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Missed Opportunities for Writing in the Kindergarten Classroom

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Missed Opportunities for Writing in the Kindergarten Classroom

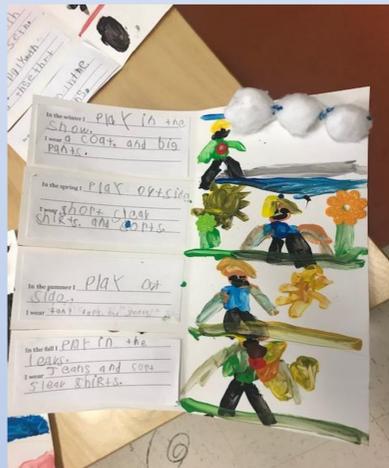
Shalise Meadows, ENGL 483 Honors Enhancement



Writing Instruction and the Issues Facing It

Before embarking on the journey of looking further into what writing is like in the kindergarten classroom, I believed I would see a lot of writing. While I see the students write each day that I am in the classroom, I realized that I have never witnessed writing instruction. Teachers cannot expect that their students can fend for themselves when it comes to writing; instruction should not be done primarily at the beginning of the year because it should be continuous. Some reasons for lack of writing instruction include:

- The immense amount of time that comes with writing instruction, assessment, and grading
- Instruction needed for other content areas like reading and math is deemed more important
- Effort needed for differentiation (Harward, Stan et al. 214)



Student Work Samples

Pictured above are recent work samples that showcase the writing of two students in my practicum placement (both of these students are higher-performing in relation to some of their peers). I designed this activity as a performance-based assessment for another class and figured it could be used for this purpose as well. Students had prior instruction weeks before about weather and the seasons. To administer this assignment, I began by performing a book walk with a book all about seasons (*Caps, Hats, Socks, and Mittens: A Book About the Four Seasons* by Louise Borden) to get them thinking about the seasons again. They were then asked to write sentences about what they do in each season and what they wear. I was advised to prompt them. They then illustrated the sentences they provided. I wanted them to do this with as little help from me as possible—I wanted them to spell how they thought and write what they were thinking. There were five students in total. Having prompts and creating a picture that goes with their writing prompt is normal for them. I wanted them to have fun with their writing. To expose them to a new genre, I would have asked them to write a letter to their favorite season or write a story about their favorite season. Writing activities like that take more time, but the time needed is worth it because students get to really use and grow their writing skills.

Opportunities for More Effective Writing Instruction

In comparing what I have seen in the classroom to the Standards of Learning set by Virginia for kindergarten, I can confirm that my Cooperating Teacher has implemented almost every standard. I can see this through the work that students do. The only standard that I have not observed is using technology to write. There are always means to improve instruction; nothing is perfect in education. I believe that kindergarten students' writing abilities would increase if certain modes of instruction were implemented.

What Can Be Done?

- Creating a Community
 - Students should be comfortable with writing and be able to build confidence in writing throughout their education.
 - Students should be taught guidelines for writing communities.
 - Small groups of students (and maybe even the teacher) share and discuss each other's writing.
 - Students, in turn, are more comfortable with each other and will feel more comfortable sharing their writing, ideas, and experiences with others. (Hall 28)
 - Writing abilities, as well as verbal communication skills, are strengthened.
 - Students should participate in communities several times throughout the school year. (Jones 42)
- Providing an Audience
 - Students are highly accustomed to writing to their teachers. Providing exposure to other audiences helps students develop a deeper understanding of word choice and voice.
 - Family members provide a wide range of opportunities
 - Students can write to immediate family members.
 - Students can write to relatives who do not live close. They can then send their writing to them. This is exciting!
 - Family members can come into the classroom to experience their students' writing.
 - Other students are a great audience for students.
 - Other students are a part of their community. They are also friends instead of authority figures.
 - This goes hand-in-hand with the idea of community. When writing to other students, it is easier for the student audiences to give feedback and ideas. This leads to participating in the writing process. (Hall 28)
- Teaching the Steps of the Writing Process
 - Steps—Pre-writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, Publishing
 - Some may view the writing process as a concept that kindergarten students would not be able to comprehend. Teachers have stated that their students have been able to apply the writing process to the sentences and stories they have written. (Traga, Munsell, and Robinson 2)
- Conferencing with the Teacher
 - Talking one-on-one with students about their writing is beneficial for both struggling and high-performing students.
 - Teachers can provide feedback that will enhance their writing skills.
 - Teachers can gain a deeper insight into how their students write and how their students view writing.
 - Teachers collect data on their students work; this data can then be used to guide further instruction. (Hale, Elizabeth 651)

Sources

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