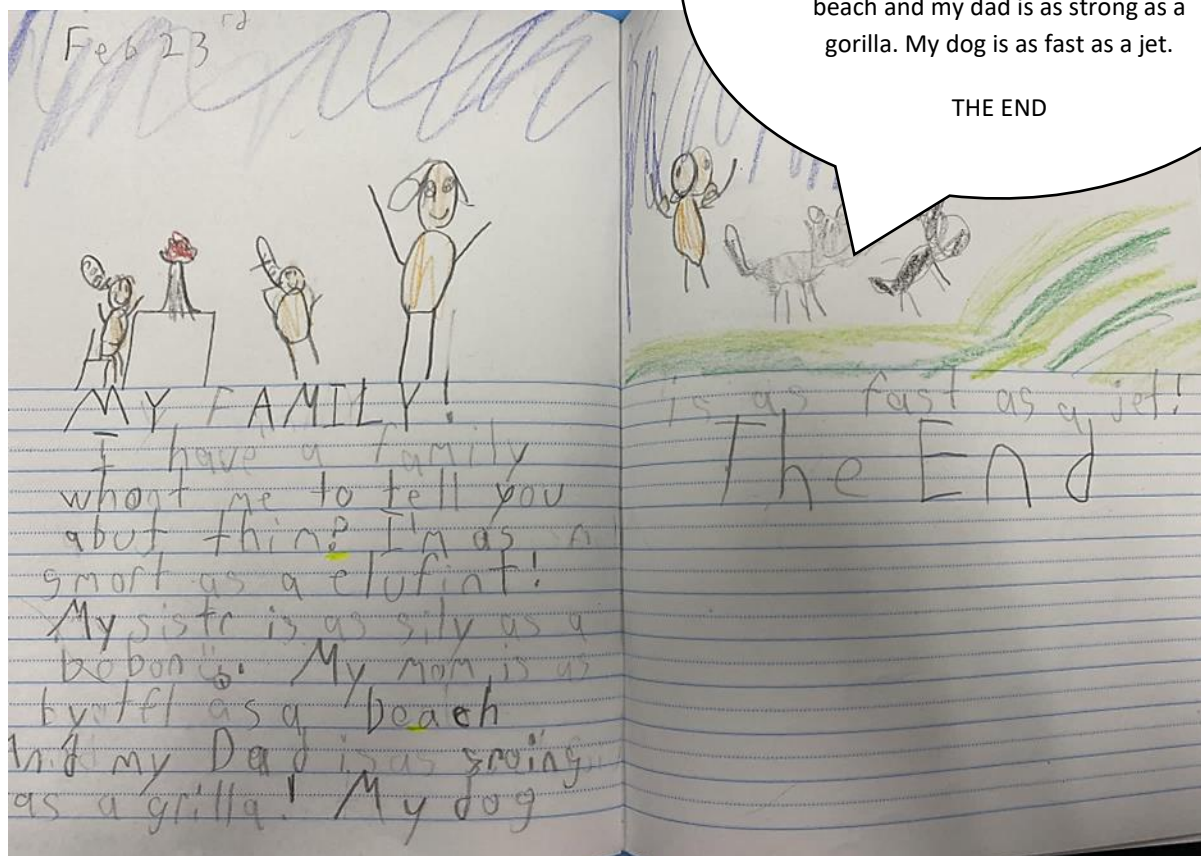
This student is one my reluctant writers. He is usually very conscious about spelling every word correctly and this prevents him from adding details to his writing. He was eager to tell the story of his family and wrote this journal entry independently and took risks sounding out words. He was very proud of his work!

Figure 6b

My family writing sample



This student took a creative risk and used humour to make her writing more interesting. She worked very hard to draw detailed illustrations of all the animals that represent her family members.

Figure 6c*My family writing sample*

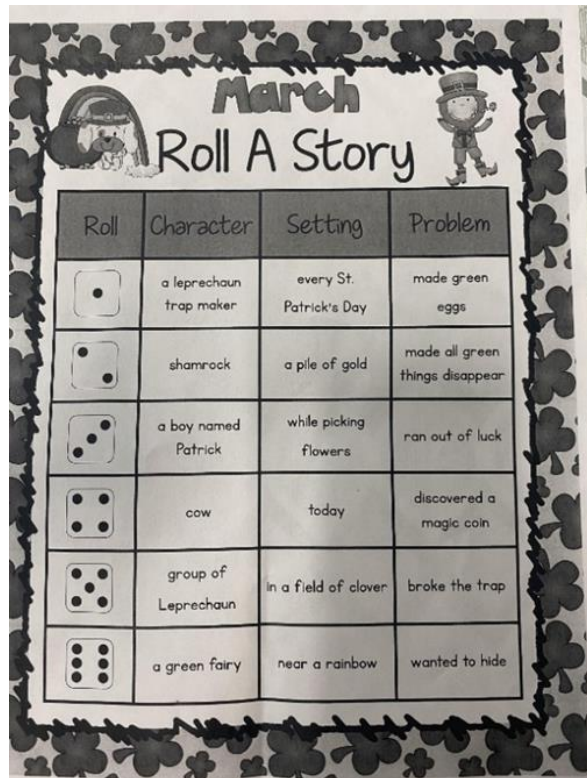
This student was able to independently think
beyond animals when coming up with similes.

Activity 2: St. Patrick's Themed Silly Stories

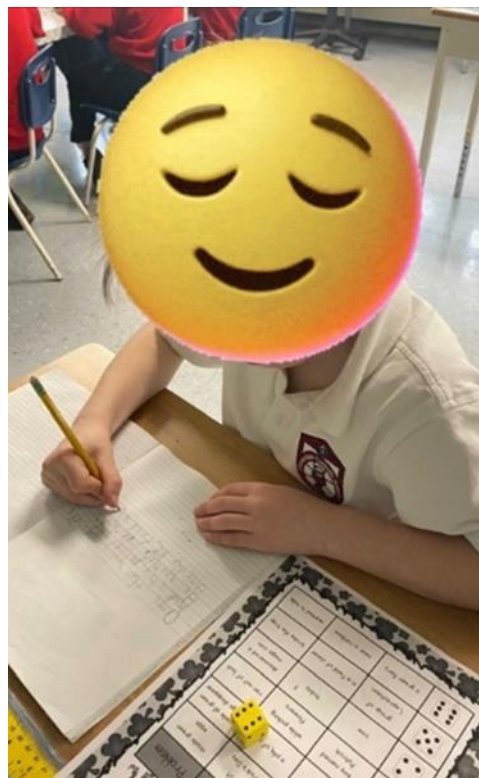
March 03, 2022

In the primary classroom, there are many festivities and holidays that students are excited about. Instead of seeing these celebrations as interruptions to my instruction, I am learning how to build on that excitement by incorporating themed activities that engage my learners while teaching them important skills. Spring break was just around the corner and my students had been begging me for an opportunity to write silly stories. I printed out a St. Patrick's Day themed "roll a story" activity sheet off Teachers Pay Teachers (see Figure 7). The handout that I used was created by an educator named Angela Crescenzo¹. I used the cognitive tool of jokes and humour in this lesson. IE recognizes the universal nature of jokes and humour and asserts that it is a tool that humans use to make meaning (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 54). Additionally, young students love saying jokes and bring a sense of humour with them to the classroom everyday. Utilizing jokes as a cognitive tool motivated my students to create stories full of creative details and humorous plot twists. In addition, allowing the students to roll dice and choose their own characters and settings added an element of play to the writing activity (see Figure 8).

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Roll-A-Story-March-1764901>

Figure 7*Roll a story activity sheet*


Roll	Character	Setting	Problem
1	a leprechaun trap maker	every St. Patrick's Day	made green eggs
2	shamrock	a pile of gold	made all green things disappear
3	a boy named Patrick	while picking flowers	ran out of luck
4	cow	today	discovered a magic coin
5	group of Leprechaun	in a field of clover	broke the trap
6	a green fairy	near a rainbow	wanted to hide

Figure 8*A student working hard on his roll a story activity*

I provided an experience of scaffolding with a joint activity. We began our story workshop by creating a class story using the same activity sheet. Students who felt comfortable volunteered to add details to a class story that we first narrated orally. I then wrote the story on the whiteboard and we read it together as a class. Afterwards, I erased the story off the whiteboard and students began to work independently to create their own stories. I worked with a small group of students who require support with adding details to their stories. Overall, my students seemed to enjoy this activity and even my typically hesitant writers included a simple problem and solution in their stories with the scaffolding and mediations provided.

Figure 9a

St. Patrick's themed story writing sample – part 1

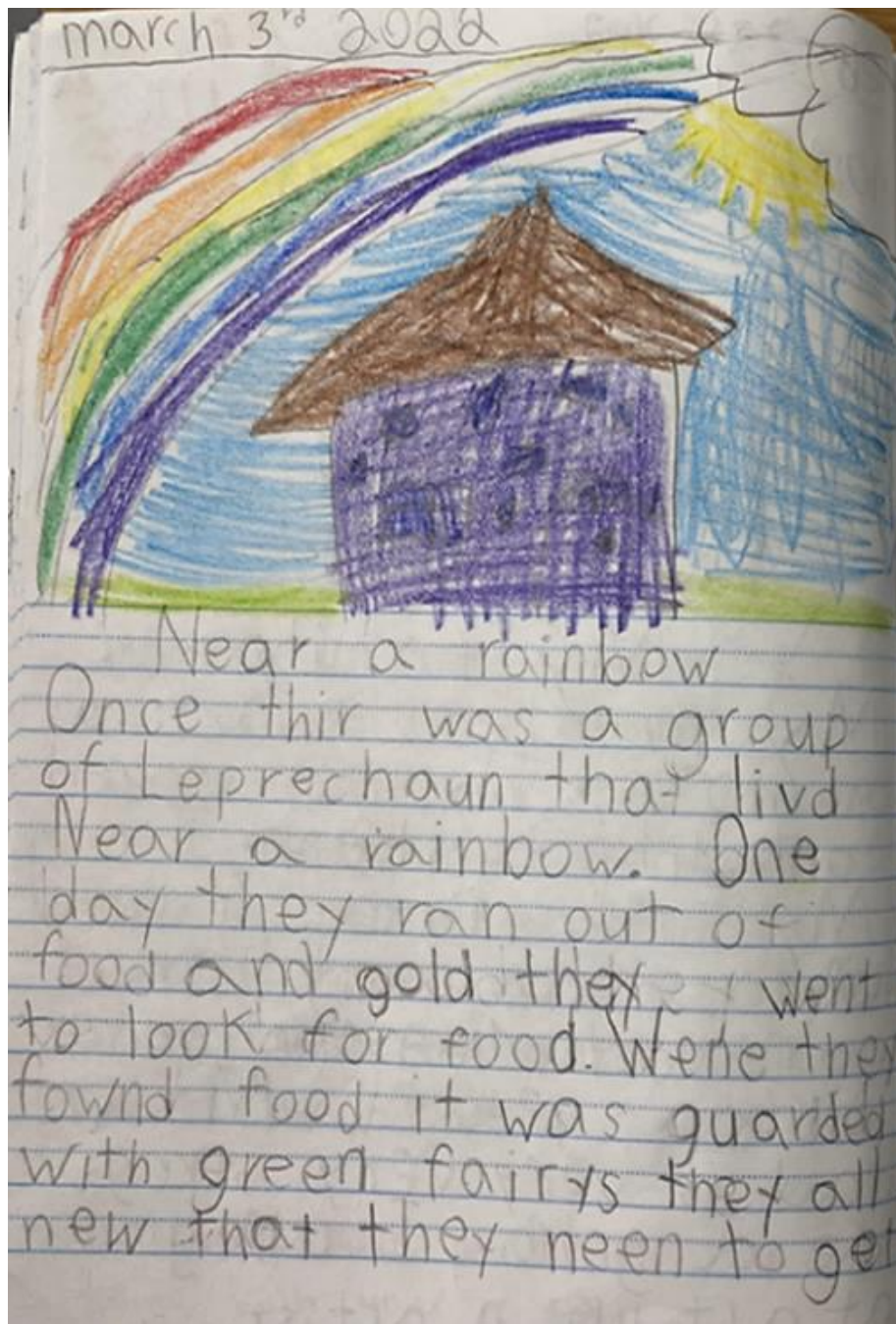


Figure 9b

St. Patrick's themed story writing sample – part 2

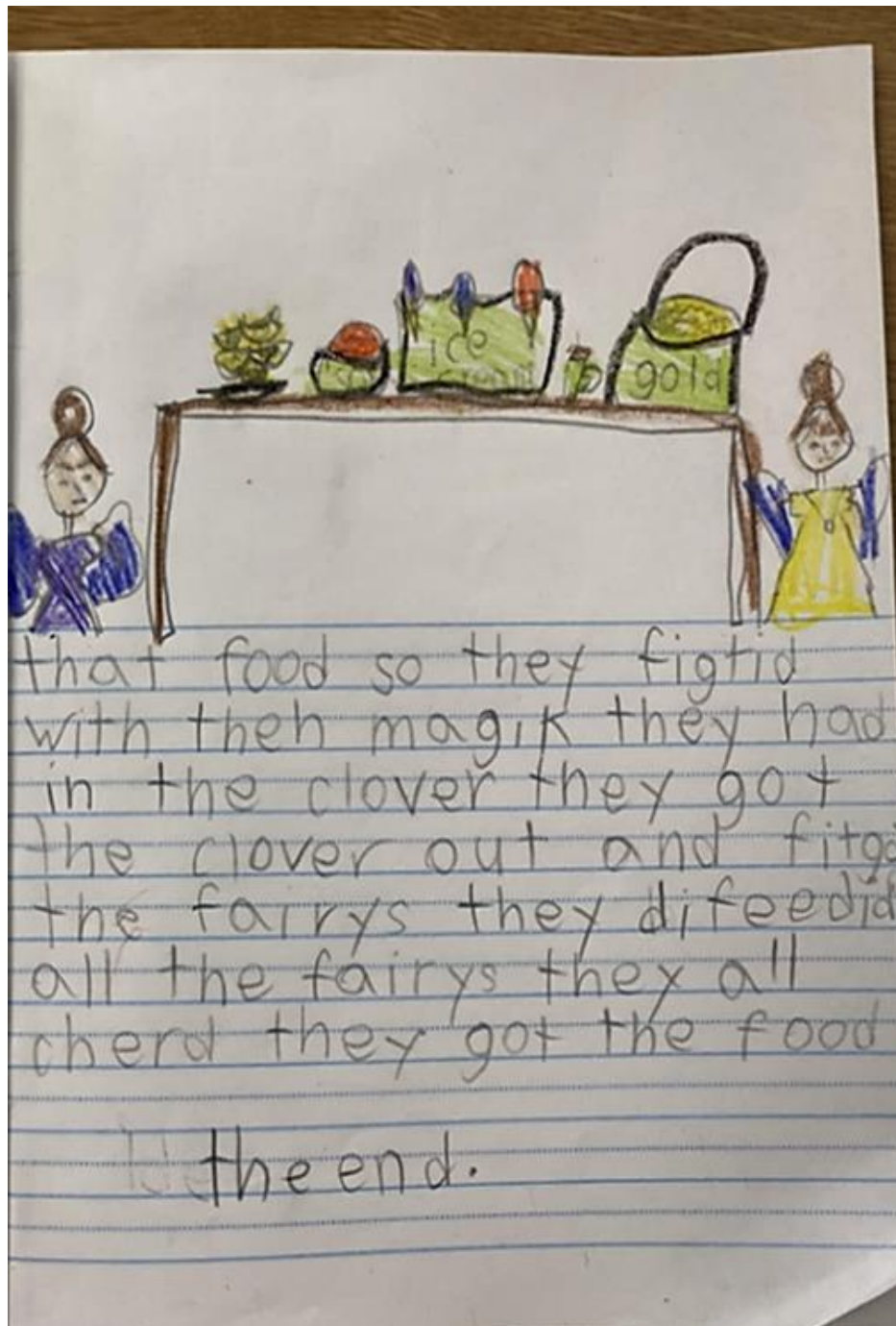


Figure 9c

St. Patrick's themed story writing sample – part 1

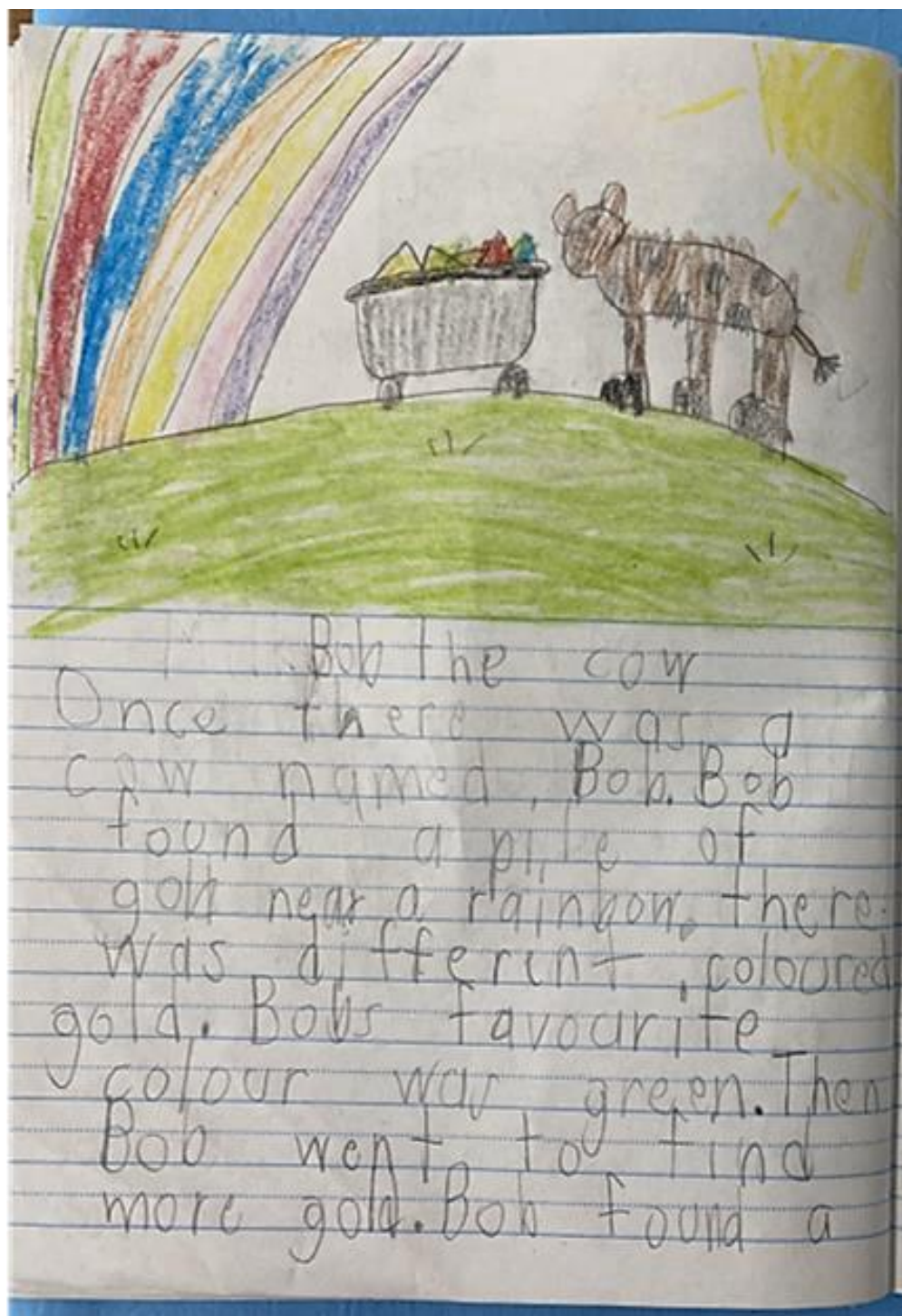
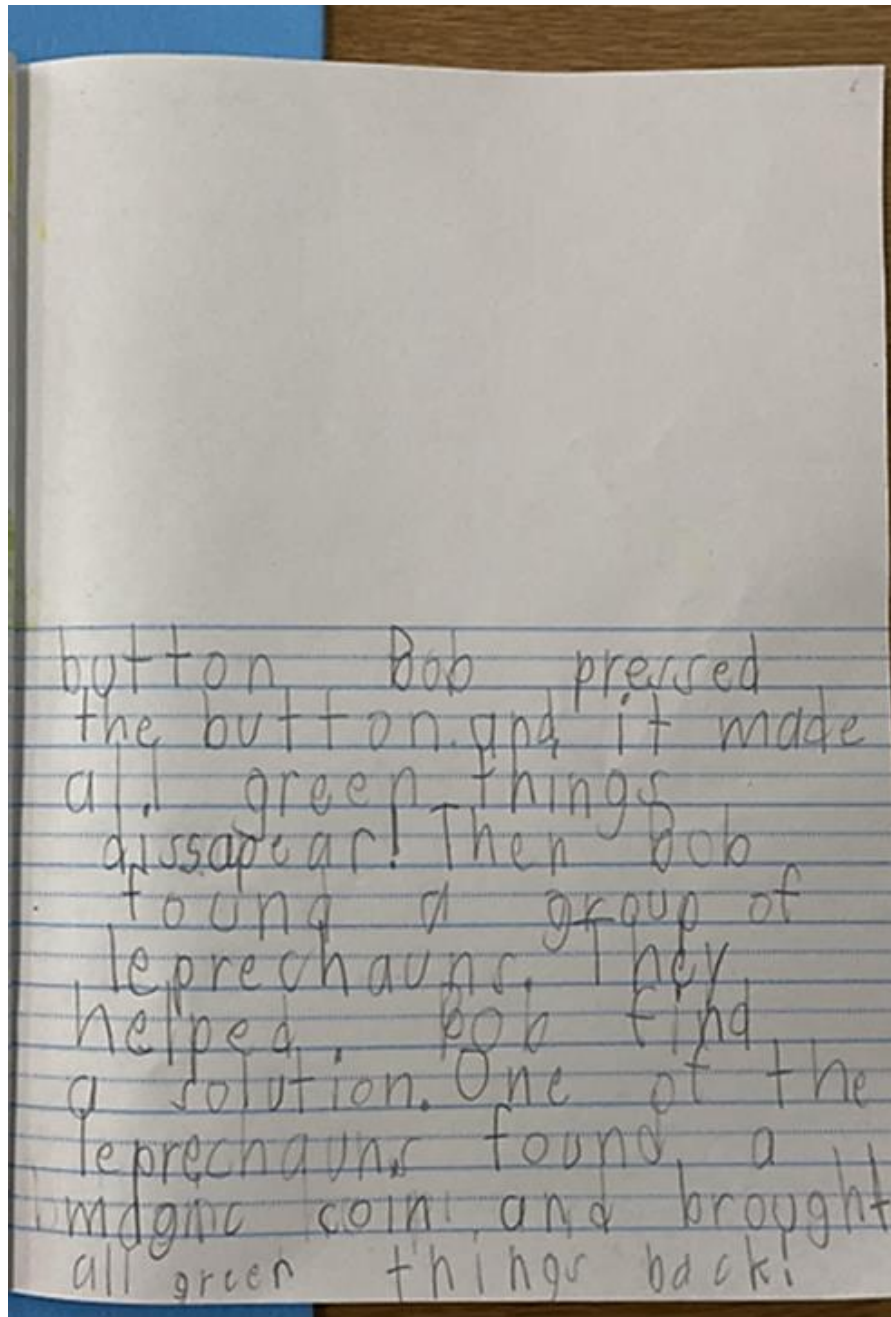


Figure 9d

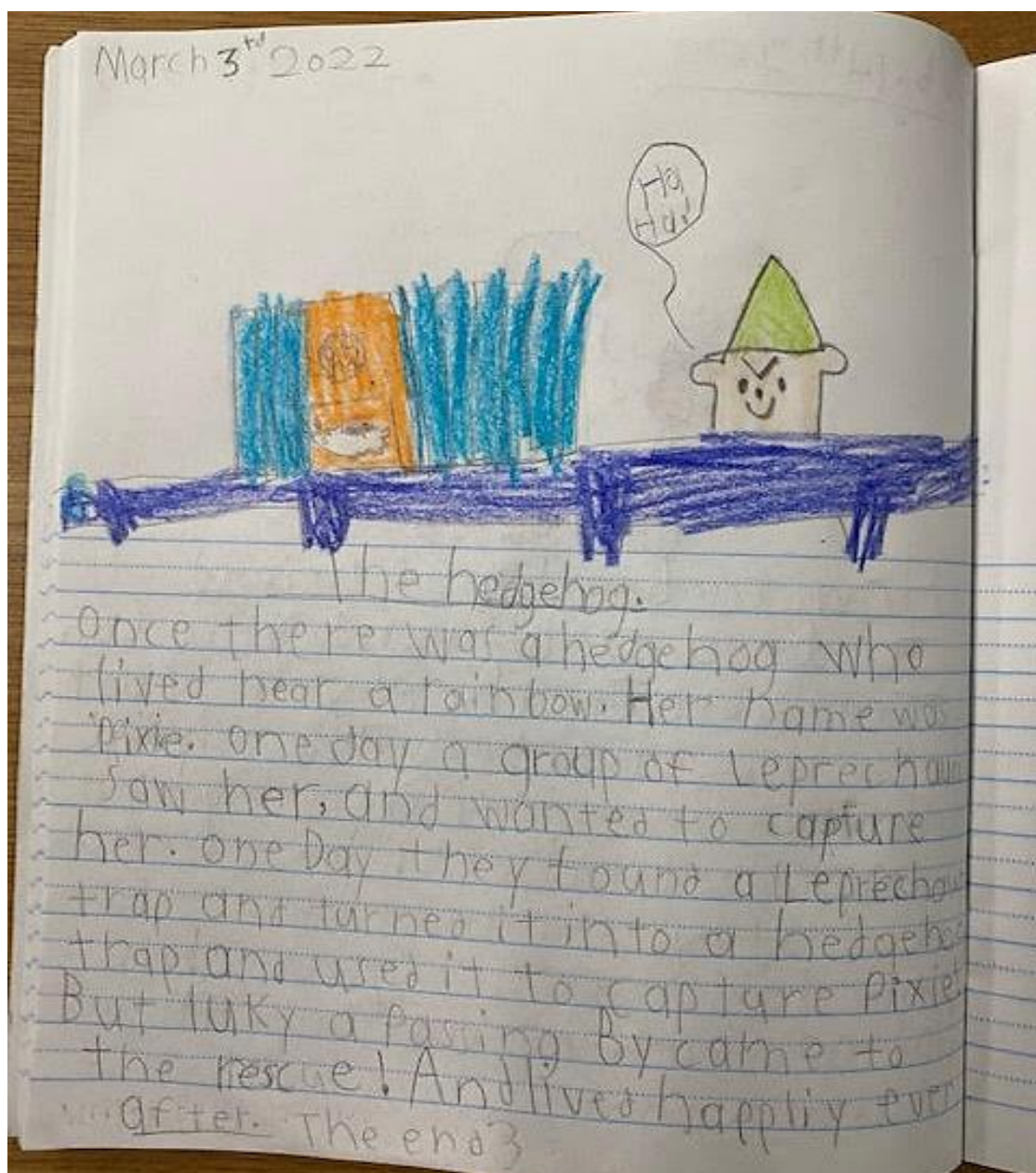
St. Patrick's themed story writing sample – part 2

A photograph of a piece of lined paper with handwritten text in cursive. The text is written on the bottom half of the page. The paper is placed on a wooden surface, and a blue object is visible on the left edge.

button Bob pressed
the button and it made
all green things
disappear! Then Bob
found a group of
leprechauns. They
helped Bob find
a solution. One of the
leprechauns found a
magic coin and brought
all green things back!

Figure 9e

St. Patrick's Day themed story writing sample



I conducted two focus group interviews after this activity to find out what my students thought about this particular activity and about story writing in general ([see Appendix H](#)). I have included sections of the interview here that were particularly thought-provoking to me as a teacher-ethnographer. Please note that pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of my students.

Group one

Miss A.: So, what's one thing that you enjoyed about it today?

Daisy: I enjoyed about it because I...I can do um, drawing! Writing! The writing was fun.

Miss A.: mm-hm

Daisy: And I like the drawing part too.

Carnation: It was fun making up your own story...Because, I mean, you can like, use your own imagination and...yeah! **Satisfied sigh**

Lily: It was um, fun, like, saying what like your character's like, skills were and stuff, so like, like, what they like and where they live

Miss A.: Great! Uh huh

Lavender: It's fun making funny stories!

Daisy: It was fun making up names and...and making up a story and where they live and drawing details on pictures.

Group 2

Hydrangea: I liked the story today because I got to make a cool story with a bunch of cool figures in the story and I love writing.

Miss A.: That's awesome. Was anything hard while writing the story? What was challenging?

Anthurium: Um, trying to find something perfect to fit in the story.

Lilac: making the story

Miss A.: making the story was hard?

Lilac: Because like, making all the ideas.

Miss A.: making all the ideas. Fair enough.

Hydrangea: trying to make the story make sense.

My students do not know that I am pursuing graduate studies in Imaginative Education. I was excited to learn that they not only use their imagination to write stories, but also think metacognitively about using their imagination in their writing! I was also pleased to know that students thought intentionally about developing the characters in their stories. I noticed how Anthurium was very concerned about making her writing perfect. I had a conversation with my class about how writing is a skill that improves with practice and that making mistakes is a part of learning. I tend to circulate the room when my students write and occasionally point out a student's spelling error or lack of a punctuation mark. I realized how my students need permission to make mistakes and need the mental space to focus on encoding their ideas without being interrupted. I now allow my students to complete their initial draft before pointing out errors in their writing and assisting them with editing.

Activity 3: Reverse Mental Imagery

March 04, 2022

With Spring Break fast approaching, I was eager to try out another IE-inspired lesson, but I was not too sure how my students would respond to the idea of “journals” two days in a row. As I handed out students' writing folders, one of my students exclaimed “yay! Journals again!”. I could hardly believe my ears.

I decided to use the cognitive tool of mental imagery with the hopes of enlivening the task of retelling stories, an activity that my students are typically not too fond of. Egan (2016) defines mental imagery as “constructs we form in our minds in response to things we hear or read – images in the mind generated by words” (p. 35). In this particular lesson, I used what I call “reverse mental imagery”. We started by looking at the wordless picture book *Chalk* by Bill

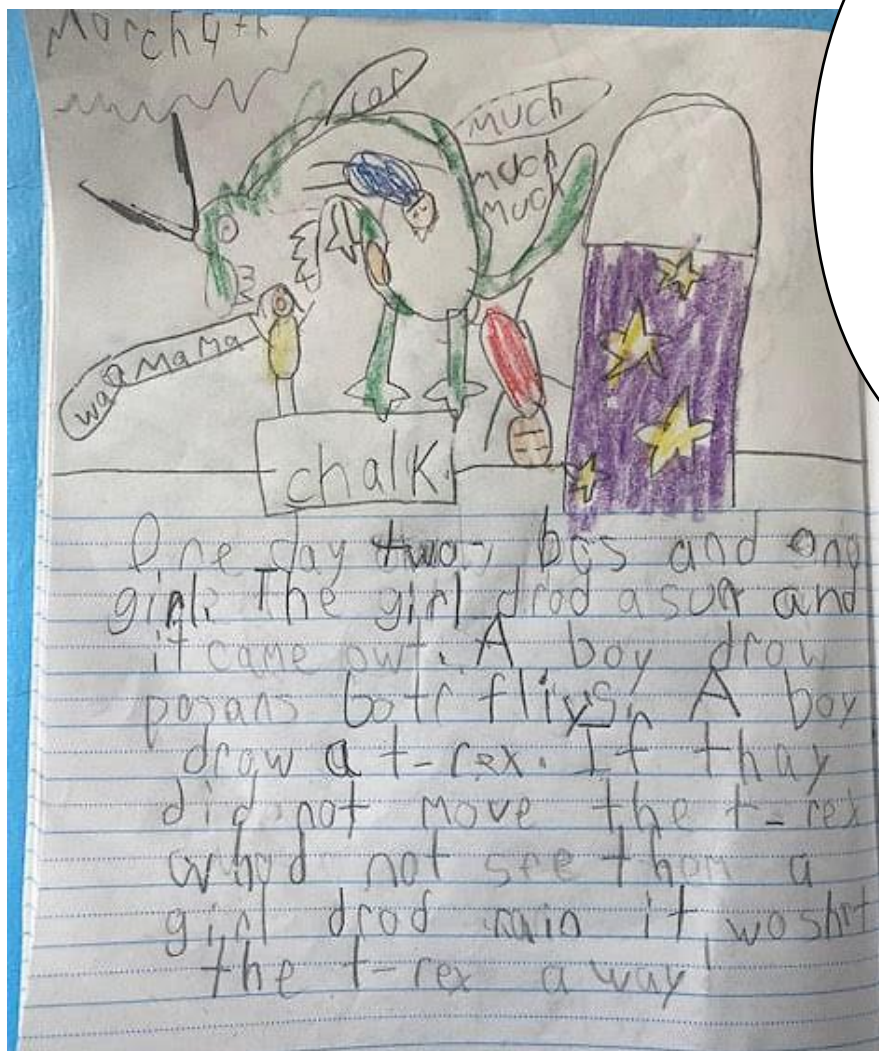
Thomson (2010). I told my students that the author/illustrator is telling us a story using images, and we get to decide what happens in the story by using our own imaginations. My students were engaged in the process and eager to guess the plot of the story. After a lively class discussion, I wrote down the keywords that students identified on the whiteboard, and students began the task of independently retelling the story of “Chalk”. I reminded my students that our goal was to paint a picture with our words. As students began writing, there was pin-drop silence in the room. As students completed their writing and illustrations and brought over their work to me, I could see that many students had taken creative risks with this activity. I noticed that students used speech bubbles, detailed images, humour, emotion words, and varied punctuation. One student proudly told me that it was his first time writing three pages in his journal. Egan (2006) states that “nearly always, vividly recalled images are connected with strong emotions” (p. 19), and this was evident in my students’ work. Towards the end of the day, our principal Mr. Heah visited the classroom. My students love showing him their proudest work when he drops by. I was assisting another student at the time, but I overheard the following conversation:

<p>Lilac: Mr. Heah, look what I wrote!</p> <p>Mr. Heah: *points to speech bubble* what does this say? “wah! Mama??”</p> <p>Lilac: Yeah! Because the T-Rex is trying to eat him!</p> <p>Mr. Heah: If a giant T-Rex were chasing me, I’d say “wah! Mama!” too.</p>
--

It brought me joy to find out that my students were thinking about their writing after they had completed the task and were proud of their work (see Figure 10a). I was also grateful because my own creative risk in trying out reverse mental imagery was a powerful writing experience for my students.

Figure 10a

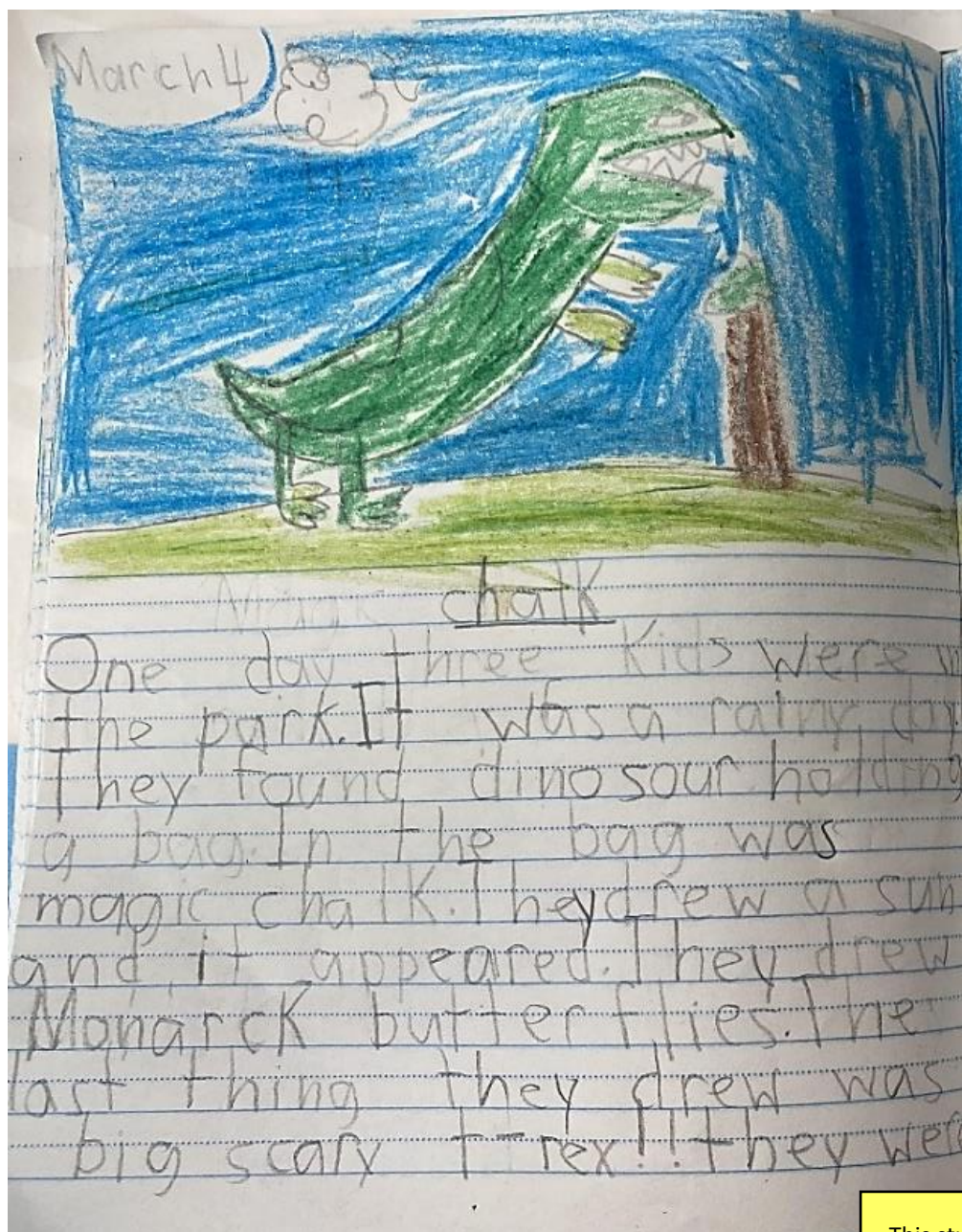
"Chalk" retelling – student work sample



"One day two boys and one girl. The girl "drew" a sun and it came out. A boy drew poisonous butterflies. A boy drew a t-rex. If they did not move the t-rex would not see them a girl "drew" rain it washed the t-rex away!

Figure 10b

“Chalk” retelling – student work sample – part 1



This student worked hard to convey her emotions in her writing.

Figure 10c

"Chalk" retelling – student work sample – part 2

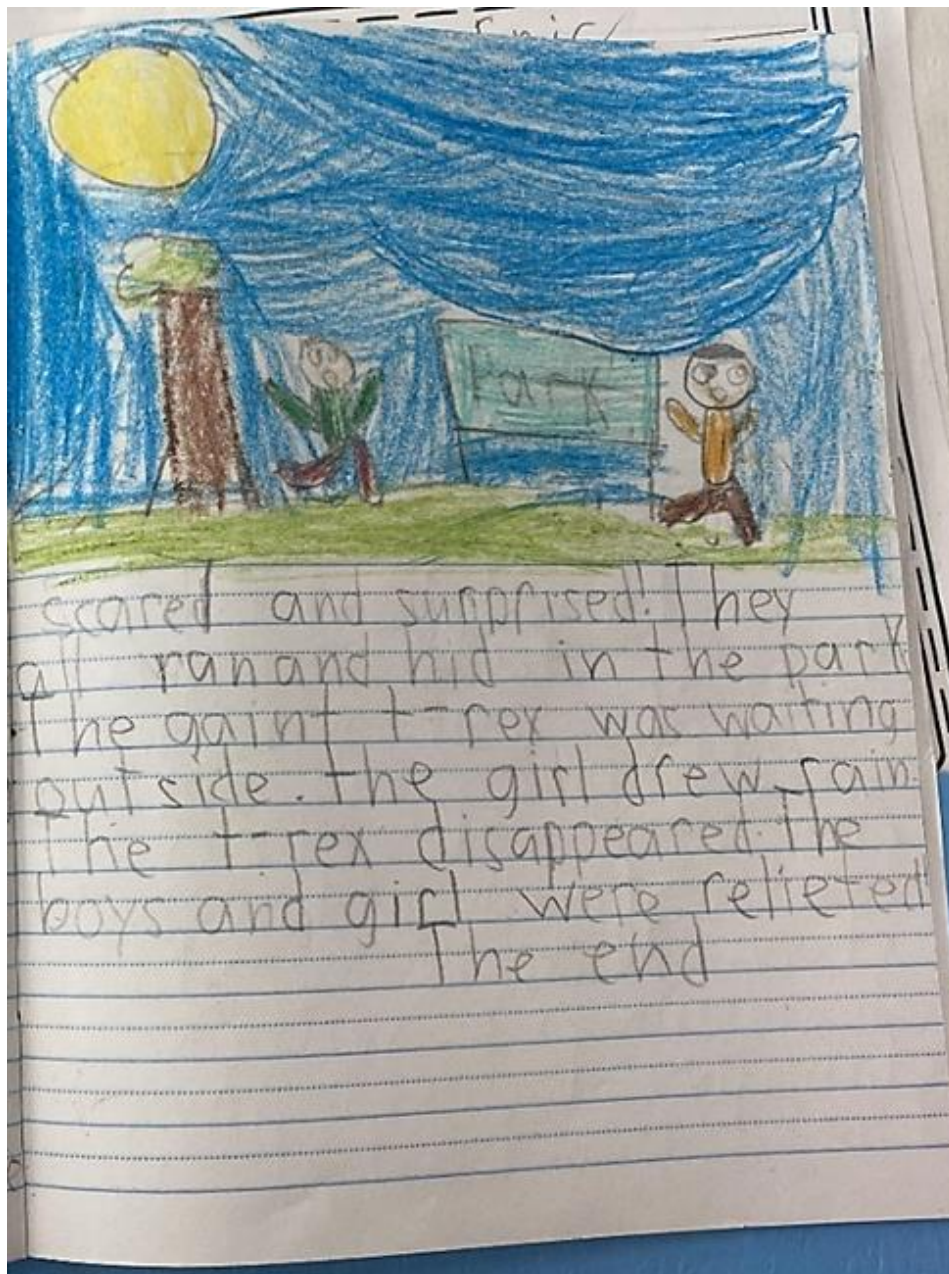
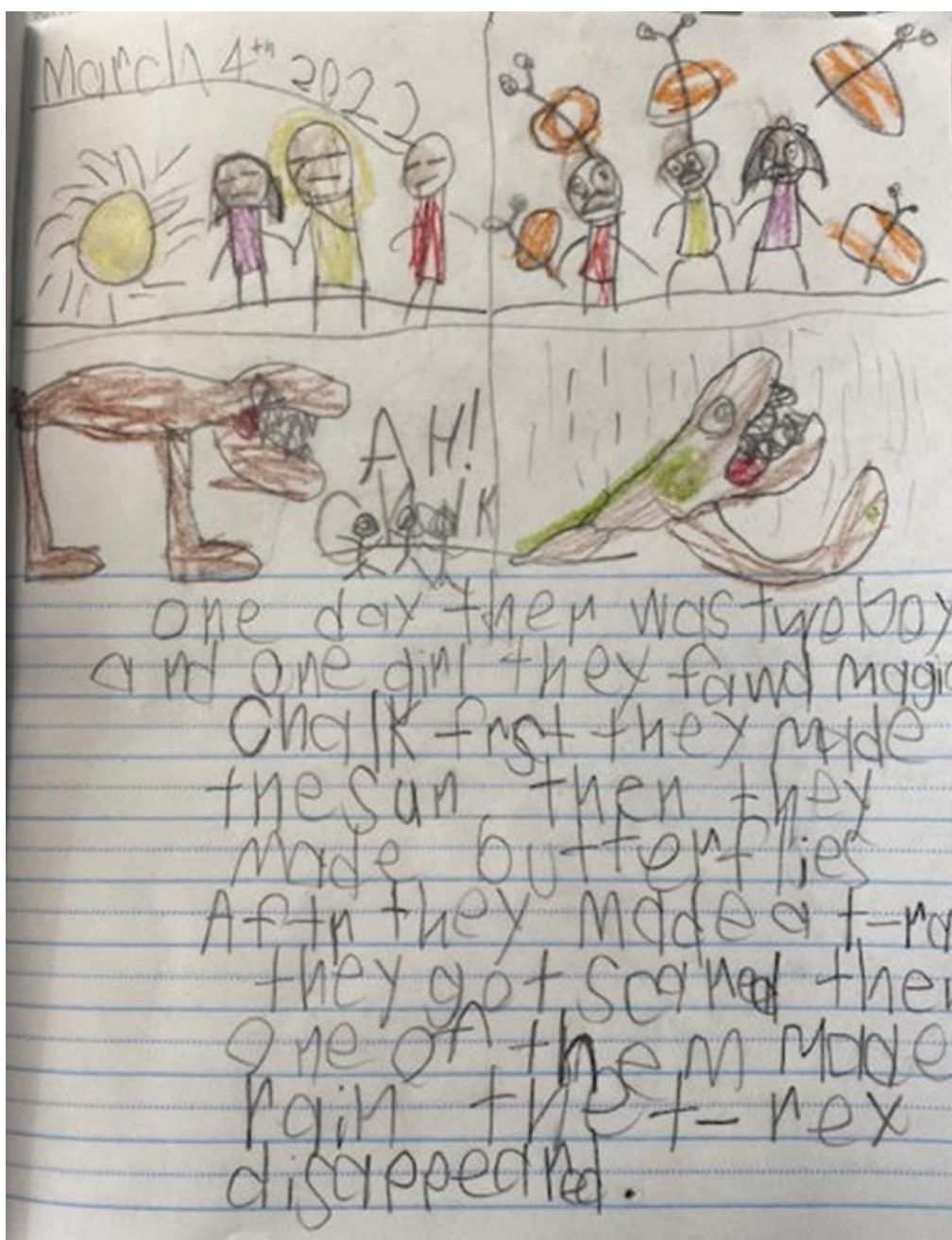


Figure 10d

“Chalk” retelling – student work sample



This is a student who typically struggles in the area of encoding and is reluctant to write. He loved having the opportunity to create a detailed illustration that captured so many emotions! When he was done, he completed the writing on his own and was very proud of his work.

Activity 4: Useless Knowledge and Creepy Bugs

March 08, 2022

A few days ago, while on recess supervision, I spotted a group of students intently peering at the ground and poking around with little sticks. As I came closer, I noticed that they were examining a pill bug, often called “rollie pollies” by students. While some students scrunched up their foreheads in disgust, one little girl proudly exclaimed that she loves bugs and was going to become an entomologist someday. Her peers responded with “eww!” and “gross!”. It became evident to me that children had strong opinions about bugs! For our next writing activity, I decided to give students the opportunity to tell me their opinion about bugs. David Jardine (2012) states that:

Conversing, debating, investigating, reading, exploring, studying, composing, changing your mind, illustrating, performing, demonstrating what you know and giving a public account of that knowledge, letting others read back to you what they understand your understanding to be – these are not just effective pedagogical techniques, means, or vehicles for “getting across” amassed knowledge [...]. They are how knowledge lives and is held and is cultivated in the world. (p. 96)

I wrote down the title “my opinion about bugs” on the whiteboard and asked students to spend a few minutes deciding if they thought bugs were “cool” or “gross”. Nine students raised their hands to identify that they like bugs and find them cool. Seventeen students raised their hands to identify that they were either afraid of bugs, or they found them to be disgusting. I wrote down students’ responses and reasons on the whiteboard in the form of a word bank. Before we began our writing task, we spent a few minutes watching the following video on YouTube – *10 interesting insects (bugs for kids)*. The video was produced by the channel

Socratica Kids (2017). As we continued the discussion and talked about bugs and insects ranging from ants to tarantulas, several students asked me if they were allowed to change their opinion. I reminded them that an opinion is how we feel about a particular topic and that we are indeed allowed to change our opinions. Egan (2017) states that “imagination [is] necessary for conveying knowledge meaningfully, and, reciprocally, accumulating knowledge [is] necessary for engaging the imagination” (p. 37). This was one of the most lively classroom discussions that I have ever experienced. Students listened eagerly, contributed ideas, and built upon each others’ ideas. It was evident that students were engaged in the topic. At the end of our discussion, we had the following words listed on our word bank on the whiteboard:

- | | | |
|---------------|----------|--------------|
| • Sting | • Buzz | • Poisonous |
| • Bite | • Crawl | • Cute |
| • Glow | • Fly | • Colourful |
| • Luminescent | • Scaly | • Trick |
| • Predator | • Slimy | • Long legs |
| • Prey | • Honey | • Camouflage |
| • Annoying | • Deadly | |

I provided the students with some sentence starters to help them get started with their writing. For example, I told my students that they could use the following opening sentence “In my opinion bugs are ____ because...” I also modelled how to write supporting details to convey their opinion. This time, the room was buzzing with activity. As students wrote, they were curious about each other’s opinions. Some students were trying to convince their peers that bugs were cool and friendly. When I read my students’ work, I was pleased to see that their emotional engagement with the topic was represented in their writing (see Figure 11a-11d). A few students told stories about their experiences with bugs.

I also had a moment of self-doubt as an educator. After our lively discussion, I was expecting that students would write many sentences and fill up pages in their journals about their opinions. Although their writing was engaging and interesting, a part of me was disappointed that my students did not write “a lot”. I recognized that this was a bias of mine. As a teacher, I held the belief that good writers could write lots of words on several pages. I revisited my students’ writing at the end of the day and realized that in this case, the quality of my students’ writing was something to celebrate and that I shouldn’t be overly concerned about the quantity.

Figure 11a

Student writing sample – my opinion about bugs

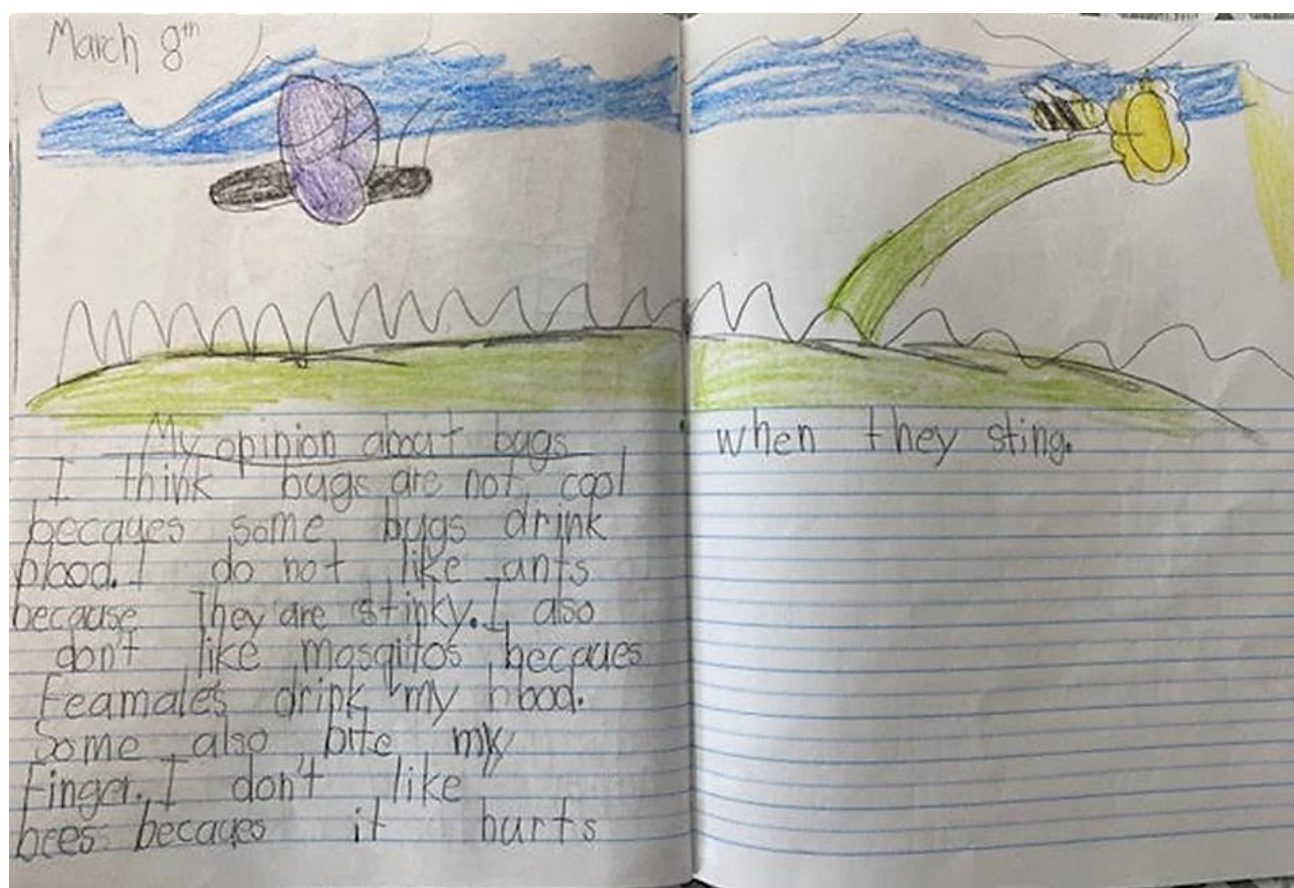


Figure 11b

Student writing sample – my opinion about bugs

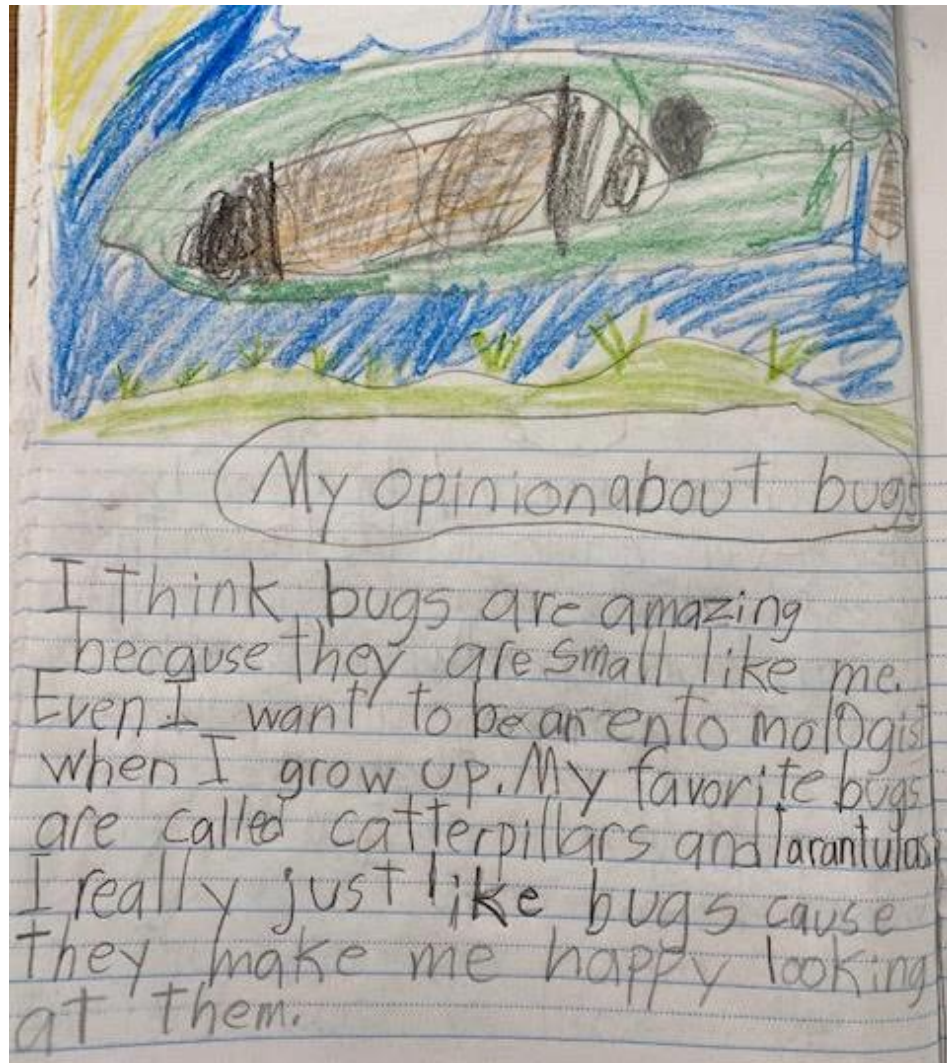


Figure 11c

Student writing sample – my opinion about bugs

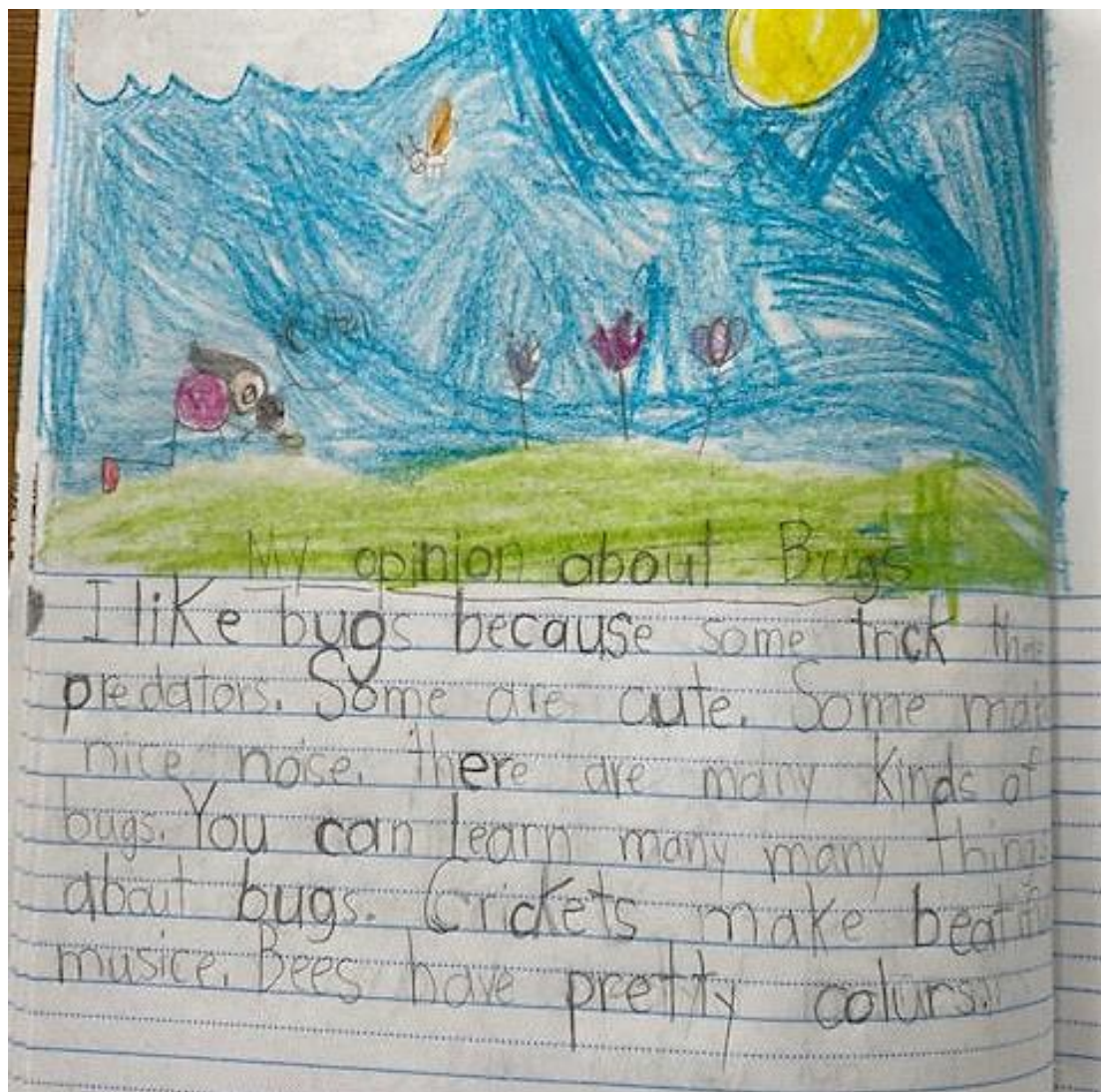
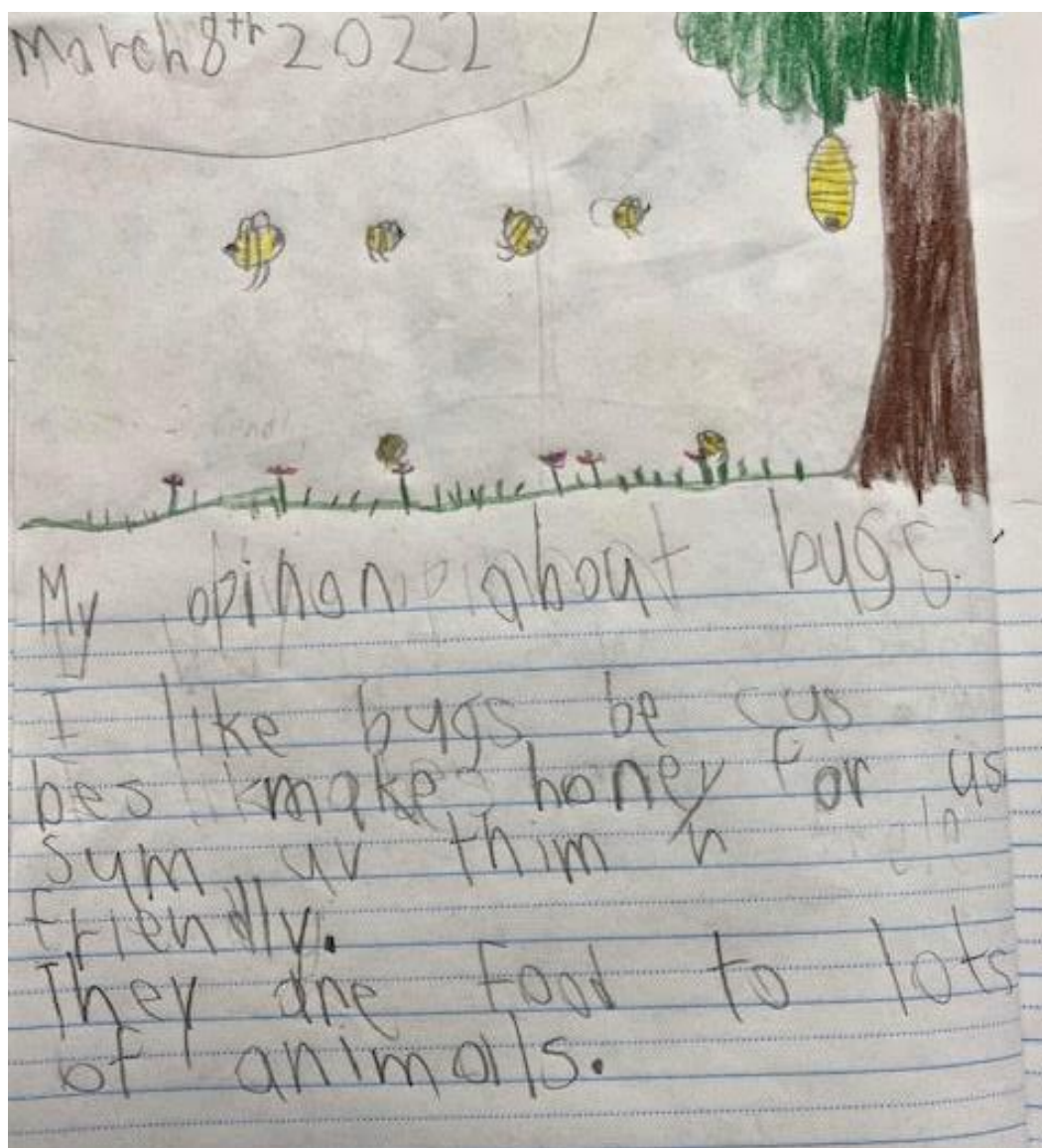


Figure 11d

Student writing sample – my opinion about bugs



Activity 5: Thinking Outside the Box

March 09, 2022 - April 08, 2022

On the Wednesday before spring break I announced to my class that I was assigning some homework to be completed over spring break. My students groaned and complained. Some students tried telling me that they cannot do any homework because they will be away on vacation. I calmly picked up my copy of Antoinette Portis' *Not a Box* and read it to my students. They listened intently and several students told me that they love building things. Egan (1997) states that young children have the ability to grasp metaphors at a very young age. In fact, he goes on to say that a young child can list more possibilities for an empty box than an older child or an adult (2006).

After reading the story I handed out a planning page and told my students that they get to design their very own not-a-box. Then there was cheering! My students designed their not-a-boxes, wrote a list of materials that they need and eagerly took their planning pages (see figure 12a and 12b) home to collect the necessary items over spring break. The planning page that I used for this activity was downloaded from the blog "Mrs. Jones' Creation Station".²

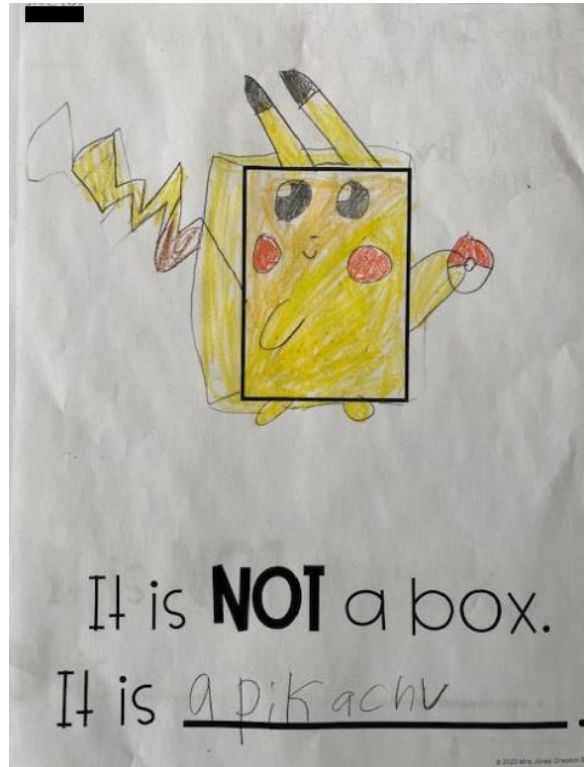
² Retrieved from <https://www.mrsjonescreationstation.com/a-pre-writing-activity/>

Figure 12a

It is not a box. It is a rocketship!

**Figure 12b**

It is not a box. It is a Pikachu!



After students returned from spring break, they slowly started to bring in their empty boxes and materials. We talked about the creation process and how our creations sometimes end up looking a little different than what we envision. I also explicitly taught my students some basic skills for building with cardboard such as creating flanges and hinges, and making slots. We discussed safety measures and when to ask an adult for help. After that, I stepped back and watched the magic unfold! I was delighted to see students helping each other and collaborating (see Figure 13a). All my students completed a creation that they were proud of. The next day, they excitedly presented their creations to the class. One of my students who is extremely shy and quiet found this activity an opportunity to shine. He created an impressive robot that could

rotate its arms. This activity gave him the opportunity to be praised by his peers and strengthened his sense of belonging in our classroom community (see Figure 13c).

Admittedly, a STEM activity is not something that I would typically associate with writing or writer's workshop. However, I have learned the importance of metaphor in the Mythic Understanding toolkit and was eager to provide my students with this experience to think metaphorically. Egan (1997) states that "metaphor is one of our cognitive grappling tools [because] it enables us to see the world in multiple perspectives and to engage with the world flexibly" (p. 58). In addition, Egan and Judson (2006) assert that "metaphor is a powerful learning tool because it provides applications that can expand our capacity to think" (p. 43). Creativity and the capacity to think flexibly are both important skills that help young writers.

Due to time constraints, I did not have the opportunity to allow my students to write about their creations. In the future, I hope to repeat this activity with an added writing component. Nevertheless, I believe that the opportunity to explore the cognitive tool of metaphor was a valuable experience for my students as it gave them the opportunity to be creative and grow in their imaginative capacities. Vygotskian theory holds the belief that the same creative capacities that children use in play-based and creative scenarios develop their minds and aids them in the writing process (Vygotsky, 2004).

Figure 13a

Students helping each other

**Figure 13b**

Students hard at work creating their not-a-boxes

**Figure 13c**

Chrysanthemum with his robot

**Figure 13d**

It's not a box. It's a Pikachu!



Activity 6: Onomatopoeia Comics

March 30, 2022 – April 08, 2022

Onomatopoeia is listed as a method of exploring the cognitive tool of rhyme and rhythm in Egan and Judson's (2006) IE planning framework for primary teachers (p. 58). As well, some of my students absolutely love reading comic books and creating comic strips in their free time. They inspired me to design this onomatopoeia learning activity.

I have discovered that if I write anything on our whiteboard before my students arrive in the morning they typically try to read what it says. One morning, I wrote *onomatopoeia* in big letters on our whiteboard and enjoyed the puzzled looks on my students' faces as they attempted to decode it. One student proudly declared "Miss A. forgot to use spaces in her writing! It says on a mat!". After this initial element of mystery, I explained to my students that onomatopoeic words sound like the thing they describe. I played Jack Hartmann's *Onomatopoeia alphabet* (n.d.) on YouTube for some inspiration. Afterwards, we practiced coming up with onomatopoeic words for various scenarios. I described the activity to students and asked them to try to portray a story using onomatopoeic words. I also gave students the opportunity to work in small groups and share ideas. I purchased the comic strip template on the website Teachers Pay Teachers through a seller named "Happy Teacher Happy Students."³

³ Retrieved from <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Onomatopoeia-Activities-Posters-Word-List-Write-a-Comic-more-2767866>

Figure 14a and 14b

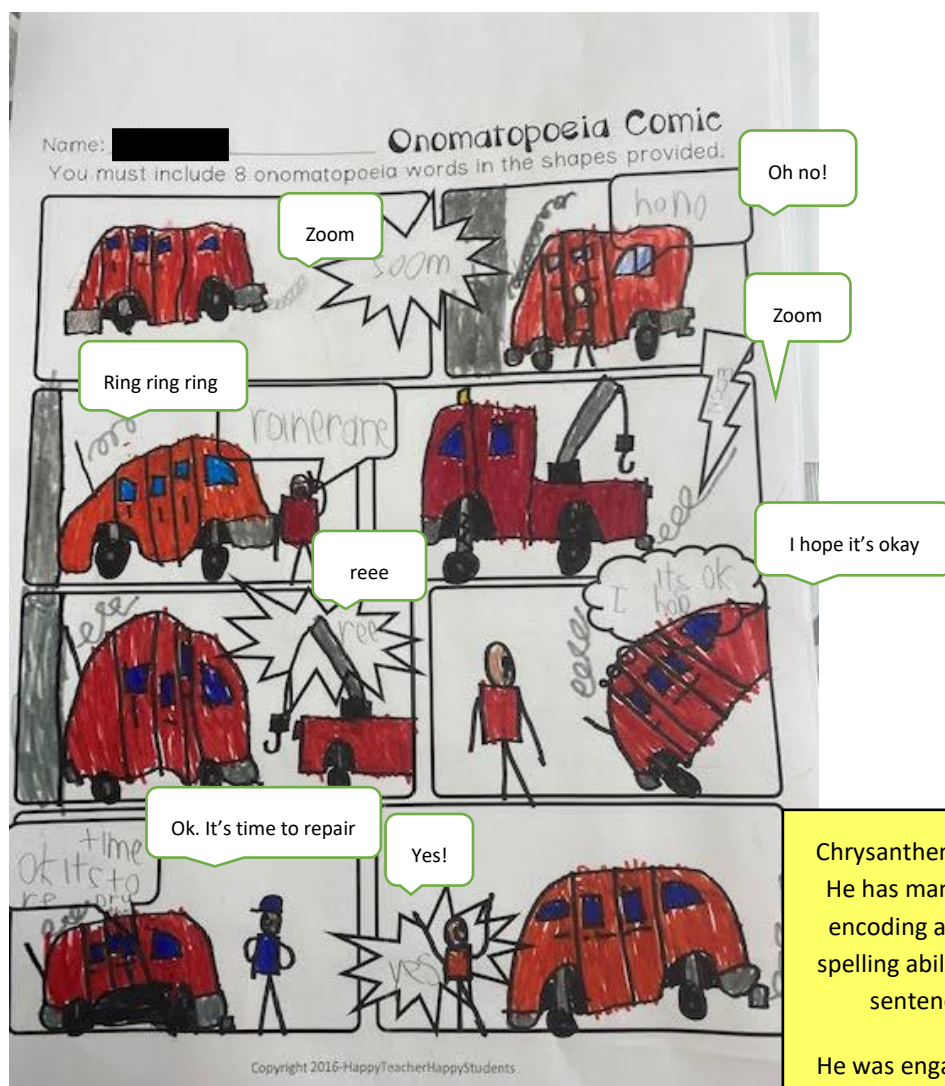
Students working together to create their onomatopoeia comics



This was an activity that all my students were engaged in. Students spent many work blocks drawing out little details, carefully outlining them, and colouring in pictures with bright markers. However, I noticed that my students who are familiar with comic books were able to tell a story using onomatopoeic words while some students were only able to compile a list of sounds. Vygotskian theory holds the belief that students learn by appropriating cultural tools through the mediation of adults (Kozulin, 2003). This activity was a reminder of my role as a teacher in being aware of what cultural tools my students have appropriated and how I can mediate by introducing new and necessary cultural tools. Several students who are self-identified reluctant writers were able to create imaginative comics that they were extremely proud of. This activity gave them confidence in their ability to tell stories.

Figure 15a

Chrysanthemum's completed onomatopoeia comic strips

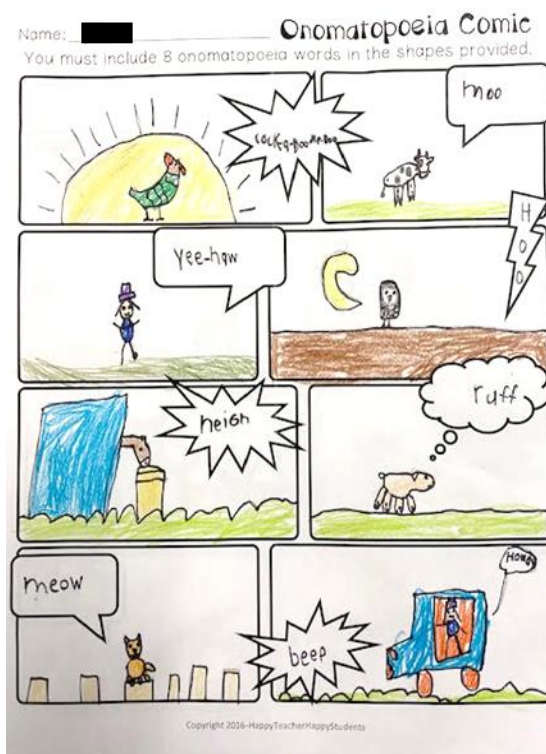


Chrysanthemum is one of my reluctant writers. He has many great ideas but has trouble with encoding and is very self-conscious about his spelling abilities. He typically writes one or two sentences in his journal and gives up.

He was engaged in this activity and was able to tell a story without worrying about spelling words correctly. When he was done, he pointed to each image and read the corresponding speech bubble! He was very proud of the end result!

Figure 15b, 15c, 15d, and 15e

Students' completed comic strips



Activity 7: Spring Senses

April 05, 2020

We had a particularly wet and rainy beginning to the Spring season. When we finally had a relatively sunny, dry morning, I set out with my class to explore the school grounds. I set the expectations and clarified that this was not play time outside. I told my students that we will be walking as quietly as we can and using our senses to experience the signs of new life popping up all around us. As we walked around, some students were enthusiastically collecting little pine cones that lay strewn across the grass after the wind storm the night before. Other students were fascinated by the cherry blossoms, the hyacinths, and daffodils (see figure 16a and 16b). Gillian Judson (2018) states that walking outside can “emotionally and imaginatively engage learners by changing the “contexts” of learning” (p. 1). Judson further asserts that “walking [...] can enrich our students’ sense-making abilities [and...] enhance their very *being*.” (p. 6). My students had a certain calmness as they walked around the school yard. “David Kresch coined the neat term “perfinkers” (in Bruner, 1986, p. 69) to highlight the fact that we perceive, feel, and think together” (Chodakowski & Egan, 2008, p. 5). It was evident that my students were connecting to their place and “perfinking” about the world around them.

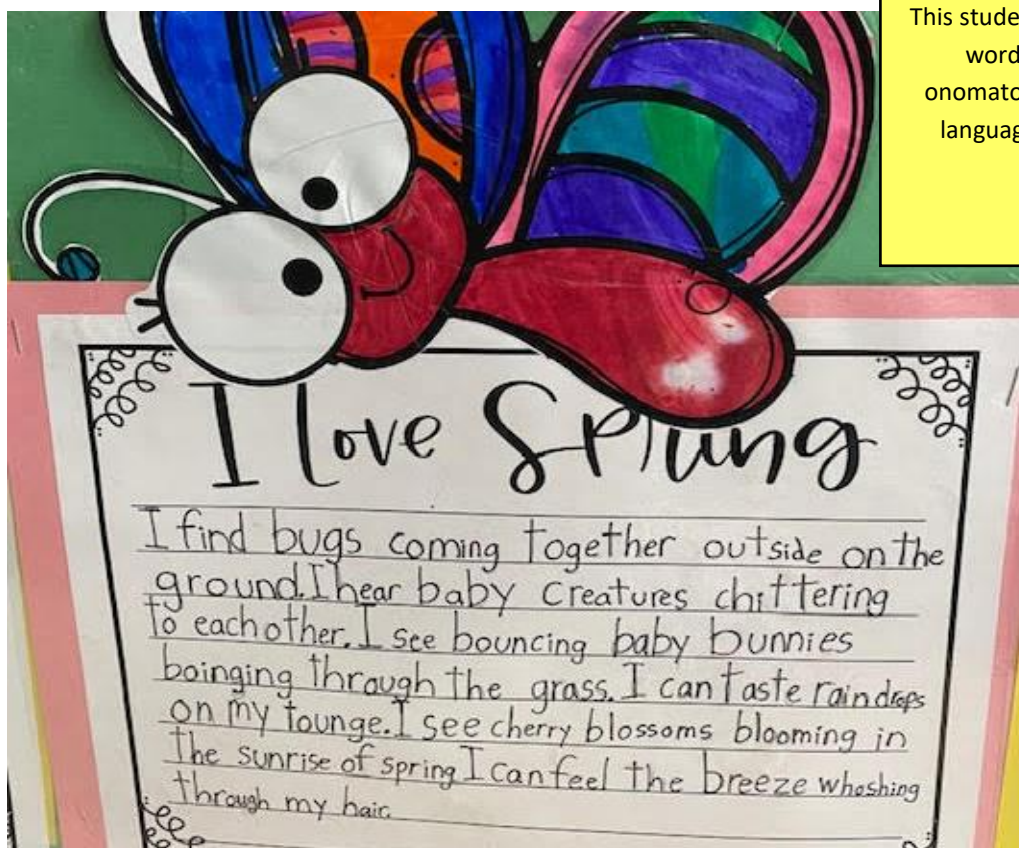
Figure 16a*Students collecting pine cones***Figure 16b***Delighting in the delicate petals of a cherry blossom*

Once we returned to class, I gave students the opportunity to share their knowledge about the season of Spring and share what they noticed during our walk. Students commented on how the tiny new leaves were a beautiful shade of light green and how it was nice to feel the warm sun on their skin. After brainstorming and creating a word bank on the whiteboard as a group, students began to create their first draft. Providing students with a word bank allowed students to create descriptive sentences without worrying about the correct spelling. After editing their work, they began to write out a good copy. I was thrilled to notice that students not only used beautiful, descriptive words in their writing, but that they were using their knowledge about spring to enrich their writing. Other students were using similes and onomatopoeia in their writing. It was such a joy to see students use skills from their cognitive toolkit to make their writing more imaginative and creative.

About a week later, we had student led conferences. As parents and caregivers walked around the classroom looking at our bulletin board where our spring writing was proudly displayed, (see Figure 16c-16f) many of them commented how they could not believe that their children could write so poetically and imaginatively. Prior to my experience with imaginative education, I would have shook my head and declared that there is no way that grade two students could properly use similes or onomatopoeia in their writing! However, I am now grateful to know that mediation [is] the main determinant of development (Karpov, 2003, p. 148). In other words, I now understand that I can confidently introduce rich cognitive tools to my students so long as I act as a mediator and provide students with experiences of scaffolding. Cognitive tools help students develop a sense of wonder and awe about the world (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 11).

Figure 16c

A student's writing sample about spring senses



This student used descriptive words, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and poetic language in her writing.

Figure 16d

A student's writing sample about spring senses



Figure 16e

A student's writing sample about spring senses

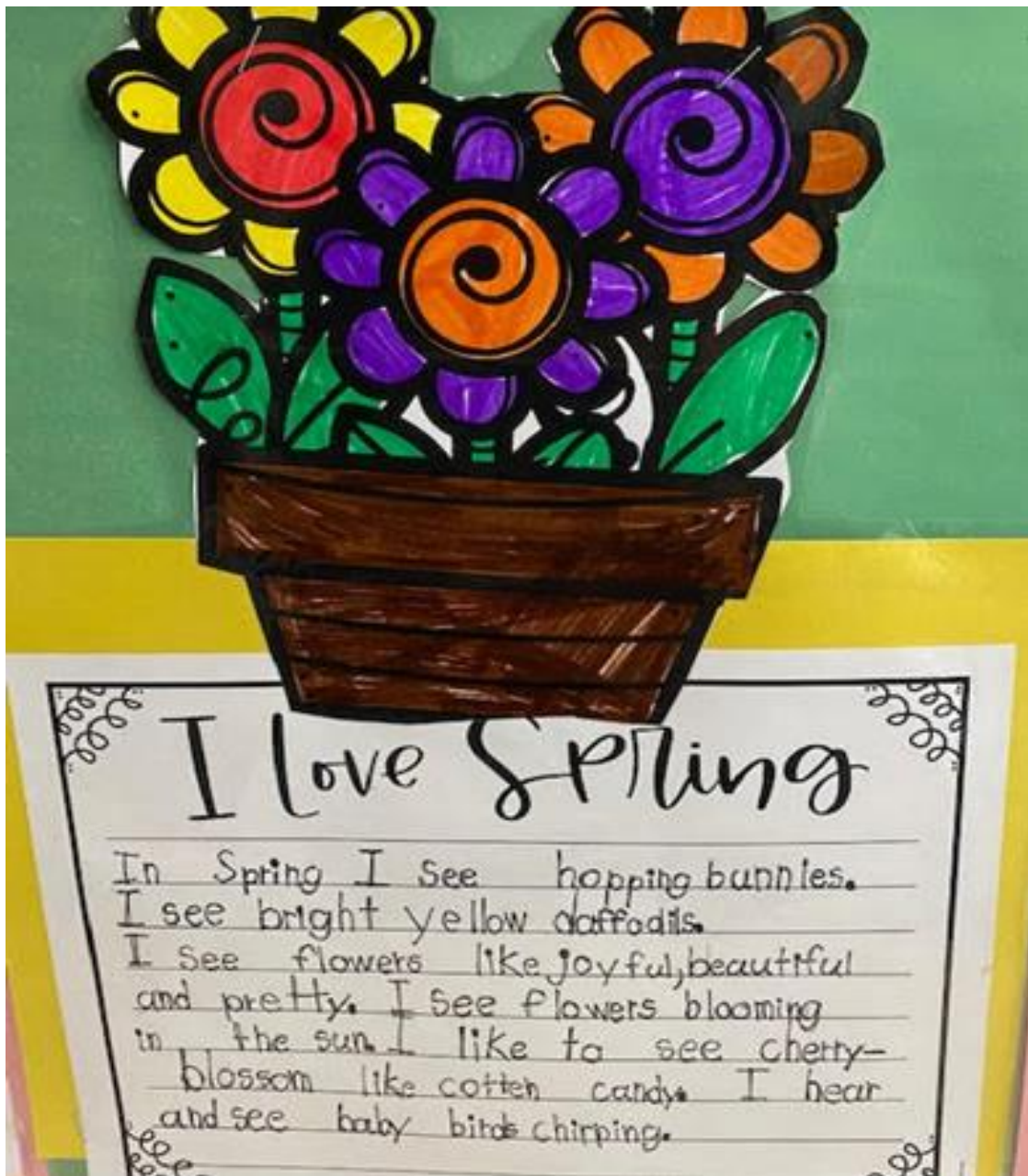
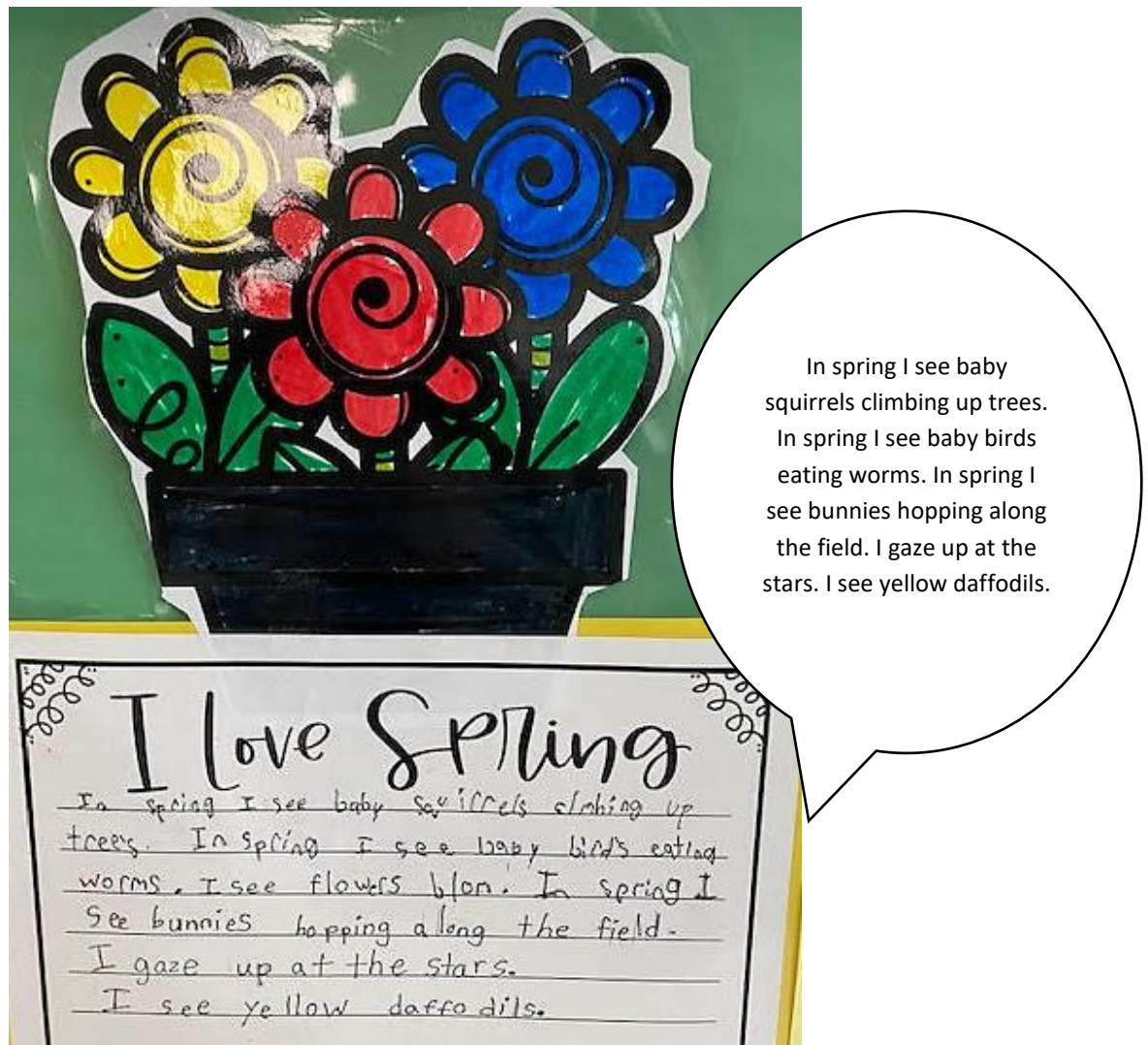


Figure 16f

A student writing samples about spring senses



Activity 8: Marvellous Me

April 20th – May 6th

After learning about similes and writing about families using similes, I wanted to give my students the opportunity to write about themselves using similes. Inspired by Adrienne Gear's "Celebrate Me!" Activity in her book, *Powerful Understanding* (p. 29), I asked students to write about their appearance, their character traits, and their talents. Students worked on a draft and were encouraged to write around twelve sentences. Students were given a two week period to work on their writing and editing. Halfway through this project, I read the book *The Best Part of Me* by Wendy Ewald (2002) for added inspiration. Many students started adding interesting details about their appearance after looking at the various poems, photos, and passages in this book. Many of my students worked independently on completing their draft while some students needed small group support and some prompting to think of what makes them unique and interesting. It was a wonderful opportunity for students to celebrate who they are!

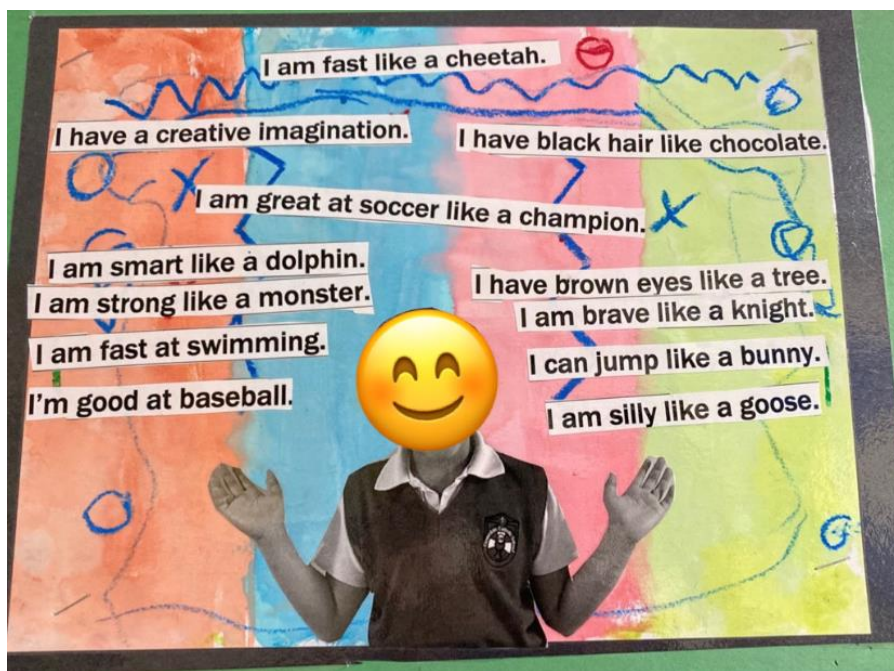
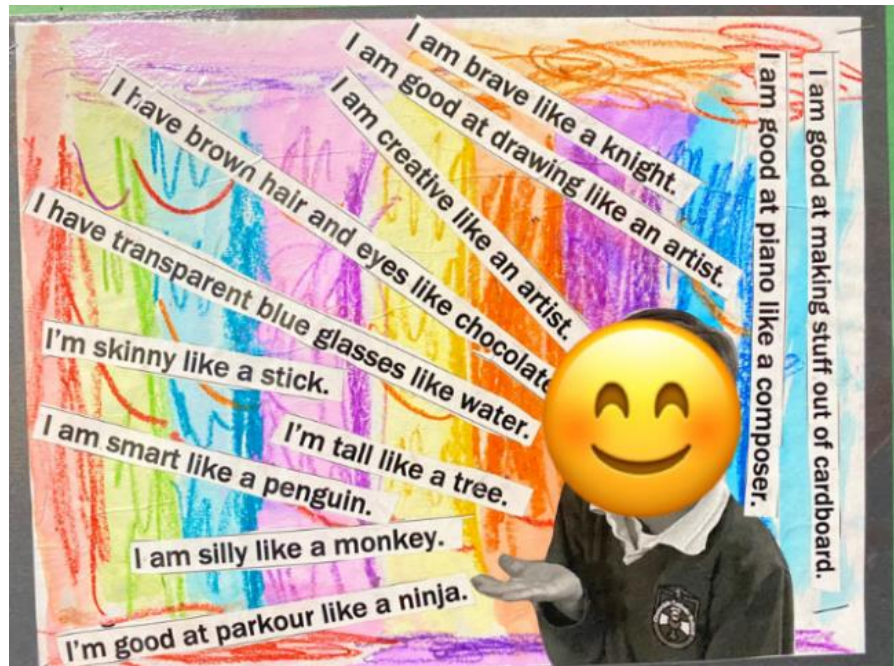
Inspired by the art lesson on the blog *Mrs. Filmore's Art Room* (n.d.), I decided to turn this writing lesson into an art project complete with students' photographs and typed out sentence strips. My students enjoyed getting their photos taken with different poses. Students' personalities shone through their photographs. Finally, we completed an abstract background using oil pastels and water colour paints. My students were very particular about how they wanted their art to look like. They carefully placed their photos and sentence strips and moved them around until everything was *just-right* before gluing them down in place.

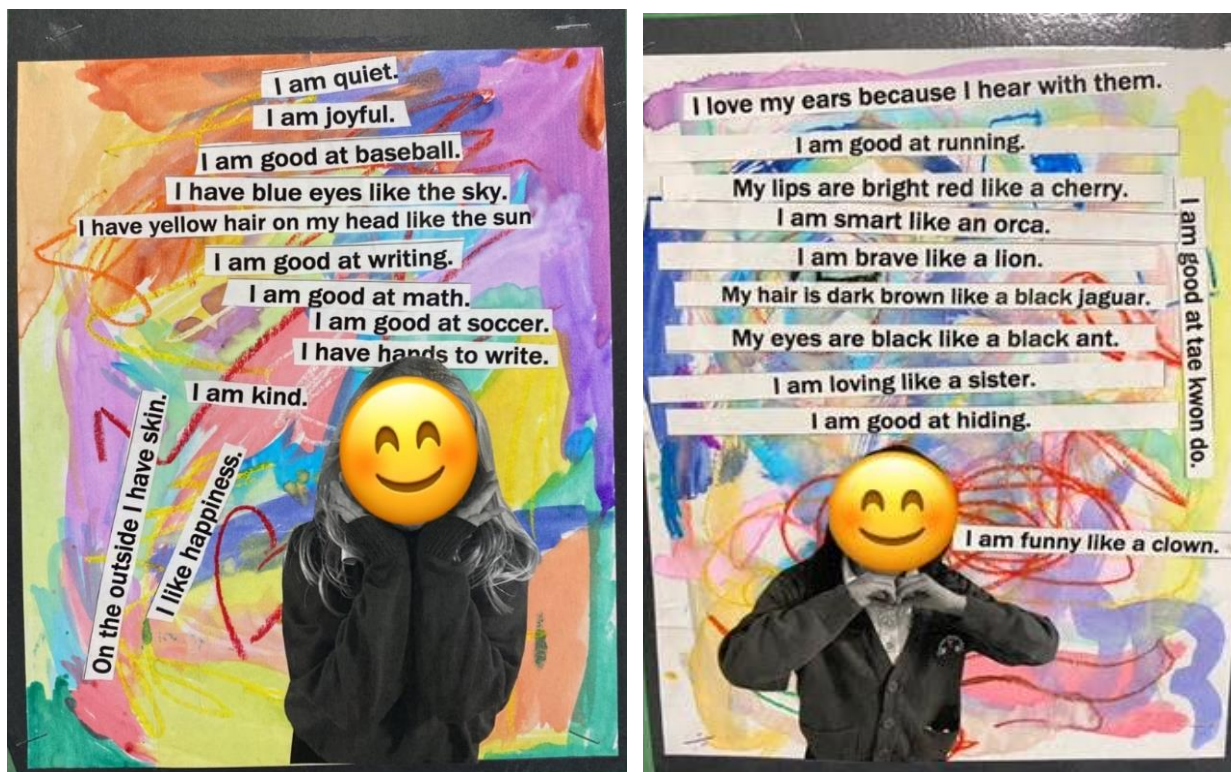
We proudly displayed this art/writing project on our bulletin board in the hallway. My students were very excited to notice various staff members and students from other classes stop by to admire their work and read all about them. I recognized that this was a wonderful

opportunity for my students to tell the school community the story of who they are and what makes them unique!

Figure 17a – 17d

Students' Marvellous Me art/writing activities





Activity 9: Mental Imagery

April 25, 2022

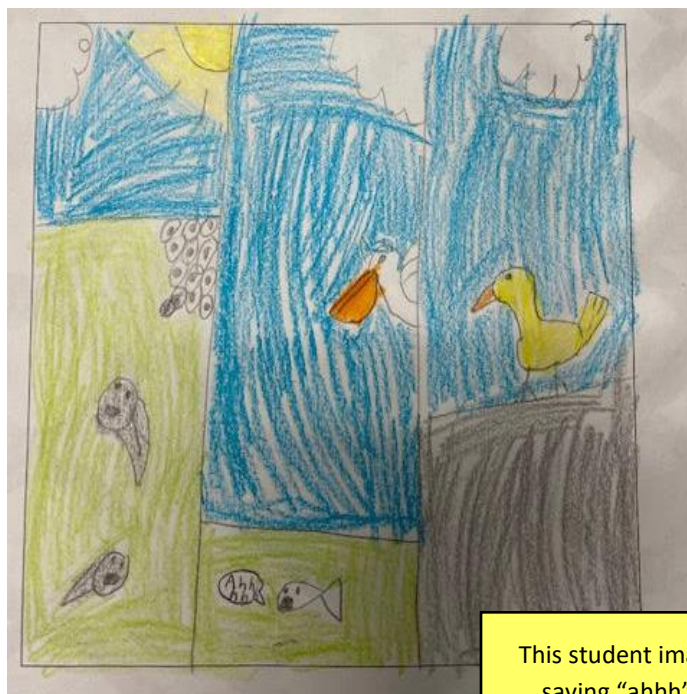
This next activity took place on a particularly gloomy Monday morning. Indoor recess was on the forecast and the rain was pouring down. I decided that a nice relaxing mental imagery activity would be perfect! I told my students that I would read them a book and invited them to close their eyes and imagine what is happening in the story. I chose the book *In the Small, Small Pond* by Denise Fleming (1993). Fleming (1993) uses beautiful poetic language to describe various animals and insects that live in and around a pond. Onomatopoeia and metaphors are also used in the book. As I read aloud, I asked students to guess what animal the author was trying to describe. I did not show students the illustrations at any point of this activity. After I read the book, students were given the opportunity to share what they imagined in their minds. Some

students shared that the book was about tadpoles, geese, and dragonflies. Other students noticed verbs like twirl, wade, and hover.

Afterwards, students were given a visualization sheet and given permission to illustrate whatever they imagined in the story. This was an activity where the whole room was quiet and students bent over their desks drawing and colouring happily while the rain pelted against our classroom windows. Egan (1997) states that “words can be used to evoke images in the minds of their hearers, and that these images can have as powerful an emotional effect as the real events themselves (p. 60). My students’ mental images of *The Small, Small Pond* certainly captured many emotions and intricate details conjured by their imaginations (see Figure 18a and 18b).

Figure 18a and 18b

Students’ mental imagery samples



This student imagined a little minnow saying “ahhh” as a pelican hovers nearby. She also asked me to notice the tadpoles hatching from their eggs.



This student spent a lot of time drawing intricate details trying to capture the various emotions of the animals in and around the pond.

Activity 10: Be Free!

May 04, 2022

Unlike the other lessons and activities mentioned in this action research project, this lesson was not intentionally planned by me. It was an ordinary writer's workshop block and I handed out students' journals and wrote down a prompt on the whiteboard. One of my students exclaimed "we've already written about this before!". "Please let us choose our own topic" begged another student. I couldn't believe my ears! My students this year are not particularly fond of "free writes". When I had attempted to let them choose their own topics in the past, it always resulted in some of my students crying and being frustrated because they would simply

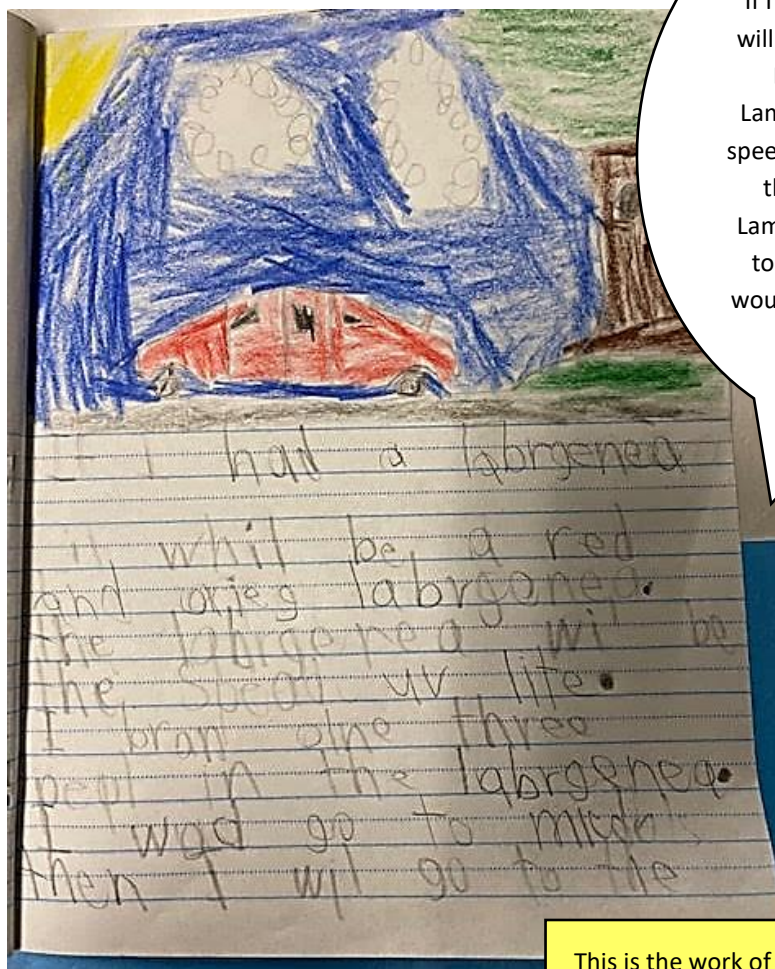
be overwhelmed or have a hard time coming up with a topic. Not this time! One of my students suggested that they would like to share a creative writing topic. The following topics were suggested by students and I wrote them down on our whiteboard:

- If I designed a playground...
- If I could have any pet...
- If I found a treasure chest...
- If I had a million dollars...
- If I could turn into any animal...
- If I had a magic wand...
- If I went on a cruise ship...

Eventually, I ran out of space on my whiteboard and allowed students to continue to verbally share their ideas for a writing topic. I gave students the options of choosing a topic from the whiteboard or coming up with their own idea. As students began to write, I was pleasantly surprised because my students who typically ask for small group support and find writing challenging also chose to complete this activity independently. I couldn't help but notice how much their writing has improved! They showed improvement in their use of conventions, but most importantly, their writing was interesting to read and very imaginative! I had spent a good part of this school year scaffolding and mediating and teaching them how to encode (sound out words) and use conventions. We then spent the last eleven weeks learning how to use cognitive tools in our writing. As I walked around the room reading students' work and admiring their illustrations (Figure 19a – 19d), I let out a happy sigh...my students were finally ready to fly out of the nest! As Vygotsky (1986) would say, "what the child can do in cooperation today [they] can do alone tomorrow" (p. 188). My students have certainly reached a point where they can write confidently on their own.

Figure 19a – 19 d

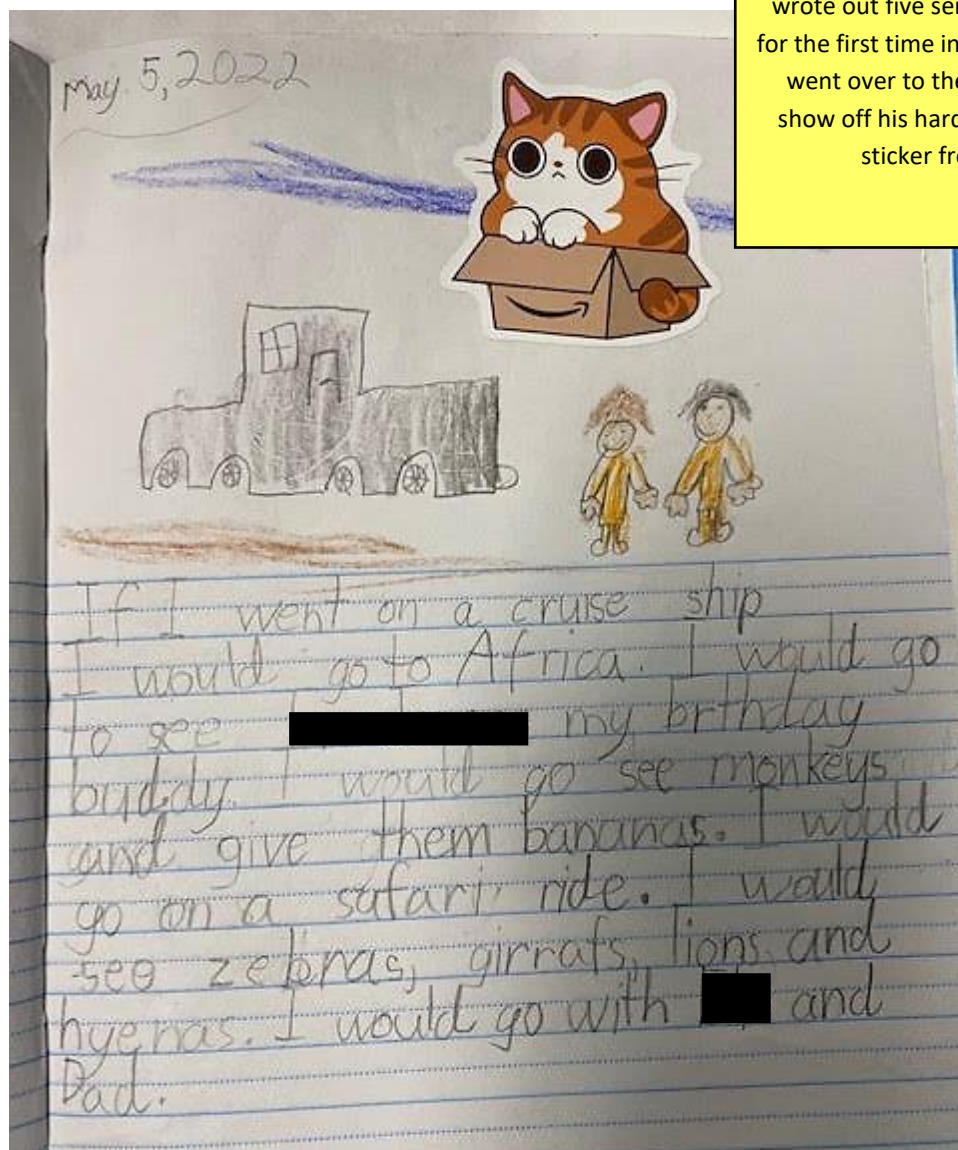
Work samples from my previously-reluctant, now independent and enthusiastic writers!



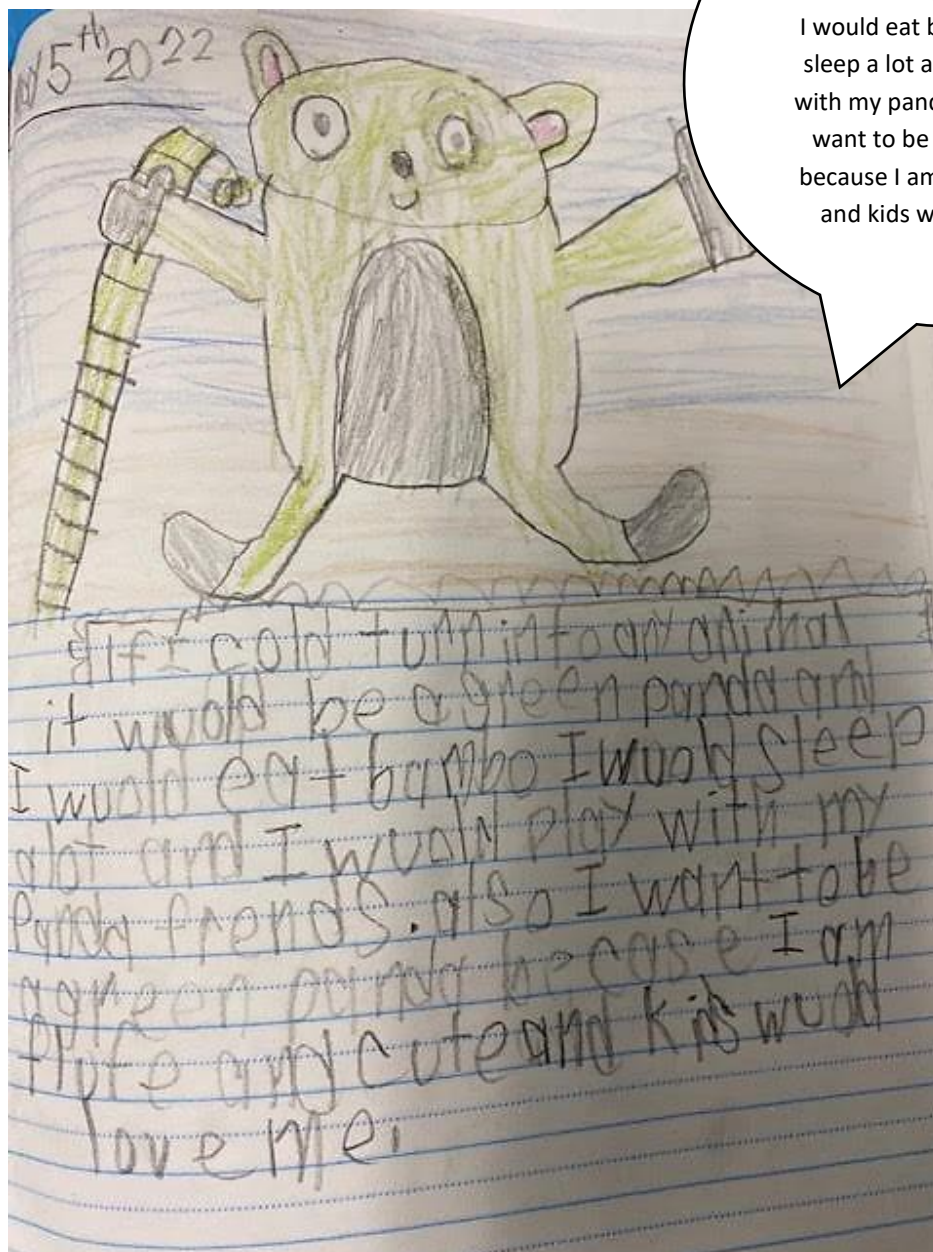
"If I had a Lamborghini it will be a red and orange Lamborghini. The Lamborghini will be the speed of light. I bring only three people in the Lamborghini. I would go to McDonalds. Then I would go to the movies."

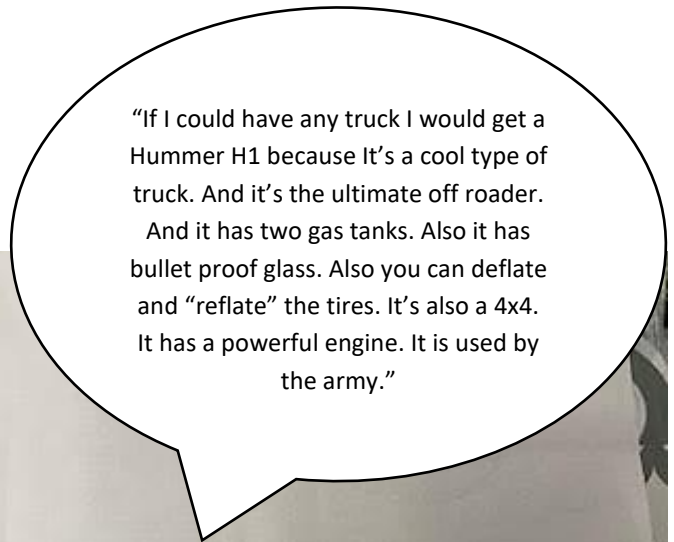
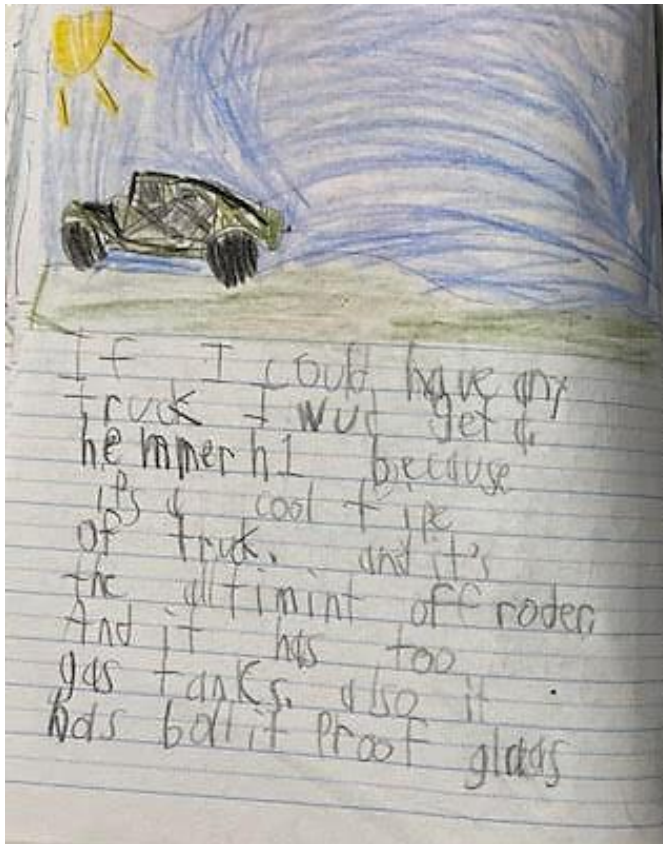
Imovee 50

This is the work of Chrysanthemum. It brought me such joy to see him grow in confidence and blossom throughout this project!



This student was so excited because he wrote out five sentences all on his own for the first time in grade two. He proudly went over to the principal's office to show off his hard work and received a sticker from Mr. Heah.





also you can deflate and reflate the tires. its also a 4x4. it has a powerful engine. it is used by the Army.

This is a student who typically strongly dislikes writing. In the past, he would do everything he could to avoid writing tasks. He chose a topic that he was passionate about and used many descriptive words to describe his favourite truck. This is a fantastic example of how knowledge about a topic is needed in order to engage the imagination! (Egan, 2017).

Data Analysis

Student Survey

I conducted a student survey on the last day of my Action Research project ([see Appendix I](#)) in order to find out if students felt differently about writing and to see what their favourite writing activity was. Since I did not have EA support in the classroom at the time, I could not leave the room. However, I reminded my students that the survey is anonymous and that they did not need to write their name. I also reminded them that I would like to hear their honest opinion.

In regards to how students felt about writing in general, student responses did not vary greatly from the pre-writing survey conducted in February. Two more students recorded that they were excited to write and one more student responded that they were happy to write (see Figure 20). Overall, I am pleased to find out that a few of my students feel a little less stressed about writing and seem to enjoy it more.

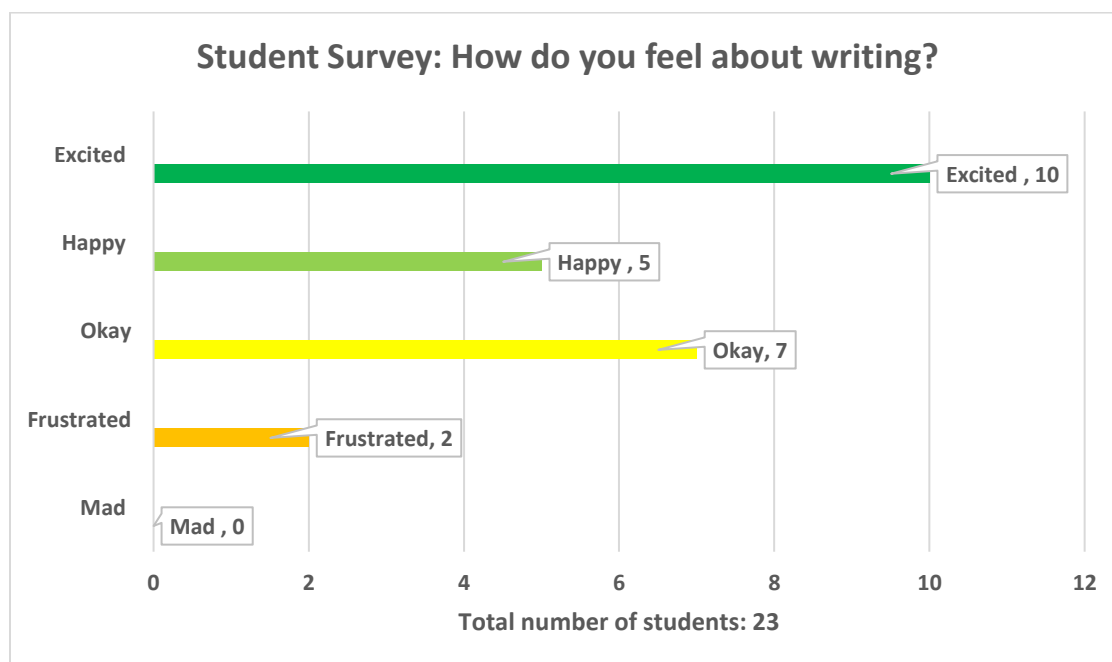
Students were given the option of explaining why they felt a certain way about writing. Here are some sample responses from students:

- Excited – I love writing very, very, very much
- Excited – because I feel calm
- Excited – because I love writing. It is very fun because it given me lots of ideas that I want to write on my paper.
- Happy – I like making good ideas.
- Okay – I don't really like writing
- Okay – sometimes I don't get ideas
- Okay – because I need to think a lot.
- Frustrated – I have issues with it.

- Frustrated – because it is very hard doing it.

Figure 20

Student survey results: how students feel about writing



Students were also presented with a list of writing activities that we had completed during the fieldwork stage of this project. They were given the option of selecting their top three favourite activities. I was not overly surprised by my students' responses (see Figure 21). Seventeen students chose the “not-a-box” project as one of their favourite activities. Given that my students absolutely love building, crafting, and hands-on activities, I already had a strong feeling that this would be their favourite activity. Thirteen students chose onomatopoeia comics as one of their top three activities. Since making comics (especially using onomatopoeia) was a new concept for them, I am pleased to see that many of my students enjoyed this activity. Ten students reported that the mental imagery task was one of their top three favourite activities.

Once again, this response did not surprise me too much because my students absolutely love drawing and painting!

Figure 21

Student survey results: students' top three favourite writing activities

Student Survey: What were your favourite writing activities?

Writing Activity	Number of students who picked this activity as one of their top 3 favourite writing activities
Families and similes	7
St. Patrick's themed silly stories	7
Reverse mental imagery	3
Useless knowledge and creepy bugs	2
Thinking outside the box	17
Onomatopoeia comics	13
Spring senses	4
Marvellous me	7
Mental imagery	10

Students were given the opportunity to write about what they liked about these activities.

Here are some student responses:

- Not a box. It made me get good ideas.
- I like the not a box because we can use our imagination.

- I liked to write about my opinion about bugs because you see on the paper that I like bugs.
- I like using my imagination and I like making stuff and I like writing comics.
- I liked writing about spring because it was about nature.
- I liked writing about me because it makes me happy.
- I like to write and colour.
- I like these three things (St. Patrick's day silly stories, not-a-box project, and onomatopoeia comics) because we got to use our imagination.
- I like telling people about my family.
- I like telling things about myself.






The last question on the survey gave students the opportunity to tell me anything else about writing. Students wrote the following:

- I still think writing is hard.
- I still find writing a little hard.
- I love writing because I want to tell people about things.
- It is easier for me.

Figure 21a – 21b

Sample Student Survey Responses

How does writing make you feel?

Mad Frustrated Okay Happy Excited

Why?

because I love writing
very, very very much.

Is there anything else you want to tell Miss A.
about writing? (e.g. what are you proud
of/how have you grown/is there anything you
still find difficult?)

I still find writing
a little hard.

"I liked writing about
spring because it was
about nature. I liked
writing about me because
it makes me happy. I liked
writing about small pond
because we drew."

What were your three favourite writing activities:

- ☐ Writing about my family using similes.
- ☐ St. Patrick's Day silly stories.
- ☐ Retelling the story "chalk" using our imagination.
- ☐ My opinion about bugs.
- ☐ Designing and creating a not-a-box.
- ☐ Onomatopoeia comics.
- ☒ Writing about spring using our senses.
- ☒ Writing about myself using similes.
- ☒ Drawing what we imagined for the story "in the small, small pond."

Why? What did you like about these writing activities?

I liked writing about spring because
it was about nature. I liked writing about
me because it makes me happy. I liked writing about
small pond because we drew.

Focus Group Interviews

I conducted focus group interviews during the last week of my fieldwork stage to get a better understanding of which writing activities students preferred the most. I was also interested to know how my students viewed their writing after engaging in IE-inspired writing lessons.

I asked students to volunteer to be a part of focus group interviews and twelve students raised their hand indicating that they wanted to participate. I created two groups of six students each. I asked my students two questions:

1. What was your favourite writing/cognitive tool activity and why?
2. How has your writing changed since the beginning of the year?

The last time I conducted focus group interviews for this project, several students dominated the conversation and students who require some time to formulate their thoughts did not have the opportunity to participate fully. I set the expectations by asking students to be honest about their thoughts and opinions, to raise their hand for an opportunity to add to the discussion, and to listen respectfully to the student who is speaking. I also reminded students of the nine writing/cognitive tool activities that I had conducted during the fieldwork phase. I utilized voice recording so that I could focus on my students' words, emotions, and body language. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them verbatim. Once again, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of my students. Below are some snippets of the responses from both focus groups. I have included the fully transcribed responses from both focus groups in [Appendix J](#).

Interview question 1: what was your favourite writing activity and why?

Responses from group one:

Miss A.: Grade 2s can you please tell me what your favourite writing activity was?

Hydrangea: *excited gasp*

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Carnation: uh...uh...Making a “not-a-box”, because uh...you can like, use your imagination...and...mmmmm

Miss A.: What did you make for your not-a-box?

Carnation: A Nintendo switch

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Hibiscus: uh...I like! Hmm...hmm...I like doing the not a box ‘cause it’s fun

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Hibiscus: and you can learn more

Miss A.: about?

Hibiscus: how to make things

Miss A.: absolutely! Mm-hmm

Daisy: I like the opinion about bugs. ‘Cause I really like...bugs! And it...and it makes me happy looking at them and seeing them and learning all about them

Responses from group two:

Marigold: I liked the “not-a-box” ‘cause I liked it because I like to design

Miss A.: And what did you design?

Marigold: a rocket ship

Miss A.: Also a rocket ship. Thanks for sharing.

Lotus: Um, my favourite was us writing about my family using similes because I “gotted” to tell you about my family

Miss A.: Thank you for sharing all about your family!

Daphne: I really like doing our onoma..onomatopoeia comic because you got to write whatever you like

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. And what did you do about? What did you write about in your comic?

Daphne: a farm

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. Thanks for sharing.

Tulip: I like writing about spring because we were writing about nature and it’s like we’re learning more about nature!

As expected, many of my students commented that they enjoyed creating their “not-a-box”. It is not surprising that students associate hands-on learning activities as opportunities to

use their imagination but often do not realize that the imagination can be engaged in many other areas of learning.

However, I was pleased to hear from students who enjoyed several other writing activities as well. Students' responses indicated that they enjoy telling stories about themselves and their families. Some students enjoyed having the freedom to choose their own topic/theme for writing activities.

Interview question 2: How has your writing changed since the beginning of the year?

Responses from group one:

Miss A.: My next question is...how has your writing changed since the beginning of the year? What do you notice about your writing now that is different from when we began?
 Hibiscus: I got smarter and it's more easy
 Miss A.: Mm-hmm. How is it easier?
 Hibiscus: because you learn more
 Miss A.: About?
 Hibiscus: writing and how to write...yeah
 Miss A.: what's your favourite thing to write about?
 Hibiscus: when we did...Chalk! The chalk one.
 Miss A.: Mm-hmm...thanks for sharing.
 Carnation: uh...I'm better at spelling words that are like hard to spell...I can spell like harder words...and I've improved by making like better letters instead of like sloppy and nice and neat ones.

Responses from group two:

Lotus: I feel more confident because my writing has been much neater and I've been learning about how to...where to put my periods.
 Miss A.: Uh huh!
 Daphne: I'm starting to like writing a lot
 Miss A.: Mm-hmm. Can you tell me more?
 Daphne: I really like writing stories and fairy tales.
 Miss A.: Thanks for sharing
 Miss A.: *looks at lavender who has a half-raised hand* Would you like to share?
 Lavender: writing was good.
 Miss A.: uh huh
 Tulip: *interrupts* I like writing because I really want to tell things to people and like, if you don't want to talk to them you could write a message.
 Miss A.: yeah, we write to communicate. Thanks for sharing!

Many students commented on how they have improved their writing skills by adding the correct punctuation, printing neater letters, spelling words correctly, and by their ability to produce many more sentences. A few students stated that they like writing more because they find it easier now.

My students' responses made me think of how writing is often presented to students in a utilitarian manner. In the past, I have often presented "success criteria" or expectations for students' writing that resemble the following:

- ✓ Neat printing.
- ✓ Use proper uppercase and lowercase letters.
- ✓ Use proper punctuation.
- ✓ Write X amount of sentences.

In addition, when parents view their child's work in their Seesaw digital portfolio, they often comment on how proud they are that their child is able to produce neater printing, use the correct spelling and punctuation, and write many more sentences. Therefore, it does not surprise me that students associate good writing with writing that includes the proper spelling and conventions. I believe that spelling and conventions are an important aspect of writing that allow students to convey their thoughts clearly. However, as a result of this project, I am re-examining how much value I place on the mechanics and conventions of writing over the more creative and imaginative aspects of writing.

Conclusion

After teaching grade two for several years, I had unknowingly created a trajectory for teaching writing skills. When students first arrive in grade two, they often have great difficulty with encoding skills (sounding out words). Therefore, I would focus on phonemic awareness and encoding skills in term one. During term two, I would focus on conventions such as when to use a capital letter and how to use questions marks, periods, and exclamation marks in their writing. Finally, in term three, I would raise the bar slightly and expect students to write more sentences. I had a misconception that students needed to be able to write proper sentences and be confident with conventions before attempting to teach them how to write creatively. Without my knowledge, I also held on to the presupposition that some children were naturally imaginative writers. Therefore, the thought of teaching all my students how to become imaginative writers had not been a priority for me in the past.

When I designed this project, I was hoping to use cognitive tools such as metaphor, story, mental imagery, and binary opposites to engage students in the conventions and mechanics of writing. However, I now recognize that I was unintentionally ignoring a crucial part of the writing process – using the imagination! Egan and Judson (2016) state that “literacy is not only a set of skills associated with coding and decoding written forms, but better seen as a whole new cognitive toolkit” (p. 16). Thankfully, during one of my focus group interviews at the very beginning of this project, several students mentioned how they enjoyed using their imaginations to create funny stories. Once we had finished our interview, a student approached me and shyly asked, “can you teach me to use my imagination in my writing?”. This student’s comment inspired me to shift the focus of this action research project.

Delving deep into Vygotsky's theories and IE helped me recognize that both Vygotsky (2004) and Egan (2003) hold the belief that young children do not have the innate ability to be creative. Rather, children need to gain knowledge and the appropriate psychological and cognitive tools in order to grow in their imaginative capacities. Further, Vygotsky (2004) states that "[the] imagination, as the basis of all creative activity, is an important component of absolutely all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific, and technical creation alike" (p. 9). Based on this renewed understanding of the role of imagination in writing, I became interested in helping my students become more imaginative and creative writers by maximizing their cognitive toolkit. Throughout this project, I noticed that students who have not yet fully grasped the mechanics and conventions of writing were able to successfully use cognitive tools to enhance the creativity of their writing! In other words, I did not have to wait until my students were proficient writers before I could teach them how to be imaginative writers.

A theme that emerged in my focus group interviews at the beginning of this project was that students were hesitant to make spelling errors in their writing and were worried about making their writing perfect. Although I did not explicitly address this concern, I noticed that when students were engaged in using the cognitive tools in various lessons, they were less concerned about making errors and more willing to take creative risks. I used to walk around my class and suggest changes while my students were writing. For example, I might ask a student "what do you need at the end of that sentence?" to indicate that they forgot to add punctuation. However, I have learned to respect students' creative processes and the mental space they need to generate ideas and encode them. At the end, when students are done writing, I work jointly with the student to identify a few errors in their writing. I allow students to mark these errors with a yellow highlighter and then fix them before they begin illustrating. I believe that this

approach has given my students the ability to write more freely instead of being overly worried about making mistakes.

Another shift that I notice in my approach to teaching literacy is that I no longer worry about what is considered “grade level”. I now understand the importance of meeting my students where they are at in the journey and determining the next steps with confidence. I recognize the importance of teaching writing skills explicitly to my students and offering the necessary mediations and scaffolding experiences. I believe that this approach helps each child to develop to their fullest extent. For example, instead of assuming that my children were too young to grasp cognitive tools like onomatopoeia and similes, I was able to teach these skills explicitly and provide joint activities and mediations until students were able to complete these tasks independently and confidently.

A few weeks after I started this project, our school was able to loosen Covid-19 safety protocols based on Provincial Health orders. I was able to have my students sit in table groups again and bring back unstructured play time in the classroom. Sitting in table groups gave my students the opportunity to collaborate with peers while they engaged in writing tasks and exchange ideas and perspectives. My students this year particularly love playing with Lego. Allowing students to have unstructured play in the classroom meant that students were able collaboratively build elaborate structures with Lego. Playing together allowed them to see multiple perspectives and tell each other stories of pirate ships, farms, and space stations while they played. I believe that these opportunities for play and collaboration were beneficial for my students and contributed to their growth in the area of writing.

I believe that the IE-inspired lessons and activities provided to my students were beneficial and helped my students produce writing that is more imaginative. Over the period of

eleven weeks, I noticed how my students became more independent in their writing skills and that some of my previously reluctant writers were more willing to engage in the writing process. I reflected back on the initial survey where many students indicated that they have difficulty with coming up with ideas for writing and adding details to their writing. It was not uncommon to see students protest and put their heads down on their desk and exclaim “I don’t know what to write about”. As my students grew in writing skills and confidence, they grew in their ability to generate creative ideas for their writing. Overall, my students seem more joyful and even excited to engage in writing tasks. Furthermore, based on my students’ enthusiasm, I believe that cognitive tools can be successfully used to enliven pencil-to-paper writing tasks.

As we approach the last few weeks in the school year, I cannot help but think of the next school year and wonder how this experience will transform my teaching of writing skills in the future. Going back to my previous trajectory, I still believe that students need to learn important skills such as how to encode. However, I plan to “engage the feelings of [my] students in what [I] want them to learn” (Egan, 2006, p. 3). In other words, I plan to use cognitive tools such as the story form and jokes and humour to teach my students about punctuation, capitalization, and phonemes. I also plan to explicitly teach my students how to use their imagination in their writing by utilizing cognitive tools. I plan on using the vocabulary of cognitive tools and naming each cognitive tool that I introduce to them. I believe that creating a large poster of a toolkit to serve as a visual might be beneficial. Throughout the year, we could add the tools that we have learned about in our visual toolkit. I hope that through scaffolding and mediation, students would be able to independently use these cognitive tools in all areas of their writing.

It is ironic that I began this project inspired by a colleague asking a struggling student to write “just one more sentence”. As I glance down at the page count, I am slightly amused that

after months of reading literature, teaching, reflecting, and writing, I “only” generated 92 pages or so in this report. However, as I think with gratitude about how my students and I have grown throughout this process, I cannot help but smile. The page count is irrelevant and insignificant because the writing on these pages most certainly contain my deepest hopes, fears, dreams, desires, and passions about teaching literacy!

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Appendix A

Rubric used to assess students' writing levels

Writing Scoring Guide

BC Performance Standards	Culham's Traits	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Extending
					
Meaning	Ideas "I have a topic and I know a lot about it."	I haven't figured out what to say My details aren't clear I'm still thinking about and looking for a topic	I know enough about my topic to get started Some of my details are general My topic might be too big	I know A LOT about my topic My writing is bursting with fascinating details I've picked a topic that's focused enough to handle	
Style	Voice "My writing sounds like me."	I forgot to say what I think and feel about my topic I don't connect to the topic and it shows	My writing is safe The reader gets a glimpse of me I care a little about the topic	My writing sounds like me The reader will know I care about my topic	
	Fluency "I wrote sentences that sound great."	I am learning to write a sentence My beginnings all sound the same My sentences are all the same length	I've got sentences, but some are hard to read aloud A couple of my sentences begin in different ways I might join short sentences or cut long ones in two	My sentences are well built and easy to read aloud The way my sentences begin makes my writing interesting I use a variety of sentence lengths	
	Word Choice "I picked colourful, just-right words"	I'm learning to use words well I've left out key words Many of my words are the same and don't make sense	Some of my words work well, but others don't I've used too many ordinary words My words paint a general picture of the idea	I've picked exactly the right words My words are colourful and snappy The words help my reader see my ideas	

Form	Organization “I put my ideas in an order that makes sense.”	My writing doesn't have a clear Beg, Mid, End My details are confusing I have 'stuff' on paper but it's not in order	My Beg, Mid, End are off to a good start Most of my details fit The order of my ideas makes sense	I have a bold beginning, mighty middle and excellent ending All of my details are in the right place The order of my ideas works	
Conventions	Conventions “I cleaned up my writing for my reader.”	My spelling makes it hard to read my words I am learning about capitalization I am learning to use punctuation I forgot to proofread	Simple words are spelled correctly I've used capitals in easy spots I've used some correct punctuation I quickly proofread and missed some things	My spelling is magnificent All of my capitals are in the right place I've used correct grammar and added paragraphs as needed I've proofread carefully	

Appendix B

B.C. Language Arts Curriculum Connections – Grade Two

Big Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy. • Stories and other texts connect us to ourselves, our families, and our communities. • Everyone has a unique story to share. • Through listening and speaking, we connect with others and share our world. • Playing with language helps us discover how language works. • Curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world us.
Curricular Competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding. • Create stories and other texts to deepen awareness of self, family, and community. • Plan and create a variety of communication forms for different purposes and audiences. • Communicate using sentences and most conventions of Canadian spelling, grammar, and punctuation. • Explore oral storytelling processes.
Content Areas
Story/text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of story. • Literary devices and elements.
Strategies and processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing process
Language features, structures, and conventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word patterns, word families • Sentence structure • Letter formation • Conventions

Appendix C

TCPS2 – CORE22 Certificate



Appendix D

Permission from CISVA to conduct action research



The Catholic Independent Schools Of Vancouver Archdiocese

February 18th, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

Carmelene Judith Ameresekere, competing a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction at Simon Fraser University, has submitted to the Catholic Independent Schools of Vancouver Archdiocese (CISVA) Superintendent's Office, a research proposal to be conducted in our Catholic Schools. The research, entitled, "Just write one more sentence!", includes a Quality Assessment and Quality Improvement Inquiry Project designed to investigate how a Vygotskian approach to literacy can support writers in the primary grades.

After examining the research project and the Certificate of Completion from the Panel on Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University, indicating completion of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE 2022), and concluding that the study meets the requirements of ethics and protocols of the CISVA, the Superintendent's Office has given approval for the research project to proceed.

Therefore, the aforementioned researcher has permission from the CISVA, to contact individual schools and seek permission from the local school authorities to conduct research. It is up to each local authority as to whether it wishes to participate.

Attached please find the CISVA Policy on Research Projects for your reference.

Sincerely

S. Marshall

Associate Superintendent

CISVA

Appendix E

Letter of notification sent out to the parent community

Cloverdale Catholic School



17511 – 59th Avenue, Surrey, B.C. V3S 1P3

Telephone (604) 574-5151 Fax: (604) 574-5160

E-Mail: office@cloverdalecatholicschool.ca

Website: cloverdalecatholicschool.ca

February 23, 2022

Dear Grade Two Families,

I am currently working on my Master of Education Degree in Curriculum Theory and Development through Simon Fraser University. This program enables me as an educator to reflect upon my practice as well as student learning, with the intention of developing my own best practices. As part of my studies, I have developed an inquiry project to examine how our Writer's Workshop Program engages all learners in my classroom. I anticipate that my inquiry will provide me with valuable insights on how to continue to improve this program and engage students in the writing process.

My inquiry will be primarily informed on my own observations and reflections on my work as a teacher. Over the course of the next two months, I will also collect student work samples, surveys, reflections, voice recordings, and photographs to inform my understanding of my practice. All elements of my inquiry will take place within the context of my normal instruction and practice. I will, of course, also be following our school's Covid safety protocols.

This letter of notice is part of my ethical responsibilities as a teacher-inquirer. I am informing you that I intend to use your child's work samples, surveys, reflections, and photographs to present to members of my graduate cohort and my instructors to demonstrate my own learning. This project will *not* affect student assessment in any way. As part of my responsibility as an educator, professionalism around issues of confidentiality will be ensured. Consistent with the ethical protocols of teacher inquiry, if your child is mentioned in the presentation of my work, an alias (pseudonym) will be used at all times and any photographs of your child will have their face blurred to respect and protect his/her privacy.

I would like to reassure you that regardless of my inquiry, my ethical best practices as a teacher will remain the same. Again, this inquiry process is not intended to assess or evaluate your child in any way, but will serve to strengthen my own teaching practice.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact me at (604) 574 -5151 or jamersekere@cloverdalecatholicschool.ca




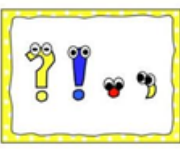

Sincerely,

Ms. Judith Ameresekere
Grade Two Teacher
Cloverdale Catholic School

Appendix F


Initial Student Survey

What do you find the most difficult about writing? Please select the top 3 things that you find the most challenging.

<p>Coming up with ideas</p> 	<p>Sounding out words</p> 	<p>Using uppercase and lower case letters</p> 	<p>Using punctuation</p> 	<p>Adding details to my sentences</p> 
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Is there anything else you want to tell Miss A. about writing?

How does writing stories or writing in your journal make you feel?



Mad Frustrated Okay Happy Excited

Appendix G

Question 1: what do your students find challenging when it comes to writing?

- Some students find it challenging to come up with ideas for story writing on their own. Conventions of writing: at the grade two level, spelling and punctuation continue to be difficult for students.
- Formulating ideas -spelling unfamiliar words -writing complete sentences that make sense (tense, subject-verb agreement, etc.) -connecting ideas together and adding details to build on ideas.
- Generating ideas, putting pen to paper – get overwhelmed, sentence structure – using periods and uppercase consistently and correcting, anxiety around spelling, using imagination is difficult.
- A few challenges that I have observed and assisted my students with when it comes to writing are putting their ideas down on paper, organizing the sequence of their story, and having to write a great deal.
- Mechanics, proper grammar, spelling, limited vocabulary, coming up with ideas, staying focused on the topic.

Question 2: What are some strategies that you use to motivate students? Are there any writing activities that your students particularly enjoy?

- Writing is a favourite in my classroom (for most students). For regular Journal writing, students have a chance to talk about their ideas with friends and to ask them questions, which hopefully helps a student to gain more ideas for adding details in their writing. When we did persuasive writing (eg. At Thanksgiving, convince people to eat a hot dog and not turkey), the kids had the chance, with a partner, to practice their argument orally before writing it down. For story writing, we do a ‘write’ together on the board, focusing on beginning, middle and the end of the story. The students are t’e one’ to come up with the ideas and I will write them down, modelling how to write detailed and interesting sentences. Near the end of the story, the kids will act it out. Our class quote (found online) – If you can think it – you can say it. If you can say it, you can write it!! So, we practice all of those parts of writing. Finding a purpose for writing is key too. Kids love Robert Munsch stories and his story format is quite simple.... often repetitive and silly. The kids learn about him and how he often gets his ideas from kids, so then each student in my class will come up with a story idea for Robert Munsch and we actually send him our ideas. When he writes back, they are thrilled!!! Thematic writing is also fun for kids as it pertains to things they are interested in. Hallowe’en is a great time for creative stories.
- 30 second brainstorm: students brainstorm as many topic-related vocabulary words, adjectives, etc. before writing -verb game before writing: students brainstorm big lost of verbs, teacher points to verbs, they act it out -fix it up game: (whole group) students try to find mistakes in a given sentence and come up to correct it -picture writing prompts with vocabulary -fun/creative/silly journal topics
- As a class, we create our own “Success Criteria”, students decide what each writing piece requires in order for it to be proficient. Students enjoy having ownership of the marking and it encourages them to meet the success criteria. Using a Journal Jar – each month we have a theme for the Journal Jar and students are also given an opportunity to write their own questions for example (Imagine you were a dragon in a magical world, what would you do with your powers). Again, students are given ownership of their journals and pick from the journal jar once a week. They really enjoy this and find it motivating. Everyone is keen to read one another’s’ questions and answer them. Students enjoy writing activities that they can really relate to – get to know students personally and inviting them to write what they want to write about helps to keep each one motivated. (e.g. For transitional writing pieces, we talked about How to play Minecraft, How to make a s’more) Both were examples of exciting writing topics for the class Using the online portfolio SeeSaw has motivated students this year – students work is celebrated when they upload their written work f’r their parents to see. Students will ask, Can I upload my work to Show Mum and Dad. They are more motivated to complete their best work and keen to hear what Mum and Dad have to say about their writing.
- Weekly opportunities for a free write on topic of choice writing about experiences, activities, personal interests modelling writing brainstorm ideas and vocabulary about a topic with students, children work

with a partner to brainstorm ideas provide vocabulary lists: adjectives, descriptive verbs, vocabulary lists relating to a topic (i.e. Spring words). Read good quality literature, so students understand what good writing entails. Show samples of writing at different levels on the proficiency scale so students have an understanding of what is expected. Students read stories and write about material read. Expose children to different types of writing: stories, recipes, instructions, persuasive writing, poetry, journal, letters, post cards, cartoons, fantasy writing. Take students outdoors. Have students visualize, plan, draw and write. Create a craft and write about it. Paint a picture and write about it. Informational Writing. Teach the Writing Process. Make connections to something that is familiar. Children like writing about themselves, family, favourite things, holidays. They enjoy writing about fun topics and personal experiences. After reading a good story to children, they like to write about a topic related to the book. reading and Writing go hand in hand.

- I incorporate the '6-Traits of Writing' program into my teaching, which provides structured, fun short activities that help both the teacher and students practice writing strategies and opens up discussions on different topics: ideas, organization, word choice, voice, conventions, and sentence fluency. Also, I noticed that students enjoy writing when they are writing about topics they enjoy or can relate to. For example, my students enjoyed writing letters, journal reflections, poetry, creative writing stories, and persuasive writing.

Question 3: What are some strategies that you use to motivate students who struggle with writing?

- Definitely having the students talk about their ideas before they write helps. For students that really struggle with coming up with what to write – our writing times are consistent throughout the week, so the kids will talk to their parents at home for ideas they may be able to use the next day in their Journal. I've had kids write a list of ideas they can write about and we glue it into the front of their Journal book. While writing, I make sure the kids are focused on their ideas and not on the conventions of writing. We can go through that later. A lot of kids that struggle with writing are kids that don't like to make mistakes, so when they don't know how to spell something, they will just stop writing. Often kids don't see themselves as writers either, so I make sure to work on building their confidence. This is a lot easier to do when their writing becomes 'readable', as you can read it back to them and they are at first amazed that you can read their writing. But for kids that are still stringing together letters, you can still make comments, as they read their work to you about them using more of the correct letters and that you can 'see' the word in their writing. Small groups for strugglers often helps too. Sometimes kids have so much in their mind to get out on paper, that they get overwhelmed. So, pull a small group to the rainbow table and we can go through one sentence at a time to slow them down a bit. I've drawn a line for each word in a sentence before so they begin to learn word placement. And then letting kids 'publish' what they write or share it with the class also helps to build that confidence. Also finding different ways of writing. Kids love comics and find that a fun way to share their ideas. There are just so many ways!!!
- I don't normally use a lot of rewards but my struggling writers are very motivated when I give out stickers for juicy writing (sounding out lots of words independently, more than two sentences, descriptive words) -My struggling writers are motivated to keep writing when I get excited about what they've written and ask personal follow up questions -sitting with them to sound out words together, segment words with Heggerty exercises (phonics instruction).
- Spending some one to one time with students who struggle with writing is key to help you as a teacher find the root of the problem, this takes time. Sharing a lot of self talk with the students, getting to know their interests and apply it to their writing helps. Depending on the learner, visual checklists(step by step' instructions), sentence strips and lowering the success criteria. Give the student a smaller goal, I want you to write one sentence for me and then we will take a break. It depends on what aspect the student is struggling with. If it is a learning disability, focusing on phonics first is priority and sight words. Making that area more enjoyable for them by using manipulatives like play dough to build words instead of reading them. Once you see progress, share with the student also their progress (this is what you did in September, now look what you can do) Discussing with home that parents also have a role to play in helping their child enjoy writing more Brainstorming ideas together instead of overwhelming the student with a written task. I have 2 students in particular this year who really disliked vocally writing activities and when I look back the biggest realisation is that once the safe and

positive relationship is made with the child, their fear of making mistakes and their anxious lessons and they are keen to please the teacher more. Both students have made excellent progress at their level. Important for teacher to focus on the level the student is at right now and gain momentum rather than fixating on what grade level is and where they “should” be.

- When students struggle with writing, I have observed that they write a minimal amount. Sometimes it is attributed to their incorrect pencil grip or their physical stamina to actually write since their hand would get tired, and they would be frustrated when they couldn't put their ideas down or wouldn't know where to start. I found that various graphic organizers are very helpful for my students when writing, especially for stories or longer pieces of work. Also, word banks are helpful for brainstorming ideas. Another exercise I find helpful is self and peer editing. Students often do not read their own work, but when they see others are struggling to understand their sentences, it helps them to go back and fix their writing to make it understandable or accurately reflect what they want to say.
- Make connections to a topic child can relate to. Draw a picture and write about it, work with a partner. Give students a fun photo to write about. Provide a sequence of pictures for students to write about. Provide a recipe for students to follow using guided questions. Some students don't like creative writing, but like to read non-fiction and share informational writing.

Question 4: What do you notice about your students who particularly enjoy writing?

- Students who demonstrate enjoyment in writing are the students who have a love for reading. They read with every opportunity given. Students who are comfortable with making mistakes and are keen to learn and try enjoy writing too (goes back to relationship with the teacher). Students with great imaginations thrive in the area of writing. I notice that students who enjoy writing are comfortable in all aspects of learning in the curriculum. For me, reading and writing are the foundation for every child and it paves the way for a happier more confident learner.
- Students that love writing: • often they are also the students that love to read. • do not get hung up on the conventions of writing, but rather just write • love to share their ideas after • see a purpose to their writing • love words and love to experiment with using ‘fancy’ words in their writing • are the ones that quickly grab onto new things we learn (eg. Onomatopoeia) and start to use it in their writing
- They usually like to share their opinions, have a creative imagination, and/or enjoy reading.
- They also enjoy reading, they have good imaginations, they can visualize ideas, they experience life, they are involved in a variety of activities.
- I notice that students who particularly enjoy writing can write a great deal, in terms of the length of their writing. They add detail and make their writing clear for their reader by painting an accurate picture of their thoughts with their words.

Appendix H

Initial Focus Group Interviews with Students

Focus Group 1: St. Patrick's themed story writing

March 3rd 2022

Students: Hydrangea, Lilac, and Anthurium

Miss A.: So, grade twos, what did we work on today?

Hydrangea and Lilac (simultaneously): A story

Miss A.: about?

Anthurium: a leprechaun

Lilac: a cow

Miss A.: Okay. You had a cow in your story?

Lilac: yeah

Hydrangea: I had *a fairy* in my story! (emphasis added to convey excitement in student's voice)

Miss A.: What did you have in your story?

Anthurium: A leprechaun

Miss A.: mm-hm

Miss A.: How did you feel about this activity?

Hydrangea: good

Lilac: happy

Miss A.: mm-hm. Can you tell me more?

Anthurium: I felt happy to doing this

Miss A.: can you tell me a bit more about why you felt this way?

Anthurium: I felt this way because I like, love writing.

Hydrangea: Me too

Anthurium: and I love (mumbles) like, making up stories.

Hydrangea: I liked the story today because I got to make a cool story with a bunch of cool figures in the story and I love writing.

Miss A.: That's awesome. Was anything hard while writing the story? What was challenging?

Anthurium: Um, trying to find something perfect to fit in the story.

Lilac: making the story

Miss A.: making the story was hard?

Lilac: Because like, making all the ideas.

Miss A.: making all the ideas. Fair enough.

Hydrangea: trying to make the story make sense.

Miss A.: yeah, that's tricky. Is there anything Miss A. can do to help you write a story better? To help you be more confident at writing a story next time?

Anthurium: well, I like trying, but maybe you can help me like next time

Miss A.: with?

Anthurium: with my writing

Miss A.: You have to be a little more specific. What about your writing?

Lilac: like um, you can teach us to come up with more ideas.

Anthurium: like, helping me come up with ideas to go with my story.

Hydrangea: helping me come up with cooler ideas.

Miss A.: mm-hm

Anthurium: and making it more perfect.

Focus group 2: St. Patrick's themed story writing

March 3rd 2022

Students: Carnation, Lavender, Bluebell, Daisy, Rose, and Lily

Miss A.: so, how'd you guys feel about the activity we did today?

Carnation: uh, it..it felt... It felt kinda fun.

Other students nod in agreement

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Carnation: you can write and draw, you can make up your own story.

Lily: um, it was kind of hard thinking of a problem

Carnation: yeah! Yeah, it was so hard

Me: thinking of a problem for the story?

Carnation: yeah, it was really hard

Rose: it was very easy for me

Daisy: easy for me too!

Miss A.: So, what's one thing that you enjoyed about it today?

Daisy: I enjoyed about it because I...I can do um, drawing! Writing! The writing was fun.

Miss A.: mm-hm

Daisy: And I like the drawing part too.

Carnation: It was fun making up your own story...Because, I mean, you can like, use your own imagination and...yeah! **Satisfied sigh**

Lily: It was um, fun, like, saying what like your characters like, skills were and stuff, so like, like, what they like and where they live

Miss A.: Great! Uh huh

Lavender: It's fun making funny stories!

Daisy: It was fun making up names and...and making up a story and where they live and drawing details on pictures.

Rose: I love making my stories very epic and always having a good ending.

Miss A.: That's important. Is there anything you'd like to see next time to make your story writing even more exciting or fun or interesting for you guys?

Lavender: you can use your imagination more. I forgot what I was going to say.

Miss A.: That's okay!

Daisy: I can use more big words...to...for my writing...and make more drawings into pictures.

Rose: making the bad guys more evil

Miss A.: ohhh

Rose: yeah, and that is hard

Miss A.: that is hard, huh?

Several kids nod in agreement.

Rose: It is hard for the person who's catching to get away

Miss A.: Oh, so coming up with better problems and solutions in your stories

Rose: yeah

Lily: It's hard to know what the costumes are

Rose: oh yeah!

Lily: so, you have like a bad guy that's like a person,

Miss A.: uh huh

Lily: you don't know what to like draw

Miss A.: As a character and their clothes?

Carnation: uh huh. It's very hard.

Rose: It's hard for me too to draw eyes.

Appendix I

Student Survey conducted at the end of the action research project

What were your three favourite writing activities:

- ☐ Writing about my family using similes.
- ☐ St. Patrick's Day silly stories.
- ☐ Retelling the story "chalk" using our imagination.
- ☐ My opinion about bugs.
- ☐ Designing and creating a not-a-box.
- ☐ Onomatopoeia comics.
- ☐ Writing about spring using our senses.
- ☐ Writing about myself using similes.
- ☐ Drawing what we imagined for the story "in the small, small pond."

Why? What did you like about these writing activities?

How does writing make you feel?



Mad



Frustrated



Okay



Happy



Excited

Why?

Is there anything else you want to tell Miss A. about writing? (e.g. what are you proud of/how have you grown/is there anything you still find difficult?)

Appendix J

Focus group interviews with students

Focus group 3: End of project feedback from students

May 06, 2022

Students: hydrangea, carnation, hibiscus, daisy, pansy, hyacinth

***Students were asked to raise their hands when they wanted to add to the discussion so that everyone had a chance to participate and share ideas instead of one or two students dominating the conversation.*

Question 1: what was your favourite writing activity and why?

Miss A.: Grade 2s can you please tell me what your favourite writing activity was?

Hydrangea: *excited gasp*

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Carnation: uh...uh...Making a “not-a-box”, because uh...you can like, use your imagination...and...mmmmm

Miss A.: What did you make for your not-a-box?

Carnation: A Nintendo switch

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Hibiscus: uh...I like! Hmm...hmm...I like doing the not a box ‘cause it’s fun

Miss A.: mm-hmm

Hibiscus: and you can learn more

Miss A.: about?

Hibiscus: how to make things

Miss A.: absolutely! Mm-hmm

Daisy: I like the opinion about bugs. ‘Cause I really like...bugs! And it...and it makes me happy looking at them and seeing them and learning all about them

Miss A.: thank you for sharing!

pansy: I really like the opinion about bugs because my story was really funny

Miss A.: Mm-hmm

Hydrangea: I really like “not-a-box” because you could use your imagination and you could make anything you want

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. And what did you end up making?

Hydrangea: I end up making a time travel machine

Miss A.: Thank you for sharing

Hyacinth: I like my not a box because you can use your creativity to make stuff...like stuff you want and um, it’s very cool showing your friends and seeing your friends’ “not-a-box”

Miss A. Thank you for sharing, boys and girls.

Question 2: How has your writing changed since the beginning of the year?

Miss A.: My next question is...how has your writing changed since the beginning of the year?

What do you notice about your writing now that is different from when we began?

Hibiscus: I got smarter and it’s more easy

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. How is it easier?

Hibiscus: because you learn more

Miss A.: About?

Hibiscus: writing and how to write...yeah

Miss A.: what's your favourite thing to write about?

Hibiscus: when we did...Chalk! The chalk one.

Miss A.: Mm-hmm...thanks for sharing.

Carnation: uh...I'm better at spelling words that are like hard to spell...I can spell like harder words...and I've improved by making like better letters instead of like sloppy and nice and neat ones.

Miss A.: Thank you very much for sharing

Pansy: It was a little bit stressful...but...um, when I was in grade one I was a little bit stressed because I couldn't have help with my spelling words but now it's a little bit easier

Daisy: um, um, um, I forgot

Miss A.: So, the question was, how has your writing changed since the beginning of the year. You might need a little time to think and that's okay!

Miss A.: Mm-hmm

Hydrangea: In grade one I used to have really sloppy writing and now my writing is really neat and now I know how to spell words

Miss A.: Very good

Daisy: *sighs*

Miss A.: That's okay. Would you like to share how your writing's changed?

Daisy: When I started grade two, my writing was...umm...very...umm...very little sentences. But now I can write about three pages on my journal...and...my...I have improved my skills of...writing and improving on spelling words

Miss A.: Thank you for sharing

Hyacinth: So, I *mumbles* grade two, and we started journals...the first one was quite easy and then we went to um, the end of grade two it was kind of hard *mumbles*

Miss A.: could you explain how it became harder?

Hyacinth: because other journal ones were easier and then when it was the end of grade two. Yesterday when we did the journal it was quite hard because it's hard doing *mumbles* and stuff.

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. Thank you for sharing

Miss A.: Thank you for your time, boys and girls, and thank you for helping with my homework!

Carnation: Your welcome!

Focus group 4: End of project feedback from students

May 06, 2022

Students: Lavender, Marigold, Lotus, Daphne, Wisteria, and Tulip

***Students were asked to raise their hands when they wanted to add to the discussion so that everyone had a chance to participate and share ideas instead of one or two students dominating the conversation.*

Question 1: what was your favourite writing activity and why?

Miss A.: Thank you grade twos for helping me with my homework! My first question is what was your favourite writing activity we did?

Lavendar: Not-a-box

Miss A.: Mm-hmm...can you tell me more?

Lavendar: hmm

Miss A.: What did you like about it? And what did you make?

Lavender: mm...uh...like...building stuff with cardboard.

Miss A.: Mmm-hmm. And what did you end up making?

Lavendar: a rocketship

Miss A.: Thanks for sharing

Marigold: I liked the “not-a-box” ‘cause I liked it because I like to design

Miss A.: And what did you design?

Marigold: a rocket ship

Miss A.: Also a rocket ship. Thanks for sharing.

Lotus: Um, my favourite was us writing about my family using similes because I “gotted” to tell you about my family

Miss A.: Thank you for sharing all about your family!

Daphne: I really like doing our onoma..onomatopoeia comic because you got to write whatever you like

Miss A.:Mm-hmm. And what did you do about? What did you write about in your comic?|

Daphne: a farm

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. Thanks for sharing.

Tulip: I like writing about spring because we were writing about nature and it’s like we’re learning more about nature!

Miss A.: Thanks for sharing. Mm-hmm.

Wisteria: I like the “not a box” because it’s tricky to make it in the *mumbles*

Miss A.: In the group?

Wisteria: in the hoop

Miss A.: In the hoop! Right...

Wisteria: I like challenging stuff.

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. So, what did you make for your “not-a-box”?

Wisteria: umm...yeah basketball.

Question 2: How has your writing changed since the beginning of the year?

Miss A.: My next question, which is also my last question is...how has your writing changed since the beginning of grade two? How has it changed?

Miss A.: Mm-hmm.

Wisteria: I forgot

Miss A.: That’s okay!

Marigold: It has changed...and ...it has gotten...nicer over time

Miss A.: nicer over time. Can you tell me a little bit more?

Marigold: Like, I can spell stuff really *mumbles* but in Kindergarten I wasn’t that good *mumbles* or at the start

Miss A.: At the start of grade two, but you feel more confident now?

Marigold: yeah

Miss A.: Thanks for sharing

Lotus: I feel more confident because my writing has been much neater and I’ve been learning about how to...where to put my periods.

Miss A.: Uh huh!

Daphne: I'm starting to like writing a lot

Miss A.: Mm-hmm. Can you tell me more?

Daphne: I really like writing stories and fairytales.

Miss A.: Thanks for sharing

Wisteria: I forgot.

Miss A.: Do you need a moment to think?

Wisteria: yeah

Miss A.: *looks at lavender who has a half-raised hand* Would you like to share?

Lavender: writing was good.

Miss A.: uh huh

Tulip: *interrupts* I like writing because I really want to tell things to people and like, if you don't want to talk to them you could write a message.

Miss A.: yeah, we write to communicate. Thanks for sharing!

Miss A.: Would you like to share how your writing has changed?

Lavender: I like drawing and writing a story

Miss A.: drawing and writing a story. What's your favourite kind of story to write about?

Lavender: hmm

Miss A.: Is there a kind of story you like?

Lavendar: *mumbles*

Miss A.: say it one more time

Lavendar: the Chalk story

Miss A: the Chalk story.

Miss A.: Thank you very much for sharing! That was very helpful.