

DOINGWHATWORKS



PRESENTATION

4:52 min

[Full Details and Transcript](#)



Giving Students a Choice

Fall Creek Elementary School, North Carolina

April 2012

Topic TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

Practice ENGAGED COMMUNITY

- Highlights**
- » Giving students a choice makes it easier for them to write and improves the quality of their writing.
 - » Students have ownership over their own writer's notebook, which they decorate themselves and keep a running list of writing topics that they can return to throughout the year.
 - » Students have a choice of writing topic, writing utensils, and where to sit when they write.

About the Site Fall Creek Elementary School
East Bend, North Carolina

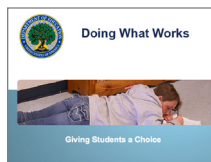
Demographics

- » 86% White
- » 11% Hispanic
- » 2% Black
- » 1% Other
- » 48% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Teachers at Fall Creek Elementary use a Writer's Workshop model to ensure students are fluent writers who are comfortable putting their ideas on paper. Every day, students write and celebrate their writing through the following practices:

- » Mentor texts used to illustrate the features of good writing;
- » Explicit instruction in writing strategies and independent use of the writing process;
- » Uninterrupted daily writing time;
- » Feedback received through peer sharing and teacher conferencing;
- » Self-selected topics and materials; and
- » Regular celebrations of published pieces.

Full Transcript



Slide 1: Welcome

Welcome to Giving Students a Choice.



Slide 2: Introducing Ms. Adams

My name is Kailey Adams. I teach a first-grade/second-grade combination class here at Fall Creek Elementary in East Bend, North Carolina.



Slide 3: Choice

When students have choice, they find it much easier to write and write for an extended period of time. They have more to say and it matters more to them because they've chosen the topic that they're writing about.



Slide 4: Benefits of choice

The quality of their writing is better. The amount that they're able to write about a topic is more extensive, so it's very important that students feel like they have a choice of genre and the type of writing that they do.



Slide 5: Prompted writing

When I first started teaching here at Fall Creek, the students were given prompted writing topics, and the writing was very uniform. It was very boring for the students. I had several students every day that would say, "I don't know what I'm going to write."



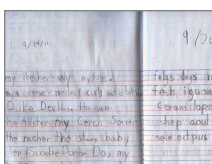
Slide 6: Writer's workshop model

When the county decided to work with Appalachian State University in their writing cohort for their graduate program, a shift began. Our school chose to go with a Writer's Workshop model, which allows the students a lot more freedom, and it's produced far better-quality writing and the students love to write.



Slide 7: Personalized writing journals

At the very beginning of the year, the students were asked to bring in composition notebooks, and these notebooks are what we call our writing journals. They also brought in photographs, stickers, any form of two-dimensional artwork that they wanted to use to decorate and personalize their writer's notebook. We wanted to show them from the very beginning of the year that that was their notebook. It was their writing. It was something that they should be proud of and that they should be excited about.



Slide 8: Writing topics

Each child was asked the first week that they had their journal to make a list of topics. And we wrote those down on the first page inside the journal, and it was just a list of topics that were important to each

child, that they thought they might want to write about sometime later on. So that on that day when that child comes in to school and says, “You know, I’m not really sure what I want to write about,” they can turn back to that list of topics and come up with something that, “Oh, I remember that vacation that I went on.”

We talk about what makes a good writing topic. Something that we like. Something that we know a lot about. Something that we want to write about. Something we want to share with other people.



Slide 9: Writing topics (cont'd)

It really allows them to just get right into writing every single day. And a lot of times students will be writing a story about their dog, and it reminds them of some other time, and it’s not appropriate to write about it right that minute in the center of this story. But they go back to their list, jot it down really quickly, and it’ll be there the next time they don’t have something to write about.



Slide 10: Writer’s bookcase

During writing time, the students have a writer’s bookcase, and on that bookcase there are six or seven different kinds of paper. The students have choice of their paper, their writing utensils. There’s different pencils. And all of those things factor into their desire to create a piece that they want to publish, that they’re proud of, that is uniquely theirs.



Slide 11: Focus and freedom

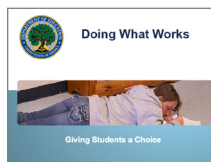
The students have a choice of where they sit in the room, and that allows them to find a space that they can focus. So they have choice of their materials. They have choice of where they sit in the room. It allows them some freedom as opposed to me telling them, “This is what you have to write. This is where you have to sit.” They are also always on different steps of the writing process. They have choice as

to which step they're working on, and that allows them to really guide their own writing and guide their own learning.



Slide 12: Fluent writers

The biggest change in this shift of including choice and adding more freedom to the entire writing process is that those students who came in at the beginning of the year struggling for every word, they're what we call fluent writers. They spend 20, 30, 40 minutes of solid writing time filling pages upon pages simply because they got to choose what they were going to write about and they're passionate about whatever that is. It's just been a remarkable change for the kids and for us. It's far more exciting for us to teach writing and for us to work with our kids.



Slide 13: Learn more

To learn more about Giving Students a Choice, please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.

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