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Fourth-Grade Writing Teachers' Perceptions of Learner-Centered Strategies

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Walden University

College of Education

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April Townsend

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Fourth-Grade Writing Teachers' Perceptions of Learner-Centered Strategies

by

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MA, Texas A&M-Commerce, 2014

BS, University of Houston-Downtown, 2010

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Writing is a fundamental skill needed for academic success and is considered a lifelong tool. Most students in the United States, however, do not meet grade-level proficiency in writing. Since 2015, the fourth-grade writing performance has not exceeded 50% proficient at the study site. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and to identify best practices that can be shared via professional development. The conceptual framework was based on Weimer's learner-centered principles. The research questions focused on exploring fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identifying learner-centered best practices for teaching writing. Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 fourth-grade writing teachers at the site. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis and open and axial coding strategies. Participants identified that students did not have control of assignment choices and felt that allowing students to write freely about their experiences (vs. having them respond to writing prompts) was beneficial to lifelong writing and learning. Based on these findings, a professional development series was designed to support fourth-grade teachers' implementation of learner-centered writing instruction to allow students to choose their assignments in writing and teachers to act as skilled facilitators. The findings from this study may lead to positive social change by implementing learner-centered writing instructional strategies in schools to improve students' writing.

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Dedication

This page is dedicated to my grandmother, Fern Davis. That one time, she told the church that I was valedictorian before I knew it. I could not let her down. She knew it before she passed away in December 1993. From that moment, I strived and conquered regardless of the frustrations, other people's doubts and discouragements, and life's struggles.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Writing is a tool to communicate with people. It is a fundamental skill needed for academic success and is considered a lifelong resource in today's society (Graham, 2019; Kent & Brannan, 2016). However, most students in the United States do not meet grade-level proficiency in writing (Parr & Jesson, 2016). Students who have less than 30% writing proficiency experience poor writing outcomes (Barrett et al., 2020; Haskey et al., 2020; Hsiang et al., 2020). The primary aim of writing instruction is to teach students to become confident writers (Graham, 2019). To learn how to write, they must receive adequate practice and instruction (Graham, 2019; Weimer, 2003).

Today, students are still having difficulties in writing. According to Brindle et al. (2016) and Beveridge (2019), there have been concerns about writing in the United States within the past 10 years. Of the three R's (writing, reading, and mathematics), writing has been the neglected "R" inside of schools (Beveridge, 2019). Also, learner-centered writing practices have been infrequent in primary grades (Brindle et al., 2016; Goodwin et al., 2014; Rietdijk et al., 2018). In 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 60% of U.S. students did not meet writing standards. Teachers struggle to teach writing effectively and found that grading written work is time-consuming and disappointing (Hodges et al., 2019; Lane, 2018). Therefore, students struggle to write proficiently, and teachers struggle to teach writing.

The Local Problem

The problem is that to improve fourth-grade writing at the study site, teachers need to effectively implement learner-centered writing instructional strategies in the writing curriculum. Since 2015, the fourth-grade writing performance has not exceeded 50% proficiency. Staff at the study site had implemented two writing programs, Write From the Beginning and Beyond (WFTB) and The Writing Academy, from 2015 to the time of the study. Though there is extensive literature on the improvement of writing (Graham, 2019), there is no current research focused on fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of instructional writing strategies, based on my review of the literature. In a data meeting that I attended, according to English language arts and reading (ELAR) specialists, district data coordinators, administrators, and fourth-grade writing teachers noticed that the study site proficiency levels were not consistently increasing on the state's assessment in fourth-grade writing.

Teaching to write must focus on teaching cognitive strategies that support the writing tasks and must be carried out through student and teacher cooperation (Demir, 2018). Applebee and Langer (2016) stated that if writing is closely related to thinking, teachers might begin writing contribution studies to learn and instruct. To improve fourth-grade students' writing, there is a need to explore how writing is taught to determine if effective instructional practices are applied (Brindle et al., 2016). Due to decades of focus on effective writing instruction, researchers have found that many teachers may not be fully implementing learner-centered instructional strategies, or they may be using best practices in ways that detract from their writing instruction

effectiveness (Graham, 2018; (Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016; Plessis, 2020; Simmerman et al., 2012). Therefore, writing instruction must be implemented with instructional strategies to increase students' proficiency in writing.

Rationale

Fourth-grade students in a southeastern U.S. state take a yearly state writing assessment that consists of one expository writing composition and 28 multiple choice questions on revising and editing. The expository writing composition is rated on a 0-8 scale. Two different trained raters use the "adjacent scoring model" to assign a performance scale to the student composition, according to 2019 documentation published on the website of the state education agency's student assessment division. At study site, 41% of the fourth-grade students in 2018 and 29% of the fourth-grade students in 2019 were rated at least 4 out of 8 (a grade of 50%) on the writing assessment, according to the 2019 state assessment performance report. These ratings are considered "approached grade level proficiency." "Approached grade level" means that the student showed some knowledge of the course content but may be missing critical elements, according to the student assessment division documentation (see also Technical Digest, 2018). According to division documentation, the minimum proficiency level for fourth-grade students' writing composition is 50%. In other words, those students who have approached grade level wrote a weak expository essay with vague ideas and minimal details.

Table 1 shows a comparison of state and study site writing proficiency levels for fourth-grade writing (using the state assessment performance report) for 2015-2019. The

data in the table show that the writing proficiency levels fluctuate but are always lower than the state's proficiency level each year.

Table 1

Comparison of State and Study Site Percentage of Fourth-Grade Students Reaching Proficiency on the Writing Assessment, 2015-2019

Proficiency on the fourth-grade writing assessment		
Year	State (%)	Study site (%)
2015	71	42
2016	58	42
2017	58	25
2018	62	41
2019	57	29

Note. The percentages shown are of students in the fourth grade showing proficiency in writing. In 2019, only 29% achieved proficiency at the school, which is 28% less than the state. The data in the table are from the 2019 state assessment performance report.

The fluctuating proficiency levels in Table 1 have been noted in both the site-based decision-making meeting and campus improvement plan. As a result, one of the administrators stated that current and previous writing instruction programs had not helped increase proficiency. Writing instruction and strategies have been an ongoing problem within the school district from 2015 to the present, according to the district data coordinator. Therefore, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore fourth-

grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and to identify best practices that can be shared via professional development (PD).

Definition of Terms

Definitions specific to this study are as follows:

Approached grade level: A student who has some knowledge of the content but who may miss critical writing elements (Technical Digest, 2018).

Best practices: Data or research-based strategies that have yielded superior results (Johnson, 2008).

Learner-centered: A form of instruction in which the teacher assumes the facilitator's role in the learning environment and instruction focuses on the learner and what the learner is learning (Weimer, 2013).

Strategy: A set of techniques to produce an overall aim (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998).

Write From the Beginning and Beyond (WFTB): A kindergarten-Grade 8 (K-8) comprehensive, systemically written writing curriculum designed to assist educators and students in developing knowledge and skills necessary for age-appropriate and domain-specific writing achievement (Buckner, 2012).

Writing: A system of symbols that corresponds to sounds and then words of spoken language (Vygotsky, 1978).

The Writing Academy: A curriculum based on the why, the what, and the how of effective vertical alignment for writing (Whitney, 2020).

Writing instruction: Lessons and assignments led by the teacher that include brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing drafts, or publishing work (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Writing proficiency: Mastery of writing demonstrated by consistent performance and measured by established standards (Lembke et al., 2003).

Significance of the Study

Learner-centered instructional strategies can provide students with engaging and meaningful instructional opportunities that are more likely to result in students' writing success (Weimer, 2013). I conducted this basic qualitative study to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identify best practices that can be shared via PD. Exploring fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions may yield knowledge that leads to recommendations for change to the instructional strategies, curriculums, or support services offered. The implementation of such changes may have a beneficial impact on students' writing performance. This study may contribute to a positive social change by helping teachers gain insight into learner-centered writing instruction and by identifying best practices to implement in writing instruction.

Research Questions

Writing is of paramount importance to students because it is a tool that enables students to communicate, function in society, acquire knowledge, and display what they have learned (Graham, 2018). The quality of learner-centered writing instruction needs improvement at the study site. A study was needed to explore fourth-grade writing

teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instruction strategies and identify best practices to be shared via PD. I sought to answer the following research questions (RQs) in this study:

RQ1. What are fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies?

RQ2. What are fourth-grade writing teachers' learner-centered best practices for teaching writing to fourth graders?

Review of the Literature

The following literature review supports the development of this project study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identify best practices that can be shared via PD. Writing is of paramount importance to students because it is a tool that enables them to communicate, function in society, acquire knowledge, and display what they have learned (Rietdijk et al., 2018). Several studies have indicated that authentic writing tasks in which students write with a clear communicative goal for an audience and receive feedback from teachers or peers positively affect students' written texts (Graham, 2018; Rietdijk et al., 2018; Weimer, 2013). Teaching writing using instructional strategies can be useful when goals, curriculum, instructional methods, and assessments align (Graham, 2018).

Teacher quality is one of the most critical factors in determining students' writing success (Lane, 2018). According to experts, instruction must move from a teacher-centered model to a new model where the learner is at the center of instruction (Badjadi,

2020; Lane, 2018). Some teachers resist the shift of power from teacher to student because they lack experience or knowledge of a different teaching approach (Lane, 2018; Weimer, 2013). Students may also be reluctant to share control in the classroom or shift power.

The problem explored in this basic qualitative study was that to improve fourth-grade writing at the study site, teachers need to implement learner-centered instructional writing strategies in the writing curriculum effectively. Learner-centered instruction encourages a deep understanding of the content being taught and results in students' academic advancement and engagement in the classroom (Badjadi, 2020; Dole et al., 2016). Although teachers face challenges, such as the balance of power, function of content, role of the teacher, responsibility for learning and purpose, and evaluation process, they can benefit from learner-centered instruction. This form of instruction is effective and has an impact in determining student writing success (Lane, 2018; Weimer, 2013). In other words, both the shift from teacher-centered instructional strategies to learner-centered instructional strategies and the quality of instruction play a role in how students construct their learning and develop their writing performance.

Conceptual Framework

Learner-centered instructional practices have changed over the years. According to Henson (2003), two of the first educators to focus on the students were Confucius and Socrates. John Locke, an educational philosopher, developed the idea that students learn through experiences and considered education from the student's point of view rather than that of the teacher (Nicholas, 2018). Learner-center practices focus on how and what

the students learn. In the 19th century, an educator named Colonel Francis Parker began to educate the whole child (Kaput, 2018). Parker eliminated testing, rote learning, and grading systems and argued that teachers consider students' interest in, and capabilities for, learning. Parker advocated for focusing on the whole child's basic needs, such as the social and emotional skill sets for human development and life success (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Kaput, 2018).

Theorists such as Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget shaped the existing learner-centered education into constructivism (Henson, 2003). Constructivism is based on students constructing their learning or understanding by tying it to new information or experiences; students need to make meaning for themselves and connect the meaning to what they know (Boudjelal, 2019; Brown, 2003; English, 2006; Weimer, 2013). According to Weimer (2013), making meaning and connecting what students know creates independent learners. Therefore, unlike constructivism, learner-centered instruction guides the students to understand what they are learning and allows students to decide when to ask for assistance from the teachers. Dewey argued that students should be engaged in meaningful activities, believing that students tend to learn well and develop a willingness to learn when interacting (Alanazi, 2016; Kaput, 2018). Vygotsky and Piaget studied how children think and learn (English, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) stated that mental processes developed through social interactions and thought, and language processes develop independently. Vygotsky found that learning took place when social interactions between students occurred through language and maintained that thinking skills and language development are connected. Therefore, for students to write and read,

they must use critical thinking skills (Vygotsky, 1978). These theorists contended that students must interact and socialize with one another to develop critical thinking skills. Socialization and interaction are two of the principles in the learner-centered approach to enhance students' learning on accountability.

Weimer's Approach to Learner-Centered Teaching

Weimer (2013) explained that learner-centered teaching focuses attention on what the students are learning, how they are learning, and applying prior knowledge to what they presently know. The author provided the meaning, practice, and ramifications of the learner-centered approach and how it transforms the classroom environment. In the same study, Weimer also demonstrated how learner-centered teaching ties teaching and curriculum to the process of learning rather than to content delivery alone.

Learner-centered teaching does not employ a single teaching method but employs different methods to ensure student learning (Weimer, 2003). Therefore, Weimer's (2013) learner-centered instruction was an appropriate conceptual framework for this study. I used Weimer's five principles to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of instructional writing strategies. Weimer (2003) explained that learner-centered instruction is based on the following five principles:

1. The role of the teacher: The teacher's role promotes learning, not telling students what they should do and know (Weimer, 2013). The roles of teachers in the learner-centered approach are to design the course such that it creates a climate for optimal learning; a teacher should model the appropriate expected behavior for the students, encourage students to learn from and with each

other, and provide more feedback throughout the process (Weimer, 2013).

The teacher should also relate lessons to everyday experiences to motivate the students to find the significance of what they are learning.

2. The balance of power: Teachers can provide a balance of power by sharing power with the students. According to Weimer (2013), students are included in the educational decision-making, and teachers adapt to students' developmental differences. Students do most of the work, from asking questions to providing examples; however, the balance of power is gradually proportioned based on students' abilities to handle the responsibilities.
3. The function of content: The content is to build knowledge and learning base skills to use across a lifetime of learning. Teachers use the curriculum content to build students' knowledge, skills, and ability to transfer knowledge to other settings (Weimer, 2013). According to Duros (2015), students become experts when they begin to think critically, solve problems, and apply an extension to what they learn. By activating what students already know, teachers provide students with the foundation to understand and acquire new information.
4. The responsibility of learning: Students experience consequences of the decisions they make about learning. According to Alanazi (2016) and Darsih (2018), in learner-centered learning, students are responsible for their learning while the teachers take the role of the facilitator. Students create and promote an environment that is conducive to their learning.

5. The purposes and processes of evaluation: The purpose of learning is for students to produce a product, perform a skill, or demonstrate their knowledge. Students can explore and develop skills that will not compromise the integrity of the grading process (Weimer, 2013). With teachers' assistance, students can set goals and participate in the selection and planning of the lesson.

In a learner-centered classroom, students work collaboratively, participate in instructional decisions, and take responsibility for their learning while the teachers serve as facilitators for student learning (Weimer, 2013). Weimer (2013) argued that students become lifelong critical and independent thinkers when teachers use learner-centered instruction. The challenge for learner-centered teachers is finding strategies that give students control and responsibility commensurate with their ability to handle it. Weimer stated that the goal of learner-centered teaching is the development of students as autonomous, self-directed, and self-regulating learners. Flachmann (1994) stated that the oracle, the locus, and ownership of knowledge should reside in each student, and the principal goals of teachers must be to help students discover the most essential and enduring answers to life's problems within themselves.

Weimer's concept of learner-centered instruction was aligned with the goals of this basic qualitative study. Its five principles were pertinent to exploring fourth-grade writing teachers' effective implementation of learner-centered writing instruction to improve students' writing performance. I developed the RQs to focus on fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identify best

practices that can be shared via PD. I conducted open-ended, semistructured interviews to gather data from participants to address the research problem.

Review of the Broader Problem

A review of current research regarding learner-centered (i.e., student-centered) instruction was necessary to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identify best practices through PD. In this literature review, I focused on the broader problem by discussing the literature on learner-centered learning, writing instruction, and instructional strategies. I searched for peer-reviewed articles and dissertations through the Walden University Library using databases such as SAGE, Education Resource Information Center, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Education Source, and Academic Search Complete. To find specific articles referenced in other articles, Google Scholar was used. The literature review consisted of studies that were published within the last 5 years. I used the following terms and phrases to locate peer-reviewed articles and dissertations: *learner-centered instruction*, *learner-centered instruction in writing*, *instructional strategies*, *learner-centered practices*, *teachers' perceptions on learner-centered instruction*, *writing instruction*, *writing achievement*, *writing improvement*, *writing process*, and *writing instructional strategies*.

Learner-Centered Learning and Instruction

In teacher-centered instruction, teachers typically lecture, and students do not choose what and how they learn in the classroom. In traditional learning, teacher-centered classroom strategies have typically consisted of learners being required to assume a passive learning role where the instructor spends most of the class time lecturing and

presenting course material (Weimer, 2013). In other words, learners are expected to come to class prepared, having read the textbook and additional assigned reading materials before class, and take lecture notes during the class (Stefaniak & Tracey, 2015; Weimer, 2003). Also, in traditional learning, students are listeners and follow directives from their teachers. Therefore, the traditional learning approach relies more on the teachers depositing the information than students being part of or having a voice in the lessons.

The shift toward learner-centered instruction is a change that has caused teachers to rethink how they teach and assess students. Learner-centered education is a model that emerged to shape a new understanding of learning and to pave the way for what teaching and learning ought to be (Badjadi, 2020; Mehr, 2017; Starkey, 2019; Weimer, 2013). Learner-centered or student-centered learning is a classroom education method in which the students' needs are the primary focus (Weimer, 2013). This approach, which is a form of self-directed learning, is different from traditional education in that teachers are the facilitators of learning rather than the leaders who choose what and how students will learn (Alanazi, 2016). The responsibility for learning is placed in the students' hands while the teachers' role is transformed into a guide and facilitator (Alanazi, 2016; Darsih, 2018). Learner-centered instruction is the preferred approach to how teachers and students learn writing in the United States.

Students are active participants in learner-centered teaching and are held accountable for what they have learned. Learner-centered teaching occurs when teachers focus on student learning, and students control the learning process (Alanazi, 2016; Darsih, 2018). Hanewicz et al. (2017) studied whether the traditional grading style

empowers students to take responsibility for their learning. Almost all (98%) of the students in their study completed more assignments and discussions when deciding to apply what they have learned. In other words, students were active participants when they were responsible and could choose what and how they learn in the classroom.

However, instituting a learner-centered practice can be challenging. According to Weimer (2013), 75% of teachers still implement lecture-based practices. Furthermore, Plessis (2020) and Soysal and Radmard (2017) explored teachers' perceptions, challenges, and experiences of learner-centered teaching and revealed that teachers have a limited understanding of learner-centered practices and are only in the early stages of implementing learner-centered instruction. In addition, the challenge for the students with the learner-centered approach is the shift from the teacher to student model (Lane, 2018). This shift allows students to have more control over what and how they learn. The student model allows the students to be accountable for their learning with fewer teacher directives. Therefore, students and teachers may be hesitant to begin the learner-centered approach in the classroom because of the challenges they face.

Feedback provided to students from peers or teachers increases students' critical understanding. Learner-centered practices shift the role of teachers from givers of information to facilitators, motivators, and feedback providers in student learning (Darsih, 2018; Indrilla & Ciptaningrum, 2018; Plessis, 2020). Sekulich (2018) found that focusing on student-centered learning, addressing learning styles and critical thinking levels, and providing feedback help students succeed in their development. Teachers give feedback to students about the assignment expectations and criteria. Providing feedback

allows students to reflect on their learning and take responsibility for their learning process; therefore, learner-centered practices force students to play an active role in their education instead of the more passive role traditionally used (Darsih, 2018). In addition, Stefaniak and Tracey (2015) observed educators' teaching strategies and found that students engaged in learner-centered activities demonstrated higher motivation levels and were actively engaged in their learning. However, for students to achieve higher learning levels, teachers must provide frequent feedback and practice opportunities.

Teachers must provide differentiated lessons in writing. Learner-centered instruction consists of different levels of learning (Weimer, 2013). Learning may come from peers interacting with one another or from teachers or peers providing feedback, students choosing an assignment, or students being accountable for their learning. In a learner-centered approach, teachers provide various cooperative learning strategies to ensure learning to be effective in the classroom.

Writing Instruction

Writing helps improve students' performance in school, cultivate growth, and increase their critical thinking skills. In addition, it is an essential skill that provides a gateway to knowledge and supports and extends the comprehension and learning of content material presented in class or text (Graham et al., 2012; Rietdijk et al., 2018), such as shared writing, modeling, guided writing, and interactive writing (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). Writing instruction focuses on teaching students how to write for a purpose and an audience (Philippakos & Fitzpatrick, 2018) and involves the explicit and systematic instruction of strategies for executing one or more writing processes, such as

planning, drafting, and revising texts (Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016; Kohnen et al., 2019). A central feature of social life, writing is used to communicate, share ideas, persuade, chronicle experiences, and entertain others (Graham, 2018). However, previous studies have shown that writing instructional practices are not applied or are practiced infrequently in Grades 4–12 (Applebee & Langer, 2016; Gilbert & Graham, 2010), even though educational research has provided best practices for writing (Hodges et al., 2019).

Writing can be challenging for teachers and students alike. It is a difficult skill for teachers to instruct and students to master (Curtis, 2017). Writing teachers have reported that they are inadequately prepared to teach writing (Brindle et al., 2016; Hodges et al., 2019; Kohnen et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2016). Teachers have also admitted they are reluctant to teach writing in the classroom (Kohnen et al., 2019). Elementary writing teachers face scarce opportunities to learn writing strategies due to few elementary writing courses being offered (Paulick et al., 2019). Furthermore, many ELAR teachers have literature and not a writing background and receive more training in teaching reading than teaching writing (Myers et al., 2016). According to Kohnen et al. (2019), studies have demonstrated that in the K–12 curriculum, little time is dedicated to writing instruction, and less writing is assigned. Teachers need more support to implement comprehensive writing instruction that includes a writing framework (Coker & Lewis, 2008; Smith et al., 2019). Focusing on enhancing students' writing development would help teachers be better prepared for writing instruction (Cheung & Jang, 2019). If teachers are not focused on using the writing process or are not effectively conveying this

approach to students, students' lack of understanding of the writing process could result in a low level of success.

The way writing is organized affects the reader's interpretation of the writing piece. Writing is an organizational skill that consists of structure, flow, and clarity (Asaro-Saddler, 2016; Keen, 2017). Teachers are mediators who organize the writing classrooms by integrating resources and rules to help students compose their writing (Cheung & Jang, 2019). Many U.S. students struggle to meet basic writing standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012) and require writing instructional strategies to support writing skills (Wang & Matsumura, 2019). Graham and Hall (2016), Kadmiry (2021), and MacArthur et al. (2016) stated that teachers who used learner-centered strategies and students who were taught with the use of strategies improved their writing more than students who were allowed to write a final composition without the learner-centered strategies. Graham and Hall found that students who struggle with writing benefited from evidence-based practices. Therefore, teaching the writing process using strategies or best practices can improve students' writing. Teaching the writing process allows a clearer interpretation of the ideas to the reader.

Writing is taught and learned based on experiences. Teachers can learn how to teach writing through their efforts and experiences (Graham, 2018). According to experts, teachers must balance the writing product and process approach (Curtis, 2017; Paulick et al., 2019). Although Graham and Sandmel (2011) and Kadmiry (2021) stated that the writing process approach yielded a modest improvement in the quality of students' written text, it is more effective than the writing product approach (Ghufron, 2016).

Pacello (2019) stated that grammatical skills should not be taught in isolation, and therefore, writing should be taught in the writing process approach. Pacello confirmed that students understand the effectiveness of the writing process based on the improvement in their writing. Also, according to Arteaga-Lara (2018), the writing process approach helps students improve their writing skills by generating and discovering ideas. Through the writing process approach, the teacher's roles is to guide students in the areas in which they need help, provide them with feedback, focus on what students do while writing, and address students' weaknesses at the end of the writing session (Kadmiry, 2021). The writing process approach focuses on developing the writer rather than the product.

However, most teachers use a writing product approach in which they focus on mechanical techniques (Paulick et al., 2019); this starts with reading a modeled text, followed by students producing that example or model (Keen, 2017). In other words, the writing product approach focuses on the rules of the written language and the textual form. According to Kadmiry (2021), grammatical structures and lexical patterns are crucial for writers. Hence, students can form correct sentences, but they cannot write extended texts (Kadmiry, 2021). The writing product approach enhances students' writing abilities in organization, content, vocabulary, and language usage (Arteaga-Lara, 2018). Teachers do not provide explicit instruction and clear directives (Kadmiry, 2021). Furthermore, students are on their own to discover the appropriate forms while writing. The writing product and process approaches allow students to explore and create ideas written on paper and are effective in students' written text in different ways. Therefore, in

learner-centered instruction, writing product and process approaches instill Weimer's five principles: role of the teacher, the balance of power, function of the content, students' responsibility, and the purposes and process of evaluation.

Teachers' writing development is essential. Focusing on the development of students' writing would help teachers prepare better writing instruction (Cheung & Jang, 2019). Students' lack of understanding of the writing process may be due to teachers not focusing on using the writing process or not effectively teaching it. Teachers' perceptions may impact how teachers teach, which influences how students learn the writing process and the targeted writing skills. Curtis (2017) investigated and found that the modeling of writing strategies impacts teachers' beliefs on writing instruction. According to Keen (2017), evidence has shown that greater emphasis on the writing process is associated with more effective teaching and more students writing. Therefore, teachers must understand the writing process and product approaches before teaching the skill to students.

Writing skills must be mastered through practice and modeling. The writing product consists of overlapping processes that include a) prewriting, b) drafting, c) revising, d) editing, and e) publishing (Jagaiah et al., 2019; Keen, 2017; Rietdijk et al., 2018). However, Kadmiry (2021) stated that teaching students writing skills such as the stages-prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing is important, but it is not enough. In addition, students are judged based on the product than the process. These stages allow students to explore and create ideas to be written on paper. The prewriting process involves students generating ideas before they start writing. During this

instructional learning, students discuss or write different possibilities to explore in their writing (Keen, 2017; Listyani, 2018; Ray et al., 2016) and choosing a topic that interests them. Students write their ideas down during the drafting phase (Smedt & Keer, 2018) and construct those ideas into sentences. This phase can be crafted into a composition (Keen, 2017) and later revised and edited into a written composition that is concise and clarified. During the publishing of the final product, students are given a chance to share experiences and values in their writing pieces.

Instructional Strategies

The use of instructional strategies may increase the success of students' writing. Teaching strategies for planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing will increase the quality of the students' composition (Graham & Harris, 2016). Teachers can teach thinking processes by modeling and providing students with practice. Strategies such as modeling, scaffolding, or collaborative writing have been found to improve the quality of students' composition (Grunke et al., 2017).

Strategic instruction and genre study have been adopted in writing instruction to help struggling writers. According to Shen and Troia (2018), strategic instruction is a systematic instruction that consists of teacher modeling, scaffolding, collaboration, and independent practice. Strategic instruction focuses on cognition and motivation writing and targets specific writing strategies to support the writing process (Shen & Troia, 2018). However, genre study guides students through the writing process (Shen & Troia, 2018) and focuses on the content of writing and targets specific genre characteristics and elements.

In strategic instruction, the teachers activate the students' background knowledge through discussion. Teachers provide a self-regulated strategy model to teach students how to plan and draft stories or texts. According to Graham et al. (2019) and Shen and Troia (2018), these self-regulated strategies are

- tell what the writers believe, give three or more reasons, examine each reason, and end it (TREE),
- pick up my ideas, organize my notes and write and say more (POW), or
- who, what, and how (WWW).

Based on the self-regulated strategy model, teachers model a step-by-step how to complete a graphic organizer or one of the strategies used during the instruction (Graham et al., 2019; Shen & Troia, 2018). This graphic organizer is essential because it provides a place where students can store their thoughts and ideas on paper (Graham et al., 2019) and construct ideas into sentence structure. The teachers discuss, practice, and rehearse information on the planning sheet or a graphic organizer. Students can independently practice what they have learned and are later weaned off the graphic organizer without scaffolds (Shen & Troia, 2018). Therefore, struggling writers learn this strategy through scaffolding until they can write independently without teacher guidance.

In contrast, genre study emphasizes the ability to write for multiple genres. Students learn through immersion and explicit instruction (Shen & Troia, 2018). Teachers collect and guide the students using mentor texts or sentences as examples to engage students' interest in writing. Students discuss the ideas or details about topic (Graham et al., 2019; Shen & Troia, 2018). Teachers model and examine how to use the

ideas for the composition and introduce transitional words to connect the ideas or relationships (Shen & Troia., 2018). Teachers or peers conference and give feedback to the students. According to Mehr (2017), students who were provided feedback from peers or teachers improved their writing and outperformed students who received writing product approach instruction where feedback was absent during the writing process. Feedback is crucial based on the time it is provided to the students (Kadmiry, 2021; Martinez et al., 2020). Using the planning sheet or strategy, students draft their composition and begin revising and editing their writing using their peers' or teachers' information during the conference (Shen & Troia, 2018). The goal for revising and editing is to improve the writing and ensure flow and clarity within the paper (Graham et al., 2019). With teachers' continued modeling during the publishing, students can correct any errors and complete their final product. Soon, students can independently write a composition without teachers' guidance.

In conclusion, learner-centered instructional writing strategies using Weimer's (2013) five principles may help fourth-grade writing teachers to improve students' writing skills. To improve writing skills, writing instruction must be transitioned from teacher-centered to student-centered. The instructional writing strategies consist of shared writing, modeling, writing process and product approaches, the self-regulated strategy model, and other strategies. The implementation of these strategies may increase the success of students' writing.

Implications

In this basic qualitative study, I explored fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identifies best practices that can be shared through PD. I used the data acquired from this study to develop a PD series for fourth-grade writing teachers to provide them with additional support in their application of learner-centered writing instruction strategies and identify best practices to teach the writing curriculum. Appendices A-C contain an overview, pre- and postassessment, and daily agenda for the project, which is discussed in detail in Section 3. The results may help administrators and campus leaders make recommendations for changes to the instructional strategies, curriculums, or support services offered, leading to students' writing performance changes.

Summary

A basic qualitative study will be most helpful in exploring fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identifying best practices that can be shared through PD. I discussed and explained the local problem at the study site with the state and school's writing data. In addition, the rationale and purpose of the study were justified with the support from the literature and personal communications with stakeholders. The terms were outlined and defined. I presented the significance of the study and the RQs that will guide the purpose and problem at the study site and described how studying the problem might be helpful at the school.

Weimer's (2013) framework on learner-centered instruction was identified and defined based on the phenomenon of the study. I stated how the framework connects with

the study and RQs. Furthermore, I indicated how resources were conducted and presented an overview of the topics. Section 2 will focus on the methodology. In the methodology section, I will provide details on methods used to collect and analyze the qualitative data from the open-ended questions during the semistructured interviews using Zoom for Grade 4.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

In this study, I addressed the problem of low fourth-grade writing scores. Teachers at the urban school under study have used several different instructional strategies to improve students' writing efficacy and scores. However, students' writing scores have not improved in the past 6 years. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identify best practices that can be shared through PD. Following are the RQs that I sought to answer:

RQ1: What are fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies?

RQ2: What are fourth-grade writing teachers' learner-centered best practices for teaching writing to fourth graders?

There are three primary types of research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative researchers analyze data using numbers (Mertens, 2018; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Quantitative research is classified as experimental or nonexperimental. Researchers conducting experimental studies seek to determine cause-effect relationships, whereas those conducting nonexperimental studies focus on determining whether a relationship exists between study variables (Roulston & Choi, 2018). In this study, quantitative research was not appropriate because I was not seeking to determine whether a cause-effect relationship existed between the study variables using statistical analysis.

Mixed methods are both quantitative and qualitative. Researchers collect and analyze data using quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study (Shorten & Smith, 2017). By doing so, they are able to gain in-depth knowledge of a specific topic. A mixed-methods approach was not the best one for this study because I only wanted to analyze one data, qualitative.

I used a qualitative approach. According to Mertens (2018), qualitative researchers contend that people construct knowledge by engaging in the phenomenon. Qualitative research is one of the primary methods used in the social sciences because it allows for in-depth, probing questioning to understand participants' perceptions (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Use of the qualitative approach allowed me to understand the participants' perceptions of learner-centered instructional strategies in depth by further probing their interview responses.

Before deciding on a basic qualitative study, I considered different qualitative designs, including case study, ethnography, phenomenological design, and grounded theory. A case study is an in-depth investigation or explanation of real-life situations involving multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, and audio-visual material (Mertens, 2018). I opted against conducting a case study because I had one source of information, semistructured interviews; and semistructured interviews were sufficient to answer the RQ. I also opted against conducting an ethnography. According to Roulston and Choi (2018) and Willig and Rogers (2017), ethnographic researchers observe real-life events, experiences, and memories to examine cultural groups. Ethnography allows the researcher to become the participant and involves field notes and

observations (Flick, 2018). Because I was exploring fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing strategies (vs. exploring cultural groups through observation), I concluded that this design was not appropriate for the study.

The second design that I considered was the phenomenological design. Researchers using a phenomenological design describe events or human experiences to understand participants' lived experiences (Roulston & Choi, 2018; Willig & Rogers, 2017). This design is premised on the basic structure of individuals' lived experience, such as that related to love, anger, and betrayal (Mertens, 2018). A phenomenological design was not appropriate for the study because I was not focusing on participants' emotions.

Another design that I considered was grounded theory. Using this design, a researcher collects and analyzes data and then forms a theory (Willig & Rogers, 2017). According to Mertens (2018), grounded theorists construct theory by addressing questions about process in their collection and analysis of data. Because I was not trying to build a theory, I determined that a grounded theory design was not appropriate for the study.

I conducted a basic qualitative study because I sought to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions on learner-centered instructional writing strategies using semistructured interviews. I did so from the perspective of Weimer's (2013) five principles. A researcher conducting a basic qualitative study explores people's interpretations of their experiences (Mertens, 2018). This design was appropriate because it allowed me to explore and investigate teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing

instructional strategies. According to researchers, the basic study provides an understanding and makes sense of the phenomena from the participants' perspective (McGregor, 2018). I wanted to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions about writing. I aimed to identify best practices that can be shared through PD. The results were the basis for recommendations for changes to the instructional strategies, curriculums, or support services offered. As I discussed in Section 1, implementation of these changes may improve students' writing performance.

Participants

The population of focus for this study was fourth-grade teachers who were teaching or had taught fourth-grade writing at the study site. I used purposeful sampling to identify participants because, according to Billups (2021), this type of sampling furthers the researcher's ability to acquire relevant data. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who are relevant to the research and knowledgeable about or experience with the phenomenon of interest (Billups, 2021). By selecting fourth-grade teachers who were teaching or had taught fourth-grade writing at the study site as participants, I was able to obtain the information I needed to address the study purpose and problem.

Researchers determine the sample size based on informational considerations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). After obtaining approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study (approval no. 09-30-21-0587316), I reached out to the principal at the study site via email and phone. I discussed the purpose, problem, and RQs and provided the study invitation and consent form. I also provided the

criteria for selecting the participants. After soliciting the principal's feedback on any changes needed for the communication protocol to follow at the school and incorporating these changes with the principal's permission, I emailed potential participants an invitation (see Appendix D) and a consent form.

In engaging with participants, I followed the guidelines put forth by Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Flick (2018) for establishing a working relationship between the researcher and participant. My approach emphasized open communication based on trust and disclosure of the participants' roles and responsibilities in the study. Before asking any of the interview questions, I discussed with the participants the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their role as a participant. During the scheduled interview and in the consent form, I informed the participants of the time frame of the semistructured interviews. To protect their identities, I assigned each participant a letter (e.g., TA). I used this coding identification in the data analysis and reporting.

Data Collection

Data that are conveyed in words are qualitative, whereas data that are represented as numbers are quantitative (Billups, 2021). The methods that I used to analyze and interpret interview data and represent participants were qualitative methods. In this study, I collected data via one-on-one interviews that I conducted on a videoconferencing platform, Zoom. There are several types of interviews, including highly structured, semistructured, and unstructured. Highly structured interview questions are predetermined by the order and wording of the questions and are appropriate for a formal written survey (Billups, 2021). However, an unstructured interview, which is commonly

used in ethnographies, participant observations, and case studies, is informal. In an unstructured interview, the researcher does not know enough about the phenomenon to ask relevant questions (Billups, 2021). According to Flick (2018), a semistructured format allows a researcher to gather additional information by asking supplemental questions after posing the initial question. Semistructured interview questions are flexibly worded and based on a list of questions to be explored (Billups, 2021). The questions do not have exact wording, and the order of the questions is not determined ahead of time. In the study, I chose to conduct semistructured interviews because doing so allowed participants to freely express themselves in the interview. The semistructured interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom with participants' approval. Appendix E contains the interview questions that I developed to explore participating fourth-grade teachers' perceptions about writing.

To assist with the semistructured interview process, I developed an interview guide. Such a guide is an effective tool to use when conducting semistructured interviews because it allows the researcher to focus on the phenomena of the study (Billups, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick, 2018). According to Flick (2018), the researcher should anticipate how the interview questions will work in practice, how participants will understand them, and how likely participants will be to respond to them in the interview. I asked three expert teachers, who have experience in the field, to review the interview questions. According to Flick and Billups (2021), using experts who have experience in the field improves the likelihood that the RQs will be addressed and that the problem will be the focus of the questioning.

I based the semistructured interview questions on Weimer's (2013) learner-centered teaching. In qualitative research, the researcher relies on crucial informants and focuses on themes and concepts (Flick, 2018). Individual participants were interviewed one time for approximately 45-60 minutes. Data gathered from the semistructured interview were audio-recorded (see Flick, 2018). An audio recording will ensure the preservation of data for later analysis (Billups, 2021). Participants had the right to refuse the audio recording. I used member checks to ensure internal validity or credibility (see Billups, 2021). The process involved in member checks is to take the preliminary analysis or transcriptions back to the participants and ask whether the interpretation is accurate (Billups, 2021).

In addition to the recorded interviews, I took notes during the interview process and kept a researcher log to organize the data. Use of researcher log made it easier to effectively keep track of the data collected throughout the study (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher log was kept in a binder and divided into sections for each participant. In each section, there were contact information, interview notes, and transcriptions for each participant in the study.

My role as a researcher in the study did not cause bias or conflict of interest. I was previously employed at the study site as a classroom teacher, but, at the time of the study, I had not worked there in over 4 years. Because I have not worked at the study site, there was no conflict in collecting data through the interview.

Ethical Considerations

I assigned letters to participants to protect their identities. Participants received a consent form. The use of protected passwords and storage of data in a locked file cabinet helped to ensure confidentiality. Participants knew that they could leave at any given time during the interview process. After 5 years, participants' information, notes, and transcripts will be discarded. Psychological, legal, economic, and professional risks were not applicable in this study (e.g., I did not administer any treatments). I ensured a respectful, nonjudgmental, and nonthreatening environment. The interviews were conducted after work to lighten the burden on the participants. I scheduled a time that was convenient for the participants that they chose. Participants understood each question and provided concise answers.

No leading questions were asked to avoid bias or reveal an assumption. I obtained oral and written permission to conduct the research at the study site. I emailed the principal and PD director the purpose of the study, the role of the participants, and my role in the study. I received permission from the PD director in an email and physical letter. Upon approval, I contacted the building principal through email and phone calls. I explained the study and the criteria of the participants to the building principal. The three expert teachers reviewed the questions to see if the questions were correct for gaining answers for the RQs.

Data Analysis

According to Billups (2021), data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities in qualitative research. The analysis began with the first interview and the first

document read. I followed Creswell and Creswell's (2017) seven suggested steps for qualitative analysis' data. These steps were (a) preparing for analysis, (b) reading and reflecting data, (c) coding data, (d) using coded data to determine themes, (e) representing themes, (f) interpreting findings, and (g) validating accuracy of findings. In this subject, I provided a step-by-step overview of the data analysis process.

I began by transcribing each interview one at a time into Microsoft Word documents within 48 hours. I reviewed the purpose of my study and began writing notes on paper, such as highlighting common words throughout the transcribed paper. Each transcription has two letters, such as Teacher A (TA), for each participant. I continuously compared the interview notes or transcriptions of participants. According to Flick (2018), this comparison informs the data collection. I planned the data collection based on the findings from the first transcripts. I began assigning segments, categories, or themes in the data set similar to the RQs. The names of the categories and the scheme used to sort the data reflected the focus of the study (Flick, 2018). I created a Word document file with a secure password for each participant's information to keep me organized as I recorded information.

I used thematic analysis to organize the data. It was an appropriate form of analysis in qualitative research because it involved recognizing, examining, and recording themes from data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I inputted data from the semistructured interviews into a Word document to filter and assign codes. Coding is a word or phrase that can be easily retrieved to identify themes and their relationship (Flick, 2018). These codes were open and axial.

Open coding is the initial coding or initial step in the analysis of qualitative research (Flick, 2018). By using this type of coding, I broke up the data to compare similar events in the data. Transcription and interview notes were open-coded based on the participant's response to each interview question. I used open coding to separate the data from the semistructured interviews into themes and concepts. However, axial, or analytical coding is the process of grouping the open codes (Flick, 2018). I made connections and organized the open codes. I created and assigned each file folder with a category name. Each unit of data placed in a category should include original identifying codes such as participants' names (Flick, 2018). I continued this process until all the data have been assigned to a file folder linked to a category.

Data Analysis Results

The problem at the study site was low fourth-grade writing scores. Despite several efforts to use different strategies, the writing scores have not improved, nor have they been steady in the past 6 years in the urban school of study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and to identify best practices that can be shared through PD.

Data collection for this study took place on Zoom as a one-on-one semistructured interview. Using a researcher-developed interview guide, I explored fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instructional writing strategies and identified best practices that can be shared through PD. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes each. Once interviews were completed, I transcribed and conducted a member

check for each interviewee. I coded and compared each data collection from participant interviews. When the coding and comparison were completed, themes were emerged. I looked for discrepancies within the data. Therefore, there were no inconsistencies or differences in answering the interview questions from the participants. Through the RQs that I developed for this study, I understood fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identified best practices to be shared through PD.

In alignment with Weimer's (2013) principles of learner-centered strategies instruction, I understood fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions on learner-centered writing instruction and identified best practices to be shared through PD. I used the data gathered during semistructured interviews to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies?

RQ2: What are fourth-grade writing teachers' learner-centered best practices for teaching writing to fourth graders?

Research Question 1

RQ1 was, What are fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies? Through one-to-one semistructured interviews with participants, I created questions that were intended to help me understand fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions on learner-centered writing instructional strategies. The questions were intended for fourth-grade writing teachers to express their thoughts about learner-centered instructional strategies, share some of their experiences as fourth-grade writing teachers, and provide their writing instruction in the classroom. Through the

interview process, I engaged with the participants about their perspectives on learner-centered writing instructional strategies. Furthermore, some additional questions were asked for clarification. Afterwards, I identified themes from the participants' responses.

I used open and axial coding to identify the central ideas that emerged during the interview process through Weimer's (2013) learner-centered principles during the interview process. Coding is a process qualitative researchers use to categorize data and describe categories (Flick, 2018). I began the process of open coding by manually writing and highlighting words and phrases in the transcribed Word document from each question. I identified common labels and terms that became my open codes based on the interview transcripts (see Appendix F). Common words and phrases were highlighted with specific colors to group them into categories. After comparing each interview's responses and reducing the open codes, I conducted the next step, axial coding. During this process, I looked for common patterns among the codes. I grouped the codes into categories to create themes that were related to the fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions about learner-centered writing instructional strategies (see Table 2). I used thematic coding and looked for relationships among the themes. I concluded that the following themes revealed concepts related to fourth-grade writing teachers' perspectives of learner-centered writing instructional strategies:

- focus on students,
- growth mindset,
- feedback, and
- student-driven.

Table 2*Open and Axial Codes and Themes for Research Question 1*

Open code	Axial code	Theme
Individual Produce more Develop knowledge Accommodate Specific needs Differentiate Vary writing levels Opportunity	Define student-centered learning	Focus on students
Data tracker Engage Interest Incentives Praise Collaborate Accountability Responsibility	Learning environment	Growth mindset
Peer to peer/teacher conference Checklist Share Reflect Positive outcome Voice-communication	Support	Feedback
Collaborate Choice (writing prompt) Choice (not grammar) Monitor/adjust Lesson relevant Background knowledge Alignment (vertical/horizontal) Weak writers (foundation skills)	Student input	Student-driven

A detailed description of the themes, along with supporting excerpts from interviews, is listed below.

Theme 1: Focus on Students

It was important to understand if fourth-grade teachers understood and defined student-centered, learner-centered instruction. All participants defined learner-centered instruction strategies. For example, TG stated, “Learner-centered means that the students develop a knowledge of the skills by mostly listening to and working with each other rather than the teacher doing most of the talking.” In addition, TA suggested, “Learner-centered means that not only are the students the focus of the class, but they are also the individuals doing the work.” Learner-centered is centered around students’ abilities or levels. Students are thinking “outside of the box” more than answering yes or no.

Theme 2: Growth Mindset

Students are being responsible and held accountable for their learning. TB considered that using a growth mindset concept where students can see and track their gains will allow students to have ownership over their learning throughout the year. In TD’s classroom, the teacher creates lessons and promotes an environment that is fun and engaging. “I create strategies that students can implement and apply them to the material that I am teaching,” stated TD. In addition, TE commented, “We do a lot of writing workshops when coming to class. Kids get excited and motivated about sharing their composition with their peers.” When students take on challenges and learn from them, their abilities and achievements increase.

Theme 3: Feedback

Providing feedback to students, such as a comment or words of encouragement affect a student more than a grade itself. Teachers knew the importance of providing feedback to students. “Face-to-face conferences help students and guide them in the right direction into developing the foundations of writing,” explained TH.

TG stated, “I support students writing by always encouraging them to get out of their comfort zone when writing. Since most students are not comfortable writing; I believe it is essential to offer constructive criticism to help them to grow.” TF concluded, “I used buddy systems in place to where I would have a high-medium student or a medium-low student and that way, they could help each other and provide feedback. They also have checklists to guide them with different writing prompts and task cards to promote thoughts and ideas.” When constructive feedback is given immediately, students were aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

Theme 4: Student-Driven

Understanding student-driven lesson plays an important role on students’ participation in the classroom. Fourth-grade teachers are giving students two prompts to choose; however, students are not given a choice for grammar instruction or assignments. They apply what they have learned thus far to their writing compositions. TA, TB, TC and TD stated, “The district selects the assignments. However, students can choose between two writing prompts.” Also, TE admitted, “This is unfortunate when it comes to the academic school year. Teachers are limited to only teaching personal, expository, or persuasive writing, but there are more than one writing styles.”

In addition, writing instruction must be vertically and horizontally aligned within the grade levels. “At the beginning of the year, fourth-grade students rely heavily on the teachers because they are not familiar with writing structure. Therefore, this forces the teacher to find other strategies to implement while teaching the foundations of writing,” stated TH. Furthermore, TI commented, “Checking for understanding helps monitor and adjust while teaching a lesson. Checking for understanding creates a student driven environment and makes me as a teacher reflect on what I taught and go back and reteach in a different way with a different strategy.” By involving students with decision-making, students are at the center of learning using their voice to understand why, how, and what shapes their learning experiences.

Research Question 2

RQ2 was, What are fourth-grade writing teachers’ learner-centered best practices for teaching writing to fourth graders? In my one-to-one, semistructured interviews with participants, I asked interview questions with the aim of identifying participants’ best practices for teaching fourth-grade students. The questions were intended for fourth-grade writing teachers to provide examples of how and when they used or teach best practices in writing, content used for instruction, and planning collaboration. Through the interview process, I gathered information on how and when best practices were used and the types of best practices. Furthermore, some additional questions were asked for clarification. Afterwards, I identified themes from the participants’ responses.

I used open and axial coding to identify the central ideas that emerged during the interview. Coding is a process qualitative researchers use to categorize data and describe

categories (Flick, 2018). I began the process of open coding by manually writing and highlighting words and phrases in the transcribed Word document from each question. I identified common labels and terms that became my open codes that were based on the interview transcripts (see Appendix G). Common words and phrases were highlighted with specific colors to group them into categories. After I compared each interview's responses and reducing the open codes, I began conducting the next step, axial coding. During this process, I looked for common patterns among the codes. I grouped the codes into categories to create themes related to best practices used to teach fourth-grade students (see Table 3). I used thematic coding and looked for relationships among the themes. I concluded that the instruction delivery theme revealed concepts related to the best practices used in writing instruction.

Table 3*Open and Axial Codes and Themes for Research Question 2*

Open code	Axial codes	Theme
Thinking maps Write from the beginning HMH Social studies/writing integration Eight traits of writing Reading/writing integration	Professional development	Instruction delivery
CUPS/ARMS Anchor chart Sentence stems Minilesson KAGAN strategies Examples Thinking maps Writing process WFTB HMH	Strategies/best practices	Instruction delivery

Note. HMH = Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; CUPS/ARMS = Capitalize, usage, punctuation, and spelling/Add, remove, move, and substitute; WFTB = Write From the Beginning and Beyond.

Theme 1: Instruction Delivery

Effective planning is essential to instruction delivery. Teachers acquire skills through PD, team planning, and best practices (strategies). Due to Covid, teachers had limited PD for writing. TA stated, “I did not have any PDs in regard to writing; however, I participated in other contents.” Other teachers such as TD, TH, TJ, and TI participated

in Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH), WFTB, and Writing Academy within 5 years. TB and TE replied, “I attended PDs that integrated social studies and reading with writing.”

Team planning ensured grade-level alignment in writing. “Team collaboration has been beneficial over the years,” stated TF. Content specialists and the fourth-grade team collaborate to determine Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards and ensure the teachers follow the pacing guide. TD stated, “As teachers, we have to follow the standards; therefore, the standards are the road map to our lessons.” Effective team planning comes with the balancing content and teaching the learning strategies.

Best practices are based on what teachers are doing as a routine. The fourth-grade teachers understood that modeling is important part of teaching the lesson. TJ stated, “Best practices are great routines used throughout the day. It provides an organized framework for students to begin their writing and creating writing prompts that are meaningful to the students.” TB replied, “Teaching a minilesson with guided practice using WFTB and graphic organizers is one of the best practices used in fourth-grade writing.” Fourth-grade teachers find the best way to improve students learning using best practices.

Outcomes

The problem that this study addressed was the low writing scores at the study site. The purpose of this study was to explore fourth-grade writing teachers’ perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identify best practices that can be shared through PD. Common themes among the participants’ interview responses were identified. To successfully implement learner-centered writing instructional strategies,

participants need to allow students to decide their assignments and to become better skilled as facilitators to guide students on the learning process. Participants want to provide more writing lessons based on students' background knowledge-experiences.

When teachers use learner-centered instructional practices to teach writing, students are more likely to possess skills that are lifelong (Weimer, 2013). Based on Weimer (2013), learner-centered instructional environment motivates students to want to learn. While participants shared positive views of the benefits of learner-centered versus teacher-centered instruction, they would implement learner-centered writing instructional strategies if provided with PD that focused on facilitative teaching and student choices on assignments. Therefore, when preparing teachers to use learner-centered instructional practices, Weimer (2013) stated that one principle should be introduced at a time beginning with facilitative teaching. Therefore, based on data findings, participants would prefer to implement facilitative teaching and students' choices (assignments) as the strategies. The previously offered PD integrated different contents with writing or provided techniques or strategies to teach writing. Participants understood learner-centered instructional strategies but have not received adequate training using learner-centered writing instruction practices in the classroom. For fourth-grade teachers to be successful in implementing learner-centered writing instructional strategies, they need appropriate training. PD specific to learner-centered writing instruction and focused on the two strategies could help prepare teachers to implement learner-centered writing instruction into their lesson. As a result of the study's findings, I created a project in the form of a 3-day PD series. The PD series is designed to support fourth-grade writing

teachers' implementation of learner-centered writing instruction. I used the findings from this study to guide my development of the project.

Summary

In this case study, I explored fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions on learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identified best practices that can be shared through PD. Using a basic qualitative study, data were collected in the form of interviews to explore the following RQs: What are fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies? What are the learner-centered best practices used to teach writing to fourth graders? Ten fourth-grade writing teachers at the study site formed the sample of participants for this study.

I found several ways to improve students' writing skills. Students can

- write based on their own experiences to make connections
- share their writing in whole group and allow teachers to use their writing piece as an example to revise and edit, and
- write in their journal every day and provide at least 5 sentences on the topic.

The number of sentences can increase based on student needs.

Teachers can

- start a blog so that students can provide feedback on the lesson or on the chapter book the teacher is reading everyday-minimum 2 sentences,
- write and model their writing during the time students are writing,
- allow students to write on a different format or use different materials.
- create pen pals at a different school, and

- begin interactive writing whereas students can create the story as a writing choice.

Writing improves students' knowledge on recalling information, making connections by comparing or contrasting concepts and synthesizing information in a new way. It strengthens students' memories so they can apply what they have learned in all contents or subjects. Students will be able to expand their knowledge and evaluate the ideas and write the information on paper.

Based on these findings, a PD series was designed to support fourth-grade teachers' implementation of learner-centered writing instruction to allow students to choose their assignments in writing and to become better skilled as facilitators. The findings from this study and the resulting project may lead to recommendations for change to instructional strategies, curriculums, or support services offered, leading to improve students' writing. The description and details of this project are outlined in Section 3.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this project study, I explored fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions on learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identified best practices through PD. In this basic qualitative study, I interviewed 10 fourth-grade writing teachers who were teaching or had taught fourth-grade writing. Participants reported the need to become better skilled as facilitators and to allow students to make choices on assignments, weekly deadlines, assignment formats, and independent or group choices. Although PD on integrating other contents with writing had been provided at the study site, there was little evidence of learner-centered instruction PD in writing. My goal was to develop a project in the form of a 3-day PD series. In the training, teachers will be able to collaborate and learn how to become more skilled at facilitating and finding ways to give students choices on the assignments.

Description and Goals of Project

The project for this doctoral study is a 3-day PD series designed for fourth-grade writing teachers (see Appendix A). In addition to the initial 3-day PD, I will provide ongoing support to fourth-grade writing teacher in the form of quarterly meetings. The quarterly meetings may change over the year if the meetings involve a larger audience within the school or district. For PDs to be effective, the meetings should be ongoing and allow participants time to apply what they have learned in training (Bowles & Pearman, 2017; Louws et al., 2018). Administrators, such as the building principal and assistant principals, and specialists will be invited to attend the PD series and quarterly meetings.

My goal with this project is to prepare fourth-grade writing teachers to implement the learner-centered writing instructional strategy. The PD will focus on using learner-centered writing instructional strategies, specifically the strategy of facilitative teaching and student choices within the writing curriculum. Participants will practice training and role-playing during the PD so that they apply these strategies in the classroom.

Practice on both strategies (training and role-playing) are critical to the PD series because participants expressed a need for both in the study. The goals of this PD series are to engage participants in collaborative conversations about learner-centered writing instructional strategies. The overall goal of this training is to ensure that participants are prepared to implement learner-centered writing instructional strategies within the writing curriculum. By participating in the quarterly follow-up meetings, participants will have the opportunity to plan and collaborate with colleagues as well as discuss the successes and challenges in their implementation of facilitative teaching and student choices. Participants will also have the opportunity to receive ongoing support if needed during the quarterly follow-up meetings.

Rationale

The problem addressed in this project study was that fourth-grade writing scores were low; therefore, fourth-grade writing teachers needed to implement learner-centered writing instructional strategies effectively. State and district writing assessments indicated that the writing scores were low. Participants revealed that they understood the importance of learner-centered writing instruction. However, they needed more training on becoming better facilitators and allowing students to choose assignments, weekly

deadlines, and formats. Participants were hesitant to give student choices in writing because the school or district assigned the assignments using a pacing guide. I used the study's findings to plan the PD series. The PD content will focus on facilitative teaching and student choices.

Review of the Literature

In Section 1 of this study, I described the conceptual framework, Weimer's (2013) principles of learner-centered teaching. The literature review in Section 1 included discussion of learner-centered instruction, writing, and instructional strategies. The literature review in this section addresses PD and its benefits for instructional practices, facilitative teaching, and student choices in assignments. To demonstrate saturation of the topic, I gathered materials from Walden University Library and Google Scholar. The following terms and phrases were used in reviewing the literature: *professional development, benefits of professional development for teachers, facilitative teaching, and student choices.*

Project Genre

The PD series I designed for this project focuses on helping fourth-grade writing teachers implement facilitative teaching and student choices in the classroom. I chose PD as the genre for this project because PD will allow participants to collaborate and find ways to become more of a facilitator and allow student choices. Study participants felt the need to become more of a facilitator in the classroom and allow students to make choices in the assignments. According to Sancar et al. (2021), schools cannot improve without improving the skills and abilities of the teachers. Also, teachers must create and

promote a learning environment that supports students using teaching methods strategies (Makovec, 2018). PD is an important tool when preparing teachers for a new or unfamiliar concept (Koster et al., 2017; Mustafa & Pacarizi, 2021) and is the most common form of training in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sancar et al., 2021). The PD series I designed for this project focuses on helping fourth-grade writing teachers implement facilitative teaching and student choices in the classroom.

Teacher PD captures what is known about how teachers make changes in their practice and can promote students' success (Martin et al., 2019; Mustafa & Pacarizi, 2021). When PD focuses on active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection, teachers are able to develop the skills to impact student learning (Harris & Jones, 2019; Matherson & Windle, 2017). PD can be considered traditional, in the form of workshops and conferences, or nontraditional, such as mentoring, coaching, and learning communities (Lee, 2018). Effective PD should consider the needs of the adult learners and be collaborative, hands-on, content-related, and focused on issues relevant to the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Mohan et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2020). Also, PD requires participants to take part in active learning and participation with one another (Yoon et al., 2020). It should be continuous and ongoing, collaborative, address teacher needs, monitor effectiveness, and focus on instructional outcomes (Brown & Militello, 2016; Curry et al., 2018).

Educational leaders should design PD that allows teachers to increase their knowledge on related issues and that is based on students' needs. Focusing on teacher development, teacher learning, and PD reform, Matherson and Windle (2017) found that

teachers wanted relevant and engaging PD. Additionally, teachers wanted to learn a more practical way to deliver content tied to the classroom lessons. Teachers did not want a quick fix. In other words, teachers wanted PD that will make them better over time.

Benefits of Professional Development on Instructional Practices

As detailed in the findings from the study, participants wanted training in the learner-centered strategy of the facilitative teacher and student choices to be better prepared to implement the strategies. Matherson and Windle (2017) and Yoon et al. (2020) asserted that PD must include active learning and require that participants be actively engaged in both the activities and the thinking process. In the active learning process, participants construct knowledge by analyzing work, looking at examples such as students' artifacts, and collaborating with peers (Mertens, 2018). Participants are more likely to leave prepared to implement new strategies in the classroom when PD provides concrete teaching tasks through active learning and collaboration.

PD is directed to show, not tell. In other words, teachers benefit from visual learning practices and active demonstrations rather than video, peer observations, or case studies. Mertens (2018) stated that using various models allows teachers to understand that no two students have the same needs or follow the same learning process. Therefore, participants must understand the need to instruct different models to increase students' achievement and learning.

PD plays an important role in changing teachers' teaching methods. Teaching is a reflective practice that improves with peer collaboration (Zide & Mokhele, 2018). When teachers have opportunities to discuss ideas with peers, it challenges the teachers' theories

of practice and allows teachers the opportunity to look at a new method through the eyes and experiences of peers (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021; Zide & Mokhele, 2018). An important part of the learner-centered model is discussion; therefore, discussion is a critical component of PDs about learner-centered pedagogy (Weimer, 2013). Through discussion in PD participants are able to reflect on their practice and share what is working and what needs improvement.

PD that focuses on best instructional practices through discussion, coaching, and lesson planning offers long-lasting benefits for participants (Learning Forward, n.d.). Learner-centered instruction is considered a best instructional practice and offers a voice to students in their learning (Weimer, 2013). To participate in learner-centered instruction, it is imperative that learners master skills such as reflection, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration (du Plessis, 2020). These learner-centered skills should be an integral part of a PD workshop for participants to model and practice.

Facilitative Teaching

As detailed in Section 2, participants might benefit from facilitative teaching in implementing learner-centered writing instruction. Facilitative teaching is defined to help learners construct meaning and understand ideas and processes (Avdeeva et al., 2021). According to Avdeeva et al. (2021), the most important task in education is to facilitate the development of learners. Therefore, teachers' role and techniques change to incorporate facilitative learning.

To acquire facilitative skills, teachers must provide opportunities and resources to learners that will enable them to make progress and succeed. Avdeeva et al. (2021) stated

that facilitators should acquire these skills: setting of guidelines, neutrality, encouragement, preparedness, flexibility, and good listening. Teachers facilitate how students think, solve problems, evaluate evidence, analyze arguments, and generate hypotheses (Weimer, 2003). Teachers should have the opportunity to work through new practices while examining students' success (Martin et al., 2019; Sancar et al., 2021).

Student Choices

Participants in the study understood the importance of learner-centered writing instruction. However, they did not know how to provide students the opportunity to make choices in the assignments. Although students choose their data goals, they do not choose the activities, assignments, or writing prompts. However, students can choose between two genre writing prompts. According to Parker et al. (2017), teachers need to understand how individuals and groups of students respond to the opportunity to make choices in the classroom. Parker et al. stated that students' choices could boost engagement and motivation, allow students to identify their strengths, and meet their learning goals. Parker et al. found that teachers can increase students' value of choice by analyzing how students perceive competence, relevance, and autonomy. How students perceive their choices determines the effectiveness of student choices.

The choice must be something personally meaningful to the students. Students must know the relevance of the choices presented to them. Parker et al. (2017) proclaimed that students must find one challenging option worth choosing. Students must feel competent when completing the assignments. However, students often choose an easier assignment when too many choices are presented.

Project Description

I developed 3-day PD series that will include facilitative teaching and student choice. The 3-day PD series will be followed up with quarterly meetings to allow participants the chance to collaborate and share successes and challenges in implementing learner-centered writing instructional strategies. Through quarterly meetings, participants will have the opportunity to receive ongoing support in their implementation of learner-centered writing instructional strategies. The PD series will be called *Facilitating Writing With Student Choices*. I will hold these sessions at the elementary school in August or during the summer when teachers must attend PD sessions. I will invite all fourth-grade writing teachers at the study site. Administrators and specialists will also be invited to attend. The building principal will have the discretion to determine whether fourth-grade writing teachers' attendance is voluntary or mandatory.

I will conduct 3 consecutive days of the initial PD series. Each day will begin at 8:00 am and finish at 3:00 pm with a 1-hour lunch break. My study findings suggest that fourth-grade writing teachers felt the need to be more of a facilitator and allow students more choices in the writing assignments and weekly deadlines along with the choosing to be independent or partner with a peer. To address the needs found in the study, the first day of PD will focus on facilitative teaching. The focus on facilitative teaching on the first day of PD is critical for laying the foundation and providing participants with background knowledge.

On the second day of the PD, participants will engage in student choice activities to deepen their understanding of learner-centered instructional strategies when giving students assignments. At the start of each session, participants will have an opportunity to partner with another participant. Each group will be given two writing compositions, a choice board, and instructions. According to Coppens (2021), choice boards are the simplest ways to implement voice and choice in the classroom. I will model the expectations of the activities and provide an example for each group. Participants will read and discuss each composition and highlight the verbs, nouns, adjectives, punctuation, and complete sentences on the composition paper. Participants will analyze the writing compositions and decide which assignment they will complete as a group based on the writing evaluation from the two compositions. The idea for student choice is to customize the learning experience for each student based on their needs (Herold, 2019). The choice board allows students much-needed flexibility, individuality, and an opportunity to extend their learning. Participants will then share what assignments they chose from the choice board with a shoulder partner or face-to-face group and explain the choice. As a group, participants will discuss the challenges and successes of completing this activity and how to implement the activity using HMH and WFTB curriculum guides. At the end of Day 2, I will provide the participants with several choice boards templates to assist with the following activity for the next day. Participants will bring the HMH and WFTB curriculum and an example of a writing composition for the next day's activity.

On Day 3, participants will find a new partner. I will facilitate the activity and allow participants to discuss what they have learned the day before in the whole group. If participants have questions, I will allow other participants to answer the questions. I will give participants a template of the choice board for the activity. Each participant will have an opportunity to complete two activities or assignments on the template before lunch. I will continue to facilitate while participants are completing the template. After lunch, each group will share their assignments and explain the reason for the assignments. At the end of Day 3, a folder will be created for all participants to share their choice boards with at least four assignments with the group and information provided during the PD.

After the initial 3-day PD series has concluded, I will provide ongoing support to participants in quarterly meetings. The quarterly follow-up meetings are 45 minutes and will take place during the time allotted to professional learning communities. Participants will share and collaborate on the successes and challenges they have faced in implementing learner-centered writing instruction. According to Martin et al. (2019), it is important for participants to share their interpretations of the PD. Participants will also have the opportunity to share choice boards they have created. Someone knowledgeable about the topic must be available to facilitate discussions during ongoing PD and collaboration opportunities (Learning Forward, n.d.). Therefore, I will facilitate the ongoing quarterly meetings. I will invite the ELAR specialist and administrators to attend quarterly follow-up meetings. Quarterly follow-up meetings will continue for the duration of the school year.

Resources, Supports, and Potential Barriers

To conduct this PD, I will need Weimer's (2013) book *Learner-Centered Teaching*, my laptop, a projector, and access to the internet. I will share the Google Slides used in the PD with participants. Additionally, I will need highlighters (various colors), two different writing compositions, one choice board, chart paper, markers, and the pre- and postassessments. I will ask for an accessible location to hold the PD.

There may be barriers affecting the PD, such as internet outage or technical issues with the internet connection, participants' unwillingness to learn and participate, and the time for quarterly follow-up meetings. To address this, I will make copies of the information for the PD and to ensure internet connection I will ask for access to the campus technology person. By presenting the findings and the overall goal for PD, I can overcome this barrier. The quarterly follow-up meeting will be held during the time allotted for teachers' professional learning communities. Therefore, this will not be a barrier because it is during the school day and not after school, and it is focused on the teachers' needs.

Project Implementation

As the study researcher, I am knowledgeable about the problem and prepared to offer potential solutions. In addition, I have previously taught fourth-grade writing for 8 years. Therefore, I will lead the PD series (see Appendix C) and follow-up meetings. The PD will focus on facilitative teaching and student choices. Participants' ideas and discussions will be shared during the PD. I will closely work with the principal and ELAR specialist when setting up the quarterly follow-up meetings.

As the facilitator of PD, I will create an environment for participants to feel safe and secure to collaborate, reflect, and discuss the writing experiences in their classroom. According to Avdeeva et al. (2021), to create safe and secure atmosphere, an effective facilitator will encourage involvement from the participants and allow time for reflection and discussion. Before the first PD day begins, participants and I will introduce ourselves and share teaching fourth-grade writing experiences. For the next 2 days, teachers will find a partner. As a daily icebreaker, they will discuss what they have learned and what they want to learn in the future to expand facilitative learning and student choices for follow-up meetings.

Activities for the 3-day PD will involve participants interacting and focusing on active learning. Each activity will be meaningful to ensure participants can return to the classroom and apply what they have learned. On the final day of the PD, participants will create a different choice board based on the HMH and WFTB curriculum guides to implement in the classroom.

Project Evaluation Plan

The objectives for this project are for fourth-grade writing teachers to understand and apply the learner-centered instructional strategy of facilitative learning and student choices to their teaching of the writing curriculum. Participants of this study felt the need to become better skilled as facilitators and allow student to make choices on the assignments, weekly deadlines, and formats. Based on the data, participants could not allow student choices due to the district assigning the classwork, or the pacing guide did not allow the flexibility. The main goals for the project are to engage participants in

collaborative conversations about learner-centered instructional strategies with an emphasis on facilitative teaching and allowing student choices. The key stakeholders are the fourth-grade writing teachers.

Evaluation is a systematic process that can be used to learn if the activities are achieving the intended purpose (Adom et al., 2020). Therefore, throughout the implementation of this PD, I will consider if the goals and objectives are being met by using a formative and summative assessment (see Appendix B).

Formative assessment provides immediate feedback to teachers or students to help students learn more effectively. According to Cotton (2017) and Dolin et al. (2018), formative assessment provides teachers and students with information to continue the learning process and regularly assess students' progress. Therefore, I can adjust the instruction to maximize the participants learning. In the PD series, I will utilize the spontaneous formative assessment. According to Dixson and Worrell (2016), spontaneous formative assessment is when a teacher can read the body language of a participant to assess misunderstandings, ask for verbal clarifications or explanations, and check for participant's understanding. It lets me know what is working or what needs improvement.

Additionally, I have created activities that will lead to discussions that will allow me to determine if the goals and objectives have been met. For example, on the second day of the PD, participants will find a partner to read and discuss two writing compositions and select three weekly assignments for each composition. Formative assessments will continue during the quarterly follow-up meetings. I will listen to the

participants' discussions on the challenges and successes of becoming better skilled facilitators and allowing student choices.

Summative assessment is used as a final evaluation whether the goals and objectives have been met (Ahmed et al., 2019; Dolin et al., 2018). I will utilize a survey to determine if the objectives of the 3-day PD series were met. I will administer a pre- and postsurvey (see Appendix B). In this survey, I will ask participants open-ended questions to determine if they are better prepared to implement the skills as a facilitator and to allow students choices on the assignments. By using the summative evaluation, I intend to determine and measure the findings of what the participants learned (Ahmed et al., 2019).

Evaluating this project will determine if the participants are better prepared to implement the two learner-centered instructional strategies in teaching writing. Improving fourth-grade writing teachers' instructional practices may affect student writing achievement. In addition, the information from the evaluations may be used to provide more PD on learner-centered instructional strategies.

Project Implications

This project has the potential to benefit fourth-grade writing teachers and students. The 3-day PD series may prepare fourth-grade writing teachers to use learner-centered instructional strategies, which may impact their instruction in writing. For PD to be successful, it must be continuous and ongoing. Therefore, quarterly follow-up meetings will be conducted to allow participants the opportunity to collaborate and discuss successes and challenges in implementing facilitative teaching and student

choices. Also, participants will have the chance to receive ongoing support in implementing learner-centered instructional strategies when teaching writing.

This project study has the potential for positive social change on the local level for fourth-grade teachers, administrators, ELAR specialists, and students. Learner-centered instructional strategies create learning environments that allow students to be active and willing to participate and be accountable for their learning in the classroom (Weimer, 2013). By understanding and analyzing the findings from my study, I learned teachers were unsure on implementing facilitative teaching in the classroom because of state testing and time. Also, teachers were not confident to fully utilize facilitative learning in the classroom. Teachers understood that learner-centered instruction is more beneficial than teacher-centered. In teacher-centered, students do not have the opportunities to develop specific skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Although, teachers understand the importance of learner-centered instruction, there is a continued teacher-centered method in the classroom.

In addition, other schools within the district may adopt the PD to provide teachers with support in using learner-centered instructional strategies to teach writing. Therefore, I will be available to assist or be a resource to help other schools apply the PD and train people who may facilitate the PD. Learner-centered instruction may help students become active learners and willing participants in their learning. Writing across the grade-level may improve students' communication skills at school, at work, or in a social setting.

Summary

The proposed project developed for this study is a 3-day PD with quarterly follow-up meetings. In Section 3, I discussed the project, rationale for choosing PD as the project genre, and a literature review on the topic of PD. Also, I included the description of the project, described a plan for implementation and evaluation, and reviewed potential project implications. In Section 4, I reflect of the project's strengths and limitations.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of the basic qualitative study was to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of learner-centered writing instructional strategies and identify best practices that can be shared via PD. The project, which resulted from the findings, was a 3-day PD series with quarterly follow-up meetings that incorporated ideas intended to help fourth-grade writing teachers implement learner-centered writing instructional strategies. In this section, I discuss the strengths and the limitations of my project, and I consider alternative approaches. I also reflect on my growth as a scholar, researcher, and project developer. The section also includes recommendations for future research and a conclusion to the project study.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Researchers have shown that the use of learner-centered instructional strategies when teaching writing increases student engagement and leads to students' success in writing (Badjadi, 2018; Graham, 2019; Kaput, 2018; Shen & Troia, 2018). When learner-centered instruction is not used in the classroom, students are less motivated to learn, and they are less likely to progress to proficient writers. The first strength of this project is that it has the potential to improve the way fourth-grade writing teachers teach writing in their classrooms. In creating the project, I considered the barriers fourth-grade writing teachers faced when implementing learner-centered writing instruction and attempted to provide them with the resources and knowledge to implement facilitative teaching and

student choices in their classrooms. I created the project using the data collected during the study, which allowed me to design it with the intent of meeting the need of the fourth-grade writing teachers. Another strength of the project is that it gives fourth-grade writing teachers the time to create choice boards based on student need to implement in their classrooms immediately. Also, it provides an opportunity for ongoing collaboration and supports through follow-up meetings. A final strength of this project is that the leaders of other districts may be able to adapt to it to provide their teachers with PD in learner-centered writing instruction.

Limitations

A limitation of this project is that it does not address all components of learner-centered instruction. Learner-centered teaching is based on five principles: (a) teacher facilitation of learning, (b) teacher-student shared decision-making, (c) use of content to build knowledge and skills, (d) student responsibility for learning, and (e) purpose of evaluation (Weimer, 2013). In developing the project, I focused on facilitating learning and teacher-student shared decision-making. Although I created this project in response to data collected during interviews, it does serve as a limitation. Fourth-grade writing teachers may leave the PD series prepared to implement the learner-centered teaching strategy of facilitative teaching and teacher-student shared decision-making. However, the other three strategies will not be covered in depth. Fourth-grade writing teachers may still feel unprepared to implement the other three learning-centered strategies, and they may require further PD on those strategies after mastering facilitative teaching and

student choice. Another limitation of the project is that it was created with the needs of the study participants in mind. Teachers in other districts may have different needs.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem that underpinned this project study was that fourth-grade writing scores at the project site were low. I collected data by interviewing participants. I could have interviewed two campuses with low writing scores and compared the results to gain additional insights. I could have observed fourth-grade teachers teaching writing and reviewed their lesson plans as supplementary data. Instead of using the qualitative approach, I could have designed a mixed-methods study. Instead of interviewing fourth-grade teachers, I could have administered a survey on their knowledge and use of learner-centered writing instruction to determine how and which strategies they were using. Additionally, a questionnaire could have been created to determine if participants had sufficient knowledge about learner-centered instructional strategies to use them in writing instruction effectively. A survey or questionnaire would have allowed a larger sample size and extended my study beyond one campus.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

During the time I spent as a student at Walden University, I grew as a scholar in my ability to conduct and analyze research. I was able to appreciate the challenges and setbacks that occur when conducting research. I learned how to accept critique feedback and find a solution for each setback I encountered during this journey. While learning the different methodologies and research designs, I became more confident as I read more

information and became more skilled as a researcher. In seeking approval of my proposal, I became frustrated and confused. However, as I continued to utilize the resources that were provided to me, it became easier to adjust and find information to assist me in writing the research. I used every resource daily to improve my writing and formatting of the capstone document.

As an educator and a scholar, it is my goal to make a positive contribution to the field of education and to impact the lives of teachers, students, and communities. I am confident that I have enhanced my skills and knowledge as a scholar at Walden University to contribute to positive social change in the field of education. I am committed to using my research skills to address and look for potential solutions to educational problems.

Participating in the doctoral process allowed me to become better equipped to conduct and analyze findings. I learned about the research process and how to design a study effectively. I work in an elementary setting where there is an emphasis in growth in the education field. Before I began at Walden University, my understanding of research process was vague, and I struggled to participate in conversations with my colleagues about research in the educational field. I am confident in my ability to conduct valuable research and contribute to the field of education.

Academic writing was another area I grew during my time at Walden. I did not consider myself a strong writer; therefore, I struggled throughout this process. It took about 3 years to gain approval to undertake the project study. Once I took the initiative to discuss that I needed help and support with my academic writing, I grew tremendously in

this area. I utilized the Writing Center, the Doctoral Capstones, and Grammarly websites to help with my academic writing skills. Also, I learned the importance of asking for help and becoming patient with myself.

Project Development

The opportunity to develop a project based on the findings of my study allowed me to grow in the area of project development. I served as an English as a Second Language lead teacher in the past. I was involved in improving over 200 students' English language and academics performance. I have used assessment data to determine the next steps for the students to enhance in their academics or the English language. However, I have not designed a PD session on how teachers could analyze data to improve English as a Second Language students' academic performance, including English language acquisition. I have always understood that PD should be engaging and based on teachers' needs; therefore, developing this project allowed me to understand the components of a successful PD experience fully. I now understand the value of using data to design PD to ensure that it meets the needs of those it serves. I feel confident in my ability to successfully design and evaluate projects and PD series. The PD session taught me the importance of collecting data to determine the participants' needs. Also, I learned about what effective PD entails. I used this information to create a PD series that I am confident will meet the needs of fourth-grade writing teachers. The experience I gained through this process and the development of the project should help me when I design and facilitate future PD activities.

Leadership and Change

As a student at Walden University, I gained knowledge on how to be an effective leader and inspire change in education. I have served in many leadership roles in my professional career. I have been a mentor and lead teacher. I have led the Advanced Bridge program for gifted and talented students and the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics program on my campus, and I have served as a facilitator for School and Community Observation Protocol Evaluation and the bilingual committees. While completing my project study, I have been able to think critically about promoting positive change and influencing others. I feel better prepared to lead people and encourage them to participate in the leadership and decision-making process.

Also, throughout this process, I gained more confidence as an educational practitioner. I led several professional learning communities in all grade levels (K-8) in analyzing data. I am more knowledgeable about how to prepare teachers to utilize learner-centered strategies. I learned the importance of being a lifelong learner and growing as a practitioner in the educational field.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

As a teacher, I believe that it is of utmost importance that fourth-grade writing teachers are prepared to teach writing successfully. When teachers use learner-centered strategies to teach writing, they are able to increase students' ability to become lifelong writers and proficient in writing skills (Graham, 2019). When fourth-grade writing teachers' needs are supported and met, they are able to be more successful in the classroom and in implementing learner-centered writing instruction. By listening to

fourth-grade writing teachers, educational researchers can devise strategies to improve writing instruction in the classroom. Through my participation in this project study, I learned to listen and respond to the needs of teachers as part of my broader goal of supporting data-driven and learner-centered instruction in the classroom.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

I aimed to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perspectives on learner-centered writing instruction and identify best practices used in the classroom. Through the data collected in the project study, I have learned that participating fourth-grade writing teachers felt unprepared to implement learner-centered writing instruction in their classrooms. I learned that they preferred to be facilitators, but they were not comfortable allowing students to take control of the classroom. Therefore, by providing the PD to meet the needs of the fourth-grade writing teachers, they may be better prepared to use learner-centered strategies to teach writing. This may increase students' writing skills and help them to become lifelong writers. Also, it may improve teachers' knowledge and teaching skills on learner-centered writing instruction strategies.

This project has the potential to benefit teachers beyond the local level by providing support for all prekindergarten to Grade 5 teachers who are struggling to implement learner-centered writing instruction in their classrooms. Further application of the project might involve offering the PD series to districts around the state. Additional support might be offered to teachers through the modeling of learner-centered writing lessons in the classrooms, and PD could be provided that targets the three learner-centered principles that were not explained in this PD series: (a) teacher-student shared

decision-making, (b) use of content to build knowledge and skills, and (c) multiple approaches to evaluation (Weimer, 2013).

I grounded this project study in Weimer's (2013) learner-centered principles. The literature review was conducted as a part of the study, and the findings could have theoretical implications. The literature review findings support learner-centered instruction as being an effective method for teaching writing (Badjadi, 2020). This may help researchers in devising a new theory regarding the use of learner-centered writing instruction.

Leaders at the project site should conduct continuous research on sustaining learner-centered writing instruction in fourth-grade classrooms and PD. In this study, I explored fourth-grade writing teachers' perspectives on learner-centered writing instruction and the best practices used in the classrooms. Further researchers could explore the effectiveness of learner-centered writing instruction in fourth-grade classrooms. Also, further researchers could conduct observations throughout the school year to ensure that learner-centered instruction has been effectively implemented in the classroom.

Conclusion

Learner-centered writing instruction is crucial to promoting students' writing skills at jobs, in schools, and social interactions. Learner-centered instruction encourages a deep understanding of the content being taught and results in students' academic advancement and engagement in the classroom (Badjadi, 2020; Dole et al., 2016). In preparing students to write, teachers must focus on teaching cognitive strategies to

support writing tasks and emphasize student and teacher cooperation (Demir, 2018). The findings from this study indicated that fourth-grade writing teachers at the study site struggle with becoming more skilled facilitators and allowing students choices. Understanding the perspectives of fourth-grade writing teachers regarding learner-centered writing instructional strategies is important. The knowledge from this investigation may be useful to educational leaders in helping teachers to successfully implement learner-centered writing instruction in the classroom. Improved writing instruction may benefit students' academic performance, and it may help them to develop into lifelong writers. The recommendations in this capstone for changes to instructional strategies, writing curriculums, or support services offered, if implemented, may support improvements to students' writing.

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Appendix A: The Project

Purpose	This professional development series was created to address the needs of fourth-grade writing teachers in implementing learner-centered instructional strategies in writing. The purpose of this project is to provide fourth-grade writing teachers with information and strategies such as facilitative teaching and students choice.
Target/audience	The target audience is fourth-grade writing teachers. Administrators and ELAR specialists will be invited to attend.
Goals/Objectives	<p>Objectives: Participants will understand and apply facilitative teaching and utilize choice boards for students.</p> <p>Goals: Participants will discuss learner-centered instructional strategies such as facilitative teaching and students' choice in assignments, deadlines, and independent or group work. Participants will create choice boards to use in the classroom and apply the skills to become more as a facilitator.</p>
Evaluations	There will be two evaluation assessments, formative and summative. Formative assessment will be the pre-assessment, which will be completed at the beginning of the first PD series and discussed throughout the PD series. Summative assessment (post-assessment) will be completed and submitted at the end of the third series.
Resources/materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighters Internet connection Laptop HMH WFTB Chart paper 4 compositions

	4 English as a Second language (ESL) compositions 12 shapes: 4 circles 4 hearts 4 squares Projector Handouts Copies of Weimer pages 70-84, 147-165
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Appendix B: Pre- and Postassessment

Formative Assessment

Pre-Assessment

* Required

1. Name

2. What is learner-centered? *

3. Provide two examples of learner-centered instructional strategies in your classroom? *

4. How does learner-centered benefit students in writing? *

5. What is facilitative teaching? *

6. Provide two ways of how you facilitate in the classroom? *

Summative Assessment

Post Assessment

* Required

1. Name: *

2. What is learner-centered? *

3. Provide two examples of learner-centered instructional strategies in your classroom? *

4. How does learner-centered benefit students in writing? *

5. What is facilitative teaching? *

6. Provide two ways of how you facilitate in the classroom? *

Appendix C: Professional Development: 3-Day Agenda

Day 1

Time	Activity
8:00-8:30 am	Sign-in and breakfast
8:30-9:00 am	Welcome, introductions and partnership
9:00-9:30 am	Warm-up activity (Listening)
9:30-9:45 am	Goals and objectives
9:45-10:00 am	Pre-Assessment
10:00-10:15 am	What is Facilitative Learning?
10:15-10:30 am	Break
10:30-11:00 am	Reading excerpts and highlighting
11:00-11:15 am	Discussion
11:15-12:15 pm	Facilitative Activity
12:15-1:15 pm	Lunch
1:15-2:15 pm	Partner and group teaching
2:15-3:00 pm	Reflections, successes, and challenges

Day 2

Time	Activity
8:00-8:30 am	Sign in and breakfast
8:30-9:00 am	Recap (reflection)
9:00-9:15 am	Goals/objectives
9:15-10:00	Composition Activity
10:00-10:30 am	Observation/group discussion
10:30-10:45 am	Break
10:45-11:15 am	What are choice boards?
11:15-12:15 pm	Creating choice boards
12:15-1:15 pm	Lunch
1:15-1:30 pm	Discussion (choice boards)
1:30-2:30 pm	Continuation of creating choice boards
2:30-3:00 pm	Reflections/discussions

Day 3

Time	Activity
8:00-8:30 am	Sign in and breakfast
8:30-9:00 am	Recap (reflection)
9:00-9:15 am	Goals/objectives
9:15-10:00	HMH/WFTB Activity
10:00-10:30 am	Partner Work
10:30-10:45 am	Break
10:45-11:15 am	Creating choice boards
11:15-12:15 pm	Lunch
12:15-1:15 pm	Discussion (choice boards)
1:15-1:30 pm	Continuation of creating choice boards
1:30-2:30 pm	Sharing/uploading choice boards
2:30-3:00 pm	Reflections/Challenges/Successes

Appendix D: Invitation

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral student at the Walden University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, conducting a research study examining learner-centered instructional strategies in writing. The purpose of this study is to explore fourth-grade writing teachers' perceptions on learner-centered writing instruction strategies and identify best practices that can be shared via professional development.

You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time during this study.

The semistructured interview questions will be the only data collected in this study, and it is designed to be completed in less than an hour and a half. The semistructured interview will be conducted on Zoom or Google Meets. The interviews will be recorded, and a consent form will be created to inform you of using a recording device.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. There is no direct benefit, in the form of compensation, for participation in this study. However, your participation will help teachers understand the importance of learner-centered writing instruction strategies and identifying best practices to increase students' writing performance.

Your data will be kept confidential, and the study will pose no risk to your privacy. The data collected from the study is for educational purposes and will be published in aggregated form. The study records and collected data will be kept secure and

confidential. I would be happy to share the results and findings after the research has been concluded. After five years, the data will be destroyed.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or during the study. I can be contacted by email at [redacted].

Regards,
April Townsend
Doctoral Student
Walden University

Appendix E: Interview Questions

1. What does learner (student) centered mean to you?
 - a) Is it done in your class? If so, how/explain?
2. What learning environment do you create that motivates students to accept responsibility for learning writing?
3. How do you support students learning in writing?
4. What is the balance of power to you as a fourth-grade writing teacher? Or -Do you or the student decide on what the students will learn?
 - a) What criteria do you adhere to when you or the student decides on what is being taught?
5. How do you share decision-making with students in writing?
6. What is your role as a fourth-grade writing teacher?
7. If students are taking charge of their learning (writing), do they need you more or less?
 - a) What happens when they need you during instruction or small group?
 - b) How many of your students take charge of their learning (writing)?
 - c) Do you think these students will perform below average, average, or above average? Why?
8. What are your classroom procedures or process when teaching writing?
9. In your own words, what is active learning?
10. How are you covering all the content within the fourth-grade writing curriculum?
 - a) Is it beneficial to the students to cover the content? Why?

- b) Are the students able to grasp the concept and apply it in their writing?
11. How are you teaching learning strategies in writing?
 12. What processes are you using to ensure a balance between covering the content and teaching the learning strategies?
 13. In writing, do you utilize self and peer assessment skills? If so, when and how is it used/done in your classroom?
 14. Describe your vision in teaching writing.
 15. What professional development did you participate in or attend in the last three years?
 - a) How did you apply what you learn in the classroom?
 16. Do you allow students to choose their assignments?
 - a) Why or why not?
 17. Do you prefer teacher-centered or student-centered instruction?
 - a) Why did you choose this?

Appendix F: Research Question 1 Open Coding and Interview Excerpts

Open code	Transcript excerpt
Learner-centered	<p>TB and TE: The lesson should be centered around the students and their specific needs.</p> <p>TI: Learner-centered means that the majority of that lesson the students are doing the talking and the doing because like they say, whoever is doing the talking or whoever is actually doing the task is actually doing the learning.</p> <p>TD: As a teacher knowing that each child learns differently. Each child is on a different level.</p>
Learning environment	<p>TB: Using a growth mindset where they can see and track their gains so that at the end, they feel ownership over all the growth that they make.</p>
Shared decision/Taking charge	<p>TG: When students are taking charge of their own learning, they do need more guidance at first since it is something new to them.</p>
Teachers' role/vision	<p>TB: My role as a fourth-grade writing teacher is to assist them in developing a writing style.</p>
Active learning	<p>TA, Active learning is actively learning.</p> <p>TB: Active learning is when the students are actively engaged and taking ownership of what they're being taught when they're engaged in a conversation amongst each other.</p> <p>TD: Active learning is where the kids are doing something to promote learning.</p>
Choice	<p>TG: Students are able to make a decision about what they will write about using writers' choice board or menu. However, students do not have choice when learning the foundation (grammar) part of the instruction.</p>
Self/Peer assessment	<p>TB: You know there is a peer review system where I have conferences with my kids about their writing. And I like to give them examples of what good writing looks like, how it was derived, where it came from, what made it good, really?</p> <p>TC: Students are given rubrics or checklists to evaluate each other or themselves.</p> <p>TD: Students cannot assess themselves or peers, if they are weak writers.</p>

Appendix G: Research Question 2 Open Coding and Interview Excerpts

Open code	Transcript excerpt
Content	<p>TD: When grade levels are not vertically aligned, it makes it difficult at the beginning of the year for kids to write a simple sentence. Therefore, it is difficult for them to write a composition.</p> <p>TB: I support student learning and writing by trying to start with the fundamentals with starting with the basics of teaching of grammar. I'm using a resource called Write from the Beginning which really breaks down the writing process and allows kids to put their thoughts on paper and it translates their thoughts into deeper concepts over time.</p>
Balance of power	<p>TB: I take suggestions from the students but also keeping in mind that yes, you do still have to learn the basics and there will be topics that you won't necessarily be familiar with.</p>
Best practice	<p>TC: We must still follow the pacing guide and be sure it is all TEK (standards) based.</p> <p>TB: I'm teaching learning strategies through the use of Write from the Beginning and through the use of going over grammar and grammar rules prior to the lesson.</p>
Professional development Monitor/Adjust	<p>TC: Strategies are taught in steps, through guided lessons, and through corrective feedback. Brain storming, organizing thoughts, using blank graphic organizers to write in the correct format.</p> <p>TB: Due to Covid, I have been to one PD-8 traits of writing professional development.</p> <p>TD: So just making sure that that they you know they know the steps to the writing process and how important one step is to the next step so that they can gradually move to a final product.</p>

Note. TEK = Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills; PD = professional

development.