The power of partners: a qualitative study on the effects of long-term partnerships during Writing Workshop

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THE POWER OF PARTNERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS DURING WRITING WORKSHOP

by

Nicole D. Smith

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
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For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Susan Browne
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Thesis to my family. To my parents for not only instilling in me the importance of education but also for their unending support throughout my journey. To my children for their patience while I dedicated much of my time to this paper and to the pursuit of a master’s degree and for knowing exactly when I needed a hug or an encouraging word. To my husband whose limitless love, support and encouragement allow me to not only believe I can accomplish anything but whom is the driving force that keeps me moving forward. To each of you, I love you more.
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Abstract

Nicole D. Smith
THE POWER OF PARTNERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS DURING WRITING WORKSHOP 2016-2017
Dr. Susan Browne
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study is to determine how long-term partnerships will support second grade students during Writing Workshop. The specific goals of the study are to examine the effects long-term partnerships utilized during Writing Workshop will have on both student achievement and student engagement. Student interviews pre and post study, student writing, along with weekly student reflections were analyzed. The group of students who were the focus of the study demonstrated increased engagement when participating in Writing Workshop. The students also demonstrated increased writing proficiency throughout the duration of the study. The benefits of utilizing long-term peer partnerships during Writing Workshop are considered.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

“The best part of having a writing partner is that they help me get unstuck.”

-Second Grade Student

The room is noisy. It is really noisy. I start to feel a bit nervous. I begin to think to myself that if my principal walks by he will certainly come in and question what is going on in the room. The room looks and sounds more like indoor recess than Writing Workshop. Pairs of second grade students are scattered all over the room. Some pairs are lying on the floor flat on their stomachs with legs stretched out behind them. Some have pulled their desks together so that they are facing one another while others have taken up residency at the kidney table at the back of the room. There are even two students huddled together in the coat closet. I start to wonder if I have made a mistake in giving the students this kind of freedom during Writing Workshop. Over the last week, the students and I have discussed what partners look like and sound like. I have explained to them that as partners they will be together throughout the entire workshop. I have also explained that it will be up to each partnership to decide where they choose to work. This was the moment that I let them have at it! The moment I sent them off to begin collaborating as writing partners. At this moment, I am definitely having second thoughts. Perhaps second grade students are too young for this much freedom. Perhaps they need more guidance. Perhaps they need more structure. At the very least, they may need more quiet.
I sit for a moment getting lost in the chatter that is all around me. That is when I hear it. I tune out the chatter and tune in to what the students are actually saying to each other. Partners are talking about writing. I can hear snippets of their conversations: “I like how you told the names of the people in your story.”, “Maybe you could write about something that happened at recess.”, “Can you help me spell a word.” These conversations go on throughout the workshop. I do not dictate the students’ interactions. The students themselves dictate them. Partners are talking to one another when they need support not when I tell them they need support. When the students leave for lunch, their teacher and I sit down to discuss what we heard and saw. It is then that she enlightens me to something I missed during our forty-five minute Writing Workshop. She smiles and says, “That was a first!” Unsure about what she means, I question her. Smiling, she says, “Not one student raised their hand for help. I did not have students lining up to talk to me or trailing behind me as I walked around the room!” She was right. I had missed it. I was so lost in the thoughtful conversations that had occurred between partners that I had missed how engaged they had been.

Their classroom teacher and I felt invigorated by what we had seen and heard. We marveled at how well they worked together. We imagined what their interactions would look like in the days and weeks to come. We questioned what effects the relationships built between partners would have on their engagement as well as their achievement. My feelings of apprehension and discomfort began to dissolve. I looked forward to this new Writing Workshop. A Writing Workshop where long-term partners sat where they wanted, talked when they wanted, and asked for the help they felt they
needed. I believed these long-term partnerships were going to be the key to the students’ engagement and success.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to determine how long-term partnerships will support second grade students during Writing Workshop. I will document the effects long-term partnerships utilized during Writing Workshop will have on both student achievement and student engagement. The goal of the study is twofold. First, I want to look closely at the consequences that cooperative learning between partners will have on student engagement in the writing process. Student engagement is an issue that is pervasive throughout the school in which I serve as Literacy Coach. This is especially true when it comes to the task of writing. Student engagement has become more of a focus over the past several years. This issue has deep roots in the expectations set forth by the Common Core State Standards. Students must have a high level of engagement if they are to do the thought provoking work that the new standards prescribe. Lack of engagement is the lament of many of the teachers with whom I work. As the school’s Literacy Coach, I am charged with looking at ways to improve literacy instruction. Student engagement is an essential piece of the puzzle that makes up effective literacy instruction. Guthrie’s work in relation to student engagement was of great interest when considering this topic.

Research that he conducted on classroom practices, which affected motivation and engagement, found that a key factor in student engagement in a literacy task was that of peer collaboration (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014, p. 406). Engagement in a task supports students in their ability to stay focused and attend to a task even when it is challenging.
If students are to meet challenging writing tasks that incorporate text analysis, persuasion and opinion, as well as numerous forms of narrative writing, engagement is essential.

Peer collaboration in many forms is a key component of the Writing Workshop. Its utilization in my building has often been discounted and/or abandoned during writing instruction. Teachers who have students work collaboratively in math, reading, and other subject areas forgo this practice during writing. Many seem to feel it is a distraction rather than a support. Due to its positive outcome, collaboration among peers is an area in which we, as a staff, are expected to incorporate into all areas of instruction. Research conducted by Johnson and Johnson found that “. . . cooperative learning can improve cognitive and social aspects such as increased academic engagement, self-esteem, attitudes toward school, and opposition to social segregation and loneliness (as cited in Dean, Hubbel, Pitler, and Stone, 2012, p. 38).” Through my research, I hope to highlight how long-term partnerships benefit the unique needs of our population of students. Many of our students lack academic support outside the confines of the school building. Teachers are often their only source of support. Developing another source of support through long-term partnerships can prove to be beneficial. I believe that developing interpersonal relationships between peers will provide students with the support they need to keep them engaged in their work as authors. Increased engagement will allow students to develop their skill and knowledge of writing because of their commitment to writing tasks. Research conducted by Guthrie and Klauda (2014) found that peer collaboration was a key factor in increasing students’ literacy achievement in reading comprehension because it helped to develop engagement and in turn dedication (p. 405).
Student achievement is the second focal point of my research. I will document the effects that long-term partnerships in Writing Workshop have on student writing achievement. Student writing proficiency is another concern that is echoed among many teachers with whom I work. Both formative and summative assessments reflect that many of the students in my school do not meet the expectations that the Common Core Standards require. This often leads teachers to rely more on explicit instruction followed by student practice and less on cooperative work. This approach seems like a logical response to student need. However, collaboration among peers has been proven to have positive effects on student learning. Hattie’s meta-analysis of teaching practices found that student collaboration versus individual learning had a positive effect size (the impact of a specific approach) of .59, which falls well into the range of desired effects (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, p. 169). The work students do together supports their ability to become more proficient in learning tasks.

...schools should be filled with student-to-student interaction. As one of the mind frames suggests, classrooms should be filled with dialogue rather than monologues. We say this for several reasons, including the fact that no one gets good at something he or she doesn’t do. If students aren’t using language-speaking, listening, reading, and writing—they’re not likely to excel in those areas (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, p. 23).

One of the concerns emphasized by the teachers in my building in relation to partner work during writing is how to appropriately partner students. An existing belief that deters many of them from utilizing peer partnerships during writing instruction is that students are not skilled enough to support each other and in turn learn from one
another. This concern is valid when considering that optimal learning occurs in an individual’s zone of proximal development. In other words, what a student can do when provided with the appropriate support from a more skilled individual such as a teacher.

The research of Daiute and Dalton supported my belief that peers with similar writing aptitudes could benefit from one another. The interactions that took place between novice writers contributed to the students’ “mastery of subject matter and skills” (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p. 330). Homogenous partnerships still allow for peers to learn from one another. When working collaboratively, peers let one another’s needs guide their interactions rather than a prescribed agenda. They provide one another with the time and space to discuss, practice and in turn learn new skills. Daiute and Dalton (1993) found that “children responded to each other’s initiations by contesting or repeating and followed up on specific initiations, often for many turns of talk” (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p. 327).

The goal of my research is to show the benefits that can be gained through long-term partnerships. Peer collaboration is a teaching practice that benefits both engagement and achievement. It is an instructional strategy that can benefit students as they take on the challenging work of being authors. Collaboration among peers is an integral part of my school’s teaching philosophy. Documenting its benefits during writing instruction will help me to positively affect the literacy learning that occurs in my building.

**Statement of Research Problem and Questions**

The purpose of this study is to determine how long-term partnerships will support second grade students during Writing Workshop. The specific goals of the study are to
examine the effects long-term partnerships utilized during Writing Workshop will have on both student achievement and student engagement. Will having a long-term partner help students stay focused on their writing? Will partners support one another when they feel challenged by the writing process? Will students develop relationships that allow them to feel comfortable asking one another for help and/or support? Can students help one another become more skilled writers? Can talking, sharing, and writing with a peer partner help students become more skilled writers? What will be my role in helping students develop relationships with their peer partner?

**Story of the Question**

My question is rooted in my passion for reading and writing. As a classroom teacher, these two areas of instruction were always the ones in which I was most interested. That is not to say that I did not work to create instructional experiences in all academic areas that would be beneficial to my students. I was diligent in investigating teaching practices that would improve all areas of my teaching. However, it was literacy learning that was nearest and dearest to my heart. Books and articles about literacy learning were and still are my constant companions. The work of individuals like Lucy Calkins and Debbie Miller inspired me throughout my career. It was this love of literacy that guided my decision to pursue a Master’s degree in Reading and leave the classroom to become my building’s Literacy Coach. As I began my role as Literacy Coach, I was charged with working closely with teachers in order to support them in developing effective literacy instruction. An area of need that was brought to my attention by numerous teachers was writing instruction. Teaching writing is one of those subjects that often makes teachers sigh, cringe, or throw their hands up in frustration. It was my
interest and the interest of the teachers with whom I work that is at the heart of my question.

For the many years that I utilized the workshop model to teach writing, I often felt like it was not living up to its potential. My room did not resemble what I had read about in Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study. My room seemed to be filled with three types of students. The students who roamed the room under the guise of retrieving paper in order to add to their writing or in search of the “sharpened” pencil can in order to replace a “flat” pencil. The later often declared that their pencil was “flat” from writing so much. Then, there were the students that looked more like daydreamers than busy little authors. When approached, their defense was that they were thinking about what to write or planning their next piece. Finally, there was the small group of students that were engaged in their work as writers. These students were often the same students that were engaged throughout most of the school day. I lamented daily on what changes I could make to alter the face of my Writing Workshop. After all, how were my students to become proficient writers if they weren’t writing? I made small changes such as supply stations at each group of four desks to eliminate the opportunity to roam instead of write. I made big changes such as eliminating whole class mini-lessons in favor of small group differentiated mini-lessons. My changes did very little to alter the problems I encountered everyday during Writing Workshop. When I left the classroom, I did not leave this area of disappoint and frustration behind. This problem actually became an area where my interest grew because I realized that it was not a problem with which I struggled alone. It was this common struggle that brought me to the area in which I knew
I would focus my research. The area of focus for my question was clear but the question itself still had yet to come into focus. Shagoury and Power (2012) explain:

Being mindful of our gaze helps lead us to surprising inquiry. Teaching is filled with researchable moments—those instants when a question suddenly snaps into consciousness. Questions may come from a teaching journal or a snatch of conversation with a colleague (p. 20).

It was a conversation with a colleague that led to my inquiry. After a conversation with a teacher in my building about an upcoming lesson she was teaching, she stated that having someone to “talk it out with” helped her get over some of the areas of difficulty she was experiencing. Those four words immediately made me think of my experiences while pursuing my Master’s degree. The collaborative work with which I participated along with the relationships I built during this pursuit were essential to my success. One relationship immediately came to mind. A relationship I developed during my second Master’s class. This individual and I became partners. When one of us needed help, support, or just someone to “talk it out with,” the other was there. I thought deeply about the benefits of this long-term partnership. My partner pushed me when I was feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. My partner shared her knowledge with me and in turn made me more knowledgeable. The longer we worked together the more we relied on one another’s support. We became invested in one another’s successes. This support was a key factor in the work we both accomplished throughout our academic pursuits. I began to relate my own experiences to those of my students.
I knew the benefits of collaborative work from my experiences as a teacher. I had students work with partners in many forms during Writing Workshop but as mentioned earlier my utilization of the workshop model did not garner the results I had wanted or expected. Creating partnerships that were long-term seemed to be a change that may stimulate engagement as well as achievement. Allowing students the time and space to develop relationships with which they felt secure could be beneficial to their work as writers. As I contemplated the work I did with my partner, I knew that in order for students to reap the same rewards as I had the face of my Writing Workshop would have to change. I would need to give them the freedom to talk, to share, and to write together. I would need to guide more and direct less. I would become the silent partner who watched and listened closely in hopes that these students would discover the power of having a partner.

**Organization of the Paper**

The chapters that follow will provide further information about the research topic, the methods employed in researching the topic, as well as the findings of the study. Chapter Two will review the current literature that is applicable to the research question such as Writing Workshop, collaboration and its effects on student engagement, and collaboration and its effects on student achievement. Chapter Three will look closely at the community, the school, and the class of the research site. It will highlight the students who were the focus of the study. This chapter will also give information on the methods used to implement the qualitative research utilized. Chapter Four will discuss and analyze the data collected over the length of the study. Chapter Five will discuss the
conclusions that can be made from the study, the implications this work can have in the field of education as well as its limitations.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Writing Workshop

Effective writing instruction is paramount for today’s students. The Common Core State Standards require students of all ages to participate in complex writing experiences at every level of their education. The Common Core State Anchor Standards for Writing encompass writing in different genres such as narrative and informational as well as the ability to plan, revise, produce and present writing in various formats (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Effective writing instruction incorporates more than just a skilled teacher passing on knowledge of planning, revising, editing, and publishing. Students need to participate in writing experiences that are meaningful and authentic if they are to meet the demands of the standards as well as PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments that most public school students are required to take each year. These tests have also become a requirement for high school graduation in states such as New Jersey, New Mexico, and Washington (Gewertz, 2016). Findings from a 2007 report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that only 33% of eighth grade students and 24% of twelfth grade students performed at or above proficient levels in writing. These results as well as past disparaging results from the same agency as well as the National Commission on Writing have highlighted the need for academic reform in the area of writing instruction (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396).
According to Graham and Sandmel’s meta-analysis on the process approach to writing commonly known as Writing Workshop, they assert that implementing the workshop model will help to reform writing instruction (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). The workshop model consists of components that are consistent throughout all grade levels. These components include: mini-lessons, student work time (planning, composing, revising and editing, conferencing), and informal as well as more formal share sessions (Calkins, 1994, pgs. 188-191). Mini-lessons not only focus on teaching students the craft of writing but also provide the freedom to focus on the needs of a specific group of learners (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 397). Student work time encompasses the bulk of the Writing Workshop. “Work time is the only indispensable part of the writing workshop” (Calkins, 1994, p. 189). During this time, students are actively engaged with a variety of tasks such as planning, composing, conferring, revising, and editing numerous pieces of their writing. Students work collaboratively at prescribed times with peers as well as the teacher. Share sessions can consist of students taking the author’s chair to read drafts of their writing to classmates to more formal celebrations when students share published pieces with a larger audience.

The workshop model provides students with an environment in which they engage in the process of writing as authors. It affords them the ability to choose self-selected topics, work with peers, and write authentic pieces for real audiences. This process allows them to view writing as an integral part of the human experience and not something that is prescribed by a teacher. Calkins (1994) believes:

When we have experienced for ourselves the human reason for writing, then instead of assuming that writing will always be a dreaded activity-and therefore
pushing, luring, motivating, bribing, and requiring our students to write—we ask, “How can I establish conditions within which my students will want to write?” (p. 14).

As I consider the components of Writing Workshop, I reflect on my own experience as a writer. The most beneficial component for me as a writer during my graduate work was that of having a partner. I formed this ongoing partnership early on in my graduate studies. This collaboration benefitted me in a multitude of ways. It allowed me to generate ideas and rehearse and plan my writing with support from a trusted peer, as well as garner useful feedback. My partner also became a source of support and motivation while increasing my sense of accountability. Our relationship propelled our success throughout our graduate work. This experience highlighted the importance of not only the benefits of working with a peer but of building a long-term relationship that supported interdependence, motivation, and achievement.

**Peer Collaboration in Writing Workshop**

Working with peers during Writing Workshop can be represented in a variety of ways. When working with young writers, collaboration often involves planning, revising/editing, and sharing writing pieces. Collaboration is a powerful tool that allows students to share their thoughts and ideas about their own work and the work of their peers. Calkins (1994) believes, “In the workshop children write about what is alive and vital and real for them—and other writers in the room listen and extend and guide, laugh and cry and marvel” (p. 19). The work students do with their peers through collaboration develops not only a community of writers but also creates an environment where children
learn from one another. Students’ ability to share and discuss their writing with one another during the workshop allows them to give and receive valuable feedback that in turn adds to their knowledge and understanding of the writing process. Tracey and Morrow (2012) state that Vygotsky’s Social Constructivism theory emphasis the idea that children learn through social interactions with their peers (p. 128). Collaboration is as integral a part of the Writing Workshop as is teacher modeling. Just as students collaborate on various topics and ideas such as planning, editing, etc., there are various types of student collaboration. Student collaboration can be structured in several ways. Teachers can assign partnerships of two as well as assign students a group with which to work. Student collaboration can also be less structured whereas an entire class talks and shares ideas about one student’s work that has been highlighted during the workshop or as simple as students turning and talking to peers who are near them.

A common form of collaboration found during the Writing Workshop takes place during a common class share time. In this type of collaboration, a limited number of students share their work with the entire class. Calkins (1994) explains, “One format for a share session is that each of three or four children take a turn sitting in the author’s chair at the front of the circle reading notebook entries or a draft aloud and soliciting responses from listeners” (p. 190). This type of share allows students to garner ideas and feedback from a large audience. This collaboration supports the student’s on-going work by providing them with support from a larger writing community. This type of collaboration can be problematic for some children. These children are the individuals who are not comfortable with being the center of the group’s attention. The reasons for these insecurities are as varied as the students themselves. Hall (2014) asserts that
children may be reluctant to share for a variety of reasons such as suffering from shyness, feeling protective of work that is deeply personal, as well as feeling insecure about their reading and writing ability (p. 31). Collaboration in other forms such as response groups allows for students to work together without the stress and discomfort of being the center of a group’s undivided attention.

Response groups involve a smaller group of students. These response groups can be formed in relation to multiple criteria such as student interest and student need. Students in response groups come to their peers with issues or problems that they are having in their writing. Response groups allow for students to narrow their focus and ask for specific feedback from a small group of peers. Participants in a response group share their work and solicit feedback about specific areas of need that have been determined by the student sharing his or her work (Calkins, 1994, p. 190). These groups because of their smaller size as well as the individual’s ability to collaborate on specific areas of need are more supportive of individuals that are uncomfortable with collaborating with the entire class. Hall (2014) emphasizes providing students with opportunities to collaborate in ways other than the “author’s chair” such as sharing self-selected pieces with smaller audiences (p. 31). Providing these types of opportunities supports those students who struggle to benefit from collaborating with a large group of students. Hsu (2009) also highlights the benefits of response groups as another form of peer collaboration that allow for students to receive and give important feedback as well as share ideas about their writing process with a group of peers (p. 157). Response groups allow for students to collaborate with multiple peers during prescribed times during the Writing Workshop. Although response groups are a supportive tool, the prescribed times
can limit a student’s ability to collaborate with their peers when the need arises such as during their independent writing. Partnerships of two allow for students to collaborate without the intimidation of a large group as well as giving them the ability to work together outside of a teacher-determined time.

Peer collaboration that consists of a partnership of two is a hallmark of the Writing Workshop. It is as vital as mentor texts, teacher modeling, and independent writing. Calkins (1994) asserts that it is not enough to provide students with examples of good writing, explicit instruction, and time to write without providing them the opportunity to share their ideas and work with a partner (p.47). The work students do in pairs can occur throughout various times of the Writing Workshop. Collaboration between partners can be as simple as a “turn and talk” during a mini-lesson to reading one’s work and gathering feedback. “Turn and talk” sessions are brief and allow for students to share ideas with a peer that is close to them. Calkins (2013) highlights this type of collaboration as one that allows students to quickly share what they have noticed about a particular mini-lesson and/or practice a teacher highlighted strategy (p. 47). This form of collaboration is more often than not unstructured. Students are not paired by any specific criteria such as ability, interest, or personality. Students simply turn to a peer that is next to them or in close proximity to them. Partners for “turn and talk” collaboration can be as varied as the multitude of ways a group of students can find to sit together during a writing mini lesson. There are also partnerships that extend beyond the sharing that occurs in the “turn and talk”. These partnerships collaborate more deeply by sharing their individual writing with one another. Mermelstein (2007) believes that partnerships that share their writing benefit students because it allows them to see one
another’s writing and that this concrete example allows them to help one another with more ease (p. 80). Unlike students who briefly partner up during teacher mini lessons, these pairs of students work together for longer periods of time. Calkins (2013) states the work with which partners collaborate is more beneficial and productive if students work with the same partner over an extended period of time such as an entire writing unit to a full year (p.47). Collaboration of this nature supports students in their ability to become successful, independent writers.

**Peer Collaboration and Engagement**

Student engagement is a topic in education that is of great importance to teachers and researchers alike. Engagement is a broad term that involves a multitude of factors:

- Engagement has most recently been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, consisting of affective, behavioral, and cognitive components.
- Affective engagement emphasizes interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm.
- Behavioral engagement relates to effortful participation. Cognitive engagement encompasses strategic behavior, persistence, and metacognition. In addition, engagement is currently conceptualized as a dynamic, malleable construct (Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, & Burrowbridge, 2015, p.223).

In order to enhance student engagement, educators must create environments as well as opportunities that support and promote student engagement.Providing students with ample opportunities to work collaboratively with peers is an essential piece in creating engagement in literacy tasks. Collaboration with peers also known as cooperative learning has been deemed an essential factor that positively affects student engagement in
such tasks. John Guthrie posited this idea in his Engagement Theory. Tracey and Morrow (2012) explain how Guthrie’s Engagement Theory asserted that one of the key factors in promoting student engagement in the literacy task of reading is social interaction with peers such as talking about books and sharing ideas (p. 75). In order for collaboration among peers to promote engagement, several key components must occur during social interactions. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) asserted collaboration that supported engagement must contain key factors such as allowing students to read together, discuss ideas, and exchange feedback (p. 388). Although the Engagement Theory focused on the act of reading, Guthrie’s assertions about collaboration can be applied to the literacy task of writing. When collaborating with peers during Writing Workshop, students participate in similar activities such as sharing their stories, discussing ideas about the craft of writing, and providing one another with feedback.

Daiute and Dalton (1993) found when students worked together during writing activities that the text served as a focal point that kept them engaged (p. 325). The students’ texts that are shared during the Writing Workshop can be compared to the texts that students share during reading activities. As discussed earlier, collaboration ranging from groups of students to partnerships of two is an integral part of the Writing Workshop.

Peer collaboration helps to create increased engagement in literacy tasks because it serves as a positive support for students. The conversations and work with which students participate during peer collaboration help to forge personal connections. These connections and/or bonds that students’ form are the basis for the support system that promotes student engagement. Griffiths, Lilles, Furlong, and Sidwa asserted that without personal connections students not only lack engagement but also, actually demonstrate
disengagement (as cited in Guthrie & Klauda, 2012, p.389). The relationships that students build while working together actually intensify their engagement in participating in the collaborative activity. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) found that students shared interpersonal relationships were a key factor in students’ interest, motivation, and engagement in a literary task (p. 405). Students also form relationships and bonds when they work together towards a common goal. Emmer and Gerwels (2002) found that students who worked together in groups to accomplish a common task had better social interaction and were more motivated than students who did not work together towards a common goal (p. 89-90). Peer collaboration not only serves to improve student engagement but also increases student proficiency and competence in literary task such as reading and writing.

**Peer Collaboration and Student Achievement**

Collaborating with peers serves as a tool that increases student proficiency and achievement in literacy tasks. Working with peers allows students the ability to use skills that have been taught and apply them with independence. Mermelstein (2007) believes that partner shares serve as a powerful tool in allowing students to practice skills in order for them to be internalized (p. 84-85). Collaborating with peers through conversation supports students’ ability to integrate newly obtained skills into their knowledge base.

Students utilize higher order thinking skills such as critiquing, revising, creating, etc. when they share and discuss their writing with one another. Tracey and Morrow (2012) explain that according to Vygotsky “a child must experience the use of higher mental functioning in social situations before he or she can internalize such functioning and independently use it” (p. 128). Peer conversations help all children regardless of their
age or level of competence in writing to develop a deeper understanding of ideas and skills. Daiute and Dalton (1993) assert:

So, regardless of expertise or maturity, having a partner to discuss intellectual material in concrete terms may be of profound help at some points in development of a concept. In addition to dealing more explicitly with one’s own knowledge, hearing other perspectives on an issue currently under investigation and comparing one’s understandings and reflections with those of others can be a catalyst to the analysis and refinement of one’s own perspective (p. 291).

Students in their study were able to participate in collaborative conversations that promoted proficiency in their writing. Daiute and Dalton (1993) explain that although students’ knowledge about story writing was at times flawed, their collaboration allowed them to develop their writing ability (p.322). It seems clear that the talk students participate in during Writing Workshop in relation to planning, editing, revising, and the craft of writing supports them in becoming proficient and knowledgeable authors.

Peer collaboration has been shown to increase student achievement on writing tasks compared to students who worked independently. Yarrow and Topping (2001) found students aged eleven and twelve that participated in peer writing activities over a period of time showed greater gains in post-test writing assessments than their counterparts who worked alone (p. 278). This writing achievement in relation to peer collaboration can also been seen in students as young as five and six. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) found that through peer conferencing first grade students were able to improve their writing by helping one another add detail and by editing one another’s
writing (p. 138). When working collaboratively, each student brings his or her own unique abilities and skills. By sharing theses unique abilities with their partner, peers support one another in the attainment of new skills and knowledge. When children work together, they are able to accomplish more than if they were to work as individuals.

The ability to be successful at a new task with appropriate support is known as the zone of proximal development. Tracey and Morrow (2012) explain that Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development refers to the optimal level of task difficulty accompanied by appropriate support with which learning can occur (p. 128). Traditionally, an adult or a more knowledgeable peer provides the support a student needs in order to facilitate learning. However, Daiute and Dalton (1993) contend that the zone of proximal development is “relative and dynamic” and that even children who are considered novice writers have individual strengths and skills that can serve as a support to their peers (p. 289). Working within the zone of proximal development allows for internalization and acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Students working collaboratively with peers during the Writing Workshop capitalize on optimal learning in the zone of proximal development because of the individual skills and strengths each student brings to the partnership. Peers working together become more proficient writers because of the support with which they provide each other. “Clearly, children need experts as intellectual mentors, but engagement with peers provides a type of intellectual workout that is also essential to the mastery of subject matter and skills” (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p. 330).
Conclusion

The body of literature that exists about Writing Workshop and the benefits of peer collaboration is prolific. The basis of my study is built upon my experience with student performance and engagement when participating in writing instruction that utilizes the workshop model as well as the benefits I received from creating a long-term partnership during my graduate work. With the dawn of the Common Core State Standards, students not only need to be proficient writers but they also require the skills necessary to work collaboratively with others. I believe that having students work with long-term partners within the Writing Workshop will benefit them by enhancing their engagement in the writing process as well as their academic achievement. The literature suggests that the social aspect of collaborating with others is essential to student engagement in learning tasks. I contend that long-term partnerships will create an interdependence and bond between peers that will enhance their motivation and engagement in the writing process.

The relationship developed between peers will serve as an ongoing support when the students are faced with difficulties and challenges. Beyond the support that peer collaboration provides in regards to engagement, it also provides support in the attainment of new skills and knowledge. I believe that my study will add to the research that examines the ability of students of like ability to provide the appropriate support required for students to acquire new knowledge in regards to the zone of proximal development. Peer collaboration is a powerful tool in the field of teaching. I hope the data that will be collected in regards to my study will enrich the information and research that already exists on this significant topic in the area of education.
Chapter 3

Context

Community

The site of this study is in one of two elementary schools in a regional school district. The school is located in a small borough in Camden County, New Jersey. It is located approximately thirty minutes east of a heavily populated metropolitan area. The borough was home to 10,510 people and 3,921 households at the time of the 2010 United State Census. The average income per person was $23,935.00 and the average income per household was $50,184. 14.3% of the population was living at or below the poverty level. This percentage was higher than the national average of 13.5%. Of those living at or below the poverty level, 19% were children under the age of eighteen. The borough hosted an ethnically diverse population. The population consisted of 67.5% Caucasian, 24.1% African American, 2.1% Asian, 6.7% Hispanic or Latino, and 3.6% of that identified two or more races as of 2010.

School

The school is home to approximately 400 students. The ratio of male students to female students is roughly equal. The enrollment consists of 197 males and 199 females. The student population is 54% Caucasian, 28% African American, and 11% Hispanic. The other 7% of the student population consists of students of mixed race. ELL students make up 1% of the school population. Special Education students account for 16% of the school’s population. Thirty-two of these students are educated in self-contained classrooms. 255 of the students who attend the school are designated as Economically
Disadvantaged. This accounts for 64% of the student population. These 255 children are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch.

The teaching staff consists of 33 individuals. Classroom teachers account for 24 of those individuals. Three of the classroom teachers are Special Education teachers who teach self-contained multi-grade classrooms. Two of the classroom teachers are Special Education teachers who instruct with another teacher in an inclusion classroom. The staff also includes a full time English Language Arts paraprofessional, Math Specialist, Reading Specialist, Special Education Teachers (K-2) and a Literacy Coach. The Related Arts staff includes a P.E., Art, Music, and Technology teacher. The school shares an ELL teacher and Occupational Therapist with the district’s other elementary school. In addition to the teaching staff, there is a full time Guidance Counselor and a full time Speech Therapist.

The school’s academic performance lags behind that of the state average in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. According to the 2014-2015 scores from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, the school’s average English Language Arts performance score for grades third thru fifth was 739 compared to the state average of 747. The school’s average score falls into the assessment’s approached expectation category. The school’s average Mathematics score for the same grades was 733 compared to the state’s average of 743. The school’s score again fall into the assessment’s approached expectation category.

The school’s mission statement asserts that it is a neighborhood school that offers an array of programs and services to meet the needs of both the students and the
community. It believes that every child has great potential and that the staff is dedicated to nurturing all children so that they can grow academically, emotionally, and socially.

In accordance with the mission statement, the school’s teachers and staff work collaboratively to create a learning environment that affords each child ample opportunities to flourish. In order to achieve this goal, instruction is student-centered. Teachers develop lessons that utilize the unique background, knowledge, and learning styles that best support their group of learners. The teachers and staff are also committed to preparing students for the challenges of living and working in the 21st century. In order to prepare students for the future, skills that encourage problem solving and higher level thinking through communication and collaboration are promoted throughout the curriculum.

**Classroom**

The study took place in a Second Grade classroom. The classroom consisted of seven girls and ten boys for a total of seventeen students. The instruction in the classroom utilized the workshop model for both reading and writing instruction. The teacher in the classroom used cooperative learning in all areas of her instruction. The students in the room were familiar with the norms of cooperative learning because of its daily implementation in their classroom. The classroom teacher and I have worked together over the last several years to implement different instructional practices into her daily instruction. Cooperative learning within the Writer’s Workshop was an area in which this teacher and myself both had a great interest. It was our goal to work together in order to use cooperative learning in ways that would not only engage Second Grade students in writing but also assist them in becoming more proficient writers.
As mentioned earlier, the teacher utilized the workshop model during writing instruction. However, she felt the cooperative learning experiences that were built into her lessons were not having the desired effect. Although the students were familiar with all forms of cooperative learning, the time they spent working as partners, small groups, etc. did not appear to keep the students engaged in the writing process. The teacher also felt that these experiences were not having an impact on the students’ writing proficiency. For these reasons, the teacher often abandoned many of the cooperative learning experiences that were part of her writing instruction. This teacher’s experiences mirrored my own when I utilized the writing workshop model as a classroom teacher. Our common interest in this topic made her classroom a perfect fit for the context of this study.

Students

The students who received the instructional practices that were part of the study were chosen because of their enrollment in the aforementioned teacher’s Second Grade class for the 2016-2017 school year. The six students that were the focus of this work were chosen because of their attendance during the study and their parents’ willingness to have their children’s work, conversations, etc. be used in this thesis.

“John” is an eight-year-old boy. His favorite sport is wrestling and he participates in this sport outside of school. He enjoys reading both in school and at home. He is interested in all types of genres. “John” says that he enjoys writing and that he is a “really confident” writer. He revealed that he does not always enjoying working with a
writing partner or sharing his writing with others. His teacher says that he works well with others and serves as a role model for his peers.

“Gina” is a seven-year-old girl. She likes to dance and takes jazz and hip hop lessons. Her teacher describes her as very social. She enjoys talking and playing with her peers. She was both a reluctant reader and writer at the start of Second Grade but her interest and confidence in both areas improved from the beginning of the year. “Gina” explained that she often feels nervous when it is time for Writing Workshop. She also said that although she likes working with a writing partner, she is not comfortable when her peers try to help her with her writing. Her teacher says she works well with her peers during all types of collaborative learning.

“Conner” is an eight-year-old boy. He is a friendly and an exuberant child. He enjoys all aspects of school. His teacher expresses that he has a true love for learning. He loves reading and uses any free time to pick up a book and read. Although he reads a variety of texts, nonfiction is his genre of choice. He says that he “loves” writing and gets very excited when it is time for Writing Workshop. He also explained that at times he has difficulty deciding what to write. He said that he likes to work with partners and share his writing with them. His teacher expresses that “Conner” is the child who can work with absolutely anyone in the class and is thrilled with whomever his partner(s) is for an activity. She says his personality contributes to his ability to work well with his fellow students.

“Braylin” is an eight-year-old girl. She enjoys cheerleading. Her favorite thing to do outside of school is spend time with her family. “Braylin” is not an enthusiastic
learner but readily participates during instruction and learning activities such as Writing Workshop. She enjoys Kevin Henkes’ books and more often than not will choose his titles as an independent reading choice. "Braylin” says she likes writing as well as working with writing partners. She said she likes working with a partner because they can help her “fix mistakes”.

“Amanda” is an eight-year-old girl. She plays basketball for a recreational league. She loves reading and writing and excels in both of these areas. She enjoys reading all types of genres. She can often be found writing stories when given free time during the school day. “Amanda” says that she likes writing and that she is “happy” when it is time for Writing Workshop. She also expressed that she likes working with writing partners because they can “tell me things I don't know”. Her teacher says “Amanda” has very strong interpersonal skills. She can often be found giving assistance to a peer who is struggling with issues ranging from academics to behavior. In the classroom, she serves as a role model to her peers.

“Robbie” is an eight-year-old boy. He loves video games. He enjoys reading when the books are either fantasy or nonfiction. His teacher says he enjoys writing and is very enthusiastic about sharing his work with others. “Robbie” expressed that he feels nervous when it is time for Writing Workshop. He also explained that he likes working with partners because they help him “learn”. According to his teacher, “Robbie” struggles when working cooperatively with others. He struggles to follow the norms and procedures that are associated with working collaboratively.
Research Design/Methodology

“Research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing it to answer those questions” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 2). When one thinks of research, charts, graphs, as well as complicated jargon come to mind. This type of traditional research utilizes the quantitative research design. It more often than not employs mathematical algorithms that are complicated and difficult to understand in order to explain research outcomes. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert that this type of research positions educators as knowledge receivers rather than knowledge holders (p. 11). In contrast to this type of traditional research is teacher research. This is the design that will be utilized for this study. Teacher research often employs a qualitative research design. Qualitative research utilizes classroom anecdotes, teacher journal entries, as well as student surveys, conversations, and work to explain the outcomes of a research inquiry. Research of this type embraces the teacher as problem solver and knowledge holder.

The teacher researcher develops questions based on problems, concerns, and/or issues that impact student learning. Shagoury and Power (2012) explain:

Teacher research is research that is initiated and carried out by teachers in their classrooms and schools. Teacher-researchers use their inquiries to study everything from the best way to teach reading and the most useful methods for organizing group activities, to the different ways girls and boys respond to a science curriculum (p.2).
Teacher research has gained recognition and respect over the past two decades. One factor that has brought about this recognition is the importance and validity that educators themselves have placed on this type of research. “Many educators still believe that deep and significant changes in practice can only be brought about by those closest to the day-to-day work of teaching and learning” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 6). Teachers have also felt that traditional research in the field of education often lacked any bearing to the daily work that was happening in their classrooms. Shagoury and Power (2012) assert, “For many years, teachers have criticized education research as not being relevant to their needs, or written in a way that fails to connect with their classroom practice” (p. 2).

The aim of teacher research is to improve one’s practice in relation to one’s students, classroom, and community. In contrast to studies that look to impact education on a large scale, the goal of teacher research is to positively affect the daily instruction that goes on in the classroom in order to best meet the needs of one’s students (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p.4). The strength of teacher research lies in the relationships between the researcher and his or her students. This relationship allows the research that is conducted to look closely at inquiry questions that focus on the unique needs of a group of students. These unique needs are not limited to students’ academic needs but include all aspects of their lives such as social, economic, and cultural. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert the importance of the teacher-student relationship in relation to research:

Yet even as teaching becomes more and more public, it remains, at its heart, radically local-embedded in the immediate relationships of students and teachers,
shaped by the cultures of schools and communities, and connected to the experiences and biographies of individual and groups (p. 10).

This notion of the importance of the relationship between researcher and students is a driving force in my study. Large-scale research about cooperative learning is prolific. It is well documented that cooperative learning is an instructional practice that not only enhances student engagement but also contributes to student achievement. As a teacher researcher, I have looked closely at the effects of cooperative learning in regards to the students with whom I work. I have often seen it not live up to the potential with which these large-scale studies have reported. My students must be central to my inquiry into cooperative learning. Shagoury and Power (2012) emphasis “The notion of understanding learning from the students’ perspective is central to teacher research” (p. 4). My research design utilizes the qualitative data that is a hallmark of teacher research. This type of data will allow me to understand my students and this understanding will guide my inquiry.

**Procedure of Study**

This study investigated what effects long-term partnerships will have on student engagement and writing performance during Writing Workshop. The inquiry question was developed in coordination with another teacher. The question was in response to the similar experiences that occurred during our implementation of Writing Workshop. In order to focus the inquiry on the needs of the students, I employed a student survey. This survey allowed me to understand how the students felt about writing, viewed themselves as writers as well as their thoughts about working with others during Writing Workshop.
On-demand writing samples were also utilized at the onset of the study. These two pieces of data allowed me to create the long-term partnerships that would be employed throughout the research.

**Data Sources**

As mentioned earlier, a teacher-developed student survey was the first data source that was collected as well as an on-demand writing piece. The writing pieces helped to determine individual students’ writing proficiency. An on-demand writing piece was also given at the end of the study. In addition to these, other sources of data were collected throughout the duration of the study. A teacher journal was utilized from the onset of the study. In the journal, I gathered notes about student participation during Writing Workshop. Journal entries focused on student engagement during peer collaboration.

Writing samples were collected at the end of each week throughout the duration of the study. A rubric was utilized at the end of each week. It was used in coordination with journal notes and student work samples to assess student engagement. Students also answered open-ended questions at the end of each week. These questions were answered individually and focused on the work students did cooperatively with their partners.

IPads were utilized to audiotape conversations that occurred between partners. The goal was to record each partnership at least bi-monthly. At the conclusion of the study, the student survey was administered again. The survey helped to determine what effects long-term partnerships had on the students’ feelings about writing, themselves as writers, and the effects of working with a partner.
Data Analysis

The data collected was utilized in order to gain an understanding of the effects that long-term partnerships during Writing Workshop had on both student engagement and student achievement. The teacher created student survey that was given at the onset of the study was used to determine the participants’ feelings about the process of writing, collaborative work, and personal opinions about themselves as writers. The same survey was given at the conclusion of the study. It was used to ascertain changes in student feelings about the aforementioned topics. The on-demand writing pieces were used to determine students’ levels of writing proficiency in order to create partnerships in which peers had like skills and abilities. Post on-demand writing pieces were used to determine if the work students did with their partners transferred when they wrote independently. Weekly student work samples helped me to determine the effects of the collaboration between peer partnerships. Students used color pencils to make changes such as adding details, fixing spelling errors, and correcting punctuation that were impacted by their collaborative work. The rubric was used in conjunction with the student work samples and my teacher journal. The rubrics gave me a clearer picture of the differing levels of engagement of each child throughout the study. The audiotapes allowed me to listen to the social interactions that occurred between partners. These conversations were a window into how students worked together, who initiated collaborative conversations, what type of feedback partners provided one another, as well as how peer partnerships evolved from the beginning to the end of the study. The open-ended questionnaires helped me determine if what the student articulated about the work they did each week mirrored their writing samples, their conversations, as well as the anecdotal notes I kept.
in my journal. Finally, my teacher journal, gave me insight into the Writing Workshop environment that was created by the long-term partnership. The anecdotal notes gave me information about the students’ level of engagement when working with their partners as well as when they worked independently. It was a powerful tool that allowed me to reflect on the community of writers that developed amongst the children in the classroom. It also allowed me to look closely at my evolving understanding of the students, cooperative learning, and Writing Workshop.
Chapter 4

Introduction

As a teacher-researcher, my study arose from questions that were unique to experiences that I encountered in relation to the students with which I work. The analysis of the data that was collected looked for themes and trends that occurred during the four-week study. Looking closely at the data collected went hand in hand with being a careful observer and listener throughout the duration of the study. Shagoury and Power (2012) explain:

Good teacher research is exactly like good teaching. It requires careful listening, observing, and a good idea of where you want to go-combined with a focus on what is happening right now and a knowledge of how it all connects to what happened yesterday (p. 34).

My data involved observing, listening, and talking with students as well as collecting samples of their writing and their ideas about the work they did with partners in order to determine how long-term partnerships support second grade students during Writing Workshop.

The discussion of the data focuses on partnerships in Writing Workshop, the effects of peer collaboration on engagement, and the effects of peer collaboration on student achievement. Each category discusses themes and trends the data revealed. The data incorporated anecdotal notes from my teacher journal, student conversations, student surveys, student writing samples along with student questionnaires and rubrics to help determine the engagement levels of the participants. The data collected revealed
important trends that occurred in relation to peer partnerships, student engagement, and student achievement. What follows are samples of the data sources as well as a discussion of what they revealed in relation to the study.

**Writing Workshop and Long-Term Partnerships**

I administered a student survey during the first week of the study. The survey was teacher made and helped me to gain an understanding of the students’ feelings about Writing Workshop, the writing process, and working collaboratively with partners. The survey was then administered at the end of the study in order to see if the students’ feelings in relation to these topics had altered or changed in any way. Table 1 shows student responses pre and post study.

Table 1

*Pre/Post Student Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How do you feel when it is time for Writing Workshop? Why?</th>
<th>What do you like best about writing?</th>
<th>What do you like least about writing?</th>
<th>Do you like working with a partner when you write? Why/Why not?</th>
<th>How do you feel when a partner gives you ideas about things you can try, change, and/or fix in your writing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“John” (pre-study)</td>
<td>Great, I am a good writer.</td>
<td>I like coloring my pictures.</td>
<td>Remembering capitals and punctuation.</td>
<td>Sometimes it is hard to share ideas.</td>
<td>I like it. I guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“John” (post study)</td>
<td>I like it because I am a really confident writer.</td>
<td>Sharing my stories and my work.</td>
<td>When I am given something specific to write about.</td>
<td>Yes, they give me help with my writing.</td>
<td>It’s good because the help me make my writing better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How do you feel when it is time for Writing Workshop? Why?</th>
<th>What do you like best about writing?</th>
<th>What do you like least about writing?</th>
<th>Do you like working with a partner when you write? Why?/Why not?</th>
<th>How do you feel when a partner gives you ideas about things you can try, change, and/or fix in your writing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Gina” (pre-study)</td>
<td>A little nervous because I don’t know what to write.</td>
<td>I like how you get to choose (needed prompting).</td>
<td>I don’t have enough time to get done.</td>
<td>Yes (unable to give a reason why).</td>
<td>I feel nervous when people try to help me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Gina” (post study)</td>
<td>I feel really happy.</td>
<td>I like that I get to work together with friends.</td>
<td>I can’t think of anything.</td>
<td>Yes. My partner really helps me with my spelling and the beginnings and endings of my stories. Also, I don’t really get to hang out with him when we are not writing.</td>
<td>I like it because I learn things from it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Conner” (pre-study)</td>
<td>I feel happy. I like writing.</td>
<td>We can write about our pictures.</td>
<td>When I don’t know what to write about.</td>
<td>Yes, partners are nice to have.</td>
<td>Okay. I am not sure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Conner” (post study)</td>
<td>Excited. I really love writing.</td>
<td>I like to write about me, like my small moments.</td>
<td>I don’t always have time to draw pictures to go with my story.</td>
<td>Yes, I like to help my partner with her writing.</td>
<td>I’m fine with it because it helps make me a better writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Braylin” (pre-study)</td>
<td>Happy. Writing is fun.</td>
<td>We can write about what the teacher says (needed prompting).</td>
<td>We have to write a lot.</td>
<td>Yes, they can help me spell stuff.</td>
<td>Okay, if I didn’t write a lot of stuff, they can help me add to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Braylin” (post study)</td>
<td>I feel excited. I like to write.</td>
<td>I like that we get to write about different stuff.</td>
<td>Sometimes I feel like I run out of time.</td>
<td>Yes, we work together on stories.</td>
<td>Excited because it makes me work harder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Amanda” (pre-study)</td>
<td>Happy. I like writing.</td>
<td>Drawing the pictures.</td>
<td>Writing.</td>
<td>I’m happy because they can tell me things I don’t know.</td>
<td>I’m happy because they can tell me things I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How do you feel when it is time for Writing Workshop? Why?</th>
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<th>Do you like working with a partner when you write? Why/Why not?</th>
<th>How do you feel when a partner gives you ideas about things you can try, change, and/or fix in your writing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Amanda” (post study)</td>
<td>Excited. I get to write stories about stuff I know.</td>
<td>I like all of it like writing small moments and helping my partner.</td>
<td>I don’t like drawing pictures for my writing.</td>
<td>Yes, I get to read them my story. I like having an audience.</td>
<td>Yes, they help me with my spelling and help me when my writing doesn’t make sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Robbie” (pre-study)</td>
<td>I feel really nervous.</td>
<td>I get to draw pictures (needed prompting).</td>
<td>It’s hard to put space and be neat.</td>
<td>Yes, they are my friends.</td>
<td>Happy, they help me learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Robbie” (post study)</td>
<td>It’s good. I like writing about things I know.</td>
<td>I get to choose what to write about.</td>
<td>It can be hard.</td>
<td>Yes, she helps me with my ideas and my spelling.</td>
<td>I think its good like my partner helps me with the hard stuff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the study occurred, the majority of the students with the exception of “Gina” and “Robbie” had positive attitudes towards Writing Workshop. “Gina” and “Robbie” both shared that they felt nervous when it was time for Writing Workshop. “Gina” said her nervousness originated from the difficulty she experienced when it came time to choose a topic for her writing. During Writing Workshop, students often participate in a quick Think-Pair-Share with a partner in order to plan and discuss the topic of their writing. This type of quick collaboration did not seem to support “Gina” in her work as a writer. At the start of the study, my teacher journal recorded observations of “Gina” frequently asking to leave the room (use the girl’s room, get a drink) during
writing and “Robbie” spent much of his time wandering the room getting paper, sharpening pencils, etc. At the conclusion of the study, all students revealed positive attitudes towards Writing Workshop. “Amanda”, “Braylin”, and “Conner” stated that they felt “excited” when it came time for writing. Both “Gina” and “Robbie” no longer felt nervous when it came time to participate in Writing Workshop but felt “happy” and “good” respectively. My observations revealed that “Gina’s” requests to leave the room decreased and “Robbie” spent more time actively participating in writing with his partner. Both students increased their time on task.

When asked pre-study “What do you like best about writing?”, several students needed prompting to answer the question while others’ answers did not reflect on the act of writing. The majority of students’ discussed drawing and coloring their pictures as the activity they most enjoyed. Although young writers use pictures as a springboard for their writing, these pictures are meant to be quick sketches to stimulate ideas and details, not detailed illustrations. They are used as a support not as a focus of the writing process. This type of response revealed that the majority of students favored being an illustrator over being an author. At the conclusion of the study, none of the students needed prompting in order to answer the question. Each student was able to articulate what he or she liked best about writing. Reasons provided revealed deeper reflection by the students as to what they liked best. “John”, “Gina”, and “Amanda” specifically noted a form of collaboration as what they like best about the writing process. Neuman and Roskos highlighted “the presence of other people” and “feedback from others” as integral parts of creating authentic literacy experiences (as cited in Hsu, 2009, p. 154). These authentic experiences became what these students valued most. “John” and “Gina” were partners
throughout the study. My journal revealed that at the onset of the study I worked closely with this pair on conflict resolution. “Gina” expressed feeling “pressured” by “John” because he gave her too many ideas at once and “John” felt “frustrated” that he accepted “Gina’s” advice but she did not use his advice. Their ongoing conversations revealed that they began to understand the other’s feelings and their work as partners flourished:

“John”: I like how you wrote about dancing.

“Gina”: Thank you!

“John”: What kind of dance do you do?

“Gina”: It was hip-hop.

“John”: That would be a good detail to add.

“Gina”: Oh! That’s a good idea.

When asked at the onset of the study, “Do you like working with a partner when you write? Why/Why not?”, all but one of the students responded that they liked working with a partner. Another common feature of the students’ responses to this question was their explanation as to why they liked working with a partner. Most responses did not have any correlation to writing. Their answers were generic and had more to do with partners being their friends and an overall feeling that the benefits of being a partner had more to do with congeniality than anything connected to its effects on their work as writers. “Amanda” and “Robbie” both shared that they like working with partners during writing because they like working with “friends”. These answers revealed that the overwhelming majority of study participants did not view the work they did with writing
partners as anything more than an opportunity to do something nice for one another or a chance to spend time with their friends. At the conclusion of the study, a new trend among the students emerged. All of the students now revealed that they liked working with a partner when writing because of the help and support collaborating with partners provided. “Robbie” explained that he liked working with a partner because “She helps me with my ideas and my spelling.” Conversations between “Robbie” and his partner were marked with him asking for help when he experienced difficulty:

“Robbie”: audibly trying to sound out the word *because*

“Robbie”: “Amanda” do you know how to spell *because*

“Amanda”: Yeah.

“Robbie”: Can you help me spell it? Does it have a z?


Anecdotal notes in my teacher journal recorded early in the study revealed that “Robbie” would often stick on areas of difficulty:

“Robbie” fixates when he finds something challenging and/or difficult. This can range from spelling a word to generating a topic for his writing. He becomes easily frustrated. He does not ask his partner for assistance without prompting from me (Teacher journal, week of November 7, 2016).

My prompting became less and “Robbie” began interacting with his partner on his own. “Gina” went from being unable to articulate a reason as to why she liked working with a partner to providing specifics reasons. Her post survey response highlighted the many
ways collaborating with a partner assisted her writing. She also explained that it was an opportunity to interact with a classmate with whom she did not normally spend time. She explained, “Yes. My partner really helps me with my spelling and the beginnings and endings of my stories. Also, I don’t really get to hang out with him when we are not writing.” Guthrie and Klauda (2014) found that the “interpersonal relationships” that developed when peers worked collaboratively helped to increase their motivation and engagement in a literacy task (p.405). Beyond the academic support “Gina” received from her partner, she appreciated the relationship that she was able to develop with a peer that she had little interaction with outside of the Writing Workshop.

The final question asked, “How do you feel when a partner gives you ideas about things you can try, change, and/or fix in your writing?” Pre-study answers were mixed. Only two students had positive responses. The other students’ responses ranged from feeling nervous to being just “okay”. “John” questioned his initial response of “I like it” by following it up with “I guess.” “Conner” shared similar misgivings when he responded, “Okay, I’m not sure.” The students’ pre-study responses revealed that they were not comfortable with the collaborative process although many had said they liked working with a partner during Writing Workshop. Had the collaborative work with which they participated in the past not allowed them to build relationships that supported their ability to work with peers in a meaningful way? Calkins (2013) states the work with which partners collaborate is more beneficial and productive if students work with the same partner over an extended period of time such as over an entire writing unit to a full year (p.47). The students’ post study responses all echoed what Calkins’ asserted about the benefits of working with the same partner over an extended period of time. The
participants all agreed that they had positive feelings when a writing partner gave them advice. The participants also explained that this type of advice allowed them to improve their writing. “Gina” who initially felt “nervous” explained that she now learned things from the collaborative work that occurred with her partner. Notes in my teacher journal also supported “Gina’s” new feelings about her partner’s advice:

“Gina” and “John” had experienced some difficulty working with one another at the beginning of the study. Today when I sat with them and asked how they felt their work as partners was going, they both agreed it was going well. “John” told me how “Gina” was having trouble deciding on a small moment. He went on to explain that he gave her some ideas like writing about Halloween or the playground. I noticed “Gina” was smiling and nodding in agreement. She held up her small moment to show me how “John” had helped her (Teacher journal, week of November 21, 2016).

“Braylin” shared, “Excited because it makes me work harder.” Her response highlighted that she worked harder when her partner gave her ideas. “Braylin’s” answer supported the notion that peer collaboration increases student engagement. Hsu (2009) revealed that long-term writing partnerships created an excitement during Writing Workshop that kept students focused and engaged (p. 158).

The post-study survey indicated that the students developed a better understanding of the true nature of partnerships. They viewed a partner as someone that could help them with the writing process. The students recognized collaboration as a tool to support them in their work as writers. At the conclusion of the study, all participants
not only had positive feelings about Writing Workshop but also the long-term partnerships that were utilized during the study. In order to shine a light on what affects peer partnerships had on student engagement, I looked closely at student conversations and my teacher journal. I used these two data sources to complete a weekly engagement rubric for each student.

**Peer Collaboration and Student Engagement**

During the Writing Workshop, peer collaboration consisted of sharing stories, providing and receiving feedback as well as using peer feedback in one’s writing.

Students were given sentence stems to help them provide feedback to their partner about their writing. The sentence stems focused on questions about characters, setting, areas of confusion in the story, and areas with which the listener wanted to hear more. The engagement rubric employed consisted of a four scale rating system with four being the highest level of engagement and one being the lowest level of engagement. The ratings are as follows: a rating of four represented that the student collaborated consistently and independently with their partner (at least 90% of the time) on task, a rating of three represented that the student collaborated frequently and independently with their partner and was usually (at least 80% of the time) on task, a rating of two represented that the student collaborated with their partner when prompted by teacher and/or partner and was often (at least 60% of the time) on task, and a rating of one represented that the student struggled to collaborate with their partner even when prompted by the teacher and/or partner and was occasionally (50% or less) on task.
During the first week of the study, all participants received ratings of either a one or two. “Robbie” and “Gina” both received a rating of one. These two students found it difficult to collaborate with their partner even with teacher prompting. Notes in my teacher journal reflected that they were uncomfortable not only sharing their work but also providing feedback and receiving feedback:

I noticed that “Robbie” was distracted and digging through his pencil box. I approached him and his partner and asked how their work as partners was going. “Amanda” responded that they hadn’t shared yet. I asked “Amanda” if she would share her story first. When she was finished, I asked “Robbie” what he could ask his partner about her story that may help her make it better. He just shrugged his shoulders. I modeled how I could ask questions about his partner’s story using the question stems. When I released responsibility of the task over to him, his only feedback was “it’s good”. I prompted him by asking him to use the sentence stems as a guide to provide his partner with feedback. I then used the stems to ask him questions about his partner’s writing. This allowed him to think about areas of his partner’s writing with which he could provide feedback. With additional prompting, he asked his partner where her story had taken place (Teacher journal, week of November 7, 2016).

“Gina” also received a one on the engagement rubric during the first week of the study. Listening to a conversation that occurred between “Gina” and her partner revealed that she experienced anxiety when having to share her work with her partner:

“John”: Okay now you read your story.
“Gina”: Silence

“John”: It’s your turn.

“Gina”: I don’t have a lot written.

“John”: Okay. Just read it.

“Gina”: But I don’t have a lot. Silence. I don’t want to read it yet.

“John”: You have to share. Writing is almost done.

“Gina”: Um but it’s not enough.

“Gina” finally went on to share her story. Her story was limited although she had been working on the piece for the entire forty-five minutes of the Writing Workshop. I spoke to “Gina” the next day and she shared with me that she did not want to share because she had a hard time deciding what to write about that day and was nervous because she didn’t think it was enough writing. Through these interactions with their partners, it seemed like both “Gina” and “Robbie” had not yet begun to develop relationships with their partners that would allow them to collaborate in a meaningful way such as sharing ideas and thoughts about their partner’s work or being willing to share their own work. Their lack of engagement was evident in the amount of writing produced and distracted behaviors. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) asserted collaboration among peers had a direct effect on students’ engagement in literacy tasks (p. 389). It seems that in order to become more engaged during Writing Workshop, these students needed to experience meaningful collaboration with their peer partners. The remainder of the students did collaborate with their peers but required teacher prompting. This need for teacher prompting seemed
related to their previous collaborative experiences during Writing Workshop. Notes from my teacher journal explored this idea further:

The students needed prompting in order to collaborate with their partners even though they had been told they could work with their partner whenever they wanted. Once I sat with them and prompted them to work with one another, they collaborated by sharing their stories and asking each other meaningful questions in relation to one another’s stories. I questioned several of the students as to why they had waited for me to sit with them before they worked together. They all shared similar responses such as “we forgot” or “we were waiting for you to talk to us”. It seems like prior Writing Workshop routines interfered with their collaboration rather than other factors (Teacher journal, week of November 7, 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Student collaborates consistently and independently with partner. Student is consistently on task. (90% of time)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student collaborates frequently and independently with partner. Student is usually on task. (80% of the time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student collaborates with partner when prompted by teacher and/or partner. Student is often on task. (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student struggles to collaborate with partner even when prompted by the teacher and/or partner. Student is occasionally on task (40%)</td>
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*Figure 1.* “Robbie’s” Engagement Rubric for the week of November 7, 2016
Figure 2. “Amanda’s” Engagement Rubric for the week of November 7, 2016

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<th>4</th>
<th>Student collaborates consistently and independently with partner. Student is consistently on task. (90% of time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student collaborates frequently and independently with partner. Student is usually on task. (80% of the time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student collaborates with partner when prompted by teacher and/or partner. Student is often on task. (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student struggles to collaborate with partner even when prompted by the teacher and/or partner. Student is occasionally on task (40%)</td>
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Over the course of the study, student engagement increased as determined by the rubric. During the second and third week of the study, all students increased their rubric score by at least one point. The majority of students collaborated with their partner without prompting from the teacher and/or their partner. It appeared that the forms of collaboration with which they had participated in previous Writing Workshop experiences had given way to the new norms and procedures of working with a long-term partner. Notes that I recorded in my teacher journal reflected that the students appreciated the ability to work with the same partner during each writing session and that they could interact with their partner without teacher direction:

I sat with “Braylin” and “Conner” today. I asked what they had been working on as authors. “Braylin” asked if she could share her story with me. When she got to a specific part in her story, “Conner” became very excited and said “I helped with that part!”. I thought “Braylin” might get upset by his interruption and his
ownership of her work but this was not the case. She was just as excited as him. She stopped reading and said “Yeah, we did this part together.” I asked how they felt about being able to work with the same partner whenever they wanted. They both expressed that they like having someone to talk to about their stories. “Braylin” added that she liked that she had “Conner” to work with and that she worked harder when he gave her ideas. “Conner” added that they both give each other ideas. I reflected on how they were developing an interdependence on each other that fostered excitement and engagement. They were becoming invested in one another’s work and according to “Braylin” were working harder because of it (Teacher journal, week of November 14, 2016).

A conversation between “John” and “Gina” the third week of the study also revealed how their long-term partnership was helping them to develop a relationship that supported their engagement during Writing Workshop:

“Gina”: You said you were playing Madden.

“John”: Yeah.

“Gina”: What is Madden?

“John”: It is a video game. You know football.

“Gina”: Oh I never heard of it.

“John”: I can explain that part more in my story.

“Gina”: I’ll share now
“John” had revealed in his student survey discussed earlier in this chapter that it was difficult to share ideas with a writing partner and was uncertain about how he felt when a writing partner gave him ideas and suggestions and “Gina” had expressed that it made her feel nervous. “Gina” was also hesitant to share in the beginning weeks of the study even with prompting. This collaboration between “John” and “Gina” was completely independent of any prompting. It was natural and relaxed. It seemed that they were developing a relationship that allowed them to collaborate in an authentic way that supported them as writers. Calkins (1994) asserted that children “. . . will care about writing when it is personal and interpersonal” (p.14).

At the conclusion of the study, four of the six participants increased their rubric scores by two points while two of the six participants, increased their rubric score by one point. “Amanda” and “Conner” received the highest rubric score of four during the final weeks of the study. Notes from my teacher journal revealed that they often initiated peer collaboration with their partner and were consistently on task during Writing Workshop:

“Amanda” is a supportive partner. She more often than not initiates collaboration between her and “Robbie”. Not only is she consistently engaged and on-task but she often supports her partner when he is off task. She does not simply remind him to get back to work but will offer help and assistance. I noticed that she assisted “Robbie” in deciding upon a topic for his small moment. Her support has assisted “Robbie” on staying more focused and on task during Writing Workshop (Teacher journal, week of November 21, 2016).
“Conner” showed that he valued the collaboration that occurred between him and his partner and that it supported his writing. He turned to her when he was unable to generate a small moment with which to write:

“Conner”: What is your story about?

“Braylin”: Recess

“Conner”: I don’t know what to write about. Sometimes I have a hard time deciding.

“Braylin”: You could write about recess like me or what you did on the weekend.

“Conner”: I don’t know

“Braylin”: Maybe just write about recess like me

“Conner”: Okay. Thanks!

Their conversation was natural and echoed of two students who enjoyed working together. It was also a reflection of how their collaboration allowed “Conner” to stay engaged in his writing and stay on task. Without collaborating with his partner, he may have needed to seek out or wait for teacher intervention to successfully generate an idea. “Conner” began to write after this interaction and disengagement did not occur because of his initial difficulty. Hsu (2009) found that writing partnerships allowed for students to share thoughts and ideas with each other rather than seeking out teacher support therefore creating more engaged and productive students (p. 158).
The remainder of the students received a three on the rubric by the final week of the study. They no longer needed teacher prompting to collaborate with their peer partners. Collaboration normally occurred when a student needed some type of assistance with their writing. They began to naturally turn to their partner for help rather than becoming distracted or asking for teacher assistance. The students also moved away from using the question stems and their collaborations were based on student need and the students developing understanding of the components of a good story:

“John”: You know when you talked about jumping up because of the show you were watching.

“Gina”: Uh-huh

“John”: That would be a good place for a sound word. What sound did you hear?

“Gina”: A boom

“John”: You should put that there in you story.

“Gina”: I’m gonna add boom, boom, boom because it happened more than one time.

Journal entries highlighted that students were engaged in the writing process and fewer disengaged behaviors occurred throughout the four-week study. They also revealed that students had developed trusting relationships with their partners. Peer partners came to rely on one another for help, assistance, and advice:
I am sitting back and looking at the development of the partnerships since the start of the study four weeks ago. The indoor recess atmosphere of that first day has been replaced by something more quiet and subtle. Partners are still scattered around the room but the conversations are not occurring all at once. When students work together, it seems to truly be because they need their partner. The need ranges from help that is specific such as planning and spelling to help that is more general such as needing someone to listen and give feedback about what missing details might enhance a story. Just today I heard partners ask for help with spelling a word, what a good ending might be, and a request just to listen to a story. I also heard partners providing feedback to their partner’s work such as adding feelings, adding missing punctuation, and fixing a part that did not make sense. The best part of all was that partners helped when asked, used peer feedback in a meaningful way, and not one hand was raised for teacher assistance nor did I have a trail of students lingering behind me! They wrote. They talked. They shared. They were engaged (Teacher journal, week of November 28, 2016).

I watched some of my struggling partnerships closely this week. “Gina” and “John” are sitting side by side in two desks. “Gina” no longer looks like a child who gets nervous when it is time to write. She is hunched over her paper writing. She looks up and starts to stare into space. I watch to see how long she will stay “stuck”. Will I need to intervene or will she turn to “John”. Their partnership got off to a rocky start and required extra support and guidance. She taps him on the arm with her pencil. I move a little closer so I can hear what she is saying. She
tells him she is not sure how she should end her story. He listens. He suggests she could end it with a feeling (this was a mini-lesson from a week or so ago). She smiles and gets back to work. I look later at her story. She took his advice and ended her story with a feeling. “Robbie” has really begun to depend on “Amanda” and she seems to relish her role. “Robbie” was one of the most disengaged writers at the start of the study. He was often playing in his pencil box or asking to leave the room. He is more engaged during Writing Workshop. I see him nudge “Amanda” several times. Sometimes he points to something on his page and other times he asks her for help. As for “Amanda”, she keeps him on track when he begins to get off task. She will ask what he is stuck on or she will share her story with him. These interactions help to refocus him on his writing. As for how he supports “Amanda”, well “Robbie is a details kid. He is always asking “Amanda” questions about things that she did not include in her story. His questions make her writing richer in details and she freely expresses the help she has received from him (Teacher journal, week of November 28, 2016).

The students’ long-term peer partnerships along with their on-going interaction during Writing Workshop supported students in their engagement in the writing process. Students spent more time on task at the end of the study than they had at the beginning. They were self-directed and collaborated with their partners in meaningful ways. Students now had a partner with which to work when confronted with the obstacles and challenges that often face young writers. Fidelity and emphasis on student collaboration were determined to be a key factor in student engagement when participating in a
challenging literacy task (Guthrie and Klauda, 2014, p. 405). Collaboration helped to keep students engaged. Would this engagement help to increase their writing proficiency?

**Peer Collaboration and Writing Achievement**

In order to better understand the writing proficiency of the students in the study, a pre-survey on-demand writing piece was obtained. The unit of study being instructed during my research was narrative writing. Therefore, the students were asked to write a narrative as their on-demand sample. The students’ writing samples revealed many similarities. The majority of the students’ narratives lacked both an opening and a closing. All of the samples lacked a clear beginning, middle, and end. They also were limited in their use of characters as well as descriptive words and feelings. The majority of writing samples contained inconsistent use of both punctuation and capitalization.

This group of students had participated in Writing Workshop the previous year and received instruction in the aforementioned areas. Throughout the four weeks of the study, weekly writing samples were viewed in order to determine if peer collaboration would support the students in their ability to become more proficient writers.
As mentioned earlier, students were given question stems in order to help facilitate their work as partners. The question stems focused on story content such as

Figure 3. “Robbie’s” on-demand pre-study writing sample

Figure 4. “Conner’s” on-demand pre-study writing sample
characters and setting as well as areas that were unclear or need more elaboration. It is important to note that the students did not employ these as a list of questions to be asked each time they discussed one another’s stories but rather as a guide that allowed them to think about areas of their partner’s story that may need to be improved. Students used colored pencils to show the work in their story that was born out of collaborating with their partner. The weekly work samples showed that collaborating with partners supported students in their ability to write with more proficiency than in their pre-study on-demand writing piece. The collaboration between partners resulted in students developing writing pieces that followed a logical sequence of events rather than loosely connected ideas as in their pre-study on-demand samples. “Amanda” took out several sentences of her writing and replaced them with a closing. The sentences removed were details that were related to her story but had been mentioned earlier in her work. When I spoke to “Amanda” about this choice, she explained “Robbie’ said that part was confusing because I had already said that.” Student work samples also revealed that partners assisted each other with spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. “Conner” changed “lit” to “lihgt”. Although light was still misspelled, work with his partner allowed him to use a spelling choice that was more appropriate. Many of the work samples included the addition of character feelings. “John” included how he felt when he was allowed to play his video game for two hours. “Amanda” was able to add feelings about how another character in her story felt. Students also added details such as sound words, which was the focus of a writing mini-lesson. “Gina’s” work contained the addition of a sound word that was appropriately placed and enhanced her overall story. The addition of sound words were evident in the majority of student work samples which
showed students were applying the focus of mini-lessons into their daily writing. Several students added more specific settings to their stories. “Robbie” and “Braylin” both included specific places where their stories had taken places. “Robbie” included the proper name of the water park that was the setting of his story while “Braylin” added that her story took place on the school playground.

Weekly work samples illustrated that peer collaboration supported the students’ ability to become more proficient writers. Working with peer partners allowed the students to talk, share, and ask questions about one another’s narratives. The collaboration among peer partners assisted students in creating stories that were more reflective of proficient writing than if they had worked alone. Calkins believed that “after a question is asked, the force of listening will draw words out of the writer and they will find themselves saying things they did not know they knew (as cited in Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p. 132).” Although students were of like ability, peer partners were able to provide a scaffold that allowed one another to work within their zone of proximal development. They supported one another in participating in learning that would not have occurred if working alone. It appears that peer partners brought strengths to their work as collaborators that they were able to share with one another. Daiute and Dalton (1993) found that when peers with similar writing abilities worked together they shared their “complementary expertise” when appropriate during the collaboration (p. 323). Being long-term partners also seemed to enhance the support they provided one another. Partners were not only familiar with one another but also with one another’s stories. They did not have to negotiate how to work with one another nor did they have to familiarize themselves with one another’s work. Other data such as the open-ended
questions that students responded to at the end of each week made the learning that occurred during peer collaboration visible.

Figure 5. “Conner’s” weekly writing sample

Figure 6. “John’s” weekly writing sample
The open-ended questions were another snapshot of how peer collaboration affected student writing. At the end of each week, the students reflected on the work they did with their partners and then independently answered the questions. Student responses illustrated that they were able to communicate not only areas with which they offered assistance but also the areas in which their partner assisted them. Notably, their responses went beyond the areas of focus from the question stems. The answers offered a range of areas with which the students collaborated such as spelling, punctuation, beginnings, endings, and character feelings. Students were able to “talk” about their work as writers. Young writers often struggle with verbalizing the work they do as writers when questioned by others. Their answers are often general such as “my writing” and require teacher prompting in order to discuss their work in more detail. The participants in the study exhibited that they could effectively “talk” about the work they had done as authors. The areas that students discussed in their answers mirrored the work that they had highlighted in their weekly writing samples. “John” shared that his partner gave him feedback about “being confused about the video game I was playing.” His weekly writing sample reflected that he reacted to this feedback and added more detail about the video game to his story. “Robbie” shared that his partner helped him with the setting of his story and that he gave his partner feedback about a character in her story. Writing samples from both “Robbie” and his partner, “Amanda” showed that these were areas that had been affected by the work they did together.

Peer collaboration involved reading, sharing, and discussing one another’s narratives. These interactions happened repeatedly with the same story over the course of a single Writing Workshop as well as spanning multiple Writing Workshops. The
repetition that occurs when students collaborate supports them in solidifying their understanding of concepts related to writing (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p. 324). The multiple conversations that centered on the same story helped students’ understanding of the components of a good narrative become more concrete in their knowledge base. This repetition over multiple Writing Workshops would not have been possible if students had not worked with the same partner over an extended period of time. Student collaboration not only improved student writing when they worked on stories together but it was also reflected in the narratives the students wrote independently.

*Figure 7. “Amanda’s” weekly open-ended questionnaire*
Post survey on-demand writing pieces were obtained from the students. Students worked independently on these pieces over the course of a single Writing Workshop. Their post survey writing samples showed increased writing proficiency in relation to narrative writing. All writing samples contained an opening and a closing as well as following a logical sequence of events. The majority of the pieces contained sound words, which were taught during a mini-lesson and were the subject of many of the students’ open-ended questions in regards to feedback. All of the student stories contained characters other than themselves. Most of the pre-survey narratives contained the child writing the story as the sole character. Many of the writing pieces exhibited more proficient use of punctuation. Student spelling choices, although not always correct, were more representative of accurate spelling than in the pre-survey writing samples. Another improvement between the pre and post writing samples was the increased content of the story. Each child wrote a lengthier and more detailed narrative.
Collaborating with a peer on narratives allowed them to internalize and then independently use the writing skills with which they attended to with their partner. The collaboration that happens between peers requires children to attend to the text in order to make sure their partner has not “done something unacceptable” and in the process supports them in their learning (Daiute & Dalton, 1993, p. 325). The type of collaboration that occurs between peers such as correcting one another’s work and offering suggestions as to how to improve writing requires peers to be comfortable enough with one another in order to give and accept advice and opinions. Long-term partnerships allowed students to develop the relationships necessary to collaborate in ways that had positive effects on their independent writing.
Figure 9. “Conner’s” post-study on-demand writing piece
Figure 10. “Robbie’s” post-study on-demand writing piece
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

-Ben Franklin

Conclusions

Good teaching not only requires one to look closely at the quality of instruction being provided but more importantly to look closely at the impact that instruction has on one’s students. Teacher-researchers carefully examine what impact and/or effects instructional strategies and practices have on their students. As a teacher-researcher, I examined how long-term partnerships would support second grade students during Writing Workshop. I found that utilizing long-term partnerships had several positive effects on the students that participated in the study.

Long-term partnerships helped students to realize the benefits of having someone with which they could collaborate. Working with the same partner over an extended period of time supported the students’ ability to develop a relationship that allowed them to collaborate with one another in a meaningful way. Hsu (2009) explained that when students had only one partner there was less negotiating which allowed for more efficient communication (p. 155). The students gave and received feedback about one another’s stories. They were excited about the work they did with their partner. Partners freely shared what aspects of their work had been the direct result of collaborating with their partner. Students not only felt pride in their writing but because of the on-going nature of their collaboration they also felt pride in the work of their partners. Partners not only
collaborated with one another but also provided additional support such as keeping one another focused and encouraging each other when they were having difficulty. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) found the interpersonal relationships that students develop support them when approaching difficult tasks (p. 405). The students recognized a key benefit to having a long-term partner was that they had access to someone who could help and support them whenever they were in need.

Long-term partnerships supported student engagement during Writing Workshop. Students became more engaged in writing with the continuing support of their partner throughout the course of the study. Students relied on their partner to support them during Writing Workshop. Instead of waiting to talk with the teacher for a variety of reasons such as planning, editing, or simply wanting to interact with someone during the writing process, partners turned to one another. Students stayed engaged because they had someone with which they could collaborate when the need arose and not when the teacher and/or schedule of the Writing Workshop dictated it. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) asserted that without collaborative relationships students became disengaged with the task at hand (p. 389). It appears that the collaboration that occurred between long-term partners kept students on task. They no longer became disengaged and distracted while waiting to interact with the teacher. The Writing Workshop was transformed from one individual supporting seventeen students to students having a one to one support system. This engagement in the writing process led to more conversations about writing, more sharing of stories, and more writing.

The increase in these types of interactions between partners supported the students in becoming more proficient writers. Partners engaged in various conversations
about writing that ranged from mechanics to content. Yarrow and Topping (2001) emphasized the need for children to talk to one another during the writing process in order to utilize the “social interactions” necessary for learning to occur (p.262).

Collaborating on one another’s writing supported the students’ ability to share, discuss, and utilize their developing knowledge of the writing process. Daiute and Dalton (1993) found that verbalizing both old and new learning with a partner made the thinking process visible and that this type of collaboration helped students improve their overall writing ability (p. 322). Students of like ability were able to support one another in their understanding and acquisition of new skills. Students shared their individual strengths with one another whether it was their knowledge of spelling, punctuation, adding details, and/or generating story ideas. When individual strengths were utilized during their collaborative work, students were able to support their partner’s ability to acquire new skills. Partnerships allowed one another to work within their individual zone of proximal development. This is level at which a child can learn new skills with appropriate support. Vygotsky asserted that working within the zone of proximal development was essential for learning to occur (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 128). Collaboration through long-term partnerships allowed for students to be continuously supported by a peer and therefore have access to the help needed in order for them to achieve new skills. Without this ongoing collaboration, it appears that students working independently may not have received the help and support required to attain much of their knowledge about the writing and the writing process.
Limitations

It is important to note that there were limitations associated with this study. The time that was allocated for the study was limited. It occurred over a four-week period between November and December. However during that time, students were not in attendance because of several school closures. There were also several half-day schedules within the time frame that the study occurred. Another limitation that should be noted is that the classroom and the students utilized for the study were not mine. Although I am familiar with all of the students because of my work as the building’s Literacy Coach, I was not privy to their daily interactions outside of the Writing Workshop. The limited time I spent with the students did not allow me to see how their long-term partnerships affected other areas of their school day both academic and non-academic. A small group of students from one grade level were utilized for the purpose of this study. A larger sampling of multi-age students would help to give a broader picture of the supports of long-term partnerships across grade and age level. The participants in the study were familiar with the norms of collaborative work because it was an instructional practice that was regularly utilized in their classroom. The outcomes of the study may have been altered if collaborative work was not a classroom norm.

Implications

As a teacher-researcher, I investigated a question that was personal and deeply rooted in my experiences as an educator. I looked deeply at the impact my instruction had on my students. As a teacher-researcher, I became what Shagoury and Power (2012) described as “not a scientist in a lab coat, staring down a ‘research subject’ (a kid!), but a human being in the midst of teaching, carefully weighing the value of different ways of
teaching and learning” (p. 5). The research of others was critical in order to guide my study. I found that research focusing on the effects of collaboration in regards to achievement and engagement was mostly focused on the area of reading. The amount of research into the effects of collaboration on engagement and achievement in relation to reading was prolific. However, I found research that focused on the effects of collaboration on writing achievement and writing engagement to be limited in comparison. Research into reading has been a major focus throughout the history of education. However, its literary counterpart, writing, does not appear to have received the same attention.

The dawn of the Common Core State Standards has brought writing into the spotlight more than ever before. I believe that research into topics that are centered on instructional practices that help support student writing achievement needs to be the focus of more educational research. Individuals such as Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Ralph Fletcher have done much to develop practices to support the instruction of writing. However, the demands and expectations with which students of all grade levels must attain seem to support the need for additional research. Only through curiosity and inquiry will we support our students in their attainment of becoming writers who are ready to meet the expectations of school and beyond.
References


Appendix A

Pre/Post Student Survey

How do you feel when it is time for Writing Workshop? Why?

What do you like best about writing?

What do you like least about writing?

Do you like working with a partner when you write? Why/Why not?

How do you feel when a partner gives you ideas about things you can try, change and/or fix in your writing?
Appendix B

Weekly Student Open-Ended Questionnaire

This week my partner and I worked on:


My partner gave me feedback about:


I gave me partner feedback about:


We worked well together when we:


We DID NOT work well together when we:
Appendix C

Student Engagement Rubric

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student collaborates consistently and independently with partner. Student is consistently on task. (90% of the time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student collaborates frequently and independently with partner. Student is usually on task. (80% of the time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student collaborates with partner when prompted by teacher and/or partner. Student is often on task. (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student struggles to collaborate with partner even when prompted by the teacher and/or partner. Student is occasionally on task (40%)</td>
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Appendix D

Question Stems

Questions that help my partner with the content of their writing!

Can you tell me more about . . .

I was confused about . . .

Who (people, animals, . . .) is in your story?

Where does your story take place?