This is my TechQuest implementation podcast.

The writing program at my school has my third grade student’s focus on four different types of writing throughout the year. We start with a personal narrative from there we go to memoirs, report writing and finish with poetry.

I end up teaching 1 type of writing per marking period. There are about 30 lessons that go along with each genre of writing. With so many lessons my students end up working on one writing piece for almost the entire marking period. They are never given a chance to do any quick writing, unless I find time to fit that in. My students end up disliking writing, because the process is so drawn out.

My problem of practice that I am focusing on is the writing process. I wanted my students to understand and they could take a writing piece and finish it in one day or even a shorter period of time and to have it be fun at the same time.

Learning about blogs in CEP 811 made me wonder if I would be able to use blogs to help my students with their writing process hang ups. I contacted a friend of mine that teaches third grade in North Carolina and asked her if she would be interested in having our student’s blog to each other.

Right away she was excited but also very nervous. She didn’t know anything about blogging and made sure that I promised to help her. We each set up a classroom blog, thinking that this would be the best option since neither of us had ever blogged with students before and we didn’t want to have to keep track of 20 different blogs. We each thought that this would help us monitor what was being written in the blogs. We started blogging to each other, personally, so my friend could have a better handle on the idea of blogging. This was a way of us trouble shooting.

Our classes blog every Thursday. We decided that we would have our students start off with introducing our classroom as well as how our classroom works. From there we introduced our school, in the next blog our town, and then our state, after that it was fair game what we blogged about. After those topics were done I had thought that I would assign their blog topic to them. On of the fifth day of blogging my students said “what are we going to blog about today?” And I decided that I would ask them. They came up with 7 different topics and could have kept throwing out ideas if I hadn’t stopped them. I decided then that I would always let them cooperatively come up with a blogging list of topics.

Every Thursday morning at our class meeting we write a list of ideas on the board of things that happened during the past week that they would like to blog about. I also use my blog as something that is cross the curriculum, this was not my intention when starting this project I wanted to solely focus on the writing process. My students actually gave me this idea. As a class when we come up with the blogging list, they always incorporate concepts that we learned in class. If there is an important concept that we talked about in Social Studies then I may tell the students that they all have to write at least one paragraph about that topic. For example, third grade students in Michigan are learning about Michigan History. This week all of my students were expected to have at least one paragraph written about the Three Fires Tribe. That is the only direction that I give them on that topic. They may write things that they found interesting about the Three Fires Tribe or they may just give their friends in North Carolina facts about the Three Fires Tribe.

I found that giving them free rain of what they write about is fun for them and they put a lot of effort into what they write. If they can’t remember anything about the mandatory topic then they bring out their books and they re-read about that topic. This is huge for my students; they are re-reading and re-teaching themselves. It also gives me an idea of what they are picking up in my teaching. It’s a good tool for me as a teacher, because I can use their blogs to help me evaluate my own teaching.

My class started writing only one paragraph to the kids in North Carolina and truth be told they weren’t even sure what a paragraph was at that time. This blogging idea has made it possible for me to teach them about paragraphs in a really positive and concrete way. They understand what writing in a paragraph means and at this moment they are expected to write at least 4 paragraphs each week and typically always meet that goal, I even have some that want to go above 4 paragraphs. And of course I let them, what teacher wouldn’t want their students to go above and beyond what was asked of them.

This blog has made them think more about adding details to their writing. It’s easier for my students to understand that these other kids don’t know what they are talking about unless there is a lot of detail in their writing. They like to idea of teaching other students who don’t know about the things we are learning. They also think its cool when they find out that those kids in North Carolina are learning about the same things that they are.

My students get very excited when it is blogging day. I had one student who described the blogging process to an adult who was a friend of their parents. She said that she really liked blogging. She gets to talk to kids that are really far away. She said that these kids are her friends and they would be her friends for life. To hear a student get that excited about something that I was doing in my room got me really excited that we were doing it.

We start off the day by having a class meeting about what they are going to write about and then away they go. They get their first drafts written and then they are expected to have two peer revision conferences. Once they finish their revision conferences they have two peer editing conferences. After they have made all of the appropriate changes to their piece they bring it to me for a teacher’s conference. When they get the approval they write their final draft.

After they turn in their final draft my students put their names into a clay pot. I decided that I wanted to draw the student’s name that would get to blog for that day. I wanted each child to get a chance to blog and at the same time be motivating them to get their writing to the final draft. However, I do not let the students who already blogged put their names into the pot. I found that this works for this year, but it is something that I would like to reevaluate for next year. Whether that means I will have every student with their own blog I don’t know yet.

This blog has given my students the opportunity to turn in a completed writing piece every week and has given me the chance to see their writing progress every week as well as take a writing grade every week as well as other summative evaluations. In years past I would not be able to see a final draft except for once a marking period and at other times when we did a quick write.

My students know that every Thursday they are expected to get a writing idea and take it through the writing process. In fourth grade these students will be expected to take the MEAP test for writing. This is the first year where I feel like I have tried to make it possible for them to go above and beyond.