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Teacher-Student Relationships and Student Writing Achievement

Jacqueline Hilary Blackmore
Walden University

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Jacqueline Blackmore

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2013

Abstract

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MS, Southern Connecticut State University, 2000

MAT, Sacred Heart University, 1998

BS, Eastern Connecticut State University, 1983

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

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Abstract

Past research has shown that learner-centered environments can improve students' self-esteem and increase their academic skills. The purpose of this study was to determine whether teaching the core curriculum within a caring classroom environment increases students ability to communicate effectively and perform at higher achievement levels in writing. The study addressed the experiences of teachers in implementing a new writing program with a strong emphasis on social skill development as a precursor to good writing. Guided by the social learning theories of Dewey, Rogers, and Vygotsky, who contended that social interaction is vital to the development of cognition, a qualitative case study was undertaken consisting of individual interviews with 15 teachers at 6 elementary schools in southwestern Connecticut. Data were collected to address the extent to which a caring community of students can foster positive academic outcomes. Data were analyzed and coded to discover common themes. Results showed that teachers perceived that the social skills taught through the program did increase students writing skills. In addition, students had better listening skills and were more comfortable taking academic risks. This finding supports past social learning theories. Based on these findings, 3 days of professional learning workshops were created with the goals of building student-teacher relationships, creating learner-centered environments, and curtailing bullying. Equipping teachers with this resource will help to create social change by helping students become better communicators in a diverse society, increasing their graduation rates, and preparing them to enter the global workforce of the 21st century.

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Introduction

When a child enters school, one of the most important foundational phenomena that the child will experience is the teacher-student relationship (Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashburn, 2008). According to Hamre et al. (2008), positive interactions between teachers and students have proven to be an asset, as they help students adjust to school and promote learning development. Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), many educators have been encouraged to focus on core content and to devote much less time to creating a caring community of learners who are motivated to achieve to their highest academic potential (Hamilton et al., 2007). Students in classrooms that lack a sense of community may not feel emotionally safe enough to take academic risks, and this has the potential to compromise their scholastic performance. Creating caring classroom atmospheres has been shown to reduce behavior problems and allows students the opportunity to place their focus on learning (Brannon, 2008; Hamilton et al., 2007). Cavanagh (2008), an educational researcher, stated that too much emphasis has been placed on curriculum and that often relationships with students are forgotten. He suggested that effective pedagogy combined with building caring and respectful relationships in the classroom would encourage students to develop to their fullest potential both academically and socially. If a culture of care is created in schools, students will develop into responsible, educated citizens who promote tolerance, equity, and peace (Cavanagh, 2008).

Local Level

The problem that exists at the local level is that the current core curriculum has become so stringent that in order for teachers to meet all the demands placed on them, they must spend less time building strong teacher-student relationships. As of August 2011, 45 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, which are a set of academic expectations for learning in Grades K-12 (Center on Educational Policy, 2011). Often, teachers are so focused on teaching to these standards and raising test scores that the importance of building personal relationships with their students is overlooked. Maintaining positive social relationships with students is vital in creating safe and orderly learning environments (Arum, 2011; White, 2007). Everyone wants to feel a personal connection and feel cared for, especially children. When children encounter a personal connection, they feel happy and are more willing to engage in behaviors such as raising their hands, trying new math problems, or working cooperatively with partners.

This problem of interest in this study involves the writing instruction of students in Grades 1 through 5 in six suburban elementary schools in the southwestern part of Connecticut. The total enrollment throughout the district in Grades K-12 is 6,744 students. Of the 6,744 students, 425 are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 106 are not fluent in English, 591 are receiving special education service, and 118 have been identified as talented and gifted. This school system supports the involvement of family and the advancement of learning for all students.

Prior to this year, these six elementary schools did not have a writing curriculum in place for Grades 1 through 5. Teachers taught writing using personally created materials or

materials found in books or on the Internet. Teachers tried to increase writing development by working as teams, sharing ideas and suggestions. However, not having a set writing curriculum in place allowed for a disjointed writing program and led to a lack of consistency in writing skills across the grade levels. According to Wright, Stackhouse, and Wood (2008), it is important that teachers be consistent, work collaboratively, and keep abreast of students' strengths and weaknesses in order to monitor students who may be at risk for speech, language or literacy difficulties.

Three years ago, several teachers were trained in a new writing program titled *Being a Writer* published by the Developmental Study Center (DSC, 2007) and piloted the program at their respective schools. Last year, teachers had the option of trying the new writing program, and this year teaching the new writing program is mandatory. After two decades of research in the area of writing, the Developmental Study Center created a writing curriculum with a strong emphasis on caring and respectful relationships as the foundation for students to become successful writers. When students work together in a caring atmosphere while building strong relationships with teachers and peers, they are more inclined to increase their academic performance in all subject areas (Brannon, 2008; Cavanagh, 2008)).

In this particular school district, many students did meet the goal for writing on the Connecticut Mastery Tests in 2010-2011. The testing levels and score ranges were as follows: below basic (100-173), basic (174-204), proficient (205-250), goal (251-282), and advanced (283-400). In Grade 3, 80.4% of students in the district met the state goal level; in Grade 4, 81.9 % met the state goal level; and in Grade 5, 90.2 % met the state goal level in writing. The goal level is more demanding than the proficient level but is not as high as the advanced level.

This leads me to question how many students did not meet goal level. In Grade 3, 12.4 % of students were below basic and 16.4 % were at the basic level. In Grade 4, 10.4 % of students were below basic and 20.3 % were at the basic level, and in Grade 5, 7.2 % were below basic and 6.6 % were at the basic level. According to Roth and Guinee (2011), many students today are not writing well enough to meet the demands placed on them by basic college entrance exams. Poor student achievement and lack of positive outcomes in writing development are due to poorly implemented writing instruction beginning at the primary grade levels (Roth & Guinee, 2011). The challenge that lies ahead is for educators to find creative ways for students to strengthen their writing skills and reach the goal level. Taking a closer look at the successes of the Being a Writer (2007) program (as this study does) can benefit teachers who are working with students and need more support in the area of writing.

Larger Population

The problem is also existent in the larger population. According to Coleman (2011), the acting Commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Education, student performance in writing on the Connecticut Mastery Tests was generally better in 2011 than it was in 2010. However, writing in Grade 3 remained relatively flat at 61.1 % from 2006-2011. Grades 4, 5, 6, and 8 all showed an increase in writing scores between 2006 and 2011, while writing scores for Grade 7 decreased and those for Grade 3 remained the same. Students are showing incremental improvements, but the greatest challenges are ahead as teachers work to improve the test scores of students who score below proficiency levels in writing (Coleman, 2011). Writing is one of the most neglected subjects taught in schools today. A recent analysis completed by The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools (2003) discovered

that 50 % of students were not well prepared enough to pass the written portion of many college entrance exams.

Children are faced with various situations that can have a negative impact on their social and emotional development and that may hinder their academic success. With world leaders at odds, inequities among the rich and poor, and Internet predators and illegal behaviors becoming commonplace, children are faced with insecurity and uncertainty in their daily lives (Zins & Elias, 2007). In addition, lack of motivation, violence, and bullying are serious issues facing educators today. The schools that are the most effective are schools that prepare students for the real tests of life. They integrate social, emotional, and academic skills together, maximizing students' potential to be successful in school and live cooperatively in multicultural and international environments (Helterbran, 2009; Zins & Elias, 2007). It is crucial that teachers maintain positive social relationships with their students and build classroom environments that are comfortable and safe for student learning (Arum, 2011; White, 2007). Students who feel content in their learning environments are better able to perform to their highest academic potential (Hamilton et al., 2007).

Rationale

The issue of classroom relationships is an important area to investigate for a number of reasons. First of all, creating a caring classroom environment helps students remain focused on their learning while reducing behavior problems (Brannon, 2008). According to Brannon (2008), when students have strong relationships with teachers and peers, they feel as though they are part of a larger community, are more prone to apply themselves academically, and are more inclined to increase their academic performance. It is vital that teachers realize the

importance of social relationships with their students and the impact that they have on students' academic achievement.

Many times, schools implement conflict resolution or character education programs that are short lived and have no positive impact on students' academics. According to the Developmental Study Center (2007), child development experts have shown through their research that children learn best when their psychological needs are met and they feel safe physically and emotionally. Children who feel a sense of belonging and who build student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships have stronger self-esteem and are more motivated to perform (Chaney, 2011; DSC, 2007). Educators urgently need to explore the relationship among social behavior, character development and academic achievement (Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009; Snyder et al., 2010). Programs that incorporate academics and social emotional skills consistently over time are more apt to be successful than programs that are instituted as a quick fix with no consistency. Therefore, the Being *a* Writer (2007) program and the effect it has on students' social skills warrants further investigation to get to the heart of why it is so successful.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2011), there is ample evidence to prove that students who have solid attachments to school are strongly influenced by their learning environments. Classrooms that have teachers who create learning environments that are safe and caring, that are managed well, and that encourage participation have been shown to increase student attachment, have students who are more engaged with higher graduation rates, show a decrease in dropout rates, and produce students who are more socially and emotionally prepared to enter the workforce (CASEL, 2011). High

quality student teacher relationships are critical in supporting students' academic growth and social development.

In contrast, classroom communities that lack a sense of caring and respect may have a negative impact on students with behavioral or learning difficulties. Students' externalizing behavior problems may manifest through acting out, impulsivity, or aggression, while students with internalizing behavior problems may experience depression or social withdrawal (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). Some students with behavioral difficulties may experience punitive actions from their teachers and are less likely to be engaged in academic instruction and positive peer relationships (Landrum, Lingo, & Scott, 2011). Students who lack positive social relationships might not get along well with peers, which could lead to bullying types of behavior. Peer mistreatment and lack of social and emotional competencies can harm students' sense of belonging and connection to school (Durlak, Dyminicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011).

Students who feel a connection and sense of belonging are focused on their learning and are less apt to disrupt classroom instruction or take away learning time from others who are ready to learn. Students who are disruptive can have a negative impact on other students' success in the classroom. Depending on the offense, a student is disciplined by his/her teacher or sent to the administrator's office. Sometimes, these disruptions involve bullying. Freiberg, an expert on bullying, as cited in *The Connecticut Post* (2011), stated that bullying is really just a form of being cruel to others. She argued that the best way to prevent bullying is to make schools safer and happier by giving students tools to use if they felt threatened, such as telling an adult. Bullying has become so prevalent in the United States that 47 states have passed

some type of antibullying laws (Lamback, 2011). Therefore, it is important for teachers to reduce incidents that are disruptive to classroom instruction and create classroom climates where students feel a sense of belonging and are more willing to put forth their best effort. An investigation of how the *Being a Writer* (2007) program successfully incorporates the teaching of social skills into the writing curriculum may allow teachers the opportunity to embed these skills into other subject areas in order to increase community development and decrease behavioral issues that take away from learning time.

Schools that integrate academic skills and social and emotional skills in a coordinated effort over an extended period of time have students who reach their highest academic potential and are better prepared to participate cooperatively in our ever-changing society (Helterbran, 2009; Zins & Elias, 2007). In addition, teachers who maintain positive social relationships and personal connections with students allow students the opportunity to feel comfortable enough to take academic risks and place their efforts on learning (Brannon, 2008). The main goal of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program is building caring and respectful relationships as a foundation to creating a successful writing community where students express interest in and appreciation of each other's work. It is important to investigate the extent to which the *Being a Writer* (2007) program achieves this end.

Prior to the use of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program, students' writing skills were inconsistent. Teachers often commented on the fact that students were writing minimally developed narratives with little expansion of key ideas and concepts. They also stated that students were not working jointly as a writing community, forming caring partnerships, sharing ideas and suggestions, and working together to become better writers. According to

Graham and Harris (2006), it is important that students begin to build a foundation for writing in the primary grades. Phonological awareness is taught in the early years and is a process whereby students think about the sounds of language by exploring sounds, putting them together, and taking them apart (Diamond, Greed, & Powell, 2008; Erdogan, 2011). In the upper grades, students spend time learning sequencing and adding creative details to their written pieces. Today, many students in high school or college are able to write, but most do not write at the level necessary to participate in a global workplace that requires strong writing proficiency (Roth & Guinee, 2011). An examination of the new writing program will give teachers the opportunity to see whether it achieves its purpose of increasing writing development along with creating students who are caring citizens.

<div align="center">Special Terms and Definitions</div>

The two goals of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program are to develop the creative writing skills of the writer and to develop the social and ethical values of responsible citizens. The writing skills the program incorporates in the primary grades include the following: using spacing between words, writing in complete sentences, capitalizing first letters of sentences, and using correct punctuation (DSC, 2007). In Grades 3 through 5, the program increases students' writing development by teaching students to write well-developed narratives while expanding on key events and characters. The second goal of the program is to encourage social skills and citizenship, along with reinforcing connectedness, belonging, and respectful relationships with teachers and peers (DSC, 2007). Following are special terms and definitions associated with the problem.

No Child Left Behind, 2001 (NCLB): The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was put into law by the federal government in 2002 to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to acquire a high-quality education and reach proficiency levels on state academic assessments. Schools that receive federal money must show that students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state-mandated test. By creating this law, the federal government held school systems accountable for student learning (United States Department of Education, 2010).

Being a Writer program: The *Being a Writer* (2007) program is a yearlong writing curriculum that was created by the Developmental Studies Center in 2007 based on the latest research on teaching writing along with social, emotional, and ethical skills. By coordinating writing and social development, the program is designed to help students become better writers and feel empowered to take responsibility for themselves and their classmates.

Social skills: Social skills are among the skills that students learn throughout the *Being a Writer* program. Students are taught the importance of core values such as responsibility, caring, helpfulness, respect, and fairness. They learn to reflect on these values and the effects they have on their classroom community. Students work together, sharing ideas and suggestions for making better writing choices or better choices for their behavior (Developmental Studies Center, 2007).

Motivation: According to Wentzel, Battle, Russell, and Looney (2010), motivation consists of expressing interest in classroom activities and making an effort to act and behave in socially competent ways. In other words, motivated students act interested in the activities that

are taking place in the classroom and interact in positive ways that show that they are interested in what they are learning.

Student-teacher relationship: Relationships between students and teachers are the basis for students' early learning success at school (Hamre et al., 2008). Having positive student teacher relationships helps to promote healthy adjustment to learning experiences at school. Relationships that are of high quality are relationships that are characterized by a high level of closeness and a low level of conflict (O'Connor, Dearling, & Collins, 2011).

Classroom community: The teacher, being the classroom community organizer, strives to establish a learning environment that all students can be actively involved in. Through warm interpersonal relationships that are interwoven throughout the curriculum, students can see that they share academic issues that can be solved by working together. This unifies the classroom community and makes learning together more enjoyable (Putney & Broughton, 2011).

Self-esteem: Positive self-esteem is associated with pride in oneself. It has been associated with good coping skills, good relationships with others, a sense of wellbeing, and positive academic achievement. Negative self-esteem has been linked to psychological and behavioral problems, having a lack of pride in oneself, anxiety, conduct disorders, depression, and poor school performance (Kutob, Senf, Crago, & Shisslak, 2010).

Meeting goal level: The Connecticut Mastery standardized testing results are graded by levels. The following levels are used to indicate whether students are below the goal level, meet the goal level, or are above the goal level: below basic, basic, proficient, goal, and advanced. States are required by the federal government to determine if their school districts are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) by having 100 % of students scoring at or above

the proficient level in math and reading by 2014. Schools that continue to fail are faced with interventions (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2012).

Integration: Integration for the purposes of this study includes intertwining academics and social skills at the same time. Students are taught how to behave in caring and respectful ways at the same time that they are learning subject material. By integrating the two, students learn together by respecting each other and helping one another as a caring, growing community (Developmental Studies Center, 2007).

Common Core State Standards: A panel of governors and chief state school officers in 45 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia created The Common Core State Standards. The standards offer a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and what teachers are expected to teach to ensure that all students find success by building a strong future for themselves and their country. The standards inform teachers and school systems what needs to be taught but allow them the opportunity to decide the best way to teach them (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011).

Significance

There is currently a growing concern that students are lacking in writing development and communication skills and are unprepared to face the demands placed on them as they enter the workforce. Schools that incorporate cooperative learning among students and emphasize verbal and written communication skills have students who are better prepared to take school exams, speak effectively in interviews, and market themselves for businesses looking to hire new recruits. According to the National Commission on Writing in America's Colleges and Schools (2003), writing is one the most neglected subjects in schools. The commission was

created over growing concern within education, business, and policy-making communities that the level of writing in the United States was not what it should be. In addition, it was suggested that the nation's leaders should place writing at the forefront of their topics to address at the state and local levels while providing the resources necessary to improve writing. A recent analysis showed that more than 50% of first-year college students were unable to create papers free of language errors and that although many students were able to write, many of them did not write well enough to take on jobs that would require them to write reports while organizing and synthesizing information to be disseminated to others (National Commission on Writing in America's Colleges and Schools, 2003).

Roth and Guinee (2011) found that many students today have difficulty reaching higher levels in their education because they are unable to write. Many are not able to write at the level necessary to participate in college entrance exams or in the global workplace that requires strong writing proficiency (Roth & Guinee, 2011). In addition, many standardized tests have increased writing requirements to demand more skilled writing ability. Similarly, the United States employment market has raised the bar and now requires increased communication and writing skills (Roth & Guinee, 2011). High-quality student-teacher relationships are critical in order to support students' academic growth, social development, and communication skills. The growing concern over the lack of students' writing ability that this study investigated is significant because if students are not writing and communicating well, they will not be prepared to face the demands placed on them by society in their future endeavors.

Policymakers must be made aware that education is not about academics alone. When students' psychological needs are met, they feel safe physically and emotionally and are more able to achieve their highest academic potential (DSC, 2007). Students who build strong relationships with teachers and peers have a stronger sense of self and are more highly motivated to perform (Chaney, 2011; DSC, 2007). Studying this problem is important in discovering if creating classroom communities and building respectful relationships in coordination with learning academic subject material does increase students' ability to perform to their highest academic potential.

Guiding Questions

Positive interactions between teachers and students have been proven to be an asset in helping students adjust to school and in helping promote their learning development. Many times, teachers are focused on the curriculum and have less time to spend on building personal relationships with their students. When students work together in a caring, respectful atmosphere, building relations with teachers and peers, they are more apt to perform to their highest potential. Programs that implement academic skills and social and emotional skills in a coordinated effort have more students who reach their utmost performance level and are better prepared to enter the workforce. This leads me to the following research question.

Research Question

In alignment with the research problem and purpose, the following research question is posed: To what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing (Appendix G, p. 160)?

Subquestions

Question 1. What are your experiences with the *Being a Writer* (2007) program?

Question 2. How has the *Being a Writer* (2007) program affected students' writing development?

Question 3. How has the *Being a Writer* (2007) program affected students' social development?

Question 4. How do the social skills taught through the program improve students' writing development?

Question 5. What aspects of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program do you feel can be enhanced?

In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative single case study was conducted. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), a case study is conducted in an attempt to capture individual participants' experiences within a specific setting. Asking teachers who were familiar with the program these research questions helped aid in gathering their perspectives in order to investigate how the new program was being incorporated in the classroom, and if they had any suggestions for how the program could be enhanced to align with the new Common Core State Teaching Standards.

Practical action research is usually undertaken by a practitioner within his or her specific classroom, school, or district and is designed to enhance the practitioner's own teaching or students' learning (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). A single case study appeared to be most fitting because this allowed me to focus on an in-depth exploration of the

actual case. Once these questions were answered, educated decisions were made about the program and its usefulness in improving teaching and learning for the future.

Review of Literature

This literature review will examine current research and the extent to which building respectful relationships between teachers and students, and between students and their peers increases students' ability to perform at higher achievement levels with a specific emphasis on writing development. In addition, this literature review will provide readers with a clearer understanding of the theoretical framework offered by past researchers, as well as prior research that has been conducted on building student-teacher relationships, social and emotional learning programs, behavioral issues in the classroom that may effect relationships, student motivation, and student achievement with regard to writing. This information will allow educators the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding the types of relationships that are most effective in the classroom in improving student motivation and students' ability to perform at higher academic levels.

The literature review was conducted by collecting data from a variety of sources using the study's main research question as a guide. Walden University's library database was the main source of data collection. Databases such as Education Research Information Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete, Sage Full Text Articles and ProQuest Central were used in the data collection process. Google Scholar was another source used to collect peer-reviewed journals, books, and scholarly articles. For the search, I used terms such as *student teacher relationship*, *writing achievement*, *social and emotional skills*, *behavioral issues*

effecting relationships, and *motivation*. Only studies that were peer reviewed and completed in the last 5 years were reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

With educational reform in full swing, many school systems are very focused on raising test scores at the expense of working with the whole child. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), many educators have been concentrating on the delivery of lengthy curriculum and much less on enhancing the quality of their relationships with their students. In addition, the new Common Core State Standards that are currently being implemented in 37 out of the 50 states are also very academically oriented. Theorists such as Carl Rogers admonished against teaching to the test and suggested building a relationship with students while helping students learn how to learn (Miller, 2001). Based on Rogers's (1961) theory, teachers should position themselves as facilitators and not in traditional teacher roles. Teachers in traditional roles are dispensers of facts and information. Teachers in learner-centered environments are facilitators of learning who set the mood for the environment, develop a sense of trust and cooperation within the group, and foster a noncompetitive learning environment.

Facilitators must be accepting of their own feelings to develop real relationships with their students (Rogers, 1961). Rogers and Freiberg (1994) discovered that students want to be trusted and respected in classrooms where people care. They want opportunities to take part in the decision-making process with teachers who are supportive of their successes (Smith, 2004). Teachers who allow students to make classroom decisions, support student efforts, and share in student successes and failures have classrooms that are thriving. In addition, activities

that encourage students to take part in creating their classrooms such as labeling objects with word cards, creating posters, and making class books and materials are valuable ways for young children to learn about the writing process and letter-sound relationships (Mayer, 2007). Students look forward to coming to class when their needs as individuals are met.

Rogers's (1961) theory fits well with this study because learner-centered environments not only focus on the academic curriculum, but also focus on allowing students to learn to work together for the good of the classroom community. Decisions are made together that empower students as they build self-esteem (Putney & Broughton, 2011). The early childhood years are a time when students should be developing healthy belief systems influenced by early interactions with trusting adults (Szente, 2007). According to Szente (2007), students who have a strong sense of self-esteem have success with achieving initial goals and therefore strive to develop even higher goals. Being able to work well with everyone is an important lesson that children need to learn at an early age (Wilson, Ellerbee, & Christian, 2011). This is why it is so important that the classroom community be one of respect and understanding, where students feel comfortable making mistakes, and where there are healthy relationships with peers and adults on whom students can rely (Mercer & DeRosier, 2010).

Other theorists who have been cited throughout this literature review have been Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1977). The basic premise of Vygotsky's theoretical framework was that social interaction is vital in the development of cognition. Vygotsky also developed a construct called the *zone of proximal development*, which is the level of development students attain when they engage in social behavior. With adult guidance, students can attain a higher level of cognition when they are working together collectively than they could if they were

working alone (Putney & Broughton, 2011). Bandura's social learning theory is closely related to Vygotsky's theory. Bandura's theory emphasized the importance of communication in promoting positive developmental outcomes. In addition, his theory postulates that social behaviors are learned behaviors that occur by observing others and modeling. Social behaviors are learned through continuous interaction among cognition, behavior, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). According to these theorists, when students learn from one another and work collectively for the betterment of the whole, they obtain higher cognitive functioning, better communication skills, and a stronger belief in their ability to perform, or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978).

The philosophy behind the *Being a Writer* (2007) program is based on educating the whole child, which is very similar to Rogers's (1961) theory. It is important for the facilitator to consider the whole child and not just the current curriculum. Delivery of a curriculum can be easily accomplished. However, delivery of a curriculum while considering all aspects of the child, such as students' backgrounds, social and emotional development, academic ability, self-esteem, and history of peer relationships can be a more challenging task. It is vital today more than ever that teachers challenge themselves to look more deeply at their students. They should spend more time getting to know them holistically while developing strong bonds and creating caring classroom communities. Rogers's (1961) theory focused on the strength of the relationship in order to promote growth in an individual. Teachers who get to know their students and spend the time to listen and find out students' interests and backgrounds will be in a much better place to teach the students academics, along with the social skills that will help them to become successful citizens of the 21st century.

Teacher-Student Relationships

It is important to explore the impact that having healthy student-teacher relationships can make. It makes a difference in students' motivation to perform, increases their self-esteem, and has been associated with positive outcomes in academic achievement. Educators who are aware of the importance of building strong relationships with their students are better prepared to meet the educational demands placed on them. Students who have a relationship with a caring adult are more motivated to perform, which has been associated with lifelong learning and retention.

Healthy teacher-student relationships are more prominent when students have the perception that they are given a high level of support within the school environment (Carlisle, 2011; Carreno, & Dzral, 2011; Griggs, Gagnon, Huelsman, Kidder-Ashley, & Ballard, 2009). Highly supportive relationships have been associated with high levels of closeness and low levels of conflict. Pianta (1999) stated that students' relationships with their parents were also extremely important, but a growing body of literature is now showing the vital role that teachers play in shaping student development in the early years. There are many studies that have looked at the effects of student-teacher relationships in the preschool years, and the middle and high school years, but much less has been written about these relationships beyond second grade and throughout the elementary years (Carrreno & Drzal, 2011). When students feel they are supported by their teachers and supported by their peers, they become comfortable in their school setting and develop a higher sense of self esteem, which in turn leads to better school performance (Mayer, 2007; Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Szente, 2007).

Pianta (1999) created his own conceptual model to help in the advancement of our understanding of the nature of the relationship between teacher and child. According to his model, a relationship exists between the teacher and the child that is determined by the level of closeness or distance they share and the reciprocal interactions among them. Closeness is characterized by open communication, warmth, and positive affect. In contrast, a distant relationship is characterized by conflict, negativity, and difficulty in managing a student's behavior (Pianta, 1999).

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) conducted a study with 490 children in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade that examined social skills and academic skills, along with the relationship between closeness and conflict in teacher-child relationships. Students' academic achievement, vocabulary skills, behavior problems, social competence, and teacher-child relationships were taken into consideration and were rated on various scales and checklists. With regard to academic performance, first grade teachers reported higher academic achievement scores for those students with whom they shared a close relationship with and reported lower achievement scores for students with whom they experienced more conflict. Teachers also reported on students' social competence, which showed an inverse relationship. A higher level of conflict with a student was associated with a lower social competence, while a higher level of closeness with a student was associated with higher levels of social competence (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). This study demonstrated that relationships with teachers and significant adults had a positive impact on students' academic achievement and social competence.

According to Giles (2011), it is extremely important for teachers to be attentive to the relationships they have with their students individually as well as collectively. Teachers and students are always in a relationship together. How much the relationship matters shows up in the experience of being in the relationship. There can be times when the relationship will matter, times when the relationship may be indifferent, and times when the relationship does not appear to matter at all. Relationships do matter, but they lie out of sight and are often taken for granted (Giles, 2011).

Giles (2011) conducted a phenomenological research project on the experience of being in a teacher-student relationship with 18 student teachers in New Zealand. What he discovered was that when the teacher-student relationship mattered, the students were engaged, respectful of others, and connected. An obvious sense of caring and concern connected the students and the teacher relationally. Students can sense when the teacher is interested, and this makes them want to perform. In other instances, students may feel indifferent about their relationship with their teacher. They may wonder if the teacher really cares about them. If a teacher is too laid back, the student may get the impression that the relationship does not matter. This can be a cause of concern for a student that can have a negative influence on his or her learning experience. The last type of relationship that Giles (2011) discussed is a relationship that is imbued with dis-ease. In this type of relationship, one of the participants feels vulnerable or uncomfortable in the relationship. In Giles study, one teacher felt betrayed by a student who had been dishonest and had been talking behind her back. The teacher then began to lose trust in the relationship. When students do not want to reciprocate in a relationship, this can be cause for concern and can have a direct effect on student learning.

This study explored the importance and the delicate nature of the teacher student relationship that often goes unnoticed. It is not always observable and lies below the surface. Relationships can also fluctuate from day to day or week to week. When teachers are overly concerned about their lesson content and do not invite students to participate, they send a message that the content of the material matters more than the relational experience, and this can diminish learning outcomes. In contrast, when teachers invite students to participate in the lesson and share personal information, and what matters most to them, the relationship becomes stronger and so will their academic performance (Giles, 2011; Griggs, 2009).

It is important that teachers be aware of the sensitive nature of the teacher student relationship. Students do sense when a teacher cares about them and are more apt to work hard because they sense that they do matter in the life of that teacher. In a study completed by Split and Koomen (2009) teachers who expressed anger toward their students had a direct correlation with relational conflict. In contrast, teachers who showed a positive affect had more relational closeness. Fostering healthy relationships in the school setting helps to build a positive school climate where everyone works together with common goals for the greater good of the whole (Carlisle, 2011; Putney, & Broughton, 2011).

Similarly, Mercer and DeRosier (2010) completed a study with 1,104 Grade 4 students in 10 schools to investigate teacher preference. The study examined teacher preference, and the teacher student relationship quality in a two-year wave design. The design included questionnaires given to both teachers and students and reported on teacher preference over time. High teacher preference was associated with students' positive perceptions toward their teachers, while low levels of perceived preferences were associated with higher levels of

conflict. The results also indicated that even though teachers may conceal negative feelings toward certain students in order to treat all students equitably, many students were able to detect indirect non-verbal differences in the teacher's behavior (Mercer & DeRosier, 2010).

According to Mercer and DeRosier (2010), longitudinal studies show a link between low teacher preference and lower achievement scores, student loneliness, and higher rates of peer rejection. Teachers need to be made aware of the strong impact that they have on their students. The importance of maintaining a healthy reciprocal student teacher relationship cannot be understated. Relationships do matter (Carlisle, 2011). Teachers not only influence students academically, but they create social and behavioral classroom climates that can be positive or negative predictors of aggression, pro social behaviors, or social acceptance by peers (Chang et al., 2007; Mercer, & DeRosier, 2008). Teachers must take the time to get to know their students, spend time to listen and find out their interests and backgrounds and include them in creating their own welcoming classroom atmosphere that is accepting of everyone regardless of race, religion or culture. Students in these types of classrooms are thriving in academics and social skills concurrently and will be better prepared to enter society and today's workforce. (Chang et al., 2007; Mayer, 2007; Mercer, & DeRosier, 2008; Szente, 2007; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

Behavior Problems

Student behavior and classroom management are topics that often get overlooked. With the main focus on academics and test scores, policymakers fail to take into account that each student has daily individual needs to be met by their teachers. Meeting the needs of each student socially, emotionally and academically can lessen the time a teacher has to teach

academics. It is important to explore student behavior and how building a community of learners and relationships with the students' can help to alleviate some of these behavioral concerns.

Student misbehavior can cause significant stress in the life of many teachers. It often leads to teacher burn out, leaving school systems with difficulty retaining quality teachers (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Students who misbehave in the classroom are less engaged, disruptive to their teachers and peers, and generally have lower performance scores (Freiberg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009). According to Hamre, Pianta, Downer, and Mashburn (2008), relationships with teachers build the foundation for future adjustment and learning. Teachers can promote positive emotions by making students feel comfortable, implementing lessons that include higher order thinking skills, and organizing the classroom to structure student's time effectively. Students in caring classroom communities feel a sense of belonging, have stronger relationships with teachers and peers, have higher self-esteems, and are more motivated to perform (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011).

Students enrolled in classes that do not feel a sense of caring and belonging, are void of a comfortable reciprocal relationship with the teacher, are learning through mediocre lessons that do not promote higher order thinking skills, and are in classrooms that may be setting students up for failure. Students with externalizing or internalizing behavior problems may be prone to long-term academic and behavioral maladjustment issues (O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2010). Internalizing behavioral issues manifest through depression or social withdrawal, while externalizing behavioral issues manifest by a student acting out, impulsivity, or aggression (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). It is important for teachers to be

aware of what types of behavior problems may be occurring in their classrooms and what they can do to promote healthy growth and development. According to Whittaker and Harden (2010), teachers need more training to help them better understand student behavior from a developmental perspective. Research shows that teachers who have taken training programs and have increased their knowledge of developmentally appropriate behavior can have a positive influence on their own knowledge and develop positive attitudes and skills toward the students in their classrooms (Fukkink & Lont, 2007).

Instructional Practices

In 2011, Durlak, Dyminicki, Taylor, Weissberg and Schellinger completed a meta-analysis on social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that included 270,034 students from kindergarten through high school. When compared to a control group, students who participated in the SEL programs showed significant improvement in their attitude, social and emotional skills, and an 11% point gain in academic achievement. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2007), there is much agreement among educational professionals, policymakers, and the public that when students graduate they should not only be proficient in core academic subject areas, but also should be able to work well with others of various cultures and behave respectfully in responsible ways.

The most common type of SEL instruction takes place in the classroom by the classroom teacher. Other types of instruction include having an outside consultant come into the school to provide various workshops. Another approach is a multi component approach with the teacher working together with a parent or having a whole school wide initiative (Durlak et al., 2011). There are many programs that offer a social and emotional learning

component. However, the most productive programs have been research based and proven to be effective. Programs that are more integrative that address multiple behaviors and involve families and communities have also shown success (Snyder et al., 2010).

Snyder, et al. (2010), completed a study in Hawaii of 20 elementary schools, regarding the impact of a comprehensive school based social and emotional, character education program called Positive Action (PA). The Positive Action Program is designed to improve character, student behaviors and student academics. Upon a one-year implementation of the program, schools that used the PA curriculum scored significantly better than control schools in math and reading, and also lowered their absenteeism and suspension rates (Snyder et al., 2010). Similarly, Domitrovich, Cortes and Greenburg (2007) completed a randomized clinical trial in two Head Start programs in Pennsylvania evaluating a curriculum titled Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS). This is a comprehensive program to help prevent and reduce behavior problems and enhance social and emotional competence in young children. The trial included 407 students for a period of three months. The results suggested that after the students had been exposed to the PATHS program they were more mature emotionally and were rated more socially competent by their parents, and teachers. As the United States curriculum continues to change and be under close scrutiny, policymakers should continue to consider the positive effects of including social and emotional learning programs in promoting success in the nation's public schools (ASCD, 2007; Griggs, 2009).

In addition, several other studies have been completed exploring programs such as Banking Time, and the Responsive Classroom. Banking Time is a program that promotes the student teacher relationship by having the teacher meet with a child one on one while engaging

in child-led play that enhances the quality of the relationship. Driscoll and Pianta (2010) evaluated the early efficacy of the Banking Time program with 29 Head Start teachers and 116 children. Data were collected using teacher rating scales and videotaped interactions of the children. Teachers who used the Banking Time approach consistently reported that they had an increased perception of closeness with their students as well as a decrease in conduct problems (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010). Furthermore, Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, and Rimm-Kaufman (2008) investigated the Responsive Classroom, which is a program that integrates social skills, and academic learning together. Their study included a sampling of 530 students in Grades 3 through 5. They gathered data through a collection of questionnaires, and looked at student standardized test scores over a three year period. Teachers that implemented the Responsive Classroom approach had students who had higher ratings on academic skills, social skills, and standardized reading tests (Brock et al., 2008). These studies provide evidence that programs such as Banking Time and the Responsive Classroom have made a positive impact on students' academic achievement, and an increased awareness in students' social and emotional skills. Educators and policymakers should view academic skills and social skills as two complimentary objectives that are necessary to promote the future success of our students (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufmann, 2011).

Motivation

An important factor that underlies academic performance is student motivation. Students who are motivated to perform have more positive teacher and peer relationships and more favorable feelings about attending school. When students feel that their teachers care, they have much more confidence in their capabilities. McCombs, Daniels, and Perry (2008)

conducted a study with 2100 children and 124 teachers in California, Florida, Texas, Michigan, South Dakota, Washington, and Minnesota that examined instructional practices related to motivational outcomes. Students surveyed were in Kindergarten through Grade 3. The study examined three Learner-Centered Psychological Principles put out by the American Psychological Association (APA, 1997) and tried to determine if they facilitated learning, provided motivational support, and positive perceptions of interpersonal relationships. Data collection included student and teacher surveys that had been previously pilot tested to establish reliability and validity. The results indicated that children in classrooms that followed the three Learner Centered Principles had positive perceptions of their interpersonal relationships, felt motivated by their teachers, and had more favorable feelings toward being in school (McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, 2008). Students that perceived their teachers cared about them and were interested in their academic performance were more motivated to perform and put in more effort for their teachers (Dix, & Cawkwell, 2011; Fong, & Kum, 2007; Wentzel, Battle, Russel, & Looney, 2010).

The students in this study were young and were still able to decipher if their teachers were child oriented, cared about them and motivated them. Students reported that they liked school more and felt more positive about their own capabilities when they felt the teacher cared. Primary school teachers who had students who perceived them to be learner centered, contributed to their students higher motivation and development as life long learners (Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2007). Conversely, students who perceive their teachers as less learner centered, who focused more on testing and memorization, with less personal interaction,

contributed to lower levels of learning, motivation and achievement (Nguyen, Jang, & Yang, 2010; Wilson, & Trainin, 2007).

There were a variety of studies that discussed the relationship of the teacher and student, but researchers have rarely examined the social supports of teachers along with peers in promoting student motivation. Wentzel, Battle, Russel and Looney (2010) investigated teachers and peers and student motivation. Student motivation was expressed if students showed an interest in school, and behaved in socially appropriate ways. Participants in their study included 358 students in Grades 6, 7, and 8, in a suburban middle school in mid Atlanta. The study was presented as a survey to get students opinions on their classroom experiences. Their findings indicated that students who had teachers who interacted with the class in supportive ways, that create interesting lessons, that promoted positive social interaction, appeared to be more successful in promoting positive social motivation. With regards to peer support, their findings indicated that there was merit to peer support within classrooms with regards to academic tasks and social tasks. They also found that peer support for social behavior and emotional support was predictive of socially supportive relationships. There were various limitations to this study, one of which was its sole reliance on self-reported measures along with the fact that its population was predominately Caucasian and middle class. The results of the study concluded that students were more motivated to perform in positive ways socially, and academically when they had a combination of support from their teachers and peers, received advice and instruction on how to achieve these outcomes, and had clear expectation in non-threatening environments (Wentzel et al., 2010).

In addition, La Guardia and Ryan (2007) stated, that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are three main elements in understanding human motivation that people need for healthy psychological development. Autonomy refers to a person being able to make his or her own informed decisions; competence is being able to meet day to day challenges; and relatedness is a feeling of being connected to others. Learners with high levels of motivation take a more active role in their learning, while students who are less motivated to perform may have difficulty performing to expectation in the classroom (Otoshi & Heffernan, 2011). Also, according to Otashi and Heffernan (2011), if there is some type of a reward in completing an activity, such as a boost in self-esteem, or a conscious value in performing a task, students are more motivated to complete the activities at hand, and are more satisfied with their performance.

One issue that had been previously discussed was the inability of college graduates to use the knowledge gained in the current work environment (Dalgren, 2007). Hossainy, Zare, Hormozi, Shaghaghi, and Kaveh (2012) set out to determine if students who were placed in situated learning environments had higher achievement and school motivation. Situated learning is when learning takes place in the actual real work situation. Learning is a very social process and authentic learning takes place when learners see an expert on the job perform the task and use it as a model (Stalmeijer, Dolmans, Wolfhagen, & Acherpbier, 2009). Another important aspect to consider in a situated learning experience is that the learner takes the time to reflect and analyze his/her work while comparing it to the model (Oriol, Tumulty, & Snyder, 2010). Situated learning experiences provide students with real hands on exposure. Hossainy et al. (2012) discovered that when students actually get to perform an activity as

opposed to reading about it in a book, they were much more interested and motivated to achieve higher goals. Teachers who showed they care, were interested in students' academic performance, created interesting real life lessons and promoted social interaction amongst peers contributed to students' motivation to perform, higher academic achievement and the creation of life long learners.

Writing Achievement

Learning to write is a process. It starts at an early age when children draw pictures and scribbles. Eventually, they learn the alphabet and start to add letters to their drawings and labeling objects. Next, students learn that a string of letters form words, and eventually learn that words can form sentences. Students in the primary grades learn that these sentences have meaning, and that these sentences can also be a way for them to express themselves.

Erdogan (2011) completed a study to determine if a relationship existed between phonological awareness and writing skills of first year students in two primary schools in Finland. This study included 126 first year students that were randomly selected. Data were collected using a Reading-Writing Skills Scale and a Phonological Awareness Scale. Students were asked to write five sentences. Data were collected during the middle of the first term, at the end of the first term, and during the middle of the second term. Erdogan (2011) discovered that there was a significant relationship between a student's phonological awareness and his or her writing during the middle term, but no significant difference existed at the end, or middle of the following year. The findings indicated the importance of teaching phonological awareness in the early part of the school year, as well as throughout the year and into the next school year with the expectation that student's writing scores show more improvement in the

later terms. Consistency across grade levels is important in giving students the continual practice, and scaffolding they need to be successful writers.

Several other studies explored implementing ten minutes of interactive writing a day or using student tutors to boost writing achievement. Roth and Guinee (2011) completed a study with 101 Grade 1 students. One group was given ten minutes a day of interactive writing while the control group did not receive the treatment. A standardized vocabulary measure was used to assess student's independent writing. Students who were in the interactive writing group showed gains in nine out of ten of the subcomponents used to measure student success. This study demonstrated that consistency and daily practice are important in the improvement of student writing. Furthermore, Paquette (2009) studied whether peer tutoring increased writing improvement. In this study the treatment group consisted of 15, Grade 2 students, and 25 Grade 4 students, and the non-treatment group consisted of 20 Grade 2 students and 25 Grade 4 students. Crossed aged tutoring took place by having a pre-trained fourth grader work with a second grader. Journals, writing samples and discussions were measures used to collect data. The findings were interesting in that the second graders who were tutored and the second graders who were not tutored showed no gains in writing, while the fourth graders who were tutoring and the fourth graders who were not, showed statistically significant gains in writing. The author attributed the lack of gain in second grade to the fact that the students were not enthusiastic about the year end writing prompt they were given and that it was given to them by their teacher and not their tutor. The gain in fourth graders writing scores had been attributed to the use of higher order thinking skills while tutoring the younger student. The second graders did not make significant gains in their writing scores. However, during

discussion the second grade students said that they enjoyed the program and believed that they were better writers. The way students behave and feel in academic situations is largely attributed to their belief in their own capabilities (Corkett, Hatt, & Benevides, 2011).

When students believe in themselves they are capable of improving in all academic subject areas. When teachers help students to develop skills and build self-esteem, students feel proud of their accomplishments. One program that is being used in schools today is the *Being a Writer* (2007) program. This program was field tested in various schools in California. Following the teaching of the program teachers and administrators were surveyed and interviewed. The surveys indicated that after implementing the *Being a Writer* (2007) program that students were more motivated to write, wrote more than they had previously, were excited to work with peers, became better listeners and showed a marked improvement in respectfulness toward one another. In addition, the percentage of students who scored at the proficient level in writing increased from 14 percentage points to 50 percent.

The basic premise of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program is to increase students writing achievement while incorporating social skills. Students are not only learning the basic skills of writing but they are also learning how to build relationships, listen respectfully to the thinking of others, and help one another improve in writing. The teacher plays a key role in building the foundation for the learning community by including everyone in the decision making process and incorporating student ideas into the lessons. Students feel appreciated and work together as a team. They cultivate empathy toward others and build caring relationships with teachers and peers. Once this foundation is in place students reach a comfort level where they believe in themselves and their capabilities. They develop goals and strive to reach them. They become

lifelong learners as their achievement scores increase and they become better citizens of the world (DSC, 2007).

Implications

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) instituted by the federal government has most educators focused on academics alone. Many educators today are focused on raising test scores and not focused on the impact that the student-teacher relationship can have on raising test scores. Many years ago Rogers and Freiberg (1994) realized that students want to be trusted and respected. Students want to be in classrooms where they feel that people care. Students want to take part in the decision making process with teachers who support them and praise their success (Smith, 2004). The early years are a time when students should be developing healthy belief systems that are learned through their early interactions with caring adults (Szente, 2007). Another important lesson that children need to learn at an early age is to be able to work well with everyone (Wilson, Ellerbee, & Christian, 2011).

As a teacher-facilitator it is important to consider the whole child and not just the curriculum. The teacher should be aware of student's backgrounds, social and emotional development, self-esteem, academic ability, and even a history of peer-relationships. Healthy teacher-student relationships are much more prominent when students are given a high level of care and support (Carlisle, 2011; Carreno, & Dzral, 2011). When students feel they have a support system with their teachers and peers, they are more comfortable in their school setting, and develop a stronger sense of self which leads to higher achievement scores in academic subject areas (Mayer, 2007; Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Szente, 2007). Students can sense

when a teacher cares about them and are more apt to work hard because they sense that they do matter in the life of that teacher (Split & Koomen, 2009). In contrast, if teachers are overly concerned with the curriculum content and less on their students personally, this could lead to behavioral problems, difficulty in the relationship, and a drop in student success (Giles, 2011).

Summary

The purpose of the current study was to investigate if creating a caring classroom community coupled with teaching the required core curriculum did in fact increase students' ability to perform at higher achievement levels. In addition, asking the teachers for suggestions on how the program could be enhanced will be valuable information in creating a successful program in the future. The issue of classroom relationships is an important area to investigate for a number of reasons. First of all creating a caring classroom environment helps students to remain focused on learning and reduces behavior problems (Brannon, 2008). Next, students who feel that they are part of a community of learners are more apt to apply themselves and be more motivated to perform to their highest potential. Lastly, curriculum that incorporates academic skills and social skills consistently are much more likely to be successful and motivate students, who in turn will be excited to come to school to learn.

I believe the *Being a Writer* (2007) program currently being used in my school district warrants further investigation to get to the core of why the program has been successful in the development of better writers and students who are respectful of one another's work, better listeners and more responsible citizens.

Section 2: Methodology

Introduction

The best way to get to the heart of why the *Being a Writer* (2007) program has been successful was a singular case study. By completing this case study, I was able to take a closer look at the new writing program and determine whether it increased writing skills as teachers created classroom communities where students were working together to support each other's writing development. The participants were 15 teachers who were purposefully sampled in order to gain their views on how the new program was working. The sample included teachers in Grades 1 through 5 who began piloting the program 3 years ago.

After gaining all the necessary permissions, the investigation was conducted. Ethics were an extremely important consideration. Any information gained was kept completely confidential, and I treated each participant with utmost regard and respect. Member checking ensured that the interviews were satisfactory with the participants.

Following the interviews, the data were transcribed by using a computer-generated program. Later, I wrote up typologies and themes that stood out as I read through each interview. I created a themed notebook and an interview question notebook. As I read through each interview, when I came across a theme, I would write the interview number and what the participant said in the theme notebook under that specific theme. Where data did not fit in, I inductively created new themes or categories. The more I read, the more themes emerged. Later, I reduced the themes to the ones that were mentioned the most and seemed to be of most concern or pleasure for the teachers. Last, I condensed similar themes into one category. Following that, I did the same for the interview question notebook. After reading each

interview question, I wrote the interview number and what the participant said in relation to each interview question.

In the future will share this information through a PowerPoint presentation during a professional development workshop, keeping in mind to remove all personal bias. This case study has yielded rich results that have implications for creating social change in the future.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

In order to answer the research question posed, a qualitative case study was undertaken. A single case study is chosen when a researcher wants to investigate a single unit or bounded system (Creswell, 2009; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010;). This case study involved an in-depth look at six elementary schools in a single school district. I originally started with five elementary schools. After further thought, I added a sixth elementary school, which will be discussed later in this paper. This case study consisted of one-on-one interviews at six elementary schools with teachers who had piloted and used the *Being a Writer* (2007) program for the last 3 years. According to Creswell (2012), interviews are used when a researcher wants to speak to one person at a time who will not be hesitant to share his or her ideas on the subject. Interviews were audio taped, followed by transcription, member checking, and follow-up personal or email conversations. In conducting this type of evaluation, I set out to capture the reality of the participants and include anything they felt was important in understanding their experiences with the new writing program and the experiences of their students (Patton, 2002). This strategy was a suitable way to gather data while taking an in-depth look at the writing program to determine whether creating a caring community of learners had an effect on students' communication skills and writing development. Other

strategies, such as ethnography, grounded theory, or narrative inquiry, would not have been appropriate to answer the focus questions. Ethnography is reserved for writing about cultural groups; grounded theory is based on building a theory using the data from the ground up; and narrative research is looking to individuals who will provide stories about their personal lives and experiences. Although some of these do share overlapping strategies, I believe the best strategy to accomplish my purpose was a singular case study. This case study has given me the opportunity to focus on one central issue, which was whether building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners fosters positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing.

This was also an intrinsic case study. An intrinsic case study is taken on when the researcher has a particular interest in the case (Merriam, 2009, Stake, 2005). In this situation, I was intrinsically interested in gaining insight into and understanding more deeply the classroom community and student-teacher relationships. Particularly, I was curious as to whether teachers building caring relationships with their students based on mutual respect has a positive effect on students' self-esteem, communication skills, academic achievement, and/or test scores.

In this case study, I took a closer look at the social relationships of teachers and students in six elementary schools to determine whether feeling a sense of belonging and having strong student to student and strong teacher-to-student relationships are motivating factors that foster academic gains. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (2013), many educators have concentrated on teaching the core content standards and have much less time to create a caring community of learners who are inspired to achieve their highest academic

potential (Hamilton et al., 2007).

In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of phenomena through the participants' points of view; this type of research is more exploratory than confirmatory (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In this study, I used teacher interviews to explore participants' experiences with the new writing program. In contrast, a quantitative study might involve first stating a hypothesis and then testing this hypothesis by only comparing writing test scores. With a mixed-methods approach, a researcher might compare writing test scores and conduct teacher interviews or surveys. Mixed methods can be very powerful but can also be very time consuming; this type of study is usually most effective when conducted by multiple researchers (Creswell, 2012). With the qualitative method, the researcher takes an inductive approach and collects data before formulating a hypothesis (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). A qualitative approach was more appropriate for this study because I conducted interviews to hear the direct experiences and viewpoints of the participants. I did not project my personal bias into the study but looked only for what emerged from the data.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used in this single qualitative case study. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling can yield information-rich cases from which I can learn a great deal. I intentionally selected individuals and sites that would help me, the researcher, better understand and learn about the central phenomena (Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling was the sampling technique that was chosen in order to gather the personal experiences of teachers who were using the writing program.

Before conducting my research, I had to gain permission from Walden University's

Institutional Review Board (IRB). I did gain approval from the IRB before I began, which can

be viewed in Appendix A (p.143). It was important to gain this approval to ensure that the

research I was conducting did not have any harmful effects on my participants and that any

information the participants gave me was kept confidential and protected.

Following IRB approval, I shared my research proposal with the superintendent of the

school system. He approved my research and signed a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix B, p.

145). This letter stated that he approved that I conduct research in his school system. Next, I

sent out Letters of Invitation, followed by Letters of Cooperation to the school principals

(Appendix C, p. 146; Appendix D, p. 148). I selected five out of six elementary schools in this

district to start my study. It took several weeks to get everyone on board, but all agreed to

allow me to access their buildings and interview their teachers. Furthermore, I contacted the

language arts department program leader and the head of the curriculum department, who were

instrumental in giving me the names of teachers who had been teaching the program for the

last 3 years.

I interviewed two to five participants from each grade level in Grades 1 through 5

across the district. Their experiences with the program, knowledge, and insights proved useful

in answering my research questions. Fifteen teacher participants were chosen in order to allow

for saturation of ideas and redundancy of themes.

After sending out Letters of Invitation (Appendix E, p. 150), I set up appointments for

each interview and met the participant at his/her respective school in a comfortable and private

location (Glesne, 2011). I introduced myself and spoke informally at the beginning to make

the participant feel relaxed. Following this, I reminded the participants that anything said

regarding the program would remain confidential and if at any time he/she felt uncomfortable that we could stop the interview with no questions asked (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Next, I asked the interviewee to sign a Consent Form (Appendix F, p. 151). I then begin recording the interview. My questions were formulated ahead of time and were open-ended so that the participant could best voice his/her experiences (Creswell, 2012). In addition, I probed with follow up questions to get further clarification about specific responses. At the end of the interview, I asked the participants if there was anything that they wanted to add or include and thanked them for their time.

Ethical Protection

Participants voluntarily consented to be in the study and had the option of withdrawing at any time. The relationship between the participants and the researcher must be based on honesty, trust and respect (Protecting Human Research Participants Guide, 2011). By maintaining trust and confidentiality participants were more comfortable and more apt to share in their experiences. In response to many years of human degradation, in 1974 the Belmont Report was created that identified three essential principles for the treatment of research with humans. According to the Protecting Human Research Participants Guide (2011) created by the National Institute of Health, investigators should have: respect for persons and allow individuals to make their own decisions; beneficence, by creating research designs that maximize benefits and minimize risk; and justice, by fairly distributing the burdens and benefits of research to individuals, groups, and societies. This research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to insure protection from harm and rights for all individuals involved. In addition, confidentiality is of utmost importance in the protection of

individuals who participated in the study and all names were removed from any data collected.

Prior to conducting my study I received certification in Protecting Human Research

Participants created by the National Institute of Health (Appendix H, p. 154).

Data Collection

Interviews are one way of allowing the researcher to enter into another person's

perspective (Patton, 2002). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the

experiences of teachers with regards to the new writing program and building a classroom

community. I interviewed fifteen teacher participants from a total of six elementary schools in

the district with permission from the superintendent and each school administrator. The

interviews occurred in the fall of 2012. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each

and took place at each individual school after making an appointment with each individual.

The one on one interviews were tape-recorded and semi structured. Semi structured interviews

allowed me the researcher the ability to come to the interview with questions, but left me the

option of following the leads of the informants (Hatch, 2002). During the interviews I was

very careful not to interject any personal bias regarding the central phenomena. By asking

open-ended questions, participants voice their experiences unconstrained by the researchers

point of view (Creswell, 2012).

According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, (2006), it is important to establish a good

interview protocol, which included a brief script that explains the purpose of the study, places

that record dates and background information on the participants, as well as some preliminary

questions to begin the discussion. Also keeping a journal of field notes and observations is an

important consideration while collecting findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). All data

collected were examined after the normal workday was completed and provided me with rich narrative and valuable information in understanding the central phenomena.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is an important one that must not be taken lightly. It is possible that the researchers relationship with the participants may be tainted and the participants are only saying what they think the researcher wants to hear. For this case study, I began with only selecting participants from five out of six elementary schools in this district. I was not planning on including the school where I am employed. I did this because I wanted to interview teachers that I did not know personally. Knowing the participants personally may have tainted the data through personal associations. However, after careful consideration and approval from the IRB, I decided that it was important to include all six elementary schools, in order to get a clear picture of how all of the teachers in the whole district were feeling about the writing program. I wanted to give any teacher in the district that was using the program the opportunity to voice their experiences if they so chose. Throughout the data collection process I was very careful to be sure the findings and interpretations were accurate (Creswell, 2012). I used a process called triangulation, which will be discussed later in this paper.

In addition, it was important for me as the researcher to take a close look at my own personal bias regarding the central phenomena. I have used the new *Being a Writer* (2007) program for one year prior to the start of this research project. I found the program to enhance the community atmosphere in my classroom, as well as increase writing development of my students. One very important component of my personal teaching philosophy is to learn about my students and build their self-esteem. This can take many months. However, once they have

developed some confidence in themselves they become less self-absorbed and look to help others, which then strengthens the classroom community. Even though the new writing program has shown to be a success, I do include other self esteem builders to foster the positive social and emotional growth of my students. Personally, I believe a combination of academics and social and emotional activities to be the most successful in increasing self-esteem, creating a sense of belonging in the classroom, and promoting academic growth and development.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews I transcribed the data with the help of a program application called Dragon Dictate created by Nuance that converts voice to text. I listened to the interview in one ear and spoke the words into the text converter application. This was very time consuming and not without error. I had to go back many times to be sure all mistakes were corrected and punctuation was placed correctly. Creswell (2012) stated that the first step should be a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data, which allows the researcher to get a general sense of what it is all about and to begin to think about ways of organizing it. It is also important to immerse oneself in the details as a whole before trying to analyze the results (Creswell, 2012). When speaking aloud each interview into the voice converter I was able to relive each interview and get a closer glimpse of each participant's experiences while considering ways of organizing the data. The interviews were tape recorded with a Sony digital recorder and data was transcribed with the Dragon application that converts voice into text. After reading the data I completed a typological analysis. According to Hatch (2002) the researcher should read through the data and divide it into initial typologies. Since interviews

are taken on with a fairly focused purpose I already had some inkling of what categories might emerge ahead of time. Following transcription I read through each data set with one typology in mind and color-coded the text that related to that specific typology. As I continued to do this, I also looked for patterns, relationships, and themes to emerge. The typological model starts out deductively but also depends on inductive thinking within this approach for data that do not fit into a typology (Hatch, 2002). At this time I also looked for anything that may be contradictory to my findings. These interviews yielded rich data that helped to answer my original research question that is to what extent does building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners, foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing.

A final consideration in data analysis was to validate the findings. According to Creswell, (2012), this means that the researcher has to determine the credibility of the findings to be sure they are accurate. There are several ways to go about this. Triangulation is the process of corroborating the evidence. One method is member checking, where the typed report is given back to the informant to check for authenticity (Holosklo & Thyer, 2011). Member checking lets the participants review the findings and give feedback in relation to their accuracy. For this study each participant was sent their transcript and able to change it by adding or deleting text. When they were satisfied, they sent it back to me signed with their permission for me to analyze it. I received all fifteen transcripts back with minimal changes. All the hard work during the transcription process paid off. Other ways to confirm the findings were to share them with colleagues or experts on the topic (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I was fortunate that one of the program leaders in my district had just received her doctorate.

Therefore, I was able to share my findings with her. She helped me develop an excel spreadsheet and she asked me questions about the validity of my findings. The intent of validating the findings is to provide evidence of the accuracy of your report (Creswell, 2012). Finally, it is the obligation of the researcher to explore other explanations for his/her findings and to look for instances where the research does not match his/her own. This is called looking for discrepant cases. When a researcher offers alternative explanations, it can make the researchers findings more valuable (Coleman, 2009).

Qualitative Results

After receiving IRB approval, I immediately contacted the language arts program director. I shared a copy of my study with her and asked how I could be of help to the district. She came and met me at school and I shared my interview questions with her. She said that the most helpful question would be the question that asked how the teachers felt the writing program could be enhanced. I kept that in mind as I conducted the interviews. At this time she offered to give me the names of the teachers who had started piloting the program a few years prior. Next, I asked her to sign a Letter of Cooperation as we discussed confidentiality (Appendix A, p. 143). I was given twenty-seven names. She does not know which participants agreed to participate in the study. Following her visit, I sent Letters of Cooperation to the superintendent and the curriculum director. I felt it important that everyone be on board before I embarked on this study. Once they agreed and signed the Letters of Cooperation, I was ready to begin. Next, I sent out Letters of Invitation to five of the six elementary principals. After about a month, I received signed Letters of Cooperation from all. One principal went on and sent my Letter of Invitation out to her whole school and invited them all to participate and to

contact her if they were interested. At this time I had to contact her and explain that this study was completely confidential and the participants needed to respond to me when I invited them. Some administrators felt the need to be in control of all happenings in their buildings. For some of them it was hard to give up this control. I persevered and after a month of going back and forth I got all of the principal's permission. Lastly, I took the list of names I was given and sent out twenty-seven letters of invitation to participants. Their responses trickled in slowly.

As the letters of invitation trickled in, I set up appointments to meet the willing participants at their respective schools. When I arrived, we made small talk and then I went over how the interview would work. At this time I had two consent forms with me. I asked them to sign two. They kept one and I kept one for my records. At this time I recorded the interview and I asked my five interview questions. I also had a notebook with me to take any pertinent notes and observations. At the end, I asked if there was anything they wanted to add and I said thanked them for the interview. I told them that they would receive a copy of their transcript in the mail and they could add or delete if they wish. I asked them to sign the transcript and send it back to me.

As I got to interview number twelve, I questioned why I was not using my own school? If I really wanted a complete picture of the whole district and wanted to document the experiences of all teachers who were using the program and wanted to share, why should my school be left out? At this time I approached IRB with my concern and they gave me permission to include my own school (Appendix I, p.155). I gained permission from my principal and the last three interviews took place.

After each interview I transcribed the data using an application called Dragon Dictate

created by Nuance. I had to purchase a few Dragon applications before I was able to purchase the correct one for my cherished apple computer that has been my right hand throughout this journey. I transcribed by having an earpiece in one ear to hear and verbalized all voice from the interview into a headpiece that would take my voice and transcribe it into text. Many errors occurred and I had to go back and correct errors, but even having to do that the program was a real time saver. Following, I asked participants how they wanted their transcript sent back. They had three options, email, interoffice mail or postage mail. Most opted for interoffice with some using email. I sent them two copies. They had one to sign and return and one to keep. I wanted them to be comfortable with the confidentiality of their document. Once they reviewed it and added or deleted, they signed it and returned it. I did have to retrieve a few in the end. Some had just been busy and forgot to send it back. I was pleased when I had all fifteen in hand.

The next step was to analyze the data. According to Hatch (2002) there are several steps to be taken in analyzing your data. Step one is to identify typologies or themes. I created a few based on what I had heard from transcribing. Some typologies were that the teachers felt the program was limited in structure, they loved the student dialogue and they loved the read aloud books. I started with these few. Steps two and three referred to reading the data and making entries under each category, which is exactly what I did. I later typed this all up by categories. Steps four and five referred to looking for patterns and relationships and coding entries according to patterns. After the data were typed up, I looked for patterns and relationships within. Steps seven, eight and nine refer to identifying patterns, writing them in one sentence generalizations and selecting data excerpts to support your generalizations

(Hatch, 2002).

The teachers were all very willing to share their experiences with me. I was sure to make them comfortable in knowing that any information that they shared with me would be kept completely confidential and their names would never be used. Maintaining trust and confidentiality made the participants more willing to share their experiences with me. At this time all of the interviews were transcribed. They were typed up and kept in a pocket folder notebook each having their own pocket. On one side of the pocket was their signed consent form and on the other side of the pocket was their transcript. I kept them in a locked file cabinet. No personal identification information was typed onto the transcript. Transcripts were numbered in the order that they were transcribed.

I had two forms of looking at this data, one being by themes or typologies and one being how they answered the interview questions. I read each interview and as a theme arose I turned to the page in my notebook under that theme and wrote the interview number and what the participant said. I did the same for the interview questions. Later, I typed up all of this data to help to give me a complete picture of what was emerging. The more I worked with the data a more complete picture arose. I will begin with a discussion of how each interview question was answered and then I will discuss the findings by themes and discuss emerging patterns and relationships that arose.

Interview Question 1

The first interview question I asked the teachers was about their experiences with the *Being A Writer* (2007) program. Twelve of the teachers began piloting the program three years prior and had become more comfortable with the program after using it year after year. Other

teachers had the program in their classroom and had the opportunity to try it out if they so

chose to. All of the teachers had at least two years of experience using the program. According

to the teachers who began piloting the program, it took them a few years to get used to the new

layout. Being the first consistent writing program in the district was pleasing to many. Two out

of six schools did not use the program as prescribed and only used the read aloud books or parts

of the program. All fifteen of the teachers made positive comments about the program and one

hundred percent felt strongly that the program was lacking in structure and organization. They

felt that the pacing was too slow and that the program did not meet up to the expectations of the

district. One teacher stated:

> During the pilot we found out early on that we felt like it did not meet the expectations
>
> of our kids. We started integrating other programs. The *Being A Writer* (2007) program
>
> alone would not produce the type of writers that the district would expect. (Appendix J,
>
> 2013, p. 156)

With regards to the lack of structure of the program many teachers felt that the lessons were too

long and they were not able to get independent writing in. They felt that the students needed

more time to develop their own ideas and have more time for free writing from their hearts and

not about an animal that they read about in a story. Seventy three percent of the teachers used

supplemental materials that offered students more structure, such as how to create a beginning,

middle and end or how to add a catchy beginning to a story. All fifteen of the teachers asked for

supplemental texts or other material to enhance the program. Other supplements will be

discussed later in this paper.

Some positive experiences that the teachers had were that they did see an improvement in

writing skills and in students working together to help one another come up with ideas to add to their stories. The teachers and students enjoyed the read aloud texts as examples of good literature and samples of good writing. In addition, students' loved sharing their stories and had improved their listening skills while they listened to their partner read and ask pertinent questions. Overall, the teachers enjoyed the positive features about the program but were forced to supplement with other programs that offered more structure or got the students to think more in depth.
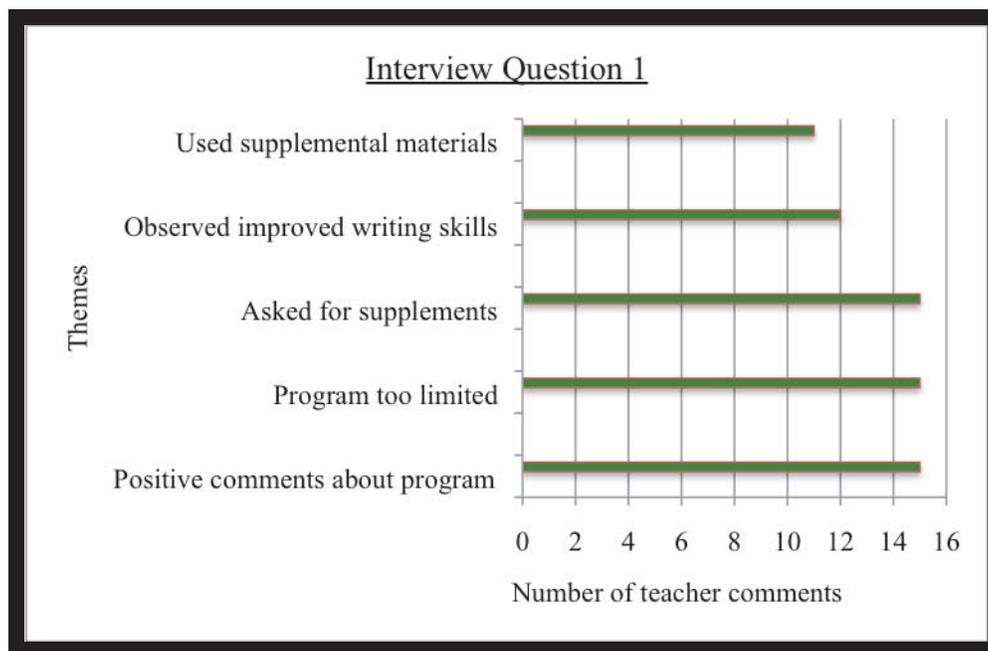
Figure 1. Interview Question 1. What are your experiences with the *Being a Writer* (2007) program?

This graphical representation shows that although teachers made many positive comments about the program, they equally felt that the program was too limited and asked for

supplemental materials. Twelve teachers spoke of seeing an increase in writing skills, while eleven teachers discussed different materials they used to supplement the program.

Interview Question 2

The second interview question posed to the teachers was if they felt the new writing program increased students writing development. Overwhelmingly, all of the participants stated that the program had made a difference in their students writing ability. One teacher indicated:

I definitely see an increase in their details, definitely in their fiction stories.

I feel that they use the model text to really model their own writing and they

get the ideas. I find their vocabulary, this year especially their vocabulary is

more in-depth and advanced. (Appendix K, p. 163)

Every teacher felt that their students had become better writers by elaborating on main events. Eighty percent of the teachers said the students had become less apprehensive about writing and that they were writing for longer periods of time. A big component, actually addressed in my next question, but was often discussed during this question was the fact that the students were working together and really engaging. This same teacher stated, "They do share with their partners, they reflect on each other's work and help their partners. They help them to add more to their piece." (p. 176). They were listening to each other's stories and actually were making suggestion for improvements. Next, the child would go back taking the suggestions and create a better story. The teachers were excited about the student dialogue because it enhanced social skills and it also gave the students a time to share and validate their work, while at the same time the teacher could either walk around the room and encourage students or work one on one. Working one on one seemed to be an issue that most felt was the most beneficial way to teach

writing but most teachers lacked the time with such a stringent curriculum to meet.

All fifteen teachers complimented the read aloud texts as models of good writing that the students could imitate. They felt that the read aloud literature books were engaging and inspired students to go back and write as the author did. These read aloud text books were especially chosen for the program as a way of showing what good writing looks like. At the same time that teachers were using the read aloud text, they also felt it important to create their own models of how a story should be composed. Some met this goal by writing a class story, others placed up charts and some wrote in a personal journal as examples of good writing. Modeling writing was an important component of teaching students what good writing looks like.
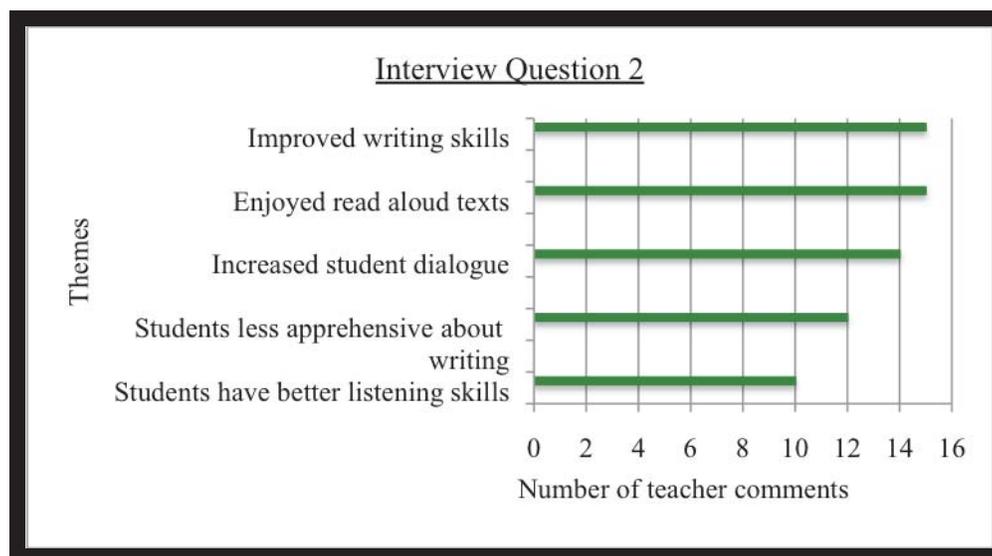
Figure 2. Interview Question 2. How has the *Being a Writer* (2007) program affected student's writing development?

This graphical representation shows that teachers felt the new writing program did increase

their student's writing development. They overwhelmingly enjoyed the read aloud texts and saw an increase in student dialogue. In addition, they found that students were less apprehensive about writing and that they had better listening skills.

Interview Question 3

The third interview question asked the teachers how they felt the Being A Writer Program (2007) affected students' social skills. This question elicited the most responses. Teachers responded that the following five areas showed improvements. They included improved listening skills, an increase in student dialogue, students learning together, students learning to positively critique each other's work and positive character building. I did have one discrepant case that felt that the writing program focused too much on social skills and not enough on writing skills.

First I'd like to share what one teacher said about improved social skills. According to this participant:

> I think the fact that they actually share with each other allows them to really
>
> have to be active listeners. They have to listen to each other because they are
>
> expected to give feedback. I think it totally makes a difference because they
>
> really want to hear from their peers, they're listening to their peers, they're
>
> getting ideas maybe that they didn't think of. It's about being respectful about
>
> listening to their partner and giving positive feedback, that's important.
>
> They have to learn that. It's a learned respect. (Appendix L, p. 171)

Students share their writing pieces and each has to be an active listener in order to make suggestions to the other. This can be difficult for the younger students but the teacher's model

in the hopes that as the students progress through the grade levels they will become better

listeners. The program also increases student dialogue with students working together learning

to critique each other's work and building class community. One participant had not worked on

building a social environment prior and was quite surprised with the results as she stated:

> I think in the past not ever really trying to build the social environment and
>
> writing, that it was just strictly where you write and you come to the teacher, that
>
> aspect. I think that they do, they're excited to hear each other when they share as a
>
> whole class. Some of those lessons are building that caring community and we go over
>
> that. (Appendix M, p. 178)

Ninety three percent of teachers expressed that the dialogue was good and it helped students to

build respect for one another. Students were excited to share their stories and they encourage

each other. One teacher went on to say that, "they applaud each other and that boosts their self

confidence. It boosts self esteem because they know they are reading each others work and

they want to help each other" (p.194). Overall, this question had a variety of positive responses.

I believe with the Common Core State Standards (Center On Educational Policy, 2011) coming

into the arena in the next school year, the big focus will be on test scores and much less on

building a classroom community based on listening skills, empathy, respect and sharing.

Teaching to the test while placing less emphasis on personal communication and creating

caring classroom atmospheres is of significant concern to some educators (Brannon, 2008;

Cavanagh, 2008). One teacher participant commented on the lack of personal communication

going on in the world and how this writing program helped to get the conversation among

students rolling again. One teacher felt that the program focused too much on social skills and

not enough on writing as she stated:

> The social component focus is on turn and talk. By fifth grade they already
>
> know how to do it and can focus more on writing. It does affect their social
>
> development. They practice these skills throughout the day. I do not believe
>
> that the social skills taught throughout the program help their writing. It seems
>
> to make them better people but not better writers. (Appendix S, p. 223)

This teacher has a differing opinion. I believe there is a point to be recognized here. When writing skills are lacking, teachers want to teach more writing skills. Some might not feel that spending time on social skills will enhance writing skills. However, verbal communication is a precursor to writing with pencil and paper. If students are not able to communicate verbally and learn to agree and disagree in person, it will lead to difficulty in getting their thoughts down on paper. This could lead to difficulties in the future with interviews, communicating on college entrance exams or carrying on discussions with future employers. Therefore, the social skills taught through the *Being a Writer* (2007) program are useful to student's future success.
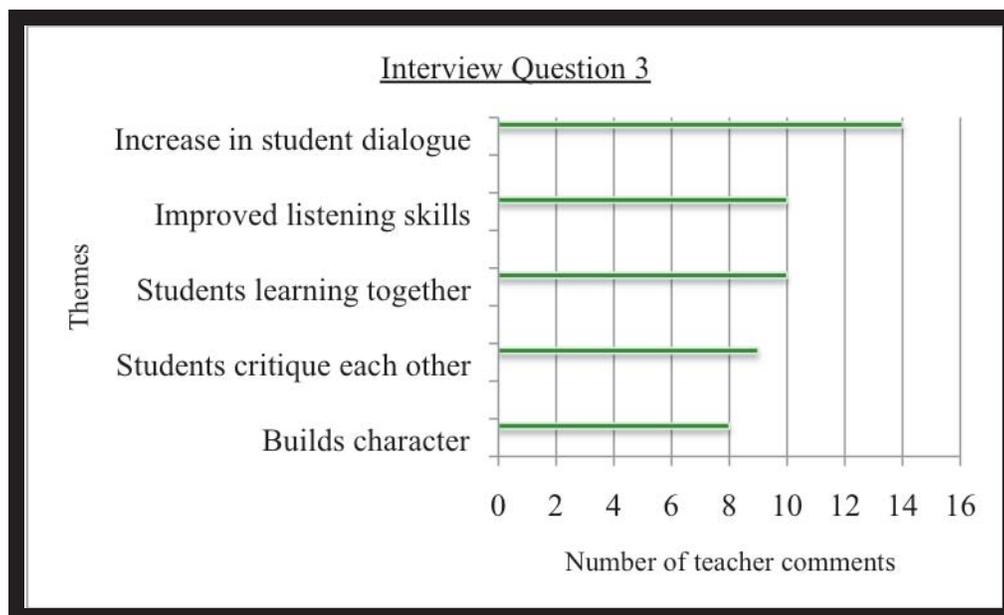
Figure 3. Interview Question 3. How has the *Being a Writer* (2007) program affected student's social development?

This graphical summary shows that the social skills taught through the new writing program increased student dialogue, improved student's listening skills and helped students learn how to work together. Furthermore, they noted that students were getting better at critiquing each other's work in a nice way thus building good character skills.

Interview Question 4

The fourth interview question asked teachers if the social skills taught through the new writing program helped improve students writing. Ninety three percent of teachers felt that increased student dialogue and that students spent time working together to become better writers increased writing skills as well as improved social skills. In addition, fifty three percent felt that character building and building a community of learners absolutely improved the

overall classroom atmosphere and the overall writing skills of the students.

One teacher noted,

> Absolutely, they are being heard and the sharing and listening to one another.
> They're moving closer to others, wanting to see their piece, sharing their piece and
> making new friendships. Yes, making new friendships and the dynamics. Perhaps it
> was a child that had no idea that there was another child on a soccer team like them,
> just by listening to their piece they gravitate to one another and want to write more.
> They connect that way. (Appendix N, 2013, p. 186)

Students share their writing pieces and create friendships as they dialogue with each other and have discussions about how their story can be improved. Students are taught to critique their partner's work, as they look for errors in punctuation or lack of inspiring adjectives. Sixty percent of teachers noted that when the students shared their ideas, it gave them a sense of comfort in the classroom leading them to take risks by trying different things with their writing. "They are not afraid to make mistakes or think that their idea is silly just because they know that they're supported by everyone. I believe that has helped" (p.178).
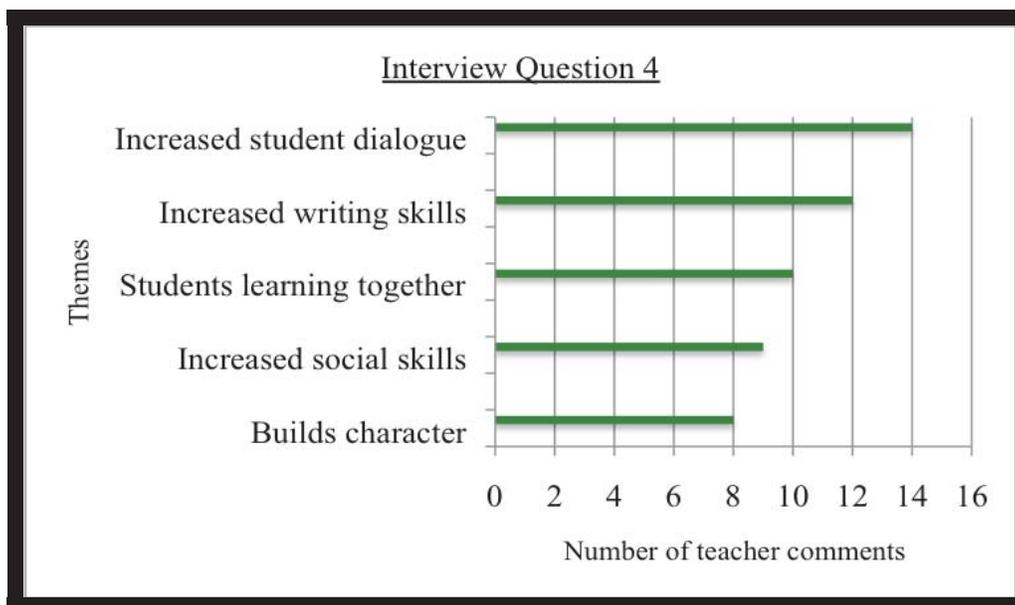
Figure 4. Interview Question 4. How do the social skills taught through the program improve student's writing development?

This graphical summary shows that fourteen of the teachers felt that the new writing program helped to increase student dialogue and twelve believed that the increase in communication skills helped students to become better writers. Additionally, themes of students learning together, increased social skills and building character were also mentioned as useful ways of building a classroom community and allowing students the opportunity to feel safe enough to take academic risks in all subject areas.

Interview Question 5

This leads me to my last interview question, which is how the program could be enhanced. This is the question that the district was the most interested in. All fifteen participants expressed concerns about the pacing being too slow, the program lacking structure

and the need for more resources. The program lacking structure was the theme that was repeated over and over again. The teachers felt that the *Being a Writer* (2007) program was too loose and floppy, not meaty enough and not enough to help students meet the expectations of the district. Due to this fact seventy three percent of the teachers were supplementing with other programs to fill in where this program was lacking. The teachers felt the program did not have enough explicit strategies in grammar or how to organize a story. Sixty six percent of teachers taught grammar separately. Some spoke of a grammar book that they used for morning work and teachers of younger students felt the book was too difficult for their children to complete independently. The lack of grammar lessons was a big concern as was noted by this participant:

> The one area that is lacking is the mechanics and grammar. It is in there, when we get to the proofreading portion of the unit that we're covering, but it's bare minimum. The grammar component can definitely be enhanced. I know it's better to teach the kids through their own writing how to improve their grammar skills but some times you need to teach it out of context as well, just so that they understand the concept of it. I don't think there are enough lessons on that aspect for the kids to do. (Appendix M, p. 178)

Other areas that all of the teachers felt could be enhanced were the lack of resources. Most wanted more book titles for re teaching, enrichment or differentiation. They loved the read aloud text books and felt that they were well chosen for the program but would like to have more of them to use as models of good writing.

A few outlier issues had to do with assessment. One teacher in a higher grade mentioned that the *Being a Writer* (2007) program teaches students how to write fiction and poetry but

when it came time for the Connecticut Mastery Test she had to stop teaching the program to teach students how to write a personal narrative, which is what is on the writing test. She had a concern that the writing program and the testing did not match up. A teacher at a lower grade level expressed the same concern. She had to stop the program to prepare her students for the district test that was a personal narrative that was given in December and personal narrative was not taught in the writing program until spring.

One of the most worrisome concerns to one of the teachers was that not all the teachers in all schools were using the writing program in the manner that it was intended. Some schools were using the program faithfully, others were using only the read aloud text and some schools were barely using the program at all. This was a concern to this teacher as she stated:

There are actually people who are not using the program. So it's hard that we're all going to be assessed by something and we're not all using it. We should all be using the same thing. Then we get a district wide writing prompt. Then our scores come out bad or worse. Then they ask us what we are doing wrong and why our test scores are so low. Is it because of the program or sticking to the program or something else. (Appendix O, p. 193).

There appears to be a disconnection in terms of all of the schools using the program in the intended manner. One teacher stated that her principal told the staff that as long as the teachers were meeting the goals of the district that they could use any writing program or combination of programs that they wished. This leaves the district back in a very similar place that it started. Looking back, the district had no formal writing program. The district then instituted a new writing program. Some teachers felt it was not stringent enough and the teachers go about

creating their own writing program using a variety of sources to meet the high demands of the

district. I find it interesting that communication is a precursor to putting words into written

form. This district has a lack of communication when it comes to the writing program of

choice. If the teachers could get together and share what they do use that helps to get the high

writing scores, than maybe a program could be created that would be consistent and pleasurable

to all at the same time while increasing writing scores and making the students more proficient

writers in the future.
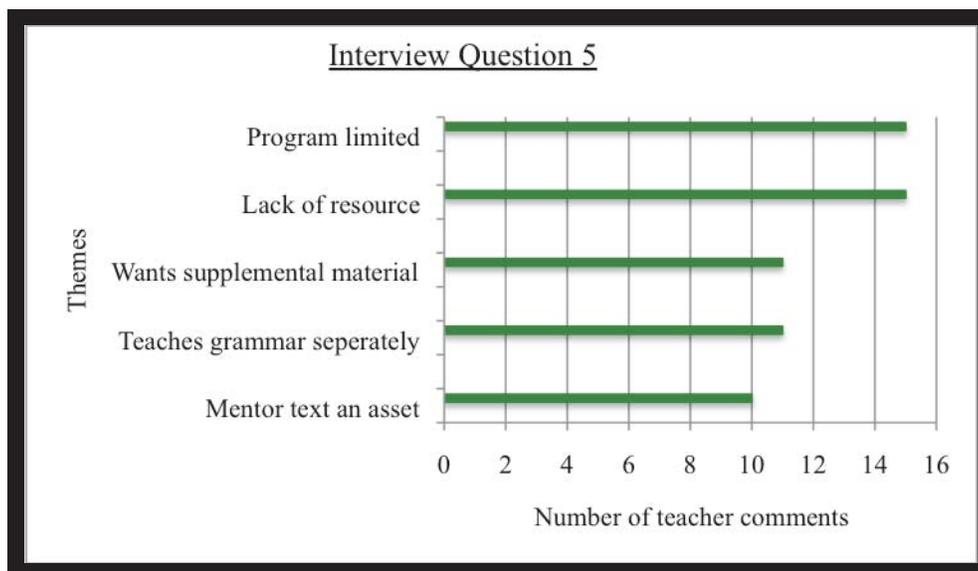
Figure 5. Interview Question 5. What aspects of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program do you feel

could be enhanced?

Lastly, this graphical summary shows that although the teachers felt that they saw an

improvement in writing skills and really enjoyed the mentor text they felt the writing program

was limited and lacking in structure. They supplemented grammar lessons with their own

materials and felt that they lacked the resources necessary to meet the high expectations of the district.

Themes

I later went ahead and analyzed my data by themes. I did this because I wanted to be sure that I had an accurate representation of what my participants were thinking and feeling about the writing program. According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010), for a study to be credible the researcher must be able to discuss ways in which they engaged in extensive and prolonged involvement in the field. In addition, a good qualitative study will provide extensive discussion and an in depth analysis through detailed descriptions of the outcomes (Lodico et al., 2010). Four very distinctive themes arose as I read and reread the participant's transcripts. The two areas of concern with the writing program were that it lacked organization and structure. Teachers used supplemental materials to fill in the missing pieces. Some teachers spoke of necessary enhancements. In addition, they had concerns that the writing program did not coordinate with district and state assessments. On a positive note, the two areas of improvement were that student's writing skills had improved and student's social skills had improved. I will discuss each of these more in depth in the following paragraphs.

Program Limited

All fifteen participants made comments that the writing program was limited in some way. Seventy three percent used the foundation of the program but supplemented with other programs, worksheets or books. They felt it was lacking in the structure and organizational piece that the students need when they first become writers, such as how to start a story with a catchy beginning or how to use special adjectives or words that catch the reader's attention.

The teachers had to add in their own grammar lessons and lessons on editing and revising. One teacher indicated:

> There is not curriculum built in for editing and revising. I must supplement. It's not meaty enough. The rigor is not there. It does not seem to have a positive impact as a stand alone. I have to supplement everything. Not enough variety of books. They are boring. Program has great ideas but not targeted to all audiences. It's a lot of work because there is not enough to it. (Appendix P, p. 200)

In addition, they felt the pacing was too slow and that the program did not push the students to become independent writers. Four of the teachers had concerns that the program did not meet the expectations of the district and were worried about the new Common Core State Standards (Center On Educational Policy, 2011) and how that will affect the teaching of writing.

The teachers who did supplement used other models such as the Lucy Calkin's Writers Workshop model. With the Lucy Calkins model students follow a format but were allowed to choose a topic of their own that was important to them. This allowed students to draw from their own personal experiences. They were excited to share about their life story with a friend. It also allowed them to write freely and become more independent and less dependent on the teacher. Other supplemental materials discussed were Barbara Mariconda Recipe For Writing. Five teachers spoke of condensing programs because the Being A Writer (2007) program did not meet the needs of their students. One teacher commented:

> I wish we could have all of the writing materials in one place and not have to go looking for things all the time. There are too many programs to choose from and I'm starting to get confused as which program to use. (Appendix P, p. 200)

All except one teacher expressed interest in enhancements such as stronger writing strategies, more grammar, more independent writing time, more read aloud books and even some higher level thinking questions to help prepare the students for when they take the district and statewide tests. More writing strategies and lessons in grammar would be helpful in that it would give the students the structure they need to learn to be strong writers. It would give them a format to start from and as they get older they could remove those formats and become more independent writers. When students learn how to write they begin to enjoy it and it increases their writing stamina as they begin to write for longer periods of time. One hundred percent of the teachers enjoyed the read aloud texts and noted that they could use more of these special pieces of literature. More texts would give teachers the opportunity to change books from year to year, use them for re teaching, enrichment or differentiation. Having models of good writing in the classroom is a good way for students to see what good writing looks like. To create higher level thinking questions, teachers could work together with their reading consultant or program leader to create them and share them among the whole district. This is a great idea to give students practice before the district and state exams. These are some concerns of the teachers that will be shared at the district level in the hopes that some of these obstacles can be remedied.

Writing Skills

One hundred percent of the teachers were pleased to report that they had seen an increase in student writing skills. Students had become more comfortable with their own writing. Teachers felt more comfortable with the new writing program after using it for a couple of years. One teacher stated that, "When I used the program faithfully I was surprised at

the student's improvement in writing" (p.199). Every teacher expressed a concern about the program not being structured enough and all used supplemental materials. All fifteen of the teachers loved the read aloud text books and used them as models of good writing. The read aloud texts were specifically chosen to read aloud to the students to give examples of a specific skill that they may be working on. Teachers felt that in order for the students to get a clear picture of how a well written piece looked they would often model by writing a class story, changing a poor sentence into a glowing sentence or do a mini lesson on how to add sensory details following the reading of one of these texts. Two teachers enjoyed the majority of read aloud texts but occasionally felt that some texts were too young for their grade level and went out and bought their own text to use to teach the lesson. Others teachers asked for more texts to change things up a bit from year to year.

Teacher feedback was very positive when it came to discussing student work. It appeared that students became better at writing for longer periods of time, adding more descriptive details to their stories and were more comfortable sharing their work with others. One teacher noticed a big change as she stated:

A big change in the way they get excited about writing. I see an increase in

them adding details to their fiction stories. Their vocabulary is more in depth.

The kids work together, it gives them a sense of comfort in taking risks and trying

different things. They are not afraid to make mistakes. They take more risks.

(Appendix K, p. 163)

In order for these improvements to occur teachers stated that they were hard at work piecing together a variety of supplemental materials that increased student's writing achievement in a

way that would make their district proud. One teacher stated that, "it's not a complete program and that is why we have open weeks to add in any missing pieces" (p. 223). This was not discussed by any of the other teachers during the interviews. Overall, student writing had shown wonderful improvements and teachers felt good about their student's progress.

The teachers that I did interview were very honest and open and were happy to share the instructional methods they were using in their classroom. Six teachers spoke of having special folders with pockets for a variety of uses. Three teachers discussed that brainstorming ideas for writing a story was helpful, especially for students who had difficulty coming up with ideas. Students often helped each other by reading a friends piece and making suggestions. When students know their work is going to be read by a friend they put in more effort. One teacher enjoyed the dialogue and stated:

It helps them to become better writers by taking others suggestions and going back and changing their stories. They are respectfully listening and learn to agree and disagree. The dialogue helps them feel less fearful about their writing. They become more risk takers. (Appendix Q, p. 208)

 All fifteen of the teachers felt that dialogue was an important component of the program but seventy three percent were using the format from other programs and using the read aloud text while also including the student's sharing piece from the Being A Writer (2007) program. Each teacher used the instructional methods that worked best for their individual teaching style to get the results they were looking for.

As stated previously, all of the teachers really enjoyed the read aloud texts. These text were carefully selected and most were written by well know authors such as Ezra Jack Keats

or Eric Carle. The students enjoyed being read to from these texts and they were examples of how a story can be well written. Even though they enjoyed the texts, three teachers felt the read aloud texts took too long and took time away from independent writing. When the teachers followed the manual, they would often stop to ask questions and students would partner up and discuss the answer to the question and then share their answer with the class. This is the social aspect of the program that will be discussed coming up. Due to the fact that these read aloud texts took time away from actual writing, these teachers condensed lessons to give the students more time for writing.

Social Skills

There is no doubt that the Being A Writer (2007) program has a strong social component. The social component includes things like talking to your partner, listening and repeating what your partner said, maintaining eye contact while talking to your partner and learning how to agree or disagree in an appropriate manner. Later, students may write a story together or share their work with a partner who may make suggestions for improvement. The social skills if taught according to the program should be in place by the time students reach the upper grades so that they can spend more time writing and less time learning them. The teachers overwhelmingly saw an improvement in listening skills, student dialogue, students learning together by critiquing each other's work and character building. Each will be discussed briefly.

Listening skills are an important component of student learning. The younger students must be taught how to sit still and really focus on the teacher. For some students this skill comes naturally, for others it does not. If a student is looking out the window and thinking

about what they will be doing after school, they are not listening and may miss an important lesson. The teachers felt that this program teaches the students to be active listeners. When listening to their teacher or their partner they must face them and make eye contact. As the year goes on and students practice, they become better listeners and make better friendships and stronger relationships. One might ask what this has to do with good writing. Communication is a precursor to the written word and in an age of electronics it is vital that teachers continue to teach students listening skills and help them to build positive teacher and student relationships. As one teacher puts it, "They have become better listeners in an age of electronics. This teaches them to learn to listen. That is part of writing and communicating" (p.195).

Peer conferencing is another aspect of the program that allows students to learn from each other. With this program there is a great deal of peer conferencing. The lessons build a caring community. Students work together and read each other's work and make suggestions such as adding a sparking detail or adding punctuation. They may even ask a few questions to get the writer to think more about their story and add more. One hundred percent of the teachers enjoy the positive classroom community atmosphere. One teacher stated that, "Kids see other kids amazing writing and that inspires them to go back and become better writers. They want to help each other" (p. 207). The teachers were pleasantly surprised at the way the program gets students actively engaging together. One teacher was amazed because she had a class of students that did not particularly get along well and using the program helped her students build relationships and gain a better understanding of each another. Teachers do their best to fit in one on one teacher conferencing but with many time limitations they often end up

spending time with their most needy students.

The *Being a Writer* (2007) program includes character building. Students build confidence and social skills. Four of the teachers mentioned that their students were taking more risks because they felt that they would not be laughed at if they tried a new idea. The program fosters positive relationships and builds responsibility. One teacher told me that:

It holds the students accountable, especially when they have to listen to their partner and repeat back what their partner said. It's about respect, they learn to show empathy and respect for others. Partners share and listen to each other. It's a good skill to work on with each other. (Appendix R, p. 216)

Students learn how to critique each other's work in a nice way. In the younger grades this takes a bit more practice since students are just learning how to get their ideas onto the paper. In the older grades it just works. What could better than a classroom of students who feel comfortable working together to help each other learn? According to Arum (2011) and White (2007) maintaining positive social relationships in the classroom is vital in creating safe and orderly learning environments.

Assessment

Assessment is an ongoing issue in the field of education. There are many questions that revolve around the topic of assessment. Are there too many assessments and not enough teaching time? Are teachers giving formative assessments or summative assessment or both? Are teachers teaching to the test? The questions can go on and on. Two teachers brought up the issue of assessment. One teacher was very happy that the whole town was using the new writing program. She stated that, "With everyone using the new writing program it levels the

playing field when it comes to assessment" (p.184). What this teacher did not know is that not all the schools are using the new program as prescribed. What she meant was that now when test scores are compared by school there will be no question as to why one school has higher scores than another school. The other teacher was very upset because she knew that all the schools were not using the writing program. She followed the curriculum as prescribed because she was doing her job the way she was told. When assessments came out and schools were compared her school did not do so well and the teachers were questioned as to why their scores were lower. This upset her very much since she was teaching using the new writing program as she was trained to. She noted, "That skews the scores and makes us look like we're not doing what were supposed to" (p. 213). What is the answer to this difficult question? Remember the principal who stated that he did not care what program the teachers used as long as they met the goals of the district? These are real issues that need to be discussed by administration. These teachers feel that it is unfair to be judged based on a test score, especially since they are using the program they were trained in and told to use.

Other issues that came up with assessment were, that the Being A Writer (2007) program teaches fiction writing and poetry and does not teach personal narrative until later in the year. Students in second grade are given an assessment on personal narrative in December when they are not prepared. One teacher said, "I stop using the program a few weeks before the CMT to prepare the students for a personal narrative" (p. 241). This also came up with a teacher in fourth grade. She also said that she stopped the program to prepare her students ahead of time for the personal narrative on the Connecticut Mastery Test and that the *Being a Writer* (2007) program did not prepare her students for the test. These assessment issue needs

to be looked at closer by the district leaders. Maybe those few open weeks should be put in before the exam in order to allow the teachers to prepare their students.

Evidence of Quality

One of the most important considerations in the data analysis is to validate the findings. The researcher must determine the credibility of the findings to be sure they are accurate (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation is the process of using multiple sources, investigators or theories to confirm your findings (Merriam, 2009). Throughout this process I have been sure to identify all personal bias. I did not interject personal bias during the interview process or while transcribing the interviews. I also used member checking. After each interview was transcribed it was sent back to the participants for review. At this time they were able to add or delete anything from the transcript. All fifteen of the interview transcripts were returned. Each transcript had been signed confirming its accuracy and giving me permission to use them for this study. While analyzing the data, I had several personal conversations with a few participants to be sure that I had an accurate understanding of their accounts. I compared and cross checked my data by keeping two notebooks, one for interview questions and one for emerging themes and typologies. I spent many hours going over the data and typing up the many pages of hand written notes. Information from both notebooks confirmed that the findings from both notebooks remain accurately similar. Other ways to validate the findings are to share them with colleagues (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I was fortunate to have the assistance of the language arts program leader, a principal, a fellow colleague and the science program leaders to review my work and check for accuracy. The science program leader had recently finished her doctorate and she assisted me in validating the finding and organizing the

data. Lastly, it is the responsibility of the researcher to identify any discrepant cases. Not all of the data fit with the anticipated outcomes of this research study. All of the participant's experiences and viewpoints have been clearly represented. Triangulating all of these sources assure the high quality of this research project.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of students' experiences with a new writing program in six suburban elementary schools in Connecticut. According to the Developmental Study Center (2007), child development experts have shown through their research that children learn best when they work together as a community and they feel safe physically and emotionally to take academic risks. The interviews completed yielded rich data that is very telling in how the teachers feel about the writing program, the successes of their students, and how the program can be enhanced.

All of the teachers felt that the *Being a Writer* (2007) program was lacking in organization and structure. Many teachers supplemented with other programs to meet the high demands of the district. Teachers were interested in enhancements such as more lessons in grammar, editing and revising, as well as more read aloud texts for re teaching, enrichment or differentiation. The teachers felt that student writing had improved through their teaching methods and the social skills taught throughout the program. They added where needed, modeled lessons, bought their own age appropriate texts and stopped teaching in order to prepare students for specific exams.

Social skills were an asset of this writing program. Teachers reported better listening skills and an increase in student dialogue. Students communicated together and helped one

another by reading and critiquing each other's work. Teachers worked one on one with students as appropriate. Teachers and students felt the positive effects of the program by stating that they enjoyed being in a respectful classroom community. Due to the comfort of being in this community atmosphere students felt at ease in taking risks with their writing by adding more details or writing for longer period of time. Character building was evident by the respect and empathy that students showed for one another. The original premise of this study was to discover if creating caring classrooms coupled with teaching the required core curriculum did in fact increase student's ability to communicate more effectively and increase student achievement levels. Teachers in this district were supplementing the writing program to meet the high demands of the district. However, it appears that students who took comfort in the relationships that they had built with their teachers and other students were more comfortable in taking risks and developed higher writing skills. An excellent study for the future would be to compare the academic scores of two classrooms, one classroom that teaches social skills and one classroom that only focuses on academics.

Other areas of concern to teachers regarded assessments. Teachers had to stop teaching the writing program to prepare students for specific exams that the writing program did not prepare them for. Also, not all of the schools were using the writing program in the manner that it was intended. Therefore, when test score were compared, some scores were not as high as others. This made some schools look as if they are not doing their job. This was very upsetting to some teachers who were only following the program as the district had asked them to follow.

Overall, it looks as if more lessons in grammar, editing and revising are needed. The

teachers need more open weeks to prepare students for exams. More read aloud texts would be an asset to each classroom. The district needs to meet with the teachers and find out what is working in their classrooms and compile what seems to be working for them. Another option would be to look for another writing program. The *Being A Writer* (2007) program did have some outstanding features such as building a classroom community that allowed students to feel comfortable taking risks in their studies.

A project that I felt would be very worthwhile would be to create three days of professional learning workshops for new teachers on student teacher relationships, learning communities in the classroom, cooperative learning and putting a stop to bullying. I could see from the current data results that when students felt a sense of comfort in their classroom communities they were more willing to take academic risks. With the big focus today on test scores, I believe this would be an opportune time to create this type of workshop in order to let policy makers, administrators, new teachers and old alike, understand the importance of building caring and respectful relationships with their students. The implications for positive social change include making adults aware of the enormous impact that they have on their students self worth and the importance of empowering our students by building strong relationships and developing caring communities in the classroom with them. Teachers can create exciting classroom lessons that students can help create and are excited to get involved in. Students will be excited to come to school as their achievement scores increase and they become better citizen of the world. In conclusion, it is very important that administrators, teachers and policymakers be made aware of the importance of integrating social emotional skills and academic skills together at an early age in order to maximize students' potential to be

successful communicators in the global workforce in the 21st century (Helterbran, 2009; Zins, & Elias, 2007).

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards, many educators are focused on raising test scores and have less time to consider the impact that social and emotional development has on students' academic achievement. Students who have developed strong relationships with their teachers and peers have increased social and emotional stability and are more comfortable in taking academic risks (Chaney, 2011; DSC, 2007). In a school district in southwestern Connecticut, teachers began using a new writing curriculum. Prior to using the new writing curriculum, teachers had a disjointed writing program and used self-created materials to teach writing. The new writing curriculum had a strong emphasis on building respectful relationships as a foundation to being a successful writer.

This study was designed to determine whether building respectful relationships with teachers and peers did actually increase students' writing skills and, more importantly, whether it increased students' communication and social skills, and whether the increase in social skills actually did help to improve writing achievement. The study results indicated that students who had developed good listening skills became better at communicating with teachers and peers. With the increase in social communication, students were better able to get their ideas and thoughts on to paper. Thus, they developed better writing skills.

As I pondered the importance of building respectful relationships in increasing academic achievement, I decided to create 3 days of professional learning workshops on

creating relationships with teachers and peers, building the classroom community, and putting

a stop to bullying as a way to educate teachers, administrators, and policy makers on the

benefits of not only teaching academic skills, but also including social skills in instruction.

Professional learning is important in that it requires educational professionals to rethink their

basic understandings involving curriculum, teaching, and learning (Klein, 2008; McDonald,

Klein, & Riordan, 2009). By taking these workshops, educators can be equipped with new

knowledge and skills that they can take back to their classrooms and apply. They will be better

able to meet the needs of their students and increase academic achievement.

Brief Description of the Project

The project was created after analyzing and synthesizing the results of the current study

titled *Teacher-Student Relationships and Student Writing Achievement*, which showed that

students who were in classrooms where they felt that their teachers and peers cared about them

were more comfortable in their classroom setting and in taking the academic risks necessary to

increase their achievement levels. For this study, I interviewed 15 teachers in Grades 1 through

5 who piloted a new writing program. The teachers overwhelmingly saw an increase in

communication skills and an increase in students writing achievement. A previous literature

review indicated that students who were part of a caring classroom community and had good

relations with their teachers and peers felt more comfortable in their school setting and

developed higher self-esteem, which led to better school performance (Mayer, 2007; Pianta, &

Stuhlman, 2004; Szente, 2007). The project entails 3 days of professional learning workshops

to instruct teachers on ways to get to know their students better, infuse cooperative learning

into their curriculum, and stop bullying in the classroom. It is fitting that teachers attend these

workshops because the more time teachers spend in professional learning workshops, the more likely they are to change their practice. By working together in learning communities during the workshops, teachers will receive maximum benefits (American Educational Research Association, 2005).

The workshops have been designed to not only teach participants about building a classroom learning community based on caring relationships, but also inspire participants to create their own learning community as they take the workshop. During the workshop, participants will work together in groups to get to know each other; they will have discussion time, sharing, role playing, problem solving, and group activities. They will also learn theories and facts, watch video segments, and build relationships with their peers. While I am giving the workshop, I will also be showing participants how a caring community is created. According to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008), one of the best ways to improve student learning is to invest in teaching the adults who work with students. The workshops would be appropriate for new teachers coming into the profession, veteran teachers, administrators, and even parents. This information has real implications for social change not only in the classroom, but also in the world today. Professional learning is important to keep teachers abreast of current trends. With this information, they can bring new knowledge and life into their classrooms while engaging students in increasingly successful learning experiences (Joyce & Showers, 2003).

Goals of the Project

One of the goals of this project is to improve learning for all students. When students take comfort in their classroom settings and have good relationships with their teachers and

peers, they perform better academically. The 3 days of professional learning will help to give teachers the skills needed to begin building safe learning communities. The second goal is to create my own learning community where the teachers feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions. During the workshop, teachers can observe the caring learning community being created. They will actually participate in creating this caring learning community collectively. My hope is that this will appeal to the teachers and impact them to go back to their classrooms and implement this practice. With the advent of the Common Core State Standards at the doorstep, teachers need to be aware of the importance of including social skills in their teachings while making sure that all students feel a sense of belonging. In the world today, students are faced with innumerable situations that can negatively impact their social and emotional development and thus hinder their academic success. With world leaders at odds, inequalities among the rich and poor, violence becoming commonplace, illegal behavior, and Internet predators, it is more vital today than ever that teachers, administrators, and policy makers be made aware of the consequences of only teaching to the test (Zins & Elias, 2007).

A third goal is to let teachers know the importance of interacting with their students. Students who have strong relationships with their teachers and peers and feel part of a community and are more apt to apply themselves in their academic work. When students' needs are met and they have reached a level of comfort they can leave those concerns behind and concentrate on their studies. Teachers should be friendly and open, demonstrate respect through verbal and non verbal communication, and teach students the importance of respecting one another (Danielson, 2007). In addition, teachers need to be on alert to bullying behavior

and put an end to it as soon as it is discovered. The fourth goal is to instruct teachers on how to put a stop to bullying.

The PowerPoint slides I have created are filled with rich information such as theories, literature, ideas, and suggestions on ways to improve teacher-student relations, create cooperative learning groups, and put a stop to bullying. The final goal is to reach as many educators as possible and arm them with the facts in the hope that they will incorporate these skills into their classrooms. By viewing these slides, one can learn about building relationships, creating a learner-centered environment based on cooperative learning, and taking actual steps to reduce bullying. When teachers learn about these topics, they will be helping to reduce violence, depression, and bullying behavior and help to make the world a safer place to live.

Scholarly Rationale for Why the Project Genre Was Chosen

I chose to create three professional learning workshops because I felt that this structure had the potential to reach the most people. The professional learning workshops were created as a 3 day series. However, each workshop can also be given separately. The workshops are interactive and done in PowerPoint. I will present the PowerPoint presentation while participants follow along with a handout. On the handout are fill-in-the -blank areas on important things to remember. These packets can be taken back to participants' classrooms to use as reference sheets in creating lesson plans. We will also have discussion groups that will enrich the learning experience and help the students get to know one another on a more personal basis. Students will work in groups to complete activities, participate in role playing and explore their own past assumptions about these important topics.

It is important that teachers continue to be life long learners. According to Learning Forward (2013), an organization that promotes professional learning, teachers should be active participants in choosing the content of their learning, how this learning occurs and how to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning. When teachers continue to learn new methods to practice in their classrooms, students benefit. After attending these workshops teachers will be equipped with new suggestions, methods and ideas on how to build caring relationships with their students. Through taking these workshops teachers will learn about trust, empathy, active listening and motivation. One of our main jobs as teachers is to make the students feel safe and that they are in a trusting learning environment (William Glasser Institute, 2010; Brooks & Richman, 2010). When students feel safe they are more likely to perform well academically.

I have chosen Powerpoint slides as a way of presenting information to my audience. The slides are a way for me to keep my information organized and a way for me to stay focused during a presentation. The slides can also be viewed via the computer giving me ability to reach a wider audience. Using a slide show presentation will allow me to direct the audience's attention to the slides so that they may learn pertinent information. I chose this format because I was able to include video segments that appeal to the audience's emotional side, making the information that much more interesting to learn. In addition, I was able to include charts, graphs and pictures. The slides can be moved through quickly or slowly. They can be stopped during discussion points as well. The slide show presentation can be copied onto paper and disseminated. I enjoyed making the three presentations titled, Teacher Student Relationships and the Classroom Environment, Learning Communities in the Classroom and Putting A Stop To Bullying. Staff professional development is critical to successful student

learning (Servage, 2008).

Scholarly Rationale for How the Problem Will Be Addressed

The main goal of the project is to give teachers knowledge and share with them the importance of taking a deep look at the children in their classroom in a different way. By getting to know the child on a more personal basis the teacher develops a relationship with the child. The teacher can find out the child's likes and dislikes, ask about family, and even talk a little about him or herself so that the students see that he/she is a human being just like they are (Brooks & Richman. 2010). By creating a relationship with the child the teacher can later build those relationships between children, and teach them the proper way to listen and respond, and even apologize if they do something wrong, thus building the classroom community. The classroom community is built on trust and respect for self and others. Once the students take comfort in the classroom community they are willing to try new things such as raising their hand or trying a new math problem or even adding another sentence to their story. Students who take comfort in their classroom setting perform higher on academic achievement tests (DSC, 2007; Chaney, 2011). Once teachers are equipped with the new information and the importance of creating a caring classroom atmosphere they will be ready to apply their new skills and will be encouraged when they see the smiling faces of students making progress both socially and academically.

Constructivism is an approach to teaching and learning. It stems from the writings of well-respected cognitive psychologists, such as Dewey, Vygotsky and Piaget. Today this form of teaching is a powerful framework to understanding how children learn. With constructivism, it is the learner who is actively engaged in the learning process (Danielson,

2007). Teachers traditionally focused on what they were teaching and not as much on how the students were learning. Students then become passive learners and do not take responsibility for their own learning (Blumberg, 2008).

Today, learner centered environments foster academic development. In a learner-centered environment the teacher is more of a facilitator. Blumberg (2008) stated that teachers in learner-centered environments design lessons and activities in which students interact with the material, the teacher and each other. In addition, the teacher accommodates different learning styles by utilizing multiple teaching techniques that coordinate with students learning goals. Students have been more successful in learner-centered environments than in the traditional model of teaching (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

Classrooms should function as communities where students work together, draw on each other's strengths and collaborate for the betterment of the whole. Teachers and students uplift each other and are connected in such as way as to transform each other to higher levels emotionally and academically (DuFour et al., 2008). This is the premise of cooperative learning. "Cooperative learning, by definition requires students to work together to accomplish shared learning goals, meaning an individual student can accomplish his or her learning goal only if the other members of the group achieve theirs (Johnson & Johnson, 1994)."

With violence on the rise and growth in mental illness teachers need to be aware of the importance of infusing social skills in with their content curriculum. By taking these professional learning workshops teachers will gain this pertinent information. Building strong relationships and creating classroom communities will help students find a safe haven. Students will be eager to come to school and participate, especially when they feel accepted

and that they belong. Students want to belong and be a part of the community. Every student has a need to belong. It is important that all students experience a sense of belonging in school. As Bob Sullo (2007) eloquently stated:

The need for belonging or connecting motivates us to develop relationships and cooperate with others. Without the need for belonging and cooperating, we would only strive to be independent. The social, cooperative instruction propels us beyond independence toward interdependence and community. Schools can be environments were students (and staff) satisfy this drive to connect and feel a sense of belonging. Building a spirit of connection and community is essential to creating a need satisfying school characterized by high achievement.

Literature Review

This literature review was conducted by collecting data from multiple sources. I used the Walden Universities library as my main database. Within the library I searched through the Education Research Information Center (ERIC), Sage Full Text Articles, Education Research Complete and Pro Quest Central. I also searched through Google Scholar to collect peer-reviewed journals, books and scholarly articles. The search terms used were student teacher relationships, bullying, violence, cooperative learning, professional learning and trust. Most studies that I did review were completed within the last five years. I do include a few outdated journals and books because of the importance of the material and relevance to the study results.

It is unfortunate that violence has become common in our world today. A study conducted by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education (2002) titled Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States found that

in more than three quarters of the 37 school shootings since 1974, the attackers felt

"persecuted, bullied or threatened." Seventy three percent of the attackers had a grievance

against one of their targets prior to the attack. Over 90% involved young boys who were

relentlessly tormented and bullied because they were considered unmanly or not aggressive

enough (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

In addition, nearly 3.2 million youths are moderately to severely bullied each year.

Seventy seven percent of students have been bullied mentally, physically or verbally, with

teens being especially vulnerable (American Medical Association, 2013). Approximately

160,000 students per day stay home because of bullying (National Association of School

Psychologists, 2003). Bullying causes low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. The World

Health Organization (2004) and the Center for Disease Control (2013) tell us that 3.22 million

children ranging in ages seven to seventeen have been treated for depression in the last five

years. This number has doubled from the previous five years. By the year 2020 depression has

been projected to reach second in the global burden of disease (Center for Disease Control,

2013). These statistics are frightening. The definition of bullying created by stopbully.org

(2013) stated that:

> bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived
>
> power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over
>
> time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting
>
> problems.

 Duke University professors conducted a study on the degree that childhood bullying affected

adult mental health disorders. Copeland, Wolke, Angold, and Costello (2013) followed more

than 1,000 youth, starting at the ages of 9, 11, and 13. The youth were interviewed each year until they turned 16. Follow-up interviews were then conducted into adulthood. Results of the study showed bullying elevated the rate of mental health problem later on in life. Some of the key findings were that victims of bullying had a higher chance of having agoraphobia, anxiety and panic disorders, were at risk for antisocial personality disorder, had a higher risk for adult depression and panic disorder. It has never been more vital that teachers take these matters very seriously.

Another study completed by Andreou, Didaskalou, and Vlachou (2007) sought to find out if four weeks of an anti bullying curriculum had any effect on student bullying behavior. The curriculum included classroom opportunities to raise self-awareness, self-reflection and problem solving situations focused on bullying. They used an experimental pre-test/post test design with a control group. The sample consisted of 454 students from Grades 4 and 6, in 10 primary schools in central Greece. The results indicated that the program contributed to a positive reduction in outsider behavior where the student remained silent allowing bullying to continue. The study also concluded that there was an increase in student self-efficacy and students intervening when they saw bullying occur. These are important finding and show that there is a need to have bully prevention programs going on in schools today (Barnes, Cross, Lester, Hearn, Epstein, & Monks, 2012).

The original premise of my study was to investigate if a new writing program that included academic skills and social skills made a difference in the way the students treated each other and in their work. The findings were that the social skill such as active listening, communication and empathy helped students to form better relationships with each other and

also improved their academic skills. School climate is a multifaceted issue in many

educational settings today (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008;

Harlow & Roberts, 2010). A positive school climate is a place where people are respected and

productive (Bluestein, 2011). It should be a climate that fosters values and expectations that

support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe (Cohen, 2009). Based on these

findings and based on the disturbing statistics above, I felt that creating 3 days of workshops

on *Putting a Stop to Bullying, Learning Communities In the Classroom, and Teacher Student

Relationships In the Classroom Environment* seemed fitting. Professional learning is important

to keep teachers abreast of new trends. They can bring this new knowledge back to their

classrooms while engaging students in successful learning practices (Joyce & Showers, 2003).

With regards to professional learning, teachers should be active participants in their own

learning by choosing the content of their learning, how they will obtain it and how to evaluate

its effectiveness (Learning Forward, 2013). If attending or viewing these workshops in person

or online helps teachers change the way they relate to their students, this will have a huge

impact on reducing violence, depression and other mental health disorders. They will be a big

part of making the world a better and safer place for all. Teachers who continue their education

and are supported by their administration have a greater willingness to take part in the school

decision-making process and will be able to use this education to make positive social change

and impact student's social development, academic development and bring more peace to the

world (Pankake & Moller, 2007).

Many educators today have become so focused on raising test scores that they have less

time to consider the impact that social and emotional development have on student's academic

achievement and in our world today. They are so focused on what they are teaching that they

are not attuned to how social, emotional and ethical dimensions affect the larger system.

(Cohen & Hamilton, 2009). Many past theorists have suggested that classrooms be social

interactive places for students to learn. John Dewey was an educational reformer whose ideas

influenced education and social reform. He felt that education and learning were a social

interactive process and that students thrived in environments when they were allowed to

interact with the curriculum. He believed that students should take part in their own learning

(Dewey, 1938). Lev Vygotsky (1978) a Russian psychologist believed that social interaction

was vital in the development of cognition. He developed a construct called the *zone of*

proximal development, which was the level of development students attain when they engage

in social behavior. Similarly, Carl Rogers an American psychologist admonished against

teaching to the test and suggested building a relationship with the students and discussed the

importance of helping students learn how to learn (Rogers, 1961). Roger's theory focused on

learner-centered environments that not only focus on the academic curriculum but also focus

on allowing students to learn to work together for the better good of the classroom community.

The importance of building a classroom community cannot be understated. According

to Blumberg (2008), in traditional classrooms the teacher's role is directive. The teacher

adheres to a fixed curriculum and disseminates information while students listen passively.

Learning is based on repetition. Assessments are testing and checking for correct answers. On

the flip side, classrooms that function as learning communities are classrooms where student's

work together, they collaborate and everyone helps each other to reach higher levels

emotionally and academically (DuFour et al., 2008). The teacher is more of a facilitator and

interacts with the students. The teacher allows the students to see them as a real person with feelings, likes and dislikes. Every interaction with a student is an opportunity for a teacher to learn something about that child (Ridnouer, 2006).

Cooperative learning groups when implemented well have a high impact on student achievement (DuFour et al., 2008). When students interact in their cooperative groupings they develop awareness and understanding that they are not likely to achieve if they had not been in cooperative groups (McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavalek, 2005). Learning together is need satisfying, especially the need for power and belonging, than learning individually (Glassar, 1998). Lavasani, Afzali, and Afzali, (2011), completed a study on cooperative learning and social skills. Their study was conducted with 74 Grade 1 students. The method of study was a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test/post-test and a control group. Their findings showed that students in the experimental group showed significantly higher levels of social skills than the control group. They concluded that cooperative learning was a more effective method of teaching than the traditional model.

There is much research to support that students in caring classroom environments feel a sense of belonging, have strong relationships with their teachers and peers, have higher self esteems and are more motivated to perform at higher academic levels (Chaney, 2011; DSC, 2007). Teachers can begin by building caring relationships with their students starting with trust. Trust is at the core of all healthy relationships (Brooks & Richman, 2010; Carreno, & Drzal, 2011). According to Nel Noddings (2005), building trust is an enormous responsibility. Teachers can build trust by speaking to each child personally, maintaining eye contact, seeing the world through their eyes and always letting them feel you are on their side. Every child

needs to feel that they have someone whom they can trust to look up to (Gallager & Mayer, 2008; Kemp, & Reupert, 2012). A study on selective trust was completed by, Liu, Vanderbilt and Heyman (2013). Ninety, 5 and 6 year olds participated in the study. Students were randomly assigned to four experimental conditions. These students witnessed teachers offering advice to other students about hidden prizes or offering advice that was incorrect. The students trusted the adults who did not deceive others about where the hidden prizes were. The outcome of the study was that students were aware of when an adult was honest and based their trust on past outcomes.

Other skills of importance are empathy and empathetic communication. Empathy is being able to appreciate the other person's perspective. Empathy influences our social relationships. It enhances communication, cooperation and respect (Brooks & Richman, 2010; Covey, 2004). Active listening is important in the promotion of empathetic communication. First one must seek to understand before seeking to be understood (Covey, 2004). To be an empathetic communicator one must tune in to the other person cognitively and emotionally and perceive the feelings thoughts and beliefs the person is trying to communicate. The most important need is for love and belonging. When these needs are satisfied in a consistent manner, then the seeds for creating a motivating learning environment will be planted (Brooks & Richman, 2010; Daniels, & Perry, 2003; William Glassar Institute, 2010).

The 3 days of PowerPoint slides I have created have the ability to impact many and create social change. With violence, depression and bullying on the rise it would be useful for teachers to use this information to their advantage. Change is never easy, but in the long run we must make a change for the better good of society. It is important that teachers are aware of

what is happening in the world. After viewing these slides teachers can bring new knowledge into their caring classrooms where students will take comfort. They can create exciting and enriching lessons with input from all students as they build the trust, self esteem and communication skills which will lead to better school performance and the ability to move forward in our society today (Brooks & Richman, 2010; Mayer, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Pankake, & Moller, 2007; Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Szente, 2007).

Description of the Project

With the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards educators are more focused than ever on curriculum and have less time to consider the social and emotional growth of their students as well. For this study, I interviewed 15 teachers on how they felt about a new writing program that was being implemented. This writing program was created by the Developmental Studies Center (2007). The creators of the program understood the importance of infusing social and emotional skills into the curriculum. Through the program students were taught how to make eye contacts, work with a partner, be a good listener and to be respectful. The interview question that I found most interesting was if the social skills taught though the program made a positive difference in student's social skills and if this increase in social skills helped them to become better writers. The answer was an overwhelming, yes. I was pleased with the outcome and realized the importance of teaching our students social skills right alongside academics. The teachers spoke positively of the students building caring relationships with their peers while working together to help each other learn. When researching for this project I discovered how prevalent depression and bullying were. I also discovered that in many of the past school shootings, the perpetrator felt

persecuted or bullied and reacted out of revenge. Therefore the focus of my project is to educate others on the importance of building caring relationships, teaching students how to work together cooperatively and how to reduce bullying.

I have created 3 days of professional learning workshops using PowerPoint that teachers can attend. Teachers can attend these presentations and go back to their classrooms with new knowledge to create social change in their classrooms. The workshops were designed for teachers to attend with myself as facilitator. I have also been thinking about placing theses workshops online or saving them to a disc and possible marketing them. The most important goal for me is to get the word out on the importance of building caring relationships with students as a way to reduce violence, depression and bullying. I have also published two articles in our Connecticut state newspaper about this important topic.

The first workshop is titled *Teacher Student Relationships and the Classroom Environment.* The people who attend will be given a hand out of the PowerPoint Presentation, a separate handout with fill in the blanks on important terms in the presentation and an evaluation form at the end to help me further develop as a professional speaker. We begin the workshops by exploring past assumptions and thinking about teachers that we have had good relationships with and those we did not. Throughout all 3 workshops participants will work with partners or in small groups and will engage in team building activities, watch emotional videos and answer some tough question about their own practice and how they may like to change after learning the new information.

Many school aged students come to school with various other things going on in their minds. It is important for teachers to get to know their students academically and socially and

emotionally as well. Traditionally, teachers would stand in front of the room and deliver curriculum. Today, times have changed and teachers need to be more in the role of a facilitator. The better they know their students the easier it will be for them to create lessons that are of interest to their students, motivating them to learn. According to Blumberg (2008), learner centered environments are places where teachers design activities where students interact with materials, the teachers and each other. This motivates students to learn intrinsically. When students learn how to make their own decisions, it helps them to become more independent and responsible members of a group (Developmental Studies Center, 2008).

When students feel safe in their learning environments they are more willing to take risks and are more willing to try new things. A caring classroom environment lets students focus on their learning and less on other things. When students feel a part of a larger community they are more apt to apply themselves academically (Brannon, 2008). According to Danielson (2007), teachers should recognize that even though students are smaller they have feelings, aspirations, hopes and dreams. Teachers should interact with students as individuals and all students should feel valued and respected. Teaching students the value of respect lets students take comfort in the classroom community and they have less fear of being made fun of.

One of the main terms in this first power point presentation is to build trust. Trust is at the core of all healthy relationships (Brooks & Richman, 2010). Teachers should greet their students' everyday before and at the end of the school day. They should maintain eye contact and try to see the world through their student's eyes. They should find out the students likes and dislikes and let the students get to know their own likes and dislikes. They should always

make the students feel that they are on their side, especially students who may have behavioral issues. Empathy is another term used in this workshop that teachers can help their students develop. It is the ability to place one self in someone else's shoes. It should not be confused with sympathy, which is feeling sorry for someone. Empathy is being able to appreciate the other person's perspective. It enhances communication, cooperation and respect (Brooks & Richman, 2008).

One of the last terms to be discussed in this first workshop is active listening. Teachers are taught to tune into their partner cognitively and emotionally. A person should seek to understand before trying to be understood (Covey, 2004). According to Brooks (2010), they should perceive the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs the other person is trying to communicate. Participants will practice these skills during the workshop with their partner and will have gained a skill that we often don't really think about. They can use it in their classrooms with their students making them feel valued and listened to. The workshop concludes with the teachers reflecting back on their past assumptions while they analyzing and synthesizing new information and create a goal for their future development.

The second and third workshops also have a similar format. Participants will be given a copy of the power point presentation, a separate hand out with fill in the blanks of important terms from the presentation, and an evaluation form at the end. They will work in partners or small cooperative groupings, engage in team building exercises, view emotional videos and learn new techniques to bring back to their classrooms. Each workshop begins by greeting one another and sharing something about themselves. The second workshop is titled *Learning Communities in the Classroom*. Following the greeting, we start exploring our past

assumptions of what learning communities are and write them down on our hand out.

As stated previously, in the traditional classroom the teacher is focused on what is being taught and not as much on what the students are learning. When this happens students become passive learners and do not take on responsibility for their own learning (Blumberg, 2008). Constructivism is an approach to teaching and learning that is a powerful framework for understanding how children learn. With constructivism, it is the learner who is actively engaged in the learning process (Danielson, 2007). When students are in learner-centered environments their questions and interests are valued. Learning is based on what students already know and it's interactive. Teachers create dialogue with their students and help to create new knowledge. Teachers use multiple techniques that are appropriate to student learning goals.

A classroom community is a place where students work together. They draw on each other's strengths and collaborate for the betterment of the whole. They are connected in such a way that it transforms them to higher levels academically and emotionally (DuFour et al., 2008). When teachers begin the school year they should engage the class in building a set of classroom norms. This can be done by engaging students in a dialogue of what they hope and desire for their classroom, their teacher, and each other. Norm building is worthwhile in building a sense of community. It can also be a powerful way of addressing students who fail to follow the commitment of the group. At one point during this session participants will watch a controversial video. It is a video of young man who stands up to his teacher and tells her to stop lecturing and to start engaging students in dialogue by finding out about what is going on in their hearts. My hope is for this video to illicit a discussion among the workshop

participants.

Cooperative learning is a way for students to learn together and share learning goals. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994), "Cooperative learning, by definition requires students to work together to accomplish shared learning goals, meaning an individual student can accomplish his or her learning goal only if the other members of the group achieve theirs."

Students take responsibility for their own learning and then move on to help peers learn the material as well. Students help each other and provide feedback and share resources. They push each other to achieve mutual goals and applaud each other efforts. With cooperative learning it becomes a group effort. Students communicate and support each other. With cooperative learning the students assume the responsibility for the operation of classroom procedures (Danielson, 2007).

The teacher can establish routines early on and then later the students take on the responsibility of these routines. Instructional groups are engaged at all times, which allows the teacher to monitor students and their progress. Small group work allows for the teacher to differentiate instruction. Groups in a well-managed classroom can work independently. From the start the teacher must set clear expectations and have them posted. These group norms should be developmentally appropriate. The expectations should be applied consistently with no favoritism. When students misbehave the teacher should focus on the behavior and not on the student. Students are encouraged to monitor their own behavior. By working cooperatively, students form strong relationships and encourage one another to reach their highest academic potential. Following the workshop participants are asked to go back to their original assumptions and check them against the new information they have learned as they write down

one new learning goal for their future use.

The last PowerPoint presentation is titled *Putting A Stop To Bullying.* We begin once again by exploring past assumptions and write them down on our hand out. Following, I share some disturbing statistics regarding violence, depression and bullying. The American Medical Association (2013) stated that 3.7 million youth engage in bullying each year. Bullying happens every 7 minutes on elementary school playgrounds (Pepler, Craig, & Atlas, 1998). In addition, the National Association of School Psychologists (2003) concluded that 160,000 students per day stay home from school because of bullying. Students that are bullied, experience low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety disorders. A study conducted by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education (2002) titled Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States found that in more than three fourths of the 37 school shootings that have taken place since 1974, the attackers felt "persecuted, threatened or bullied." In over half, revenge was the motivation. The link between bullying and mental illness is very real.

The definition of bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated over time. Both students who are bullied and bully others may have serious lasting problems (stopbullying.gov). Teachers can reduce bullying by keeping a watchful eye and talking to the student or students, to find out what is taking place. Teachers can ask the student if it is physical, verbal, emotional, or cyber bullying. They can show that they care by being supportive and explaining that it's not their fault. It is helpful if the student focuses on their friends and positive influences. Teachers should contact the parents when necessary. The

student should avoid the bully, not react to them in any way and seek counseling if needed. In addition, teachers need to let the bully know that their behavior is not acceptable and take necessary action to put a stop to it. Teachers can seek help from administration and in the most severe of cases get law enforcement involved. Some of the signs to look for if you feel a student is being bullied are withdrawn, have a fear of school, seems depressed, fears another student or has a low self esteem (United States Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2009).

There are many types of bullying including physical bullying, verbal bullying and emotional bullying. There is also cyber bullying that takes place through emails, text messages, Facebook and chat rooms. Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, shoving, slapping or attacking, to mention just a few. Some signs of verbal bullying are name calling, threats, intimidation, insulting remarks or whispering behind someone's back. Some forms of emotional bullying are gossiping, dirty looks, excluding someone, destroying a reputation, or manipulating a relationship (BullyFree.com, 2013). Ways that teachers can help to reduce bullying are to show love and support, explain that it's not the student's fault, avoid the bully, do not overreact, have the student stay close to an adult or friend, notify administration and let the bully know that the behavior is not acceptable (Bullyfree.com, 2013; Stopbullying.gov, 2013; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

There are many forms of cyber bullying as well. According to Bamford (2004), the following types of cyber bullying exist, exclusion, harassment, outing, cyber stalking, masquerading, flaming, pseudonyms and anonymity. I will explain each briefly.

Exclusion: Being excluded from a group.

Harassment: Sending offensive messages to an individual or group.

Outing: Public display or forwarding of a text message with personal or explicit
information.

Cyber stalking: A form of harassment through text message or email.

Masquerading: The bully pretends they are someone they are not.

Flaming: An intense argument over email or text message.

Pseudonyms: Making up a nickname or keeping identity a secret.

Anonymity: When someone makes threatening comments anonymously.

Ways that teachers and parents can reduce cyber stalking are to watch for signs that the child

is being bullied, know the child's peers, create rules and consequences regarding online

behavior, work with the school and other parents, if need be get law enforcement involved

(Bullyfree.com, 2013; Stopbullying.gov, 2013; United States Department of Health and

Human Services, 2009). In addition, teachers and parents can help by being active listeners

and tune into the child cognitively and emotionally while perceiving the child's feelings,

thoughts and beliefs about what is happening to them. The last few slides of this workshop

include a list of fiction and non-fiction books, resources and references on bullying. Once

again participants will be asked to go back to their original assumptions regarding bullying and

compare them to what they have now learned while writing down one goal for themselves to

enhance their professionalism.

These workshops were created to promote social change and help our world be a less

violent place, help to reduce depression, and to put a stop to bullying. All of the workshops are

interactive. I have included quotes, comics, video segments, team building, discussion, puzzles

and games. Participants will have a fill in the blank hand out to fill in pertinent facts and

information to take back to their classrooms. If one teacher is able to stop bullying or help a child from becoming depressed than they have done something very powerful. They may have put a stop to future violence and revenge by not looking the other way and taking the opportunity to put a stop to bullying immediately.

Needed Resources

To begin I will need to rehearse my workshops and time them. Prior to giving any of the three workshops I have created I will keep abreast of current happenings in the newspaper, local, state and national news. I will have a copy of my speaking notes readily available. I will email the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and tell them about my presentations and times that I am available. I will also keep an eye out for any organizations looking for presenters. Once I am given notice that I will be presenting I will arrange the room for my presentation. I will arrange tables or desks in groups of four or five. I will be sure the room has an overhead projector or white board where I can present my PowerPoint. I will have my PowerPoint presentations on a flash drive and a disc for backup. I will make copies of all the appropriate hand outs and have them copied and ready to go. As I am giving the presentation, I will keep in mind the importance of the message that I am trying to get across to my audience. I will also be sure to include discussion points and time for questions.

Proposal for Implementation Including Timetable

I plan to research and find area clubs and organizations looking for speakers on these topics and I will apply. This will all depend on my full time teaching job. I can speak after school and at night. I may even stop by a local college upon completion of my doctorate and let them know I am available. I have already published two articles in the newspaper on my

topics and will submit to some teaching magazines to get my name and message out there. In addition, I am thinking of creating a website or putting these workshops on discs to make them available for viewing.

Roles and Responsibility of Teachers and Others Involved

It will be up to the specific participants what they take away from my workshops. I have made it interactive and fun by inserting comics and videos that will provoke emotions that will help to promote social change. I am hoping upon seeing some of the video segments that the participants will think that they would never want to be this type of teacher or they would never want to see a child hurt by bullying and that the videos will support my message and be the impetus for them to do things differently. The workshops are also filled with theory and literature. We will be working cooperatively in groups on team building, creating a class community and having informative discussions. The hand outs challenge them to look at past assumptions on certain topics, fill in the blanks on important terms to remember and an analysis and synthesis section to help them tie it all together and create a change goal for themselves. The rest will be up to them when they get back to their home base.

<div align="center">

Project Evaluation Plan

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I have created a summative evaluation. The evaluation has five questions that can be rated on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the lowest score. It will be given to participants upon completion of the workshop. The five questions are in relation to the workshop and presentation asking for suggestions so that I may make positive changes in the future. The four questions are as follows:

1. Was the PowerPoint Presentation clear and easily understood?

2. Was it helpful for you to have a hand out in front of you during the presentation?

3. Did the presenter leave ample time for discussion and clarification of ideas?

4. How likely will you be to utilize the behavioral characteristics of an effective caring teacher in your future teaching and learning?

5. Do you have suggestions for making this presentation more effective in the future?

After each workshop I will compile these evaluations and consider the suggestions and ideas given to me by the participants. This will allow me to take an objective look at my effectiveness and make any changes necessary to be more productive in the future.

Project Implications

This project has the potential to impact many. With violence, depression and bullying on the rise teachers need to step up to the plate, get involved, and help put a stop to it. In addition, the whole country is concentrating on the Common Core State Standards and not as much on the importance of the social and emotional development of our students. Students face many difficulties such as living in broken homes, poverty and crime. When they come to school they need a safe haven. They need a place where they can feel a sense of belonging. When students feel safe they build trusting relationships and flourish. In trusting and caring classroom environments students can thrive academically and socially and emotionally as well.

These workshops have the ability to impact administrators, teachers, parents and students. The workshops were created to educate as many people as possible on the sad reality that we are not presently doing enough to help our students feel safe. If more students felt safe and fewer students felt bullied we could reduce violence in our world. When students are

nurtured and happy and learning they do not develop anger toward other individuals and thus will not have the need to seek revenge and hurt innocent people in the process.

It has never been more important for teachers to challenge themselves to take a deeper look at their students. They must take the time to find out about them and learn about them personally. Educators can give students the tools and skills they need to stand up for themselves and be their own agents of change. Once teachers are equipped with the knowledge in these workshops they can begin to take small steps that have the ability to promote healing and positive change in our world. What could be more powerful? It's time to put our heads and heart together and create the social change necessary to make our world a safer and happier place to live.

Conclusion

In conclusion, students that were in classroom settings where they have good relationships with their teachers and peers and felt part of a classroom community had stronger self-esteems and were more willing to take risks academically which had a positive impact on their achievement scores (Szente, 2007; Mayer, 2007; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). In addition, students in caring classroom environments felt a sense of belonging, felt comfortable working together and were more motivated to perform at higher academic levels (DSC, 2007; Chaney, 2011). Similarly, students who are not comfortable in their classroom environments may experience violence, depression or bullying. The literature showed that 3.22 million children in ages from 7-17 have been treated for depression and many of these mental illnesses have come about due to bullying in school. By the year 2020 depression is projected to be second in the global burden of disease (World Health Organization, 2004; Center For Disease Control,

2013). This is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Therefore, I felt that creating three days of professional learning on how to create relationships between teachers and peers, how to build a caring learning community and how to put a stop to bullying would be fitting as a way to educate professionals about these serious issues.

<div align="center">Section 4: Strengths and Limitations</div>

<div align="center">**Strengths and Limitation**</div>

This doctoral project was created as a way to inform policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents about the importance of including social and emotional skills in today's curriculum. In education today, policy makers are very focused on test scores and are less focused on the emotional development of students. There is a rise in school violence, depression, and bullying going on in schools today (Centers for Disease Control, 2013; World Health Organization, 2004;). This project was created as a way to help alleviate some of these problems. This doctoral project has both strengths and limitations in addressing this multifaceted problem.

The specific problem is that state officials and policy makers are currently in the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards. These standards are a clear set of expectations that provide consistency in what students are expected to learn across the country. These standards will ensure that students gain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and math (corestandards.org). However, the standards do not address student's social and emotional development. That appears to be a separate issue or an issue that policy makers do not feel is as important. This could be no

farther from the truth.

In the local setting, teachers were faced with creating their own writing program from materials that were self created or found on the Internet. Then a new writing program was instituted in all of the elementary schools to address this problem. This new writing program had a strong emphasis on building social skills as a way to increase writing skills. Through this doctoral study, I sought to investigate whether the new writing program did increase social skills and if the social skills taught did increase writing skills. As I interviewed 15 teachers regarding the social skills taught through the program, they responded that improvements were gained in listening skills, student dialogue, students learning together, students learning to positively critique another's work, and character building. With regard to writing skills, 100 % of the teachers felt that the interaction among students improved the overall classroom atmosphere and the overall writing skills of the students in the class.

Strengths

These workshops are based on recommendations from scholarly research and have the ability to create positive social change. After spending many hours reviewing the literature, what I found the most touching were the statistics on depression and bullying. Through these workshops, teachers can learn pertinent information that they can bring back to their classrooms and implement. By bringing new knowledge back to their classrooms, they can engage students in successful and positive learning experiences (Joyce & Showers, 2003). The workshops contain theory, literature, emotional video segments, comics, book readings, charts, team building, role-playing and handout worksheets. Teachers have the very important job of educating students. By including social skills in their teachings, they have the ability to reduce

violence, depression, and bullying and make the world a safer place to live.

Another strength of the project is that I have included rich data throughout the workshops and I have employed a variety of teaching techniques. The video segments of the workshops evoke powerful emotion that can be the impetus for teachers to make necessary changes. In addition, the participants will speak with peers, problem solve, and discuss pertinent issues while building lasting relationships and creating a caring community in the process. The participants will be involved in creating class norms and be responsible for following them.

Having teachers be personally involved in creating a caring community together during the workshops is another strength of the program. When teachers are actively engaged in their own learning, they more readily retain the information and it makes a lasting impression. When people feel moved emotionally, they are more apt to make lasting changes in the way they do things.

Through taking these workshops, teachers will learn the importance of interacting with their students and teaching students the importance of respecting each other (Danielson, 2007). Students who feel a sense of belonging reach for higher academic goals. Teachers will learn about learner-centered environments and the importance of designing lessons in which students interact with the materials, the teacher, and each other (Blumberg, 2008). Students have been more successful in learner-centered environments than in the traditional model of teaching (DuFour et al., 2008). Teachers will also learn about ways to put a stop to physical bullying, verbal bullying, emotional bullying, and cyber bullying by showing love and support and not engaging the bully in any way. They will learn to tell the bully that his or her behavior

is inappropriate and that they should contact administration or law enforcement in the most serious of bullying cases (Stopbully.gov, 2013). Once teachers are equipped with this new arsenal of information, they can go back in to their classrooms and make the necessary changes in their teaching to help reduce these problems.

Limitations

There are a variety of limitations that exist within this study. To begin, not all schools were using the program. Therefore, I did not have the opportunity to make an accurate analysis as whether the program was truly effective. As I look back at the Connecticut State Mastery Writing scores from 2010-2011 and compare them to those for 2012-2013, the scores show an inconsistency by grade level. Both third and fourth grades showed an increase, while fifth grade showed a decrease. Third grade scores rose 1.1 % in a 3-year time period. Fourth grade had a 2 % increase, and fifth grade had a 3.1 % decrease. Two grade levels had a rise in scores while the highest grade level showed a decrease.
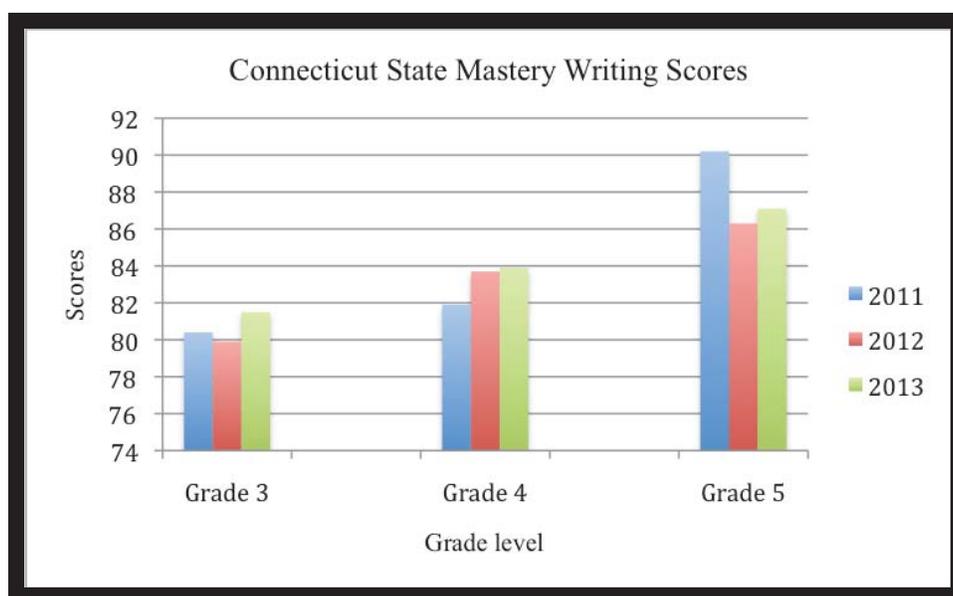
Figure 5: Connecticut State Mastery Writing Scores. Three year comparison, 2011-2013.

The teachers that I did interview felt that the new writing program was limited and lacked the necessary resources needed to improve students' writing skills. Many were still supplementing using their own materials. This makes it difficult to decipher whether the increase was due to the new writing program or the supplementation by the teachers.

As I took on this study, I lacked the ability to interview teachers who had not used the program at all, as all teachers had been trained at the time of the study. If I had been able to interview teachers who had not been trained, as well as teachers who had been trained, I could have set up one group as a control and would have been better able to make a more scientific inference as to the effectiveness of the *Being a Writer* (2007) program beyond the 15 teachers who I interviewed. This would make an effective study in the future.

In addition, due to protecting the privacy of participants under the age of 18, student work was not used as a data source. Therefore, I did not use student pretest/posttest data. An effective future study could be done evaluating student work at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year after students are exposed to the program to see if the program had been effective in increasing students' writing development.

Another limitation of the project was that I cannot disseminate this multitude of important facts and information on creating caring classrooms and antibullying quickly enough. At this time, I am required to give the workshop personally, and due to the fact that I teach full time, I am not readily available to give the workshops at any time during the school day. I have been thinking about creating a website where the workshops can be viewed or even putting them into booklet form or onto a disc and marketing them to school systems. I think

the workshops will not be disseminated quickly enough unless I find other means of disseminating them. I am working on that at this time. Also, the workshops have been created for teachers, and I think that with additional time, I could change the *Putting a Stop to Bullying* workshop into one that is more child-friendly or even write it in book form to be disseminated to students.

Furthermore, the workshops are not being given during the school day. When teachers learn new information during the school day while they are collaborating with peers, they are much more likely to use it in their everyday work. In addition, attending professional development workshops can be costly. Teachers will need to seek permission and funding to attend professional workshops. Attending professional development workshops can take teachers away from the classroom, and sometimes this can be a deterrent. Last, teachers' attendance at these workshops does not ensure that they will make changes to their teaching practice. This is exactly why I included a book with excerpts of students in an uncaring classroom, a video of a student who was furious with a teacher for only lecturing and not looking at what was in the students' hearts, and a video from a girl in a singing competition who made up a song about how she was bullied and cried her way through it. My hope is that these videos will inspire teachers to make changes to their practice.

Last, I have never had a course on public speaking, and putting myself out there for the first few times will be nerve-racking. I can be a bit of a perfectionist at times, and I would want the workshops to go off without a hitch. I think with practice and experience, I will be able to make this happen. I feel that this message is so important to get out there that I have been writing letters to the state newspaper, and I am proud to say that I have had two of them

published in the editorial section. I feel that getting articles published is a way for me to establish credibility and attain voice for myself. Overall, I feel that the strengths of the project outweigh the limitations and feel strongly about getting this pertinent information out to the public even if it means taking some public speaking courses along the way.

Alternative Solutions

This section will include some alternative solutions to the problem of reducing violence, depression and bullying. One solution could be to incorporate a character education program such as Character Counts. Another solution could be to incorporate the workshops I have created during the school day during teacher collaboration times. The more teachers are educated in how to build relationships with their student and create caring learning environments they can be greatly effective in reducing some of these problems. Lastly, a website could have been created where teachers and students can learn about these pertinent topics and apply solutions in their classrooms.

One alternative solution to addressing this problem would be for the school system to incorporate an anti bullying program into their curriculum at the elementary, middle and high school levels. One program that has found success is the Character Counts program. This approach to character education excludes no one and is based on six ethical values that are not political, religious or culturally based. The six pillars of the Character Counts program are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship (Josephson Institute, 2013). The Character Counts program can teach students the ethical values they need to be effective and productive citizens in a difficult world. It can also be effective in reducing behavior problems and bullying. There are other programs available as well that can support

character education in the schools if the school systems are willing to include them in their budget, purchase and implement them. Unfortunately, there are times when school systems will purchase this type of curriculum and teach it for only a year or two and then abandon it (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, 2000). This leads to lack of success and puts a school system back to square one.

One way to ensure the success of implementing a character education program would be to complete a student survey prior to the use of the program and following its implementation. Students could be surveyed and asked questions, such as if they feel comfortable in their class setting, if they have ever been bullied or if they have suggestions for improvement. The character education program can be implemented and at the end of the year another survey can be given to see if any real changes have taken place. Some educators may not feel it is their responsibility to teach character education and that it is a parental responsibility. However, in light of the recent statistics regarding school violence and depression it is more vital than ever that school systems include these types of programs in their curriculum.

Another alternative solution to the problem could be to show educators the workshops I have created during their school day collaboration. Teachers could view the slides independently and have discussions about the major concepts. Many teachers teach after school programs or tutor and do not have the time to attend workshops after school. If these workshops could be shown during the school day there is a greater possibility that the workshops will resonate with the teachers and they will be more apt to make changes in their teaching practices. I also feel that showing a whole school the workshop or workshops would

be more effective in creating a whole school change as opposed to one or two teachers attending and trying to create change in only one or two classrooms.

One last solution could be to utilize technology in getting these messages out to the public. These workshops can be viewed on the web. A teacher website could be created where teachers can view current literature and alternative teaching strategies. They could take these workshops independently. Keeping the website current would be a way for the developer to keep abreast of new trends. It is imperative to continually read current literature on these topics so that as new information comes forth it can be disseminated. With regards to technology, there could even be a web page for students to learn about bullying, the types of bullying, and ways to prevent it. There also could be booklets or literature that could be made available to go along with the site. Any of these mentioned solutions could help teachers and students learn ways to treat each other more humanely and help each other reach higher levels of success.

Analysis of Learning

I had always known that I wanted to achieve a higher level of education. I see myself as a life long learner. However, as I went through the program I was shocked at how much I did not know. I learned an enormous amount during the program and how to be a scholar practitioner. Prior to taking these classes, I had no idea how to read scholarly literature, where to find it, how to analyze and synthesize it, or the importance that ethics plays in keeping participants safe from harm or sharing other's works. All of these skills are extremely important when reading or creating a piece of scholarly work.

Scholarship

In order for one to complete a scholarly piece of work or project they must review a

large amount of primary sources. It is important for the literature to be current, peer reviewed or published. In order to find scholarly works pertaining to a specific topic the researcher must use various search engines that house scholarly works such as ERIC, Research Complete or ProQuest. This can be quite time consuming but well worth the effort. It is also a skill that one can use for a lifetime especially when they have a topic of interest and see themselves as a life long learner. Upon reviewing these sources it is up to the researcher to analyze each piece and later to synthesize it in their own words. Following the reading of many articles and summarizing them the researcher will form their own opinion based on what they have read.

My study topic and a passion of mine is to include social skills and academic skills in our daily teachings. By completing a thorough review of the literature I was able to come up with a project that was based on theory and current knowledge. However, the most exciting part for me was to add in a few of my own insights and creativity in the hope of igniting a passion for my topic in others. All of this was completed with the hope of creating real social change in our classrooms today.

Learning how to read scholarly articles is a skill in itself. I would start with the topic title and then read the abstract. If the abstract pertained to my topic I would read further. It was important to look at how the problem was being addressed and if the article stated its central purpose. Next, I would look at the sample size, the population or the number of participants in the study. Lastly, I would look at the study results. There were times when I would ponder why the study was not done another way. In addition, I would look at the reference section to see if there were any other articles of interest that pertained to my topic.

Another way to obtain scholarly literature is through the Internet. However, I was

careful to look to see if the site was credible. In order for a site to be credible one must be able

to determine the author, organization or sponsor to see if it is a legitimate site. It is also

important that the site is up to date. In addition, the researcher needs to be watchful of sites

that only include one point of view. Most legitimate sites will have links to other literature that

may have opposing viewpoints.

Lastly, ethics are an important consideration while undertaking a study or reading a

study. When reading a study you want to be sure participants were treated ethically. For my

current study I had to obtain permission from the institutional review board (IRB) before

completing my research. The job of the IRB is to be sure that all ethical issues have been

considered. Following permission from the IRB, I had to obtain informed consent from the

participants stating that I would protect them from harm while maintaining their

confidentiality. Later member checking took place to establish credibility and I have written up

a detailed explanation of how the data were collected establishing reliability.

Project Development and Evaluation

I completed three appealing Powerpoint workshops. The project started by interviewing

fifteen teachers on how they felt about a new writing program. The new writing program

included social skills as a way for students to learn to communicate and help each other with

their work. With my interest in social skills this was a perfect way for me to see if the social

skills taught through the program were useful in increasing students' social skills and academic

skills as well.

After gathering all of the necessary permissions I was able to interview fifteen teachers

on how they felt about the program. Walden University had well prepared me on how to

complete the interviews and I also took the necessary ethics course. I was very excited to complete the interviews. I feel proud to say that I analyzed and synthesized each interview by hand and really got to take a good close look at the data. One hundred percent of the teachers felt that the social skills such as eye contact, listening, communication and students working together with teachers and peers had a positive effect on classroom climate and improved writing skills. Therefore, since this program had such a positive effect on the students and teachers, I felt that creating workshops in student teacher relations and building classroom communities was fitting.

The PowerPoints were all created in a similar format. They begin with a meet and greet. Then I challenge teachers to take a look at their own past assumptions on the topic. They write this down on a hand out. Then I have them view some past social theorists such as Dewey and Vygotsky who both believed that social interaction was vital in the development of cognition. Next, I show a study or two that shows how improved social skills improve academics. I have a few team building exercises included within each workshop to get the participants working together. Each workshop includes a video that will appeal to the participants emotions such as a story about a teacher who does not care, a boy who felt his teacher should not just lecture and a girl who cries while singing a song about how she was bullied at school. Later in the workshop I share current literature and suggestions for changes in pedagogy. In the end, teachers will go back to their original assumptions and compare them with their new knowledge. Following, they write down areas of strength and weakness and create a change goal to increase their professionalism.

The workshops were also created as a way to reach the larger population. With violence

in schools, depression and bullying increasing in our society the message needs to get out about the importance of caring, showing that one cares and how to work together cooperatively. Students in classroom settings who are comfortable with their teachers and peers do better academically, show less behavior problems and less bullying. My hope is that depression will decrease as well. Students are very impressionable. I feel that teachers need to know how powerful their verbal and non-verbal communication really is and that they have the power to make great changes in our society today.

The project evaluation is in summative form. It is a form that the participants will fill out at the end of the workshop. It asks the participants to answer five questions in relation to the workshops with a rating of 1-5 with 5 being the lowest. I also include a question that asks them if they have any ways or suggestions for me to improve on the workshop. This is a new area for me so I am sure I could use some great ideas and suggestions. At the end of each workshop I will collect them and make the necessary changes so I can grow as a public speaker in the future.

Leadership and Change

Leadership has changed in the past few years. Traditionally the administrator made most of the school decisions. Today many teachers are stepping forward as leaders in their schools. They are taking on more roles, running committees and getting more involved in school decision-making. I feel that I have taken on a leadership role by completing this doctorate degree. Teachers are interested in what it is all about. They are proud to know someone who is taking on a leadership role. I have recently written two articles for our state newspaper. As the teachers have read them they have commented on my topic. It opens up a

dialogue on the importance of including social skills in our everyday curriculum. It is more vital than ever, especially with the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards that only focuses on academics.

I will be approaching my district with these workshops once this doctorate is completed. I will also be looking for venues where these workshops can be given. I have a good rapport with parents, teachers and administrators. It is one of respect and professionalism. Having these open discussions in our collaboration meetings are an important way to show leadership and bring about the necessary changes into our classrooms. Change is never easy but it is important in helping our students develop the skills they need to move forward in a positive manner in the future. Teaches need to be made aware of how important it is to look to the students, talk to them, get to know them and support them. Once the students know that they really do care they will be more willing to perform and will be eager to come to school.

I would be happy to help any teacher who may be having difficulty with any of the information in any of the three workshops. I will be available for consult and to talk to the teachers at my school on a regular basis. I would be happy to go into any of their rooms and show them a lesson on any of the three topics of my workshops titled, *Teacher Student Relationships In The Classroom Environment, Learning Communities In The* Classroom and *Putting A Stop To Bullying.* I believe that part of leadership is by example. If teachers can attend these workshops and see the rapport that we build together in them it might inspire them to go back to their own classrooms and try it. I would also be happy for any teacher to come into my classroom and see for themselves the good rapport and relations that I develop with my students. It does take time and effort but in the long run if we don't make changes now we

could be in for a rude awakening in the future.

Analysis of Self

I have learned a great deal about myself. I have learned that I am knowledgeable about my topic and I have the ability to create positive change in the world. Creating change in the life of a child in a chaotic world can be very satisfying. I have enjoyed working with and learning from other students in the classes that I have taken. Completing this study was exhausting and thrilling at the same time. My advisor has been an excellent support and I thank her for being by my side at all times.

Scholar

I have learned that I am much more capable than I ever dreamed of. I am proud that I took all of the classes and worked many long hours to learn the new information. The classes were difficult and challenging, especially working full time. I learned that I am an optimist and I never give up even in the face of challenge. If I felt overwhelmed or knocked down I would get right back up and keep trying again and again and again until I got it right. I am not a person with a great deal of self-confidence. However, through this process and with the help of my advisor I have learned that I am a scholar and I do have much to offer.

I learned so much about how to find primary sources and secondary sources. I learned how to use that information in such a way as to create social change. I am excited about the workshops that I have created. It took a great deal of research and time and effort but the outcome has the ability to impact many. My hope is that teachers view these workshops and really take them to heart and go back and make changes to their practice. I won't really know if they actually do implement these lessons into their classrooms unless I keep the names of

participants and send them a survey at a future date. I can only hope that the workshops will touch them emotionally and impact them to change.

I enjoyed working with others students in the classroom and responding to their daily posts. I developed some nice relationships with other students. We worked together in groups and helped each other. The teachers were knowledgeable about their classroom topics and were available to help upon request. I can't begin to even tell you how wonderful my advisor was. That could take another ten pages. There were several times and still today that people will call me and ask me for advice and I am really happy to help them in anyway I can. Developing relationships with other students is important in this doctoral process. Online learning can be a lonely journey. I am glad that my classes were able to have the same students in them so we could spend time getting to know one another. I believe that working cooperatively with others helps in the success of the program.

Practitioner

I really care about my students and I develop kind and warm relationships with them daily. However, after creating these workshops I have learned about theories and studies and exact steps to take in certain situations that I did not know before. I have taken the time assess my past assumptions and after learning the new knowledge have created some new goals for myself. The new goals I have created are as follows:

Goal 1: The students will be more involved in the classroom decision-making.

Goal 2: I will create lessons where the students work cooperatively for the better good
of the classroom community.

Goal 3: I will teach my students the steps they can take to prevent bullying.

Each of these goals will help me to lead the way of creating a caring classroom, developing cooperative learning groups and teaching students to stand up for themselves if they feel they are being bullied

Including the students in the decision making process will allows us to all work together and build a classroom community. This lets students leave their concerns behind so they can remain focused on their learning. Everyone has a need to belong. When students feel that they belong they are more willing to come to school, try a new game or work with a new student. I will accomplish this by interacting with them, asking them about their likes and dislikes, and making them feel valued and respected. We will learn how to respect each other and why it is so important to be kind to our peers. I will build trust by speaking to them personally and trying to see the world through their eyes. In addition, I will be an active listener and tune into what they are saying cognitively and emotionally.

Next, I will teach in a constructivist manner by actively engaging the learners in the learning process. We will establish group norms and routines and transitions early on. Students will take on responsibilities in the classroom. Small group work will allow me to get around to each group and assess for differing needs. Student will learn that when they understand the material it is their job to help others. We will all work together to accomplish and achieve our goals.

Lastly, I will teach students about bullying. We'll talk about what it is and I will allow them to share if they have ever been bullied and explain how they felt. We will discuss types of bullying and what each type is. Next we will learn ways to stop bullying, such as not to react to the bully, staying with a peer, or telling an adult. I will teach students how to create an

action plan. Step one is to think about the situation, how it happened and how it made you feel. Step two is to think about what you would like to see happen or how things could change. Step three is to think about the steps you need to take to change the situation. Teaching students these skills will equip them with the necessary tools to take control of these types of situations.

Project Developer

As the project developer I first had to discover the problem I wanted to address. Then I had to interview the teachers to see if they also felt that this was a problem. They did not see this as a problem but the did feel that when students were taught socials skills along with academics students had better listening skills, were better at communicating and had higher achievement scores. Therefore, it can be deduced that when social skills are taught, students are more comfortable in their academic setting and are more willing to perform to their highest academic potential.

As I went further and researched this problem in the larger population, I learned that depression is on the rise and in the year 2020 it is projected to be second in the global burden of disease. I also learned that in many of the school shootings that have taken place the perpetrator was acting out of revenge because they had been bullied at a younger age. Bullying is also on the rise and many students stay home from school due to bullying. Therefore, I felt that creating three days of professional learning would be useful in getting the word out to teachers on this important topic.

The three days of professional learning challenge teachers to look at their teaching styles, learn new information and encourages them to look at their strengths and weaknesses while creating a goal for change. The workshop include theories, literature, videos, studies,

team building, group discussion, comics and book excerpts. I created them to be varied and interesting. One suggestion that I made earlier was to put the workshops on a website or disc so that they could be disseminated more quickly to get this important message out. Teachers who learn the information and make changes to their current teaching methods have the ability and the power to make changes in the world.

Importance

This doctoral project began with my intrinsic curiosity about social skills in schools. In the local setting a new writing program was implemented that included the teaching of building respectful relationships as the foundation to becoming successful writers. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards many teachers are focused on data and test scores and much less on teaching students the importance of being respectful and how to work together as a classroom community. Upon completion of interviewing fifteen teachers amongst six elementary schools it was discovered that the social skills taught through the new writing program were successful in building classroom communities and increasing writing achievement. After giving these result much thought, I decided that creating three days of professional learning would be useful to administrators, teachers, and anyone who works with students in schools.

After researching the topic of caring relationships, building classroom communities and bullying in schools, I discovered how prevalent bullying has become. I was taken aback as I learned that many students who are bullied develop depression and that depression has doubled in the last five years among school children. I also learned that in many of the school shootings that have taken place the perpetrator felt bullied in school and carried out a shooting

as a way to seek revenge. These statistics were very disturbing to me. As I continued my research many studies showed how important it was to build caring relationships with the students. Building caring relationships with the students helps them to feel a sense of comfort and belonging. When students get along well they take comfort in coming to school. Also, when students get along with their peers there are less incidents of bullying. A reduction in bullying will lead to a reduction in depression. With less depression fewer students will want to seek revenge on others who have persecuted them. Thus, making our world a safer place.

This project has the ability to have an impact on the local setting as well as the larger setting. This project is just one possible solution to this prevalent problem. This is a start to helping to reduce violence in our world. By refining the project into a website or putting it onto a disc it can have a greater impact in many school systems. I realize that teachers already have enough on their plates. However, after viewing these workshops teachers will feel rejuvenated. My hope is that they will take this important message to heart and realize that they have the power to be part of the solution. The goal is to inspire teachers to show their students that they really do care while building a classroom community where all students can build self-esteem and find success.

Future Research

This research project has the ability to impact many and is just a small way to start to tackle this problem. There is a need for continual updated research on bullying, depression, and violence in schools. In addition, more valid and current studies on caring in schools are necessary to show the public what a positive impact it can have on these problems. Possible future implications might include further lesson development. After viewing these workshops

teachers may have many specific lessons and activities that they use to teach students about caring. These lessons could be collected and made into book form to disseminate to all at the local setting. All teachers and students could benefit from these lesson plans. Teachers will not have to reinvent the wheel and students will have fun participating in teacher created team-building activities.

Other future implications may include other training in how to reduce bullying or creating caring classrooms. There are many groups involved in the social and emotional development of students in school. These organizations may conduct professional development workshops as well. In addition, they may have further resources for teachers. The more teachers become informed and knowledgeable about the problem the better equipped they will be to respond in a professional manner and help to reduce some the these issues.

There are a variety of ways that this project can be applied in the future. To begin, I will keep current on these topics by reading journals, books and being involved in professional organizations. One way would be for this study to be published in a peer reviewed educational journal and viewed by many leaders and policymakers in the field of education. They may use this as one of their resources in making social change. Another way would be for me to create a website. The website would include the workshops I have created, ideas, suggestions and varied resources that teachers can view, print and apply. Having a website will have the ability to reach people around the world.

Other future applications would be for me to put these workshops into disc form and create a booklet to go along with the workshops. These discs could be sold to school systems and viewed by staff as an organization. Teachers can collaborate together and share ideas and

suggestions on ways to teach students about respecting each other and ways to prevent bullying. In addition, another way to disseminate this information would be for me to write a book. The book would include all three workshops and engaging lessons created by teachers. Teachers could use this book as a resource in promoting social and emotional development in their classrooms.

Lastly, these workshops can be given at professional development workshops. The project was created as a professional learning opportunity for teachers to attend. I put much effort into creating workshops that would be educational, emotional, fun and interesting. I used a variety of teaching techniques to appeal to many learning styles. Participants will interact, discuss, problem solve, team build and goal set. My hope is that teachers will take this information back to their classrooms and apply this new information.

Further research suggestions would be for a researcher to take a survey of how students and teachers are feeling about their school climate. Next, they could implement a character education program such as Character Counts. Character Counts is a program based on six ethical principals of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Following the implementation of the program teachers and students could take a post survey. The survey results could be compared to see if the program made a difference in how students feel about their school climate. Another alternate study would be to survey a whole school system on how they feel about their school climate. After studying the results the researcher could see what problems teachers and students are faced with. They could later complete a research project on ways to alleviate the teachers and students concerns. Whether implementing a purchased program or one created by the researcher would be helpful to

teachers and students in creating the social changes necessary for all to work in a happy healthy learning environment

Conclusion

The purpose of this doctoral project was to learn about the importance of teaching social skills along with academic skills in the classroom. After interviewing fifteen teachers it was discovered that the newly learned social skills had a positive effect on students classroom relationships and academic achievement. Following the interviews, three days of professional learning workshops were created to educate policy makers, administrators and teachers on the importance of teaching social skills and academic skill together.

Through the process of taking classes on research and development at Walden University I have grown as a scholar practitioner. As a scholar I have learned about how to conduct a research study by discovering a problem, investigating the problem and coming up with a solution to the problem. I have learned a great deal about ethics and ethical principals and the importance of confidentiality when completing a study. As a practitioner, I have learned that past theorist have suggested the importance of teaching social skills as a way to increase cognition. Also, students who have good relationships with their teachers and peers feel a sense of belonging, are happy to come to school and do better academically. I have set a few goals for myself for the coming school year. As a practitioner it is important for me to be a life long learner and apply the skills that I have learned in the classroom.

In conclusion, in our world today students are faced with a multitude of personal hardships and issues. It is imperative that teachers tune in to their students emotionally and cognitively. They must let their students know that they are there for them and include them in

the learning process. Learner centered environments are exciting places where students are actively engaged in the learning process. Students who feel a sense of belonging have higher self-esteems and higher achievement scores. By creating a culture of caring in the schools students will be more resilient in facing today's challenges. Teaching students the importance of respect and cooperation will help them become responsible citizens that in the future will promote tolerance and peace in our world.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

10/15/2012

Dear Ms. Blackmore,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Teacher Student Relationships and Student Writing Achievement."

Your approval # is 10-15-12-0192797. You will need to reference this number in your doctoral study and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on October 14, 2013. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden web site or by emailing irb@waldenu.edu:
http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4274.htm

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Please note that this letter indicates that the IRB has approved your research. You may not begin the research phase of your dissertation, however, until you have received the **Notification of Approval to Conduct Research** e-mail. Once you have received this notification by email, you may begin your data collection.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Sincerely,
Jenny Sherer, M.Ed., CIP
Operations Manager
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
Email: irb@waldenu.edu
Fax: 626-605-0472
Tollfree : 800-925-3368 ext. 1341
Office address for Walden University:
100 Washington Avenue South
Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Appendix B: Superintendent Permission

Dear Jacqueline,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Teacher Student Relationships and Student Writing Achievement within the Public Schools. You have permission to audio record your interviews followed by transcription. Following transcription, member checking will take place and allow each participant the opportunity to review their transcript and make any additions or deletions. You will remind the participants that anything said regarding the program will remain confidential and if at any time he/she feels uncomfortable, the interview will end with no questions asked. Following the completion of your study you will share your results with the Language Arts Department and Curriculum Department if asked to do so.

Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. Individuals who agree to participate will be interviewed at their respective school in a location of their choosing, such as classroom or library.

The Public Schools reserves the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

I confirm that I am the Superintendent of Public Schools and I approve this research.

Sincerely,

Thank you.

Jacqueline Blackmore,
Walden University

Appendix C: Principal's Letter of Permission

Jacqueline Blackmore   Date: October 1, 2012

Dear ,

My name is Jacqueline Blackmore. I am currently beginning my fourth year as a doctoral student at Walden University, Minneapolis Minnesota. I am conducting a research study as a requirement for my degree in Teacher Leadership and would like to invite teachers in your building to participate in an interview. I have recently received permissions from the Superintendent, the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and the Program Leader for K-5 Language Arts.

I am currently studying if building caring and respectful relationships with students in the classroom has any effect on their academic performance, specifically with regards to writing and the Being A Writer (2007) ®program that was instituted in grades 1-5 in the last few school years. Also, I will be looking at ways to enhance the program to keep in alignment with the Common Core State Standards.

I am interested in interviewing three to five teachers from your school. Participation is voluntary and the teachers will not be compensated for their time. If they do agree to participate, we will meet for a 20-30 minute tape-recorded interview at your home school, at a time that is convenient for them. In particular, they will be asked questions about how the new writing program is going and if they see any difference in student's written work and community building in the classroom. In addition, they will be asked if they feel that any enhancements or changes can be made to the program in order to align the curriculum with new standards.

They will be asked to sign a consent form and if at any time they feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview it will end immediately. Any information that they share will be kept confidential and kept in a locked secure location. Following the interview and the transcription of my notes, I will be sending them a copy to read to see that they are comfortable with their answers. If they would like to add or delete from their interview answers they have the option of doing so at this time.

Having your teachers participate in these interviews will help me to discover if building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners in the classroom can foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing or if enhancements can be made to the program to make it more successful in the future. This information may be published and be beneficial to other researchers, policymakers and future leaders in the area of education.

I thank you for your consideration.

If you are in approval of this research in your school building please electronically sign the Letter of Cooperation that is Attached, Save, and email a copy to me at

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Blackmore
Teacher Leadership
Walden University

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Jacqueline,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled <u>Teacher Student Relationships and Student Writing Achievement</u> within the Public Schools. As part of this study, I will provide you with the names of 25 teachers who have piloted the <u>Being A Writer (2007 ®</u> Program for the last three years. I understand that teacher participants will be interviewed on how they feel about the <u>Being A Writer®</u> program. You have permission to audio record your interviews followed by transcription. Following transcription, member checking will take place and allow each participant the opportunity to review their transcript and make any additions or deletions. You will remind the participants that anything said regarding the program will remain confidential and if at any time he/she feels uncomfortable, the interview will end with no questions asked. Following the completion of your study you will share your results with the Language Arts Department and Curriculum Department if asked to do so.

Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. Individuals who agree to participate will be interviewed at their respective school in a location of their choosing, such as classroom or library.

The Public Schools reserves the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

I confirm that I am the Program Leader for K-5 Language Arts and I approve this research.

Sincerely,

Thank you.

Jacqueline Blackmore

Walden University

Teacher Leadership

Appendix E: Participants' Letter of Invitation

Jacqueline Blackmore   Date:

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jacqueline Blackmore. I am currently in my third year as a doctoral student at Walden University, Minneapolis Minnesota. I am conducting a research study as a requirement for my degree in Teacher Leadership, and would like to invite you to participate in an interview.

I am currently studying if building caring and respectful relationships with students in the classroom has any effect on their academic performance, specifically with regards to writing and the Being A Writer (2007) program that was instituted in grades 1-5 in the last few school years.

Participation is voluntary and you will not be compensated for your time. If you do agree to participate, we will meet for a 20-30 minute tape-recorded interview at your home school, at a time that is convenient for you. In particular, you will be asked questions about how the new writing program is going and if you see any difference in student's written work and community building in the classroom. In addition, you will be asked if you feel that any enhancements can be made to the program in order to align the curriculum with new Common Core State Standards.

You will be asked to sign a consent form and if at any time you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview it will end immediately. Any information that you share will be kept confidential and kept in a locked secure location. Following the interview and the transcription of my notes, I will be sending you a copy to read to see that you are comfortable with your answers. If you would like to delete or add to your interview answers you have the option of doing so at this time.

Participating in this interview will help me to discover if building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners in the classroom can foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing or if enhancements can be made to the program to make it more successful in the future. This information may be published and be beneficial to other researchers, policymakers and future leaders in the area of education.

I thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please send me a return email so that I may contact you to set up a time and place for the interview.

Sincerely,
Jacqueline Blackmore

Appendix F: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research interview with Jacqueline Blackmore. You

were chosen for the interview because you are familiar with the *Being a Writer* (2007) Program

created by the Developmental Studies Center. Please read this form and ask any questions you

have before agreeing to be part of the interview.

A researcher named Jacqueline Blackmore, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this interview.

Background Information:
The purpose of this interview is to learn about the participant's experiences with teacher and student relationships and the new Being A Writer (2007) program. In addition, the researcher would like to learn if there are parts of program that you feel can be enhanced in order to align the writing program to the new Common Core State Standards.

Procedures:
If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview, lasting 20-30 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:
Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the interview. No one in the District will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview:
There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this interview project. Also, the researcher will not

include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview. All information gathered will be kept in a locked file cabinet.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Jacqueline Blackmore. The researcher's course instructor is Dr. Fadia Desmond and can be reached at. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at. jacqueline.blackmore@waldenu.edu or the instructor at Fadia Desmond, Ph.D., Walden University:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can email Jenny – irb@waldenu.edu

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

☐ I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed Name of

Participant

Participant's Written or

Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or

Electronic* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix G: Research Question

In alignment with the research problem and purpose, the following research question is

posed: To what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners,

foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing?

Follow Up Questions

Research Question 1: What are your experiences with the <u>Being A Writer</u> (2007) program?

Research Question 2: How has the <u>Being A Writer</u> (2007) program affected students' writing development?

Research Question 3: How has the <u>Being A Writer</u> (2007) program affected students' social development?

Research Question 4: How do the social skills taught through the program improve students writing development?

Research Question 5: What aspects of the <u>Being A Writer</u> (2007) program do you feel can be enhanced?

Appendix H: National Institute of Health Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Jacqueline Blackmore successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants". Date of completion: 10/31/2011 Certification Number: 796172

Appendix I: Permission for Change of Procedure

2/20/13

Dear Ms. Blackmore,

This e-mail serves to inform you that your request for a change in procedures, in which you requested to add as a community partner has been approved. You may implement the requested changes effective immediately. The approval number for this study will remain the same.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Sincerely,
Jenny Sherer, M.Ed., CIP
Operations Manager
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
Email: irb@waldenu.edu<mailto:irb@waldenu.edu>
Fax: 626-605-0472

Office address for Walden University:
100 Washington Avenue South
Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link: http://researchcenter.waldenu.edu/Office-of-Research-Ethics-and-Compliance-IRB.htm

Appendix J: Interview 15

2/27/13

The following research question is posed, to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing?

Hi, and how are you?

Hi good, how are you?

I'm just going to start off with my first question. What are your experiences with the Being A Writer program?

We have been to the training, we piloted, one of the other teachers was asked to be the official pilot teacher, so we all sort of joined in with her. ***During the pilot we found out early on that we felt like it did not meet the expectations of our kid. We started integrating other programs. The Being A Writer program alone would not produce the type of writers that the district would expect.***

Which is?

Which is the Lucy Calkins Units Of Study. So we tried that this year, kind of integrating them together. Even the pilot teacher, halfway through the year just about gave up trying to only use Being A Writer. We just felt it wasn't enough. So I'm familiar with it but it's not what I use as my main program. This is already a class of 2nd graders who already tend to be pretty strong writers, so it didn't really take them anywhere. If we had struggling writers in this school, then I would think it would benefit them better. If that makes sense.

I know the presenter came to talk about some schools in inner city Rhode Island and I could see how it could definitely benefit students who are at square one with writing. But we felt like where the program left was almost where we were already past.

I understand, so you believe students were beyond what the program was offering?

And now this year looking at the common core, we feel even more strongly that this program alone would not produce the kind of writing that they now expect 2nd graders to do alone.

Can you tell me a little bit about Lucy Calkins? How does that work? Does she have books or mini lessons?

Her kit came with 6 units of study in each unit and has text that comes with it.

Like a read aloud?

Yes, very similar to Being A Writer it has read alouds, exemplary text to use, but not a different one every time. The other thing about Being A writer too is that it took so much time to read the stories. The writing lessons and the writing time was shrunk. Hers, there might be one or two for every unit that she keeps referencing.

Do you do mini lessons with grammar and punctuation? Do you add that in yourself?

We add that in ourselves. For Lucy Calkins, It's an 8 to 10 min. mini lesson. The rest of the time is independent writing with conferences. During the mini lesson it's pretty much a connection to what you've done the day before, one teaching point and then a time when the kids are in partners, and a turn and talk and do some sort of active engagement. Maybe you've demonstrated something and now you give them a different example to turn and talk and practice themselves.

Does Lucy Calkins do turn and talk also?

Yes. They try it with their partner and then that's the active engagement piece and then there's the link to their work. So today and every day, now we're in poetry, so when you go back and read your poems, try to repeat an important line at the beginning and at the end, whatever the lesson is, and then the rest of the time is spent independent writing and I conference with individual students. So it's a lot more... I think that the Being A Writer program at the beginning assumes that they can't write for a very long period yet, and usually kids coming into 2nd grade are already able to write for like a 20 min. period. So the Lucy Calkins is more, it's a little more explicit teaching and then letting them go. Then the grammar, we use the Wright Source books that Terry gave us. Once a week when I don't have that time for a full writing period, I end up doing once a week a grammar lesson.

Okay so you do a grammar lesson and that supplemental?

As things come up we hit on them. That's a piece that's missing overall is the grammar. Do you remember DOL? We used to do DOL every morning and now there's just no time. I don't do any morning work because if I want to get a morning meeting in before starting, because we have an intervention block that starts at 9:55 so if I don't start math at 8:55, I don't get a whole hour of math before a bunch of my kids leave.

So often times there's not enough time to get everything in?

Right.

Do you do writing every day or a couple of days a week?

Four days a week.

Is this prescribed by Lucy Calkins or do you choose?

That's what our schedule is. Our principal gives us our schedule because we have so many kids in and out of things. We're told when to teach reading, writing and math. Which the last 2 years has been good because there's been so many kids that are pulled out, its been good for the special ed. teachers because they know that everyone in 2nd grade is doing reading at this time and it makes it easier for them to pull out their group. It's taken some getting used to.

Okay so what you do know about the Being A Writer program? Did you use it at all?

We definitely use it when it comes to the informational writing.

Do feel that, that section helps students? That informational section?

Yes, because they haven't had much of it.

From what you know of using that informational section, does that help the students become better writers?

Yes because of that exposure. I feel like that Being A Writer is a lot of exposure to everything. It doesn't go deeply I don't think it goes into the actual strategies that makes good writing, but because informational is new, usually in 2nd grade and they haven't done a lot of it, that unit works well because it's exposure and they just kind of go for it. And then after, I add in more structure. Like I teach them more structure that the upper grades use for informational such as topic sentence, 3 details and a closing. I incorporate that in there. But even now with the common core, lower grades we will be doing more informational writing. So they will know more by the time they get here. So I don't know how useful that unit will be in the future. But I'm sure at Long Hill they're going to want to bulk up everything, if you're assuming the kids coming from K-1 are able to do what the common core says.

Plus with the full-day K.

Yes. Someone was telling me today that next year the 1st grade teachers are going to be blown away with what the kindergartners are able to do.

Okay so as far as the nonfiction, you feel at this time that it definitely helps their writing because it's giving them more exposure because they haven't really been exposed to that nonfiction piece up until this point and you're not sure in the future if they were given exposure in 1st grade. Am I understanding you correctly?

Yes exactly.

Let's move on. The next question is if the Being A Writer effects their social development.

That's the turn and talk, and listening, and either complementing or having the partners say you could add to your story to make it better, or that kind of thing. Do you use any of those social skills during nonfiction writing?

Yes, we follow those because it's so similar to Making Meaning. Making Meaning I do like, and that's our main curriculum for reading. You know there's always other stuff we use. The part of Making Meaning I really do like is when we say, how are you going to be a respectful partner today? How will you show your partner that you're listening? That's one of the things that I do like about Being A Writer and Making Meaning that they emphasize that the kids actually talk to each other and listen to each other. The Lucy Calkins has that too, that turn and talk, but she doesn't do any social lessons. It's kind of already assumed that they know how to turn and listen. So I do like that they don't assume that the kids know how to do it. They are more explicit in things like make sure one person goes first this time and the other person goes first the next time. I like that social piece. I just wish the academic piece were more. But I do think it definitely helps students and I do like for each unit they want you to randomly pick new partners. I like that too because I used to always assign my partners and once or twice a year I'll still pick my partners because they switch so often. I feel like if I know that they end up with somebody who's not a great fit for them that it's only going to be for a couple weeks and it's good for them to have to work with people that they don't necessarily gel with. I do like really that they want you to pick randomly.

Are the students kind to each other, especially if one student is not especially a good writer?

Yes. We talked about that a lot even throughout the day. We say different things are easy and hard for different people all across her whole life and just being respectful. Sometimes you have to correct someone if you don't understand what they're saying. I have some kids that don't make sense when they're talking. So I'm teaching them how to say things in a nice way, such as, can you repeat that, or what are you trying to get across, and I'm trying to get them to be kind to each other. So I do really like that piece.

Do you think those social skills of the students talking together, being a good listener, saying things like maybe you could add to your story or I don't quite understand or who else was in your story, do you think those social skills help to improve their writing when they go back and maybe add to it or fill in more? Do you think those social skills help to improve their writing development?

I think any partnership is going to help them because it's going to be someone else's thoughts. I try to encourage them not to tell their partner what to write but to think of themselves as a writing teacher. Like what strategy would you suggest? Instead of saying, hey you should repeat this word, or suggesting what about repetition. I tell them that real writers have editors input. It's not just that they write and someone publishes it. I'm trying to get them to understand that it's not written once and done. So I think it's good having that partner to bounce ideas off of. Some kids really get it and they'll meet with their partner, not just because they want to chat during writing time but because they actually want to hear an idea or read it to someone.

Especially with the poetry, they love meeting with a partner to read their poem and have someone listen to it because they know that they can't raise their hand for me, that I can't listen to everyone of their poems everyday, so their partners give a chance for them to get that out and share. So I think that's helpful.

Do they get ideas from each other sometimes?

Right now are revising our poetry to wrap up this unit. On our list of ideas for revision, one of them is to meet with your partner and read them your poem and see if they have any suggestions for you and then it's your choice whether to take their suggestion or not because it's their piece of writing. Some kids have really strong vocabulary, so if there's a boring word, if you know your partner has great words, ask them, what can I use instead of this word? So I'm trying to get them to see each other strengths. So if they know like Lakshmi knows how to spell everything, they can ask her and utilize that strength. I have a couple that I just didn't have to teach them anything. They just understood how to write a poem and the kids in the class know who those kids are and that they're the ones to go to for that.

Do the kids go to them?

Yes, if I'm in a conference here with a student like Georgie and he has a couple of strong writers with him. I don't want to tell them what to write but in my head I'm thinking, if only they could write like this. So I'll throw it out, to like the other kids, such as what could Georgie say this is like, and let them give ideas, because then it's more student oriented. So I try to get them to feel okay asking for help and we try to share at the end so they get to.

Does it help them to feel more safe and take more risks?

Yes, especially the students that know that writing isn't their forte. I have one and he said to his mom and he said to me that he doesn't like writing and whenever I call his name to share, I just pull a name out of a cup, he would always say no thank you. Then just last week, I called his name and he was like, okay, and he came up and shared. That was exciting and we clapped for each other and we try to encourage them. I feel like he was finally like okay, I did it, but then today he was kind back to his usual.

So you feel that any social interaction is usually kind of positive if they can get it out and share with another person and get some ideas from another person. A struggling writer can learn some things from a strong writer so that definitely improves their writing than.

So that leads me to my last question, what aspects of the Being A Writer program do you feel can be enhanced? You had said it's not meeting up to your students, the expectations that you have for your students.

It's surfacey. I don't know if that's a real word. It's kind of touches on a lot of things. There is not enough explicit strategies for…. I like the beginning, at the beginning we're like, this is

great, because it had a lot of making lists and generating ideas and reading; but then I just felt like it just stayed there. It was like okay today write a story, then draw a picture of a window and write a story about the broken window. Then the next day was like something different and you felt like the kids never got a chance to see a piece through. It seemed like it started a lot of things but never went really deep into anything.

So didn't have them adding a lot of details, and going back.

There were no other strategies like stretch it, stretch it out or tell in slow-motion like Lucy Calkins has more explicit show don't tell, stretch it out, what found my you here. Even Barber Mariconda has more explicit strategies teaching kids exact things to do to make their writing stronger. Writing is already hard to teach because it's so subjective and the kids are in so many different places because of their own ideas it's like everywhere already. So I feel that I need at least more structure to teach them.

So you feel it is lacking in structure?

Yeah. I didn't feel it was going to take my kids any further. But we tend to have strong writers, so I think in a population where the kids were not writers or students who really struggled with writing, like the presenter was talking about schools in Rhode Island, I bet this program took them from being non-writers to writers and getting things out on the paper. At least here there are so many of them writing at home.

The students here are probably exposed a lot. They have their own computers or maybe their taken to museums.

Exactly. I mean we feel the same way about Making Meaning too sometimes. It doesn't quite like go deeply into strategies. It presents them in a kind of practice, but we feel that we end up adding a lot, so that the students go more deeply into them. So I guess that would be my issue with both of the programs. But especially Being A Writer because what we already had, we felt was really generating good writing.

Does your principal support the Lucy Calkins?

Yes. We had a writing committee and they went through the Being A Writer program. These units are the genres, these are the objectives, this is what the town expects you to teach. Our principals and reading specialists really said you know, as long as you teach these things, we are fine with whatever you choose to use, whether it's Lucy Calkins or Barbara Mariconda or whoever, they were very supportive of whatever we wanted to use.

That's your town, your grade level or your reading specialists?

It was the principal and reading specialists. Each grade level met with them individually last year. We had kind of like a writing focus in our building. So when second-grade met we

brought up our concerns about Being A Writer and they felt that as long as we were teaching what the town and now with common core. The kit we've always used is actually K-2, so some of the lessons we don't use because they're geared for too young. So some of the lessons might get repeated from year-to-year. So the 1st grade uses a unit and we might use the same unit, which they don't remember anyway. But I want to say, this year, she's coming out with great specific units that incorporate the common core and have the books with them so we've mentioned that we'd be interested because we have felt that the units in the past have gotten a lot out of the kids.

I went to the teachers college one summer. I bought into it too. I was there for a week with the trainers. They definitely convinced me that it works. I can see it. Writing in general is hard. It's like… I love it… but it's frustrating at the same time to teach.

Great. Is there anything else that you'd like to add or anything else that you can think of?

No I definitely think no matter what program you use, having the partners and someone for the kids to bounce ideas off of….

The class community you feel is important?...

Definitely. And the writing and the reading too, I think you need that, because you know you can't call in 21 kids everyday, so it gives them a chance to say what they're thinking to someone, even if it's not the teacher.

Great.

Great! Excellent, well thank you very much for this interview.

Thank you for taking the time to interview. I will type up your transcript. Feel free to delete by crossing off or add by writing in at the bottom.

I am in agreement of this interview transcript. Please sign, copy and return one copy to me.

Signature: _____

Appendix K: Interview 12

2/25/13

The following research question is posed, to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing?

Hi, How are you?

Hi good, how are you?

I'm just going to start off with my first question. What are your experiences with the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program at all?

Here in my classroom for the last three years I have been using the program. The first few years I was just dipping into pieces and parts and this year I've been using it for the entire year.

Do you like it?

I do like it. **I've sent a big change in the way that the kids get excited about writing** and going off to writing time and definitely after using the model text they get excited about the stories and they want to complete a piece similar to it.

You do like a mini lesson?

Yes. I start with a mini lesson and sometimes it's either reading of a text or creating a piece together as a class or individually and depending on the focus of the lesson they'll go and apply it to their own writing.

Do they do partner share?

I do have kids working in partners, they share and talk a lot following the mini lesson and even when they go back to write they work with their partner a lot. They're reading each other's text and offering suggestions as to what they can enhance in their writing or what they like about their writing.

Okay so you have used it for three years, mostly this year continuously.

Yes.

Did you find it took a few years to get used to it?

I was so used to using the model of Barbara Mariconda.

You used this before?

A lot of that. As a model.

Do you mix the two now?

I do, I do mix it sometime for the structure. I feel that Being A Writer lacks that, such as beginning, middle and end, the structure and how to tell the kids how to structure a story. How to organize the story.

Tell me a little bit about Barbara Mariconda and the structure of the story.

Basically whenever the kids write a narrative they have a graphic organizer to start out and all have their beginning, their main ideas, and details and their conclusion. So it definitely helps the kids realize this is what I'm going to put in my beginning, middle, and end. Where Being A Writer has you just like give the kids paper and have them begin writing a story. They think about it but they don't plan it out. They may plan it in their mind but at the second grade level it's such a big jump for the kids. They need that structured model first.

So your saying that Being A Writer is lacking in that structure that they still need?

Yes definitely for second grade and for the expectations that the district sets upon us.

Do you use any other things besides Barbara Mariconda?

Basically that, that's what I used before Being A Writer.

Do you mesh the two, to keep the structure?

This year I've been trying so hard to stay with it because we've been asked to stay with it, so I'm just following along with that. It's hard sometimes because you want to just jump to what you know because it's easy for you. We did do in December the writing prompt. The scores were actually better than what I anticipated them to be. So I was like, alright we have to put our trust in it. Maybe in off weeks I'll work on the beginnings of a story, ways to begin or conclusions.

So that leads me to my next question, how does the Being A Writer program improve students writing development? Are there any increases in their actually adding details, maybe the length of their story or the spelling of their trick words, that kind of thing.

I definitely see an increase in their details, definitely in their fiction stories. I feel that they use the model text to really model their own writing and they get the ideas. One example is the story Dogzilla, it's about a fiction dog that comes and attacks the city of mice and the kids

get so excited and want to make their own story of Dogzilla. *It really captures them and they get very excited. So I think that helps them develop as writers because they want to go on and write. They do share with their partners, they reflect on each other's work and help their partners.* They help them to add more to their piece.Where as before when they're just writing and showing them what to write and writing the story together it's fun, but sometimes when they go on their own, they don't know what to write, so those model texts really help them.

So you really like those model texts?

Yes.

Do you have enough of those?

No.

You would like more?

Yes, that would be great. Some of the units don't have as many as other units.

Okay so you said the kids are excited, they want to learn to write, they're adding more details.

I find their vocabulary, this year especially their vocabulary is more in-depth and advanced.

Then do they share with their partner or do they share with the class?

Yes, we do both. *They do share with their partners, they reflect on each other's work and help their partners. They help them to add more to their piece.* We also have shared writing time where we have author's chair, where students will share their piece of work and then the class will come and comment what they liked about their story what they want to hear more about. Then they go back and add more to it.

How do you edit, do you skip lines or do you have them write it over?

I struggle with this all the time. I taught the kids how to skip lines and put a dot on every other line first to start their paper with dots just for them to get started.

That's cute they must like doing that.

They do. They remind each other too. Such as, oh Ben didn't do his dots. That's been helpful. But it's so hard because some of the kids remember and some of them don't and some kids never think they have to add anything to their story. So that's always a struggle. Yes, they think it's perfect. What I have done before is they've added to their paper with a piece of tape on the side, like wings but that gets confusing too sometimes. But for now we've been skipping the lines.

How about ideas coming up with their own ideas? Does the Being A Writer give them an idea or are they able to come up with the ideas on their own?

I think sometimes especially for the kids who struggle they just take the idea that the program gives to them that's just where they are. That's all they know. But for the higher kids they can really stretch it. They are able to discuss together and sometimes come up with these amazing ideas that you wouldn't think of.

Okay so let's go onto the next question how has the Being A Writer program effected the student's social development? What I mean by that is that think, pair, share, listening to each other stories, commenting, teaching those respect type skills.

In the beginning of the year it takes a lot of modeling just because you'll be like, okay you're going to read your piece, you're going to share your idea with your partner and I find in the beginning of the year when you tell them that, they're like okay and then when you ask them to share their partners idea, they weren't really listening at all. But with the practice and modeling over and over and over again they are getting really good at being able to listen and tell you what their partner said. It's basically training them how to listen. It's important and it's great for social development and being able to articulate what someone else has said. This class caught on very quickly like within a month. They were all very good at being able to share their partner's ideas even what other people had to say because sometimes after we share our ideas we might talk and say who can tell me what somebody else's idea was today? And they're able to say, well Austin said this, so they've gotten a lot better at it.

What if a story needs a lot of work, are they able to say in a nice way to fix it up?

Yes, we talk a lot in the beginning of the year. If I were to say to you this is terrible, how would that make you feel. And so we came up with different ways to find one or two things that you think they need to work on. I think you might think about adding this to your story. We try to work on those sentence starters. It's not anything negative, like your spelling is terrible. I think too that they're good at taking turns with sharing. In the beginning, of course everybody wants to read their story first or share their idea first, but now they're able to take turns and say how about you go first today. They seem more mature then in years past.

Have you been doing agree or disagree or your opinion, that kind of a thing?

Yes. I taught that and giving reasons why they agree or disagree.

Let's go onto the next question which is very similar to the previous one do you feel the social skills taught through the program help increase student writing skills? So all that talk and in discussions and suggesting does it help their writing development?

I think it does in a way that sometimes is not so obvious. **I think with the kids working so**

much together and sharing ideas just gives them a sense of comfort in the class room and gives them that comfort in taking that risk and trying different things with their writing and not to be afraid to make mistakes or thinking that their idea is silly just because they know that they're supported by everyone. So I think that has helped. There's so much sharing. It's a community and they all want to be a part of it and just to know that they're supported. If you're quick to say, oh I don't know what to write, they're not going to be part of the conversation in the community too. So I feel like the amount of sharing lifts them to what to do next, it's the expectation. I think too when kids see other kids writing an amazing piece and see what other kids can do with their writing it sparks them to try to do it as well. My class is very aware of where each other are in terms of reading and writing, who's in small groups more often, and why does somebody go to reading. I think they all want to try to keep up with each other so there's a little bit of healthy competition. It's not a bad thing but they're very curious as to why is somebody going here and there, why are you working with me two days in a row versus somebody else. It's very different.

Do you find that it depends on the group you get year-to-year? Some years they need more instruction and some years they may need less instruction?

Definitely. Last year I had a very low group and it was a struggle because I felt as though everybody needed extra support and luckily for three months I had a student teacher so it was very helpful because I could attack more of the kids. It was too open for them. I would say go free write on anything and they would say free write about what. They just couldn't come up with anything. They might write one sentence and say I'm done and here's my picture. Where this group is a lot more interactive so it could be the group.

So it could be the group or it could be that you have more experience with the program.

Yes, I'm feeling more comfortable with it. Even organizing everything. In the past I would just throw it all into like a folder and now I have a binder with different sections. The kids all have a binder, their first section is for stories, another section for free writes.

Tell me about the binder.

We have not used all the sections yet, it's sections 1 through 5. The first one is for their stories, the second one are free writes, the third one is poetry, the fourth one is blank right now that's where we're going to be putting their published pieces in and the fifth one is where they keep all their ideas to write about. So it helps me to say okay you're going to put this in section one today to help keep it organized. Then at the end of the year they can just take it.

That's great.

The past few years I just had papers everywhere, what to save, what not to save what to send home, it was a struggle.

Do they have you making books? Putting together class books.

We haven't done that.

They have us take all their writing and then we make it into one big book. Like a class book for the first few.

No we don't have that at all.

Do you like the mentor texts?

Yes, I do like those a lot.

I think I asked you that already right?

Yes.

Are there aspects of the program that you feel can be enhanced?

The one thing basically is the organization. There's so little, just to say okay go and write a story. They think they're doing it and when you're reading it you're like, oh my goodness it skips all around. Sequencing is such a big part of what their scored on for the writing prompt. So much of it is about the sequencing, what happens first, next and last. We talk about it but just how to attack story. Also the planning piece. They talk a lot about it, but the don't write out a plan and even the writing prompt says use this sheet to plan out your piece. The kids are like what am I supposed to do? They don't understand even what that is.

They give them a sheet with something on it?

It says use this space to plan out your story. Use about five to ten min. to do that and then write for the last thirty min. They used to give the organizer and now they don't. It's just like here's the topic use the rest of this blank space to plan it out. And then they say here's three pages to write. So it's hard.

Do you give a graphic organizer to help them write?

I supplement, the only thing I've done with like my small group of kids who can't even, well not that they can do it on their own but their structure is everywhere. I taught them so here's a triangle and here's character, setting and the problem so think about that and just write down one or two ideas. And then here, the first thing you going to do for the character to solve the problem 1st, 2nd, 3rd and then the conclusion of the bottom. They have to tell how the character feels at the end. Just a try give them a structure.

So you're creating a structure for some. Some are able to go on their own.

Yes some are able to just fly.

Do you publish?

We just are finishing up. It's funny in our Being A Writer it wasn't until now that they asked to publish the first piece and I feel like it's very late so we're just finishing that up right now. What the kids did was they had to pick one of their fiction stories and then create almost like a book like an author would and draw pictures to match and decide what sentences they wanted on what page to match certain pictures. They're finishing that up now. And that's just now and I know it's very late but with the week off and the storm. It's pretty late.

I'm just curious what do they do leading up to it?

It's a story after story after story. You read a story we write stories together.

Is it picking a skill to teach?

No. The first ones are all like life experiences. The stories are about their own life. Write about your favorite pet, write about your favorite sister, write about a trip you went on and then it goes into fiction. And that's when a lot of the mentor texts came in for fiction and it wasn't until now that they say okay go ahead and pick one of your pieces to publish. It's been a long time without publishing anything. It's just story after story after story. But now every couple of weeks were off to publish.

It's interesting because ours is just starting to do that now too.

Okay so you think it's needing more organization, planning. You also would like more books.

Absolutely.

Is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to say before we end the interview.

No it's just that the writing prompt, I know I keep going back to that. This is a district writing prompt they have one in December and May and they're both always personal narratives. But the kids spend so much time in fiction and poetry and then May comes around again and they are asked to write personal narratives and they haven't done it since the beginning of the year. It's hard to transfer

You get a score for that?

Yup. It's the same score that they use for the CMT 3, 4 and 5 they use the same rubric.

Really so there's a rubric? You do the scoring?

We get together as a grade level and we all have to switch our papers and we give them two scores.

Do all the schools do that, do you know?

I know all the schools definitely have to do it in May. Last year we did not do the December one and Jackie was mad at us because it came from her and then this year we had to do the December one. I don't know if everybody else did it or not but we definitely did. I think everybody had to, but we have always done it.

Do you put that in their file then?

Yep. and that goes with them to the next grade.

Both?

Just the end one unless their in resource and they need to keep track of everything.

That's interesting.

I do like now that at least we actually have something to follow. I felt like before every single class was just throwing things together. We were like let's do this, let's do that. ***With everyone using the new writing program it levels the playing field when it comes to assessment.*** Because if we were doing something and somebody else was doing something different it's unfair to compare. It's not fair to the kids if we know that other kids are learning different things.

So your whole second grade is using this?

Yep.

Do you know if the whole school is using it?

Everyone is supposed to be using it.

Thank you for taking the time to interview. I will type up your transcript. Feel free to delete by crossing off or add by writing in at the bottom.

I am in agreement of this interview transcript. Please sign, copy and return one copy to me.

Signature: _____

Appendix L: Interview 10

2/15/13

The following research question is posed, to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing?

Hi How are you?

Hi good, how are you?

I'm just going to start off with my first question. What are your experiences with the Being A Writer program. Do you use the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program at all?

I'm new to the grade level this year, 2nd grade, so it's my first year in 2nd grade. I am familiar with it. I have picked up the manual and obviously have kind of glanced through it. At my school, we don't use it often, it's not my primary tool. Our primary tool is something different but we do use the books out of Being A Writer because we feel they're good examples of books to show students how authors write and different aspects of writing, such as using juicier verbs or sparkling adjectives. So they're good resources with books that are wonderful.

Okay so you use the books but you don't use the actual teachers manual?

Yes, we don't really follow the teacher manual. We don't find that the lessons are meaty enough.

Is there another program that you do use more often?

Yes, we use Lucy Caulkins and the Writers Workshop. We focus on small moments with the kids. We model by writing our own pieces and then have the students work with us on trying to juice up our writing by adding those adjectives or verbs that would be more appealing. So it's very much the same model of Being A Writer with that actual talking with the partner. They do partner share, so they sit with their partner and share what their ideas are and tell them their story. So from that aspect it is the same. Lucy Caulkins also recommends that. They're kind of aligned in that way. And then we do How To's with the children.

What are How-To's?

How To's are to teach them how to do something. So for example how to bake cookies. Thinking of the ingredients and the actual steps that it would take to carry out baking cookies and they share that with their partner again. Their partner acts those out to be sure that they

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have all the steps. We just finished up All About Writing so that's something they are an expert in. So they recently just did an expert on their family, they were researchers and ask questions of their family to gain information that they actually needed to complete their All About books. Now we are moving into opinion writing. We don't really follow the actual lessons from Being A Writer but we use the books as tools to show them how to make their writing stronger.

Okay, so you like the books and it's in alignment as far as partner sharing. Do you do a mini lesson or what is her format? Is it just Lucy Caulkins or do you use something else?

Mainly Lucy Caulkins.

Okay can you give me like a format such as you start out with a mini lesson.

Depending on what the focus will be for the day. So let's say we're looking at having the students add sparkling adjectives to their stories. So we take in their small moment, we will say… So I take a piece that I wrote and their familiar with the piece because I write the piece with them. I map out my thinking with them.

So you're doing it while they are sitting on the rug?

Yes and I write it out with them so they get to hear my story because I've shared my story with a partner. So we've got our story, it's been up there. Let's say today's lesson is to add sparkling adjectives. Together we read the piece fully one time. So they can remember the piece. Then we go through kind of line by line and see where could we add a sparkling adjective and we add them. Sometimes depending on what were doing with sparkling adjectives I may have a book to actually share with them before jumping into my piece so that they can see examples.

And those are called mentor texts?

Yes mentor texts.

Does Lucy Caulkins and have mentor texts? She does not provide a list of mentor texts, sometimes she'll recommend in her manual, there is a manual she has but there's no set list.

So you're kind of mashing the two together.

Yep.

Okay. So after you talk about the sparkling adjectives do they go back and do that individually or do they go back and do that with a friend?

Then what they do is they go back to their seats for writing and they pull out writing from their writing folder. Then they do model after what I did. They too read over their piece and look for places where they can add sparkling adjectives. After they finished doing that, they have

writing partners that they get with and they take their piece with them and they sit with their partner knee to knee, eye to eye and read their story to that partner. The partner then listen to their story actively and may have suggestions of how they can add an adjective and then they go back and obviously make those changes and then the other person shares their story and it helps them as well. So they have the partners to help them in places they're not always catching. We also use those partners too when we're writing the story. We use them when their first beginning to write their story to ask questions such as what does the dog look like? Or what did you do with your dog? So they ask questions so that the writer can think of ways to add more to their pieces.

How often do you change those partners? Do you set them up, or do they pick friends.

It's done by unit, so like the small moment unit, they have those partners for that unit and their chosen, I choose them. I don't choose them by friends. I choose them based on ability. I match them up based on what they need. Sometimes it's a high and a low, sometimes it's something that one friend has a real strength in that can help another friend with that. The partner ends up being a good model too.

Does Lucy Caulkins fostered this pair share or is that more part of Being A Writer?

I know it's in both. Like I said I'm more familiar with Lucy. I do know Being A Writer and I know it's a big part of Being A Writer but at the same time Lucy really pushes that too. This poster over here is the writing process that the kids follow. These are the things that they follow to know where they are in the process.

Is that Lucy Caulkins?

This is a Lucy Caulkins thing and this is something that Booth Hill put together.

Do all the teachers have this?

Yes, all the teachers have this. The whole building uses Lucy Caulkins. We use some other things to supplement it as well. In 2nd grade it's Lucy Caulkins, part of Being A Writer, and the mentor text.

How has the Being A Writer program affected students writing development? Let's ask about the mentor text how do those text effect, does it have an effect on their writing development?

I do, I think seeing is really powerful for them to see writers actually applying the skills because you know we call them our authors. They're authors and when you're an author you really need to grab the attention of your reader. And by using those mentor texts they can see how the author pulled in the reader. And how they want to do the same for those who are reading their pieces.

So they want to model what the author did?

Yes.

So as far as the Being A Writer program you feel the mentor texts are helping?

Yes, by seeing what good authors do.

How has the Lucy Caulkins writing program affected students writing development?

I think for the students to see us being writers as well is another great thing to share how the teachers model, to see how she writes. When students write they kind of just write their story. They have to go back and revise and for them to see that. The 1st time we write a story it doesn't just come out perfect. Even the teacher has to go back and correct. I tell the students that when the author wrote this story what you see right now is not what the 1st draft looked like. So for them to really kind of understand it takes editing and revising and you may do several times of editing and revising after reading that piece to finally get a nice polished published piece. At the end of each unit they pick their piece. They write several pieces throughout, so for a small moment they might write 3 small moments at the end we talk about what's the best piece. Which one did you have the most in your piece? And then they rewrite that piece with the revisions they made and there's a whole process of cutting....

Do you readers questions where they skip lines? Do you know of the reader's questions where the reader reads it. There's something called readers questions where the reader reads it and then they writing a question or maybe cut them apart you said something about cutting them apart.

They cut if they have something they need to add if they can't put a little carrot in. Then they cut the paper and they have another piece and they write it and they tape it into their story. They love it. Then they rewrite it and they published that piece. Then we have a publishing party for them. The other classes come in to hear their story. And usually we invite some of the younger classes so they can share them with their past teachers which is really nice. And at the end of the year we do the next grade up so that those teachers get a feel of how the students are doing. They love it.

That sounds really great!

My next question is how has the Being A Writer program effected students social development? If you just think about your two programs meshed together how have those two programs change their social development? I'm thinking more of like the pair /share and the discussions, the questions and the suggestions and revisions. I mean you had to teach that and model that. So let's talk a little bit about that.

So for that think pair share they obviously needed modeling and learning what questions to ask

their partner. When they're asking their partner to tell about their story I give them suggestions such as, tell me more about your story or why did that happen or tell me more about this part of the story. By doing that allowed the person they were working with to think of something they hadn't thought of so that was helpful to them. ***I think the fact that they actually share with each other, it allows them to really have to be active listeners*** which I think at a young age is sometimes hard for them. They're not always listening to others. By doing this ***they have to listen to each other because they are expected to give feedback.*** And I think it's almost like being an editor. They have to be like an editor because they're giving feedback to the person and then at the same time the person that's giving the feedback to the other person, the author, that author has to listen to their feedback and go back into their story and make changes. So there's a lot going on with the feedback and it did take a while with modeling. I model with my story and another student story. I picked a student, I had my story all written on the paper and I get on the floor so I was actually doing it. I would hold it in my hands and say okay am going to read my story then I would point to the chart of the steps of what to ask, then the student would look at the chart and ask questions, then I would fill in the gaps of what I was missing to answer her questions and then she modeled it back. I had the kids immediately after get together and do the same thing so I could hear how they were doing and remind them. Then eventually it just became a habit that they understood what to do.

So those are social skills. The active listening the questioning and like you said eventually it became a habit. Do you think those social skills of the think pair share and questioning and discussions help them to become better writers.

I do, I absolutely do. I've seen growth because I think even when they actually listen to someone else they might say, wow what a great idea that was, I think I want to do that as well. There's times when I sit on a stool, I have a stool and actually go around and listen to what the children are working on. We read those pieces and we ask them those questions and I'll stop every now and again. I'll say to them, wow this is really great let me share what my friend has, sometimes I let them read it if they're comfortable and I'll say, what was so great about what they wrote, and let the kids share what they heard was so wonderful. And then there like, wow Mrs. Conklin stopped I want to do the same. They get excited and want to do those kind of things. So I think that's great with it

Okay so you feel that that social peace is important?

Mmm. Yep it's a respect thing too.

Yep, so it builds respect for others, listening to others.

It's about being respectful about listening to their partner and giving positive feedback, that's important. They have to learn that. It's a learned respect.

How do the social skills through the program improve student's writing development that's a very similar question.

I think it totally makes a difference because like I said they really want to hear from their peers, they're listening to their peers, they're getting ideas maybe that they didn't think of. they're seeing other models other than authors books, my stories and they're seeing their peers and they're able to take ideas, not necessarily the actual words but how someone else wrote a piece, such as using onomatopoeia or using similes, sparkling adjectives. So using all those things that maybe we talked about in a mini lesson, but they are not sure how to put it in their piece, but by listening to a few of their peers they're able to do the same or find a way to start to do that. The discussion is key. The partner might say, you might want to look at that again, that didn't sound right, that didn't make sense. I think you need to reread that, you know because they leave out words here and there, so they might say you're missing a word and if the friend can't figure out where they're missing a word they'll help them and show them where that word is. Towards the end when it's kind of the final revision they sometimes actually physically swap the paper. I was telling them that it's true for adults because sometimes when you write something and you read it over it looks right to you because you've read it so many times and you don't catch the little things. They have a little checklist that they check off to make sure that they have things and sometimes some of them are like check, check, check, check. It allows the peer to take their piece and have a fresh look at it. And look for those same things and help the partner look at it. Then they might say, are you missing something here do you think you need this here? So that's helpful.

I know you don't use the Being A Writer that much, do you feel it can be enhanced? What is it, is it your principal that is said he likes Lucy Caulkins better.

It's a little bit of both.

You had said you didn't think it was meaty enough.

Our principal pushes Lucy Caulkins. That's the program that he wants us to use and the Writers Workshop model. When looking at it, the mentor texts are really great, there's some great jumpstart's, kind of ideas to get you thinking, I just don't think it gives them enough. I feel like the pieces that they want to write, it's just not enough they'll don't go very far with it. I don't think it allows them always to be free. Like with small moments their writing about experiences they've had. Which helped them to actually write more. They'll write two or three pages, sometimes four because they can relate to that experience, it's about them. And the How To they pick something they knew about to tell someone how to do and all about so they were invested in it. The Being A Writer more tells you what to do, like what they should be writing about.

So it doesn't really cover what's in their heart.

Yeah, sometimes some of the lesson could but I just don't feel with some of the lessons that the kids are invested in.

So there's really not a way that it could be enhanced you're really more using Lucy Caulkins, you're using some of the mentor text, you're combining the two, you use the Writers Workshop, mentor text, think/ pair /share is in both of them, listening skills, suggestions about each other's writing in both, you think that those social skills are definitely beneficial to student writing…

Absolutely I think it's key.

In helping students become better writers is there anything else you might like to add or say..

No we are pushed to use Lucy Caulkins in the building. I think it can be hard for us in the district because the district has put forward Being A Writer. Does the district know?

Yes

Thank you for this interview.

Thank you for taking the time to interview. I will type up your transcript. Feel free to delete by crossing off or add by writing in at the bottom.

I am in agreement of this interview transcript. Please sign, copy and return one to me.

Signature: _____

Appendix M: Interview 5

1/24/13

Okay, this is interview number five and my name is Jacqueline Blackmore and I am a researcher at Walden University. I am here to interview a teacher to discuss the Being A Writer program and I would like to know to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing and then I also would like to know if there are any suggestions or ways that this teacher feels that the program could be enhanced. So we're going to start the interview, Hi, how are you?

Good, hi, how are you?

I'm going to start with my first question which is what are your experiences with the Being A Writer program?

I started in 3rd grade as one of the pilot teachers for the Being a Writer program. I piloted it that 1st year in 3rd grade and I did have difficulties with it. It started off with talking about a lot of "getting ideas" but I felt that there was no writing. I continued with it and I think at third-grade they were a little too young to be so independent and doing a lot of the writing on their own. Then I moved to 4th grade and I used the Being A Writer program, I felt in 4th grade, whether it was the 4th grade edition versus the 3rd, that it just did a much better job showing how to use the mentor texts and then having the kids independently write and how to do conferences and I don't know if it was because the students were more able to handle more independence as opposed to third-graders. But the kids did a wonderful job. I really enjoyed doing the Being A Writer program. We do a three-way switch, so last year and this year I taught writing to 3 of the fourth-grade classes. So I did the lessons 3 times. I really felt that the students became much better writers. The books were fantastic, the way that they have the kids turning and talking with each other, sharing ideas. I think it helped kids that were stuck and it also helped the kids that weren't stuck develop their stories even further.

The sharing was wonderful. There was one activity where they share one sentence and everybody gets to share just that one sentence and everybody gets to share, so it's not a competition because everybody gets to share. It's almost gotten to the point as the year goes on that the kids all want to share now. At the beginning some maybe were more shy. I love that they also have all the different genres of writing. It takes them not just through,.. I mean we have focused on just fictional narrative in the past before the Being A Writer program and you taught that all year long, all year in 4th grade. Now it really shows the kids how to write fictional, how to write personal narratives, poetry, informational, functional, and I mean it just shows so much more. Because I've taught it 3 times, I've been able to refine a lot of it for me. Even with one class coming in after the next, what worked, what didn't work, what books were useful, what books weren't as useful and I was able to do that. I enjoy the program now.

But it took a few years to get to that point?

That I think is the key and I think when I was in 3rd grade I may have given up too easily and said this isn't going to work and not have really seen my way through it. Where when I actually just followed through and just said okay I am going to try this, I'm going to do this with fidelity and just really focus on it, it worked. I was pleasantly surprised that it worked. I was very apprehensive at first at the beginning.

Do you think there was a big difference between the 3rd and the 4th?

Yes, I really do and I think that it may just be the developmental age of the child. It could have also been me saying all of this isn't working in my head and I just gave up too quickly.

Okay so you've been using this for 3 years, in 4th grade?

One in 3rd, and two in 4th.

I see you like the mentor texts and I see in 4th grade you like that they're more independent, that you like their conferencing, you are doing a three-way switch, so you're teaching it 3 times. That makes you feel as though you're a better teacher and the students are better writers. You also like the talk and turn and sharing of ideas.

So how has the Being A Writer program affected the students writing development? What do you see as something that they have become better at?

They're better at creating ideas. At the beginning of the year they want you to give them the ideas. They say what should I write about? And through reading the stories and talking with other students they've learned to create their own ideas. Which is probably one of the most wonderful things. There are going to be times in their life when they're going to have to come up with things on their own. That's definitely been one positive. I think the other thing that's positive is that it increased their writing stamina. They can write for longer periods of time and I think through hearing the mentor texts they've heard examples of good writing. I always tend to as I find a word or a phrase that I think is well written, I point it out and tell them that they might want to use something similar to this. This vocabulary word is good for this part. I think that's also helped their writing ability too.

So you said that you liked that they created their own ideas. Do you think that makes a difference in their stamina because it's coming from something they've done or a place they've been? Do you feel that that will help them write longer as opposed to if you give them a prompt? Do you think that it makes a difference?

I do, I think it makes a difference because they're taking ownership for their writing and it's something that they enjoy. It's something that they like. They are excited. I have to say that teaching in the past without the Being A Writer program that you would say to the kids, okay

it's writing time, and they almost like dreaded it. This time I have to say more than half the class, when I say it's time for writing, they are excited, they want to go back to their seat to write. Or if I'm doing a whole class lesson and they don't have as much time to write, their bummed about it. They're so upset, they say we don't get to write today? That's a vast improvement over years that I've been teaching.

That's great!

I think that they're excited about it and that carries over to them wanting to share what they're doing, they're all eager to share whatever their writing. They might say, oh I have this great sentence, can I share it? Sometimes they're leaving my room and they don't want to leave the room yet because they want to show me something that they've done today. It's almost like I have to push them out the door so they get back to their class. Which is something I've never experienced before.

That's great! How about the mechanics, sentence structure, punctuation or details, do you think that those are getting better?

I think that the detail portion of Being A Writer does a wonderful job of showing the kids how to add sensory details into their writing. ***The one area that is lacking is the mechanics and grammar. It is in the there, when we get to the proofreading portion of the unit that we're covering, but it's bare minimum.*** We might just focus on homophones or this is just focusing on punctuation at the end of the sentence or capitalization of proper nouns and I don't feel that it does enough. I have to supplement that. I do supplement and add-in whenever I see the kids during a conference and I noticed several of them are making....

So that's the details piece?

That's the grammar piece, the proofreading. I noticed a lot of similar errors with my students.

Do they do editing?

They have editing books. We call it the white book. The white book has all grammar components in it. It's not very friendly to use.

Is it part of the Being A Writer program? Yes, it is a part of the Being A Writer program. It never tells you specifically went to use it. You have to almost look through the pages and put them where you think they fit best throughout the unit.

So this is an editing book?

Yes and it's not the friendliest book for the kids to use. It has paragraphs and it will have them find all the nouns in the paragraph and they just go through and circle it. So how beneficial that is for them and their writing? That is a part that I feel is lacking.

Do they do a partner editing or share where they read to their partner and make suggestions?

There are lots of opportunities for peer conferencing. The kids meet together usually several times throughout the unit. So they meet together whenever they are starting and it gives the kids the opportunity to talk about what they should do next. Then a little farther into the unit, but there will be another opportunity to peer conference and you will be closer to completing your piece and discuss what's missing. They tell you to make charts like I have one up on completing first drafts.

You have a lot of charts.

Yes I do, some of them are reading, some of them are writing, but like completing first drafts, to add on and its questions, that the kids can start to ask each other, and then they meet again and it's done. So that they can have each other proofread. So there are a lot of opportunities to peer conferencing. But you definitely had to teach them to peer conference.

You have to model it?

Yes, there's lots of modeling, and I will even model with a para in the classroom, or I will pick a student that can handle doing it in front of the class and won't get nervous. I model that with them and that's usually the first few times. At this point in the year with it being January, they know what to do. They're more efficient at conferencing.

And they're accepting that friends make comments and suggest changes?

They have, they are. The one thing that I've noticed at first I would pair them together myself and they weren't as comfortable if it was somebody that they were not friendly with. They almost need the comfort level. So once I know the children and I knew who their friendly with I mix-and-match. I try to keep them with somebody that they're comfortable with because then they're more apt to want to share as opposed to, oh I'm working with this kid and I don't really get along with him or her and that can sometimes create issues that you don't need.

How is the Being A Writer program affected student social development? So it a little bit kind of ties into if they're close to the person or not. Do you find that when they do talk and discuss and share and then share together is that building a strong social relationship more so then it would if you didn't teach it through this format?

I think in the past not ever really trying to build the social environment and writing that it was just strictly where you write and you come to the teacher, that aspect. I think that they do, they're excited to hear each other when they share as a whole class. Some of those lessons are building that caring community and we go over that. Someone that you're partnering with you may not like their story or there may be parts that need a lot of fixing, but you have to phrase it in a way that is helpful and you have to model that. I say that you're not

always going to have a partner that will be doing their best writing and that's your job to help them. There's definitely a lot of modeling but it's still tough for some of the kids. A lot of times they strictly go with, oh yeah that's great, when they conference. We're still working on that. I do feel that it does help their social development. They listen to each other better than before, They're actively listening and not staring up into the ceiling.

I know at my grade level they have skills like, speak clearly, and look at your partner, and look back and say what they did well or what they could do better, do they have that here at this grade level as well?

Yes, what they did well, what they need to do better, sometimes the kids will even say I think you should do this and help them by giving them an example. But I do see that they definitely do want to help each other. Sometimes they don't know the best way to but they know they want to help. ***They applaud each other and that boosts their self confidence. It boosts self esteem because they know they are reading each others work and they want to help each other.*** But it does create a different environment. The kids know that writing is to be shared. One of the things that that Being A Writer program has them do is they publish a book after the unit is over. We just finished personal narrative so they published a personal narrative story. They say to keep it in a classroom library so that kids always can read each other's, so we have boxes for each class and are able to at certain times go over and read somebody's published piece. That also builds... because this is something that's going to be shared. It's supposed to be shared so that it almost makes them do better work because of it.

So it's boosting their self-esteem and makes them want to do more because they know other people will be reading their piece.

Right, yes, they know other kids are reading it. They will even comment on each others, they'll say, oh I read your story and you know that was such a great story that you wrote.

That's so nice.

It is. it's great. It definitely has a positive effect on the social development. ***They have become better listeners in an age of electronics. This teaches them to learn to listen. That is part of writing and communicating.***

Okay, how do the social skills taught through the program improve their writing development and we've been discussing this a little bit previously all along.

By hearing other students writing they hear other examples of good writing, other ideas and it just helps them with their own writing. There are several kids that are truly talented writers and when they share it helps some of the kids that may need a little more help. They'll hear a phrase or word and they'll say oh maybe I'll try using that in my story. Here's an idea and they say, oh I can take that and develop that into something maybe a little differently. Which all goes together with the sharing idea. Sharing helps. It's fun just to go around and listen to them. Whenever

their peer conferencing or turning and talking it's really important that you walk around listen in to what they're saying because you'll hear some kids off-topic and you can guide them to hear some of the good stuff that the other kids are discussing. Sometimes I'll stop the groups and say look, this is what's going on with these two students and this is what they are talking about. Then they try to do it.

So that's another modeling situation where two students are doing it and modeling a way for other students to do it well.

So that leads me to my last question, what aspects of the Being A Writer of program do you feel can be enhanced? You had mentioned something earlier about proofreading and editing and grammar.

The grammar component can definitely be enhanced. I know it's better to teach the kids through their own writing how to improve their grammar skills but some times you need to teach it out of context as well, just so that they understand the concept of it. I don't think there are enough lessons on that aspect for the kids to do.

So you supplement your own lessons?

Yes I do. Sometimes I have them use grammar books that I've used in the past that I've supplemented with, that seems to help. The other area that could be enhanced is that I feel there should be more modeling of writing, so right now I'm teaching fictional narrative and we read several stories that have wonderful descriptions of settings, so that they can hear it, but they almost need to see somebody write a good description, so that they can carry that over from the mentor text into their own story. So I supplement that as well. Okay were going to write about a beach, I model, this is how you write a good setting.

So they don't tell you to do that?

No.

At the younger age they do teach about the setting and what it looks like as the students get older they seem to pull that away when maybe they need to keep it in there a little longer.

There might be some grades that in the future I might not have to do that with as they move throughout their years of doing the program. There are lessons on how to build suspense and you read stories that are suspenseful but you're not writing one and for some of the children they need to see how to put it all into action into their story. So I sometimes model more with the kids then what the manual say to.

Do you have the kids, and add pieces to the story?

Yes I do the interactive piece with the kids, I do have kids come up. Like we just did today we

were building suspense in a story, they came up with a topic, they voted on it. They voted on a titanic ship so we used that to build suspense and I showed them a few techniques that they could use. Then they gave me the ideas and I just put them in a better more cohesive sentence and sometimes I would use a different vocabulary word. So they would say "oh I saw" and I might say let's use "I peered into" so it also enhances their vocabulary. Then they say, oh I can use that in my story.

How do you like to mentor text do you think that they are appropriate that there should be more or less?

I think that most of them are appropriate there are certain ones that we have with the Making Meaning for reading and they had the same book in writing and that's not always the best thing to do. We read Basket Moon in reading three times. Then the following week had to read it again for writing and by then for the kids it gets old. I would like maybe if possibly they could give alternate book titles that you can use.

Does that happen often with Making Meaning?

Not too often, there may be 2 or 3 that overlap like that.

The overlap is great so that they can hear how reading and writing go together but I think it sometimes overkill for the kids.

Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to add or do you have any other questions you can think of as far as their experiences, how to enhance their writing development, their social development etc.

One thing for their writing development that's really important is the individual conferences that you have with kids. I've created a binder. Where each student has their own page. When I meet with them I write down just observations, then I notice and what I think that they can work on. That part being with them one-on-one is more beneficial probably than anything you can do because it's definitely aimed right at the student, it's what they need. It's really important to do the conferences, the hard part is fitting the conferences in.

Do you do that when other students are writing?

When they're all writing I call students over one at a time. I just meet with them and check in with them. Sometimes it's at the beginning of the story to help them come up with ideas, sometimes it's in the middle of the story to see how they're doing and where they're at and sometimes it's at the end of the story to help them proofread.

So that gives you the chance to complement them when they're doing something better.

The last time you were working on adding details and this looks good now why don't we focus

on character reaction. But you have to take really good notes or otherwise with so many students I forget what I've talked to the student about. The Being A Writer has like a form, which was helpful, with the date, the observation and suggestions. I find that is one of the most helpful things. Then I have one on each kid so is when I meet with them, some I meet more often with than others depending on their writing ability. Some kids ask for them. They say they need a conference. Then there are some kids who need a conference that don't ask for them so you need to give them a conference. I would have not thought to formulate one like that so it was nice that it was already there. Another part that's really nice is there grading rubrics where it has all the traits and then you can circle and then, I changed the bottom, at the bottom there was some random questions I didn't feel it was kid friendly in giving this back to the child so just changed it with two additional comments and then I write notes to them. I write notes up over here, all over the place and I give this back to them and I keep a copy.

Then you send it home?

Yes I do I send that home and then the parents know. Unfortunately I don't send writing home because they keep it here in school but I let them bring it home to show their parent but they just have to bring it back and at the end of the year I send it home. I like having the library of all their work. Those are 2 tools that they have right in the program to use that I like.

Okay sounds great. Thank you for this interview.

If you are in approval of this interview, please sign below and return a copy to me. You may also sign it electronically and send it via email, interoffice or postage mail. Thanks again. Email: blackmoj@trumbullps.org

I am in approval of this interview.

Signature_____

Appendix N: Interview 3

1/10/13

Hi, this is Jacqueline Blackmore a researcher at Walden University and I am studying to what extent building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners can foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing. I am also curious to find out how teachers feel about the new Being A Writer program and if they feel that the program is useful or if there are any enhancements that they feel that could make the program more successful in the future. Thank you very much for meeting with me, how are you today?

Good. Hi Jacki, it's always a pleasure to see you.

So let me just ask the first research question. What are your experiences with the Being A Writer program? Tell me a little bit about your experience with it.

I've had the program in the classroom for about 2 to 3 years now and I've been using it a little bit more this year. We've had someone start a pilot in our school so I've been using it in the classroom for 2 to 3 years. Just thinking about writing in general, while I'm looking at the questions and reflecting on writing. I think writing to begin, especially with early children or even adults, writing, is a lifelong skill. It's a skill that evolves with each experience, expression, and can help the individual or the person reading the piece, the pieces. Writing means different things to different people. It's a challenge for some. It's a pleasure for others. It's a voice for people that want to be heard. Sometimes there are children who may not always be heard. It's a good way for them always to be on the show and tell and share. It's a release for some, it could be stressful for others, fun or not fun at all. So when I think of this program, I think of all these variables, especially with young children. As a 1st grade teacher in their early years of writing, I'm modeling. I'm a big part of this program. As an educator expected to teach writing to young children, I think I have a really big commitment in this role. So in looking at this program, not only do I look at it and execute it verbatim but I really need to do some reflection because I may be their very first experience in writing. ***When I used the program faithfully I was surprised at the student's improvement in writing.***

Okay so you do a little modeling first before they go off and do anything on their own?

Absolutely, being committed to this, the program it has a nice layout. I think it does have a nice layout. I like the fact that for new teachers who really need an anchor to start somewhere, this is a nice introduction. Should this be the only experience for the young writers, not at all. Writing expresses so many different feelings and emotions, this is just one way of starting writing. I think it's a benchmark. The modeling is a very important piece. I usually gather my children on the rug. I talk to them about my own writing and how I feel about writing and when I write and I tell them that they're going to do a lot of writing. The program is set up to teach the students and this program allows that. One of the things I really enjoy about this program is the conversation piece and the discussion. I think it hooks them into sharing and one of the

questions you had is if the program is set up to teach the students to begin, having you know, turning and talking, sharing ideas with friends, reviewing, discussion, and children love to share. They want to come in and immediately, especially young children 3, 4, 5, 6, 7-year-olds when they come in they're happy to share. This helps them turn and talk. I love the piece about illustrating. I'm a very big advocate throughout my years of early childhood teaching especially kindergarten and 1st grade. Illustrating is the key. That's one piece that I love about the program, the illustration piece. That helps children with the entire story. Their entire writing piece, that's their reference. That's their resource. As adults we know that many times when we're asked, you need to respond to something, we're frozen, we're frozen, were not sure what to do. Where do we begin? It always tricky and how do we began… once we get that flow we're okay. It is very similar with the illustration with the pieces. It guides the children. Again the program has mechanics that are part of the curriculum. That's important as well. Going over each day what good writers do, conversations, the modeling, feeling good about it, trying to release the stress. I think again writing is a lifelong skill.

So you really enjoy the conversational piece and the modeling?

I love the conversational piece.

You're doing the modeling and then they're copying

Exactly, because I noticed the dynamics. New friendships start. If I say that I went to a particular movie and another child is sharing the same thing with another child now they have a common ground. I saw that movie and it starts a discussion and I pair them up, they share, because the goal is to help them become stronger writers. So having the illustration, having the grammar, having talk about the uppercase letters and the spacing the ending marks and not just zoning in on those pieces but given the importance of the writing. How wonderful, we want to hear all your words. You have such great words. Your stories are so valuable and by having the modeling and conversation they don't really see that. That will come in time, but because they're early writers and their just starting it's critical to bring them in, that desire, I want to do this, I want to try this, I can do this.

So do you think the program has had a positive effect on their writing development?

Yes, when I first started I wasn't sure about the pace. I felt, I think my children can do more than this. This is taking a really long time. Now that I've exercised the program for 3 years I see how valuable it is. That the beginning, you know how you will only have that first time to make that 1st good impression and having the deliberate pace. Sometimes we just work on the illustration from one day and their eager… can I start writing now and I say not yet… wait let's look at our illustration and then come back, let's just share the picture. I'm certain that your classmates will almost know your story just by looking at your picture by looking at the illustration. The program promotes that. Again all the mechanics of it, sharing the story, revisiting the story, adding to the story, not feeling as if they need to have an end product immediately thinking the piece has to be completed today. That's valuable as well.

That's difficult for little ones that want to get it done quickly.

Exactly. Revisiting the stories, let me read that piece again, or I'll say to a child, Jacki, I really liked that story, can you go back to that piece? I want to just picture that in my mind. I can see you there. The conversation is a strong piece, having the discussions.

Okay is the discussion between you and the students or the students and the students?

Both.

Okay because that is a question that I have, how has it affected their social development, do you think it affects the social development in a positive way or at all. Do you think by having those interrelationships, does that strengthen their writing?

Absolutely, well just to go back my professional goal for the last 2 years has been writing. Again, as a seasoned teacher, I've been doing a lot of writing. I wanted to challenge my self a little bit. I researched Habits of Mind because I noticed that through the years there are some children that naturally are great writers. They'll look at another peer and almost snicker at them, that they're not really at this stage that they are at, and that concerns me, so I really wanted some empathy in there and Habits of the Mind has that piece where the children are being respectful to one another.

Is this a book?

Yes. Habits of the Mind is a practice Jackie and it actually,.. corporations are doing this, lots of different companies have been exercising this.

So you are incorporating this with the Being a Writer?

Yes.

Can you tell me a little about it?

Yes. We focus on Habits of the Mind. It has 16 different ideologies. One is not giving up, we can do it, perseverance, and that's one that I've chosen this year. Each year I look at my class. I look at the dynamics of my classroom and the dynamics of the children and empathy is another habit of the mind that I exercise with the writing. We're listening to our friends as they're reading their piece. This time is social. We need to be respectful. You're going to be the reader as well. I also have several others that I incorporate from habits of the mind, which I can't recall at this minute right now. This ties in with the social peace of Being a Writer, being respectful, listening to one another. So I was pretty excited that here I am introducing habits of the mind which I think are lifelong skills. I want the children to have short-term goals and long-term goals. Again, Being a Writer has that, where the books, the literature is about social and friends

and family and community. That's the core of my teaching Jacki, it's about the community here. I'm able to bring everything together very nicely. So I'm very pleased with how it links the pieces, empathy, listening, being respectful, gravitating to a person that you may have never even talk to, and because their writing piece has something in common with your writing piece and something that you're interested in. For many years we just have them writing the short stories and then we just move on. We never had that time of discussion together and this allows that. I'm very excited about that. That piece, that's a really important piece. So again, we go to the area that we share. Children love to share, reading their pieces and going back. I also have them read to one another. They can go in the corner and what has become contagious Jacki is that even during their leisure time they want to write in their books. So here you're suggesting, okay we have fun Friday, or indoor recess, and you see them going to others asking one another, using each other as resources, how do you spell that, what was that about, do you know that? I think being a writer has definitely gotten me excited because of that piece. I didn't always feel that way until my 3rd year. I think it takes a little time. I think you need to give it time to embrace it and not put it on a shelf. We tend to be worried about all the things were introducing but if you just work with it in different ways, that should be your anchor and try a variety of things, different variable, like introducing Habits of the Mind as well.

Do you have any other programs that you use with it?

I do so many things right now. We have Making Meaning. I'm such a science person, Jacki, that I bring everything together. I have my Go Chart, my KWL, I love my Go Chart so it all comes together. The pieces all fit together. My strongest thing is the modeling so that they're excited about it. This is what I have by showing them that they're going to be amazing writers as well. It's not just going to happen. They're going to have lots of time in 1st grade and that's why we're here. So that the main focus for me, like the social piece, I'm comfortable with the books. I think if I had to suggest something I would want for the weeks… For example we have Sheep on a Ship. I would like just to have a variety of other books because I'm very big on differentiating. I'm very big on my guided, differentiating for 5 different groups, that means 5 different writing groups and I have my ELL children. If I could just have maybe 3 more that we can anchor in there. That type of text, then that would be helpful as well, because interesting enough, a book like Sheep on a Ship may not make a lot of sense to some children.

Okay, so as you pull reading groups you may read a different book to them, because they might be on a little different level?

Yes, because that's something that I do on my own as their teacher. But if we could come together, when we do in our groups to review the program, we just need to plug it in. We are busy people and we want to be smart about the time and how we are using our time.

So you're doing writing groups as well as reading groups?

Yes I incorporate writing in my guided. I do guided reading every single day for about 30 min. 5 different groups. I start very early and I alternate. The children take literature home on

Monday and Wednesday that's our guided reading on those days and then Tuesday's, Thursdays I do a guided writing. I say, let me look at your pieces. We all know that with young children, their first graders, it takes time to conference so I want to hear your piece, what made you write that piece, what were you thinking about, is that something you enjoy? The conversation and discussion happen right at my kidney table during the week. That's something that I've just done through the years of experience, you start crafting left to your own devices, you're trying to figure out.

You're an artist.

You're trying to figure out what works out best. You just try to queue into what it is they need. Every year every group is different. Some years you have some eager writers and they take off, other years you're really guiding all the way to the end of the year. Can I see more, add more detail, I noticed, just going over the exercises over and over and over again.

Do you think they are grown-up enough when they look at another's piece when they share to ask a question when they might say could you add to it?

Absolutely, it's all about the teacher, that's habit of the mind, it's all about being respectful what you celebrate a piece and you suggest something, so I will say, what a wonderful piece, let's celebrate Millie's piece. I really like the way she made that picture. Is there something you would suggest? Oh, she forgot to do her finger spaces. So we learned that suggestions are good and they guide and help us so were not feeling,.. not that you want to take away, but their 5 and 6, they don't know about constructive criticism, so this is the path for them to know if people are going to give suggestions. So to answer your question Jacki, yes. It's all in presentation and how you use your verbiage. It's my language at all times, that is what they walk away with and they use the language as well.

I believe that you definitely feel that the social skills taught through the program definitely improve their writing development. Just in what you just told me that conversation, that making suggestions, it helps them to make their pieces better and sharing.

Absolutely, they are being heard and the sharing and listening to one another, they're moving closer to others, wanting to see their piece, sharing their piece.
They are making new friendships and the dynamics. Perhaps it was a child that had no idea that there was another child on a soccer team like them, just by listening to their piece they gravitate to one another. They connect that way.

So you feel that the program could be enhanced if you had a few more variety of text that you could use as anchor books?

For differentiating and I know that as I mentioned to you, we do that.

And you've been doing that by just getting some other books.

Yes, by getting some other books but as we know we want to be smart with our time if the teachers could come together and we could mastermind that way and give some suggestions, because there so much literature out there. We're so fortunate, our children are so fortunate in many ways compared to the literature that we had when we were growing up, we were limited. Now there's so much out there, once you get one of those really good books you don't want to let go.

Do you have any other ways that you feel you would like to have the program enhanced besides that book piece?

To me in the beginning I was very concerned about the length of time, that was a concern for me, that the pacing was a little too slow, but I realized for example when you're asking the child to say, "I like" when here we are promoting so much more, so that was a concern. But I noticed just one piece that's an anchor and you know that you're going to meet with them, you're giving more suggestions, you tweak it.

And you said after you used it for a few years...

I think it takes a few years to realize looking at my audience, some children really do need that. That's not all the writing that were doing, that is just a way to anchor any new teacher, any the new program. I actually think that it's beneficial. I would be concerned if it was full speed ahead, then I wouldn't have that opportunity. It takes time for us to digest.

Okay is there anything else that you would like to add about writing or the Being a Writer program or the student social skills or anything else that you would like to add?

Again, I would just like to mention that it was my personal goal because writing is not my strength, so I want to make sure that I'm modeling and being clear and always reviewing, going back, giving them that opportunity above all to feel really good about their pieces and what they're doing because this is very early in their career in their writing career, so I want to make it fun and educational and it should be done every day. I say that to the families as well, whether it's a list, a grocery list, reminders, a planner, so theirs writing across their whole entire curriculum and that's beneficial, definitely the writing is. We see it in the math, we see it everywhere, so writing each day, so those would be my only enhancements, more of the literature and looking at that, maybe even keeping the books, but you always want to have something fresh, so maybe you want to introduce different books for each year, you know after a while you don't always want… some books are great but others you just want to have that flexibility, a little movement there.

That's all I can think of at the time Jacki.

Okay, that sounds fabulous. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with

me.

If you are in agreement with this interview transcript, please sign below and return it to Jacqueline Blackmore either by electronic signature or interoffice mail. Thank you, again.

Signature:_____

Appendix O: Interview 8

02/08/13

The following research question is posed to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing.

What are your experiences with *Being A Writer* (2007) program do you use the Being A Writer program?

I do use it and I have been using it. I'm actually one of the original pilot teachers. I started using Being A Writer in its entirety four to five years ago. At this point it is the only writing program that I am using.

So you have 4 or 5 years experience with it?

Yes. I am also one of the teachers that is on the writing curriculum committee for the Being A Writer program.

Okay. Can I ask you a question within a question? Did you find that the longer you used the program it became easier to use or you got more value out of it, was it more difficult at the beginning because it was new?

I think changes aren't for everyone and I think with this particular program when I 1st started using it, I questioned a lot of it. Now that I'm using it year after year, I'm much more comfortable with it. I do see the value in it. Our district is very data-driven and I know the younger grades don't assess the writing as much as older grades do, so there wasn't really a good indicator if it was working until the writing prompts came along. I know in talking with my team that some of the teachers are really unhappy with the program. Personally, using it year after year I do like it. I like the anchor texts that teach a specific skill. I think as a teacher you get to know your kids so you pour in those extra things that you may need that don't necessarily come from within the program. As a teacher you know you need to address it. I think if you follow the program the way it's laid out it does teach writing to the kids and then you need to tailor it to whatever the needs of your classroom may be.

How about the anchor text do you like the anchor text? Are you pleased with them, do feel you have enough, do you fill in with your own, do like them?

I really like the majority of the anchor text. There are a few that I question just in terms of the subject matter, the illustrations or what ever, especially on a 2nd grade level. But for the majority of the lessons that I teach I do enjoy the texts and the kids enjoy the texts and being that it's authentic literature, I see that the students will even seek out another book by the same author. I think as a teacher if you can instill that love of reading and this author is amazing, I

think the kids get into it especially at the younger levels. Me, I do like the majority of them but there are a few that I'm like oh geez, I hate this story. For the most part I do enjoy them all.

You said sometimes you add in your own things so what might be some things that you might want to add in?

For example my class in particular this year, capitals, are nonexistent. I don't think they even know what one is so I am constantly blending that into the interactive writing that I do. I ask them what is missing in this sentence and they may say a period or a capital letter. Even though we've been doing the Fundations for years, this year the spelling is horrendous. I have them take a look over their work and checking over. So those little things and just adding more details. I don't know if that's just where my kids are developmentally at. I mean they are 2nd graders so any time that we can hone in on those skills that we want them to have as 2nd grade writers, we do. For the most part I think that the structure is there on how to write a story from the program. I think pulling in the little things that the authors or illustrators pull into their writing, if you throw those out, kids will put it into their writing. It's those little skills that they tend to neglect, nothing huge.

Also you're saying it differs year to year based on your children's skill level?

It does for the most part especially year after year because we do the writing prompt, we just tend to bring things in, developmentally they can write a story with a beginning, middle and end, they can focus on one main event but they can be lacking in detail or those things that you just notice from year-to-year. I think that's more developmental and you just need to keep instilling that in them.

That's going to lead me in to my 2nd question which is do you feel that the Being A Writer program has effected their writing development, do you feel it has had a positive effect on their writing development, a negative effect, no affect, how do you feel that Being A Writer program has effected their writing?

Kids see other kids amazing writing and that inspires them to go back and become better writers. They want to help each otherI think in a very positive way, it allows them to write about their personal experiences. They also draw off what the author has written about but you typically will bring it to an overall topic and not telling them that they will need to write about an adventure under the sea. You're giving them a general topic like talk about a day that you spent with a friend. I think that opened up to them to think about something very specific in their life. Whereas with other programs I always felt like I was teaching a story or how to write a narrative. This lets them develop their own stories.

Does this help them to tap into their own personal feelings?

Yes definitely.

Does that lead them to write more?

For the most part, yes. You always have those one or two who after writing one or two sentences their done. That's not going to change anything. Then you meet with those kids and you say that's a great thing that you've written, let's talk more about this sentence. You talked about going to the park, tell me more about what you're going to do. You get them really thinking about it. It's truly their own story.

Do you meet with writing groups or do you meet individually?

I typically meet with, I do a whole group lesson and I model, then they go back to writing and I circulate through the room and touch on you know the ones that are done quickly and help them a little more often. But the ones who are writing, writing, writing, I'll just stop in and say, hey, tell me the gist of your story. I'll pick a couple of kids to meet with who will give me their writing and I will meet with them as often as I can. In the real world I wish it could happen more often than it does.

So you do like a little mini lesson and a little modeling?

Yep. I bring them together as a group and then I let them meet together for a few minutes with their partner, and they get to brainstorm together, then after they go to their writing.

Do they write together or single or sometimes both?

More often they write individually. In my classroom when it's writing time everyone has to prepare their materials ahead of time. We all get to our seats and then when everyone's ready I turn the music on and as long as that music is playing no one is allowed to talk and everyone can write in peace.

That's nice, that's good.

Okay so my next question is how do you feel the Being A Writer program has effected the students social development such as the think, pair, share, learning to disagree, or listening skills. Do you think those interpersonal skills effects their writing in a positive way?

I think the brainstorming together really helps them because it's good for the kid who says I don't have a favorite food or I don't have a favorite whatever or I've never done that. That allows you the opportunity to say to the kids, well can we help him maybe to come up with some ideas. That always helps that person to say okay and maybe come up with an idea. I think when they work with their partner, it's a little more individualized so they really get to talk to each other about what they're going to write about. It's nice that they share conversation between the 2 or 3. They may say, oh yes, I've done that myself or, I know what you're talking about. There's always a little bit of conversation with that. I think that the piece that's really hard is after writing. Now I'm getting into peer conferencing with them and that's that piece that

I struggle with them developmentally. You're always instilling in them the fact that their friends and you want them to be nice. If one's writing is not that great, they may say oh that sounds wonderful. When maybe they've been trained not to say anything negative. So I think that piece is a little tricky, especially at this age. So we're still working on that.

Okay so you think the social skills are not quite developmentally all there?

In terms of being able to critique friends, yes. I think it's hard for them because especially at this level, because everything is wonderful, how can it be bad, and how can you tell your friend that they did something bad. I think they think it might be wrong to tell other friends something negative about their work. I find that it's a little challenging and again I don't know if it's necessarily because of the program or developmentally they're just not at that age where they can look at others writing and say, you need to fix this.

Do you do think pair share, are they okay with that, how do they do with that?

They love to do that, they absolutely love to do that. If you give them the opportunity to have their voice be heard, they feel validated, and it gives them the opportunity to move on. Sometimes if theres time at the end of writing and some are willing to share something, if I have a few minutes I have some people come up and share. They do enjoy that.

Great. Okay my next question is how do the social skills taught through the program improve their writing development? I guess some of the things that you just said that you use the think, pair, share, you said their voice is heard and they feel validated. I believe you partially answered that question with that kind of a statement.

I think they like to brainstorm their ideas with another person. They may say I go here and the other person might say I go there too. So they can walk away with a few more ideas than maybe they had before. I think just being able to share with someone, they can experience being together and hopefully incorporate that into their writing.

That leads me to my last question which is what aspects of the Being A Writer program do you feel can be enhanced are there any aspects of the program that you would like to see changed to help you become a better teacher of writing?

I think honestly there's no program that's perfect. I'd like to see a little more structure and it just to gauge me developmentally with the kids. Like at this point it would be good to introduce this. I think they do a wonderful job with the anchor text and how to write to a topic but sometimes I feel like when would be a good time to introduce this or that. And I think sometimes personally, I've been in this town for a long time and I've used Barbara Mariconda for a longtime where there's a recipe for writing and I think that's kind of neat. They need to know what the structure of a good writing piece is. It think that's the one piece that's missing. It doesn't have to necessarily be like Barbara Mariconda but just that in this lesson we're going to

really focus on beginnings. Let's get what a good beginning looks like. I'm trying to pull those pieces in and it gets a little tricky for me, because I'm not sure which; and I've been doing this program for a really long time. Which story lends itself to this skill and how can I develop that? I think if that were in the program, I myself would be more comfortable and I know my team would just eat that up because that's the one thing that we keep saying.

So more structure, like for this lesson we're focusing on just capital letters and this book goes with that and that's going to be our focus for the next number of weeks. Then the next 3 weeks is going to be working on punctuation at the end of a sentence.

Exactly, I wish it was more structured. One of the things I've noticed is that every unit is very isolated. One of the things is letter writing and you teach it to nauseam and then you're done. You don't get to revisit it, you don't go back in the program you never revisit the ones that you used to teach. There isn't a clear place to teach this or there isn't a good place to teach that. I know as a teacher you want the flexibility to pull things in. I think it would be nice to have a little more structure to say, today were going to focus on this, or next week were going to focus on that and revisit things throughout the year. It's not built into the program. You've taught and then you move on. The kids need that because they don't hold onto things long enough. Next year the teacher is like did you ever teach this? And you say I've spent several weeks on that how can that not be? I think that piece is missing. You're teaching and it develops nicely but then you're done and you never go back to it.

In essence I like the program but there are some flaws it's not perfect.

Do you add in a Barbara Mariconda or a Lucy Calkin's lesson from time to time?

I do. When I see like especially that we needed more detail in our writing. I may use a snapshot so that they use their senses. But again it doesn't generalize to all their writing. Okay, I taught this and now they know how to use all their senses in their writing but then they get to write their own piece and there isn't anything in there that shows that I even taught them how to do that. It needs more revisiting.

Is there anything out there you'd like to add or anything else that you can think of?

I don't think so I think I mentioned everything. I'm hoping that the program correlates to the CCSS. I know that the program leader and the team and myself have really been talking about that and working on that. We're trying to adjust lessons to be sure that we hit all those areas. That's a big concern. And especially moving forward as a teacher with the new evaluation program. You're in a town where we're really held to use these kinds of materials to teach and it gets a little tricky and I'm just hoping that we don't look back after a couple of years and say gosh we really missed this and our teachers are failing because of it.

So you're matching up some of the things from the Being A Writer with the Common Core.

Yes. The pilot team is really working hard. The curriculum team is working really hard to be sure that whatever is in the CCSS that the Being A Writer is not addressing, that we're bringing in something to address it, so that we're hitting all those points. Unfortunately we are in the arena and we don't have as much time to look into it as the program leaders do. We're totally looking to Terry to help us through it all.

Maybe it's a good time to put in all those little structured lessons that are missing.

That's what we've been talking about. I think again and I know I'm being paid so I'm going to be very careful about what I'm saying but and I know it goes nowhere but still. Even with our curriculum team we don't come to agreement on things. ***There are actually people who are not using the program***. We know for sure that there are schools that are not using the program they don't care or whatever it is. So it's hard because we all come together and everyone says, yes this is wonderful, this is wonderful yet they're not using it. ***So it's hard that we're all going to be assessed by something and we're not all using it.*** That's what worries me. As a district we need somebody who's a strong leader that can say this is what you're using, this is what you're doing, I don't care what your philosophy is. As a town this is what we are using. ***We should all be using the same thing*** as teachers. I think that's the hard thing, we're trying to build in all those little extra things and some people who aren't using the program don't know where to put it in. So we say, oh this would be good if we could use it here. Then they say, oh well I do this. We say, oh are you using the program and they say no. Then we say how can you say that that would be a good place to put it in? That's where it gets a little tricky. And your hands are tied because you're just a teacher. So you go back to your team and you say these things and they look at you like you have four heads.

It sounds like you're doing what you're supposed to be doing and they're just doing whatever they want to.

Exactly. I think it's a really good program. Does it need a little bit of help, yes but if we could come together and actually use the program and found its weak spots and actually added to it. I think you could probably do what we needed it to do. If the majority aren't going to use it then it's hard to say if it's the program that's not doing what it's supposed to or is it due to something else?

Does Terry know a lot of people aren't using the program?

Yeah, I think she does know that a number of schools aren't using it.

I think that's part of my difficulty in getting people to interview.

Because they're not using it.

I know of two schools that don't use it and the principle is okay with it. I don't know how much

you know about Frenchtown but if it's in the curriculum, it's the letter of the law and you have to use it. I know your schools using it.

We are all using it. We learned it and we're using it. We were told you were required to use it this year. We follow it to a T. Then you hear of other places that aren't using it at all. So it's kind of like what's going on here.

Exactly.

I think what makes it hard is that my principal is very data-driven. The majority of my team uses it. ***Then you do a district wide writing prompt. Then our scores come out bad or worse. Then they look at us like what are you not doing? Why are our scores are lower, is it because of the program or sticking to the program or something else?*** There's no way to tease that information out because if not every school is using it you can't say for sure that it's our clientele or is it the program and it makes it very challenging. That's my big argument every time I sit in curriculum and I sit down in a lot of curriculum in this town and I'll bring that up and I'll say the teachers in my school get handed a piece of paper that say why aren't your scores as good as XY and Z but we're following every piece of curriculum to a T and other people are not. Is it because we are following curriculum and something's not right and we need to look at it or is it our kids are different? There's just no way to know unless everyone in the town is using it and that leads to frustration in our building per se. ***That skews the scores and makes us look like we're not doing what were supposed to.***

Thank you for taking the time to interview. I will type up your transcript. Feel free to delete by crossing off or add by writing in at the bottom.

I am in agreement of this interview transcript. Please sign, copy and return one to me.

Signature: _____

Appendix P: Interview 9

2/15/13

The following research question is posed, to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing?

Hi How are you?

Hello.

I'm just going to start off with my first question. What are your experiences with the Being A Writer program. Do you use the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program at all?

I do. Every day I use the skills book. It's a white skills book on editing and revising. I find that I don't know if people really use this portion of Being A Writer. **There is not curriculum built in for editing and revising. I must supplement. It's not meaty enough. The rigor is not there. It does not seem to have a positive impact as a stand alone. I have to supplement everything. Not enough variety of books. They are boring. Program has great ideas but not targeted to all audiences. It's a lot of work because there is not enough to it**. So every week on a Monday I do a mini lesson on whatever that skills focus is. So if it's, as in a series or capitalization, or proper nouns, we do one activity together and we work on it independently throughout the week and I pull other supplemental materials I have for homework for that skill of the week. I never had anything before Being A Writer, something that was accessible for the kids to write in. They can keep track of everything that we've covered. It's like we have editing and revising in one book all in one. Do you know what book I'm referring to?

No. I haven't seen it but I have heard about it. So it's a way for them to keep track of everything that they're learning?

Here is the book and basically they check off everything that we do and we go through passages like this one was finding nouns and adjectives. When I model for them, these are ones they do independently. They get an editing and revising grade from it. It is part of our state testing. Some of it I'll skip that we might not need, but we do research projects at Frenchtown so they have a whole section on making a bibliography. You know, like just knowledge that they might need to know.

What do you cover for writing?

We are expository. That's the main focus. But all of this is solely grammar, mechanics, editing, revising.

This book?

Yes, solely for that.

My kids use this every day. I have an answer key to it from Being A Writer but I don't know that there's a script that supposed to go with it like some of the writing lessons. This is kind of just a workbook.

Do they tell you how they want you to use it?

I would say the direction there wasn't really to clear. I find it really useful. This is something that they can write in and a quick hit. There's so many things as a 5th grade teacher that you stress about your kids getting. Editing and revising they never get, so many things are not covered. So the kids do really well with it too and their into the routine of using everything, so it's good.

So for the Being A Writer, other than this booklet, tell me about it in 5th grade. I don't know. Do you do a mini lesson, is there a book, is there writing that they do independently or do they pair up.

It's everything, it basically, you have a bunch of really great texts and books from Making Meaning because they go hand-in-hand and you might be looking at that particular text for that certain skill. You're using whatever that particular author has really displayed. Being A Writer does a really great job of picking awesome text to model certain skills. That's very helpful. It is very helpful also in the sense that, I'm sure I'm going to go into other questions, is it okay if I just ramble.

yes, okay.

It's also very helpful in building a writing community. The kids are kind of forced to pair share a lot of things that they have and peer edit with one another which is something that I've added in a lot more because of Being A Writer. That communication dialogue which they would have not ordinarily built into their speech with one another is great for Being A Writer. So that's definitely one of the ways that it affects them socially because since they have the prompting from the Being A Writer and you'll hear them agree with one another appropriately during Making Meaning or disagree with one another appropriately. With the upper grades, I guess with any grade that's a hard thing.

Do you think the years that they have used the Being A Writer program prior to coming to you have prepped them for this already knowing how to agree and disagree.

Yes. I think the combination of, I can't say that solely the Being A Writer program unless I'm saying also that it's Making Meaning. I don't know how much teachers are using the Being A Writer as much as they are using Making Meaning. The prompting and the dialoguing since I

have been using both is just about identical. That dialogue definitely.....

How often do you do it a week?

I only do Being A Writer once a week. Last year I used it more and because it's not, I can't say it's not an enforced curriculum, but it's not an enforced curriculum. I can't say the pacing has been as clear as it is for math.

What about the pacing how do you find the pacing of it?

The pacing is not realistic.

In what way, too slow too fast?

My whole opinion on the Being A Writer program and I'm sure this is wrong, I guess there's not a wrong opinion but. The idea behind the program is that kids meet exposure to all kinds of writing to be well-rounded writers in a wholistic approach. Down the line, they will be assessed on any kind of writing. So it is my interpretation that this program is given to us so our kids aren't just drilled and practiced on the narrative writing diamond! This is the expository pillar! But rather given a big umbrella of writing genres and ideas. The pacing with what teachers are actually expecting kids to be assessed on does not match. If I have an expository writing prompt next week and Being A Writer pacing has me doing a narrative piece I'm not going to do it. I think that's the struggle in all curriculum right now is balancing CCSS with, Being A Writer which is a little CCSSish. With that whole piece you should be able to throw them anything and they can write to it and not need a template but rather work from knowing what good writing is through good word choice. Knowing what good writing is through voice, knowing that good writing is persuasive, expository, compare/contrast.

Do they come up with their own ideas or do you give that to them?

I think it's a mixture, it's a mixture of both. Obviously in the beginning of the year you don't see that as much because they are not just as outgoing yet. I think that Being A Writer and Making Meaning programs, both of them, one of the disadvantages that I see is that a lot of the books that they have are fabulous and we do a lot of work on great text and really highlighting and finding, I don't know let's say, it's authors craft, or finding and really picking apart like that close reading that we've been trying to do and having the one book. I almost feel like I am, they are just so accustomed to just sitting and watching me read like and as a 5th grader they need to be doing something to be held accountable and copying those books is not something that we should not do. So a lot of teachers I know speaking for myself and other teachers have hand typed a lot of the passages that we might be using from those text so kids can have something in front of them to really highlight and do things. That would be so helpful if they had more passages because. You know in the Being A Writer books, the other books that they have, that coincides with the writing part of it, they have certain excerpts from the books but sometimes you catch other parts of the book that the kids can really benefit from and they might not be as

accessible.

Do you think of being a writer program is meaty enough?

I don't, I am giving a lot. The rigor is not in there. I feel it is a positive thing having the social piece, that prompting, it's almost too focused on it. Like making the writing community, once it's there and you establish it, like give me more, more hands-on practice for the kids. There's not as much hands-on and when there is hands-on is minimal. it's not really too deep.

Okay so do you think the Being A Writer program has affected students writing development in a positive way, a negative way, not very much?

I would say not very much. It's definitely not negative. I don't think anything that you do is going to take away from what they are doing in writing.

But if you didn't have the Being A Writer program?

I would be fine.

So you don't think that has much of a positive impact?

Not really. When I look at you know, I think it's, and I have to mention Making Meaning program. If I were to do that every day, Making Meaning and Being A Writer. My kids would be read to every day for 2 hours that would be a big portion of their day. Okay going to read to you now for half an hour, turn and talk, turn and talk again, now you're going to pair share this. He gets to appoint by 5th grade if they've done that for that many years they're sick and tired of turning and talking and they don't want to do anymore and there needs to be some variety. If I do Making Meaning and Being A Writer there has to be some differential. I can't really see the difference accept the boxes that they come in are 2 different colors and that's about it. All the prompting is the same.

Do you feel that there's overlap or there's too much of a similarity?

They overlap which has its positives and its negatives. Yes, the kids will, if you're reading a book in Making Meaning and they notice a certain skill that you are doing and that's what you want and they are making those connections that's great, but it doesn't, so I don't know, it's almost like beating a dead horse type of a thing. So it definitely affects them in a way that's not negative but at this point in time when I take out Being A Writer the class goes Aww. I get a sigh. It's the same thing with Making Meaning. I have to supplement everything we do because it's not meaty enough. There's not enough variety, although the program can be a great thing and you want something that you can go by.

So it might be a good anchor?

Yes.

So there's got to be some additional resources and I don't mean more books you read. They need to be held accountable. Their used to just getting read to. We don't really do anything where we say just go and do this, they're not getting as independent. I'm going to be sending them to middle school next year and they're not going to be getting read to. It's going to be sit down and teachers are going to model on the board and go. And I can tell you as a 5th grade teacher I don't feel that it's preparing them for middle school or high school or what's coming for the rest of their life. It's also about getting them prepared for life.

Do you believe the social skills that the children are taught through the program are positive?

Yes I do I think that it is definitely something that shows up in other environments and not necessarily just in the writing or reading. I see it in their daily conversation and that's a good thing. Definitely a positive.

Do you think those conversations impact their writing? Yes because they're getting advice and editing and revising with their peers. I do think that the good strength in the program. I don't think I focused on peer editing prior to getting the Being A Writer program. I would do workshops with the kids and I would meet with them around the table in that sense it does give the kids more accountability and open my eyes to peer editing a lot more than I had in the past. Especially with older kids because they can really be good editors. It's not like a first-grade child that may not notice if something spelled wrong. That definitely helps because the peer-editing piece is the bulk of it.

You said at some points you thought it focused too much on the social piece and not enough on the writing piece is that correct?

Too much on the dialogue and not enough on the just getting down and dirty writing. With my kids the stamina piece isn't really there. They lack stamina because the program focuses on the routine. Let's read this, let's analyze this, let's talk about it, and you'll write but then they say,' I'm done, I'm done'. I think it's because a portion of it that their used to, they had their one prompt every 3 months. They have their one assessed prompt from the district. That's 45 min. long. I rarely see somebody take 45 min. they have to be trained on it. They don't know how to have that stamina. There's no way that those kids can be ready for 45 min. block of writing and be successful if they're trained to just peer edit and stop what you are doing and turn and talk to this person. That's not realistic compared to what were expected to do. The writing isn't there. It's so much more observing writing than writing.

Are there other programs that you supplement with?

I use two. I used 6+1 which has some similarities to Being A Writer because it does break down some of the 6+ 1 traits in some of those are writing lessons. I also still use Barbara Mariconda.

What do you like about those two that you keep them?

Barbara Mericonda I'm sure you know is basically I feel like all of these different writing programs are kind of 4 different levels of writers. Like my lower writers need Barbara Mericonda. They need a framework and a template to work from. And even for some of them could be in their IEP. And they actually need that. So you know in the classroom that I have this year, there is like a 3rd of my classroom that has writing IEP's. So last year I used the Being A Writer more because I had a higher group. Because Being A Writer and 6+1 look at writing as a wholistic approach and not only focusing on expository, or only focusing on narrative but focusing more on writing as a whole and breaking it down into its traits and how to make any type of writing good writing. But our population just has a lot of kids, but I have to say, you need a main idea, you need a main idea. Not every kid needs that, they do introduce it to every kid to show them that this is a template that you could use for this type of writing. We've looked at narrative templates, we've looked at expository templates, we've looked at persuasive templates, compare and contrast templates because Barbara Mariconda has all that. So they've got exposure to all those things and when I pull small groups and I do writing workshop those kids that are my low kids are trained to use an expository pillar. They need to be successful. The 6+ 1 is great. I actually I teach a summer program in Adam greens Farms Academy for inner-city Bridgeport and we focus on 6+1 all summer. We use that particular program for 3 months and that particular program. It's kind of similar to Being A Writer in that a gives book recommendations to model the different writing traits so you are sharing an author's work and looking at it for word choice. It's almost like a close read you could look at the same piece again for voice or you could look the same piece again for grammar mechanics or you could look at the same pace again. So you can really break it down. I don't know if anyone's mentioned the CBASS writing to you.

I' ve heard a little about it.

CBASS is by the state. With our new standards-based report cards the CBASS website is broken down identically to our Trumbull standards. So when the kids write a piece, they submitted to CBASS, and it scores them on word choice, voice, organization, so a lot of our standards are 6+1 which is kind of funny that were not really doing 6+1.

Do all the fifth-grades do CBASS?

Yes. Just this school or all the schools?

Just this school. It's the only school I know that is. We have a faculty meeting where it was introduced to us and I know other schools know of it but I don't know if they use it. So I think in general the fact that there. **I wish we could have all of the writing materials in one place and not have to go looking for things all the time. There are too many programs to choose from and I'm starting to get confused as to which program to use.** I think it's confusing to me and I think it's really confusing to the kids. They'll do it Being A Writer lesson one day.

They'll do a Barbara Mericonda lesson another day, then to a 6+1 lesson because it fits but it doesn't make... It's so much work for us because of the Being A Writer program doesn't have enough. It definitely has fluff but it's got some great ideas but I don't think it's targeted toward all audiences of kids and meeting the needs that we have in the classroom. In a realistic classroom. it's kind of like investigations with writing. You show them something and then you're like figure it out, talk to your peers about it. Those are enrichment programs and not programs that help kids that need more support.

Is there anything that the district could be doing or could help?

I guess if there was any way you know how for... We don't have a differentiation guide on either of them. In math we do. We don't have any type of resource to go to that says here is the meat of what they really need to get from this lesson and break down for you what it is that they're supposed to get. With this there's not an organizer insight. That's what they need for writing. Any kid that has some type of needs, almost any of my kids...

I wonder if there's any other components that they have purchased?

This has been the best part that's when I share it. It's the most consistent and down and dirty. I mean in a realistic classroom setting the time that is taken from us we need something that is just, I don't know, right out there.

Consistent.

Mmm.

I wish the pacing would go along with what were exactly expected to accomplish.

Is there anything else that you want to add or anything else that you can think of?

That's pretty much it. This is very in general but I understand that these programs that were given, but all the programs that are newly unfolding are so socially based in every subject in math and writing and reading and that the clear indicator that our country, this youth, that's an area that they obviously felt needed improvement so it's a good thing. I definitely think that's a positive thing however, they have to... It can't just be social. When you have an entire day with program to program after program.

I happened to be given a lot of special needs kids and for some teachers they just do that to. I'm one of those teachers. I teach the co-taught math class. I'm like special ed all day. For my class all these programs I truly feel there enrichment. I'm feeling they must want the kids to infer and not learn explicitly and some kids need explicit instruction. You have to frontload everything and supplement after. The text are great.

Like the texts?

Yes.

I think when Nancy Boyles came to the district and discussed that close reading proved that you don't need to read the whole book to the students you can even use one book in 4 different lessons and make a copy of that page and dig into it and it really makes the reading so much more meaningful

Thank you for taking the time to interview. I will type up your transcript. Feel free to delete by crossing off or add by writing in at the bottom.

I am in agreement of this interview transcript. Please sign, copy and return one to me.

Signature: _____

Appendix Q: Interview 11

2/22/13

The following research question is posed, to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing?

Hi How are you?

Hi good, how are you?

I'm just going to start off with my first question. What are your experiences with the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program at all?

I have used Being A Writer for the past two years. I started in second grade. The kids loved it. And then I was moved into third grade. So I am currently using the third-grade program this year.

Is there a difference between the two?

No, the basic outline is the same. It's just asking a little bit more of the students in their writing time. The ideas in some of the stories that we've used in third grade were actually the same that we used in second grade, which I think was beneficial, they actually were excited.

So you use some of the same stories in second and third?

Mmm. And some of the stories from Making Meaning were incorporated into the writing… Into the Being A Writer program, like Making Meaning stories from 2nd grade now become a Being A Writer story in third grade.

Interesting.

Do you like the mentor texts?

I do. I like how they give them all to us.

What do you like about them?

I think that they are well chosen for the writing skill that were working on at that particular time. They definitely keep the kids engaged. They're precise. It's not a story that goes on and on, it's just enough for the amount of attention that they have at this age.

Do you have enough of them?

I would like to see more. Because I know that there's additional texts available or suggested and it would be interesting to have those available just either for an extension or for reteaching for the kids who don't get it. But then again, that throws in, when during my school day would I be able to fit it in?

Could you swap out one for one year and put a different one in another year?

Yes. Actually Terry has suggested that those sets are, well she has said that those that are available are with our reading consultants but they're not easily accessible which can be frustrating.

So they're not easily accessible, do we have them?

Supposedly we have them in every building, yes.

But we do not have access to them?

Yes.

Do you use anything else besides the Being A Writer program?

I do. I've incorporated Empowering Writers which is what we've had. I did this in the primary grades. Being a Writer is ***not a complete program and that is why we have open weeks to add in any missing pieces.***

Tell me a little bit about it.

It gives them more concrete sentence starters and it just gives them the basic framework for a writing piece which I find definitely helps the struggling writers. But it also gives them a basic outline of word choice which I think, Being A Writer definitely does.

Do you do a mini lesson using this format?

Yes, you do a mini lesson on feelings, you use your 5 senses really for writing. So I do a mini lesson but then again I'm picking stories. I use the Being A Writer story first. I do that then with the Empowering Writers. I have those posters up there. These are the 5 senses and they have sentence starters right on there where they will just fill in the information.

And those are from Empowering Writers?

Yes, Empowering Writers. I also did a lesson on entertaining beginnings. I gave them the 5

different topics of beginnings, of entertaining beginnings so that way they had….

Oh they each have a binder?

Yes they each have a binder.

So they have this little booklet that has those suggested sentence starters in it.

That's nice with the senses.

Who is the author of Empowering Writers?

I'm going to look that up for you.

I also added in editing mini lesson, that's not necessarily in Being A Writer yet. It is but I felt that they needed it when they were peer editing and they needed it a lot sooner. This wasn't done in 2nd grade. We talked about capital letters and stuff but not necessarily deleting things. We used a carrot in second grade. But these I wanted them to be familiar with a couple of ways to edit.

So you feel they needed it sooner … How do you feel the pacing of the Being a Writer is?

I think it's a little slow. There's a lot of time for writing, and ways to come up with writing, and listing ideas, and talking about different topics to write about. However with that being said, I also find that there's not enough time to individually conference with my kids.

So you feel that the pacing is a little off.

Yes, yes.

Let's move on, how has the Being A Writer program effected students writing development?

It definitely has improved. It has given them better ideas.

Do they come up with their own ideas or does the program help them?

The program guides them.

Okay.

I read an ABC book, and obviously for that week they were working on making their own ABC books. But it also allows them to do that, once they have to make a list for that 1st day, but then they could go back and work on a different piece if they wanted to. So they have a choice. Which is great, but then I've got some kids that only want to keep doing ABC books because

this choice is offered to them weeks ago and they like it, but they're not getting enough practice on one that is a little harder for them. It's not really pushing them.

Do you think if they had more of their own choices they would be more excited or you think it's okay?

I think it's okay, I think that they definitely have fun ideas and choices but as a teacher pushing them along I want them to do more narratives, more real complete stories rather than fun stories.

So give me an idea of a fun story.

There was one where they had silly sentences. It was like those Click Clack Moo books and stuff like that. So they came up with, zebras don't go roller skating. That was their sentence. So then they had to write a story all around that. So it's fun but I'm looking for more personal narrative. Showing the whole writing process. Which they haven't, we're just getting to the writing process now in February and March. I've been obviously doing mini lessons for CMT's.

So you've been supplementing.

Right.

Hence the editing and revising because they've been peer editing.

What can you tell me about the peer editing?

It's those motivated students who are great at it. My kids that struggle with writing or are just struggling learners, that may have an IEP or 504. Kids really have a hard time, so pairing them up you can have a hard time because in Being A Writer you randomly pair kids. That's great for certain activities but when it comes to an activity where they have to peer review, I'm not really doing random pairing because it's not going to be beneficial at that point. I pick and choose kids that I know can either work together or one is lacking in a certain area and the other kid will bring them through. Which has worked out fine but it still is a struggle for those kids who don't like writing to be a peer reviewer. They don't feel confident, clearly. They don't like it. Then their getting hit with a story that sounds really great so they don't think there needs to be anything changed in it.

Okay let's move onto the next question, how has the Being A Writer program effected students social development and that goes a little bit with peer editing. So some of those students who are strugglers are not getting as much out of the social relationships. Does this grade have active listening, looking eye to eye, disagreeing appropriately. How do those social skills play out when you have that struggling student who just says, oh it's good, and the better writer is sort of left on their own. How do the social skills effect the writing?

It's the same framework from 2nd to 3rd. For example, I agree with Rebecca because… I disagree with you because… I see your point that I disagree. So there's definitely respectful agreement and disagreement.

Do you model that first?

Yes, so they definitely know how to appropriately agree or disagree. That being said, all of the kids show empathy during their listening. All of the kids will for the most part high and low will show that they value the person story. They will find something positive about it. They will usually state the positive and then they will state the negative and they will say things like, it kept me interested. They will say a positive, negative, positive, to make them feel good. They really do all see each other as a team working together, however, I find that I have already earmarked those groups that have someone who's struggling and might not give enough feedback. So I make sure that I'm around those groups and guiding the questions that they have. Then as soon as I give them models, that struggling student might be able to get at least one more. So then the other student feels okay, there was feedback given.

What do they do when either the peer makes suggestions or you make suggestions, do they then go back into their writing and revise?

It helps them to become better writers by taking others suggestions and going back and changing their stories. They are respectfully listening and learn to agree and disagree. The dialogue helps them feel less fearful about their writing. They become more risk takers.

Okay so you believe the social relationships have a positive effect?

We call it the JFZ, the judgment free zone just because I talk about kids and some kids maybe are more athletic, maybe kids are better at math, some kids are really good at writing so were just all going to have a judgment free zone.

That's really nice.

The next question is how do the social skills taught through the program make the students better writers, I feel that this question is very similar to the previous one.

I find that it has created less fear in me. I always feared teaching writing. That was a struggle for myself. How do I get across an engaging story? So it has helped me, I think become a better teacher of writing. Giving my own personal struggles as I'm teaching lessons I personally feel that it has created less fear for the kids in writing. They're excited.

Is it more of a community now their all learning together and were always respectful and working on writing together? And that's even helped you as a teacher.

Exactly. It just gives them options. Like I said before, I like more narrative writing however, that's not what life is all about and so it's good letting kids have different options when scores are the way they are. I don't really want to get into that. I don't have to put in more supplemental stuff now, which I'm excited because once March is over with I can go back to just Being A Writer and making it fun learning.

But you also want them to be prepared for CMT's.

Right.

And the Being A Writer is not meaty enough or it does not have enough to meet all of those requirements?

Right, yes. It's interesting though because we had one discussion when we talked about the entertaining beginnings and we just made a list of boring beginnings and one of them was, one night, or one day. I can tell you that every day that we go into the library and the kids are looking at their books, if they find a story that begins with one day, they say look Ms. Ruane this is not a good book.

That's good so it's generalizing into other areas.

Yes.

They're definitely taking a piece of it and it's making some of an impact.

Okay so that leads me to the last question what aspects of the Being A Writer program do you feel can be enhanced? Is there anything that you feel that could be enhanced. Is there anything that you need? Is there anything that the district could do to help you be a better teacher of writing?

I think it's great, however, but like I mentioned before, the amount of time it takes. It takes up a lot of time doing different things, then there's not enough time. I feel like there's not enough time to meet for one-on-one conference with my students. The peer conferencing is great but there needs to be time for me to guide them into certain areas that they're falling short on. I have started to use CBASS. We just had a writing prompt and it's amazing. To me… I give them a writing prompt, we go into the computer lab and they type it into that program. Then it automatically gets graded according to the 6 guidelines, such as organization, fluency… And to me coupling the Being A Writer program and that CBASS is….

Do all the third-grade do it?

No. This is what they score it on.

Can I get a copy of this? Other teachers have mentioned this and it's helpful for me to see what

it is.

Sure. It's awesome. I'll print out students work and you get a grade, your highest is 6 out of all of these areas. What was interesting was that I have them all submit their 1st writing prompt yesterday. Kids that I would think weren't that great…you can get as high as 30 and they were getting 22's which to me is really great. And I have a strong writer and not as strong a writer and they both got 22's. So it's showing me. Also that anyone gets below a level four they have mini lessons for me to teach them to be better writers. So I can group my kid that way. It just is a timesaver and it's hitting, this is what Being A Writer, you know besides the community issue, this is what they're hitting on. So it's definitely I think going to help me with the scoring and the timing.

We have that as a district so that's positive.

To recap: you don't have enough free writing time, the free writes are great, I just think I personally need to figure out how I need to work those days in appropriately.

That the kids get to choose?

Mmm.

Because I find that the kids that are struggling and no one always pulls them in a small group that's not fair during this free write time but then their choosing to do things that aren't really beneficial, like sticking with the ABC book instead of writing something else such as a nonfiction piece.

So they get a little stuck. And you need a way to kind of move them along.

Mmm.

Do you do writing groups? I'll pull kids that need grammar, or just their organization is way off. I pull them by skill. That's what I've been doing during RAP a lot. The only other thing would be additional books, those additional books, and now that were changing again. I don't want it to be all about CMT but 3rd grade has talked as a team and we've asked the reading consultants to come up with SBAC written response questions for the new test for Making Meaning and Being A Writer just so that we could use those stories and it just has to be one question that is a higher-level thinking question that the state or national testing is going to be at because that way it would be as a practice. Our reading consultant said they were going to ask Terry and we agreed that reading consultants should do it as a whole because grades 3, 4 and 5 in Trumbull would benefit from it.

Is there anything else that you would like to add at this time?

No I wish you all the luck.

Thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to interview. I will type up your transcript. Feel free to delete by crossing off or add by writing in at the bottom.

I am in agreement of this interview transcript. Please sign, copy and return one copy to me.

Signature: _____

Appendix R: Interview 6

1/24/13

Okay, this is Jacqueline Blackmore a researcher at Walden University, and this is interview number 6 and I am interviewing teachers on the Being A Writer program and I would like to know to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing. I also want to know if the teachers feel if there are aspects of the program that can be enhanced so if there's anything in the program that they're looking for to support them in their writing process or anything that can be enhanced I'd be interested in finding that out as well. So, hi how are you?

Hi Jacki I'm good how are you?

I'm just going to go along and ask you the first question, what are your experiences with the Being A Writer program? How long have you used it? What do you know about it?

Three or four years ago one of my colleagues was given the pilot program to get started and another colleague and I decided we would hop on board, so the three of us started doing it and have really enjoyed it. So this is my third year using the program and I see a lot of benefits from it.

What are some of those benefits?

I like how it builds. I like the fact that it starts out simple then develops, such as going into beginning, middle, and end. I like that it has children reviewing what they have written, editing. I like the teacher child conferences. I like sitting with them editing. I bring in Fundations with it. If they have spelled cat "c e t" I ask them what's the story of that letter, they're able to tell me, so I'm able to cross disciplines with it as well. I also like that the product in the spring is a book that they review different pieces that they've written and that they have a say and actually make a choice as to what their book will be. It's not a title that's given to them. It's work that they're looking at and deciding what could they write more about, what more information could they give, could they add a sentence, could they develop it more. I have found it to be very successful. I also like the fact that it builds the reading community. The children have assigned seats. I like that they have,… they learn to turn talk, pair share. This I think has been especially beneficial for children who are not able to generate those ideas but when they hear other children speaking as we share, then they get an idea. I like that you brainstorm and do a shared story, again, giving a child that's not very sure some ideas how to get started on what they choose to write about. And again that it starts out simple and builds, you're adding sound, Chinatown, your adding sound to your writing. You're adding feelings, which are important and sometimes difficult for young children to get down. I suppose one of the drawbacks could be that it could be a little meatier in its requirements or its expectation. Although in all honesty, that's a complaint I've listened to, and reflected on, but with the clientele I've had the program fits.

So it really depends on your class.

Yes it really depends on your class. But as I'm saying that Jacki, then I'm realizing that it's my responsibility as a teacher to make it more challenging for those students.

I love the community idea though. I see a lot, right now if I say to my children, if somebody is trying to share something, I'll say, everybody stop, what are we not doing right now? They will say we are not showing respect. I really like that they understand that. It gives them an opportunity to see what respect is all about.

Okay, so that would lead me to my second question, how has the Being A Writer program effected students writing development? So you said they could come up with their own ideas. Tell me more, a little bit about the mechanics or specifically writing, maybe like sequencing, punctuation, and how are they doing with that kind of thing? Does the program promote that in a positive light? Is that something you have to add in?

I think the program does promote it, however, I think developmentally that's a challenge for children at this age. To start with a capital and end with a period, proper punctuation is something I believe young children, first graders need almost daily reminders and again it crosses over into Fundations when the assessments are completed and you have a two sentence requirement that is dictated to them. But often when I conference with a child the capitalization and punctuation is not accurate, but it gives that teachable moment to conference with them and talk to them about it. The hope is that they will walk away with that skill when they leave 1st grade.

How about adding details?

Adding details, again, the way the program has been set up, that the children are on the carpet and it's a whole group lesson and we're sharing those thoughts. So when they say that they're going to write about a time that they got a new book, and I'll say to them, now think about that. Johnny just said that he's going to write about a time that he went to the beach. I'm thinking when Johnny writes about the beach, he can talk about the waves and who was with him and if you're going to write about your new book, are you going to have enough detail, and I know you probably love the book and can tell about the book but are you able to add enough detail and bring in your adjectives and give it the supportive details that it requires. So I think again, the program allows you to show those examples as you share.

Okay, so by the students giving examples or you helping to give the students examples, then does that spur on other students to think about what they want to write about, and adding more details to their stories?

Mmm. I have a very funny Being a Writer story that happened last year.

Please tell.

Two students were matched up and one was a take charge person and the other person was very concrete and very literal and often had difficulty sometimes because of that because often when you need to bring in your feelings or think of a story that may or may not be true that was difficult for that student. So one day I happened to be doing a shared story and did the starting, then the class read it, and this pair was sitting down below me and so I have the class read it and it was about a time when they were sad and my story was the model and the book was about a time when I had ice cream and the ice cream fell off the cone and I was very sad. So I said, I wanted them to turn and talk pair share about a time when they were sad. First the child who was very confident and in control said two things, don't spin when you're talking to me today, and I'd like your answers to be in complete sentences.

Haha.

The next thing that he said, the student said okay. Then the confident child said, I want you to think about a time like Mrs. Flanagan wrote, a time when you were sad, maybe your ice cream fell off the cone. The response was I don't have any ice cream. The confident child said I know you don't but please try to think of a time when you were sad. So it also, I think allows those personalities and difficulties to be resolved within peers. Which I think is very interesting. Funny

That's funny.

Mmm.

Do you pick peers intentionally, do you pick them randomly, do you put them together, like I think these two would be a good pair, do you change them often?

Initially, I let them pick, it's random. Later as time goes on and I am getting to know the children better I would then assign where I think they would work best.

Okay. Do you think the pair share is successful with the writing development, like when one might say, maybe you can add this, or maybe you should put this here, or I have a question about that, do you think that helps them to be more successful writers?

I do, when a child shares their writing, the class is then allowed to comment and we try to keep it positive although depending upon the assignment, they may ask a question that may require that the writer add more details. Such as, I see you had three people in your picture but who are they? Is that your mother that you're baking with? Then the student might say, no actually it was my aunt that I was baking with and the other child would say, but you didn't tell me it was your aunt. That detail then the writer can add in.

Okay so that peer conferencing that peer talking helps them to become better writers?

Yes were actually going to be starting with, I found out, I want to know, there's three parts to it, but I think that this class will be very good at that. I think they're always interested in letting me know what they know about someone else. **It holds the students accountable, especially when they have to listen to their partner and repeat back what their partner said. It's about respect, they learn to show empathy and respect for others. Partners share and listen to each other. It's a good skill to work on with each other.** If a child says, I don't remember what Johnny said, then I say, okay you two talk some more and I'll get back to you in a minute. One part that is difficult is not allowing everyone to share when they turn talk pair share. If time permits I do try to allow all the children to share because that is another thing that's hard for a child in 1st grade.

Okay, anything else about the writing, we talked about details, we talked about punctuation, pair sharing.

Some stories are more engaging than others. I think they lend themselves to writing more, more opportunity for a better writing piece. But I think in general this program has aided children in the writing process. Some colleagues think it starts to slow but I think and it does depend upon your clientele, but I think those early days when they're trying to adjust to all the routines, to have those starter sentences, or their model it, and shared stories, are nothing but helpful.

Okay so that would lead me to my next question which is how does the Being A Writer program effect students social development, such as the pair share, listening, speaking clearly, and those kinds of things.

I think that the child who is reluctant to raise their hand and participate now has more confidence in being able to just turn and talk to one person. They seem to be comfortable with that person sharing what they have shared. I think it also helps them to become better listeners. The talk turn pair share helps them to stay focused. The respect piece is nice and the feeling of community.

Do you think the respect piece of the promoting a sense of community is helpful to your class as you teach those skills, do you maybe see them carry over into anything else?

Yes often if we are doing a new math lesson and I might have them on the perimeter of the carpet and perhaps it's a little noisier and another child is listening, I'll say, what might I say right now? And another student will raise their hand and say we're not showing respect. Those aspects of being a responsible student and respecting each other's time to answer, time to talk. I think that it definitely fosters those skills.

My fourth question is, how do the social skills taught through the program improve students writing development? I think that still all goes together with the sharing piece and the discussing but to hear from you, how do those social skills or do they improve writing?

I think again it helps at all different levels, it helps the shy quiet and reserved child who might be hesitant to participate but is encouraged to do so on a smaller scale with the turn talk, pair share. But the program also gives that brainstorming, that shared writing, the idea starters so that someone who is uncomfortable will feel more comfortable because they know what the expectations are. Sometimes if I feel the assignment is going to be difficult for them, I make sure they do not leave the carpet before they have an idea in place. So their not going back to their seats wondering what am I going to do, what am I going to write about. They already know. Sometimes it's really cute as they get excited, "I can't wait" and I say don't tell me everything, now go back and write about it. This class this year has been good about going back and adding details.

Do they do it as a pair sometimes or individual?

This class I have to do individual.

Do they ever read it with a partner?

Yes I've done that.

Okay so paired reading?

Yes. Mmm.

And do they make suggestions, maybe you could add this or spell a word differently anything like that?

We haven't gone to that additional skill yet, no.

So you see that some of the social skills taught are helpful with the writing?

Absolutely. I think the progression of the program lends itself to meet the needs of that non-writer, that child who thinks they are a non-writer and the child who already sees themselves as a writer can add the details early on. My high students books are more detailed but at the same time I feel like all levels are met. It's up to me as the teacher, and the child who is a go getter to add that detail sooner, to raise the bar for them.

Are there times when a story isn't quite up to par? Someone might have a longer story while someone might just have two sentences. When they come up to share are they understanding when they might see a story like that?

My class has to be very accepting, there are challenges throughout the day and they recognize that everybody does their best.

That's nice.

We all do different work.

I think that is to be commended to you as a teacher. It sounds like one of your philosophies that everybody does their best and gets as far as they can get.

Mmm.

We spent a lot of time together. Which ties in nicely together with your character counts program and character education.

Do you do PBIS yet?

No, I'm aware of it, but we have teachers and staff in training.

It sounds like it's coming your way.

Yes and will tie in nicely.

Okay so that leads me to my last question, what aspects of the Being A Writer program do you feel could be enhanced, is there anything that you feel can be done better such as more mentor text or templates, pacing, more meaty, your clientele. I'm just throwing out ideas. Is there anything that we can do to help it be better for you?

I just really like the program. I imagine for a new teacher, if an inexperienced teacher was to look at the program they may need more direction or instruction how to get them started if they weren't relating to the shared writing or didn't understand. I think as an experienced teacher I just really like the program. I think there are so many good aspects to it that I don't have a negative about it.

So you're enjoying it?

I am.

And I'm sure as an experienced teacher, if something's missing or if it's going too fast or too slow you get in there and make a move the way you need to in the kind of way that we do. You're not in need of anything more at this time?

No.

Okay thank you very much for this interview I will transcribe it, I will e-mail it to you or interoffice it or postage mail. I'll e-mail you with whichever way you are most comfortable with.

I have read and am in agreement with this interview transcript.

Signature_____

Appendix S: Interview 7

02/13/13

This is an interview with Jacqueline Blackmore. I am a student at Walden University and I have a teacher here with me that I'm going to ask some research questions. The main research question is to what extent can building respectful relationships and a caring community of learners foster positive interactions and academic gains in the subject area of writing. So, hi, how are you today?

Good thanks.

Good, good. Okay I'm just going to start off with the first question, what are your experiences with the Being A Writer program? Do you use the Being A Writer program?

I do, I've used it for three or four years now and have used it in grades three through five. It's the core to our writing program. I probably use it about three times a week, at least, some weeks are different, sometimes we use it more or less. It is our core and I do supplement it.

Okay, and what do you supplement it with?

Various other lessons, some are Ralph Fletcher lessons, some are Barbara Mariconda. Some are just good lessons from other teachers.

Can you tell me a little bit about Ralph Fletcher?

Sure, he's an author, and he also has out a writing program. I find his read aloud's, his books.... His writing is so descriptive and he's one of the best models of writing that I have found.

So he's an author?

He's an author. But I also have a writing kit, like a Ralph Fletcher kit. So he's an author, but he also has mini lessons. It's funny, because in his mini lessons, he suggests other author's books. I use his mini lessons often with his own books.

Do you usually do a mini lesson before the kids take on their own writing?

Yes.

Okay give me an example of a mini lesson that you would do.

Okay, if am using the Being A Writer program, the selected real aloud's, which I love, I think that's one of the best parts of that Being A Writer program. I think those particular texts have been carefully selected and it's always a model of good writing. The kids are always interested

in the read aloud's and I think its their favorite part of the program as well. It gets the kids interested in writing, you know, like a good example is, we have a couple of days of pattern books. They love... They can't wait to go and try that out. So for the student who has a hard time, who has the 'oh I don't know what to write about' syndrome, or they just have a hard time generating ideas or getting pencil to the paper, that just helps them. They are excited to have an idea and they want to try out.

Is that like an anchor text?

Yes.

So you use the Being A Writer and some books from Ralph Fletcher?

Yes, and when I do a mini lesson, a Ralph Fletcher mini lesson, it follows the same sequence. I start with the read aloud, it's just one that I'm picking, rather then something that's being selected from the Being A Writer. I just pick a text depending on whatever my goal is. One of his lessons that I like is using fresh language in your writing and then he has a couple of books that just have incredible fresh language.

Okay can you tell me what fresh language is?

I'm trying to think of an example, writing with like similes and metaphors and figurative language, and kind of picking the better word. Sometimes we just look at the book called Harvest Moon. I'll put up his pages, I scan them right up onto my smartboard and then I think he wrote something like "how the moon climbs the night stairs with silent slippers."

So you're really looking into that vocabulary language?

When he writes something like that I explained to the kids that he could have written, the moon rose into the sky. So they really see what the fresh language is.

Do they then get excited and they want to try it themselves?

Yes, they do. They love that particular lesson.

Alright so you use it three times per week, is that prescribed by the program, is that because you don't have time to do it five times a week. Should you be doing it more or do you do writing more across subject areas?

A lot of those reasons, actually. The program really should span the entire week but you find a lot of the lessons are short, where you can compact a couple of them into one day, you know, kind of depending on what your goal is. Some days I just kind of like to give them some writing time. I like to use a read aloud, maybe it is prescribed for one day, but I like to use it for two days or three days. It depends on what your goal is. It depends on where the kids are with

their writing. It's prescribed for a week but like I said, some of it can be compacted.

So that will lead me to my second question, how has the Being A Writer program effected students writing development? Do you think this Being A Writer program, after you've used it a few years now, I think you said, do you think their writing development is better than before you used the Being A writer Program?

Well, I think the Being A Writer program has a lot of positive components to it. So to me the greatest benefit and kind of half the battle with the kids is getting them interested in writing and I think it serves that purpose. Not only the read aloud's but it has something called Quick Writes in it and the kids really like Quick Writes because they're kind of given an idea, a lead and they don't have to focus on capitalization or punctuation or spelling. It's just for them to.... they have like three minutes to write about whatever the topic is, and they just have to write.

That sounds like fun.

It is fun for them because... they are excited that they don't have to think about the mechanics at that moment. It's a way for kids to just kind of dump their thoughts on paper, to get it out and they don't have to worry about if it's organized. They really like that part, so I think half the battle of writing for kids at this age is getting them to actually write to get something on paper to work with. So I love that the read aloud's and the Quick Writes gets the kid interested and helps them generate ideas. They really like when I sit down when we have writing time and I am just sitting down quietly with them and writing and then at that point I'm the model of good writing. I think that's a positive component of it.

Do you do actual story writing with them?

I have my own notebook where I will be writing the same Quick Write as them.

Do you ever do whole group writing, like I would write it on this lined paper here and we would write a story about going to the beach and I would say, okay give me a sentence about going to the beach. I'd model writing a story.

Like modeling writing a story?

Yes like modeling a story.

Not so much, I may model a paragraph myself on the smartboard but we don't typically in the upper grades write in the same manner where they each throw out an idea.

You may model a paragraph on the Smart Board?

Yes, like if we're working on…. i'll just go back to that fresh language because we talked about it, but I could model a paragraph that was kind of boring and then my own paragraph using

fresh language and how I went back and revised it.

I don't necessarily think that the Being A Writer program itself makes the kids better writers. I think it's a great component to have in the classroom almost like as your core program. But I think if you don't supplement I think actually a lot of kids may struggle. I think it could use some added lessons to it.

Okay, how do you find the pacing? Do you think it's giving them enough information or mechanics or grammar or proofreading or do you think it's too slow or too fast? So how do you feel about the pacing?

Well I do think some of it is too slow because sometimes you can compact things. I always like the read aloud's on the first day in introducing what you're working on. Then sometimes when I look to days two and three, it's like okay we could just kind of put two and three together. It really doesn't need to be stretched out. I think a lot of it does take too long through the course of a week and you could accomplish more so you just compact it, but I think it takes the first year or a couple of years to figure it out, what you can compact and where things work and which weeks really should be drawn out and which weeks you can compact things together and then that could change from year to year based on your student population too. You have to know your kids as writers to look at a lesson and say we can compact this into one day or we can compact this into a three-day lesson. I almost feel like as a teacher when you know your class when you know your students and you know their strengths and weaknesses, I like having a suggested pacing, but I always think that as the teacher you just need to alter that to fit your class.

Do you find as you used it through the years that you like it more or like it less? As you're getting to use it more and more is it becoming more friendly to you or is it becoming more of like a burden?

For myself as a teacher? I do like the program, I think it falls short in some areas, but I like having it as my core. I like the fact that the kids actually will use it from the lower grades through the upper grades because I find.... right now I'm teaching third grade and we focus more on how to talk to each other in an appropriate turn and talk, and appropriate ways to evaluate your partners writing. So we focus a lot on the social component in third grade, but then as you move through fourth and fifth. Last year I taught fifth grade and by the time you get to fifth it's so nice to see that they already know how to talk to each other. It's ingrained in them already and then your pacing can really change because the days that are focused on the social teaching them to turn and talk, think pair share. They already know how to do it, so it's just ingrained in them you don't have to focus so much on the social. It's really nice to see in fifth grade. One of the other issues that the program has is ***that I have to stop using the program a few weeks before the CMT test to prepare the students for a personal narrative.*** The CMT tests require the students to write a personal narrative and Being A Writer only focuses on Fiction in fourth grade. So I have to stop teaching BW and teach them narrative writing.

That leads me then into the next question which is how do you feel that the Being A Writer program has effected student social development? Do you think it has an effect on student's social skills?

I think it does effect the social development. We use the Making Meaning program as well that focuses on the same social development as Being A Writer. So it's nice that during the day the things that they're learning are practiced for a good portion of the day through reading and through writing and then it carries over certainly throughout the rest of the day, but to learn a nice way to evaluate your partners work, just to be able to have the turn and talk, and pair share to share ideas, and kids learn so much from each other. If you can pair a student who struggles with getting ideas on paper with one who just has so much to say. They help each other, to get excited as writers and to look at their own writing or look at the way their friend wrote something and say I'm going to try that in my writing. So I love that component of it. I think it's really important that they learn how to speak appropriately to each other to, that they realized that they all can share their ideas and they all have the opportunity to share their ideas with somebody and have the opportunity to disagree as well. They can have different opinions but it can be challenging and I see that this is a greater challenge in third grade then in fifth grade. By fifth grade they just know how to do it. They know how to say, I have a different opinion than you in a nice way, but in third grade they're still learning it so they can be quick to jump on each other and might say, that's not true or that their opinion is different.

They're learning those skills at that age level. They are a little less mature.

In third grade we have posted on our wall the ground rules for sharing and some of the quotes like, I'd like to add on to what Sophia said or I understand what Sophia said but I think something different. So we have those things around our room but by fifth grade they really don't need them which is nice.

Do they do a lot of sharing of their pieces or do they share with partners or the whole class?

Sometimes I have them just read stories to each other so everybody gets a chance to share. Sometimes I personally do what's called an author's chair in my room. When we do Quick Writes and a shorter piece of writing, especially if they're really excited about it, I give them the opportunity to sit in the author's chair and that's just whoever volunteers. They get to sit in the author's chair and share their writing. That would be a whole class where everybody is listening to one person. Sometimes they share with each other and then they definitely conference with myself.

Do you pull them over one-on-one or do you scatter around the room and conference as they're working.

A little bit of both, sometimes if their quiet writing I will circulate among them but I personally more like to have a one-on-one conference where they sit with me.

Okay, so you do feel that some of the social skills are an important component of the program. That the writer program has effected their social skills in a positive way? Do you feel that those same social skills taught through the program improve the students writing development?

I'm unsure if it improves their writing development so much. I think it makes them better people. They seem to be able to even evaluate each others' writing in a nicer way but I don't know that it makes them stronger writers. I think the read aloud can make them stronger writers because it's the model of good writing. I don't necessarily think that the social component of it makes them a better writer.

Okay.

I don't know that what they work on socially through the program comes through in their writing. I think you see them more in the way they share with each other and work with each other and evaluate, help evaluate each other's work. When they evaluate each other's work they do something called readers questions, so if I'm conferencing, they'll read each other's stories and instead of saying I don't get what this means, the story is mixed up, anywhere that their confused, the person who's reading the story may have a reader's question, which just means I didn't understand this part of the story. They write their questions down and the writer can go back and use the questions to help elaborate their writing or to make it more specific.

That is something you've taught them to do?

Yes I've taught them. I write readers questions for them as well, the kids can write them and I write them. They've learned it through modeling.

This helps to improve their writing? This is not part of the Being A Writer program is it?

No. It's not I wish it was though, that I do believe helps them improve. It helps each other improve their writing. I don't know that the social development and improves their actual writing.

I'm thinking if their doing readers questions and socially talking to each other and saying I have a question, can you build on this, and then the student goes back and builds on it, then socially it's working.

Yes that's a good point. I wasn't really thinking of it that way.

If you think of it like that.

Yes, if you think of it like that it is helping. But if we didn't to that, I wish that was part of the Being A Writer program. If other people don't know about something like that they might not do that to help each other evaluate.

Do they do any peer editing or proofreading through the Being A Writer program at that grade level?

A little bit not too much. This is my first year going through the third-grade program and we have not hit anything like that yet. I personally did not use it so much in 4th and 5th I don't remember if it was part of the program. I prefer to do more of their editing. The kids help with the revising with the reader's questions and elaborating but the actual editing I do.

Okay and that leads me to the last question which is what aspects of the Being A Writer program do you feel that can be enhanced? Is there anything about the program that you would like to see changed or added to or taken away or in any way that the district could help you be a better teacher of writing?

In each grade level I feel like the lessons that I have supplemented in myself I certainly would like to see in the program. It's nice to see a different take. I would like to suggest to somebody, could you give me some lessons for writing through the 5 senses? I would like to see the suggested read aloud's and what kind of mini lesson would be suggested but I know a 5th grade teacher wouldn't want to see the same thing. So it would depend on the grade level that I was at. I would just like to see the things that I go and supplement myself, I would like to see those lessons there. Like this year the things that I felt that the kids needed in their writing, to be good strong writers in third grade, writing through the five senses, that sensory writing, bringing things to life, painting the picture on paper.

So you had to go and find these extra lessons and put them in yourself?

Yes, I would find what I thought were the good read aloud's and I typed up my own model work for it and created my own lessons, where I wish it was just built in there. Such as writing with specific rather than general details, using fresh language.

So if you went to another grade level you would hope that these lessons would already be a part of it, but they're not.

Yes. I just think it's lacking in some specific lessons that make the kids, that help them to be good writers like what a piece of good writing needs. If you don't teach them to write with specific details, they end up writing, what I'm finding when they come into third grade, it's list like. It's this, then this, then this, then this. There is nothing specific. If you don't teach them to pick one moment in time and focus on it and blow up that moment and tell the action and have them tell you everything.

The Being A Writer program does not do that?

I don't think it focuses on that enough. I think it's better for generating ideas, getting the kids excited to write. I think it does a good job of taking them through the process of learning what

pre-writing is and drafting and taking them to the actual writing process. I think it's stronger in those respects rather than those key lessons that they need to make your piece of writing strong.

How about grammar and mechanics is that a part of it?

They do learn some editing.

Like punctuation and proofreading that kind of thing?

Yes, they learn that stuff but again we supplement that as well. So I don't feel that there is enough. It does come with a nice book for practice. They have good practice.

What's the book?

It's a Being A Writer workbook. They have different selections, maybe read this paragraph and underline all the nouns or edit this paragraph or fix the capitalization and punctuation. So it does, have a good practice book.

Okay and you use that book?

Yes I use the book. I use it for morning work more than I do than I actually combine them into my lessons. I think there could be a little bit more as far as lessons go.

Okay if you did not have the Being A Writer program what would you use, would you choose your own read aloud's and use Ralph Fletcher and Barbara Mariconda? A whole mix together.

Yes I would pull things together. I like having the Being A Writer as my core but I do personally feel like you need to supplement it. I don't think it's enough, I don't feel that it's meaty enough.

When they get to fifth grade they go from narrative writing to expository writing so it's nice to just be able to focus on kind of a different form of writing rather then have to teach them the social components again which is nice.

So if it's done properly throughout the grade levels by the time they get there they don't have to focus on that.

Yes that's nice if your fifth-grade teacher.

Is there anything else you would like to say or anything else that you would like to add before we end the interview?

No. I don't think so.

Thank you very much for this interview, I will transcribe the notes at which time I will send them to you and you can take a look at them. If you want to delete, cross it off, if you want to add, you can write something at the bottom.

I am in approval of this interview transcript

Signature_____

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Curriculum Vitae

Education:

2009-2013:   Walden University. Ed.D. (Title of Doctoral Project Study: "Teacher Student Relationships and Student Writing Achievement" (Fadia Desmond, Committee Chair). Coursework in Teacher Leadership.

1998-1200   Southern Connecticut State University, M.S. School Psychology.

1984-1986   Sacred Heart University, M.A.T. Master in Teaching

1979-1983   Eastern Connecticut State University, B.S. Elementary Education

Certifications:

1983   Certification in Elementary Education, N-6.

Teaching Experience

1984-2000   Westover Magnet Elementary School, Stamford CT. Teaching K-2.

2000-2013   Daniels Farm Elementary School, Trumbull, CT. Teaching K-1.

Other Experiences

2010-2012   Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study Team. Completed research on full day kindergarten.

2010-2012   PBIS Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies Team. Team member, attending all training sessions.

2007-2010   Instructional Technology Leader. Teaching staff new technology.

2000-2010   Crisis Management Team Leader. Managing the crisis team.