

**The Influences of Play and Gender on
Transitional Writing Development**

By

Lynsey Gausman

A Masters' Paper

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education – Reading**

Major Advisor's Signature

Date

**University of Wisconsin – River Falls
2013**

Abstract

Can a child sit down, pick up a pencil, and start writing? Have you ever met a child who says, “I don’t know what to write about?” Writing is a skill that takes time to develop, a skill that a child can grasp when given the opportunity and support. Teachers need to help children develop basic writing skills and also help children give meaning to their writing. Research shows that play gives children experience, builds cognitive development, grows social skills, and can set the foundations for further learning. Research also reveals that if teachers help children develop basic writing skills through mini-lessons and support children by helping them give meaning to their writing, a child can experience success with writing. Play can give children meaning and ideas to bring to their writing. It can spark a child’s creativity and inspire them to pick up that pencil and start writing. This action research project examines children at play and studies if play and/or gender influence the quality and quantity of writing of a transitional writer. Twenty-one children (ten male, eleven female) in first grade participated in a four-week study. Six of twenty-one children (three male, three female) were chosen to be part of a focus group. These six children have an array of writing abilities (two high, two medium, two low, one male and female in each writing ability). Before starting the research, four prewriting pieces were collected from each child giving a baseline before play was introduced into his or her writing. For four weeks, every Tuesday and Thursday, during the children’s writing block, the children wrote for ten to fifteen minutes after coming in from recess. During this time children were given a choice about what they could write about. The writings from Tuesday and Thursday were collected and the six children’s writings were analyzed by using a rubric to look at the quality and quantity of their writing. Pre-and post-writing attitude surveys were used to give the researcher an understanding of how the children felt about writing. A checklist was also used to measure children’s engagement. Eight pieces of writing were collected to analyze the progress of the six focus children. Throughout this study the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the children demonstrates their attitudes towards writing, engagement in the writing process, and shows changes in their quality, quantity, neatness, punctuation and spelling in their writing with play being introduced before their writing block.

Introduction

Play and imagination are a critical part of the mental development of human beings. As stated by Olfman (2009), “Many of our greatest thinkers locate their capacity for original and profound thought in their imaginative abilities, first developed through creative play in early childhood” (p. 1). This learning occurs very early in life and is a building block for our cognitive development. According to Elkind (2009),

Play starts right away with infant’s playful babbling which teaches them to create all the sounds needed to speak their native tongue or any language. A toddler learns that when you bang a metal spoon or a wooden spoon, you get two very different sounds (p. 2).

Play is something we all enjoy, especially when young. It gives children a sense of wonder and allows people to discover the world. Play also gives minds a break from everyday thinking. Because play is not a large part of today’s school day, children are not getting enough of this time where they can allow their imaginations to dominate their brain for a short period of time. As an educator, without the time to bring play into learning, it is often frustrating knowing the developmental growth children are denied when they are not allowed time to engage in play. Knowing the value of play promoted the question of what impact it might have on children’s ability to write, and does it facilitate children to have a clear mind, when subsequent to play, they are given the time to simply write their thoughts down on paper.

This paper stemmed from earlier research that focused on looking at how play can influence a transitional writer when evaluating the quality and quantity of their writing. The researcher has added a new piece to the research to examine the role gender might play in a child’s writing development.

This paper will describe the benefits of play, the developmental stages of writing,

the differences between male and female's writing and how they interact in play. It will explore how play and gender can influence a transitional writer's quantity and quality of writing. It will also show how children can develop a love for writing through enjoyment of play, while discovering the world around them.

Review of Literature

What is the value of play?

Play is all around us; it gives children background knowledge, developmental experiences, and the foundation for exploring new things. According to Zigler, Singer, and Bishop-Josef (2004), "Play is the natural way for children to explore, learn, and build skills. It is where children make clear childhood play experiences and outcomes; verbal and mathematical literacy, organization skills, intrinsic excitement about learning, school readiness, creativity, and more" (p.v). Therefore, children who are emerged in play at a young age will benefit from all spans of development: physical, emotional, mental, and social. As noted by the Action Alliance for Children,

When children play, they are testing their developing ideas with objects, people, and situation, the key ability for academic learning. They develop many kinds of skills together, physical, social, emotional, thinking, and language. They are doing things they are interested in, so they have a natural motivation to learn (Children's Advocate, 2007, p. 2).

Given this, play gives children an interest and above all, motivation to learn new things. Motivation is a key tool that will give children the drive and the energy to want to learn how to write.

While a child is interacting in pretend play, she is also learning the concept that each letter represents a sound. And she is very motivated by the meaning of her own name! Children are more likely to remember skills and concepts they have learned by doing things that are meaningful to them (Children's Advocate Journal, 2007, P. 2-3).

Educators also have to provide motivation for a child to write and to plant a seed in a child's life that will give them a personal connection in their writing. Calkins (1994), confirms "...there is a difference between "motivating writing" and helping people become deeply and personally involved in their own writing (p.12).

Play is essential to early learning and is the primary way children learn and develop ideas about the world. Play gives children purpose, meaning, and a jumpstart in understanding main concepts in their learning. The Children's Advocate Journal (2007) gives an example of children at play and how children are becoming successful in their learning. For example, children can be observed acting out scenes in the housekeeping corner or a child making her stuffed animal "talk" by telling a story. The author continues that these examples show oral language skills and storytelling that are building blocks of reading and writing (p.3).

Finally, play gives children a brain break from the classroom. Educators know the importance of play during recess and how it is essential to a child's success during the school day. Children need breaks from being in the classroom, time to be social with their peers, gain background knowledge, and a time to discover the world around them through play. Singer, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek (2006) stress, "It's necessary to take breaks between periods of intense work, when children can both relax and interact with peers, with the hope that they will return to their classroom after their breaks and work with renewed interest" (p. 36).

Play becomes a powerful tool for a child and holds great promise for children in holding new learning experiences in life that can be built upon for further learning.

How Do Boys and Girls Play?

Is there a difference between the play of boys and girls? There are varying opinions about the difference between boys and girls, especially how they play. When looking at boys and girls on the playground during school recess, you might find girls and boys playing separately. When boys and girls are playing together, you often find the boys running after the girls. “Watkinson (2010), confirms, “When boys and girls play together, they tend to play chasing games, such as tag” (p.7)

Waltkinson (2010) stated, “Playground activity is important for both boys and girls. Some differences generally exist in what and where girls and boys play, and in how hard they play. But having playground skill is equally important for both” (p. 7). The typical stereotype for boys on the playground when thinking about how they play is physical. Often boys will be undertaking activities that are large group games that can be vigorous such as running and dodging. Boys also like to learn an assortment of ball skills. It’s important that boys learn the foundations of these activities so they become competent in other activities (Waltkinson, 2010).

Most people might think that girls are less physical when they play on the playground, but they show a great deal of activity when playing on the jungle gym. Waltkinson notes that girls should be competent in different activities such as playing ball games. It’s typical to find girls playing on the playground equipment for example, swinging, sliding, and developing monkey bar skills. Being active in these different kinds of activities encourages girls to become active participants in other activities (2010).

Through play children are given an opportunity to gain experience from the world

around them, a time to free their minds from the classroom, to discover a new interest, a new friend, and to use their imagination.

The Developmental Stages of Writing

Play uses imagination, which is also used in writing. Play can give children the inspiration to pick up a pencil and to start writing about their experience. Through writing children are able to communicate and share with others what they discovered during play. Young children also communicate through writing (Klein, 2010).

Understanding the developmental steps of a child's writing is crucial when teaching and/or analyzing a student's writing. A student's writing abilities don't come about by happenstance. According to Strickland (2008), "Reading and writing abilities just don't happen. They are acquired, nurtured, and refined through the acts of those who provide appropriate instructional contexts and support"(Strickland, as cited in Weatherspoon, 2008, p.1). Teachers who share their passion of writing, their personal writings, and express their writing journey will give children the understanding that we all have to learn to write, as it is a process. This will give children an understanding that we are all authors and are all at different stages in our writing. A teacher may also express that with more practice, their writings will improve over a period of time. As children begin their writing voyage they are going to travel along many stages of writing.

Weatherspoon (2008), explains the five stages of writing. See Appendix E for examples of each writing stage. The first steps of writing include awareness, exploration, and role-play writing by children using drawings and scribbling to express themselves through written symbols. Children may believe that drawings have "a message." During the beginning of this stage of writing there is no apparent difference between the marks a

child uses to draw pictures and those that are intended to “say something.” By the end of the first stage a distinction emerges between the marks used for writing than those used for drawings. Children will point to their symbols or drawings while “reading,” when asked to tell about their “writing” (Weatherspoon, 2008).

The second stage of writing is emergent. At this point children are aware that speech can be written down; they understand the left to right organization of print and experiment with letters and words. Children will be able to read back their own writing, attempt familiar forms of writing (e.g. lists, letters, messages), and use simple oral language structures (Weatherspoon, 2008).

The third stage is transitional writing; these children need an audience and have a formal sense of print conventions, letters, words, and sentences. During this stage children are also able to rely heavily on obvious sounds of a word, small range of familiar text forms, basic sentence structures and various sentence beginnings. Children can explain in context their purpose using certain types of writing (e.g. shopping list or telephone messages as a memory aid) (Weatherspoon, 2008). These children also experiment with words from personal experiences, literature, media, and oral language with peers and others. Children in the transitional stage will attempt to use some conventional punctuation and will talk to others to plan and revise their own writing (Weatherspoon, 2008). They will draw pictures before, while, and during their writing. A child’s drawings can help to organize thoughts, may guide writers to more ideas in their writing, and can add meaning to the writer’s words. Baghabn (2007), stresses that children draw pictures and write to organize ideas and construct meaning from their experiences. This stage usually ends in kindergarten and first grade (Weatherspoon,

2008).

The fourth stage is conventional writing, when children become familiar with most aspects of the writing process and understand that writing can have different purposes. Children in the conventional writing stage start to have control over the structure, punctuation, and spelling in their writing (Weatherspoon, 2008).

The last stage of writing is proficient writing where children have developed a personal style of writing and are able to manipulate forms of writing to suit their purposes. They understand the importance of spelling, punctuation, and using large vocabulary. Writing pieces are organized, consistent, and fulfilling (Weatherspoon, 2008).

The five developmental writing stages provide a foundation to understand children's writing. In addition, the steps are key when analyzing a student's writing and looking at the quality and quantity that a first grade writer produces.

Male Writing Vs. Female Writing

When looking at a student's writing, an educator may see a variety of different levels of strengths and weaknesses. An educator will gain an understanding of children's interests and insights into writing strengths and weaknesses. Setting up a classroom that enriches and welcomes literacy is one way to excite a child to write. West and Cox (2004) confirm "By putting children in an enriched literacy environment, they can practice, experiment, and explore oral and written language" (p.18).

When comparing the writing of males and females, teachers may notice differences in the quality and quantity of written work, and the passion in a student's writing. According to Spear, boys and girls who are at the conventional writing and

proficient writing stages show differences in their quality and quantity of written work.

She explains:

Most teachers recognize differences between the written work of girls and boys. The differences were that girls' work tends to be neat and well presented, while that of boys is often untidy and poorly presented. Good presentation is frequently associated with girls' work, but never with boys' work. The language used by boys was generally considered to be poorer than that used by girls, when looking at vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and grammar. (Spear, 1989, p.271).

When examining the quality of both male and female writing strengths, weaknesses, and background knowledge are noted for each student. Spear (1989) states,

Girls' work is much more detailed, comprehensive, and complete than that of boys. Boys' work is often accurate and to the point than a girls' writing. Boys writing tend to be brief but cover essentials, whereas girls work can be waffling, and longer than needed"(p.274).

All of these points are going to be different for each child. Each child comes to school with an array of different knowledge, strengths, needs.

Does Play Influence the Quantity of Writings?

Powel and Davidson (2005), understood that there are many pieces to look at when analyzing a child's quantity of writing. They explain that "Tapping into students' 'funds of knowledge' is inherently motivating, and hence children are more engaged in learning when they perceive an authentic purpose for their efforts (p.7)." When a child is engaged in writing, the amount of writing that takes place will be directly affected by this engagement. Play often promotes engagement and thus increases the quantity of writing. Through play children are given memories, ideas, and experiences that they could write about. Morrow claimed (as cited in Isenberg and Jalongo, 2006-2012), "Children are also gaining literacy development through play by learning how to read and write in meaningful, functional social settings that involve both social and cognitive abilities"

(p.4). The literacy developmental processes that are built in play give children the foundation that they need to start writing. Teachers want children to become as engaged in their writing as they are with their playing and allow them to use these experiences to create meaningful writing samples. This can influence a child's quantity of writing.

Does Play Influence the Quality of Writing?

Play also connects with a child's quality of writing, by building their fine motor skills. Play helps with the development of a child by stimulating the brain through the formation of connections between nerve cells. This process can help with the development of fine motor skills. Practicing fine motor skills through play supports actions that children are doing every day at school such as being able to hold a crayon or pencil. (Anderson-McNamee and Bailey, 2010). Consequently a child's fine motor skills are being practiced every day when a child is working on letter formation and handwriting. By learning these skills, children are able to express their emotions from play through writing. They can be creative and apply problem-solving skills by including pictures that demonstrate their feelings. As children build their fine motor skills to increase the quality of their writing, they also need to take the concepts they have learned in school and incorporate them into their writing. This will impact the child's thought process and will give more meaning to their writing. When children write about something they have just experienced in play, it can lead to more meaningful writing experiences (Anderson-McNamee and Bailey, 2010).

Mini-lessons also affect a child's writing. A mini-lesson briefly defines a specific concept that is modeled by the educator and is practiced by children. An educator would teach a mini-lesson by having a large group discussion on improving one aspect, such as

prewriting strategies, revision strategies, or editing. The skills that are taught can be developed from earlier mini-lessons or writing needs that the educator may have noticed when examining children's written products. (Calkins,1986; Pinnell & Fountas,1998; Rhodes & Dudley-Marling,1994; Wagner et al.,2001; as cited in Jasmine and Weiner, 2007).

Play can act as a mini-lesson, introducing a pre-writing strategy that includes brainstorming and acting out new ideas to write about. Play gives children new seeds and the ability to build fine motor skills. Mini-lessons can develop and strengthen skills that will help increase a child's quality of writing.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

Research shows that play influences an individual's writing development in many ways. Involving play in a child's writing can improve the quantity and quality of their writing. Play gives children substance for their writing and builds their background knowledge. Giving children the opportunity to play, and then to write, will give children enthusiasm, ideas, and meaning to express themselves through writing. Although, boys and girls may play and write differently, play impacts both genders and can have a positive impact on their literacy development. This depends on each child and what they may be doing during recess and what experiences they bring from home. Their words become meaningful because they have direct experiences to provide a foundation for their writing. The research clearly supports the power of play and why it is important in a child's life and literacy development.

Action Research

The Influences of Play and Gender on Transitional Writing Development

Participants and Setting

The action research took place in the school district of New Richmond, Wisconsin. New Richmond is a growing rural community of about 8,000, located in Western Wisconsin about 35 minutes from the Twin Cities. This action research project included six first graders out of a classroom of 21 boys and girls who were closely observed. These six children have a range of writing abilities. Two children are below average writers who are reluctant to write, struggle with ideas of what to write about, and with improving the quality of their writing. Two of the children are average writers who enjoy writing, but struggle with adding extra detail and knowing how to go back and edit their writings correctly. The last two children are above average; they love to write and are starting to understand how to edit their work and add details to their writing. Because the children haven't been exposed to as much writing instruction due to the beginning of the school year, children haven't been immersed in writing as much as they will by the end of the school year. The researcher uses mini-lessons for instruction. Using a mentor text as a model of good writing helps teach specific reading or writing strategies or skills. Using the mentor text to model a skill or writing strategy in front of children demonstrates how and what that skill or strategy looks like. Some of the lessons that have been covered are handwriting, punctuation (periods, exclamation marks, question marks), spacing, and capital letters. Lessons have also covered the steps of writing workshop (1. Think of a topic, 2. Sketch a drawing 3. Write about it 4. Add to your drawing, 5. Add to your writing, and 6. Start a new piece). During this time children talked a lot about

memories that they have made and how memories are seeds that we can write about. These are skills that the researcher will continually stress throughout the year. Four pieces of prewriting were collected from each child before starting research, without having children play before writing. These sample pieces of writing helped the researcher pick the six focus children to further examine their writing. Figure I presents pseudonyms of the children as well as their gender and writing abilities that were determined using the writing rubric (Appendix D).

Child (Pseudonym)	Gender	Writing Ability (Abilities when Study Started)
Lori	Female	Above Average
Huck	Male	Above Average
Ava	Female	Average
Carson	Male	Average
Kara	Female	Below Average
Cole	Male	Below Average

Figure I – Participant Information

Materials

Permission letter (Appendix A) was sent home to parents on September 11, 2013. The first piece of writing was collected from all twenty-one children on Tuesday, September 24, 2013 and the last piece of writing was collected on Thursday, October 17, 2013. Student Interview Survey (Appendix B) was used before and after research was collected. On-Task Evaluation form (Appendix C) was used by the researcher to tally the six focus children’s engagement every minute during the 10 minute writing block. Throughout the four weeks, writings were collected from all 21 children after recess. The researcher gathered writings from the six focus children to grade using a writing rubric (Appendix D). The rubric was used on all four pieces of prewriting (no play was

involved) and writings that were collected on Tuesdays and Thursdays (play was involved).

Procedures

Before the researcher started collecting data for four weeks, four prewriting samples were collected from all children in the first grade classroom. Children could write about anything they desired. Some children wrote about recess, hobbies, while others wrote about what they did during the week or what they enjoy doing with their friends and family. A rubric (Appendix D) was used to analyze all pre-writings.

Children were given a Student Interview Survey (Appendix B) before and after play was introduced in children's writing block. The survey asked children how they felt about writing, how do they feel when it becomes writing time, and what do they like to write about the most. The first two questions asked children to circle a smiley face, an okay face, or don't like to write face. Children were also able to leave a comment about the first two questions. For the last question on the interview, children could write or draw a picture of their answer.

The researcher then proceeded with collecting data for this study. For four weeks all children were given ten minutes to write after their recess period. During this time each child was given the same piece of writing paper from the researcher on which to write. After all the children completed their writing, the six focus children's writings from Tuesday and Thursday were analyzed using a writing rubric (Appendix B). The rubric covers the quality (use of details and strategies from mini-lessons), quantity (length of writing), neatness (handwriting), and spelling and punctuation in a child's writing.

While children were writing after play the researcher observed the children writing. She paid extra attention on the six focus children while they were writing. For ten minutes while children were working on their writing, every minute a child was on-task, pencil in hand and looking at paper, the child received one tally on the On-Task Evaluation Form (Appendix C).

Findings and Results

In addition to the quantitative data, collecting children's interviews, writing samples after play, and collecting on-task data to look at gender engagement, the researcher also collected qualitative data through observations. Throughout each piece of data that was collected there were observations from the researcher that gave substantial information. The observations are filtered throughout this section under each appropriate heading. The researcher has added after play writing samples in Appendix F.

Student Interviews

Before play was introduced in children's writing, all of the children took a Student Interview Survey (Appendix B) about how they felt about writing. The first question on the survey asked children how they felt about writing. The bar graph (Figure I) below shows data from the six focus children; three out of six children are happy to write, one out of six children are okay with writing, and two out of six don't like to write. The second question asks children how they feel when it comes to writing time, three out of six children enjoy writing time, one out of six children are okay with writing time, and two out of six children don't care for writing time. The last question on the survey asks children what they like to write about. Some of their responses were: the park, memories, Pokémon, rainbows, dirt bikes and snowmobiles, cats, and one child that said he doesn't

like to write about anything. After the research was collected children took another Student Interview Survey with the same questions. Lori and Huck, above average children in reading, math and have a good grasp on writing, increased in their writing interest and how they feel when it comes to writing time. Ava and Carson, average children, stayed the same in how they feel about writing and writing time. Kara and Cole, below average children, varied a bit in their scoring, Kara increased in both areas, while Cole decreased in how he feels about writing and stayed the same for how he feels about writing time. Children's responses for the last question about what they liked to write about were-- video games, feelings, puppies, monster trucks, cats, and again one child said nothing. Lori's responses on the attitude survey were remarkable because on her preliminary survey she drew what she liked most about writing. On her post survey, however, she wrote the same thing and had many correctly spelled words all over her survey expressing how much she likes to write. Lori has bloomed as a writer, a speller, and truly has enjoyed becoming a writer.

The researcher took notes while the children were taking the preliminary survey; she noticed that some children didn't seem excited about taking the survey, while others enjoyed the process. The survey was taken in the third week of school and at the end of the day, which may have affected the children's feelings about the survey. The children took post survey again at the end of the day, but the researcher heard kids say, "Man, I love writing, can we write again tomorrow because we didn't get much time today?" Seeing these results from the student surveys was rewarding in that the researcher didn't see as much growth in the children's writing abilities while collecting data but it was

apparent through observations and the student survey that the six focus children became much more positive in their attitudes about writing.

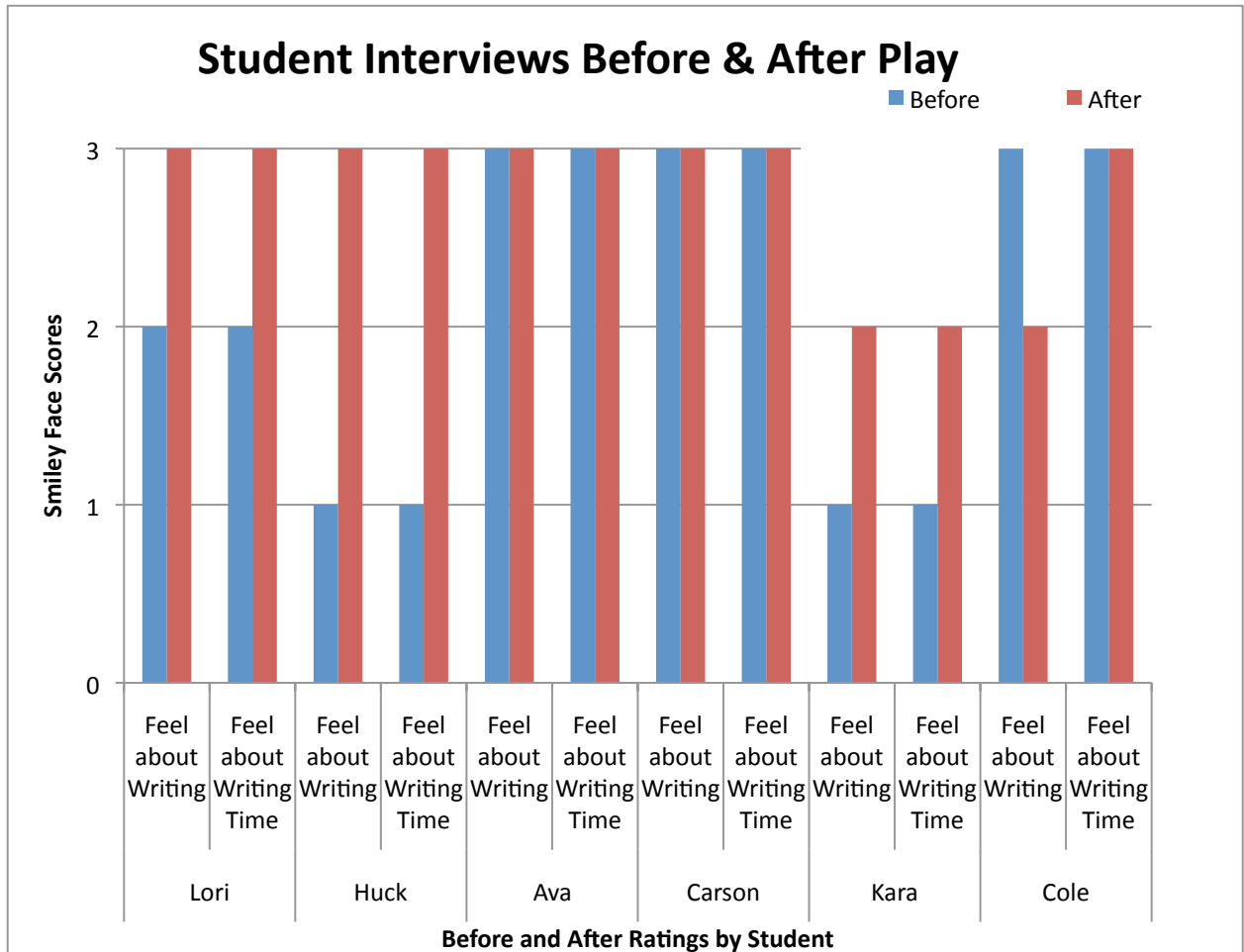


Figure J – Student Interview’s Before & After Play

Writing After Play Results

The following line graph (Figure J) depicts the results of the six focus children’s writing samples. The eight writing sessions took place after children went out to recess. Writing Rubric (Appendix D) focused on the quality, quantity, neatness, and spelling and punctuation of each piece of children’s writing. The researcher totaled writing scores from the rubric and divided by four to get the average for all eight days (Tuesdays and Thursdays) of writing. The rubric scores were gathered from all eight pieces of writing

from the six focus children using a rating scale from one to four. This rating scale can be seen on the vertical axis on the graph. The graph also shows the average ratings between all participants of the eight days writings were collected after play.

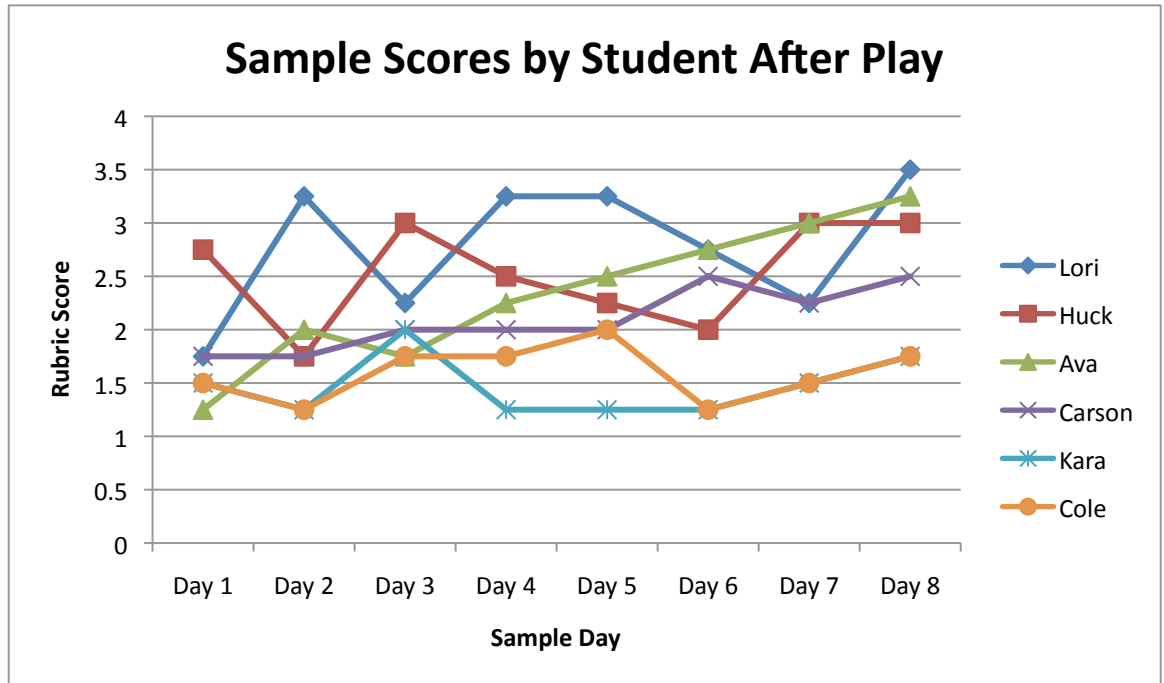


Figure K – Sample Scores by Student After Play

It is evident from the findings and results that play can influence the quality and quantity, neatness, and spelling and punctuation in children’s writing. The children were interested in being able to connect play and writing. Yet, when looking at individual children and the children’s average for the eight days (quality, quantity, neatness, and spelling and punctuation) children went up and down in their writing abilities once play was introduced. The researcher’s hypothesis was that play would have a positive effect on children’s writing in terms of quality, quantity, neatness, spelling and punctuation. The growth of the six focus children in these areas is not as large as the researcher predicted, but through the observations it was noted that each child either grew in their writing ability, enhanced their confidence in writing, or gained ideas of what to write

about. The researcher has noticed overall during writing time that children are excited to write and for writing time. During the four weeks that data were being collected, the researcher observed children outside enjoying multiple types of play. There were children playing team sports such as basketball, kickball, soccer, and football. There were also children playing jump rope, playing on the jungle gym, swinging, running around while playing zombies, tag, horses, house, Sky Landers, ninjas, a family going to the beach, explorers, monsters, and so much more. The researcher heard children explaining rules to games, figuring out who got the ball first, laughter, and children who were excited to start playing!

Through observation the researcher was amazed by the imagination being demonstrated through play. When it was time to come in from recess, the researcher heard a couple of girls on the second day of data collection talking to each other about how excited they were to start writing about what they did out at recess. Before children started to write, the researcher heard a lot of energy and excitement for writing and a lot of, “Can we start writing yet?”

At times when children came in from recess to start writing, some would not know what to write about. The researcher would mention to the writer that they could write about recess and from there the child went to town writing about what they played.

During the assigned writing time, the classroom was quiet other than the sounds of pencils writing on paper and children quietly talking through their play. At times the researcher would hear a child ask another child who they played with or a question about what they played outside.

All of these bits and pieces played into the research results. Overall, the research

didn't show as much growth in children's ability to write as originally hoped, but observations, children's conversations, and anecdotal evidence revealed that children gained creative writing ideas, enjoyed sharing writing seeds with peers, and increased their love for writing.

The following bar graph (Figure L) compares the averages of the six focus children's prewriting samples to the writing samples with play. In this graph, you will notice that Huck and Ava are the only two children that slightly increased in their writing with play being involved. It is very evident that all the other children decreased in their writing once play was introduced in their writing. This data reveal that the six focus children's writing abilities didn't grow as much as the researcher predicted. However, through observations and Student Surveys (Appendix B) it is apparent that each child's attitudes stayed the same or improved relative to their writing. The researcher feels that this positive outlook on writing has enriched children thoroughly as transitional writers.

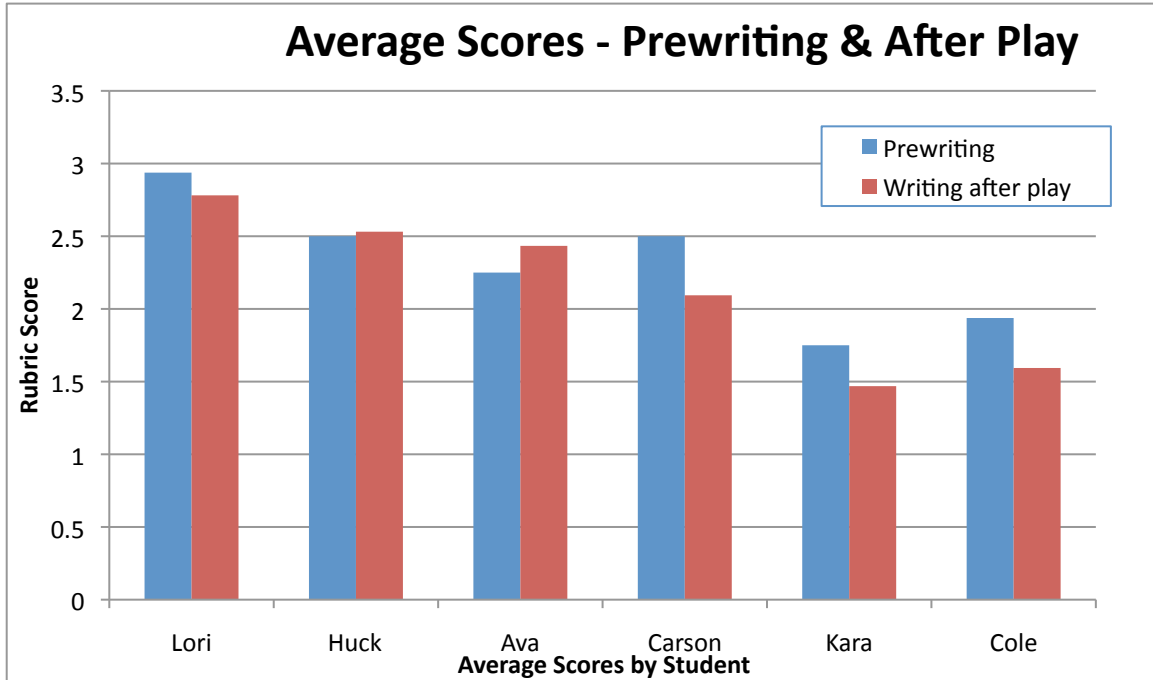


Figure L – Average Scores-Prewriting & After Play Student Time on Task Results

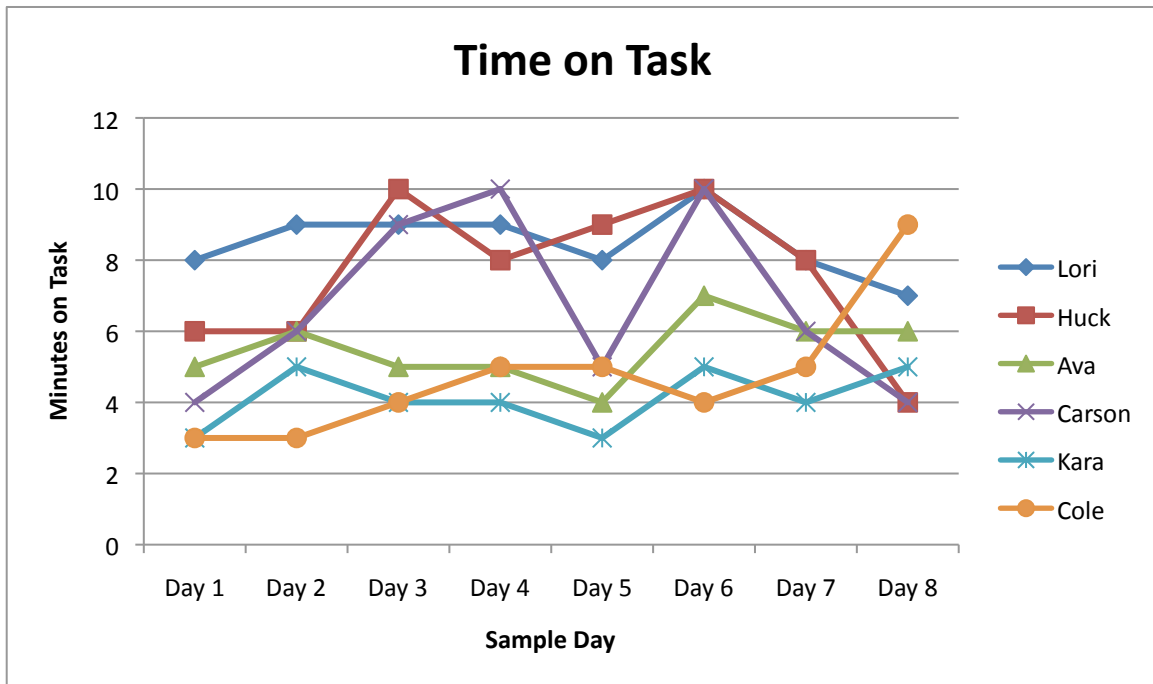


Figure M – Time on Task

The above line graph (Figure M) focuses on gender engagement while children were writing after playing outside at recess. The researcher tallied every minute that the

six focus children were on task. The graph shows that play didn't significantly affect either gender. Cole and Ava, who are below average writers, showed the most increase in engagement while playing before writing.

The researcher noticed while children were writing, the boys seemed to write more about what they did out at recess compared to the girls. In their writing they gave more details about what they played, whom they played with, and what happened while they were playing. The girls seemed to write about their friends, fictional stories mainly about animals, and other memories that they have experienced in their lives.

Implications and Conclusions

Applications

This study points out that all kinds of writers can benefit from play and that it can bring excitement to a child while working on writing. I was able to verify this by observing students before and during writing. This study also helps teachers who may have reluctant writers see that adding play before writing time can be a powerful tool for a child who especially struggles with thinking about a writing topic. This study also examines if play affects one gender more than another in their writing. My hypothesis was that play would have a larger effect on males than females. After doing the research it was noted that it affected the boys and girls about the same. This shows that children need "brain breaks" throughout their day. Teachers should make sure to include brain breaks throughout their students' day and in-between students' learning. The reader is also able to see if play gives that extra spice to a child's piece of writing. Children are able to experience a memory and use their imagination during play, which may help a child begin their writing piece. Play shows children that they can write about anything

and gives them ideas for their writing, and through this experience they may gain confidence as a transitional writer.

Limitations

After reviewing the research and data, there were many limitations during the four-week study. Because the study was conducted in the beginning of the school year the ability of children to understand a certain skill or strategy and use it in their writing may have been weaker and less significant than it would have been later in first grade. I moved around the children's afternoon schedule when collecting data, therefore, children would write right after they came in from recess. Some children struggled with adapting to this change; they were uncomfortable not knowing what their afternoon schedule would look like. Also, many children struggled when I explained to them that they were going to write when they came in from recess, because many of the children were just learning how to put their thoughts on paper. Further research might indicate the need to change the schedule permanently from the beginning of the school year, so children would always be writing after recess. Collecting data throughout the whole school year would give me an opportunity to see if play can increase children's quality, quantity, neatness, punctuation and spelling in their writing. Children were only allowed to write for ten minutes after they came in from recess. Giving children a larger amount of time to write could alter the quality, quantity, neatness, and punctuation and spelling of their writing.

I have introduced an assortment of mini-lessons to the children from the beginning of the school year that will continue to be practiced within a child's writing throughout the school year. By adjusting the classroom schedule and having play before

writing children will benefit from a brain break, and the play could also be fuel for a child's writing.

Reflection of Study

Before digging into data collection, it was thought that play would increase children's writing ability, their quality, quantity, neatness, and spelling and punctuation. Research revealed it could be much more than that; it could also influence the confidence of a writer. It does so by giving the writer the power to see that they can write about anything. It was also clear that play may possibly not influence a child's writing at all.

Continued writing support through mini-lessons, modeling, and one-on-one support becomes key in furthering a child in their writing and gives a child the building blocks to understand the important pieces to their writing process. The experience that play gives children could be the flint that starts the spark of a really good idea and starts the fire of a writer.

Future Questions

While working on this study, many questions arose that could possibly change or alter my study. The following are some of the questions that came about while collecting data:

- Does it matter what children write about after they have played?
- If the study lasted all year and children had no time limits, would the data change and would the children's writing abilities increase?
- Could it impact children's writing if the researcher told children what to play and then children wrote about it afterwards?
- Could or would there be a correlation of what children played to what children

wrote about?

Furthering this research and exploring these questions could help to improve the quality, quantity, neatness, and punctuation and spelling that characterize a child's writing. These factors could also play a role in guiding writing instruction. Teachers can assist children with making the connection between play and writing that can have a significant effect on their writing.

Appendix A

September 11, 2013

Dear Families,

I am currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Literacy through the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. This fall I will be working on my Plan B paper. My focus is how play can influence writing. I will be observing the students in my classroom by monitoring the choices they make while playing. I will then be looking at how play can influence the quality and quantity of your son/daughters' writing. My goal is to enhance the love and quality of writing in my classroom.

I am hoping you would allow your child to take part in this research project and grant permission to use samples of your child's work if needed. I will be using observation notes and writing samples to support my findings. I will protect students' privacy by using a pseudonym. All identifying information will be kept confidential. This information will be shared in educational settings including a University mini-conference for teachers and as part of my Plan B Paper. If you agree, please, sign the bottom of this sheet and return to me as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and help. Please call me at 715-234-1426 or email me at lynseyg@newrichmond.k12.wi.us if you have any questions.

Thank you for your support in your son or daughter's writing success!

Sincerely,
Lynsey Gausman
1st Grade Teacher

My child, _____,
has permission to participate in Lynsey Gausman's literacy research action project,
through the University of Wisconsin River Falls in Winter/Spring 2013.

Parent's Name (please print) _____

Parent's Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B Student Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How do you feel about writing?



Comment:

2. How do you feel when it comes to writing time?



Comment:

3. What do you like to write about?

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How do you feel about writing?



Comment:

2. How do you feel when it comes to writing time?



Comment:

3. What do you like to write about?

Appendix C

On-Task Evaluation

Date: _____

Student 1: _____

--

Student 2: _____

--

Student 3: _____

--

Student 4: _____

--

Student 5: _____

--

Student 6: _____

--

**Appendix D
Writer's Rubric**

	4 Outstanding!	3 Good Work!	2 Could Do Better	1 Need to Improve
Quality	Entry was detailed throughout writing and used multiple strategies taught in mini-lessons.	Entry had 2 to 3 details and used various strategies taught in mini-lessons.	Entry had 1 or 2 details and used some strategies taught in mini-lessons.	Entry lacked details and showed little evidence of strategies taught during mini-lessons.
Quantity	You wrote at least a page.	You wrote less than a page but more than a half-page.	You wrote less than a half-page.	You wrote a couple sentences.
Neatness	You used your best handwriting.	Most of your writing was written in your best handwriting.	Some of your entry was written in your best handwriting.	You did not use your best handwriting in your writing.
Spelling & Punctuation	You paid attention to spelling and punctuation throughout your whole writing. Someone else can easily read your entries.	You tried to use the correct spelling and punctuation. Someone else can usually read your entries.	Your writing had some correct spelled words and punctuation. It's often difficult for someone else to read your entries.	You did not pay attention to your spelling and punctuation. It's very difficult for someone else to read your entries.

Appendix E

Examples of the Five Developmental Stages of Writing (Weatherspoon, 2008)

Stage 1: Awareness, Exploration or Role Play Writing

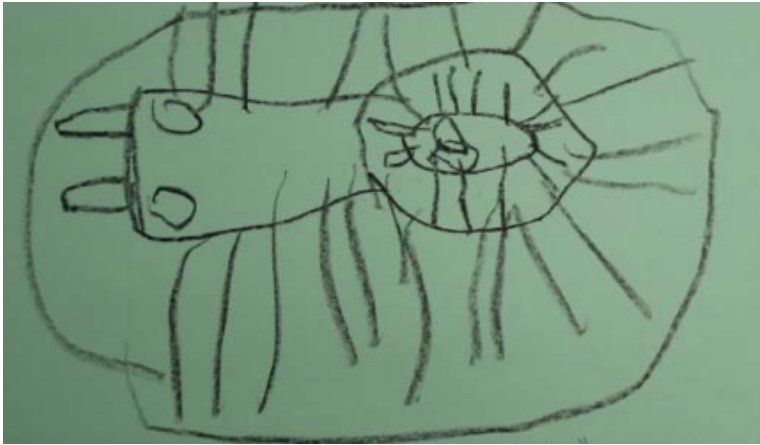


Figure A: Sample of Drawing

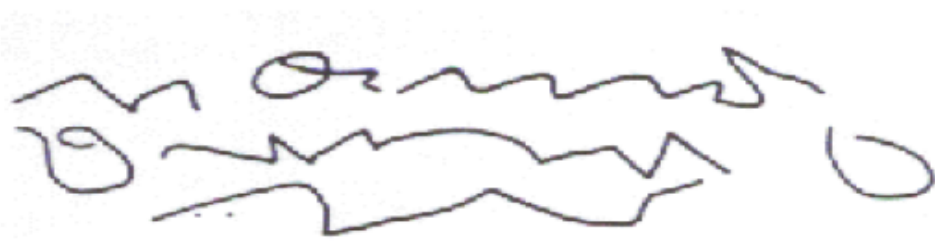


Figure B: Sample of Scribbling

Stage 2: Emergent / Experimental Writing



Figure C: Sample of Emergent writing



C H P F D P E 3 d P 4
AC rm c O 2 + d /

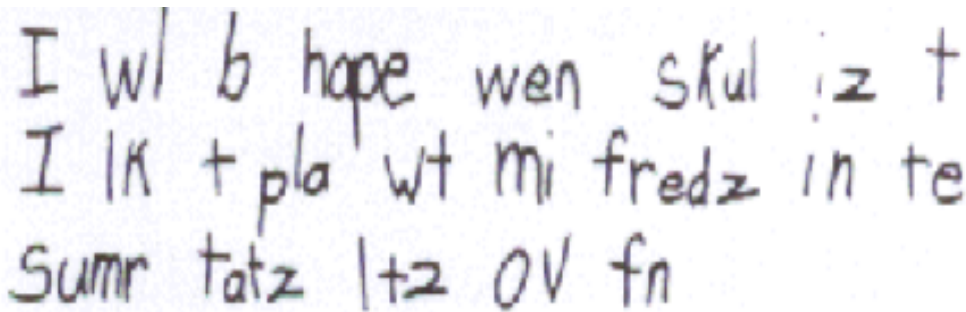
Figure D: Emergent/Experimental

Stage 3: Transitional or Early Writing



A house is on fire

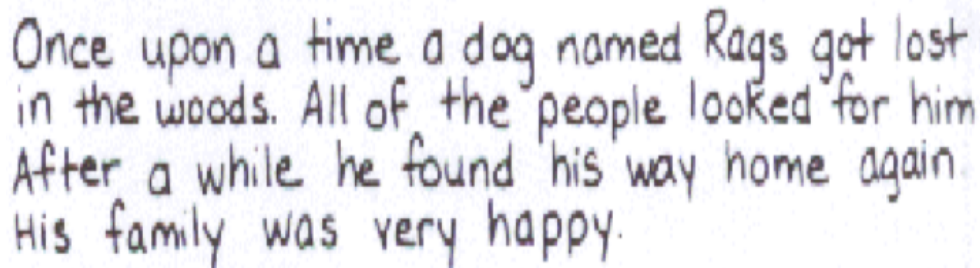
Figure E: Sample of Early Transitional Writer



I w/ b hope wen skul iz t
I lk t pla wt mi fredz in te
Sumr tatz l+2 OV fn

Figure F: Sample of Transitional Writer

Stage 4: Conventional Writing and Proficient Writing



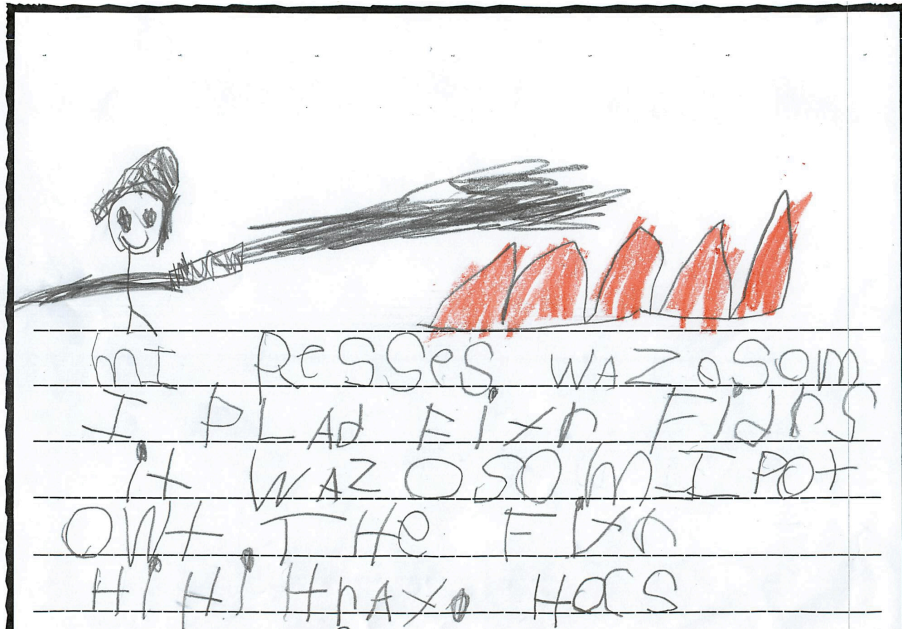
Once upon a time a dog named Rags got lost in the woods. All of the people looked for him. After a while he found his way home again. His family was very happy.

Figure G: Sample of Conventional Writing

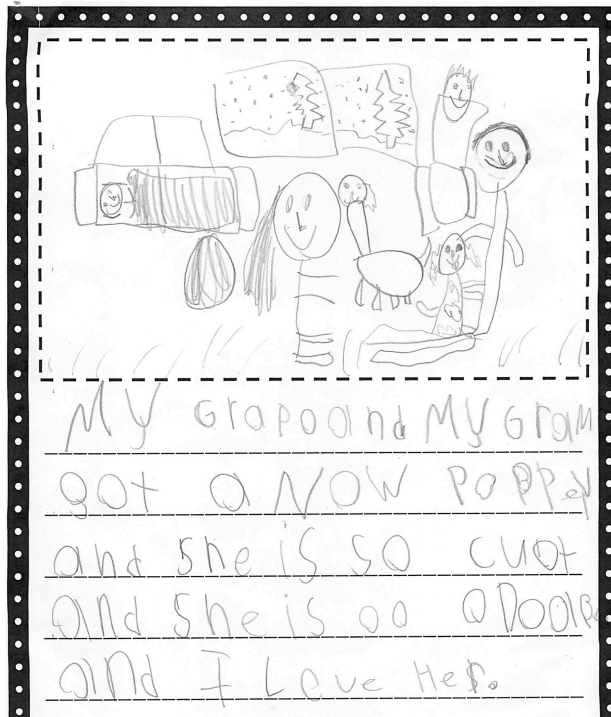
Appendix F

After Play Writing Samples

Male Writing Sample



Female Writing Sample



References

- Baghban, M. (2007). Scribbles, labels, and stories: The role of drawing in the development of writing. *Young Children*, 62(1), 20-26.
- Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- "Children's Advocate - Published by Action Alliance for Children since 1973 ."
Children's Advocate - Published by Action Alliance for Children since 1973 .
N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2013. <<http://www.4children.org/play.htm>>.
- Elkind, D., Clemens, S. G., Lewis, R., Brown, S., Almon, J., Miller, E., ... Wardle, F. (2009). The Wisdom of Play. *Community Playthings*. Retrieved from <http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/literature/booklets-and-cds/wisdom-of-play>
- Isenberg, J. P., & Jalongo, M. R. (2006-2012). Why is play important? Cognitive Development, language development, literacy development. *Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.com/reference/article/importance-play-cognitive-language/Anderson->
- Jasmine, J., & Weiner, W. (2007). The effects of writing workshop on abilities of first grade students to become confident and independent writers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(2), 131-139.
- Klein, A. (2010). *Write Habits*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, INC.
- McNamee, J. K., & Bailey, S. J. (2010). The importance of play in early childhood education. *MontGuide*, 1-4.
- Powell, R., & Davidson, N. (2005). The donut house: Real world literacy in an urban kindergarten classroom. *Language Arts*, 82(4), 248.
- Singer, D. G., Golinkoff, R. M., & Pasek, K. (2006). *Play=learning: how play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spear, M. G. (1989). Differences between the written work of boys and girls. *British Educational Research Journal*, 15(3), 271-277.
- Wagner, L., Nott, J. G., & Agnew, A. T. (2001). The nuts and bolts of teaching first-grade writing through a journal workshop. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(2), 120-125

References

- Watkinson, J. (2010). *Let's play!: promoting active playgrounds*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Weatherspoon, L (2008). What does it look like, and how can it be supported in the preschool years? *Developmental Writing*, 1-31.
- West, S., & Cox, A. (2004). *Literacy play: over 300 dramatic play activities that teach pre-reading skills*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc.
- Zigler, E., Singer, D., & Bishop-Josef, S. (2006). *Children's Play The Roots of Reading*. Washington, DC: Zero To Three.