

The Island Project: Creating a Framework for Emerging Writers in Three Cycles of Inquiry

Organizing observations and artifacts

**Observing, recording,
and collecting artifacts**

**Analyzing and inter-
preting observations and
observations artifacts;
building theories**

Framing Questions

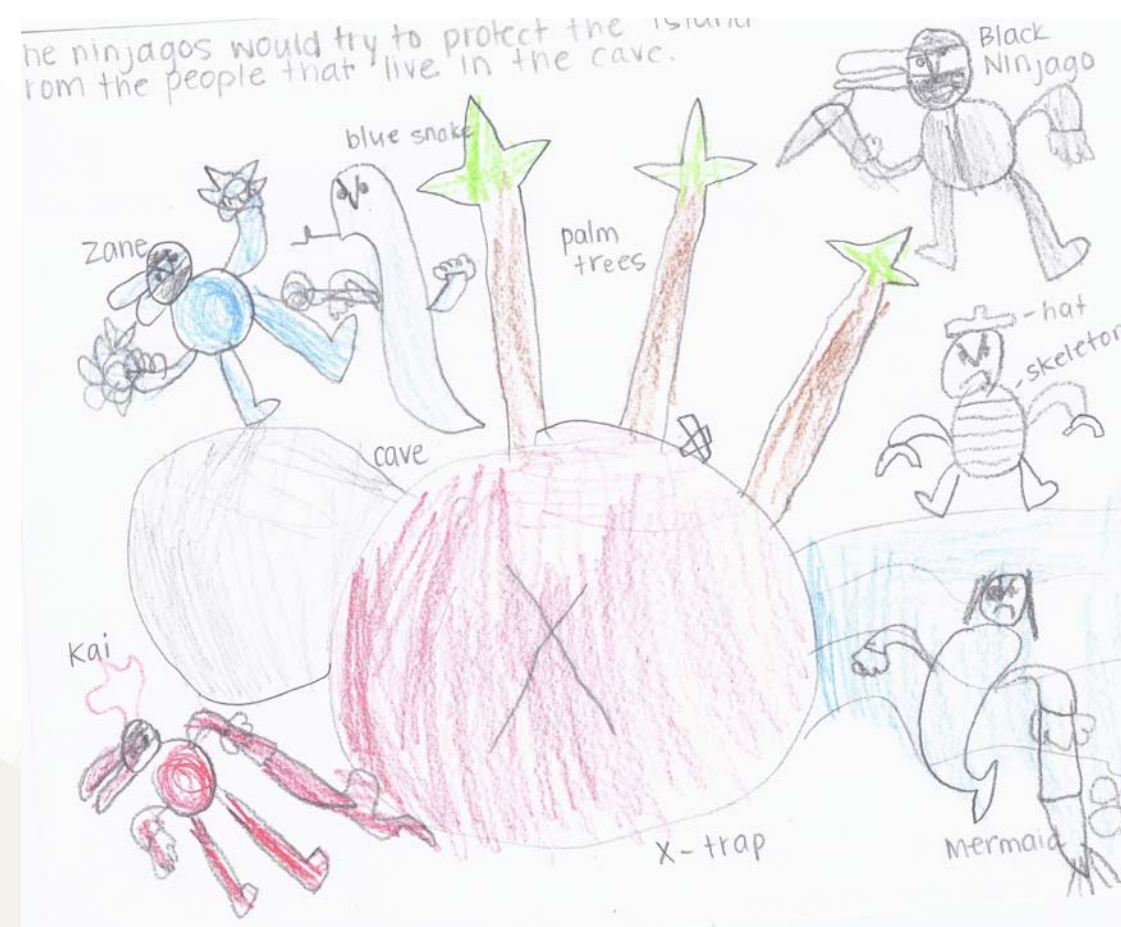
Reframing questions

**Planning, projecting
and responding**

Cycle #1: Building the Island Context

Teachers wanted to honor children's interest in performing and find other meaningful avenues for children to share in the performance area. Teachers noted this space was the least defined in terms of materials and purpose compared to other classroom areas at the beginning of the school year.

Children had various theories about what could happen in a performance area, including practicing, performing for an audience, acting, and listening. According to Mae, “we can make up our own stories.”



Graphic representation uncovered an island as an intriguing location to create in the performance area. Again, fantasy was a definite draw for children, surfacing as ninjas, caves, treasure, animals, secrets and themes of good versus evil. But their understandings of islands also revealed real life connections like people, skies, nature, and water.



Sharing summer provocations with the classroom community uncovered children's interest in performing, sharing personal stories and making connections to similar interests (e.g. realistic and fantasy).

Once an island was identified as the context to create in the performance area , teachers captured children's prior knowledge through conversation and illustration.



Ashton: There can be dangerous animals on the land and sharks in the water.



Eva: It's a big sidewalk, a cut-up sidewalk in the middle of the ocean. It has restaurants and trees and places to go.

Summer Provocation: Share important connections from your life.



Jose: An island like Hawaii has a volcano.



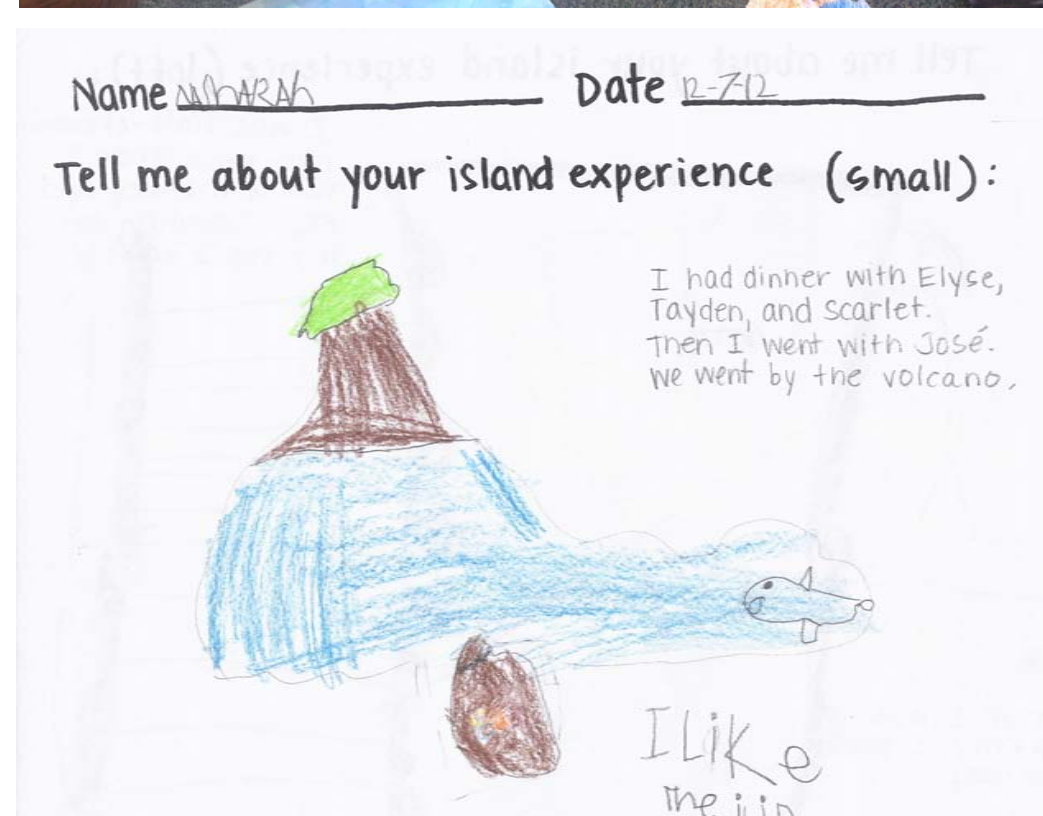
Will: A big picture of sand way in the middle of the ocean.

Teachers wondered what play could inspire next for children? A provocation in two different spaces representing islands was prepared.

Context 1 was the small island space created by children out of various materials. Context 1 observations, photographs and video revealed more emotional exchanges, a focus on animal props and less on the island scenery. They tended to be quieter and seated more often than when in Context 2.

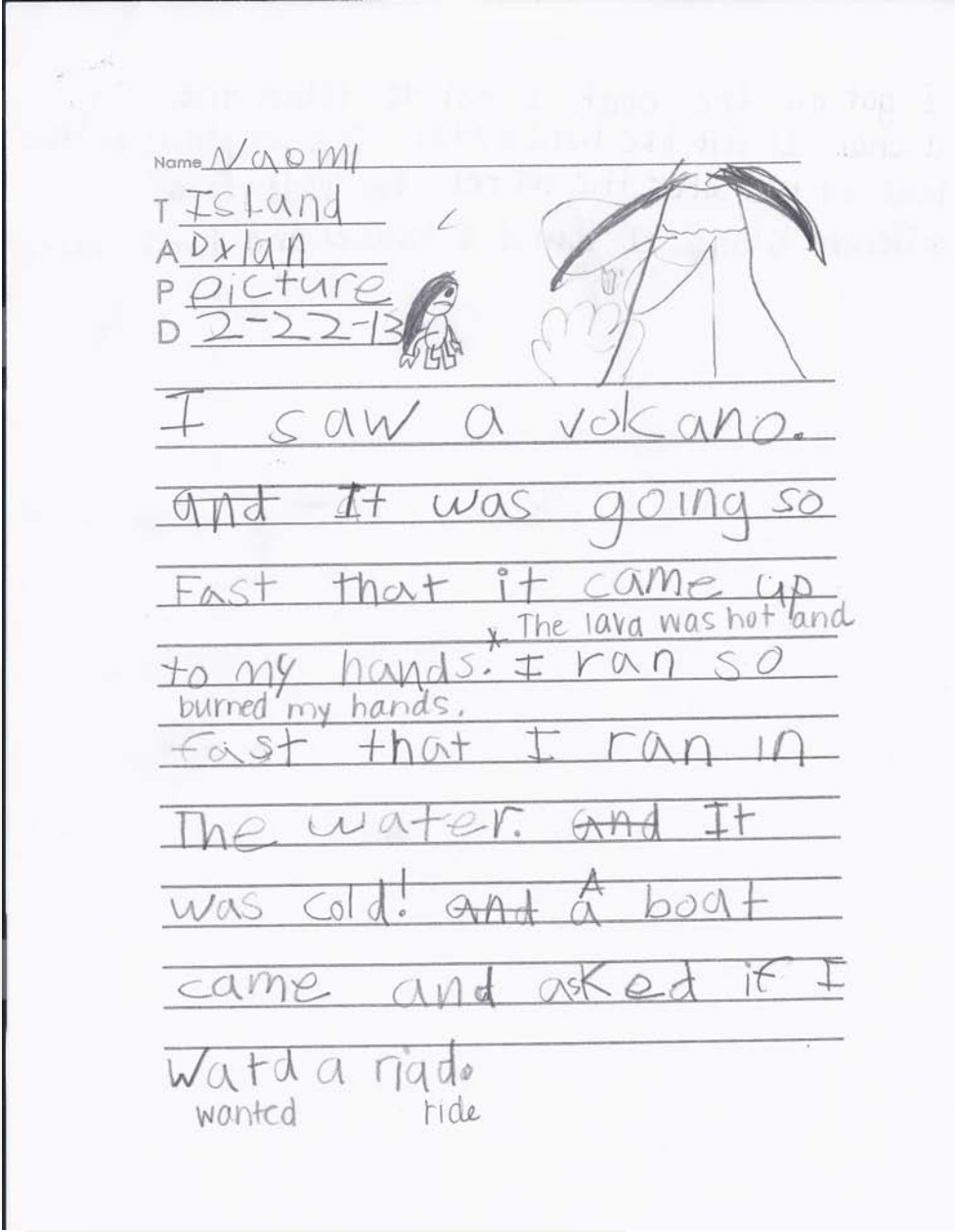
Context 2 was the loft and children were asked to imagine it was an island as well. Context 2 observations revealed more creative story lines, quick changes among storylines, parallel play, leader and follower scenarios, louder voice volumes, including sound effects and a full body kinesthetic advantage. This island offered more gross motor opportunities as well.

Children's excitement was contagious as they jumped into designing an island. They discussed what materials they could use. Teachers provided paint, paper, wire, fabric, natural materials, recycled materials, and construction area props to build the island. Most of these materials were previously used in the mini-studio, but this opportunity offered teachers a new understanding of where languages can be used in the classroom.



Cycle #2: How do teachers honor storytelling richness and teach writing process and mechanics?

In connection with a science standard, teachers aligned sensory explorations with the island context. Children were challenged to look at the island and recreate stories that represent what you could see, touch, taste, smell and hear. Senses like touch and sight were easier experiences for children to recount detailed stories. In general however, children’s associated writings included real life connections, rich vocabulary, more than basic structure of beginning, middle and end, storyline twists, and different genres.



Reflection of the paired writings led teachers to wonder about their writing instruction and the role of storytelling and dictation. When do we focus on mechanics? How do we teach a love of writing, not just the formality? Teachers began uncovering previous struggles of early writers: identifying a topic, appropriate teaching points, rushing the children’s process to move instructional goals, and identifying teacher versus student goals.



Ja’Kayla and Lindsay were partnered to allow Ja’Kayla to tell her story while Lindsay transcribed her words.

Teachers wanted to capitalize on children’s storytelling interest within the island context. They paired older (first graders) and younger (kindergartners) to afford early writers the benefit of capturing their complete oral storytelling in writing. Interestingly, teachers noticed that the younger children used their storyboards to tell detailed, exciting stories. Older writers like Lindsay tended to write stories with less attention to detail and imagination, focusing more on mechanics and story structure.

Teachers organized stories by developmental writing stages and noticed that the majority of the class was able to write at the phonetic level and above. This suggested small group differentiated instruction could address writing needs rather than in individual writing conferences.

Teachers learned that when children were provided with a rich, relevant context to experience, the subsequent academic work connected to that context was enriched with quality and infused with excitement.

Teachers refined the focus of the study, developing three framing questions to follow:

- 1.How do children connect to each other through stories within context?
2. How does storytelling develop writing skills in emergent writers?
3. How do teachers facilitate story development and the mechanics of writing?

The island context, in conjunction with these new framing questions allowed teachers to step back and think about writing instruction at a more developmentally appropriate level for Kindergartners and First Graders. Opportunities like classroom message centers and a writing shelf for variety and choice would fuel these findings to create a more authentic writing experience where children would feel in control of their learning. These experiences would also afford children the opportunity to write for an authentic audience and share their writing on a more consistent basis. The writing produced could offer an opportunity for group conferences that could focus more on the ideas rather than mechanics.



Pictorial

Pre-Communicative
S L) M T

Semi-Phonetic
I MD BT

Phonetic
I mad a bot.

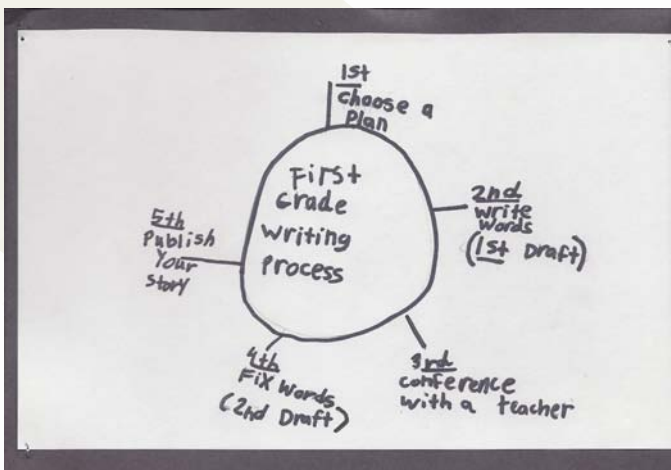
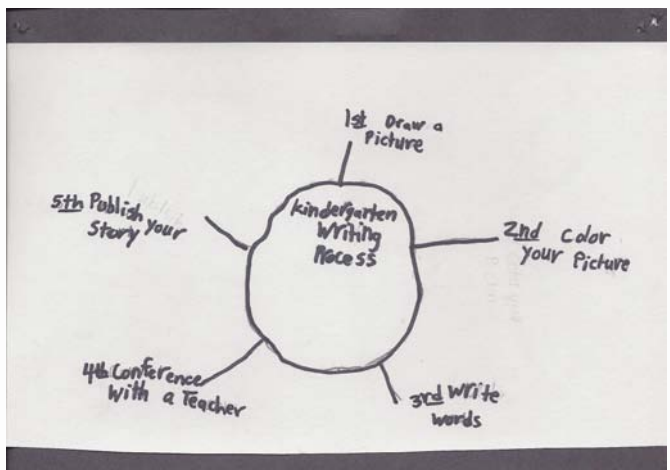
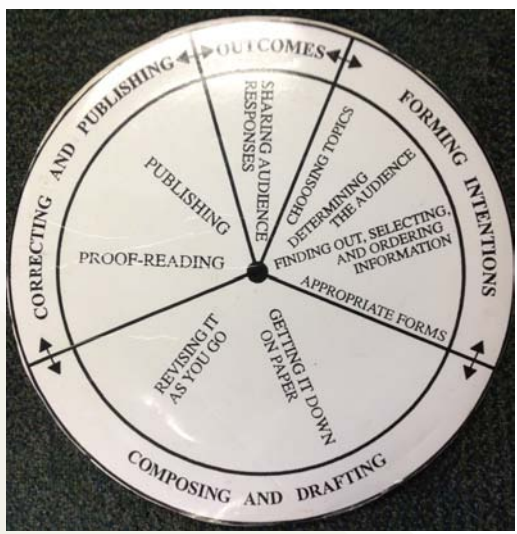
Transitional
I made a blu boat.

Independent
I made a butiful blue boat,
It was fast.

Cycle #3: How do we articulate the writing process?

"When I wrote my story, it made me happy. I like that [the teacher] conferenced with me." - Elyse

Teachers referenced the writing process wheel that had been used previously and noted that it may not be developmentally appropriate for children in Kindergarten and First Grade. Teachers identified a need for two different writing process structures, one for each grade level. Two approaches would allow for simplified vocabulary and differentiation.



Dylan 4-D2-13

1. I Draw Pictures.
2. I Write Words.
3. They Can be funny.

① Draw a picture.
② Write your words.
③ Sometimes you need to read it.
④ Take it to the teacher and read it to her.

Children went through the newly developed writing process structures. Overall, the children enjoyed the process and produced quality work. Teachers noticed longer pieces, richer vocabulary and sustained work time.

Children represented their theories about the writing process. Teachers hypothesized that the higher the writing level, the higher the understanding of the process. This was not the case when their work was sorted. Some children who were at the beginning of the developmental levels had more of an understanding of the writing process than those who had progressed to higher levels and vice versa. Teachers used children's work and understanding of the writing process to evaluate their own teaching practice, identifying that the writing process steps were taught in isolation, and was somewhat secretive, rather than explicitly taught.

Name: Camie Date: 4-29-13

① picture
② color

I went to the park with my Mommy and my Daddy. We had a picnic and we had a picnic. We had a picnic and we had a picnic. We had a picnic and we had a picnic.



Sample of the Kindergarten Writing Process

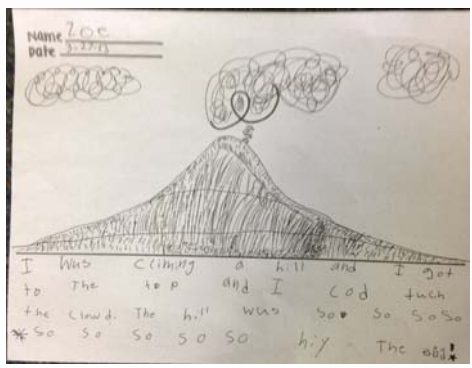
At the end of the study, teachers recognize that writing is an explicit process, which is not prescribed for all children or even all teachers. This study uncovered many implications for teaching writing in the future.

- Choice
- Meaningful context to experience/write about
- Sharing with an audience
- Frequent publishing
- Collaborative writing

Goal-oriented writing by developmental level rather than individual level seems to be one of the greatest implications. Teachers thought about how children process writing instruction, noting that sharing and reflecting on the work in small groups benefited children at all developmental levels. In addition, dialogue about writing would make the process more explicit. This gives children the opportunity to share theories about how they wrote as well as what they wrote.

Authentic Writing Instruction

Choice: The Writing Shelf



Scribble Writing: Turn a random scribble into a picture and write a story about it.

Meaningful Context to Write About: The Island



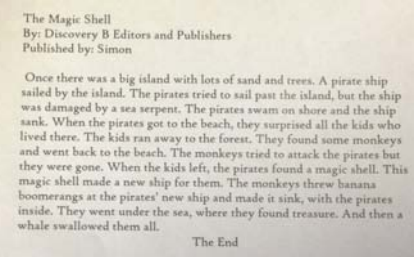
Sharing with an Audience



Frequent Publishing



Collaborative Writing



Name: DeAyd
I Wrote a Story
DeShawna King
P.M.E
4-25-13

② DeShawna and I were
③ Deshawna and I were
X Outside for recess. We were
was at recess. We
X fighting but then we
Fighting we were
X worked out our problem
Or Or pins we play
X We started to play together
together.

④ Deshawna and I were
X Outside for recess. We were
X fighting but then we
X worked out our problem
We started to play
X together.

Deshawna and I were outside for recess.
We were fighting but then we worked
out our problem. We started to play together.

Sample of the First Grade Writing Process

"It was exciting to learn new stuff. I don't remember doing this before." - Jameson