

Achieving Their Dream (Part II)

By Isabel Sawyer | Categories: Reading, Writing

This is the continuation of Senior Staff Developer Isabel McLean's account of her visit to a first grade classroom at An Achievable Dream Academy in Newport News, VA. [Click here to read Part I.](#)

To help get the children thinking about writing ideas, I modeled writing about a time in my life that was not pleasant and then asked them to talk with their partners about a time in their life that was not so fun. As I listened in to one group of boys, I heard one of them say that he had a hard year in Kindergarten at his old school because no one liked him. His partner replied, "Aww. I'm sorry." I was surprised at his kindness.

I then sent the students to their seats to write. They were quietly engaged and focused for close to 20 minutes-and they could have continued writing longer! One little girl wrote about the time a friend stole her make-up and fingernails. Another wrote about how sad she was when her mother moved away without telling her. Another wrote about the time his grandma slapped them. Some wrote about how hard it was to be the new kid in school.

The topic was challenging and sad-but they all rose to the occasion and wrote incredibly heart-wrenching pieces. At least five children wrote stories that were over two pages long. No one had the need to illustrate their piece as they were all engaged in their writing. Some were incredibly fluent; others were still worried about leaving finger spaces. Some got caught up with spelling but many knew to use resources around the classroom. One little girl pulled out her journal because she knew it had the word "friend" in it. Another went to the word wall in search of the word "when."

When we came back together to share and reflect on our work, many students were able to provide their partner with productive and thoughtful feedback. I heard them say things like, "I liked the part in your story where you got in trouble with your mom." Of course, some commented on their partner's handwriting-"I really like the way you make your letters" but they were beginning to move beyond that and give each other meaningful feedback about the content of their work.

When asked it how it made them feel when their partner told them what they liked about their piece, they all were able to say that it made them happy and one little girl said that she felt "special." I think all the children at An Achievable Dream Academy feel special-thanks to the hardworking staff and their thoughtful choice of curriculum. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan would agree-He visited the school recently and here is a local news clip highlighting his time at An Achievable Dream Academy.

