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Effects of specific instructional practices on independent writing of learning-disabled students

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EFFECTS OF SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES ON INDEPENDENT WRITING OF LEARNING-DISABLED STUDENTS

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my study participants who were willing to devote their time to my curiosity and allowed me to share their voice. I also dedicate this study to my colleagues, whose guidance, expertise, and wisdom helped me through the tough parts. Most of all, I dedicate this study to my amazing family and my patient friends who were incredibly supportive through this process. You all gave me the space and strength I needed to withstand this endeavor. Let's talk about the next adventure.

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Abstract
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This mixed methods case study explored the effects of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice on independence in writing, increased time on task, and improved written output for fifth grade learning-disabled students serviced in a replacement language arts special education setting. Qualitative data was collected through pre and post interviews with teacher and student participants. Student writing samples were also assessed for sentence structure and support using the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) scoring rubric.

Student avoidance behaviors were recorded during independent writing while each instructional practice was presented. This quantitative data was analyzed along with the ERB scores through cross-case analysis to address the research questions. The data was also analyzed by student to determine if one instructional practice yielded higher rubric scores and more time on task than the others.

The emerging themes of confidence, interest level, and skill acquisition were uncovered through thematic coding. Positive growth was indicated for all three student participants when exposed to each of the three instructional practices though one practice did not stand out above the rest. Teacher participants felt mentor text produced the greatest gains for students. Findings indicate each instructional method can be equally effective when used in isolation or in combination with another instructional practice.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Writing is an important skill students acquire in school that they continue to use throughout their lifetime. It remains a primary means of communication in our society as it facilitates the expression of ideas for a variety of purposes. A student's writing is frequently used to assess knowledge across content areas. Therefore, academic achievement often depends on the ability to write (Mason, Benedek-Wood, & Valasa, 2009). While some students may be able to critically analyze and draw conclusions from text and class activities, many others struggle to organize ideas into comprehensible written language. These struggling writers will continue to face challenges as they attempt to meet future educational and employment demands because their lack of writing skills limits their opportunity to articulate ideas and demonstrate learning (Mason, Benedek-Wood, & Valasa, 2009).

As educators, it is our responsibility to provide students with the proper tools that prepare them for the demands they will encounter with independent writing as they progress in their education. According to Anderson (2005) and Cruz (2004), teachers generally teach writing by beginning with a topic specific whole class mini-lesson (about ten to fifteen minutes). This is followed by independent writing time (about thirty to thirty-five minutes) with the teacher circulating around the room conferencing with as many students as he/she can. The lesson ends with a ten to fifteen minute share session of student work (Anderson, 2005; Cruz, 2004). Yet teachers may not be entirely certain of which skills they should teach or what kinds of writing conferences are beneficial to the students. Therefore, independent writing time may not be as productive as it could be,

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particularly for those students with weaker skills, as they may engage in avoidance behaviors to delay the writing process.

Statement of the Problem

Human beings write for various reasons which may include to communicate, to plan, to remember, to announce, to list, to imagine, or to capture an aspect of their life (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994). According to Calkins (1994), writing allows us to frame selected moments, and to uncover, organize, and celebrate our experiences. Writing is a powerful communication tool, yet it remains a challenge for some students. This struggle with written expression is observed personally in my current school district, particularly with learning-disabled students. Very often, as I walk into a special education language arts classroom, I observe that the students are generally engaged in their writing assignments, but there are always a few who are not actively working. This is a concern to me as a Learning Consultant, as the teachers are often unsure how to encourage independent writing. Teachers often ask in frustration, "What can I do to help these students? I just can't get them to write."

Teaching writing can be a challenge because writing involves a cluster of skills (sequencing, spelling, rereading, and supporting big ideas with examples) that often need to be used at the same time (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). This presents a challenge for the classroom teacher as he/she attempts to not only address the skills but also the varying functioning levels of the students in the classroom. My current district attempts to address these challenges through the implementation of a writing workshop approach.

A writing workshop approach focuses on the writer rather than the process that leads to the finished piece. One of the main goals of a writing workshop is for teachers to

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help students find good reasons to write (Ray & Laminack, 2001). This approach encourages student reflection, research, and exploration while supporting them with prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Ray & Laminack, 2001). A writing workshop creates an environment where students acquire these skills, along with fluency, confidence, and the desire to see themselves as writers, which is accomplished through allowing students "generative" time where they take charge of their work and through responsive teaching. (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). In other words, the teacher sets up the structure, allows for student choice, and starts them writing.

When attempting to teach writing skills, it is crucial for students to have frequent, predictable time set aside preferably three to four times a week (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Knowing writing has a scheduled time is helpful to students because it allows them to be prepared for discussions and gives them time to think about their writing piece between sessions (Anderson, 2005; Cruz, 2004; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Think time allows for students to have meaningful discussions with their peers or teacher which helps to refine their ideas. Students are more likely to be engaged in their writing when given choice in the purpose for writing, whether to document an important event in their lives or communicate a message that matters.

Ideally, one hour should be allotted for a writing lesson (Anderson, 2005; Cruz, 2004; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). A typical writing workshop starts with a brief ten to fifteen minute mini lesson, followed by thirty to thirty-five minutes of independent writing time. This leaves approximately fifteen minutes at the close of the lesson for share time. In my experience, the struggles of learning-disabled students are evidenced within the first ten minutes of independent writing in both the length and quality of their

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writing. Age and grade equivalent peers generally have produced at least a paragraph, while the learning-disabled students have a sentence or two at best. In an effort to understand the basis of this observation, my research was designed to explore specific instructional practices that encourage independence while writing for students identified with learning disabilities. Through observation of student time on task, evaluation of written output, and discussions about the act of writing with participants, I gained insight with reference to specific instructional practices used during writing workshop.

Broad Issue

On many national, state, and district standardized tests, writing is used to assess a range of academic skills including reading, mathematics, and science. Writing is described as a complex process as it involves letter formation, accurate and fluent spelling, sentence construction, and the ability to compose text structures with coherence and cohesion (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2008). It also involves planning, generating content, organizing the composition, and translating content into written language (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Reid & Ortiz Lienemann, 2006; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). If students are unable to accomplish these structural tasks effectively they may garner low scores on standardized and classroom tests. In 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that only 31% of students nationally scored at or above the proficient level in writing (The Nation's Report Card, 2007).

From this data, it is apparent that writing is an extremely challenging process for a significant number of students, which would be important for school districts to examine. Current literature addresses the skill of writing and its complexities, but there is limited

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research addressing those students identified with learning disabilities. Learning-disabled (LD) students experience problems with writing that are rooted in both cognitive and motivational factors (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). These students have trouble acquiring, utilizing, and managing strategies used by skilled writers (Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). Special needs students also tend to have lower self-esteem and more stress, which leads to the tendency in such learners to assume less responsibility for their learning, and therefore they experience higher academic frustration (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). Learning-disabled students need tailored instructional practices to encourage independent writing, and their teachers need to know which specific methods to implement in order to meet their individual needs.

Local Issue

Standardized math and science test scores reveal steady progress in Verity School, which is located in central New Jersey in a high performing suburban area. Recent trends, however, are not so favorable in the area of language arts. In this particular 4th-5th grade building that houses approximately 650 students, literacy, specifically written expression, has not shown the anticipated progress as evidenced by the language arts portion of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) and district administered Educational Records Bureau (ERB) writing test scores. In fact, approximately 15% of the general population (97 students) scored below proficient in the written expression portion of the NJ ASK in 2010, and approximately 38% of these students (total of 37) were those identified with learning disabilities (District Report Card, 2010). If a portion of the general population is not achieving the anticipated progress, the impact is further intensified for learning-disabled students due to the nature of their learning issues. This is

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then compounded by teacher frustration when attempting to engage learning-disabled students in independent writing.

Teachers in Verity School have been engaged in a district initiative focusing on writing workshop training for the past seven years by using a program developed by a well-known university. The district requires each staff member who teaches literacy to receive ongoing training. Teachers and administrators receive training during the summer and throughout the school year from the program developers at the university. In addition, weekly Professional Learning Committee (PLC) discussions center on the improvement of writing. In spite of all of this support, in 2009 the NJ ASK scores revealed that of the 548 upper elementary students, 70 were below proficient in the writing portion of the language arts assessment, and 27 of these 70 students were identified as special education (Performance Matters Data Base, 2010). While any student receiving below proficient scores is cause for concern, these numbers were an issue because it was approximately half of the special education student population. The total special education population was 56 students and 27 of these students were below proficient. With the extensive training the teachers had received, it was important to investigate the cause of this trend so that measures could be taken to address the problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my mixed methods case study was to explore specific instructional practices that encouraged independence in writing, increased time on task, and improved written output for fifth grade learning-disabled students serviced in a language arts replacement special education setting in a suburban public school. An embedded design was used to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data

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concurrently which enhanced the overall study design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Quantitative data embedded in the qualitative data provided a supporting role in the procedures when attempting to address the research questions (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative data addressed the expected outcomes while the qualitative data explored the processes experienced by the participants (Creswell. 2009). These multiple methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection in concurrent exploration were used to triangulate my case study, in an effort to increase validity and reliability (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006).

The qualitative research approach was utilized to gather data through student and teacher semi-structured open-ended audio-taped interviews prior to the start of the study and again at the close of the study. Field notes and analytic memos were recorded in a research journal then later coded to identify emerging themes and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Artifacts such as lesson plans, classroom conferring charts, and student work samples, were reviewed to provide additional data. Initial student behaviors were observed during independent writing, and avoidance behaviors were recorded then used to develop the quantitative data retrieval chart for each student pre and post instructional practice implementation. Behavioral changes were identified through comparative analysis relative to time on task and written output. The interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative data highlighted the successful instructional practices. As a result of the analysis and synthesis of my data, methods emerged that were more effective. These methods were provided to the teachers for reference when planning future writing lessons.

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Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this mixed methods case study was based on a blend of ideas and theories. My experiential knowledge and training gained from many years in public education, combined with existing research (Maxwell, 2005) that addressed improving the writing skills of students was the foundation. I began my career in education as a special education teacher and worked in a variety of classroom settings. In this capacity, I taught a range of subjects including writing. Inspired and intrigued while observing the learning process in students, I became a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant (LDTC). Currently employed as such, I diagnose learning disabilities, develop individualized programs for students, and support classroom teachers with program implementation. This position provides me with direct student contact in addition to the opportunity to provide professional development to teachers, both of which address the art and science of teaching and learning.

Vygotsky's (1934/1986) social constructivist model for learning supports my conceptual framework with reference to the acquisition of writing skills. Vygotsky postulated that social interaction is essential for students to learn (as cited in van Geert, 1998). A zone of proximal development exists while learning, which is the distance between the child's actual development and the child's potential development (van Geert, 1998). Actual development includes those tasks a child can complete independently while potential development involves guidance and interaction from the teacher or a more capable partner to accomplish a task.

Learning-disabled students often function in potential development and require guided support. Scaffolding a task is the starting point where the student internalizes

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instruction and transforms it to usable knowledge and skills. With mentor support and social interaction, students can grasp challenging concepts more readily than if they work alone which the instructional practices offer. Writing conferences, mentor text, and guided practice utilize modeling, guiding, and collaboration as a basis for providing teachers the opportunity to introduce content and scaffold information for each student according to their individual levels, skills, and needs.

My leadership style was also integrated into my conceptual framework. For this investigation, a democratic leadership approach was used to create buy-in from stakeholders (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004). I believe that stakeholders, including students, should have a voice in decisions made, and by asking for and listening to their perspective on writing, their opinions and insights were considered (Bondurant, Tappert, & Yettick, 2011). The rational choice model described by Pfeffer (1981) provides a way for the participant voices to be heard. The rational choice model presumes that there are goals and objectives in an organization, and alternatives to reaching these goals are achieved through a decision-making search process (Pfeffer, 1981). Once alternatives are identified, an assessment of probable outcomes produces options most likely to achieve the goals. Obtaining the opinions of the teachers and students about effective writing strategies, techniques, and tools allowed for this voice, and identified changes that were more likely to succeed (Bondurant, Tappert, & Yettick, 2011; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004).

This blended conceptual framework was the basis for my mixed methods case study, which empowered the individuals involved to identify the most effective instructional practices for increased time on task and improved writing output, which led

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to student success with independent writing. The more an individual feels empowered, the greater the chance for success according to March (1966). The instructional practices that were examined in this study were derived from the works of Anderson (2005), Calkins (1994), Cruz (2004), Miller (2008), and Ray and Laminack (2001) and included the use of mentor text, conferring, and guided practice. These specific instructional practices are often implemented when using a writer workshop approach which is currently a requirement of the district's writing curriculum. The use of an integrated approach in my study yielded rich data, provided a deeper understanding of the struggles encountered by learning-disabled writers, and offered evidence of specific strategies, techniques, and tools that improved the written expression of these students.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my case-study research as I interacted with and observed teacher and student participants in a language arts replacement special education setting regarding effective writing instructional practices.

1. Which instructional practices were perceived by teachers and students to be the most effective for increasing student success with independent writing in upper elementary learning-disabled students as measured by increased time on task and improved written output?

2. What was the impact of conferring on student success during independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

3. How did the use of mentor text to model specific writing strategies encourage student success with independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

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4. How did guided practice encourage student success with independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were derived from a combination of information discovered in the literature, my perspective based on many years professional training and experience, and the context of my study. They are clarified here to ensure understanding and to provide uniformity of terms throughout my study.

Learning-disabled. In general terms, learning-disabled students are those who have been identified with a learning difficulty through a Child Study Team evaluation and have been classified as eligible for special education services. As a result of their identification, each student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) written to address specific needs through goals and objectives and program design. Student participants fall in this general category and are described with specific information later in this study.

Special education classroom. A special education classroom may be defined as an in-class resource, replacement, or self-contained classroom. In an in-class resource classroom, the general education and special education teacher co-teach subjects. The total student population contains the average number of students (generally twenty-four) and up to eight of the twenty-four students are identified as having a learning disability. A replacement class is a single subject replacement class that services up to six students with one special education teacher. A self-contained class offers replacement instruction for each of the four core subjects. A special education teacher, often accompanied by an

instructional assistant, can service up to twelve students. IEP's for each student are followed in all of these settings.

Independent writing. Independent writing is classroom time allotted for the students to work individually on their writing piece. Students engage in independent writing practice once a mini-lesson has been taught using either mentor text, conferring, or guided practice.

Improved written output. Improved written output is an identifiable increase in quality and/or quantity of writing when samples are assessed for sentence structure and supporting details using the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) rubric designed for grades 3-12.

Time on task. Time on task is the time a student has eyes on the paper and is actively engaged in writing or interacting with the teacher in a writing related discussion. It is not daydreaming, staring off, doodling, head on desk, or any other behavior that impedes attention to the task.

Avoidance behaviors. Avoidance behaviors include any behavior that prevents a child from completing an assignment. They include but are not limited to fidgeting with an object, looking around the room, and leaving the classroom.

Mentor text. Mentor text is the use of model text to demonstrate specific skills or strategies (Calkins, 1994).

Conferring. Conferring refers to conferencing with a student on their independent writing piece in a way that addresses specific strengths and weaknesses, suggests ways to improve the work, and then brings about further writing (Calkins, 1994; Ray & Laminack, 2001).

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Guided practice. With guided practice, the teacher poses questions and encourages discussions that gradually lead the student from familiar examples to a new understanding.

Significance of the Research

Existing research has explored the struggles of learning-disabled writers, but few studies have attempted to identify specific instructional practices that foster success with independence in writing for these struggling learners. Teachers, students, and administrators may benefit from this study because it can clarify which instructional practices are helpful in fostering success with independent writing. Teachers may feel more confident implementing well-researched methods. Administrators may be more comfortable knowing their teachers are using best practices. Most importantly, students will benefit from the expert teaching.

By exploring the most effective writing instructional practices, teachers may gain a clearer understanding of the essential components of the writing process which could lead to the refinement of their skills when teaching writing. Teachers must fully grasp the techniques of each instructional practice before they can communicate the writing process effectively to their students and then subsequently guide them through the steps. A better understanding of effective teaching methods could enable the educators to respond appropriately when their students begin to call out the dreaded words, "I'm done!" within minutes of starting a writing piece.

My study may also have significance for educators as it falls in the realm of periodic assessment of independent writing through conferring. Good writing teachers assess student writers every day (Anderson, 2005). Assessment can support teachers in

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learning about their students as writers as they gather information not only in the written work but also while observing the student during a writing activity. Assessment can be a highly effective tool that helps teachers target specific skill areas that need additional instruction which could be dealt with in a group mini-lesson or during individual writing conference (Anderson, 2005). This study highlighted the importance of periodic assessment to increase independent writing skills through conferring.

In addition, my study may have significance due to its potential influence on educational policy as it may impact the way teachers are prepared to teach writing while taking their college courses. In 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported only 31% of students nationally scored at or above the proficient level in writing (The Nation's Report Card, 2007). Though there may not be a direct link, this information should be examined by policy makers as well as those colleges that design teacher preparation programs. Colleges may need to take a closer look at the curriculum that prepares their teachers to teach writing. New teachers may also require additional support once they obtain a job, whether through mentoring or ongoing professional development, to refine the art of teaching writing so that they will be confident with the implementation of specific instructional practices.

My study could provide invaluable information to teachers, administrators, and policy makers but most importantly, it could benefit students because they would be exposed to instructional practices that have the potential to produce strong results. If reluctant writers are taught specific methods that improve written output during independent writing, they could acquire skills that would help them meet success as they progress in their education and beyond. As this is such a critical topic of research, it

would be important to further explore which instructional practices are most effective for increasing student success toward independence when writing in the general education population. Comparative research of the various instructional strategies, techniques, and tools to encourage independent writing with classified versus non-classified students is also necessary.

Limitations of the Study

The main limiting aspect in my case study included the selection criteria I used for the student participants. I identified three student subjects in my research who were selected by specific criteria. Criteria included the identification of a learning disability through special education classification, partially proficient (below 200) scores on the language arts portion of the NJ ASK, scores below the building norm (21.5/36) on the ERB writing test, and confirmation from the teachers that independent writing was difficult for each student. While case-study research allows for a limited number of participants, results may have varied if the sample population was different or an alternate research approach was used. Due to the in-depth study of the instructional practices, and the nature of case-study research, my population needed to remain small and narrow.

A limiting factor may also include the exposure to teaching methods other than those investigated in this study that may have impacted the quality of student writing. During the five months of data collection, the special education teacher demonstrated each instructional practice twice for the purposes of the independent writing observation. In between these observations, however, she had the opportunity to instruct the students with various other approaches as she deemed necessary. In addition, the related services

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the student participants received within this time frame, such as speech and language services, may have also impacted the results as there may have been an emphasis on vocabulary development.

Another limitation of my study may include the subjects' responses to the interview questions and observations of classroom behaviors. The potential exists that the student and teacher participants did not communicate honestly about the issues with writing because they did not want to appear less capable. Teachers and students also may not have behaved in the same way during the classroom observation due to my presence in the room. Frequent non-study related observations were conducted to establish a sense of trust between this researcher and the participants, and normalize my presence in the classroom.

A final limitation may include the weight of evidence and priority of the qualitative and quantitative data represented during the interpretation of the information. Each data type represented a unit during the analysis with the assumption that one piece of evidence was not more significant than another. Another researcher may have felt the participant interviews carried more significance than the rubric scores or behavioral observations or vice versa.

Organization of the Dissertation

This research is organized into five chapters with references attached. Chapter One begins with a statement of the problem, which includes the broad and local issues that are involved in my study. The purpose of the study is also discussed along with the conceptual framework used to view this issue. Research questions, definition of terms,

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the significance of the research, and the limitations of the study are described. This chapter closes with a brief summary of the organization of the dissertation.

The literature review in Chapter Two addresses research that has already been conducted in my area of interest, and validates the relevancy of my study. It also highlights the gaps in the current literature, which supports the significance of my research. Time on task, motivation, independent writing, and obstacles to writing are explored. Strategies, techniques, and tools that encourage independent writing are discussed. Learning-disabled writers are examined through current research, and implications of classroom practice are addressed. Conclusions are drawn from the information uncovered in this literature review.

In Chapter Three, I present my research design using a mixed methods case-study approach. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, data analysis and the coding system are described, along with my rationale and assumptions for the study design. Sampling methods and the interview and data collection tools are also discussed in this chapter. Finally, the study participants are presented and described.

Chapter Four provides the data description and the data analysis methods used. The research questions are addressed through cross-case analysis followed by individual student analysis. Emergent themes are identified from the data, and the findings were addressed in connection to the literature. Finally, the limitations of the study, personal biases, and conceptual framework are addressed.

Chapter Five addresses my perspective on the importance of this research, the social justice issue related to special needs students, and the impact on the educational system. I will also discuss my leadership, implementing change in an organization, and

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implications for the future through the lens of transformative leadership and second order

change.

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<center>**Chapter 2**
Literature Review</center>

The purpose of this case-study research was to examine which instructional practices increase student success during independent writing. This literature review focused on the existing body of information related to the research questions as a basis for support in the significance of this study and helped establish the research questions. Increased time on task during independent writing and improved written output are the underlying desired behaviors, therefore an exploration of specific instructional practices that foster motivation and success for the general population as well as the learning-disabled population are presented. Information relating to conferring, mentor text, and guided practice was also examined for foundational purposes. The existing body of research was additionally explored to ascertain possible classroom implications by examining learning outcomes for students, and effective instructional practices that may be used for teacher implementation. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of this literature review and supports the need for this study.

Time on Task and Motivation

To understand the underlying behavior of remaining on task, motivation must first be addressed. The relationships between motivation and school-related outcomes, such as sustained academic performance, have been historically and routinely established in the literature (Walls & Little, 2005; Wieth & Burns, 2006). Motivation, in its simplest form can be described as something that causes a person to act. Historically, it has been described as a process that involves arousing, directing, and sustaining behavior (Kozeki & Entwistle, 1983; Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallieres, 1992). Motivation is related to various outcomes such as curiosity, persistence, learning, and

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performance, particularly with complex problem solving tasks (Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996; Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallieres, 1992). Motivation is what keeps an individual engaged and inspired.

Motivation is thought to be one of the most important aspects of human behavior and has been extensively studied in education and other contexts (Barkoukis, Tsorbatzoudis, Grouios, & Sideridis, 2008). With the basic understanding of what motivation is, we can begin to understand its importance in instructional practice. Motivation is not a stable characteristic as it depends on the situation, domain and context (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). Learning-disabled students are often characterized as unmotivated because they cannot sustain attention to a task until its completion, particularly with a writing task, because of the complexity of skills required (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). Completing a writing task involves processes that interplay among the cognitive, metacognitive, and emotional domains, where performance is affected by individual differences in both intellect and personality (Feifer, DeFina, Lang, Holland, & Coughlin, 2002; Garcia & de Caso, 2004). This offers hope for educators as it suggests that if we modify our approach for struggling learners, we can enhance student motivation, increase time on task, and improve academic achievement.

Achievement-based rewards such as task completion and verbal praise can promote motivation for the specific task and enhance general interest in the activity (Cameron, Pierce, Banko, & Gear, 2005; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). This implies that if students are rewarded for successfully solving a particular type of problem or accomplishing a challenging task such as completing a writing piece, students' motivation to engage in similar activities will be enhanced. Conversely, in a classroom

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setting where teachers evaluate students and students compare themselves to others, this potentially decreases motivation based on the students' assessment of their own ability, therefore making perceived competence a significant factor.

Verbal praise is one way to ensure that students feel recognized for their own accomplishments. Verbal praise can enhance motivation and increase time on task according to research (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Rakoczy, Klieme, Burgermeister, & Harks, 2008). Verbal praise refers to positive evaluations made by a person of another's performance or attributes, and goes beyond simple acknowledgment and feedback (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). Verbal praise enhances motivation and increases perseverance with tasks when it is perceived as sincere, encourages adaptive performance, promotes autonomy, provides positive information about personal competence, and conveys standards and expectations that are realistic (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). Verbal praise is essential in increasing motivation in learning-disabled students, particularly when attempting to accomplish a task the student finds challenging, such as writing independently.

Independent Writing

Due to the recent focus in education on writing through the curriculum, the skill of writing has gained importance as it contributes significantly to general academic success (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). The expression of student learning and knowledge is often demonstrated by writing skills. Students use writing to share information and communicate ideas (Lane, Harris, Graham, Weisenbach, Brindle, & Morphy, 2008). More importantly, it can be used as a means for self-expression. As such, encouraging independent writing skills and providing time for independent writing is essential for

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student writers to grow. Independent writing is a time when students are on their own and do not engage with anyone else while working. Students are not told step by step what to do, but they are provided with enough information to get started on their writing piece (Ray & Laminack, 2001).

The basic skills that are needed to successfully engage in independent writing include three basic steps (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). The first step involves planning the writing piece. The teacher should expose students to some type of concrete aid for planning purposes, whether it is prompt cards or graphic organizers, to serve as a guide to students as they begin to write (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). The second step involves the writing were students expand the information from the planning step in to a written piece. In the revision step, the teacher guides students to edit their work through questions, discussion, and conferencing.

Writing is an invaluable skill but it is also challenging for students and teachers alike. The first challenge for teachers is to help students understand the reason behind independent writing time. If this idea is presented in a manner that emphasizes writing as a project, students will be more likely to understand that they need to develop a writing plan, or their purpose of the writing (Ray & Laminack, 2001). The next challenge for teachers is to help students understand the range of activities that they can choose from to help them with their writing projects. This helps students fill the blocks of time allotted to independent writing.

Obstacles to Independent Writing

According to Feifer, DeFina, Lang, Holland, & Coughlin, (2002) although many students acknowledge the importance of writing and its direct relationship to school

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success, the thought of writing evokes negative reactions, such as anxiety, dread, and avoidance. The transformation of thought into written communication is a challenging activity that requires various levels of complementary skills (Scott & Vitale, 2003). Writing requires the integration of prior knowledge, the application of rules, and the organization of thoughts, in addition to the physical act of producing words on paper (Feifer, DeFina, Lang, Holland, & Coughlin, 2002; Scott & Vitale, 2003). Students may not have the proper tools for producing a writing piece or the understanding of what makes a good writing piece.

A growing body of evidence suggests that motivated writers use a variety of approaches and strategies that are dependent on their purpose (Calkins, 1994; Cruz, 2004, Feifer et al., 2002; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Skilled writing is a complex problem-solving act that involves memory, planning, text generation, and revision, and motivation toward writing assumes a prominent status (Feifer et al., 2002). A skilled writing teacher must provide students with the knowledge associated with producing quality writing, in addition to supporting them with developing the underlying motivation to do so.

Encouraging Independence When Writing

Independence when writing is one of the most valuable skills we can teach our students. Writing is one of the few areas that students can have complete control in a school day to freely express themselves (Cruz, 2004). Writing can be a struggle for many students, particularly when they must do so independently. Therefore it is up to the teacher to provide a variety of approaches that will encourage this task. Conferring, the use of mentor text as a model, and guided practice are instructional practices that can potentially encourage independent writing and increase on task time while composing.

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Conferring

Conferring can be challenging, but it can also be exciting. Conferring starts with the mindset shift of thinking of writing as a dialogue between writers and their emerging texts. This entails a shift from being writers to being readers of an individual's own draft by asking questions about the draft (Calkins, 1994). Then in a direct but conversational way, the teacher attempts to teach the student something that could improve the writing piece (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005; Ray & Laminack, 2001). The important aspect of conferring is talking to students about their writing. An average conference lasts between two to seven minutes (Anderson, 2005; Ray & Laminack, 2001). This helps students with the perception that writing should be a dialogue between the writer and the emerging text, and that writers are readers of their own drafts (Calkins, 1994; Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005; Ray & Laminack, 2001).

According to Lucy Calkins (2006) conferring is done on an individual basis and has a predictable structure to follow with four basic phases. In the research phase, the teacher sits beside each student to find out what he or she is in the midst of, what he or she intends to do next, reads the section the student is working on, and gleans the student's general feeling toward the piece (Calkins, 2006). A typical question might be, "What are you working on as a writer?" If this is difficult for the student to answer, it may be turned into multiple choices (Calkins, 2006). More specifically, a student could be asked, "Are you trying to make sure your character is coming to life, or are you working on writing with details?"

The next phase involves decision making which often happens simultaneously with the research phase (Calkins, 2006). In this phase, the teacher decides what to

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compliment and what to teach. The teacher learns the writer's intentions in order to support and extend what the writer is already trying to do and then equips the writer with more strategies for achieving his or her intentions. Working toward independence and growth, it is important for the teacher teach within the writer's reach so that what is learned can be applied to a future writing piece.

The compliment phase focuses on a particular part of the writing that the student has done well with which the teacher can acknowledge. For example, if a student has added an animal sound such as "meow" for a cat, the compliment should include the use of the skill. The teacher might say, "I love that you added the detail of the animal sound in your writing. This could help the reader create movies in their minds of exactly what happened. Whenever you write, you might want to add details like these." A compliment of this nature allows the student to identify the skill and apply it again in a future writing piece (Calkins, 2006).

The final phase is the teaching phase and is similar to a mini-lesson (Calkins, 2006). The goal is to teach the student something they can apply to a future piece. The teacher might say, "If you are interested, I can give you one more tip that might help you with this piece as well as ones you may write in the future. Once I finish a piece, I reread the story in parts. After each part I ask myself if the information supports my topic sentence. If it is no, I rework the section, and if it is yes, I go on to the next part and ask the same question." The message the teacher should gently communicate it that sometimes we need to revise the revisions (Calkins, 2006).

Conferring is more than troubleshooting specific problems when students raise their hands to seek help and the teacher attempts to address questions. Though helping

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students is useful, teaching students is far more worthwhile (Calkins, 1994; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Conferring involves record keeping as the teacher tracks which students had conferences and on what topic (Ray & Laminack, 2001). This information also supports the development of mini-lessons for the class as the teacher has a pulse on the learning needs in the classroom.

Mentor Text

Modeling writing through the use of mentor text can be an important writing tool to motivate students with independent writing as it helps to establish the reading-writing connection which can be particularly effective for those students who cannot make the connection on their own (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). It fosters the student's ability to learn from another writer that moves beyond the confines of the classroom (Cruz, 2004; Friese, 2010). With mentor text an area of focus is read, and then reread, with specific questions in mind about a particular style or technique used. Thoughts such as "what makes this sentence so strong?" or "why did this title catch my eye?" guide the reader while looking at the model and their own writing.

For example, the teacher may demonstrate how an author passes time in a story because the reader does not need to know what happened every minute. Time does not have to move at the same pace. Important parts can be slowed down and other parts can be sped up by bypassing details (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). This can be done in a simple sentence by using words such as 'later that day' or 'every day for the next few months'. When the teacher uses the mentor text as a model, he or she may ask each student to attend to how time is moving in his or her story.

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Once the students are familiar with a variety of mentor texts and are skilled at identifying a particular method they would like to use, learning how to choose a mentor text should be taught as a mini lesson. It may begin with the teacher selecting an author to read to and discuss with the class. The teacher reads the book again (and often again) and highlights specific sentences or passages and talks about what makes them intriguing (Cruz, 2004). Observations and theories about the writer can be charted, and then the students are asked to write using one technique that the writer used. Once students have attempted a technique, they may discuss their selection with a classmate or simply begin to write. It is important for the teacher to have a variety of texts available for students to peruse so that when they are asked to write, they can select their own author based on the skill they are attempting (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Friese, 2010).

This choice builds independence and supports the development of a positive image so students may see themselves as writers and be more motivated to write (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). Choice can have a positive effect on motivation and the related outcomes of effort, task achievement, perceived competence, and preference for challenge (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). In the classroom, choices should not be a laborious decision on the part of the student (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Watts Jr., Cashwell, & Schweiger, 2004). There should be enough variety of choices but not to the point of overwhelm, and the choices should be relevant to task completion. Mentor texts as models provides choice for students as they can select those parts of an author's style that appeals to them the most.

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Guided Practice

  Guided practice is a technique that guides students to an understanding of a concept through discussion and questions asked (Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005; Dean & Grierson, 2005; Ray & Laminack, 2001). The discussion and questions activate prior knowledge and encourage unique thinking about themes, which leads the students to more subtle aspects of learning. In essence, it is a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction from the teacher to the student (Miller, 2008). Once the teacher introduces the skill in the lesson, guided practice begins. The teacher engages the students in a focused discussion and practices with students while scaffolding information (Calkins, 2006).

  For example, the teacher may support students working on sequencing on a story by asking questions such as, "What did you do first? Exactly what did you say and do?" Students may then practice with the teacher or each other, and share their thinking and learning. The teacher supports and encourages the efforts of students with this scaffolding information, which prepares them for independent practice by encouraging them to keep the story rolling (Calkins, 2006). Providing students the opportunity to practice in a supportive context allows the teacher to understand what they are thinking and discover where students are in the learning process (Miller, 2008).

Learning-disabled Writers

  The basic structures of writing development are challenging for teachers and the general population of students. This is intensified for those students that have been identified as having learning difficulties especially those educated in a setting where they have their typical developing peers to observe and then compete with (Saddler &

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Graham, 2007; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). According to Stotz, Itoi, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan (2008) students identified as having learning difficulties struggle with three writing goals. These include basic writing ability and fluency, the ability to recognize oneself as a presenter of information, and organizing strategies. Due to these challenges, students with learning difficulties tend to write shorter, less polished pieces. These problems with writing are often rooted in cognitive and motivational factors (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). Students with learning difficulties have lower self-esteem, lower self-efficacy, more stress, and tend to assume less responsibility for their academic learning (Garcia & de Caso, 2004; Saddler & Graham, 2007).

The ability to express thoughts through written language is closely related to the ability to communicate orally as literacy development has its roots in oral language development (National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities, 2008; Reid & Ortiz-Lienemann, 2006). Students with learning difficulties often have deficits that become more pronounced as demands increase in areas such as vocabulary, content specific knowledge, organization and retrieval of semantic information, and syntax with basic, complex, and higher order processing (National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities, 2008; Reid & Ortiz-Lienemann, 2006). As a consequence of these challenges, students with learning difficulties struggle to maintain a positive attitude and sufficient motivation and persistence to meet educational expectations when attempting a writing task.

As discussed earlier in this literature review, motivation is a complex and intriguing phenomenon that has a significant impact on students' writing performance in the classroom (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). Teachers should become aware of its

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complexities so that when they encounter students who present with low motivation toward a writing task, they can look in depth at the problem before they attempt to provide a superficial solution. So often teachers look at an unmotivated child, one who does not show interest in a task to sustain attention until completion, and provide a quick fix to get the assignment done rather than explore the underlying obstacles the child encounters. Instructional practice must be viewed with a critical eye to determine if the existing classroom practices hinder or foster the development of motivation, particularly for those learning-disabled students (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Garcia & de Caso, 2004; Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard, 2000).

Students, in general, can find independent writing challenging. When a student is learning-disabled, independent writing can become significantly more difficult. Written output is comparatively less than their general education peers (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Garcia & de Caso, 2004; Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard, 2000). Learning-disabled students present a unique situation for teachers. These students bring a wide variety of academic, social, and psychological needs which must be addressed in the context of the larger setting (Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard, 2000). Their teachers must rely on strategies that fall into three main classifications, which include teacher-directed, peer-mediated, or self-directed (Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard, 2000).

Research Related to Writing

A number of teacher-directed or peer-mediated investigations have been performed. Miller and Lignugaris-Kraft (2002) examined the performance of three learning-disabled students who were taught specific skills that highlighted critical components of text structures. They looked at opening sentences, detail sentences, and

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key words in four expository text structures. The results of this study indicated improvement in these areas in addition to skill transfer to content writing, however, sentence structure remained weak (Miller & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2002). Englert, Raphael, and Anderson (1992) conducted a peer-mediated study that involved thirty-two learning-disabled and non-disabled students at the upper elementary level. One group of students engaged in peer discussions about writing while the other group did not. Results showed that all students who participated in the peer discussion group revealed more metacognitive knowledge about writing, and were better able to talk about planning, drafting, revising, and the focus of their writing (Englert, Raphael, & Anderson, 1992). This study has significance as it demonstrated the impact of 'talk writing' which allowed students to see themselves as members of the writing community and their writing reflected the voice of a skilled writer (Englert, Raphael, & Anderson, 1992).

A study conducted by Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard (2000) focused on a self-directed strategy using self-monitoring. In this study, the researchers observed four learning-disabled elementary school males as they used a self-monitoring approach in their resource room setting. These students were identified by their classroom teacher as having the skills and abilities to complete their work but did not sustain attention to task long enough to complete an independent writing piece. All students in the classroom received self-monitoring instruction, however, attention to task and written output was only recorded for these four boys. Results of the study found that time on task and written output increased when the students monitored their own behaviors (Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard, 2000).

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A similar study conducted by Lane, Harris, Graham, Weisenbach, Brindle, and Morphy (2008) examined the effects of self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) on writing performance of second grade behavioral and learning-disabled students. The SRSD model was designed to improve students' strategic behavior, knowledge, and motivation by addressing three main goals (Lane et. al., 2008). Students first learn to carry out specific processes such as planning and drafting. They then develop self-regulatory skills, such as goal setting, which they apply to writing strategies while they self-monitor. SRSD is designed to enhance motivation and effort toward tasks. This study supported the effectiveness of SRSD as evidenced by increased written output by the subjects (Lane et. al., 2008).

Several other studies focused on increasing writing ability through self-regulated strategy development for elementary school aged learning-disabled students (Ortiz Lienemann, Graham, Leader-Janssen, & Reid, 2006; Reid & Ortiz Lienemann, 2006; Saddler 2006; Saddler & Asaro, 2007; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). The number of subjects varied from three to six students. Each of these studies found that the use of SRSD had a positive impact on student writing, and described stories as longer, more complete, and qualitatively better with improvements that sustained over time (Ortiz Lienemann, Graham, Leader-Janssen, & Reid, 2006; Reid & Ortiz Lienemann, 2006; Saddler 2006; Saddler & Asaro, 2007). This is important information for educators to assimilate into their teaching practices as it addresses the motivational aspect of writing while teaching self-monitoring skills, however, these studies do not explore additional strategies, techniques, and tools that may also be beneficial in fostering student success during independent writing.

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A multiple-case study conducted by Bayraktar (2009) focused on the nature of scheduled teacher-student writing conferences with confident and less confident fifth grade students. This investigation found that after a semester of observing two teachers use writing conferences in their classroom, their students' saw themselves as improved writers primarily because the teacher shared authority and the decision making process with the students (Bayraktar, 2009). These signs of confidence toward writing were determined through student self-reflections, their active engagement in writing conferences, and their observed willingness to engage in independent writing tasks immediately following the writing conference (Bayraktar, 2009). While this study offered valuable insights into the benefits of teacher-student conferences, it did not, however, go beyond the exploration of these writing conferences.

Lanza (2009) explored the impact of scaffolded lessons on the writing of third grade students using a non-equivalent control group design over a period of four months. These scaffolded lessons used the framework of guided practice to teach the aspects of author's craft (visual craft techniques, word choice, sentence variety, and elaboration) multiple times during this time period. The results of this study found that struggling students who found the lessons helpful made significant gains in writing (Lanza, 2009). The findings of this study speak to the need for a flexible, scaffolded approach to teaching writing. The researcher points out, however, that further investigation is needed in reference to examining additional writing strategies and techniques that improve writing instruction (Lanza, 2009).

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Implications for Classroom Practice

In order to teach writing effectively, the classroom teacher must rely on the production of the students' work to determine the curriculum. Curriculum guides do not know the students, teachers do. A typical writing lesson may look like many other lessons. The teacher stands in front of the room to teach a skill, then the students work on that skill independently. What is different about teaching writing is the preparation. A quality writing program should start with a writing sample that will be used for an assessment of student work on a given skill (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Cruz, 2004; Ray & Laminack, 2001). The assessment can be narrowed to a specific skill, such as sentence structure or paragraph cohesiveness.

The writing sample can be used as a pre-assessment to help guide instruction for the individual writers, and then a similar prompt can be given as a post-teaching assessment of the mini-lesson strategy to determine if the students have acquired the desired skill. Some form of data collection is also necessary as the skill and the student's mastery of the skill should be documented. In addition, the student's response to specific strategies, techniques, and tools, such as conferring, mentor text, and guided practice should be recorded as this will assist the classroom teacher in refining the writing program for the student.

Most importantly, writing should be taught as a skill, not as a topic (Calkins, 1994; Cruz, 2004; Ray & Laminack, 2001). This can present a challenge to the classroom teacher as they would question how does one teach skills and document at the same time, particularly for twenty-four students? It comes down to careful planning. If the focus of the lesson is on descriptive writing, the students should first engage in a mini-lesson

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about sensory writing then practice implementing the skill by attempting descriptive writing (Ray & Laminack, 2001).

When students are asked to do independent writing, choice should be allowed. For example, students should be asked to describe any place in the world rather than being asked to describe a specific place, such as their bedroom. The application of the sensory writing skills is the focus of the writing, not the place written about. The element of choice will also foster motivation, thus increasing active engagement in the task (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Teachers then can look for evidence that students are making use of the skill by nudging them during the writing conferences to try to get them to think about the strategies discussed in the mini lesson (Bayraktar, 2009: Ray & Laminack, 2001). Teachers can also ask students to highlight the skills taught during the lesson as evidence of understanding. If a teacher stays focused on teaching students how to write rather than what to write, students will achieve more success because ultimately, while the teacher can decide what will be taught only the students can decide what will be learned (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Conclusion

The importance of independent writing is well-established in the literature. The motivation to remain on task until completion is a challenge for many students while writing independently, particularly those with identified learning disabilities. As a consequence to this struggle, written output is often limited compared to non-disabled peers. As educators, we must identify specific strategies, techniques, and tools that foster student success when writing independently.

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The focus of this research was to identify which specific instructional practices foster motivation during independent writing as measured by increased time on task and improved written output. Studies support this researcher's belief that motivation combines additively to affect overall completion of tasks and is causally connected to academic performance (Cameron, Pierce, Banko, & Gear, 2005). The increased focus in education on writing through the curriculum and using writing as an assessment has caused the skill of writing to gain significance as it contributes to academic success (Garcia & de Caso, 2004; Walls & Little, 2005).

The specific skills needed to write independently, and the obstacles that teachers and students face when attempting this task supports the notion that writing is a complex problem solving activity that involves memory, planning, composing, and revision (Feifer et al., 2002). Various instructional practices that improve time on task and written output during independent writing were investigated. The results of this exploration yielded a limited number of studies that looked at teacher-directed, peer-mediated, and self-directed strategies for improving writing (Englert, Raphael, & Anderson, 1992; Lane et al., 2008; Miller & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2002; Ortiz Lienemann et al., 2006; Reid & Ortiz Lienemann, 2006; Saddler, 2006; Saddler & Asaro, 2007; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007; Wolfe, Heron, & Goddard, 2000). In spite of this research, little information was uncovered relative to the strategies, tools, and techniques of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice, which was the focus of this study.

Implications for classroom practice was also addressed as research shows classroom teachers are in need of support when encouraging a struggling learner to write independently (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Cruz, 2004; Lanza, 2009; Ray &

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Laminack, 2001). Ultimately, the teaching of writing should revolve around strategies, techniques, and tools, and the understanding that writing does not need to be connected to specific topics (Ray & Laminack, 2001). Record keeping on the part of the teacher is essential as it helps to inform instruction and demonstrates skill acquisition on the part of the student. To complement the existing body of research, this research offers valuable information relative to identifying which instructional practices foster motivation and success during independent writing for the struggling learner. There is a need for this investigation as it helps alleviate the challenges teachers and learning-disabled students face when engaging in independent writing.

Chapter 3
Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my mixed methods case study was to explore specific

instructional practices that encouraged independent writing for fifth-grade learning-

disabled students serviced in a language arts replacement special education setting in a

suburban public school. The specific instructional practices of conferring, guided

practice, and mentor text were utilized as teaching methods. Concurrent exploration in an

embedded design (Creswell, 2009) examined the challenges, motivation, and preferences

of three student subjects using qualitative and quantitative data. The impact on

independent writing was measured by increased time on task and improved written

output.

Qualitative data provided insight into the teacher and student perceptions of each

teaching method through audio taped semi-structured open-ended interviews and field

notes gathered during classroom observations. Material culture and artifacts, which

included lesson plans and classroom conferring charts, were also reviewed as this

contextual information helped to enrich the data (Hodder, 2002). Student work samples

were collected and assessed using the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) grades 3-12

writing scoring rubric to determine if an increase in written output occurred. Written

output was assessed by examining changes in sentence structure and essay content

through the use of supporting details as these two areas provide a strong foundation for a

solid writing piece.

Used in its entirety, the ERB rubric (See Appendix A) assesses six areas of a

writing piece and includes overall development, organization, support, sentence structure,

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word choice, and mechanics. Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest) with 4 reflecting an average score. The quantity and quality of a writing piece are addressed through scoring with the higher numbers indicating enhanced information to review, while lower numbers reflect omission of important or relevant details.

Quantitative data was collected through data retrieval charts that were developed based on avoidance behaviors observed during the initial classroom observations. These charts recorded individual students' time on task and the behaviors they engaged in during independent writing upon the completion of the conferring, guided practice, and mentor text teaching methods. The scores obtained from each writing sample were also evaluated quantitatively to demonstrate if notable changes had occurred when exposed to each of the instructional practices.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my case-study research as I interacted with and observed teacher and student participants in a Language Arts pull-out replacement special education setting regarding effective writing instructional practices.

1. Which instructional practices were perceived by teachers and students to be the most effective for increasing student success with independent writing in upper elementary learning-disabled students as measured by increased time on task and improved written output?

2. What was the impact of conferring on student success during independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

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3. How did the use of mentor text to model specific writing strategies encourage

student success with independent writing as measured by time on task and

improved written output?

4. How did guided practice encourage student success with independent writing as

measured by time on task and improved written output?

Rationale and Assumptions

I selected a mixed methods approach for this embedded exploratory case study

because it combined qualitative and quantitative forms of concurrent data collection used

in tandem to add rigor to the study (Creswell, 2009). Mixed methods research provided a

means of balancing information holistically and empirically to develop a more accurate

description of a phenomenon. It also provided a means of examining and associating data

in a way that could not be attained by the single source of qualitative or quantitative, and

ultimately brought strength to the study design.

Quantitative data embedded in the qualitative data provided a supporting role in

the procedures (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative data addressed the expected outcomes

while the qualitative data explored the processes experienced by the participants

(Creswell. 2009). Qualitative data was collected through student and teacher semi-

structured open-ended audio-taped interviews prior to the start of the study and again at

the close of the study. Field notes and analytic memos were recorded in a research journal

then later coded to support emerging themes and patterns gleaned from the participants'

perceptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Artifacts such as lesson plans, classroom

conferring charts, and student work samples, were reviewed to provide additional data.

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An initial observation of student behaviors was conducted during independent writing to determine if avoidance behaviors occurred. These avoidance behaviors were recorded and used to develop a quantitative data retrieval chart for each student post-instructional practice implementation. Behavioral changes were identified through comparative analysis relative to time on task and written output. The interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative data highlighted the impact of each instructional practice.

A case-study approach was used as the literature indicated this as the preferred manner for studying methods and interventions as it investigates an occurrence within a real life context and uses multiple sources of evidence to explain the phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Toma, 2006; Winter, 1986; Yin, 2009). A case study is an in-depth examination of an individual or a small group of participants that are considered to be representative of the general population (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 1995; Winter, 1986; Yin, 2009). My study utilized a representative sample of the general population of learning-disabled students in my school to explore the effects of specific instructional strategies on independent writing.

There were advantages to using a concurrent exploratory embedded design for this case study. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) suggest that a concurrent embedded approach offers a multilevel design. It allows the researcher to collect two types of data simultaneously, during a single data collection phase (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). By using different methods, I gained meaning from the diverse data within the levels of the study (Creswell, 2009). There were challenges to this design. First, it was challenging to integrate the different types of data in the analysis phase, particularly when comparisons were made between students. Discrepancies also arose between

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teacher and student data sets which needed to be resolved (Creswell, 2009). In addition, because the two methods were unequal in their priority, the information resulted in unequal evidence within the study (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009) unequal in priority equates to qualitative and quantitative data used in tandem rather than one having more significance than the other. The unequal evidence created challenges when interpreting the final results as it was difficult to determine the weight of each in the data analysis.

Motivation, as measured by time on task (Kozeki & Entwistle, 1983; Walls & Little, 2005) toward independent writing was a difficult behavior to evaluate and required numerous approaches to ensure the research was reliable. Motivation is described in the literature as something that causes a person to act, sustain performance, and persist with a learning task (Walls & Little, 2005; Wieth & Burns, 2006). An assumption of my research was that motivation toward independent writing was a factor in the low performance of learning-disabled students. According to Garcia and de Caso (2004), students with learning disabilities experience problems in writing that are rooted in motivational factors. I also assumed that motivation could be measured by time on task as literature supports this notion (Cameron, Pierce, Banko, & Gear, 2005; Wieth & Burns, 2006).

Participants and Sampling Methods

The participants for my mixed methods case study included three learning-disabled fifth grade students who currently attend a suburban public school in Meadow County, which is located in central New Jersey. The study site currently houses approximately 650 students, with a classified population of approximately 8%. In class

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resource, pull-out replacement, and language/learning-disabled programs are offered in a variety of subject areas, including language arts.

Criteria for selection included students who were indentified with a learning disability through a Child Study Team evaluation conducted within the last three years and were determined to be eligible for special education services. Primary instruction was delivered in special education setting for language arts by a certified Teacher of the Handicapped in a replacement setting. Student participants had obtained partially proficient scores on the Language Arts portion of the 2011 NJ ASK standardized test, with deficit scores on writing task 1, 2 or both. Student participants also achieved ERB writing scores below the building norm (21.5/36). The ERB rubric assesses a prescribed writing piece in six areas: overall development, organization, support, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics (See Appendix A). For the purposes of this study, support and sentence structure were the areas of focus as these areas are the foundations to good writing.

Once student participants were identified, parental consent (see Appendix B) was obtained. Classroom observations were then conducted to identify each individual's avoidance behaviors while engaged in independent writing. This selection process used a purposeful single-stage sampling procedure (Creswell, 2009) as learning-disabled students who experienced the phenomenon of struggling with independent writing were intentionally selected. The stratification of this population (Creswell, 2006) was a representative sample of fifth grade learning-disabled students in the building who struggled with independent writing.

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Two teachers consented to participate in this study (see Appendix C). Student participants received their language arts instruction in a pull-out replacement setting as outlined in their IEP's, therefore the certified special education teacher was the primary adult participant. The general education teacher who agreed to participate had contact with student participants in a least one core subject area. In this case, the teacher delivered instruction to the student participants in the general education classroom for science and social studies, and in one student's case, math. Writing was incorporated into each curriculum. Teacher selection was based on a convenience sampling (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006) as they were dependent on the student participants. Biographical sketches for each participant are described below.

Student Participants

Student 1 is a ten-year-old male fifth grade student who is currently classified with a specific learning disability due to weaknesses in the areas of reading comprehension and written expression. He has been classified since kindergarten and has received replacement services in the areas of reading/language arts since his initial classification. In the core subjects of math, science, and social studies, Student 1 has been supported in the general education setting by a classroom instructional assistant.

Student 1 scored in the partially proficient range (169) on the Language Arts portion of the spring 2011 NJ ASK. He earned 4 out of 10 possible points on writing task 1, which was expository writing. For the speculative writing task 2, Student 1 scored 6 out of 10 possible points. This gave him a total score of 10 out of 20 in the area of writing. He was proficient in Math (215) and Science (226). In September of 2011,

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Student 1 took the 5th grade ERB writing test and scored 21 out of 36 possible points. In both the areas of support and sentence structure, he achieved 3 out of 6 possible points.

Student 2 is a ten-year-old female fifth grader currently classified as Communication Impaired due to delays in listening comprehension, auditory processing, and overall language ability which had a significant impact on her written expression. She was classified during the summer before she started fifth grade, therefore this was her first experience in a replacement program. She also received replacement instruction for math. In the core subjects of science and social studies, Student 2 was supported in the general education by a classroom instructional assistant.

Student 2 scored in the partially proficient range (153) on the Language Arts portion of the spring 2011 NJ ASK. She earned 4 out of 10 possible points on writing task 1, which was expository writing. For speculative writing task 2, Student 2 scored 6 out of 10 possible points. This gave her a total score of 10 out of 20 in the area of writing. She was also partially proficient in both Math (171) and Science (186). In September of 2011, Student 2 took the 5th grade ERB writing test and scored 16 out of 36 possible points. In both the areas of support and sentence structure, she achieved 2.5 out of 6 possible points.

Student 3 is a ten-year-old male fifth grade student who is currently classified Communication Impaired due to delays in expressive vocabulary and auditory reasoning that significantly impact written expression. He has been classified since second grade. Student 3 was supported in the general education classroom by a classroom assistant for all academics during his second, third, and fourth grade years. During fifth grade, Student

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3 received replacement instruction for Language Arts and Math. He received the support of a classroom assistant in the core subjects of science and social studies.

Student 3 scored in the partially proficient range (175) on the Language Arts portion of the spring 2011 NJ ASK. He earned 6 out of 10 possible points on writing task 1, which was expository writing. For the speculative writing task 2, Student 3 scored 6 out of 10 possible points. This gave him a total score of 12 out of 20 in the area of writing. Student 3 was also partially proficient in Math (195). A proficient score was obtained in Science (217). In September of 2011, Student 3 took the 5th grade ERB writing test and scored 19.5 out of 36 possible points. In both the areas of support and sentence structure, he achieved 3 out of 6 possible points.

Adult Participants

Teacher 1 was the special education teacher for Student 1, Student 2, and Student 3. She provided replacement instruction in the resource room for language arts for 100 minutes daily. In addition, Teacher 1 provided replacement instruction in math for Student 2 and Student 3. She has been a teacher in the district for 21 years, and has provided replacement instruction and inclusion support for language arts in both fourth and fifth grade. Teacher 1 has developed her own language arts program based on the needs of individual students while remaining compliant with each IEP and the district curriculum requirements. She has participated in the writer's workshop professional development training offered by the district for the past seven years.

Teacher 2 was the general education teacher for all three students in the areas of science and social studies, which was offered four times a week for 40 minutes per period. In addition, Student 1 participated in the general education math class for 60

minutes daily. The support of a classroom assistant was provided to these three students

in the general education classroom. Teacher 2 has been teaching fifth grade for 35 years.

She follows the district curriculum in all subject areas and modifies the demands for

students based on the accommodations outlined in each IEP. She has participated in all

seven years of the writer's workshop professional development offered by the district.

Data Collection

Data was collected concurrently using multiple methods in an effort to triangulate

my concurrent embedded exploratory case study, which increased the validity and

reliability of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006). Creswell and Plano Clark

(2011) suggest the combining of persuasive qualitative data and rigorous quantitative

data strands for a mixed methods study. Various forms of these data collection methods

were used in this case study.

Qualitative Data

A semi-structured, open-ended audio-taped interview (see Appendix D) was

conducted with each teacher prior to the start of the student observations to obtain their

perspective toward the participant's motivational level toward independent writing, their

perception of the student's writing strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges faced

when attempting to motivate and encourage struggling writers. In addition, questions

regarding the specific writing instructional practices of conferring, guided practice, and

mentor text targeted in this study were asked to obtain a baseline assessment of the

teachers' understanding of these teaching methods. The teachers were also interviewed at

the close of the study (see Appendix E) to determine if changes were noted in the student

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participants' independent writing abilities or in their own teaching approach toward writing.

Initial independent writing samples were collected from each student participant as baseline documentation for sentence structure and support. These two areas were selected as they are the foundation to good writing. This was later used for comparative purposes with subsequent writing samples collected after each teaching method was demonstrated. A total of four writing samples from each student were obtained. The topics of these writing samples were self-selected for their personal essays. Next, avoidance behaviors, student comments, and time on task were recorded for each student through field notes during initial classroom observations as students engaged in independent writing. Behaviors included but were not limited to, the use of the bathroom, dropping or rolling a pencil, staring off, talking to a neighbor, immediately seeking teacher support, and laying their head on the desk. The initial behaviors observed along with time on task were used to develop individual data retrieval charts.

During each of the seven classroom observations, field notes were recorded in a research journal along with analytic memos (see Appendix F), in an effort to monitor personal biases (Peshkin, 1988). Student comments that indicated frustration such as, "Do we have to write?" or "My life is boring. I have nothing to say" were also recorded (Calkins, 1994). These comments were used in my research findings as they proved relevant. To assure intra-rater reliability (Fink, 2010) was established when recording information, frequent and consistent observations were conducted.

Student participants were individually interviewed using a semi-structured open-ended format (see Appendix G). Questions regarding their perceptions of writing, their

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skill level as a writer, their knowledge of specific teaching methods, and their level of

writing support received at home were asked. The students were re-interviewed at the

close of the study using similar questions (see Appendix H) to ascertain if they perceived

changes in their attitude towards independent writing or in their quality of work. These

interviews, along with teacher interviews, were audio-taped then later transcribed.

Two lesson plans demonstrating conferring, two demonstrating guided practice,

and two demonstrating mentor text were reviewed to clarify the lesson objectives. In

addition, charts that identified occasions of conferring in the classroom charts were

reviewed at the close of the study from the special education teacher participant. These

material artifacts provided contextual information which supported and enriched my

study (Hodder, 2002). Each instructional practice was observed twice for research

purposes. As part of the district's writing curriculum, the special education teacher

continued to implement each method independently.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was collected using individualized data retrieval charts

developed based on the writing avoidance behaviors and time on task recorded during the

initial classroom observations (see Appendix I). One chart was developed for each

student participant. Data was recorded at the completion of each lesson that demonstrated

the use of the teaching methods of conferring, guided practice, and mentor text, for a total

of seven observations per student. Information regarding time on task was recorded every

five minutes for a total of twenty minutes. If looking around the room was an observable

behavior, this was not counted in the data if the glancing occurred for ten seconds or less.

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The frequency of behavior data was later graphed to demonstrate if changes occurred in student behavior in reference to time on task during independent writing.

The ERB scores obtained by each student participant were also charted for comparison purposes. This was to help determine if an increase in scores occurred after each of the instructional practices were implemented. In addition, the scores were used through cross case analysis in determining if one specific instructional practice had more of an impact on written output than others.

Time Line

Data collection occurred between September 2011 and January 2012, for the duration of two marking periods which was approximately five months. By the end of September, initial behavioral observations for each student were conducted with field notes and analytic memos recorded in my research journal. Data retrieval charts for each student were developed using this information. Teacher and student interviews were conducted, transcribed, and then member checked (Glesne, 2006).

The initial independent writing sample produced during the standardized administration of the ERB was collected from each student participant. To assure inter-rater reliability (Fink, 2010), these samples were rescored by me to determine if my assessment was in line with the ERB assessors. This provided a baseline focusing on sentence structure and supporting details using the ERB writing rubric. According to Fink (2010) inter-rater reliability is established when two or more individuals agree on their measurement of an item. The additional writing samples were scored by me as the primary researcher accompanied by one additional staff member, who was not a participating teacher. The second evaluator was a language arts specialist. When a

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discrepancy existed of more than one point among the two evaluators, a third rater (the

language arts supervisor) was consulted. According to Fink (2010), this was an

appropriate method of resolving discrepancies among raters. It is also the procedure the

Educational Records Bureau uses when assessing student writing samples. All raters

received training through the district on scoring with the rubric prior to the study.

During the months of October, November (end of the first marking period), and

December, each student participant was observed twice during a language arts writing

lesson after being exposed to either conferring, guided practice, or the use of mentor texts

as models (Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005; Cruz, 2004; Dean & Grierson, 2005; Ray

& Laminack, 2001). The choice of the lesson most appropriate at the time was left up to

the classroom teacher which created buy-in and empowered the stakeholders (Goleman,

Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004; March, 1966). Classroom observations of student behaviors

were recorded on data retrieval charts and through field notes in the research journal. The

lesson plan utilized during instruction was reviewed primarily to obtain the lesson

objective and used as material culture (Hodder, 2002).

A writing sample from each student participant was obtained and scored for

sentence structure and support using the ERB writing rubric. This rubric awards points in

particular areas that range from 1 (lowest score) to 6 (highest score). An average score of

4 for support indicates details are adequate to support the focus, and they are generally

relevant to the focus. An average score of 4 for sentence structure identifies some

sentence variety, generally correct structure and usage, and attempts to use more

sophisticated sentence patterns. According to my years of training, a typical fifth grade

student is just beginning to vary the beginning of their sentences with dependent clauses

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and prepositional phrases. Fifth grade students are generally proficient with using compound sentences. Supporting details are beginning to embellish the main idea and setting. Dialogue is often attempted though it may not be punctuated correctly. The author attempts to convey emotion at this grade level.

By the end of January or second marking period, follow-up interviews with teacher and student participants were conducted and transcribed. Classroom conferring charts were also reviewed. All field notes, analytic memos in the research journal, and artifacts were coded and analyzed. Time on task was graphed for each student, and progress with the writing samples relative to sentence structure and support was charted. All data was analyzed and synthesized in preparation for determining the significant findings of the study.

Data Management and Analysis Methods

Student and teacher participant identities were concealed by assigning a number code for the individual and a letter code for the teaching method, which assured anonymity and assisted in the accurate correlation of qualitative and quantitative data. The audio-taped teacher and student interviews were transcribed and reviewed with participants for member checking purposes (Glesne, 2006). Field notes, analytic memos, interviews, and artifacts were reviewed several times as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2006) prior to establishing codes or themes.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest that repetition, or topics that continuously appear in the data, are evidence of an emerging theme and may demonstrate a connection in the data. Similarities and differences in the data were reviewed as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003) to determine parallels in the teacher and student perceptions, and add

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insight into the research. Once the data was coded for themes and patterns, the

information was cut and sorted (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This involved locating specific

comments, quotes, and participant expressions that were imperative to the findings in the

research project (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and synthesizing specific information in the

data analysis. Lesson plans, conferring charts, and student work samples were used for

contextual interpretation and coded to enrich the qualitative data (Hodder, 2002). Student

work samples were reviewed during structured and unstructured observations through

examining each participant's writer's notebook. Any emerging themes helped identify

important categories in the data and provided additional focus to my research (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2006; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Each student's writing sample was scored for sentence structure and support using

the ERB writing rubric which helped determine if individual growth had occurred. Two

evaluators were used to assess each writing sample to establish inter-rater reliability

(Fink, 2010). Writing samples were scored by me as the primary researcher and one

additional staff member, who was not a participating teacher. When a discrepancy existed

of more than one point on either of the areas among the two evaluators, a third rater was

consulted. According to Fink (2010), this was an appropriate method of resolving

discrepancies between raters.

The writing sample results were charted for each student to ascertain if

improvement in independent writing was evident. Data obtained during pre-observations

and post-observations for each of the methodologies of conferring, mentor text, and

guided practice were graphed to determine if a change in motivation toward independent

writing, as measured by increased time on task, had occurred. The data collected on each

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participant was compared to their own performance then viewed for a cross-case analysis to determine if there were any similarities, differences, and/or salient themes (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

All qualitative and quantitative data gathered from the student and teacher interviews, classroom observations, artifacts, and data retrieval charts were compared and integrated where possible. The instructional practices that had the most impact on encouraging independent writing for the student participants were identified. Narratives and graphs were produced from this information and an analysis of the instructional practices determined most effective from this research were provided to the teachers for future reference when planning writing lessons.

Establishing Rigor

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently in my mixed methods case study, which triangulated the research and helped to enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation allowed multiple sources of data to provide a fuller understanding of the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) of motivation toward independent writing. Researcher biases were monitored through analytic memos entered in the field notes journal (Peshkin, 1988). The qualitative data collection provided a holistic view of motivating reluctant writers, while the quantitative data allowed for the empirical measurement of change in a behavior. The use of multiple methods of data collection provided 'credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability', which supported 'validity, reliability, generalizability and objectivity' in the research (Toma, 2006).

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        Qualitative data obtained through interviews were checked for accuracy by the

participants through member checking (Glesne, 2006). The transcribed interviews and

analytical thoughts were shared with each participant to confirm that the information

accurately represented their ideas (Glesne, 2006). If a discrepancy was noted, I deferred

to the participant for the final information. The prolonged involvement in the classroom

by regular observations supported the development of trust with the teacher and students,

and allowed for thick rich descriptions of the classroom environment (Glesne, 2006).

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Chapter 4
Findings

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to explore specific

instructional practices that encouraged independence in writing, increased time on task,

and improved written output for fifth grade learning-disabled students serviced in a

language arts replacement special education setting in a suburban public school. The

perceptions surrounding the effectiveness of the instructional practices of conferring,

mentor text, and guided practice were obtained from both student and teacher

participants. This chapter focuses on the data and analysis of the findings, organized

around the initial research questions.

Data Description and Analysis

The qualitative and quantitative data presented in this chapter was collected over a

five-month period which began in September 2011 and concluded in January of 2012.

The three student participants were interviewed pre-study and post-study regarding their

perspective on writing, and then observed during seven independent writing periods. The

adult participants were interviewed pre-study and post-study in reference to their

perspective about motivating and teaching writing to struggling learners. Open-ended

semi-structured interview questions were asked of student (see Appendix G, H) and

teacher participants (see Appendix D, E) in an effort to allow for a more in-depth

conversation about their experiences with writing. Field notes, analytic memos (see

Appendix F), and spontaneous comments were also recorded during observations and

interviews.

The qualitative data obtained through the interviews, field notes, and analytic

memos were coded to determine emerging themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldana,

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2009). Words or short phrases were used as codes while the themes were the outcomes

of the codes (Saldana, 2009). The information was then checked for accuracy through

member checking (Glesne, 2006). The data collected on each participant was compared

to their own performance then viewed for a cross case analysis to determine if there were

any similarities, differences, and/or salient themes (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin,

2009). Artifacts and material culture, such as conferring charts, lesson plans, and work

samples were reviewed and incorporated into the analysis as this contextual information

provided additional insight for my study.

The observations took place in the special education setting which was a

replacement language arts class. Observations were generally forty-five to sixty minutes

of the one hundred minute period, though behavioral data (see Appendix I) was recorded

for approximately twenty minutes during each observation. Periodically, unscheduled

observations were also conducted which generally lasted fifteen minutes. Anecdotal data

was collected during these times. The special education classroom was a well- lit

carpeted full-sized room on the second floor. It was equipped with two white boards, a

document camera, two working student computers, fully stocked bookshelves, the

teacher's desk, the teacher's computer, a kidney shaped table, six student desks, and

chairs. The special education teacher added a rocking chair, two bean bag chairs, and two

director's chairs which were set up in the back of the room near the windows. This area is

where the mini-lessons took place. The students were allowed to sit where they were

comfortable. Once the mini lesson was complete, they had the option of writing in this

area or returning to their desks.

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Seven writing samples were collected from each student participant, one initial and one after each of the instructional practices was implemented. The samples were assessed by examining sentence structure and support using the ERB scoring rubric. Two evaluators were used to assess each writing sample to establish inter-rater reliability (Fink, 2010). Writing samples were scored by me as the primary researcher and one additional staff member who was not a participating teacher. When a discrepancy existed of more than one point on either of the areas, a third rater was consulted. Fink (2010) suggests this was an appropriate method of resolving discrepancies among raters.

The students developed two personal essays during the data collection period as they worked on each writing piece for approximately six weeks. They were exposed to conferring, mentor text, and guided practice once in the six-week period for research purposes. Lessons were observed approximately every two weeks. The special education teacher (Teacher 1) decided which order the lessons would be delivered. She continued to use these strategies as needed between observations as part of her instructional program.

Data was collected on a data retrieval chart on which were recorded time on task and avoidance behaviors during independent writing (Appendix I). Initial data was collected as a baseline to determine which behaviors, if any, each individual student exhibited in an attempt to avoid the task of writing independently. During the baseline data collection, it was determined through observation that if a student participant looked around the room for less than ten seconds this was not considered an avoidance behavior. Looking around for ten seconds or less was viewed as a gathering of thoughts behavior as all student participants looked around briefly on occasion. Behaviors were recorded for each student six additional times, once after each technique was implemented for the

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duration of twenty minutes per observation. The frequency of behavioral occurrences was graphed per student then cross-referenced with each strategy.

Upon completion of the analysis of data, in an attempt to answer the research questions, the findings were compared to the information presented in the literature review. The intent of this research was to explore specific instructional strategies that encouraged independence in writing, increased time on task, and improved written output for learning-disabled students. The hope is that this research will identify if specific instructional practices have more of an impact on independent writing than others and that this information will be used to improve classroom instructional practices.

Research Questions Addressed Through Cross-Case Analysis

This analysis reveals findings through a cross-case analysis. Qualitative and quantitative data were synthesized to address my guiding questions for my case-study research as I explored the instructional practices of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice.

Research Question # 1

Which instructional practices were perceived by teachers and students to be the most effective for increasing student success with independent writing in upper elementary learning-disabled students as measured by increased time on task and improved written output?

Prior to the onset of the study, Teacher 1, the special education teacher, reported that she combines methods as she sees fit as she teaches. She stated the following:

> Because of their special needs, you need to be flexible and combine techniques as struggles come up. It is hard to motivate them sometimes so you need to change your approach. I think they need experiential teaching to sustain their interest, not only what the curriculum dictates you should do. I really like conferring because

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you can spend one on one time with students. With mentor text, I don't always use the same books like you are supposed to. Guided practice is good for writer's block as students can create lists.

She did not have a definitive answer in relation to one technique producing a better outcome over the others.

Upon completion of the data collection, Teacher 1 held a different view as she discussed during the post interview. She continued to feel that learning-disabled students need a flexible, experiential approach because they can be difficult to motivate and keep on task. Her opinions of the specific instructional practices changed, most notably with conferring and mentor text. Teacher 1 felt that guided practice was useful when focusing on a specific skill, such as using idioms. Prior to the study, she used conferring mostly for improving mechanics in a writing piece. Due to the expectations of the study of using the appropriate steps and specific language when conferring, Teacher 1 felt her expertise in this area had increased which enabled her to provide more meaningful instruction to her students. She stated the following:

> I was never one for following procedures step-by-step, but I have to admit I enjoyed the structure that accompanies conferring. The compliment stage really made my students smile and feel good about their writing. I felt good because I looked for something good to say to each of them. I made better use of my individual time with them and they grasped the skills pretty quickly.

It should be noted that Teacher 1 did not regularly use a classroom conferring chart pre-study or post-study. With only three students, she did not feel the need because she could just look at their work.

Of the three instructional practices, Teacher 1 felt mentor text had the greatest impact on improving writing skills. She also saw the value of using a text a few times whereas before she did not think it mattered. Her comments included:

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Mentor text is a crucial technique to use with my students. It makes a big difference almost immediately because they have a model to refer to. When I used the same text a few times, I could see that they had a better understanding of the skill I was trying to teach. It was, by far, the one that had the most impact.

Teacher 2, the general education teacher, mentioned that she uses the methods together if she thinks it will make her lesson more effective. She tends to use either guided practice or mentor text with conferring when teaching a specific skill. Teacher 2 often uses conferring alone if she just wants her students to complete a writing piece. Teacher 2 did not have direct contact with the student participants while exposing them to the three instructional strategies but when asked which of the three she felt had the most impact on her writing students, she responded:

Each of the instructional strategies has their own merits. Guided practice gives me a quick indication of the skill level of my students because I can quickly see if they grasped the concepts. Conferring is crucial to improving writing skills because it involves real teaching, but it is difficult to implement in a large classroom. The conferring chart helps because I can keep track that way. Mentor text is great because once the students are presented with the model they can immediately apply the skills. If I had to choose, I would say mentor text has the greatest impact on student writing.

In gaining insight into the perceptions of the students, similar questions were asked during the interviews. Student 1 pre-study did not really know much about each individual strategy. When given an example of mentor text, he explained the teacher never used this. He related guided practice to the teacher just asks a lot of questions. Student 1 had a general understanding of the one-to-one writing conferences but said, "The teacher usually does this when something is wrong and it means I have to fix it." The differences in the post interview responses were notable. Student 1 could clearly articulate the different instructional practices and the benefits of each. He stated:

Guided practice was helpful because the teacher provided questions or sentence starters to guide my thinking. The structure helped me to address each area she

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wanted me to focus on. When the teacher conferenced with me, she pointed out the parts of my writing that were strong which made me feel good about myself. Then when she pointed out parts I needed to work on it didn't upset me as much because I realized some parts might be better than others. Mentor text was the most helpful because I could model the style of the author. I would look back at the text when I got stuck and reread it. It helped me to understand the different approaches I could use in my writing.

Student 2 had a better understanding of the instructional practices pre-study and post-study as her responses were somewhat similar. Pre-study, she felt guided practice was more confusing than helpful because she would lose track of her ideas. Post-study, she felt that guided practice was helpful but repetitious. She clarified, "A few times, the teacher talked when I was ready to write. The step-by-step instruction was easy to follow though and I could do my writing independently because I could look back at the guidelines." With mentor text, pre and post-study she felt that this was helpful because it created a picture in her head while the teacher was reading. Post-study she added, "Mentor text made my writing come more alive because I could model an author's style. I could pick the technique I wanted to try so I found I was more creative in my writing." Conferring was Student 2's favorite technique. She loved the one to one attention both pre and post study. Post-study she stated, "Conferring was great because it helped build my confidence as a writer. I could focus on and improve small pieces of my writing at a time so it was not so overwhelming."

Student 3 was not aware of how guided practice or mentor text was used pre-study. He felt that conferring was helpful because the teacher describes what the writing is about. Post study, Student 3 expressed more clarity and understanding of the three instructional practices. He stated:

> Using mentor text examples gave me confidence because I knew what to do. Having an outline to follow with the guided practice was good because I could

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follow the steps and put my own experiences in the outline. The teacher helps me with the hard stuff when we conference. It is nice because there is no pressure and I am not nervous when we talk. She always points out something good about my writing then gives me advice on how to make it even better.

In looking at this data, I found that both teachers and one student found mentor text to be the most helpful for improving writing skills while the other two students preferred conferring. There was little difference in the general education teacher's understanding of the instructional practices pre and post study. This may be due to the fact that she uses them regularly and in accordance with her training in each technique. The special education teacher was not so structured with her presentation of the three techniques pre study but admitted post study that this may have been an error on her part. She added:

Being asked to implement the techniques according to the training I received made more of a difference than I thought. I know my students need and like structure, and the instructional practices provide them with that. I plan to continue improving my instructional delivery, particularly when I confer. Going through each of the stages had more of an impact than I expected.

All three of the student participants were more confident and articulate about their writing in the post-study interviews. The fact that conferring was preferred over mentor text two to one may have more to do with the individual's unique learning style and learning needs than with the instructional practices themselves. The most important outcome is that all three students felt better about their writing and did not get upset when they needed to make revisions. None of the participants felt that guided practice was the most helpful instructional practice. This may be due to the perception that guided practice offers a structured outline from which questions are answered to generate ideas for a writing piece. The data will reveal if one instructional practice had a measureable impact

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on increased time on task and improved written output over another as the next three questions are addressed.

To answer the following research questions, student writing samples and the behavioral data retrieval charts were used as Teacher 1, the special education teacher, delivered the lessons. The ERB writing scoring rubric (see Appendix A) was used to assess sentence structure and support. Scores ranged from 1 (low) to 6 (high). A .5 can be used when the writing demonstrates select skills between two categories. The initial score was derived from the district's standardized assessment given to the students in September of 2011. These ratings were used as part of the identification process of the study participants. Student 1 and Student 3 earned scores of 3 for both sentence structure and support on the indentifying writing sample. Student 2 earned a score of 2.5 for both sentence structure and support on the indentifying writing sample.

Research Question #2

What was the impact of conferring on student success during independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

The lesson objective for the instructional practice of conferring was the same for both observations: To use conferring to support students with expanding a current writing piece. The teacher started on time with both lessons. The mini lesson was delivered in approximately fifteen minutes, with a twenty-minute independent writing time-frame immediately following. There was no share time at the end of the lessons; however, the teacher asked the students to continue writing at home so they could share during the next class.

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        The four recommended phases of conferring were demonstrated during each one to one interaction with the student participants though some phases occurred simultaneously. This was most noticeable during the research, decision making, and compliment phases as the teacher sat quietly and waited for each student to finish their thoughts. She read their work, decided what she was going to compliment, and also which direction she planned to take each writer in. The teacher verbalized the compliment to the students then moved immediately into the teaching phase.

        In recording time on task for each participant immediately following the one to one writing conference with the teacher, I observed the following in the twenty-minute time period during each of the two lessons. Student 1 was on task for the majority of the first observation. He was writing a piece on attending a baseball game with his father. Ten minutes after his direct instruction, he looked around the room once for approximately twenty seconds then went back to work. During the five-minute conference, the teacher pointed out that he demonstrated effective use of details and suggested that by adding dialogue his story would come alive. He verbalized his thoughts by saying, "Something like: as we stepped out of the car, I could feel the warm sun on my face at the same time my dad said, "You feel that warm sun. This is going to be a great day!" The teacher acknowledged the thought, encouraged him to write more and then left him alone to write.

        Student 1 was on task for the duration of the second observation and wrote for the entire twenty minutes without interruption upon completion of the seven-minute conference. This writing piece was about a snowy winter afternoon of sled riding. The teacher complimented him on his use of details and suggested that he add life by adding

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some sensory experiences and possibly some idioms. With this suggestion, Student 1 changed the sentence "we drank hot chocolate" to "as my mom and I sipped hot chocolate in the warm kitchen, I felt the sweet drink move down my throat. I felt like I was wrapped in a cozy blanket of love."

Student 2 was on task for the majority of the first observation. She was writing a piece about meeting her fourth grade teacher for the first time. Student 2 was actively writing when the teacher sat down next to her for the one to one conference. The teacher waited for Student 2 to finish her thoughts then complimented her about the excellent use of emotion and suggested she add dialogue to make it more real. At the close of the five-minute conference, Student 2 worked quietly for ten minutes then took a five minute bathroom break. When she returned, she reread her entry then crossed a part out. Student 2 had crossed out "my mom said stop acting like a flowie [*sic*] and I was in-bares [*sic*]." She replaced it with:

> The first day of school I was shiey [*sic*] and had trouble telling the teacher my name. The teacher smiled, put her arm around me and said, "I am so glade [*sic*] to have you in my class this year!" I felt so comfortable. I knew I was going to be ok.

Student 2 was on task for the duration of the second observation and wrote for the entire twenty minutes without interruption upon completion of the five minute conference. This writing piece was about getting her hair cut. The teacher sat down next to Student 2 and waited for her to finish her thought. When ready, the teacher began with a compliment about how Student 2 remembers things and brings them to life. She then suggested that Student 2 continue to work on her use of dialogue as she had none in this writing piece. Upon completion of the conference, Student 2 added:

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> My mom "said' let's go to the hair treasure [*sic*] and get your hair cute [*sic*] to give you a new look. I "said" that would be fun but it turned out it really wasn't. I hated how it looked and cried all the way home. My mom "said" it will grow back but I kept thinking I was not going to school looking like this!

Student 3 displayed two avoidance behaviors during the first observation. He rolled on the floor once for approximately two minutes within the first five minutes, and picked up and dropped his pencil repeatedly for approximately twenty seconds at four, seven, and nineteen minutes. The teacher conferred with Student 3 for approximately five minutes and during this time complimented for his use of action then suggested that he add more detail to expand the small moments. His writing piece was about his old TV compared to his new one. He changed the sentence 'with my old TV I had to get out of bed to turn it off' to:

> I used to hate to get out of bed to turn off my old TV. If I was snuggled under the blanket I had to brave the cold night air then quickly hop back into bed. The remote on my new TV is the best because I can relax, stay in my bed, hit the button and it goes off.

Student 3 wrote that segment in the five minutes he did not display avoidance behaviors.

Student 3 demonstrated much different behaviors during the second observation. He was on task for the duration of the conferring observation and wrote for the entire twenty minutes without interruption upon completion of the five minute conference. Prior to the conference he had listed topic ideas and the teacher complimented him on the use of this effective strategy. She suggested he select one idea to write about and asked that he be as detailed as he can. Student 3 decided to write about a time he was startled by a bird flying up to the classroom window. He wrote:

> It was 8:37 in the morning at school it was a warm day I am just talking to my friend and I suddenly turned around and screamed "Ah!!!" Another classmate asked, "Why did you scream?" "because I saw a huge black bird on the window.

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It was really seray [*sic*].

For comparative purposes, avoidance behaviors the student participants exhibited during the instructional practice of conferring were examined.

5
4
3
Frequency of
Occurrence
2
1
0

Student 1
Student 2
Student 3

1 st   2 nd

Observations
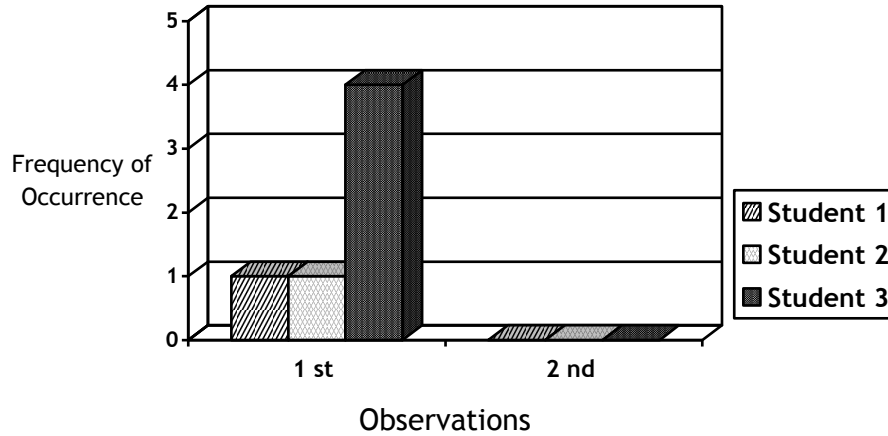
Figure 1 Conferring Avoidance Behaviors

Figure 1 represents the frequency of the total number of avoidance behaviors observed from each student participant during the two writing lessons that focused on the instructional practice of conferring. For comparative purposes the frequencies of behaviors demonstrated were more relevant to this research than the particular types of avoidance behaviors.

To assess the impact of conferring on improved written output the participants' writing samples previously described were used. On both writing samples, Student 1 achieved a score of 4 for both sentence structure and support. Student 1 used some sentence variety, generally used correct structure and usage, and attempted to use more sophisticated sentence patterns. He also had adequate details to support his focus which

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were generally relevant to the topic. There was no discrepancy in the raters' scores.

Student 2 achieved a score of 3 on both samples in relation to sentence structure. There was a discrepancy between the raters for support, therefore the third rater assessed support as a 3.5 (the midpoint between the two scores) on writing sample 1. Student 2 received a score of 3 on sentence structure and a 4 on support on writing sample 2. There were no discrepancies in the raters' scores. Though her sentences had variety, there were numerous errors in structure and usage that interfered with the meaning. There was also an over-reliance in repetitive constructions. Details were adequate and relevant to support the focus.

Student 3 achieved a 4 on sentence structure and support on writing sample 1. Writing sample 2 was assessed as 4 for sentence structure and 3 for support. There were no discrepancies among the raters' scores. Student 3 utilized some sentence variety, generally applied correct usage, and attempted to use more sophisticated sentence patterns on both samples. Sample 2 had weak elaboration of details when compared to sample 1, and there was an omission of important details as the writing piece did not have a clear focus.
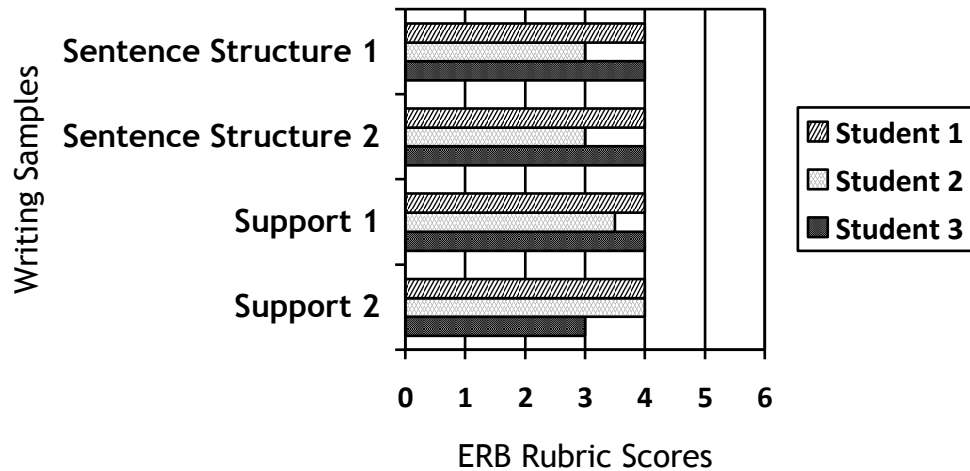
Sentence Structure 1

Sentence Structure 2

Support 1

Support 2

Writing Samples

Student 1
Student 2
Student 3

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

ERB Rubric Scores

Figure 2 Conferring Rubric Scores

Figure 2 graphically represents the scores each student obtained with sentence structure and support on writing sample 1 and writing sample 2.

Research Question #3

How did the use of mentor text to model specific writing strategies encourage student success with independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

The objective for the first mentor-text writing lesson was: to model the addition of action through the use of detailed description using mentor text to enhance a writing piece. The second lesson objective varied slightly and was the following: To model supporting reasons through the use of mentor text to enhance a writing piece. Each mini lesson was approximately fifteen minutes followed by a twenty-minute writing block. In the first lesson, the teacher read *Come on Rain* by Karen Hesse to emphasize the use of descriptive details. The second lesson used the mentor text of *A Pig Parade is a Terrible*

Idea by Michael Black. The purpose of this text was to focus on the main idea and the supporting details. During both lessons, each text was read once, then reread to emphasize the skill that the teacher tried to convey. When the students began independent writing time, the book was available for them to look at again if they needed to though none of the three referenced either book.

In recording time on task for each participant immediately following the use of mentor text as a model, I observed the following in the twenty-minute time period during each of the two lessons. Student 1 was on task for the entire first observation. He was writing a piece on attending a baseball game with his father. After the lesson was introduced, Student 1 went to work immediately using sticky notes to identify areas that he wanted to expand. He jotted thoughts down for future revisions such as "when I stepped out of the car" to "I quickly unbuckled my seat belt and stepped out of the car on to the warm pavement." Another revision included "the air was warm" to "the air surrounded me with warmth and the smell of food was everywhere. I could detect fries, hot dogs, and the sweet smell of ice cream."

Student 1 was on task for the duration of the second observation and wrote for the entire twenty minutes without interruption upon completion of the mentor text mini lesson. This writing piece was about a snowy winter afternoon of sled riding. In the previous conferring lesson he added "as my mom and I sipped hot chocolate in the warm kitchen, I felt the sweet drink move down my throat. I felt like I was wrapped in a cozy blanket of love." He decided to expand this thought even further with:

> It was then that I realized how lucky I was to have my family. The simple times are special. Spending time together can be precious even if it over a cup of hot chocolate because we talk and laugh about the day.

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Student 2 appeared to have some difficulty with time on task during the first mentor text observation. She was writing a piece about meeting her fourth grade teacher for the first time. Upon completion of the mini lesson, Student 2 went to her seat and laid her head on the desk. This lasted approximately three minutes. She then took a five minute bathroom break and when she returned, she flipped through her writer's notebook. She finally began writing fifteen minutes after the mini lesson concluded and selected an area to focus on that she had previously addressed in a conference. She had previously revised "The teacher smiled, put her arm around me and said, "I am so glade [*sic*] to have you in my class this year!" I felt so comfortable. I knew I was going to be ok." Using a post it note, she added "I must have looked so surprised because my eyes opened and my moth [*sic*] dropped. I had never had a teacher happy to have me in her class from the first day of school."

Student 2 encountered much more difficulty during the second mentor text observation. She was continuing the writing piece on getting a haircut. In a fifteen minute period, she was off task five times. Within the first five minutes, she looked around the room for thirty seconds then took a seven minute bathroom break. Upon her return, she laid her head on the desk which lasted four minutes. She picked her head up once, looked around the room for twenty seconds, then laid her head on the desk for three minutes. Student 2 began writing and wrote for one minute then crumbled up her paper. She finally settled down and started to write however there was only five minutes left to the period. On the crumbled paper, she listed thoughts such as "I woke up one morning", "my mom told me to get dressed," and "I put my cloths [*sic*] out."

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Student 3 displayed four avoidance behaviors during the first mentor text observation within the first fifteen minutes. In the first five minutes, he looked around the room for thirty seconds. Within the next five minutes the same behavior was observed. Fifteen minutes after the mini lesson concluded, he looked around the room for twenty seconds and played with his pencil by dropping it and picking it up repeatedly for one minute. Student 3 began writing the last five minutes of the period. He was continuing his writing piece on his old versus new TV and added "in my room I have a desk that is so big I can do all my homework on it. I can read, write, and do all kinds of things on it."

Student 3 demonstrated different behaviors during the second mentor text observation when compared to the first observation. He was off task only twice in the first ten minutes, laying his head on his desk for three minutes and playing with his pencil (dropping it and picking it up) for one minute. For the remainder of the twenty minute observation he worked on his writing piece about the bird flying to the classroom window. Student 3 added to his conferring revision of "Another classmate asked, "Why did you scream?" "because I saw a huge black bird on the window. It was really seray [*sic*]" and included the names of classmates. He also added, "My teacher wanted to know what the excitement was about. When I told her what happened, she laughed and said "that big black bird can't hurt you in here." Everybody laughed and I laughed too."

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Frequency of Occurrence

5
4
3
2
1
0

Student 1
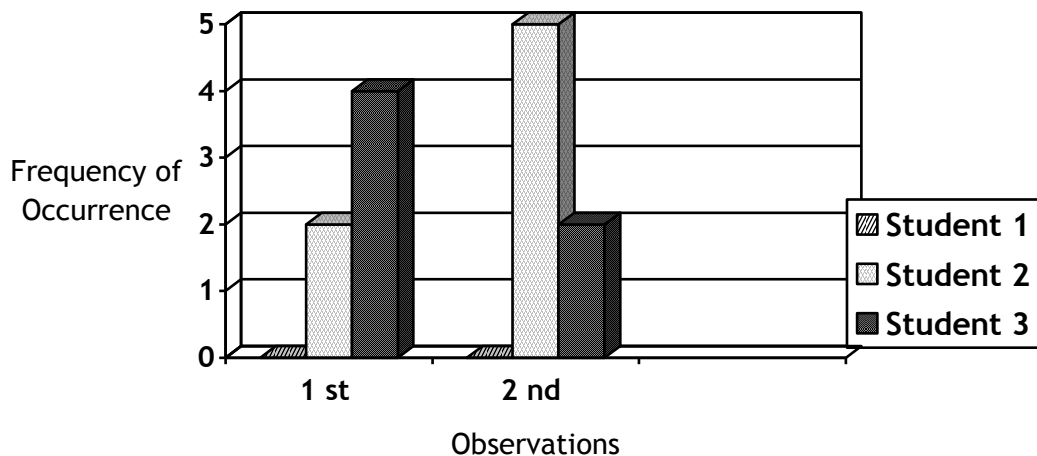Student 2
Student 3

1 st   2 nd

Observations

Figure 3 Mentor Text Avoidance Behaviors

Figure 3 represents the frequency of the total number of avoidance behaviors observed from each student participant during the two writing lessons that focused on the instructional practice of mentor text. For comparative purposes the frequencies of behaviors demonstrated were more significant to this research than the particular types of avoidance behaviors.

The previously described writing samples were used to assess how the use of mentor text to model specific writing strategies encourages student success with independent writing. On both writing samples, Student 1 achieved a score of 5 for both sentence structure and support on the first writing sample. Student 1 used sentence structure that demonstrated the appropriate effect on the model text. Sentence patterns were more sophisticated, and details were strong and relevant throughout. There were no discrepancies in the raters' scores. On the second writing sample, a discrepancy existed between the two raters for support. The third rater determined a 4.5 was appropriate as it was the mid way point between the two scores.

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Student 2 achieved a score of 3 on both sentence structure and support for writing sample 1. There were no discrepancies among the raters' scores. She produced little variety in her sentences and did not elaborate on her ideas. On the second writing sample, Student 2 was rated at a 2 for both sentence structure and support by both raters. This entry was difficult to rate due to its brevity and the list format she chose.

Student 3 achieved a 2 on sentence structure and a 2 support on writing sample 1. Writing sample 2 was assessed as 4 for sentence structure and 3.5 for support. There were no discrepancies among the raters' scores. On writing sample 1, Student 3 produced a passage too brief to demonstrate sentence variety and offered too few details to support his ideas. Writing sample 2 contained some sentence variety with generally correct usage. He provided adequate details but lost the focus of his writing piece.
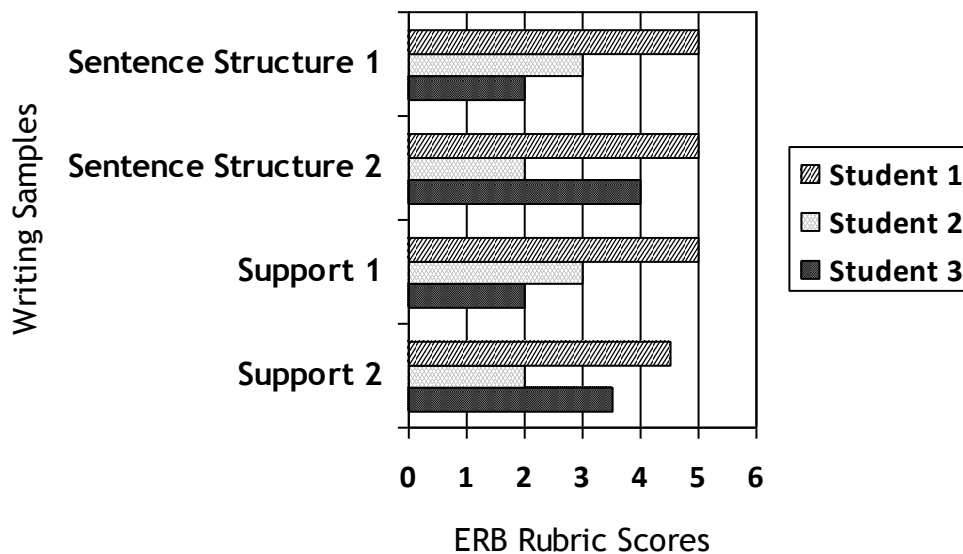
Figure 4 Mentor Text Rubric Scores

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Figure 4 graphically represents the scores each student obtained with sentence structure and support on writing sample 1 and writing sample 2 when exposed to mentor text as a model.

Research Question #4

How did guided practice encourage student success with independent writing as measured by time on task and improved written output?

The objective for the first guided practice lesson was: To demonstrate and scaffold the capturing of the big idea in a personal essay through detailed description of observations. The second lesson objective was the following: To use guided practice to support students with expanding a current writing piece. Each mini lesson was approximately fifteen minutes followed by a twenty-minute writing block. In the first lesson, the teacher started with a discussion of good writing. She pointed out that good writers write long because they add detail and emotion to help the reader feel they are sharing the moment with the writer. She then guided the students through a joint writing piece about herself using the stories she previously told them about involving her family, her favorite things, and some of her memorable experiences. As each student shared their thoughts, the teacher wrote them on chart paper. When necessary, she questioned them, and this prompted more details.

For the second guided practice lesson, the teacher had prepared the chart paper with the following: Big idea and Observe-what sparks the idea? Observe-so what? This makes me realize? She then held up a stuffed turtle and asked them to share what comes to mind. Sand, nature, and swimming were offered as some responses. The teacher then read a section her own personal essay. The writing piece described the importance of

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spending time with her grandmother to learn the family recipes so she could pass them

down to her daughters.

In recording time on task for each participant immediately following the guided

practice lessons, I observed the following in the twenty-minute time period during each

of the two lessons. Student 1 looked around the room once for forty-five seconds seven

minutes after the completion of the mini lesson otherwise he was on task with writing

sample 1. He continued revisions to his entry about the baseball game. Student 1 added

details to the beginning of his story and included a paragraph about wanting to go to a

Yankees game but his father could not afford it. He added:

> My Dad said but I don't have the money. But next month I am going to get a big
> cheack [*sic*]. Then we can go to that yankee [*sic*] game. I sprinted up to my room
> and put it right on my calendar.

Student 1 looked around the room twice for forty-five seconds each during his

writing of sample 2 otherwise he remained on task as he expanded his sled riding essay.

He added details to the introduction with:

> There is a huge hill that my mom and I go sleding [*sic*] on every year. We watch
> the weather together when snow is in the forcast [*sic*]. Sometimes we stay up at
> night to watch the snow fall with antispation [sic] of our fun the next day.

Student 2 looked around the room twice for a duration of twenty seconds each

time during the first ten minutes after the first guided practice mini lesson. No behaviors

were observed during the second writing sample observation as she wrote for the entire

time. Student 2 continued to enhance her writing piece about meeting her teacher on the

first day of school. She added segments such as "The teacher smiled like the sunshine and

the whole room lit up. I knew it was going to be a really great year" and "the classroom

was colorfully deckorated [*sic*]. Each desk was labeled and I went to find mine. The

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Teacher had put me in front of the room near her desk. The morning just kept getting

better."

As she enhanced the second writing sample about her haircut, Student 2 added

details about being in the hair salon. A sample of her entry included:

> As we walked into the salon, I noticed a strong smell. My mom must have seen a funny look on my face because she "said" you smell the chemicals. Don't worry, you won't have that. The lady said hello and asked me to sit down. I slid on to the cold chair and she put a drape on me. For a second I felt like her prisoner.

Student 3 demonstrated five avoidance behaviors during the twenty minute guided

practice observation. Once in each five minute segment he looked around the room

(fifteen seconds, fifteen seconds, forty-five seconds, thirty seconds) and laid his head on

the desk at sixteen minutes for one minute. Student 3 wrote for brief periods in between

these behaviors and produced a brief segment to add to his writing piece about his TV.

He added:

> I remember when my mom told me I could get a new TV. I was so exsicted [*sic*] because she said I could pick what I want as long as I have good reasons. She asked me to list what was important in my new TV starting with the most important thing. Of course I put a remote as the first thing then I added high defanison [*sic*].

Student 3 demonstrated different behaviors during the second guided practice

observation as he worked the entire time period without interruption. He enhanced

writing sample 2 with segments that addressed the transition after he saw the bird and

moved to the next class. His entry included:

> We all had a good laugh but I knew it was time to go. I packed up, walked down the hall, and saw my next teacher. I was still thinking about the bird and she asked what was on my mind. I told her the story and she said the she had seen a black bird too. We wondered if it was the same one.
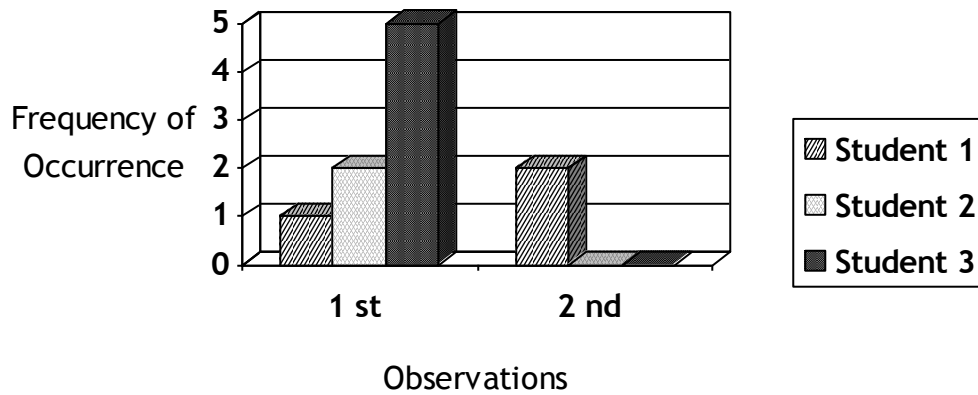
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Figure 5 Guided Practice Avoidance Behaviors

Figure 5 represents the frequency of the total number of avoidance behaviors observed from each student participant during the two writing lessons that focused on the instructional practice of guided practice. For comparative purposes the frequencies of behaviors demonstrated were more significant to this research than the particular types of avoidance behaviors.

The previously described writing samples were used to assess how guided practice encouraged student success with independent writing. Student 1 achieved a score of 3.5 for sentence structure and a 5 for support with writing sample 1 with no discrepancies in raters' scores. He had variety in his sentences but there were errors in structure. He provided strong supporting details that were relevant and focused around the topic. On writing sample 2, Student 1 was rated at 4.5 (sentence structure) and 5 (support) again with no rater discrepancy. Few errors were noted in his sentence structure and there was some variety style. Supporting details were strong and varied, and

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supported the focus of the writing piece.

Student 2 was rated with 4 on both sentence structure and support by both raters on writing sample 2. She had variety in her sentences, and details relevant to the focus. Student 2 achieved the same rating on writing sample 2 demonstrating the same strengths with her skill application.

On writing sample 1, Student 3 was rated as 3 for sentence structure and 2 for support by both assessors. This entry was brief with few details. Sentence structure showed little variety with errors in usage. Student 3 was rated at 3.5 for sentence structure with the intervention of the third rater. There were attempts to use sophisticated patterns but there were also usage errors. Support was rated as 4 by both assessors. Student 3 provided relevant and adequate details to support his focus.
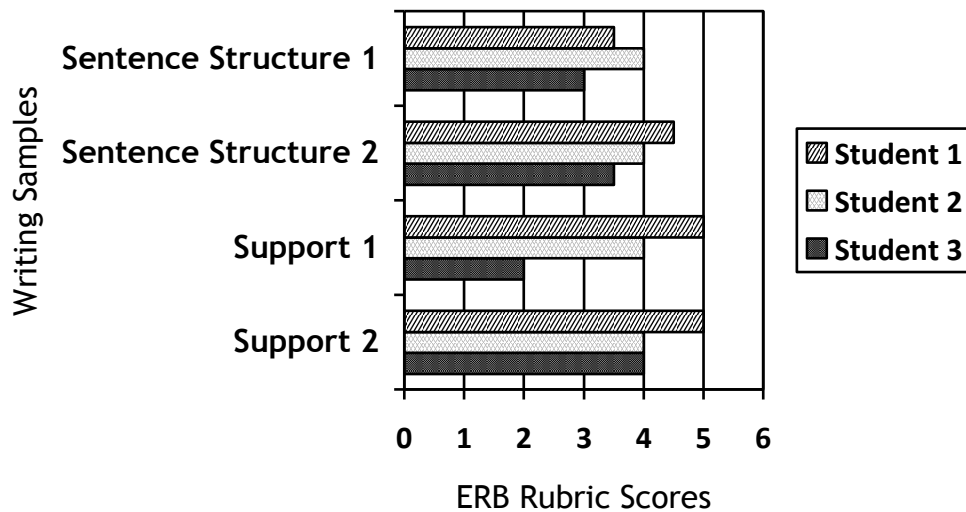

Figure 6 Guided Practice Rubric Scores

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Figure 6 graphically represents the scores each student obtained with sentence structure and support on writing sample 1 and writing sample 2 when exposed to guided practice.

Analysis of Student Performance

This section examines student performance on an individual basis. The data described in the previous sections were used to determine whether the participants showed a change in their perceptions about writing or their habits in writing. The information was also used to determine if time on task increased and whether written output improved while engaged in independent writing.

Student 1

Student 1 denied the use of avoidance behaviors when presented with a writing task though during the baseline data collection two episodes of looking around the room for approximately forty-five seconds each were observed. He felt he could complete an assignment even if he didn't like it or want to. Student 1 admitted that he looks around the room when he gets stuck with hopes that this will trigger some ideas. He also admitted that sometimes he looks around the room for longer periods of time because he really does not want to write. He reported an increase in writing skill during his post-study interview. Student 1 felt his writing was more detailed and showed better quality. He did not report an increase in length of writing time outside school; however, he did report an increase in frequency of writing unrelated to school assignments. When discussing writing strategies, Student 1 originally stated he makes lists to get ideas. During the post-study interview, he named the additional strategies of using mentor text, post-it notes, graphic organizers, and free writing as techniques he would use. In addition,

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he was articulate about the three instructional practices of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice used in the study and identified what he gained from each technique.

Student 1 understood conferring to be more than the teacher sitting next to you to talk about the writing piece. He felt conferring improved his writing by targeting a specific skill and appreciated the compliments about his writing. He felt mentor text was helpful because he could copy a particular author's style and liked that he could reread the text. He felt guided practice offered structure that was easy to follow. Student 1 preferred the use of mentor text but felt it should be used with conferring because the compliments helped him to feel better about the parts that needed work. He is most comfortable writing about his personal experiences. Student 1 enjoyed participating in the study and appreciated having permission to just write.

Student 1 demonstrated infrequent avoidance behaviors during the study data collection writing observations. If behaviors were demonstrated, he typically briefly looked around the room. The frequency of his avoidance behaviors are charted below with the ERB rubric scores and the two study writing samples. The original ERB scores obtained through the district assessment pre-study are included for comparative purposes in Table 1.

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Table 1

Student 1 Rubric Scores and Avoidance Behaviors

	Sentence Structure	Support	Avoidance Behaviors
Original ERB Score	3	3	2
Conferring Sample 1	4	4	1
Conferring Sample 2	4	4	0
Mentor Text Sample 1	5	5	0
Mentor Text Sample 2	5	4.5	0
Guided Practice Sample 1	3.5	5	1
Guided Practice Sample 2	4.5	5	2

In comparison to the baseline data collection, it appears that the avoidance behaviors demonstrated by Student 1 do not impact his written output. Though he demonstrated the most avoidance behaviors during guided practice, his rubric scores are within the range of the other scores. During the conferring lesson observations, Student 1 demonstrated only one instance of avoidance. His rubric scores are within the range of his other scores as well. Most notable is the absence of avoidance behaviors during the mentor text lesson observations. The rubric scores are also the highest for both sentence structure and support. Student 1 stated this was his preferred instructional strategy. Overall, there was positive growth with all three instructional strategies when scores are compared to the original ERB ratings.

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Student 2

During the pre-study interview, Student 2 openly admitted she avoids writing because it is very hard. She typically goes to the bathroom for a break as this helps her clear her head. During the baseline data collection Student 2 demonstrated avoidance behaviors twice (head on desk for two minutes, bathroom break for four minutes). Student 1 initially felt like she was not a good writer and needed teacher support to complete a writing piece.

Student 2 reported an increase in writing skill and confidence during her post study interview. She felt her writing strength was in her ability to convey emotion through dialogue. She reported an increase in length of writing time outside school and an increase in frequency of writing unrelated to school assignments as she recently wrote a song. When discussing writing strategies, Student 2 originally stated she makes lists to get ideas. During the post-study interview she named the additional strategies of using mentor text, post-it notes, graphic organizers, and picturing the scene in her head like a movie as techniques that have been helpful. Student 2 was articulate about the three instructional practices of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice used in the study and related the benefits to each.

Student 2 viewed conferring as a way to talk write before writing because she could discuss her ideas with the teacher. She appreciated the compliments the teacher had given her about her writing and feels that this was most helpful to building her confidence. Mentor text was helpful because the characters seemed to come alive when the teacher stressed the author's style of writing. Sometimes she would close her eyes and picture the story in her head like a movie. Guided practice offered step-by-step

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instructions which were helpful to create structure in her writing. Student 2 preferred

conferring because the teacher would show her small pieces that could improve her

writing. It was less embarrassing and helped build her confidence. Student 2 was most

comfortable writing about personal experiences because she could relive the moments.

She enjoyed participating in the study and shared that her mother cannot believe the

improvements she made in such a short time. Student 2 appreciated the longer (twenty

minute) writing blocks and felt that she could easily write for twice a long because it

would allow her the time she needs to get her thoughts out.

Student 2 demonstrated more avoidance behaviors than Student 1 but less

avoidance behaviors compared to Student 3 during the study data collection writing

observations. She typically took bathroom breaks, looked around the room, and laid her

head on the desk. The frequency of her avoidance behaviors is charted below with the

ERB rubric scores and the two study writing samples. The original ERB scores obtained

through the district's assessment pre-study are included for comparative purposes in

Table 2.

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Table 2

Student 2 Rubric Scores and Avoidance Behaviors

	Sentence Structure	Support	Avoidance Behaviors
Original ERB Score	2.5	2.5	2
Conferring Sample 1	3	3.5	1
Conferring Sample 2	3	4	0
Mentor Text Sample 1	3	3	2
Mentor Text Sample 2	2	2	5
Guided Practice Sample 1	4	4	2
Guided Practice Sample 2	4	4	0

In comparison to the baseline data collection, it appears that the avoidance behaviors demonstrated by Student 2 have an inconsistent impact on her written output. A general trend is evident with the lower number of avoidance behaviors demonstrated yield the higher rubric scores. There was a spike in avoidance behaviors with one use of mentor text and consequently low rubric scores. When Student 2 was questioned about this she stated that she did not connect with the book, *A Pig Parade is a Terrible Idea*, and the author's writing style confused her. Student 2 showed an increase in rubric scores when exposed to the skill for the second time for both conferring and guided practice. Though Student 2 preferred instructional strategy was conferring, her performance was better when exposed to guided practice as seen in the sentence structure and support

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scores. Overall, there was positive growth with all three instructional strategies when scores are compared to the original ERB ratings.

Student 3

Student 3 admitted that writing can be very frustrating and it helps when he moves around as he is trying to think. He felt his writing had improved lately and he comes up with ideas more easily. Student 3 used to out anything down before just to get the assignment done but now he spends more time adding details because he wants the reader to have a good moment. During the baseline data collection, Student 3 demonstrated avoidance behaviors four times, twice by looking around the room (fifty-five seconds each) and twice by playing with his pencil (for approximately sixty seconds each). Initially Student 3 was unclear of how he was as a writer but during the post study interview, he felt he had average writing skills particularly when writing realistic fiction.

Student 3 did not report an increase in length of writing time nor did he increase his frequency of writing unrelated to school assignments. When discussing writing strategies, Student 3 originally stated he did not have any strategies he used to help him write. During the post interview he named the additional strategies of lists, mentor text, talk write, and graphic organizers as techniques he likes to use. Student 3 could articulate the strengths of the instructional practices used in this study and expanded on the advantages of each.

Student 3 viewed conferring as a no-pressure, non-threatening way to improve his writing because the teacher always found something good before she pointed out what needed work. Mentor text was helpful because having the model of a specific skill made it easier to try out the writing style. Guided practice offered step-by-step instructions

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which were helpful to create structure in his writing. Student 3 preferred conferring because the teacher showed him specific areas to revise and working on specific skills made it not so overwhelming. Student 3 was most comfortable writing about his personal experiences because he could write about what happened step-by-step. He feels he continues to need work on picking topics that are more meaningful. Student 3 often hears the words 'so what?' in his head when he decides on a focus. He wants his writing to be more important to the reader so they will feel like his writing was worth reading. He enjoyed participating in the study, felt that his greatest gain was in making his writing come more alive, and appreciated the longer writing blocks then he was exposed to in the past.

Student 3 demonstrated frequent avoidance behaviors during the study data collection writing observations. He typically looked around the room, played with his pencil, and laid his head on the desk. The frequency of his avoidance behaviors are charted below with the ERB rubric scores and the two study writing samples. The original ERB scores obtained through the district's assessment pre-study are included for comparative purposes in Table 3.

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Table 3

Student 3 Rubric Scores and Avoidance Behaviors

	Sentence Structure	Support	Avoidance Behaviors
Original ERB Score	3	3	4
Conferring Sample 1	4	4	4
Conferring Sample 2	4	3	0
Mentor Text Sample 1	2	2	4
Mentor Text Sample 2	4	3.5	2
Guided Practice Sample 1	3	2	5
Guided Practice Sample 2	3.5	4	0

In comparison to the baseline data collection, it appears that the avoidance behaviors demonstrated by Student 3 have an inconsistent impact on his written output. At times his avoidance behaviors were high but his rubric scores showed equally high scores. Other times, avoidance behaviors were high and his rubric scores were low. A general trend is noted with lower incidences of avoidance behaviors and higher rubric scores on the second of the two exposures to each instructional practice. Student 3 preferred conferring as his instructional practice. He also scored the highest on the writing samples when exposed to conferring.

The results of my study yielded positive growth from all three student participants when exposed to each of the three instructional practices; however, one did not stand out above the rest. Overall, there was positive growth with all three instructional strategies when scores are compared to the original ERB ratings. In addition, all three student

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participants achieved higher rubric scores on the second exposure to each instructional practice. It was also noted that the frequency in discrepancies between the raters' scores decreased as the number of writing samples increased.

A connection was also noted with two of the student participants in that their preferred method of instruction also yielded the highest rubric scores. One student preferred mentor text while the other had a preference for conferring. The third student preferred conferring but higher rubric scores were achieved with guided practice. Both teacher participants felt that mentor text produced the greatest gains for their students but acknowledge that each instructional practice used in isolation or with another instructional practice were equally effective.

Emergent Themes

Emergent themes were uncovered through cutting, sorting, and coding words or short phrases (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldana, 2009). Cutting and sorting involved selecting specific information from the data and utilizing it in the data analysis. Codes emerged from the repetition of words and phrases as suggested by Saldana (2009). In reviewing the qualitative data collected through interviews, field notes, material culture, and analytic memos the following information was garnered which revealed several themes. The emergent themes were identified as (a) confidence (b) interest level and (c) skill acquisition.

Confidence

The theme of confidence emerged as a result of the pre-study interviews with both teachers and the post-study interviews with all three of the student participants. Both

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teachers felt that building a student's confidence with their writing skills was of primary

importance. Teacher 1 stated:

> These kids [learning-disabled students] come to me with the belief that they are
> not capable. They compare themselves to their general education peers and see
> that they cannot write the same way. If they don't believe they can, they never
> will.

Teacher 2 stated:

> Learning-disabled students have so much to overcome based on their underlying
> difficulties. Teaching them writing is challenging because they need to work on
> their skills at the same time you build their confidence. With general education
> students, they come with confidence so they learn the skills more easily.

Teacher 2 also commented that she noticed a change in the student participants. She
added:

> As an outsider looking in, they seem to have internalized a lot which is exciting to
> see. In class discussions the students [participants] can verbalize important
> aspects of good writing which I expect when they complete their science and
> social studies assignments. They are more settled and responsive when I ask them
> to write.

All three students talked about their increased confidence level in their writing

skills post-study. Student 1 stated:

> I feel so much better about my writing now and as a result I feel better about
> myself. I know when I have to write in science and social studies [general
> education classes] I can do it as well as my classmates. I am not embarrassed by
> my writing anymore. I feel so good about my writing that my handwriting and
> spelling improved too.

Student 2 shared similar enthusiasm as she declared:

> My writing is so much better now! My teachers and my mom noticed the change
> and compliment me all the time. I enjoy writing now. Last year I was so
> embarrassed about my writing. I did anything I could to get out of it. Now I do
> my assignments without a problem because I know I can.

Student 3 declared a shift in his confidence level and stated, "Coming up with

ideas and writing a longer piece is much easier now. I really feel good about my writing."

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Interest Level

Interest level emerged from the student and teacher interviews in a variety of ways. One being the students' own interest in writing while another was apparent in the students' desire to produce a writing piece that someone wanted to read. In addition, interest level also emerged as an indicator of motivation and time on task with all student and teacher participants. They each acknowledged in their own ways that 'when you are interested in something it is easy to stay focused.'

Teacher 1 stressed the importance of producing an interesting writing piece:

You have to engage the kids so they want to write, and you have to help them write something that is worthwhile and conveys a message. It is like reading a good book-you can't wait to see what happens next. I want them to treat their writing the same way.

Teacher 2 acknowledged that students had to be interested in what they are writing to produce an interesting piece. She viewed this from a peer perspective as well:

These students [participants] have a lot to say. Sometimes even more than their peers because they have overcome many more struggles. It goes back to the confidence-first they need to feel what they say is worthwhile then they need to say it in a way that feels real to others.

Student 1 acknowledged the importance of being interested in doing a writing assignment and writing it so that others enjoy reading it. He stated:

I am not always interested in the assignments I am given but I do them whether I like to topic of not. Even if I don't like the topic, I try to make it interesting for me to write and others to read. Sometimes it helps when I pretend I am writing a movie because everybody likes movies.

Student 2 strives to write to please her mother and as a result writes about family events that she enjoyed. She stated:

I have such good memories with my family. When I write about them and my mom reads them, she gives me a hug and we talked about how much fun we had.

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I like to let my feelings out in my writing because sometimes she has a tear in her eye.

Student 3 shared, "I know I can do a good job and write something that will be important for someone to read. I am comfortable sharing a piece of myself for their enjoyment."

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition emerged in discussions with the teachers as both stressed the importance of delivering skills in a way that students could receive them. Teacher 1 discussed the need for variety in the approach to teaching learning-disabled students and as a result, she needed to be more skilled in her delivery. She admitted:

> These kids need to get skills in a lot of different ways. I thought I did that by teaching them handwriting, spelling, vocabulary, and all the basics. I see know that I had to include (and improve) my ability to deliver instruction more closely related to the training I have received over the past seven years. I thought it would not matter but now I clearly see that students benefit from the methods delivered in the way they were intended. I can't expect them to fully grasp a skill if I don't present it in its entirety.

Teacher 2 viewed skill acquisition from the perspective that learning-disabled students have so much to overcome because of their disability. She stated:

> It is their right to be instructed like the general education population. I know that they can learn the same things if they are given the information. The delivery may have to be modified but they can get the concepts well enough to compete with their peers.

The students viewed skill acquisition from the lens of their own individual improvement. I was impressed that all three student participants could articulate specific components of each instructional strategy during the interviews. All students shared that they had gained a number of skills that they had never learned before. This is in spite of the fact that these instructional practices have been a district mandate for the past seven

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years. They were comfortable applying these skills in both the general education and special education settings. Student 2 captured this area perfectly when she said, "I think teachers thought I couldn't do whatever everyone else was supposed to so they never bothered to teach me. I proved that I can do it."

Literature Connection

In this next section, I address the key point of my literature review as they relate to my findings. The qualitative and quantitative data gathered throughout the study and my reflections on the information will be considered in this synthesis.

Time on Task and Motivation

The relationship between motivation and sustained academic performance has been established in the literature (Walls & Little, 2005). Motivation is what keeps an individual inspired and engaged. Learning-disabled students are often characterized as unmotivated because they do not sustain attention to a task until its completion (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). The off-task behaviors demonstrated by the learning-disabled student participants had an inconsistent impact on their performance as demonstrated in their rubric scores. Though off-task behaviors did not appear to impact the writing quality of one student, the two other participants appeared to show more of a connection between attention to task and written output. Educators must be mindful of what they perceive as off task behaviors in students as my data indicates observed off task behaviors may be in fact a way for students to process information.

Achievement-based rewards such as verbal praise can promote motivation for the specific task and enhance the general interest in the activity (Cameron, Pierce, Banko, & Gear, 2005; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). This was clearly established in my study as all

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student participants felt that one of the most helpful techniques the teacher used was positive verbal feedback about specific strengths in their writing. This simple act boosted their self-confidence and helped them to stay engaged in the assignments.

Independent Writing and Learning-Disabled Students

Independent writing has gained a central focus recently as a means to assess student learning and knowledge (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). The basic steps needed to successfully engage in independent writing include planning, writing, and revising (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). If students understand the reasons behind these steps, they are more likely to accomplish a writing task successfully. The participants accessed a variety of approaches to improve their writing piece, and the literature supports this as a key to success when writing independently (Calkins, 1994; Cruz, 2004; Feifer et al., 2002; Ray & Laminack, 2001). As a result, the participants felt that their writing pieces were comparable to those of their general education peers.

The student participants clearly articulated the importance of writing and understood the steps necessary to complete a writing piece worth reading. Though they grew tired of the revisions while they were asked to do yet another, when the final piece was complete they recognized the overall improved quality. They also identified having the flexibility to write about their personal experiences as valuable and meaningful, and this ties into their motivation to write.

The literature indicates independent writing is challenging for students, particularly those who have been identified as having learning difficulties (Saddler & Graham, 2007; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). According to Stotz, Itoi, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan (2008) these students struggle with writing ability and fluency, the ability

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to recognize oneself as a presenter of information, and organizing strategies which often leads to lower self esteem. This finding was supported in my pre-study interviews, however, post-study this was not the case. All three participants reported a significant boost in self-confidence based on the improvements they recognized in their own writing. They attributed this to the fact that they had in fact acquired the necessary skills.

Instructional Practices and Classroom Implications

In reference to conferring, the literature stresses the importance of this process. The goal is to shift the writers into readers of their own work (Calkins, 1994). During the approximately five-minute conferences, teachers generally follow the phases of research, decision making, compliment, and teaching (Calkins, 2006). Conferring charts are often used to keep a record of the discussions held with each student. I observed the special education teacher conducting the mini-conferences as recommended. The phases were identifiable by me as the observer and by the student participants as the receivers. Each of the student participants described the phases and commented that the part that was most beneficial was the compliment phase.

The special education teacher recognized the students understood the process and purpose clearly (which surprised her) and admitted that she could now see the value in following the format. The special education did not see the need for a classroom conferring chart as she only had three students and preferred to keep anecdotal notes. The general education reported that she followed the procedures outlined for conducting a writing conference and also kept a conferring chart for her class of twenty-two students.

According to the literature, modeling writing through the use of mentor text can be an important tool to help motivate students, particularly when students are having

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difficulty making a connection to a specific writing skill (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Both teacher participants pointed out the value of using mentor text as it provided their

students with a concrete example of a skill. All three student participants also commented

that having a model was helpful as they tried out a new skill. They also enjoyed the

repeated readings as it helped the text come to life in their minds.

Guided practice or the scaffolded presentation of a skill requires discussion and

questioning (Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005; Dean & Grierson, 2005; Ray &

Laminack, 2001). The student participants responded to this structure as evidenced by the

higher rating on the rubric scores. The special education teacher also felt this process

supported the students' learning as they were responsive during the discussions and

added more detail to their independent writing pieces.

The literature suggests teaching writing as a skill rather than a topic (Calkins,

1994; Cruz, 2004; Ray & Laminack, 2001). My research supports this as evidenced by

the instructional strategies the student participants were exposed to by the special

education teacher. When the students were exposed to individual skills and had the

opportunity to practice them, they became more proficient with the application in the

writing pieces. In addition, by providing the student participants with a variety of skills

they could use, they had the opportunity to chose what felt most comfortable. This in and

of itself, helped them to gain independence.

Limitations and Biases

As in any research, there are limitations to this study. One limiting aspect

included the selection criteria used for the study participants. If different criteria were

used in the identification process of the student participants, the outcome may have been

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different. I also used a small sample for my participants. While this allowed for an in

depth exploration of their perceptions toward independent writing and investigation in to

the impact of each instructional strategy, it also may have skewed the results. The

possibility also exists that the teacher and student participants may have been reluctant to

respond honestly to the interview questions. The questions were carefully crafted to

minimize this possibility. As the behaviors of each student participant were recorded,

misinterpretations also may have occurred. Formal and informal observations were

conducted to ensure a broad scope of understanding in this regard.

The special education teacher participant was allowed the freedom to present the

instructional practices in the order she determined most appropriate for her students. She

also continued to use the instructional practices between the formal observations. These

may or may not have been limiting factors. The time of year may have had an impact on

student performance as the study was conducted from September 2011 to January 2012.

This time frame was intentional as there was an attempt to observe the students when

they were initially exposed to the strategies. If the study occurred during the second half

of the school year, this may have affected the results. Finally, the special education

teacher did not always provide the recommended independent writing time in one block

of time as the literature recommends (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994). The students were

generally given twenty minutes of independent writing time while the recommended time

is approximately thirty minutes. The student participants made progress with the time

allotted and the additional writing times between the observations however the progress

may have even been greater, or there may have been more avoidance behaviors with the

additional time.

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The order and manner in which each instructional practice was delivered may also be a limitation. The selection of the text used for the mentor text lessons may have influenced the outcome as demonstrated by Student 2 when presented with the second mentor text book she did not connect with. Teacher 1 admitted this book may have not been the right choice for the purposes of her lesson. Teachers must be mindful to the text they are selecting and the impact the text may have on their students. While guided practice offers a structured approach by scaffolding questions, if the right questions are not asked, the students may not fully grasp the concept of the lesson. Teachers must be very careful to ensure they are leading students down the correct path. The timing of when each student engaged in a one-to-one conference with the teacher after each mini-lesson may have impacted on the results in this study. Teachers use their judgment as to who they conference with first and those who they decide can wait. If the student participants were approached in a different order, the avoidance behaviors observed may have varied. Teachers must examine their methods for determined who they conference with first to ensure that each student is receiving maximum instructional benefits.

While being mindful to be objective and open during the interviews, and attentive during the recording of the behavioral data, every researcher has their own biases and assumptions. Acknowledging this is an opportunity to ensure the research is not swayed in a particular direction. Through self-reflection and the recording of my observer's comments, I diligently monitored my biases and assumptions throughout the study. As I reviewed my information, I questioned whether the behaviors of the student participants were truly avoidance behaviors, and I felt very excited during the post study interviews as the information I was receiving was so positive. When I interpreted the data, however, I

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remained neutral and objective. In addition, through the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, I created a triangulation effect that supported a balance in my study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in my mixed methods study was a blend of my ideas gained from my years of experience as an educator and the existing research that addressed improving students writing skills (Maxwell, 2005). As a learning disabilities teacher consultant, I not only identify specific learning disabilities, but I also develop individualized educational programs to address a student's unique learning needs.

Vygotsky's (1934/1986) social constructivist model for learning supports my conceptual framework in reference to the acquisition of writing skills. Vygotsky postulated that social interaction is essential for students to learn referred to as the zone of proximal development (as cited in van Geert, 1998). During my study, I witnessed the student participants moving from their potential development into their actual development as they received specific guidance from their teacher as she used the instructional practices of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice.

My democratic leadership style was also integrated into my conceptual framework to create buy-in from stakeholders (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004). When stakeholders have a voice in the decisions made, they are more willing to participate and maintain a vested interest in the outcome (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). When I encouraged the teacher participants to share their ideas about writing, and offered the special education teacher a choice in the sequence of the instructional strategies presented, both teachers were willing to participate in the five-month study. In addition, the student participants were willing to complete the requirements of the study as they

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were given the opportunity to share their thoughts and select topics for their writing

pieces. Utilizing this blended framework allowed me to share the ideas, knowledge, and

experiences of others to gain insight and understanding into what may improve the

independent writing skills of learning-disabled students.

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Chapter 5
Conclusions and Recommendations

This mixed methods case study explored specific instructional practices that encouraged independence in writing, increased time on task, and improved written output for fifth grade learning-disabled students serviced in a replacement language arts special education setting. Qualitative data gathered helped to understand perceptions surrounding the effectiveness of the instructional practices of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice from the teacher and student perspectives' through pre and post interviews. The emerging themes of confidence, interest level, and skill acquisition were uncovered through thematic coding. Student writing samples were also holistically assessed for sentence structure and support using the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) scoring rubric.

Student avoidance behaviors were recorded during independent writing time while each instructional practice was presented. This quantitative data was analyzed along with the ERB scores through cross-case analysis to address the research questions. The data was also analyzed by student to determine if one instructional practice yielded higher rubric scores and more time on task than the others.

Positive growth was indicated in all three student participants after they were exposed to each of the three instructional practices though one practice did not stand out above the rest. A connection was noted between the preferred method of instruction and higher rubric scores with the student participants. Considering the level of understanding that the student participants demonstrated in relation to their own needs, this is not surprising. Both teacher participants felt mentor text produced the greatest gains for students yet acknowledged that each instructional practice has merit. The teacher's own

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comfort level when delivering writing instruction may have an influence in this perception. In sum, each instructional method appears to be equally effective when used in isolation or in combination with another instructional practice. Teachers should feel confident that when these instructional practices are paired with the unique learning needs of students they are effective strategies that improve independent writing. The structure, individualized attention, and models they provide offer students the opportunity to acquire skills in a variety of ways which is essential for learning-disabled students.

During the process of completing this dissertation, I reflected on the information obtained through the lens of transformative leadership. Within this chapter, I will provide my perspective on the importance of this research, the social justice issue related to special needs students, and the impact on the educational system. I will also address my leadership, implementing change in an organization, and implications for the future through the lens of transformative leadership and second order change.

So What? Importance of This Research

During the guided practice writing lessons I observed, the special education teacher often posed the questions: So What? Why is this important? These simple words asked the students to reflect and highlight the meaning to their work. Now the question is asked of me and my work. As educators, it is our responsibility to teach students in a way they can learn. My study provides valuable information to teachers, administrators, and policy makers, to address this which will be discussed further with the impact on the educational system.

The most important contribution my research provides are the benefits that can be obtained from the differently-abled students. In the post-interview, the student

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participants verbalized the key strengths of each instructional practice without being directly taught this information. The implication this has on their ability to understand good teaching and what works for them is note worthy. To varying degrees, the student participants' were meta-cognitive about their writing; they internalized the information and demonstrated a deeper understanding of teaching methods. Preferences demonstrated toward the teacher selected mentor texts also support this level of understanding. Teachers should consider allowing students to self-select a writing style they would like to attempt.

The knowledge and insight gained from my study could be shared with special education teachers to help them to understand that just because a student is classified does not mean they cannot learn comparable skills to their general education peers. Reluctant writers need to be taught specific methods to improve their written output and once they acquire these skills they can apply them successfully to their writing. The best instructional practices should be used with these students, not because they are required but because when implemented fully, they work. Special needs students often have gaps to fill and need to be exposed to the most effective strategies that will target their weakness so they can get back on track. The confidence level that can be gained by the students who see themselves as less able with their writing than their general education peers has more of an impact than one could imagine.

As we strive for excellence in our teaching practices, examining specific instructional practices to improve writing are also helpful as it helps teachers and administrators reflect on teaching. With the increased demands on the classroom teacher and the overloaded curriculum that must be addressed each year, teachers need to know

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that what they are doing will have a significant impact. Since a student's knowledge base

is often assessed by their writing skills, administrators should be mindful that student

performance is an overall reflection of what the school district has to offer as the district

is accountable to the students and their parents. After all, the core function of teaching

impacts the core function of learning, and student learning is the ultimate goal.

Their Right to Write Right

This study was important as it highlights a social justice issue. All students should

have an equal opportunity to experience a well-developed writing curriculum yet

classified students often receive watered down instruction in their replacement classes

(Theoharis, 2007). Special education teachers argue that their students cannot handle the

general education curriculum and that is why they are classified (Garcia & de Caso,

2004). Classified because they cannot handle curriculum or rather they are classified

based on a learning need that requires them to have specific modifications and

accommodations to help students achieve success with the curriculum (Ortiz Lienemann,

Graham, Leader-Janssen, & Reid, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). From a social justice

perspective, special education students have a right to be educated with the general

education curriculum otherwise it could be perceived as discrimination (Theoharis,

2007).

Special needs students tend to stand out more in a high performing school district

because they struggle with the curriculum expectations both in and out of school. Given a

writing assignment, they produce one or two sentences by the time their peers produce

one or two paragraphs (Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). This causes low self-

esteem and stress, which leads to the tendency to assume less responsibility for their

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learning, therefore special needs students experience higher academic frustration in school (Garcia & de Caso, 2004). In addition, when they go home their experiences are often vastly different from their peers. They may not have access to external supports such as private tutors to help them with homework (Noguera, 2011). Many times their parents can't help with homework because they themselves don't understand it. At school the next day, their classmates have homework completed, the teacher moves on, the struggling learner becomes more lost, and the achievement gap widens (Laden-Billings, 2006).

The unique learning needs of special education students coupled with a writing curriculum that is challenging equates to a significant challenge for me as an educational leader. With the often necessary budget cuts, support programs may be terminated first as they may appear to be unnecessary or not cost effective. However, the achievement gap comes with the educational and moral debt owed to these students (Ladson-Billings, 2006) as they have just as much right to access the general education writing curriculum as every other student. As a leader, I must find creative ways for these students to have access to the full writing curriculum and exposure to the best instructional practices. To achieve this, it may require providing classroom teachers with additional training and support as change must occur within the organization and those supporting systems that surround it.

Impact on the Educational System

As an educational leader, it is my responsibility to ensure that teachers provide differently-abled students with the proper tools that prepare them for the demands they will encounter with writing as they progress in their education. Teaching writing to these

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students can be a challenge because writing is not just one skill. It involves a cluster of skills (sequencing, spelling, rereading, and supporting big ideas with examples) that often need to be used at the same time (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Learning-disabled students need support with the integration and application of these complex writing skills, and our teachers need support with delivering the best practices.

To support teachers, educational institutions would benefit from understanding if specific instructional strategies improve independent writing skills for special needs students. This knowledge not only improves the instructional practices of special education teachers but it also helps the identified students acquire the skills necessary to interact and compete with their general education peers. Special education teachers may require additional support and training to develop their skills so they feel more comfortable implementing well researched techniques in the manner they were intended just as Teacher 1 did in my study. It also may require a mindset shift for special education teachers to see their students as equally-abled. This aspect will addressed further in the transformative leadership and organizational learning section of this chapter.

This research could also influence educational policy as it relates to teacher preparation at the post high school level. Colleges and universities should examine the design of their teacher preparation programs to determine if there is ample training for pre-service teachers in the area of delivering writing instruction. Writing is an important skill that will be used by students as a primary means of communication and as an assessment of content knowledge according to Mason, Benedek-Wood, and Valasa (2009). This essential piece of a student's education must be carefully delivered.

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Transformative Leadership and Organizational Learning

As a transformative leader, I must move issues beyond transformational and into social justice (Theoharis, 2007). Transformative leadership facilitates organizational learning by strengthening school culture and the bonds the school has with the community, in addition to enhancing staff capacity and improving school structures which ultimately leads to improved student performance (Theoharis, 2007). According to Friedman, Lipshitz, & Overmeer (2001) organizational learning is a process of inquiry through which members of an organization develop shared values and knowledge based on past experiences of themselves and others. The processes are conscious and systematic, involve critical and reflective attitude towards the information processed, and leads to actions that members feel committed to (Friedman, Lipshitz, & Overmeer, 2001).

Organizational learning is the collective conscious of the group that meshes the isolated knowledge of its individual members. As a transformative leader I must facilitate systems that support and enable these interactions in an effort to create double loop learning (Friedman, Lipshitz, & Overmeer, 2001). To achieve this, I must be courageous, adaptable, and open to the thoughts and ideas of the stakeholders (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) when taking a realistic look at the functioning of the organization. Difficult issues need to be confronted and addressed rather than avoided, and changes must move forward in spite of potential resistance (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kotter, 1996).

I believe a multifaceted approach must be developed to achieve transformation within an organization, which will help prepare differently-abled students to function in a global economy and compete with their normally developing peers. The organization must move beyond the technical problem and view it as an adaptive challenge (Heifetz &

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Linsky, 2002). In order to raise the achievement of special needs students in the area of writing, staff consciousness must be raised in regard to social justice. Staff needs to be sensitive to the unique circumstances that these students are exposed to in both the school and home environment. This would require sensitivity training through professional development and discussion time. When the issues are addressed and discussed openly stakeholders have the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and weigh in on solutions and an egalitarian or power sharing dynamic is established (Friedman, Lipshitz, & Overmeer, 2001). This also fosters buy-in and increases the sustainability of the change as stakeholders can internalize the change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

I would also recommend strengthening the school structures to support programs that allow equal access for students. The inclusion of special needs students in the general education classroom not only provides exposure to the mainstream curriculum but also allows for exposure to their typically developing peers (Theoharis, 2007). A model worth considering is a combination of inclusion and small group instruction when teaching writing.

All students would be exposed to the lesson as part of a mini-lesson to teach a skill. Then, those students who need additional support could receive this in a small group reinforcement model with extended guided practice. Finally, individualized support could be provided through conferencing while students are writing independently. This model would require the general education teacher to work cooperatively with the special education teacher to plan and execute lessons. In addition, teachers may need training with extended coaching to function successfully in this model as they would need to be skilled not only in curriculum delivery but also in collaboration

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and making appropriate accommodations and modifications for each student. This could be achieved through my support as an administrator and through peer support offered through Professional Learning Communities.

Parents must feel like that they are valued participants in the educational process of their children as well. As a leader, my goal would be to establish trust through open communication (Noguera, 2011). This could be achieved through establishing parent-training programs that are offered at a time convenient to parents with the promise of child care. I would also task a group of willing teachers to reach out to the community to enlist their support, which may come in the offerings of token gifts or snacks for the meetings. If community members were willing, they would also have the opportunity to present to the parents to reciprocate relationships.

With all the challenges transformative leadership has to offer, the real challenge is for those special needs students who must overcome many obstacles to receive an equitable education. They must contend with teacher beliefs that they cannot handle the general education writing curriculum therefore it is watered down. They must also contend with their own learning difficulties and the perceptions of their peers which may lead them to feel less able. Often, they must deal with less support at home which may put them at a disadvantage when they enter school the next day with assignments. Not only are these students entitled to an equal education but it is their right to have access to the general education writing curriculum.

As a transformative leader, it is my responsibility to provide those things necessary for special needs students to succeed. This will narrow the achievement gap and begin to address the educational debt they have acquired due to past practices of

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exclusion (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). A multifaceted approach will

support the organization and move it from the technical problem into an adaptive

challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). In order for the school to develop into a learning

organization, staff must develop a collective conscious around the social justice issue

(Friedman, Lipshitz, & Overmeer, 2001). School structures must also be strengthened to

support the organizational change. Parents and community members must be engaged as

well so that a truly supportive environment can be created for these students. As a

transformative leader, if I am to help prepare special needs students to compete in the

global economy as they enter adulthood, I must ensure that they are provided with every

opportunity to succeed. Writing skills reflect who students are and it is important to

prepare them for this type of assessment with the most effective strategies available.

Implications for the Future

The implications for further research on the topic of improving independent

writing skills for students are vast. Future research endeavors specific to this research

include expanding the participant base to a larger population of students. In addition,

incorporating additional instructional practices may also offer depth to the knowledge

base of improving instructional practices in the area of writing. Research that includes

prolonged independent writing time would also be worthwhile as this perspective would

truly capture motivation and avoidance toward independent writing. An in-depth study

involving teaching writing and the perceptions of teachers toward their pre-classroom

preparation would help colleges and universities to determine if their programs provide

the necessary offerings. Research should also be conducted to explore teacher perceptions

of their continued support in reference to teaching writing once hired by a district because

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this would help school systems determine whether their professional development has a positive impact on the art of teaching writing.

My leadership changed through this dissertation process as I recognize the importance of a democratic approach but it does not stop there. It is important to seek input from stakeholders to ensure they have a voice. This is how a leader builds buy-in and trust. It is equally important as a transformative leader to understand the inner workings of an organization's culture so that change can be addressed at the core level. Mindfulness and reflection are essential in an effort to complete this goal. Being mindful, I will use a variety of methods to self-monitor, examine my values, become aware of new information and perspectives, and respond thoughtfully to others (Epstein, 1999). I must also set realistic expectations for stakeholders within a specific timeframe, and periodically assess the organization's progress to determine if any shifts are necessary in my approach.

In addition, I realize that an educational leader must also be an instructional leader (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). As such, I understand the importance of conducting informed classroom observations which would allow me to provide valuable information to the teachers. Leadership that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Having gained an in-depth understanding of the writing instructional practices of conferring, mentor text, and guided practice, I offer specific recommendations to the teachers to improve their practice.

Talk to students and really listen. Often times they can tell you what they need. Allow them to share their voice with the focus of their writing and the selection of an

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author style they feel connected to. Value their voices as they value yours. When providing feedback, go beyond "good job." Offer positive contingent feedback with specific information about specific points in their writing. Students love to hear good things about their work as we all do. Consider the sequence of when individual conferences are held. Survey the class and determine who would benefit from support first and who can wait. Be mindful to address students in a rotation over time. Variety in approaches is important to address individual learning styles and boost motivational levels. Implement best practices to their fullest not because it is expected but because when done correctly, it works.

I believe my case-study research achieved its aim of identifying which instructional practices improve the independent writing skills of learning-disabled students. I discovered that all three methods are beneficial in improving the independent writing skills of my study participants as each have their strengths that can be utilized in different ways to support students when acquiring specific skills. The most significant insight gained from this study, however relates to the students' perceptions of themselves. The teacher participants noticed a change in the student participants' confidence level, which then led to a greater readiness to acquire the skills. The student participants openly shared their pride in their improved performance. For the students and teachers that participated in this study, that is significant because they achieved a mindset shift. The general education teacher captured this in her final interview comments:

> I am happy you did this study with this population. These strategies are applicable to them but there has been a lot of push back for many years with the teachers saying that they can't do it. It is perfect for these kids. Hopefully you can be their voice.

That is my exact intention.

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Appendix A
ERB Rubric

ERB Rubric   Grades 3-12

	Overall Development	Organization	Support	Sentence Structure	Word Choice	Mechanics
6 Paper	• Fluent, richly developed • Clear awareness of audience and purpose • Distinctive, engaging voice • Original, insightful, or imaginative	• Carefully but subtly organized from beginning to end • Logical order (well sequenced)* • Elegant flow of ideas • Provides closure	• Supporting details are rich, interesting, and informative throughout; • Details are relevant and appropriate to the focus	• Sentence structures enhance style and effect • Virtually no errors in structure or usage • Successfully uses more sophisticated, varied sentence patterns	• Rich, effective vocabulary throughout • Vivid language • May use figurative language and imagery	• Very few or no mechanical errors relative to length or complexity
5 Paper	• Fluent, fully developed • Clear awareness of audience and purpose • Evidence of voice, compositional risks attempted • Cohesive	• Organized from beginning to end • Logical order (sequenced)* • Subtle transitions • Provides closure	• Details are strong and varied throughout • Details are relevant and appropriate for the focus	• Sentence structures are appropriate to style and effect • Few errors in structure or usage • Moderately successful in using more sophisticated sentence patterns	• Effective vocabulary relative to length or complexity • Generally successful in using rich language	• Few mechanical errors relative to length or complexity
4 Paper	• Moderately fluent, adequately developed • Awareness of audience and purpose • Ideas developed but somewhat limited in depth	• Minor lapses in order or structure (some breaks in sequencing)* • Meaning is subordinate to organizational devices • Contrived transitions • Provides closure	• Details are adequate to support the focus • Details are generally relevant to the focus	• Some sentence variety • Generally correct structure and usage • Attempts to use more sophisticated sentence patterns	• Acceptable vocabulary • Attempts to use rich language • Misuse of big words	• Some mechanical errors that do not interfere with communication • Limited text, but mechanically correct
3 Paper	• Somewhat developed • Some awareness of audience and purpose • Repetitive or too general	• Poor transitions • Random sequencing* • Attempts closure • Shift in focus	• Details lack elaboration • Insufficient relevant details • Important details are omitted	• Little sentence variety • Errors in structure or usage interfere with meaning • Over-reliance on simple or repetitive constructions • Chaining • Noticeable errors in usage	• Simplistic vocabulary with acceptable but limited word choice • Some errors in word choice	• Some mechanical errors that do interfere with communication
2 Paper	• Poorly developed • Poor awareness of audience or purpose • Ideas and details are not clear	• Thought patterns are difficult to follow • Ideas are not clear or sequenced* • Resembles free-writing, rambling • Continual shifts in focus	• Supporting details are listed • Repetitious details • Too few details	• No sentence variety • Serious errors in structure or usage • Too brief to demonstrate variety	• Simplistic vocabulary with inappropriate and/or incorrect word choice	• Noticeable mechanical errors that interfere with communication • Errors are disproportionate to the length or complexity of the piece (errors cause major problems for readers)
1 Paper	• Not developed • Restates topic • No awareness of audience • Inappropriate response or purpose • Too brief to show development	• So short or muddled that it lacks organization or focus	• Virtually no details • Irrelevant details	• Lack of sentence sense • Riddled with errors at the sentence level • Riddled with errors in usage • Too brief to evaluate	• Extremely limited vocabulary • Riddled with errors in word choice • Too brief to evaluate	• Mechanical errors that seriously interfere with communication • Too brief to evaluate

* Grades 3/4 Narrative Only

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Appendix B
Consent Letter Student Participant

Effects of Instructional Practices on the Independent Writing of Learning-disabled Students

INFORMED CONSENT FOR MINORS

Dear Parent/Guardian of_____:

As part of my continued professional growth as a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant, I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership Program at Rowan University. I will be conducting research with the permission of Dr. Victoria Kniewel and the West Windsor Plainsboro Board of Education under the supervision of Dr. Donna W. Jorgensen of Rowan University as part of my doctoral dissertation concerning the exploration of specific strategies, techniques, and tools that improve independent writing for learning-disabled students. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research.

The goal of the study is to determine which instructional practices encourage independent writing as measured by on task time and improved written output assessed through sentence structure and content. The study will offer students the opportunity to participate in classroom instruction using the specific teaching methods of conferring, guided practice, and mentor text to improve independent writing skills. Student interviews, classroom observations, and the collection of writing samples will be required of student participants.

Your decision of whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her classroom. Confidentiality of all study participants will be maintained through coded data reporting and participants may choose to opt out of the study at any time without penalty. Since the study will be conducted as part of the regular course of classroom instruction within the regular school day, there are no anticipated risks to participating in the study. Study participants will receive no compensation for their participation. The study is expected to be conducted over approximately five months during the span of the 2011-2012 school years.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me through Village School at 609-716-5200 x5211 for more information. If you prefer, please contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Donna W. Jorgenson, through Rowan University Teacher Education Department at 856-256-4649.

Yours truly,

Astrid Bohler Monforte, Learning Consultant

Please tear off section below and return to Astrid Bohler Monforte by September 8, 2011

RESEARCH STUDY STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Student's Name: _____   Grade: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____   Date: _____

_____ I grant permission for my child to participate in the study entitled: Effects of Instructional Practices on the Independent Writing of Learning-disabled Students

_____ I do not grant my permission for my child to participate in the study.

`

Consent Letter Adult Participant

Effects of Instructional Practices on the Independent Writing of Learning-disabled Students

INFORMED CONSENT

The intent of this research study is to explore instructional practices that improve independent writing for learning-disabled students. Various data collection techniques will be utilized including: teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, data retrieval charts, student work samples, researcher journal entries, standardized test scores, and artifacts.

The study is intended to be conducted over approximately five months during the span of the 2011-2012 school years and will not cause any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participants. Benefits will include professional growth experience regarding refining specific writing instructional practices to best serve the needs of learning-disabled students.

Participation in this study is voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained through the use of coded data reporting. Refusal to participate in the study will in no way jeopardize the status to which the subject is otherwise entitled. In addition, subjects may discontinue participation in the study at any time without penalty.

The study will be conducted as part of the subjects' regular job responsibilities and no additional compensation will be awarded for participation.

For further information about your rights as a research subject, please contact:

Associate Provost for Research, Rowan University Office of Research, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028, (856) 256-5150.

For further information about this study, please contact the researcher:

Astrid Bohler Monforte, 63 Peter Rafferty Drive, Hamilton, NJ 08690, (609) 586-6241.

Or: Dr. Donna W. Jorgensen, Faculty Advisor, Rowan University Teacher Education Department,

856-256-464

I agree to participate in the research study entitled "Effects of Instructional Practices on the Independent Writing of Learning-disabled Students" which is being conducted by Mrs. Astrid Bohler Monforte as part of a doctoral dissertation for Rowan University.

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date   Researcher Signature   Date

Appendix D
Adult Participant Interview Questions Pre-Study

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
2. How much time do you devote to the teaching of writing on a daily/weekly basis?
3. How much time do your students spend writing independently during a writing lesson?
4. Talk to me about teaching writing to learning-disabled students.
5. Are you familiar with the end of the year writing benchmark expectations for the current grade you teach? Do you feel this applies to students with learning disabilities?
6. What is the expectation of student independent writing time in the next grade? Does it differ for learning-disabled students? Do you discuss this with your colleagues?
7. Talk to me about scoring student writing using a rubric.
8. What type of professional development training and experience have you had in reference to teaching writing?
9. Are you familiar with the teaching methods of Conferring? Guided practice? Mentor text?
10. How often do you use these instructional practices in your classroom?
11. How do you use your classroom conferring chart to monitor student progress in writing? Have you found this to be beneficial?
12. Do you find that guided practice is helpful in motivating a student to write independently?
13. Is the use of mentor text as a model helpful in encouraging writing in learning-disabled students?
14. What are some of the challenges you have found in motivating learning-disabled students to remain on task during independent writing? What have you found to be successful in overcoming these obstacles?
15. Rate each student participant's current independent writing skill as either poor, fair, average, or above average. Please expand on the writing strengths and weaknesses of each student.
16. What would you like to see as a result of this study?

Appendix E

Adult Participant Interview Questions Post-Study

1. Talk to me about teaching writing to learning-disabled students.
2. How much time do you now devote to the teaching of writing on a daily/weekly basis?
3. How much time do your students now spend writing independently during a writing lesson?
4. What is your general reaction to the teaching methods of conferring, guided practice, and mentor text? Do you feel that your skills/expertise has changed in these areas?
5. Do you feel that these specific teaching methods have increased the student participant's time on task and written output?
6. What changes have you seen in the writing skill of each participant?
7. What do you feel they need to continue to focus on? What methods do you feel would be most helpful in helping them achieve greater writing skill?
8. Has your instructional use of conferring, guided practice, and mentor text increased?
9. Has your use of a classroom conferring chart to monitor student progress in writing increased? Please explain.
10. Talk to me about scoring student writing using a rubric.
11. Have you found guided practice to be helpful in motivating a student to write independently?
12. Has the use of mentor text as a model been helpful in encouraging writing in learning-disabled students?
13. What are some of the issues you continue to find challenging in motivating learning-disabled students to remain on task during independent writing? What current methods are you using to overcome these obstacles?
14. Rate each student participant's current independent writing skill as either poor, fair, average, or above average. Please expand on the writing strengths and weaknesses of each student.
15. What types of comments or feedback have you gotten from the student participants in reference to their independent writing while using conferring, guided practice, and mentor text?
16. Are there any comments you would like to share in reference to this study?

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Sample Analytic Memos

9/15/11 Pre Study Interview with Teacher 2:

Most of the questions just flow right into the next with her comments. I am silently chuckling. The same happened with my interview with Teacher 1. I was concerned about my questions- if they addressed the appropriate areas. The flow of the interview is effortless and the information is really helpful. I belief my questions are valid and will support my study.

9/22/11 Upon completion of the initial behavioral observations of students during independent writing:

I need to revise the classroom observation charts, and reframe my thinking about motivation and time on task. I need to be careful not to misinterpret student behaviors. I will question the student participants to validate my observations in reference to their writing avoidance behaviors.

10/5/11 First Guided Practice Lesson:

Teacher 1 was surprised that the students could write for an extended period of time. It was hard for her to not interrupt. I think the next time she has independent writing time, she should write too. This way she will be occupied while they work and not be tempted to check on them. She will also have a writing piece that she can share and edit.

10/19/11 First Conferring Lesson:

Student 1 had a conference that lasted 5 minutes. It was powerful. I could almost see a light bulb go off in his head. When a conference is done correctly, it can have amazing results.

11/3/11 First Mentor Text Lesson:

Teacher 1 seemed to rush through the mini-lesson. I am not certain that all three students grasped the skill she was trying to convey. It will be interesting to see if they were able to add the level of detail she was looking for.

Appendix G
Student Participant Interview Questions Pre-Study

1. What kind of writer do you consider yourself? (above average, average, fair, poor)
2. Do you like to write? (yes, no, sometimes)
3. What do you like to write about?
4. Talk to me about how you feel about writing. (What are you thinking when there is a writing assignment on the board when you walk into the room?)
5. What was the last thing you wrote that was not required by school?
6. How much time would your parents say you spend writing at home?
7. How much time do you think you write daily/weekly in school?
8. Think back to a writing lesson in school that you liked. How did the teacher help you write?
9. Is it helpful when a teacher sits with you one-on-one to talk to you about your writing? What do you like/dislike about this?
10. Has your teacher ever asked a lot of questions to get you to think about your writing?
11. Has he/she ever helped you write step by step, maybe even using a diagram? Was this helpful?
12. Did your teacher ever use books or other writing samples to help you learn a writing skill, such as when to punctuate? Was this helpful?
13. How is your writing graded by the teacher? Is this helpful?
14. Do you need to make a lot of revisions when you write? Do you do this because the teacher asks you, or do you do this because you want your writing to be better?
15. What do you do when you don't feel like doing a writing assignment in class?
16. Do you know how long a writing piece should be in the next grade?
17. If you could tell your teacher the best way to help you improve your writing, what would you say?
18. Do you have any questions for me?

`

Appendix H
Student Participant Interview Questions Post-Study

1. Talk to me about how you feel about writing. (What are you thinking when there is a writing assignment on the board when you walk into the room?)
2. What kind of writer do you now consider yourself? (above average, average, fair, poor)
3. Do you like to write now? (yes, no, sometimes)
4. What do you like to write about?
5. What was the last thing you wrote that was not required by school?
6. How much time would your parents say you spend writing at home now?
7. How much time do you think you write daily/weekly in school now?
8. Think back to a writing lesson in school that you liked. How did the teacher help you write?
9. How did you feel when the teacher sat with you one-on-one to talk to you about your writing? What did you like/dislike about this?
10. When your teacher asked a lot of questions to get you to think about your writing, was this helpful? Why/why not?
11. Was it helpful when your teacher showed you how to write step by step or asked you questions step by step when you were writing? Why/why not?
12. Was it helpful when your teacher used books or other writing samples to demonstrate a writing skill, such as when to punctuate? Why/why not?
13. Did your writing improve when your teacher gave you feedback on your writing?
14. Did you need to make a lot of revisions after you wrote? Did you do this because the teacher asked you, or did you do this because you wanted your writing to be better?
15. What do you do when you don't feel like doing a writing assignment in class?
16. Do you know how long a writing piece should be in the next grade?
17. If you could tell your teacher what was most helpful to you in improving your writing, what would you say?
18. Are there any comments you would like to share in reference to this experience?

Appendix I
Avoidance Behavior Data Collection Chart

Student: Date: Time:

Behavior	5 mins.	10 mins.	15 mins.	20 mins.	Comments
Played with objects					
Head on desk					
Bathroom break					
Rolled around on floor					
Looking around					

*Note the above behaviors were determined during the initial observation for each student participant. The same chart was used for all participants as there was a limited number of avoidance behaviors observed.