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**THE IMPACT OF USING MENTOR TEXTS AND THE  
WRITING WORKSHOP WITH FIRST GRADE WRITERS**

by  
Kelly W. Turner

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Reading Education  
at  
Rowan University  
December 2014

Thesis Chair: Valarie G. Lee, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family: Jody Turner, Emmett Turner, Kevin Turner, and Matt Arnao.*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my family for all of their support throughout this entire process. Without you, I could not have made it this far. Mom and Matt, your constant encouragement and support in everything I do helped me to accomplish my goals. Each semester presented a new demand and you made me believe in myself and helped me conquer each challenge. Mom, you're the best editor! Thanks for all of your help. I must apologize to you, Matt, because I know it was not easy living with me over the past two years! I love you. Dad and Kevin, thank you for always believing in me. You have both cultivated a desire within me to work to my fullest potential during this process. I am so excited to have my life back and to be able to spend time with each of you. I would also like to thank my coworkers, especially Sarah, for putting up with my craziness during this time. You have helped to keep me prepared and ready for my students even when I felt like I was barely able to breathe. Lastly, a huge thank you to Erica, Lisa, Stephanie, Samantha, and Kim for the venting sessions and study groups. Congratulations, ladies! So happy to have met you!

## **Abstract**

Kelly W. Turner

**THE IMPACT OF USING MENTOR TEXTS AND THE  
WRITING WORKSHOP WITH FIRST GRADE WRITERS  
2014**

Valarie G. Lee, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact that using mentor texts in conjunction with the writing workshop would have on struggling first grade writers. A group of eight first grade students participated in the study. The participants had varying writing ability levels. During the study, the students were provided writing instruction with a variety of mentor texts during mini-lessons. After each lesson, the students were given between thirty to sixty minutes to write. The workshop sessions concluded with the students sharing self-selected writing pieces. This format was followed four days a week for the duration of four weeks. The data collection methods used were individual student interviews, anecdotal notes, student-teacher conferences, weekly conferencing records, workshop recordings, and a teacher research journal. The findings of this study suggested that mentor texts and the writing workshop model increased students' interest in writing and their motivation to write. Additionally, a writing community was created throughout this process. Furthermore, the students' awareness in writing developed along with an increase in their self-efficacy. Ultimately, the study concluded that utilizing mentor texts and the writing workshop increased students' writing interests, created a sense of collaboration, and allowed students to take ownership of their learning.

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## Chapter 1

### How This Study Found Me

“Writing is important only when it is personally meaningful. And it is meaningful only when it is seen by the writer as communication with an audience - not as an opportunity for a teacher to give a grade or teach another curriculum objective.”

(Thomason, 1998, p. 6)

#### Introduction

“Okay, it’s time for writing!” rang out the teacher’s voice, collectively followed by, “Oh man!” and groans from the students. Secretly, the teacher was thinking the same thing. “What is wrong with this picture? I have a degree in writing and love to write! Why can’t I get this message across to my students? This type of instruction is so predictable and mundane,” agonized the teacher silently. The instruction continued as usual. “During the past two weeks, we have learned how to write sentences about things, then sentences about places. This week we are going to learn how to write sentences about events. Doesn’t that sound like fun?” “We already did this! Why do we have to do it again?” called out a particularly loquacious student. The teacher ignored the comment, “Here is a student sample. What do you notice? Let’s talk about... Now, let’s make our own sample... Great! Now it’s your turn. Write your own sentences about a place during our writing times on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. I’ll guide you through the process, and then you’ll never see it again.” This last sentence is a bit of an exaggeration, but you get the picture.

This is my sixth year teaching writing to students. The first group of students I had when I started teaching was a small group of second and third graders in a resource center. Our writing lessons were very fun and exciting to me as it was my first year teaching. I was then moved to first grade to be an inclusion classroom teacher. What a

fantastic time I had with my own class filled with eager and willing students! The school district's writing curriculum is based on the English Language Arts balanced literacy program that was purchased for instructional purposes. This type of writing instruction was fulfilling for the first two years of my career. After that, it went downhill, a little more and more every year. The longer I taught writing this way, I continually questioned: Why do we have to teach this way? What are the students truly gaining from this instruction? Are their writing skills developing in meaningful ways? - Oh, what's this? The students standardized testing scores? Oh, my! Look at those writing scores! Those definitely do not meet our expectations! - So, why are we still teaching writing in this fashion?

The groans, grunts, grimaces, and gripes - from my students and myself - continued for years. So did the self-questioning: How can I change this? How can I get my students interested in writing? What was so special about writing for me that helped to foster the love I have for it? I want my students to experience this, too! I began researching different models and methods of writing instruction. I wanted to see change, but did not know where to begin. Is it possible to completely change the writing curriculum? Would my supervisors and administration be willing and able to make that decision? How can I help show a different writing approach that might be more beneficial than what is currently being used? And most importantly, how can I make my students enjoy writing while meaningfully developing their skills?

When considering the students' lack of motivation to write, the monotonous writing instruction, and the district's low writing scores, I have chosen to focus on writing instruction within my first grade classroom. Specifically, I will aim to increase

students' interest and motivation in writing while developing meaningful and engaging lessons in the hopes of strengthening the students' writing skills and knowledge. This will be tested through the use of mentor texts as a means of writing instruction followed by the implementation of the writing workshop model.

### **Purpose**

There is a problematic trend that has been spotted within schools in our country: “American students today are not meeting even basic writing standards, and their teachers are often at a loss for how to help them” (Gregorian, 2007, p. 2). As a teacher who can personally relate to this feeling of loss, it is imperative that action be taken. Writing is a lifelong skill that students need to develop early in their schooling to carry with them throughout the remainder of their education, social interactions, and careers. Gregorian (2007) explains how this writing deficit can lead to other downfalls as well: “Young people who do not have the ability to transform thoughts, experiences, and ideas into written words are in danger of losing touch with the joy of inquiry, the sense of intellectual curiosity, and inestimable satisfaction of acquiring wisdom that are the touchstones of humanity” (p. 1). Writing instruction within schools needs to be improved. Our nation is facing a literacy crisis (Graham & Perin, 2007).

As Graham and Perin (2007) emphasize, “Writing well is not just an option for young people - it is a necessity” (p. 3). As previously mentioned, this necessity will be heavily relied upon for the remainder of the students' lives. “Writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy. Yet every year in the United States large numbers of adolescents graduate from high school unable to write at the basic levels required by colleges and

employers” (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 3). This national challenge can be faced by teachers who are willing to put in research and effort to help remediate this writing crisis. But how can it be done? Research recommends using a variety of techniques and strategies, including mentor texts and the writing workshop model. Each of these strategies incorporates something unique into the classroom writing instruction.

Gallagher (2014) draws parallels between how we as humans learn to do things, watching, analyzing, or copying someone who is knowledgeable, and how this process is valuable in writing instruction. Using models and authentic literature can provide students with the necessary tools to analyze and mimic writing styles and formats. Gallagher (2014) emphasizes how students need to be immersed in writing and have continual access to mentor texts for them to truly be successful. He also goes on to explain that students need to be taught how to think like writers (Gallagher, 2014). This means looking at a text purposefully to determine and recognize how a text was written. By doing this, students can then in turn incorporate these strategies into their own writing.

Friese (2010) elaborates: “Writing is a way to learn, a way to share, and a way to create a more equitable world. Effective writing can make things happen. It can convey a story. It can convince a reader to think differently or change the way they live. I can inform an audience of pieces of life they did not know about” (p. 18). This type of thinking about writing can be conveyed to students with the use of authentic literature as models. This can help to create interest in writing as well as motivate the students to write while demonstrating their skills.

Clark (2014) more specifically explains this thinking by highlighting the use of children's picture books as mentor texts to teach the concept of persuasive writing. Beginning a persuasive writing lesson with a "great book" can engage students and help them understand the concept of argument. When referencing Dorfman and Cappelli (2007), also emphasize the use of mentor texts for use in the classroom due to the nature of their influence on children's writing abilities. They can be incorporated into the classroom curriculum and used as guides for students' developing skills. Students' writing knowledge and skills can be increased through the exposure to a variety of writing styles, formats, and techniques.

When researching instructional formats, Ray (2004, 2006) provides ideas for building a strong writing foundation for children through the use of writing workshop. She discusses the reasoning and thinking behind this type of classroom instruction as well as provides examples and ways to implement this type of instruction. Ray (2004) believes "that it is the energy of *making* stuff in a daily writing workshop that drives all our teaching with our youngest writers" (p. 6). Ray (2006) also examines the use of the writing workshop format and mentor texts that are implemented within the teaching writing process. When using mentor texts, teachers are showing and leading students to possibilities within their own writing. The goal is to turn students on to various ideas and a variety of useful writing techniques.

The purpose of this study is to determine how using the writing workshop model in conjunction with mentor texts will improve students' writing abilities. Both of these writing instructional strategies have been proven to be effective, but what happens when they are used together? Can they help students meet the writing standards they are being

held accountable for? Students' writing abilities need to be strengthened and improved. The nation's literacy crisis has come to a crossroads. To help meet the students' needs and the national writing standards, the study will examine two writing approaches and determine if they are beneficial for students and can increase writing skills and abilities.

### **Research Problem and Question**

Writing is a lifelong skill that students will need to succeed in many areas of life. Students will write for the remainder of their school careers; most students will need a strong writing foundation for their future careers; and, in today's ever-increasing technological environment, students will rely on writing as a form of communication. When purposeful instruction and interest are missing from writing, students will have no motivation to learn the basic writing skills they will need for a lifetime. Falling standardized test scores are showcasing that the current theories being used in most schools for writing instruction are not adequately preparing students. Because writing instruction is such an important part of students' education, I am addressing the following question: What happens when struggling first grade writers are immersed in writing through the use of authentic text models and self-selected writing topics and forms? I intend to study the efficacy through the use of student interviews before and after the study, teacher observations, and teacher-student conferences. Student work samples will also be collected and analyzed to determine if there are changes in the students' writing abilities.

### **Story of the Question**

When teaching writing to my students, I was no longer inspired. My lack of inspiration was partly due to my mundane instruction as well as the students' lack of

interest in writing. As previously stated, writing is an imperative skill students will use for their remaining lives. I was desperate to find a way to make writing fun again for my students and myself.

The formulation of my research study began without me even knowing it. I enrolled in a Master of Arts in Reading Education program that immediately began to change my thinking about literacy. When learning about literary processes, strategies, and methods, I started questioning my teaching practices, especially in the area of writing. *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide* by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) piqued my interest in the writing workshop which led to further research and discussions with my colleagues. I had never implemented this type of writing instruction in my own classroom. Everything the authors wrote about writing instruction seemed to go against what I was doing with my students. Where did I go wrong along the way? But more importantly, how could I fix it? Could the writing workshop lead my students and me in the correct direction of writing instruction?

Another writing influences that left a lasting impression on me was a district workshop I attended. Last September, a woman came to our school to give a presentation on using mentor texts and the 6+1 writing traits. I was fascinated by her and her creative ideas. She was an inspiration for writing instruction. After attending the workshop, my writing instruction began to shift slightly to include the focus of writing traits. This was a challenging process as it was something new to me. I tried to implement the traits but mainly wound up implementing some of her lesson ideas rather than the overall picture of using the writing traits.



Toward the end of the school year last year, I became more interested in different instructional techniques for writing. This was mainly due to my students' interest in selecting their own writing topics and assignments when the opportunity was presented. I continued to research the writing workshop instructional format to gain further insight into the procedures and methods used. When I met my current students and began to understand who they are as learners, I knew my previous methods used to teach writing would not suffice. Something needed to change in order to increase their interests and skills.

Would this be my opportunity to experiment with the writing workshop model? I also recalled my excitement when learning about mentor texts and made the connection to my students' favorite time of the school day - teacher read aloud. What would happen if these two instructional strategies were used together to teach writing? The need for reform in my writing instruction was the driving force behind the formation of this research study.

### **Organization**

This thesis is laid out in chapters to highlight the specific stages of the process. Chapter two is a literature review exploring the uses and outcomes of the writing workshop approach when teaching writing. It also examines the uses of mentor texts and the benefits associated with incorporating them into writing instruction. Chapter three describes the context in which the study will be taking place, the research paradigm and methodology, and the data analysis and collection. The collected and analyzed data as well as the findings of the study will be discussed in chapter four. The study's conclusion

and implications will be thoroughly presented in chapter five along with newly developed research suggestions based on the findings.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

“We believe so strongly in teaching very young children to read like writers. We believe that all there is to know about how to write well is found in well-written texts.”  
(Ray, 2004, p. 16)

#### Introduction

When teaching writing to young children, what are the best strategies? What are the best resources? It has been proven that using the writing workshop model has a positive effect on students’ writing abilities and motivation to write. Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) emphasize that the focus of the writing workshop is on what students are writing rather than on what is being taught. This fosters creative freedom and does not hinder students’ thinking and idea development. The benefit of the workshop is in the doing of the activity rather than in the talking about it. This helps to foster a love of writing within students and helps lead to lifelong writers. Mentor texts have also been studied and proven to have a beneficial influence on students’ writing knowledge. The students learn to examine, replicate, and implement authors’ strategies and techniques. What happens when the two techniques are used together?

To determine the possible benefits of using the writing workshop model with the implementation of mentor texts, effects of the writing workshop approach were explored through students’ growth in writing strategies and improved attitudes. Researchers also examined using a writing by ear approach and teaching students to read like writers. Mentor texts were viewed as writing guides, sources of literature that can be used to teach the craft of writing. These texts can be viewed as the “more knowledgeable other” when teaching students to write.

## **Effects of the Writing Workshop Approach**

Teaching students to write can be accomplished through a process approach. “The process writing approach involves a number of interwoven activities, including creating extended opportunities for writing... and offering personalized individual assistance, brief instructional lessons to meet students’ individual needs, and, in some instances, more extended and systematic instruction” (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 19). Using a writing workshop model can incorporate these activities into the writing instruction. Flexibility in writing, which can also be achieved through the writing workshop model, is considered a necessity for students’ abilities. Graham and Perin (2007) elaborate: “Flexibility is now perhaps the most prized goal of writing instruction because the fully proficient writer can adapt to different contexts, formats, and purposes for writing” (p. 22). Teaching students to write a variety of “forms, genres, styles, and tones, and the ability to adapt to different contexts and purposes” prepares students for writing experiences that will be necessary in their school, career, and everyday lives (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 22). Writing workshops can help students learning to write meet this goal.

When further researching strategies to improve writing skills and motivation among struggling student writers, Adams, Power, Reed, Reiss, and Romaniak (1996) implemented a writing workshop with second and fifth grade students over the course of five months. The researchers found, “The high level of student involvement presented a positive outcome of the intervention. Students were actively engaged in writing what was meaningful to them” (Adams et. al., 1996, p. 45). The results of the study also indicated, “The increased amount of time spent sharing original works, both in small and large groups, seemed to have stimulated imagination and enthusiasm within the class” (Adams

et. al., 1996, p. 46). At the conclusion of the study, Adams et. al. (1996) shared their intentions of continuing use of the writing workshop model. This decision was supported by their findings: “Strategies used in the writing workshop approach produced many positive results. The intervention could be a valuable tool to educators seeking to improve writing skills” (Adams et. al., 1996, p. 46).

In a similar study, Boone, Farney, and Zulauf (1996) researched the use of the writing workshop model and its effect on students’ writing abilities and their attitude toward writing. The participants were early childhood, first grade, and third grade students. The study took place over five months in which time the researchers gathered information through observations, parent and student surveys, and portfolios. At the conclusion of the study, Boone, Farney, and Zulauf (1996) found that each focus group had positive responses to the teaching method used. “The majority of the students exhibited growth in writing strategies, and their attitude toward writing improved” (Boone, Farney, & Zulauf, 1996, p. 51). Some determining factors of the workshop’s success were the influence of a “consistent routine within a safe and predictable environment;” an atmosphere in which students were “willing to take risks and were enthusiastic about the writing process;” and, the “developmentally appropriate approach that was taken during writer’s workshop” (Boone, Farney, & Zulauf, 1996, p. 51-52).

In later years, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) studied similar effects of writing workshop and first graders’ ability to become “confident, independent writers” (p. 133). In this six week study of a first grade classroom, research was gathered in the form of questionnaires, observations, portfolios, and a random selection of students who were interviewed. The writing workshop model was used with mini-lessons that focused on

rough drafts, peer conferencing and revision, editing, independent writing, and sharing student samples. At the conclusion of the study, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) reported a “slight increase in the [students’] enjoyment of writing” (p. 136). The research concluded, “The writing workshop model has proven to be an effective instructional method to support first graders in learning the writing process by choosing a topic, revising and editing drafts, and sharing their work” (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p. 138). Similarly to Adams et. al. (1996), Jasmine and Weiner (2007) continued to implement writing workshop “on a daily basis, [it] has become an essential part of the curriculum in this researcher’s first grade classroom” (p. 138).

When attempting to improve writing motivation among elementary students, Conroy, Marchand, and Webster (2009) implemented a five month study using the writing workshop model. They were specifically interested in improving the writing areas of creativity, detail, and accuracy. The students who participated in the study were from two first grade classes, about 50 students, and one second grade class, about 25 students. The students’ motivation toward writing was determined through the use of surveys, writing samples, observation checklists, and rubrics. At the completion of the study, a difference was noted in the students’ feelings toward writing: the percentage of students who felt excited about writing just about doubled while the percentage of students who were bored with writing was lowered by over half (Conroy, Marchand, & Webster, 2009). “Although the data did not show major growth from the pre and post results, the overall attitude and motivation of the students increased” (Conroy, Marchand, & Webster, 2009, p. 41).

The exploration of writing workshop led Carroll and Feng (2010) to examine the effects on first grade writers' abilities and attitudes when using writing workshop or writing prompts. The researchers felt that the writing workshop model that was being implemented was in direct contrast of the writing prompt assessments the students were being given. One first grade class was split into two groups and instructed separately over five weeks. "One group received instruction on writing a persuasive paper using a prompt, and another received instruction on writing a persuasive paper with a free-choice of topic" (Carroll & Feng, 2010, p. 2). After completing surveys, taking notes, and using rubrics to assess students' writing, Carroll and Feng (2010) found, "First graders need to be given prompts in order to perform well on assessments geared towards a specific type of writing... The students that chose their own topics had to spend a great deal of time trying to come up with an argument" (p. 19). The study also revealed students were more motivated to write when given the choice to choose their writing topic; however, both groups' feelings toward writing declined. Carroll and Feng (2010) found one possibility for this finding could be the students' attitudes specifically toward persuasive writing.

### **Writing by Ear**

Using literature as a guide is an important process within the writing workshop model. Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) explain how writing by ear can lead to strong writers: "The ear guides [the writers] to emulate the sounds of good writing" (p. 74). Mentor texts provide students with opportunities to hear various authors' sounds and styles. The mentor texts also offer students the chance to emulate these writing strategies within their own writing. Furthermore, Culham (2014) emphasizes the importance of teaching students "how to think about how text is constructed" through the use of mentor

texts (p. 32). Powerful writers can develop from an emphasis on writing by ear and teaching students how to think about texts. Using “texts that show students a particular writing skill in action is an effective instructional strategy that supports deep reading, which in turn leads to deep writing” (Culham, 2014, p. 30). Focusing on the particular 6+1 writing traits, which Coe, Hanita, Nishioka, and Smiley (2011) found, within a mentor text can further develop students’ writing abilities and skills and promote deep writing.

Students who are taught to read like writers notice “as an insider how things are written” (Ray, 2006, p. 25). When students are engaged and can read like writers, they are encouraged to take writing risks. “Mentor texts help students find ideas and breathe courage into their writing by helping them take risks and think outside their ‘writing box’” (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007, p. 8).

This type of thinking can be found in a study completed by Henry and Roseberry (1998). When working with 34 university students, the researchers’ aim was to determine if genre-based instruction would help to improve the students’ abilities when producing texts and improve their abilities to “texture their writing” (Henry & Roseberry, 1998, p. 148). The results highlighted the increase of students’ abilities within the genre-based group over those within the non-genre group. These students were able to write by ear while reading like writers in order to emulate the genres with which they were being instructed.

### **Mentor and Guide**

When examining the writing process and the development of writers, Dorfman and Cappelli (2007) draw parallels to a variety of learning experiences: “We all need



mentors in our lives - those knowledgeable others who help us learn how to be teachers, mothers, musicians, artists, athletes - who help us do what we could not do before on our own” (p. 2). This helps to understand the importance of mentor texts when teaching students how to become writers. Mentor texts can be viewed from Vygotsky’s perspective as the more knowledgeable others that help provide scaffolded instruction. Research on teaching writing further elaborates ways to use teaching strategies that are beneficial to student learning. Graham and Perin (2007) describe the benefits of using mentor texts, or the study of models, to increase students’ writing abilities: “The study of models... [provide] students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing” (p. 5). Lancia’s (1997) study found that the use of literature acted as the best mentor for writing with his students: “The literature-rich environment in combination with an interactive writing workshop enabled this mentorship to blossom” (p. 475).

Dorfman and Cappelli (2007) further elaborate how mentor texts can guide writers to imitate the writing styles and strategies used by the author, and “help writers notice things about an author’s work that is not like anything they might have done before, and empower them to try something new” (p. 3). The students in the study, through the use of mentor texts, were taught to read like writers. The use of literature showcases a variety of writing techniques that students can benefit from hearing and exploring. The National Council of Teachers of English (2004) explain the rationale for using mentor texts to help students read like writers: “Understanding what writers do... involves thinking not just about what texts look like when they are finished but also about what strategies writers might employ to produce those texts” (p. 2). The texts can lead

students to the development in skills which allow them to analyze written works and emulate authors' techniques in the students' own writing.

Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) continue to explain, "Literature isn't only used to teach about the writer's craft. Early in the workshop [teachers] will find that literature is valuable simply for modeling the possibilities open to writers" (p. 81). Imitating and copying authors' work and ideas is a powerful learning tool for students. Lancia (1997) refers to this process as literary borrowing. Through the process of literary borrowing, students can gather information and explore ideas that originated with published authors. This gives students the opportunity to understand the author's craft and experiment with their own. When investigating literature's influence on children's writing, Lancia (1997) found that mentor texts' modeling abilities directly influence students' writing development and help create successful end results. He also adds: "Adopting the ideas of already established authors appears to be a significant stage in a child's writing development" (Lancia, 1997, p. 473).

The literature that is used as mentor texts with students can also be used during student-teacher conferences as references or for comparison of writing samples. Ray (2006) encourages asking the following question to students when discussing their writing: "What have you read that is like what you're trying to write?" (p. 56). The encouragement of this question when conferencing with students can help lead them to mentor texts that can enhance or strengthen their writing. "In a classroom where students have the opportunity to interact with books and authors every day and to practice writing in an environment built on support and encouragement, authorship becomes real as they imitate their role models and write their own stories. Literature inspires, influences,

instructs young writers by providing examples needed for effective learning” (Lancia, 1997, p. 475).

## **Conclusion**

After reviewing literature on the teachings of writing, writing workshops, and mentor texts, there are many aspects of each that can be used together to create a meaningful, effective writing instruction program. Using the writing workshop approach increases motivation among students to write as well as increases their interest in writing. This writing instruction approach encourages students to experiment with various types of writing styles and strategies. The use of mentor texts can encourage students to experiment with their writing even further by using the same strategies and techniques that authors’ use in their writing. The research and ideas presented in these studies led to the development of the exploration of using the writing workshop model in conjunction with mentor texts in this current study. As explained by Graham and Perin (2007), “Writing is made up of closely linked processes that operate simultaneously, as teachers model and guide students through various writing strategies” (p. 24). Both techniques were used as teaching strategies in this exploration to determine if there was an increase in students’ writing abilities as well as an increase in their motivation and interest in writing.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Context of Study and Research Design**

“Teacher research has a primary purpose of helping the teacher-researcher understand her students and improve her practice in specific, concrete ways.”  
(Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 4)

#### **Community, School, and Classroom**

The study “Using Mentor Texts and the Writing Workshop” was conducted in a small elementary school, Ethel Jacobsen Elementary, located on a barrier island in Surf City, on Long Beach Island, New Jersey. Long Beach Island is eighteen miles long and half a mile wide at its widest point. The island community is relatively small with only about 20,000 year-round residents. The summer population increases exponentially to around 100,000 people. The island’s main revenue comes from tourism, fishing, and real estate. Many of the year-round residents are self-employed or work within these industries.

Long Beach Island was devastated by Hurricane Sandy on October 29, 2012. Many of the island’s townships were left with four feet of sand covering roadways and properties that was left behind from the effects of the bay meeting the ocean. The hurricane had an impact on the school community in that classes did not resume for two weeks until clean up and restoration had made the island safe enough to access. The one entryway onto the island is a bridge that was closed for two weeks after the storm. Many people were displaced from their homes and businesses which had devastating impacts on many of the school families. There is also a large renter population on the island. Some of the students in families who rented properties were homeless after the storm because the

property owners decided not to rebuild or chose not to rent their properties again once they completed construction.

This was a very difficult time in the Pre-K through 6th grade school district. One of the two school buildings in the district was closed because of damage sustained so all of the grade levels were housed in the Ethel Jacobsen Elementary School for over a year. Teachers, students, and staff members alike were all experiencing the turmoil and traumatic effects of the hurricane, but the school environment was one place that could provide normalcy and regularity for those experiencing upheaval. Some students lost everything they had and knew and were forced to leave the community to find shelter elsewhere. This changed the enrollment within the school district as some students from low income families had no other choice but to leave the island.

Two years after the hurricane, some of the school families are still feeling the effects but life is starting to return to normal. When things began to settle, the school numbers started to stabilize. The district's total enrollment is 247 students. Of the 247 students, 142 students within the population are male while there are 105 female students. The students are residents of the following communities: Barnegat Light, Harvey Cedars, Surf City, Ship Bottom, and Long Beach Township. The district's population includes 79.2 percent Caucasian, 16.7 percent Hispanic, and 4.1 percent African American (NJ School Performance Report, 2013). Of this student population, 24 percent are from economically disadvantaged families. Seven percent of the student population has limited English proficiency, while seventeen percent primarily speak Spanish at home. Eleven percent of the population is students with disabilities.

The Ethel Jacobsen Elementary School (EJ School), located in Surf City, serves the students in preschool through second grade. The Long Beach Island School (LBI School), in Ship Bottom, houses the students in third through sixth grade. Within the EJ School, the student population is about 120. There are two classes at each level with the exception of one three-year-old preschool class and one four-year-old preschool class. Currently, the largest grade-level class is kindergarten with 37 students in two classes, while the smallest class is first grade with a total of 26 students between two classes. Both first grade classes are inclusion classes with in-class support teachers providing extra services for Basic Skills and Special Education students.

The classroom in which the study will be taking place has a total of twelve students. Five of the students are Hispanic and seven are Caucasian. Two of the students receive ESL services three days a week. Four students are in the Basic Skills Instruction Program (BSIP). Two students are classified and have IEPs. One student is classified as Specific Learning Disability while the other student has cerebral palsy and cortical visual impairment (CVI). This student has a one-on-one aide who has worked with him for the past three years. The aide is a certified teacher and supervisor so she works with the student academically as well as physically. The two students with IEPs receive speech, physical therapy, and occupational therapy services throughout the school week. There is also a special education teacher who works with the classified students within the classroom due to the nature of their disabilities. There are two in-class support teachers who provide services within the classroom throughout the week as well. Of the twelve students in the class, eight will be participating in the study.

The English Language Arts (ELA) instruction within the classroom follows a balanced literacy approach using the Storytown series by Houghtlin Mifflin Harcourt. Whole group and small group instruction are used on a daily basis. Writing instruction within the classroom and district follows that of which is presented within the Storytown series. Weekly focus skills are taught with corresponding writing assignments. The writing focus changes each week with a different skill highlighted during these lessons. The Math curriculum is taught through the use of enVision Math by Pearson. Whole group, small group, and individual instruction is used during this instructional time. The instruction in both ELA and Math is driven by the Common Core State Standards. Science and Social Studies are both taught as independent subjects, but are enhanced throughout the English Language Arts and Math programs as well. Writing instruction takes place in all subject areas. Throughout the day, a variety of small-group and whole-group instruction is used to keep the students constantly moving within the classroom environment.

### **Research Paradigm**

This research study used qualitative methods. A qualitative study takes place in a natural environment, or naturalistic setting. It is a sustained, in-depth study that explores broad, general questions through a “bottom-up” approach. Researchers collecting qualitative data use non-numerical analysis, such as observations, interviews, field notes, and discussions. Multiple perspectives, particular patterns, and images, photographs, or samples can all be seen in collected qualitative data. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) explain, “The purpose of the ... qualitative study [is] to generate grounded, expert

knowledge from the field in order to bring about change directed at improvement” (p. 257).

A qualitative paradigm best fit this study as it examined a broad question within the field of writing instruction. It closely investigated students’ learning and the writing processes taking place in their established classroom through the use of anecdotal notes, observations, interviews, and conferences to gather information and data. No numerical data, as is found in quantitative research, was gathered or collected throughout the study. Rather, students’ perspectives, interest and motivation, and work samples were analyzed and explored.

The qualitative data was gathered through the use of teacher research. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) define teacher research as “work in inquiry communities to examine [teachers’] own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and gathering data” (p. 40). Shagoury and Power (2012) more simply define teacher research as “research that is initiated and carried out by teachers in their classroom and schools” (p. 2). To conduct a qualitative teacher research study, several steps must be included. Teacher research consists of identifying a problem, formulating a question or questions, deciding on an approach to data collection, analyzing and interpreting the collected data, and forming a conclusion which includes study implications (Shagoury & Power, 2012). It is a planned approach used to increase understanding of what occurs within a classroom or to help solve classroom problems. It can also be used for furthering social progress or discovering the nature of a situation.

Teacher research is a powerful practice as it can improve “the link between teachers’ practice and their students’ learning” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 56). For



example, instruction and strategies can be analyzed and improved upon with teacher research. Shagoury and Power (2012) explain, “[The teacher] research process involves the kinds of skills and classroom activities that already are part of the classroom environment” (p. 3). This makes teacher research accessible within a classroom environment and allows it to target specific areas that require investigation. The research process is extensive, but ultimately has tremendous benefits. Teacher research was the chosen method of study for this investigation for these reasons. Observations, anecdotal notes, voice recordings, and conferences were used as methods of collecting data.

### **Study Procedures**

To begin the study, a classroom problem was identified and explored. This problem explored the writing instruction that was taking place. The strategies and techniques that were being used were not truly meeting the students’ needs. The exploration of this issue led to the formulation of my research question: What happens when struggling first grade writers are immersed in writing through the use of authentic text models and self-selected writing topics and forms? Once the areas of focus were identified, I sent permission forms home to my students’ parents. The students were identified for participation because they were members of my classroom community. Student participation was dependent on parental permission. Any student who was granted parental permission took place in the study. Eight of the twelve permission forms were returned; therefore, eight of the students in the class were study participants.

Before the study began, interviews were conducted with each participant to gauge his or her feelings about writing. The participants’ thoughts and ideas about writing were discussed during the interviews between the students and me. These interviews helped me

to determine a baseline for the students' interest in and motivation toward writing. I also used the interviews to determine if the selected instructional method which was explored in the study increased student interest and motivation. The interviews were audio recorded so I could revisit them as a reference when analyzing data.

To further prepare for the study, I introduced the students to the writing workshop format so time scheduled for the research study was not spent on monitoring behaviors and establishing expectations. I also introduced mini-lessons with mentor texts to the students before the start of the study so they knew my expectations of their behaviors during the lessons. The concept of literary borrowing (Lancia, 1997) was introduced to the students. This was our class focus for the first few introductory lessons to ensure the students understood that it was acceptable to borrow ideas from other authors including their classmates.

The initial timeline of the study spanned a period of five weeks, but due to unforeseen circumstances, it had to be adjusted to four weeks. The initial lesson focuses were the use of punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation points, dialogue, and ellipses) and voice in writing. Due to the students' progress and initial timeline adjustment, I slightly changed the lesson focuses. The lessons that I taught focused on the use of punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation points, ellipses, and dialogue) and the formulation of ideas when writing.

To begin the study, a focus was given to the use of various types of punctuation. The mentor text I used was *Have You Ever Done That?* by Julie Larios. This was used as a starting point for our punctuation discussion. I asked the students to share what they knew about punctuation and how it was used. An anchor chart was created to display the

students' punctuation knowledge and as a reference for them when writing and during other mini-lessons. This also helped me to determine the focus areas for the instruction that needed to take place. After the mini-lesson, students worked on self-selected writing topics and formats. Student-teacher conferences took place throughout the writing workshop. The students spent a short period of time sharing their writing at the conclusion of the workshop.

The following day, I used *Do You Know What I'll Do?* by Charlotte Zolotow. During this workshop, the students provided examples of the punctuation they were familiar with to add to the anchor chart. This showcased the students' abilities to use the punctuation and helped me to further design the necessary instruction. After they shared their examples, I showed the students how to search for punctuation in texts. Working in small groups, they explored how various authors used different types of punctuation. They made notes of how it was used and why the author used the selected punctuation. The students' findings were discussed during the share session along with new types of punctuation that were found. The texts the students used to explore were *My Dad* by Anthony Browne, *Punctuation Takes a Vacation* by Robin Pulver, *Yo! Yes?* and *Ring! Yo?* by Chris Raschka, *Tulip Sees America* by Cynthia Rylant and Lisa Desimini, *The Great Fuzz Frenzy* by Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel, *Do You Know What I'll Do?* by Charlotte Zolotow, and *If...* by Sarah Perry.

The remaining two writing workshop sessions of this week focused on the use of periods. The texts I used were *The Great Fuzz Frenzy* by Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel and *Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie DePaola. The lessons focused on the authors' use of periods to share information with the reader. I led a discussion

about why periods were used when examining both texts. An anchor chart was created by the students and me to display their knowledge of periods. The student-created and -written examples were added to the chart. After the mini-lessons, the students engaged in self-selected writing topics and formats. During the students' writing, I conducted student-teacher conferences. Selected students shared their writing at the end of the workshop.

The second and third weeks of the study continued to provide an in-depth exploration of the uses of punctuation when writing. I taught the use of question marks, exclamation points, ellipses, and dialogue in the same fashion as the use of periods. To explore authors' uses of question marks, I used the texts *Exclamation Mark* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and *What REALLY Happened to Humpty?* by Jeanie Franz Ransom. The students created an anchor chart to demonstrate their knowledge of question marks and wrote examples of how to use them on the chart.

*Exclamation Mark* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal, *Yo! Yes?* and *Ring! Yo?* by Chris Raschka were used to analyze the use of exclamation points. Again, I assisted the students in the creation of an exclamation mark anchor chart which displayed student examples.

When researching ellipses, I read the text *If...* by Sarah Perry. We had previously read this text so the students were familiar with the ellipses used by the author. I led a discussion as to why the author used ellipses and this reasoning was recorded on an anchor chart. I asked the students to come up with examples for the anchor chart. One student asked me if the class could write their own *If...* book and the other students were

in agreement. The writing workshop that day consisted of the students creating pages for a class *If...* book.

I used the remaining three days of the week to examine dialogue. I followed the same lesson and workshop format as in the previous weeks. I used *Fiesta Fiasco* by Ann Whitford Paul, *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street* by Roni Schotter, and *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman to examine how the authors' used dialogue within their writing. Because dialogue was a new concept to the students, I pointed out various aspects of using dialogue during the reading that the students did not notice on their own. Again, an anchor chart was created to document the learning of the students and the necessary components used in dialogue. I created examples that were used to demonstrate the process of using dialogue. Examples without punctuation were also given to the students so they could add the required punctuation. Student examples were written by students who were able to strongly grasp the process of using dialogue.

During the second and third weeks of the study, after every mini-lesson with the exception of ellipses, each student created self-selected writing pieces in a format of his choice. While the students were writing, I held student-teacher conferences. A few students shared their writing at the end of the workshop.

The fourth and final week of the study provided an insight into the development of ideas when writing. I used various texts such as *Bat Loves the Night* by Nicola Davies, *What REALLY Happened to Humpty?* by Jeanie Franz Ransom, *Two Bad Ants* by Chris Van Allsburg, *The War Between the Vowels and the Consonants* by Priscilla Turner, *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street* by Roni Schotter, *Creepy Carrots!* by Aaron Reynolds, *17 Things I'm Not Allowed to Do Anymore* by Jenny Offill, and *The Great*

*Fuzz Frenzy* by Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel to explore the formulation of ideas.

During the introductory lesson, I used the text *Creepy Carrots!* We had previously read this story so we revisited it as a familiar text for the introduction of ideas. I read *Two Bad Ants* as another mentor text during this lesson to explore how writing can take place from different viewpoints when describing very familiar objects. The students created an anchor chart with a brainstormed list of ideas while I provided some guidance. I read *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street* during the next lesson to show how ideas can be changed and modified to create stories when writing. We had a discussion as to whether or not the events in the story actually took place or were created by the author. The students continued to add to their list of writing ideas after using the mentor text. During the following lesson, I used *What REALLY Happened to Humpty?* to introduce the idea of modifying well-known stories when creating a new story. I had a discussion with the students about using known characters and story structures as writing inspiration. During this lesson, I presented the idea of literary borrowing (Lancia, 1997) to the students again. We returned to the anchor chart again to add new student ideas. The last lesson had me using *Bat Loves the Night*, *The War Between the Vowels and the Consonants*, and *The Great Fuzz Frenzy* (all previously read texts) as resources for ideas. During this final lesson, I demonstrated that ideas can be found in a variety of places including writing about what is known, and exploring the depths of the author's imagination. The students finished the anchor chart by adding additional writing ideas.

All of the mini-lessons I taught this week were followed by the students working on self-selected writing pieces in a format of their choice. I led student-teacher

conferences during the writing workshop to further examine the ideas the students were experimenting with. Selected students shared their writing at the end of each workshop.

During the last week of the study, I conducted student interviews again to determine if there was a change in interest and motivation among the students after participating in the research study. I used the same interviewing process and questions that I used during the initial interviews that took place six weeks prior to the conclusion of the study. I used this information as a learning process which helped me to evaluate the instructional techniques I used over the course of the study. I added an additional question to the final interview with the students: “What is your favorite part of the writing workshop?” This question also helped me to examine the instructional process that took place over the four weeks of the study.

### **Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation**

When conducting this study, I used qualitative data collection methods to gather information for the analysis. These methods included interview recordings and notes, anecdotal notes, conference recordings and notes, and a teacher research journal. As I was conducting research outside of the classroom, I came across another data collection method that was then added to the study. Davila (1998) provided an example of a Daily/Weekly Conferencing Record to track student-teacher conferences and write short notes. I added this method because it allowed me to easily track, through a glance, the conferences that took place between myself and the students. Each of these data collection methods was used to analyze the students’ progress and growth in their writing.

The data collection methods were all used for a particular purpose. The students' interests in writing and motivation to write were tracked through the use of the initial and post interviews. I used the interview recordings as a resource to revisit if information needed to be accessed after the interview or if particular information was not written down during the actual interview. The notes I took during the interviews were used as a quick reference guide if the recordings could not be accessed at that current time. I also took anecdotal notes throughout the writing workshop to track student behaviors, processes, and conversations. They were also used so I could make notes on the mini-lessons and the students' interactions with the information presented.

During the student-teacher conferences, I took notes on the students' writing topics, use of punctuation, and later in the study, the formation and use of ideas. Various questions that the students and I asked and responses that were given were tracked as well. During the second week of the study, the Daily/Weekly Conferencing Record was added to the data collection process during the student-teacher conferences. I used this as a quick reference to monitor the number of times our student-teacher conferences took place throughout the week. The notes that I took during student-teacher conferences were written on address labels and transferred to sheets. Each student had a sheet for the student-teacher conference notes that were taken so his progress could be monitored and writing topics and ideas could be tracked.

At the close of each day when a writing workshop took place, I used a teacher research journal to make notes, track my thinking, ask questions, and post reflections. This research journal became a valuable resource during the study as it was a place for me to turn to for tracking my inner conversations, thoughts, and questions that arose



throughout the process. I could revisit lessons and revise them if the outcome was not productive or what I expected. The reflective aspect of the journal allowed me to make necessary changes throughout the study to ensure it was conducted in the most productive way. It was continually used and revisited during the study to make changes to lessons and guide the learning process for both the students and myself.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Evidence of Themes and Findings**

“The more people write, the easier it gets and the more they are motivated to do it.”  
(NCTE, 2004, p. 1)

#### **Introduction**

When conducting this study, I aimed to answer the following research question: What happens when struggling first grade writers are immersed in writing through the use of authentic text models and self-selected writing topics and forms? After collecting anecdotal notes, conducting interviews, participating in conferences, listening to recordings, exploring student work samples, and revisiting my research journal, several themes emerged from the data. These themes include an increase in students’ motivation and interest in writing; an increase of students’ awareness of writing elements, techniques, strategies, and processes; a deepened sense of community through the collaboration and support of writers for one another; and, an increase in self-efficacy among the students.

#### **A Study Refresher**

As explained in chapter three, the study took place over a course of four weeks in which the students were immersed in the writing workshop. I enhanced the workshop mini-lessons with the use of mentor texts. To begin the study, I conducted student interviews to determine the students’ interest in and attitude toward writing. I recorded mini-lessons, student-teacher conferences, and student conversations to determine the effectiveness of each component, and to gather students’ responses and thought processes during each focus area. I collected and analyzed work samples. The students’ work samples provided me with feedback about their responses to the lessons and concepts that

were taught. My research journal was used during the duration of the study to track important findings; take notes on lessons, conferences, and student interactions; and, reflect on the experience of the study as well as my own thinking during the process. To conclude the study, I conducted student interviews again to determine if there was a change in students' interest in or attitude toward writing.

### **Increase in Motivation and Interest**

To begin the study, individual student interviews took place. The interviews were used to gather information about the students' feelings toward writing. This helped to establish a baseline of the students' motivation to write as well as their interest in writing. The first interview question asked was, "Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?" The same question was asked during the final interview at the conclusion of the study. The students' responses varied and changed throughout the study. When Mae was asked if she enjoyed writing at the beginning of the study, she responded, "Not so much - it's a lot of work. It tires my arm." At the conclusion of the study Mae explained that she enjoyed writing because "you get to write about anything you want." Similar results can be seen in Maria's responses. When asked if she liked writing at the beginning of the study, she replied, "Not really because of taking your time and running out of time." When asked if she liked writing at the completion of the study, Maria said, "Yes, we can write about things we like." Kathy stated during the initial interview that she enjoyed writing. She claimed, "You get to write stuff, like stories." During the final interview she was more enthusiastic about writing: "I love writing! It makes you learn stuff, you can come up with ideas, and fix stuff." The students' responses to the interview question showed a seventy percent increase in their interest in writing as well as an increase in motivation to

write. Students who felt that writing was a lot of work and tiresome became interested in writing and enjoyed writing about topics of their choice. All of the students' interview responses to this question can be viewed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Pre- and Post-Interview responses to the question, "Do you enjoy writing?"

<b>Table 1</b>		
Student	Initial Interview Response	Post Interview Response
Mae	Not so much – it's a lot of work. It tires my arm.	Yes, you get to write about anything you want.
Maria	Not really because of taking your time and running out of time.	Yes, we can write about things we like.
Kevin	Not that much – it takes time.	Yes, you can write about something exciting.
Jose	Yes, now I leave spaces between the words. It's not squished like a pancake anymore!	Yes, I like using different kinds of ending marks.
Kylie	Yes, you get to read it when you're done.	Yes, I get to tell about good things.
Kathy	Yes, you get to write stuff, like stories.	I love writing! It makes you learn stuff, you can come up with ideas, and fix stuff.
Ophelia	Yes, it's fun to make up things in a story – you have fun doing it.	Yes, I have lots of fun doing it. Writing makes me happy.
Eric	Yes, because when I'm bored I like it.	Yes, because I'm learning about all of the words.

During the writing workshop, interest in writing and a desire to write could be seen in the students' actions, responses to lessons, and comments from conferences. When we began using the workshop format, the students were writing a sentence or two and drawing a picture to illustrate what they wrote. Jose finished his writing piece and announced, "I'm done!" I responded, "Do you remember one of our workshop rules? Are

we ever done writing?” He replied, “No, we always keep writing.” He then went back to his selected writing spot in the classroom while dragging his feet with his head hung.

The following week saw a change in response and attitude from Jose. Due to the administration of mandatory end of marking period assessments, we had to skip our writing workshop one day. Jose asked, “When are we going to get to write?” I explained that we would not have time because of the other activities we needed to complete that day. Jose responded, “Aw man! I want to write!” This change was seen in all of the students throughout the study. The students would grudgingly gather their writing supplies when we began the writing workshop. They would find a spot around the classroom, sometimes with classmates and other times alone, and begin writing. My initial observations found that most of the students were working to their full potential during the beginning of the writing portion of the workshop, but after about ten minutes, they were lacking in their progress. Once they finished the writing pieces they started, the students were not pushing themselves to continue writing. I constantly needed to remind them to keep writing.

Within a week, the students’ demeanors changed to reflect a positive attitude toward writing. When reflecting on the lessons and workshop, I found that the students changed from an, “Oh man... writing time...” attitude to an, “Oh man! We don’t want to stop writing!” attitude. I felt this had to do with the students becoming more comfortable with the workshop format and the expectations. The students began demonstrating their willingness and desire to write. Instead of only being able to write for a short period of time, they would get upset when it was time to stop writing. Even though they really

liked to share their writing, it was viewed as a negative when it was time for them to stop writing when that portion of the workshop was over.

When analyzing the students' interview responses and their actions during the workshop, their change in attitude toward writing can be seen. When I asked Mae what her favorite part of writing was, she initially explained, "When I get it done." She was not interested in taking her time to create writing pieces. After participating in the writing workshop, Mae stated her favorite part of writing was everything. She further explained, "I like writing what I'm thinking about." I observed that to Mae, student choice was a meaningful element of the workshop. The self-selection of a topic made writing interesting to Mae in a way that it was not previously viewed.

Some of the students' initial interview responses displayed what they had learned prior to the study beginning. We spent a few weeks getting accustomed to the writing workshop model in our classroom so the students were familiar with the expectations of the model and how the workshop would be implemented during the study. Kylie used knowledge from this introduction during her initial interview. When telling about her favorite part of writing, she said, "Picking what to write and coming up with my own ideas." She found her favorite part of the workshop before the study was in full implementation. After participating in the study, her favorite part of writing changed: "I like getting to read my writing and sharing it." Kylie greatly enjoyed sharing the ideas she developed when writing during the workshop. She would ask on a daily basis if it was her turn to share her writing even though there was a weekly chart for the sharing schedule.

Ophelia provided an example of the students’ shifting interests in favor of writing. She described her favorite part of writing: “When you get to draw the pictures.” Initially

**Table 2:** Pre- and Post-Interview responses to the question, “What is your favorite part about writing? What do you like the most?”

<b>Table 2</b>		
Student	Initial Interview Response	Post Interview Response
Mae	When I get it done.	Everything! I like writing what I’m thinking about.
Maria	We get to write about ourselves and a lot of stuff.	We get to share ideas.
Kevin	You get to write fun things. You can make up fantasies.	You get to show your skills.
Jose	You go word by word and I leave spaces between them.	That I get to write a lot and sharing my ideas.
Kylie	Picking what to write, coming up with my own ideas.	Getting to read my writing and sharing it.
Kathy	Sometimes you can write your own story.	That you can write anything you want to write!
Ophelia	When you get to draw the pictures.	That you have fun writing.
Eric	I stop and check my work.	Learning about all the different letters.

Ophelia’s favorite part was limited to illustrating and included no other elements of first grade writing skills. After participating in the workshop, her views changed. Ophelia stated her favorite part was “that you have fun writing.” She started looking at writing as an enjoyable activity. Creating the written portion to match her illustrations became just as fun to her as creating the pictures. All of the students’ responses to “What is your favorite part about writing?” can be seen in Table 2.

When reviewing what the students’ claimed to like least about writing, growth and interest in writing can again be seen through their interview responses, student-

teacher conferences, and classroom behaviors. Kevin said at the beginning of the study that he does not like that writing “takes a lot of time.” After participating in the workshop, he now finds “when there are difficult words to spell” to be his least liked thing about writing. Even with this as his perceived downfall, Kevin has offered help and advice to classmates who need assistance with spelling. For example, a classmate asked, “How do you spell stop?” Kevin eagerly replied, “S-T-O-P. You can tap it out.” He encouraged his classmates in this fashion throughout the study.

During one of the student-teacher conferences with Kevin, I asked what he thought he was doing well within his writing. He stated, “With spelling the words. I used what we learned in phonics to help me tap out the words. The word wall also helps.” Kevin does not like spelling in regards to writing, but he is skilled in this area and has shown growth over the past four weeks. He has learned various techniques to help him with spelling and has explored the classroom and the available resources. He helps students utilize these resources when they are looking for spelling support as well.

Kathy also explained her least liked element of writing before the study began: “When you can’t write a story, like during a lesson or when you’re told what to write.” This was directly related to the previous writing instruction format. The students were used to a day spent on introducing skills, another day spent on creating a class writing sample, then finally being told what the topic was that they had to write about. At the conclusion of the study, when asked what she liked the least about writing, Kathy exclaimed, “Nothing!” The writing workshop eliminated the elements of writing that she disliked and encouraged her creativity on a daily basis. The daily mini-lessons allowed the students time to write and opportunities to experiment with what was just taught



through the use of the selected mentor text. Kathy enjoyed using the mentor texts as guides for her writing. When learning about quotation marks, she used our selected texts to help guide her in the use of this punctuation in her writing. She was very eager to try new strategies and skills during the writing workshop.

Eric also demonstrated growth with his interest in writing and motivation to write. At the beginning of the study, he admitted, “When the words are all together, it confuses me.” This was what Eric liked least about writing. As the study progressed, during our conferences together, he stated that he felt he was getting better with learning letters. This learning was evident in his writing samples. More letters were used in the spelling of words in his writing as the weeks progressed.

When asking Eric about his least liked element of writing at the conclusion of the workshop, he said, “It takes a lot of time.” This is something that initially surprised me. Eric enjoyed working with his classmates when developing ideas for writing, but he would move to a quiet spot and work independently while writing. Eric explained, “It’s easier for me to write when I’m not distracted.” When conferencing with Eric, he would also share very elaborate and detailed ideas about what to write. He would struggle at times to get these ideas on paper. Because of this, he would dictate some of his stories to either myself or one of the other teachers. He would then transfer our writing into his writing journal by rewriting the story. After looking back on this process, I understand why he feels writing is still a time consuming activity. This could be a situation where dictation software may be more beneficial to him. When considering the writing process in its entirety, Eric likes to write. He constructs very creative and detailed stories that he

is proud of and enjoys sharing with his classmates. Table 3 explores all of the students' responses to the question, "What do you like least about writing?"

**Table 3:** Pre- and Post-Interview responses to the question, "What do you like least about writing?"

<b>Table 3</b>		
Student	Initial Interview Response	Post Interview Response
Mae	It's a lot of work and my arm gets tired.	Nothing!
Maria	It takes long to sound out words.	Spelling words I don't know.
Kevin	It takes a lot of time.	When there are difficult words to spell.
Jose	That I have to write a lot.	The drawing.
Kylie	Writing a lot of sentences.	Writing a lot of pages.
Kathy	When you can't write a story, like during a lesson or when you're told what to write.	Nothing.
Ophelia	Trying to sound things out, then when you can't read it later.	That your hand gets tired sometimes.
Eric	When the words are all together, it confuses me.	It takes a lot of time.

The data collected during this study led me to conclude that the use of the writing workshop model influenced the increase of students' motivation to write and their interest in writing. In some specific instances, the use of mentor texts influenced the students' motivation and abilities as well. Not all of the students showcased increased interest and motivation due to the mentor texts. However, the writing workshop model provided a sense of freedom and ownership in the students' writing. This is what seemed to have the greatest influence on their interests in writing. This conclusion was supported by the responses from individual student interviews, anecdotal notes, student-teacher

conferences, student work samples, audio recordings of the writing workshops, and my reflections in my research journal. After analyzing the changes in the students' thinking, their actions, and their completed writings, I was able to conclude that the writing workshop model had a significant influence on the students' increased motivation and interest in writing.

### **Awareness in Writing**

There was an increase in students' awareness of writing elements, techniques, and strategies with the use of mentor texts with the writing workshop. Students demonstrated their knowledge of punctuation during our mini-lessons and in their writing. During our lessons with mentor texts, the students noticed punctuation marks that were not taught during our mini-lessons, such as hyphens, dashes, parentheses, and colons. The students also found many sources that served as inspiration for ideas, including texts. Our reading lessons at the time were exploring the beginning, middle, and ending of stories which some students translated into their writing. The students also found that words were written differently in some mentor texts. The words were written in italics or bold font, some were written in all capitals, and others had a larger font than the rest of the words in the text. The students' mentioning of these written strategies were explored and led us to a conversation and mini-lesson on onomatopoeia. While listening to and working with the various mentor texts, the students also noticed when authors used alliteration in their writing. This led to yet another mini-lesson. The students spent time asking each other questions about their writing when they were in the author's share chair. This again led to an exploration of various writing techniques and processes.

When we began our lessons with a focus on punctuation, the students demonstrated their understanding of how to use certain punctuation marks while others needed to be reinforced. We created anchor charts as a class to show what was known about periods, question marks, exclamation points, commas, apostrophes, ellipses, and quotation marks. The students provided examples and wrote them on the chart. During our readings of mentor texts, the students were able to point out how the authors used various punctuation. The students also noticed new types of punctuation in the texts. For example, while we were reading *The Great Fuzz Frenzy*, Kathy said, “I notice something new! What is that?” She motioned to the author’s use of a dash. We discussed what type of punctuation it was, what it is used for, and why the author may have decided to use it.

One particular lesson on punctuation had the students using two or three mentor texts and Post-it notes to mark where and how authors used punctuation. Ophelia found a new type of punctuation in the text *Tulip Sees America*. Her Post-it read, “I see a period and a ? :” She wrote the question mark because she did not know the name of the colon. When working with the text *My Dad*, Kylie wrote a question mark on a Post-it and stuck it to the page that had parentheses on it. She had not seen them before so she wanted to ask what they were. When working with *The Great Fuzz Frenzy*, Kathy noticed an ellipsis. Her Post-it explained why the author used this type of punctuation, “The author was not done [writing].” Kevin also noticed the use of an exclamation point within the same text. He wrote, “The author said something loud,” as to why she chose to use an exclamation point. This type of exploration was carried over with some students to their reading at home. Mae even noticed an unknown punctuation mark in a story she read at home with her mom. She shared this information with the class during one of our mini-

lessons so we could discuss her findings. Jose was able to find many different punctuation marks in our reading, science, and social studies texts. Whenever we read lessons together, he made note of the types of punctuation used within each text.

When the lesson focus switched to ideas, the students' exploration had a new focus. During the writing workshop, the students shared and discussed their ideas in great detail with each other and with me. Maria and Jose had a conversation about using texts as ways to get ideas. Maria was using *I Love My New Toy!* to guide her ideas for writing a book. They also discussed other Elephant and Piggie books and how funny they found them to be. Maria stated, "It was so funny when that happened!" This sparked Jose to ask, "When did you read that book?" Maria responded, "My sister showed it to me. I'm using *I Love My New Toy!* to help me write."

Kylie also demonstrated how she used a mentor text for writing inspiration during a conference. When I asked her what she was working on, Kylie responded, "I'm working on a book about dots." I searched for some elaboration by asking, "What are you writing about the dots?" Kylie explained, "What shapes they could be or make, they can be big or small." I made the connection to a text by asking, "Is that kind of like the *Ten Black Dots* book we read?" She said that is was, then added, "It's not just about dots though. I'm using other shapes too." Kylie was able to take an idea from a text and use it to create her own story with some added detail.

The students also discovered the technique of gathering ideas from multiple authors. This occurred through the conversations that were held with classmates during the writing workshop. When conferencing with Mae, we had the following conversation about multiple author texts:

Mae: Me and my friends came up with the idea to write this book.

Me: Are you all going to write the book?

Mae: Yes, like me, Kevin, Maria, Jose, and Eric too.

Jose: Maria and me will do the illustrations!

Me: Are you all going to get to write about your ideas?

Mae: Yes.

Me: What is it going to be about?

Mae: When Maria said about friends, it gave me an idea to make a book about school and all of my friends and teachers. (Turning to her classmates at the table)

What colors should I use for my friends?

Kylie: I'll help too!

The conversations between the students and the conversations that were held during conferences led to an awareness among the students. They were quick to point out whenever we used a mentor text with more than one author. This provided validation for their idea of creating a text together as coauthors.

The students also explored ideas from sources outside of the classroom. Kathy shared with me during a conference one day that she was making a Frozen activity book. I responded by saying, "Oh wow! What a great idea! Can you show me what you did so far?" Kathy gave a page-by-page explanation of her book:

These pages are coloring pages. This next page, you need to find the shapes that are hiding in the picture. This one is where you have to find the words. This is a picture of Elsa and Anna ice skating and you have to follow the path to get to the end. This page you have to finish the other side of the picture. This page is going to be a picture of me with Elsa and Anna.

I encouraged Kathy by exclaiming, “What a fantastic activity book! Where did you get the idea to make this book?” Kathy told me, “I like doing activity books. They’re really fun. So I thought it would be fun to make one!” Kathy shared her activity book with her classmates and explained how she came up with the idea to further show that authors can find inspiration anywhere.

The author’s share chair provided a forum for the students to share ideas, discuss what they know about writing, and ask questions about their classmates’ writing. One of the most asked questions during the sharing portion of the workshop was, “Where did you get that idea?” When asking each other how an idea was thought of, the author’s response shed new light on the many resources available to help writers in the writing process. Other thoughtful questions that displayed the students’ writing knowledge and development were asked as well. The following exchange between Dan and Ophelia helps to explain this:

Dan: Why did you use a period when you wrote that you love your mom?

Ophelia: That’s what I wanted to use in my writing.

Me: I’m so happy you pointed that out, Dan! If I remember correctly, you wrote that exact same sentence the other day, but you used an exclamation point. Are one of you right or wrong?

Dan: No, we can write it any way we want.

Me: Absolutely! It is the author’s choice about which punctuation mark he or she wants to use. It’s all about how you want the reader to read the writing.

This conversation demonstrated how discussions during the writing workshop encouraged the students to take creative strides in their writing while exploring various punctuation marks and ideas.

The use of mentor texts allowed the students to discover other writing styles and techniques such as onomatopoeia and alliteration. When reading *Santa's Reindeer Games*, the students noticed that some of the writing for specific words was larger than the other words. They asked why it was written this way. This led to a conversation and mini-lesson about onomatopoeia. The students started to include this technique in their writing. Eric wrote a story about a race car that went "FAST!" When I asked him why he wrote it that way, he stated, "The cars go really fast and you can hear the fast going by." I asked him if he was referring to the "whoosh" sound when something moves quickly and he confirmed this thinking. Maria also noted during the reading of *Santa's Reindeer Games* that some of the words in particular sentences all started with the same letter. Again, this led to a conversation and mini-lesson about alliteration.

The exploration of mentor texts also carried over to our basal reader as a mentor. We were working on the beginning, middle, and ending of stories during our reading lessons. Jose took this knowledge and applied it to his writing of a story about a crazy turkey. He also gathered some of his ideas from the texts *Turkey Trouble* and *Turkey Claus*. He was able to apply reading skills he was learning to his written compositions. This demonstrated the connections he was able to make between reading, printed text, and the writing he was creating.

Overall, when analyzing the data from this study, I was able to deduce that the students' awareness of writing strategies and techniques, as well as the writing process



were increased. The students became aware of the many decisions an author can make when writing. They also discovered the variety of writing techniques that can be implemented in their writing to strengthen it and make it more interesting to a reader. The students' involvement in the mini-lessons, the guidance of the mentor texts, the students' use of the information presented, and the application of the information that they themselves were able to discover helped the students to create this writing awareness. The writing workshop format allowed the students' awareness in writing to flourish.

### **Creation of Community**

The students' increased interest and motivation in writing along with their increased awareness of writing techniques helped to create a writing community with the implementation of the writing workshop. The students were able to share their ideas and elaborate on thinking through discussing and sharing their writing. The students worked together during each segment of the workshop - from supporting each other during lessons, assisting each other during writing, and encouraging each other during the sharing sessions. Students who were uncomfortable with sharing their writing soon became the most eager to share. An environment of encouragement and exploration was created among the students and throughout the classroom. When a student announced, "Can someone help me make a bulls eye?" the other students collectively and eagerly replied, "Sure!" This was the attitude of the students throughout the entire writing workshop which helped to create the sense of collaboration and community amongst the students.

My observations of Kevin during the writing workshop proved that he enjoyed the social aspect of the workshop format. During this school year, he has demonstrated that

he is the type of student who prefers to work alone. Over the course of four weeks immersed in the writing workshop, Kevin has become more social with his classmates. He provided ideas and insight into writing for his classmates during the writing portion and shared his thoughts almost every day during the mini-lessons. He also became more willing to share his work with his classmates. The audio recordings of the workshop have highlighted conversations Kevin has had with classmates about sharing ideas and discussing them for his writing.

Kevin: It's Mr. Nobody!

Dan: Who's Mr. Nobody?

Kevin: Remember that story I was telling you about with him?

Dan: Oh, yeah!

Kevin: He's like a bear but a human. He's so mean.

Dan: Maybe he did a crime!

Kevin: Yeah, like stole a truck!

Kevin also provided ideas for students who were stuck in their writing and helped them with spelling words. For example, Dan decided to write about crimes. Kevin told Dan it was kind of like a newspaper. Kevin stated that Dan "could also put famous stuff in there!" Dan continued the thinking by explaining, "You could then send it to the mailman, and the mailman would send it to someone else, and the whole United States would see it!" "Yeah, that would be cool!" encouraged Kevin.

The students chose to work in various areas of the classroom when writing. One of the most populated areas was the classroom's round reading table. The students would cram themselves around the table so they could collaboratively work and share their ideas

and progress. During a writing session, Mae was showing the students at the table her writing and art work. Dan commented, “How did you make that ant? Because that’s pretty impressive!” Mae responded, “I used the tracer from the writing center.” This exchange turned into Mae sharing with her classmates some of the items she had used from the writing center to enhance her writing.

The students also offered help and support to other students who needed it when writing. They helped to develop storylines and ideas, and assisted with using the classroom’s word wall when students could not locate a word they were trying to spell. Other students also shared their “My Words” booklets with classmates as a spelling resource. Each student had one of these books in their desks, but not all of the students fully utilized it. Seeing classmates use the book encouraged others to use it more frequently as a spelling resource.

The sharing portion of the writing workshop created a sense of togetherness and community through the presentation of each student’s writing. The students and I had discussed offering feedback to classmates during the share portion to help further develop their ideas and make their writing stronger. The benefit of this support can be seen during the following share session through the use of student questions.

Maria: How did you come up with that idea?

Kevin: Just thinking. I thought about it and wanted to write it.

Ophelia: The robber, does he get in jail? Did they catch him?

Kevin: Yes.

Jose: Why is he robbing the bank?

Kevin: That’s what robbers do, like rob, robbers rob stuff.

Dan: You should add a little bit more so we know what's happening because is it going to catch him? Is he going to rob the bank? Where is the bank?

Kevin: I have no idea...

Dan: You could make another one!

Ophelia: You have a very good story!

Kevin: Thanks!

Me: I must say, I agree, you do have a great story. I think that this sounds like a really great beginning. Do you think you could continue working on that story? You could think about what your friends asked you and add more details. Great start so far, Kevin!

Kevin was able to use his classmates' questions and encouragement to expand his story and add more details. The story he created contained the answers the students were looking for. During our conferencing, we revisited some of the questions to help guide Kevin in his writing. His classmates also offered advice while they were writing to strengthen his story.

The writing workshop format had a powerful effect on the classroom environment. The students also sought my advice on a regular basis. It helped to pull me into their thinking and writing so I could provide them with the information and guidance they needed to become stronger writers. I was able to conference with about half of the class on a daily basis because of the small class size. On days that I would not conference with certain students, they would seek me out to ask when we would be conferencing. Mae and Ophelia liked to share their writing ideas with me every day. During the final student interviews, Mae explained that her favorite part of the workshop was "meeting

with the teacher. I like to share my ideas and writing.” Ophelia stated something similar. Her favorite part was “meeting with the teacher, you get to tell your teacher all this stuff!” Maria, Jose, and Eric all agreed. Jose elaborated, “Meeting with the teacher because it’s fun to talk about my writing.” Another favorite part of the workshop for some of the students was sharing their writing and helping classmates. All of the students’ interview responses can be viewed in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Pre- and Post-Interview responses to the question, “What is your favorite part of writing workshop?”

<b>Table 4</b>		
Student	Initial Interview Response	Post Interview Response
Mae	Not an initial question.	Meeting with the teacher, I like to share my ideas and writing.
Maria	Not an initial question.	When I meet with the teacher.
Kevin	Not an initial question.	Picking what to write about and working with my classmates.
Jose	Not an initial question.	Meeting with the teacher because it’s fun to talk about my writing.
Kylie	Not an initial question.	Writing the stories and sharing them. I can read to all my friends. It’s kind of boring to read only to myself.
Kathy	Not an initial question.	I like sharing, I want everyone to know about my writing.
Ophelia	Not an initial question.	Meeting with the teacher, you get to tell your teacher all this stuff!
Eric	Not an initial question.	Meeting with the teacher.

The community that was developed was an important factor in the success of the workshop. All of the students provided support to each other and kept their classmates on task. Based on the research findings, I inferred that the writing workshop model and the students' interest in it helped to make it so successful. The sense of community could be seen in the students' daily activities. To a large extent, the comfort, safety, and supportiveness of the created classroom community helped to make this research study successful.

### **Development of Self-Efficacy**

Students began to view themselves as authors. The areas in which students felt they needed improvement during the initial interview became the same areas in which they were supporting classmates toward the end of the study; however, some of the student self-selected areas that needed improvement remained during the final interview. Overall, the students started to display traits of writers as the workshop progressed. Their confidence in their abilities increased and they were more eager to display their writing skills than they had been previously.

When holding a student-teacher conference with Kylie, I asked, "How are you doing with your punctuation marks in your writing?" She stated, "I'm doing good." I questioned what kinds of punctuation she had been using or experimenting with. Kylie informed me that she had used periods and exclamation marks. Because I knew she had a well-established knowledge of these marks, I prodded, "Did you try anything new today?" Kylie hesitated with her response, then said, "Uhh... No." I encouraged her that this was fine but asked if she would be interested in trying some other punctuation in her future writing.

During a conference that took place later on in the study, Kylie showed more independence and willingness to experiment with punctuation. We began discussing her idea for a book and what she had written so far. She seemed confident in what she had produced, so I asked her the same question that provided her with hesitation previously: “How are you doing with your punctuation marks in your writing?” Kylie stated, “I used periods, a exclamation mark, a ellipsis, and tried some quotations.” We looked through her book together to find the punctuation she used and reviewed how to use quotation marks correctly. Kylie’s attitude toward discussing her writing had changed. She displayed more confidence in her abilities and seemed proud of what she was able to do within her writing.

When interviewing the students, I asked, “What is something you do really well with when writing?” Mae’s initial and post interview responses showcase her increased confidence in her writing abilities. When initially asked the question, she stated, “I have no clue.” When asked the same question at the conclusion of the study, she claimed, “Staying on the lines and my letters are the right size” as her strength. Maria also demonstrated her knowledge growth and confidence when answering this interview question. Maria initially stated that “using periods” was her writing strength. During the final interview, “using capitals and onomatopoeia in my writing” were her stated strengths. Using onomatopoeia in her writing was something that Maria was very proud of.

Jose showed growth in a different sense than Mae and Maria. Jose’s growth was in his maturity level. Throughout the study, with the use of the writing workshop model, he was able to discover his preferred setting for meeting his needs while working. When I

asked Jose about his writing strengths for the first time, he explained, “I use capitals, periods, and spaces.” These are skills that are taught and worked on, but as the workshop progressed, his thinking changed. When asked this question at the conclusion of the study, Jose said his strengths were “being quiet so I can concentrate and underlining digraphs.” He found the way in which he was able to work to his fullest potential, all while applying phonics skills to his writing. To see the students’ interview responses to “What is something you do really well with when writing?” (See Table 5).

Similarly to asking the students about their strengths in writing, I wanted to know what areas they thought they needed to work on when writing. Again, this interview

**Table 5:** Pre- and Post-Interview responses to the question, “What is something you do really well with when writing?”

<b>Table 5</b>		
Student	Initial Interview Response	Post Interview Response
Mae	I have no clue.	Staying on the lines and my letters are the right size.
Maria	Using periods.	Using capitals and onomatopoeia in my writing.
Kevin	Sounding out words.	Sounding out the words I’m writing.
Jose	I use capitals, periods, and spaces.	Being quiet so I can concentrate and underlining digraphs.
Kylie	Reading what I write.	Spelling the words.
Kathy	Using capitals and periods.	Making pictures and using spaces between my words.
Ophelia	Sound out the words.	Spelling, I spell the words right.
Eric	Making the letters.	Making the letters.



question highlights how the students have developed throughout the workshop. Maria explained at the start of the study that she needed to improve on her patience when writing: “Being patient - [writing] takes time.” After participating in the workshop, her self-selected area of improvement was “using punctuation.” This seemed to stem from the punctuation instruction and the new information that she learned during the workshop lessons. Kevin also explored an area of self-growth based on the instruction during the workshop. Initially, he felt that he did not need improvement when writing. His response to the interview question was “not that much.” At the end of the study, he stated “working on hard words - spelling” was an area in which he would like to work on.

Kylie showed growth in her self-examination of her writing skills as well. The first time she was asked about an area of improvement, she explained that she needed to work on spelling. As the workshop progressed and she learned about various resources for spelling, this concern faded away. Kylie decided her area of writing that needed to be worked on was her writing in general. She clarified, “Keep writing, keep practicing - continue writing if I don’t finish it.”

One student who surprised me with her responses was Kathy. Kathy is a bright student who excels in each subject taught in our class. I initially asked, “What is something you feel like you need to work on when writing?” Kathy simply stated, “Nothing.” Her handwriting and presentation of her writing has improved over the course of the study. It was never problematic, but it have shown improvement nevertheless. This is why her final response to the interview question was surprising. Kathy stated she needed improvement in the following area: “Making my letters stay in the lines.” I wondered if Kathy just provided me with that response because she thought I wanted a

meaningful answer, as opposed to her ‘nothing’ response, if she just said the first thing that came to mind, or if she genuinely felt that she needs to improve her handwriting. For a completed list of the students’ interview responses to this question, see Table 6.

The students’ self-efficacy could greatly be noted during the sharing sessions. The increase of comfort among the students when sharing was clear from the first week of the study to the last week. During the first week of the study, I observed that the students seemed a little hesitant about sharing. I wondered if they were embarrassed by their work or worried about what their classmates might think of their writing. As time went by, the students started to settle into the role of being authors and sharing their creations. I later noted that the students were really enjoying the share chair. They were asking me on a daily basis if they can share their writing. Because of the slow start, I did not think I

**Table 6:** Pre- and Post-Interview responses to the question, “What is something you feel like you need to work on when writing?”

<b>Table 6</b>		
Student	Initial Interview Response	Post Interview Response
Mae	Projects of writing and writing with pictures.	Nothing.
Maria	Being patient – it takes time.	Using punctuation.
Kevin	Not that much.	Working on hard words – spelling.
Jose	Get better at writing.	Spelling words.
Kylie	Spelling.	Keep writing, keep practicing – continue writing if I don’t finish it.
Kathy	Nothing.	Making my letters stay in the lines.
Ophelia	Spelling the words, like just knowing the words and trick words.	Spelling words correctly.
Eric	(No response.)	Periods.

would need a schedule; however, I quickly found that I needed to create one so the students knew what days they would be sharing their writing. There was a change in thinking among the students. As previously noted in Table 2, Kevin enjoyed that “you get to show your skills” when writing. Sharing his writing with his classmates provided the opportunity for him to do just this.

During one of our sharing sessions, Dan was reading his writing in the author’s share chair. He displayed a sense of confidence and emulated my actions and behaviors during our mini-lessons. This was evident when analyzing one of Dan’s sharing sessions with his classmates. The session took place as follows.

Dan: (Discussing illustration) If you look in the window you can see it here. I was sleeping here, and who do you think that is?

All: Santa!

Dan: I was going to call on somebody!

All: (Laughs)

Dan: Okay! (Continues reading) “It is Christmas. Santa Claus did come to my house...” (Read as dot, dot, dot)

Jose: Dun, dun, dun! (sound effect for the ellipsis)

Dan: Who do you think is on my roof? Don’t call it out! ... Oh, man! (in response to everyone raising their hands). You, you, you, and you.

All: Santa!

(Dan finished reading story)

Me: I love that you used a beginning, middle, and ending in your story! (The class discussed which parts of the story were the beginning, middle, and ending.)

Me: Does anyone have any questions or comments for Dan?

Jose: Our Christmas books and mom books match! You love your mom and I love my mom, and I love Christmas too!

Maria: Why do you like Christmas?

Dan: Everyone knows that!

A Few Classmates: Presents!

Me: Oh, but this just reminded me of *Auntie Claus*! What did we learn about the true meaning of Christmas? It's better to what?

A Few Classmates: It's better to give than to receive!

Dan: And besides, Christmas is all about family!

Throughout this entire interaction, Dan exuberated a sense of confidence and comfort with his writing abilities and classmates. He was not worried about being judged or criticized for his work. He merely wanted to share his creation with his classmates. Dan also enjoyed asking his classmates questions and playing the role of the teacher.

The writing workshop model and the use of mentor texts proved to be a powerful tool in the use of students' self-efficacy as writers. The evidence that was discovered during the study proved this to be true. The students' change in thinking about their writing abilities and the comfort level that was developed when sharing their writing samples help to demonstrate these findings. The students developed into confident writers during the course of this study.

### **Summary of Findings**

As stated in the opening of this chapter, "The more people write, the easier it gets and the more they are motivated to do it" (NCTE, 2004, p. 1). The analysis of the data

collected from this study concludes the same findings. The more students were able to write, the more they were motivated to do so. The writing workshop format gave the students freedom to write what they wanted and geared the instruction toward their needs. Moreover, the use of mentor texts in accompaniment with the writing workshop helped to increase students' awareness of writing and the various elements that surround it. The students began finding elements of the craft in a variety of sources. Additionally, a sense of community was developed over the course of the study. Students began to look to each other for support and feedback in the creation of their writing pieces. Finally, the students' self-efficacy was strengthened throughout this learning process. They became comfortable with their writing abilities and began to view themselves as authors. While the use of mentor texts with the writing workshop had positive effects on the students' learning, the students seemed to be more interested and motivated by writing through the use of the writing workshop.

The conclusions and implications of this study are presented in chapter five. The chapter also includes recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

“Inquiry does not narrow our perspective; it gives us more understandings, questions, and possibilities than when we started.”

(Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson, & Crawford, 1996, p. 8)

#### Summary

At the conclusion of this study, I found that the use of mentor texts and the writing workshop had a positive effect on students in multiple ways. After conducting a four week study in which the writing workshop was used with mentor texts for the mini-lessons, I found that the students’ interest in writing and motivation to write increased; the students became more aware of the different types of writing strategies and techniques that authors use; the students developed a writing community within the classroom and provided each other with support; and, the students’ confidence in themselves as writers increased.

After participating in the writing workshop for four weeks, the students were more interested in writing and their motivation to write increased as well. The use of student interviews, anecdotal notes, student-teacher conferences, and workshop recordings were all analyzed to determine the students’ interest. As the workshop progressed, the students’ writing endurance increased and they were more motivated to continue writing for longer lengths of time. The freedom of choosing what to write also helped to develop this increase in interest and motivation. During the course of the study, the students went from a dislike of writing to it being one of their favorite parts of the school day.

The use of mentor texts specifically led the students to an increased awareness of the writing craft, along with strategies and techniques that authors use when writing. Students' observations and questions about elements they noticed in the mentor texts led to additional, unplanned lessons about writing techniques. The students discovered new punctuation marks as well as the use of onomatopoeia and alliteration. When creating writing pieces, the students experimented with the newly taught and discovered elements of writing. The students also began to analyze the use of writing techniques in our textbooks. This writing awareness carried over into all subject areas, not just our writing lessons.

As the study continued, a community developed within the classroom. The students began writing collaboratively. They shared ideas and thoughts for writing as well as different strategies that they were using. Students asked each other questions about why they made specific decisions in their writing. This allowed the students to understand that there are differences among authors and their chosen styles and techniques. The students also took pride in helping each other with writing. Coming up with ideas and the spelling of words were two areas in the students' writing that seemed to benefit the most from the developed community.

When the study concluded and the data was analyzed, it was clear to see that the students' self-efficacy was impacted greatly. The students viewed themselves as writers and authors at the conclusion of the study. Writing was not just something they had to do, it became something they enjoyed doing. The students developed a sense of confidence that could be seen in their writing, their interactions with classmates, and the showcasing of their skills during the sharing sessions. The writing workshop and use of mentor texts

developed the students as writers and allowed them to see many of the elements and strategies that authors use when writing.

## **Conclusions**

Upon reviewing the literature on the writing workshop and mentor texts as part of classroom writing instruction, I found that my study was beneficial to the students because it exposed them to an instructional style of writing in which they were able to take control of their learning. Without this study, they would not have been exposed to this type of freedom in writing because of the district's selected instructional writing method. This is important because freedom of choice, motivation, and enjoyment in writing encourages students to continue writing. As previously quoted in chapter two, Lancia (1997) found

In a classroom where students have the opportunity to interact with books and authors every day and to practice writing in an environment built on support and encouragement, authorship becomes real as they imitate their role models and write their own stories. Literature inspires, influences, instructs young writers by providing examples needed for effective learning (p. 475).

Many of the highlights in this quote were found in my research study. The students interacted with literature on a daily basis which helped them understand the craft of writing. The newly discovered elements of the craft were implemented in the students' writing within the community setting that was developed among the students during the workshop. Lastly, the students' self-efficacy developed over the course of the study due to the positive outcomes of the writing workshop and the use of mentor texts.

The use of mentor texts had a positive influence on the students. Dorfman and Cappelli (2007) stated that mentor texts can "help writers notice things about an author's work that is not like anything they might have done before, and empower them to try



something new” (p. 3). This empowerment was seen during the writing workshop in students’ work samples as they implemented new writing techniques within their writing. Dorfman and Cappelli (2007) further explained, “Mentor texts help students find ideas and breathe courage into their writing by helping them take risks and think outside their ‘writing box’” (p. 8). The mentor is used as a resource and guide for the students when writing. They can find ideas and strategies within the text that can be used in their own writing. The findings of my study showed that mentor texts and the writing workshop helped to foster an awareness in writing among the students as well as create a sense of confidence in their abilities. Students learn best through encouragement, which occurred during student-teacher conferences, writing sessions, and sharing sessions, and through modeling, which happened with the use of mentor texts. The mentor texts and support helped to develop a sense of confidence among the students and allowed them to view themselves as authors. They felt empowered by their new writing knowledge.

Encouraging, supportive environments also help to strengthen learning and motivation. As stated earlier, Adams, Power, Reed, Reiss, and Romaniak (1996) found a positive aspect of the writing workshop: “The increased amount of time spent sharing original works, both in small and large groups, seemed to have stimulated imagination and enthusiasm within the class” (p. 46). The students were interested in impressing their audience - their peers. When writing, the students were motivated to work to their fullest potential because they wanted to showcase their abilities. This enthusiasm was seen in my study as well. The students were motivated to not only do their best, but to also help their classmates do their best. Each of the students wanted to see their classmates succeed. The sharing aspect of the writing workshop inspired the students to read their

favorite and best written selections during this time. The students enjoyed listening to what others wrote and providing feedback on the writing elements and strategies used. Because the students were so supportive and encouraging, the writing community became a place where students could seek help without being judged.

The sense of community allowed students to experiment with their writing. Because students felt comfortable with the setting and the ability to try new writing techniques, they were able to focus on their writing in a way that would not be possible if they did not have the support. As mentioned in chapter four, “The more people write, the easier it gets and the more they are motivated to do it” (NCTE, 2004, p. 1). The use of mentor texts and the writing workshop along with the newly developed writing community allowed the students to just write. They were able to do this on a daily basis which increased their motivation and desire to write.

Further research stated, “Strategies used in the writing workshop approach produced many positive results. The intervention could be a valuable tool to educators seeking to improve writing skills” (Adams et. al., 1996, p. 46). There were many positive results seen in my study findings, but I did not have the available time to further explore the impact the writing workshop and mentor texts had on the students’ writing skills. Even though there was a slight increase in the students’ abilities, more time would be needed to confirm this.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations that affected this study and the findings. The main limitation was the length of time in which the study was conducted. The study took place over four weeks. The use of mentor texts and the writing workshop was introduced to the

students before the four week study began so time was not spent on monitoring and correcting behaviors. The students knew the expectations for the workshop process. Even with the introduction given before the study, the findings could have revealed other issues or positive outcomes if there was more time to continue the study. The students' writing progress may have demonstrated greater strides or could have shown very little growth and progress. The limited timeframe impacted the study's findings.

Another limitation to this study was the small class size in which the study took place. Because there were only twelve students in the class, eight of which participated in the study, I was able to spend a significant amount of time with each student during our conferences and was available to the students quite regularly. A larger class size could prevent as much support being provided to the students.

The student interviews also proved to be a limitation. The interviews were conducted by me, the classroom teacher. When asking the students certain questions, such as, "Do you enjoy writing?" their answers may not have been truthful. Were answers accurate or what the students thought I wanted to hear? The students may have provided false information to show they felt what I wanted them to feel, rather than what they actually felt or believed.

Lastly, the fact that I was the researcher was a limitation. This was the first time I had conducted a classroom study. I found it challenging to take on the role of teacher and researcher at the same time. During the lessons, I was focused on my role as the teacher. I was unable to document certain behaviors and responses from students. The audio recordings helped with this, but did not provide a full picture as the actions and behaviors were not recorded. Looking back on the study, there were certain aspects that I could

have documented to better support the findings. All of these factors will be taken into account for future studies.

### **Implications for Future Research**

After analyzing the data and drawing conclusions about the impact of using mentor texts and the writing workshop with struggling first grade writers, I found that there are various aspects that could be investigated further. The length of the study played an important role in this study. In a future study, the length of time could be increased. It would be beneficial if teacher researchers conducted a similar study over the course of a school year rather than four weeks. This would allow for more developed and detailed findings. Once the students are promoted to the next grade level, it would be beneficial to discuss the students' writing abilities and knowledge with the current teacher. The teacher could provide a comparison of the students' writing abilities from previous years' classes.

Besides increasing the time, including a control group in the study could provide varied findings. Two first grade classes could participate in the study. One class would receive the district's chosen instructional method for writing while the other class would receive instruction with mentor texts and the writing workshop model. This would allow the researcher to base the findings on comparisons between the two classes in addition to the findings from the class using the writing workshop. Rubrics could be designed and used to implement quantitative measures into the study.

The study could also be modified by using a variety of grade levels. This study's participants were students who were just beginning formal writing. Different findings may occur if older, more developed writers were the participants. Conducting this study

in an upper elementary class, a middle school class, and a high school class could find different results. The students' interest and motivation and the sense of community and willingness to help one another may vary drastically from each grade level.

The research and findings gained from this study, as well as the suggested future research, would be beneficial for many reasons. Teachers can implement mentor texts and the writing workshop into their daily instruction to strengthen students' interest in writing and increase their awareness of writing strategies and techniques. Further research may reveal that this type of instruction, along with increased interest, motivation, and awareness, could lead to an increase in students' writing abilities. With this current test-driven educational society, increased writing abilities among students is imperative for not only teachers but for school administration as well. There is a demand to increase test scores within many districts across the country. This research may drive administrators, teachers, and interested parties to modified or create a new writing curriculum for schools. It could provide the needed documentation to support these types of changes and make them possible.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In conclusion, this study found that using mentor texts and the writing workshop model with struggling first grade writers has a positive impact on students' writing. Providing students with the opportunity to make their own writing decisions can foster interest and motivation in writing among students. The writing workshop model can develop a classroom community of support. Mentor texts and the writing workshop also increase students' awareness about the craft of writing. This writing process can improve students' self-efficacy as well. Providing students with models and allowing them the

freedom of choice fosters creativity, collaboration, and courage when writing. This study suggests that teachers should use mentor texts and the writing workshop when instructing students in the area of writing. Not only did students increase their motivation to write, but their foundational knowledge of the writing process and various techniques that authors use were developed.

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**Appendix A**  
**Writing Attitude and Motivation Survey**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Writing Attitude and Motivation Survey**

- 1) **Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?**
- 2) **What is your favorite part about writing? What do you like the most?**
- 3) **What do you like least about writing?**
- 4) **What are some topics you like to write about?**
- 5) **What type of writing do you like the best?**
- 6) **What is something you do really well with when writing?**
- 7) **What is something you feel like you need to work on when writing?**
- 8) **How do feel about reading something you wrote to an audience?**
- 9) **Do you think you are a good writer?**
- 10) **What is something you want to learn about writing this year?**

**Appendix B**  
**Daily/Weekly Conferencing Record**

**Writing Workshop - Daily/Weekly Conferencing Records**

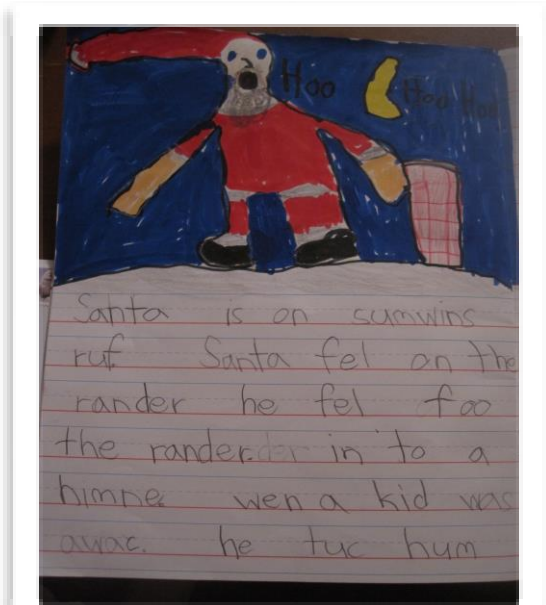
Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

Students	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Comments

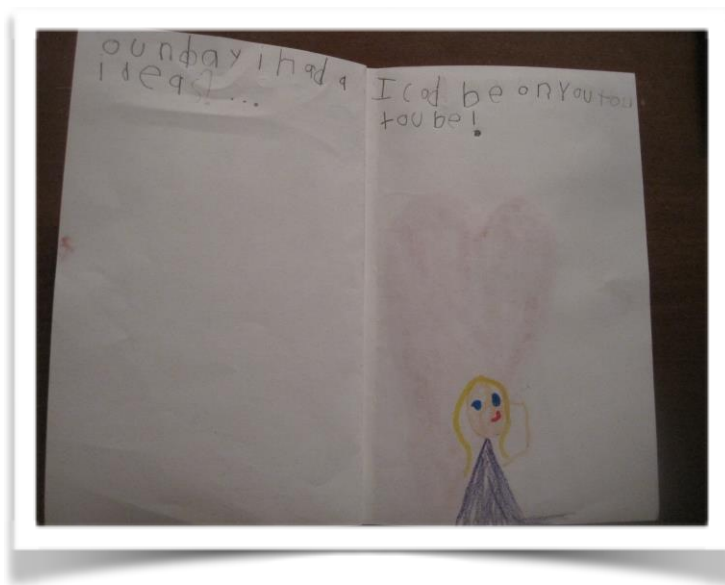
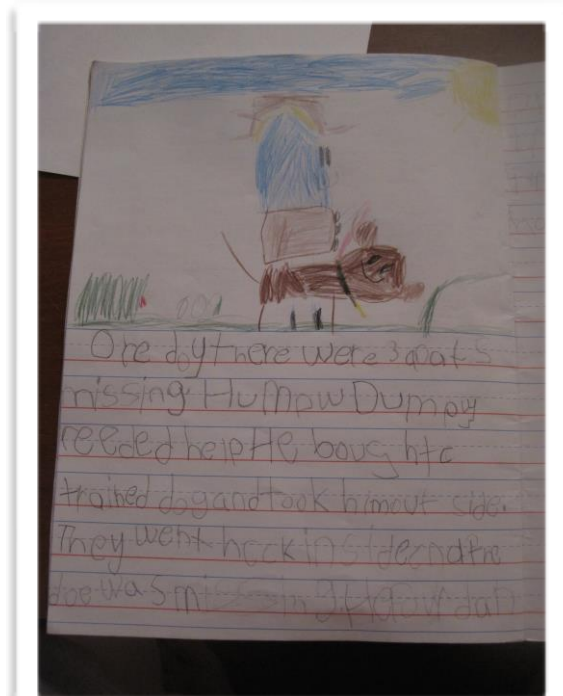
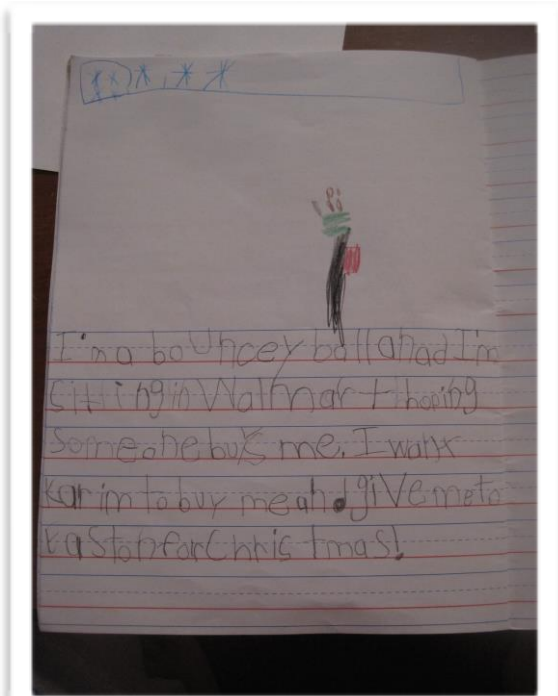
Mini-Lessons: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

HFW: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C  
Student Work Samples



Appendix C  
Student Work Samples



Appendix C  
Student Work Samples

