

Institute for Professional Development School Studies
College of Education
Towson University

Mini-Grant Program
Final Report 2007-2008

Purpose: The purpose of this Mini-Grant was to provide financial support in order to improve teaching and learning through research and inquiry at Bear Creek Elementary School.

Project Application

1. Title of project

Writing in the Primary Grades

2. Name of persons submitting the proposal

Karen Cohen
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3. Investigators

Karen Cohen and Nanette Dunphy
Towson University Primary Early Childhood Interns and Student Teachers

4. Name of PDS/School(s)

Bear Creek Elementary School
1601 Melbourne Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21222

5. Purpose

The purpose of this grant was to improve student writing through targeted small group instruction based on Traits of Writing for the Primary Grades by Ruth Culham.

6. Problem or Issue

We felt that there was a strong connection between reading and writing and that by teaching students the attributes of good writing both their reading and writing will improve. 6 & 1 Traits of Writing for the Primary Grades is developmentally appropriate for grades 1 and 2. A framework for writing was taught through the use of quality children's literature.

7. Guiding Questions

How can we improve the writing of targeted (below grade level) students in grades one and two?

- ◆ How will the student interns impact reading and writing of our at risk students in grades one and two?

8. Context 2006-2007 School Year Data

Total Student Enrollment	480
White	415
Other Subgroups	65
Male	251
Female	229
Attendance Rate	94.9%

9. Participants

- Eight Towson University Early Childhood Primary from both the primary and pre-primary semesters
- 7 at risk first grade students and 10 at risk second grade students (as measured by DIBELS and supported by a writing sample)
- Six first and second grade classroom teachers were invited to participate in a book club in order to enhance and continue learning beyond the tutoring sessions. 5/6 of the teachers participated in the book club.

10. Process/Timeline

- The interns met after school ten times from October thru December in order to prepare for the next weeks lesson.
- Weekly small group instruction. One first grade and one second grade writing club was formed. Each group met for approximately 45 minutes for 10 weeks at Bear Creek Elementary School.
- Teachers and interns analyzed writing samples weekly. Additionally, the following benchmark samples were taken:
 - Pre-assessment – September
 - Preliminary findings – November
 - Post-assessment – March

11. Evidence/Sources of data that answer the project's guiding questions

- Weekly writing projects along with pre and post writing assessments indicated growth from all of the students.
- TU interns initiated and participated in rich conversation about and reflection of the students who participated in the tutoring sessions on a weekly basis.
- Pre and post surveys were given to students, teachers, and interns (see attached data).
- Anecdotal data – weekly observations of student progress and feelings were documented after tutoring sessions.

12. Evaluation/Results

- Post surveys indicated that across the board both teachers and interns increased their knowledge of the 6+1 Writing Traits. Classroom teachers and interns increased from 0% confidence in their ability to teach writing to 100% confidence in their ability to teach writing.
- Post writing assessments indicated that all students showed improvement in their ability to write. This “cold” write proved a challenge so difficult for some at the beginning of the year that they were unable to write anything at all.

13. Resources/Expertise needed to conduct the project

- TU interns conducted tutoring one day per week for 10 weeks, analyzed student samples, constructed take home backpacks, participated in an after school book club and reflection meetings.
- Children's books were purchased for lessons
- Backpacks for home activities
- Books for backpacks
- Refreshments were purchased for celebrations