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Instructional Writing Practices in Grade Five

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Susan Elaine Newberry

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Abstract

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by

Susan Elaine Newberry

MA, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1995

BS, Appalachian State University, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Nationally and locally, a paucity of students are effective writers. The purpose of this

exploratory, sequential mixed methods study was to explore effective research-based writing

strategies and influences on writing skills of 5th grade students. Guided by Vygotsky's zone of

proximal development theory, the research questions investigated teachers' perceptions of the

best instructional writing practices, the effect of writing practices on students' state writing

scores, the relationship between student attendance and performance on the state writing test,

and the amount of instructional planning dedicated to best writing practices. Data were

collected from interviews with 5th grade teachers ($N = 5$), student scores on the state writing

assessment ($N = 247$), student attendance records, and teacher lesson plans. Interview data

were open coded and thematically analyzed, quantitative data were analyzed using

descriptive statistics and t tests, and lessons plans were content analyzed for time spent on

best writing practices, as identified in the review of literature. The overarching themes from

the teacher interviews included (a) importance of teacher guided instruction, (b) confusion

about the best practice in writing instruction, and (c) additional supports for students to be

effective writers. Current writing instructional practices did not improve state writing

assessment scores. There were significant differences in the state writing scores between

students who passed and those who did not pass the state writing test. Attendance data were

not related to student writing scores. Teacher planning did not reflect the use of best practices

in the classroom. These findings informed a 21-hour professional development program to

increase awareness of best practices in writing instruction. This study contributes to social

change by potentially affecting students' proficiency in writing for 21st century college and

career expectations.

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Dedication

This study is first and foremost a dedication to God. He gave the courage to begin this journey, the strength to write into the wee hours of the morning, and the perseverance to complete this journey. I pray that I never take for granted the blessings my Lord and Savior has given to me.

Next, this study is dedicated to my husband, Archie. He supported me through this whole process. He never questioned my tendency to write in the wee hours of the morning. He gave me encouragement when I needed it and never let me give up. Thank you, my love.

This study is also dedicated to my sons, Shawn and Devin. You are my shining lights. I am so proud of the young men you are. I pray that you use the gifts God has given to you to serve Him to the best of your ability. Thank you for loving your ol' mom.

To my parents, Rebecca and Charles, my sister, Kimberly, and my grandmother, June, I thank you for supporting me through this huge academic endeavor. I am thankful to be part of this family. You are the rocks that keep my feet firmly planted.

To my neighbors, Blair and Kristina, I thank you for the coffee early in the morning and late at night. I thank you for letting me use Birch when I needed the isolation time to write. Your family has been my lighthouse as I neared the end of this process.

And finally, to my dear friends, Shonda, Michelle, and Melanee, who have supported me, prayed for me, and sometimes had to swallow hard and just love me, I sincerely thank you and love you.

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I also must thank Dr. Amy Sedivy-Benton, University Research Reviewer. You were an expert at research to guide me to write my research reviews thoroughly and logically. Thank you for the support and guidance, especially at the end.

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Introduction

Both students and adults must demonstrate proficiency in writing for success in the

21st century. Without writing proficiency, students cannot write for a variety of purposes,

including narrative stories, arguments, research, poetry, and persuasion. As adults,

writing is essential for college entry, for employment applications, and for successful

employment at the general and business level (Mascle, 2013). According to The Nation's

Report Card for Writing (2011), proficiency is defined as "students performing at this

level have clearly demonstrated the ability to accomplish the communicative purpose of

their writing" (p. 1). Unfortunately, at the national level, only 27% of eighth and 12th

graders scored at the proficient level or higher in writing (The Nation's Report Card

Writing, 2011). The students in the local school district in the present study scored higher

than the national level in writing, with 43.3% at proficient in fifth grade and 53.7% at

proficient in eighth grade (ASO Report Card, 2012). In this project study, I investigated

current writing instructional techniques at the local level in order to eliminate the gap

between current proficiency and future proficiency. Ideally, the future proficiency in fifth

grade writers will be 100%.

Specifically, I investigated fifth grade scores and writing practices of fifth grade

teachers. Fifth grade is a critical grade to investigate for three reasons. First, fifth graders

took the state writing test consistently since the test's introduction in 2009. Second, fifth

graders had the most opportunities for writing instruction when compared to students in

other elementary grades. Third, fifth grade is a pivotal grade in the local school system

because the students are preparing to transition to middle school expectations in writing. Elementary students must have the best instruction in writing to prepare them for middle school, high school, college, and careers.

Local Problem

The local setting was an elementary school that serves grades PK through 5th. E Elementary School (pseudonym) serves approximately 593 students in a small, southeastern town with a population of about 10,000. According to the PowerSchool Data Program at the elementary school, 64% of the students received free/reduced lunch, 74% of the students were Caucasian, 12% of the students were Hispanic, 8% of the students were African American, and 6% of the students were considered other ethnicities. In the current student population, 16% had an identified disability and received special education services. Of the seven elementary schools in the district, this elementary school had the highest level of poverty and the most diversity. There were two neighboring schools that were included in this project study. Both F and G schools (pseudonyms) had similar student body populations and were classified as high poverty schools.

The state report card showed the need to produce more effective writers at the fifth grade level in each of the three high poverty elementary schools in the district. Table 1 shows the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level in writing in each school for the past 4 years (State Report Cards, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012).

Table 1

Percent of Students Scoring at the Proficient Level in Writing in Title I Schools

Schools	2009	2010	2011	2012
School E	38.1%	32.7%	40.4%	32.6%
School F	41.7%	36.5%	36.8%	35.9%
School G	37%	32.9%	25.7%	25.6%

The data show inconsistent trends among the three high poverty schools. School

E shows an up and down pattern in scores. Both Schools F and G show a relatively

constant downward pattern in scores. All three schools are below the district's overall

percentage of 43.3 on Grade 5 proficient writing scores. These data illuminate the local

problem of a low percentage of proficient Grade 5 writers.

The district level and local school level curriculum specialists and administrators

recognized that writing instruction must become a focus of teachers' instruction. In a

presentation to the district's third through eighth grade teachers, the district curriculum

administrator recommended Writer's Workshop to all teachers to improve the writing of

the students (Writing for PASS - Blowing the Top off the Test, Sept. 24, 2012). A gap in

practice was evident in the local school because few of the teachers had fully

implemented Writer's Workshop or other best practice approaches in the classroom.

When discussed with School E's administrator, J.B. (personal communication, February

6, 2013), she reported that only one fifth grade teacher out of five was fully using

Writer's Workshop. This local administrator discussed that despite providing

opportunities for professional development in writing on integrating skills into writing

instruction, 80% of the fifth grade teachers in School E still teach grammar in isolation from writing. This gap in practice justified the need for this study to help understand which writing instruction practices assist fifth grade students in becoming proficient in writing skills so that the students master the necessary writing skills for middle school, high school, college, and 21st century careers.

The problem of the low percentage of proficient or higher writing scores at the local, high poverty elementary schools are potentially related to several factors in writing instruction. The United States Department of Education published *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* (2012). The four major recommendations for effective writing instruction as posited by this publication were as follows: (a) provide daily time to write, (b) teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes, (c) teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing, and (d) create an engaged community of writers (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). The authors analyzed and synthesized the research for best writing practices and instruction (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham, & Sandmel, 2011). Specifically, my study added to the body of research by strengthening the second recommendation of the Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012) to teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes. As Common Core State Standards (2013) stated, students must build a foundation of writing skills and be flexible enough to understand the audience, purpose, and tone for a piece of writing. The local problem articulated the lack of these foundational writing skills for a majority of students in the

fifth grade at the high poverty elementary schools in the local school district. Since a majority of students in fifth grade lacked foundational writing skills, the tests also reflected a low percentage of fifth grade students who had attained proficiency in writing scores at the local school level.

Rationale

The rationale to study writing instruction practices in the elementary school setting revolved around three current factors: (a) the local, high poverty elementary schools had a significant number of students in fifth grade who either passed the state assessment with the bare minimum requirements or not at all, (b) the state assessment in writing changed from assessing only students in fifth grade to assessing students in third, fourth, and fifth grades which started in school year 2012-2013, and (c) the Common Core State Standards(CCSS) were fully implemented in the school year 2014-2015. CCSS (2013) required that all students write opinion papers, exploratory/information papers, and narrative papers. Teachers' instruction in writing was too varied and often lacked focus, even when given the tools and resources needed (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Dunn, 2011; Troi, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011). If this problem was not addressed, then the students were at risk for long term effects. Students who did not learn to write effectively in various formats were at risk for lower grades and potential failure in middle school and high school courses that required writing. The lack of effective writing skills impacted their potential to enter college successfully, to gain employment that requires writing skills, and to communicate effectively with others (Parent et al., 2011).

According to the U.S. Department of Education publication, *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers,* writing is not a linear process (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). The publication likened the linear writing process to baking a cake, moving through the steps to get to an end product. The authors of the publication recommended that the writing process be more fluid, where writers can move back and forth throughout the process to become effective writers (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). Since the South Carolina State PASS Writing test is a prompt-based assessment, many teachers viewed the writing process as a linear process rather than a fluid process. Despite the research available on best practices in writing instruction (D'On Jones, Reutzel, & Fargo, 2010; Laman, 2011; Tracy, Reid, & Graham, 2009; Wong, Hoskyn, Jai, Ellis, & Watson, 2008), teachers continued to use a linear approach in the classroom. Brimi (2012) reported that teachers may be influenced by statewide testing to produce a successful product, as opposed to teaching students the writing process. The purpose of this mixed methods project study was to discover the most effective research-based writing strategies to improve the writing skills of fifth grade students.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

Content/development: An area on the State Writing Rubric in which students are required to present, develop, and sustain focus around a central idea (SC Extended Response Writing Rubric, 2008).

Conventions: An area on the state writing rubric in which students are required to use grade-appropriate grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling (SC Extended Response Writing Rubric, 2008).

Exemplary: "The student demonstrates exemplary performance in meeting the grade level standard" (ASDO State Report Card, 2012, p. 2) in South Carolina.

Met: "The student performs at the minimum requirements in the grade level standard" (ASDO State Report Card, 2012, p. 2) in South Carolina.

Not met: "The student did not perform at the minimum requirements in the grade level standard" (ASDO State Report Card, 2012, p. 2) in South Carolina.

Organization: An area on the State Writing Rubric in which students are required to have an introduction, body, and conclusion with a logical progression of ideas through the use of transitional devices (SC Extended Response Writing Rubric, 2008).

State assessment: High stakes testing that is partially or completely connected to sanctions and rewards assigned to schools and school districts (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Voice: An area on the State Writing Rubric in which students are required to use vocabulary, phrasing, sentence structure, and awareness of audience (SC Extended Response Writing Rubric, 2008).

Writing process: The process of writing that includes planning, writing, and editing writing (Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

Significance

The problem in the current study was the low percentage of fifth grade students who attained proficiency in writing scores at the local school level. The students' written

responses on the current state writing assessment received evaluation on

content/development, organization, voice, and conventions. Without proficient writing

skills, students may struggle for success in college and in the 21st century careers. Schlee

and Harich (2010) examined job requirements for marketing careers across the country

using an online job database. They found marketing jobs required effective written

communication skills throughout the country. Similarly, Jones (2011) investigated

accounting, a traditionally mathematical-based career, for the employers' strongest

desires for new employees. Jones discovered that employers highly valued the ability to

communicate in emails and other documents with proper conventions, organization of

documentation, and effectiveness in content development. The abilities identified by

Jones are three of the four areas on the State Writing Rubric for proficiency. The only

area not mentioned by Jones for business level writing is voice. In addition, Parent et al.

(2011) investigated the attitudes towards writing instruction in business schools. They

found that some progress is being made in colleges towards effective business writing

skills, such as writing technical reports, memos, formal reports, and correspondence.

However, although colleges are making strides in developing writers who are prepared

for the business field, writing must be a focus from kindergarten to high school (Parent et

al., 2011).

This study was significant because it added to the current body of literature

regarding instruction in writing. As educators develop writing instructional skills, the

discussions and professional development regarding writing instruction must be focused

on the current best practices. At the local level, when teachers understand and implement

best practices in writing instruction in the intermediate grades, a solid foundation is created. Middle and high school teachers can build upon this writing foundation to prepare for students for college and careers. Locally, this study provided specific research to identify the best practices in writing instruction for teachers to build this writing foundation in their fifth grade students so that the students score higher on the state tests and are better prepared for their futures.

<div align="center">Guiding Questions</div>

Proficient writing skills are essential for all students and adults. Students in the district in this study needed to develop skills as efficient and effective writers to successfully master high school courses, write college entrance essays, articulate points of view, and prepare proposals and presentations in today's 21st century careers. Educators and administrators needed to understand the most effective writing instructional practices to create these efficient and effective writers. This study was conducted to add to the knowledge regarding effective instructional practices in writing. The guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What types of research-based writing practices did teachers in Grade 5 believe were most effective in their writing instruction?

2. Which of these reported writing practices did teachers believe were the most effective in addressing the State Writing Rubric in each component area (content/development, organization, voice, and conventions)?

3. What effect did the reported use of these writing practices have on students' scores on the state writing test?

    a. How did scores on each component of the state rubric of students passing

        the state writing test differ from those failing the state writing test?

    b. Did attendance of students discriminate between passers and nonpassers

        of state writing test?

4. Do teachers spend proportionally more time on best practices as identified by

    the research?

Review of the Literature

Writing well in a variety of formats is critical for success in one's academic and

professional life. Students who are prepared for college and careers can "demonstrate

independence, build strong content knowledge, respond to varying demands of audience,

task, purpose, and discipline, [as well as] comprehend and come to understand other

perspectives and cultures" (Common Core State Standards, 2013, para.1-7). Success in

writing can be affected by several factors, such as child developmental stages, student

attitudes towards writing, assessment of writing, and instructional practices. Writing well

often depends on effective writing instruction in school. A plethora of research on

effective writing instruction was available for my project study.

To conduct the literature review, I used the ERIC-Education Resource

Information Center, Education Research Complete, Sage, Proquest Central, Academic

Search Complete, and Google Scholar databases. To locate peer-reviewed, empirically-

based articles from 2009 to 2014, the Boolean search terms I found most successful

included *writing instruction and instructional practices, writing instruction, writing

instruction and teacher perceptions, writing process*, *Vygotsky and zone of proximal*

development, and *scaffolding.* Articles located by reading the reference sections and by searching for key researchers who appeared multiple times in the literature provided additional resources. I used articles that included either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research approaches.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this project study was Vygotsky's work on human development and learning. Writing instruction cannot be learned independently in isolation (Alston, 2012; Dunn & Finley, 2010; McGrail & Davis, 2010; Towell & Matanzo, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) stated that the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86) is the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (2011) explained the zone of proximal development as the space between where a child is actually developed and where the child could develop with the guidance of teachers or advanced peers. Adding to this definition, Shabani, Khatib, and Ebadi (2010) explained that the zone of proximal development keeps an individual in problem-solving tasks that are slightly more difficult than what the individual can do on his or her own. With the assistance of teachers and advanced peers, the individual completes the more difficult tasks. As a result, the next time the individual encounters the same task, he or she completes the task independently. Regarding writing specifically, teachers or advanced peers who guide students in the writing process help to develop the writer to her or his fullest potential (Boyle & Charles, 2011; D'On Jones, 2010; Laman, 2011).

Wearmouth, Berryman, and Whittle (2011) concluded that teachers who scaffold writing instruction develop stronger writers in a variety of genres. According to Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), scaffolding instruction is essential so that learning can occur. The steps in the scaffolding process are as follows: (a) engage the learner's interest, (b) reduce the task to manageable units of learning, (c) keep the learner focused on the objective or the end product, (d) mark the important features of a task, (e) keep frustration at a minimum without creating a dependency on the teacher, and (f) model the correct solutions to complete the objective (Wood et al., 1976). Scaffolding writing instruction consistently results in gains in written expression within the general education population, including subgroups of students with learning disabilities and attention deficient hyperactivity disorder and students for whom English is a second language (Mason, Harris, & Graham, 2011; Read, 2010; Schwieter, 2010;Wearmouth et al., 2011).

Writing Instructional Practices

The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance and Institute of Education Sciences (IES) released a report that reviewed writing instruction practices for elementary-aged students (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). Research from over 1,500 articles written in the past 20 years was examined, but the focus was narrowed to 41 research articles with high causal validity. Four research recommendations emerged based on a review of the aforementioned articles. Minimal evidence supported the first recommendations, providing daily time to write and creating a community of writers. Moderate research supported the next recommendation: Students should be fluent in spelling, handwriting, sentence construction, and grammar. However, strong evidence

supported one recommendation for writing instruction in the elementary classroom. This recommendation was to "teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes" (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012, p. 9). Traditional writing instruction and process writing instruction are the two the primary methods of writing instruction.

  Traditional writing instruction. Traditional instruction of writing in the elementary classroom is teacher led lessons that focus on specific skills and rules in grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Often traditional instruction only requires students to write a minimal amount, one or two paragraphs at a time (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Troia, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011). McCarthey and Ro (2011) described traditional writing instruction as that which includes textbooks and workbooks to teach precise skills in grammar and sentence mechanics, such as capitalization and punctuation. This writing instruction includes traditional lesson formats, which include introduction, new skill, guided practice, and independent practice in a whole class setting.

  Traditional instruction does not lead to students' understanding that writing is a process. As Graham, Bollinger et al. (2012) showed in their study, process writing instruction has stronger evidence for effectively teaching writing than traditional, skills-based writing instruction. Applebee and Langer (2011) noted a shift in focus among middle school and high school writing instruction from 1979-80 to the present. Teachers reported using cognitive strategies, such as "deconstructing prompts, how to pose questions, how to anticipate readers' questions, strategies for paraphrasing, Socratic Seminars" (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 26) to model and teach the writing process.

Teachers also reported increased use of rubrics to score writing. In addition to teacher-reading of students' writing, peer-reading of writing reportedly has increased since 1979-80 (Applebee & Langer, 2011). This shift in focus led to process writing instruction becoming more prevalent in classrooms.

Process writing instruction. In the process approach to writing instruction, the cycle of writing is viewed as a circle, as opposed to linear (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). The cycle includes self-selecting of a topic, prewriting, drafting, and revising for creating a final version. The cycle concept allows students to fluidly move back and forth through the writing process to create a writing piece. The linear approach is thought of as a teacher-directed approach, typically associated with traditional writing instructional approaches. The teacher assigns the topic and the students move from one step to the next to create a final product. In contrast, in the process approach, writing is student-centered (Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

Process writing instruction has several different components that enhance student writing. Process writing instruction emphasizes a student-centered focus, lessons that are planned based on teachers' observation of students' writings, student- and peer-conferences, goal setting, and reflection (Applebee & Langer, 2009; D'On Jones et al., 2010; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham, McKeown et al., 2012; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; McCarthey & Ro, 2011). Graham, McKeown et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental research studies that investigated writing instruction with elementary aged students. They examined 115 articles that were in English with elementary aged students and contained a treatment group with posttest

results that had results that compute effect sizes. Graham, McKeown et al. (2012) found

positive ES (effect size) for teaching students strategy instruction for planning, drafting,

and revising; teaching students how to self-regulate while they are planning, drafting, and

revising; teaching students to create mental images while writing; teaching students genre

types for writing; teaching students spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding skills;

allowing students to collaborate during various phrases of writing; assisting students in

setting clear goals; explicit teaching of prewriting skills and strategies; and assessing

students' writing with an on-going method. All of the components with positive effective

size were evidence based best practices for process approach writing instruction. These

two approaches to process writing instruction are supported in the literature.

Approaches to Instruction Using Process Writing

Research in writing attempts to identify various theories, policies, and classroom

instructional practices that show a positive effect on writing in students. Classroom

instructional approaches and methods improve the quality of writing of students. There

are two methods identified in research as effective instructional process approaches to

writing: the self-regulated strategy development method and the writer's workshop

method.

Self-regulated strategy development method. The first process approach

writing instructional method is self-regulated strategy development (SRSD). Graham,

MacArthur, and Fitzgerald (2013) described SRSD as "explicit instruction to scaffold the

process of acquiring and independently applying writing strategies" (p. 123). One of the

primary components of SRSD is the use of mnemonics. Some of these mnemonics

include *POW: Pick my idea, Organize my notes, Write and say more; WWW, W=2, H=2: Who is the main character, When does the story take place, Where does the story take place, What do the characters do, What happens to the characters, How does the story end, How do the characters feel; TREE: Topic sentence, Reasons (3 or more), Ending, Examine;* and *UNITE: Unload all you know in note form, Note categories and arrange facts in each category, Identify categories in your topic sentence, Tie detailed sentences together with transition words, End with an exciting conclusion* (Dunn & Finley, 2010; Laud & Patel, 2008; Mason et al., 2011; Tracy et al., 2009). For the implementation of SRSD, there are six steps that include (a) building or activating the students' background knowledge, (b) introducing the mnemonic and its use for the rationale to set goals, (c) using metacognitive strategies to model the strategy in the writing process, (d) encouraging students to memorize the strategy, (e) providing scaffolded instruction through peer collaboration or shared writing, and (f) monitoring independent usage of the strategy in writing (Brunstein & Glasner, 2011; Graham et al., 2013; Laud & Patel, 2008). As students use the SRSD method, they deepen their understanding of the writing process and sustain this understanding over a period of time (Brunstein & Glaser, 2011). Tracy et al. (2009) conducted experimental research with 127 third graders. For 2 weeks, the treatment group learned the SRSD method to determine the potential impact of SRSD on story writing. Tracy et al. found that third graders who learned the SRSD approach wrote longer, more complex stories. These students generalized the knowledge they had regarding writing narratives to other genres of writing. Through the use of the SRSD method, students comprehended how to complete the writing task. When used correctly,

adult interaction within the process fades over time, thus developing self-sufficiency in writing (Dunn & Finley, 2010).

SRSD is effective with students who have learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, attention-deficient disorders, and with students for whom English is a second language. Ennis, Jolivette, and Boden (2013) implemented SRSD with 25 elementary students, third through sixth grade, who had identified emotional/behavioral disabilities. The researchers divided the students into three groups: Group 1 had 12 sessions of SRSD over 6 weeks; Group 2 had 16 sessions over 6 weeks; and Group 3 had no SRSD instruction, only traditional writing instruction. A pre- and posttest experimental approach was employed. The SRSD strategies taught included STOP and DARE. STOP and DARE taught students to "*Suspend judgment, Take a side, Organize ideas, Plan more as you write; and Develop your topic sentence, Add supporting ideas, Reject at least one argument for the other side, End with a conclusion*" (Ennis et al., 2013, p. 89). At the end of the intervention time, students in both experimental groups made significant gains in persuasive writing and maintained these gains for period of 6 weeks. This study showed the effectiveness of SRSD with students with emotional/behavioral disabilities.

Jacobson and Reid (2010) conducted a multiple-baseline-across-participants design with multiple probes to study the effectiveness of SRSD with students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The researchers chose to use three males in high school as the participants in the study. The SRSD used in this study was also STOP and DARE as mentioned in the previous study (Ennis et al., 2013). Although the participants'

scores did not reach the normal range, the results showed that all three students increased their holistic writing scores.

The process approach to writing instruction should be explicitly taught to students. Self-regulated, strategy development is designed to scaffold instruction to effectively and explicitly teach writing to students. Furthermore, according to recent research, SRSD is effective with students in the general education classroom as well as students with learning disabilities, English as a second language, emotional/behavioral disabilities, and attention deficient disorders.

Writer's workshop method. The second process writing method is commonly referred to as writer's workshop. The premise of writer's workshop is to allow students the opportunity to create writing in various genres for authentic purposes. Teachers and peers consistently conference, collaborate, and share ideas and writing with each other. Students choose the writing genre depending upon the message they want to send to others to read. For example, one student may want to write a letter to a zoo in New York to request information about a type of animal. Another student may want to write an informational pamphlet about another type of animal. Teachers create lessons based on the needs of the students, as opposed to following a particular program or a textbook (Caulkins, 2001; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Graves, 1983). Since writer's workshop is a student-centered, process approach to writing instruction, it varies from class to class as to what an observer may see. There are some basic components that should be evident in all writer's workshop classrooms. Troia et al. (2011) summarized these components as

(a) mini-lessons on workshop procedures, writing skills, composition strategies,

and craft elements; (b) sustained time (20-30 minutes) for personally

meaningful writing nearly every day to help students become more

comfortable with the writing process and varied writing tasks; (c) teacher- and

student-led conferences about writing plans and written products to help

students appropriate habits of mind associated with good writing and to make

the most of their writing; and (d) frequent opportunities for sharing with

others, sometimes through formal publishing activities, to enhance the

authenticity of writing activities and cultivate a sense of community. (p. 156)

The writer's workshop focuses on the writing as a whole. As opposed to a traditional,

skills-based approach, which is a bottom-up approach, the writer's workshop is a top-

down approach. Writer's workshop approaches writing in a way that allows students to

share or convey thoughts and ideas with others in a purposeful and meaningful manner

(D'On Jones et al., 2010). Writer's workshop is a process approach in which students

learn to write in authentic method.

Components of Writing Assessment

The National Commission on Writing (2003) asserted that writing instruction is

neglected in today's schools. However, with President Barack Obama's Race to the Top

initiative (2009), states were challenged to adopt international standards to prepare

students for success in college and in the workplace. In response to this initiative, 45

states and three territories adopted Common Core Standards (Common Core States

Initiative Standard, December 6, 2012). The CCSS in writing (2012) included

argumentative writing, informational/explanatory writing, and narrative writing. This research in my study was conducted in the year the state in this project was implementing Common Core Standards. This was classified as a bridge year by the state department as the Common Core Standards were used in the classrooms, yet the students' assessment was the current high-stakes testing developed by the state using state standards (State Department of Education Common Core State Standards, 2013). The State Writing Rubric in the state in the study covered four areas: content/development, organization, voice, and conventions (State Writing Rubric, 2008).

Content and development. Content and development relate to a theme of an essay and the relative details that support the theme (Statewide Writing Rubric, 2008). Methods, such as SRSD, assist students in development of a theme and supporting details (Tracy et al., 2009). Moreover, writer's workshop assists teachers and students in developing the genres of writing to convey meaning and ideas (McCarthey & Ro, 2011). In addition, Boyle and Charles (2011) conducted a case study of one 6-year-old, elementary-aged student to explore the progress she made in development of ideas, text cohesion, and spelling. The authors examined the progress she made when working collaboratively with her peers in her writing development. There was clear growth in her writing development. Since this was a case study, it would not necessarily be representative of all elementary-aged writers. However, it led the authors to conclude that when students write collaboratively with peers during writer's workshop time, their writing shows growth in development of ideas (Boyle & Charles, 2011).

Students relate to each other in a social context to learn from each other. Schwieter (2010) stated that peers collaborate with each other to scaffold learning. This collaboration supported Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development. During a college course on writing in a secondary language, 22 students participated in a writer's workshop model to work collaboratively with peers on revising and editing writing. The students created an authentic writing piece in the form of a magazine. Results showed improvements in each stage of revising and editing. Thus, Schwieter (2010) concluded that scaffolded writing instruction with both peers and instructors within a learner's zone of proximal development can improve revisions of writing compositions in terms of content and development of writing.

Organization. Organization refers to the use of an introduction, body, and conclusion throughout a piece of writing. In addition, organization of writing refers to the appropriate use of transitional words and phrases (Statewide Writing Rubric, 2008). Myhill (2009) studied the developmental mastery of writing multiple paragraphs with cohesion. Myhill collected two writing samples from 12 to 13 year olds and two writing samples from 14 to 15 year olds. The first writing sample was a first person narrative and the second writing piece was a persuasive writing piece. Myhill analyzed a total of 718 pieces of writing for sentence, paragraph, and text structure. Myhill found that weaker writers appear unsure of when to use paragraphs and why to use paragraphs. Weaker writers used paragraphs as a tool of layout of what an essay should look like, rather than using paragraphing as a tool to convey meaning to the reader. Additionally, Myhill observed that weaker writers only wrote the topic sentence of a paragraph at the

beginning of a paragraph. Again, this finding suggested that weaker writers view topic

sentences as a tool of layout, as opposed to a tool to convey meaning to readers.

Furthermore, Myhill observed that weaker writers use adverbs minimally. And moreover,

weaker writers mostly used temporal and ordinal adverbs, such as next, first, last. On the

other hand, stronger writers integrated the use of additive and adversative adverbs, such

as furthermore, alternatively, similarly. This study suggested that mastery of the concept

of organization is more complex than simply teaching a five paragraph rule for writing,

and developmental factors, such as understanding the function and appropriate use of

paragraphing, are critical to this understanding of organization in writing. SRSD

strategies, along with self-regulatory strategies, produce writing from students that is both

planned well and revised well (Brunstein & Glaser, 2011).

Additionally, the use of communication among peers and teachers in writer's

workshop produces better revisions for organized and coherent writing. Laman (2011)

employed a qualitative approach as an observer to analyze writing conferences between

students and a teacher. This study was conducted in the southeastern United States in a

fourth grade classroom. The teacher used the writer's workshop model to hold one-on-

one conferences with her students. Laman noted that student and teacher conversations

allowed for the students to have the opportunities to reflect on their organization of their

writing pieces. With this reflection time, students better organized and reorganized their

written pieces to improve the flow and organization of their writing.

Voice. The next component in the State Writing Rubric is voice. Voice covers

several areas in writing. A piece of writing with strong voice has vivid vocabulary,

awareness of audience, effective phrasing, and rhythmic reading (State Writing Rubric, 2008). Developing an awareness of the reader takes time and practice. As a writer matures and develops, he or she moves from egocentric writing to an awareness of the reader (Kellogg, 2008). McGrail and Davis (2011) effectively used blogging with elementary students to increase their awareness of audience. In their study, the authors chose to use a bounded case study method to investigate the use of internet blogging as an instructional method and to investigate its impact on writing. This study used fifth graders in one classroom for 1 year. The authors used a triangulation of data via writing samples (pre and post the blogging experience), student interviews, teacher interviews, and videotaped sessions of the blogging. Through the use of blogs, the readers became real, and the writers evolved from writing for their teachers to writing for a larger worldwide audience (McGrail & Davis, 2011). As students developed a new understanding of their audience for the writing, the voice in their writing became more powerfully clear.

In addition to awareness of audience, a piece of writing with strong voice has vivid vocabulary. Current research regarding vivid vocabulary usage in writing instruction is limited. However, Olinghouse and Leaird (2009) examined the vocabulary development of 92 second and 101 fourth graders to determine vocabulary diversity, length of words used in writing, and use of less frequently used words. The authors surveyed 13 second and fourth grade teachers. The teachers reported using writer's workshop in instruction, expectations that students use the writing process, and approximately 8 ½ hours of writing instruction each week. The authors examined various

pieces of writing from second and fourth graders in December, February, and April. In the writing tasks, fourth graders demonstrated higher performance in all areas of vocabulary. This quantitative study showed that fourth graders used more diverse vocabulary, less frequently used vocabulary, and more polysyllabic words. However, Olinghouse and Leaird discovered that when tested for vocabulary on a standardized measure, such as the TOWL-3(Test of Written Language), second graders included more polysyllabic words than fourth graders. When Olinghouse and Leaird compared the stability of the vocabulary scores between the writing task and the standardized test, all students demonstrated higher vocabulary on the standardized test as opposed to the writing task. Olinghouse and Leaird posited that writing prompts may be a factor in whether students use age appropriate vocabulary in writing activities.

As students share their writing with more frequency in the final stage of writer's workshop, they develop an understanding of effective phrasing and rhythmic reading. Some teachers have students share with peers, other grade level students, parents, student teachers, and/or administrators (Towell & Matanzo, 2010). Students need to become authentic authors and illustrators to develop voice in their writing. Towell and Matanzo (2010) studied five teachers' approaches to writing instruction and their students' approaches to writing to observe improvement in several writing skills, including voice. This qualitative study varied in length from 2 weeks to 2 months, depending on the direction the participant took the assignment. The students transformed a traditional tale into another version from another country or another culture. The authors noted that when students shared their writing with others as authentic authors and illustrators, the students

improved speaking and listening skills. Speaking and listening assist in the concept of effective phrasing and rhythmic reading in the assessed area of voice (Towell & Matanzo, 2010).

       Conventions. The final component in the State Writing Rubric is conventions. Conventions include an understanding and the consistent usage of grade-level appropriate grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (State Writing Rubric, 2008). This area is often taught the most frequently in classrooms. Gilbert and Graham (2010) conducted a national survey in Grades 4 to 6 to evaluate teaching writing in classrooms. Seventy-seven percent of teachers taught spelling skills weekly or more frequently. Fifty-four percent of teachers stated that they give extra practice on grammar skills weekly or more frequently. Graham, McKeown et al. (2012) found that teaching grammar in isolation did not significantly improve the overall writing products by students. In this previously mentioned meta-analysis study, Graham, McKeown et al. reviewed four articles on teaching grammar in isolation. The effect of teaching grammar in isolation did not increase grammar skills of students. Therefore, teachers must incorporate methods of teaching writing so that the best methods are used to make the most significant improvement in student writing.

Teachers' Perspectives on Writing Instruction

       With the plethora of research regarding best practices in writing instruction, it is important to understand teachers' perspectives on writing instruction in the elementary classroom. Teachers may develop their perspectives on writing instruction from their professional learning communities, professional development, and state standards

requirements (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011, McCarthey & Roe, 2011). Even with scoring rubrics, the determination of what constitutes good writing is often subjective. Nauman, Stirling, and Borthwick (2011) examined various perspectives as to what makes good writing. These researchers examined the perspectives of a combination of 75 classroom teachers, preservice teachers, and professional/published writers. The authors used the Q methodology for their research. The Q methodology is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Simons, 2013). In Q methodology, statements are sorted and commented on by the participants, thus producing rich, qualitative type data. Then, the data gathered from the participants are correlated, and factor analysis is employed to produce quantitative data (Simons, 2013). Statements regarding what constitutes good writing were on cards. The participants sorted the 31 statements from most *disagree* to *most agree*. Three perspectives of what makes good writing emerged in the findings. The first perspective of good writing was good thinking and communicating. Proponents of this perspective viewed writing as communication, with a sense of audience and personality. The second perspective of good writing was structure and clarity. Proponents of this perspective viewed good writing as being organized, free of errors in mechanics and grammar, and logical. The third perspective of good writing was purpose, voice, and correctness. Proponents of this perspective viewed good writing as including many details, being free of errors in mechanics and grammar, and having a point to the writing. Rubrics help focus readers of writing in assessment, but what makes writing good is still subjective for teachers (Nauman et al., 2011).

These perspectives of what constitutes good writing and the influences from various sources on the best methods to teach writing impact the way teachers approach writing instruction. Graham and Perin (2007) identified 19 evidence based instructional practices for improving quality of writing in adolescents. The experimental or quasi-experimental, peer-reviewed studies included only students from Grades 4 to 12. The authors only reviewed those articles that used a highly reliable measure for writing quality. Interrater reliability for the writing measures in each study was .60 or higher. The final criterion for the articles was the ability to create an effect size, a weighted average effect size, and homogeneity of effect sizes based on the information given in the article. In the meta-analysis, the authors examined a total of 123 articles. Graham and Perin identified a total of 19 evidence based practices for writing instruction. Process approach, peer collaboration, teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing, direct instruction of skills, setting writing goals, teaching word processing skills, and providing professional development were the practices identified effective for writing instruction.

In a nationwide survey, teachers reported using 17 of the 19 practices; however, teachers reported that 60% of these practices were used infrequently in the classroom (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). The authors used a stratified, random sampling procedure to identify 300 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classroom teachers. Only 103 completed the survey. Since teachers reported using best practices infrequently in the classroom, Gilbert and Graham (2010) concluded their study by recommending more consistent and frequent use of identified evidence based practices.

Dunn (2011) further supported that teachers use evidence based practices. Dunn conducted a qualitative study in which he interviewed 16 elementary, middle, and high school teachers using a semistructured approach. Dunn also observed these teachers for a total of 11 hours and 20 minutes. Four themes emerged during this study. The participants stated that it is imperative that classroom procedures and routines are established to provide explicit instruction in the classroom, collaboration between teachers and students, and feedback to the students. The final theme was that teachers struggle with time constraints and increased class sizes as they try to meet the needs of all students (Dunn, 2011). Teachers desire to use the best practices in writing instruction; however, time constraints and large class sizes impede their desire.

McCarthey and Ro (2011) found that teachers generally taught using four styles of writing instruction. The authors of this qualitative study interviewed and observed 29 third and fourth grade teachers from Illinois, Utah, Vermont, and West Virginia. Findings from the data showed four themes regarding styles of writing instruction. The first style was writer's workshop (Calkins, 2001). This was a complete use of the writer's workshop approach, student-centered and highly collaborative.

The second style was genre based. Genre based is not an approach that is considered evidenced-based because the teachers are choosing the genre and directing the writing process in a linear approach. These teachers taught a formula of writing to accomplish the state standards and focused on passing the state writing test. They often used a graphic organizer planning approach for students. All the teachers in this study who focused on the test in the genre-based approach taught in upper income schools.

However, this style of teaching will not prepare students for 21st century colleges and careers as stated in the Common Core State Standards (McCarthey & Ro, 2011).

The third style was skills based and traditional. In these classrooms, there was little focus on extended times to write. Instead, these teachers used worksheets to teach skills. All the teachers who taught skills based methods were in lower income schools. Alston (2012) stated that teachers of African-American students in lower income schools often do not use a process approach to writing, but instead tended to use a traditional style with worksheets and textbooks to teach writing instruction.

The final style that McCarthey and Ro (2011) identified in their study to approaches to writing instruction was hybrid or eclectic. These teachers' approach was a combination of styles, designed primarily for the enjoyment of writing. Gilbert and Graham (2010) recommended that teachers use the evidence based practices more with more frequency and duration and implement these practices with integrity for maximum effectiveness in the classroom. It was evident from McCarthey and Ro and Dunn (2010) that teachers have mixed approaches and perspectives to teach writing instruction in the elementary classroom.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Writing instruction is primarily delivered in classrooms through two approaches. The first approach is the traditional writing approach in which grammar, spelling, and mechanics are taught in isolation. This approach does not require students to write frequently. Most writing assignments are only one or two paragraphs (Applebee & Langer, 2009).

The second approach to writing instruction is the process approach. Graham and Sandmel (2011) stated that this process is student centered with all skills taught within the writing process as a whole. Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development and Wood, Bruner, and Ross' theory of scaffolding instruction guide the process approach to writing. Students' writing skills are scaffolded during explicit instruction from peers or teachers who guide the students' writing development.

The two most common approaches to process writing in the research literature within the previous 5 years were self-regulated strategy development and writing workshop. In self-regulated strategy development, teachers scaffolded instruction into increments to teach to students, using strategies to help students self-monitor their own writing (Graham et al., 2013). In writing workshop, students wrote for authentic purposes in a variety of genres. Conferences were held with peers and teachers to move the students to the next level in their writing (McCarthey & Ro, 2011).

The writing assessment components can influence writing instruction in the classroom. The State Writing Rubric had four components: content/development, organization, voice, and conventions. Each of these components was supported in the research as essential in the development of effective writers. Research showed that a process approach to writing instruction was more effective in developing each of these components in students' writing (Brunstein & Glaser, 2011; Graham, McKeown et al., 2012; McCarthey & Ro, 2011; Myhill, 2009; Olinghouse & Leaird, 2009; Tracy et al., 2009).

Researchers also examined teachers' perspectives on the most effective methods to teach writing. Teachers' perspectives were influenced by state standard requirements, professional development, and professional teaching organizations (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011, McCarthey & Roe, 2011). Teachers had a mix of perspectives of what constitutes good writing instruction. Teachers also had mixed views of the best research-based practices (Dunn, 2010; McCarthney & Roe, 2011). This research of current writing practices had direct implications on my project study.

Implications

Based on the theoretical foundation and literature review, students learn to write for authentic purposes when a process approach of scaffolded instruction is used. This literature review and the data from the local schools set up a project study to investigate the problem of the low percentage of students attaining proficiency in writing scores in the fifth grade at the local school level. Brunstein and Glasner (2011), Graham and Sandmel (2011), Tracy et al. (2009), and Troia et al. (2011) provided research to support the process approach in writing instruction. The process approach includes collaboration with adults and peers, strategies for planning and revising, student-centered instruction, goal setting, writing for authentic purposes, and sharing with others. Process approach writing instruction was considered the best practice to accomplish the recommendations in the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance and Institute of Education Sciences (2012) that successful students learn to write in a variety of formats. Evaluation of fifth grade teachers' perceptions on writing instruction compared to the research-based best practices assisted teachers in critically evaluating and reflecting on

their own practices in the classroom setting. If teachers can observe the connection between the best practices in writing instruction, including the frequency and duration of implementation of these best practices as they relate to student scores on state test rubrics, then perhaps they can adjust their own practices to mesh with the potential findings in this project study.

The social implications of this project study may impact students on a larger scale. If teachers refine their writing instructional practices, then students may develop the writing skills necessary to "demonstrate independence, build strong content knowledge, respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline, comprehend and come to understand other perspectives and cultures" (Common Core State Standards, 2013, para. 1-7) for college and careers. One possible product of this project study was a professional development consortium to work with in-service teachers to research their own practices and to collaborate with others to develop and refine writing instruction in the elementary classroom. Another possible product of the project study was a white paper for administration in the local school and local school district to explain the findings from this project study. An additional project could have been the development of a workshop to share the findings from my project study. As part of the workshop, participants could develop lesson plans that focus on particular areas of need in writing instruction and that use the effective writing strategies were identified through the research. As the findings emerged, a project was developed to impact the stakeholders and to influence a positive social change.

Summary

Writing is an essential skill for students to master in elementary grades. This foundation gives them the skills for middle school, high school, college, and careers in the 21st century. Careers now require employees to write for a variety of purposes, such as communicative, persuasive, and informative. The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011 (2012) reported that only 24% of the nation's eighth and 12th graders are writing at a proficient level. At the local level, 32.6% of the fifth graders scored proficient. Although this statistic was somewhat higher than the national average for eighth and 12th graders, there was clearly a reason for concern as to whether students are properly prepared for the future.

Research showed that there are best practices in writing instruction at the elementary level. Process writing instruction showed greater improvement in developing students' writing over an extended time. A summary of these identified best practices as described in the literature included (a) providing models of good writing, (b) providing time for collaboration and support from teacher and peers, (c) providing strategies for planning, organizing, and revising, (d) providing a student centered environment with self-selected writing topics, (e) providing time to share with authentic audiences, and (f) providing students with goals and expectations (Graham et al., 2013). The purpose of this mixed methods project study was to discover the most effective research-based writing strategies to improve the writing skills of fifth grade students.

In Section 2, I described and defended the exploratory sequential research design as supported by the literature. In Section 2, I described the participant pool and the

sampling method used. The data analysis and validation procedures were explained.

Finally, measures for the protection of participants' rights were discussed in detail. In

Section 3, I described the goals of the proposed project. A review of the literature

supporting the project and implementation of the project provided a special focus on

social change. Section 3 included resources needed for the project, assessment of the

project, and social implications of the project. In Section 4, I concluded the project with a

discussion of the strengths and limitations of the project, recommendations for how to

address the problem differently, and an analysis of scholarship, project development, and

evaluation, and teacher leadership and change that is embedded with the project. Finally,

the project concluded with a personal reflection as a scholar, practitioner, and project

developer. In Section 4, I discussed the importance of the work in the project as well as

what I learned as a scholar practitioner. I concluded with an exploration of the

implications, applications, and directions that future research in this area may take.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In Section 1, I discussed the need for teachers to understand and use the best writing instructional approaches to effectively teach writing to students for the 21st century. The purpose of this mixed methods project study was to discover the most effective research-based writing strategies to improve the writing skills of fifth grade students. In Section 2, I discussed the project study's design, setting, sample, sequential strategies, data analysis and validation procedures, and methods for the protection of participants' rights.

Mixed Methods Research Design and Approach

Social and health science research today is more complex than in previous decades. Using only qualitative or only quantitative approaches to address a problem often does not provide the depth of understanding of an identified problem that is needed for full understanding of the problem to develop (Creswell, 2009; Hesse-Biber, 2010). The research design for this project study was a mixed-methods approach. In qualitative research, the researcher inductively searches for possible solutions to problems by learning directly from the individuals who are involved in the problem (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Conversely, in quantitative research, the research deductively tests measurable theories to discover the relationship between the variables within the problem (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Similar to the research conducted by Kington, Sammons, Day, and Regan (2011), the methodology in this project study began with an identified problem. As the identified problem was researched in the current literature, an "integrated, holistic

approach involving the combination of a range of research techniques, including those traditionally associated with both 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' paradigms" (Kington, 2011, p. 106) emerged as the method to fully investigate this problem.

Creswell (2012) described a plethora of mixed methods designs. These included convergent parallel, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, embedded design, transformative design, and multiphase design. While research shows that each of these designs have both strengths and weaknesses, this project study's design was mixed methods, explanatory sequential with equal weight. Often, the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach is used when the research places more emphasis on the qualitative data than on the quantitative data. The researcher first gathers the qualitative data to explore a phenomenon and then gathers the quantitative data to explain the relationships that are discovered in the qualitative phase. Thus, the approach is sequential in that first qualitative data are gathered, and then quantitative data are gathered (Creswell, 2012, p. 543). However, these data can be also equal in weight when analyzed and discussed to fully explore all parts of the phenomenon being explored (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The final justification for using the exploratory, sequential mixed methods with an equal weight approach as opposed to the explanatory, sequential, or a concurrent mixed methods approach is researcher bias. I did not want to investigate the quantitative data prior to or simultaneously while gathering qualitative data so that I could be open to all possibilities and themes of exploring the phenomenon of instructional practices in the classroom to teach writing.

The qualitative data were collected in the first phase of this study. This first phase included semistructured interviews with fifth grade teachers who had taught writing for at least 1 year. Merriam (2009) stated a semistructured interview is structured around a theme or a phenomenon but is unstructured in the order of the questions or the exact wording of the questions (p. 90).

The goal of this phase was to conduct a case study. According to Merriam (2009), a case study is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). In this project study, the teachers in the study were the bounded system because they worked in a particular school district, in a particular grade, and all taught writing instruction. I investigated the specific characteristics and themes of the phenomenon of writing instruction. Merriam (2009) described case studies as being particularistic, descriptive, or heuristic. This case study was particularistic in nature because it was a design that was good for practical problems that occurred in educational practice. Alternatively, I considered whether the qualitative phase of this study is a grounded theory. Creswell (2012) stated that researchers use a grounded theory approach when there are no theories available in the literature to address the problem (p. 423). In this project study, literature revealed the best practices and theories for teaching writing instruction. The investigation in this project study was focused on which of these theories and practices teachers in a bounded system used. Therefore, grounded theory was not the best qualitative approach. I used a case study approach during the qualitative phase of this sequential exploratory mixed methods study.

The quantitative data were collected in the second phase of the project study. The first part of the quantitative phase of this study used inferential, parametric statistics. I used inferential, parametric statistics to "assess whether differences of groups [their means] or the relationship among variables is much greater or less than what we would expect for the total population" (Creswell, 2012, p. 182). In this study, I compared the test scores of the passers of the state writing test to those of the nonpassers of the state writing test to determine if there was a difference from the total population. Descriptive statistics, such as mode, median, and mean, were useful when I summarized the data.

After I analyzed the inferential statistics using *t* tests, then the quantitative phase included a nonexperimental, comparative design to compare multiple variables on a single dependent variable. Nonexperimental designs are used when variables either cannot be manipulated or have already occurred (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle , 2010). The multiple variables were total writing scores and subsection scores, including content/development, organization, voice, and conventions of fifth grade students in school year 2012-2013 from the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) and attendance records of the students. I considered an experimental approach in this study but did not choose to use the experimental approach due to the fact that I, as the researcher, did not manipulate the variables. Creswell (2012) stated that researchers use multiple regression analysis to analyze the impact on the outcome from multiple variables. Additionally, I collected and analyzed teachers' lesson plans in direct writing instruction to determine the time spent on writing instruction.

The qualitative phase provided rich, detailed descriptions of the case study of fifth grade teachers who taught writing in the classroom. As themes emerge from the qualitative phase, the variables in the quantitative phase may be altered somewhat. This was one of the advantages to using a sequential, exploratory approach (Creswell, 2009). Most of the data from both phases were analyzed and interpreted after the second phase was complete, giving equal importance to both phases. Therefore, a mixed methods study that expands the understanding of the phenomenon by investigating the various facets equally through qualitative and quantitative methods is called expansion (Lopez-Fernandez & Molina-Azorin, 2011). A disadvantage to sequential, exploratory approach mixed methods research is that it is time-consuming; however, I considered this in the decision to use this methodology and decided that the additional time was justified by the increased depth of data that would be generated by using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Setting and Sample

This mixed methods study took place in a school district in a state in the southeastern part of the United States. The school district had one primary school (K-2), seven elementary schools (K-5), three middle schools (6-8), and three high schools (9-12). The purposeful sampling was conducted from three Title I elementary schools for the qualitative phase. Title I schools have a higher population of lower socioeconomic families. Lower socioeconomic status was determined by the number of students and families who qualify for free or reduced lunch in the school. There were a total of 10 fifth grade teachers among the three Title I schools. I invited all 10 fifth grade teachers to

participate in the qualitative phase of interviews and observations. Creswell (2012) defined homogeneous, purposeful sampling as those individuals who have defining characteristics, such as individuals in a certain group or organization who have experienced the same phenomenon. For this study, the qualitative sample was five fifth grade teachers who taught writing in the fifth grade for at least 1 year. Qualitative research does not specify the exact number of participants for an adequate sample. Glesne (2011) stated that purposeful sampling should lead the researcher to participants who can provide rich information for the study. Fifth grade teachers who taught writing in fifth grade for at least 1 year were information rich in regards to classroom practices for instruction in writing in the fifth grade. Since five out of 10 potential participants agreed to be part of this study, and this half of the total population, I decided that this was adequate sample for this study. Additionally, by the fourth and fifth interviews, I noticed that there were no new ideas or themes, so I determined this was a point of saturation for the data collection. This determined that I collected an adequate sampling for the qualitative data collection.

The quantitative phase was a homogeneous sampling of the available scores. Homogeneous sampling is when the population is similar in characteristics and attributes (Lodico, 2010). These scores were homogeneous in that all scores were from students who were in the fifth grade and who took the state writing test in school year 2012-2013. All scores were from students who had writing instruction from teachers who had taught writing for at least 1 year in the fifth grade. The local district office housed the scores for this investigation.

A power test determined the minimum sample size for the quantitative phase used to determine the minimum sample size required for the quantitative phase. As noted in Figure 1, the sample size required is 176 for a one tailed *t* test: mean difference between two independent means (two groups).

```
t tests – Mean difference between two independent means ( two groups)
 Analysis:   A priori: Compute required sample size
 Input:      Tail(s) = one                 =  One
             Effect size d|                =  0.5
             α err prob                    =  0.05
             Power (1-β err prob)          =  0.95
 Output:     Noncentrality parameter δ     =  3.3166248
             Critical t                    =  1.6536580
             Df                            =  174
             Total sample size             =  176
             Actual power                  =  0.9514254
```

Figure 1. Power analysis using G*Power 3.1.7 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

Attendance records were kept on file with the local district office. Finally, I analyzed the fifth grade writing instructional lesson plans from September to March for the number of hours each week that teachers focused on each best practice for writing. The list of best practices is founded in Appendix A. I coded each lesson for which best practice was used along with the amount of time planned to implement instruction. A school database published lesson plans for all teachers within the schools to access. With permission, I accessed these lesson plans for analysis.

Context and Sequential Strategy

This project study used a sequential, exploratory mixed methods design to investigate the best practices in writing instruction in fifth grade. The qualitative and

quantitative phases occurred sequentially so that themes could emerge in the qualitative

phase to drive the quantitative phase. Both phases weighted equally in the exploration of

the best writing practices in fifth grade.

Qualitative Sequence

It was critical that the qualitative phase of this project study led the way into the

investigation. After teachers articulated perceived most effective writing instructional

practices, I examined student writing scores in order to determine if these reported

practices were effective. In this section, I described the procedures for access to the

participants of the qualitative phase, a plan for the interview process, and an explanation

of the triangulation of the data with an observation component. This section concluded

with methods used for establishing a researcher-participant relationship and my role as

the researcher.

Since the project study was conducted in a school district where I was employed,

gaining access to the participants involved a scheduled meeting with the assistant district

superintendent. After providing an overview of the project study's goals and objectives

and ensuring privacy of all individuals who chose to participate, I answered any questions

she had. She asked clarification questions on the timeframe of the project study. Then I

secured a letter of cooperation from the assistant superintendent. Afterwards, I requested

a meeting with the administrations at each of the three schools to again explain the

project study in depth and to answer any questions. I secured a letter of cooperation from

each administrator. Once this was accomplished, I sent these letters with my approval

request to IRB at Walden University for approval. The letters of cooperation can be found in Appendix C.

The specific plan for the qualitative phase of this project study began with teacher interviews. I requested face to face interviews with 10 fifth grade teachers from three Title I schools in the local school district. Before I conducted each interview, I informed the participants of their rights, including refusal to participate in the interview, and the right to stop the interview at any point without penalty, and secured their informed consent (see Appendix D). I informed each participant that all interviews were protected by confidentiality and no one, except me, had access to the information. All data were kept in a password protected computer file.

I adapted the interview questions from McCarthey and Ro (2011). In their study, McCarthey and Ro interviewed 29 third and fourth grade teachers regarding their writing instruction practices. The purpose of that study was to learn what approaches to writing instruction teachers employed, what influences professional development and state standards had on teachers' writing instruction, and what patterns emerged in writing instruction in the United States. McCarthey and Ro used interviews and observations to gather the data. Four themes emerged to answer the research questions about writing instruction. Teachers in this study used a writing workshop approach, a genre approach, a skills-based approach, and a hybrid approach of several of these methods. McCarthey and Ro conducted three interviews with the teachers. I interviewed teachers once and in combination with other data collection addressed the research questions in this mixed methods study. I gained approval from the authors of this study to use their interview

questions. The list of interview questions is located in the interview guide in Appendix F. I conducted two pilot interviews with fourth grade teachers to field test the interview guide. After the field test, I reflected on the protocol but did not adjust any question on the interview guide. I concluded that all questions gathered data directly related to the research questions.

Each interview was held in a neutral location for the participant. Most participants chose to meet at the local library; however, one participant requested to meet in her classroom. The longest interview lasted 34 minutes and the shortest interview lasted 25 minutes. Merriam (2009) stated that "the interviewer-respondent interaction is a complex phenomenon" (p. 109). As the researcher, I was responsible for establishing a researcher-participant working relationship. To begin, I had to recognize and set aside my personal biases. I had to appear neutral in my body language and voice tone as I asked questions. I digitally audio-recorded the interviews with an application called Super Note. Active listening during the interviews was important to establish rapport and to ask appropriate probing questions, as the need arose (Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

My role as a researcher in the environment was limited in regards to professional roles and relationships. I worked as a teacher in the same district as the three schools in the study. Specifically, I worked in the same school as four of the fifth grade teachers. I was not, however, a fifth grade teacher. I was a self-contained teacher of students with learning disabilities in the school. I did not mentor or coach any of the 10 fifth grade teachers within the past 12 years. I served on two committees with several of the fifth grade teachers, but I was not the chairperson of either of these committees. I taught

writing to fifth grade students with learning disabilities, but I was aware of this potential bias. I adjusted for this potential bias through the pilot interviews. Pilot interviews are excellent tools for a researcher to test the interview questions for validity and to identify and adjust for researcher bias (Chenail, 2011). After I completed the pilot interviews, I conducted a critical self-reflection. King and Horrocks (2010) stated that a qualitative interviewer should conduct a personal self-reflection after the interviews using questions such as, "How might my presence and reactions have influenced the participants? Did I say too much and therefore the responses given were somehow swayed by my involvement? Or perhaps did I say too little and fail to establish rapport with the interviewee?"(p. 129).

Quantitative Sequence

In the quantitative phase of this project study, I collected data to compare to the qualitative data collected. Although the quantitative data collected were in a sequential order, both phases of collection had equal weight. This mixed methods approach allowed me to fully analyze all data equally to potentially determine the best instructional practices to teach writing in the fifth grade.

After I received IRB approval (approval # 04-21-14-0259534) and permission by the local school district, I collected this archived data for students who were in fifth grade who took the state writing test (Palmetto Assessment of State Standards) in school year 2012-2013 from the local school district database.

This assessment was designed to assess students' mastery of state and national standards in writing. Each student's writing was scored in the following four areas:

content/development, organization, voice, and conventions. The scores were reported in terms of *p*-value and item/criterion point-biserial correlation. Reliability and validity for the state test was established by the state. Creswell (2012) stated that test content validity examines the logical content of the test measures what it is designed to measure, in this case the state writing standards. Internal structure validity examines the relationship among the test items for consistency. Relations to other variables validity refers to correlations with other test scores to get similar results (Creswell, 2012).

The Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) technical document reported interrater reliability. Reliability was reported for overall student population, gender groups, groups with disabilities, groups with limited English proficiency, and ethnic groups, white, Hispanic, and African-American. Reliability indices was at least 0.85. Overall, reliability for the fifth grade writing test was 0.910. Reliability for other groups were: females (0.901), males (0.912), African- American (0.898),

Validity was established in three areas: test content, internal structure, and relations to other variables. The PASS test was compared to the state standards. All items on the state writing subtest were analyzed for test bias. Findings concluded that no group had an unfair advantage over the other groups. The test items were examined for any bias and for correlations among the standards. Test bias among female and African American Students showed 95% of no difference or test bias. Correlations among the standards at the fifth grade level was 0.697 (Technical Documentation for the 2010 Palmetto Assessment of State Standards of Writing, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, 2010).

The process to complete the assessment included: (a) all students participated in the test, including those with Individualized Education Plans, 504 accommodations, and English as a Second Language, (b) all students took the test on the same date each year across the state, (c) no students were timed during the test, and (d) all students completed the test within one test day, unless they had specific accommodations otherwise (Technical Documentation for the 2010 Palmetto Assessment of State Standards of Writing, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, 2010). All raw data from the school district were anonymous so that student identity was protected. Requests for the raw data may be directed to me, the researcher.

The data used for each variable included total writing scores and subsection scores, including content/development, organization, voice, and conventions of fifth grade students in school year 2012-2013 from the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS). Other data used for variables was the number of hours students received instruction in writing. The data for these variables were collected from student attendance in school and number of hours that teachers engaged in writing instruction. The data for the PASS test were archived in the district database, called Testview. The data for the student attendance were housed in the local database system, called Powerschool. The data for the number of hours that teachers engage in writing instruction were located on a school-wide database that housed lesson plans and daily schedules.

Data Analysis and Validation Procedures

Data analysis of a mixed methods study involved three separate analyses. First, the qualitative analysis, then the quantitative analysis, and finally a synthesis of both methods were conducted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Data analysis in the qualitative phase occurred both within the collection process and after all data are collected. Galletta (2013) stated that a qualitative researcher must make notes and analyze the data for emerging patterns and themes as the data are collected. I used a researcher journal to record thoughts and impressions from the interviews immediately after each interview concluded. I transcribed each interview from the digital recording to a Microsoft Word document. As part of the researcher journal, I developed a codebook for analysis of the interviews. Each theme received a code name, definition or meaning, an example of the code, and any relationship to other codes (Galetta, 2013). I analyzed each interview for the codes and themes that were identified by writing instruction research.

Data analysis of the quantitative phase occurred after the quantitative data were collected. As mentioned previously, the data were collected from the district and school based data systems. First, all students who were taught by a teacher who had taught fifth grade writing for less than one year were removed from the data set. Then, I examined the data to determine if the distribution was normal. I removed any outliers from the data set. Next, I used descriptive statistics to determine mode, median, and mean of the test scores for overall writing scores and the component section scores, content, organization, voice, and conventions. I used an independent t test to determine if a significant

difference existed between overall writing scores of the passers of the state fifth grade

writing test and the nonpassers of the state fifth grade writing test. An independent *t* test

was "used to test the difference between two group means; a significant *t* value shows

that a true difference exists between the group means" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 257). If

there was a significant overall writing score difference between passers verses

nonpassers, then independent *t* tests were employed to compare the scores of the passers

and nonpassers on each of the four components, content/development, organization,

voice, and conventions. I also used independent *t* tests to compare the attendance of the

passers and nonpassers of the state writing test. I collected the final pieces of data,

student attendance in school and number of hours that teachers engaged in writing

instruction, in the quantitative phase of the data collection. This final piece answered the

4th research question to determine if the largest percentage of time spent on writing

instruction was in the best practices as identified by research.

Validation Procedures for Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Member checks determined the trustworthiness of the qualitative phase of this

project study. Creswell (2009) stated that member checks does not mean for the

interviewee to review a raw data transcript. Instead, it means that the researcher provides

the interviewee with an overview of the themes and important points made during the

interview. The use of the researcher journal to provide on-going reflections of the data

gathered determined the reliability of the qualitative phase. The journal also was the code

book which was developed based on the practices of Galletta (2013). The qualitative data

code book provided consistency, and thus reliability, among the coding of the data that

could be duplicated by another researcher. I asked another doctoral student to code a sample of the interviews to further establish both reliability and validity to the qualitative data collection and coding phase of my project study.

The validity and reliability of the quantitative phase of this study was largely dependent on the measurement test that was used. As previously mentioned, the state test for writing has been thoroughly tested for validity and reliability. Sample size was another factor for validity in the quantitative phase. I used all data available from the three Title I schools in our district.

The procedure for the integration of the qualitative and quantitative data phases was a connected mixed methods data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this study, the qualitative and quantitative data phases were equally weighted. This design allowed me to examine all facets of the problem to attempt to determine what instructional practices had the most impact on writing scores in the fifth grade.

Protection of Participants' Rights

The protection of participants' rights was guaranteed by National Institute of Health. I trained and passed certification in a web-based program to assure the rights of all participants in research. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Walden University for this study before contacting any participants or gathering any data. All participants were informed of their rights and signed a consent form. All participants were assured of confidentiality by using pseudo-names during the qualitative phase. No student names or identification were associated with students' test data. I archived all student data. I obtained consent from the school district to access these data. All

information remained on a password protected external hard drive. Information and raw data were stored for at least five years before it is destroyed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected included 10 fifth grade teacher interviews, teacher lesson plans, student attendance, and state writing scores of 247 fifth graders in this sequential mixed-method doctoral study, which began when my application to the Walden University Institutional Review Board to conduct research was approved by the university research reviewer (04-21-14-0259534). Qualitative data were initially collected, followed by collection of quantitative data.

Qualitative Data Collection Process

I met with the assistant superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. After explaining the project study, I received a signed data use agreement and a letter of cooperation (see Appendices C and E). Then, I met with the principals at the three Title I schools in our school district. I received a signed letter of cooperation from each principal.

To conduct a pilot interview to test the interview protocol, I asked two 4th grade teachers to participate. Both teachers agreed to participate in the pilot study. Both teachers signed consent forms. After conducting the interviews, data from the pilot interviews were analyzed in regard to the research questions. I concluded that the interview protocol did address (a) what types of research-based writing practices teachers reported that they used in their writing instruction and (b) which of these reported writing practices teachers believed were the most effective in addressing the State Writing Rubric

in each component area (content/development, organization, voice, and conventions). I drew these conclusions because the teachers understood the questions and gave thorough responses. The responses directly answered the research questions addressed in my study. Upon reflection from the researcher journal of the actual interview, I chose to create a card that could be used during the interview with the scale written on it as shown on Figure 2. The participants of the pilot interviews needed a reminder of the scale throughout the interview. This card provided a visual so that I, as the interviewer, would not distract from the flow of the interview by restating the scale frequently during the interview.
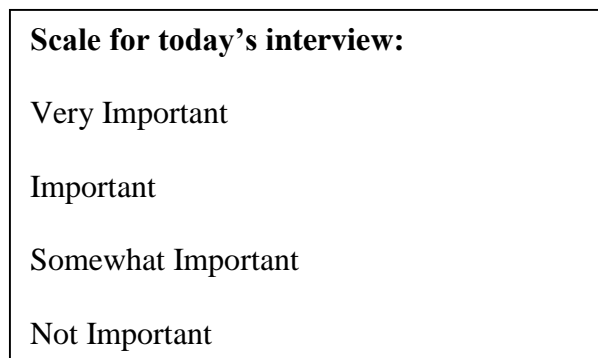
Scale for today's interview:

Very Important

Important

Somewhat Important

Not Important

Figure 2. Scale for interview with teachers.

After the conduction of the pilot interviews and reflections, I sent invitations to participate to 10 fifth grade teachers. I included a copy of the consent form with the invitation. A follow-up request for participants was sent. Five fifth grade teachers agreed to participate in the interviews. There were representatives from each of the three Title I elementary schools. 2 teachers were from School E, 2 teachers were from School F, and 1 teacher was from School G. All participants were female. The teaching experience in fifth grade writing was 2, 4, 8, 12, and 21 years. In a meta-analysis of qualitative studies

that explored sample size and saturation of number of participants, Mason (2010) found that the range of participants in 179 case studies was 1 to 95. The mean of the qualitative case studies was 36 participants. In the current study, I used 5 participants of the 10 whom I invited. Mason concluded that qualitative samples are chosen to reflect the purpose and goals of a qualitative study. Since this study has the limited focus of Title I schools only, I determined that 5 participants were appropriate to reflect the purpose of this study. As I interviewed the fifth participant, I noticed that no new data were added to the data that I already gathered from the first four participants. In addition to reflecting the purpose of the study, the data had reached saturation, so I determined that five participants were appropriate for this study.

When each participant agreed to participate in the study, I scheduled a convenient time for the participant to meet with me. The interviews were held at neutral locations that were suggested by the participants. Most were held at the local public library in a private room. One participant requested the interview in her classroom.

I received the signed consent form from each participant. I used the application from Apple called Super Note to digitally record each interview. I followed Creswell's (2012) checklist for conducting a good interview to assure I was prepared for each interview. I pre-checked the technical equipment to assure that everything was working and ready. I listened more than talked. I probed when necessary, avoiding leading questions. Probes are useful when an interviewer senses that the interviewee is on to something that is significant. Probes usually request more details or ask for clarification (Merriam, 2009). I kept the interviewees focused and refocused them on the questions

when necessary. I withheld judgments and offered no opinions of my own during the interview. Finally, I ended each interview on time and was courteous during each interview. I followed up the interviews with a handwritten thank you note for participating in the interview.

Immediately after the interview, I wrote a reflection on the interview in my researcher's journal. I reflected on my impressions as the interviewer, attended to any biases that surfaced during the interview, and made notes about body language and flow of the interview. Galletta (2013) stated that post-interview reflections also keep the researcher focused on the research questions. By reflecting after each interview, I continually revisited the research questions to assure that the interviews were focused on the information sought. Appendix G contains a sample of my post-reflection journal. The qualitative data were stored on a password protected hard drive until the analysis of the data began.

Qualitative Data Analysis

After all interviews were completed, I transcribed the interviews from the Super Note audio application file to a Microsoft Word document. Appendix H is sample of one transcribed interview. Although transcribing can be a tedious process, it was accomplished in an efficient manner so I could verify the data with the member checks. Member checks were conducted to establish validity of the data. To complete the member check, I wrote a summary of each interview with bulleted points as the main themes of the interviews. I sent an email with the summary to the corresponding interviewee. Appendix I contains one member check with a confirmation from the participant. I

received email confirmations of accuracy from each participant. These emails were added to the data collection and stored on a password-protected external hard drive.

After summarizing each interview for overall key ideas, I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to analyze each interview in more depth. I developed codes to analyze the data. Galletta (2013) suggested that codes should be recorded in the researcher journal. The following information was recorded in the journal: code name, meaning of the code, an example of the code, and relationships to other codes (Galletta, 2013). This process created a clear record of the process for other researchers who may wish to duplicate or expand upon my research.

Qualitative Data Results

The purpose of the qualitative component of the study was to address the first two research questions in this project study design. The first two research questions were (a) What types of research-based writing practices did teachers in grade 5 believe were most effective in their writing instruction? (b) Which of these reported writing practices did teachers believe were the most effective in addressing the State Writing Rubric in each component area (content/development, organization, voice, and conventions)?

Data analysis for Research Question 1. Participants were asked to rate the importance of a stated practice in writing instruction as identified from the research literature. Table 2 shows the ratings that the participants gave each writing practice.

Table 2

Participants' Ratings of Writing Practices

Writing instructional practices	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Teacher modeling	4	1		
Teacher-Student conferences	4	1		
Explicit instruction	4	1		
Peer conferences		2	3	
Memorize spellings of words			2	3
Opportunities to share writing	4	1		
Instruction of grammar and mechanics	3	2		
Traits of writing	4	1		
Revising and editing	1	2	2	
Label parts of speech	1		3	1

Note. Numbers represent number of participants who ranked the practice in terms of importance.

From the data presented in Table 2, I concluded that teachers believed that teacher modeling, teacher-student conferences, explicit instruction, opportunities to share writing, and traits of writing were very important and important. Teachers also believed that instruction of grammar and mechanics is important to very important. However, when I examined revising and writing, I noticed more spread among the participants. One teacher thought revising and editing was very important, two teachers thought revising and editing was important, and two teachers believed revising and editing was only somewhat important. Participants believed that memorization of spelling words are either somewhat important or not important at all. The final conclusion I made from Table 2 regarded labeling parts of speech. Four of the participants believed that labeling parts of

speech was either somewhat important or not important. However, I noticed that one teacher felt labeling parts of speech was very important.

Themes emerged specific to each instructional writing practice. Within each writing instructional practice, the codes and subthemes are discussed in detail. Codes were developed based on research, based on surprising results, based on unusual results, and based on theoretical perspective in the research (Creswell, 2009).

Theme 1: Active teacher participation. Research question #1 was: What types of research-based writing practices did teachers in grade five believe were most effective in their writing instruction?

During the interview, I asked the participants what teaching practices they used for the most effective writing instruction. As I analyzed what the teachers reported that they used, I identified the theme, *active teacher participation* in the instruction. Specifically, the participants believed that teacher modeling, teacher-student conferences, explicit instruction, and opportunities to share writing were the most effective practices to use in writing instruction.

Subtheme 1: Teacher modeling. Active teacher participation in instruction begins with modeling. Participants felt that a model made writing more concrete for students. Modeling after the teacher helped the students write correctly. All five participants stated a similar response in their respective interviews. Participant #2 stated that modeling gives the students "something to initially base everything off of." Participant #1 stated that "they need to see someone else's writing other than an author like a lay person's writing." Participant #5 made the observation that writing had not been a focus in the previous

grades so she felt that she had to show them a lot of her own writing because they had not seen it previously.

Frequency of modeling varied widely among the participants. One participant stated that she does a lot of casual modeling. All five participants used modeling each time they start a new writing genre, like narrative or expository. One participant stated that she models about twice a week. Participant #3 used modeling to show a new concept, like using transition words. In summary, teacher modeling of writing had three themes emerge. Positively, modeling makes writing concrete and helps students write correctly; but negatively, students can copy the teacher's writing too much.

Subtheme 2: Teacher-student conferences. Teacher-student conferences are another way that the theme, active teacher participation in writing instruction, occurred. Participant #4 stated that when she reads their papers back to them, they often catch their own mistakes. Participant #5 commented that she uses a specific example with her students to demonstrate the importance of teacher-student conferences. She says to the students "You think you are spelling a word the right way. So you keep spelling that word the same way until… someone points it out to you and says 'This is not spelled right.' " Three participants specifically mentioned that the teacher-student conferences allow them to focus on the students' individual needs and skill level. Participant #2 stated that "some [students] can't get the concept or the idea going at all or can't communicate clearly. So it [conferences] helped me to be able to see what each child needed." Participant #1 noted that when a teacher conferences with a student, she can help them reorganize their writing and "lead them down a path."

Subtheme 3: Explicit instruction. The theme of active teacher participation in the writing instruction continued with explicit instruction from the teacher. Explicit instruction in teaching writing was ranked by all participants as very important, although Participant #4 and #5 requested clarification in the form of an example of what explicit instruction meant before they ranked this writing instruction practice. Three of the participants mentioned explicit instruction techniques in mini-lessons before they asked students to write. Participant #3 mentioned that explicit instruction is very important "so that they totally understand what you are asking them." She went on to state that she may show examples, student work from previous years, or a mentor text. Participant #5 stated that she "might model the hook sentence. Then [I] let them do that. Then we write the first paragraph and [I] let them do that."

Subtheme 4: Sharing writing. Opportunities for students to share writing involve active teacher participation. Sharing writing aloud allows for feedback from peers and teacher. Four of the five participants ranked sharing writing as a very important writing instructional practice. The participants discussed the ways they incorporated sharing into their writing instruction. Writing was shared to create excitement among the students, to give purpose for writing, and to increase stamina on a piece of writing. Participant #2 stated that sharing writing is an excellent way to develop their voice in their writing.

Sharing writing builds confidence of the writer. Participants stated repeatedly that sharing writing reinforces writing skills and encourages the writers to write better. Participant #2 stated that the students in her class want to share, "They get so excited. They just automatically do [share]. They love it." Participant #4 stated that the students'

confidence builds over time when they have opportunities to share. She stated, "It's good to see those [students] who at the beginning of the year would never share their writing, and by the end…they share." Participant #3 allowed for opportunities to share in front of a group to get confidence. She has the audience of peers give three critiques and three positives after listening. However, she taught the peers to give positive critiques statements like "I would like to have heard more description or I feel like I didn't get quite where you were going with your 2nd paragraph." She didn't accept any statements that destroyed confidence in her students as writers.

The frequency of opportunities to share writing varied greatly among the five participants. One participant allowed for sharing after every completed writing piece; whereas, participant #5 allowed for sharing writing almost every day. During her mini-lesson, she asked students to share a portion of their writing to demonstrate a specific skill. One participant allowed for sharing weekly either whole group or with a peer. Another participant stated that she planned for sharing once a month. Finally, participant #4 stated that she does not allowing time for sharing writing "as much as I should." She did not give a finite answer in her response.

Theme 2: Confusion exists. The participants were scattered among their beliefs on instruction of conventions and editing and revising. As Table 2 showed, there was variability among the participants as they ranked these areas of writing instruction.

Subtheme 1: Confusion on best practices for conventions. There was no consensus among the participants on the most effective strategies to teach the conventions of spelling, grammar, and mechanics. A variety of strategies were employed by the

participants. Two participants mentioned the use of morning sentences to correct.

Participant #1 stated that she tried asking the students to look at specific sentence from a

social studies text, for example. The students told her what was correct in the sentence.

One participant used exemplar papers to show the students examples of papers with

proper conventions and those papers without proper conventions. Participant #2 stated

that she believed the students mastered conventions better when she had activities

planned other than worksheets. One participant mentioned peer conferences again for

teaching conventions. Three of the participants specifically stated that teaching

conventions and grammar is the hardest part of teaching writing. All participants used a

variety of methods to help the students to master conventions.

Subtheme 2: Confusion with best practices for editing and revising. The

participants rated their instruction in editing and revising. There was a wide variance in

the ratings; thus indicating the confusion. Editing and revising was ranked as somewhat

important (*n*=2), important (*n*=2), and very important (*n*=1). No clear best methods

emerged while analyzing the data. The remarks by participants included that "not much

time is spent on editing and revising because it will eventually come in later grades,"

"students often don't recognize the errors," "editing should be done with a peer," "editing

is initially on their own," and "sometimes checklists help for editing."

The frequency of editing and revising as a focus of instruction was ambiguous as

well. No clear data from the responses on frequency was evident. Several participants

stated that they taught editing and revising once a quarter, but then two of these

participants clarified and stated that maybe not that often. Participant #2 stated that she

teaches editing and revision when requested by the students. Participant #5 stated that maybe she should do more editing and revising, but the students just did not understand how to edit and revise correctly. Confusion about the best method to teach conventions was evident from the data.

Data analysis for Research Question 2. Research question #2 was: Which of these reported writing practices did teachers believe were the most effective in addressing the State Writing Rubric in each component area (content/development, organization, voice, and conventions)?

After the best practices writing instruction were investigated with each participant, the best practices in writing instruction, specifically focused on the state writing rubric, were investigated. The state rubric had four components; content, organization, voice, and conventions. The first component of the State Writing Rubric was content and development. Content and development related to a theme of an essay and the relative details that support the theme (Statewide Writing Rubric, 2008). Organization included the use of an introduction, body, and conclusion in a piece of writing. Organization of writing also referred to the appropriate use of transitional words and phrases (State Writing Rubric, 2008). The third part of the State Writing Rubric was voice. Voice included vivid vocabulary, awareness of audience, effective phrasing, and rhythmic reading (State Writing Rubric, 2008). Finally, conventions was defined as the understanding and the consistent usage of grade-level appropriate grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (State Writing Rubric, 2008).

Theme 1: Provide supports to the students when needed. The participants were not asked to rate the importance of the four components. Instead, I asked each participant to explain which teaching practices they felt were most effective for teaching each component of the state rubric. After I collected the data, one clear theme emerged. Participants felt that the most effective teaching practices for teaching the components of the state rubric were the practices that *provide supports to the students when needed*.

Subtheme 1: Use mentor texts. One example of a support for the students when needed was the use of mentor texts. Dorfman (2013) explained mentor texts as

> pieces of literature that you—both teacher and student—can return to and reread for many different purposes. They are texts to be studied and imitated... It helps them to try out new strategies and formats. And of course, a mentor text doesn't have to be in the form of a book—a mentor text might be a poem, a newspaper article, song lyrics, comic strips, manuals, essays, almost anything.

Four of the five participants specifically mentioned the use of mentor texts as the most effective in teaching content and development. Participant #5 stated, "I like to do anchor charts and mentor texts and modeling" and Participant #3 stated, "Really, I think mentor texts are essential. I think finding mentor texts for everything and using that as an example."

Subtheme 2: Use visual organizers. Another example of a support for the students when needed was the use of visual organizers. One participant used a writing process chart with clips in which the students would move as they move through the writing process. One participant used writing notebooks to give students movement through the

process. One participant even used the classroom daily schedule to relate to reasons why organization must be thought out.

However, the participants felt the most effective method to teach organization of writing was the use of graphic organizers. Participants #4 and #5 mentioned that their school uses one graphic organizer. They felt the continuity of the one graphic organizer helped students develop their sense of organization. Participant #4 stated that she observed the students internalizing the graphic organizer; even when they did not have it, the students drew it out or mentally used it to organize their writing. Participant #1 used graphic organizers, but she did not notice the internalization that Participants #4 and #5 noticed. Participant #1's school did not use a school-wide graphic organizer. Participant #1 stated "that's where they struggle…I don't care how many times I stand in front of the classroom and say 'if you're talking about the dog and that the dog has fur and he goes outside and he plays and he chases a bone. Do not throw in there that the cat is licking itself.'…I can show them what that looks like and it still worms its way into their writing." She went on to state that she continues to look for a good graphic organizer to help with organization.

Subtheme 3: Auditory cues. Another example of supports for students when needed was auditory cues. Participant #2 used reader's theater to help students understand and use voice in their writing. Mostly, participants felt that mentor texts were the key to teaching voice. Four of the five participants specifically mentioned mentor texts to demonstrate voice in writing. Participant #3 stated that she used mentor texts and would change her own voice to demonstrate the expression. Participant #5 stated she used

mentor texts "because there are so many good books out that drive home the point of what I want to show them and they pick up on that very quickly and easily." Participant #1 stated simply that she reads to her students to hear how different authors sound. Participant #4 stated that she used modeling, picture books, and other people's writing. She used pieces that she had saved from other classes so that she could model the difference when she changed even one word. Mentor texts were used by most of the participants.

Quantitative Data Collection Process

First, I received approval from IRB as previously mentioned. Then, I met with the assistant superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. After explaining the project study, I received a data use agreement and a letter of cooperation (see Appendices C and E) from the assistant superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. I contacted the Director of Testing & Accountability for the school district to request state writing test scores for fifth grade students from each of the three Title I elementary schools in the school district. Ideally, I would have used only the students' scores from those teachers whom I interviewed during the qualitative phase. However, the Director of Testing & Accountability only released the fifth grade scores as a whole for the three Title I schools. Additionally, I requested and received attendance data from the database on the fifth graders from the three Title I elementary schools.

The Director provided a Microsoft Excel document that included Writing Scaled Score, Writing Category (Exemplary, Met, Not Met), Content Score, Organization Score, Voice Score, Conventions Score, and Days Present in school. No student or school

identifying information was shared with me at any point in order to protect student

confidentiality.

Quantitative Data Analysis

After quantitative data were collected, data were analyzed using Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a statistical program, as recommended in

Creswell (2012). There are two types of statistical analysis that can be conducted. The

first is descriptive statistics. This usually includes, but is not limited to, means, standard

deviations, and ranges. The second type of statistical analysis is inferential statistical

tests. These tests are used to explore the research questions or hypothesizes in the study

(Creswell, 2009). I chose to report the mean of each variable, total composite, subsection

scores, and attendance, for the passers and the nonpassers. I used an Independent t test

because the Independent t test compares whether two groups, passers and nonpassers,

have different average values.

Quantitative Data Results

The quantitative data results answered the third and fourth research questions. The

questions included: What effect did the reported use of these writing practices have on

students' scores on the state writing test? How did scores on each component of the state

rubric of students passing the state writing test differ from those failing the state writing

test? Did attendance of students discriminate between passers and nonpassers of state

writing test? Do teachers spend proportionally more time on best practices as identified

by the research?

Data analysis for Research Question 3. The third research question had two parts. The main third question was: What effect did the reported use of these writing practices have on students' scores on the state writing test? The first part of the third question was: How did scores on each component of the state rubric of students passing the state writing test differ from those failing the state writing test? The second part of the third question was: Did attendance of students discriminate between passers and nonpassers of state writing test? The results are discussed by the question parts.

Part I analysis. How did scores on each component of the state rubric of students passing the state writing test differ from those failing the state writing test? The first part of the quantitative research question of this study used descriptive statistics. I chose to report the mean of each variable for the passers and the nonpassers. I calculated the mean by adding the students' scores and dividing by 179 passers or 68 nonpassers. Next, I used inferential, parametric statistics to "assess whether differences of groups [their means] or the relationship among variables is much greater or less that what we would expect for the total population" (Creswell, 2012, p. 182). I used an Independent *t* test because the Independent *t* test compares whether two groups have different average values. Table 3 shows the inferential group statistics for the total writing scaled score. There were 179 passers and 68 nonpassers of state writing test.

Table 3

Group Statistics of Total Writing Scores

	Writing category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Writing scale score	1 - passers	179	647.40	33.336	2.492
	2 - nonpassers	68	577.50	19.286	2.339

The test's results revealed a significant difference between passers and nonpassers in terms of their total writing scaled score, t (205) = .20, $p = 0$. Table 4 shows the results of the Independent t test for Total Writing Scaled Scores for fifth grade students.

Table 4

Independent t test Total Writing Scaled Scores

		t	df	Mean Diff	Std Error Diff
Writing scale score	Equal var assumed	16.27	245	69.90	4.30
	Equal variance not assumed	20.45	205.67	69.90	3.42

Writing Content Subsection Table 5 shows the inferential group statistics for the writing content subsection score. The test's results revealed a significant difference between passers and nonpassers in terms of their content subsection scores, t (114.15) = 9.56, $p = 0$. Table 6 shows the results of the Independent t test for Content Subsection Scaled Scores for fifth grade students.

Table 5

Group Statistics of Content Subsection Scores

	Writing category	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Content subsection score	1 - passers	179	2.89	0.47	0.03
	2 - nonpassers	68	2.22	0.5	0.06

Table 6

Independent t test Content Subsection Scores

		t	*df*	Mean Diff	Std Error Diff
Content subsection score	Equal var assumed	9.85	245	.67	.068
	Equal variance not assumed	9.56	114.15	.67	.07

Organization Subsection. Table 7 shows the inferential group statistics for the organization subsection score. The test's results revealed a significant difference between passers and nonpassers in terms of their organization subsection writing scaled score, $t(113.82) = 10.62, p = 0$. Table 8 shows the results of the Independent *t* test for organization subsection scores for fifth grade students.

Table 7

Group Statistics of Organization Subsection Scores

	Writing Category	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Organization subsection score	1 - passers	179	2.87	0.45	0.03
	2 - nonpassers	68	2.15	0.48	0.06

Table 8

Independent t test Organization Subsection Scores

		t	*df*	Mean Diff	Std Error Diff
Organization subsection score	Equal var assumed	10.96	245	0.72	0.07
	Equal variance not assumed	10.62	113.82	0.72	0.07

Voice Subsection. Table 9 shows the inferential group statistics for the voice subsection score. The test's results revealed a significant difference between passers and nonpassers in terms of the voice subsection scores, t (154.64) = .6.27, p = 0. Table 10 shows the results of the Independent t test for voice subsection scores for fifth grade students.

Table 9

Group Statistics of Voice Subsection Scores

	Writing Category	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Voice subsection score	1 - passers	179	2.18	0.34	0.03
	2 - nonpassers	68	1.93	0.26	0.03

Table 10

Independent t test Voice Subsection Scores

		t	*df*	Mean Diff	Std Error Diff	
Writing scale score	Equal var assumed	5.61	245	0.26	0.05	
	Equal variance not assumed	6.27	154.64	0.26	0.04	

Conventions Subsection. Table 11 shows the inferential group statistics for the conventions subsection score. The test's results revealed a significant difference found between passers and nonpassers in terms of their conventions subsection score, $t (127.1) = 12$, $p = 0$. Table 12 shows the results of the Independent *t* test for convention subsection scores for fifth grade students.

Table 11

Group Statistics of Conventions Subsection Score

	Writing Category	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Conventions subsection score	1 - passers	179	3.1	0.51	0.04
	2 - nonpassers	68	2.26	0.49	0.06

Table 12

Independent t test Convention Subsection Scores

		t	*df*	Mean Diff	Std Error Diff
Conventions Subsection Score	Equal var assumed	11.7	245	0.84	0.07
	Equal variance not assumed	12	127.1	0.84	0.07

The results of the data as presented in the tables indicated that there was a significant difference between the passers and the nonpassers on the total composite score. Additionally, there was a significant difference between the passers and the nonpassers on each subsection of the test: content, organization, voice, and conventions indicating that nonpassers score significantly lower than passers on the total writing score and on each subsection of the writing test rather than just scoring lower on particular sections.

Part II analysis. As previously mentioned, the third research question had two parts. The main third question was: What effect did the reported use of these writing

practices have on students' scores on the state writing test? The second part of the third question was: Did attendance of students discriminate between passers and nonpassers of state writing test?

Attendance records in Table 13 show the inferential group statistics for attendance records between the passers and nonpassers. The total possible days present for writing instruction was 180. No significant difference was found between passers and nonpassers for number of days present for instruction, t (135.01) = 1.12, p = 0.27. Table 14 shows the results of the Independent t test for total number of days present in school for writing instruction for fifth grade students.

Table 13

Group Statistics of Days Present

	Writing Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Days present	1 - passers	179	175.56	3.21	0.24
	2 - nonpassers	68	175.10	2.85	0.37

Table 14

Independent t test Total Days Present

		t	df	Mean Diff	Std Error Diff
Days present	Equal var assumed	1.06	245	0.47	0.44
	Equal variance not assumed	1.12	135.01	0.47	0.42

The second part of research question 3 asked whether there was a

significant difference between the passers and nonpassers in regards to the number of

days of attendance. I used a *t* test to determine whether a significance existed. The results

indicated that there was no significant difference in the days of attendance. This finding

suggested that poor attendance did not account for the difference in writing test scores for

passers and nonpassers.

Data Analysis for Research Question 4

The fourth question in the project study was: Do teachers spend proportionally

more time on best practices as identified by the research?

After I analyzed days present for any statistically difference between passers and

nonpassers, I analyzed the participants' lesson plans for minutes used for instruction on

each instructional best practice. Table 15 shows the actual amount of instructional time

spent on the identified best writing practices in fifth grade. To calculate the time on each

instructional practice, I requested lesson plans with time frames attached from each

participant. I calculated the total writing time, including grammar, spelling, writing process, conferences, and sharing for a week. Then I coded each instructional component in the writing lesson plans as one of the best instructional practices listed in the chart. Table 15 shows the percentage of time spent on each writing instructional best practice as evidenced from the five participants' lessons plans from September to March.

 Teachers spent the most amount of time on modeling of writing, instruction of grammar and mechanics, and memorization of spelling words. Teachers spent the least amount of time on teacher-student conferences, explicit instruction of writing, peer conferences, opportunities for students to share writing, traits of writing, instruction of revising and editing, parts of speech, and other writing instruction, like poetry.

 Table 15 shows the percentage of time weekly that the five participants spent instructionally on each best practice.

Table 15

Best Instructional Writing Practices as Identified by Research

Best instructional writing practices as identified by research	Percentage
grammar and mechanics instruction as a focus of instruction	29%
students' ability to memorize the correct spellings of words	26%
teacher modeling of writing	20%
instruction in revising and editing	6%
teacher-student conferences	5%
students' opportunities to share their writing	4%
traits of writing (ideas, content, organization, and voice) as a focus of instruction	4%
explicit instruction of writing	2%
students' ability to label parts of speech in their writing	2%
peer conferences before, during, and after writing	1%
other aspects of writing instruction Notes: poetry, rhyming words	<1%

The fourth research question regarded the amount of instructional time spent on writing. The minutes of time on writing were analyzed to determine participants used instructional time. Participants spent the most amount of time on memorization of spelling words, grammar and mechanics practice, and modeling writing. This indicated that they are not spending proportionally more time on best practices as identified by the research.

Summary and Interpretation of Results

The problem in this project study was the low percentage of proficient writing scores at the local, high poverty elementary schools in fifth grade. The research questions related directly to this problem. The first research question was: What types of research-based writing practices did teachers in grade 5 report that they used in their writing instruction?

The first theme among the research-based practices was active teacher participation. The subtheme that emerged from the interviews was teacher modeling. Teacher modeling of writing makes writing more concrete and helps students write correctly. Graham et al. (2012) reported that one the most effective writing instructional practice is teacher modeling of writing. Another subtheme that emerged practice was teacher-student conferences. Teacher-student conferences are a key point of the writer's workshop approach. The points made by the teachers were that conferences build self-assurance in writers and students grow and build their writing skills.

The next subtheme of active teacher participation was explicit teaching in writing. Teachers thought explicit teaching was the same as modeling of writing. Teachers reported using explicit teaching, although they expressed confusion when questioned about this practice. Teachers needed more explanation or a definition of explicit teaching. Graham, MacArthur, and Fitzgerald (2013) explained that explicit teaching is the scaffolding the process of writing. Whereas, modeling of writing showed students an example of a piece of writing. Teachers reported using this practice, but were unclear as to the difference between modeling and explicit teaching.

The last subtheme of active teacher participation in writing instruction was the opportunities to share writing with others. The points that emerged were that sharing writing builds confidence of writers and it allows students to learn from each other. Again although participants stated that they believed this is a very important practice, they were sporadic in the frequency for sharing opportunities.

The second theme that emerged while exploring the first research question was that confusion exists when teachers are asked to teach conventions, grammar, or spelling. The first subtheme revealed that there are confusions on the best practice for teaching conventions. There was no consensus among the participants on the most effective strategies to teach the conventions of spelling, grammar, and mechanics. The second subtheme that emerged was that confusions exist for the best practices for editing and revising. The participants could not clearly identify methods to teach conventions.

The second research question was: which of these reported writing practices did teachers believe were the most effective in addressing the State Writing Rubric in each component area (content/development, organization, voice, and conventions)? This question was addressed through the data collected in the qualitative phrase of the study. The theme that emerged was the provision of student supports as needed. The subthemes that emerged were the use of mentor texts, visual supports, and auditory cues to provide support to the students. When providing student supports, teachers were utilizing the theory of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The supports assisted students in moving from one level of writing development to the next level of writing development.

The third research question addressed the possible effect of writing instructional practices on the students' scores on the state writing test. The third question was divided into two parts. The first part was: How did scores on each component of the state rubric of students passing the state writing test differ from those failing the state writing test?

There was a significant difference between the passers and the nonpassers on the total composite score. Additionally, there was a significant difference between the passers and the nonpassers on each subsection of score of the state writing test: content/development, organization, voice, and conventions. This finding indicated that the nonpassers are not meeting minimal standards in any writing area at this point on the state writing test.

The second part of the last research question was: Did amount of instructional time on the reported writing instructional practices discriminate between passers and nonpassers of state writing test? This question was addressed through a quantitative analysis of student attendance data. The data indicated that there was no significant difference between the passers and the nonpassers on the state writing test.

As part of the last research question regarding the amount of instructional time spent on writing, the minutes of time on writing was analyzed for how the minutes were most used by the participants in the interview. Participants spent the most amount of time on memorization of spelling words, grammar and mechanics practice, and modeling writing. Although a large proportion of the time was spent on these three areas, this instruction did not help the nonpassers achieve an adequate score on the conventions score of the test. There was still a significant difference between the passers and

nonpassers in the area of conventions even though a large proportion of the time was spent on teaching conventions.

In summary, the results of this sequential, mixed methods study to investigate the most effective research-based, instructional writing practices in fifth grade indicate that teachers need more expertise in implementing best practices in writing instruction. Teachers do not spend a proportionate amount of time on several practices identified be research to be highly effective in writing instruction: teacher-student conferences, explicit instruction, and traits of writing.

The project as an outcome of the data collected was identified in Section 3. Research regarding the most effective methods to help teachers gain the expertise needed to implement the best practices in writing instruction is discussed. The project included the goals, the implement plan, and the evaluation. Social implications of the project were discussed in Section 3.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Elementary students must have the best instruction in writing to prepare them for middle school, high school, college, and careers in the 21st century. Writing skills are necessary to present proposals, write effective communications, and clearly exchange thoughts and opinions with other professionals. The problem presented in this project study was the low percentage of proficient writing scores at the local, high poverty elementary schools. The purpose of this mixed methods project study was to discover the most effective research-based writing strategies to improve the writing skills of fifth grade students. As reported and discussed in Section 2, teachers did not proportionately devote more time to specific practices that researchers have noted to be highly effective in writing instruction: teacher-student conferences, explicit instruction, and traits of writing. Research has shown, as identified in Section 2, that these specific practices make the most difference in the writing test score results.

Because there were significant differences between the passers and the nonpassers in qualitative data of this study, if teachers increase the amount of instructional time spent in the best practices in writing instruction, then the difference between the passers and nonpassers may be reduced. I developed a project to specifically address the most effective research-based writing strategies to guide teachers in determining the need to increase the amount of time spent on these practices, as opposed to the amount of time on other less effective practices.

In Section 3, I discussed the project developed to address these specific weaknesses in teaching practices. Next, I described the goals for the project. I present the rationale, including justification for the specific project chosen. I presented a thorough literature review to explain the theory and research to support the project. Finally, I included resources needed, supports, and potential barriers of the project. The timeline of implementation and a method for project evaluation were included. A description of the social implications concluded Section 3.

Description and Goals

The project options I considered were an evaluation report, curriculum plan, professional development/training curriculum and materials, and policy recommendation paper. After talking to my committee chair and reviewing the data gathered, I determined the professional development/training curriculum and materials to be potentially the most effective in creating a change in writing instruction practice. The project addressed the problem that there are a low number of students who are proficient on the high stakes state writing assessment. The project also addressed the findings from my research that showed that there is a significant difference between the passers and nonpassers on the same assessment. Teachers did not report using the best writing practices with any more frequency than less effective writing practices. Finally, the project could have a positive social impact by creating strong, accomplished writers who are competitive in 21st century careers.

The central goal of the project was to increase the number of students who score proficient on the state mandated high stakes test. Researchers identified the best writing

instructional practices. Teachers who taught writing to fifth grade students for more than 1 year appeared to use these practices in their classrooms to some extent. This project was designed to assure that teachers of all grade levels in an elementary school can define the best practices in writing instruction, implement the best practices with fidelity, prioritize the amount of instructional time devoted to the identified most effective practices, and reflect on student growth in writing. Based on the findings in this study, a professional development project was designed to accomplish the following goals:

1. To have teachers (K-5) identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research.

2. To have teachers (K-5) develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

3. To have teachers (K-5) reflect on the amount of time devoted to each of the most and least effective writing instructional practices.

4. To have teachers (K-5) develop a plan of action to increase the amount of instructional time devoted to the most effective instructional practices.

5. To analyze student data outcomes after implementation of the plan of action.

Rationale

Researchers have stated that teachers' instruction in writing is varied and often lacks focus, even when given the tools and resources needed (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Dunn, 2011; Troi et al., 2011). In addition, effective professional development is tied directly to student outcomes (Blank, 2013; Blank & Alas, 2010; Stewart, 2014). Furthermore, the Standards for Professional Learning (2011) stated that "professional

learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning" (para. 1).

According to the data from this study, teachers felt the most effective practices to teach writing content/development were modeling and mentor texts, the most effective practice for teaching writing organization was the use of graphic organizers, and the most effective practice for teaching voice in writing was the use of mentor texts. There was no clear consensus from the participants on the most effective instructional practices to teach conventions from the State Writing Rubric. Data also revealed some confusion about explicit teaching approaches to writing instruction and how to effectively teach grammar and mechanics of writing. Finally, although teachers reported the writing practices that they felt were most effective in writing instruction, they actually spent the most instructional time on spelling, grammar, and modeling.

Specifically, this project was a form of professional development called professional learning communities. Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) stated that the characteristics of a professional learning community include "an environment that fosters shared understanding, a sense of identity, high levels of involvement, mutual cooperation, collective responsibility, emotional support, and a strong sense of belonging" (p. 20) to work together to achieve a goal as an individual. Based on the work of Vygotsky, learning occurs mostly effectively in a social context (Deulen, 2013). Vygotsky theorized that adult learners need a community of other learners and facilitators to assist them from moving from the zone of proximal development to the zone of actual development

(Deulen, 2013). This project could develop communities of learners who can assist each other in making wise instructional decisions regarding writing instruction at the elementary level.

Review of the Literature

Professional development for teachers has been valuable to inservice teachers as an avenue to learn the latest educational best practices as identified by research. In 1969, a group of staff developers formed the National Staff Development Council. Teachers who continually stay updated with the current research and practices are more effective in the classroom in the 21st century (Learning Forward, 2014). A plethora of research on effective professional development was available for my project study.

To conduct the literature review, I used the ERIC-Education Resource Information Center, Education Research Complete, Sage, Proquest Central, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar databases. To locate peer-reviewed, empirically-based articles from 2009 to 2014, the Boolean search terms I employed included *Vygotsky*, *zone of proximal development, adult learning, student data, professional development, professional learning, professional learning communities, teacher facilitators, teacher study groups,* and *book studies.* Articles located by reading the reference sections and by searching for key researchers who appeared multiple times in the literature provided additional resources. I used articles that included either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research approaches.

Adult Learners

Adult learners have been clearly identified as unique learners as compared to children. Knowles (2011) identified adult learning as the andragogy model of learning. Knowles stated that the pedagogical model, learning by children, is different from adult learning. The pedagogical model gives the teacher the complete responsibility for what to learn, how to learn, and deciding whether it was learned. In contrast, the andragogical model of learning is focused on different assumptions about learning. Adults need to (a) know why they need to learn something before they engage in learning, (b) allow to self-direct their learning, (c) use their own experiences as part of the learning, (d) be ready to learn, (e) understand how the learning applies to their own real life experiences, and (f) internally motivate to make the greatest gains in learning (Knowles, 2011).

Gravani (2012) investigated adult learning concepts. Gravani sought to answer the following research question: To what extent were adult learning principles applied to the learning activities in the teacher development program at the university. Gravani used an opportunist sample to explore the question in a qualitative investigation. Through the use of interviews, Gravani discovered four critical issues in planning adult learning programs. First, if adult learners do not have active participation in developing the learning goals and objectives, then they do not commit to the learning. Second, there must a respectful, supportive environment so that the learner will be creative. Third, the facilitators must be open to honest dialogue with adult learners, as opposed to teaching them. Last, Gravani discovered that adult learners must be active, not passive, in their learning.

Dunlap, Dudak, and Konty (2013) summarized and synthesized two models of learning. The first model was from Bloom in 1956. Bloom's model was a hierarchy of learning that moves from knowledge to comprehension to application to analysis to synthesize to application. The second learning theory was from Kolb in 1974. Dunlap et al. (2013) summarized Kolb's model as a progressive learning from an experience that leads to reflection on the experience that leads to conceptualization about the experience to experimentation on the newly developed concept. Dunlap et al. synthesized these two learning theories into a new model. The new model begins with selection where adults have control over what they would like to learn and engaging in the new learning. Then the learner reflects about what he or she has experienced. Next the learner applies what he or she has experienced in new ways. The final step is verification in which the learner decides whether the new learning was positive or a change is needed to make the learning more effective. Dunlap et al. tested the new model with two groups of learners, one group was an adult group (over 25 years) and one group was a nonadult group (under 25 years). Dunlap et al. used a proportional z-test (two tailed) to test for any significance between the two groups. No significant difference was found. This study showed that both groups learned within the new model as proposed by Dunlap et al. (2013).

Adult learners are uniquely different than children learners. Research is growing in support of this fact. There are common themes among the researchers regarding adult learning. First, adult learners need control of what they are learning and why they are learning the new information. Second, it is critical to allow adult learners to use their prior experiences to apply to the newly learned information. Third, adult learners must be

internally motivated to learn the new information (Dunlap et al, 2013; Gravani, 2012; Knowles, 2011).

Using Student Data

The Standards for Professional Development learning stated that "professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2011, para.1). Despite this standard, there have been very few studies that linked student data to professional development. The What Works Clearinghouse by the U.S. Department of Education studied over 1,300 articles to investigate the effects professional development has on student growth and achievement. Only nine articles met the What Works Clearinghouse standards for effectiveness. Those nine articles were all from the elementary level; none at the middle or high school level (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Since the What Work Clearinghouse study and the update on the Standards for Professional Development, more research has focused on the effectiveness of teacher professional development in terms of student achievement.

Earley and Porritt (2013) argued that if evaluation of professional development was clearly established in terms of student growth and achievement prior to any professional development, as opposed to an afterthought, the evaluation would become a powerful tool for student achievement. Most professional development evaluation is focused on the participants' reactions to the professional development (Earley & Porritt, 2013). Earley and Porritt described the Effective Practices in the Continuing Professional

Development project. This project was a grant to 232 school-based professional development projects to determine effective practices in professional development. The first finding from the study was that schools had a difficult time defining how to determine the impact professional development had on student achievement. The second finding related to the first in that schools had a difficult time demonstrating and showing evidence of the impact on student achievement (Earley & Porritt, 2013). These findings continue to emphasize the need for student achievement data as a focus of professional development.

One learning model attempted to focus on the student achievement from professional development. The Griffith-Kimmel model is a learning model with professional development with research-based curriculum in an appropriate environment (Griffith, Kimmel, & Biscoe, 2012). This professional development model was developed to have an optimal learning center for students. This optimal center is the intersection of professional development, coaching, progress monitoring, and content knowledge. A critical piece of the model is the ongoing student data collection and evaluation while experiencing the professional development and coaching. Griffith et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study with seven private and public preschools. The researchers collected data from Year 1 prior to the implementation of the Griffith-Kimmel model to Year 3 of implementation. Using comparative data, students in the preschool classes with the Griffith-Kimmel model made significant gains as compared to the control group classes (Griffith et al., 2012). This model made student achievement an integral part of the entire learning process.

Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, and Beatty (2010) examined a large professional development program to determine teacher efficacy and student achievement. The focus of this research was teachers from K-6 grades in two school districts. The study employed a convergence mixed methods model. The quantitative data consisted of pre- and post-teacher surveys and student achievement data. The qualitative data consisted of five case studies with classroom observations, teacher interviews, and field notes. Participants evaluated student work, then refocused the lessons and retaught the lessons. Researchers noted that participants slowly changed their discussions to more explicit talk about the students' thinking, as opposed to general comments regarding the students. Furthermore, student achievement increased more in the district where the teachers felt they had learned the most. These results show that there may be a correlation between increased teacher efficacy and student achievement.

One model of professional development is coaching. However, just as with workshops and professional learning communities, coaching must be related directly to student achievement for effectiveness. Helmer, Bartlett, Wolgemuth, and Lea (2011) investigated a group of teachers whom they coached to implement an early childhood literacy program. Helmer et al. used a qualitative approach to study the teachers' commitment to the new literacy program and a quantitative approach to study the students' gains in literacy. The teachers who made a high level of commitment to coaching made the most gains with their students in literacy.

These research studies show the importance of including student achievement data in the professional development programs and plans. Student data can be formative

or summative, but it is critical that the professional standard regarding student data be adhered to for the most effectiveness in professional development.

Teacher Study Groups

As previously mentioned, adult learners prefer to self-direct their learning to give purpose and meaning to the learning (Knowles, 2011). Teacher study groups give ownership of learning to teachers (Zepeda, 2012). Teacher study groups are grounded by concepts and theories of collegiality, professionalism, and collaboration. Study groups are designed to allow teachers to choose the topics that are of particular interest to the members of the group (Zepeda, 2012). Zepeda (2012) noted the purpose of study groups varies. The study groups may examine issues in education, conduct action research, read and discuss the latest research, or conduct a book study. Research shows that study groups are an effective means for adult learners to participate in professional development.

Teacher study groups are often evaluated by qualitative researchers. Masuda (2010) spent time in a teacher study group evaluating the dynamics that make this type of professional development effective. Masuda (2010) identified specific themes that emerged from the research. The first theme was an issue with time. Time is critical for meaningful and productive professional dialogue. The second theme was a safe space for intellectual inquiry and questioning. Teachers must feel free to express themselves, make mistakes, and learn without an authority figure as part of the discussion. The third theme was opportunities to support each other to overcome difficult times. Teachers must be free to be vulnerable without judgment or criticism. Teacher study groups allow teachers

the space to show empathy for each other and aid others in moving forward. The fourth

theme was time to grow as a co-learner. Some teachers are not comfortable expressing

their thoughts and opinions. As they become co-learners with the other teachers in the

group, they gain confidence in their knowledge to share thoughts and opinions. The fifth

theme was opportunities to grow as thinkers. When teachers are part of a study group,

they are active thinkers and learners. This may help teachers when they are faced with

mandates from the state and district levels. The sixth and final theme was development of

ownership in teaching. When teachers are part of a study group, they learn from each

other. Some teachers become mentors for others. As Vygotsky's theory states, this allows

for teachers to move from a zone of proximal development to a zone of actual

development (Masuda, 2010).

Teacher study groups can focus on specific content, like writing instruction.

Masuda and Ebersole (2012) conducted a study with beginning teachers in a teacher

study group. The focus of this group was to learn about effective writing practices. This

study group reflected on student writing work and conducted book studies on writing.

The group used the concept of action, reflection, reflection, and action. The teachers felt

more empowered by the conversations they had as a study group. The study group was

effective for these teachers, although it is difficult to generalize these findings because of

the qualitative nature of the study.

Another study focused on novice or beginning teachers in a teacher study group.

In this study, the beginning teachers became part of an already established study group

(Lambson, 2010). The researcher conducted a qualitative case study on three novice

teachers. Findings from the study showed that the novice teachers changed in their attitudes and comfort level as the school year progressed. In the beginning of the school year, the new teachers were generally uncomfortable as part of an experienced teachers group. They asked few questions and made few comments. As the year progressed, the new teachers began to participate and make suggestions with more frequency. In the beginning of the school year, the novice teachers focused more on lesson delivery, but later, they focused more on student achievement and outcomes (Lambson, 2010). This study demonstrates the effectiveness of teacher study groups with novice teachers over time.

When studies are qualitative, often it is difficult to generalize the results to other settings with other participants (Creswell, 2012). However, Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, and Santoro (2010) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the impact of teacher study groups. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact teacher study groups had on teacher knowledge of vocabulary and reading comprehension, classroom application of the knowledge, and student achievement in vocabulary and comprehension. The authors divided the teachers into two groups: control and experimental. Both groups received regularly scheduled professional development. The experimental group also received 16 interactive sessions in teacher study groups. The focus of these teacher study groups was vocabulary and comprehension strategies. The results showed a positive effect on both classroom application and teacher knowledge as compared to the control group who only had the regularly scheduled professional development. Student growth did not show significance in any area except vocabulary.

The authors learned that teachers felt they had too many comprehension strategies given to them. Teachers had a difficult time knowing which strategies to implement that may have had an effect on the student outcomes. The authors suggested that teachers have more time to fully understand and use one strategy before being given another (Gersten et al. (2010). While student outcomes were not significant in this study, the study shows the need to analyze teacher study groups in terms of student data.

Teacher study groups give purpose, meaning, and self-directed focus for adult learners. As the teacher study groups are formed, teachers must consider the impact on student learning. Teacher study groups should meet on a regular basis. The groups may have an overarching purpose for meeting, but the groups may want to brainstorm the specifics at the first meeting (Zepeda, 2012). After the purpose and focus is set, the next point to consider is the facilitator or leader of the teacher leader group.

Teacher Leader

Teacher leaders are practicing teachers who influence the practice of their teaching colleagues through facilitation of professional development that is organized, structured, and consistent (Hobson & Moss, 2010). Traditional professional development in a lecture style format has repeatedly proven ineffective in creating significant change in practice of teachers (Hobson & Moss; Hunzicker, 2012). While there are barriers and challenges to developing effective teacher leaders in schools, there is growing research that suggests using inservice teachers as leaders to influence the teaching practices of their colleagues for gains in student achievement.

Margolis and Doring (2013) examined teacher perceptions of teacher leaders in terms of distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice relates to perceived understanding of fairness and treatment in comparison to others. Procedural justice relates to teachers' job satisfaction and the impact others, like administrators or policy makers, have on their job. The authors of this qualitative study collected data from observations and interviews to examine how teachers interact with teacher leaders during professional development opportunities. Margolis and Doring summarized the themes in their findings as an overarching issue of time. Teachers did not respect or value teacher leaders as change agents in a school when they perceived that the teacher leaders spent more time "monitoring, controlling, and serving as quasi-administrators" (p. 206) than engaging in teaching with students. Hobson and Moss (2010) noted this same finding in their review of literature in their meta-analysis of teacher leadership. A barrier to effecting change in the classroom was administrative duties performed by teacher leader, like teacher observations. While reviewing the literature, Hobson and Moss identified other barriers that prevent impact of teacher leaders on student achievement. These barriers included (a) the reluctance by teachers to view themselves as leaders, (b) the conceptions of leaders to minimize their effectiveness, (c) the lack of time for an effective teacher leader, (d) the lack of support or misconceptions by administrators, (e) the lack of rewards, (f) the nonexistence of teacher leaders in teacher preparation programs, and (g) the concept that the only instructional leaders in schools are the principals. While barriers to teacher leaders have been identified in literature, the

potential for positive effects on student gains by utilizing teacher leaders has also been identified in literature (Hobson & Moss).

Teacher leaders may operate under several possible effective approaches. One approach is the coaching model (Hobson & Moss, 2010). Personal, professional coaching (PPC) is one coaching model that has shown positive effects on student growth and achievement. PPC uses the theories of adult learning, emotional intelligence, and social learning. Patti, Holzer, Stern, and Brackett (2012) conducted two bounded case studies on school systems that used the coaching model of PPC. One case study was conducted in England with 12 trained teacher leaders who provided coaching to newly hired teachers. The second case study was conducted in 25 New York City public schools. The steps to coaching in the PPC model are a) establishing trust, b) creating a vision, c) understanding strengths and challenges of emotional intelligence, d) developing short terms goals, and e) creating a long-term plan (Patti et al., 2012). The findings showed teacher leaders engaged in self-reflection to grow in their professional roles, in their leadership skills, and in their own emotional development. Coaching models is one effective approach for teacher leaders to effect change in schools.

Another approach that research has shown to be effective is Critical Friends Group (CFG). Critical Friends Groups are a form of Professional Learning Communities. The National School Reform Faculty (2012) stated that CFG are professional learning communities of "8 -12 members who are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning and structured interactions" (p.2). Over a 3 year period Burke, Marx, and Berry (2011) conducted a qualitative, in-depth bounded study to investigate

the challenges and successes of a district's use of a CFG approach to professional development. Analyses of interviews of building principals and teacher leaders, and field notes and artifacts from meetings revealed that CFG in this setting related only somewhat to student change and growth. Evidence revealed that there was a difference between what teachers say they do and what they actually do. The authors termed this as the difference between espoused theory and theory in action. The authors further summarized that CFG must be clear in the operational definition of student growth. This clear definition of student growth demonstrates the effectiveness of CFG for teacher leaders.

Study groups are another approach for effective professional development communities using teacher leaders (Hobson & Moss, 2010). Study groups are small groups that are formed to study a specific issue to effect student change and growth. Generally, study groups should be voluntary and diverse. Connections must be made between theory and practice. Teacher leadership of study groups should be shared by several members of the group (Hobson &Moss, 2010). Hung and Yeh (2013) in their investigation of teacher study groups found that teacher study groups helped teachers to engage in "interactive reflection on and for their enactive practices in which (a) sharing practical knowledge, (b) co-designing teaching activities, and (c) self-appraising classroom teaching were prevalent throughout the process of this collaborative inquiry" (p. 162). In the next section, I reviewed additional literature on teacher study groups with an emphasis on book study groups.

Book Study Groups

Eick and McCormick (2010) described book study groups for teachers as peer-led opportunities to discuss in depth some teaching aspect to effect change with students. Teachers who participate in book study groups have opportunities to share in meaningful discourse with peers, conduct self-reflection of their own teaching practices, and tie professional development directly to teaching practice. Eick and McCormick led a book study with student teachers during one semester. This mixed methods research used a survey and reflective journals about the book to collect data. The authors noted through the use of descriptive statistics and coding of responses that the pre-service teachers developed their understanding of pedagogical approaches through dialogue with peers about the book.

Grierson et al. (2012) examined a book study with university professors. The authors engaged in a self-study while participating in a book study. The concern of this study was that there was very little evidence of the effectiveness of book study groups with faculty at the university level. The seven members of the group participated in eight sessions throughout the year. They collected data from minutes of meetings, transcripts of meetings, and surveys to triangulate findings. The researchers concluded that the self-study of a book affects positive changes in thoughts and practices. Finally, the authors stated that leadership does not have to come from formal school leaders, but leadership can come from within the group.

Book study groups are effective for pre-service teachers and university faculty. Book study groups allow practicing teachers the opportunities to explore new ideas and

pedagogies, to use inquiry to advance student learning, to share teaching stories, and to explore teaching beliefs (Jacobs, Assaf, & Lee, 2011). A study focused on a multiliteracies book club was conducted with seven primary teachers. Multiliteracies is a term that is used more frequently in the 21st century to refer to a variety of literacy formats, including print, multimodal, visual, and spoken. The participants in this 21st century book club met throughout the school year. The purpose of the qualitative, case study was to investigate how a group of primary teachers could participate in professional development through a multiliteracies book club. The themes that emerged during this book study showed that (a) teachers prefer book clubs to district imposed professional development, (b) book clubs scaffolded past experiences and understandings to build inquiry for new concepts, and (c) through book club discussion format of professional development teachers spontaneously shared, demonstrated, and critically analyzed their own learning (Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin, & Hesterman, 2013).

In summary, effective professional development relies on several factors as the literature reveals. Adult learning theories must be the underlying principles upon which the professional development is formed. Adult learning theories and research indicate that adults who are internally motivated to use their prior experiences to build new relevant knowledge (Dunlap et al., 2013; Gravani, 2012; Knowles, 2011). Student achievement should be directly tied to professional development. Most preferably, the student learning outcomes should be addressed as one of the professional learning goals (Earley & Porritt, 2013). Recent research shows that teacher study groups are more effective means of professional development than one-time, expert led professional developments (Zepeda,

2012). Leaders of the study groups should be colleagues who wish to influence the practices of their peers in positive, organized ways (Hobson & Moss, 2010). Book study groups are teacher-led study groups to discuss in depth a teaching pedagogy to effect change in student achievement (Eick and McCormick, 2010). Based on my review of recent professional development literature and analysis of my data, I elected to conduct a project that focused on a teacher-led book study group to provide opportunities for in depth discussions and reflections on writing instruction pedagogy to effect change in student achievement on the state-mandated high stakes testing.

Description of Project

Because of this doctoral study, I designed a development of a professional development project designed to train regular education teachers in Title I schools in the best practices in writing instruction as identified by research. The professional development project is divided into two parts: teacher study groups and one professional development day for teachers to reflect and apply what they have learned to their own lessons and student data (see Appendix A).

I designed the teacher study groups to (a) establish teachers as leaders, (b) meet the goals of the project, and (c) allow for teacher collaboration. Whereas, I designed the professional development day for teachers to (a) apply knowledge from the book study, (b) reflect on own practices in context of best practices in writing instruction, and (c) create plans of action to use the best practices more effectively.

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

The resources I will need for this project included funding for each participant to receive a copy of *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2013). Additional resources I will need is a comfortable place to meet, internet access via a computer, laptop, or tablet, handouts, and training materials. The support I will have for this project was the local school district and principals at the three Title I schools in the district. The professional development I designed was 9 one and one half hour study group times after school hours and one professional development day for seven and one half hours. This is a total of 21 hours of professional development time. At a designated time, approximately one week prior to each teacher study group meeting, I will upload the PowerPoint presentation for the specific chapter for the month (see Appendix A) for participants to view for their teacher book study professional development time.

The existing supports will include administrative support for improvement in writing. Administrators will communicate their interest in improving test scores. Another existing support will be the laptops and iPad tablets given to teachers for use in instruction and in professional development. Handouts (see Appendix A) will be delivered electronically due to each teacher's access to an iPad tablet.

Potential Barriers

The barriers are time and cost. Any professional development after school requires a commitment of time by teachers. One potential solution for this barrier is to provide compensatory time for teachers by allowing them to leave as soon as students

leave for the day after they attend the teacher book study. Another commitment of time

by teachers is the time to preread and reflect in their journals prior to the teacher book

study afternoon. One potential solution for this barrier is to assign parts of chapters to

different members of the group so that no teacher is required to read a chapter in its

entirety. The final potential barrier is cost of materials. The book costs about $30 for each

copy, whether digital or print version. Potential solutions for this barrier are either to

contact the publisher for a possible bulk rate to purchase the books with Title I funds or

to write a small "Donor's Choose" grant to fund the purchase of the books.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

When this project study is completed, I formally requested time on the

professional development calendar for the three Title I schools and any other elementary

school who would like to participate in the teacher book study. I determined with each

principal the number of participants and the locations where each teacher book study

group met. The timeline in Table 16 shows an overarching implementation plan. Table 17

shows an agenda for each of the four days of the teacher book study meetings.

Table 16

Project Timeline

Actions	Dates
After approval, meet with principals to set dates for book study groups	March 2015
Make invitations for book study groups	May 2015
Determine number of participants and groups – each group = 5 participants	June 2015
Order books for study	July 2015
Meet with principals to determine locations for each book study group	August 2015
Contact participants with dates and locations for meetings	August 2015
Contact tech support for the district to assure that no internet site is blocked for the meetings	August 2015
Check each room for comfortable arrangement conducive for discussions	Prior to first scheduled meeting
Check in on each group during the meeting to assure all is well	First scheduled meeting and each of the following meetings
Coordinate each teacher study group time	Once per month from September 2015 – May 2016
Conduct professional development day	June 2016

Table 17

Agenda for Each Teacher Book Study Meeting

Day 1 – Teacher Study Group (1.5 hours)	Days 2 – 9 –Teacher Study Group (1.5 hours each)	Day 10 – Professional Development Day (7.5 hours)
Pre-study group evaluation of best writing practices (formative assessment) 15 minutes	Review topic from previous session 10 minutes	Introductions 15 minutes
View 1st Powerpoint on Intentional Leadership 15 minutes	View PowerPoint on the day's chapter 15 minutes	Lesson Plan Reflections 150 minutes
Discussion questions 20 minutes	Discussion questions 15 minutes	Using Instructional Time Wisely 150 minutes
View 2nd Powerpoint Results of current study as a basis for book study 15 minutes	Interact and collaborate with PowerPoint 10 minutes	Write lesson plans 30 minutes
Discussion questions 20 minutes	Set a student achievement goal 15 minutes	Sharing overall reflections from year's study group 60 minutes
Conclusion	Conclusion	Create an action plan for lesson plans
Assignment for next meeting 5 minutes	Assignment for next meeting 5 minutes	60 minutes
		Create an action plan for student data 60 minutes Post-study group evaluation of best writing practices 30 minutes

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

My responsibilities were to develop the project, materials, and evaluations. I coordinated the dates, times, and places for each teacher study group at each school that participates in the project. I checked with each teacher leader of the book study groups to ensure the groups stay focused on the goals of the day. I was also responsible for leading the professional development on Day 10. Based on the research and data findings of this study, I was responsible for implementation of the project with fidelity and integrity. I reported a summary of the formative assessments from each teacher book study group to the principals and district office personnel so that they may use these data to make leadership decisions for the schools and teachers.

The role of others, including district office personnel, principals, and teachers, was to actively engage in the project to assure the best practices of writing instruction for all elementary students. The responsibilities of the district office personnel were to set and publish the dates for the teacher book study meetings. The responsibilities of the principals were to establish comfortable places for each group of five to meet after school. The responsibilities of the teachers were to prepare for each meeting by reading the book and answering the discussion questions and to actively participate in leadership and member roles in the group. The fiscal responsibility for the purchase of the books ultimately fell to the district office.

Project Evaluation Plan

The evaluation for the project consisted of three pieces of data. First, I administered pre-study group evaluations of teachers' perceptions of the best practices in

writing. Data from the study revealed some confusion about explicit teaching approaches to writing instruction and how to effectively teach grammar and mechanics of writing. Additionally, although teachers reported the writing practices that they felt were most effective in teaching writing instruction, they actually spent the most instructional time on spelling and grammar that are the least impactful on student scores. By conducting prestudy group formative evaluations of teachers' perceptions of the best practices in writing, I observed any changes in perceptions by the end of the teacher book study groups. This pre-study group evaluation was based on the project goals and interview questions I piloted in the study.

The second piece of evaluation was administered post-study group (see Appendix A). This summative evaluation summarized the changes in perspectives of the teachers in the study groups. This summative information was shared with the shareholders to evaluate the teachers' learning. The post-study group evaluation was based on the project goals and interview questions I piloted in the study. This evaluation was a Likert-scale survey to give descriptive statistics on the accomplishments of goals of the project.

The final piece of evaluation was four open-ended formative assessment questions (see Appendix A). These questions are directly related to the interview questions in which I probed for perceptions for the best practices to teach content, organization, voice, and conventions. These questions were on the both the preprofessional development and postprofessional development summative assessment tools. By having the questions appear twice, I can report any patterns in shifts of thinking in the teachers to all stakeholders.

The overall evaluation goals assessed the accomplishment of the project goals and objectives. Lodico et al. (2010) explains that formative evaluations provide feedback to identify and improve any issues in project. The formative evaluation methods allowed me to increase my likelihood to adjust the project to better meet the needs of the stakeholders (Hall, Freeman, & Roulston, 2014). The stakeholders are teachers, principals, and administrators at the district office. The stakeholders received a summary report containing overarching themes noted in the open-ended questions on the formative assessments and descriptive statistics on teachers' perceptions of the best practices in writing instruction. By using this summary, stakeholders can plan for future learning regarding best practices in writing instruction.

Project Implications

Possible Social Change

This project addressed the need in the local school district to produce more effective writers by fifth grade. Fifth grade is a pivotal year between mastery of elementary level writing to the initiation of middle school writing. High-stakes state testing showed that students did not perform adequately in writing. Although teachers had participated in professional development in writing, the scores of fifth grade students did not reflect an improvement. During the qualitative phase of this study, it became apparent that although teachers may understand what are the best practices in writing instruction, they are unclear with the best practices in particular areas, like editing and revising. After examining writing lesson plans, teachers spend far greater instructional time on tasks, like spelling and grammar skills, that research does not show to improve

writing test scores. The possible social change of this project is to create teachers who are more effective in writing instruction. As mentioned in Section 1, teachers who understand and implement the best practice in writing instruction provide students with a solid foundation in writing. Students need this foundation for success in high school, college, and in careers. Businesses and business schools continue to stress the importance of employees who have skills in writing (May, Thompson, & Hebblethwaite, 2012). This professional development project is important to the faculty so that they may examine and reflect on their teaching practices in regards to direct student improvement in writing.

Importance of Project

As teachers reflect on their current pedagogy in best practices in teaching writing, students will potentially become better writers. The stakeholders for this project are teachers, principals, and district office administrators. These stakeholders may observe higher test scores to reflect positively on the school district in comparison to other districts in the state and country. However, the most important stakeholders are the students. The social impact of better writers could be students who are more prepared for college and careers in the 21st century. In a larger context, a more competent 21st century work force could improve the economic well-being of our country and the world.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

The goal of this project was to create strong, more capable writers in the elementary grades so that students have a firm foundation to build upon in upper grades and for careers in the 21st century. The data in this study indicated that teachers have misperceptions about the best practices in writing for editing and revising. Teachers spent

a disproportionate amount of instructional time on tasks in spelling and grammar skills. Best practices in writing did not identify spelling and grammar as best practices. Instructional time spent on other best instructional practices, such as time to write and conferencing with teacher and peers was proven by the research to be the most effective instructional practices to improve writing. Providing professional development through the book study and follow up professional development day would potentially allow teachers time to analyze and reflect on their own teaching practices and time spent on the various components of writing.

After conducting a literature review focused on professional development, the research led me to design a teacher-led study group that uses student data and a published book, *Best Practices in Writing Instruction,* by Graham, MacArthur, and Fitzgerald. These authors are well-published in the literature. The book was based on strong evidence from research. The overarching theory behind the professional development was adult learning or andragogy as identified by Knowles (2011).

Section 3 explained the project description and the evaluation methods to assess the effectiveness of change in pedagogy. Section 3 concluded with project implications for social change. Section 4 provided personal reflection on the project study. I discussed the project's strengths and limitations. Section 4 concluded with recommendations for alternative approaches to address the problem and what I learned as a scholarly-practitioner.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

I conducted this mixed methods study to explore the local problem of high percentages of fifth grade students who did not score proficient on the high-stakes state testing. I used a school district in a state in the southeastern part of the United States to conduct the research. I designed the qualitative portion of the study to reveal what teachers perceived as the best practices in writing instruction. In the first part of the quantitative portion of the study, I examined the amount of instructional time spent on each best practice. In the second part of the quantitative portion of the study, I examined whether there were any significant differences between the passers and the nonpassers of the test.

After examining the data, I created a professional development plan designed to address confusions in teacher perceptions about best practices in teaching writing. The professional development sessions used data collected in this study on the effectiveness of each of the best practices. Finally, the professional development sessions had teachers reflect on the amount time they spend on each component of writing to guide them to spend more time on the best practices and less time on the less effective practices of writing.

After conducting a thorough literature review of current research on professional development, the project study was developed based on the theories of adult learning by Knowles (2011). The project is a teacher-led book study group. The basic resource book for the project study is *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* by Graham et al. (2013). The

project study was evaluated using a pre- and post-study group survey and two open-ended formative assessments. The evaluation of the project study was summarized to share with the stakeholders.

Project Strengths

The project strengths were twofold. First, strong, evidence based research of best practices in writing instruction grounded the study. The literature review in Section 1 of this study provided an in-depth look at the best practices in writing instruction as identified by research. Graham et al. (2013) wrote their book based on the research they conducted over many years and in many settings. The project focused on the best practices areas that the data in this study identified as misperceptions.

The second strength was that the project is grounded in strong, evidence based research of most effective means of professional development for teachers. Knowles (2011) theorized adult learning as characterized by (a) knowledge of why they need to learn something before they engaged in learning, (b) self-direction in their learning, (c) use of their own experiences as part of the learning, (d) readiness to learn, (e) understanding of how the learning applied to their own real life experiences, and (f) internal motivation to make the most gains.

To build the knowledge of why they need to learn something before they engage in learning, the project began with an overview of the data from this study. To provide self-direction, the project used teacher leaders as the facilitators for discussions. To use their own experiences as part of the learning, the teachers evaluated student data to examine effectiveness of instruction. To provide for the readiness for learning, only

volunteers participated in the teacher study groups. To understand how the learning

applied to real life, participants analyzed their own units and lessons to determine the

proportion of time spent on various practices in writing instruction. Finally, participants

voluntarily chose to be part of the professional development that increased their own

internal motivation.

The strengths of this project were its foundations in current, evidence based

research. All stakeholders, teachers, principals, and district office administrators trusted

that this project was conducted with fidelity. Finally, the summary of the evaluations of

the project provided evidence to strengthen the project further if it is implemented again

in the future.

<p style="text-align:center">Project Limitations</p>

The limitations of this project were also two-fold. The first potential limitation

was the number of meetings scheduled for the teacher study group to meet. The project

was designed to have one meeting each month, with the exception of December. The

focus book, *Best practices in writing instruction,* by Graham et al. (2013) was rich with

practices to enhance writing instruction. The participants discussed many of these

practices in the project because of the number of times the group met. The research

indicated that the duration of teacher book clubs vary. Some groups met twice per year,

some met once a month for a year, and some met once a week for a semester (Burbank &

Kauchak, 2010; Gardiner et al., 2013; Jacobs et al., 2011).

The second potential limitation was the facilitating of discussions by teachers as

opposed to an expert. In Session 1, the concept of informal teacher leaders (Moller &

Pankake, 2013) was discussed. Then, the participants in the group chose a teacher leader or decided to rotate that role among the participants. Informal teacher leaders are most often identified as those who are competent, credible, and approachable (Moller & Pankake, 2013). However, there was a potential for a group to not have teacher leaders to facilitate the discussions. When that occurred, I met with the group to lead them to a more thorough understanding of the roles of an informal teacher leader to guide them in choosing a leader for the group.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Alternative Ways to Address the Problem</h3>

Fifth grade students who do not show proficiency in writing could be addressed in an alternative way. This project was designed to be a short-term, teacher-led study group based on a book about best writing practices. There were two potential alternatives to address the problem of the study. The first alternative is to increase the number of meetings over the course of a semester or year. This would give teachers extended opportunities to examine more of the best practices in writing instruction as identified by Graham et al. (2013).

Another potential alternative to a teacher-led study group is to have expert-led study groups. This would require the approach of expert or coach. This approach is used to facilitate some professional learning communities, but it often takes time to build trust and relationships with the teachers of the group (Helmer et al., 2011).

<h3 style="text-align:center">Scholarship</h3>

During this project study, I learned various aspects regarding scholarly learning. I learned the importance of defining a problem clearly and specifically. Through extensive

use of the Walden University library, I learned to search, locate, and make evaluative decisions about the quality of the research reported. I learned to read and interpret evidence based, empirical research with critical eye for weaknesses in methodology, analysis of data, interpretation of results, and conclusions drawn by researchers. I developed an understanding and appreciate for theories of learning and pedagogy.

I mastered the art of organization of massive quantities of information, including hundreds of articles, reports, websites, and books. I also organized data in terms of qualitative and quantitative. I learned the ability to manage time in spite of life's circumstances.

During the data collection, interpretation of data, and development of a project, I learned the importance of setting aside biases. What I expected to find is not what was revealed during the project study. I learned to allow the data to guide my thinking and conclusions drawn. Most importantly, I learned the value of ongoing research to improve student learning and growth. Personally, I learned that I prefer the qualitative part of research more than quantitative. I will lean towards conducting more qualitative research in the future.

Project Development and Evaluation

Project development and evaluation required critical thinking skills and organization. First, the most effective means of developing a project uses critical thinking skills. After talking with my committee chair, I determined that a professional development project would be the most appropriate way for the data gathered to influence growth in writing. That determination was only the beginning of creating a

well-constructed project. After researching and reading many articles on professional development, I decided to base my project in the adult learning theories by Knowles (2011). Furthermore, after reading and interpreting other current research on professional development, I designed a 4-day teacher-led book study group that focused on the best practices in writing instruction. I evaluated the project with methods that are the most effective in reporting a summary for all stakeholders.

The second part of development and evaluation of the project is organization. When I conducted research, the articles, books, and websites organized into clear themes. I developed goals, timelines, and implementation plans for effective execution of the project. I anticipated potential problems and created solutions to confront these possible problems. I developed materials, evaluations, and a plan to disseminate these materials to the study groups. Finally, I determined a method to share the results and perceptions of the study groups with all stakeholders.

Leadership and Change

Teacher leadership is a complex, rewarding job. As part of the teacher leadership doctoral program at Walden University, I learned about various aspects of leading teachers. As a teacher leader, I should know what type of leader I am. Early in the doctoral program, I learned about various styles of leadership: transformational, transactional, and servant. I am a servant leader. A servant leader wishes to serve first and then lead (Greenleaf, 2008). As a leader, I must establish goals and directions for the teachers with whom I work. I enjoy listening to others to set the goals of the individuals and groups based on reflections of the learners I lead. In the professional development

project, I did not assert myself as the ultimate leader and expert of the knowledge of best writing practices. I established teacher leaders in each teacher study group to facilitate the conversations and discussions. My goal was that the teachers become their own leaders, and that I serve these leaders in whatever capacity is needed to facilitate the discussions throughout the professional development project.

As a researcher in the doctoral program, I observed teachers who had misconceptions about teaching the best practices of writing, yet who desired to be better teachers. When determining the best project for this study, I felt it would be most beneficial for teachers to learn from each other. Therefore, I used the concept of teacher leaders for each group. I served the groups as a coordinator and organizer, but the teachers made true changes in their thinking about best practices when they learned from each other. I now have a position in the district as a teacher leader. It is my hope that my servant leadership changes teaching to have the greatest impact on student learning.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

`   As a scholar, I developed a deeper understanding of the amount of work it takes to become a high quality researcher. Scholarly researchers must be ethnical, diligent, and thorough in their work. I learned to ethnically protect human rights, be aware of biases, and be honest in the work I produce. I diligently learned to stay the course on the goals in front of me as I also juggled work, home, and family. I learned to thoroughly read research to saturation, transcribe each note carefully, and analyze and interpret data correctly. Scholarly work is always a changing product. While this research is complete and published, there are always ways to improve and expand on research in education.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a practitioner, I have a deeper understanding of amount of work it takes to become a high quality practitioner. Practitioners must be never ending learners. Practitioners must be active listeners. Practitioners must have vision for the future. As a learner, I read current research in the educational field with a critical eye. As an active listener, I am a teacher leader who allows teachers to voice concerns, then actively assists them in developing a plan of action to solve problems. As a visionary, I look for new ways to develop as a teacher leader. I am a practitioner who learns, listens, and looks forward to new possibilities with preservice and in-service teachers.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As a project developer, I am better equipped to design and implement projects, especially professional development. Project developers must be researchers. Project developers must be facilitators. Project developers must be organized. As a researcher, I developed a project based on the data I collected. Many projects can be developed based on the research of others. It is important to synthesize the research on a particular topic before creating a professional development project. The professional development is grounded in the theory and current research. As a facilitator, I developed a project with a clear rationale, goals, and evaluations. As an organizer, I learned to organize people, venues, and materials for a seamless professional development experience for the teachers. I evolved as project developer who understands the importance of research and data in creating a focused project.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The importance of this work for students is immense. According to Graham et al. (2013), writing is important to accomplish goals, to influence others, to learn and communicate, to understand material read and to improve reading skills. Writing is a tool that communicates information, tells stories, and expresses feelings. The impact on students can potentially affect many aspects of their lives, including personal, social, and educational.

The importance of this work for educators is also immense. When educators understand how to teach writing, they are more effective teachers. Educators need the tools to teach writing well. This project study provided teachers with the tools to improve their instruction in writing. The current, research-based, empirical studies identified the best practices in this study. Using strong evidence gives value to the statement that the work through the project study is important. Although the local problem in writing was the catalyst for this study, this study has potential for improving writing for fifth grade students in other districts in the state and other states in the country.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project study has potential impact on teachers' pedagogical beliefs in regards to using the best practices in writing instruction at the fifth grade level. Implications for social change can occur if teachers move their thinking from using less effective strategies in the classroom to using the most effective strategies in the classroom when teaching writing instruction.

When students are more effective communicators through writing, they express themselves at a higher cognitive level. Expressing their thoughts at a higher cognitive level creates more competent, confident learners who prepare themselves for the future in college and careers. Careers in the 21st century ask employees to operate at a higher cognitive level when expressing their thoughts through written communication. Employers ask employees to "analyze audiences; negotiate the social, cultural, and ideological structures that affect communications within organizations; use standard business grammar; and write effective messages" (Lentz, 2013, p. 486). When teachers use the best practices in writing instruction, the potential implications are far reaching.

Applications of this research can impact writing instructional practices in elementary schools. I can apply the knowledge I gained through the project study to conduct further research in best practices in writing at the 8th or 12th grade levels. I can design future professional development based on other theorists and researchers, such as Fletcher or Calkins. This research may impact my work with preservice and inservice teachers, as I work as a literacy coach in the local schools. I can continue to provide professional development opportunities and coach teachers to use the more effective writing practices and thus continue to work to improve the writing of the students.

Teachers can apply this research to make the best educational decisions for their students. Future research can improve on the findings of the qualitative portion by interviewing more fifth grade teachers. Additional data could be collected by observing writing instruction in the classrooms. Interviews could be conducted with first, third, and fifth grade teachers to look for patterns of best practices usage in a continuum throughout

elementary school. Future research in the quantitative portion could improve if researchers conduct an experimental design to attempt to observe specific outcomes from specific best practices in writing instruction.

Conclusion

This project study was designed to address the current problem that an inadequate number of fifth grade students scored proficient in the formal assessments of writing in Title I schools in the local school level. I employed a mixed methods research design to gather data to investigate the problem. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the passers and nonpassers of the high-stakes, state mandated test. Data from the interviews indicated that teachers were unclear about the best practices to use when teaching grammar and mechanics. Furthermore, lesson plans indicate that teachers spent a disproportionate amount of time on the practices of spelling and grammar skills. The review of current research indicated that spelling and grammar does not greatly affect scores on high stakes tests. I developed a project to address these findings. I created a teacher-led, book study professional development to guide teacher on the best practices in writing instruction.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Training: Improving Writing Instruction with Best Practices

Professional Development

Teacher Book Study

Best Practices in Writing Instruction

Steve Graham, Charles A. MacArthur, Jill Fitzgerald (2013)
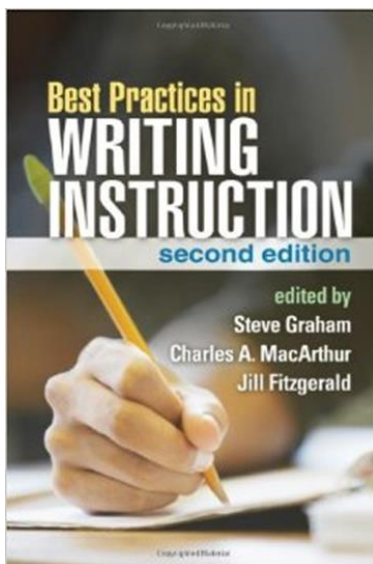
This project includes a formal request to the district office and local school administrators for professional development time with kindergarten through fifth grade teachers to explore the best practices in writing instruction. An invitation letter for teachers is included. Additionally, this project includes materials for four teacher book study sessions. Finally, all assessment pieces are included for an evaluation of the project.

Project Goals

1. To have teachers (K-5) identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research.

2. To have teachers (K-5) develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

3. To have teachers (K-5) reflect on amount of time devoted to each of the most and least effective writing instructional practices.

4. To have teachers (K-5) develop a plan of action to increase the amount of instructional time devoted to the most effective instructional practices.

5. To have teachers (K-5) develop a plan of action for individual students and for class instruction based on assessment of student work.

Component 1: Formal Request to the District Office and Local School Administrators

Dear Sirs and Madams:

First, I would like to formally thank you for allowing me to conduct research in your district and schools. It was a pleasure to work with the fifth grade teachers in your schools. I appreciate your willingness to partner with institutions of higher learning to conduct research for the betterment of students.

Next, I would like to summarize the findings from my research for your consideration. I conducted a mixed methods research project to investigate the locally identified problem of too few fifth grade students scoring proficient on high-stakes state testing in the local Title I schools. The primary findings from this study indicated that teachers understand and use these best practices: modeling of writing makes writing more concrete, teacher-student conferences builds the students' confidence in writing, and traits of writing should be integrated into the writing process. The primary concerns identified in this study include (a) how to effectively teach editing and revising, (b) how to best teach grammar, and (c) how to use more instructional time proportionately on the best practices as opposed to the less effective practices in writing.

In response to these identified concerns, I created a professional development for the teachers in the local schools. Current research shows that effective professional development relies on several factors. First, adult learning theories must be the underlying principles upon which the professional development is formed. Adult learning theories and research indicate that adults need to be internally motivated to use their prior

experiences to build new relevant knowledge (Dunlap et al, 2013; Gravani, 2012; Knowles, 2011). Second, student achievement should be directly tied to professional development. Most preferably, the student learning outcomes should be addressed as one of the professional learning goals (Earley & Porritt, 2013). Additionally, recent research shows that teacher study groups are more effective means of professional development than one-time, expert led, professional developments (Zepeda, 2012). Leaders of the study groups should be colleagues who wish to influence the practices of their peers in positive, organized ways (Hobson & Moss, 2010). Book study groups are a type of teacher-led study group to discuss in depth a teaching pedagogy to effect change in student achievement (Eick and McCormick, 2010). The proposed professional development is a teacher-led book study group to provide opportunities for in-depth discussions and reflections on writing instruction pedagogy to effect change in student achievement on the state-mandated high stakes testing.

I am writing this letter to formally request time for the professional development and financial support to purchase the study book. I prepared all materials for the professional development as part of the completion of my doctoral program. The professional development is designed for 9 one and one half hour study group times after school hours and one professional development day for seven and one half hours. This is a total of 21 hours of professional development time. The book for the project is *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* by Graham, MacArthur, and Fizgerald (2013). I look forward to working together to improve student writing to prepare them for college and careers in the 21st century.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Yours,

Elaine Newberry

References

Dunlap, E. S., Dudak, B., & Konty, M. (2012). A synthesized model for integrating principles of adult learning in the higher education classroom. *Kentucky Journal Of Excellence In College Teaching & Learning*, *10*, 19-35.

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Gravani, M. N. (2012). Adult learning principles in designing learning activities for teacher development. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *31*(4), 419 432.

Hobson, L. D., & Moss, L. (2010, January). Analysis of teacher leadership as a teacher: An opportunity for reform and improved practice. In *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal, 27* (2), 28-42.

Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2011). *The adult learner*. Burlington, MA:Butterworth-Heinemann.

Zepeda, S. J. (2012). *Professional development: What works*. New York, NY: Eye on education.

Component 2: Invitation to teacher book study

You're Invited to a Teacher Book Club
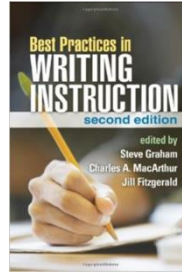
Best Practices in Writing Instruction (2nd Ed.)

By Steve Graham, Charles A. MacArthur, Jill Fitzgerald

You're invited to join one meeting each month of a teacher book club and

one day of professional development at the end of the school

for a total of 21 hours of professional development.

"This book presents evidence based practices for helping all K-5 students develop their

skills as writers." "Leading authorities describe how to teach the skills and strategies that

students need to plan, draft, evaluate, and revise multiple types of texts." (Graham,

MacArthur, Fitzgerald, 2013)
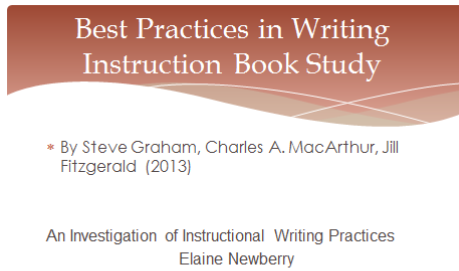
You will receive the book and all materials without cost to you.

To register, email Elaine Newberry

elaine.newberry@waldenu.edu

Component 3: Presentation slides for 21 hours of professional development

Slide 1

Best Practices in Writing Instruction Book Study

* By Steve Graham, Charles A. MacArthur, Jill Fitzgerald (2013)

An Investigation of Instructional Writing Practices
Elaine Newberry

Slide 2

Welcome!
Thank you for participating!

Please help yourself to refreshments.

Before we get started, please complete the **survey** on your table.

Materials: Pre-professional Development

Survey (Appendix B)

Slide 3

Presentation # 1
Part 1

Teachers as Leaders

Slide 4
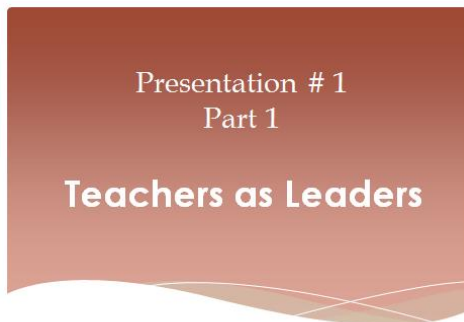
Teachers as Leaders

Two ways to create leaders in schools:
　　　1 – Obtain the knowledge to receive a
degree in leadership.

　　　2 – Provide the conditions so that teachers
can learn leadership.

Slide 5

Teachers as Leaders

* Conditions needed to create leaders:
  * Provide support
  * Give advice
  * Do not tell the leaders what to do
  * Encourage leaders to work with others
  * Allow adequate time

Slide 6

Teachers as Leaders

Teachers Leaders Can Have Many Roles:
❖ Resource Provider
❖ Instructional Specialist
❖ Curriculum Specialist
❖ Classroom Supporter
❖ Mentor
❖ School Leader
❖ Data Coach
❖ Catalyst for Change
❖ Learner
❖ **Learning Facilitator**

Harrison, C. & Killion, J. (2007). Ten Roles for Teacher Leaders. Educational Leadership.65(1). 74-77.

Slide 7

Teacher Leader

Learning Facilitator
Are you willing to:
o Learn with and from your colleagues
o Focus directly on student learning
o Explore possibilities to improve student learning
o Develop, implement, and analyze action plans based on student data

Slide 8

Slide 9

Hunzicker, J. (2012). Professional development and jobembedded collaboration: how teachers learn to exercise leadership. *Professional development in education,* 38(2), 267-289.

Slide 10

Hung, H. T., & Yeh, H. C. (2013). Forming a

change environment to encourage

professional development through a teacher

study group.*Teaching and*

Teacher Education, 36, 153-165.

Slide 11

Slide 12

Time to Get in Groups

- When you come up to get your book and your reflection journal, you will find a slip of paper inside your book. The paper will let you know your group's room number.

- When all five members are present, please spend the first few minutes deciding who will facilitate the group's discussions.

- In your email, you will find a link to the second part of today's discussion. Open the PowerPoint and use it to guide your discussions.

Materials: copies of book, journals, pens, slips of paper with room numbers

Slide 13

Presentation # 1
Part 2

**Designing an Effective
Writing Program
Chapter 1**

Slide 14

Why is writing important?

* Write your ideas on post-its and place on the chart paper in your room.

* *Facilitator* – have someone read the ideas aloud

* Compare your group's ideas to the 5 ideas on pages 5-6.

Materials: books, pens, chart paper, post-it notes

Slide 15

What Are the Best Writing Instructional Practices as Identified by Research?

Slide 16

Each group member will read about
an identified best practice in writing.

Group member #1 – Create a Supportive Classroom Where
Writing Development Can Flourish pp. 12- 16

Group member #2 – Teach Writing Strategies pp. 16 – 18

Group member #3 – Help Students to Acquire Knowledge
Needed to Write Effectively pp. 18 – 19

Group member #4 – Teach Foundational Writing Skills

Facilitator – Bringing It All Together pp. 21 - 22

Slide 17
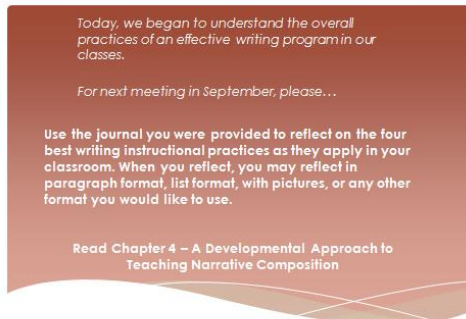
Facilitator – ask each group member to summarize the best
practice that they read in the book on one circle on the
diagram on the chart in your room.
          After everyone writes their summary, you write a
statement to bring it all together.
          Share/read all summarizations on the chart for the
group.
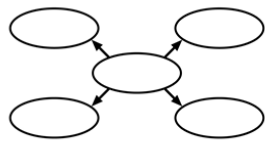
Slide 18
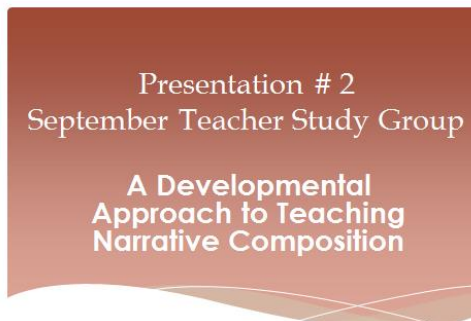
Today, we began to understand the overall practices of an effective writing program in our classes.

For next meeting in September, please...

Use the journal you were provided to reflect on the four best writing instructional practices as they apply in your classroom. When you reflect, you may reflect in paragraph format, list format, with pictures, or any other format you would like to use.

Read Chapter 4 – A Developmental Approach to Teaching Narrative Composition

Slide 19

Presentation # 2
September Teacher Study Group

A Developmental
Approach to Teaching
Narrative Composition

Slide 20

Today's goals:

* 1.   Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research for narrative writing.
* 2.   Teachers (K-5) will develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

Slide 21

Pages 74 - 75

Read *Untitled Story by Jessica*

Slide 22

Pages 75 - 76

Discuss with your group your reaction to analysis of Jessica's writing. Discuss specifically from a teaching point of view.

Slide 23

Materials: graphic organizer chart

Slide 24

Materials: post-it notes

Slide 25

Slide 26

Today, we began to understand the overall practices of an effective writing program in our classes.

For next meeting in October, please…

Use the reflection journal to reflect on the narrative writing instructional practices as they apply in your classroom. Make a copy of a student's narrative writing, attach it in the journal, and then reflect on where the student currently is writing, and what you would teach next to this student.

Read Chapter 5 – Best Practices in Teaching Argumentative Writing

Slide 27

Presentation # 3
October Teacher Study Group

Best Practices in Teaching Argumentative Writing

Slide 28

Today's goals:

* 1. Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research for argumentative writing.
* 2. Teachers (K-5) will develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

Slide 29

Slide 30

Materials: Post-It notes, chart paper with figure

Slide 31

Materials: Post-It notes, chart with figure

Slide 32

SRSD Strategies

Choose one of the following SRSD strategies
Spend 15 minutes learning about it, then be
prepared to teach the strategy to the others in
your study group.

PLAN   DARE   THE READER   AIMS

TREE   WRITE

Slide 33

Today, we investigated best practices to teach
argumentative writing.

For next meeting in November, please...

Use the reflection journal to reflect on the
argumentative writing instructional practices. Make
a copy of a student's argumentative writing, attach
it in the journal, and then reflect on where the
student currently is writing, and what you would
teach next to this student.

Read Chapter 6 – Best Practices in Teaching
Informative Writing from Sources

Slide 34

Presentation # 4
November Teacher Study Group

**Best Practices in Teaching
Informative Writing
from Sources**

Slide 35

Today's goals:

* 1.   Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing
  instructional practices as noted in research for
  informative writing from sources.
* 2.   Teachers (K-5) will develop an
  understanding of those research practices that
  are more effective and less effective in student
  outcome of writing.

Slide 36

Share Out

SHARE

Share out with your study group any points in
pages 141 -146 that you highlighted and why?

Share out ways you create authors from your
students in your own classroom.

Reread the first paragraph at the top of page
147. Share out ways that writing informatively
from sources can be challenging for student
authors

Slide 37

Learn and Teach

Each member of your group:
Pick one of the Principles for a Structured-Process Approach
to Teaching Writing from Sources

Ownership – page 148
Structured Activities – page 148
Collaboration – page 149
Appropriate Tasks and Materials – page 149
Transfer of Control – page 149

First, earn about the principle.
Then teach the principle to others in your group.

LEARN
TEACH

Slide 38

Informative Writing in First Grade

* Reread pages 150 – 156 to yourself.
* Now look specifically for instances that the principle you learned and taught to others appear in this scenario.
* Share with others in your study group.

Slide 39

Today, we investigated best practices to teach Informative Writing from Sources.

For next meeting in January, please…

Use the reflection journal to reflect on informative writing from sources writing instructional practices. Make a copy of a student's informative writing, attach it in the journal, and then reflect on where the student currently is writing, and what you would teach next to this student.

Read Chapter 8 – Best Practices in Teaching Planning for Writing

No Meeting in December!

Slide 40

Presentation # 5
January Teacher Study Group

**Best Practices in Teaching
Planning for Writing**

Slide 41

Today's goals:

* 1.   Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing
instructional practices as noted in research for
the planning stage of writing.
* 2.   Teachers (K-5) will develop an
understanding of those research practices that
are more effective and less effective in student
outcome of writing.

Slide 42

To Plan or Not to Plan

Read page 198 – **What Some Writing Scholars and
Popular Writers Think about Planning**

Make a list of Pros and Cons of Planning to Write

Materials: journals

Slide 43

Students Plan Differently
pages 201-202

* Reread about the teacher, Cindy, in pages 201-202.
* Discuss with your study group what ways is she the same and different than the way you teach planning to your students.
* Reread Why Don't Students Plan Their Writing page 203.
* Discuss with your group – Why is planning important?

Slide 44

Best Practices in Planning Writing

* Components of the Planning Process
  * Divide the 5 steps (pgs. 205-206) among the group members.
  * Summarize the step you have on the slip of provided paper and add your slip of paper to the chart on next slide.
  * Read aloud the summaries when everyone is finished.

Materials: long slips of paper, chart paper with figure

Slide 45

Step 1
Step 2
Step 3
Step 4
Step 5

Step 46

Slide 47

Slide 48

Slide 49

Today's goals:

* 1. Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research in teaching evaluation and revision.
* 2. Teachers (K-5) will develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

Slide 50

Revising
Cognitive Models

Choose a cognitive process from pages 216-218.

Read it yourself. Teach the cognitive process to a partner. The partner will then teach the other members in the group.

Cognitive Models
1. Changes can be made at point in the writing process.
2. Sophisticated conceptions of and goals for revising.
3. Good reading comprehension.
4. Extensive knowledge about criteria for good writing.
5. Solid metacognition, self-regulation skills.

Slide 51

Evaluation Criteria and
Self-Evaluation

* Reread pages 220 – 221 with close reading stance – mark points that stand out to you.

Have an open dialogue with your study group about the points that you marked. Are you similar to the other members of the group? Are you different in your thinking?

Slide 52

Today, we investigated best practices in teaching
Evaluation and Revision

For next meeting in March, please…

**Use the reflection journal to reflect on any ah-ha
moments as you read and discussed revision with
your colleagues. Has anything changed in your
thinking after reading about the best practices for
evaluation and revision? Are you going to try
something new or different? Why or Why.**

**Read Chapter 10 – Best Practices in
Sentence Construction Skills**

Slide 53

Presentation # 7
March Teacher Study Group

**Best Practices in
Sentence Construction**

Slide 54

Today's goals:

* 1.   Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing
  instructional practices as noted in research in
  sentence construction.
* 2.   Teachers (K-5) will develop an
  understanding of those research practices that
  are more effective and less effective in student
  outcome of writing.

Slide 55

"In fact, a sentence can require so much thought and planning that it resembles a 'composition in miniature'" (Flower & Hayes, 1981)

With your group, discuss your first thoughts when you read this statement.

Slide 56

Materials: Post-It notes

Why is construction of sentences important to teach to students?

➢ Reread pages 239 – 240.

➢ On a Post-It, write your answer to this question and post it on the chart.

➢ Take a few minutes to read each others' thoughts and answers to this question.

Slide 57

What problems can occur when a student does not possess well-formed knowledge of syntactical construction of sentences?

Discuss these problems with the members of your group.
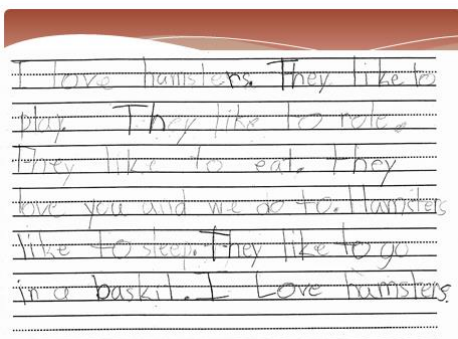
Slide 58

Instructional Recommendations
Second Grade Class
Reread pages 243 – 252.

Slide 59

Evaluate the piece of writing on
the next slide in terms of sentence
construction. What steps would
you use to scaffold instruction to
move this student forward.

Slide 60

Slide 61

"When sentence-combining exercises are used as one component of a well-rounded writing program that includes ample time to write, conferencing between peers and teachers, mini-lessons to increase skills, ample teacher modeling, and choice in writing assignments, they can provide essential knowledge for writers to use as they craft and shape their messages" (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 255).

A Thought to Leave With You Today

Slide 62

Today, we investigated best practices in teaching Sentence Construction Skills

For next meeting in April, please…

Use the reflection journal to reflect on students in your class who need sentence construction. What steps and strategies can you use to scaffold their learning to construct better sentences.

Read Chapter 11 – Best Practices in Spelling and Handwriting

Slide 63

Presentation # 8
April Teacher Study Group

Best Practices in Spelling and Handwriting

Slide 64

Today's goals:

* 1.   Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research for spelling and handwriting.
* 2.   Teachers (K-5) will develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

Slide 65

Spelling is varied in elementary classrooms today.

Share out with your study group how and why you choose the spelling words in your class.

Slide 66

Spelling – Vocabulary Approach Memorization – 1800's

* With your group discuss potential pros and cons of a vocabulary/memorization approach to spelling.

PROS   CONS

Slide 67

Slide 68

Slide 69

Slide 70

Share Out

Discuss with your group.

With technology so prevalent in students' lives, is handwriting an important skill to teach?

Why or Why not?

Give specific examples to support your opinions.

Slide 71

Today, we investigated best practices in spelling and handwriting.

For next meeting in May, please…

Use the reflection journal to reflect on the effectiveness of spelling instruction in your classroom. What strategies could you employ to make spelling instruction more effective?

Read Chapter 15 – Best Practices in Writing Assessment for Instruction

Slide 72

Presentation # 9
May Teacher Study Group

Best Practices in Writing
Assessment for Instruction

Slide 73

Today's goals:

* 1. Teachers (K-5) will identify the best writing instructional practices as noted in research for writing assessment for instruction.
* 2. Teachers (K-5) will develop an understanding of those research practices that are more effective and less effective in student outcome of writing.

Slide 74

Standards – Share Out

Share out with your study group.

How have you witnessed changes in standards for writing during your career in teaching?

Slide 75

Reread pages 354 – 356.

The authors of this chapter describe their wish lists for assessments and standards. Pick one of their wish list points. Discuss it with the rest of the members of your study group.

Professional Development Programs

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION PACKAGES

Digital Libraries

Extended Performance Tasks

Slide 76

Reread pages 359 - 362

Use Figure 15.1 on page 360 to discuss the following statement with your group.

The cycle of Assessment as Inquiry can break down even with well-intentioned teachers. Give examples of what could cause this break down in assessment as inquiry in writing.

Slide 77

Building Blocks for Assessments

Pages 369 - 373

Slide 78

Materials: Post-It Notes, chart paper with figure

Building Blocks for Assessments

Prompts	Procedures	Rubrics

Use the Post It notes to jot down a point for each heading. Then share out with your group. You should use 3 sticky notes this time

Slide 79

Slide 80

Slide 81

Today's goals:

* 1   To have teachers (K-5) reflect on amount of time devoted to each of the most and least effective writing instructional practices.
* 2.   To have teachers (K-5) develop a plan of action to increase the amount of instructional time devoted to the most effective instructional practices.
* 3.   To have teachers (K-5) develop a plan of action for individual students and for class instruction based on assessment of student work.

Slide 82

Today's Agenda

8:00 – 9:30 – Lesson Plans Reflections
9:30 – 11:00 – Using Instructional Time Wisely
11:00 – 11:30 – Write Lesson Plans
11:30 – 12:00 – Lunch Break
12:00 – 1:00 – Sharing Ah-Ha moments
1:00 – 2:00 – Action Plan for Lesson Plans
2:00 – 3:30 – Action Plan based on Student Data
3:30 – 4:00 – Post Professional Development Evaluation

Please help yourself to snacks and bathroom breaks as needed throughout the day.

Slide 83

Today we will the jigsaw method to collaborate.

Using your Ipad, scan the QR code to read about the jigsaw method of collaboration.

Slide 84

Lesson Plans Reflections

* Look at your daily lesson plan example that you brought – analyze your daily lesson in terms of the best practices you learned this year.
* Jigsaw to the tables where you see your strengths lie (best practice tent cards are on each table). Discuss with your expert table why you believe this is an area of strength for you.

Materials: Teachers' personal lesson plans, tent cards with best practices on the cards

Slide 85

Lesson Plans Reflections (cont.)

* Jigsaw back to your original place. Teach the others at the table about your strength in writing best practices, using examples from the others who were at your expert table.
* Look at your daily lesson plan example that you brought again– analyze your daily lesson in terms of your weakness in best practices in writing instruction.

Slide 86

Lesson Plans Reflections (cont.)

* Jigsaw to the tables where you see your weakness lies (best practice tent cards are on each table). Discuss with your expert table why you believe this is an area of weakness for you. Help each other think of ways to improve this area in your lessons.
* Jigsaw back to your original place. Discuss with the others at the table about your weakness in writing best practices. Share possible solutions to these weaknesses.

Slide 87

Using Instructional Time Wisely

* On your table, there are lesson plans in a typical 3rd grade classroom for a week.
* Using the **Lesson Plan Analysis Protocol** determine the number of minutes in each best practice. Convert these to percentages.
* Discuss with your table group your impressions of the writing time proportions.

Materials: copies of sample weekly lesson plans, lesson plan analysis protocol, calculators

Slide 88

Using Instructional Time Wisely (cont)

* Now use your own week's lesson plans to analyze.
* Using the **Lesson Plan Analysis Protocol** determine the number of minutes in each best practice. Convert these to percentages.
* Discuss with your table group your impressions of the writing time proportions.
  * Do you spend a bulk of the time on actual writing activities?
  * Do you spend a bulk of the instructional time on spelling?
  * Do you spend a bulk of the instructional time on worksheet/grammar practice?

Materials: Teachers' own lesson plans, lesson   plan analysis protocol, and calculator

Slide 89

Write A Week's Writing Lesson Plans

Using your reflection journal, write a response to the following question.

* Based on your observations of the percentages you spend on writing practices, are you spending too much time on activities that have not shown to be effective in the research, like ABC order of spelling words? How could you spend more time on the best practices in writing?

Materials: Journals

Slide 90

Write A Week's Writing Lesson Plans

- Using your reflection journal, write an outline of week's writing lesson plans.
- After you write the outline with times, analyze your lessons with *Lesson Plan Analysis Protocol.*
- How do you feel about your proportions now?

Slide 91

Sharing Ah-Ha Moments

- Each of the best practice in writing are still on the tables. Look back through your reflection journal and highlight an Ah-Ha moment from this year of professional development.

- Jigsaw to the table where you had an Ah-Ha moment that you believe will be the most beneficial for students' writing.

- Share with the table your Ah-Ha moment.

- Return back to your original table and share either your own Ah-Ha or someone else's from your jigsaw table.

Slide 92

Materials: copies of action plan template

Write an Action Plan. Using the Action Plan template, make a plan of action to make lesson plans more focused on best practices in writing.

Slide 93

Materials: student work

Slide 94

Materials: copies of best practice checklist

Slide 95

Slide 96

Action Plan Using Student Data
(cont)

Write an Action Plan. Using the Action Plan
template and student data, make a plan of
action to determine what to teach both in a
mini-lesson for the whole class and in a student-
teacher conference.

Materials: copies of action plan template

Slide 97

Complete the Post Professional
Development Evaluation

Thank you for a productive year
of learning. I wish you and your
students the best next school
year! Happy summer!

Materials: post professional development

evaluation

Slide 98

References:

Graham, S., MacArthur, C. A., & Fitzgerald, J. (2013).
Best practices in writing instruction. Guilford Press.

Jigsaw Classroom. (2015). Retrieved from
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Self-Coaching Field Test. (2009). Retrieved from
http://tff.embeddedinstruction.net/forms#pf

Component 4: Materials for Professional Development

Evaluation – Pre Professional Development and Post Professional Development

1. **How important is teacher modeling of writing?**

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do you use teacher modeling?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

2. **How important are teacher-student conferences?**

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do you use student-teacher conferences?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

3. **How important is explicit instruction of writing?**

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do you use explicit instruction of writing?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

4. **How important are peer conferences before, during, and after writing?**

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do you use peer conferences?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

5. How important is students' ability to memorize the correct spellings of words?

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often you instruct on memorization of correct spellings of words?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

6. How important are students' opportunities to share their writing?

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do students have opportunities to share their writing?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

7. How important is grammar and mechanics instruction as a focus of instruction?

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do you instruct on grammar and mechanics as a focus of your instruction?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

8. How important is traits of writing (ideas, content, organization, and voice) as a focus of instruction?

1 -Not Important	2-Somewhat Important	3- Important	4-Very Important

How often do you instruct on the traits of writing?

1-Never	2-Once a month	2-Once a week	4-Several times weekly

9. How important is instruction in revising and editing?

| 1 -Not Important | 2-Somewhat Important | 3- Important | 4-Very Important |

How often do you instruct on revising and editing?

| 1-Never | 2-Once a month | 2-Once a week | 4-Several times weekly |

10. How important is students' ability to label parts of speech in their writing?

| 1 -Not Important | 2-Somewhat Important | 3- Important | 4-Very Important |

How often do you instruct on the parts of speech or ask students to label the parts of speech?

| 1-Never | 2-Once a month | 2-Once a week | 4-Several times weekly |

On the next questions, there is no scale. Please answer in your own words.

11. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective to use in teaching students about **content**?

12. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective to use in teaching students about **organization**?

13. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective to use in teaching students about **voice** in writing?

14. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective to use in teaching students about **conventions and grammar**?

Teaching Practice Action Plan

The goal I will work on in my writing lesson plans:

Steps to achieve this goal:	Resources needed:	Timeline:
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Review Date:_____

☐ I know I **achieved this goal** because:	☐ I am **making progress** toward this goal and will keep implementing my action plan	☐ I **need to change my plan** to achieve this goal by revising the goal or changing

		the action steps

Adapted from: Snyder, P., Hemmeter, M. L., Sandall, S., McLean, M., Rakap, S., Emery, A. K., McLaughlin, T., & Embedded Instruction for Early Learning Project. (2009). *Coaching preschool teachers to use embedded instruction practices* [Manual and Coaching Protocols]. Unpublished guide. College of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

Teaching Practice Action Plan

The student goal for writing is:

Steps to achieve this goal:	Resources needed:	Timeline:
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Review Date:_____

☐ I know I **achieved this goal** because:	☐ I am **making progress** toward this goal and will keep implementing my action plan	☐ I **need to change my plan** to achieve this goal by revising the goal or changing the action steps

Adapted from: Snyder, P., Hemmeter, M. L., Sandall, S., McLean, M., Rakap, S., Emery, A. K., McLaughlin, T., & Embedded Instruction for Early Learning Project. (2009). *Coaching preschool teachers to use embedded instruction practices* [Manual and Coaching Protocols]. Unpublished guide. College of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

Lesson Plan Analysis Protocol

Best Instructional Writing Practices as Identified by Research	Number of weekly minutes noted in lesson plans
teacher modeling of writing	
teacher-student conferences	
explicit instruction of writing	
peer conferences before, during, and after writing	
students' ability to memorize the correct spellings of words	
students' opportunities to share their writing	
grammar and mechanics instruction as a focus of instruction	
traits of writing (ideas, content, organization, and voice) as a focus of instruction	
instruction in revising and editing	
students' ability to label parts of speech in their writing	

Appendix B: Lesson Plan Analysis Protocol

Best Instructional Writing Practices as identified by research	Number of minutes noted in lesson plans from September - March
teacher modeling of writing	
teacher-student conferences	
explicit instruction of writing	
peer conferences before, during, and after writing	
students' ability to memorize the correct spellings of words	
students' opportunities to share their writing	
grammar and mechanics instruction as a focus of instruction	
traits of writing (ideas, content, organization, and voice) as a focus of instruction	
instruction in revising and editing	
students' ability to label parts of speech in their writing	
other aspects of writing instruction Notes:	

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Jane Harrison

January 27, 2014

Dear Susan Elaine Newberry,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled An Investigation of Instructional Writing Practices in Grade Five within Anderson School District One. As part of this study, I authorize you for the recruitment of fifth grade teachers and data collection of PASS test writing scores of 2013, member checking, and results dissemination activities. Schools' and individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: fifth grade teachers at three Title I elementary schools, one room at each school to conduct interviews at a time that is convenient for both the teachers and the schools, access to lesson plans for school year 2013-2014, and 2013 PASS writing scores data from each school. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

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. The results of data analyses will be reported in such a way as to not identify individual responders and all interview data collected will be stored in secure encrypted computer files.

Sincerely,

Jane Harrison

Appendix D: Informed Consent Letters

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of writing instruction practices for fifth grade students. The researcher is inviting fifth grade teachers who teach writing to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Susan Elaine Newberry who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a special education teacher, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to study the best practices in writing instruction for fifth grade students.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in one interview that will last approximately 45 minutes.
- Provide lesson plans from September 2013 to March 2014

Here are some sample questions:
15. How important are teacher-student conferences?
    a. Explain.
    b. How often do you use student-teacher conferences?
16.   How important is instruction in revising and editing?
    a. Explain.
    b. How often do you instruct on revising and editing?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Anderson District One or (insert name of school) will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or stress. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The potential benefits of this study is to provide other teachers and schools with an understanding of the most effective writing practices in Title I schools with fifth grade

students. The social impact is to create effective writers for middle school, high school, college, and the 21st century workplace.

Payment:
No payment will be given for your participation in this study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in an encrypted, password protected data file. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

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

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

                                                _____

Appendix E: Data Use Agreement

DATA USE AGREEMENT

This Data Use Agreement ("Agreement"), effective as of   , is entered into by and between Susan Elaine Newberry and District One. The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set ("LDS") for use in research in accord with the HIPAA or FERPA Regulations.

Definitions. Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the "HIPAA Regulations" codified at Title 45 parts 160 through 164 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.

Preparation of the LDS. District One shall prepare and furnish to Susan Elaine Newberry a LDS in accord with any applicable HIPAA or FERPA Regulations

Data Fields in the LDS. No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS). In preparing the LDS, District One shall include the **data fields specified as follows**, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research: PASS writing scores 2013 for fifth graders these data will include overall scores and subscores for each component area of content/development, organization, voice, and conventions/grammar. Additionally, District One will provide attendance records for the fifth grade students who took the test in March 2013 at one of the aforementioned schools. The LDS will exclude any scores from teachers who had been teaching one year or less at the time of testing in March 2013.

Responsibilities of Data Recipient. Data Recipient agrees to:

Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;

Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;

Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;

Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and

Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.

Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for her research activities only.

Term and Termination.

Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.

Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.

Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.

For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.

Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.

Miscellaneous.

Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.

Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.

No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.

Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER   **DATA RECIPIENT**

Signed: _____   Signed: _____

Print Name: _____   Print Name: _____

Print Title: _____   Print Title: _____

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Interviewer _____   Interviewee _____

Date _____   Location _____

Start time _____   End time _____

Hello _____,

My name is Elaine Newberry. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. For my

project study, I am interviewing fifth grade teachers to discover the best practices in

writing instruction. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Did you review

and sign the consent form? Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Interviewee identification information will be kept confidential. Please be assured that

no one, other than me, will have any access to this interview. You may take a break at

any time during the interview. You may also quit the interview at any time if you feel at

all uncomfortable. The interview will be audio taped and later transcribed. I will provide

you with a copy of the transcript to allow you an opportunity to check for accuracy. I

will also be taking notes during the interview to help me later when I transcribe the

interview. Your participation in this interview is greatly appreciated.

Interview questions:

What instructional practices for teaching writing do you use in the classroom?

Please answer each question on a scale of Not Important, Somewhat Important,

Important, and Very Important. Then, I will ask you explain your answer.

1. How important is teacher modeling of writing?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you use teacher modeling?

2. How important are teacher-student conferences?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you use student-teacher conferences?

3. How important is explicit instruction of writing?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you use explicit instruction of writing?

4. How important are peer conferences before, during, and after writing?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you use peer conferences?

5. How important is students' ability to memorize the correct spellings of words?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often you instruct on memorization of correct spellings of words?

6. How important are students' opportunities to share their writing?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do students have opportunities to share their writing?

7. How important is grammar and mechanics instruction as a focus of
instruction?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you instruct on grammar and mechanics as a focus of
       your instruction?

8. How important is traits of writing (ideas, content, organization, and voice) as a focus of instruction?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you instruct on the traits of writing?

9. How important is instruction in revising and editing?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you instruct on revising and editing?

10. How important is students' ability to label parts of speech in their writing?

    a. Explain.

    b. How often do you instruct on the parts of speech or ask students to label the parts of speech?

On the next questions, there is no scale. Please answer in your own words.

11. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective in teaching students about content?

12. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective in teaching students about organization?

13. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective in teaching students about voice in writing?

14. What instructional practice do you view as being the most effective in teaching students about conventions and grammar?

15. What other aspects of writing instruction do you think are important?

Thank you again for your time.

Appendix G: Sample of Researcher Journal

Reflections after Interview #4:

This interview was the smoothest so far. I felt that the participant was comfortable with

me and openly answered all questions without feeling that there was a "right answer." I

think this is a reflection of my interviewing skills improving over time and with practice.

The interview was interrupted twice with phone calls from participant's daughter,

however we reengaged quickly into conversation. It was definitely apparent that the

participant is more comfortable with teaching math, not writing. However, she showed

how reflective she was with her practice as she made comments "I kept pushing that five

paragraph, five paragraph, five paragraph and they couldn't do it. So I backed up and had

them just write a paragraph." As the interviewed progressed, the participant elaborated

more on her comments without probing or prompting from me. This reduced the

opportunity for me to insert any biases.

I felt the research questions remained a clear focus of the interview. The participant

spoke and reflected on what she perceives as the most effective practices for instruction

in writing. The interview was slightly longer than 30 minutes, but the participant did not

seemed concerned about the time.

Appendix H: Sample Transcript

The following is a sample from a transcript of interview with participant #2. In this

transcript *R = researcher* and *P = participant*

R – How important is teacher modeling of writing?

P – Very important. I feel like it just gives them something to initially base everything off of. I mean to see the teacher do it shows them… and too, another thing, I would always come up with a story that went along with my life and they loved that! The first story I wrote…the first 10 days of school…me auditioning for American Idol. They never forgot that because they loved the story so much because what they learned about myself through it. They made that connection to whatever skill we were talking about from that story. I think it just makes it more…it just gives them something…more concrete.

R- How often do you model writing?

P – Very time we start a new…I do a lot casual modeling. If we are doing just paragraph… I model that one paragraph. As far as showing them the entire process, every time we are transitioning to a new writing assignment.

R- Do you go through the whole process with them?

P – Yea, whether it is expository or narrative or whatever it is. I will just have an example of one that I did for them to see. And it really seems to answer a lot of their questions because there were a few times where I did not do that and the questions were unbelievable that they had. They just didn't. It's not that they didn't understand or didn't know the skill, but I think they doubted their ability because they didn't have something to compare it to. It gives them something to immediately go off of. I used a lot of …you know the writing series…I used a lot of the mentor texts that came with it that showed an example of the good writing verses the bad writing. I let them pick and choose which one they thought and then we would critique it. That sort of serves the same purpose. I feel like that helps a lot, but more with the traits and not the writing process.

4:08

R – How important are student-teacher conferences?

P – Very important.

R – What do you see that is beneficial from student-teacher conferences?

P – I feel that with that you are able to get on every child's level and figure out what every child needs and what I do with is every time we would have some type of writing assignment in here-I would meet with them. Even if it took up to two weeks because there was this one time where it took me two weeks to get to every student between both classes. And I still did it because it was just very…even though if they finished I let start working on something else. That way they weren't waiting on me. But before they wrote their final copy, I wanted to meet with all of them. Umm because there are some that it is something as simple as grammar, some can't get the concept or the idea going at all or can't communicate clearly. So it just helped me to be able to see what each child needed.

Appendix I: Member Check

The following is a copy of two emails. The first one sent by the researcher to Participant #1 and the second one was received by the researcher from Participant #1.

Follow up to Interview

Susan Newberry <
>

Dear ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

I want to thank you again for participating in my research project on writing instructional practices for 5th grade students. I sincerely appreciate your time. I have summarized the points you made during the interview. Will you please read over these points, make any corrections, and return to my email inbox?

During the interview you made the following points:

1. Modeling is very important so the students see other people's writing.
2. Student-teacher conferences are very important so the teacher can lead students in the right direction.
3. Explicit teaching of writing is very important so that students understand what is expected.
4. Peer conferences are somewhat important because students must be taught how to conference with each other.
5. Spelling is not important because technology will assist students in spelling, but students must be able to recognize the correct spellings.
6. Opportunities to share writing is important because it gives students a reason to write.
7. Grammar and mechanics instruction is important because errors take away from meaning.
8. Traits of writing is very important, but must be taught integrated within writing units.
9. Labeling parts of speech is not important because students are not asked to label parts of speech in their writing,
10. To teach content in writing, the students need to write a lot. The more they write, the better they will become with content.
11. To teach organization in writing, you have used a variety of graphic organizers, but this is difficult thing to teach in writing.

12. To teach voice in writing, you read many different authors to notice how the authors' voice sounds in the books.
13. To teach conventions and grammar, you mostly work into your writing lessons.
14. The final point you made was that you had started Grammar Interactive Notebooks as a resource for the students. You hope these notebooks will be an effective tool for the students to use.

Please review this summary, please feel free to add, delete, or change any comments I made.

Thank you again for your time,

Elaine Newberry

RE: Follow Up to Interview

‖

 Elaine Newberry

Mrs. Newberry,
I think all this looks good. Good luck with your doctorate.

Sincerely,

███████