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Using a shared vocabulary to teach key qualities of good writing in a fourth grade classroom

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**USING A SHARED VOCABULARY TO TEACH KEY QUALITIES
OF GOOD WRITING IN A FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM**

by

Kristi Schoppe

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literature, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

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Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Susan Browne

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of my wonderfully supportive family members and friends. I would like to especially thank my husband, Steve, for his understanding from the initial start of this program, which enabled me to focus and devote the time and energy needed to be successful. I thank Steve for all the meals, loads of laundry, and cleaning for the past two years. I would also like to thank my three children, Jenna, Jared, and Tyler for their patience while I missed sporting events or sat in the car to work during practices. Without the love and encouragement from these special people in my life, I am not sure I would have made it through. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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Abstract

Kristi Schoppe

USING A SHARED VOCABUARY TO TEACH KEY QUALITIES
OF GOOD WRITING IN A FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM
2017-2018

Dr. Susan Browne

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this research is to investigate what happens when teachers replace traditional grammar instruction methods with small group guided instruction focused on a set of vocabulary terms used in writing. The vocabulary terms represent the key qualities of writing; the terms for teachers and students is word choice, ideas, conventions, organization, voice, sentence fluency, role, audience, format, and topic. This study aims to learn more about this topic by investigating how using a shared vocabulary during writing instruction in a fourth grade classroom will engage students longer to improve their writing through the writing process.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A few years ago, in my 12th year of teaching, my doubts of being a weak writing teacher became valid. It was the year that I looped from first grade to second grade with my students that my concerns grew even deeper. I had often thought that writing was my weakest point of instruction, but had followed the curriculum and observed modest improvements in my students writing abilities. However, I knew that I had never purposefully reflected in this area. That September was the start of my second year with a wonderful group of thriving students. They entered my classroom and we were all thrilled to see each other again. The routines and behavior management stayed reasonably the same as the previous school year, so we were ready for learning. It was not long into the school year, before I realized that my students were stagnant in their writing ability. The students were able to include an introduction statement, end with a closing, and describe an order of events within their writing, but they continued to struggle with descriptive words that match feelings and actions of the characters. Their writing also became very boring to me, I was not seeing the growth that I expected from my students. It was first grade writing and I had high expectations for my second graders. I knew that I had to make a change.

More than anything else, I always had a passion for helping students to be the best student they could be. Being a teacher is not always easy, and in fact can be quite challenging at times. It has always been part of my philosophy, that all students can learn and that they all learn differently. I also believe that if a student is not learning the way I

teach, then I need to teach the way they learn. I love what I do and when I feel like I am making a difference, I feel a sense of accomplishment that motivates me during challenging times. I have good ideas when it comes to classroom instruction, but felt that I lacked the knowledge and resources to improve my writing instruction. I went to our school's Master Teacher to acquire her professional input. She introduced me to 6 Traits Writing. She provided an overview; she reviewed the six traits and how they connected to using literature.

That was the difference, I had always taught writing in isolation and never really related it to real literature. I bought in to the key qualities that define good writing as identified by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory ("What are the Traits," 2012).

They are:

- Ideas—the main message
- Organization—the internal structure of the piece
- Voice—the personal tone and flavor of the author's message
- Word Choice—the vocabulary a writer chooses to convey meaning
- Sentence Fluency—the rhythm and flow of the language
- Conventions—the mechanical correctness

I did my own professional development on the strategies through research and videos and implemented the key qualities of six traits into my instruction. That year, I saw true thriving writers, the traits offered a clear approach to help students write with confidence and competence. Students were using effective hooks to get the reader's attention, they were making an effort for better word choice, and their feelings came through in their writings. My writing block extended into my reading time, which until now, had happened in the reverse. My students began to look at books differently. They noticed word choice, voice, organization and ideas of the author's direct message.

Fast forward to last year, 2016-2017, I had a new teaching position at a new school. I was the new Language Arts Literacy Master Teacher for a K-8 school within the district that I started my teaching career. Here I met, Daniel P. Tulino, Professor-In-Residence from Rowan University - College of Education. Mr. Tulino was assigned to our school as the liaison for the partnership of the Professional Development School. The school's leadership recognized writing as an area of focus. Through multiple conversations and collaborative meetings, Mr. Tulino and I developed an approach to help student writers.

Mr. Tulino had success using RAFT writing strategy that helps students focus on the audience they address, the varied formats for writing, and the topic they write about. The RAFT technique (Santa 1988) is a writing strategy that helps students understand their Role as a writer, the Audience they will address, various Formats for writing, and the expected Topic or content. RAFT strategy (Santa,1988) that employs writing-to-learn activities to enhance understanding of informational text. Instead of writing a traditional essay explaining a concept learned, students demonstrate their understanding in a nontraditional format that encourages creative thinking and motivates students to reflect on their reading in unusual ways. The RAFT technique can be adapted to fit the needs of any subject area to encourage discussion about subject matter, while providing an opportunity for students to view the subject from various perspectives.

I had success implementing the methods of six traits that define quality writing. We united our past successes into a shared set of vocabulary terms and combined explicit and systematic writing instruction to describe what good writing looks like.

Origin of Question

The 6+1 Trait Writing Model is a method of teaching writing and assessing students' writing using the distinct vocabulary of a professional writer. The traditional writing workshop method of instruction focuses on sentence and paragraph structure, conventions, and organization, emphasizing a beginning, middle, and an end. The 6+1 Trait Writing Model adds emphasis on additional writing skills such as ideas, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and presentation.

The latest paper test results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002) indicate that 72% of 4th-grade students were not able to write at a proficient level. In fact, a large number of American students have very poor writing skills. Writing problems surface early and tend to remain with students throughout their schooling experience. Reading is important, but it is only half of the equation. By writing, students are forced to take their own ideas and form them into something concrete, something defensible. This expands their ability to make coherent arguments, a necessary skill for any citizen.

Inconsistencies in instructional methods for teaching writing abound in elementary schools across the United States (Graham, Bollinger, et al, 2012). When elementary school schedules get filled with too many subjects, usually writing is the first content area to suffer from benign neglect. Finding quality writing instruction and time committed for writing instruction and practice are rare in elementary schools. Elementary schools often do not have a designated writing curriculum or a specific method mandated by the district. There can be inconsistencies within schools and even from teacher to

teacher in the selection and implementation of writing instructional methods. Both veteran and beginning elementary teachers can feel inadequate when deciding how to teach writing to their students. In 2008, as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), most states have adopted demanding writing standards for grades K-12 (Graham et al. 2012). Teachers are now required to teach writing but rarely are given instruction on how to do so effectively. The goal of this study was to look at specific ways in which to improve the overall quality of writing instruction for students.

Writing is an essential skill can benefit students for the rest of their lives. Introducing and practicing writing with engaging activities in elementary school, can foster confidence and a lifelong love of writing. Writing skills are important for elementary students' continued learning in all academic areas, communication and self-expression, Good writing, and good writing instruction, involves a repeated process that overlap and build on one another. Learning how to write essays can be one of the drearier experiences for students in school, but it is also one of the most important.

Learning how to write well also forces students to think better. They become more capable of analyzing what they read, interpreting data, and thinking critically. The need for good writing instructions is evident in the report of "The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution" (2003). The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2003) reports that writing has been shortchanged in the school reform movement over the past twenty years and must now receive the attention it deserves: "American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts the power of language and communication in their proper place in the classroom".

Although many models of effective writing instruction exist, there are many reports that indicate both the teaching and practice of writing are shortchanged throughout the school years. Traditional writing instruction has emphasized teaching students the skills and strategies needed to write effectively in a variety of contexts and disciplines. Such instruction, typically has been called process-oriented and has tended to emphasize extensive prewriting activities, multiple drafts, and careful attention to writing conventions before sharing with others. (The Neglected "R", 2003).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate what happens when teachers replace traditional grammar instruction methods with small group guided instruction focused on a set of vocabulary terms used in writing. The vocabulary terms represent the key qualities of writing; the terms for teachers and students is word choice, ideas, conventions, organization, voice, sentence fluency, role, audience, format, and topic. This study aims to learn more about this topic by investigating how using a shared vocabulary during writing instruction in a fourth grade classroom will engage students longer to improve their writing through the writing process. Because of the student population where the research is taking place, the subjects for this research will focus on English Language Learners, Inclusion students and regular ed. students.

Research Question

It was because of my own writing instruction struggle and the research about the lack of writing instruction across the grades, which I decided on a topic for my teacher research. My essential research question evolved into, "What happens when teachers replace traditional grammar instruction methods with instruction focused on a set of

vocabulary terms used in writing?” Other sub questions surfaced, such as: “How will knowledge of the shared vocabulary engage students during the writing process to improve their writing? What impact will the shared vocabulary have on English Language Learners (ELL) and Learning Disabled (LD) students?”

I knew that I would be working with an inclusion class, with a high percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs). I decided to focus on the challenges facing the English Language Learners and Learning Disabled students in the classroom, I felt this group was the most in need of further research.

Thesis Outline

In chapter one, which you have just read, I have provided an introduction to my research and research question, the origin of my question, and the purpose behind my research. In chapter two, there will be a review of past and current literature surrounding the topics that will be studied through my research question. Chapter three looks at the methodology and context of the study. You will get familiar with the community, school, and participants involved in the research. Chapter four will include a complete explanation and analysis of the data collected throughout the study. Finally, chapter five will provide a conclusion, including assertions that can be made with support from the previous chapters, and implications for further related research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Background on Writing Instruction

Despite the need for writing competence in and out of school, writing has been deemed the neglected “R” in educational practice. According to the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (NCWAFSC) in 2003, many students do not meet expected standards of writing performance. This was the outset of a movement toward testing and accountability and away from best practices and standards that is eroding teacher and student activity.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 required schools to make a number of improvements in areas such as graduation rates, improving the education of students with disabilities, and more effectively addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged and needy racial categories (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing exam administered to students in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades indicate that the vast majority are not meeting educational standards for writing proficiency, with 72% of 4th graders, 69% of 8th graders, and 77% of 12th graders scoring at the Basic or Below Basic levels (NAEP, 2002). The National Commission on Writing report (2004) required that schools and colleges significantly improve student writing skills. The report denoted that students who do not learn to write well are at a disadvantage. At school, they earn lower grades, especially in classes where written tests and reports are the primary means for assessing students’ progress.

[NCWAFSC], 2003)

Through the work of scholars such as Lucy Calkins (1994), Steve Graham (1989, 1993, 2005, 2007), and others effective practices of teaching writing are well researched and documented and have been adopted in classrooms today. Writing has come to be more widely accepted as a holistic process that takes place within a social context where students engage in a cognitive experience of language learning and acquisition rather than as a set of isolated skills.

Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools is a 2007 report by Graham and Perin and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education. In it, Graham and Perin highlight specific teaching strategies that help adolescent students learn to write well, ranging from the use of collaborative writing arrangements to inquiry activities that engage students in developing content and ideas. Graham and Perin believe that writing and teaching writing skills has not received enough attention by researchers and educators. Graham and Perin (2007a) argue that for the 21st century, "writing well is not just an option for young people — it is a necessity" (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 3).

To develop the theoretical foundation for examining the impact of a shared vocabulary for teachers and students during writing performance for an urban inclusion classroom with a high percentage of ELL students, the review of related literature focused on several strands. This chapter first discusses the challenges that face ELL and Learning Disabled students in regards to writing. Next, research is reported in areas of effective strategies to improve student writing performance. Finally, research examines best practices that support student engagement for struggling writers in an urban setting are demonstrated.

English-Language Learners

The profile of the typical classroom in the United States has undergone dramatic changes in the recent past. Many more students today come from impoverished homes, speak English as a second language, and have identified or suspected disabilities (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). More demands for higher levels of writing performance and for demonstration of content mastery through writing are being required of students and their teachers, while facing a higher proportion of students who struggle with basic writing skills.

Writing instruction for English Language Learners (ELL) has become one of the most urgent issues in today's educational practice (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005, p. 10). An increasing number of children in U.S. schools come from homes in which English is not the primary language. Lin's (2015) research study highlights this issue, "Native English writers acquire English grammatical and linguistic patterns naturally from their own language and culture. On the other hand, ELL writers must acquire these writing skills deliberately, usually as a result of direct instruction" (p. 238). ELL writing also differs from native writing in the ways the ELL primary language and culture may influence the second language student's style, organization, and expression of ideas (Lin, 2015). Lin (2015) implies that ELL students have learning needs that are ELL student-specific. The writing obstacles expressed by participants in this study show that ELL students have to overcome some difficulties in order to write effectively. These are cognitive/linguistic difficulties, sociocultural differences, and psychological/emotional concerns. To meet ELL students' writing needs, instruction strategies in ELL classes would need to differ from traditional grammar strategies.

Researchers in second language acquisition do not agree about how ELs handle the writing process of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) discuss many strategies for teaching English Language. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) claim that the undertaking of the writing process is the same for all writers (p. 208). Incorporating process writing in English Language (EL) instruction is a worthwhile goal. Research substantiates the merits of key learning activities incorporated throughout a process approach for second language learners (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). When EL instructors utilize process writing to transform the classroom into a writing workshop, overall second language acquisition can be enhanced. However, Truscott (1996) suggests that grammar correction is ultimately ineffective for language acquisition students. He goes as far as to say that "grammar correction in Second Language (L2) writing classes should be abandoned" (Truscott, 1996, p. 327). He raises the idea that it is harmful because it takes away from focusing on other more important pedagogical topics such as writing content, structure, and organization. Truscott (1996) suggests that theoretically and pragmatically, grammar correction in L2 classes is not beneficial to English L2 students because language acquisition is a long and complex process.

In the *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages TESOL Journal*, editor DelliCarpini (2012), offers suggestions for addressing the challenges EL writers face. Direct instruction in the elements of the various genres needs to include opportunities for the students to analyze, discuss, and compare and contrast these genres. This will enhance their understanding of the purpose and form of the variety of writing tasks asked of ELs. Responding to their need for more time to work through the writing process, EL teachers and classroom English Language Arts (ELA) teachers can plan together so that the

students have structured writing time and support across both classrooms. DelliCarpini (2012) promotes sustained silent reading (SSR) as one strategy to increase vocabulary knowledge of ELs, resulting in enhanced writing fluency. It is suggested that teachers give clear and specific feedback related to three or four aspects of the writing that are good as well as showing students what is not acceptable along with concise explanations (DelliCarpini, 2012). It is expected that EL writing will contain many errors. If the teacher marked each one, the student would likely feel deflated and require a great amount of encouragement to continue to write.

Writing is an important skill for language production. However, it is considered a difficult skill, particularly in for ELL students, who can experience a great number of quandaries (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Writing in a manner that is clear and interesting is a difficult skill for most people whether they are writing in their first language or in a language in which they are working towards proficiency.

Writing for Students with Learning Disabilities

Studies conducted in 1998 indicated that a sizeable minority of students, with and without learning disabilities, have very poor writing skills (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). Students who have learning disabilities exhibit a wide range of traits, including but not limited to, problems with reading comprehension, spoken language, writing or reasoning ability. Teachers should not generalize all students with disabilities into one behavioral and learning group, but approach each student to his or her own personal characteristics.

According to Sousa (2001), writing is a complex process which involves many different areas of the brain to work together. Writing involves attention, fine motor skill

harmonization, memory, visual processing, language, and high-order thinking. All of these processes need to work together in order for one to successfully write. While writing, students need to have receptive and expressive language skills, working cognitive operations, and emotional stability. They also need to understand the proper forms of organization, and need to follow rules or punctuation, spelling, grammar, and syntax. Without the alignment of these factors, writing becomes challenging and frustrating (Sousa, 2001). Reid, Lienemann, & Haganman (2013) point out the reasons why students with learning disabilities struggle while writing. One reason is due to the demands writing places on an individual. Writing involves multiple different processes, which can become overwhelming for student with learning disabilities. The second reason these students are challenged is because they fail to use effective strategies. Students with learning disabilities often forget to use strategies and lack the self-regulation and attention that they need to use strategies while they are writing (Reid, et al., 2013).

Sousa (2001) explains different reasons why writing may be such a daunting task for students. One possible reason for this would be due to the environmental factors. These factors would include issues such as how much time was spent on writing in the student's early years or how writing is taught. Students don't see the importance of learning to write and when they aren't given the appropriate instruction and time for writing, it becomes a challenging task for the students.

There are many problems that students with learning disabilities face with writing. Wong (2000) states that these students are generally more challenged by writing than their peers are, with writing that is not as legible, effective, detailed, and understandable

as their peers. There are five main ways that students with learning disabilities are different from their peers. One way is that students with learning disabilities struggle to clearly express their ideas in writing. They also don't really understand what good writing is. They focus more on the mechanics and process rather than the content of the piece. Another difference is that students with learning disabilities fail to use the appropriate strategies as they are writing. They also tend to make a larger amount of errors in their writing piece. The last difference between students with learning disabilities and their peers is that students with learning disabilities need more practice than their peers to develop the writing strategies that should be absorbed (Wong, 2000).

Some students with learning disabilities don't understand the importance of writing and they fail to recognize the steps that are involved in writing. They just want to get the work done and just want to get information down on the page. These students also forget about organization and flow and just work to add any information that they can (Wong, 2000). Wong (2000) states the last step to writing is revision. Students with learning disabilities are often faced with more revision that needs to be done, due to their more frequent mechanical errors. These students focus more on the mechanical revisions to make their piece look better, rather than content revision (Wong, 2000).

For students who have learning disabilities, giving them new tools for planning, revising, or regulating the writing process is critical (Graham & Harris, 2005). Struggling writers must not only learn a specific strategy, but must also have continuous support to practice and use the strategies as they were intended. Graham and Harris (2005) believed students with learning disabilities are too concerned about rules of usage, spelling, and handwriting when they write. The students' knowledge about writing, including genres,

devices, and conventions, is quite limited (Graham & Harris, 2005). Graham and Harris have found that students with learning disabilities have an incomplete knowledge of writing which is reflected in the stories they write. The students often exclude basic story elements such as location, problem, ending, or a moral.

Students with learning disabilities are challenged by many different factors of writing and they lack the appropriate understandings to decrease the difficulties that they face. Helping students develop these understandings will help make writing a less stressful and more enjoyable process for students with learning disabilities.

Effective Practices

How students learn best is a question that drives much of the research done in the field of education. Most curriculums are divided into two schools of thought, teacher-directed instruction and student-directed learning. With teacher-directed instruction, students are taught specific skills through explicit, systematic instruction. With student-directed learning, students are responsible for managing and monitoring their learning, which can include selecting and employing skills and strategies to use and learn for various lessons (McCarthy & Ro, 2011; Englert, et al. 1991).

Traditional instruction of writing in the elementary classroom is teacher led lessons that focus on specific skills and rules in grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Often traditional instruction only requires students to write a minimal amount, one or two paragraphs at a time (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). McCarthy and Ro (2011) described traditional writing instruction as that which includes textbooks and workbooks to teach precise skills in grammar and sentence mechanics, such as capitalization and punctuation. This writing instruction includes traditional lesson

formats, which include introduction, new skill, guided practice, and independent practice in a whole class setting. Traditional instruction does not lead to students' understanding that writing is a process.

As Graham, Bollinger, Booth, D'Aoust, MacArthur, McCutchen, & Olinghouse.(2012) showed in their study, process writing instruction has stronger evidence for effectively teaching writing than traditional, skills based writing instruction. In the process approach to writing instruction, the cycle of writing is viewed as a circle, as opposed to linear (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). The cycle includes self-selecting of a topic, prewriting, drafting, and revising for creating a final version. The cycle concept allows students to fluidly move back and forth through the writing process to create a writing piece. The linear approach is thought of as a teacher-directed approach, typically associated with traditional writing instructional approaches. The teacher assigns the topic and the students move from one step to the next to create a final product. In contrast, in the process approach, writing is student-centered (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Process writing instruction has several different components that enhance student writing. Process writing instruction emphasizes a student-centered focus, lessons that are planned based on teachers' observation of students' writings, student- and peer conferences, goal setting, and reflection (Graham, McKeown et al., 2012; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; McCarthy & Ro, 2011).

Graham, McKeown, Kiuvara, & Harris (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental research studies that investigated writing instruction with elementary aged students. Graham, McKeown et al. (2012) found positive ES (effect size) for teaching students strategy instruction for planning, drafting, and revising;

teaching students how to self-regulate while they are planning, drafting, and revising; teaching students to create mental images while writing; teaching students genre types for writing; teaching students spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding skills; allowing students to collaborate during various phases of writing; assisting students in setting clear goals; explicit teaching of prewriting skills and strategies; and assessing students' writing with an on-going method. All of the components with positive effective size were evidence based best practices for process approach writing instruction.

An additional benefit of teaching students writing strategies is it enhances knowledge about writing, the writing process, and their capabilities as writers (Graham & Harris, 1993). According to Graham and Harris (2005), when struggling writers are taught a strategy for planning a story, the writers gain information on the structure and content of stories in addition to the knowledge on how to create and organize possible ideas for writing. If the strategy helps to improve writing performance, it will likewise increase confidence and belief in themselves as writers. This continues on in a cycle and in turn boosts students' motivation for writing and increases the likelihood of students using strategic behaviors (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Hillocks (1986) conducted one of the first scientifically based, meta-analytical studies on best instructional practices for writing. Over twenty years later, the meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Perin (2007b) identified self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) as the most effective instructional strategy to teach writing. SRSD is an example of an instructional approach that provides students with specific writing strategies to guide them from the beginning to the conclusion of the writing task. Research indicates that good writers plan, monitor, evaluate, revise and manage the

writing process (Graham & Perin, 2007b). SRSD is designed to help struggling writers adopt these skills by providing a manageable framework. Students' progress through explicit and strategic steps to accomplish their writing task. The self-regulatory aspect of the process includes; goal-setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-instructional statements. It provides students with writing instruction that includes planning, drafting and revising. The SRSD approach is framed around six stages of instruction which include: providing background knowledge needed for students to plan the essay, describing the strategy to students, teacher modeling how to use the strategy, memorizing the strategy, support thorough group writing and teacher scaffolding, and finally independent performance (Graham & Perin, 2007b).

Tomlinson (1999) suggests that differentiation of instruction is not a recipe for teaching, nor an instructional strategy, but rather a philosophy about teaching and learning. In, *Differentiation: A Way of Thinking About the Classroom*, Carol Tomlinson outlines seven basic beliefs upon which the philosophy of differentiated instruction is based: (1) same age students differ in their readiness to learn, interests, learning styles, experiences, and life circumstances; (2) differences in students are significant enough to make a major impact on what students need to learn, the pace at which they need to learn it, and the support they need from teachers and others; (3) students learn best when pushed slightly beyond their abilities to work independently; (4) students learn best when they make a connection between their interests and experiences and the curriculum; (5) students learn best when learning opportunities are natural; (6) students learn best when they feel significant in, and respected by, a supportive educational community; (7) and

lastly, the central function of a school is to maximize the capacity of each of its students (Tomilson, 1999).

Tomlinson (1999) describes process as the activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content. Differentiation of process incorporates such instructional strategies as tiered activities where all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity; interest or learning centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them; varied length of time to complete the assignment and use of manipulatives or hands-on supports; flexible grouping where students have a level of choice in working independently, in teams, or in pairs. In addition to student choice or "personal agendas" where teachers prepare "task lists" individualized to student needs, the teacher considers the nature of the activity and dictates whether the student will work independently, in a pair, or in a group

Research has shown that struggling students need the opportunity to dialogue about the writing process (Englert, Zhao, Dunsmore, Collings, & Wolbers, 2007). He continued and stated that students must be scaffolded and supported throughout the writing process with a gradual release of responsibility. Teachers who model and think aloud for students support them through instructional dialogues. Englert, et al (2007) recommended partner work throughout the writing process for scaffolding student support, which can include teacher conferencing and peer editing. Teachers, through conferencing with students, have the opportunity to show children how to build their writing and improve the quality.

Writing Conferences require regular feedback and an opportunity to dialogue about writing and the writing process, as well as examples and modeling how writers think in order to understand and apply what writers do (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). Modeling with elaborate dialogue, coupled with feedback, should improve student writing. Englert, et al (2007) suggested “an emphasis on dialogue related to writing, the provision of scaffolded instruction, and the transformation of writing from a solitary to a collaborative act” in order to improve student writing” (p. 339). Through conferencing, teachers and students have an opportunity to talk about writing and what goes into improving and revising a written piece. According to the research reviewed, conducting writing conferences with students provides support for students who experience difficulty in writing. Conferencing with students could “foster dialogue among teachers and students about the writing process and problem-solving strategies” (Englert, et al. p. 155). Through conferencing, teachers have the opportunity to discuss writing strategies with students and share insight and scaffolding so that students can be guided towards improving their writing with support while they are learning to think like a writer (Graham & Bollinger, 2012). Conferences are conducted one-on-one with students throughout the writing process. It allows the student to discuss what they are struggling with and for the teachers to help them stretch and revise their work to improve it.

Students also need explicit instruction in the writing process. Some researchers feel that “writing instruction needs to make the processes of writing and the strategies for performing processes visible to students” (Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 1991, p. 338). They suggested in order to make these processes visible, teachers need to model through think-alouds so that students can understand how writers think.

Students who are at-risk in academic writing require explicit knowledge in the writing process (Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Englert, et al. 1991; Graham & Harris, 2005). Baker, Gersten, and Graham (2003) suggested that students must be able to plan and organize their writing and they need explicit, visible instruction. In addition, teachers who model the writing process help students to understand the writing process. These researchers stated that teachers must also provide a gradual release of responsibility by first modeling, then supporting, until finally, the students work independently.

Student Engagement

Research is sparse in the category of engagement and literacy, but as Guthrie's (2000) research indicated, most of the research for engagement is hidden behind the term motivation rather than engagement. Early research in this area focused on motivation, but as this area of inquiry merged into the education sector the concept became known as engagement. Children who have faced failure and criticism when writing tend to develop poor attitudes and resist the writing process. Overcoming these psychological obstacles has been found to be an important part of helping struggling writers to improve. Research has indicated the need to consider the emotional frustrations that struggling writers experience such as self-doubt, frustration, and helplessness (Graham & Harris, 1989). Other characteristics such as impulsive behavior, difficulty processing information and lack of motivation have a significant impact on children's ability to become proficient and skilled writers (Graham & Harris, 2005). Students who view themselves as poor writers, who have had negative experiences with writing, or who have learning disabilities that make writing challenging, need instruction that addresses all of these issues Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) found that children who were motivated and

had a positive attitude toward writing produced qualitatively better pieces. They concluded that when children have a desire to write, their performance improves and that enhancing a child's motivation has a positive impact on outcome. The downside to developing a child's confidence is that they may feel overly capable and fail to put enough time, resources, and effort into their writing, believing their product to be polished and complete when in fact it needs more work and attention (Sawyer, Graham, & Harris, 1992).

Engagement with learning is essential to student achievement. John Guthrie began researching engagement in 1990 by investigating the knowledge base for reading motivation. Guthrie's (1997) theory identifies four qualities of an engaged learner: social interactions, motivations, strategy use and conceptual knowledge (Guthrie, 2000). Encompassing the qualities of an engaged learner are ten instructional contexts that promote literacy engagement: conceptual orientation, real world instruction, autonomy support, interesting text, strategy instruction, collaboration, teacher involvement, rewards and praise, evaluation and coherence (Guthrie, 2000). While these contexts were designed for reading, they apply to various aspects of literacy such as writing.

The qualities of an engaged learner, identified by Guthrie, came out of his study trying to address "what is engagement in literacy?" (1996). Guthrie states "this view of literacy engagement depicts the learner as possessing a variety of motivations to gain conceptual understanding by using cognitive strategies and participating in a diversity of social interchanges" (1996, p. 434). Motivated students are engaged students. Students who are motivated want to be involved in literacy activities as compared to being involved out of compliance (1996). Conceptual understandings are based on a child's

need to understand, link and explain his/ her world. Cognitive strategies include summarizing, talking about the text, using text to gain ideas for writing or problem solving. Social interchanges could be the core to engaged literacy learners. Engaged students involved in social interchanges will be talking about their text (written or read) to the teacher or other students, sharing ideas, sharing what was written or read within the classroom community or gaining input from other students about the meaning of text. Guthrie suggests the context of the classroom will influence engagement and motivation. All of the instructional contexts do not have to be present for students to be engaged, however the more contexts that are present during a literacy lesson the more likely the students will be engaged in the work.

Summary

Most children start school wanting to learn how to write. Too quickly many of them come to view school writing as a chore or something to be avoided altogether. An important ingredient in fostering students' interest in writing is to make sure their writing assignments serve a real or meaningful purpose, as opposed to a one size fits all writing process. Writing can be a struggle for both teachers and students. Teachers continue to strive to assist students when writing. Students have been encouraged to use both traditional methods and newer approaches, which have more flexibility. The ability of a student in reading often determined his/her ability in writing. The thought process of writing can be linked to vocabulary. Writing has been found to be used in all subject areas in school and in many areas of the business world. The importance of writing should begin when a student enters school and should be valued as much as reading.

It is important for teachers to understand that to improve the writing performance of their students, they need to recognize the challenges that face ELL and LD, they need to utilize effective strategies, and examine best practices that support student engagement for struggling writers.

Chapter 3

Methodology

School

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand more about how English Language Learners, and children with learning disabilities who struggle with writing progress in a fourth grade inclusion model class. Qualitative methods helped to focus on individual students to learn more deeply about their unique problems and perspectives. Through the process the researcher came to understand specific reasons children struggle with writing, how they are accommodated, and how they learn. By looking at the complexities of these individual experiences, the research gained insight into how we may find solutions. The project took place in the natural setting of a fourth grade classroom in order to gain a full understanding of the children and their experiences as writers. By visiting the classroom for 3 months of the school year, the investigator made observations of the children, talked to and interviewed them, learned about teaching methods, and gained a better picture of the complexities of how students make progress.

This 4th grade classroom resides in a South Jersey district, which is a comprehensive community public school district. It serves students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district is one of 31 former Abbott districts statewide, now referred to as "SDA Districts", Schools Development Authority, based on the requirement for the state to cover all costs for school building and renovation projects. The district, classified by the New Jersey Department of Education, as being in District Factor Group "A", the lowest of eight groupings. District

Factor Groups organize districts statewide to allow comparison by common socioeconomic characteristics of the local districts.

The school has gone through some growing pains recently. In 2015, the school only held 324 students in a 13-classroom school building with an additional 4 temporary classroom units (TCUs). The students came from the adjacent neighborhood and the teachers knew just about every family that walked through the door and their story. The following year a new school, directly behind the old part was established. This made the school three times the size that the “old teachers” were accustomed. There were now 33 classrooms and over 650 students. Many new staff members and bused students were now part of the neighborhood school. This school year, brought even more students and staff. The original reconstructed building brought in the addition of 10 classrooms to accommodate Pre-K students. Because of these recent changes, the most recent information from the NJ Department of Education, the 2015-2016 School Performance Report, is not accurate of the current school demographics.

The school is located in a low economic, urban area, where gang violence is among the top concerns for its citizens. Many of the families are migrant farmworkers making less than minimum wage. 100% of the students receive free breakfast, lunch, and dinner (if they stay for an afterschool program). Although it is a public school, the students are required to wear uniforms for various reasons that include: cost effective for parents, inability for students to promote gang colors or symbols in school, and making an “even playing field” for all students where dress is concerned.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education school report card, of the 370 students enrolled at the school during the 2015-2016 school year, 52.7% were

Hispanic, 38.4% were Black, 6.2% were White, 1.9% were two or more races, and 0.8% were American Indian. The number of Hispanic students has been steadily climbing for the past several years for this school and the district. This change in demographics has caused many other changes in the school such as the amount of bilingual classes, English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, funding, and an increase in Spanish materials/resources. It has also caused teachers to focus on the needs of English Language Learners through professional development and planning. In past years, each grade level had at least one bilingual classroom, where students who qualified were placed. They received instruction in Spanish and English from their regular education teacher, and had the support of an ESL teacher in the classroom. A year ago, many changes effected to the program. Only kindergarten through second grade now have bilingual classrooms. This means that many students who were in bilingual classrooms are now in regular education classes this year. They get pulled out for ESL services during the day, but their primary instruction is in English. This caused a shift in teaching to accommodate for the needs of these learners.

The languages spoken at home included: 40.8% English, 59.2% Spanish, and 0.4% Chinese. This is relevant to the study, because the participants will be English Language Learners. It is important to understand that many of the students in the school go home to a Spanish speaking household, where one or both parents do not speak English. The students are often not receiving support at home because their parents are unable to assist them with certain assignments due to the language barrier. Availability of resources is also an issue for these students. They do not have the access to reading materials they need in order to grow as readers and writers. All of these factors play into

a decrease of writing for students. As discussed in chapter 1, thinking about the issues and challenges that my students are faced with, led to the development of my research question.

Participants

All 19 students of the fourth grade class participated in this study on some level. The students and teachers learned what happens when teachers replace traditional grammar instruction methods with small group guided instruction focused on a set of vocabulary terms used in writing. The shared vocabulary was derived from the key qualities of good writing from the 6+1 Trait Writing Model: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. The 6+1 terms combined with the terms used for RAFT writing strategy. Those terms help students understand their roles as writers, the audience they will address, the varied formats for writing, and the topic they'll be writing about. Writing is an essential skill can benefit students for the rest of their lives. Introducing and practicing writing with engaging activities in an elementary school, can foster confidence and a lifelong love of writing. Writing skills are important for elementary students' continued learning in all academic areas, communication and self-expression,

Of the 19 students in the class, ten are boys and 9 are girls. The demographics of the class are: 64% ELL, 26% are black, and 10% are white. Six students have an Individualized Education Program that varies in learning issues and specific educational goals.

Description of Research

The research that was conducted in this study was qualitative and naturalistic practitioner inquiry. Qualitative researcher used field notes, journals, participant's artifacts, etc. as a means of acquiring data. The principal investigator was the main source of information, and assumed a subjective, biased stance as a participant observer. The co-investigator, Daniel Tulino, applied his expertise to contribute and compliment this research. Mr. Tulino was part of the study once a week for the six week investigation. He assisted in instruction, planning and analysis. The principal investigator and co-investigator engaged in weekly conferences to gain awareness of student comprehension, engagement, and progress.

In this qualitative research the researchers listened to participants' views, asked general open questions, and conducted research in a natural setting. Practitioner inquiry refers to a non-quantitative, non-psychometric, non-positivist, and non-experimental study. It uses insider perspectives and provides others with local knowledge about the classroom/school in which the research is being conducted. It is planned, systematic, and intentional inquiry. It is not random, and has a carefully framed research question that attempts to address a clearly identified problem. There must be relevant and trustworthy data collection, and analysis and interpretation of that data. The conclusion includes implications and claims to provide knowledge and understanding to those who read the research. This research conducted will allow us to learn more about the students, the classroom/school environment, and to investigate a problem I have come across when teaching. I aimed to affect and improve my own instruction in the classroom. It has been stated that teacher research is simply an extension of good teaching because teachers are

looking closely at their students' needs. I hoped to not only improve my own instruction, but also share my knowledge with other professionals in the field in order to affect their instruction as well. The ultimate goal was to improve literacy education for students by looking closely at a carefully developed research question.

Data Collection Tools

Data collection occurred in many different forms during this study. It was critical to look at different types of data in order to gain a broader and more complete perspective on the issue being studied. Prior to the study, scores from their 2016-2017 PARCC writing scores assisted in measuring the student's abilities. To meet the Written Expression standard, fourth graders are expected to: organize their ideas when writing an essay; provide examples from what they have read to support opinions and arguments; create stories using dialogue, description, and sequence of events. This data was analyzed to determine whether the students met or exceeded, approached, or did not yet meet or partially met expectations of PARCC writing.

Students were also given the "Writing Attitude Survey" developed by Daniel Tulino, PIR through Rowan University. This survey assessed: the student's level of interest toward writing, their overall attitude toward academic and recreational writing, and their motivation for writing both in and out of school. The survey was very "child friendly" in the way the questions are stated, and in the way the students answer the questions. The language was appropriate for fourth graders. The students rated their response by circling a phrase best describes how they feel about the question. The survey was explained to the students prior to them answering the questions. The questions were read aloud to the students, and they were encouraged to be as honest as possible with

their responses. This survey may be administered again at the conclusion of the study in order to analyze and compare the students' responses.

In addition to the more formal survey with pre-determined questions, students were interviewed periodically throughout the study. They were asked open-ended questions related to what they have learned to help improve their writing. They were asked questions that allow them to explain how they feel about themselves as writers. The goal of the student interviews was to hear from the students themselves regarding the issues related to the research question being studied. Finally, the students were given time to simply talk freely about their feelings related to the research topic.

The final piece of data collection was in the form of a teacher researcher journal. This journal was kept to record observations about the whole class as well as the selected participants. This data provides the reader with a peek into the classroom, and with information that cannot be gained through more formal assessments or data collection tools. By thinking deeply and recording what takes place during the study, I hoped to understand more clearly what is happening with the students.

Data Analysis

The data collected over the duration of this study will be used to make conclusions about the impact a common vocabulary for writing instruction has on English Language Learners' motivation to write. The analysis of data allows teachers to interpret the data, which can lead to conclusions and implications for their work. The interest survey and motivation profile will provide me with a way to chart similarities and differences amongst students, as well as gauge their individual stance on writing. I will also be able to determine

if using a shared vocabulary had any impact on their motivation, by comparing the beginning data with the ending data.

Interviews will be analyzed by reading, listening, and thinking about the students' responses, and making implications about how that connects with my research question. This type of data is more open to interpretation by the researcher. It will be combined with the other forms of data to create a more detailed picture of the results.

By keeping a teacher researcher journal, I will be able to analyze student behavior and reactions to the shared vocabulary. This may provide me with information that students were unable to articulate to me during interviews and wasn't addressed during other methods of data collection. This type of data collection will be one of the most authentic pieces of information. It will allow me to analyze my own instruction, individual and general student reactions, and other observations I may have normally missed.

Data analysis will be one of the most critical aspects of this study. Without looking closely at the data that will be collected, there would be no way of drawing conclusions about the results. The goal of this research is to impact own instruction and the instruction of others by sharing my findings. This would be impossible without a thorough data analysis component.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter is an analysis of the data that was collected in order to research the question, “What happens when teachers replace traditional grammar instruction methods with instruction focused on a set of vocabulary terms used in writing in a fourth grade classroom?” The sub questions investigated included: “How will knowledge of the shared vocabulary engage students during the writing process to improve their writing? What impact will the shared vocabulary have on English Language Learners (ELL) and Learning Disabled (LD) students?” Data was collected over a six week period during which children were exposed to the common vocabulary that good writers use, literature and activities. To increase confidence and provide a clearer understanding in the research, the investigator looked at student’s PARCC writing results from the previous year, student survey, and the investigator’s reflective journal.

Main Research Question

Looking at the summative data from Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) English Language Arts/Literacy Assessment Reports of 19 students, from the end of their third grade year, display the need for more intense Language Arts Literacy instruction.

Table 1

2016-2017 PARCC Results

Performance Level	Number of Students
Did Not Yet Meet Expectations Level 1	10
Partially Met Expectations Level 2	5
Approached Expectations Level 3	2
Met Expectations Level 4	2
Exceeded Expectations Level 5	0

Table 1- Performance Level results indicate that only 10% of the students passed the 2017 PARCC Language Arts/Literacy Assessment. When looking closer at the results, specifically writing, the results reported below show that there was a slight percentage growth of students passing the writing portion.

Table 2

2016-2017 PARCC Writing Results

Writing	Number of Students
Did Not Yet Meet Expectations	15
Met Expectations	4

These scores indicate that 12% of the students passed the writing portion and 88% did not yet meet expectations. This means that at the beginning of the 2017 school year, students were not able to effectively develop a written expression with narrative elements that are consistently appropriate to the task. It also indicates that the students lack the ability to effectively organize a clear and coherent writing task or use language to effectively

clarify their ideas. This assessment provided the researcher with information on the gaps that exist between their current knowledge and the state learning goals and helped map next steps for individual learners and the class as a whole. The fact that the students' overall performance did not meet the desired goals can be contributed to the need of a curriculum change, introducing an approach different from grammar instruction.

Of the 88% of the students that did not pass the writing portion of the PARCC Assessment, twelve students only scored a 10 which was below the state, district, and school average. This revealed that those students were in most need of writing instruction that provides explicit scaffolding, constructed instructional conversations that address the language, knowledge, and strategies required for problem solving in writing. There were two students that scored in the range that was above the district average but just below the state average. These students seemed to have basic writing skills, they can focus less on these basic writing skills and more on developing and communicating their ideas. However, those writers must devote attention to acquiring and polishing these skills before they become proficient.

Sub Research Questions

To address the concerns of engagement, the researcher distributed a Student Writing Attitude Survey to 19 students. The purpose of this survey was to gain insight on the characteristics of the class and their personal feelings towards writing. The main goal being, to ascertain if the students like to write. As detailed in the survey results below, that 74% of the students have a positive perspective on writing. This information was surprising and caused questions of the validity of the survey. However, the percentage of responses remained consistent throughout the survey. For example, questions 1, 3, 4, 5,

7, 9 and 10 all indicate a positive, unbiased, voluntary responses. While in reverse, questions 2, and 6 weigh heavily in the “not at all” or “a little” responses, these also reveal a more positive feeling towards writing. The one survey question that requires attention was, “I like to share my writing”; this represented 79% of students with negative feedback. Final thoughts, while analyzing the survey data, whether positive or negative, patterns need to be acknowledged. The pattern of positive feelings toward writing are important, but “what can be done to continue the students writing experience to make it better and improve their writing?” The first step in interpreting the negative feedback is to listen to what the students are saying. It is obvious that the evidence of “sharing their writing” needed to be considered for future instruction.

Table 3

Student Survey Results

Survey Questions	not at all	a little	some	a lot	a whole lot
1). I like writing stories.	0	5	4	6	4
2). Writing is boring.	10	6	1	2	0
3). I like to write in my spare time.	1	2	6	4	6
4). I enjoy writing notes and letters to people.	1	1	7	6	4
5). I like writing at school.	0	1	4	7	7
6). I have trouble thinking about what to write.	4	4	7	0	4
7). It’s fun to write things at home.	0	3	5	4	7
8). I like to share my writing.	5	8	1	2	3
9). Writing is fun.	0	3	5	3	8
10). I wish I had more time to write at school.	0	1	8	4	6

A reflective teacher journal was used to reflect on instruction and student activity to provide an in-depth look into the classroom. This information helped to see what was happening during the study, how students were responding, and what could be changed to

benefit the students. Reading and reflecting on the notes taken in the journal was a weekly activity during this study. The researcher reflected on planning, student motivation and learning, and the broader realm of instructional goals. The reflective journal helped the researcher evaluate and sort what the students know from what they did not know and how to improve student instruction. This process of examining one's own thoughts is particularly helpful with complex issues that go beyond right and wrong answers.

Week 1: A plethora of material was covered. In the first few days of instructions, the researchers introduced the goals and expectations for the teachers and students involved with the study. Mr. Tulino introduced the RAFT writing strategy with a power point. This instruction was presented in a whole group setting, it provided teacher-led direct instruction. The teacher provided the entire class with the same lesson regardless of where any particular student is. The lessons were designed to reach the average student in the classroom, however allowed for individual clarification as needed. The students seemed to be interested in the teacher instruction. They were paying attention, they were alert, tracking the instructors with their eyes. Students were listening as opposed to chatting, they were asking questions, responding to questions, and following requests to participate. That week, the researcher continued with whole group instruction to connect RAFT with the voice trait. Examples of role/voice were given and the students had multiple opportunities for interaction. Overall, the first week was spent getting to know the students and for the students to get to know the investigators.

Week 2: The first assignment did not seem to be difficult for the students, but it exposed many teaching points to drive future instruction. Students used a RAFT graphic

organizer for their writing. Students were given a choice of the type of format they wanted to write: a letter, a poem, a list, or an essay. For this first assignment, explicit instruction was provided based on the skill of role/voice. Eighteen of nineteen participants were active in the learning process. 58% of the students exhibited a proficient ability to maintain personality for their audience. The percent was determined by using the Student-Friendly Scoring Guide for voice from 6 Traits. The writings did display evidence that they needed more background knowledge on types of format. One student chose to write an essay and was very successful. She displayed evidence of commitment to topic that was appropriate to audience and purpose. Five students stated that they were going to write a letter as their format. None of the five showed evidence of knowledge of parts of a letter. This became an area of focus during the week, for the entire class and the small group of writers that needed to address corrections for their task. Thirteen of the students chose to write a list as their format. Again, this became an area to address, as only four students successfully wrote a list with one or two words describing the topic. The other nine students ended up writing an essay format or what appeared to resemble free form poetry. They displayed five-ten word descriptions free from limitations of regular rhythm, and did not rhyme yet still provided artistic expression. The findings from the first assignment triggered mini lessons for letter writing, poetry, and voice.

Week 3: This week the focus of instruction was word choice, as well as continued support with role/voice using the RAFT strategy. In preparation for teaching word choice, the investigator questioned the teacher about using a thesaurus. She replied, “Oh, these students aren’t prepared to do that, they can’t even spell.” The researcher’s

philosophy is quite different, great teachers engineer learning experiences that maneuver the students into the driver's seat of their own education. Mentor texts were used for explicit instruction on the importance of word choice. Different texts by the same author were used. During the reading of the different texts, students exhibited postures that indicate they are paying attention to the teacher. All students focused on the learning activity with minimum disruptions. Students expressed thoughtful ideas, reflective answers, and questions relevant or appropriate to learning. The text that were chosen seemed to have a positive effect on the entire class, including the ELL students and the LD students. The researcher had the main characters of the text as a stuffed animal. This seemed to gain the students interest even more. They wanted to touch the animals and if they were left behind there was disappointment. The student activities were conducted in a small-heterogeneous group environment to provide students extensive opportunities to express what they know and receive feedback from other students and the teacher. The groups used the illustrations from the mentor text to identify words that described the characters looks, actions and feelings. The students generated lists of basic words like: happy, sad, run, short, etc. There was one student not participating, he sat with the group but did not interact. The researcher wondered how to involve this student more. Students had the opportunity to use www.kidthesaurus.com to find better word choice words. Students benefited using the online resource. They each were able to identify a new word choice word as called upon.

Challenges that were faced this week varied from technology issues to instructional. Computers not logging on the internet properly, this delayed the learning, however there were at least two computers per group that continued to work. This

compelled students to be cooperative. One classified student shows little interest, what can be done to build their intrinsic motivation. Another problem was spelling the words correctly, either a peer helped or a teacher. Verb tense also became a problem, students were not adjusting the tense of the old word to the new word. Verb tense is an instructional skill that needed to be addressed.

Week 4: The lesson objectives for this week were clearly stated and marked on the board. I can infer that the students did understand the goal because 89% of the students were able to develop character voice in their writing. They stayed on topic and successfully addressed their audience. Two students did not elaborate enough to determine their understanding. Their writing didn't have a distinctive voice, it was not clear who was writing or who their audience was. This lesson covered one main objective that the students were graded on, but also included secondary goals that were challenging to the students. Students used a graphic organizer from last week to help organize their writing. The students were able to discuss their ideas with teachers and peer before writing. The discussions seem to help those students who may not be secure in their ideas as evident by the percent of students which used the traits taught, used voice, and maintained engagement. Although, there was not one on one conferencing, the researcher did meet with the small groups of students. The choices this week for the format of their writing was a recipe, letter, narrative or list. Eight students tried to write a recipe. It was evident very quickly that recipes needed to be reviewed, the students were not confident in measurements systems. While this was not the main objective, it is still worthy of small group instruction because so many chose to use the format. Nine students wrote their assignment in letter format; three of which were in proper letter

format and 6 used a greeting, but did not indent their body. Since letter formats seem to be popular, more instructions is needed in this area. Providing additional instructions on this high interest format will assist in maintaining student engagement during the writing process.

Week 5: The list of goals and objectives are growing for the students. They are responsible for maintaining role throughout their text, word choice, and organization. If students are reminded of the writing strategy that they are missing, most of them are capable to revise their writing to accommodate the suggestion. Some students need more guidance. The instructor should post a checklist of expectations to allow for more student ownership of their writing. One student with an IEP continues to have difficulty focusing on a task unless he has one-to-one attention. He needs to be walked through each step. Another student with an IEP is able to come up with his own thoughts but is unable to put the words on paper. If a teacher scribes his work, he shows evidence of using organization, word choice and voice. Of the ELL students, all but one seems to be able to stay focused on the task. The writing for this week has seemed to give students more confidence. This week's writing was completed on the computer. For some, the lack of typing experience slowed the process. A few did prove to be more familiar with typing. All students seemed to enjoy typing on the computer. The investigator noticed that the classroom was so quiet that you could just hear keys clicking. There is also data that supports their engagement, as 84% of students completed this writing task. Using the computers to write benefited most of the students by giving them the ability to correct spelling. Once taught how to correct the blue and red underlined words, they were more interested in fixing the spelling errors. Using the computer seemed very useful for the

ELL, LD, and regular education students in the class. They were not as focused on spelling. The students were also very intrigued that I could provide instant feedback using OneDrive. They wanted to respond to the teacher. Once completed, students had to read another student's work and offer suggestions. The researcher has been working on modeling offering feedback to students regularly. About half the class is able to state something they like about another student's writing, and the other half still needs support.

Week 6: This was the last week of the study. Lesson objectives were similar to the past few lessons. Students were expected to write a text in the voice of leaves on a tree during fall. At the time of instruction, the investigator, believed that the students understood the assignment. As the teacher was walking around the room, students were observed being focused and on task. There were verbal reminders given to describe what good writing needs. Through analyzing their writing, it is identified that although students stayed in voice, they lacked using word choice, or organization or both as detected using the Student Friendly Scoring Guide for organization and word choice. Time became an issue this week, there just did not seem to be enough. The researcher believed that the students felt rushed. When collecting their work, many of the students commented that they did not finish. It is believed that, if more time had been given to complete the writing task, the percentage of student using traits and completing the assignment would have been better.

Table 4

Data Analysis

Assignment	1 Week 2	2 Week 3	3 Week 4	4 Week 5	5 Week 6
Students used trait/traits taught ~ Independently	68%	63%	84%	84%	36%
Students used consistent voice/RAFT	58%	89%	89%	78%	80%
Students engaged to complete assignment	97%	68%	63%	84%	58%

Increase in Overall Student Achievement

After looking closely at each of the three components, it is important to relate that information to overall writing achievement. This is measured by looking at three factors: teacher observations, PARCC scores and the student survey. The analysis for each of those areas are considered to determine an overall student achievement to improve their writing. As indicated by the student PARCC scores, there is noticeable room for writing growth. With the scores from this class much lower than the state average, a focus on writing is crucial. The student survey implies that there is an overall positive perception from the students towards writing. Generally, when students are given the opportunity to practice writing, they support the task. Yet, the survey also provides proof of insecurities with their lack of willingness to share their writing. The reflection of students' work throughout the research did suggest improvement in writing. Although the percentage of students that included the taught trait, remained in voice through the piece using RAFT, and engaged to complete the assignment fluctuated during the six weeks, it is noticeable that advances were gained. Whether from the specific trait instruction, using a RAFT

graphic organizer, or from just having consistent writing instruction throughout the six weeks, the students in this class improved as writers.

Findings

This study produced 5 major findings that focused on two themes focused on within this study. The themes that were developed, researched and studied concentrated on a traditional instructional approach vs instruction on the key qualities of writing, ELL and LD learners, and engagements. The following findings shadow the themes.

1. Using the RAFT graphic organizer helped students maintain a constant voice to connect to their audience.
2. Students liked using the computers to write their story, they made spelling corrections by addressing the underlined words, and they used teacher feedback to correct their writing.
3. When given the opportunity, students used a variety of self-chosen formats to express their stories, like narratives, poetry, plays, lists, and letters.
4. Students successfully used a thesaurus to improve their word choice.
5. Focusing on the key qualities of good writing and not grammar, improved the content of all the students writing, including the ELL and LD students.

The themes that were developed, researched and studied concentrated on a traditional instructional approach versus instruction on the key qualities of writing, ELL and LD learners, and engagements. The following findings shadow the themes.

Writing Strategies that Foster Engagement

The approaches used for instruction focused on using literature to teach and model the key qualities of voice, organization, and word choice. The non-traditional

vocabulary strategy supported the engagements of ELL and LD learners. The student engagement finding were echoed by the following researchers. Graham & Harris (1993) who believed that an additional benefit of teaching students writing strategies enhances their knowledge about writing, the writing process, and their capabilities as writers. Graham and Harris (2005) further expressed that when struggling writers are taught a strategy for planning a story, the writers gain information on the structure and content of stories in addition to the knowledge on how to create and organize possible ideas for writing. The shared vocabulary helped to improve writing performance and increase confidence in themselves as writers. Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) found that children who were motivated and had a positive attitude toward writing produced qualitatively better pieces. They concluded that when children have a desire to write, their performance improves and that enhancing a child's motivation has a positive impact on outcome.

English Language Learners and the Learning Disabled

The investigator had never really given much thought until this investigation of the struggles that all students, but especially ELL and LD students, face with grammar. This became very evident when the students were using the computers to write their stories. Having the spelling and grammar mistakes underlined for them allowed for the opportunity to focus on content. The vocabulary also gave clear instructions to improve their writing. This research also supported the finding of other current research.

DelliCarpini (2012), offers suggestions for addressing the challenges EL writers face. Direct instruction in the elements of the various genres needs to include opportunities for the students to analyze, discuss, and compare and contrast these genres.

This will enhance their understanding of the purpose and form of the variety of writing tasks asked of ELs. Responding to their need for more time to work through the writing process. Through this study, the researcher provided exposure to and practice with different genres of academic writing, found ways to provide time for ELLs to engage in the task, build academic vocabulary, and provided effective feedback that ELLs can use to improve on what they are doing. Raimes (1985) reported that ELLs, can certainly benefit from “more of everything”, more time, more instruction and practice, and more opportunities to read, write, and truly engage in learning.

Wong (2000) articulated that some students with learning disabilities don't understand the importance of writing and they fail to recognize the steps that are involved in writing. They just want to get the work done and just want to get information down on the page. This study focused on key qualities that the students could focus on to improve their writing, one key quality at a time; this seemed to not overload the students. Using mentor texts also provided published examples to follow.

The five findings delivered a constant ebb and flow between engagement and progress for ELL and LD learners. All of the instructional practices used for this study were new to the students. Although there was a constant focus on the ELL and LD learners, the explicit instructions and non-traditional approach benefited all the students in the class.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to investigate the potential of using a shared vocabulary in writing instruction to engage students in the writing process. In order to investigate this broad topic, research was conducted to answer the following question, “What happens when teachers replace traditional grammar instruction methods with instruction focused on a set of vocabulary terms used in writing?” This question was carefully chosen by the teacher researcher based on the student population and student needs. After completing the study, many conclusions can be drawn based on the data that was collected.

From this study, the researcher found that the participants all showed growth in the areas of: 1. what key features good writing needs, 2. identifying those key features through literature, and 3. overall improvement in their writing based on teaching and implementing a shared vocabulary. Their success was due to implementing the shared vocabulary daily, writing daily and providing time for the students to share their writing with their peers. The students showed an enthusiasm and excitement for writing that was not common. This engagement was true for all the students including English Language Learners and Learning Disabled students, except for one.

Student writing improved with instruction using key vocabulary terms of good writing in conjunction with consistent time to write throughout the study. Students were also more confident as writers because of knowing what their writing needed. The

students from my classroom clearly benefited from learning the shared vocabulary. They benefited from meaningful writing practice on a consistent basis throughout the study. The results of the study mirrored the results of studies done by DelliCarpini (2012), Raimes (1985), Wong (2000), Graham & Harris (1993), (2005), and Graham, Berninger, & Fan (2007).

Giving students the freedom to format their own piece, the time to write, and the knowledge of the key qualities of writing is beneficial. While not all students took advantage of the writing time, those that chose to improve as writers began to increase in their abilities. They took risks and wrote beautiful stories. Looking specifically English Language Learners, writing with learning disabled students, effective practices and student engagement were ways to add to the body of research we currently have on this topic. Although we have a significant amount of data surrounding topics such as: engagement, best practices, and English Language Learners and Learning Disabled Learners, there are still limitations to what we know and how we know it.

Limitations

As with any research, especially research that is qualitative in nature, there are limitations that may affect the results of the study. The participants in this research study consisted of a single class of nineteen students. With a small group size, it is not possible to make conclusions that can be generalized, and are true for all students. Because all students, schools, and communities are unique, the results of this study may not apply to a different group of students, in different locations, with different educational backgrounds. The size of the group is not the only factor that may limit the conclusions.

The participants of the study were categorized as an inclusion class with English Language Learners, Learning Disabled, and regular education students. The students were at a variety of readiness abilities. They are fourth graders with different language abilities, and academic abilities. This may not be the case for other English Language Learners or Learning Disabled, therefore those differences make it difficult to compare the results.

The time span also limits the generalization of the conclusions. The study took place over a six-week period of time. Because of the short duration, it is unknown what the long term effects of the research will be. Assumptions can be made, but all they will only be strong opinions without the proper data to support them. Also, time limited the amount of shared vocabulary taught. The researcher was only able to provide instruction on voice, role, audience, format, topic, organization, and word choice. The instruction of all the key qualities would require a longer time period.

Another limitation included the researcher not being the full time teacher of the class. The classroom teachers were present during the writing instruction time and did their best to follow through with what was being taught when appropriate. Yet, they were learning a new approach to writing as the students were learning. If this study was extended to a larger group of participants, lasting a longer period of time, more data could be collected and analyzed. This would allow for more generalized conclusions to be made.

In spite of the study's limitations, valuable data was collected and analyzed, and valid conclusions were made. Good teachers and teacher researchers will be able to use the information presented in the study, and apply it to their own instruction despite

differences such as: grade level, student background, and district mandates. In addition to the conclusions previously discussed, implications for further research is another important component of teacher research, and the never ending search for what is best for our students.

Implications

Teaching a shared vocabulary to the students brought improvement. Was it the shared vocabulary, spending time writing, the focus on ELLs or LD students, or just this stage in their educational development that influenced improvement the most? Nevertheless, the students as a majority grew as writers through spending time writing and learning the key qualities of good writing through a shared vocabulary.

The researcher did not read aloud enough with focus on the key qualities. This was a failure on the researcher's part. The investigator read short stories to introduce voice and word choice, but and did not spend enough effort to find books at the library that continued to model the key qualities. More of an effort is needed to get the students to think about literature as models for writing. Students need to be introduced to a variety of writing and given the opportunity to discuss and analyze writings.

When reflecting back on the study, questions arose that could be considered for the focus of future research. Some examples include, "How much it too much time to allow students to produce a text?", "Will a longer time period enable students to learn all the key qualities?", and finally, "Would teaching a shared vocabulary be an effective strategies for other grade levels?" This research study has helped to open my eyes to different possibilities for writing instruction. My hope is that it will enlighten others and inspire more research to be conducted. According to Kofi Annan, "Knowledge is power.

Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”

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Appendix A

Student Writing Attitude Survey

STUDENT WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Name _____ Age _____ Date _____ Teacher _____

A. I like to draw (circle one)

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

1. I like writing stories.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

2. Writing is boring.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

3. I like to write in my spare time.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

4. I enjoy writing notes and letters to people.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

5. I like writing at school.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

6. I have trouble thinking about what to write.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

7. It's fun to write things at home.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

8. I like to share my writing with others.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

9. Writing is fun.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

10. I wish I had more time to write at school.

not at all a little some a lot a whole lot

Appendix C

Student Friendly Scoring Guide-Organization

Student-Friendly Scoring Guide Organization

6



I've Got It!

- ✧ I included a bold beginning.
- ✧ I've shown how the ideas connect.
- ✧ My ideas are in an order that really works.
- ✧ My ending leaves you with something to think about.

5



On My Way

- ✧ There is a beginning, but it's not particularly special.
- ✧ Most of my details fit logically; I could move or get rid of others.
- ✧ Sections of my writing flow logically, but other parts seem out of place.
- ✧ My ending is not original, but it does clearly show where the piece stops.

3



Just Starting

- ✧ I forgot to write a clear introduction to this piece.
- ✧ I have the right "stuff" to work with, but it's not in order.
- ✧ The order of my details are jumbled and confusing.
- ✧ Oops! I forgot to end my piece with a wrap-up.

2






1

Appendix D

Student Friendly Scoring Guide-Voice

Student-Friendly Scoring Guide Voice

	<p>I've Got It!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✧ I used a distinctive tone that works with the topic.✧ I was clear about why I was writing, so my voice is believable.✧ The audience will connect with what I wrote.✧ I tried some new ways of expressing myself to add interest.
	<p>On My Way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✧ I played it safe. You only get a glimpse of me in this piece.✧ I wasn't always clear about my purpose, so my voice fades in and out.✧ I'm only mildly interested in this topic.✧ I didn't try to express myself in new ways.
	<p>Just Starting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✧ I didn't share anything about what I think and feel in this piece.✧ I'm not sure what or why I'm writing.✧ This topic is not interesting to me at all.✧ I'm bored and it shows.

Appendix E

Student Friendly Scoring Guide-Word Choice

Student-Friendly Scoring Guide Word Choice

6



5

I've Got It!

- ✧ I used strong verbs to add energy.
- ✧ My words are specific and are colorful, fresh, and snappy.
- ✧ My words help my reader see my ideas.
- ✧ My words are accurate and used correctly.

4



3

On My Way

- ✧ Only one or two verbs stand out in this piece.
- ✧ I've used many ordinary words; there's no sparkle.
- ✧ My words give the reader the most general picture of the idea.
- ✧ I've misused some words or overused others.

2



1

Just Starting

- ✧ I haven't used any verbs that convey energy.
- ✧ I've left out key words.
- ✧ Many of my words are repetitive or just wrong.
- ✧ I'm confused about how to use words as I write.