

## INQUIRY 5- WRITTEN NARRATIVE

### Focus

#### (Inquiry 2):

The focus of my ten day unit was “I can write a complete sentence by beginning with a capital letter, spacing between words, end with proper punctuation, and write my upper and lower case letters legibly.” In the unit I emphasized each point in the “I can” statement. When students write sentences it is important for them to understand each of the elements in order to make a coherent sentence. The main focus of the unit was the proper use of capital and lower case letters, using spaces between words, and ending a sentence with some kind of punctuation.

### Where the students were at the beginning

#### (Inquiry 3 and whole class assessment):

In order to figure out where my students were at the beginning of the unit I had to pre-assess their sentence writing. I had the whole class write a sentence about something they like. Each of the students had to start the sentence with “I like,” and had to do their best to spell out the words phonetically. Developmentally the students are using sounds to spell out words. During the pre-assessment many of my students struggled with the writing process, in which they were very concerned with spelling everything correctly. Overall, most of the students struggled with punctuation and then spaces. I could tell that the students had a difficult time with punctuation based on their pre-assessment scores. Many of the students did not have any spaces at all or there were very few spaces between their words. Also, I could tell that many of the students did not know about punctuation based on the pre-assessment scores, because many of them had nothing at the end of their sentences. There was no sign of any kind of punctuation, and I think many of them have not been formally taught about punctuation. They see it when they read, but they have not yet been taught about it in writing. Based on the pre-assessment the majority of the students performed well when it came to capitalizing the first letter of their sentence. The first letter was capitalized in their sentences in which the letter had the correct line use (top to bottom) and the correct form of the letter.

When it came to my three focus students, Hailey, Myren, and John performed about the same as the other students at their academic level. Hailey was one of the few students to receive the highest score in each component. Myren began his sentence with a capital letter and used some lower case letters throughout the rest of his sentence, but left out the punctuation at the end and spaces between his words. John made a great effort in that he used lower case letters throughout most of his sentence and attempted to start his sentence with a capital letter, but left out the punctuation and spaces. John has a harder time forming letters and lacks some of the fine motor skills of writing, which makes some of his writing is difficult to read, and is the reason why he did not receive full points for the capital and lower case letters.

### What was taught and how

#### (Inquiry 4):

In order to teach each component of writing a sentence, I broke it down and spent about one to two days teaching each part. To differentiate my instruction for my students I provided a small group environment for my intensive students to work in during independent work time,

and for my benchmark students I gave them some form of extension depending on the lesson on that given day.

I started out the first day with explaining the definition of a sentence as a complete thought or idea and I gave the students several examples of sentences and wrote them on the overhead. Then I gave the students some non-examples of sentences and we discussed why they were not sentences. We discussed that for the non-examples we were left with several questions, which was an indicator that it was not a complete thought or idea. After opening up the unit with the introduction of what sentences are, I then taught the class about capitals and lower case letters, spaces, punctuation, capital use in names and the pronoun 'I', and then two days for review. Each day I reviewed the definition of a sentence and all the components that are in it, in order to activate their prior knowledge each day and to refresh what we had been learning about throughout the whole unit.

When teaching the students about capital and lower case letters, I started out by having them practice writing the entire alphabet in capital and lower case form. My objective for this day was that students will be able to write the letters of the alphabet in upper and lower case form. Many of the students need the extra practice writing their letters, because many of them write them backwards or do not even know what they look like. I simply used the overhead to write the letters of the alphabet and explained how the dictation paper has a hat line, belt line, and boot line, in order to make it easier for them to see how the letters should be formed. The next day, after we practiced writing our letters out, I used a big book to show the students real world examples of how sentences are written and how there is a capital letter at the beginning. I used highlighter tape to underline the capitals in the book in order to make it easier for the students to see. Also, after we highlighted the capitals at the beginning, we went through the book and highlighted where the periods were in order for the students to notice the pattern that after each period comes a capital letter. I highlighted the capital in one color and the period in another color so the students could see a color pattern to make it easier to notice the pattern within a sentence. My objective for this day was that students will be able to identify that sentences begin with a capital letter and end with punctuation. Also, at the end of the lesson I wrote sentences incorrectly on the board and had the students make the changes in order to make the sentence correct with all components. This helped me informally assess to see if the students were on the right track and that they understood that sentences begin with capital letters and end with some kind of punctuation.

After teaching the students about sentences beginning with capitals, I spent two days teaching the students about spaces and the importance of them. I made a space man for each of the students to use and to keep in order to remind them to put spaces between their words when they are writing. For the first day I wrote a sentence on the board without any spaces to see if the students could read it, and used it as a way to emphasize the importance of spaces when writing. My objective for this lesson was that students will be able to use spaces between their words when writing. The first day I modeled how to use and take care of the space man for the students, because we had a limited time constraint. The next day I had the students practice using the space man by having them copy a sentence from the overhead. My objective was the same in that students will be able to use spaces between their words when they write. I started out the lesson by writing a sentence without any spaces to see if they could read it. Many of them struggled and I explained that there are many ways to read a sentence that has no spaces. This showed the students the importance of the lesson and that they should use spaces when they write in order to make it easier for them to keep track of what they are writing and for someone

else to be able to read it. The students loved using the space man and still take it out to use it for when we do any other kind of writing. After the students copied a couple examples from the overhead, I had them write their own sentence and to review the other components that we have learned about and to incorporate them into their sentences. For the students who are at benchmark, I did not have them copy a sentence from the board, but instead they had to write a sentence on their own. Once I had the other students working independently, I then gathered the benchmark students and introduced the idea of writing a paragraph and explained that it was about three sentences about one topic that provided detail about a specific topic, and had them try to write a paragraph. Also, I differentiated by working with my intensive students at a table in the back of the room to give them more individual assistance and guidance in writing their sentences.

For the next component, I taught the students about punctuation and explained that it was used at the end of a sentence to show that a person has completed their thought or idea and served as an ending point for the sentence. My objective for the lesson was that students will be able to recognize and use a period or other kind of punctuation at the end of their sentences. I started the lesson by reviewing what we know about sentences and each component and what we have learned so far. Then I used the big book that we used in a previous lesson to use as an example of how sentences end with some kind of punctuation. After reading a couple of examples, I explained to the students the three types of punctuation that we usually use at the end of a sentence (period, question mark, and exclamation point), and gave an example of how we use each one. When the students gave me the examples I wrote them on the chart paper and had them guide me through the process of writing the sentence and using each component. Then I had the students give me an example of a sentence that would use each type of punctuation. After we gave examples, we went back to the big book and highlighted the periods at the end of the sentences in order to emphasize the ending of the sentences.

As we ended each component of sentence writing, I made sure to review with the students the other components that we learned. The major component that I taught the students was about capitalizing names and the pronoun 'I' in sentences. I started out by asking the students if they have ever written anything that had a persons name in it, or something where they wrote about themselves. Many of the students raised their hands and I explained that many of us could relate to learning about this specific lesson. My objective for this lesson was that students will be able to Students will be able to capitalize "I" and names when they use them in a sentence. I began the lesson by giving the students an example of writing a person's name in a sentence and one with the pronoun 'I'. As I wrote the sentence I had the students guide me through writing it. After I gave an example, I had a student come up and give an example of a sentence with a person's name in it and we wrote it together on the overhead. Then the students worked independently on creating their own sentence that had a person's name in it so that they could practice the new component and the other components that we learned. During the independent work time I reviewed with the benchmark students what a paragraph was and told them to write a paragraph about a friend or family member. Also, I placed my intensive students in a small group environment to provide them with more individualized assistance.

After we covered all the components, which took about seven days, I then spent two days reviewing the entire sentence writing process with the students. For the first day my objective was that students will be able to students will be able to give me examples of sentences and guide me through the process of writing it using all components we have learned. The first day I modeled how to write a sentence and gave a couple examples and wrote them on the overhead.

Then I had the students give me examples and guide me through the process of writing the whole sentence. The second day my objective was that students will be able to write sentences on their own and be able to correct sentences. This day was more about independent writing and practicing on their own how to write a sentence. We first played a game where I paired up the students with a partner and were given a sentence with individual components and words on the index cards. I made sure they were words that they could read and that they were familiar with from their reading groups. I had a separate flashcard for a space man, and a word with a capital at the beginning, and a word with a period at the end in order to serve as starting and ending points for them. There were a total of five sets of sentences that went out and I made sure that partners sitting near each other didn't have the same sentence in order to prevent copying. After the pairs were done they shared with the class their sentences and how they knew to arrange them. After the game the students worked independently to write their own sentence.

The last day of the unit I formally assessed the students by having them write a sentence starting with the words "I like." If the students finished early I had them draw a picture on the back about their sentence. For my benchmark students, I had them write the same type of sentence but asked them to write another sentence about the same topic.

#### What the students learned and how I know (Inquiry 4):

Based on my post-assessments my students drastically improved in their punctuation usage and their use of spaces between their words. I know that the students improved in these areas, because the graphs show an increase in their scores from their pre-assessments to their post-assessments. Before I taught the unit, many of students had no form of punctuation at the end of their sentences and would just keep writing. However, after the lesson there has been an improvement to at least make an attempt at a punctuation mark and many of them do end their sentences with a period. On the post-assessment I had only a handful of students who received a zero for not having any punctuation at the end of their sentence; whereas, for the pre-assessment over half did not use any type of punctuation. My focus students varied in how they did when it came to punctuation. Hailey performed the same and received a three (full points) for her use in punctuation in the pre and post assessment; John stayed the same with his use in punctuation in that he received a zero on both the pre and post assessment because he did not use any punctuation at the end of his sentence; Myren did improve his punctuation and went from a zero on the pre- assessment to a three on the post- assessment.

The students also improved on their use of spaces between their words. This is evident based on the data collected from the pre and post-assessments. In the pre-assessment almost two-thirds of my students received a score of zero or one for not having any to very few spaces in their sentences. However, after the unit in the post-assessment only a handful received a zero or one for leaving out spaces in their sentence. This is a great improvement in their writing. Also, before the unit many of the students just wrote all their words next to each other and it was very difficult to read what they were trying to write. After the lesson, many of the students continue to use their space man when they are writing for academic purposes or in their writing journals. It has been a great tool to serve as a reminder to students that they need to put spaces between their words and make their writing easier to read. What I noticed for my focus students is that my benchmark student, Hailey, received full credit on each component in the pre-assessment and in the post- assessment; therefore, Hailey's scores did not go down or improve and shows me that she already had the skills for writing a sentence. Myren's score did improve

with the use of spaces between his words. In his pre-assessment he scored a zero, but in the post- assessment he received a three and put spaces between all of his words. John's score stayed the same between his pre and post- assessment in that he received a zero for not putting spaces between his words.

I was also very impressed to see that the students' scores mostly increased in the use of lower case letters in their sentences. Many of the students would write upper case letters throughout their sentence at the beginning and for the pre-assessment. After the unit and for the post-assessment many of the students' scores increased. There were a few zero scores given out during the pre-assessment, but for the post-assessment there were no students that received a zero score for not having any lower case letters. Also, many of the students made an effort with the lower case letters in their post-assessments. Many of the students had the capital form of the letter, but used the correct line use, in that they were below the belt line or where they should have been on the line. When the students used the correct place on the line that told me that they understood that the first letter was supposed to be the larger letter and the rest were supposed to be smaller, which means that they understood the general concept. For my focus students Myren's use of lower case letters increased from a two to a three from his pre- assessment to his post-assessment; John's scores stayed the same in that he scored a two on both his pre and post-assessments in that he did use several lower case letters in his sentences; and Hailey remained the same and scored a three on both assessments.

When it came to beginning the sentence with a capital letter, the majority of the students fulfilled that requirement during the pre-assessment. There was a student who received a zero in the pre-assessment and a couple who received a score of a two on the pre-assessment; however those students increased their scores to receive full points and one student stayed the same and still received the score of a two. This shows me that many of the students are comfortable with capital letters and understand that they come at the beginning of a sentence. My focus students all scored well in this category on the pre- test and improved or stayed the same for the post-assessment. Myren and Hailey both scored threes on both the pre and post- assessments. I was very pleased to see Myren improve all of his scores from the pre- assessment to the post-assessment. This shows me that he really did learn the components of writing a sentence and could write it on his own. John did improve his score from a two on the pre-assessment to a three on the post- assessment. This made me very happy to see, because he does struggle with writing his letters, because of his lack of fine motor skills. It takes him longer to write and he has to spend a lot of time focusing on how to form the letters that it is difficult for him to focus on any other writing component at this time.

#### What I learned from teaching the unit and rethinking it (Inquiry 1 and Appendices 1 and 2):

What I learned from the unit was that it is very difficult to teach students how to write, and that it is extremely difficult to differentiate. My main core values in literacy are that it is extremely important to differentiate instruction to meet every student's learning style and capability, it is important to create a community of learners, and that it is important to integrate other subjects into literacy. In order for students to learn to the best of their ability, I believe that it is important for them to feel comfortable with their classmates and to work together as a team to make sure everyone is learning and understands what we are doing. If students do not feel comfortable in their environment then they will not be willing to participate and become part of a team. Also, if students do not feel like they are accepted by their classmates then they will not

want to voice their opinions or questions. I believe it is important for students to be able to talk about how they feel and to talk about questions they may have, because that is how everyone learns. Every day we learn something from other people, whether it is from a different perspective that they offer or a question that they may have that we never thought of. Also, I believe that differentiating is a way of teaching that allows a teacher to reach every student's needs and learning style. Everyone does not learn the same way and it is important to understand that children do not all learn in the exact same way. Also, not everyone comes from the same background and experiences and may need more assistance than others, or may need something introduced in a different way so that they understand what is being taught to them. Also, integrating across all subjects is a great way to relate things to the world around us and across the curriculum. When we integrate other subjects into literacy, I believe that we are showing that you learn from reading and writing and can relate it to other subjects. Integrating subjects is a great way to talk about different subjects in a new way.

Looking back on the unit I see how difficult it is to differentiate instruction to meet all the children's needs. I really struggled with finding ways to challenge my more advanced students and worried about them getting bored with the material. Also, for my more intensive students I tried to find a way to make things simpler for them or to have them focus on just one area at a time rather than a few things at the same time. Also, I learned that some students learn and pick things up right away and others take some time and a lot of repetition to finally pick up a skill. It was difficult for me to move on with a lesson when everyone was not on the same track or some were left behind.

From the unit I also learned the time management issue that I think many teachers struggle with. There never seems enough time to get what I wanted done. Many days I felt like I was rushing the students to write their sentences because we had to move on to something else. Also, there were days when I thought the lesson would not need a lot of time and I would completely underestimate the time it took to get students writing or to finish the lesson. With the time constraint I realized how difficult it is to provide hands on activities for my students. I have a rather talkative group of 30 students, which makes it hard to do hands on activities without them getting out of control and working on the task.

What went well in my unit was that I feel that some of my lessons were interactive and interesting, especially the lessons when I used the big book and the space man. We have not used big books in our classrooms and the students were thrilled to see something new and something so big. They really liked using the highlighter tape in the book to show where the different components we were learning about that day were. Also, the space man was a huge hit for the students. They still use the space man in their journal writing and in any other type of writing that we do. I think the students liked it so much, because it was something that they could keep and would be personal for them. They can fit the space man in their desk and use it at any appropriate time. I know the students loved the space man, because their faces just lit up when I passes them out to them and the majority of the students have kept their space man in good condition. These lessons went well because they were interactive and the students were introduced to something new, which was connected to my planning. I felt that a lot of the writing we do in the class is done with them sitting at their desks looking at the overhead and it is a struggle to get them to do anything because they are so bored. With my planning I really wanted to find new ways to introduce the components to the students and to do so in a meaningful way that they could relate to.

What I would like to change about my unit would be the first lesson where I introduced capital and lower case letters. I pretty much used a dictation style to have the students write the whole alphabet in capital and lower case form. During the middle of the lesson I felt bored with it and could only imagine how the students were feeling. The students were not very engaged in the lesson and had to sit for about 35 minutes straight. This made the students very anxious at the end of the lesson to get out of their seats and talking. This was one of my lessons where I definitely underestimated how much time it would take to go through the whole alphabet in upper and lower case form and then have the students do the same thing. I think next time I would maybe use a couple examples to show how each form of the letter looks and then use the alphabet strip on their name tags to show the letters.

I would also change the fact that I did not integrate any other subject into my writing lessons. I think if I had the lesson to do over again that maybe I would incorporate some letters or journal entries that have been written by historic people, such as Ann Frank and other historic artifacts. This would show students that people mechanically write sentences in similar ways and all have capitals at the beginning, spaces between their words and a period at the end; as well as incorporating some history into the lesson. If I had more time, I think I would have eventually wanted the students to write a letter to someone in the class. I believe that integrating other subjects makes lessons more interesting for the students, because they are learning many things at one time.

Another thing that I would change in my lessons would be to have a back up plan for when the students get done much earlier than the rest of the group. Many times I had to think on my feet on something for the students to do, because I did not think many of them would finish so soon. It seemed that I would have several students finish really early and another handful that would take an extremely long time to finish a task. This made it very difficult for me to balance the time to where my faster students wouldn't get bored and become disruptive, yet provide enough time for my slower students to finish up their work and not feel rushed.

I can only imagine where they will be at the end of the year and the progress they will make. The unit was a way for me to evaluate the way that I plan my lessons and what to take into account for planning in the future. I was able to see the various obstacles that teachers encounter when they plan for the entire class and try to create fun activities for the students. It is exhausting to find new and creative ways to introduce topics and subjects to students, especially when it comes teaching first graders how to write, because they are limited in what they can write at this point in time. This unit was the first writing activity that they have really done so far this year. This unit was a great learning experience in planning something from start to finish and to see the finished product of it all. It was wonderful to see how the students grew in a matter of two weeks in their writing.