**Planning To Be A Good Writer**

**Teaching Project for TE 848**

**Laura Stokes Spring 2011**

**Introduction to my classroom, teaching situation, and experience before implementing my project:**

Writing is an art and learning how to be a good writer is essential when you are expected to teach writing. Since a young age, I have always enjoyed the ability to write about anything. Creating my own stories was something that I found relaxing and fun. I would write and illustrate my own mini books on a daily basis. Previously I taught first grade for 3 years, and then moved to a new state, but continued to teach first grade. As this school year began in my class of 21 first grade students, I saw a few who possibly shared in this same passion, but lacked the knowledge of how to get their ideas out on paper. Hence I embarked on my journey of teaching the writing framework to my students. I began as I have in the past with talking about getting ideas out on paper, but I stressed that you must always start with a capital letter. Once this task was accomplished, we moved on to making sure that we added a period at the end of the sentence. Finally I made sure they understood that a sentence must make sense, and they quickly learned how to read back their writing to make sure they hadn’t left out a word or written something down that didn’t quite make sense. I figured that would be sufficient, and slowly I would be able to teach them how to add adjectives, voice, and give their writing a style they could call their own. It wasn’t until about a month into teaching at this new school, that I realized the large emphasis that was placed on writing. Now it wasn’t just writing complete sentences, or allowing for freedom the way that I was used to teaching. Instead, I was given a rubric that my students were expected to pass by the end of their first grade year. (I am attaching the rubric as artifact 1). Then I was introduced to the wonderful world of assessment sets that were geared towards an “ideal” paper. Little did I know there would be little wiggle room because the expectation was written in the rubric.

Our writing scores were examined by our principals and we were told how to change our instruction to get our students to better “fit” the rubric and score higher. We were also encouraged to teach our students the rubric and allow them to know what the expectation was. I thought this would be extremely difficult with first graders, but I decided to try and tackle it. I read the rubric and together with my students we broke it down and created a first grade kid friendly version that we made on butcher paper and kept up in our room. (Artifact 2) Shortly after my first assessment set, the rubric discussion, and feeling the pressure from my superiors to create a first grade class that was going to “pass” the writing assessment at the end of the year, I began to notice the light in my students’ eyes diminishing. Those that I felt shared my same passion for writing, didn’t seem to display it as much as they had in the beginning of the year. When I stepped back, I realized that their voices were being squashed and replaced with rubrics. I was torn on what to do. Since writing is an area that I have always felt was a weakness, a part of me felt like this assessment was designed by people much more writing intelligent than I, and that I should just trust what I was being told. However, the other part of me, the part that taught first graders in the past that left my classroom with the ability to write, told me this is not how children should be writing. This lead me to my decision on what I was going to do my teaching project on. I decided that it was going to be essential to get my students excited about writing again, and also to show them ways that would help them break away from the rubric driven writing assessments that I was guilty of training them for. I wanted the light back in their eyes, and the excitement to hold a pencil and tell a story. “Writing can be a difficult and demanding process that challenges writers’ motivation to write and continue writing. It is not hard to imagine how negative attitudes and beliefs or limited writing knowledge and self-regulation skills might hinder students” (Zumbrunn, 2010).

**Participants:**

The classroom is a first grade classroom that is made up of 21 first grade students. It is a low-income area and about 60% of the class has some relation to the military. The three students that I am going to be focusing on areTy, Michaelangelo, and Amanda. Ty is a repeatfirst grade student. He struggled with reading and writing in the beginning of the year. His confidence level was low, and he didn’t want to try. Michaelangelo is an ELL student with a Spanish speaking background. He was very low in reading and his writing skills were not developed. He enjoyed learning and has made great progress, however he is still right below grade level. Amanda is Korean and I know that her mother speaks Korean at home, however Amanda is not considered an ELL student. I do notice some second language issues present in her speech and her writing. She is very talented and always tries her best to apply new concepts and strategies she is learning.

**The project:**

Originally, I tried to have my students do free writing. This was something that I enjoyed when I was a child, and one of the ways that I would start to write my stories. Free writing is one of the things that is frowned upon at my school. Writing without a purpose and without the tools to make sure that it fits the wonderful rubric is not supposed to be taking place within the classroom. Well, I was heartbroken to see the faces of my students and hear their groans when they knew it was writing time every day. I also must admit that I was getting a little bored of reading papers that all sounded quite similar to each of my other students’ papers. Overall, I wanted to get the passion back with my students. I thought that free writing would be a great way for them to open up and tell me whatever it is that they wanted.

**The first attempt at free writing:**

I first tried to get my students to free write by telling me anything they wanted. This was a disaster. Immediately their hands went up and they asked me what exactly I meant when I said anything. It occurred to me that they needed some type of a framework since this is how I had trained them all year. So I asked them to tell me about their weekend. Again their hands went up and they asked me if they needed a topic sentence, transitions, and a closing sentence. How many adjectives? All of their questions were related to the rubric. I removed the rubric that we had placed up at the front of the room, and told them to not worry about that but instead to just tell me anything that they wanted about their weekend. The papers that I got were eerily similar to the way that they had been writing all year. Almost all of them had topic sentences, the same 4 transitions, and closing sentences. Basically, had I not been in the room to see that it was free writing that was taking place, I would have guessed that there was a prompt, or a lesson given on how to answer the question. I explained to my students what it meant to free write, thinking that perhaps I had dropped the ball by not really explaining this previously, but instead expecting that they knew what it was. I had to teach them how to free write and not write to a specific question or rubric.

**The second attempt:**

After the disastrous first attempt, I decided to give free writing a second chance the next day once they had time to process what it meant. I even demonstrated it for them. I had a few people ask similar questions from the day before, but there weren’t as many blank stares as I had previously encountered. The second time around I was eager to see what my students had written. With the lack of passion I know they had for writing, I can’t say I was surprised to see that most of them had chosen the option of “no rubric = I only have to write 1 sentence”. Again, my attempts at teaching free writing and attempting to eliminate the mess I had unfortunately created had been a fail. I decided to do another example and have another discussion to talk about what it means to free write and that it doesn’t mean just write one sentence because you can. I explained that it was a chance to express what you wanted to say and how you wanted to say it. I also tried to use a term they were somewhat familiar with, which was voice. They associated voice with adjectives, because that is how it is referred to on the rubric.

**The third attempt:**

After two failed attempts at free writing, and two separate discussions on how to do it as well as two examples of me free writing, I gave my students a third chance to give me some hope that I hadn’t completely damaged them as developing writers. Unfortunately, the talk about voice and how free writing gave them a voice of their own brought my students’ minds back to the rubric. I hadn’t even meant to do that. I was trying to give them an example of how to make their writing more exciting this way. When I collected their third free writing, it was more like the writing geared towards the rubric and less like independent writing. Their second free writing with one sentence had been more interesting than the multiple sentences and paragraphs that they wrote.

**Changing the project:**

After three failed attempts at free writing, I began doing some more research on ways to help my students organize their writing. I thought that if they could get some confidence and find ways to organize their ideas that perhaps they would have better luck at producing papers that had more voice and sounded less robotic. It was then that I looked into ways of planning. Tracy stated, “ one promising approach to enhancing writing skills of students is to directly teach them strategies for carrying out basic writing processes such as planning, drafting, and revising” (Tracy et. al., 2009).

**Plan 1, the POW and drawing approach:**

I decided to start with the POW approach first. This came from the article by Lienemann, Graham, Leader-Janssen, Reid from Summer 2006. In this approach, I taught my students how to **P**ick their ideas, **O**rganize them, and **W**rite. I decided to pair this with drawing a picture. The Van Meter, Garner article from 2005 stated that “drawing is considered a strategic process because it matches several dimensions along which strategies are defined: learner-generated drawing is goal-directed, serves to organize knowledge, and, when matched to the task, improves learning.” Although I found contradicting information in the Anderson S. article from April 2010, which showed no correlation between an increase in student writing and drawing beforehand, I decided to try it myself. That article was not focusing on the voice within the article, and increasing the voice for my students through planning was my main project focus. I thought that drawing would be a way to show how they picked their ideas. Drawing also incorporated different senses, and “the idea that learning experienced through all senses is helpful in reinforcing memory” (Dowburd-Young, 2007). I am giving the lesson that I used as artifact 3. In this lesson, we discussed how good writers plan out their ideas and organize them. I explained that doing this would help them think through their paper without actually having to write it all out. I also explained, that it gives them a chance to change something before they have it written out in a final draft. In the Tracy, Graham, Reid article from May/ June 2009, it talked about the SRSD strategy and focused on planning, drafting, editing and combining one or more of those topics. It said, “students were taught a general strategy that emphasized planning that reminded them to carry out the three basic processes: select a topic, organize ideas into a writing plan, use and upgrade a plan when writing.” I took their concept and allowed my students to “upgrade and change their writing” by changing their plan, which was their picture. My students dislike having to write and rewrite things, so they loved this idea. I went even farther to explain that drawing a picture could also be used to help them organize their ideas. In their picture they could put things that they wanted to say in their paper. By drawing a picture it would help remind them of each thing they wanted to say so they didn’t forget it before they had a chance to write it down. I could see the wheels beginning to turn and my children actually processing the idea of drawing out their plan. I passed out paper, put on some relaxing music and watched them go. Many of my students spent a good amount of time drawing their pictures. Some of them had quite a few details, a few of those ideas were off topic, but I waited to see what they would produce in their writing. I watched as they really thought about their answers, and added those thoughts into their pictures. The lesson ended up carrying over to two days because many of my students had taken their drawing to heart and really spent time thinking about their drawings. In the Cibic S. article from 2007, it says, “access to art and language as ways of knowing encouraged children to develop a sense of agency and develop a sense of voice.” I didn’t want them to feel rushed and wanted to make sure to give them the opportunity to plan their writing, carry it out completely, and find their own unique voice.

**Outcome of plan 1:**

As my students were writing, I was meeting with them for mini writing conferences, and helping them formulate their ideas to get them down on paper. I was also giving them tips and ways to use their picture as the plan to guide their writing. The conferences went great, and my students were writing and enjoying it! They were excited to come up and share their progress with me. The work that they were producing was exactly what I was hoping. It was on the right track to getting their voice to show in their writing. When I walked around and read their work, the sentences were not robotic and they seemed to have a little more of each of my individual students voice in them. It was a breath of fresh air to hear their reasons behind their writing and for them to put down on paper the ideas that they were so passionate about. Since we had been reading books and learning about whales, I was also able to see what they were taking in. It was pleasantly surprising. There were still a few things that I noticed that were the result of the drill and kill writing lessons I had been teaching in the past. Some of the transitions were similar, but not exactly the same as before. They had been working on the type of topic and closing sentences, so some of those were similar, but again not exactly the same like their writing before we began the planning process. I was beginning to see a positive change in their writing and the robotic form was starting to fade. I was looking forward to the next planning process to see how much further they would be able to stretch their minds, and let their voices shine through their writing. When I looked closely at the three students I mentioned I would focus on, it was interesting what the outcome was for them. Michaelangelo, who is one of my lower students, drew a wonderful picture. From it, I sat down and had a writing conference with him. He explained what he had drawn, and what that meant he was going to write about. His ideas, and what he had to say brought a smile to my face. It sounded like he was on his way to a great paper. When he completed his paper, I helped him check it for spelling, capitals and punctuation. After that, he was done. He had produced a piece of writing that he could be proud of, and one that definitely gave him a voice. The writing that he displayed was one of the best I have seen from him this year. Ty did a great job as well. His paper, on the other hand, had many things that still sounded somewhat robotic. His transitions were similar to the ones we had been using. The one area that I did notice had a little voice was his closing sentence. He stated, “Lastly, that is all that I want to tell you about…” Knowing him, and his personality, I could hear those words coming out of his mouth as if we were having a conversation. That was an improvement for him. Amanda usually does well with her writing because she had figured out the expectation and was only writing to that. In Fletcher’s book, he mentions that, “students learn to find out what a teacher expects and write to those expectations—and the accompanying grades—instead of trying to internalize their own high standards for writing”(22). This described Amanda perfectly. Even when given the opportunity to draw a picture and write from it however she wanted, she stuck to the framework that she knew had always gotten her the “grade” in the past. In her case, she wrote a nice paragraph, but it lacked the voice that I was trying to find in them.

**Plan 2, the WWW What=2, How=2:**

After my students finished their POW and drawing plan, and had been able to produce writing from it, I wanted to introduce another plan form to see if that would benefit some of my students that the POW and drawing form had not reached the way I hoped for. Again, we had been reading fiction stories about whales all week, as well as a few non-fiction stories about them too. The Lienemann article from summer 2006 talked about a curricular approach to writing that tied together reading and writing instruction. I tried to do this with the theme of whales crossing the curricula, and my students were very excited and into the idea of writing their own whale stories. Since I was going to have them write their own story, I decided to use the WWW What=2, How=2 plan approach. I changed it slightly, because it seemed like a lot of components for my first graders to try to take from a plan and make into a story. We had been doing the setting of stories from reading, and especially while we were reading the whale stories so my students were familiar with the 5W’s and H of reading; who, what, when, where, why and how. I explained that when they write their own story, a good writer makes sure to cover those things. Then we talked about how to go about doing that. We reviewed the planning process we had done a few days previous, and then I introduced the WWW What= How=2 process. I did it a little bit differently than it was explained in the Lienemann article. You can see the mini lesson plan as artifact 4 and the graphic organizer idea as artifact 5. My students completed theirs on construction paper that was divided into 6 boxes, and labeled according to the graphic organizer in artifact 5. Of course I modeled the way that they would use such an organizer to help them plan their story. I added a title and told them they didn’t have to fill that in until later if they wanted. Sometimes you don’t know the title of your story until the very end. I also said, they could write a title, or any portion of their story, and as we discussed before, they could always change what they wanted to happen. They were the authors and it was their story. They loved the idea of being an author.

**Outcome of plan 2:**

When I was holding my mini writing conferences with my students as they were completing their plans, or already into their writing, I noticed a few things. Some of my lower students struggled with this type of planning. Ty had a difficult time understanding what it was that I was expecting. I revisited my example with him, and then asked him to relay the directions and expectations back to me. This worked well for him and he then went on to complete his plan. When I had my conference with him, he was eager to tell me what his story was going to be about. I was shocked at what an amazing outline and plan he had and the ideas that he had flowing for the rest of his story. He thrived with the concept of this plan and the ideas that would come from it. At first, one of my other students Amanda struggled with turning her plan into a story. She brought her “complete” paper up to me, only she had taken the things on her outline, made a complete sentence out of it and called it a day. She didn’t add any extra details, nor did she have much of a story. I read her story out loud to her, and asked if it sounded like the type of story that I would read to the class. She told me no and I asked her why not. She decided it needed more details, and it was then that she realized what she would need to do. I gave her a new paper, and she eagerly got back to work. When she was done, I was ecstatic with her final product. She didn’t play it safe and stick to the expectation she had grown accustomed to. She actually gave herself a chance to branch out. In this paper, I truly heard her voice and she came up with a great storyline. There were a few bumps in the road for her, but in the end her final product had achieved the increase in voice that I was hoping for. Michaelangelo was one of the students that had an extremely difficult time with this type of planning. He was not able to fill the plan in. Perhaps I did a poor job of explaining it to him and maybe he didn’t know what the questions were asking. I tried to work with him on his own to get it filled in, but when I left his side, he was unable to keep working. When it came to take the plan and turn it into a story, he completely misunderstood the task. I had a conference with him before he began writing. We talked about his plan and he sounded like he had a good idea of what he was going to write his story about. When I came back to check on him after he had begun, he had a great start to his story. He even used the typical story starter, “once upon a time”. I was impressed with his ability to come up with a partial story from a plan that was 1/6 complete. The only thing he took from his plan was, “there was a whale that was friendly but everyone thought he was a mean whale.” Even though he only got one sentence completed, there is a little voice in it. The point of my project is to get my students to use voice, and although he didn’t get his entire paper done, nor did he utilize the plan, I have noticed an improvement in the voice within his papers.

**Plan 3: Bubble chart and peer discussion:**

Originally I had planned on doing the bubble and peer discussion plan approaches as 2 different ones, but the more that I thought about it and how my students’ minds work, I wondered how successful they would be if I combined the two. This way they are not only getting a chance to organize their writing in a different way, but also, they are able to discuss the reasoning behind it. I decided to have them do a peer discussion first, make a plan, write, and then have a peer editing session after. I also hadn’t thought through the idea of how simply discussing would benefit them without being able to produce a plan to help them organize the thoughts that they had talked about. I knew I couldn’t avoid the inevitable of those students who would simply talk and get nothing out of it. By having them produce a written piece of work, it held them responsible to have thoughtful conversation about the writing topic. It also helped to guide them about what to talk about, which helped them to get the most out of their conversations. Corden stated that, “our data confirms findings from research in the United States and the UK that illustrate how children also develop their metalanguage through small group discussion” (Corden, 2007). It was interesting to see the dialogue that took place between the subjects in that study. Then, to see it take place in my own classroom was wonderful! My students loved the idea of helping each other to create writing that was fantastic. It gave them ownership and made them feel important. This writing plan activity took place in the second week of our rain forest unit. My students enjoy having themed units, and I try to incorporate them whenever possible. For this activity, we had been reading *the Great Kapok Tree* for three days. There was mention of many rainforest animals, facts about them, as well as pictures to show what they looked like. I decided to have my students decide which animal was their favorite, and they were going to write about that animal and tell me why it was their favorite. I began by giving them the bubble chart shown in artifact 7. I altered it slightly to have the bottom three bubbles represent three different adjectives to describe their animal, and the top three bubbles were reasons why the animal was their favorite. The middle bubble, of course, was where they wrote the name of the animal they had chosen from the story. I tried to be sneaky about asking them to choose their animals because I have noticed in my class that when one person has an idea or likes something they all catch on and decide they do too. I didn’t want them all to have the same animal, so I had them write their favorite animal from the story in the center bubble. Once they had it, I divided the class into groups based on the animal that they chose. You can see the way the lesson went in artifact 6. Once they were in their group, I explained that they would be working together to get their plan filled in that talked about what their favorite animal was. They could talk about it, but they didn’t have to write the same things, however if they heard an idea that they liked, they could jot down notes about it that they liked in their bubbles. In doing this, they could use an idea, but use it in a sentence that was different from the rest of their group.

**Outcome of plan 3:**

As I walked around the room and watched my students talking about the animals, I began to see the light in their eyes that had vanished from the beginning of the year. They were laughing and actually discussing the animals and getting their plans filled in. Most importantly, they weren’t just filling out a piece of paper to “get the job done” they were actually understanding what it was that they were putting down. I enjoyed listening to them debate things about their animals. I had one group that got very upset because there was a conflict over an adjective that one person in the group wanted to use that the rest of the group didn’t want to. I reminded them that they were there to support each other and give ideas, not to make each other feel badly for writing something down that was interesting to them about their animal. They understood this, and even apologized to the student. They said, “I’m sorry Gavin, that was a really great adjective, but I am not going to use it in my story.” Another student was angry because her group wanted to use the adjective she gave, and she didn’t want them to. I had to explain to her that it was alright if they used it because they would create a sentence that was different from hers so even if they were all using the same adjective, the sentences they would use it in would all be different. She accepted this and their discussion continued. The discussion took longer than I had anticipated, but I was more than pleased to allow it to continue because they were having great discussions and coming up with wonderful plans. Ty had chosen a colorful bird that was his favorite animal and although he was a little confused on filling in the adjective part at first, he quickly caught on and was able to complete his plan thoroughly (and began having a nice conversation with his group. He listened while other students shared their ideas, made comments to them about their ideas, and then shared his own ideas. They were all very respectful to one another. They also would help each other with the plan. I heard someone in his group ask him which three adjectives he was going to use to describe his bird and why. He told them and they let him know that the ones he came up with were great, but had he thought of saying that his bird was “funny-looking”? He hadn’t, thanked them for the idea, and changed one of the color words he had originally chosen. Once he had his plan done, and began to write, he was very organized, and had his ideas laid out. He didn’t come up for help as often as he normally would have. When he completed it, his writing had voice and was organized. It didn’t seem as robotic as it had been in the past, and I could tell that he was focused and enjoyed writing about the topic that he had gotten to choose. Michaelangelo’s group had one of the best discussions that I heard. He talked quite a bit and was giving off some great ideas and adjetives to describe his animal, which was the jaguar. He also took in what other people said, and used this in his plan. “One of the great values of talk in the writing process is that it permits the expression of tentative conclusions and opinions.“ (Sweigart, 1988). When he began to write from his plan, he came up with absolutely amazing sentences. I had thought the POW plan was his best writing, but this ended up being his best eice of work. It had the most voice, and was up there with the top of the class. I was so proud of him for the progress he was making in his writing and the voice that was showing with every sentence that he wrote. Amanda did a great job as usual, but her writing was still rather stiff. I hadn’t noticed as much voice in her paper as I had seen in her story paper when she had used the WWW What=2, How=2 approach. She did alright with the discussion, but overall, she didn’t want to talk with the people in her group. She is the type that doesn’t do too well in group activities because she always wants to do it herself to make sure that it gets done. She also didn’t like the idea of sharing her ideas and allowing other students to use them in their papers. This caused her to be very closed off during the discussion portion and being very limited with what she shared with her group. While her final paper was good, I could tell that this approach was not the best one for her, nor did it give me the results I was looking for, which was more voice within her papers.

**Conclusion for Ty:**

While I saw a great improvement in Ty’s writing throughout, I noticed the most difference in voice within his paper when he used the final plan approach. When he had the chance to work with a group, share ideas and collaborate, it helped him to organize his ideas, and talk about them outloud. In talking, he was able to be sure that his ideas made sense. If they didn’t, his peers would call him out on them and question his reasoning. This caused him to have to defend his ideas, or else realize that they didn’t quite make sense and go back to the drawing board. He was held accountable for his ideas. One of the problem areas in his papers in the past has been that he has an idea, but when he writes it out, he is sidetracked and doesn’t pay attention to what he was writing, which results in a sentence or more that make absolutely no sense. He catches them when he reads them back to me, but on his own, he usually misses correcting them. In this setting, reading and comparing both plans and final drafts with his peers, he knew he was being held responsible for his writing and it needed to make sense. I noticed such an improvement in his organization and voice within his paper. I am attaching his plan and final paper as artifact 8.

**Conclusion for Michaelangelo:**

Michaelangelo is one of the students in my class that I feel benefitted the most from the planning process lessons that I incorporated into our writing block. In the beginning, I watched as he began to think about what he wanted to say and organize it in various plans that we worked on. Although he got confused with the WWW What=2, How=2 approach, he still tried his best and I could hear his voice in the little amount of his paper that he completed. In the other two papers, he did an amazing job! The POW approach worked well for him because he enjoys art, and it gave him a quick way to get his ideas out and down on paper. Then from the drawing, he was able to write from that. I was very pleased with his final whale paper. As I mentioned before, I thought this was going to be his best piece for all of the planning processes. I was pleasantly surprised when I had him complete the final planning approach, which was the bubble and peer discussion. He enjoyed the discussion with the members of his group, and he worked very hard to get his paper completed. My favorite sentence from his paper was, “First it runs faster than a snail.” His adjective had been fast. From that, he had talked with his group about how they run fast, but he was the only one in his group who compared the jaguar’s ability to run fast with that of a snail! I was so proud of him because he had done that on his own. I think that discussing the topic with his peers helped to give him the confidence that he needed to complete his writing at the ability that I always knew he was capable of. His best work was obviously the bubble and peer discussion planning approach. I attached his plan and final draft as artifact 9.

**Conclusion for Amanda:**

Amanda is a very bright student and since day one she has always tried to do her best where writing is concerned. She attempts to try new things and use new concepts she learns in her writing. Her voice was still an area that I wanted her to improve on, and I have noticed a huge improvement in the voice in her writing overall. As I mentioned previously, she did a great job on each planning approach, and writing task, however it took a little time to get her comfortable with branching away from the “safe papers” she was used to writing. I wanted to hear her voice, not what she thought her voice should be, based on a rubric. The POW approach she used yielded a piece of writing that would have passed, however it was still robotic and I didn’t hear her voice. However, when they got a chance to write their own stories with a problem and a solution, she forgot the rubric expectation and did an amazing job. She came up with a story, and it was packed full of voice. I wasn’t bored and she even had me wanting to keep reading it to find out how the story was going to end. I think that she got a chance to feel what real writing is supposed to be like, and she liked it. Although this was her best piece, and the one I chose to include here as artifact 10, her bubble and peer discussion plan proved to be another piece of work that she used her voice in. She didn’t do so well in the discussion portion of the planning process, but she was able to break away from the robotic papers she normally wrote and wrote a paper that was descriptive and included voice.

**Overall Conclusion:**

When I went into this project, I was fighting with the awful feelings I had about teaching writing due to my lack of knowledge of the process of teaching it, partnered with the pressure I was receiving from my administration to do a great job of teaching it to my students to be sure they passed the assessments. When I had pinpointed my project idea, I was hopeful that I had the power to transform the mess writing had become in my classroom into something that my students could enjoy again, as well as something that I could enjoy teaching. When my orginial free writing project tanked, and I started from scratch with a new one, I will admit that I was more than a little skeptical that it would work. When all of my students began with the first POW planning approach, I started to get the wind back in my sails. I watched them truly enjoy creating a picture, and using it to form a piece of writing that displayed a part of them I had not seen in the writing that was being turned in. I saw some of my students who had struggled the most, actually get written ideas out onto paper. There were grammatical errors, but to see them start to share their voice with me was very important. Many of my students proved to me that they were able to show the most success by drawing a picture first.

When it came to the WWW What=2, How=2 approach, this one proved to be the most difficult for my class as a whole. I am not sure if it was because they had the least experience in writing a story, if there were too many elements to focus on, or some other factor, but many of my students didn’t get the assignment completed in the allotted time. I tried it again later on, and had minimal success as well. I did pair it with a peer discussion as well, which improved the outcome slightly from the first time we did it, but overall it was the least successful in the class as a whole.

The bubble and peer discussion approach was the most successful for my entire class. Many of my students who struggle with organizing their ideas and getting it down on paper turned in papers that were absolutely wonderful. They had a voice, their papers made sense, and they all acted like confident writers! In the chart, artifact 11, you can see the comparison of which plan approach worked best for my class. I had 8 students that showed the most success in voice with the POW plan approach, 2 students who had the most success with the WWW What=2, How=2 plan approach, and 11 students that were the most successful with the bubble and peer discussion plan approach.

After I had my data for this assignment, I took the concept of peer discussion and applied it to the other planning forms that I had tried. As I mentioned with the WWW What=2, How=2 approach, I saw a small improvement in student success. The POW approach had a significant improvement in student success as a result of peer discussion being added to the process. Overall, my students seem to be the most successful when they are able to talk with their peers about their work. Sometimes it is to just share ideas, other times it is to create a plan, but the outcome is the creation of pieces of writing that display student voice in a way that has not been demonstrated in their past writing. Perhaps it is because “participation in small-group discussion facilitated the construction of a more extended and elaborated mental representation which, in turn, promotes analytical thinking and writing on an individual level” (Sweigart).

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