

2012

Writing Workshop: A Comparison of Theory and Practice

Brandi Dawn Delveau
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2012 Brandi Dawn Delveau

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>

Recommended Citation

Delveau, Brandi Dawn, "Writing Workshop: A Comparison of Theory and Practice" (2012). *Honors Program Theses*. 632.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/632>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

WRITING WORKSHOP:
A COMPARISON OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

Brandi Dawn Delveau
University of Northern Iowa

May 2012

This Study by: Brandi Delveau

Entitled: Writing Workshop: A Comparison of Theory and Practice

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

4/26/2017

Date



Rick Traw, Honors Thesis Advisor, Curriculum and Instruction

5/7/12

Date



Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Introduction

Good writing starts with good teachers. Being a good teacher of writing involves understanding the most effective practices of writing. These effective practices are brought together through the implementation of the writing workshop in classrooms, although there will be slight variations from one author or educator to the next. Having a firm understanding of the writing workshop is a foundation for teaching writing in any elementary grade. The writing workshop is a teaching framework that allows children to learn to use the writing process, which consists of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The various components of the workshop (mini-lessons, writing time, conferences, and sharing) are designed to give the students guided experiences with the various parts of the process.

There is an assortment of research that has been done relating to the writing workshop. However, it seems as though the research has mainly been carried out by highly experienced teachers or researchers who have not taught in classrooms. This research is greatly valuable; however, it is not always relatable to new teachers or those unfamiliar with this workshop process. The purpose of this thesis was to gain an understanding of the writing workshop approach through viewing its implementation in a local elementary classroom taught by a teacher new to this approach. Observations were done to find similarities and differences between this particular example of the writing workshop and how it is discussed in literature.

Literature Review

Introduction

Children want to write, and they have the natural need to do so (Calkins, 1986). This desire can be seen when children are given opportunities to become engaged in writing and have real reasons to write. It is when teachers think that children cannot write or that they are not

ready to write that the children are more likely to fall behind and lose interest. Writing is a craft; this implies a process (Graves, 1983). Children will learn this craft best through direct modeling and scaffolding, no matter where they are on the continuum of writing. Scaffolding consists of providing support for children when they are introduced to something, and then gradually taking away this support to enable children to do this activity on their own. When children continue to want to write, they will gain further competence, as they will want to continue to write better. Through the writing workshop, children should be provided with a valuable opportunity to enhance their natural desire to write.

The literature review begins by showing how modeling and routines are key components of the workshop approach. After this, specific detail will be shown about various other aspects of writing workshops. These components are conferences, mini-lessons, revising and editing, sharing and publishing, assessment, and the importance of literature in the classroom. The writing workshop encompasses a variety of other components, but these selected ones provide the foundation for this concept of teaching writing.

Modeling

Modeling is one of the most important traits of teaching writing in the workshop model (Graves, 1983). Without teachers modeling and showing the process themselves, it will be difficult for students to understand the craft fully. It goes beyond merely writing in front of the children to showing children specific components of the process. Modeling should include all five stages of the writing process, including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). These five stages are not necessarily linear, but are better defined as part of a cycle (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Overmeyer (2008) reiterated that the process for each person can be different.

Teachers can begin prewriting with modeling topic selection. In the writing workshop approach, children should be given the opportunity to choose most of their own topics. Topic selection is important because it brings the writing to wherever the children are at in their lives. They do not gain as much when they are forced to always write about topics that are foreign to them (Lensmire, 1994). Although the topics should generally be chosen by each child, students can have specific writing genres throughout the year. For example, students might be required to write a piece of poetry; however, this could be written about a topic of their own choosing. These genre selections can be used to meet standards that are put in place locally or nationally (Calkins, 2011).

For modeling topic selection, Graves (1983) suggested coming up with two topics, explaining the reasoning for arriving at each of them, and then encouraging the children to do the same. After this, the teacher thinks of two more topics, again explaining why they were chosen. The children will then need to expand their thinking to come up with an additional two topics, as well. This can help them retrieve a topic that may have more meaning to them than their first topic choices. While talking through this, it is important that the children understand that they do not need a long list of topics they want to write about. The exercise should enhance their writing, not hinder it. The most important thing initially is to have a topic about which to write. Besides listing, prewriting can also include drawing, such as a story board, (Lensmire, 1994) or even just thinking (Overmeyer, 2008). These two activities can be done before writing anything and may encourage students who do not prefer writing. Teachers should model a variety of prewriting styles that the children can try for themselves.

The next step in modeling is writing. This can be done in several different ways; Graves (1983) suggested three. One option is for teachers to write while the children write, without

being interrupted and without discussing it until the time for writing is over. This can help students learn to be independent and work for themselves, as the teacher cannot be interrupted during this specific part of the writing workshop. Teachers can also model by writing in front of the children using large paper. They can talk directly about their thought process as they write, thus giving children greater understanding into the process of writing. For example, a teacher can talk through word-choice or the flow of ideas. A similar way of doing this is through the use of an overhead, thereby allowing teachers to write normally on a small surface that can still be seen by the children. Dorn and Soffos (2001) called a similar form of modeling “daily assisted writing experiences” (p. 36). These experiences combine students’ ideas into the teachers’ compositions. This is beneficial for the students because it enables them to see what their own thinking can become.

Modeling continues after the writing. Discussion is a key part in the writing workshop approach (Calkins, 1986). Discussion is more than the teachers expanding on what they write; it involves the children’s participation to a great degree. This is the time for students to ask questions and make comments about the compositions their teachers write. They can question and critique, bringing the teachers/authors more ideas that could be incorporated into their works. This modeling can then be carried through in the same way for the remainder of the stages in the writing process: revising, editing, and publishing.

Beyond the importance of helping children become better writers, modeling is beneficial to the teachers’ writing, as well as the classroom environment (Graves, 1983). It contributes to the development of writing by facilitating more critical thinking about the process and content of writing. This helps teachers teach more effectively by forming connections to what students are actually going through in their own writing. The students’ attitudes about writing may improve

when they see their teachers writing just like them. It creates a sense of community when students are allowed to give feedback and assist the teacher in composing.

Routines

It is important for teachers to set up a predictable environment in the classroom for the writing workshop to run as smoothly as possible (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Setting up a predictable environment will help students learn the skills to self-manage, which is a key component to students gaining independence. Students need to have folders for their compositions, and they need to know where those folders are kept. Dorn and Soffos (2001) suggested students be in possession of three specific writing necessities: a writer's log, a writing notebook, and a writing portfolio. The logs are useful for the students to record things throughout their writing times or throughout their daily lives that spark ideas that could be incorporated into their writing. The notebooks are where the children actually compose. The notebooks should contain a folder with pockets to keep their writings and writing forms. The portfolios are where the students keep their finished compositions. The pieces in these folders should be evaluated and critiqued by the individual students. They should be able to see their own growth when they view the pieces in their portfolios.

Students need to be familiar with routines in order to know what to do in certain situations they encounter without always having to rely on the teachers (Graves, 1983). By doing so, they will take responsibility upon themselves and feel more in control of their writing. Some common routines include knowing how to choose a topic, knowing what to do for an unknown word, and knowing how to help classmates with their compositions. All of these routines take time for the children to fully grasp, perhaps even the whole school year; each child will learn this independence at a different rate. Routines also involve a sense of pace (Calkins,

1986). Students need to know that they do not need to hurry through writing, but that they should write carefully and at a comfortable pace. When children know the routine, they will know that they will be provided with adequate time to work on their pieces each day and each week.

Teaching how to choose a topic can begin with the first writing workshop introduction, as illustrated previously through teacher modeling. Graves (1983) described that students should keep lists of previously brainstormed topics that can be referred to at any time. Likewise, previous drafts of compositions should be kept to help with future ideas if necessary. Teachers who know their students well will be able to help them brainstorm ideas and help them find ideas to write about that the students might have overlooked. Knowing how to choose a topic is vital to composition, as Graves (1983) wrote, “The voice is the dynamo of the writing process, the reason for writing in the first place. The voice starts with the choice of topic” (p. 31). Writers who can choose their topics and choose them well will grow the most in their learning; they will want to write more and write to their best ability when they have something to share that interests them.

Children should also learn what to do when they have questions about spelling, punctuation, or word choice. Graves (1983) provided three specific things students can do to ease the flow during their writing: they can circle words that they are not sure they spelled correctly, they can put boxes around places where they are confused about the punctuation, and they can draw lines under words or blank spaces where they may want to change or add a word in the future. Teaching students these strategies will assist them in enhancing the flow of their writing, but it will also help them with the future editing and publishing of their pieces. In

addition, these ideas give teachers valuable information about where the students are in their learning by concretely showcasing students' thinking.

Knowing how to help peers is a valuable tool for children (Graves, 1983). This is taught both by teacher modeling through interactions with the students, as well as through explicit instruction (directly telling children what they should say and how they can help). Students will be able to help their classmates expand upon their ideas and provide them with new elements to think about. This benefits the students whose compositions are being helped; in addition, it improves the writing skills of those students who are assisting. The students who are able to be critical of the writing of others will more easily be able to apply that knowledge to their own compositions. This will help them see their own writing in new ways and improve their own pieces.

Routines should be reviewed often to remind children of their importance. Teachers should also have specific routines during the writing workshop times. This would include routines such as how long to work on their own writing, how to address students who are having difficulties with different components of the workshop, and how to incorporate writing conferences into the writing workshops. These routines may change throughout the year based upon how each one is working for a particular group of children at a particular time.

Mini-Lessons

The focus will now shift to the specific components that should be part of each writing workshop. The first of these is the mini-lesson. This term was coined by Lucy Calkins (1986). Dorn and Soffos (2001) provided a full chapter of information about this necessary aspect of teaching writing. Mini-lessons are explicit lessons that take place at the beginning of the writing workshop block that last about five to ten minutes. This time frame was found to be the best for

several of the authors of texts on writing workshops, including Lensmire (1994), who called this time the opening meeting. This amount of time allows teachers to teach one main concept that the students can focus on, while still allowing the majority of the time to be used for actual writing. The mini-lessons are planned according to the specific elements that children in the classroom as a whole need to focus on. Robins (2011) suggested making lists of elements that come up in drafts that students need to work on or that they are excelling at. This can provide a guide to creating mini-lessons, as many children can be instructed at once, and superior examples can be taken from real students' compositions. For instance, if many students are not capitalizing words that should be capitalized, a mini-lesson could be done focusing on this aspect of writing. Mini-lessons emphasize modeling and providing opportunities for students to directly use what they are taught in their own writing pieces (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). This is important because using their own work provides practice with the strategies or skills in a meaningful context. Mini-lessons supply guidance with the goal of greater writing development and independence.

Mini-lessons are a great place to introduce forms that students can take advantage of in their writing (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). The forms are worksheets that can be useful to aid in any step of the writing process, such as topic lists, spelling trial pages, and checklists about publishing. It is important that students are scaffolded into using them; the forms should not simply be placed in folders for students to figure out on their own. When used correctly, these forms can help students become more reflective and critical about their own writing. They can also become an integral part of the self-regulated routines of the students.

Writing Conferences

One of the most important components of the writing workshop is the writing conference (Graves, 1983). Dorn and Soffos (2001) specifically mentioned five distinct styles of conferences that should be included as part of the writing workshop. These are teacher-scheduled conferences, student-scheduled conferences, teacher-scheduled small-group conferences, peer conferences, and teacher drop-in conferences.

The teacher-scheduled conferences allow teachers to have short one-on-one visits with students about specific pieces of writing. The conferences need not be lengthy, perhaps just one to five minutes. This allows for teachers to reach several students a day. Both Graves (1983) and Dorn and Soffos (2001) believed that every student should be involved in a planned conference at least once a week. In the drafting stage, these visits are not done specifically to change the conventions of writing, such as spelling or grammar, but rather they are done to enhance the flow of the compositions (Graves, 1983). It is not as important to be concerned with each specific word within the writing of the children at this point; understanding and portraying the meaning of the words, however, is of vital necessity. Calkins (1986) stated that “Our first job in a conference, then, is to be a person, not just a teacher. It is to enjoy, to care, and to respond” (p.118-119). Although it is obviously important to take on the role of the teacher during these conferences, this is not the only role. Children need to see the impact that their writing has on others, and this comes through meaningfully reading each piece.

Graves (1983) wrote, “All writers...need to hear their own words coming back to them” (p. 14). The specific text of the writing pieces should be incorporated into what the teachers directly say during these meetings. This allows students to have ownership of their words and their writing; it shows them that what they wrote is important and that they really are conveying

a message to others. Children need to know that they are in control of their writing, which requires they learn this idea. They need to be able to write the way they feel it is appropriate, even if this does not begin with correct spelling or complete sentences. Hearing their words read back to them during these conferences can help them make sense of their own writing and help them gain confidence. Writing conferences are just as important for students who do not have anything written on their papers (Graves, 1983). Teachers can have a conversation with those students to help them decide on a topic that is important to them. Knowing students well will be of great benefit when this situation occurs, because the more teachers know about students, the more they will be able to connect with them and provide assistance. Going through the process of selecting a topic in a conference with a teacher will scaffold students and help them apply the process on their own in future topic selections.

Any of these areas can also be addressed through drop-in conferences, which should occur as needed in the classroom. Briefly checking on students throughout the writing workshop time can provide much direct benefit to their writing progress and enhance their skills. Dorn and Soffos (2001) pointed out a reminder from Graves that conferences should involve the “child speaking about 80 percent of the time, the teacher 20 percent” (p. 60). This means that it is the job of the teacher to critically listen and fully understand the writing of the children.

Children having the knowledge that they will each get a chance to talk to their teachers privately will help students continue writing when they may have questions. They will know that their answers will be addressed in the near future, and that they will not have to struggle for time with the teacher. Nevertheless, students should have the opportunity to sign up for conferences with their teachers themselves when they believe they need to talk before the teacher will schedule an appointment. The option for students to sign up for conferences is referred to as

the student-scheduled conference. When in a difficult place in one piece of writing and in need of assistance by the teacher, students also need to understand that they can be working on multiple pieces of writing. When they are stuck on one piece, they can choose to move on to another until they receive the help they are waiting for. This will help ensure that the children are always in some stage of the writing process during writing workshop time, and that they are not merely waiting and being unproductive during this time.

The previously mentioned different types of short conferences led by the teachers provide the basis for children to confer with each other on their own in peer conferences. These peer conferences involve two students interacting and assisting each other on their writing. They should be short and beneficial to both students involved. Active listening and constructive feedback should be valued during time with peers. These two components must be taught explicitly to the children, as well as indirectly through the way the teacher models interactions during conferences.

Teacher-scheduled small-group conferences are short five minute conferences that assist students with similar needs. These can be extensions of mini-lessons or lessons regarding specific areas that a group of children need additional help with. Teachers are able to give better guidance through these small groups, and the differentiated instruction is very beneficial to the children (Robins, 2011). Teachers are able to personalize these lessons to meet the particular needs of the individuals in the small groups, but at the same time they do not have to have multiple teacher-scheduled conferences.

Dorn and Soffos (2001) wrote that there should be three components to the conferences: “the preconference, the heart of the conference, and the postconference” (p. 62). Respectively during these phases, teachers set the tone, scaffold, and make sure the students can continue

working effectively after the teacher leaves. No matter how short, teachers should make it a priority to include these three components in every conference. The goal of the conferences is for the children to be able to build their independence and self-reflection; therefore, each step should aid in this.

Revising and Editing

Revising and editing are commonly thought of as the same part of the writing process. However, there are major differences. Revising typically happens first, as it affects the meaning of the writing. Students should revise to bring about improved word choice and clearness in their writing (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Children are better able to see how to revise their own writing when they assist other children through peer conferences; teaching others leads to more learning, as one study by Linda Rief showed (Graves, 2004). Children can change their stories to make them more understandable to the audience, or they can change their stories to make them more interesting.

During the editing part of the process, students should be focused on the mechanics of their writing; this includes things such as grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. Children are encouraged to edit as many errors as they can and mark potential errors. Each child should be scaffolded so that too much editing is not done by the teacher. Teachers should have an understanding of which errors to point out and which to let go for that particular draft or that particular composition. Editing too much may discourage children, but not editing enough would not be advantageous to their potentials as developing writers. Graves (1983) suggested that syntax frequently be kept as the children write it; this enables children's voices to remain in their writings. Through this revising and editing, the real learning that the children will remember and grow upon will take place (Robins, 2011)

Two of the most vital things to remember about revising and editing are that they must be taught and that they must not be forced (Graves, 2004). Children must be taught exactly what revising and editing mean in order for them to carry them out. Also, if children feel forced to edit or revise every piece they write, their views on writing may be inhibited. Children need the opportunity to choose which pieces they want to revise (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Sharing and Publishing

Graves (1983) wrote, “Writing is a public act, meant to be shared with many audiences” (p. 54). Children who write pieces for others to hear or read can see the importance in what they are doing. Understanding that revising is much more than having to rewrite the same words over will make more sense to children when they are writing to others for the purpose of conveying specific messages. Frank Smith (Graves, 2004) mentioned, “Every act in writing is a convention” (p. 89). Students will see the necessity of learning the conventions when they realize that they are writing to communicate.

Sharing writing experiences can come through discussions or publishing. Sharing through discussing is an easy activity to engage in at the end of each writing workshop time. Students should have the opportunity to read the pieces they have been working on, whether or not they are complete. One beneficial way to do this is by having a special author chair for children to sit in while they read their pieces (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Having such a chair can help students see themselves as real authors. The works that are not complete can be discussed and questioned in order to help the authors expand on their ideas or change things that were perhaps unclear. Students who are able to read completed pieces will be intrinsically rewarded for all the hard work they put into their pieces. They will have a chance to let their voices be heard through their writing. However, children should not be forced to read their pieces aloud

until they are ready or feel comfortable doing so. When children begin to see themselves as authors, they will find more connections with authors of the books they read; this will then help them become better writers themselves (Calkins, 1986). This cycle continues on.

Publishing can mean typing or rewriting the words of a composition on new paper, and then binding the pages into a book. It involves organizational aspects of writing, such as covers and illustrations (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). No matter the children's levels of writing, it is important for them to see their writing in this published way. Having the opportunity to check out classmates' compositions with other books in the classroom library will strengthen the children's understanding that they are authors when they write. One suggestion by Graves (1983) was to have children include "biographical statements" at the ends of their compositions to provide ownership and pride in their accomplishments (p. 29).

Not every piece should be published, because not every piece is the best writing a child will have (Graves, 1983). Children need to understand that most of what they do is practice. Again, it is about the process they put into each piece. They should not put too much pressure on themselves to make each piece perfect; that is not the goal of the writing workshop (Overmeyer, 2008). Children know when they work hard to achieve a successful outcome. Simply publishing every piece downplays the effort put into the best pieces they compose. They will be excited when their best works are able to be recognized. Dorn and Soffos (2001) suggested about ten compositions a year be published, although this will depend on the age of the children and the length of time it takes to complete each piece. It is important to note that when pieces are published, peers should focus on the positive factors they see. This differs from the critique they give on pieces at other stages in the writing process.

One potential downfall of the writing workshop approach is the reliance on good peer relations (Lensmire, 1994). If students are not treated equally by their peers, they may avoid certain children during conferences or they may fear sharing their pieces at any stage. These negative relations could be based upon social class, gender, or race. If issues arise and become problematic, they may have to be dealt with before the writing workshop can be carried out successfully for all students.

Assessment

The key of assessment is this: “Assessment informs instruction, and vice versa” (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Incorporated into every aspect of the writing workshop is assessment. The writing workshop is unique in that it is not about the product, but the process (Overmeyer, 2008). Assessment for the writing workshop includes both informal, formative assessments and standardized, summative assessments. Formative assessments can be done by simply observing the children as they write and focusing on the process. Asking questions is another way to informally see what children know and understand. Notes can be kept and checklists can be made concerning what the children do and do not understand. Summative assessments can be based on rubrics or other standardized materials, but again, the product is typically not the main focus (Dorn & Soffos, 2001).

Robins (2011) saw the great importance of spending time with the work of each student. It allows the teacher to get a greater sense of who each child is and what his/her strengths and weaknesses are. It is necessary to give feedback throughout the entire process of writing. Once the project is complete in the mind of a child, it is likely that feedback will not enhance writing as the motivation for that particular piece will have ceased (Robins, 2011).

The information gathered through these assessments should form the basis of large-group instruction through mini-lessons and individual scaffolding. In addition, the instruction should be based in the assessments and standards that are given for a particular group of children. It is important that students be reminded not only of the areas in their writing in which they need help, but also that they see where they are improving. Celebrating even small achievements with children is a type of formative assessment that will truly go a long way in their development as writers (Robins, 2011). Students will see that they can write and share their own ideas.

Literature

Great writing cannot come without great reading, as these two pieces of literacy go hand in hand. Fostering a love of literature and a love of reading will help children fall even more in love with their own writing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Reading a variety of genres and authors will give children the opportunity to explore a variety of writing in their own compositions (Graves, 1983). The more children are exposed to literature, the more able they will be to find their own voices in their writing. Students should know that it is not important that they write just like a particular author or in a particular style, but rather that they write in their own style, influenced by what they have read or listened to.

A broad range of literature includes much more than books. Newspapers, menus, magazines, and other types of non-traditional print should be available in the classroom for the children to view. Dorn and Soffos (2001) stated, “An important goal of writing proficiency is the student’s ability to write for different audiences and purposes” (p. 26). For this to take place, students must be exposed to these various purposes. Students should be engaged in more than simply reading literature, although this in itself is highly important. They should also have the opportunity to discuss literature and critique it, just as they do with their own compositions

(Graves, 1983). Through these critical discussions of literature, children will gain a better sense of how to critique their own writing in a way that will enhance it. Literature can be incorporated into any aspect of the writing workshop (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). It can be used during a mini-lesson to model a specific topic or area of improvement, literature can be made available for children to use as models during their writing, and literature can be compared and discussed with the actual writing of the students during sharing.

Summary

The writing workshop should be implemented at least three times per week, with the mini-lesson, writing, and sharing times coming to about one hour each day (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Although there is not one set way to implement the workshop, there are guidelines and strategies that should be incorporated into this approach to help students reach their fullest potentials. Graves (2004) cautioned that the process of writing and the writing workshop should not become regularized, meaning teachers do not have to follow everything exactly as it is written about in the literature; teachers must remain the decision-makers for what works best in their own classrooms. This may change from year to year, or even several times throughout the school year if children are not responding as well as they could be through writing workshop. Routines should be in place, but it is important to realize that some things may need to change. Lensmire (1994) quoted Calkins on this issue: “The problem is...that some of us have lost confidence in our ability to think for ourselves...” (p. 383). The writing workshop should be applied and carried out in the way that best fits each particular classroom.

In a time when it seems everything is focused on standardized testing and measurable outcomes, it may seem as though this writing workshop approach does not fit. However, this could not be any farther from the truth. Using the writing workshop in the classroom will

prepare students in a meaningful way for future testing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Although it is a different style of learning than is required for test-taking, it can be used in a way that enhances the skills of the children overall, which will thus help students with testing.

Because all can improve their writing in some way, even teachers, the writing workshop is an active process for everyone involved. Lensmire (1994) put it well when he said that children “explore and learn about writing by writing” (p. 376). Teachers having high expectations for students will help students have high expectations for themselves; in turn, this will bring about even more writing from them, better writing.

Methodology

Observations were done in order to gain further understanding of the writing workshop approach through viewing its actual implementation. The observations for gathering writing workshop data for this study took place in a fifth grade classroom in an urban Iowa elementary school. The specific teacher who was chosen for observation was suggested by a professional at the school, and the teacher willingly agreed to the research. The qualitative research was conducted over eight writing workshop sessions occurring over five weeks throughout February and March 2012. Writing workshop occurred daily in this classroom and was scheduled for forty-five minutes, although Wednesdays required the time to be shortened to thirty minutes due to an early dismissal. During the observations, data was collected in the form of field notes written about both the students and the teacher. Artifacts of the students’ writing were examined at different times during the study, as were samples of the writing-related posters and displays in the classroom. Data was triangulated, as multiple sources were used to gather information for the analysis (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Field observation notes and an examination of artifacts

were used in the analysis of the data. In addition, the perceptions of the data's significance were checked by conferring with an advisor in their field of curriculum and instruction.

The observational data gathered will be presented first in the findings, followed by an analysis. The analysis of the data involves a comparison of similarities and differences to the literature reviewed. The differences are presented first in the analysis, followed by the similarities that were found. The final part of the findings focuses on an analysis of the writing that was seen in the classroom.

Findings

Overview of Classroom

The fifth grade classroom in which the observations took place consisted of nineteen students: nine boys and ten girls; it was made up of a mixture of African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic students. The room contained much print related to writing. There were approximately ten hand-made posters focusing on writing, with more added throughout the observation time. The posters displayed proper conduct during writing workshop, various parts of the writing process, different types of writing, word choice lists, and spelling/convention reminders. There were also several premade posters hung throughout the room. These posters centered on the traits of writing, text structure, and genres. A large bulletin board display entitled "Writing Process" was a feature in the room. It included short descriptions of the five stages of the process, as well as small buckets labeled with these stages; this enabled students to move their names to the process they were working on at any particular moment. Two other large bulletin boards were filled with the students' previous publications about their cultures; there were packets stapled to the board that each student had done showing the various stages they had used in the writing process during that unit. Resources in the room for the children to

use in their writing beyond the posters and bulletin boards included a three-fold Word Wall consisting of words the students had suggested they needed help spelling written under the appropriate first letter, reference books (for example, dictionaries and thesauruses), as well as a few computers.

A specific tub for the students to place their writing notebooks in was clearly labeled. The notebooks (which were folders) held spiral notebooks for writing, rough drafts of pieces that the students were currently working on and old ones they had decided to keep, prewrites, and some published pieces. Also, students had additional resources in their notebooks to use in their writing, such as spelling trial pages and two versions of Words, Words, Words (which contained lists of words by category and alphabetical letter). These were all beneficial for the students to use as a resource to get help with their spelling and to get writing ideas.

Observations

On day one of the observations, the writing workshop lasted forty minutes. The students began prewriting and drafting pen pal letters during this session. The teacher instructed them to sit where they would do their best writing to get their job done, and she gave an example of how she does that herself. She then gave the students two choices for where they could keep their writing folders: either in their desks or in the bucket with their other writing pieces. She then reminded the class about what to do when they did not know how to spell a word; their choices consisted of using one of their Words, Words, Words books, their trial spelling pages, a dictionary, a neighbor, the Word Wall, or the computer to look the word up or check it. The teacher then indicated that they were to move their individual sticks with their names on them from prewriting to drafting on the bulletin board when necessary. While the students got to work, the teacher went around and held short conferences with individual students. During the

conferences, the teacher talked with the students about where they were in their writing and what they needed to do next to keep working. Throughout the writing time, the children were allowed to talk quietly when necessary. As the students got stuck in their pen pal writing, the teacher gave ideas. She used real life examples of what she liked to write about to her friends. When the students had questions, they frequently yelled the teacher's name to get her attention. The teacher commented to the students that she noticed they were realizing when not to add in extra words that they would typically use in their speech. At the end of the workshop time, the teacher asked the class what they were going to do differently for the next writing workshop period to help it run better. Students' responses included working harder, staying on topic, and talking less. The teacher's final comments were about a connection between writing and reading. She said that reading and writing help each other because they allow things to be seen differently; when they write they become better readers, and when they read they become better writers.

On day two of the writing workshop observations, the students published their pen pal letters. The workshop lasted twenty-five minutes. To begin, the teacher reminded the students that they were all authors, even when just writing a letter. She said because of this, they should make sure their words were spelled correctly. Again, she went through the resources that they could use to figure out how to spell unknown words. She said they should circle the words they were unsure about and then figure out the correct spelling for the published copy. She gave an example of a commonly misspelled word, "does," that they should focus on writing correctly. Before they began writing, she made sure they knew what the expectation for the day was. She had brief conferences with the students; during these conferences, the teacher checked where they were in the writing process and reminded those who needed a reminder that they had to finish this day. When children asked her how to spell words, she sometimes told them the

spelling without reminding them what to do on their own. She turned on soft classical music in the background. At one point, a student stopped working because she did not have an eraser; after she was told where to get one, she got back to work. When students finished their published versions, some were assigned random jobs to do around the room, while others were prompted to prewrite for a personal choice writing piece.

On day three of the writing workshop observations, the students were mostly working on editing their American Revolution writings that they had started prior to writing their pen pal letters. The workshop lasted twenty-five minutes. Their writings came from their choice of three sentence strips about the American Revolution from a bag full of them that each student had been given. They had to find a common category between their three chosen sentences and incorporate them into their paragraphs. To begin the mini-lesson, the teacher had them each quietly read the paragraphs they had been writing so they could have their own writing in their heads when they went over the mini-lesson material. The teacher's mini-lesson focused on editing. The teacher went over a poster that she had previously been through with them. The poster had an editing checklist; this checklist included circling words that did not look right, looking up circled words, and checking punctuation and capitalization. The teacher then had them go through a paragraph that was projected onto the board. They each quietly counted the mistakes they could find, which led to a whole group discussion about the number of errors. The students then passed the pen, meaning they took turns editing the mistakes in red on the board. The teacher talked about why it was important to use a different color to edit than what the text was written in. She also told them that it was easy to stop seeing their own mistakes, which is why it would be helpful for them to have others edit their papers, as well. During the mini-lesson, she went through a variety of editing marks and explained that there could be more than

one way to edit some mistakes. After all the edits were made, the children saw what real editing should look like in their own work. The teacher praised them for their hard work and encouraged them to do the same in their own writing. They then got the chance to do so on their American Revolution paragraphs. The teacher went through and asked everyone where they were at in the writing process, and she moved their sticks to the appropriate buckets on the board. She had those who were still prewriting or drafting come to the front table for a conference. At the end of writing time, she had the students share the biggest mistakes they found in their own writing; most dealt with punctuation and capitalization.

On day four of the writing workshop observations, the students worked on a writing topic of their choice for forty minutes. This would be an ongoing writing piece that the students would continue working on during free time or when they finished other writing assignments in the future. They were instructed to choose a genre and a text structure, with examples of compatible options given by the teacher; some examples were a mystery genre with a cause and effect text structure and an autobiography genre with a chronological text structure. The teacher told the children they could look for books of the same genre they chose to write about to get inspiration, but not to copy. She encouraged both fiction and nonfiction writing. The teacher also informed the students that many authors think of the ending first when they write or where it is they want their stories to go. She reminded them to move their sticks on the bulletin board as they worked. The students were allowed to work with partners and coauthor stories if they desired to do so and could work cooperatively. During individual conferences, the teacher commented on improvements she saw in their writing. One group of two girls worked together on a story; they were very excited and could not get their ideas out fast enough. The teacher suggested to the class that it would be helpful to write a quick list of names and things to remember for their

stories as a prewrite. She encouraged the use of the computers during the prewriting time as well, allowing students to look up information they needed. More students were engaged during this writing workshop time than was previously observed. The teacher reminded the students that they should keep all their prewrites and drafts, even if they decide on different topics; this way, they would be able to go back to them at another time if they needed to. She told the students that it was fine if they decided to begin something new, as they could write more than one story at a time; she related this to the fact that they were always reading more than one book at a time.

On the fifth day of the observations, a unit on sequencing began. This introductory day lasted thirty-five minutes. The teacher reminded the students that they had been talking about how text structures could help them navigate through text they read. She informed them that today they would focus on sequencing to connect one event with another. Together the class read aloud “A Drop of Water” by Walter Wick, which was projected onto the board. When talking about the author Walter Wick, the teacher referred to him as Walter. After the initial read, the teacher reread the sequence story with instructions for the students to stand up every time they heard a sequence word. After the reading, they discussed the three main sequence words from the story; for example, “at last” was a key phrase. The teacher reminded them to pay attention because their job would be to copy Wick’s idea of sequencing. She directed the students to a poster in the front of the room with a list of sequencing words that they could choose from for their own compositions, though she encouraged them to be creative and choose others that were not on the list, as well. At the end of the mini-lesson, the teacher told them that she wanted them to practice sequencing to get an idea of writing like Wick, but that it would be something they would not turn in. They were instructed to think of three sequences, three steps

of something they had done that day. These steps did not need to be written in a paragraph, just listed, with the sequence words to be filled in last. They were encouraged to share with their neighboring classmates or get ideas from them. After everyone was finished, several students shared aloud their sequences to the class, and they had discussions about how to improve the words they chose. The students were then each instructed to get out their free reading books from their book boxes or their desks. They had to find one section in sequence order and figure out how the sequencing helped them as a reader. She said there was sequence related to everything that happens in life, so it would be found in every book they read. They discussed a few examples of what the students found, and the class then made their own “Sequence Word” poster, adding words they found from their books and things they thought would be helpful to remember about the topic. The teacher ended the lesson by telling the students to think about something with sequence that they would want to write about tomorrow; she challenged them to brainstorm.

On day six of the writing workshop observations, the students spent fifty minutes drafting and editing their sequence stories. They began by doing think-alouds of how they were writing their sequences using Wick’s model. One student would share while others were to take ideas from what they heard, thinking about how the think-aloud would help them if they were struggling. The teacher connected the sharing of ideas to herself when she said that she shares ideas with teachers about lessons. The students read their drafts and shared how they came up with their topics, details, and questions they asked in the introductions of their papers. They talked about grabbing the reader and using key phrases that Wick used. After a few students shared their drafts, the teacher asked the class if these copies of their work would be what the final copies looked like. The class consensus was that they would look different because they

would be edited and revised. They were then given time to continue drafting, editing, and revising their sequences. The teacher put an example on the projector of a sample sequence paper written by another fifth grade teacher that the class could refer to if they needed to. The teacher commented that she had seen huge improvements in their writing, and that it was having a positive effect on their reading. The teacher had a group conference with four students at the front table in the classroom; these students were starting new sequence stories or needed additional help revising their original drafts. During the conference, there were many interruptions from other students. Although this was a time to finish drafting, some students decided to start over for the second or third time. On this day, the students seemed unengaged and off-topic quite more than usual. When it was time to end workshop, the teacher informed them to stop writing without giving any time warning. The students then shared things that they changed or improved that day; they talked about their progress and where they were going in their writing. One student did not want to stop writing. The teacher pointed this out as a great example of what happens when they get into writing and get excited about it.

The seventh observation consisted of seeing a continuation of the students working on their sequencing papers. It lasted only twenty minutes. The writing workshop session began again with think-alouds. This time the students were given a prompt: "I wanted to use signal words to clarify the steps to (their topic). In order to do this like Walter Wick I (talk about sequence words)." The teacher gave an example, and then the students shared. After each student shared, others were given the opportunity to ask questions about the thinking or the writing. Some gave comments or suggestions for improvement. The students were reinforced that the requirement for this composition was for them to use a minimum of three sequence words, but that they could use more if they desired to. Other requirements were that they must

also have at least one very descriptive sentence, and that they must be able to explain their thinking as related to Walter Wick. A group of students who needed additional help were allowed to work at the front table together, although the teacher held individual conferences as well as interacting with this small group. She encouraged the students to find new and interesting sequence words, instead of using the same common ones.

During the eighth and final day of observations, the students continued a writing workshop that had been held previously in the day. The total time for the observation was thirty minutes. During this time, think-alouds were given by seven students who had not yet done one, again using the prompt that had been written on the board previously. After sharing, classmates asked questions and gave comments. Most of the students' questions centered on how their peers came up with their topics. On this day, some students were allowed free time during this writing workshop who had earned it previously in the day. The students who had earned this free time spend it on the computers playing games.

Differences

The writing workshop that was observed in the fifth grade classroom varied from what was discussed in literature in several key ways, as well as many small ways. One of the most prominent ways was in the independence of the students. They seemed to have difficulty following the routines. Perhaps this could have improved with the addition of direct modeling and practice for a variety of different aspects of the workshop (Graves, 1983). For example, the students were reminded many times what to do when they wanted to use words in their writing that they did not know how to spell. The teacher reviewed this during several of the observation days, and the students could always respond with the correct procedures after her prompts in the reviews. However, when it came to actually following through with spelling these words, the

students frequently sought the help of the teacher instead. Being consistent and directly modeling the procedure for the students may have been helpful.

These same models would have also been helpful to the students for knowing what to do when stuck on other aspects of writing, such as when they needed direct help or when they needed specific materials. When the students needed something, they frequently called the teacher's name, even if she was busy helping other students during conferences; this created much extra noise and unproductivity. One option that was discussed in the literature review would have been for students to have codes for their writing; for example, they could have had specific markings for punctuation or words they needed help with (Graves, 1983). Having routines and expectations that were highly enforced would have helped the students in the flow of their writing.

Another aspect that differed between the research and the implementation was the role of writing for the teacher. The teacher was not observed creating her own pieces of writing or writing in front of the students, although she did frequently verbalize examples. Directly writing could have had a positive effect on the students and their willingness to write. Because the teacher was always assisting students, the students never got to see her write, and they never engaged in the beneficial experience of writing completely on their own (Graves, 1983).

Although topic choice is a main factor in the writing workshop, it was seen less than expected in the observations. Complete choice for writing only occurred during one of the observations. The other days consisted of topic choices within a specific writing unit, such as sequencing or the American Revolution. It seemed as though the children had difficulty selecting topics. For example, many times during the pen pal unit the students asked the teacher what they should write about. And again in the sequencing unit, the students frequently started

over after choosing a topic. The students were constantly asking for ideas from the teacher, which took the teacher away from helping with other stages of the writing process. One idea would have been to give brief mini-lessons on topic selection at the beginning of the units (Graves, 1983). This could have saved time in the end and given the children more clear direction.

The mini-lessons were not given every day, and when they were, they sometimes lasted long enough that the students did not have a chance to get deep into the writing process. Refocusing on this aspect to make it more consistent and predictable would have been beneficial to the students (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). It would have given them a greater sense of what to work on and an understanding of what writing workshop consists of. Nevertheless, the mini-lessons did seem to flow well with the units.

The writing conferences were a little different than was discussed in the research. For example, the teacher generally read the writing of those she was conferencing with to herself, so the students did not hear their words read back to them often (Graves, 1983). It also seemed as though the teacher did most of the talking during the conferences, as opposed to the twenty percent suggested talking time (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). She would comment on the writing of the students and ask for their responses to questions, but she did not have the students lead the conferences. No sign-up sheet was presented for student-scheduled conferences, although the teacher did well circulating the room and helping those in need. Students were allowed to conference with each other, but this was not a requirement, and the students tended not to know how exactly to go about doing this; the students often engaged in off-topic talking, and students sometimes gave their peers too much support (Dorn & Soffos, 2001).

The literature reviewed discussed the clear distinction between revising and editing, although it was unclear whether or not the students saw this difference (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Revising and editing were often discussed in the literature as being something that should not be forced (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). During the observations, the students were required to revise and edit all their pieces; however, this seemed to really help them in their writing and they did so willingly.

Sharing was typically done at the end of each writing workshop session (although it did sometimes occur at the beginning of the lesson). However, this sharing was sometimes prompted. For example, each child did a think-aloud of their sequence paragraphs. During these think-alouds, they were required to fill in the blanks to a prompt, instead of just talking freely about their pieces. This resulted in the sharing being somewhat redundant and uncreative, leaving classmates less engaged. The children also critiqued published pieces, which should have happened before publishing. Research pointed out that it is better to focus on the positives during the sharing of published pieces in order help children feel proud of their accomplishments (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). During one writing workshop session, some children were given the opportunity to have free time on the computers. This seemed to make the writing of those who were sharing less important, as attention was not fully on them and students were given a reward of not listening. The teacher did not make bound copies of published works made from the writing that occurred during the observations (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Publishing to the class simply meant rewriting stories to make them presentable and neat for others to read. Because of this, covers and illustrations were not made to go with the writing of the children. The students did this type of publishing for each piece they wrote.

The differences that were seen in this classroom compared to the classrooms in the literature were not all necessarily negative. Some of them seemed to fit the class better than other options that may have been thought necessary in the research. For example, using the computer for research and spelling was not something that was brought up in the literature; however, the classroom had several computers that were always in use during the writing workshop; the students were typically on-task when using this new resource. The writing workshop would have improved if some of these differences were not there, but some of them fit the needs of the students in this fifth grade room. Some of these differences made up what would be considered a key component discussed in the literature about the writing workshop: teachers are the decision makers and should be able to think for themselves in respect to the various components of the workshop approach (Graves, 2004).

Similarities

Although there were differences in the writing workshop of this classroom compared to the theories in research, it was still truly a writing workshop. The importance of the similarities outweighs the differences, and benefits could be seen in the writing of the students. The teacher always believed in the students and had high expectations for them. Modeling and choice were woven into the workshop; consistency was seen in the form of environment and routines; mini-lessons, conferences, publishing, and sharing were all important components; and assessment and literature were integrated into the teacher's approach.

Much of the modeling done in the writing workshop was in the form of verbal examples, as the teacher often gave multiple examples of various aspects of the workshops. For instance, she gave a variety of examples that the students could choose from if they desired for their free-choice writing pieces. She gave specific examples (such as topics), as well as general examples

(such as genres). She used actual writing samples to talk about different parts of writing, such as the sequence paper written by another fifth grade teacher. This variety of models seemed to benefit the students (Dorn & Soffos, 2001).

She allowed choice in the writing of the children in several ways. She permitted the children to sit where they wanted and where they thought they could work well. She also provided choice in the form of topics. Although during the majority of observations, she had the students write in a specific genre and following a specific rubric, the students were still able to choose their own topics within the units. This included which sentences to use in their American Revolution papers, what event to tell about in their sequencing unit, and most prominently their complete choice of topic, genre, and text structure that occurred during one observation. The more choices the children had as they wrote, the more engaged they seemed to be. When they truly got into writing something they had strong feelings for and something they truly wanted to share, they were excited and ready to write as much as they needed to convey their thoughts (Graves, 1983).

A predictable environment was set in place for the students in the writing workshop (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). The writing folders and writing materials were always kept in the same place, and the same content was always in these folders. This included items such as prewrites, drafts, spelling resources, and notebooks. Also, the same expectations were always given in regards to what paper and writing materials were proper to use during drafting and publishing. Although the children did not always remember these things, even with repeated reminders, the teacher did her best to keep things clear and consistent.

The same consistency was true for other aspects of the writing workshop, as well. Routines were clearly in place for what to do when the children did not know how to spell a

word (use the dictionary, word wall, computer, neighbor, trial pager, Words book...) (Graves, 1983). The students knew where to get these resources, and they were aware that they could circle the unknown words and go back to them later. This helped ease the flow of writing for some students. The order of the daily happenings of writing workshops was somewhat consistent. Almost always, a set of reminders and instructions (sometimes in the form of a mini-lesson), writing time, and sharing were components. Although these could have been more consistent in their time and formats, they were nevertheless present in the lessons every day.

Mini-lessons were integrated into some of the writing workshops that were observed. When they were incorporated, the students got to use their own ideas and their own pieces of writing, just as was seen as best practices in the research (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). The students were able to apply their new or refreshed knowledge first hand during the mini-lessons included in the American Revolution unit and sequencing unit, which made the tasks more meaningful and authentic.

Writing conferences were an important component in the writing workshop sessions that were observed (Graves, 1983). A variety of the different types of conferences were incorporated during the writing workshops. There were many teacher-scheduled and drop-in conferences, during which the teacher met individually with students for a brief period of time, typically one to three minutes. She met with students in a variety of stages of the writing process, helping the students enhance the flow of their compositions and get them more focused in their writing when necessary. The teacher always made sure the students would be able to work on their own after she left. She was able to get to multiple students daily, as suggested by the literature (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). The teacher also engaged the students in small-group conferences frequently. During this time, she assisted students with similar needs, such as students who were still in the

prewriting stages of writing when they should have been farther along. She was able to better guide these students and offer differentiated instruction to help them (Robins, 2011). Although it did not seem as though traditional peer conferences were part of the writing workshop, the students generally took this upon themselves. They were able to talk to their neighbors to get ideas or other help when they needed it. Peer conferences were not scheduled, but occurred when the students were willing to help each other; this worked out well.

Revising and editing were clearly seen as separate and distinct stages in this implementation of the approach (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). The teacher talked about these two stages as separate entities, had them listed separately on the bucket bulletin board, and had posters showing the difference in meaning between the two words. Another key aspect related to the stages of revising and editing that was similar to the literature was the way the teacher worked with the students' in their writing. She pointed out some areas in which improvement could be made in the form of revising or editing, but she did not point out every single detail that could or should be changed. If she would have overemphasized her own revising and editing of their papers, it could have brought about discouragement in the students and thoughts that they were not good enough to write well (Graves, 1983).

Sharing was done at the end of the writing workshop sessions and happened in accordance with various stages in the writing process. This gave time for the children to share their ideas and get constructive feedback from their classmates. It also gave individual students a time to express themselves and their thinking. A few children shared each day: some who volunteered and others who were chosen. One important observation was that the students were not forced to share when they were not ready to do so or when they did not feel comfortable doing so. This was a significant similarity that was found in the literature review (Dorn &

Soffos, 2001). When specific writing samples were not shared, students still had the opportunity to verbally share their writing thoughts. For example, the students frequently talked about things that they changed or improved during that particular day; they talked about their progress and their goals for the following days of writing. The students published each piece by rewriting their compositions with the corrected changes. The importance of writing well and to their best abilities was most clearly seen when the task was authentic and for a real audience; this was seen in their pen pal letters. The authenticity helped the students see the necessity of the conventions and the importance of conveying specific meaning (Graves, 2004).

During the writing workshop observations, both formative and summative assessments were seen (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Most of the assessments, however, were formative. This type of feedback is the most meaningful to the students, as it helps guide them in their thinking as they are in the process of writing. The teacher observed the students and questioned them about their writing throughout the different stages of the writing process. She used individual scaffolding to meet the needs of each student she interacted with based on these formative assessments. She frequently talked about the general improvements she had seen in the writing of her students, and she gave mini-lessons when necessary based upon aspects she knew needed to be taught or reinforced (Robins, 2011). Summative assessments were used at the end of the units on the published pieces. The assessments were based on rubrics focusing on specific aspects that were to be incorporated into the writings.

The incorporation of literature into writing was a major aspect of the writing workshop in the observed room (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). The teacher and students frequently talked about the variety of genres and text structures that they saw in books they read; this related to how various text structures helped them organize their own stories and helped their readers.

During a mini-lesson, the students were instructed to use their reading books to find a specific text structure and explain how it helped them as a reader. Because the students wrote for different purposes and different audiences throughout the units, they were able to see what it was like to have different readers in mind while writing. The students used authors to get inspired in their own writing; these authors were given to them by the teacher (such as Walter Wick during the sequencing unit), or they were chosen by the students (such as during their choice writing day). The students understood that they were to be influenced by such authors, which did not mean that they were to copy their words.

One important observation that happened regularly was that the students were called authors. This helped them see the importance of their writing and bring them to a similar level with those whose books they read (Calkins, 1986). When addressing Walter Wick, the teacher just called him “Walter,” which seemed to be a great way to become even more connected to real authors. The students were prompted to brainstorm about writing during the day, similar to what was found in the literature review (Graves, 1983). The teacher explicitly helped them make the connection between reading and writing by telling them more than once during the observation sessions that when they write they become better readers and when they read they become better writers; furthermore, she talked about the personal improvements she was seeing in both these areas.

Analysis of Writing

Compositions from the unit on sequencing were analyzed in particular, as parts of that unit were seen from beginning to end during the time of the observations. The writings included a range of prewriting, drafting (which included revising and editing), and publishing. Clear growth could be seen in each of the compositions, and the writing process was reflected.

Some of the writing included prewriting in the form of lists that were made about topic choices and topic selections. Others just began by drafting sentences. Some compositions only had one drafting page, while others had several. There were clear indications of revising and editing in the pieces. Some of these indications included words that were crossed out, spelling trials on the pages, sticky notes with suggestions or things to remember, words underlined, and words inserted. Some students began with the body of their paragraphs, and then they went back to add introductions and conclusions. The published pieces were written in much neater handwriting than were the rough drafts. Also, some of the published pieces had titles that had not come up in the rough drafts. There were still some spelling and punctuation errors in these published pieces, but the teacher had not specifically corrected each one before it was rewritten into the published version.

Six+1 Trait Writing is an assessment system for writing that focuses on seven traits that can be scored on a rubric (6+1 Trait Definitions, 2012). The students' compositions were not scored by the teacher based on these traits, but the traits were taken into consideration for this analysis. These seven traits of writing are ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. The fifth grade pieces from the sequencing unit were quite strong in ideas, organization, and sentence fluency. They had clear purposes and were structured sequentially. Word choice was also an important piece to these compositions. The basis for the grading of these papers mainly came from these categories. As a result, some of the other traits seemed to be less focused upon by the students, although not by all the students. The area that stuck out the most as lacking was voice; this seemed to be difficult for the students to convey in this unit. Some students simply got through their sequences and did not display

personality in their pieces. Conventions and presentation varied quite a bit from student to student.

Conclusion

Observations of consecutive days and multiple entire units would have provided more conclusive data and clear understandings of the workings seen in this particular classroom, as would have come from observations from the first weeks of teaching this approach. However, the analysis that was able to be done over the eight observation days provides a foundation and a starting place for understanding the implementation of the writing workshop. Through the writing workshop observations and comprehensive analysis, insight can be gained about difficulties and successes that teachers new to this style of teaching writing may have. Knowing and understanding these challenges that may surface will potentially benefit those currently implementing the writing workshop or those who will soon be implementing the workshop in their classrooms. These understandings will bring additional support to those who have read the literature related to the writing workshop approach.

The differences that were noted in the comparison of the literature reviewed and the observational data could have been the result of a variety of reasons. For instance, the curriculum of the school was based on specific standards. Because of these standards, the choice of topic needed to be focused for the majority of the writing; the curriculum goals needed to be met through specific writing. The writing workshop approach was able to be implemented in the teaching of this curriculum, but perhaps not as much as if the teacher would have been able to develop and implement her own goals.

Some of the differences that were found were also a result of the degree of student-centeredness. The teacher was directly involved more than the literature suggested appropriate.

This was seen in the way conferences were held, in the length of the mini-lessons, and in the reliance on the teacher. Perhaps this was so because this approach is less familiar to the students than traditional teaching. It is not just about the teacher learning a new approach and implementing it; students also need to learn and get used to these ideas that come with the new approach. All this takes time. In addition, not only was this particular teacher new to the approach, but she was also quite new to teaching in general. This could have had some influence over the effectiveness of this approach. Because the students were not able to explore their own choice of writing all the time, it led to them having a difficult time choosing their topics when they were allowed to do so. It was not something that came as naturally to them as would have come if they had been used to such choice. In result of this, perhaps the students did need the extra guidance that was seen by the teacher.

Other differences could have been a result of the observational group. This research was done in an urban setting with fifth graders. Perhaps the research from the literature review dealt with other types of schools and levels. In addition, the writing workshop was not observed on consecutive days, but rather only two to three days a week. Because of this, possibly things were not seen that would have led to additional similarities or important conclusions.

With more practice and focus on the writing workshop approach, improvement will come. This classroom has a great start to the workings of the writing workshop. It provides a superior example of the diversity that can be seen from one writing workshop to the next. There is always room for improvement, and changes should be made from one group of children to the next in order to fit their specific needs and the needs of the school.

References

- 6+1 Trait Definitions. (2012). Retrieved from <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/503>.
- Calkins, L. (1986). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.
- Calkins, L. (2011). *A curricular plan for the writing workshop: Grade 5*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.
- Cohen, D. & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative research guidelines project*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeTria-3692.html>.
- Dorn, L. J. & Soffos, C. (2001). *Scaffolding young writers: A writers' workshop approach*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (2001). *Writing workshop: The essential guide*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Graves, D. H. (2004). What I've learned from teachers of writing. *Language Arts*, 82(2), 88-93.
- Lensmire, T. J. (1994). Writing workshop as carnival: Reflections on an alternative learning environment. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(4), 371-391.
- Overmeyer, M. (2008). The rewards of writing. *Understanding Our Gifted*, Spring, 6-8.
- Robbins, K. (2011). Grading written work: An integral part of writing workshop practice. *Voices from the Middle*, 19(1), 10-12.