2010

Dialogue journals: A way to encourage emergent writers

Victoria Isabell
Eastern Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.emich.edu/honors

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation
Isabell, Victoria, "Dialogue journals: A way to encourage emergent writers" (2010). Senior Honors Theses & Projects. 239.
https://commons.emich.edu/honors/239

This Open Access Senior Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Theses & Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact lib-ir@emich.edu.
Dialogue journals: A way to encourage emergent writers

Abstract
"Writing is more than just recording; it is the process of developing a story or idea. It allows us to represent our life experiences and claim them as our own while giving them meaning" (Calkins, 1994, p.4). Every student should be given the opportunity to view writing as a way to "represent life experiences." To give students this experience, teachers must show their students that they see the value in and potential joy of writing.

Degree Type
Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department
Teacher Education

First Advisor
Margaret Moore-Hart

Subject Categories
Curriculum and Instruction
DIALOGUE JOURNALS: A WAY TO ENCOURAGE EMERGENT WRITERS

By

Victoria Isabell

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

with Honors in ___Reading____ (Department of Teacher Education)

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date ______________________

________________________________________________________
Supervising Instructor (Margaret Moore-Hart)

________________________________________________________
Honors Advisor (Margaret Moore-Hart)

________________________________________________________
Department Head (Donald Bennion)

________________________________________________________
Honors Director (James A. Knapp)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Writing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Writing Process</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals in General</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Journals</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Journals</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue Journals</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double-Entry Journals</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Logs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers’ Scrapbooks</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated Journals</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Logs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts Notebooks</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-School Journals</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking More Closely at Dialogue Journals</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success for English Language Learners</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds Trusting Relationships</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides Instruction</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes Discussions about Literature</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINI CASE STUDY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

“Writing is more than just recording; it is the process of developing a story or idea. It allows us to represent our life experiences and claim them as our own while giving them meaning” (Calkins, 1994, p.4). Every student should be given the opportunity to view writing as a way to “represent life experiences.” To give students this experience, teachers must show their students that they see the value in and potential joy of writing.

The topic of writing is of interest to me, because I have a love for writing, which developed when I was in elementary school. I want every child to be able to experience the same passion for writing, regardless of their ability level, or learning style. Since my minor is Early Childhood Education, I want to explore the writing experiences of children in grades Pre K-3rd. I understand that there is an increasing emphasis on writing in elementary through high school. It has become imperative for children to be effective writers in order to succeed on certain state tests such as the MEAP, ACT and SAT, as well as the GRE at the graduate level. I hope to use the information I gain from my research to inspire and encourage my students to become life-long writers.

Rather than telling my students that they “have to write for only ten minutes,” I can display my enthusiasm and make the writing experience meaningful and purposeful. To create a classroom that is focused on literacy, I must allow time every day for students to read and write. According to Calkins, one way that writing could be incorporated in the class every day is through the use of journals. Students are given the chance to write about what ever topic they choose to write about. Offering students the opportunity to
choose their topic allows for a positive writing experience. “Many young writers naturally begin writing about themselves and their lives, representing their experiences through drawing and writing. Since students of all ages are experts on themselves, writing emerges more easily when they write about their own lives or experiences” (Moore-Hart, 2010, p.6).

As students gain experience and become more comfortable with writing, their topics will eventually branch out. When children know that they have an audience, they will feel as though they are writing for a purpose, which is one of the benefits of dialogue journals. (Moore-Hart, 2010) Dialogue journals are a place for students to communicate with their teachers or peers. The authentic writing experience that they provide allows for communication, which is something that could easily be overlooked in other content areas in an elementary classroom. In each informal entry, the students write to the teacher. The teacher reads the entry and responds. The students write about a topic that is interesting to them. The teacher’s responses should be encouraging, supportive, and informative.

A tool that emergent writers often use is invented spelling, also referred to as temporary spelling. Charles Reed studied preschoolers’ efforts to spell words and found that they used their knowledge of the alphabet and the English spelling system to invent spellings for words (Tompkins, 2000, p. 104). There are five different stages of invented spelling, of which children move through at different ages and rates. (Tompkins, 2000) Teachers can use dialogue journals to help determine which stage of invented spelling a student is in, in order to accommodate that student in his/her instruction.
RATIONALE

As I began my review of literature for my senior thesis, I found that there isn’t a great deal of research on dialogue journal writing in early elementary grades.

I hope my research shows classroom teachers the benefits of dialogue journals. My research will also provide models of dialogue journals, which would be useful to a teacher who has never heard of them, but is interested in trying them out in his/her own classroom.

My inspiration for my senior thesis evolved after taking RDNG 240, which is a class about the reading and writing connection. As a part of the class, I had the opportunity to work with a student, and guide her through the writing process. Through the readings and the hands-on experiences the class offered me, I gained a desire to further my experiences in teaching children about writing. As an Early Childhood Education minor, I’ve been fortunate enough to spend time with preschool aged children at EMU Children’s Institute. When I was exposed to emergent writers in this first-hand setting, I became inspired to tie together my love of writing to my interest in the development of young children.

One of the unique aspects of my thesis is that I will conduct a case study of students’ writing. Using dialogue journals, I will track a diverse population of four second grade students throughout the entire school year to see how their writing evolves. Also, my case study will show how dialogue journals benefit emergent writers.

I hope to discover how dialogue journals help young writers become more confident in their writing ability, thus encouraging them to write more. Through the positive feedback that I provide, it is my sincere hope that these students will view
writing as a positive experience, and that they will carry the desire to write, with them, throughout their lives.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature is organized into eight different sections. The first section, *Theories of Writing*, outlines various philosophies of the art of writing. The next section, entitled, *The Writing Process*, goes into depth on the five steps of the writing process. In the third section, *Journals in General*, the idea of journal writing in an elementary classroom is examined. Section number four, titled, *Types of Journals*, lists and describes various types of journals that can be used in an elementary classroom. The concept of dialogue journals is inspected in *Looking more Closely at Dialogue Journals*. Benefits resulting in the use of dialogue journals in classrooms will be explained in the seventh area of the review, *Benefits*. Lastly, a conclusion of the research will be made.

**Theories of Writing**

Lucy McCormick Calkins has expressed her ideas on the essentials of writing in her first edition of *The Art of Teaching Writing*, she stated, “For me, it is essential that children are deeply involved in writing, that they share their texts with others, and that they perceive themselves as authors. I believe these three things are interconnected. A sense of authorship comes from the struggle to put something big and vital into print, and from seeing one’s own printed words reach the hearts and minds of readers” (Calkins, 1986, p.9). Calkins believes that to be an author, it doesn’t only mean that one must struggle to put big ideas into print, but rather being an author means living with a sense of awareness. Writing is not merely something that is done while sitting at a desk, it is done throughout every facet of an author’s life. Calkins points out that James Dickey’s definition of a writer is, “someone who is enormously taken in by things anyone else
would walk by.” (Calkins, 1994, p. 3). The process of writing extends beyond jotting notes and writing rough drafts. The foundation of the process is noticing, wondering, remembering, questioning, and yearning. “‘I must write,’ Anne Morrow Lindbergh says. ‘I must write at all costs, for writing is more than living. It is being conscious of living’” (Calkins, 1994, p.4).

Carolyn L. Piazza sees the process of writing as more significant than the finished product. “The fact that writing is not simply about the destination but about the quality of the journey is something every teacher understands” (Piazza, 2003, p.v). When teaching writing, the goal that teachers should have for their students is for writing to provide them with enjoyment, adventure, fascination, and discovery. As one is trailing through the journey of writing, the opportunity to play with language will ultimately offer joys and rewards. (Piazza, 2003) Piazza emphasizes the importance of growth and change throughout the journey stating that writing is “Like the journey motifs in children’s literature, where the main character goes off on an adventure and returns changed in some way, students are transported beyond the written word to new understandings of self and the world. They…learn patience, commitment, and discipline. These destinations are important to life work and should not be overlooked on this journey” (Piazza, 2003, p.vi).

Margaret A. Moore-Hart (2010) views writing as a process in various aspects. Writing is a thinking process, a process of communicating meaning (both with young children and in the elementary classroom), and a process of representing life experiences. She describes the thinking process of a 10 year old girl as she wrote a poem about writing, detailing her revision process. “As she struggled with her poem, she shared drafts
with her peers, trying to convey her message. Just as an artist shapes a piece of sculpture from a piece of wood, Jenny crafted a poem” (Moore-Hart, 2010, p.2).

As young children discover the world around them, and struggle to make meaning, writing begins to play a vital role in their quest for meaning. Moore-Hart suggests that young children use markers and pencils to express messages, much like early humans produced messages with pictures on cave walls. She describes how a young girl observes the many ways her mother uses writing throughout her daily life, and she too has the desire to record meaning. When given the tools to express herself, the girl used scribbles, lines, and dots to mimic her mother’s writing and convey her own messages through pre-phonemic spelling. (Moore-Hart, 2010)

The Writing Process

“As teachers observe children while they are writing, they can note how children move through the writing process stages: gathering and organizing ideas during prewriting; pouring out and shaping ideas during drafting; meeting in writing groups to get feedback about their writing and then making substantive changes during revising; proofreading and correcting mechanical errors during editing; and publishing and sharing their writing” (Tompkins, 2000, p.144).

The first stage of the writing process, prewriting, is the stage in which writers prepare to write. Purpose, audience, and form are considered, as writers gather and organize ideas for writing. They begin tentatively talking, reading, and writing, in order to explore what they know and in what direction they would like to take their writing. This crucial stage of the writing process is often ignored. Tompkins (2004) compares the
importance of a writer’s prewriting to the significance of an athlete’s warming-up. According to Murray (1982), at least 70% of writing time should be spent in prewriting. Choosing a topic, for many students, is challenging. When teachers supply topics to students in an attempt to assist them, students are typically forced to write about a topic with which they do not have personal experience. If a student is struggling to come up with a topic, the teacher can support that student by brainstorming together to generate a list of ideas the student is interested in. In order for a writer to journey through the writing process successfully it is imperative that they choose their own topic. “They [teachers] may specify the writing form, and at other times they may establish the purpose, but students should choose their own content” (Tompkins, 2004, p.49). When a writer is considering purpose, they need to question themselves on whether they are writing to entertain, inform, or persuade. Sometimes students may want to write for themselves, in order to express their ideas and feelings. Other possible audiences include peers, younger children, parents, foster grandparents, children’s authors, pen pals, and businesses (Tompkins, 2004).

Students are able to adapt their writing to suit their audience, much in the same way they can use code switching to vary their speech to meet the needs of the people who are listening to them. Genre is one of the most important considerations to a writer. Through reading, students develop a strong sense of genre, thus they will be better equipped to apply those ideas to their writing. (Tompkins, 2004)

Prewriting activities comprise a variety of activities including rehearsal activities that writers do to prepare for writing. These activities include: drawing, clustering, talking, reading, and role-playing. Drawing is a method typically used by young children
or older, struggling writers. Clustering is the process of students making webs to organize their ideas. Since writing is nonlinear, clustering is a better prewriting strategy than outlining. Some students also benefit from talking as a prewriting strategy. With their classmates they are able to express an idea or ask questions about their topics. Investigating the structure of various genres through reading is another way in which students can gather ideas for writing. Other students discover and shape ideas that they may possibly use in their writing through role-playing. Role-playing is just as effective for young children as it is for students in fourth through eighth grade. Reenacting events of a story helps bring it to life, allowing the students to take on the personality of the character, which would ultimately provide them with writing ideas. (Tompkins, 2004)

During the second stage of the writing process, drafting, students can write one or more rough drafts, placing a greater emphasis on content rather than on mechanics. (Tompkins, 200) In order to leave space for revision, students skip every other line while writing their draft. To remind younger students to skip lines, many teachers will have their students start their draft by placing an “X” on the beginning of every other line. Arrows can be used to move sections of text, cross-outs, to delete sections, and scissors and tape to cut apart and rearrange text. Having students label their rough draft with the words “rough draft,” helps remind the writer, their peers, and parents that the paper has not been graded for mechanics, and that the emphasis is on content. The use of computers throughout drafting is beneficial for writers. “…students are often more motivated to write, and they tend to write longer pieces. Their writing looks neater and they can use spell-check programs to identify and correct misspelled words” (Tompkins, 2004, p.53).
Refinement of ideas takes place during the revising stage. It is tempting for students to call their work complete once they have their original draft on paper. However, the process of revision allows the writer to meet the needs of the reader by adding, eliminating, substituting, and rearranging material. This stage is comprised of three basic steps: rereading the rough draft, sharing the rough draft in a writing group, and revising on the basis of feedback. (Tompkins, 2004)

The fourth stage of the writing process is editing, which consists of putting the piece of writing in its final form. This is the stage in which spelling and mechanics becomes the focus. It can be explained to students that the importance of correcting mechanical errors is to make the writing “optimally readable” (Smith, 1982, p. 127). Students learn mechanical skills best through hands-on editing of their own compositions, rather than through workbook exercises. In fact, studies over the past quarter century suggest that it is more effective to teach mechanical skills as part of the writing process than through practice exercises (Bissex, 1980; Elley, Barham, Graves, 1983; Lamb, & Wyllie, 1976; Moore-Hart, 2010). It is to the students’ advantage to wait a few days after revising to re-visit their writing piece to proofread for mechanical and spelling errors. “With the distance gained by waiting a few days, students are better able to approach editing with a fresh perspective and gather the enthusiasm necessary to finish the writing process by making the paper optimally readable (Tompkins, 2004, p.56). When proofreading their paper, a writer must read slowly, word by word searching for errors, rather than reading at a regular pace for meaning. The editing process is complete when students and their editors correct as many mechanical errors as possible, or after students meet with their teacher in an editing conference (Tompkins, 2004).
The fifth and final stage of the writing process is publishing. This is the stage in which students share their compositions with the appropriate audience, either orally, or by writing a final copy. One of the traditional means of publishing a writing piece is to make a book. Simple books can be made by folding, stapling, and sewing paper together. There are various other ways to publish a piece of writing such as, reading it at a school assembly, sharing it at a read-aloud party, or by displaying it at a public event. “Whether sharing lists of ideas for writing, the opening sentences for their lead, a revised ending for a poem, or a published writing piece, students begin to receive encouragement from their listeners” (Moore-Hart, 2010, p. 20). This will make students more willing to take risks and experiment with their writing. Through sharing, students are able to communicate with genuine audiences who respond to their writing in meaningful ways, which will ultimately lead them to become more confident authors (Tompkins, 2004).

Journals in General

“…Writing about the details of their [writers] lives can put them into an intimate relationship with writing, and let them see how powerful writing is, and how much insight writing can give them into their daily experiences” (Leonhardt, 1998, p.47). According to McGee and Richgels, there are three main reasons that journal writing is beneficial. (1) Writing in personal journals strengthens students’ writing fluency and expression. It allows them to take the risk of conveying their thoughts and ideas in writing without concern for writing mechanics. (2) Teachers can use journal entries for diagnosis of writing ability. Using students’ journal entries in order to assess, will provide more accurate information than practice workbook pages since journal entries are
the students’ most natural and authentic form of writing. (3) It fosters authentic communication. In interactive journals (students write in an interactive journal, then the teacher or a peer reads their entry, responds in writing and returns it), students can use writing for the genuine purpose of communicating with their teacher or with their peers (McGee & Richgels, 2004).

Piazza explains that a “journal” is literally a “book of days.” Journals can take many forms including a spiral notebook, a diary with a lock and key, a three-ring binder, a calendar book, or a commercial keepsake journal. Technology is being incorporated into journal writing, with many journaling websites that require a username and password. These interactive journaling websites provide a suitable option for many writers. While there are differences between the journal as a book, a personal space for thoughts, and the writing that takes place inside of it, most often the word journal refers to both (Piazza, 2003).

Tompkins (2002) points out that, elementary students write in journals for many of the same reasons that public figures, and other adults do, and that is to document significant events in their lives and to share information with others. Journal writing can also be used in an elementary classroom to develop writing fluency, practice writing conventions, handwriting skills, as well as spelling high-frequency words (Tompkins, 2002). Tompkins states that, “Some of the purposes for journal writing are to: record experiences, stimulate interest in a topic, explore thinking, personalize learning, develop interpretations, wonder, predict, and hypothesis, engage the imagination, ask questions, activate prior knowledge, assume the role of another person, and to share experiences with trusted readers” (Tompkins, 2002, p.232).
To encourage children to want to write in their journals, Moore-Hart (2010) suggests that teachers can allow students to make choices in their writing, have a print-rich classroom, be a positive role-model for reading and writing, provide students with the opportunity to orally share their writing with peers, focus on the process rather than the product, avoid highlighting students’ mistakes, and respecting and taking sincere interest in students’ ideas. Journals should not be marked up with red pens and have corrections. If the teacher chooses to write anything in students’ journals, it should be positive responses and reflections. Young children who make squiggly marks and scribbles need to have teachers comment, “Tell me about your writing.” They need to know that what they have created is valued (Moore-Hart, 2010).

Pieces from students’ journals, that are chosen by the student as the piece that they are most proud of, can undergo the writing process, and eventually be published. Not all journal entries are meant to be published, because journals are often a place to rehearse writing (Moore-Hart, 2010).

**Types of Journals**

*Personal Journals*

Personal journals provide a place for students to record events in their own lives and for them to write about other topics of special interest. These are considered to be the most private type of journal (Tompkins, 2002). Tompkins describes a first grade class which regularly utilizes personal journals. In this first grade class, the students begin their day with journal writing. Their journals have blank pages for writing on, and in the center of each table there are pencils, markers, and crayons. The table helper passes out
everyone’s writing folder which contains each student’s list of topics. Students may choose from one of their listed topics, or they can write using an alternative idea. While the children are writing, the teacher circulates the classroom, providing assistance where it is needed.

Depending on the children’s developmental level, the journal entries vary greatly. They may consist of letters and words, drawings, random letters grouped together, letter-like forms, invented or conventional spellings, sentences, and paragraphs. In the beginning of the school year, the students’ entries may be short and skimpy, but as they gain experience with personal journal writing, their writing will become more in depth, and their voice will show through. The teacher occasionally shares with the children her personal journal, explaining to them that sometimes she writes when she is inspired by a book or a newspaper article that she has read (Piazza, 2003).

In a kindergarten class, lifebooks can be incorporated into the writing curriculum. Lifebooks, which is another name for personal journals, would be used for about twenty minutes every day for children to record their life experiences in. The teacher would explain to the students that they are authors. The teacher should model temporary spelling as well as all forms of writing. Since there will be various ability levels in a class of kindergarteners, it is important for the class to know that scribbling and picture-drawing are some ways that people write (Moore-Hart, 2010).

As students grow older, privacy becomes an important issue. Young children are typically willing to share what they have written in their personal journals. However by third or forth grade, many students become less willing to read their journal aloud to their peers. Usually, students are willing to share their entries with a teacher whom they trust
will respect their writing and privacy (Tompkins, 2002). As students gain trust in their
teachers, they may describe family problems and issues in their journal, as a way to ask
for help. Teachers are legally obligated to report to school personnel, any entries about
family matters such as child abuse (Tompkins, 2002).

Some of the following attributes of students’ personal journals can be examined
by the teacher, “...frequency of entries, length of entries (fluency), dates recorded for
entries, personal voice and conventional style, connections between ideas,
experimentation and exploration, observations and questions, strong feelings about a
subject, descriptions of memorable details, abbreviations, shorthand symbols, and
unusual uses of punctuation” (Piazza, 2003, p.91). Over time, students will discover that
their personal journals are more than just writing practice, but rather a safe place for them
to explore ideas for future writings (Piazza, 2003).

**Dialogue Journals**

Dialogue journals are similar to personal journals. The exception is that they are
written with the intent to be shared with a teacher or classmate. The person who receives
the journal reads the entry and responds to it. These journals are interactive and take the
form of a conversation (Tompkins, 2002). “Most importantly, dialogue journals are an
authentic writing activity and provide the opportunity for real communication between
students or between a student and the teacher” (Tompkins, 2003, p.235).

**Double-Entry Journals**

Students create a double-entry journal by dividing each page of their journal into
two columns and they write different types of information in each column. Often times,
they can choose to write quotes from a story in one column and their reactions to the
quotes in the other. An alternative way is to write predictions to a story in one column and what actually happened in the other (Tompkins, 2002). Piazza states that several excellent professional articles on double-entry journaling describe variations, including; questions/answers and keywords/meanings (Piazza, 2003). “Through this type of journal, students become more engaged in what they are reading, note sentences that have personal connection, and become more sensitive to the author’s language” (Tompkins, 2002, p.240).

When the double entry journal is first introduced to a class, the teacher should use an overhead to model how to use this type of graphic organizer with a familiar book. The teacher would model by reading a few passages from the book, then stopping to write when something in the book prompts her to ask a question. After the teacher finishes writing an entry for the students to see, he/she should read several more passages and then have the class implement what they have just observed (Piazza, 2003).

The double-entry journal helps make the connection between reading and writing. Students may be encouraged to read books by the same author and comment on writing style, topics, or characters. Also, they could read the same book more than once, each time using a different quote or prompt from the book in their journal. When students write double-entry journals, they can use fictional and nonfiction material. For a nonfiction reading, students could use their journal to list concepts in one column and definitions or examples in the other (Piazza, 2003).

Learning Logs

Learning logs are used for students to write in as part of social studies and science theme cycles and math units. Students make quick-writes, draw diagrams, take notes, and
write vocabulary words (Tompkins, 2002). “When people write about something they learn it better” (Fulwiler, 1987, p.9). As students write in learning logs, they are able to reflect on their learning, determine gaps in their understanding, and explore relationships between what they are learning and prior knowledge (Tompkins, 2002). There are several ways in which students can respond to texts in their learning log, some of which are; “…tell what you have learned, ask questions, decide what you would like to learn next, tell about misconceptions or things you found confusing, list new words you have learned, explain how you feel about this topic, show how today’s lesson relates to yesterday’s, discuss what you learned from your peers” (Piazza, 2003, p.97).

Many different forms of learning logs can be used in science. One type is an observation log, in which students create daily entries to follow the growth of plants or animals. Another type of learning log that can be used for science is one in which students make entries during a theme. Students’ entries can take on any form; clusters, charts, maps, or paragraphs. Some examples of when entries could be made are; during teacher or peer presentations, after reading, after viewing a film, or at the end of a class period (Tompkins, 2002).

Students often keep learning logs as part of theme cycles in social studies as well as science. For social studies, students can write a reaction to stories, informational books, make a note of interesting words connecting to the theme, form time lines, and draw diagrams, charts and maps (Tompkins, 2002). “Learning logs teach children responsibility, not implicitly, but directly and unmistakably. As part of a regular routine, students list accomplishments, set goals, self-assess, and reflect” (Piazza, 2003, p.99).

Writers’ Scrapbooks
The purpose of writers’ scrapbooks is to spark memories and ideas for writing. They include an assortment of literacy memorabilia that help students explore themselves as readers and writers. In a binder students can place newspaper clippings, letters, awards, pictures, ticket stubs, stamps, labels, or other literacy items. While printed material is glued directly into the book, three-dimensional items are placed in pocket folders. Each page typically includes only one artifact or focused writing so that the binder can be continuously restructured in order to reflect the student’s developing understanding of him or herself as well as the world. Writer’s scrapbooks are not only a resource for writing, but also a written product itself, that many students come to treasure as a keepsake (Piazza, 2003).

**Simulated Journals**

When writing in simulated journals, students assume the role of a character from a book or a historical figure and write journal entries from that person’s perspective (Tompkins, 2002). Simulated journals have several benefits. Not only do they allow a student to examine the viewpoints of others, they also aid students in preparation for test prompts, in which they must assume a role in a hypothetical situation. These journals can also be used by teachers as a means of assessment since they display whether or not the student has comprehended what they’ve read, personal insights into reading, and vocabulary (Piazza, 2003). “Simulated journals show once again that journal writing is not exclusive to the writing class, but is a valuable resource across the curriculum” (Piazza, 2003, p.105).

**Reading Logs**
Students use this type of journal to write about the books they are reading, or listening to the teacher read. It is more than just summarizing their reading, students use these journals to relate what they’ve read to their own personal lives, or to other literature. Some other common names that are used to refer to these journals are; literature response journals (Hancock, 1992), literature journals (Five, 1986), and reading journals (Wollman-Bonilla, 1989). There is a variety of ways that students can respond to literature in their reading logs. Tompkins points out nine different categories of student responses including: “…questions related to understanding the text, interaction with characters, empathy with characters, prediction and validation, personal experiences, personal feelings and opinions, simple and elaborate evaluations, philosophical reflections, and retellings and summaries” (Tompkins, 2002, p.238). It is natural for students to begin writing plots and summaries in their reading logs, but as they gain experience, they will soon use them to make interpretations (Tompkins, 2002).

Language Arts Notebooks

Language arts notebooks are used by students to document a variety of information about language arts. Habitually, students use these notebooks to take notes about procedures, such as steps in giving a book talk or proofreading a paper. Students also take notes on concepts such as, information of authors and genres, contractions, homophones, parts of speech, plot diagrams, affixes, poetic formulas, and types of sentences. Students also take note of strategies including, visualizing or connecting to personal experience. Lastly, language art notebooks are used when students record various skills like, charts about forming plurals, using quotations, alphabetizing, and
skimming a text book. These notebooks become reference books for students (Tompkins, 2002).

*Home-School Journals*

The communication between parents and the teacher plays an essential role in the education of a child. McGee and Richgels (2004) propose the idea of home-school journals, which would be used as a communication tool. These journals would contain messages to and from parents (McGee & Richgels, 2004). Furthermore, home-school journals would model for children an authentic form of writing.

*Looking More Closely at Dialogue Journals*

Dialogue journals are used as a means of communication between students and the teacher. Much like friends passing notes to each other, conversational partners take turns sending and receiving messages (Piazza, 2003). These journals are interactive, and conversational in tone. “Most importantly, they are an authentic writing activity and provide the opportunity for real communication between students or between a student and the teacher, something that is too often missing in the elementary classrooms” (Tompkins, 2000, p. 174). Every time the students write in their dialogue journals, they write informally to the teacher about something of interest or concern, and the teacher writes a response. Students are in control of the topic choice, and they have the opportunity to take that topic in any direction (Tompkins, 2000). The following is a list of suggestions from Staton (1987, p. 77) for teachers when responding to students’ writing:

1. Acknowledge students’ ideas and encourage them to continue to write about their interests.
2. Support students by complimenting their behavior and schoolwork.
3. Provide new information about topics so that students will want to read your responses.
4. Write less than the students do.
5. Avoid nonspecific comments like “good idea” or “very interesting.”
6. Ask few questions; instead, encourage students to ask you questions.

Since it can be time-consuming for teachers to respond to every student’s journal entry on a daily basis, the teacher can choose to respond to the entries on a rotating basis. Perhaps they might respond to one group of students one week and another group the next week (Tompkins, 2000). It is important for the teacher to keep in mind that writing conventions should not be a concern when using dialogue journals (Piazza, 2003).

**Benefits**

“The use of dialogue journals has been studied for its positive effect on children’s personal adjustment, development of awareness for audience, understanding of others, increased motivation for purposeful writing, improved skill in conversing, and overall growth as writers” (Nistler, 1998, p. 203).

**Success for English Language Learners**

Dialogue journals are particularly successful in promoting the writing development of students learning English as a second language. Researchers have found that these students have the most success when they have the opportunity to choose their own topics and when their teachers contribute to the discussion by requesting a reply, statements or other comments (Peyton & Seyoum, 1989; Reyes, 1991). Staton (1993), states that learning to read and write for nonnative, as well as native speakers, can be a process much like the natural, practical process of oral language acquisition as it occurs between parents and children. Dialogue journals, as written conversations, resemble in
many ways the types of interactions characteristic of first language acquisition. Reyes also found that students who are English Language Learners (ELL) were more successful in writing dialogue journal entries than in writing in response to books they have read. Tompkins (2000, p. 177) presents the following excerpt from the dialogue journal of an ELL who is a fourth grade student whose native language is Lao, along with the teacher’s response. The boy writes fluently about a trip to a county fair, describing his activities and his teacher responds briefly to his account:

**Student:** Yesterday I went to the fair with my brother-in-law and my brother, sister my sister tell me to use the three doller to get that big miorrow so I use the three doller but I only got one dart to throw at the balloon then I hit miorrow for my sister my brother-in-law tell me to get one for my brother-in-law so I got a bigger one then I give to my sister and I got my self some tiket to and I got scard then I was sitting and I jump up hight when I was going down.

**Teacher:** You must have good aim to be able to throw a dart and hit a balloon. I’m glad you won some mirrors. Was this your first trip to the Fair?

“The unique aspects of ESL children’s experiences and personal identities, their history and culture, is shared in content and structure of dialogue journals, which reveal unique ways of living, thinking, and behaving” (Piazza, 2003, p.92). Piazza explains that when reading their students’ dialogue journals, teachers explore subjects that they may have never considered before and they may notice that the text itself is evident of cultural values. The teacher can point out how culture shapes writing and how writing can be used as a way to share ones culture with others. With open minds, students can explore their peers’ cultures through journals and affirm cultural themes and subjects as well as dialects and original uses of language (Piazza, 2003).

*Builds Trusting Relationships*
Tompkins (2000) states that, dialogue journals between a student and a teacher are not simply a series of teacher questions and student answers. Rather, they are a conversation which is built upon mutual trust and respect. Tompkins (2000, p. 175) uses excerpts from a fifth grader’s dialogue journal, where he and his teacher over time have gotten comfortable enough to converse about his family problems as they continue to build their relationship:

**Student:** Well, my mom and dad are divorced so that is why I am going to court to testify on Tuesday but my mom, me, and my sister, and brother are all going and that kind of makes me sad because a couple of years ago when my mom and dad were together we used to go a lot of places like camping and hiking but now after what happened we hardly go anywhere.

**Teacher:** I am so sorry your family is having problems. It sounds as if your mom and dad are having problems with each other, but they both love you and want to be with you. Be sure to keep talking to them about how you feel.

Another way in which a teacher can use dialogue journals to bond with his or her students is when they are used with students who experience behavior problems or other types of social difficulties in school. The teacher and student write back and forth about the problem and discover ways to solve it. The student can reflect on his or her progress toward solving their problem. The teacher’s role would be to respond to the student’s message, ask clarifying questions, and offer sympathy or praise (Tompkins, 2002).

**Guides Instruction**

Teachers can make notes of the different features of writing their students use as they read through their dialogue journals. They can examine statements, questions, commands, and exclamations, as well as whether the students write in complex or simple sentences. These observations will provide good examples for mini-lessons (Piazza,
Piazza explains that, “With access to repeated first drafts (the essence of dialogue journals) [teachers] can examine entries privately and write anecdotal records about some of the following:

- Range of interests
- Fluency
- Previous experiences
- Conversational style
- Ability to sustain a topic
- Use of conventions
- Attempts at transitions or conversational ties” (Piazza, 2003, p.94)

**Promotes Discussions about Literature**

Students can use dialogue journals to write to classmates about the books they are reading. In these journal entries, students have the opportunity to partake in a higher level of thinking, as they compare books to others by the same author or to books by other authors they have read. Students can also present opinions about books, and they can write about how they decided to choose the book that they have selected. This approach to journal writing is particularly successful in classrooms that utilize reading workshops, when students are reading different books. Teachers can choose to pair students with a journal buddy so that they can write back and forth. This activity provides the socialization that independent reading does not. Depending on whether students are reading picture books or longer chapter books, how often they write in their dialogue journals will vary (Tompkins, 2002).

**Conclusion**

After examining the theories of writing according to Lucy McCormick Calkins, Carolyn L. Piazza, and Margaret A. Moore-Hart, the significant role that writing plays in
our lives is made evident. Understanding the writing process enables teachers to design an appropriate plan for writing instruction. Journals have proven to be a tremendous asset for writers, especially in an elementary school setting. Any of the nine types of journals outlined in this review of literature can be used in a classroom to enhance instruction, by motivating young readers and writers. Dialogue journals are especially advantageous since they provide an authentic writing experience while they help build a relationship between the teacher and student. Among the benefits of using dialogue journals in the classroom are that they often provide a positive writing experience for English Language Learners, they foster trusting relationships, guide instruction, and promote discussions about literature. After studying various aspects of writing instruction, it can be concluded that journals, dialogue journals in particular, aide in the success of young writers.
MINI CASE STUDY

Summary

During the 2008-2009 academic school year, I worked in a second grade classroom with four struggling writers, two males and two females. Since the students were overly dependent on drawing pictures, and not producing a lot of writing, I introduced dialogue journals to them, and began to wean them off of picture-drawing. By responding back to their journal entries, I helped center their focus on writing. I met with my group two days per week for about 20 minutes each day. Every time we met they would have a new response for me to read, then they would spend their time responding back to me.

I noticed many changes over time in the students’ writing. First, since they had a sense of audience and began to become comfortable with writing, I noticed an increased length of their entries, and a more frequent use of adjectives, details, and periods. As they applied strategies from their teacher’s mini-lessons and continued to practice writing in their journals, their spelling developed and became closer to conventional spelling. In addition, following my example, the students began to ask me questions in their journals.

As I examined the students’ journals, several themes and patterns became evident to me. The figures below display some of these themes and patterns.
**Students’ Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Adjectives: Use of more adjectives over time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “I eat fish from the ocean it is <em>good</em> to eat for lunch and dinner.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Yesterday it was my friend’s birthday and we had cupcakes and it was <em>delicious</em>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I have a friend named Rayna. She is <em>nice</em> to me. She is <em>cool</em>. I love her. I like her clothes. I like her hair. It is <em>cute</em>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “The <em>big</em> rollercoaster was so <em>fun</em>.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Experiences: Most students wrote about their lives and experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “My brother is in the Navy and we went to go see him in Chicago at the Navy base inside there was a lot of people inside of there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “My dad is happy that president Obama won because he is the first black president.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I did a lot of things in Detroit.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asking Questions in Writing: Students began to follow my model of asking questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “Do you have a friend in Detroit?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Have you ever went go-cart racing?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “What is your brother’s name?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Topic choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Boys typically wrote about animals and things they like to eat and do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls typically wrote about their families and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Length of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls typically wrote about one page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Boys typically wrote less than one page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attention span while writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Boys would ask how much longer they have to write and would look around the room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls were self motivated and very rarely asked how long they had to write for.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Students’ Behaviors

#### Sense of Audience
- Students were eager to see my responses in their journals.
- Students had an increased length of journal entries.
- Students responded to the questions that I would ask them, and they would also ask me questions.

#### Successes with Writing
- Students’ spelling is closer to conventional:
  - Student’s spelling of *brother* - 12-2-08: “bruighter”
  - Same Student’s spelling of *brother* - 3-11-09: “bother”
- Students began to use periods more often.
- Students began to use more details in their writing:
  - 1-28-09: “It was fun.”
  - 3-11-09: “We had cupcakes and it was delicious.”

#### Challenges with Writing
- One of the boys was not motivated to write for an extended period of time. I gradually increased the time he had to write everyday, using a timer, which increased his willingness to write.
- Students seemed concerned with being able to spell words correctly. Even after I stressed the important of inventive spelling and writing all the sounds they hear, they would still ask me how to spell some words.

#### Excited to Read My Responses
- All students would turn to the page where my latest response was and read it as soon as they received their journal.
- Sense of audience was motivating to the students
- Authentic writing experience
### Students’ Interviews

#### Dialogue Journals were a Positive Experience

- **“How do you feel when you read the messages I write to you in your journals and why?”**
  - “I thought your messages were really nice. Because you gave me ideas for my writing and you made me feel proud.”
  - “Good. I liked reading the things you wrote because you would answer my questions. I liked when you told me things.”
  - “It made me feel good. Because you complemented me about my writing.”
  - “It makes me feel good. Because I liked the things you say and I liked answering your questions. It’s kind of exciting to read what you wrote back to me.”

- **“How did you feel about the dialogue journals that we did together this year and why?”**
  - “I liked it a lot. It was so fun to find out what you wrote to me.”
  - “I thought it was a lot of fun. Because I liked seeing what you wrote back to me and I liked telling you about things I wrote about.”
  - “I was happy that we got to do that with you. It was special.”
  - “I really liked it. Because it was something different than the rest of the class. I liked how we had messages from you, kind of like pen pals.”

#### Students Prefer to Write about Personal Experiences

- **“What is your favorite topic to write about and why?”**
  - “My parents. They take care of me and do a lot of nice things for me, so that’s why I like to write about them.”
  - “Um, my brother because I really miss him and I have a lot to say about him.”
  - “Um I like to write about having fun with my brothers. I like to write about my brothers because I know a lot about them and they are really fun to play with.”

#### Apprehensive to Choose their own Topic

- **“Do you prefer writing about a topic that you’ve chosen, or writing about a topic the teacher has chosen and why?”**
  - “I like when the teacher chooses the topic. Because I have a hard time thinking what to write about.”
  - “I like both, when I choose and when Mrs. Todd chooses. Because we both have good ideas.”
  - “One the teacher has chosen. Then I don’t have to try to think of one.”
In conclusion, I have found many benefits from my mini case study. Dialogue journals provided for my students, a model of correct writing and spelling. When trying to spell a word, they would often look back to my response for the correct spelling. They also provided an audience for my students, which allows for an authentic writing experience. Through the conversational like tone of the journals, a relationship was formed between my students and me. Our relationship positively impacted their comfort with writing. Since there were no red pens or corrections involved in our dialogue journals, the students were able to become more comfortable with their writing, thus minimizing their writing anxiety. Lastly, the sense of audience that my students had gave them meaning and purpose for writing. Once they had meaning and purpose they were more motivated to write.

Considering the benefits that this experience provided my students and me, I will incorporate dialogue journals into my writing instruction when I have my own classroom. I strongly believe that in order for students to truly learn from their teacher they must open up to them. For many students, that means developing a trusting relationship. Dialogue journals can provide the foundation for this type of student-teacher relationship. It is important to me to reduce the amount of writing anxiety for my students, which this causal writing experience can achieve.
IMPLICATIONS

Through the research that I have conducted, as well as through my mini case study, I have documented the many benefits of dialogue journals. Some of the most significant advantages that dialogue journals provide are that while they guide writing instruction, they help build trusting relationships between teachers and students.

When a teacher decides to implement dialogue journals as part of his/her writing instruction, there are considerations to be made depending on each particular group of students. In the following paragraphs, I have described strategies that may aide in facilitating the implementation of dialogue journals in an elementary classroom.

Once a teacher decides to use dialogue journals in his/her classroom, he/she must decide on a way to manage writing a response to each student. In a class of twenty-five or more students, writing a response to each of them every day could become exhausting, which may affect the quality of the responses. Using a rotating system could remedy this problem. For example, the teacher could group the class into groups of five and respond to one groups’ journals each day, until they all have a response, and then he/she would start over with the first group. Students could also respond to each others’ entries, perhaps on the days that the teacher does not respond to theirs.

When the blank journals are first given to the students, there should be time allotted for them to make an idea list on the inside front cover of their journals. The teacher should first model how to formulate a list by taking the students through the process of creating his/her own list. This prewriting strategy will reduce the amount of time some students may spend before a writing session trying to think of what to write.
Before every writing session begins, allow the students some time to review their idea list to decide what they will write about. Once most of them have decided on an idea, have volunteers share with the class which topic they have chosen. For the students who have not yet chosen a topic, hearing their peers’ ideas may spark one of their own. Also, this process could develop a sense of satisfaction and confidence as the students share their ideas and discover that they are assisting their peers.

It is imperative for a teacher to be aware of the comfort levels his/her students have with writing. During a time when the whole class is writing individually and simultaneously, it is important that as the teacher is circulating throughout the room, to first attend to the students who are not comfortable with writing, before moving on to the students who are confident writers. Some struggling writers may feel overwhelmed as they begin the writing process. However when they receive the extra teacher support initially, they are more likely to feel confident that they can continue on through the writing process.

There may be students, who after writing a sentence or two, will stop and say that they are done. In order to provide a successful writing experience for these students, an accommodation must be implemented. Have the student set a timer, perhaps three minutes to start with, and let the student know that they must write continuously until the timer rings. Having a clear goal makes writing time seem more manageable for many students. As the student progresses, the time should be gradually increased.

As the dialogue journal process develops, the teacher and students will discover what strategies and techniques are beneficial for them and which are not. Many of these strategies have proven to be effective for my group of students and me. However,
teachers may discover unique methods and tips that are successful for their students as they journey through the rewarding experience of dialogue journal writing.
REFERENCES


Questionnaire

1. What is your favorite topic to write about?
2. When you write at school, what do you usually write about?
3. What type of things do you write about when you write at home?
4. Where do you get ideas for the topics that you write about?
5. Do you have a journal or a diary at home that you write in?
6. What is your favorite time of the day to write?
7. Do you have a special place that you like to go when you write?
8. How do you feel when you read the messages I write to you in your journals?
9. Is there anything that makes you feel frustrated while you’re writing?
10. How do you feel about sharing things that you’ve written with other people?
11. Do you prefer writing about a topic that you’ve chosen, or writing about a topic the teacher has chosen?
Questionnaire- Brittany

12. What is your favorite topic to write about and why?
My parents. They take care of me and do a lot of nice things for me, so that’s why I like to write about them.

13. When you write at school, what do you usually write about and why?
My sister because I love her and we do a lot of stuff together. We play together.

14. What type of things do you write about when you write at home and why?
My friends. Well, really I write about my friends when I’m at home and at school. I write about all kinds of things at home.

4. Do you write about all kinds of things at school too?
Yeah, most of the time I do.

5. Where do you get ideas for the topics that you write about?
I get ideas from the teacher or myself.

6. Do you have a journal or a diary at home that you write in?
Yes, I write down my thoughts.

7. What is your favorite time of the day to write?
Evening is the best time to write, I just think it’s a good time.

8. Where do you usually write?
Yes, in my bedroom.

9. How do you feel when you read the messages I write to you in your journals?
I thought your messages were really nice.

Why?
Because you gave me ideas for my writing, and you made me feel proud.

10. **How do you feel about sharing things that you’ve written with other people?**
Sometimes I feel nervous about reading what I wrote in front of the class. I like it better if they just read it themselves.

11. **Do you prefer writing about a topic that you’ve chosen, or writing about a topic the teacher has chosen?**
I like when the teacher chooses the topic.

**Why?**
Because I have a hard time thinking of what to write about.

12. **How did you feel about the dialogue journals that we did together this year?**
I liked it a lot.

**Why did you feel that way?**
It was so exciting to find out what you wrote back to me.
15. **What is your favorite topic to write about and why?**

I like to write about books. I like books about batman and I can write a lot about them.

16. **When you write at school, what do you usually write about and why?**

Batman because I saw the batman movie, I have batman toys, I play batman with my brother.

17. **What type of things do you write about when you write at home and why?**

My family because my family lives at my house, so I get ideas from them.

18. **Where do you get ideas for the topics that you write about?**

I think of ideas when I’m outside, and when I’m playing with my brother.

19. **Do you have a journal or a diary at home that you write in?**

No.

20. **What is your favorite time of the day to write and why?**

Summer, anytime of day during the summer. It is my favorite season.

21. **Where do you usually write?**

I write in school when I’m at my desk.

22. **How do you feel when you read the messages I write to you in your journals?**

Good.

Why?

I liked reading the things you wrote because you would answer my questions. I liked when you told me things.
What kind of things did you like that I told you?

Um, you told me you liked Jet’s Pizza, I liked that.

23. Is there anything that makes you feel frustrated while you’re writing?

No.

24. How do you feel about sharing things that you’ve written with other people?

I think it’s fun.

Why?

Because it’s kind of like listening to a story when other people read what they wrote.

I like telling stories.

25. Do you prefer writing about a topic that you’ve chosen, or writing about a topic the teacher has chosen?

I like both, when I choose and when Mrs. Todd chooses.

Why?

Because we both have good ideas.

12. How did you feel about the dialogue journals that we did together this year?

I thought it was a lot of fun.

Why did you feel that way?

Because I liked seeing what you wrote back to me, and I liked telling you about things I wrote about.
26. What is your favorite topic to write about and why?
Um, my brother because I really miss him and I have a lot to say about him.

27. When you write at school, what do you usually write about and why?
I write about my friend Rayna because she’s a really good friend to me and I know a lot about her. Mrs. Todd tells us that we should write about stuff that we know a lot about.

28. What type of things do you write about when you write at home and why?
Toys that I have because I know a lot about them, I spend a lot of time playing with them.

29. Where do you get ideas for the topics that you write about?
When I’m at my friend Logan’s house I get good ideas. I get ideas at school when my friends read me what they wrote.

30. Do you have a journal or a diary at home that you write in?
Yes.

What do you write about?
My dad, didn’t I say that already?

31. What is your favorite time of the day to write?
Night time, because I like to play outside during the day.

32. Where do you usually write?
I write and at school and at home, but probably more at school.

33. How do you feel when you read the messages I write to you in your journals?
It made me feel good, like proud.

Why?

Because you complemented me about my writing.

34. Is there anything that makes you feel frustrated or nervous while you’re writing?

No.

35. How do you feel about sharing things that you’ve written with other people?

I feel pretty good about it.

Why?

Because I am a good writer and I like to show the things I write to my friends.

36. Do you prefer writing about a topic that you’ve chosen, or writing about a topic the teacher has chosen?

Ones the teacher has chosen.

12. How did you feel about the dialogue journals that we did together this year?

I was happy that we got to do that with you.

Why did you feel that way?

It was special.
37. What is your favorite topic to write about and why?

Um I like to write about having fun with my brothers. I like to write about my brothers because I know a lot about them and they are really fun to play with.

38. When you write at school, what do you usually write about and why?

My brothers, or playing basketball. I play basketball at school, sometimes I play it in gym, or sometimes I play it at recess. I know a lot about it, like the rules, and the players.

39. What type of things do you write about when you write at home and why?

At home I like to draw pictures and write about my dad. I think drawing pictures is fun, so I do it at home for fun. My dad lives at my home. I write about him at home.

40. Where do you get ideas for the topics that you write about?

I get ideas from my dad because he is a good dad because he likes to feed us and take care of us.

What kind of topics or ideas does your dad give you?

He knows a lot about basketball. I write about basketball.

41. Do you have a journal or a diary at home that you write in?

Yes

What do you write about?

Things like my brothers or basketball. Mostly my brothers though. I know a lot about them because they live with me.

42. What is your favorite time of the day to write?
In the afternoon because at night it’s too dark, and you can’t see what you’re writing, and in the morning I have to get ready to go to school, or go to work with my dad.

43. Where do you usually write?

Usually at school.

8. How do you feel when you read the messages I write to you in your journals?

It makes me feel good.

Why?

Because I like the things you say and I like answering your questions. It’s kind of exciting to read what you wrote back to me too.

9. Is there anything that makes you feel frustrated or nervous while you’re writing?

No.

10. How do you feel about sharing things that you’ve written with other people?

I think it’s fun to learn about what other people write, because you can like take their ideas and put them in your own writing, and they can put your ideas in their writing too.

11. Do you prefer writing about a topic that you’ve chosen, or writing about a topic the teacher has chosen?

I like topics that I pick, and sometimes the ones the teacher picks.

12. How did you feel about the dialogue journals that we did together this year?

I really liked it.

Why did you feel that way?
Because it was something different then the rest of the class. I liked how we had messages from you. Kind of like pen pals.
Dialogue Journals: A Way to Encourage Emergent Writers

Presented by: Victoria R. Isabell
Sponsor: Professor Margaret A. Moore-Hart

“Writing is more than just recording; it is the process of developing a story or idea. It allows us to represent our life experiences and claim them as our own while giving them meaning” (Calkins, 1994, p.4).
According to the National Commission on Writing…

There is not enough time devoted to writing instruction in the classroom.

Writing Scores

• Have reflected this lack of time for writing instruction
• MEAP writing scores remain low in many school districts.
• Standardized tests expect a certain level of writing performance, yet proper writing instruction isn’t given enough emphasis in the classroom.
Dialogue Journals

• One appropriate way to address the problem would be the use of dialogue journals for emergent writers.
• A dialogue journal is an interactive journal where teachers can model written communication strategies and skills as they respond to students’ journal writing (Moore-Hart, 2010; Nistler, 1998).

The Dialogue Journal Project

• During the 2008-2009 academic school year, I have worked in a second grade classroom with four struggling writers, two males and two females.
• I introduced dialogue journals to them, and began to wean them off of picture-drawing, and help center their focus on writing.
Changes

- Increased length of their entries
- More adjectives
- Began to ask me questions
- Refer back to entries for correct spelling
- Spelling is closer to conventional
- Periods more often
- More details and examples
- Apply strategies their teacher models in mini-lessons

Dialogue
Journals help establish the 
teacher/student 
relationship that plays an 
essential role in 
education.
Student entries give the teacher insight as to what topics are significant to them.

Bianca's Journal

My response

Through dialogue journals, teachers can show their students a genuine interest in what they have to say, thus inspiring them to write more.

Bianca

Bianca's Journal
The teacher's entries can be used by the students as a writing model.

Javon asked me how to spell "brother." Before I could say anything, Shomari said, "Hey, that was in mine." He flipped through his journal to the page that I had written "brother," and told Javon how to spell it.

My response in Shomari's Journal

The teacher can provide positive feedback by highlighting something the student has done well.

Asking the students questions shows interest and causes them to reflect back on their ideas.
Some students may choose to share personal stories about themselves or their family.

The sense of audience that dialogue journals give students allows for an authentic writing experience.
The conversations that take place in dialogue journals provide for a meaningful writing experience for children.

Dialogue journals, for some children, can be a place that they feel is safe to express their emotions.
Entries such as this one can give the teacher insight as to what events are important to their students’ and their families.

Gender Differences

• Topic Choice

• Length of journal entries

• Attention span while writing
Benefits

• Provides model of correct writing/spelling
• Provides audience
• Helps establish a relationship between the teacher and student
• A way to become more comfortable with their writing
• Doesn’t involve red ink pens, so students have less writing anxiety
• Gives students meaning and purpose for writing

“Most importantly, they [dialogue journals] are an authentic writing activity and provide the opportunity for real communication between students or between a student and the teacher, something that is too often missing in elementary classrooms” (Tompkins, 2000, p.174).