

*Short Communication*

# The effects of transformational literature on children's topical choices for writer's workshop in an Urban Kindergarten

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**The purpose of this qualitative case study was to document the writing choices of kindergarten children in an urban setting after planned experiences with transformational literature. This research involved nineteen kindergarten students who were participants through the naturalistic setting of routine classroom instruction. Four social issues texts were read aloud and discussed with the children. Their choices of writing topics for writer's workshop were recorded before and after the use of these critical literacy sources. Results indicated a trend in children's topical choices for writer's workshop moved from an egocentric perspective to more prosocial and altruistic stances.**

**Key word:** Early childhood transformative teaching.

## INTRODUCTION

In writer's workshop, students are expected to express their ideas and thoughts (Graves, 1983). During this time, students write with a purpose. This purpose can lead them to create a story that transforms their lives and others around them. It is a workshop in the true sense of the word. The teacher moves from student to student monitoring their progress and offering suggestions as needed (Graves, 1983; Goldman, et al., 2007).

According to Heffernan (2004), critical literacy and writer's workshop should be an integral part of literacy instruction. Students select writing topics while exploring their past, present, and future often with the teacher's assistance. The writing process has been implemented and recognized by researchers and educators alike. However, there is limited research on critical literacy and young children's choices of writing topics in urban kindergarten classrooms (Taylor, 2007).

The purpose of this case study was to document the writing choices of kindergarten children in an urban

classroom. These choices were identified both before and after planned experiences with transformational literature and critical literacy.

## METHOD

This study took place in a self-contained, public kindergarten classroom in a mid sized city located in the Southeastern United States. The classroom consisted of nineteen low-income students as determined by eligibility to receive free breakfast and lunch from the school lunch program. Of the nineteen participants, eleven were female, and eight were male. Seventeen students were African American and two were Caucasian. The students ranged in age from five to six years.

The guiding question for this research was, "How do experiences with transformational literature change the types of topical writing choices urban kindergarten children select during writer's workshop?" To answer this question, the following planned transformational literature experiences occurred.

Participants created exhibits concerning the issue of peace. Parr's (2004) text *The Peace Book* was read and discussed to introduce the children to the idea of peace. Students created exhibits depicting the issue of peace on the school campus. These exhibits were arranged throughout the school so that students, faculty, family, and other visitors could consider peace as they

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**Table 1.** Writing topic choices before and after tranformational literature experiences

| Writing Topic Choices Before and After Engaging with Critical Literacy |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | Before   | After   |
| 1.   | My toys.                                       | Helping the people in Bessemer.   |
| 2.   | My mama and daddy.                             | Sharing my snack with Walter.   |
| 3.   | My mama  | Write about my cousin sharing his snack with me.                              |
| 4.   | My baby sister.                                | Helping Mississippi by giving them some food to eat.                          |
| 5.   | My cousins.                                    | The people in Alabama and helping the people in Mississippi.                  |
| 6.   | Stories.                                       | I like to write about helping people.   |
| 7.   | I like to write about my brother.              | Helping people by giving them stuff and they will like it.                    |
| 8.   | I like to write about puppies.                 | I like to write about my family playing together.                             |
| 9.   | I like to write about my grandma.              | The people in Mississippi because they don't have a house.                    |
| 10.  | I like to write about my mama                  | I like to write about helping people.   |
| 11.  | I like to write about my family.               | About making a difference in the world.                                       |
| 12.  | My mama.                                       | I like to write about sharing   |
| 13.  | I like to write about my sisters.              | Giving Louisiana money to buy them shoes and clothes.                         |
| 14.  | My mama, my friends.                           | Helping the people in Texas by giving them things they need.                  |
| 15.  | My mama and dad.                               | We will help the people in We can change the world and save them. Louisiana   |
| 16.  | When my sister went outside to play.           | I like to write about I like to make the world more beautiful and more happy. |
| 17.  | I like to write about my sister.               | I like to write about Mississippi because they don't have nothing.            |
| 18.  | I like to write about my daddy.                | I like to write about Mississippi. They don't have any cars.                  |
| 19.  | The people in Texas. They don't have no house. | Helping the people in Mississippi.  |

observed the displays.

Another strategy aimed at transformation was the creation of a lost and found service for the school campus. This lost and found service was implemented after children experienced the social issue text Jamaica's Find by Havill (1986).

A third planned intervention using transformational literature was the exploration of Everett Anderson's Goodbye by Clifton (1983). After reading and discussing Clifton's text, a class book was made by the children in the class for students and parents who had experienced death in their family. The book was placed in the classroom library to be checked out by students and/or family members.

Finally, students wrote letters to the community nursing home. This experience was instigated after children interacted with the social issue text, Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge by Fox (1984).

In addition to these planned experiences, the children's choices of writing topics for writer's workshop were recorded before and after the use of the above transformational literature experiences. Each child was asked, "What are some of the things you like to write about?" Writing samples from writer's workshop were also collected before and after the planned intervention.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates the choices of writing topics for writer's

workshop from each of the nineteen children in the Kindergarten classroom.

Although transformational literature and writer's workshop have been studied in grades three and beyond (Heffernan, 2004), limited research has been conducted on critical literacy below third grade. This study found support for using transformational literature to expand the topics used in writer's workshop with kindergarten students in an urban setting. This is particularly noteworthy, since the school in which this study was conducted uses a scripted reading program. Many researchers believe that children must learn the basics of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency before they are able to construct meaningful writing, much less transformational literacy (Russell et al., 2007).

## Conclusions and Implications

While more research needs to be done concerning transformational literacy in low income urban kindergartens, the researchers found that kindergarten children who are taught to read and write from a scripted reading program

can still make meaningful writing choices of a transformational nature when they are also engaged in planned, critical literacy experiences. Based on these preliminary findings, early childhood educators who are required to follow scripted reading programs should consider ways to incorporate critical literacy and transformational literature into their reading and writing curriculum.

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