Spring 5-1-2017

Writing in Journals as a Tool for Expressing Ourselves: A 6-8 Week Long Writing Curriculum for a 3rd/4th Grade, Self-Contained, Special Education Classroom.

Christine Carosotto
Bank Street College of Education, ccarosotto@bankstreet.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://educate.bankstreet.edu/independent-studies

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Disability and Equity in Education Commons, and the Early Childhood Education Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Educate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Independent Studies by an authorized administrator of Educate. For more information, please contact kfreda@bankstreet.edu.
Writing in Journals as a Tool for Expressing Ourselves:

A 6-8 Week Long Writing Curriculum for a 3rd/4th Grade, Self-Contained, Special Education Classroom

By:

Christine Carosotto

Teaching Literacy (Birth to Grade 6): Focus on Classroom Teaching in Childhood Education

Mentor:

Lynne Einbender

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Science in Education

Bank Street College of Education

2016
Abstract

Christine Carosotto

Writing in Journals as a Tool for Expressing Ourselves:
A 6-8 Week Long Writing Curriculum for a 3rd/4th Grade, Self-Contained, Special Education Classroom

The following writing curriculum is intended for students aged 8-12 years old in a 12:1, self-contained special education classroom setting. Through journal writing instruction, this curriculum aims to provide support to students struggling with foundational writing skills. These skills include: topic selection, stamina, organization, awareness of audience and sentence clarity. This unit’s theoretical foundation is grounded by the core components of a Writers Workshop model, the belief in developing social and oral language skills as a pre-writing tool and the importance of providing writing opportunities that incorporate choice in both topic and response format in order to increase motivation and independence for struggling writers. The final section of this unit contains the learning objectives, writing objectives and socio-emotional goals of this unit. It also provides descriptions of each of the lessons that comprise the unit, along with opportunities for differentiation and assessment within each lesson. Overall, this curriculum will strengthen students’ overall writing abilities and communication skills.
# Table of Contents

Title Page........................................................................................................................................1  
Abstract........................................................................................................................................2  
Table of Contents............................................................................................................................3  
Introduction......................................................................................................................................4  
Summary of the Curriculum...........................................................................................................9  
Literature Review..........................................................................................................................13  
The Curriculum..............................................................................................................................22  
Conclusion......................................................................................................................................42  
References......................................................................................................................................44  
Appendices.....................................................................................................................................46
Introduction

Before writing this curriculum, I began by reflecting on my own experiences as both a student and as an educator. This reflective process helped me to dig deeper and combine my own cherished learning experiences while responding to my students’ needs. These two perspectives helped contribute to the formation of this work.

My Personal Experience

I have kept a journal for as long as I can remember. In my closet, I have a box filled to the brim with my past journals. Occasionally, I open the box, take out a journal or two and sift through the words on their dusty pages. This is a sacred and reflective practice for me. As I do this, I revisit the wide range of recorded experiences that have been preserved by my writing. Each individual journal serves as its own capsule in my own history. My journals contain stories of loneliness, maturity, excitement, fear, uncertainty, joy, adventure and wonder. Though the journal entries differ greatly from year to year, one consistent theme runs throughout--a theme that I can clearly identify now, as an educator. It was evident that true writing development was occurring through this practice. As a writer, it was clear that I possessed an awareness that my experiences and stories were worth writing about. My journal pages were places where I could tell my story, experiment with writing, record events, store emotions, and work through problems. In other words, my journals were a running and open dialogue that allowed me to check in with myself throughout course of my development.

When I think back on my elementary school years, during the 1990s, journaling was an integral part of my own writing curriculum as a student. One of my fondest elementary school memories was when I received my first journal in third grade. Till this day, the journaling lessons taught by my teacher in third grade still resonate with me.
Explicit instruction went into teaching my class how to keep an organized journal and how to select topics to write about in our journal. Our classroom had frequent journaling “stop points,” integrated throughout the course of our school day. During these twenty minute periods, instruction would pause and we were given time to sit anywhere in the classroom and write in our journals about topics of our choice. Nowadays, students may keep journals in classrooms as a form of assessment or as a response tool. When it comes to teaching students to journal about their own experiences, as one would do in a diary, there is often little room for this type of instruction. Instead, journal prompts are often provided to students after read alouds or for students to plug their writing into like in a template format. These activities only superficially scrape the surface of true journaling to me and they restrict student choice, which is integral to journal writing.

**My Experience as a Special Educator**

When I developed this curriculum, I was a special educator teaching in Brooklyn, New York. I taught in a third and fourth grade, 12:1, self-contained classroom with students ranging from 8-12 years old. My classroom contained a group of students with a wide range of cognitive, emotional and language-based needs. Five out of twelve students in my class were classified as having an Intellectual Disability. The remaining seven students had a language-based Learning Disability. Across all of the different types of classroom settings and models of curricula in my public school, one commonality could be found— each class launched their writing curriculums in September with the same version of a personal narrative unit. We used Lucy Calkins’ Writers Workshop curriculum school wide (Calkins et al., 2016). However, in my experience, the way that writing instruction had been delivered to my students during this crucial, first writing unit of the school year proved to be problematic and too prescriptive. This realization became
especially evident during my experiences teaching and differentiating Calkins’ first writing unit entitled, *Crafting True Stories* (3rd Grade.)

In Calkins’ first unit, students are taught to use specific visual memory tools to help them discern between “big ideas” and “small moment” stories as writers. When considering my students’ struggles in areas of topic selection, stamina, organization, awareness of audience, sentence clarity etc. I quickly realized that this prescriptive approach to teaching personal narrative writing was not playing to the strengths of my community of writers. Not only did it confine students within one kind of narrative text structure, but it lacked the critical and foundational writing instruction that all of my students were in great need of. Here I was trying to teach my students to become a community of writers and storytellers yet, the curriculum in front of me gave me little room to do so. I needed to instill in my students a crucial understanding— that we are all storytellers who each have our own stories to tell in our own way.

I decided that journaling could be a way to bridge this gap. Journaling is a writing technique that encourages writers to reflect on daily personal experiences relevant to their own lives. In turn, this allows for a proactive approach to teaching writing skills because it encourages the author to have the ultimate control over what he or she chooses to write about. This can prove to be a major motivating factor for struggling writers. When I looked around the classrooms in my school, I wondered if journals were still being introduced to students as spaces devoted to freedom and choice. Are students provided with ample windows of time in classrooms that allow them to journal about their own life experiences, stories, thoughts and emotions? Are there ways for non-writers to experience true journaling? These are questions to explore when considering how and why teachers should introduce an authentic journaling experience. This experience
should support students in telling their own stories in any way they choose to tell them. How can we support students in feeling a sense of ownership and freedom when they are recording their own histories?

Soon after realizing this, there was another incident that made me rethink the way I introduced writing to my students at the start of the school year. One day, I received a concerned email from one of the parents in my class. The parent of one of my students, Lucy, explained that a crumpled note was found in Lucy’s backpack that greatly upset both her and her child. Another girl in my class named, Dede, signed the note. Lucy’s parent wanted me to take a look at the note and address the situation with both students involved. Unsure of what the note said, I eagerly anticipated its arrival the next school day.

When I read the note, I was immediately struck by its naturalness, development of tone and strong sense of voice. It read the following: “Dear Lucy, I DO NOT WANT TO PLAY AT RECESS. OK? DO NOT BE MY FRIEND. I DO NOT LIKE YOU ANY MORE. STOP. Love, Dede.” Upon reading this, I immediately pulled Dede into the hallway and asked her a few questions to clarify what exactly had happened. What had made her write this note in the first place? Dede’s explanation was very clear: Lucy had been following her around during the entirety of recess and was taking her doll. Dede asked Lucy three times for some space, but Lucy did not stop. Finally, Dede got so annoyed she decided to write this note and send the crumpled message home with Lucy to read. I inquired, “Did you really mean that you don’t want to play with Lucy at recess anymore? Do you really not want to be friends with her anymore?” Dede responded promptly: “No! I love Lucy! She is my best friend. She was just bothering me…She didn’t stop… I did not know what else to do.”
Many teachers would have regarded this as a cruel note. However, I viewed this as a teachable moment. This note and Dede’s oral explanation of what inspired it, was an opportunity for me to gain direct insight into some crucial writing and storytelling skills that my students possessed and were lacking. It was evident that Dede had a story and did not know how or where to properly express it. I reflected on my own experiences with journaling. If only Dede had a journal as an outlet to express and articulate these very specific thoughts and emotions, perhaps she would have saved Lucy the pain of reading that note outside of school. Though her language may have come across as harsh, Dede was expressing herself in a moment of absolute frustration. She was able to orally express her inner feelings, but did not know exactly how to go about doing so through writing. She lacked awareness of her reader and the skills to communicate as one would when speaking to a close friend.

Dede’s note made me aware, yet again, that I needed to change my approach to writing instruction. There was a real need for students to explore and develop foundational communication skills in the areas of oral language, pragmatics, elaborating, drawing, and writing. Some of my students had yet to discover that writers write for a specific purpose and for a specific audience. Others, like Dede were able to do so. The explicit teaching of these skills paired with explicit writing instruction could provide students with opportunities to practice the articulation of their inner thoughts and feelings through oral language, drawing, and writing. The Calkins’ curriculum placed too much emphasis on text structure and not effective communication itself. My students were lacking experiences with expressive writing and storytelling. These skills are central to success in academic writing and are the focus of Calkins’ curriculum.
A Rationale for Integrating Socio-Emotional Learning and Writing Curriculums

This realization made me ask myself other questions that challenged my pedagogy: Did my students even view themselves as authors? Did their individual voices and writing styles feel valued in our classroom? Were my students given enough time to write about topics of their choice? Was writing being introduced as an outlet of expression in our classroom? As an educator, I had to reconsider the curricular demands of my school and what critical instruction my students really needed. This led to the reasons behind the creation of this writing curriculum entitled, Writing in Journals as a Tool for Expressing Ourselves.

After carefully assessing my students’ writing needs by asking the questions above as well as considering their socio-emotional needs as a result of Dede and her note, I responded by creating this curriculum. Not only is this curriculum learner centered and responsive to my students’ evident needs mentioned above, but it also integrates socio-emotional learning with writing instruction. The integration of these two factors work together to support students in developing the skills needed for effective communication.

Summary of the Curriculum

This writing curriculum is intended to be taught in a 3rd/4th grade, self-contained, special education classroom for students ages 8-12 years old. The unit supports students in developing skills for effective communication by teaching them to use the journaling process as a way to record personal thoughts and daily experiences from their own lives. While engaging in this self-reflective practice, students will be building foundational writing skills in the areas of: topic selection, stamina, organization, awareness of audience and sentence clarity. The lessons within this unit are designed with differentiation in mind in order to meet the needs of a classroom containing students with
a range of language needs and intellectual abilities. The length of this unit spans six to eight weeks long (For unit goals and objectives, see page 24).

*Writing in Journals as a Tool for Expressing Ourselves* contains aspects of the Writers Workshop model that can truly benefit struggling writers when presented in a non-prescriptive way. For example, it proposes to build a strong classroom community of writers. It teaches students to become lifelong writers who write about experiences by looking at their own lives. It provides students with opportunities to choose what they write about as authors. It views the teacher as the mentor author who demonstrates new techniques and provides ongoing feedback to students. Along with these core Writers Workshop values, this unit provides instruction in foundational writing skills as well.

The unit is divided into three phases, which propose the following questions that aim to guide instruction: Phase #1) *What types of skills should students develop before writing in a journal?* Phase #2) *What types of topics or experiences should students write about in their journals?* Phase #3) *How can students choose to respond in their journals?* These unit phases are arranged in a particular order to support students in developing the oral language, socio-emotional and writing skills they need in order to make independent choices as they begin their journey as reflective and thoughtful recorders of their own histories.

**Summary of the Phases**

Phase #1 of this unit begins with oral storytelling. In order for students to journal about their experiences, they have to learn that they have personal stories that are worth communicating on paper. Research tells us that children have a better sense of what to put onto paper if they are given the opportunity to talk through their stories first (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007, p. 2). In order for students to eventually work independently while
writing journal entries about experiences or events from their lives, they need to be given the opportunity to practice sharing these types of stories out loud first.

During the initial lessons in this phase, the teacher establishes an awareness of storyteller and audience for the students (See Phase 1, Lesson 2 for an example.) Body language, facial expressions and reactions to stories help the storyteller gauge how the audience has received their stories. During this phase, the teacher models how to tell stories aloud and how audience members can ask the storyteller questions in order to gain more specific information that will help them more clearly organize a story (See Phase 1, Lesson 3 for an example.) Eventually, this will support students in questioning their own writing in order to elaborate or add more details to their sentences or drawings. Through the gradual release of responsibility, students begin assuming the role of the storyteller and audience members begin asking their own questions about each individual’s story (See Phase 1, Lesson 4 for an example.)

Another important learning goal achieved by phase #1 supports students in learning about the variety of topics that people can tell stories about. By listening to stories told aloud, students are exposed to the wide range of topics writers can select from while brainstorming story ideas. In this phase, the teacher scaffolds the topic selection process for the students by keeping a running list of the story topics told aloud by the members of the class (See Phase 1, Lesson 1B for an example.)

During phase #2 of this unit, the students will build upon their first few weeks of oral storytelling by learning that there is another way to tell their stories—by recording them on paper. Here, journal writing is introduced as a writing tool that allows students to record their personal experiences similar to the stories they told during phase 1 (See Phase 2, Lessons 1-2 for an example.) During this phase, the socio-emotional goals of
this unit are woven into their writing experiences. Students will be encouraged to name and reflect on personal experiences that trigger a strong emotion or reaction (See Phase 2, Lessons 3-4 for examples.) From these emotional moments, students are taught that journal writing can be used as a tool to articulate and work through their inner thoughts and feelings brought on by these moments. The writing skills that students will learn to better support the articulation of their feelings during these moments are learning to add more detail to their writing, elaborating and organizing their writing to make it clearer. Prior to these lessons, students may not have considered journaling or writing in general as a self-reflective outlet or coping mechanism that could help them work through or express their challenges in this way.

During phase #3 of this unit, students will explore the multiple writing options one may choose to best communicate their thoughts. This choice coincides with the decision that the writer makes when considering what to write about. For example, students will be taught that they can choose to draw, label, write sentences, write words, or use color to express a particular story, feeling or emotion (See Phase 3, Lesson 1 for an example.) For many students (especially those struggling with communicating their thoughts clearly through writing,) drawing is a way writers can best represent meaning, communicate their thinking, develop language and go deeper into their stories (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007, p. 62). Students will be taught to make critical choices as writers after they select an experience or topic from their lives to journal about. As long as students use specific information, (See Phase 3, Lessons 2-4 for examples,) they actively participate in this meaning making process and choose how to best tell their stories. This choice helps to develop independence and puts the students in control of their decision-making process. It is similar to the choice an artist makes when considering which
medium to use when carrying out an artistic vision. Overall, this choice only further individualizes a student’s experience and relationship with journaling during this unit.

**Literature Review**

**Literature Review Introduction**

Originally, I felt the need to develop this writing curriculum after observing my students’ writing difficulties emerge during the Lucy Calkins’ personal narrative writing unit mentioned earlier. As I observed my students struggling to comprehend the prescribed narrative text structure, I also noticed large gaps in their foundational writing skills. My students struggled in the areas of topic selection, stamina, organization, awareness of audience and sentence clarity. These foundational writing skills are required for the success of any writer regardless of genre. It was evident my students needed explicit writing instruction devoted to better develop these skills. They especially needed practice and exposure to these skills through a curriculum that was developmentally appropriate, allowed for a wide range of differentiation and choice while keeping their strengths in mind. I wanted to develop my students’ higher-order cognitive development by improving their social skills and building a sense of community within an environment rich with language learning (Fu & Shelton, 2007, p. 334).

Aside from writing challenges, there was also a need for my students to work on developing their social awareness and problem solving skills (as we saw with Dede’s note.) Perhaps writing could be a way for students to better express and articulate their problems and emotions and deal with them in a more socially appropriate manner. Paired with these realizations was my desire to introduce an authentic journaling experience to my classroom as a daily reflective writing tool. As Valerie J. Janesick (2000) states, “Journal writing is a way of getting in touch with yourself in terms of reflection,
catharsis, remembrance, creation, exploration and problem solving” (p. 177). Not only did I feel that my students could greatly benefit from practicing these self-reflective skills, but I wanted to pass on my love of journaling to my students in a meaningful way.

Therefore, I decided to create this unit to develop the foundational writing skills mentioned above and to enhance my students’ self-reflective and social skills. I intended to develop these socio-emotional skills by creating a strong classroom community of reflective thinkers and writers based on the goals essential to a successful Writers Workshop model. As Fu & Shelton (2007) conclude, “The philosophy of the writing workshop model [helps] all students’ learning regardless of their various abilities” (p. 327).

Journal Writing and the Development of Foundational Writing Skills

Journaling has benefits that support successful language development, which can then translate into clearer and more effective writing. As Everson (1991) states, “[Students] see what they want to say, but sometimes during the process of writing it down, the fragments of language—syntax, mechanics, usage get in the way” (p. 10). One way to combat students’ fragmented thought is by learning to write about personal experiences in a journal. According to Everson (1991,) “Journals and diaries can help link perceptions with realities while establishing verbal fluency for even the most reluctant writer” (p. 11). In other words, journals assist students in organizing their thinking through writing as they work to translate their “inner speech” into written word.

Journaling also helps students to include specific details to their writing, which can make their writing clearer. When journaling, students are asked to begin with the “whole” personal experience and describe it in parts. Through journaling, students learn to connect details into meaningful ideas that provide a more comprehensive
understanding to their reader (Ross, 2011, p. 3). This idea is further developed during the “Writers Circle” community meetings throughout this unit. In the Writers Circle, students are given opportunities to “talk through” their personal stories, which will then turn into journal entries. This daily audience feedback before journal writing allows for students to have more opportunities to receive feedback, which will help them to better communicate their ideas even more clearly (Ross, 2011, p. 3).

This point is especially pertinent for students with learning disabilities. According to Saddler (2006,) “Students who have learning disabilities and struggle with writing may have difficulty executing and monitoring many of the cognitive processes writers need to effectively manage during the writing process” (p. 291). Therefore, Saddler conducted a study to determine if self-regulated strategy instruction could improve the story writing ability of young writers with writing disabilities. His results concluded that young students with LD and limited writing abilities can successfully learn to manage and apply writing strategies. Saddler states, “The findings of this study demonstrate that extra strategy instruction in planning can improve the ability of struggling writers with LD to write stories that are longer, more complete in terms of story elements and of higher overall quality” (p. 298). Through this curriculum, the teaching of self-regulated writing strategies (such as talking into a story,) to this population of learners will benefit their foundational writing skills in the areas that will improve the overall quality of their story writing in general—not just the writing in their journals.

Finally, journaling increases students’ overall motivation to write and sharpens their ability to select topics to write about. It does this by teaching students that when selecting topics to write about, they have to look no further than their own lives and experiences and draw from them. Horn & Giacobbe (2007) state that through telling/
writing about personal stories, children “…are valued for themselves, for using the words they have to say what they know” (p. 15). Once students feel confident in the process of looking at their own lives for topics to write about, they will be able to enter the writing activity not only with confidence in their stories, but in how to retrieve them. According to Horn & Giacobbe (2007,) “It is beginning with ordinary, everyday topics [from our own lives,] that we make it possible for all of our students to feel they can enter in” (p. 22). Many students often feel they do not have stories to tell. Therefore, it is up to the teacher to model that we all are storytellers. The teacher must model how to reflect on personal experiences and from there, select which to tell aloud or write about.

The Socio-Emotional Benefits of Journaling

Aside from promoting the development of some foundational writing skills, there is ample research that concludes that journaling can serve as a self-reflective tool that can support students’ socio-emotional learning development as well. Through his research, Roger Hiemstra (2001,) determined that most learners show intellectual growth and development as they gain experience with the procedures of journal writing (p. 24) Hiemstra also found that journal writing benefits all learners in areas of personal growth and development, intuition and self-expression, problem solving, stress reduction and reflective and critical thinking skills (p. 24).

However, simply writing in journals each day is not enough to reinforce these skills. Teachers still need to provide explicit instruction in areas of socio-emotional learning. Progroff (1975,) writes, “We have to recognize, however, that the mere fact of continuously writing entries, as is done in the keeping of a diary, is not sufficient in itself to bring about deep changes in a person’s life” (as cited in Hiemstra, 2001, p. 21). Therefore, in order for the students to view journaling as a self-reflective tool and an
emotional coping mechanism, teachers must proactively assist children in developing and becoming fluent with the skills of emotional regulation (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 4).

Therefore, imbedded in this journaling unit are opportunities for students to build their emotional vocabulary by learning how to specifically journal about emotional, personal experiences while naming specific feelings brought on by those experiences. According to Joseph & Strain (2003,) “In order to correctly perceive feelings in yourself and others, you first have to have words for those feelings” (p. 2). By explicitly naming emotions and supporting students’ acquisition and expansion of feeling vocabulary words, children can better express and articulate their emotions. From here, they can begin identifying their own internal emotional states verbally and eventually, through their writing. This is an important step in learning to regulate emotions and identify them (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 3).

**Oral Language and Its Influence on Writing**

Although this curriculum is a unit that intends to equip students with writing skills necessary for journaling, phase 1 of this unit begins by establishing a strong community of writers through oral storytelling. I decided to launch my unit with instruction in oral storytelling for many reasons. First, the group of students that I had in mind while designing this unit, possessed many social strengths which allowed them to successfully participate in classroom discussions and shares. They enjoyed sharing personal anecdotes from their own lives and were inquisitive about the lives of their peers outside of school. They shared these personal stories willingly during our classroom community sharing time. However, when it came to writing these experiences down on paper, it seemed like all their talk dissolved and their uncertainty and frustrations prohibited successful writing. I knew that I had to build upon my students’ oral language capabilities and help them
channel this into their journal writing. Therefore, this unit proposes that students first need to form a community of writers who begin by learning from each other. As Horn & Giacobbe (2007,) state: “Children learn to tell stories that are personally significant, include specific details that evoke emotion and reveal feelings when they hear stories that do those things” (p. 23).

This curriculum was built upon the belief that, “talking through” stories out loud produces stronger writing. Everson (1991,) states: “Our students write fuller narratives, more detailed descriptions and clearer explanations when they are given the opportunity to talk over their ideas before they begin to write” (p. 9). When students talk through ideas aloud before writing them down, their thoughts are made more easily accessible when it is time to write them down (as cited in Miller & Pennycuff, 2008, p. 41.) This, as found in Horn & Giacobbe’s research, can transfer into students’ writing development in the areas of order and organization, clarity, revision and awareness of audience (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007, p. 16).

Another reason I included oral storytelling at the beginning of this unit derives from my research that language development is essential to cognitive development. This relationship is inherent in the ideas put forth by Lev Vygotsky and his Theory on Social Development. Vygotsky (1934,) highlights the importance of language as a social tool by stating: “The primary function of speech, both for the adult and for the child, is the function of communication and social interaction” (p. 45). Vygotsky (1978,) also states: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level” (p. 57). From this, we can conclude that students require opportunities to engage in social learning in order to better shape their individual language learning. By telling stories aloud to the whole group, students shape how they
articulate their stories based on feedback from an interactive audience. They work through their thinking and articulation of the story and its events based on their audience’s reactions. As Horn & Giacobbe (2007,) state: “Through talk, [students] unfold their thinking for an audience that needs to understand, and in doing so, they come to understand it better themselves” (p. 16). Overall, this social interaction teaches students to become aware of their audiences’ reactions as they tell stories and the audience’s role in the creating of a story (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008, p. 41).

Research conducted by Sasser, Zorena, McKamey & Houston et. al., (1991,) found that orally sharing story ideas before writing can help all students develop the language for writing—including special education, ELL and gifted students (as cited in Miller & Pennycuff, 2008, p. 40). This view was supported by Vygotsky who considered talk to be one of the basic symbol systems children use to communicate before ever writing words on paper (as cited in Horn & Giacobbe, 2007, p. 17). To further support this claim, Fu & Shelton (2007) concluded in their study with a group of students with well developed oral language expression, but minimal writing skills that: “Their oral language expression was used to help them develop their written language; discussions and conversations were the foundation to writing” (p. 327).

**Opportunities for Built in Choice and its Influence on Writing**

When designing this unit, I wanted it to allow my students to play an active role in their learning process. I was influenced by John Dewey (1938,) who discusses the importance of, “participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process” (p. 67) as being crucial to learning. Not only did I want my students to play an active role in selecting what they could journal about, but I wanted them to select how they went about recording it. As Alfie Kohn (1993) states,
“School is about more than intellectual development; it is about learning to become a responsible, caring person who can make good choices and solve problems effectively. Thus educators must think about ways of helping students to take an active part in decisions…” (p. 7).

The writing that we record in journals is derived from our own lives and experiences. Therefore, when students sit down to create a journal entry, they are having to sift through their life experiences and select which to write about—they are making a choice. Based on a focus study conducted by Lenhart, Arafah, Smith & Macgill in 2008, it was concluded that student engagement can be increased when teachers offer choices in writing assignments. This is especially true when writing assignments involve the particular child’s experiences and interests (as cited in Norris, 2015, p. 44).

Through drawing pictures, coloring, writing, or using words, I tried to individualize the journaling process further by allowing the students to choose how they respond in their journals. I did this in order to increase student engagement and individual access to the unit. It is up to individuals to select how they wish to communicate and it is to be expected that there will be a large range in how students communicate through writing in this type of self-contained classroom. Therefore, this unit includes built in opportunities that welcome and honor all forms of written communication and provides individualized access to instruction.

In a study by Fu & Shelton (2007,) nine students with special needs who differed in disability, learning style, habit and attitude were experiencing writing instruction through a Writers Workshop model for the first time in their inclusion classroom (p. 334). Their teacher understood their differences and allowed space for each type of learner. According to Fu & Shelton (2007,) “Each student worked at a different pace, and each
was challenged appropriately. [The students with special needs] especially benefitted from this flexibility…this sense of being part of the group made [the students with special needs,] connect rather than disconnect with the school” (p. 334). Therefore, why not encourage difference? Students who choose to communicate in their journals through drawing instead of writing words should not only be encouraged, but also instructed on how to do so effectively. This type of instruction is reflected in phases 2 and 3 of this unit. Horn & Giacobbe (2007) write that drawing is, “…one primal way that beginning writers represent and understand meaning” (p. 61). Drawing also allows students to dive deeper into their stories by adding depth through drawing. Horn & Giacobbe (2007) also write, “Through drawing, [the student] reveals information about sounds, images, settings, characters, feelings and little substories that were going on in his head that are not in [the] text” (p. 62).

Drawing also helps students develop language and this should never be discounted as a communication method during any writing unit. Vygotsky tells us that students first develop private speech in order to communicate with themselves. Around school age, the private speech turns inward and students’ conversations take place within their heads as they work. When children represent meaning on paper through drawing, they are processing composing and developing language (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007, p. 62). Only allowing students to write using words when journaling could deny students access to this linguistic experience and critical step in their writing development.

**Linking This Literature Review to the Curriculum**

Through targeted instruction in the writing style of journaling, this writing curriculum aims to develop foundational writing skills in the areas of topic selection, organization, awareness of audience, and sentence clarity. It also intends to enhance
students’ self-reflective and self-regulatory skills in order to use journaling as a coping mechanism and tool for naming and articulating inner feelings and emotions in order to reflect on problems in an attempt to consider how to solve them. Overall, this curriculum strives to teach writers before teaching writing (Fu & Shelton, 2007, p. 334).

As described in the curriculum that follows, the instruction in phase #1 aims to build a strong community of writers who are immersed in opportunities to orally shape their stories and learn about audience during the storytelling component of this unit. Here, students learn to look at their own lives to draw stories from. This can later aid in topic selection as they begin to journal. As described in the next sections of this curriculum, students are instructed on how to select topics from their lives to journal about and how they can best convey their personal experiences in written format. This component of the unit allows students to take on an active role in their learning as they decide how to best communicate their experiences for their reader and for themselves. In turn, students will gain daily experiences learning to write or draw writing inspiration from their own lives while discovering journaling as a valuable writing tool that has aided human civilization in self-reflective practice for centuries.

The Curriculum

Classroom Environment and Materials

This curriculum incorporates modalities that are visual, auditory, physical and social. These modalities create a learning environment that not only accommodates different types of learners, but fosters student independence. This curriculum supports students visually by the integrating the use of a Smartboard and a document camera throughout its lessons. These visual aids are used during modeled writing and shared
reading times. During these lessons, students are also visually supported by the use of charts containing pictures and photographs of the students themselves. These charts are used to document group norms, vocabulary, journaling procedures and lists of topics shared during storytelling. Students also benefit from auditory and social feedback by participating daily in the Writers Circle. The Writers Circle is a daily classroom routine where the class gathers as a community of writers to listen, share and learn from one another. This routine establishes a safe and inviting space for students to take risks and learn from one another. These conversations and discussions serve as the foundation for writing for this population of learners.

At the start of this unit, students will receive school journals that will become an integral part of their journaling routines throughout the course of the year. These journals are hand-made with a hard, cardboard cover. The journal pages (copied on printer paper,) contain adequate line spacing for the various students struggling with fine-motor skills. They also include a box at the top to add illustrations (see Appendix A.) For some, this illustration box will foster a connection between the students’ drawings and the eventual writing of words. Students will decorate their journal covers however they wish. This is their first opportunity to personalize this writing space. Therefore, it is important to have the first Writers Circle be an opportunity for students to share and present their decorated journal covers and describe their artistic choices during their initial contact with their journals. This moment will help them to define and regard their journals as their own space to take ownership and pride over. Though it may seem obvious, this moment is a crucial and motivating force for these students and sets the community inspired tone for many of the themes present in the rest of this journaling unit.
In the writing center, there will be access to a number of writing materials such as planning paper, pencils, colored pencils, crayons and markers. Throughout the lessons, different materials will be used to support the teaching points of each lesson. For many students, this will be their first learning experience or exposure to keeping a journal as a tool for expressing themselves and their thoughts. They may have used journals before in science class to reflect on the outcome of an experiment or to respond to a writing prompt. Though it is important to draw from these kinds of journaling experiences with the students, it is important to note that journaling will be used differently during this writing unit. For many students, this will be their first exposure to having freedom and choice as writers. Therefore, the journal's purpose and use must be explained before the students are expected to go off and start writing in them.

Learning Objectives of the Curriculum

1. **Overarching objectives for this unit:**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will view their journal as a valuable lifelong writing tool that has real world applications and serves as a coping solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will use journal writing as a tool for introspection that can help them articulate their experiences and emotions through storytelling and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will demonstrate increased competence in their oral storytelling abilities and use oral storytelling as a way to “talk into” or begin orally planning a story before writing it down on paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will demonstrate awareness of their audience as storytellers and writers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will tell or write stories containing organization and specific details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will collaborate with peers and form a united writing community as they engage in a shared writing experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will build relationship skills and improve their communication, social engagement, cooperation and conflict management skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Specific writing objectives of this unit:**

**Phase #1: What types of skills should students develop before writing in a journal?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Students will tell stories about their own life experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
○ Students will demonstrate an awareness of their audience as storytellers who tune into their audience’s body language and responses to their stories.
○ Students will tell stories in an organized and chronological manner in order for the listener (or reader,) to understand.
○ Students will ask questions to the storyteller (or writer,) in order to better understand or clarify a story.

Phase #2: What types of things should students write about in their journals?
○ Students will represent the story in their minds on paper with specific details.
○ Students will look at their own lives and generate writing topics to journal about.
○ Students will select writing topics that range from seemingly uneventful moments to moments that inspire feelings or emotions.
○ Students will learn to include specific information and vocabulary to their writing to establish clarity for the reader.
○ Students will become aware of their audience as storytellers and writers.
○ Students will elaborate and write using more details and description in their writing.

Phase #3: How can students choose to respond in their journals?
○ Students will tell stories orally before turning these stories into writing in their journals.
○ Students will ask their peers questions to gain more specific information about their writing for readers to understand.
○ Students will graphically represent their thoughts or feelings in a journal in different ways. For example, through drawings, labels, colors, words, etc.
○ Students will choose to graphically represent their stories, thoughts or feelings in their journals through the response options that they are most comfortable with.
○ Students will answer the following questions for their readers through their drawings: Who? What? Where? When?
○ Students will demonstrate awareness of order and chronological organization when expressing their ideas through writing.
○ Students will close their eyes and visualize their story as a strategy for remembering and eliciting story details.
○ Students will increase their individual stamina as writers and demonstrate knowledge about what to do if they finish early.

3. Socio-emotional goals reinforced by this unit:
○ Students will be responsible members of their community and respect others by listening carefully and making eye contact during group shares.
○ Students will name and define specific feelings and emotions through multi-sensory activities.
Students will demonstrate increased self-awareness by identifying and naming an emotion and describing the experiences that caused that emotion.

Students will explore and expand vocabulary that describes feelings, thoughts and emotions.

Students will reflect on their own feelings in a given moment, name their feeling then articulate the cause of the feeling.

Students will analyze their problem-solving techniques through personal reflection and simulated activities.

Students will engage in self-regulatory practices that will help them manage and check-in with their emotions during daily activities that elicit frustration.

Students will participate in and contribute to group problem-solving initiatives and discussions that will improve the classroom community.

Students will demonstrate improved self-regulatory skills in order to manage emotions and seek an appropriate written emotional outlet when needed.

Phase #1: What types of skills should students develop before writing in a journal?:

Weeks 1-2

Lesson 1A: Introducing The Writers Circle (1 Lesson)

• Explain to students that they will be participating in their first community Writers Circle. Explain that the Writers Circle always takes place in the meeting area and it will be a routine part of their journaling experiences throughout the rest of the school year.

• Model and explain the expectations of The Writers Circle. Create a class list of norms on a piece of chart paper. Write this norm on the chart under the title: Class 123’s Writers Circle Community Norms.

• Have students turn and talk with the person sitting next to them. Together, they should develop another classroom norm to add to the chart. After the students spend a few minutes talking together, add their suggestions to the chart and be sure to have them explain why they feel their addition to the chart is an important norm to follow.
during The Writers Circle. Each class will have a different set of norms, but it is imperative that the students play a role in creating them. This is the first instance where students feel that their input is a valued and honored part of their writing community. This is a strong foundation to establish before entering the next storytelling phase of the unit.

- Differentiation: After the students create a class chart with the Writers Circle community norms, the teacher may want to add some visual images (drawn or printed,) after each norm. This visual support will make the chart accessible to all types of learners. It also provides a visual memory cue for those who may not yet be reading.

- Assessment: During the next Writers Circle, the teacher will review and reference the chart of norms and remind students to do the same. The teacher will observe: Are the students abiding by the norms that they helped create? Do any norms need to be added/amended/taken away? Are the students able to remember the norms and enact them? Are they able to refer to the chart? Are the pictures a helpful support?

**Lesson 1B: Engaging students within a story (1-3 Lessons)**

- During the Writers Circle, the teacher models how to tell a story for the students. The teacher leads by making the story seem new and exciting. For example: “I have a story to tell the class. Come and join our Writers Circle, you won’t want to miss it!” The teacher models how to tell the story. Selecting the right story is crucial. The story does not have to be about an extraordinary occurrence or life event. In fact, selecting a story about a seemingly uneventful moment demonstrates to students that they can view ordinary moments as writers do and turn these moments into a story. For examples of how to select which stories to tell, see Appendix B.
- Model: The teacher tells his or her engaging story aloud to the class. The teacher shows them a story map as a graphic description of the story.

- Ask the students to retell what the story was about. First, they can share with each other, then with the whole group. They can use the story map to assist them.

- After selecting a student to share aloud, draw their attention to a chart. This is a chart that will help us keep track of all the different things we can tell stories about. At the top of the chart, it reads: *Today ____*(name)_____* told a story about _____(story topic)_____.* The teacher fills in the chart based on what the student says.

- Have students turn and talk about how the teacher’s story made them feel. Did the story make them experience any emotions?

- After turning and talking, the teacher has students share their feelings after hearing the story. Basic feeling words are anticipated here such as: happy, glad, good etc. This is a good start in naming emotions and will be built upon.

- Each time a new feeling word is shared, the teacher writes it down in a list format. The teacher concludes and thinks aloud by drawing students’ attention to the fact that stories can make us *feel* different emotions.

- From the list of feelings and emotions generated, it is a good idea to photograph students who may need more support naming or identifying feelings and/or facial expressions. Have these students demonstrate with their faces, the different emotions listed. Then, photograph their faces. When the list of feeling words is made, tape these photographs next to the particular emotion listed as a reference for these students.

- Assessment: During the lesson the teacher will observe students and gauge whether they were engaged in the story. Did the students seem engaged by the way the teacher
told the story? Were they able to retell it? Were they able to grasp what the story was about? Were they able to emotionally tune into it?

Lesson 2: Helping students become aware of their organization and audience as storytellers (1 Minilesson)

- During today's Writers Circle, the teacher makes the students aware of their audience as storytellers. Tell students they will be working with the story they heard from the teacher during the previous day.
- Have students turn and talk about the detail they remember from the teacher’s story from the previous day. After a few minutes, have students stop and share. On individual sentence strips, write down the details the students remember. Tape up the strips containing the details in the order they occurred and make note of this aloud to the students because organization is important in storytelling. Now, hold up a journal.
- Think aloud for the students and cover these questions: How does their retelling of your story reflect their understanding of it as listeners? Why is it important to tell stories in order for our listeners? How can awareness of this organization relate to writing?

Lesson 3: Learning how to ask the storyteller questions to get specific information about their story (1 Lesson)

- During the Writers Circle, the teacher explains that there are ways to help a storyteller (or writer,) make their organization clearer for their listeners, (or reader,) Have an assistant, paraprofessional, colleague, parent etc. visit the class and as a guest storyteller. Review the story beforehand with the person to ensure it is an appropriate
match for the students. Explain to the students that today, that you (the teacher,) will be a member of the audience a listener.

- Model this with another adult. For example, “Today, after Ms. Smith tells her story to our class. I am going to demonstrate how to be a listener who helps makes the story more clear and organized by asking some follow-up questions. Let's make sure that we follow our Writers Circle norms while Ms. Smith tells her story to us!” Review the norms before listening to the story.

- After the guest storyteller shares their story, the teacher models retelling the events in order and asking questions. Explain that asking questions helped you gain more information to better understand the guest storyteller’s story.

- Talk about any emotions or feelings the story evoked from you. Reference the emotions chart from a few days prior. Perhaps highlight a new emotional response and add it to the chart.

- Explain to students that there are three ways to respond to a person sharing a story. 1) Retell the story, 2) Ask a question about the story, 3) Talk about how the story makes you feel.

- Chart these three items and label the chart: Ways to Respond to a Story: 1) Retell the story in order 2) Ask a question to understand it better 3) Talk about how the story makes you feel.

- Have each student try responding to the guest storyteller’s story using one of these ways.

- Assessment: The teacher observes: Are the students using the chart and responding to the guest storyteller’s story based on the guidelines above? Are they selecting one of the three ways to respond to the story and using it appropriately? Jot down the way
each student responds in a chart format to keep track of responses the student is comfortable using/ not using over the next few weeks.

**Lesson 4: Students as the storytellers (2 students tell stories per day)**

- Before this lesson, Tack up a piece of chart paper reading: “Student Storytellers” and below that title, number it 1-12. Have students tell up for a storytelling slot. Remind the students that even if they are unsure of which story from their life to tell, the community could help them shape their stories.

- The teacher tells another story and has the students practice responding before it’s their turn to sit in front of the class and tell their stories.

- Once the order has been developed, students will tell their stories sitting in front of the Writers Circle, elevated in a chair. Afterwards, give the group a chance to select one of the ways to respond to the storyteller through retelling, questioning, or connecting.

- After the student shares, put up the chart that helps keep track of all the different things we can tell stories about. At the top of the chart, it reads: *Today ______*(Name)_______ told a story about ______*(Story topic)_______. The teacher fills in the chart based on what the student says. This list will remain up and be added to each time a new student shares a story. If a student mentions a new emotion he or she felt after listening to a story, add it to the emotions chart (if appropriate, photograph facial expression that matches the emotion for students who may need this as a reference).

- Assessment: It is important to draw attention to the many diverse topics students select to tell stories about. This is many students’ first time telling stories and it is important that their stories feel welcome, validated and worthwhile. However, as
the teacher observes both storytellers and listeners, the teacher is observing which students needed even more coaching and support and identifying what those supports may be. Some questions to consider as students tell their stories are: Are students telling their stories in an organized manner? Are students demonstrating an awareness of their audience as they tell their stories? Do audience members understand the stories being told? Are audience members asking questions to pull out details and better understand the stories they listen to?

- Differentiation: Students who really struggle telling stories or jump from one story to another may benefit from a follow-up small group lesson. During this small group lesson, the teacher may revisit the students’ stories and say “I noticed you mentioned many different story ideas when you shared your story to the class yesterday! You had so many nice ideas to tell stories about. Let’s list them all here....” Then, the teacher can work with the student on pulling out just one moment and focusing on telling this story writing details on sentence strips and organizing events in order with the student.

Phase #2: What types of topics or experiences should students write about in their journals?: Weeks 3-5

Lesson 1: Introducing the journal (2 Lessons)

- After the previous two weeks of storytelling, students are now comfortable telling and listening to stories in their classroom during Writers Circle. Now, introduce the students to another place they can tell stories—in their journals.

- Hold up a journal. Show them its blank pages. Put a clip at the bottom of one page and demonstrate that the clip helps you know which page you are working on.
- Pass around the journals so each student can have a close look inside and actually touch or handle the journal.

- Ask, students to reflect on their experiences with journaling. Has anyone ever kept a journal before? The teacher will share his or her own personal experiences keeping a journal.

- Share with the students about 3-4 entries from your own personal journal from your own childhood. Make sure one entry includes you writing about how you felt. Show them the book, your handwriting and doodles on the pages and explain to them how old you were when you were writing in it etc. Select a journal from around the same age the students are. It is really important to be authentic during this moment. If you did not keep a journal, perhaps a sibling, colleague friend or someone meaningful to you would be willing to share a journal entry from their childhood with the class. Being open and willing to share this piece of yourself with your students really sets the tone for this unit and allows students to see the real life application and authenticity behind this work.

- Have students turn and talk about the topics you shared from your journal. How did you choose to write in the journal? Did I use words? Make drawings or do both? Mention the different ways to respond.

- Spend the rest of the period distributing journals to the students. Provide art materials (old magazines, photographs, markers, paint etc.) for students to personalize their journal covers anyway they choose. Keep reminding students that their artistic choices are up to them since the journals are their own. Have a Writers Circle share to present each individual journal cover once they finish
decorating—just as they shared their stories. Point out that each cover is different and unique just like their stories.

**Lesson 2: Teaching students how to record a “story” as a journal entry (1-3 lessons)**

- Display the Teacher’s Journal using a document camera so all students can look on as you model the following lesson.
- Introduce the Teacher’s Journal and its purpose to the students.
- Have students recall the story the teacher told yesterday. Ask them to think about what happened in that story.
- Then, call on students to share out the parts they remembered in pairs. Guide them in retelling the story if they forget. Write down 4-5 details of the story on sentence strips and tape up the sentence strips vertically, in the order at which they occurred. Engage the students by having them help order the strips chronologically so the story events are in order.
- Model how to start a new journal entry with drawing or writing using a personal topic.
- Explain that some people may want to only draw in their journal. Some people may want to write in their journal using words. Some may want to do both. Explain that this choice is up to them as writers.
- Show students how to draw a picture to match the details in their stories. Then, demonstrate how to add words to the journal entry drawing. Draw attention to the fact that journal entries are personal and about you based on events in your own life.
- When finished, remind students they can always return to a drawing or journal entry if they don’t feel finished with it. Move the clip to the next page and show
them that when they make a new entry, they can look for the clip in the journal and begin working on that blank page for their new entry.

Lesson 3: Teaching students how to record a “feelings” story (1-3 lessons)

- Before this lesson review the names for the feelings already present on the list with the students. Cite examples or quick shares that help define the list of feelings the students previously generated.

- Tell students you are going to build on the storytelling form the previous week. Explain that they are going to learn to record their personal stories in the form of a journal entry.

- Set up the Teacher’s Journal in a similar way as the previous lesson so that all students are looking onto the blank entry page. Start on the page that has the clip on the bottom to help teach journal organization skills.

- Tell a quick story about something that occurred that elicited a negative emotional response. For example, a time that you felt frustrated, angry, annoyed etc.

- Show students how to transfer this to journaling instead of physically reacting. For example: “Now, instead of saying or doing something angry with my body or with my words during this moment, I can actually save this moment for my journaling.

- Model how to journal about this moment using drawings and words. Follow same process as the lesson above. Be sure to name the feeling and what caused that feeling.

- End the lesson by having students share out a few of their ideas for “Feelings” journal entries. Without naming names, have students share a specific feeling they’ve felt that could be turned into a journal entry. Jot down a short sentence or
two regarding a potential journal idea. See Appendix C for an example chart. Make sure to hear from each student because this will lead into the next lesson.

- Assessment: Are students able to reflect on their own experiences and tell stories about emotional events in their lives? Are students able to name specific emotions and the events that caused them? Is this a comfortable process for them to engage in?

Lesson 4: Turning our “feelings stories” into journal entries (1-3 Lessons)

- In pairs, students will be revisiting their stories based off of the list from the previous day.

- Explain to students that they will tell their “Feelings Stories” to a partner at their seats. Put up a countdown clock on the Smartboard or computer screen so all can access time. Select one student to be in charge of resetting the timer when the partner pairs switch.

- Tell students they will be telling their “Feelings Story” listed next to their name on the chart to their partner. Each time a student tells their “Feelings Story,” record this line on a chart:

  “_______(Student’s name)______felt_____ (emotion)_______ because….“  

Like the storytelling earlier, this will help students become aware of the wide range of feelings that can inspire their journal writing.

- After each student tells his or her story, model how to record a journal entry using words or drawings using the Teacher’s Journal. Use the same “Feelings Story” you shared the other day that caused you to feel emotion.

- After modeling, have students return to their seats and try, for the first time, recording their feelings story in the journal. Set the tone in the room for the
upcoming journaling stop points. Dim the lights, have calm music playing. Set a timer on the Smartboard for about ten minutes to start. This will familiarize them with the journaling stop point routine that will become a featured part of their day (Develop norms for this time. See Appendix D.)

- After journaling, have a Writers Circle share to have the students present their journal entry to the class and after each share, ask each student to reflect on how they felt after writing their feeling story down.

- Assessment: See Appendix F for writing record form. This is an ongoing anecdotal recording form that will serve as a way to track each individual student's journaling progress over time. It provides a record regarding the student’s growing comfort levels with journaling. It also allows for potential small grouping of students facing similar challenges.

**Phase 3: How can students choose to respond in their journals?: Weeks 6-8**

**Lesson 1: Understanding and practicing author’s choice (1 Lesson)**

- Tell students that this week, they will learn about the different ways they can tell stories in their journals. Remind students that their journal entries are about their own lives and experiences. They are the author and get to choose the stories to tell and how they wish to tell them.

- On the document camera, display a blank page in the Teacher’s Journal. First, put the date on the top and draw the students’ attention to this.

- Draw a detailed, but relatable scene on the blank page. For example, a person falling off their bike in the park.
● Be sure not to talk students through your drawing—draw silently. The idea is to include enough details in your illustration so they are able to tell the story back to you, without help.

● After drawing the illustration, have students turn and talk to the person next to them. Have them try to retell the story you drew. Have them use evidence from the drawing to support their claims.

● Give students 3-5 minutes to turn and talk. Then have students share out loud what they think happened in the teacher’s story. Ask students, “How did you know?” when they make inferences based on your drawing. Jot down the inferences they make on a post-it note.

● After the bulk of the story has been told reflect on why they were successful with this task. Was the drawing detailed? Was it clear to understand?

● Demonstrate how one may choose to label a picture. This adds more information details to illustrations and can help bridge the gap towards writing words.

● Now, tell students you will demonstrate another way you could have responded using words. Turn to a new, blank page in the Teacher’s Journal. Instead of drawing, begin writing the story on the lines provided. Write this entry silently, just as you did during the previous exercise. Include the same specific details that were discussed in the drawing. When finished, read the entry aloud to the students.

● Have a discussion with the students comparing the two entries. Ask: Did you, my readers, get the same information from both stories? Was there an entry style you liked better? Why? As a class, you will come to the conclusion that the same story could be told in different ways.
Ask students their preference. Do they prefer writing with words or using drawings to tell their stories? Is one way better than the other? Why?

Lesson 2: How can I respond in a journal? Drawing specific illustrations to tell my story (1-3 Lessons)

- Explain to students that today, you will break down how to tell a story in your journal using specific drawings.
- Date the top of the journal page. Then tell students another story about something that occurred over the weekend.
- Model how to visualize your story by closing your eyes as you talk through it.
- Then, draw a picture that represents your story. Let the students know that you do all that you can to stay true to the details in your story. Tell students that you want to include specific information from the picture in your mind, not a different story.
- Explain to students that they can also use color to enhance their drawings and add detail.
- Model how to label parts of the picture using words.
- After the drawing is complete, ask students to answer the following questions about your model drawing. Have these written out for all to see:
  - Who is my story about? How do you know?
  - Where are we? How do you know?
  - What is happening? How do you know?

These questions serve as guidelines to help authors provide sufficient information in their drawings.
• Shared Practice: Practice with your students. Invite one student to come up and tell a story they want to journal about.

• Independent Work: Students will return to their seats and work independently on only drawing their journal entries. This will be done on a blank page in their own journals.

• Assessment: When students are ready to share, have a Writers Circle. During this time, students will share their drawings. Ask each student to demonstrate the “Who?, Where?, What?” questions by referring to their drawings. Assess, were students able to create drawing containing this information?

• * This lesson should be repeated using a different story at least one other time.

Lesson 3: How can I respond in a journal? Using pictures and words to tell my story (1-3 Lessons)

• Explain to students that today, you will break down how to tell a story in your journal using pictures and words.

• Demonstrate how to sketch out a story by creating a storyboard. Show students how to draw boxes in their journals that will help their drawings be organized and keep the story in sequence, like a storyboard. They can number the boxes to help keep events in order. It is important that the students learn to draw these boxes independently because they can use these to help them when they independently journal. See Appendix G for an example.

• After modeling, have students practice drawing only storyboard boxes on blank journal page or at the whiteboard.

• Model how to tell a story aloud, and then draw the details of the story in the storyboard boxes.
● Show students how to use the illustrations in the boxes to help write the details of their stories in order.

● Partner work: Have students practice by drawing their own story into storyboard boxes and cutting the boxes up. Then, they will give their story “pieces” to a partner who then has to place the story in order. Then, the partner will practice telling the story in order using ordinal words.

● Assessment: Were students able to place storyboard boxes in chronological order? Were students able to generate the story based on the storyboard boxes?

Lesson 4: Expectations for classroom journaling stop points (1 Lesson)

● In an opening Writer’s Circle, explain to students the classroom expectations for journaling stop points.

● Remind students to write about events that occurred in their own lives and to close their eyes and visualize them.

● Ask a student to share a topic they may write about today. Have them turn and talk with the person sitting next to them about a writing topic they wish to journal about today.

● Students go on to work independently for ten minutes with prompting as needed. Have a closing Writers Circle to share entries. After each student shares, ask if the listeners have any questions for the author. State that students can add/change previous entries based on these questions during the next journaling stop point.

*Remind students not to share names if they choose to write about another person or situation. If problems are brought up during a feelings entry, this is a time to problem solve with the whole class. Ask, how can we solve this? Use the Writers Circle as an honest and open discussion forum.
• Assessment: Use Appendix F form to log journaling progress and make small groups for potential lessons. Also, journaling conferences will be instituted as another form of assessment during this unit. Students will meet with teacher to discuss their topic choices, elements of writing craft and writing conventions in order to make their writing stronger. They will receive continuous feedback and clear next steps to help shape their writing along the way.

Conclusion

In current special education classrooms, it is not uncommon for teachers to face challenges while implementing a mandated writing curriculum. These settings often contain students with a wide range of abilities and communication methods and they often do not learn how to write through a single teaching approach. As an educator, this was my personal experience. The Lucy Calkins’ Writers Workshop approach as a whole, emphasized too much standardization and not enough differentiation for my 3rd/4th grade special education students. Therefore, my response was to take the core elements of a Writers Workshop model and create this multi-modal approach to teaching writing and social skills through a journaling curriculum. Journaling about daily experiences remains a writing technique that helps writers recognize and draw writing inspiration from their own lives.

This curriculum takes my students’ writing needs into consideration and creates a space for them to personally develop their communication skills at their own speed and along with each other. This is based on the belief that social interaction precedes individualized learning. Instead of working on conventional writing skills individually (which often causes frustration for many of these writers,) this curriculum has students improve their cognitive development by integrating social skills within a safe learning
community. Within this social learning context, students will begin to take risks, question, share and learn from each other as writers. From this social learning experience, they will gain confidence, awareness and improve their overall language learning which will inform their communication methods as writers and as individuals.
References

Calkins, L., Martinelli, M., Cruz, C., Hohne, K.B., Frazin, S., Roberts, M.B., (2016). *Units of study in opinion, information and narrative writing, grade 3.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann


Appendices

*Appendix A*

Three samples of the paper choices provided in the journals. Line spacing can be differentiated based on the fine-motor needs and/or handwriting needs of the individual child.
Appendix B
Questions to ask yourself as a teacher when selecting stories to tell. These questions are adapted from Martha Horn and Mary Ellen Giacobbe. Horn & Giacobbe (2007,) suggest: “When choosing a story to tell students, we want one that is accessible to them. By that we mean one they will be able to relate to, one that matters to us, one that as they hear it, causes them to say, Hey, I could to that” (p. 22).

- What is a recent happening that I’ve told others about?
- What’s an ordinary, everyday happening from my childhood?
- What stories from my childhood do I keep coming back to?
- Who do I know and care about and what stories do I have about him or her?
- What’s a moment, a seemingly simple happening that I hold dear?
### Appendix C

“Feelings” Journal Entry Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Name of Feeling</th>
<th>Idea for “Feeling” Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>When I got to visit my cousin who lives in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>The time my brother broke my favorite toy truck.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Some Journaling Stop Point Norms:

1) Think about the story you want to journal about today. Is it a story about an everyday occurrence? A special event? Or, is it a “Feelings Story” describing how you feel in response to something?

2) Work quietly. Writers need quiet time so they can think and remember their story. If you need a break, ask for one.

3) When you feel your journal is over. Check it over. Is there something you can add to make it clearer for the class when you share? If you feel finished, tuck in your seat and sit quietly on the rug. When the timer beeps, journaling is over.

Remember! You can always revisit your entries during the next stop point.
Appendix E

Individual Writing Record Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry Format</th>
<th>Knows About Craft (Sense of story, drawing, details…)</th>
<th>Knows About Organization</th>
<th>Knows About Conventions (Spelling, punctuation, etc.)</th>
<th>Needs to Learn</th>
<th>When to Teach…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Writing Record for _________________ 2016-2017
Appendix G

Storyboard Example