Implementing the Writing Workshop: An approach to differentiating writing instruction in a second grade mixed-ability classroom to help students demonstrate improved writing skills

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by
Amira Hachem Hachem

Under the Direction of
Dr. Mona Nabhani

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A Thesis by
Amira Hachem Hachem
Submitted to the Lebanese American University in Beirut
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Approved as to style and content by:

Mona Nabhani
Dr. Mona Nabhani
Advisor

Rima Bahous
Dr. Rima Bahous
Committee Member

Ahmad Oueini
Dr. Ahmad Oueini
Committee Member
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ABSTRACT

Amira Hachem Hachem For Master of Arts
Major: Educational Management

Title: Implementing the Writing Workshop: An approach to differentiating writing instruction in a second grade mixed-ability classroom to help students demonstrate improved writing skills

Teachers have always been faced with the challenging task of teaching a diverse group of learners in mixed-ability classrooms. Most teachers relied on the one-size-fits-all approach, which ignored students' academic diversity in favor of standardization. Similarly, students in today's classrooms are certainly diverse as they reflect differing academic readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Therefore, teachers continue to wonder how to divide their time and energy in order to provide adequate learning experiences that are meaningful to each student in the classroom.

Thus, differentiation of instruction has been proposed as an educational approach that centers on teaching and learning, which is distant from other approaches that standardize instruction. In schools, differentiation promises the possibility of establishing classrooms where student variance in academic readiness, interests, and learning profiles are addressed and become a reality.

This qualitative action research study analyzed the manner in which writing instruction was differentiated through implementing the Writing Workshop approach in an attempt to help students demonstrate improved writing skills. In addition, the study examined the effects of second graders' participation in the Writing Workshop and discussed the success factors that enabled students to develop their writing skills. The study also analyzed the manner in which portfolios have been used as an assessment tool to measure students' writing progress and growth.

The results of the data revealed that differentiating writing instruction, through implementing the Writing Workshop approach, created a powerful and motivating tool that allowed students to grow to love writing. Additionally, students' writing skills have greatly improved and that was reflected in their progression of text, expansion of ideas, and development in conventional writing.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

While educators have been intrigued and challenged by their diverse student populations in today’s classrooms, most have failed to respond adequately to student differences (Guild & Garger, 1998). What usually happened was that educators ignored their students’ differences and resorted to the easy way out by teaching-to-the-middle or relying on the one-size-fits-all approach. This meant that every student was exposed to the same curricula in the same way, doing the same activity, working at the same pace, having the same homework, and taking the same test. Additionally, Siegel and Shaughnessy (1994) reported that “The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual, and thus to feel justified in teaching them the same subjects in the same ways” (p. 564).

Tomlinson (1999) held that students populating today’s classrooms are a diverse lot. These students come from different cultures and have differing learning styles. They arrive at school with varied levels of emotional and social maturity. Their interests diverge greatly in topic and intensity and at any given time. They also reflect differing levels of academic readiness in various subjects and in various facets of a single subject.

Every day, teachers struggle to meet the needs of many learners who have individual needs (Pettig, 2000). Pettig noted that in some cases, this struggle yields a patchwork of strategies that merely “make do” from September until June. In other cases, Pettig (2000) added that struggle leads to frustration and a sense that catering for many students’ academic needs is unrealistic. Typically, many teachers felt frustrated after realizing that a group of students found the work unchallenging, others found the work too challenging, and some had learning styles or strengths that were not addressed.

Affholder (2003) noted that teachers faced a great challenge of having to create a climate for learning that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of an increasing heterogeneous population of students. She stated that as teachers were being held accountable for improvement of student achievement, these demands seemed overwhelming for them. Therefore, in order to overcome this problem and help teachers meet the complex demands of
educating today’s children, a number of models and approaches for school improvement have been proposed (Affholder, 2003).

One of these approaches, according to Affholder (2003), is Differentiated Instruction. Affholder noted that differentiated instruction was designed to enable teachers to deliver a curriculum appropriate for all students in the classroom by addressing their diverse needs. Similarly, Tomlinson (1995b) found that differentiated instruction appeared to be the most promising strategy for meeting the needs of students who were heterogeneously grouped. Acknowledging that students learned at differing speeds and differed widely in their ability to think abstractly or understand complex ideas, the differentiated classroom model has been established to accommodate this reality.

Tomlinson (1995b) noted that at its most basic level, differentiating instruction involved “shaking up” what occurred in the classroom. This meant that students had multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learned. Tomlinson further stated that teachers in differentiated classrooms provide their students with different avenues to acquire content, to process or make sense of ideas, and to develop culminating products. This means that based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile, teachers can differentiate at least three classroom elements: content, process, and product to respond to the variance among learners in the regular classroom.

The first element involves differentiating the content—what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information. Differentiating the process involves using activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity. The third element that is concerned with differentiating the product involves assigning culminating projects for students to rehearse, apply, and demonstrate what they have learned in a unit (Tomlinson, 1999).

Fortunately, differentiated classrooms feel right to students who learn in different ways and at different rates because teachers begin where students are and not from the front of a curriculum guide (Tomlinson, 1999). Moreover, Tomlinson noted that such classrooms work better for a full range of students than do the one-size-fits-all settings because the classroom teacher acts on the premise that he/she must be ready to engage in instruction through different
learning modalities by appealing to different instruction and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity.

Need for the Study

Last year, the researcher was aware of student differences and understood that their differences were significant in learning. However, it was difficult to address the wide student variance in the classroom due to the fact that there were too many students, too many needs, and too many uncertainties about how to cater for student needs in too little time (see Appendix A). In addition, few opportunities were available to allow for collaboration with other peers who might have made this journey both lighter and more prone to success.

What mattered to the researcher, this year, was her determination to respect students’ readiness level and plan instruction with student differences in mind. The researcher also aimed to make a difference in the lives of the diverse group of students by reflecting on what works and what does not, accepting the difficulty and ambiguity of it all, and not giving up this time, as compared to last year.

Statement of the Problem

In the past few years, one main school wide concern was how to bring about improvement in K-12 students’ writing skills. This concern was due to the fact that students’ writing skills have not reflected high quality performances in writing assignments. As a result, one particular accreditation improvement goal, which the school wide community is aiming to achieve by 2009, focuses on helping K-12 students demonstrate improved writing skills. This goal relates to the general efforts aimed at making the school a better place for students to learn to become life long writers. Therefore, teachers are recognized as an inherent part of the development and change process.

The fact that improving students’ writing has been viewed as an educational priority, the school wide community started working towards holding the promise of giving all students the opportunity to attain the skills needed to improve their writing performances. For example, writing instruction began to be implemented in K-12 classrooms and will continue to be taught developmentally throughout the school year, with each year building upon each student’s previous year’s growth.
The researcher felt that it is her primary responsibility to help the diverse group of second grade learners develop and improve their writing skills. Therefore, the researcher will be acting as a catalyst for classroom change and development by taking small steps towards differentiating writing instruction in a second grade mixed-ability classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to differentiate writing instruction in a second grade mixed-ability classroom through implementing the Writing Workshop approach to help students demonstrate improved writing skills.

Keeping in mind the school wide accreditation goal that involves working towards helping K-12 students demonstrate improved writing skills, the teacher-researcher aimed at developing a differentiated classroom.

According to Pettig (2000), one of the first small steps to be taken when deciding to differentiate classroom instruction and bring about success in the school wide project involves conducting meaningful pre-assessments. Pettig noted that teachers needed to have more than a gut feeling of what students know or can do before deciding how to take them farther. Pettig (2000) added that instructional decisions must flow from some level of actual assessment; otherwise teachers will be offering a menu of ideas that exist in abstract but not necessarily in their students.

As a result, the first small step towards differentiating writing instruction was pre-assessing each individual student. Therefore, a performance assessment task, which took the form of a picture prompt, was administered. Students were required to write a story that matches what was happening in a specific picture (see Appendix C). The writing prompt was given at the beginning of the school year, on September 24, 2004, and students had a forty-minute block to complete the writing assignment.

Students’ pieces of writing showed how each student had a different story to tell: no two stories were alike. A 6+1 traits rubric (see Appendix D), which has been adopted by the elementary division as an assessment tool, was used to assess students’ writing fairly. Utilizing the 6+1 traits rubric to assess students’ writing was greatly beneficial and informative regarding each student’s individual writing potential. This knowledge, in return, allowed the researcher to attend to students’ various writing readiness levels.
Using the rubric was informative because it provided evidence of how students varied in their development as writers. Some students' writing skills were below grade level expectations, while other students' writing skills were approaching grade level expectations. Other students' writing pieces had to be disqualified and not assessed using the rubric because all what they had written, given a forty-minute block, was a sentence or several incomplete phrases.

However, this wide writing ability range in the English classroom made such developmental differences more apparent and called for the teacher-researcher to implement an instructional strategy that acknowledges, supports, and celebrates these differences.

Shaver and Hunter (2003) stated that differentiating instruction is a natural fit for English classes. They believe that teachers can use many of the teaching and learning strategies that support the differentiation of instruction to cater for student differences.

One particular differentiation strategy, which gained a lot of recognition and was deemed effective in the English classroom, was the Writing Workshop (Shaver & Hunter, 2003; Ray & Laminack, 2001; Dahl & Farnan, 1998). According to Shaver and Hunter (2003), students select their own topics based on personal interests and prior experiences. Additionally, the teacher provides minilessons on writing and editing. Students are also given the choice of working alone, with a partner, or in small groups, writing, drafting, revising, and editing their papers during different stages of the writing process.

Moreover, Shaver and Hunter noted that the Writing Workshop approach offers students the opportunity to work at their own pace. They further held that what does not vary in the Writing Workshop is the goal; every student is responsible for completing the writing process and submitting a final paper.

The literature on the Writing Workshop approach showed that the practices that make Writing Workshops successful are the same elements found in differentiated classrooms. This means that teaching writing through implementing the Writing Workshop coincides with elements of the differentiated classroom because they both focus on student differences and needs. Thus, lessons are planned based on individual readiness, interests, and learning styles.

In sum, this study analyzes (a) the implementation of the Writing Workshop that supports the differentiation of writing instruction; and (b) the use of portfolios as a tool for
writing assessment that allows the teacher and students to monitor progress in acquiring improved writing skills.

Research Questions

The following questions were researched to guide the investigation:

1) What can the teacher-researcher do to help students demonstrate improved writing skills, knowing that they reflect differing levels of academic readiness?

2) How can writing be assessed in a way that allows the teacher and students to monitor progress over time based on a collection of evidence, subsequently to be used for providing feedback on whether or not students demonstrated improved writing skills by the end of the year?

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<td>2. The use of portfolios as a tool for writing assessment that allows the teacher and students to monitor progress in acquiring improved writing skills.</td>
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Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the fact that it targets a school wide goal that aims at helping K-12 students demonstrate improved writing skills by the year 2009. In an effort to work towards achieving the school wide goal through differentiating writing instruction, this study will be a rich resource for the school community because it provides a map route that eventually leads students to achieve writing progress.
Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to make important contributions to a body of knowledge that will guide elementary teachers, principals, and professionals at different levels of the school to acknowledge how differentiating writing instruction, through implementing the Writing Workshop, helped students demonstrate improved writing skills at the end of the academic year 2004-2005.

Another particular significance of the study relates to implementing an instructional strategy, the Writing Workshop, which supports the differentiation of writing instruction in the English classroom to help bring about improvement in students’ writing performances.

This research study will also help elementary teachers learn about what works in a writing task and what represents quality, through using portfolios as an assessment tool to analyze the data and evidence based on a collection of students’ writings. The study documents how portfolios were used to assess students’ writings for ongoing feedback on improved student learning and writing development.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

**Differentiated Instruction** - according to Tomlinson (1999), differentiated instruction is an alternative method that addresses the needs of individual students. Differentiated instruction promotes high level and powerful curriculum for all students but varies the level of teacher support, task complexity, pacing, and avenues to learning based on student’s readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

**The Writing Workshop** - Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) defined the Writing Workshop as a potent tool for empowering young writers. It is also about creating an environment where students can thrive as writers by acquiring writing skills that include sequencing, spelling, rereading, and supporting big ideas.

**Assessment** - the ongoing means of monitoring students’ work and progress. These results are then used to inform teaching decisions (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).
**Drafting**- the fluent, tentative writing produced early in the process, when the writer’s focus is on content and meaning (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

**Editing**- the process of rereading a text and correcting mechanical errors according to the standard conventions of language (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

**Revising**- the part of the writing cycle where students reread and make meaning-based changes in an earlier draft in order to clarify, develop, or sharpen their writing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

**6+1 traits rubric**- an assessment tool that clearly states the standards to which a piece of writing must be held in order to receive specific evaluation. Rubrics have a common language for writing assessment that can be used by both teachers and students to provide feedback on writing performances (Culham, 2003).

**Minilesson**- a short, focused lesson often at the beginning of the Writing Workshop, designed to address an issue relevant to the community of writers in the classroom and teach specific writing skills (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

**Writing prompt**- an assignment that directs students to generate a particular kind of writing on a particular topic.

**Readiness**- according to Shaver and Hunter (2003), a student’s readiness level relates to how prepared he/she is to work on a specific task.

**Interests**- Shaver and Hunter (2003) defined interests as what captures each unique learner’s curiosity, desire, and passion.

**Writing Portfolios**- Portfolios are seen by Dahl and Faman (1998) as vehicles for writing assessment designed to collect and organize students’ writing materials, provide a vehicle for evaluation, promote self-reflection, and document both writing processes and products.
Grade level expectations - curriculum standards that students are required to meet in each content area before they can be promoted to the next grade level.

Summary

This chapter examined the historical background of the one-size-fits-all approach and presented the movement towards differentiation of instruction to better meet the educational needs of all students. An alternative to standardizing classroom instruction is the differentiation approach. This study analyzes the differentiation of writing instruction in a second grade classroom through implementing the Writing Workshop approach. In addition, the study examines the manner in which the homeroom teacher, who is also the action researcher, differentiates writing instruction to help students demonstrate improved writing skills.

This study is comprised of six chapters. Chapter two reports the review of literature regarding differentiation and the Writing Workshop approach. The third chapter details the methodology and procedures, which the study followed. Chapter four presents the findings that resulted from the implementation of the Writing Workshop as a differentiation strategy in the English classroom. The last chapter, or chapter five, discusses the findings and provides recommendations for elementary school teachers, the school’s administration, and for further research. Additionally, this chapter includes the researcher’s reflection regarding the study and proposes some ideas that would be adapted and/or modified in the future.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter explores relevant literature regarding differentiating writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop to help students demonstrate improved writing skills. The first section presents the historical background on the one-size-fits-all delivery system, which failed to cater for the academic, emotional, and social needs of students in mixed-ability classrooms. Faced with this challenge, Tomlinson (1995b) proposed a promising approach that addresses the learning and social needs of all young children through the teacher’s use of a variety of teaching methods, materials, and activities. This approach is known as the differentiation of classroom instruction. Thus, the chapter reviews the literature on the approach of differentiating instruction and identifies the major elements that allow teachers to make it a reality in today’s classrooms and schools.

The second section of the chapter presents the literature of a specific differentiation strategy that was proposed by Shaver and Hunter (2003) as a natural fit in the English classroom, the Writing Workshop. This section highlights the history of writing pedagogy and discusses how the field of writing instruction has undergone a paradigm movement with the focus being shifted from a product-based to a process-based approach. In addition, the chapter reports the reasons behind viewing the Writing Workshop as an effective structure for developing student writers. Finally, the chapter concludes by identifying the basic components of the Writing Workshop, presenting the road map for launching it, and looking at how the workshop addresses assessment needs.

Historical Overview of Differentiation

For more than a century, educational psychologists have explored learning differences and how teachers can best facilitate instruction given those differences (ASCD, 2000). Lev Vygotsky and his famous work on the zone of proximal development, Maria Montessori’s contributions to individual instruction, Robert Sternberg’s learning profile approach, and Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences are just a few examples of how researchers have studied learning differences (ASCD, 2000). In addition, interest in multicultural education, learning styles, brain research, and gifted education is further evidence of how good
educators want to help all students and attend to their learning differences. Therefore, the interest in addressing student differences and improving their achievement is not new (ASCD, 2000).

For these educators, one specific area of interest in addressing student differences was the quest of bringing sound instruction to gifted students in regular classroom settings (Parke, 1992). Several researchers reported that a large majority of gifted and talented students spend most of their day in regular classroom settings (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). Unfortunately, instruction in the regular classroom setting was generally not tailored to meet their unique needs and interests (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985; Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, 1993). Parke (1992) stated that this situation has put gifted students at risk of failing to achieve their potential.

As a result, the challenge for educators was twofold (Parke, 1992). First, the gifted and talented population needed a learning environment in which they can fully develop their abilities and interests without losing their sense of membership as part of the class. Second, all the other students needed to be involved in educational experiences that are appropriate to their needs and achievement levels in order to allow them to thrive in the manner in which they are capable.

Parke (1992) held that the teacher’s goal of developing an instructional plan that would be enlightening and intriguing to students of different abilities, and still maintain a sense of community within the classroom was extremely challenging. Parke (1992) pointed out that the usual remedy was to segregate these students into small homogenous groups or to assign individual projects. However, neither was sufficient to accomplish this goal. Therefore, Parke advised teachers to look beyond the conventional, consider the overall dynamics of the classroom, and plan for a working environment in which all students can fully develop their abilities and interests within the confines of the regular classroom.

Despite new compelling educational knowledge, classrooms have changed little over the last 100 years (Tomlinson, 1999). According to Tomlinson (1995b), “In many classrooms, the approach to teaching and learning was more unitary than differentiated” (p. 3). Unitary approaches to teaching and learning assumed that all students should learn the same content in the same way and complete assignments at the same time. Therefore, students’ varying background knowledge, readiness, and interests have been disregarded.
Scherer (2000) noted that students differ in their past educational experiences, abilities and disabilities, readiness levels, learning styles, and interests, which play a role in what they learn each day. Scherer pointed out that schools are trying to respond to the struggle between standardization of instruction and student diversity in many ways. Some schools are resorting to tracking— that is, returning to self-contained classes for the highest and lowest achievers. In another quest, schools are becoming more inclusive in grouping students through employing various instructional strategies, using adaptive teaching materials, and decreasing class sizes to address student differences. However, these approaches were not deemed beneficial in helping diverse learners.

Sarason (1993) believed that the one-size-fits-all delivery system, which mandates that everyone learns the same thing at the same time, failed to cater for individual and students’ needs. Therefore, Sarason pointed out that students are calling for a different way to learn.

Tomlinson (1999) proposed a promising approach that describes how students learn, focuses on how students are alike and different, and responds to student differences in readiness, interests, and learning styles. This approach is called differentiation of instruction. Tomlinson (1995b) found that the Differentiated Classroom Model acknowledges that students learn at different speeds and differ widely in their ability to think abstractly or understand complex ideas. Thus, differentiating classroom instruction accommodates the reality of meeting the needs of students who are heterogeneously grouped.

Differentiation of Instruction

Differentiating instruction for diverse learners is an educational phenomenon that enabled teachers to develop and implement curriculum that was appropriate for all students (Tomlinson, 1995a; Tomlinson & Kiernan, 1997). Shaver and Hunter (2003) noted that what’s different about differentiated instruction is that it is a deliberate and conscious method that encompasses a comprehensive way of thinking about teaching and learning, which allows students to reach the same goals but by taking different paths. Tomlinson (1995a) held that students were successful in differentiated classrooms because the teacher was planning and implementing curriculum based on each student’s own level of readiness and moving the student forward with skills, knowledge, and educational relevance, rather than teaching them in the same way.
Tomlinson (1999) reminded readers that differentiation is not new to the field of education. She asserted that differentiating instruction “makes more sense than the timeworn method of aiming for students in the middle and hoping for the best for those on the upper and lower extremes” (p. 6). Tomlinson (1995b) explained that teachers in differentiated classrooms assumed that different learners had diverse needs. Therefore, teachers differentiated instruction by providing multiple approaches to content (what students learned), to process (how students made sense of what they learned), and product (how students demonstrated what they have learned).

According to Tomlinson (1995b), good classroom instruction ensures that the content, process, and product were built around materials and experiences that lead students to genuinely understand the subject. In addition, she held that the responsibility of planning and carrying out varied instructional strategies to content, process, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interests, and learning needs, lies in the hands of the classroom teacher (see Appendix F).

Furthermore, Tomlinson (2000) stated that differentiation needed to be a refinement of, not a substitute for high-quality curriculum and instruction. Differentiated instruction should focus on the understandings and skills of a subject discipline. Differentiation called on students to wrestle with profound ideas and apply what they learned in important ways. Thus, differentiated instruction helped students make sense of ideas/information and aided classroom teachers in connecting the classroom with a wider world.

In effectively differentiated classrooms, Tomlinson (1999) stated, “Teachers are the chief architects of learning, but students should assist with the design and building” (p. 12). Tomlinson noted the importance of having teachers engage in prescribing, diagnosing, and varying the instructional approaches to link learners with essential understandings at appropriate levels of challenge and interest. Nonetheless, Tomlinson strongly advocated having students contribute their understanding because they are the ones that can let the teacher know if the material/task is too hard or too easy, interesting or boring, when they need help and when they can work alone. Therefore, when the teacher and students collaborated as partners in shaping classroom experiences, students developed ownership in their learning, became more skilled at understanding themselves, and made choices that enhanced their learning. Tomlinson (1999). As a result, differentiation would not occur unless students had choices
about what to learn and how. This meant that classroom teachers needed to involve students in setting their own learning goals and thereby connecting their classrooms with students' interests (Tomlinson, 1995b, 1999).

Generally, proponents favor the approach of differentiating instruction because it is viewed as a way of thinking about teaching and learning that focuses on the individual needs, readiness, and interests. It is through differentiating instruction that the learner is put in first, and this primacy directs the selection of learning objectives, activities, and assessments (Shaver & Hunter, 2003).

On the other hand, skeptics may criticize differentiated instruction as nothing new (Shaver & Hunter, 2003). They argued that good teachers have been addressing individual needs and readiness for years and will continue to do so even if they have never heard the term, differentiated instruction, gone to any workshops, or read books on the topic.

Key Components that Guide Differentiated Classrooms

In spite of its promise, advocates agree that effective differentiation is complex, time consuming to use, and thus, difficult to promote in schools (Tomlinson, 1999; Winebrenner, 1992). They noted that differentiation entails time consuming pre-assessments and planning, as well as post-assessments and record keeping. In addition, Affholder (2003) argued that differentiation presents a challenge to researchers, change facilitators, and teachers in gaining a clear and consistent understanding of how to effectively implement this innovation.

Hall (1977) referred to such an innovation as “innovation bundles”. Hall emphasized the importance of identifying and defining the individual components that comprise the bundle. According to Tomlinson (1999), developing differentiated classrooms that actively attend to both student similarities and differences is anything but simple. However, she offered eight key components of effectively differentiated classrooms, which provide guidance on how to make such classrooms a reality over time.

The first component focuses on the fact that curriculum is concept-based and principle-driven. That is, major concepts and principles are held constant for all students while the specific content, processes, and student products can be differentiated. Tomlinson explained that differentiation of content involves varying the depth or breadth of content investigated by students. Differentiating the process involves the use of various instructional techniques and
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materials to increase motivation and accommodate students’ learning styles. Differentiating student products allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in countless ways and at varying levels of complexity (Tomlinson, 1999). Overall, activities for all students focus on making sense of key concepts rather than on recalling isolated facts.

In effectively differentiated classrooms, the second component involves the teacher unconditionally accepting students as they are, helping them address their common needs and expecting them to become all they can be (Tomlinson, 1999).

The third component involves on-going assessments of student readiness and growth, which are built into instruction. The main goal behind assessments (Tomlinson, 1999) is to provide teachers with day-to-day data on students’ readiness for particular ideas/skills, their interests, and their learning profiles.

The fourth component of an effectively differentiated classroom requires the teacher to modify content, process, and/or product. After thoughtfully using assessment data, teachers may adapt one or more of the curricular elements (content, process, and products) based on one or more student characteristics (readiness, interest, learning profile) at any point in a unit or lesson. However, a teacher is not required to differentiate all elements in all possible ways (Tomlinson, 1999).

The fifth component involves the teacher’s attempts in providing learning options that are a good fit for each learner and engaging them in respectful work. This could be achieved through respecting students’ readiness level, supporting their continual growth, and offering them opportunities to explore essential understandings (Tomlinson, 1999).

The importance of the teacher and the student being collaborators in the learning process is the sixth component of an effectively differentiated classroom. According to Tomlinson (1999), the teacher and students plan together, set goals, monitor progress, analyze successes, and seek to multiply the successes by learning from failures.

The seventh component involves the teacher understanding group and individual norms (Tomlinson, 1999). For example, when a student struggles or advances beyond grade level expectations, the teacher should work towards accelerating the student’s skills and understanding as rapidly as possible and ensure that the student and parents are aware of the learner’s individual goals, growth, and relative standing in the class. Assessment, instruction, feedback, and grading take into account both the group and individual goals and norms.
The final component of an effectively differentiated classroom is the consistent use of flexible grouping, while purposefully varying group sizes and patterns. The goal behind flexible groupings is to link learners with essential understandings and skills at appropriate levels of challenge and interest (Tomlinson, 1999).

Instructional Strategies that Support Differentiation

Given the eight key components of differentiation, teachers had a variety of instructional strategies and management tools from which they can draw to meet the diverse learning needs in the classroom (Affholder, 2003). The following section explores the review of literature regarding instructional strategies and management tools that lend themselves to differentiation.

Tomlinson (1999), Winebrenner (1992), & Affholder (2003) reported that in order to effectively differentiate instruction, a well-orchestrated classroom management system, a wide repertoire of instructional strategies, and knowledge of how to find the best fit between such instructional strategies and student needs are needed.

Tomlinson (1995b, 1999a) found that when a wide range of instructional strategies were used to differentiate instruction, classroom teachers were better able to address the learner's needs. Several researchers and educators recommended and suggested a series of strategies through which instruction can be differentiated to meet students' needs (see Appendix G).

Affholder (2003) noted that educators can gain additional guidance regarding management tools and instructional strategies that support differentiation from research on the effectiveness of instructional strategies with students in inclusive educational settings. In a synthesis of over 900 research studies, Kline (1995) found thirteen instructional practices cited across the studies as being effective with students of diverse needs. These were 1) use of well-structured, collaborative, or cooperative groups; 2) reality-based learning opportunities that provide opportunities to solve real problems; 3) inter-disciplinary thematic teaching involving collaborative planning by teachers; 4) active involvement of students in learning by setting their own learning goals and constructing their own understandings; 5) instruction that accommodates individual learning style; 6) desired cognitive and affective behaviors modeled by staff; 7) in-depth tasks that require critical thinking and creative problem solving; 8) integrating multicultural approaches that promote an acceptance of human differences; 9)
alternative assessments that provide information about student acquisition of skills; 10) home/school partnerships; 11) accelerated learning techniques designed to maximize learning for students at all levels of achievement and ability; 12) questioning strategies that stimulate student participation, exploration, and questioning; and 13) instruction that facilitates learning by accommodating the physiological needs of the brain such as providing students with opportunities to learn in a safe environment through different modalities.

Tomlinson and Allan (2000) noted that with regards to educator readiness to address academic diversity and employ a variety of differentiation strategies, indications revealed that there was still a great distance to go in building proficiency and expertise in differentiating classroom instruction. Teachers appeared to make few modifications to benefit students in their classes with particular learning needs, whether those students struggled or were advanced (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). They noted that veteran teachers appeared to use few instructional strategies that invited looking at students in small groups and as individuals as compared to addressing them as whole. Additionally, Tomlinson and Allan (2000) stated that novice teachers appeared to enter the ranks of teaching with little knowledge of how to address academic diversity, and there was little encouragement to do so. They concluded that what was needed was the power of effective staff development coupled with encouraging school environments to change teacher practice in desirable ways.

In sum, Tomlinson (1999b) capsulated the journey towards effective implementation of differentiation as follows:

It is, in essence, growth toward professional expertise. There is probably no such thing as an expert teacher who is insensitive to individual need and ineffective in adapting instruction in response to learner need. To develop a growing number of effectively differentiated classrooms is to foster development of a cadre of expert teachers.

Working towards developing professional expertise in the area of differentiating writing instruction, the following literature review section provides a historical overview regarding writing pedagogy and reports on a specific differentiation strategy, which has been proposed by Shaver and Hunter (2003) as a natural fit in the English classroom known as the Writing Workshop.
Historical Background on Teaching Writing

The teaching of writing has gone through some significant changes (Kervin, 2001). Kervin reported that the 1960s saw writing as a skill that had to be learnt; the 1970s saw writing as a creative exercise; the 1980s emphasized that writing was a process; and the 1990s saw writing as having real social purpose (Calkins, 1986).

Kervin (2001) also argued that teachers were going into schools with varied experiences of these changes. She recognized that teachers were often using snippets of how they were taught, what they've been told to do through syllabus documents, school policies, and what has worked for them in the past. As a result, Kervin found that such teaching occurred with limited understanding of how children learned to write.

Traditional Approaches to Writing Instruction

Research into the writing process has had a profound impact on writing instruction in the elementary school classroom (Labbo, Hoffman, & Roser, 1995). They explained that initiating the writing process often consisted of having students follow predetermined stages of prewriting (producing a rough draft), editing, revising, and finally publishing the writing piece. However, research findings supported the fact that the writing process is not a linear sense of events but rather a passage among stages of overlapping ways (Calkins, 1983, 1986; Graves, 1983). Graves and Calkins held that many teachers unintentionally made the writing process difficult by guiding students through rigid instruction.

Smith (2000) stated that student writing was too often focused on textbook material, with the emphasis being on accuracy of recitation rather than on each student's own thinking. Similarly, Applebee (1986) pointed out that writing instruction in the past has been largely "prescriptive and product-centered," thereby stressing correct usage and mechanics while emphasizing the traditional modes of discourse (narration, description, exposition, persuasion, and sometimes poetry). Applebee (1986) found that most of the problems that teachers faced when teaching writing were rooted in the difficulties involved in helping students understand what real writers actually do. That was because writing activities often became separated from the purposes they were supposed to serve and instead, the teacher's focus primarily centered on the final published piece and not on the writing process, which students followed along the way towards the published piece.
In one research study, Wartchow and Gustavson (1999) analyzed writing instruction in the upper grades by interviewing high-school students from a large urban school and others from a private suburban school. In both schools, writing was stressed with emphasis on the customary pattern: introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and conclusion. The researchers found that this process forced students to accept the format and procedure prescribed by the teacher. Thus, students relied on the teacher for topics and motivation; they were not shown how to develop and explore ideas on their own. As a result, they were put off by the "simplicity and pettiness of their writing assignments" and the knowledge that teachers "only expect a sentence or two" when students respond to various readings (Wartchow & Gustavson, 1999, p. 7).

Furthermore, Strech (1994) explained that a typical language arts lesson in a third grade classroom consists of reading aloud by the teacher and/or students, discussion, a teacher-posed topic for writing, and individual student writing time. Strech noted that while the lesson structure integrates the four modes of communication, instruction in the writing process is lacking. Students in this class eagerly participated in the reading, speaking, and listening components of the language arts lessons. However, there was considerable resistance to writing. Strech reported that writing time seemed to be plagued with frustration for students and the teacher. Many students seemed to be caught in a cycle of either not knowing what to write about in response to the teacher-given prompt or not wanting to put words down on paper in fear that they will be spelled incorrectly. Subsequently, a negative attitude towards writing seemed to prevail (Strech, 1994).

Similarly, Calkins (1986) held that when teachers dominated writing instruction, it suppressed children’s writing. Thus, road blocks are set up that stifle the natural and enduring reasons for students to enjoy writing and ironically teachers end up complaining that students don’t want to write (Calkins, 1986). Additionally, Calkins held that the damaging result behind the teachers’ use of boxes, kits, and manuals full of synthetic writing stimulants, was burying students’ urge to write.

Paradigm Movement in the Field of Writing Instruction

In schools, writing teachers tend to value and give priority to finished writing pieces or products over the writing process or how students write. No one would deny that the quality of
students’ writing pieces is enormously important. However, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) noted that the best way to get exemplary writing from our students is by helping each one of them find an effective writing process. This section explores how teaching writing has witnessed a paradigm shift from a product-based instruction approach to a process-based approach, which was viewed as more effective because it focused on allowing students to develop as writers.

Dyson and Freedman (1991b) reported that research interest in writing has shifted from studying the products of writing to studying the processes associated with how writers write. According to Dahl and Farnan (1998), this shift has occurred primarily because a singular emphasis on writing products did not serve teachers’ understandings about how to support writers in their development, nor did it help teachers develop effective writing programs. Dahl and Farnan stated that teachers’ questions about how to teach writing have motivated and guided research interests in the writing process. Thus, teachers and researchers have asked: How do writers write? What decisions do they make when they write? What problems do writers solve and how do they solve them?

As researchers have used these questions to develop descriptions of writing processes, ideas about process-centered writing instruction evolved (Dahl & Farnan, 1998). According to Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), the best way to get exemplary writing from our students is by helping them find an effective writing process. They emphasized the fact that each writer has his/her own highly personalized, often ritualized way of getting words onto paper. For example, in a first grade class, certain learners amaze teachers with sophisticated writing while others’ writing flow zone mostly consists of drawing pictures and perhaps labeling one part of the drawing. As a result, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) noted that it’s easy for teachers to forget that each writer is unique. Therefore, they warned teachers that one-size-fits-all writing process would be inaccurate and destructive to students.

Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) stated that teachers shouldn’t teach students the writing process. Rather, they should allow each one of their students to find a process that works for him or her. In return, this process will inevitably differ from student to student. For example, a student might be working on a rough draft but suddenly stop to brainstorm the shape of the story being written, while other students will skip one of the stages altogether. So, teachers
need to create an environment where students of varying abilities coexist side by side and learn from one another.

Similarly, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) explained that at any point in the writing process, students might be in and out of various stages. For example, a student may discuss ideas with friends before committing to a plan for writing, and that this discussion may help identify stories/topics that interest the student as a writer. In addition, the student may write pieces of text and ask others to react to them, offer suggestions for organizing ideas or revising the language and thus may continually refine his/her writing through successive drafts and informal consultations. However, publication requires formal consultation from the teacher regarding conventional writing and format. Overall, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that the writing process is a recursive one. A student may be revising while drafting or even while publishing.

Many writers consider pre-writing an important part of the writing process (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Pre-writing, also called rehearsal or brainstorming, includes all the cognitive warm-up work that precedes the actual writing such as planning, thinking, sketching, dreaming, and gathering information (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). However, they reported that too often the pre-writing stage became a rigid routine in classrooms. Instead of having students choose how they want to rehearse for a piece of writing, all students were required to begin by making a cluster web, story map, outline or graphic organizer. However, Fletcher and Portalupi stressed the importance of having teachers allow their students to decide which one, if any of the organizers, they find most helpful to their particular writing process.

Overall, writing teachers need to help students find their own process of writing and make it a vital part of the writing curriculum. It is crucial that writing teachers emphasize the importance of the writing process by allowing their students to share with the class the process that they have followed in an effort to complete their writing projects. That’s when students come to understand that each child followed a different process and that each one of them is a unique writer.

The Writing Workshop Approach

This section covers the most essential ideas regarding the Writing Workshop approach and documents the tone of teaching writing in a workshop setting. This section provides ways to make the workshop a daily and predictable event in the classroom whereby students write
about their own projects independently. Additionally, issues related to the parts of the Writing Workshop where students and teachers discuss writing through minilessons and conferences are further explored.

The importance of writing in the elementary school couldn’t be understated (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Strech, 1994) because it is a crucial component of literacy and it provides a basis for learning and communicating in content areas such as mathematics, social studies, and science.

Strech (1994) stated that there is adequate evidence to support the need for educators to investigate approaches to teaching writing. Furthermore, several researchers and writers felt the need for a different approach to writing instruction as an alternative to teacher-dictated writing assignments (Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1986; Graves, 1983; Strech, 1994). As a result, the Writing Workshop approach to teaching writing has become prevalent in elementary schools.

The major contributors to the literature pertaining to the Writing Workshop approach are Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Nancie Atwell (Strech, 1994). Strech held that each has portrayed in their qualitative research narrative descriptions and reflections on the teaching of writing through the Writing Workshop. According to Strech, the published books of Graves, Calkins and Atwell form the basis for many of the current advances in writing instruction. Subsequently, these books have been called “the handbooks of the new pedagogy” (Sudol & Sudol, 1991, p.292).

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) reported that the Writing Workshop has been a remarkably effective structure for supporting developing student writers. It is commonly thought of as a portion of the school day during which students write independently on topics they choose themselves. They defined the Writing Workshop as an interrelated combination of writing experiences that occur during the writing block of the language literacy framework. It encompasses focused writing, both assigned and self-selected in a variety of genres and content areas. It also includes providing specific writing instruction to small groups of students.

Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) pointed out that teaching students how to write is hard and that’s because writing is not so much of one skill as much as it is a bundle of skills. They stated that this bundle of skills includes sequencing, spelling, rereading, and supporting big ideas with examples. Thus, they believed that implementing the Writing Workshop creates an
environment where students can acquire these skills along with self-confidence, and writing fluency, which involves helping students concentrate on writing longer texts rather than focusing on editing tools. Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) concluded that the Writing Workshop gives students the very best tools to move confidently towards improving their written communication.

One study by Bayer (1999) compared the effects of the Writing Workshop on twenty-four first grade students in the East Brunswick Public School District. The class consisted of twelve girls and twelve boys. The children participated in the Writing Workshop on a weekly basis with pretests and posttests being administered to measure any changes in their attitudes towards writing. The results of the data showed that this particular class participation in a weekly Writing Workshop permitted the children to become confident writers and more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing.

Moreover, Landry (2000) conducted an action research study in her classroom to determine whether or not the Writing Workshop would allow students to improve their writing and help them become better writers. She found out that the Writing Workshop not only prepared her students for conventional writing but it also produced independent writers, by the end of the year. Landry greatly benefited from the experience because it gave her the chance to re-think how to better teach writing to her students.

The Structure of the Writing Workshop

The Writing Workshop is a highly structured place because there has to be all kinds of management structures in place for students to know how it works and how the workshop will be maintained (Ray & Laminack, 2001). They noted that students in Writing Workshops learn how to use the room during the workshop, how to manage the supplies needed for their writing, how time is managed in the workshop between teaching, writing, and sharing, knowing what the publication expectations are, and finally how to figure out what to do next in their writing.

For the Writing Workshop to be successful, Ray and Laminack (2001) explained that it must be highly structured and must work the same way basically every day so that it could almost run itself independent of directed activity.
Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) explained that when implementing the Writing Workshop, the room is noisy and dirty, with each child working at a different pace, on a different part of his/her project, and the atmosphere seems disorganized at first glance. However, on a closer study, one can see that a lot is getting done, and there is never any doubt that the student owns the project and is ultimately responsible for it.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that the goal of any writing program, specifically the Writing Workshop, is to provide the instructional support students need and help them make consistent writing progress. Therefore, they advised teachers to do the following: 1) allow time for writing every day; 2) provide minilessons that offer specific instruction on all aspects of writing; 3) confer with students by offering assistance specific to their work; 4) give feedback on writing; 5) help students set goals and assess their own progress; 6) expose students to different genres; and 7) support membership in a writing community that accepts an individual's present abilities and communicates high expectations for improvement.

There is a lot to learn about writing and students need rigorous teaching that supports their writing every single day (Ray & Laminack, 2001). Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) added that the structure of the workshop helps teachers provide the teaching that young writers need. They included three basic components that should be present in the structure of any Writing Workshop: 1) a minilesson or time for whole group or small group instruction; 2) time for independent writing; and 3) share time, which allows for structured response and feedback as a whole class.

Minilessons

In the Writing Workshop, students learn what it means to be a writer, which involves learning about how writers think, plan, compose, revise, and share their work. A typical Writing Workshop begins with a minilesson, after which students write on their own while the teacher confers with writers (individually or in small groups), and the block ends with share time (see Appendix H). Thus, the Writing Workshop gives students opportunities to write within the school day and provides appropriate, intensive, targeted instruction to the whole group, small groups, and individuals (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Skills in the Writing Workshop classroom are taught directly to the whole class during daily minilessons and as needed during individual writing conferences (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1986). A minilesson is a short lesson that focuses on a specific principle or procedure
Differentiation of Instruction

(Calkins, 1986, 1994). She adds that in minilessons, students are taught something important about writing and the teacher demonstrates an aspect of the writing process. In addition, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) defined a minilesson as a short, focused lesson often taking place at the beginning of the workshop and is designed to teach a writing skill relevant to the community of writers in the classroom. They noted that skills should be taught in the context of what the students are writing. Therefore, students see the skills they are taught as necessary and useful for improving their written communication.

A minilesson is not meant to direct the course of action for the rest of the workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Rather, it is a time to introduce an important skill and students are not expected to spend the next forty minutes practicing it. Effective minilessons are interactive with students contributing ideas and examples (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). They argue that minilesson topics should vary based on the needs of the class, but it typically falls into one of the following categories: (1) Management minilessons help students learn the routines and procedures of Writing Workshop (2) Strategy and skill minilessons help students learn how to use the conventional rules for written language accurately and effectively; and (3) Craft minilessons show students how writers work.

When the minilesson ends, students return to their ongoing writing projects, keeping the skill learnt in mind and perhaps applying it in their writing. Thus, teachers should devote most of the workshop time to actual writing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Keeping in mind teachers who have different teaching styles, Ray and Laminack (2001) found the following essential characteristics in place and manifesting themselves in various ways as children write daily during the Writing Workshop block: (1) Choices about content/topic; (2) Time for writing; (3) Teaching writing through minilessons; and (4) Structured management.

Independent Writing Time

Writer’s Workshop has been termed “authentic” by Atwell (1986) because students write about what is important to them. Atwell stated that students focus on what interests them, just as professional writers do. Their lives and own experiences is what the children use to select topics they want to write about (Clippard, 1998). Therefore, in Writing Workshops, students decide what they will be writing about for their many writing projects across the year (Ray & Laminack, 2001). By definition, writing is about having something to say, and it is the writer’s right to decide what
this will be. As teachers, we really do not have the right to make this decision for students (Ray & Laminack, 2001).

What all writers need is experience and that it takes lots of time for writers to get the experience they need to become good writers (Ray & Laminack, 2001). They noted that for students to gain that experience, it would be best if they were given the chance to work on their writing for a sustained block of time (at least thirty-five to forty-five minutes everyday). Similarly, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) noted that it is crucial for students to have frequent, predictable time set aside for them to write. They recommended that teachers plan to schedule writing for a minimum of three days a week for about an hour each day.

When it comes to time, Ray and Laminack (2001) stated that in the Writing Workshop teachers go for quantity rather than quality. Quantity is what matters because students spend a lot of time writing, knowing that not all of it will be so great. Given this chance, for young writers, would be much better as compared to spending little time writing and getting everything perfect.

During independent writing time, Fletcher and Portalupi, (2001) described the room utilizing the Writing Workshop as humming with the productive sound of writers at work on the writing projects they have set out for themselves. That is, kids might be rough drafting while others might be planning, revising, or conferring with other students. They noted that teachers use this time to move around the room and confer with students as they write. This action, in return, is the "crux of the workshop", meaning that the writing conference (or one-on-one interaction between the teacher and student) lies at the heart of the Writing Workshop.

Writing Conferences and Share Time

Writing conferences is a time when the teacher and the student meet to discuss the writing piece on hand (Calkins, 1986). Calkins explained that the teacher’s role during the conference is to interact with students in such a way that they learn how to interact with their own developing texts. The result of that conferencing time is the chance for students to discuss problems in their writing, figure out ways to solve them, and reflect on their own understanding of their writing pieces (Clippard, 1998; Calkins, 1983).

The hardest part of a writing conference is looking beyond punctuation and grammar and seeing the potential the child has as a writer (Landry, 2000). Graves (1983) explained that
teachers must carefully listen to the child, read his/her piece, and think about the content and style of writing that the child is using. Although it is difficult, teachers must try to look at a child’s piece as a “work in progress” and not cringe at every mechanical error. Conferences will eventually lead the child towards his/her final piece, but it takes time (Graves, 1983).

Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) identified another type of conferencing, which is known as peer conferencing. This special type of conferencing is a conversation during which a student seeks response to his/her writing from a peer in class. The important part about peer conferencing is that children learn how to write, find strengths and weaknesses in a piece of writing, and make suggestions towards other peer’s writing (Reising, 1997).

After teacher and/or peer conferencing, the conclusion of the Writing Workshop involves scheduling a special time for students to share their writing with the whole class (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Calkins (1983) gave two main purposes for share time. The first involves giving encouragement to children’s pieces of writing, while the second publicly allows for a teacher conference. This conference not only helps the particular child that is sharing, but may also help students who are listening to apply the same piece of advise into their own pieces.

Writing Assessments

Assessing students’ writing pieces traditionally focused on grading students’ work and this meant comparing the ability and achievement of students against each other; while in the case of standardized tests, grades were compared against a state or national norm (Smutny & Fremd, 2004). Dahl and Farnan (1998) pointed out that as primary education became more child-centered, the fundamental purpose of writing assessments centered on learning about what works in a child’s writing task and what represents quality. Furthermore, Smutny and Fremd (2004) noted that writing assessments should be seen as a process that serves the child’s needs.

The most important contribution of writing assessments, according to Spandel and Stiggins (1997) is that they have raised expectations about student performance. That is, direct writing assessments provided profiles of what students are doing well in their writing and what difficulties need to be addressed in classrooms and/or schools (Dahl & Farnan, 1998). Through direct assessments, Dahl and Farnan pointed out that educators could learn about the strengths
evident in the compositions of young writers and then, based on the information on hand, plan for specific instruction.

In a differentiated classroom, writing assessments should create the greatest benefit for the students (Smutny & Fremd, 2004). One of the most obvious benefits is that it reveals the need for curriculum adjustments for the child. For example, Smutny and Fremd (2004) described a child who is capable of using phrases directly from her first language and pointed out how the teacher can, through assessment, determine what kinds of experiences will harness the child’s unique verbal gifts while still increasing her development in verbal and written English. Thus, on one hand, assessment enables the teacher to anticipate learning needs and make changes for students or group of students; while on the other hand, assessment supports children’s self-esteem and fosters healthy attitudes about the writing process.

One specific vehicle that received increased attention for assessing primary students’ writing was the use of portfolios (Smutny & Fremd, 2004). Paulsen and Paulsen (1994) defined portfolios as a purposeful, integrated collection of student work that shows student effort, progress, or achievement in one or more areas. The main purpose behind writing portfolios is that it allows teachers to monitor student progress over time based on a collection of evidences. These evidences would then, be used for instructional planning and for providing feedback to developing writers (Dahl & Farnan, 1998).

Summary

Researchers and educators realized how standardized instruction or following the one-size-fits-all approach has failed to cater for the academic, social and emotional needs of students in diverse classrooms. As a result, Tomlinson’s (1999) Differentiated Classroom Model provided educators with strategies that allows for addressing students’ needs in heterogeneous grouped classrooms.

More specifically, this chapter reported literature regarding a specific differentiation strategy that has been viewed as a natural fit in the English classroom. Literature on Writing Workshops found that the workshop setting allows students to develop their writing skills and move confidently towards improving their written communication.

In an attempt to implement change, Calkins (1986) advised writing teachers to consider implementing the Writing Workshop approach because it centers on student-selected topics,
student conferencing, student ownership of their writing, and informative assessment methods through the use of writing portfolios.

In conclusion, Nasdijj (2000) communicated his own point of view regarding the teaching of writing when he said, “I know nothing about the technical stuff of writing or where to put a comma...What I know about writing has to do with where you put your heart”.

Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) described Nasdijj’s words as these that resonate with the task of writing teachers. They believe that, in the long run, what will matter to students probably has less to do with the techniques teachers show them than having faith in them as writers. As a result, through the Writing Workshop, students come to believe in themselves as writers and thus realize that their teachers have given them a gift that will sustain them for years to come.

The following chapter presents the setting, participants, and the design for an action research study on differentiating writing instruction in a mixed-ability classroom. The chapter also discusses the research instruments used and documents the procedures followed to gather and analyze the findings.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the setting, participants, and design of a descriptive, action research study. The investigation focuses on practices that are aimed towards differentiating writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop in a second grade mixed-ability classroom. The chapter outlines the research instruments used and the measures taken to ensure both the reliability and validity of the study. The chapter also details the procedures used to gather data and identifies the data sources. Finally, the chapter concludes with how the data were analyzed.

Setting

The study was conducted at the American Community School at Beirut (ACS). This private school provides an American-style education for Lebanese and international families, and fosters a lively and stimulating atmosphere of learning in its community. ACS seeks to educate the whole person and lay the foundations for life-long learning. The faculty sets standards of excellence and integrity in academic and co-curricular areas including the Lebanese, American, and International Baccalaureate Programs, and prepares students to meet the rigors of university education (ACS, 2004, School Mission, para.1).

The school contains a student population of 1,000 students in total. It contains a day care center, a pre-school and an elementary school building that houses grades one through five. Adjacent to the elementary building, is the middle and high school building.

Participants

The homeroom teacher who is also the action researcher was a participant in this study, which analyzed the implementation of the Writing Workshop as an instructional strategy that supports the differentiation of writing instruction in a second grade mixed-ability classroom. The students come from various cultural backgrounds such as- Lebanon, Cambodia, Syria, Iran, Kuwait, and Canada. It was through differentiating writing instruction that the academic needs of such a diverse group of learners were addressed.
In order to draw a representative sample from which valid generalizations would be made, a combination of two sampling techniques were utilized. Random sampling was the first technique used in order to ensure that each of the ten students, who aimed to become better writers by the end of second grade, had an equal chance of being selected to be part of this study. Although the study was conducted in a second grade classroom, which was comprised of twenty students, the focus of the study was on these participants that set the goal of aiming to become better writers.

The pre-writing prompt samples of these ten students were divided into three categories, based on the amount of content available. The first category included writing pieces that had at most two sentences, regardless of how accurate the conventional writing was. The second category included students’ writing pieces that showed an attempt in writing a paragraph comprised of three to five sentences. The third category contained writing samples that belonged to students who managed to write a story.

The method employed in drawing the random sample (Burns, 2000) involved writing every child’s name on a slip of paper and dropping it into one of three containers, which matched each category. For example, three students managed to write incomplete phrases and one child attempted to write a sentence in relation to the picture prompt. Thus, their names have been added into the first container. Another group of three students managed to write a paragraph, which was three to five sentences long. So, their names have been added into the second container. The third container contained three students’ names and who managed to write a complete story.

The slips in each container were shuffled well. Then, one slip was drawn out at random from each of the three containers. The student’s name that was drawn from the first container was labeled as Participant A (boy), the second student’s name was drawn from the second container and labeled as Participant B (boy), and the final name drawn from the third container was labeled as Participant C (girl).

Dividing students’ writing samples into three different stratas (or layers) on the basis of their writing readiness is known as Stratified Sampling (Burns, 2000). This was the second sampling technique utilized in this study in order to ensure that the group of ten students was divided into stratas that were directly related to the study’s characteristic. Therefore, this was another way to try reducing sampling error and increasing precision.
In sum, the whole group of twenty second grade students of mixed abilities, whose ages ranged between seven to eight years, had the chance to experience learning writing through participating in the workshop setting, yet only three students (Participant, A, B, and C) were selected as the main participants of this study.

Design of the Study

This study took the form of a qualitative research design that was conducted in a second grade mixed-ability classroom. More specifically, the qualitative research approach employed was action research. Through conducting an action research, the study analyzed the implementation of an instructional strategy that supports the differentiation of writing instruction, The Writing Workshop, to help students demonstrate improved writing skills.

Qualitative Research Design

Streich (1994) noted that the shift from skills based to whole language/writing approach brought about a shift in the type of research conducted. According to Streich, most of the research behind teacher-directed instruction is quantitative, in contrast with the qualitative approach. Streich (1994) pointed out that present research to study the writing process tends to be qualitative in nature due to the concentrated efforts in aiming to improve language instruction in all classrooms (Streich, 1994).

Within the social science research, Burns (2000) explained that typical qualitative approaches involve ethnography, survey, and action research, with observation and interviewing as the major techniques. As a result, Burns stated that the qualitative researcher is likely to become quite personally involved in the study, while the quantitative researcher attempts to be dispassionate, neutral, and detached so as to avoid bias.

With special reference to language teaching, Wallace (1998) reported on a particular strategy used, within qualitative research, for accelerating and enhancing teachers’ expertise as they continue in their occupation. Wallace’s strategy was basically a way of reflecting on one’s teaching through systematically collecting data on everyday practices and analyzing it in order to bring about improvement into one’s future practices. This process was termed by Wallace (1998) as action research.
McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead (1996) defined action research as a form of practitioner research that can be used to help one improve his/her professional practices in many different types of workplaces. To conduct action research, there must be praxis rather than practice. Praxis is informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge rather than just successful action (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). On one hand, action research is informed because other people’s views are taken into account. On the other hand, it is committed and intentional in terms of values that have been examined and can be argued. They concluded that action research leads to knowledge from and about educational practice.

In addition, all action research studies are enquiry conducted for some purpose; usually to make contributions to the advancement of knowledge (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). They argue that the main purpose of action research is to bring about an improvement in practice, which is always associated with an advancement of knowledge.

Action research has been also proposed as an empowering procedure (Wallace, 1998). This means that action research allows teachers and other professionals to develop their practice and seek professional growth. However, Widdowson (1993) pointed out that if action research becomes another top-down requirement, it turns into the reverse and creates an additional burden on teachers.

The four basic characteristics of action research as noted by Burns (2000) are: (1) Situational or diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that same context, (2) Collaborative by having teams of researchers and practitioners working together; (3) Participatory, which involves team members taking part directly in implementing the research, and (4) Self-evaluative or making modifications that are continually evaluated within the ongoing situation to improve practice.

Burns noted that action research is a total process whereby a problem is diagnosed, remedial action planned and implemented, and its effects monitored (see Appendix I). Similarly, Wallace (1998) reported that conducting action research is a reflective process or loop. This means that the researcher can repeat the action research process by reframing the problem, re-collating fresh data, and re-thinking the analyses until he/she finds a solution that satisfies him/her.

In conclusion, action research, as stated by Wallace (1998), overlaps with the areas of professional development since the aim is to provide teachers with an effective and user-
friendly method, which may make little or no use of statistical techniques/data, for improving professional actions. Wallace believed that the aim is not to turn the teacher into a researcher, but to help him/her continue developing as a teacher, using action research as a tool in this process.

Acknowledging all the literature reported above along with the researcher's deliberate intention in improving her practice of teaching writing, made action research a powerful professional development tool to utilize in this study. A summary of how classroom action research has been planned out for this study, based on the five phases of action research, as identified by Burch (2001), is found in Appendix J.

Reliability in Action Research

Burns (2000) pointed out that as action researchers devote all their energies in an effort to bring about improvements into their educational practices, special attention should be concentrated on the reliability and validity of their studies.

Merriam (1998) suggested, "Reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results" (p. 205). Concerning reliability, Wallace (1998) proposed that if an action researcher wished to convince others of how reliable his/her findings are, then he/she could publicize and be very explicit about the nature of the original data. For example, putting complete transcripts of interviews in an appendix would be one way to prove the reliability of the findings.

Wallace (1998) pointed out that sometimes, action research data are not very reliable, while at other times, achieving a high degree of reliability means controlling nearly all the aspects of the situation that can change or vary. This, however, in many action research situations is impossible or undesirable in Wallace's opinion.

In this study, reliable data were sought by utilizing a checklist that encourages self-reflection in the practice of teaching writing, classroom observations to investigate the researcher's teaching practices and looking at students' work as an indicator of their needs, and observing Mrs. Carol's practices (critical colleague) in teaching writing. Additionally, being completely open about the research findings and making it public to the school wide community, would be the best way to ensure the reliability of the study.
Validity in Action Research

Validity in traditional research, according to McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead (1996), depends on the belief that what is to be known can be objectively accessed and does what one claimed to have done. This traditional logic was inadequate in action research because it emphasized the importance of the person’s interpretation and negotiation of events. According to McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead (1996), personal experience that can be meaningfully shared by people is seen as a good basis for establishing validity in action research studies. This, in return, happens on a number of levels such as going public by convincing readers and other researchers about the truth of research claims.

Validation is an event that should be part of the ongoing, formative process of action research. This is obviously the case when it is part of the critical self-reflective process. It operates when action researchers discuss their work with colleagues, critical friends, and tutors. Action research can also be a more formal event as in the presentation of a paper to an audience at a conference or the publication of the research in a refereed journal (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead 1996).

In consideration of external validity, the study cannot be generalized to other mixed-ability grade levels in the elementary division. In order for generalizations to be made, uniform practices would need to be established in the elementary division with regards to practices of teaching writing and differentiation of instruction in the English classroom.

In order to ensure the internal validity of the study, the following strategies were used:

1. Triangulation- McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead (1996) noted that triangulating data involves getting data from more than one source to use as evidence to support a particular explanation.

   Burns (2000) defined triangulation as gathering accounts of a teaching situation from three different points of view in order to ensure the reliability of the findings; namely those of the teacher, students, and a participant observer. Burns explained that the student is in the best position to explain how the teacher’s actions influenced the way he/she responded to the situation, while the participant observer is in the best position to collect data about the observable features of the interaction between teachers and students. Burns (2000) concluded that triangulation not only fosters dialogue
between outside-researcher and a teacher-researcher; it can also foster three-way discussion between the teacher/researcher, outsider, and students.

Concerning the purpose of the study, a variety of sources were utilized to confirm the findings such as, classroom observations, having a critical colleague (Mrs. Carol), and data from the self-reflection checklist.

2. Keeping a professional diary- the diary documented how the teacher-researcher’s teaching practices and thinking have changed during and after the implementation of the Writing Workshop. In addition, classroom observations and the conference notes taken when conferring with students during the Writing Workshop, helped explain how students demonstrated improved writing skills. Therefore, keeping a professional diary systematically enabled the teacher-researcher to capture and record the factual data that result from the actions taking place while conferring with students.

Procedures

Early September 2004, second grade students and the researcher started the new academic year with several beginning of year activities, which helped determine students’ academic readiness, interests, and learning profiles. One of the planned activities was writing two goals that students aim to achieve by the end of second grade. Each child was asked to think of any two goals that they wished to accomplish. A group of ten students aimed at becoming better writers by the end of second grade. Each of these students’ prompt samples reflected differing writing readiness. However, the researcher was determined to help them reach this goal and become better writers.

At first, the researcher reflected on her practice to teaching writing, before differentiating instruction, through filling in the self-reflection checklist (see Appendix B). It was by filling in the checklist that the teacher-researcher had the chance to learn more about the best writing practices that support the differentiation of writing instruction.

On Friday September 24, 2004, a writing picture prompt (see Appendix C) was administered to assess students’ writing readiness and abilities. Instead of assigning grades to a piece of writing, the prompts were assessed using the 6+1 traits rubric (see Appendix D), which has been adopted at the elementary division as an assessment tool. The same prompt
was administered again to the same group of students during March, in order to obtain a post writing sample, and observe how much writing growth and improvement has been achieved since September. Thus, the pre and post writing prompt samples along with the rubric forms acted as evidence to show how much students were able to demonstrate improved writing skills.

The reviewed literature regarding the best practices of teaching writing in a differentiated classroom reported that the Writing Workshop serves as a potent tool for helping students thrive as writers. As a result, it was during October that the Writing Workshop has been added to the daily schedule and it was scheduled four days per cycle (one cycle is comprised of six school days) for a whole sixty-minute block.

In order to avoid losing students’ writing pieces, each child had his/her own two-pocket plastic folders that were only used during the Writing Workshop block. These folders, in return, allowed students and the researcher to monitor how much students’ writing skills have changed and progressed over time.

During the Writing Workshop sessions, the researcher observed young writers at work during independent writing time. In addition, because conferring with writers is at the heart of the Writing Workshop, engaging in a one-on-one interaction with students helped the researcher respond to each individual’s piece of writing. In each session of the Writing Workshop, conferences were held with at most five students and the Conference Notes form (see Appendix E) was used to record the writing skills found in students’ writing and/or taught to each writer. As a result, these conference notes served as additional evidence regarding students’ writing progress. After conducting these conferences, diary entries were written on the same day to document what was observed during the Writing Workshop session.

Moreover, a critical colleague, Mrs. Carol, was invited frequently to observe the researcher teaching minilessons on important writing skills. Her observations were crucial in providing feedback to help the researcher re-learn and improve her teaching practice. In addition, the researcher had the chance to observe Mrs. Carol teaching writing to her fourth grade students, since she is considered one of the expert teachers in the elementary division in this content area. Having the chance to observe Mrs. Carol teaching writing increased the researcher’s knowledge about writing practices and strategies that help in improving students’ writing skills.
Finally, all the information extracted from the professional diary, conference notes, checklist, and observations were incorporated into the study’s final results in narrative form.

Data Sources

The majority of the data that are concerned with improving the researcher’s professional practices in teaching writing were gathered from diary entries, individual classroom observations, and feedback offered by the critical colleague. Furthermore, data collected from filling in the “Teacher’s Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction” checklist, before and after differentiating writing instruction, reported what the researcher has gained about teaching writing to her diverse group of young writers.

Additionally, data were obtained from writing portfolios, which served as a collection of evidence for providing feedback and knowledge regarding students’ improved writing skills.

Data Analysis

An analysis of the data detailed the manner in which writing instruction has been differentiated in a second grade classroom through implementing the Writing Workshop to meet the academic needs of all students.

Qualitative data, which were narrative rather than numerative, were utilized to report the findings of the study. Qualitative data were obtained from: (a) the “Teacher’s Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction” checklist, (b) keeping a professional diary, (c) individual and collaborative observations, and (d) students’ writing portfolios.

One method of monitoring students’ progress in developing and improving their writing skills during the course of the year was analyzing their writing portfolios. Such portfolios aided in assessing student learning, guided the researcher’s instructional practices, and encouraged reflection of both the teacher and students.

By the end of the year, each student had the following collection of writing pieces in their portfolios that demonstrated his/her improved writing skills, (a) three samples of the same writing prompt (September, March, and June), which was administered at the beginning of the year along with the rubric forms attached to show writing growth, (b) a narrative piece of writing, (c) a friendly letter, (d) a writing piece that the student would want to add into the portfolio, and (e) an unevaluated journal.
Summary

This qualitative action research study analyzed the implementation of the Writing Workshop in a second grade mixed-ability classroom to meet and develop the writing needs of each learner. A private school in Beirut city, the American Community School (ACS), was utilized for this study. Students were administered a pre and post writing picture prompt to determine their level of writing readiness and growth as the year progressed. Additionally, filling in the "Teacher's Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction" checklist allowed the teacher-researcher to reflect on her writing practices and re-learn more about teaching writing.

In a systematic approach to data analysis, information was analyzed using the following modes: (a) checklist, (b) professional diary, (c) classroom observations, (d) conference notes, and (e) writing portfolios. As data were being analyzed, interpretations were made to answer the research questions identified in the study.

The following chapter provides a narrative report of the findings and interpretations brought about as a result of the data collected throughout the study.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative study aimed at differentiating writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop to help students demonstrate improved writing skills. This study also utilized the action research design that analyzed the manner in which the researcher differentiated writing to meet the educational needs of students who hoped to become better writers by the end of second grade.

This chapter reports the researcher’s efforts in examining the essential characteristics of the Writing Workshop and determining the basic components needed to regard the workshop as a beneficial event in the life of the classroom. The chapter also documents how the Writing Workshop was organized and implemented at the beginning of the year. The writing curricular calendar, or timeline, along with the writing skills/activities taught are discussed throughout this chapter. Furthermore, student and/or teacher comments, compliments, suggestions, and questions, during independent writing time or conferences, are reported.

Finally, the chapter provides the assessment information taken from each of the three students’ portfolios to draw conclusions about students’ improved writing skills. The four traits or elements that characterize effective writing, which are ideas, organization, word choice, and conventions, were evaluated separately. The characteristics of each trait were marked on a scale that indicates how well it has been presented in the student’s writing piece. Overall, the chapter reports how the writing assessment tools utilized supported making fair and objective evaluations.

Differentiating Writing Instruction through Implementing the Writing Workshop Approach

At the beginning of the year, the researcher faced a great challenge when confronted with teaching creative writing to a group of second grade students who reflected differing levels of writing readiness. Moreover, the researcher felt uncertain about assessing and providing feedback on a student’s writing piece without being unfair and subjective.
Therefore, teaching writing to students with diverse writing abilities was a difficult and challenging task. Keeping in mind students’ common goal and the school wide accreditation goal, the researcher asked the following two questions: (1) What can be done to help students demonstrate improved writing skills, knowing that they reflect differing writing readiness? and (2) How can students’ writing be assessed in a way that allows students and the teacher to monitor progress over time?

The first step taken towards differentiating instruction involved a writing assessment, which took place on Friday September 24, 2004. In order to determine students’ writing readiness, the pre-assessment task was comprised of a picture prompt that was administered to all twenty students. Students were asked to write a story, within a forty-minute block, describing the events taking place in that picture. This first assessment step made the researcher aware of how much the diverse group of students spans the spectrum in writing readiness.

The next logical step involved assessing and reflecting on the researcher’s own professional practice of teaching writing, through filling in the “Teacher’s Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction” checklist. The main purpose behind this type of self-assessment checklist was the fact that it could make the researcher aware of current research about best practices in teaching writing. Thus, that step was taken in an effort to bring about improvement and professional growth regarding the researcher’s writing instruction practices.

After filling in the checklist, the researcher learned more about the major characteristics or elements that constitute a successful writing program, which aids in bringing about improvement in students’ writing skills over time. These elements involve (1) Keeping writing folders for students that include their writing at various stages of development; (2) Modeling the writing process steps and providing time for students to use them; (3) Teaching writing strategies/skills by picture books; (4) Allowing students to select the topics that they wish to write about; (5) Giving students the chance to work with partners or in small groups when they are writing; (6) Conferring with students and allowing them to use the conference feedback to help them improve their writing; and (7) Making sure that students write everyday and share their writing together.

The above statements have been framed in question form in the checklist, such as “Do my students keep writing folders that include their writing at various stages of development?”
The teacher-researcher's answers to these questions were either a "no" or "I need to learn how".

The third step involved reading about the Writing Workshop in order to learn how it is implemented in the English classroom. The researcher learned that the Writing Workshop is an instructional strategy that supports differentiation of instruction and the structure of the workshop supports the variance in students' writing abilities through teaching necessary writing skills in the context of what students are writing about. The seven major characteristics that constitute a successful writing program were also embedded within the Writing Workshop.

During the week of September 27, 2004, which witnessed the start of planning for implementing a Writing Workshop, the researcher's initial focus centered on dealing with management and organizational issues. Various decisions had to be made concerning the structure of the workshop or classroom arrangements, before introducing it to students.

The main priority at that point was to focus on achieving two short-term goals. The first goal had to do with organizing a clear management system that students can easily follow whenever the Writing Workshop block was scheduled. The second goal aimed at providing a safe writing environment whereby students grow to love writing and learn that they can experiment in their writing.

The main reason behind the short-term goals was that achieving them would allow students to learn how to function in a Writing Workshop setting. The long-term goals were concerned with teaching the second grade writing curriculum and thus, were a second priority. In second grade, the writing curriculum requires students to be able to do the following: (1) Write clear and coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea; (2) Write brief narratives and friendly letters based on their experiences; (3) Write with a command of standard conventions (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling high frequency words correctly).

The physical arrangement of the classroom included setting up a Writing Workshop center, which was easy to arrange. The center was comprised of a square-shaped table that was covered with a colored tablecloth. The materials placed on the table included art supplies (scissors, glue, crayons, and markers), writing materials (pencils, rulers, erasers, and highlighters), and students' writing folders.
Another planning involved setting up a clear management system, which would be easy for students to follow during the Writing Workshop blocks, in order to avoid repeating the rules and expectations regularly. The following classroom areas have been designated and arranged: writing center, mini-lesson area, writing and conferencing areas, and a group share area.

One final item before introducing the workshop to students involved scheduling writing time and adding the term “Writing Workshop” into the daily schedule. This, in return, allowed students to know exactly on which day and at what time the Writing Workshop was scheduled. Thus, students would have predictable times set aside for them to write everyday. The Writing Workshop was scheduled for four days per cycle (one cycle is equivalent to six days) with each block lasting for sixty-minutes. The other two days in the cycle were devoted to free journal writing, which was planned for forty minutes. During this time, students had the chance to reflect on their school day, what they learned, how they feel, or answer a student prompt. A student prompt is based on the idea that when a child was selected to be the “Student of the Week”, he/she had the chance every Monday morning to write a prompt on the board. Then, the child along with his/her other classmates spent half an hour answering the prompt. Finally, students were chosen randomly to share their writing pieces. Some of the students’ prompts were the following: 1) Where would you like to spend your summer vacation? 2) What is your favorite food and why? 3) Who is your best friend and why is he/she a special person? 4) Would you like to have a pet and what would it be? 5) What would you like to be when you grow up?

Students’ journal writing pieces were never evaluated. Instead, students showed their work and positive comments/compliments were added on the page. This gave rise to a safe writing environment because students were never reprimanded on a spelling and/or grammar mistake. In addition to the writing folders, reading students’ journals gave the researcher the chance to determine whether or not they were transferring the writing skills, which they learnt during the Writing Workshop, into other writing assignments.

On September 29, 2004, and after having settled the management issues, the researcher introduced to students the Writing Workshop approach, how to function in such a setting, and how to work towards maintaining it.
During the first week of October, all minilessons focused on acquainting students with the rules and procedures of the Writing Workshop. For example, students were instructed how to (1) Use and manage materials available at the writing center (2) Find space for independent writing time, (3) Use their quiet voices (or one centimeter voice level) so as not to disturb other classmates, (4) Make use of the helping wall or “Word Wall Words” bulletin, which lists the second grade high frequency words, and (5) How to manage their time between learning a writing skill, writing, and sharing.

Teaching such procedural or management minilessons was worth the time and effort because it helped students understand what is expected of them during the workshop block. Therefore, students got into the habit of knowing what to do during the workshop block and were very independent learners. Thus, re-explaining how to do things for the whole group was not needed.

After realizing, through classroom observations, that students followed the workshop routines and that classroom management was running smoothly, working towards achieving the long-term goals began. In order to introduce the writing trait “Ideas”, which students were initially evaluated on in their pre writing samples, the researcher used several literature books during the minilesson, to show students how each writer had a different idea/topic to write about. After the minilesson, it was explained to students that each one of them will be thinking of and writing down all the topics/ideas which he/she would like to write about during the Writing Workshop. Students were happy working on their personal topic selection lists as compared to being given teacher-dictated topics. Some student-selected topics were writing about cartoon characters, the first day of school, riding a horse, traveling to Japan, going to space, and so on.

In addition to having students generate their own topic lists, another trait of writing was introduced in October. Teaching language conventions was concerned with capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and coherency in writing. This trait was being emphasized throughout the year and not only in October. Every time a writing trait was covered, the trait’s poster would be added on the Writing Workshop bulletin board for students to read and use as a revision tool. Posting these posters was very beneficial because students referred to them when revising their own work, instead of interrupting and asking for help.
Differentiation of Instruction

The month of November brought about several learning experiences. The first learning experience was during teaching a minilesson on how to use the Map your Heart writing strategy. This strategy required each student to draw a heart, divide it into pieces, and fill in his/her thoughts, words, and actions regarding the main idea. Then, students chose some words from their hearts and tried to put together a meaningful paragraph that matches the topic. After modeling how to use this strategy, students were instructed to look through their writing folders and choose a writing piece that has minimal writing. Then, they would use the Map your Heart strategy to work on improving their writing piece.

During independent writing time and as students were observed at work, the researcher spotted a group of three ESL students (English as a Second Language) who were not capable of doing the work and needed more guidance. On that day, the researcher conferred with two writers out of five because fifteen minutes of the independent writing time were spent re-teaching the ESL students how to use the writing strategy. This small group re-teaching experience confirmed the importance of differentiating classroom instruction that allows catering for the educational needs of this group of writers.

The second learning experience was attending another in-service workshop about teaching writing, which took place at school on November 26, 2004. My critical colleague, Mrs. Carol, presented a workshop about the importance of modeling writing aloud to students. She introduced to the attendees a narrative writing strategy termed “CSPACE”, which stands respectively for: characters, setting, prompt (the big idea), action, conclusion, and elaboration (the writing trait that students need to focus on when revising their work).

After this learning experience, Mrs. Carol became the researcher’s critical colleague and writing mentor. This meant that the researcher and Mrs. Carol would be exchanging class visits to observe the practice of teaching writing. Such observation sessions would give rise to professional conversations about the practice of teaching writing and would enable the researcher to improve and enhance her writing instruction. However, the critical colleague and researcher rarely had the chance to engage in such professional conversations due to tight scheduling, which did not allow for peer-coaching experiences.

Early December, the CSPACE strategy was introduced to the second grade group of students in the same way the researcher learned it in the workshop. This writing strategy was taught through a series of minilessons over a whole week. During writing time, students were
engaged and focused a great deal on their stories. Conferring with students showed that students had fewer problems with conventions and applied in their writing most of the skills that were taught earlier during minilessons. As a result, the Writing Workshop has successfully brought about improvement in students’ writing skills.

In January, it was crucial to re-communicate the workshop’s routines in order to avoid reprimanding and/or reminding students constantly of the expectations. One specific and unpredictable problem that was encountered in January had to do with having too many students asking for a conference and some would even interrupt the teacher-researcher while conferring with another child.

In order to solve this unforeseen problem, the researcher decided to train students to conduct peer conferences. Students needed the chance to meet with their peers when they have completed the writing assignment. Peer conferencing would involve having students read each other’s work and provide any suggestions that one might be in need off. One on hand, the teacher-researcher thought that such peer conferences might reduce the back up of students waiting to confer with the teacher, while on the other hand peer conferencing would also give students’ the chance to help a friend revise, edit, and improve his/her piece of writing.

The only fear behind peer conferencing was having students be very critical and end up criticizing or ridiculing a friend’s writing piece instead of helping them out. However, the researcher overcame her fear and taught students how to conduct peer conferences through modeling the process and steps that need to be followed. Modeling such peer conference procedures has sent a clear message to each student about behavior expectations.

The first peer conference experience was extremely positive. Only two out of a group of twenty students had to be reminded of the steps, specifically the part where they had to address a compliment to the other partner. Students enjoyed the experience of acting as teachers by providing their peers with suggestions that would help them improve their writing pieces and as a result, gave rise to a community of writers. Furthermore, this chance allowed students to revisit and apply all the skills they have learned during the Writing Workshop to help their friends progress towards publishing their pieces of writing.

This is an excerpt of a peer conference conversation between a boy, who wrote about a day he spent at the park with his family, and a girl:
Girl: (after the boy finished reading) It seems that you’ve spent an exciting day with your family.
Boy: (smiling) Yes we did! It was fun.
Girl: I heard you say that you went and played in a park, but you didn’t say which park. Do you think can you add this detail?
Boy: Oh, yeah! I forgot to write it down. We went to Sanayeh Park.
Girl: See, that’s much better.
Boy: You’re right.
Girl: I also want you to look at your third sentence because there is something that needs to be edited.
Boy: (reading quietly the third sentence) Is it a capitalization mistake?
Girl: (Patting him on shoulder) Exactly!
Boy: The letter “f” in family is upper case when it should not because it is not a special name.

On February 7, 2005, the researcher had the first chance to observe her critical colleague teaching writing to her fourth grade students. Mrs. Carol introduced one’s personal style, individuality “I”. She explained to students that they would be writing an autobiography about themselves. She asked them to look through their photo albums or talk to their parents, as soon as they get back home, to get ideas as to what they’ll be including in their autobiographies.

Ms. Carol started the session by thinking aloud and writing a paragraph about herself. Then, she told students to spend the next thirty minutes writing down their very first memories of themselves. Each student took out their writing notebooks and took notes as the teacher was explaining the trait. The researcher learned that having a writer’s notebook would be an easier way, as compared to using writing folders, for students to look back and learn how their writing has improved during the course of the year.

In February, another writing trait has been introduced “Word Choice” to increase students’ word banks. Students in class decided to have a bulletin board titled “Words that Sparkle” that would be used to post any new, descriptive words that they learned in any content area.
Frequently, during the Writing Workshop block, at least three or four students would stand in front of the bulletin board to choose some of the posted words and add them into their writing. Thus, the bulletin board idea was a great idea that gave students the opportunity to post new words that sparkle and use them to enhance their writing.

During the month of March, each of the three traits was revisited and the fourth writing trait was introduced. Teaching the “Organization” trait involved learning about connecting main ideas, transitions, logical sequencing of events, and developing a sense of beginning, middle, and end. During this month, students had the chance to learn more about starting stories with interesting leads, adjectives, writing poems, and generating endings to stories. In addition, editing and revising skills were emphasized throughout this month. Students were held responsible in editing their work, before conferring with their teacher. Hence, a great deal of student independence and self-confidence resulted.

The same picture prompt that was administered back in September was re-administered, during the third week of March, to determine how much participants A, B, and C were capable of demonstrating improved writing skills. The elementary division at school adopted an assessment rubric system that contains the six traits or elements that characterize effective writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. This system refrains from the use of assigning numbers or letter grades to students’ writing pieces. Instead, this rubric form provides rich information because each trait is assessed separately, by marking the characteristics of each trait on a scale that indicated how well the trait has been presented in the student’s writing.

The elementary writing committee at school made agreements regarding the traits that need to be taught at each grade level. At the second grade level, it was decided that students needed to be aware of the following four traits: Ideas, Convention, Organization, and Word Choice. Therefore, students’ pre and post writing samples were marked only on these traits.

Analysis of Participants’ Pre and Post Writing Prompt Samples

Students’ writing pieces and prompt samples have been assessed using the 6+1 traits rubric form. Students’ writing pieces were evaluated according to these four traits, ideas, organization, conventions, and word choice to check for writing progress and growth. Therefore, the following section reports the assessment data gathered from Participant A’s, B’s
and C’s writing portfolios to present respectively, how each student successfully developed his/her writing skills and thus, became a better writer by the end of second grade as a result of participating in the Writing Workshop.

Participant A

At the beginning of the year, Participant A managed to write four incomplete phrases to describe the picture prompt (see Appendix K). In terms of his ideas, he attempted to make a point and some recognizable words were present however, lacked meaning. His writing was not organized in a way that includes transitions from a sentence to another and thus, connections between ideas were confusing. He did not show an attempt to use descriptive words. Concerning conventions, Participant A showed random punctuation and capitalization. He used phonetic spelling in his writing, such as Haos and Wons. Additionally, he mixed upper and lower case letters.

Based on marking the characteristics of each trait, Participant A would fit into the Emerging stage of writing. This means that he was at a stage of writing whereby he often attempted to make a point, yet was not able to develop his ideas.

However, as the year progressed, Participant A demonstrated improvement in his writing skills. By November, he had accurate punctuation, attempted simple sentences and transitions, included more details into his writing pieces, and most importantly developed an enthusiastic attitude towards sharing his writing. Additionally, Participant A showed improvement in organizing his writing pieces, rendering them easy to read and follow. Soon, his ideas were generally on topic and he tried to choose words for specificity.

By March, and after administering the posttest picture prompt, Participant A’s writing sample differed greatly in terms of content quantity compared to his September pretest sample. The posttest sample included a title and the student wrote conveying a story that had a clear beginning, middle, and end. He developed one main idea and the relating details were generally on topic. His writing was logically sequenced and transitions were evident. He also attempted complex sentences.

Participant A also progressed from using phonetic spelling to using transitional spelling. Spelling high frequency words, capitals at the beginning of sentences, and using end punctuation were usually correct. Therefore, the student’s conventional writing greatly
improved. In sum, Participants A managed to make the progression from being an emergent writer at the beginning of the year into a developed writer.

Participant B

Participant B's writing ability and readiness varied widely as compared to Participant A's writing level. He managed to write three complete sentences and showed an attempt in writing a story (see Appendix I). The meaning of his idea was recognizable and he used interesting details to support it. He presented an original idea about the picture by stating that the child in the picture was punished, lonely, and hoped to be outside playing with the others.

In terms of his conventional writing, Participant B used phonetic spelling on personal words, yet the spelling of the second grade high frequency words were not usually correct. The student used capitalization and punctuation at the beginning and end parts of sentences. Overall, participant B fits into the developing writing stage.

Based on the writing conference notes, Participant B tended to rely on writing short, repetitive sentence patterns. However, by December he managed to learn the importance of developing his ideas by including more details that support his writing and avoiding repetition. In terms of organization, Participant B worked hard in attempting to include transitions to connect main ideas together. He frequently used precise and accurate words in his writing to convey meaning. As to conventions, he usually used capitalization and punctuation correctly, but he also experimented with other punctuation marks. Spelling of high frequency words were usually correct by January, and used transitional spelling, through sounding out, less frequent words. Generally, Participant B's conventional writing has improved significantly.

Participant B's posttest writing sample, contained more text and content as compared to his pretest sample. He had a descriptive title and the idea of the topic was focused and meaningful. Important ideas stood out in his writing and took some risks to say more than what was expected by moving beyond the picture prompt. There was an obvious use of descriptive language in an effort to create a clear image of his ideas. In sum, Participant B managed to build a great deal of writing fluency and growth by shifting from being a developed writer and into a capable writer.
Participant C

The third participant, or Participant C, was a girl who wrote a paragraph, in her pretest writing sample, describing the picture (see Appendix M). Her writing showed minimal attempt at sequencing and transitions and failed to develop her details. Moreover, the beginning of the story was suitable but she did not manage to include an ending. In terms of word choice, it was evident that the child used specific words with success to reveal emotions and thoughts. Although her conventional writing was very advanced as compared to her classmates, random punctuation was evident. One area of strength in Participant C’s writing sample was that the verb tenses and subject/verb agreement were almost accurate. Overall, participant C was rated as a capable writer, at the beginning of the year.

Participant C showed significant progress in improving her writing skills. During November, she constantly failed to include minimum details in her writing and sometimes the details she included were confusing. However, it was during conference time that the teacher-researcher had the chance to teach her the skills needed.

By March, Participant C was capable of writing about topics that were narrowed, focused, and included details that were clearly developed. She attempted and successfully experimented using complex sentences. Moreover, she effectively used simple and compound sentences that were logically sequenced. During conferencing, the teacher-researcher realized that the child presented a dialogue, but was missing the quotation marks. Thus, she took this chance to teach Participant C how to use quotation marks when writing a dialogue. As soon as Participant C learned the skill, she revised her writing piece independently and successfully added the quotation marks.

One interesting finding about Participant C was that she adopted a love of writing. This was evident in her writing pieces that were always original in terms of how much care and expression she has added into her writing assignments. She constantly wrote to convey a story to readers and thus, added her individual perspectives and voice. This child managed to gain the characteristics of an experienced writer towards the end of the year!

Overall, after having incorporated daily writing into the Language Arts curriculum through implementing the Writing Workshop, several benefits have been found. Primarily, the Writing Workshop approach was an effective writing program because it gave rise to the following elements: (1) Meaningful writing opportunities; (2) A supportive writing
environment where students felt secure about taking risks in their writing; (3) Individualized teaching that gave students a clear direction and criteria for writing success; and (4) Thinking aloud and modeling the qualities of good writing during minilessons.

Second grade students greatly benefited from participating in the Writing Workshop program. Each day, students counted on the daily and predictable opportunities they had to pursue their self-selected writing endeavors. Students were more willing to write when the writing opportunities were related to their own experiences and thoughts. When students recognized that they had wonderful stories to share with others, they became enthusiastic writers and hence, gained more self-confidence. Additionally, implementing the Writing Workshop approach increased students’ self-esteem and left students constantly bursting with pride to share their personal experiences.

Since the Writing Workshop is an individualized approach that focuses on the needs of all writers no matter where they are developmentally, all students’ writing efforts were validated and capitalized on. The fact that students had the chance to write about what interests them and were offered positive encouragement, they grew to love writing. It was important to have students feel comfortable talking about their writing drafts, opinions, and thoughts without fear of ridicule. Students also learned how to compliment, praise, and offer suggestions in an acceptable manner to other classmates.

It was due to giving rise to a friendly, risk-free, and supportive environment that students became comfortable taking risks in their writing. Students were always encouraged to write freely and were aware that emphasis was primarily on content and conventions were a second priority. As a result, it was possible to generate an atmosphere whereby students and the teacher-researcher were constantly working together and playing the roles of an author, editor, and audience to celebrate each other’s writing successes. Most importantly, a nurturing environment has resulted from striving to meet the writing needs of student writers. Listening, re-teaching, and asking questions regarding a student’s piece of writing were notably crucial as compared to using a red pen to edit or grade the writing task. That was what allowed student writers to respond positively and enthusiastically to writing.

If students were to take some risks in their writing, then, ideally their writing teacher needed to demonstrate writing in front of the whole class. During minilessons, quality of good writing has been shared with students in the hope that they will be better prepared to apply
such skills/strategies into their writing tasks. As soon as the minilessons were over, students had the chance to work on a previous draft or start a new writing piece so that they can apply the new skill. During independent writing sessions, it was particularly important to observe, model, and give feedback/advice to student writers while conferring with them to reinforce the newly acquired skill in a way whereby they were neither reprimanded nor threatened. Under such conditions, students did not feel pressured and thus, there was a stronger student commitment to writing.

Students needed the chance to engage freely in the writing process in ways that best met their individual needs. Through observing, learning, and guiding students towards the writing processes that meet their needs, the teacher-researcher avoided making the writing process a lifeless routine.

A further condition for securing a stronger student commitment to writing was through teacher-student conferencing. Teacher-student conferring time was usually comprised of having a meeting with student writers to plan a writing project, discuss conventional aspects of a draft, and set criteria for improvement. Developing clear criteria through negotiating with the student, based on an examination of a writing sample, clarified the teacher-researcher’s expectations. Thus, setting clear criteria gave the student and the teacher-researcher a common ground to monitor progress and increase the likelihood that the information exchanged between the student and teacher would improve the student’s writing skills.

Furthermore, it was during these conferences that students and the teacher-researcher met to jointly edit their writing pieces and therefore, it was a very individualized aspect of the teaching-learning process. Students learned the editorial aspects of the writing process and were given the opportunity to edit their own writing. Students became capable of locating their own conventional mistakes, without teacher assistance, and grew to act as experienced editors during peer conferencing to reinforce the aspects of planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

In terms of writing assessment, the writing portfolios provided students, parents, and the teacher with a collection of writing samples that acted as evidence and reflected each student’s growth as a writer. Parents were overjoyed to see how their child’s writing skills have significantly improved and students themselves were extremely eager to read their pieces.

Generally, utilizing portfolios as an assessment tool worked well in the Writing Workshop setting because students were given the opportunity to reflect on and assess their
own writing development. Moreover, writing portfolios allowed the teacher-researcher to focus on constantly assessing student learning and writing progress in a narrative manner, rather than assigning a letter grade or score. In sum, a writing portfolio has been an authentic assessment tool that served as a measure of writing achievement and provided evidence regarding students’ successes in demonstrating improved writing skills by the end of the year.

Summary of Participants’ Writing Samples

The results of the participants’ involvement in the Writing Workshop have been very positive, rewarding, and reflected great successes. As compared to the students’ pre-writing samples, they all managed to demonstrate improved writing skills in their post-writing samples. Towards the end of March, each participant, who was at a differing writing readiness level, managed to achieve his/her goal in becoming a better writer by the end of second grade. Each participant was able to write about his/her feelings, experiences, and interests without asking for teacher’s help. Similarly, students also experimented with different types of writing as they composed longer pieces in various genres such as fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. All three participants were capable of writing complete sentences and their writing contained a logical flow of ideas. They added descriptions, details, ideas, and used interesting vocabulary words without any teacher’s guidance. Students’ handwriting was legible and clear. Additionally, students spelled many second grade high frequency words correctly and thus, showed their grasp of spelling patterns. They were also capable of planning, drafting, revising, and editing most of their writing pieces. As the participants edited their drafts, they were able to spot most of their spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors independently.

Overall, all three participants gained self-confidence, self-esteem, and more independence as a result of their participation in the Writing Workshop. Most importantly, these students learned to set their own writing goals and worked towards identifying ways in which they could improve their own writing.

Summary

This chapter summarized the manner in which the teacher-researcher differentiated writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop approach to help students demonstrate improved writing skills.
This chapter examined the essential characteristics of the Writing Workshop and determined the basic components needed to regard the workshop as a beneficial event in the life of the classroom. In addition, the chapter presented the writing curricular calendar planned for the year and documented the writing skills/activities that have been organized. Furthermore, the chapter reported the assessment data that were obtained from students’ writing portfolios, conference notes, and observations, which supported making fair objective evaluations regarding students’ writing pieces. Finally, the chapter presented how students demonstrated improved writing skills and showed writing growth in their post-test writing samples, as a result of participating in the Writing Workshop.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This study reported how writing instruction has been differentiated in a second grade mixed-ability classroom in order to help students demonstrate improved writing skills. Based on the three participants' goal of becoming better writers by the end of second grade and the school wide accreditation goal that aims at helping K-12 students demonstrate improved writing skills by the end of year 2009, the teacher-researcher was determined to utilize a differentiation instructional strategy in the English classroom to meet the writing needs of the diverse group of writers. The employed differentiation strategy was the Writing Workshop, which was reported frequently in the literature as a promising approach that eventually leads students to improve their writing skills over time. In addition, the study analyzed the manner in which portfolios were used as an assessment tool that allow the teacher and students to monitor progress and determine whether or not students were able to demonstrate improved writing skills.

Therefore, the purpose of this study involved analyzing the (a) implementation of the Writing Workshop approach that supports the differentiation of writing instruction and (b) the use of portfolios as a tool for writing assessment in order to check student progress in acquiring improved writing skills.

A consistent setting of a second grade classroom located in the elementary building at the American Community School at Beirut was selected for this study. Three out of twenty students have been selected to participate in the study, through using random and stratified sampling methods. Additionally, the researcher was a participant in the study and took two roles by being an action researcher and the classroom teacher.

The design of the study was an action research. Qualitative data were gathered using the following instruments: (a) "Teacher Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction" checklist, which helped the teacher-researcher reflect on her current writing practices; (b) Classroom observations that took place during independent writing time and writing conferences; (c) Daily entries recorded in a professional diary, whenever there was a Writing Workshop block; and (d) Students' writing portfolios.
The data from all four research instruments were interpreted in narrative form. Narrative summaries provided a picture of how writing instruction was differentiated through implementing the Writing Workshop. Moreover, the summaries explained the effectiveness of portfolios as a tool to assess student learning. They also encouraged students to reflect on their writing progress.

It is important to note that neither the critical colleague nor the teacher-researcher had more than one chance to be in each other’s classroom while teaching writing. Having tight schedules and overload at work did not permit the teacher-researcher and her critical colleague to engage in professional conversations and thus, enhance their learning experiences. Therefore, this was one of the main limitations of the study.

The following sections have been divided into two parts. The first part responds to the first research question regarding differentiating writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop and provides the information gained during the course of the year and matching it to literature that has been reported earlier.

The second part addresses the second research question that concerns making fair assessments and allowing the students and teacher to monitor writing progress over time. So, this section reports the use of portfolios as a writing assessment tool, which allowed for monitoring writing progress.

Analysis of the First Research Question

The focus of the first research question revolved around finding a way to help students develop their writing skills, after realizing from their pre-writing samples that they reflected differing levels of writing readiness.

Differentiating writing instruction focused on the key components that Tomlinson (1999) has defined as crucial when aiming to effectively establish a differentiated classroom. Initially, at the beginning of the school year, students’ writing readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, were accepted and respected. This fact led to establishing a safe and friendly classroom environment, whereby students felt appreciated and cared for.

From this point, investing time and effort in planning writing instruction in a way that met each student’s readiness level, interests, and learning profiles involved implementing the Writing Workshop approach. This approach allowed students, who span the spectrum of
writing readiness, to benefit from meaningful learning experiences that helped them demonstrate improved writing skills by the end of the year.

The structure of the Writing Workshop program not only allowed students to demonstrate improved writing skills but also enhanced their self-esteem and confidence in seeing themselves as writers. This fact was proposed earlier by Fountas and Pinnell (2001) who reported that the structure of the Writing Workshop was remarkably effective in supporting and developing student writers.

Additionally, during the Writing Workshop students had the chance to learn more about conventional writing and valued the importance of planning, drafting, revising, and editing their writing pieces. Due to this learning experience, and based on the literature reported by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), students internalized the writing process and had several opportunities, through conferring with the teacher-researcher, a peer, or working individually, to strengthen their writing skills and thus, improve their written communication.

When any colleague entered the classroom during the Writing Workshop block, one would see students spread in different areas of the classroom. One child might be seated under the computer table, while others would be spread on the rug, and another group of students might be working on the peer conference table. Each student was working on the same writing task but at a different pace than others and each was at a different stage of the writing project, as pointed out by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001). While students were engaged in writing, locating the teacher was frequently difficult because she could be on the rug or in a corner conferring with a child and not realize the person coming in.

At first, the literature regarding Writing Workshops portrayed this approach as though it was a laissez faire situation with not much writing growth being accomplished. However, the fact that writing time was predictable and occurred daily for a whole forty minutes block, students had the chance to get the experience needed in becoming better writers, as explained by Ray and Laminack (2001).

Managing and establishing the rules/routines of the Writing Workshop setting was a challenging task. Therefore, one of short-term goal involved teaching students how to function in a workshop setting. By focusing primarily on establishing ground rules for the workshop setting and spending some time teaching the clear set of the guidelines for behavior and work production, students were trained and got accustomed to the Writing Workshop structure. In
return, less incidents of having to repeat the workshop’s expectations and routines were faced. This fact, which involved focusing on establishing the workshop’s short-term goals before accomplishing the long-term goals, has been strongly emphasized by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001).

After having established the short-term management goal, planning and delivering writing instruction was a long-term goal the teacher-researcher has set. Writing skills/strategies were taught and modeled to the whole group of students through minilessons, which were interactive, short, and focused on a specific principle/procedure. Several researchers stated in the literature pertaining to the Writing Workshop that minilessons are not supposed to be dictating speeches, rather it is a time whereby the teacher presents and empowers students with writing tools and strategies needed to become better writers (Calkins, 1986; Landry, 2000; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teaching students writing skills through minilessons was a direct teaching opportunity to reinforce procedures of the workshop, share or model examples of quality writing, and present writing strategies that students may try to use in order to improve their writing.

During independent writing time, teacher-student conferences were held on a daily basis to confer with students about their writing projects. At the beginning of the year, students were afraid to elaborate on their topics in fear of having many spelling and grammar mistakes. Therefore, most of the conferences focused on encouraging students to take risks in their writing and learning that it is alright to make mistakes because they will have the chance to edit these mistakes as they learn new writing skills. As a result, conferencing time was an informative experience for two reasons. On one hand, students had the chance to talk about their own writing and figure out ways to correct their conventional mistakes by reflecting on their understanding of the new writing skill learned. On the other hand, taking conference notes, while conferring with student writers, allowed the teacher-researcher to assess students’ writing progress and growth. Consequently, conferencing time, as explained by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) was the “crux of the Writing Workshop” or the heart of teaching writing (Calkins, 1986) because it involved the teacher interacting with students to discuss and improve the writing piece on hand.

The challenging part of conferring with writers was trying to look beyond conventional mistakes found in students’ writing pieces and act as a listener rather than reading their work
aloud. However, it was after carefully listening to students reading their own writing pieces and paying attention to their style of writing or content, that they soon demonstrated a stronger command of written language and developed greater independence in enhancing their writing project. This is similar to Graves' (1983) argument that teacher-student conferences would eventually lead students to publish their writing pieces when the teacher looks at a child’s piece as a “work in progress” without having to cringe at every mechanical error.

Another challenge that was faced while conferring with writers was having many students waiting in line for a conference. The possible solution to this problem involved training students how to engage in peer conferencing as proposed by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001). Giving students the opportunity to spend some time conferring with a partner or a small group of classmates has given rise to a community of writers. As Reising (1997) noted, peer conferencing allowed students to learn to give positive compliments regarding a friend's writing piece, developed their ability to find strengths and weaknesses in a writing piece, and were able to offer suggestions for writing improvement.

Taken as a whole, a fully functioning and successful Writing Workshop should encompass the following four factors. The first factor involves giving students the freedom to choose their own topics based on their interests as advocated by Atwell (1985), Clippard (1998), and Ray and Laminack (2001). In return, students connected to what they were writing about and thus, put forward a great deal of effort into their writing piece. During independent writing time, all students were engaged in their writing; yet, each would be at different stages in the writing process.

Giving rise to a friendly and cooperative classroom environment is the second factor of a successful Writing Workshop (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). If a teacher walked into the classroom during a Writing Workshop, one would hear constant student whispers rather than silence. One would find a child writing under his/her desk, while another child would be lying down on the carpet and writing. In addition, one might find another group of students or pairs working together. Thus, students should be given the freedom to move around the room as the need dictates yet, they should be responsible enough to follow the workshop rules and keep in mind the expected behavior.

The third factor centers on training students how to behave independently in a workshop setting. Students came to realize that the teacher would not be available when
he/she was conferring with a student or a small group of students. So, they learned not to wait for further directions and instead made their own decisions about what to do next, when to confer with a peer, and whom to ask if they needed help.

The fourth success factor involves giving students two to three minutes to look through their writing folders and set their own writing goal for the day, based on the tasks assigned. For example, during poetry month, each student had a poetry contract that contained nine different poetry tasks and were based on their writing readiness and interests. Every cycle, the teacher-researcher introduced three writing skills and students had to take back that knowledge and transfer it into their writing assignments. When students learned how to write an Acrostic Poem, some students managed to write four different ones about different topics, while others only managed to write two. Some students did not have the chance to write an Acrostic poem before they completed the previous task assigned and then moving into a new one.

Thus, the only way of keeping track of students' assignments was through keeping a status of the class pocket chart. This idea was advocated by Atwell (1987) and it centered on having students post their names next to the task they would be working on during the Writing Workshop block. In this way, the teacher-researcher knew what each child was working on and was able to monitor the progress that each student was making.

Although students were given the chance to make decisions regarding their work productions, the teacher-researcher also had goals for them and together they talked about them during conferences. In this way, and based on Tomlinson's (1999) suggestion, students and the teacher-researcher were working cooperatively as partners in aiming to achieve improved writing skills.

Overall, second grade students grew to become more aware of the audience they were writing to and they put forward more effort into the topic they chose to write about, as Ray and Laminack (2001) claimed. Increased student independence and writing fluency were observed as a result of students having the chance to set their own writing goals.

The Writing Workshop setting gave students the chance to expand their ideas during independent writing time and challenged them to become more aware of conventions. This differentiation writing strategy allowed students to progress at different rates based on their readiness level. One of the most powerful experiences that resulted from the Writing Workshop was the high level of enjoyment that students developed towards writing. Most
importantly, students were always eager to share the power of their words and the interesting topics they wrote about.

Analysis of the Second Research Question

Making fair assessment decisions regarding students’ writing was one of the most difficult and problematic tasks to the teacher-researcher. Assessing students’ writing without having to assign a grade, since it was prohibited at the elementary level, was confusing. Thus, the focus of the second research question revolved around assessing students’ writing in a way that allows the teacher and students to monitor progress over time based on a collection of writing pieces to check for writing improvement.

Portfolio assessment made it possible to monitor and examine students’ writing progress during the course of the year. The writing portfolio acted as a powerful assessment tool that enabled students and the teacher-researcher to monitor effort, progress, and writing achievement as pointed out by Dahl and Farnan (1998). Students’ writing portfolios contained their pre and post writing prompt samples, along with the following samples: (a) Friendly letter, (b) Narrative writing piece, and (c) Personal journals. Students were also given the chance to add a writing sample of their own choice into one of the pockets in their portfolio.

It was feasible for students to review all their writing pieces, from their writing folders, and make decisions as to which piece of their many drafts and sketches merit revision and publishing. These entries, later on, served as an excellent vehicle for student reflection. Students had the chance to see how they were writing at the beginning of the year and how much they have improved towards the end. However, the effectiveness of having a writer’s notebook, as was observed in Mrs. Carol’s class, was a better idea than having writing folders. Thus, having a writer’s notebook would be valuable for students because it would give them the chance to make reflections on their growth as writers throughout their school years and would serve as a vital tool for authentic assessment.

In conclusion, differentiating writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop was strongly beneficial because this approach allowed students to extend the process of experimenting with their learning into the realm of writing. The structure of the workshop enhanced students’ motivation and provided for a safe atmosphere whereby students had the chance to take risks in their writing and thus, learn that writing was much more than
correct spelling and being neat. In addition, having established a safe writing environment resulted in developing a community of writers who were always eager to share aloud their writing projects.

Limitations

The following limitations were inherent in this study. The study was restricted to one section at the second grade level. Therefore, the sample does not represent the second grade population and as a result, the findings cannot be generalized to other grade levels within the school. Another limitation centers on the fact that the study was restricted to differentiating instruction only in the English classroom through implementing the Writing Workshop approach and did not focus on other academic areas within the curriculum.

The major limitation that arose in the study was that the teacher-researcher and her critical colleague neither had many opportunities to observe each other teaching writing nor did they have the chance to engage in professional conversations regarding writing practices. Due to the several co-curricular events, holidays, and emergency manifestations taking place at school and in the community, meeting with the critical colleague was not easy and successful. In addition, it was not possible to find a common time to conduct these observations due to different and tight schedules.

One final limitation was concerned with the number of student participants who took part in the study. Since there were only three different participants, who represented three differing writing readiness levels, it was not possible to generalize the writing growth and progress to the entire group of twenty second grade students.

Recommendations

Based on the results reported in this study, several recommendations are suggested. These recommendations are addressed to elementary classroom teachers, school administrators, and recommendations for further research studies are also provided.

This study strongly recommends that elementary classroom teachers differentiate their writing instruction in today’s mixed-ability classrooms through implementing the Writing Workshop approach because it focuses on teaching in a way that supports and respects students’ writing readiness levels and interests. The principal advantage of the Writing
Workshop was its structure, which allowed for individualized writing instruction and gave students the chance to progress at their own rates. Therefore, teachers in differentiated classrooms need to commit a daily block of time for students to write regularly so that they can gain writing proficiency and learn to love writing. It is important to keep the Writing Workshop child-centered because when the instruction emerges from the student’s needs it becomes relevant and meaningful. Additionally, teachers need to work hard at creating a joyful and risk-free writing environment because it is a gift that teachers can share with their students. Being flexible is a key factor in the process because adhering strictly to the curriculum and planning procedures will result with teacher-student frustration.

Teachers need to allow students to choose the greater portion of their writing topics instead of constantly dictating topics. Thus, it is the teachers’ responsibility to teach students how to get good topic ideas and where to find them. A good idea would be using literature books and keeping a selection of stories, (non-fiction, fiction, fairy tales, poetry, etc.) in the Writing Workshop center, for students to make use of during independent writing time.

In addition to recommending differentiation through implementing the Writing Workshop approach, it is important to propose the use of a writing portfolio as an assessment tool because it tracks student’s writing improvement and progress. Therefore, writing teachers are advised to utilize portfolios in their classrooms because it enhances students’ attitudes and perceptions regarding their writing ability. Through maintaining and constantly adding more writing pieces into students’ portfolios, it would be easier and more accurate to report students’ writing progress directly to parents and teachers.

Another reason for recommending differentiation is that it allows the teacher to re-think and re-learn how to teach writing to a diverse group of students in a way that caters for their academic readiness. However, teachers who aim to work towards embracing students’ differences and plan instruction in ways that fit the needs of each learner will need assistance in making the experience more prone to success. For this reason, it would be greatly beneficial for teachers who decide to implement the Writing Workshop to meet regularly with other teachers at the same point of implementation and others with a well-established workshop to gain peer support and engage in sharing successful ideas.
Principals and administrators play a vital role in achieving the goal of helping students demonstrate improved writing skills. The process might be slow and difficult to accomplish, yet their support is greatly needed and beneficial.

One specific suggestion to the school's administration involves hiring a writing resource teacher who can help classroom teachers improve and re-learn the practice of teaching writing. Although hiring a writing resource teacher would be costly yet, he/she would be able to provide teachers with ongoing support and content knowledge. Having a writing resource teacher would be greatly beneficial because he/she would act as a mentor and assist teachers in learning how to teach writing to students, model lessons within classrooms for teachers to observe, provide feedback to teachers following the observed sessions, and collaborate with teachers to plan writing lessons. Since writing has been identified as an improvement area at school, then the idea of having a writing resource teacher could end up being worthwhile and writing improvements could be possible.

Furthermore, school administrators are advised to provide ongoing support and planning for in-service training to guide teachers in learning more about the best practices of teaching writing. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers are given some release time to observe classrooms where the Writing Workshop or other writing programs are established and successful. In addition, teachers need to be given the time and chance to talk about writing, exchange writing activities/ideas, and plan cooperatively with other classroom teachers.

It is also suggested that administrators introduce families to the writing programs and changes that the school will be undergoing towards achieving the aim of helping students become more proficient and better writers. Parents can act as invaluable supporters and writing coaches when they are informed how their child is learning to write and how they can help at home.

Concerning research recommendations, much of the research and literature pertaining to the Writing Workshop has been qualitative in nature and conducted over a short span of time. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct more research on the specific benefits of the Writing Workshop when conducted on larger populations such as more than one school or several students from the same school but at different grade levels. In addition, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess and measure the long-term outcomes on writing as a result of students' participation in a Writing Workshop program.
Reflexivity

Looking back at the complete research study at hand and all the classroom experiences that took place, it has been a rewarding year because the teacher-researcher was able to create a win-win situation. On one hand, feeling obligated to give every student an opportunity to become a better writer was achieved by steering away from providing the same teaching-learning experiences for everyone and thus, differentiating instruction. By differentiating writing instruction, students had an equal opportunity to improve their writing performances and approach learning with confidence and motivation.

On the other hand, planning and differentiating writing instruction was greatly challenging yet, it was rewarding because the teacher-researcher was able to develop a greater understanding of each student’s writing ability and progress. Thus, she will continue to differentiate writing instruction through implementing the Writing Workshop approach but the following changes will be made.

First, instead of having writing folders where students’ writing pieces are stored, but in some cases lost, it will be useful to shift into having a writing notebook that would be more contained and allows students to monitor their writing progress. In addition, using a student’s writing notebook would serve as a valuable tool for writing assessments. Secondly, the teacher-researcher plans to have a teacher’s writing notebook that will be used to document the writing lessons/skills taught and perhaps include copies of student samples illustrating the different writing strategies.

Furthermore, the teacher-researcher will strive to be flexible and move away from the routines of the Writing Workshop approach by occasionally planning for learning experiences. One good idea would be to invite an author to talk to students about the writing process, share his/her writing drafts, and read a book that he/she has written. Another idea involves celebrating each student’s writing efforts by publishing samples in the school’s magazine. Incorporating writing through a special classroom event, which involves making necessary arrangements to plan for a pen pal project in coordination with another school, is an additional idea to enhance students’ writing skills and write to someone beyond the school building.

Finally, through differentiating writing instruction in future years, it is hoped that students will gain the skill of communicating their ideas in writing because it is a lifelong skill that they will need in every step in life.
Conclusion

This study was designed to analyze the manner in which writing instruction has been differentiated in a second grade mixed-ability classroom in order to help students demonstrate improved writing skills. Qualitative data obtained from “The Teacher Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction” checklist, classroom observations, writing portfolios, and diary entries revealed that students were able to demonstrate improved writing skills, as a result of their participation in the Writing Workshop.

As classrooms continue to be full of diverse learners, it is important that teachers work towards improving their instructional practices through differentiating writing instruction in a way that best meets the writing needs of all learners.

The school leadership team should provide the support and supervision needed to increase the likelihood of having classroom teachers put forward the effort to differentiate their instruction and make it a reality in today’s diverse classrooms.
REFERENCES


Bayer, R.A. (1999). *The effects of the first grader’s participation in a Writer’s Workshop on their ability to become more confident and more descriptive writers* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 432752)


*Meeting the needs of diverse learners.* (2000, Spring). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 9 (3).


Differentiation of Instruction


Appendix A

The Researcher’s Dilemma
The Researcher's Dilemma

Last year, my first teaching experience as a second grade homeroom teacher has been successful, yet greatly challenging. On one hand, I learned how successful this teaching experience had been after an end-of-year evaluation meeting with the principal. The principal highly commended my performance in four main areas, which she evaluated during the course of the year through two formal observations and various other drop-in observations.

These four areas were instructional strategies, classroom management and organization, classroom climate, and student relationships. I was placed solidly in the highest category of teachers - fully competent. I was observed utilizing a variety of instructional strategies in different content areas such as flexible grouping, hands-on projects/activities, and encouraging higher-order thinking. There were no adjustments needed in the area of classroom management and organization due to strong sense of structure that was evident throughout the year. The high structure of the classroom neither diminished nor affected the nurturing side. Students had daily opportunities to interact, share, and solve problems, which as a result has built a community of friends and learners. Providing my students with such a nurturing setting has strongly influenced a positive classroom climate and helped me build close relationships with them.

On the other hand, my greatest challenge was learning that my classroom was filled with students of diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities. These students assimilated information through different channels, processed ideas at different rates, and differed in their readiness to learn. For example, I had three boys who spent their time in English class struggling to read. They started second grade reading at a beginner's level-kindergarten level. Another girl at a nearby desk was an advanced writer who was capable of writing a narrative piece with a strong command of conventions. In between these students was another boy who's a math whiz but used the whole forty-minute block to write only two sentences in his journal.

Throughout the year, I realized how each child was unique and that not two were alike. As a result, I faced a dilemma of either teaching my diverse students the same
Appendix B

"Teacher's Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction" Checklist
**Teacher's Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction**

Directions: The purpose of this checklist is *not* for teacher assessment by an administrator, but rather it is a way to encourage *reflection* by the teacher. This type of self-assessment can be an eye-opener to teachers who are not aware of current research about best practices in writing. It is appropriate for teachers in all grade levels and content areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I need to learn how</th>
<th>Almost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do my students write every day?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do my students keep writing folders that include their writing at various stages of development? (prewritings, drafts, revisions, published pieces)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do I write with and share my own writings with my students?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do I model the writing process steps and provide time and opportunity for students to use them?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do my students use a variety of prewriting strategies before they begin their rough drafts?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do I teach writing strategies by modeling what real writers have done in picture books, children's literature, published articles, brochures, editorials, or other content-specific genres?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do I teach target skills about writers' craft (leads, supporting details, literary devices, etc.) within the context of the students' writing?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do I teach the prewriting strategies of writing (punctuation, capitalization, and usage) through the context of student writing?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do I allow students opportunities to analyze professional and student models of the forms of writing they will be developing (e.g., short story, feature article, book review, brochure, and other content-specific genres)?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do I allow my students opportunities to select their own topics and forms based on the curriculum taught?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Can my students analyze their writing for their own strengths/weaknesses?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Do I allow my students to work with partners or in small groups when they are writing?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Teacher's Self-Reflection on Writing Instruction

Directions: The purpose of this checklist is not for teacher assessment by an administrator, but rather it is a way to encourage reflection by the teacher. This type of self-assessment can be an eye-opener to teachers who are not aware of current research about best practices in writing. It is appropriate for teachers in all grade levels and content areas.

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<th>No</th>
<th>Need to learn how</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>☑</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Picture Prompt
Appendix D

6+1 Traits For Beginning Writers
6-Trait Assessment for Beginning Writers

- **Experienced**
  - Ideas developed with depth and breadth
  - Common themes emerge
  - Well-developed paragraphs

- **Capable**
  - Ideas are supported by details
  - Paragraphs are well-organized
  - Conclusion is clear

- **Emerging**
  - Ideas suggested by details
  - Paragraphs are structured
  - Conclusion is suggested

- **Developing**
  - Ideas are suggested
  - Paragraphs are fragmented
  - Conclusion is unclear

- **Beginning**
  - Ideas are not supported
  - Paragraphs are inconsistent
  - Conclusion is absent
Appendix E

Conference Notes Form
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Differentiation of Instruction Diagram
Figure 2.1
Differentiation of Instruction

is a teacher’s response to learner’s needs

→

guided by general principles of differentiation, such as

respectful tasks

ongoing assessment and adjustment

flexible grouping

Teachers can differentiate

Content

Process

Product

according to student’s

Readiness

Interests

Learning Profile

through a range of instructional and management strategies such as

- multiple intelligences
- jigsaw
- taped material
- anchor activities
- varying organizers
- varied texts
- varied supplementary materials
- literature circles

- tiered lessons
- tiered centers
- tiered products
- learning contracts
- small-group instruction
- group investigation
- orbitals
- independent study

4MAT
- varied questioning strategies
- interest centers
- interest groups
- varied homework
- compacting
- varied journal prompts
- complex instruction

Appendix G

Instructional Strategies that Support Differentiation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition and Explanation</th>
<th>Instructional Strategies that Support Differentiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students</td>
<td>Students were different spots in the classroom where students worked on various tasks simultaneously. Students allow students to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Guidance</td>
<td>Guidance was provided as presentation. This is for each individual student who needed additional instruction in a specific area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning Centers</td>
<td>Learning Centers were classrooms equipped with a collection of activities designed to meet the needs of different levels of learners and student interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tied Activities</td>
<td>Tied Activities were used in all classes. Focus on essential understandings and skills at different levels of complexity and problem-solving were needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learning Contracts</td>
<td>A Learning Contract was negotiated agreement between the teacher and the student. Thus, a Learning Contract gives students some appropriately challenged (Thompsoon, 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Problem-Based Learning</td>
<td>Students (Thompsoon, 1999). The strategy in terms of addressing students' readiness, interests, and learning profile (Thompsoon, 1999).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Effective Strategies:**
- The strategy in terms of addressing students' readiness, interests, and learning profile (Thompsoon, 1999).
- Students are given the chance to seek information when they want. Students are given freedom to choose their own learning path. Problem solving and students must seek additional information to try and solve the problem. Students are given the chance to seek information.
Appendix H

Writing Workshop Block
Writing Workshop (60 Minute Block)

Community Meeting
Writer's Talk and Minilesson
[5-15 minutes]
Options: Any combination of Three Writing Contexts

Independent Writing

Guided Writing

Investigations

Writing
Conferring
35-50 minutes

1st Group Lesson
[15-25 minutes]

2nd Group Lesson
[15-25 minutes]

Research Genre/Author/Content/Area Study
[35-50 minutes]

Group Share and Evaluation
[5-10 minutes]

Figure 5–5. Writing Workshop Block

Appendix I

Lewin's Model of Action Research
FIGURE 25.1 Lewin's cyclic model

Appendix J

Five Phases of Action Research
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Phases of Action Research</th>
<th>Classroom Action Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1: Problem Identification:</strong></td>
<td>At the beginning of the year, I realized how much my group of students differed in their readiness, interests and learning profiles. I also understood how much these differences were significant to their learning. As a result, my professional goal for this year focused on my determination to reach out to students where they are as individuals and plan writing instruction with student differences in mind. More specifically, my aim was to help students become better writers by demonstrating improved writing skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is the practical problem?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is it important, something worth the time and effort, something that could be beneficial to you, students, and others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2: Plan of Action:</strong></td>
<td>In order to achieve this goal, the researcher will be differentiating writing instruction, through implementing the Writing Workshop, to help students demonstrate improved writing skills. Writing assessments took the form of pre-writing prompts, which were administered in September. The Writing Workshop, a differentiation strategy, was launched from October 2004 till June 2005. Finally, towards the end of March, post-writing prompts were administered again to compare students’ writing growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will a new strategy/approach be developed or implemented to address your question?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will the study focus on existing practices? If so, which particular ones?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is an appropriate timeline for what the researcher is trying to accomplish?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 3: Data Collection:</strong></td>
<td>Concerning the purpose of the study, a variety of sources will be employed to collect data such as classroom observations, having a critical colleague, keeping a professional diary, and the self-reflection checklist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What types of data should be collected in order to answer the research questions and help in interpreting the findings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 4: Analysis of Data:</strong></td>
<td>Classroom observations and conferencing with students, during the Writing Workshop, helped explain how students have demonstrated improved writing skills. Moreover, keeping a professional diary and data from the checklist allowed the researcher to document how her teaching practices and thinking have changed during and after the implementation of the Writing Workshop. As to the critical colleague, talking about teaching writing practices and observations will allow for the construction of new knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What can be learned from the data?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What patterns, insights, and new understandings can be found?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 5: Plan for Future Action:</strong></td>
<td>Based on the findings and the results of the study, the researcher will report what worked best regarding the research experience and contribute to the public the information that was gained about differentiation and writing instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What will be done differently in the classroom as a result of this study?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What might be recommended to others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K

Participant A’s Writing Samples
she loved it very very much!

Then the girl played with her friend and asked her mother and she yes!

Girls can playing out side! But she shold only she thinks I am still safe and 30 years old.

 wouldn't let her go out side because they didn't want her to play out side but her mother.

Every there was a girl he wanted

March 2005

The girl
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/18</td>
<td>Teacher's help to choose a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Random capitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comfortable using the &quot;try sheet&quot; to sound out words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attempts writing sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>Work includes a title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correct tenses (played, went)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note ideas in his writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/13</td>
<td>Random capitalization again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses simple sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V punctuation marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/11/23</td>
<td>Sets rules for the minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No sense of beginning/paragraph or end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses helping wall to control high frequency words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2/05</td>
<td>Capitalizing proper nouns (Sept., and, Dan).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spelling of high frequency words are usually correct and too many times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>Word choice used well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unaware of singular &amp; plural (2 cousins) inconsistently details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>present but not developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>Aware of indenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undeveloped ideas needs to elaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short and somewhat repetitive sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/9</td>
<td>Poetry Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expresses feeling in his writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not all sentences in poem are same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/12</td>
<td>Writing cinquains able to choose his own topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aware of adjectives + synonyms applies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/4</td>
<td>Basic punctuation used correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logical sequencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Able to come up with rhyming patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/15</td>
<td>&quot;Eager to share&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Newspaper Headlines &quot;Wedding&quot; and writing a funny poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Took a risk to say more than expected and added voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L

Participant B’s Writing Samples
Pay with the other kid's
work so go away said The.
Only bored and scared She
is polished She's
Friday Sep 24 200
Then she saw a mother lonely

de to take a walk. I decided

other kids were playing. I didn't talk to them.

would do nothing with all the

d was always lonely, and she

she did not have any friends. She

There was a girl named Lily. Lily

A friendly girl named Lily.

March 2015
## Conference Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/5</td>
<td>Uses phonetic spelling past-shin, riot... Attempts writing short and simple sentences + capitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/18</td>
<td>Used helping well to improve spelling + use of contractions (it's) repetitive sentence patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/8</td>
<td>Transitional spelling on less frequent words (playstation) sounding out. Idea is generally on topic - 1 sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/15</td>
<td>- Topic selection - A day in the past - subject/verb agreement &quot;I went, I saw...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/19</td>
<td>&quot;Map your Heart&quot; Applied the strategy without teacher help. Brainstormed relevant words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/6</td>
<td>12/6 Map your heart (re-writen) Attempts a story short paragraph Simple and compound sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/24</td>
<td>Not one sentence begins the same way as another. + cap. and punc. Possessive nouns incorrectly used (dineasour's)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/10</td>
<td>Still working on transitional spelling (faster). Uses interesting and unique details for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/24</td>
<td>An appropriate title used (without being requested) High frequency words used correctly. Attempts complex sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15</td>
<td>3/15 (Mother's poem) Precise, accurate, and original words used. Develops on one main idea writing has rhythm and flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>5/10 Completes poem unit + spelling of high frequency words sentence variety ideas and rhyming words stand out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>Writing a letter End punc. is correct and other punc. is attempted (!) Not enough details present. Could use some elaboration Expresses feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/14</td>
<td>Writing a letter. Word choice poisonous, anaconda, at once Plural/Singular understanding Tries to choose words for specificity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6-Trail Assessment for Beginning Writers

June 2000

September 2000
Appendix M

Participant C's Writing Samples
The girl, upset, wants to go play with her friends. Her mom says no. She is very noisy and she is bored. She says Sept. 24, 2004.
Homework

A girl named May wanted to play outside with her friends. But she had homework. Her friends thought that was silly because doing homework after lunch was crazy. She became very sad. Her mother said, "Those kids are silly!" But May thought they were cool because they did not do their homework. Then she jumped out of her window and played. But she did not feel good because she did not ask her mom. So she stayed out till 6:00 at night. But she jumped back in the window and
had lunch and dinner. At dinner her mother asked "Where were you, May?" she said. "I was doing my homework," her mom squeezed her eyes. "You did?" she asked. But May was starting to sweat. Finally May told her mom that she jumped out of the window. But her mom did not shout at her. But she knew she would do that.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Uses drawings that show great details. One complete sentence with correct usage of capitalization and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/6</td>
<td>Weak handwriting. Included transitions and a great attempt at sequencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/13</td>
<td>Squiggles Connection between ideas are confusing. Basic capitalization and punctuation used well. Details are not present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/18</td>
<td>Transitional spelling on less-frequent words (clay, east, favor). Incorrect use of commas. Spelling of high-frequency words not correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/27</td>
<td>Transitions are effectively used, however too dependent on &quot;then,&quot; interesting lead. Clear sense of beginning, middle, and end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>Subject-verb not in agreement (there is 12 bks). Wrote telling a story with developed and interesting details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>Word Choice) Superb, fresh, and original words. Attempts figurative language!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/18</td>
<td>Good choice of title. Dialogue present and correct use of quotation marks!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/14</td>
<td>Simple and compound sentences used effectively. Details are present. Revised her work and added new words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>About me poem. Fresh and original ideas. (Great details and high-frequency words correctly spelled.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix N

Letter of Approval
June 10, 2005

To Whom It May Concern,

This is written to confirm that I was fully aware of the action research project that Amira Hachem was conducting in her second grade classroom concerning differentiation in writing for her master’s thesis. Not only was I supportive of her efforts, but welcomed the research for the purpose of sharing with school colleagues to enhance the writing program in general at ACS.

Yours truly,

Geri Branch,
Elementary Principal