Creating Personal Relationships With Students to Improve the Implementation and Planning of Writers Workshop in a Fourth Grade Classroom

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Creating personal relationships with students to improve the implementation and planning of writers workshop in a fourth grade classroom

By

Ashley Magar
Creating personal relationships with students to improve writers workshop

Instruction and planning in a fourth grade classroom

Ashley Magar

Spring 2014
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“One lesson I wish someone taught me on my first day of teaching is all children learn better when you provide them with tough love. If you baby them and take the time to get to know them on a personal level they will walk all over you, not respect you, and they won’t learn as much throughout the school year.” This shocking advice was given to me by a fifth grade teacher I work with at Heartwood Central School District. (All names are pseudonyms.)

Walking away I instantly was thinking to myself “that’s not true! Building a bond with students and getting to know them on a personal level, allows teachers to create and implement lessons that will target and interest each individual student.”

Entering a new school, at first I decided to do a lot of observing before I began to talk about my own teaching beliefs with other teachers and professionals. One of the first observations I was able to draw upon was the conclusion that I was working with two very different types of teachers. In fact, I realized that they are completely opposite. I work with a variety of teachers due to the fact that I am a consultant special education teacher for grades four, five and six.

The fourth grade teacher who I work with is very strict. Her students are very well behaved, and they know what is expected of them. The first week or so of school the fourth grade teacher really took the time to get to know her students on a personal level, and taught them the procedures and protocol that they would be following throughout the year. Some of the activities that we did to get to know the students were surveys, interviews, memory, different writing prompts, and other fun activities. In that classroom I also feel welcome, and like we have
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a small community in there. Many students feel safe, and know it is okay to make mistakes as long as they are trying their hardest. I know this because I always see a variety of students with their hands raised, trying to give their ideas or answers, even if they were told they were incorrect the last time they answered a question.

However, in the fifth grade classroom the students spent the first week beginning their first novel of the year, their first topic in mathematics, and getting their materials, lockers and desks organized. When I enter the fifth grade classroom I see students quietly sitting in their seats, and not attempting to answer questions when asked. Many people would say each teacher has her own way of teaching and going about the day, and this will not affect how the year turns out, or how much the students enjoy learning each year. However, I think that is incorrect. When I walk into the fourth grade classroom I get a totally different feeling than when I walk into the fifth grade classroom. This is when I discovered there is a problem in the school district I work in, and something must be done. Some teachers are concerned with student relationships, while others are only concerned with teaching the Common Core (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). I do, however, believe that there is a happy medium between being able to teach the Common Core effectively, and also knowing all students on a personal level. Nonetheless, I have observed that knowing students on a personal level may also help the teacher effectively teach the Common Core Learning Standards to the students better by knowing how to successfully differentiate the instruction to meet each student’s needs.

Although there are many differences in the atmosphere of the classrooms, I have found one similarity that is very striking to me. I push into both fourth and fifth grade for writers workshop. In Heartwood Elementary School during writers workshop teachers give students a
variety of writing prompts, pictures, or sentence starters. This is to assure all students are writing during the whole class period rather than spending their time trying to come up with a possible topic. When I am in there I see the students given boring prompts, and they only write the bare minimum that is asked, which is only four to five sentences. Since I am in both of the classrooms often, I see students using their free time to write stories, letters, to do lists and so on. Therefore I have taken a mental note that some of the students really do enjoy writing: just not the type of writing they do in writers workshop. By some students only participating in the writers workshop, and not taking it upon themselves to write in their free time I think it is really hindering their writing development. When students do not enjoy writing they are not going to write very often. Since they are not engaged in writing often their writing skills will not further develop.

I really want to instill a love for writing in my students, so that is when I began to wonder what if I kept each one of my students in mind when I was creating writing workshop prompts for them in the fifth grade classroom I push into? As a graduate student I have been taught to interact with students as much as possible. I have been told by one of my professors, M. Fallon, “it is the key to success” (personal communication, December, 2010). Creating individualized student matrices helps teachers differentiate the needs of each student (personal communication, December, 2010). An individualized student matrix is a tool teachers can create that lists different traits and characteristics about different students that they can draw upon when creating lesson plans. On student matrices I like to include sections such as interests, strengths, motivations, needs, and accommodations if there are any necessary to aid the student to be become successful. Using the individualized student matrix I can pull different interests off each student’s matrix to help me create a variety of prompts for our school year together.
If I use the individualized student matrix to help me create writing prompts I will be able to determine the background knowledge the students have, along with the variety of interests in themes across the group. This will hopefully allow the students to have background knowledge of and interest in the topic I am asking them to write about. I will create my student matrix by interviewing the students, interviewing the guardians of the students, using a variety of surveys/questioners, and observations that I make daily while working with each student. Getting to know the students personally and recording my findings on the individualized student matrices will help me create writing prompts that my students will enjoy. Creating the individualized student matrices will also help me when creating mini-lessons and conferencing with students. The student matrices will inform me of how each child learns best, their strengths and their weaknesses. These data are important to look at and consider when creating and implementing lesson plans and conferences. When the students know you care about them and are interested in their learning it will help the teacher-student bond develop further.

I remember how often I wished for better writing prompts when I was in elementary school, so why not give the students the opportunity I never received? After reflecting in my journal of how that day went I began to see that Heartwood Elementary School has a large problem. The problem I found was students do not enjoy writing because they are given writing prompts that they do not interested in, and that they do not have background knowledge of the specific topic. By doing so students are not enjoying writing and it is causing students to write very little, which results in lower writing ability.
In today’s assessment driven education system, students use writing across the content areas. For example, in mathematics students have to write to explain their answers, and give the step by step procedure of how they arrived at their answers. Writing is being assessed in all disciplines, so therefore students need to learn to write effectively to do well in all content areas. Also, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has stated in the past that schools in the United States must have a high focus on writing assessments (Rubin, 2011). Looking at the Common Core State Standards (2010), specifically the writing standards, all students are required to “produce clear and coherent writing” (p. 25). Switching from the New York State standards to the Common Core Standards have made teachers focus more heavily on improving students’ writing abilities, and adding more writing time in the classroom. With the new Common Core Standards teachers are finding it hard to teach everything the students are required to learn each year. I have found the standards will help students learn more, and excel more rapidly. However, introducing it is challenging for teachers in the higher grades, because when they get their new students they are technically already behind in a sense due to the change in standards. Many learning gaps have been found, so the teacher has to teach concepts that the students should already know before entering the classroom. These problems are all leading toward teachers not having enough time in the day to teach and to get to know their students on the personal level that is necessary.

Writing is very crucial in children’s lives for many other reasons than simply reaching the Common Core Learning Standards. Children use writing on a daily basis. In any job students come across when they grow up they will need to be able to write. Having good writing skills is important to get into college, throughout the course of the time students are in college, applying
for jobs, and once they obtain jobs. If students are not taught to be good writers and don’t
develop the skills necessary to be proficient writers, they will suffer throughout their own lives.

Students are very engaged in writers workshop, and the teacher acts primarily as the
moderator (James, 2012). This means the teacher is asking students questions, prompting them
when necessary, and trying to help students think creatively. However, the students are in charge
of their own learning and writing during this time of writers workshop. They interacted and
engage with different writing tasks to help discover new ways of enriching their own creative
efforts (James, 2012). By providing students the opportunity to work with their own writing, and
have a free write based on a specific question it allows the students to explore new ideas, and
really get their thoughts down on paper with little to no guidelines. I could address this by once a
week giving the students the writing period to work on a writing piece of interest; whether that is
having them expand on one of the prompts the teacher gave them previously, or creating a story
on their own. If students are not given an adequate time to work on building their writing in an
inquiry based way, they often become bored with it, and over time begins to not want to practice
writing.

When we engage the students in writing activities that are fun and hands on, they are able
to write about what interests them and actually enjoy writing. When students are not motivated it
is shown in their writing. They write the bare minimum, and never look back to check their
writing to make sure it makes sense, and correct other errors. Also, without writers workshop,
students have a hard time getting started writing, or coming up with a topic to write about.
Teachers all want their students to be successful, so it is important to keep in mind what can be
done to help develop each and every student’s ability further. Clearly, the answer is practice!
However, without knowing the students, and what motivates them, and what they are interested
in it is hard to be sure all students are engaged in writing. Without the teacher catching the attention of all the writers, the students will over time hate writing and this will result in poor writing abilities. Writing is necessary across the content areas, therefore it is crucial for all students to excel.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to understand how I connect with students on a personal level to be sure I am creating prompts that are beneficial for each one of them. Also I wanted to know how the process I go through when I plan writers workshop lessons with each individual student in mind impacts my lesson plans, and the way I carry out each lesson. I have observed students have difficulty writing when they are uninterested in the prompt or assignment given by their teachers. Writers workshop is a time where students should be engaged in the writing process the whole time that is allotted.

In addition, students who dislike writing at a young age have a more difficult time writing throughout their lifetimes (Routman, 2005). Routman (2005) has found that using writers workshop as a writing tool encourages students to be engaged in the writing process on a daily basis. Writers workshop has proven to give students more ownership for their work. Students’ ownership is very powerful because it gives students the sense of accomplishment when they complete a task relatively on their own (Routman, 2005). Consequently, through this research study, I intend to answer the following question:

*How does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and teaching in writers workshop?*
I have designed and implemented this study to explore how teachers who take their time to get to know their students benefit in writers workshop, both in planning and teaching. I have gained insight about the best way to use what we know about our students, and create writing prompts based on the students’ interest, strengths, and motivations. Also, I have gained insight regarding how the process I go through impacts my lesson planning, and the way I carry out my lesson plans. As a special education teacher for grades for five and six, I am currently observing what topics and prompts the teachers I work with use on a daily basis. After this study I now have a deeper understanding of how I connect with my students to get them writing, and the process I go through to plan writers workshop keeping all of my students in mind. My students also benefited from this research study because they may be engaged in different writing tasks that instill a love for writing in them. Also, they learned to enjoy writing, and spend a lot of their free time writing. By students enjoying writing over time their writing abilities will increase.

Conducting this study has heightened my ability to create opportunities to get to know my students on a personal level. Also it helped me determine my teaching practices will improve if I use what I know about each individual student when creating and implementing my prompts and questions for writers workshop.

Study Approach

This study was a qualitative self-study. As a teacher-researcher I have designed and implemented the study to determine how knowing my students on a personal level impacts how I plan and implement writers workshop in my classroom. I focused my research on improving instruction and student learning within a school setting (Creswell, 2008).
My data were collected in three separate forms that are connected in the analysis. I used a personal journal, lesson plans that I create, and antidotal records. I triangulated my data to help answer my research question. Before I could start collecting my data, there were a few questions that I needed to answer specifically about myself that helped guide me to what I do. I needed to determine what my beliefs are and what has caused them to form in such a unique way. Once I figured that out, I was able to discover how I portray those beliefs to my students.

I used a variety of different ways to collect data for my study to help me better plan and implement writers workshop in my classroom. First I used journaling three times a week. Keeping a journal about what I see during writers workshop time helped me be able to look back and see what went well, and what I need to change to help writers workshop become more effective in my classroom. When I was journaling I wrote about my own work and reflection on my students’ engagement. I noted if something I planned didn’t go the way I hoped for, or if something went better than planned. This helped me improve and further develop my own instruction and implementation of writers workshop. I also collected three lesson plans a week so I could look back at a later date, and compare the notes I have in my journal to the lesson plans I created. This helped me decide if maybe I taught a component incorrectly, left something important out or the lesson just may not have gone the way I planned. Comparing the data points helped me drive my instruction and create my lesson plans differently to be sure I am meeting the needs of each student in my classroom. Lastly, I took anecdotal records during writers workshop. I did this so I can remember what I may have observed during writing workshop. For example, how my planning affected my lesson, or how implementing my lesson didn’t go as planned, why it didn’t go as planned and if helped or hurt the lesson.
Rationale

There are several goals I reached during this study. One goal was to create a student matrix that will help me understand each one of my students on a more personal level. This tool was used when I planned my writers workshop prompts and questions. The self-study enabled me to reflect on my questions about student-teacher connections in relation to writers workshop, and research helped me answer my questions. As I analyzed the impact throughout the research study, it helped me guide my future decisions about the type of writers workshop I want to implement in my classroom.

Based on the matrices I developed for my students, I used open-ended writing prompts when creating lessons for writers workshop. After planning, and implementing these prompts I reflected on the lesson, and recorded what I can do to better my own teaching practices. I wanted to learn more about my beliefs as an educator, and why I feel the way I do about different philosophies. After looking at and understanding my beliefs I wanted to know why I think the way I do, and how this affects my planning and teaching techniques in writers workshop.

Summary

Using a student matrix to create lesson plans, and implement the lesson plans in writers workshop had never been a thought of mine until I created this study. Exploring the possibilities of using the student matrix when creating writers workshop prompts has broadened my knowledge of how writers workshop and teacher-student relationships impact one another. I was curious to see how implementing personal topics and lesson planning with each student in mind enhanced the lesson outcomes that I create for writers workshop.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Teachers knowing each one of their students on a personal level impacts their planning and teaching techniques. In order to know how to better plan and carry out my lessons for writers workshop in my classroom I have done an extensive literature review on the subject of personal relationships affecting the way a teacher plans and carries out lessons plans in writers workshop. This will include the effects of student-teacher relationships in the classroom, a definition and description of writers workshop, and a comparison between writers workshop (the traditional writing approach) in the school I work in and writers workshop in other schools.

Student-Teacher Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of educational encounters (Giles, 2012). When a teacher stands in front of the classroom room the students relate to the teacher. When a student meets her/his teacher they relate with each other. Looking back and remembering teacher-student experiences is different for everyone. Some people bring back memories of feeling inspired, bored, or perhaps even overlooked at times. Curriculum, lesson plans and learning outcomes are often forgotten for many of us over the years, but the impact of the student-teacher relationships live with each one of us forever.

The best teaching and learning can be done only when there is a direct individual relationship between a student and a good teacher (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). This happens best when students are given time to discuss their ideas, make connections to their learning, talk with their peers, and discuss their thinking and confusion. Unfortunately, with modern times there are so many students in each classroom that teachers may have a hard time getting to know
each student on a personal level while being sure the content is taught and understood by students.

Getting to know each student personally is very time consuming. Noddings stated that there are three different elements in a student-teacher caring relationship (2006). The three elements include the one caring, the one cared for, and the relationship between the two. The most crucial part of the three elements is that the one cared for feels the caring of the other person. Noddings ties this into teaching by saying that it is important as teachers to care about our students, caring about just simply teaching is not enough. To fulfill the caring relationship, the students must be able to sense that their teacher cares about them individually (Noddings, 2006). Relationships are essential to the educational experience, whether they are recognized or not.

The teacher can show the child that she/he cares in many different ways. First, this can be done by the teacher making the ultimate goal in the classroom a focus on what the students are learning rather than what the teacher is trying to teach (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). When teachers spend time talking with students individually they are able to build a connection with the students, and are able to discuss what is being taught to determine their area of strengths, interests, and needs. Getting to know the students individually often changes the teacher’s perceptions of some students in the classroom, and allows the teacher to look at each student more positively (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). When talking one on one with each student for fifteen minutes it has been found that teacher-student relationships can significantly improve, leading to positive changes in the student’s behavior, and comfort level in the classroom (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). Caring for students and building individual relationships with the students is the key to a successful learning community.
It is the job of each educator to help each student develop as a person, to be a thoughtful citizen, to be able to interact with peers successfully, to be a capable worker, and also a lifelong learner. This task is very difficult, but can be done when the teacher takes time to get to know each student on an individual basis. Caring teachers listen to their students, and are very responsive. Teachers can infer certain needs from their students when they are activity listening and taking time to talk to each student daily (Noddings, 2006). Noddings stated when teachers get to know their students on an individual basis, and take time to understand each student’s needs, assessment scores have been proven to increase (2006). Therefore many studies indicate that when teachers create better relationships with their students the students’ academic success is higher (Noddings, 2006). Positive student-teacher relationships are the key to students being successful.

**Effect of teacher-student relationships on students**

Positive student-teacher relationships are proven to be very important for all students. High-quality relationships are marked by high levels of closeness, and low levels of conflict (O’Connor et al., 2010). Within high-quality relationships teachers may provide children with positive behavioral supports and teach them appropriate coping skills that will encourage the student’s development of emotion regulation skills. Students may also be more motivated to engage in age appropriate behaviors when they have high-quality relationships with their teachers (O’Connor et al., 2010). Providing students with high-quality relationships gives students a positive role model in the classroom that has a direct correlation with their behavior.

Teacher-student relationships relate to changes in students externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems. Teacher-student relationships were the only factor found to relate to
behavior problems (O’Connor et al., 2010). In the study the researchers were studying synthesizing how relationships play a role on student’s behavior over time in elementary school. They examined associations between the quality of teacher-child relationships and behavior problems among the students in the elementary school. They found high-quality relationships appear to provide students with supports for their socio-emotional and behavior development and to disrupt associations between internalizing behavioral problems in early and middle childhood (O’Connor et al., 2010). By students having the high-quality relationship, along with knowing different coping skills, it has been shown that one on one relationships between teachers and students improve students’ behavior in school. High-quality relationships improve students’ behavior in a classroom setting.

**Gender and Race**

However, student-teacher relationships affect some students more than others. Studies show that girls experience a closer relationship with their teachers than boys (Hughes & Wu, 2012). This is because boys tend to have more behavioral problems, and therefore do not value the relationship with their teacher the way the girls in the class do. This leads teachers to treat the boys and girls in the class differently when giving directions. It has been found that teachers pay more attention to the male students in the classroom than the female students when giving directions. This is because boys often have a harder time paying attention and following direction as effectively as female students (Tatum et al., 2013). Students react differently to teacher-students relationships based on their gender.

Gender is not the only difference that affects student-teacher relationships. There is also a difference between students of different ethnicities. Teachers have reported to feel a less positive
relationship with African American students than any other race. This is said to be because there has been more conflict noted between the teacher and the African American students (Hughes & Wu, 2012). Also, families who come from different racial backgrounds may have different values on education. It has been shown that families with the Asian ethnicity place a heavy value on education. Often they are very involved with the student’s education so students see the importance of education so they value their teachers significantly (Tatum et al., 2013). Each gender and race has different and similar qualities, and characteristics that affect students’ behavior in school. Although this is true no two students will ever be like even when they are the same gender and race.

**Strategies and Tools**

There are a variety of tools and strategies teachers use to get to know their students. Also it is important to use what the teacher learns about the students to make them know that he or she cares about each individual student.

**Tools**

One way teachers can get to know their students is by the teacher maintaining a personal inspiration wall. On this wall each student has his or her own section. They are able to display one new item each week about something that is important to them. They can hang pictures, different writing pieces, drawings, or anything else that may be important to them (Rogers, 2005). Another activity teachers can use with his or her students is to give them a “getting to know you” survey (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). Asking the students information about themselves shows that the teacher cares. When teachers learn about each individual student they are then able to use what they learned and implement it into their lessons plans to help meet the
students’ needs. By meeting each students needs the teacher is showing that he or she care about the student. Other activities such as show and tell, parents’ surveys, students’ surveys, and other games and activities all help the teachers get to know each one of their students. Finally teachers can give students each a classroom job to help focus on the importance of leadership in the classroom. Students can all choose a job they think is important, and the teacher can interview the students to find the best fit for the position. By giving each student a job they feel like they are an important part of the classroom community (Rogers, 2005). There are many tools teachers can use to build and maintain positive relationships with his or her students.

**Strategies**

One way teacher can show they care about each individual student is by apologizing for what cannot be made right. When students know that the teacher sincerely cares about them and their needs, they are more likely to tolerate a poor situation and continue to maintain high levels of learning and motivation in the classroom. Therefore it is important for teachers to know when something isn’t right, and try to fix it and apologize if necessary (Rogers, 2005). There are many effective strategies a teacher can implement to show they care about their individual students.

Another effective strategy to encourage all students’ motivation in the classroom is the way teachers word their questions. When asking questions about a topic it is important to ask questions so that the students’ thinking is prompted, and not ask questions that have a right or wrong answer (Rogers, 2005). When students have positive relationships with their teacher they are motivated to contribute in classroom discussion because they feel comfortable.

After teachers learn about their students it is very beneficial to record their findings on a table called an individualized student matrix. The matrix includes a variety of important
information about each student. According to M. Fallon, the teachers can use the individualized student matrix when they are writing lessons plans to be sure they are keeping all their learners in mind (personal communication, December, 2010). Different sections on the matrix include students’ strengths/weaknesses, interests, hobbies, different tools that work well for the students and so on. Creating individualized student matrices after getting to know each student is very helpful for teachers when creating lesson plans.

**Writers Workshop**

Writers workshop is an interactive approach to teaching writing in which students learn and practice the importance of rehearsal, drafting/revising and editing their own work (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Through the context of the students’ writing children can select topics that they are interested in, write for authentic audiences, and learn conventional mechanisms for writing. Also, teachers have writing conferences with the students, and there are even peer conferences during this writers workshop time slot (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). The final component of writers workshop is when the students share their writing. This is done during author’s chair. Author’s chair is a form of group conferencing, and it gives the authors a chance to get feedback from their peers to help improve their writing piece (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). This also helps motivate students to write, and allows them to take ownership of their writing.

**Writers workshop procedure**

Typically, writers workshop begins with the teacher sharing/modeling for about five to ten minutes (Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001). The teacher may share a story, or brainstorm to help get the students brainstorming. During this time the teacher may also present poems, songs, stories, or even share some of her/his own writing in a variety of different stages.
It is important to show not tell because students can make sense more clearly, and they are able to conceptualize it (Kaufman, 2004). This gives students ideas of what they may write about and also often sparks the students’ memories, and they are able to come up with ideas similar to the teacher or very different depending on the students’ ability and past experiences.

Sharing and modeling is followed by a mini-lesson in which the teacher spends about five to ten minutes on this activity as well. During this the teacher gives direct instruction about writing, and can either be done in small groups or whole class lessons (Pollington et al., 2001). The lessons that are taught are usually concepts that the teacher has observed students to be struggling with in their daily writing. That is why sometimes the lessons are taught in small groups because it is important to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all the learners in the classroom.

The next step of writers workshop is called “state of the class” which takes about five minutes (Pollington et al., 2001). This is when the teacher and the students discuss what stage of the writing process they are each in. This allows the teacher the opportunity to determine which students need to be conferenced with, and what students are working on final drafts. In many classrooms there is a board that contains all of the students’ names and also the different stages of the writing process. The students are able to move their name to the section of the chart that they are on in their writing. It helps the teacher at a glance track students’ progress.

Following this the students are given about thirty to forty minutes to work independently, with small groups, or with the teacher on any phase of the writing process they are in (Pollington et al., 2001). By conferencing and working with other students the students are able to learn from
one another. They learn to peer revise and work as a team to fix their writing, make it more
detailed, or change the wording in their writing to make it more powerful.

The writing workshop time concludes with author’s chair and about five to ten minutes is
spent on this closing activity (Pollington et al., 2001). After a student shares his/her writing with
there teacher and peers they receive feedback. Young writers learn by hearing what they are
doing correct, and by understanding what others are doing correct that they can add to their
writing to make it better. By hearing flaws in other students’ writing students are able to learn
from not only their mistakes, but others’ mistakes as well (James, 2012). Lastly, author’s chair
gives students an opportunity to critique one another at a very high level, which helps provides
maximum achievement (Frey, 2000). Collaboration and sharing out is a great way to learn as a
class. Writers workshop gives students a lot of choice and freedom.

**Effects of writers workshop on students**

**Motivation**

Rogers defines motivation as a term we use to label a human being’s focusing of energy
that is caused by a desire or a need (2005). Writers workshop has been proven to help students
increase their independence and enjoyment level of writing which allows the students to become
self-motivated (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Also, writing workshop can improve affective factors
such as motivation and self-perception, regardless of the effect on students’ writing achievement
(Pollington et al., 2001). Writers workshop is motivational because the students are given time to
share with peers, so they work hard and feel a sense of accomplishment for their hard work.
Writers workshop has been found to give all students a sense that they are writers, no matter
what their developmental level (Brown, 2012). They feel this way because they follow the stages
of the writing process, share their work with others, and use the peer and teacher feedback to make their writing the best it can be.

The writers workshop approach allows students a block of time to write, and not focus on finishing their writing, but rather on the act of following the writing process (Brown, 2010). Writers workshop can be used with students beginning in preschool. At a young age students are capable of learning the beginning fundamentals of writing, and can do so easily in environment of rich nurturing rather than one that is hyper focused on skills and the conversation (King, 2012). Young writers need encouragement as often as they receive honest criticism to grow and expand their writing abilities (James, 2012). Writers workshop fosters students writing ability at a young age, and makes helps students learn about the writing process at a young age.

**When/How to use writers workshop**

When implementing writers workshop into a classroom it is important for a teacher to consider a variety of items. Learning of writing needs to be the center focus at all times. Teachers should constantly be asking themselves “How will these decisions I make affect students’ ability to learn?” (Kaufman, 2004 p. 3). By keeping the student in mind when planning and implementing lesson plans, the teacher will be able to meet the needs of all learners and be sure they are getting the outcome they hoped for.

One consideration that the teacher must keep in mind is giving the classroom a sense of place. If a teacher cannot develop a classroom that is warm and inviting- where students know they are valued, respected, safe, able to take risks, and understood by their teacher- then the organization and structure of writers workshop will be harder to build (Kaufman, 2004). Procedures and classroom layouts help build a classroom where students know they belong.
Writers workshop gives teacher and students an opportunity to get to know each other and connect on a more personal level. Writers workshop gives students the opportunity to discuss what is important to them and add their voice in their own writing. This is difficult for students to do when they don’t feel comfortable in the classroom or trust their teacher (Kaufman, 2004). That is why it is crucial for teachers to get to know their students at the beginning of the school year.

In successful writers workshop students select topics that they have background knowledge of and a deep importance to each student. Students are able to craft their work over extended periods of time and experiment with their ideas through writing and revising. Finally students get a chance to talk about their writing, and learn from peers.

**Traditional writing approach vs. writers workshop**

The traditional approach to writing instruction is often portrayed as teacher controlled, contains pre-printed materials such as worksheets, and often the students are given writing prompts created by the teacher or a publishing company. The writing is planned and organized around a series of skills the teacher must teach without a specific writing context. Grammar and the conventions of writing are heavily stressed to the students during any writing activity they are engaged in. The topic of the writing, audience, and the time allowed for the writing task is managed by the teacher (Kaufman, 2004).

The traditional writing approach is usually taught whole group and rarely integrates other content areas. When students are working on a writing piece that is lengthy the students are usually kept at the same stage of the writing process. Assessing the students’ writing is usually product-oriented and students only get to share their writing on a limited basis (Kaufman, 2004).
Giving students writing prompts is very different than the writers workshop approach. The concern with writing prompts (the traditional writing approach) is they are found to lead to low student motivation (Kaufman, 2004). Many students may feel that the topics for writing are not meaningful to them when they are selected by the teacher. When students feel a lack of ownership, they tend to care more about getting through the writing assignment rather than getting their point through to the reader.

Another concern of traditional writing approach is skills are taught and stressed in isolation. They are not addressed in meaningful context so the students have a difficult time transferring what they learned into their daily writing. Writing is evaluated by the elements of discourse- spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and length rather than thematic development (Kaufman, 2004). When teachers place a large focus on the discourse students tend to only write what they know how to spell, write simple sentence structures, and they will not choose any topics or approaches that they uncertain about (Kaufman, 2004). When students focus on heavily on the discourse they will never learn the joy of writing.

Many times traditional writing instruction has little explicit teaching of writing. When a teacher assigns a writing piece the students are expected to write about it, and often their writing turns into an assessment rather than a learning experience. Little correlation exists between teacher correction of students work and subsequent improvement (Kaufman, 2004). Students spend less than five percent of their time during a typical school day writing in the classroom (Kaufman, 2004). When writing is not enforced and included daily in all the content area students are unable to improve their writing ability.
Summary

There are many components that need to be considered and implemented into writers workshop in order for the lessons to be successful. It has been proven that students are more successful in the classroom when they can relate to their teacher personally. There are many components that also affect the teacher-student relationship such as race and gender. The teaching of writing has two different approaches in school: writers workshop, and the traditional writing approach. Both approaches are very different, and have different strengths and purposes. Writers workshop has been proven to help engage students, and motivate students more than the traditional approach. Engaging students in writing in elementary school is crucial for the students to be successful.
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

As a teacher it is important to get to know each one of your students on an individual level to help create and implement your teaching practices in an effective manner. This is important because when students are involved and interested in what they are learning and writing about they take more responsibility for their learning and often there tends to be a better outcome (Tompkins, 2010). This study gave me an opportunity to discover my own teaching beliefs and determine what led me to the particular belief. Also this study allowed me to determine what my planning and teaching techniques are, how these are connected to my beliefs, and how they work for me. During this six-week study I explored the following question:

*How does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and teaching in writers workshop?*

**Context**

The school where I conducted my study is a rural school in upstate New York near Lake Ontario. It is a very small school with 330 students, pre-k through 6th grade. The school is located in a high needs community where the median income is $47,771, which is about 15 percent lower than the median for New York state income. Most students are from the surrounding area, and 141 of the students receive free or reduced lunch (NYS Report Cards). The town of Heartwood has a total of 862 people, 325 households, and 228 families residing in the village according to the 2010 census (New York Census). The racial make-up of the village according to the 2010 census was 98.14 percent Caucasians, 0.23 percent African Americans, 0.46 percent Asians, 1.51 percent included Hispanic or Latino race, and 0.70 percent was from other races. There were 325 households, and out of which 37.5 percent had children under the
age of 18 living with them. Fifty two percent were married couples who lived together, and 10.2 percent has a female householder with no husband present. 29.8 percent were non-family households.

Heartwood is a very small school district in Western New York. The whole district contains about 800 students in grades pre-K through twelfth. Each grade in the elementary school has only two teachers, and in the high school there are one to two teachers per class that is offered. The school feels like a community where all students know one another from pre-K to twelfth grade. Looking specifically in the classroom I carried out my study in there are twenty five students, all in fifth grade. Out of the twenty five students twelve are girls and there are thirteen boys. All students are eleven or twelve years old. Many students come from single family homes, and some live with aunts, uncles and grandparents. This fifth grade classroom has a large range of student ability. Conducting the study in this classroom encouraged me to create diverse lessons that met the needs of all learners.

I am a Caucasian female, so I am racially similar to the majority of my students. The study was conducted in a fifth grade classroom. There are 13 boys and 12 girls in this particular classroom. Twelve out of twenty five of my students are female, so I needed to be sensitive to gender issues that could have arisen during the study. I will note gender issues for both girls and boys, and how their experiences affect the study. As a teacher and a professional I share a similar socioeconomic status as the families of my class.

Within this school teachers structure writers workshop differently than many other districts than in which I have worked. Writers workshop is based on the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development is the difference between
what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. Writers workshop is student driven and teachers are focused on supporting students’ learning. The teacher does mini-lessons and conferences with the students often. However, the teacher and students learn as a collective group when a student shares his or her writing during author’s chair.

In my school, writers workshop is created and implemented only one way. Differentiated learning is not followed during writers workshop. Writers workshop at my school is when the teacher gives the students a writing prompt, and they are asked to answer the question. They don’t come up with topics on their own, they simply answer the prompts they are given by first echoing the question, giving three details, and finally an ending sentence. Usually, the students are not even prompted to go back, edit, and revise. They are given an opportunity to work more in depth with their writing. When collecting and analyzing data, I used my findings to influence how writers workshop is practiced within my school district.

Writers workshop occurs in the afternoon immediately following lunch. Writers workshop takes place for a forty-five minute block of time. However, I am only in the classroom for thirty minutes of the time slot. Each day during writers workshop we first engage in a daily language practice. This is when students receive a slip of paper that they glue into their journal, and correct three sentences they are given to make the grammar and spelling correct. Sometimes they correct capitalization, grammar, and punctuation. Each week we work on a new skill to help the students better their proofreading ability.

During writers workshop the students work at their own pace. After they finish their daily language practice they get it corrected by an adult in the classroom, and then begin responding to a writing prompt they are given, or another writing piece that was not completed previously.
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When students are working on a writing piece there is a chart in the classroom that they go to indicate what stage of the writing process they are working on. They move their magnet to let the teachers know what stage of writing they are in. The students follow recursive stages within the writing process, which include pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing their work (Au, et al., 2001). Students are given an “answer sandwich” template to help them have a checklist of what they need to be sure to include in their writing. For example some of the key components on the check list include a topic sentence check box, a details check box, and evidence from the text check box, a transitions check box, a closing sentence check box, and other important ideas to consider when writing.

The fifth graders are required to keep their daily language practice in a separate journal than their writing journal. This helps with their organization, and the teachers are able to see what stage of writing they are in, and when a conference is necessary.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

I am a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY in the childhood literacy program. I have less than one year of teaching experience with elementary aged students. I taught for a short time at a school district in Western New York working as an Academic Intervention Support (AIS) Reading teacher for grades 5, 6 and 7. I am presently in my first year of teaching at a different elementary school in Western New York. At this district I work as a consultant special education teacher. I work with students in grades 4th, 5th, and 6th grade.

There are many values I have as a teacher of writing, who recognizes the importance of building close bonds with students. I want my students to see that each one of them is important to me, and I am willing to take the time to get to know each of them on a personal level. I have
found that when I know my students’ strengths, weaknesses, motivations and interests, I have a better chance to create lessons that are engaging for them, and I have observed that to make a difference for many students academically. As far as writing goes, I think it is very important to show students that I value writing, and that writing is important throughout their whole lives. To help demonstrate this to my students I write in my journal when they are writing; sometimes I share some of my writing pieces with them (Calkins, 2011). I also like to demonstrate each part of the writing process with my students when I am introducing a new writing piece through a mini-lesson. For example, I share what my brainstorm looks like, and the process I go through to narrow my thoughts down to one specific topic. I believe it is important to model my writing for my students to help them learn and understand the process to go through when they are writing on their own. After the mini-lesson I encourage the students to work on their writing independently, or with a partner to practice using the strategy that they just learned. At the end of each writers workshop time I believe it is very important to celebrate the students’ work. I give the students the opportunity to share their writing, and then their peers provide them with positive feedback about what they enjoyed. Celebrating writing is a great way to give students a purpose to write.

I assess the students’ writing both through formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments are continual, daily, and I have a variety of different ways to collect this data. Sometimes I do this throughout observation notes, conference notes, a checklist, and so on. The formative assessments allow me to understand what the learner can do and what he or she is ready to do next. These data help me drive my mini-lessons and help me determine what needs to be taught during small group/one-on-one conferences with students. However, summative assessments help students and teachers focus on each individual student’s goal.
assessments are very important because they hold each student accountable for his or her own work. Also, I use the summative assessment to help me detect the student’s growth during the course of the academic school year. Assessing the students’ writing daily is crucial whether done through formative or summative assessments.

Confidentiality

Before the study began I talked to the principal and informed him of the data I will be collecting during the study. The data I collected was not from my students; it was from myself, and what I observed. I collected data for this study three different ways. I journaled, collected a variety of my lesson plans, and also took anecdotal records throughout the study. The data do not refer to students, the school, or the district by name.

Data Collection and Tools

This qualitative study explored what happens when teachers build close bonds with their students, and use their knowledge to create writing prompts for writers workshop. I gathered my data using journaling, lesson plans, and anecdotal records.

Journaling

I wrote in a journal three times a week throughout the course of this study. In this journal I recorded my field notes. It also used it to express my feelings about how my research was going, and record my frustrations, challenges, or share my celebrations. This communication between myself and the journal helped me to gain insight to what actions or paths I need to pursue in the study. Within my journal I searched for answers of how my personal connections with students impact my planning and teaching of writers workshop. In my journal I recorded
what I noticed about how well students were engaged in the writing task that was given. I also wrote about what I think about as I planned my lessons and as I taught I recorded my feelings as well as my reflections on the students’ engagement. I also recorded what I noticed that went well, or didn’t go so well that particular lesson. I recorded how the bonds I create with my students are being used in my lesson plan by highlighting topics that I have learned interest one or more of my students. Lastly I recorded what I was thinking for my future lesson and lesson plans.

My journal entries were recorded by using a double-sided journal. This is where I recorded my field notes on one side of the journal (left side), and reflected on what I wrote on the other side of the journal (right side). This is important because I am able to remember what made me react and feel the way I do about something that occurred during my writers workshop time. Each day I wrote in the journal after writers workshop. This always worked because I have a planning period that follows directly after writers workshop. It was important to make sure I wrote directly after class because it was fresh in my mind.

A research journal has many benefits to for the researcher. Some of the benefits include a record of the research experience that can be referred back to use as many times as necessary, a reminder of past ideas or theories that have arisen during the study, and a place to see my thinking behind a variety of research findings. I kept my journal locked in my filing cabinet during my study, and shredded it once my data analysis was complete.

Lesson Plans

I added a collection of my own lesson plans to a composition notebook during the course of this study. Each week I added at least three different lesson plans to my notebook. Keeping a
lesson plan notebook has many benefits for a researcher. Some of the benefits include a place to look back and see the variety of different mini-lessons that were taught in light of what I’ve learned about my individual students, the ways the I have adapted the lessons throughout the course of the six weeks, and a place to look back to see if my philosophy has changed along the way. The notebook that contained the lesson plans was kept in a filing cabinet during my research and shredded once my data analysis was completed.

**Anecdotal Records**

I added my anecdotal records to a journal during the course of this study. Each week I added different notes that I jotted down during writers workshop. I jotted down different things I saw that went well for the class, or what didn’t go so well that day. This was good for me to record because then I was able to see what I needed to change about my teaching practices to better my instruction and lessons for writers workshop. Recording anecdotal records to a journal during writers workshop helped ensure that I didn’t forget to add something to my journal. Anecdotal records are very benefits because during writers workshop I didn’t have time to stop and write down vivid notes of different things I noticed during my study. By jotting down a quick note it ensured that I wasn’t forgetting to add crucial information to the study.

I collected three different types of data: journals, lesson plans, and anecdotal records to this study to ensure accuracy. Triangulation of the many different types of data sources is one way for me to ensure credibility in this study.

**Procedures**

I embedded my research activities into my teaching practices each day. I created lesson plans for writers workshop each night, and carried them out the following day. When planning
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for my lessons I kept the individualized student matrices in mind to help be sure I was using what I know about each individual student when I was planning.

Also, writers workshop is run the same way each week. After lunch the students were given thirty minutes to write. They were given a prompt, picture, or activity and finished it within the thirty minute time slot that is allotted. The teachers circled the room to check students’ work once completed, and allow students the opportunity to share once everyone in the class has completed their work. Anecdotal records were kept during the writers workshop time, and directly following the writing time I wrote in my journal when the lesson was fresh in my mind. Also immediately after I filed my lesson plans into my notebook to be sure I was not missing any information that may be crucial to the findings. Writers workshop was structured the same though out the six weeks of my study.

Data Analysis

Journaling

I read though my journals many times to help me answer my research question: How does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and teaching in writers workshop? As I was reading through the journals I looked for common themes and recurring evidence that helped me answer my research question. I took notes and wrote codes in the margins too as I noted emerging themes (Hubbard & Power, 1999). This helped me be sure to remember important events that happened during writers workshop so I later formed conclusions.
Lesson Plans

I read through my lesson plans many times to look for changes in the plans over the course of the study. The plans were being compared to my journals to see if my lessons went as planned, or if they worked differently then I was hoping for. As I read through the lesson plans I looked for common themes and recurring evidence that helped me answer my research question. I took notes and wrote codes in the margins too as I note emerging themes (Hubbard & Power, 1999). This helped me to better understand my teaching philosophy, planning techniques and teaching techniques.

Anecdotal Records

I read through my anecdotal records to look for common themes. I also looked at the notes often because the anecdotal records were very important details that I jotted down to be sure I didn’t forget to include them in my study. Among the notes I looked for common themes and compare them to the common themes that I found in my journaling.

I looked across all three data sources to draw conclusions regarding my research study. I did this by comparing and contrasting my lesson plans with the journals and anecdotal records to find patterns within my data. I also looked closely at how knowing my students on an individual level impacted how I worked with them, reworded a prompt for them or guided them to make them successful. I did this by looking at my anecdotal records in comparison to my journal.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

It is important that I report my findings in a credible manner. My data analysis is grounded in my observations and reflections as a teacher. The themes that I discovered are based
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upon the data from the above sources. I used many varied forms of data collection: journaling, lesson plans, and anecdotal records. Gathering data from a variety of sources increased the credibility of my study through triangulation. To further the reliability of my study I used peer reviewed articles to help support my findings and claims. I had a peer research partner check my findings and critically audit my findings and analysis for credibility.

As a researcher, I am aware that I bring to this study my own biases and interpretations which could affect the reliability of the study. To validate my observations I used bracketing when discussing anything that may reflect my opinion. I put anything that may be biased in brackets so the reader knows that my opinion is added to my findings to avoid confusion. This is one way that researchers can show their own reflections and views which may show possible bias.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to this study. This study is a self-study so I did not have participants in the study. Also, since I am the researcher my interpretations and personal biases could interfere with the results, although I did my best to be as objective as possible.

Summary

Exploring how getting to know students on a personal level impacted the planning and teaching of writers workshop was a very informational and meaningful experience that I added knowledge to my current research and to my own knowledge as a teacher. As I examined my own teaching beliefs, how I came to these beliefs, and how they impact my planning and teaching techniques, I was more able to understand my own strategies. Keeping a journal,
tracking my anecdotal records, and reviewing my lesson plans helped me gain valuable insight of
the effectiveness of a student-teacher bond and how the bond impacts writers workshop.
Chapter 4: Interpretation of Data

Introduction

This study was completed to help me reflect upon my own teaching practices and beliefs about writers workshop. I wanted to see how knowing my students on an individual level helped me plan and teach writers workshop to my fifth grade students. I also wanted to reflect upon my own teaching methods. The study took place in an inclusive fifth grade classroom. Each session took about forty-five minutes to an hour. I taught my lessons Monday, Wednesday and Friday for six weeks.

Research Question:

This was a qualitative, inquiry based study, where I collected the data and provided instruction. The research question I hoped to answer through this study was:

*How does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and teaching in writers workshop?*

Data were collected through classroom lesson plans, reflections on how the lesson went and anecdotal records. Lesson plans were created before the unit plan began. During each lesson anecdotal notes were taken on post-it notes to assure that important information would not be forgotten. After the lesson was taught I had a planning period where I would write my lesson reflection (See appendices for all reflections and annotated notes.) and be sure to answer the following three questions in my response:

1. How was the student engagement during the lesson?
2. Did my lesson go as planned? Why or why not?
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3. How did knowing my students impact my lesson?
   
a. How did I accommodate or modify lessons to meet each student’s needs?

   After I taught the unit plan, I reflected on and analyzed the data. I did this by looking at my lesson plans, anecdotal notes, and lesson plan reflections for common themes and recurring evidence that help support and answer my research question.

   **Findings**

   **How does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and teaching in writers workshop?**

   In the beginning of December I began teaching my personal narrative unit. This unit was created to offer students the opportunity to learn about personal narratives. This unit allows students to build a classroom community because it helped all students get to know one another on a personal level. The unit plan objectives included the following:

   1. Students will come together as a community of writers.
   2. Students understand they will explore new topics, compose many drafts, revise, edit and proofread their personal narratives.
   3. Students will apply the elements of personal narratives into their writing.

   On December 18, 2013 I taught lesson plan number one part one of my unit plan. The objectives for this lesson include the following:

   1. Students will collect a list of ideas based on a variety of sentence starters found on their graphic organizer
   2. Students will begin an “All About Me Poem”.

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At the beginning of the lesson I introduced a graphic organizer to help assist the students when they began writing their “All About Me Poem”. This helped students generate ideas of what they would like to write about in the future, using the sentence starters on the graphic organizer. The students were very excited that they were getting to write about themselves, and learn about their classmates and teacher more. This lesson went very well, and the students were very engaged. Since I modeled how to fill in the graphic organizer the students learned a lot about me, so they were very engaged and excited to know about my personal life. They followed along as I filled out the organizer, and I did a think aloud to help the students generate self–questions. This was helpful when the students were working independently to complete their graphic organizers. They were able to ask themselves questions to further develop their ideas (See Appendix A). The lesson went as planned, and the students stayed on task and enjoyed working on their organizer when they were given time.

Knowing my students on a personal level was very important during this lesson. I knew I had a few shy students who would need extra help getting started. I went around and checked in with them to get them started on their graphic organizer. I spent time with the students I knew would need more assurance before getting started. I used self-generated prompts such as “You told me about – last week, where could we add that on our organizer?” If I had not known my students on a personal level I would not have been able to give my students ideas to help them head in the correct direction.

After assisting the necessary students the class time was almost over. The last five minutes of class I gave students the opportunity to share one of their ideas with their neighbor. I walked around the classroom to ensure students were still engaged and on task.
On December 20, 2013 I taught lesson one part two. The lesson plan objectives included the following:

1. Students will collect a list of ideas based on a variety of sentence starters found on their graphic organizer
2. Students will begin an “All About Me Poem”.

During this lesson we continued working on our “All About Me Poems.” I gave the students time to look back at their graphic organizers, and add more ideas if they thought of anything new that they may want to write about in the future. After giving students about five minutes to add ideas we worked on stretching our ideas and adding more details to our ideas that we listed thus far. First, I modeled how to do this for the students using the ideas I generated the lesson before. By adding more details to their ideas the students were able to write a poem by putting all their stretched ideas together. I gave students twenty minutes to work independently. During this time I walked around the room and helped students who were struggling trying to stretch their ideas. The lesson went very well, and the students were very engaged. I think they were engaged because they learned more about me, and their classmates. I elaborated on different stories and events from my life. The lesson went as planned because all students were able to stretch at least one idea with the time they were given. The students worked very hard and wanted to have more time to stretch other ideas as well.

Knowing my students on a personal level was crucial for this lesson. First, my students with disabilities are more successful when working in small groups. I was able to pull the students to the back table along with any other students who were struggling. At the back table I gave students more examples of how to stretch ideas, and gave them the opportunity to ask more
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questions if necessary. A few of my students learn best when they are given the opportunity to collaborate with their classmates and learn from one another. By having the students ask questions in small groups they were all able to not only ask their questions, but hear other classmates’ questions that helped them have a deeper understanding of the assignment. By giving the students the support they needed they were all successful. The last five minutes of class I gave students time to share one example of an idea they stretched on their graphic organizer.

On January 6, 2014 I taught lesson two. The lesson plan objectives included the following:

1. Students will collect a list of ideas based on a variety of sentence starters found on their graphic organizer

2. Students will begin an “All About Me Poem.”

The students were using their stretched ideas to draft their “All About Me Poems”. Before allowing the students to begin their drafts I reviewed stanzas, and started to model how I could turn my stretched ideas into stanzas for a poem. The students were very engaged during the lesson. However, the lesson did not go exactly as planned. The students were not sure what stanzas were, and how many lines to include. More students began to understand what stanzas were once I began working in small groups, and when a student compared a stanza to a small paragraph. Once the students did so I got all students’ attention and compared the idea of stanzas and paragraphs being similar and more students understood the concept.

Knowing my students during this lesson was very important. I knew one of my students was a very spatial learner. Spatial learners benefit from different colors on the paper to help remain focused and differentiate concepts. I had the student use a different color for each stanza to help
her separate her ideas in a way that made sense to her. This worked very well for her, and also some other students. They were able to understand the true meaning of the stanza, and by using colors to differentiate concepts they retained the information to be able to participate in group discussion at the end of class. Adding color is such an easy concept to implement, I was very happy to see how this small change made such a big difference for my students.

The last five minutes of class I gave students time to share and celebrate one stanza with the entire class. Giving students the opportunity to share their work with their classmates helps them to see a purpose in writing and it is very motivational. In my classroom it is important for students to have motivation when writing. When students are not motivated when they are writing, many have a difficult time getting started and remaining focused. When students know they are going to be given the opportunity to share their work they work hard and remain focused because they enjoy sharing their work with their classmates. For the lesson closing I gave students the opportunity to share a stanza from their poem if they were interested in doing so. Many students were very excited about their hard work and wanted to share at the end of class. Throughout the year I have learned that many of my students need to be able to share their work to push themselves to try their best. If they know only I am reading their writing I see a huge discrepancy between what they produce for me and what they produce to share with their classmates or post in the hallway. By every day having a chance to share their hard work with their classmates, it is pushing them to put their best effort forth.

One January 8, 2014 I taught lesson three. The lesson plan objectives included the following:

1. Students will review the different genres of writing.
2. Students will select one genre for the writing of a baseline sample.

3. Students will select an idea from their “All About Me” graphic organizer to develop into a baseline sample.

During this lesson we used one of our stretched ideas to turn it into a writing sample. This baseline writing piece is different than the “All About Me Poem.” This writing piece is for me to see what the students already know about writing a personal narrative. First I chose one of my stretched ideas from my graphic organizer and showed the students how to stretch the idea further and put it into a story. The students were very engaged during this lesson because they were familiar with writing stories. First, I had the students tell the story they were going to develop to their neighbor. I did this because this got them thinking about the story and the details they needed to add to make the story more exciting. Then I gave the students the remainder of class to write their narrative. The lesson plan went as planned, and a lot of students finished their first draft of this narrative.

Knowing my students was important today because a few students struggle when it comes to organizing their writing. I created an organizer that would benefit them. I broke the organizer into sections for setting, characters, purpose and details. By giving the students the organizer it made them think about and identify everything they needed to include in their writing before they got started. By planning and creating the key components of their writing piece they were able to clearly write their personal narrative without forgetting key components. Also, their writing was more organized, and their thoughts were in sequential order. Since I was using this writing sample as a baseline writing piece I didn’t have the students share a portion of their writing during the closing of the class. I didn’t have them share because I wanted to see what the students knew, and what they needed to work on. I didn’t have the students share since the
baseline writing piece was an assessment that would be placed in their fifth grade portfolio so their progress could be tracked throughout this writing unit plan.

On January 10, 2014 I taught lesson plan four part one. The lesson plan objectives included the following:

1. Students will understand that authors get their ideas from personal experiences.
2. Students use drawing as prewriting to generate ideas about places that matter to them.
3. Students will draft about their special place.

During this lesson plan students took notes on places that were important to them. I modeled some of my special places, and briefly talked about why they were important to me to help stimulate the students’ thinking. After listing a few special places I gave the students time to write down a few of their favorite places. After students recorded their special places I had them choose one. After they chose a special place I asked them to close their eyes and visualize this special place. When their eyes were shut I asked them questions such as “What time of day is it? What is the temperature? What does it smell like? Can you feel anything?” After their eyes were shut for about two minutes I had them explain their special place to a neighbor, and told them to use vivid words to help their partner to be able to visualize their special place and feel like they were there as well (See Appendix B). This lesson plan went very well, and the students were very engaged. The students were very excited to have a break from writing a poem or short story. However, many students struggled thinking of their special place. Many students thought it had to be somewhere they went on vacation, or somewhere exciting that no one else has ever been. After explaining to the students it could be anywhere that was special to them they were able to brainstorm a few more ideas.
Knowing one of my students in particular during this lesson plan was very important. I knew a particular student does not have a very good home life, and he travels often to live at relatives’ houses. He told me that nowhere was special to him so he could not complete this assignment. As soon as he said that to me, I began talking about his three favorite things that we always talk about. The three things include fishing, hunting and the Buffalo Sabres. He instantly began to write down all the good places to fish, where his three best tree stands are, and his favorite place to watch the Buffalo Sabres game. This student shuts down when he gets stuck, so if I was unaware of what he liked to do outside of school I would not have been able to give him ideas to get him started on his writing.

On January 13, 2014, I taught lesson plan four, part two. The lesson plan objectives included the following:

1. Students will understand that authors get their ideas from personal experiences.
2. Students use drawing as prewriting to generate ideas about places that matter to them.
3. Students will draft about their special place.

During this lesson, the students listened to a read aloud of the book *Secret Place* by Eve Bunting (1996). The students were directed to listen to the words to help them picture the story in their mind when I was reading it to them. After having the students involve themselves in a think-pair-share, we discussed what they were able to picture when I was reading the story aloud to them. The students went back to their seats and took out their lists of special places from the lesson before. They were given time to add more special places to their lists if they could think of any more. Then they were told to select one place they wanted to work with during the lesson. During the lesson instead of writing about their special place, they were given the opportunity to
draw it. The students were given time to draw their picture of their special place and then the last five minutes of class the students shared their drawings. The lesson went very well and the students were very engaged. The students enjoyed listening to the read aloud, and they came up with new special places to add to their list. The students enjoyed getting to draw their special place rather than writing about it. The lesson didn’t go exactly as planned, it went better! As I was reading to the students, I stopped and pointed out many descriptive words that helped the students’ picture what the writer was really talking about. This gave students many ideas that they can include in their own writing.

Knowing my students on a one on one level during this lesson didn’t play a crucial role like it has in the past lessons. However, it did make some impact. When I asked questions I was sure to reword the question when necessary and give extra wait time. By rewording the question and giving wait time, all students were able to be successful. A few of the students in my classroom need extra think time, and also need to hear questions worded a few different ways to truly understand what is being asked. By giving wait time and rewording the questions, every student was given a chance to be successful.

Also, when having the students share their drawings of their special place I learned more about each student on a personal level. The information I learned from the students was very beneficial for many reasons. First, by listening to the students talk about their special places, I learned more about where they come from and what their life is like outside of school. This showed me more of what they are interested in, and what their family and friends are like. Also, this was beneficial because my newly acquired knowledge about each student will benefit both the student and me in the following lessons. It will benefit us both because I will know more about the student, and I will be able to assist them when they are writing the story. Also, in the
future, I will know more about each student and help them chose a topic to write about. Building a one on one relationship with students is not a task that you do one time. Learning about the student never stops. By continuing to build a closer bond, it helps the student and the teacher both become more successful in the classroom.

On January 15, 2014 I taught lesson five. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will draft a descriptive piece about a special place using vivid images.

This lesson in particular went exceptionally well. The students used their drawings of their special places to assist them with their writing. We had a discussion about looking at the details in our pictures and using our details in our pictures to help assist our writing piece. Before letting the students get started, we discussed the different parts of the book we read called *Secret Place* (Bunting, 1996), and talked about why the author used specific words to help us readers paint a picture in our head. We created a chart together of different vivid words we found in the story that would be helpful to possibly use in our own writing. Finally, we discussed how Eve (the author) started her story with “In the heart of…” We talked about this because I have noticed lately that many students have a difficult time getting started. However, if they are able to use a pre-made sentence, they significantly benefit. Students were then given time to work on their own writing piece. The last five minutes of class we listed some of the descriptive words we used in our writing piece, and added them to our vivid words chart. The lesson went very well, and the students were excited to use the pictures they drew to help assist their writing. The students were very involved, and worked very hard to find and use vivid words in their writing pieces. The students did very well including vivid words verbs in their writing that help readers paint a picture in their head when they read their writing piece.
Knowing my students was very important this lesson because I know a few students in my class shut down when they get overwhelmed. I decided to give them the writing assignment in chunks. I chunked their writing assignment up by paragraphs (introduction, each body paragraph, and a conclusion). When their introduction was complete, I would give them the okay to move on to their next paragraph until their assignment was complete. By splitting up their work into chunks, and checking each paragraph as they finished, they got immediate feedback and were able to feel confident about the work they completed rather than worrying about if they were doing it correctly or not.

On January 17, 2014 I taught lesson six. The objectives for the lesson include the following:


2. Students will revise at least three verbs in their first draft of their special place writing piece.

During the lesson the students and I looked at my example of my special place writing piece. As we were reading my writing together, our job was to find the vivid verbs that I used in my writing piece. As we found the vivid verbs, we would highlight them. As we highlighted them, we would discuss if there was a stronger word that would help the reader understand the writing, and if we didn’t feel it was a strong word together we would make it stronger. We replaced many verbs and made them stronger in my writing piece. After modeling my writing, the students were given time to work on their writing. Their job was to highlight their verbs, and change 2 to 3 verbs to make their writing stronger. At the end of the lesson, students were given time to share the verbs they changed to make their writing stronger. I was very pleased how well the lesson
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went. The students were very engaged. The lesson went as planned for the most part. However, one small change was made to my lesson. The students were struggling finding verbs in my writing when I was modeling. We needed to review what a verb was before they truly understood what they needed to do. After the review the students were able to help identify verbs in my writing piece. After they identified my verbs, we spiced them up to make my writing stronger (we often relate writing and cooking together). The students had many ideas of verbs that would help make my writing piece stronger and more enjoyable for the reader.

When the students were given time to work on their own writing, I pulled a few students to the back table to assist them. Many of my students have a very strong vocabulary, but they struggle with spelling higher level words. Allowing the student to use a computer helps the students spell higher level words correctly. At the end of the class the students shared one example of a strong verb they added to their writing.

Knowing my students on a personal level helped me know how to guide them to add higher level verbs into their writing piece without them becoming frustrated and overwhelmed. Also, by giving my students time to use the computer, they were able to spell the verbs correctly. Finally, at the beginning of my lesson, a few students needed to hear many examples of verbs before they were able to identify them on their own. One student in particular learns best through movement, so we played a quick round of verb charades to help the students remember the definition and examples of many verbs. Keeping my students in mind when planning and delivering lessons is very important to my teaching success.

One January 22, 2014 I taught lesson seven. The lesson plan objectives included the following:
1. Students will create maps of special places in their life

2. Student will identify possible personal narrative topics from one specific place.

During the lesson, I had the students look back at their special place list and see if they had any more ideas they wanted to add. Then I told the students to choose one place they wanted to explore more deeply. I had them place an X next to the special place they remembered a lot of stories about and enjoyed, like how pirates put an X next to buried treasure. After they placed X next to the special place they wanted to write about, I modeled the next step. I showed them how I wanted them to sketch the special place on a map. I picked my grandma’s house, so I drew the back yard, the house and the basement because I had a variety of stories from her house. Next, I gave students time to sketch their special place. After about ten minutes I had the students give me their attention, and I showed them how I placed an X on the spots on my drawing that I had a lot of memories about and could tell many stories. I told them they were allowed to add one, two or three X’s on their sketch. After the students placed their X’s, I gave them one minute to decide what X they wanted to write about. After they all chose, they were given time to tell the story about the X to their neighbor. After they told their neighbor the story, they were given the rest of the time to work on their writing (See Appendix C). This lesson went very well, and the student engagement was higher than normal. The students were very engaged because I brought in a treasure box filled with different items that I included in my story of my grandmother’s house. Another reason the students were engaged was because they were able to create their own pirate map and mark the treasure with an X before they began writing. When I was telling stories about my grandma’s house, I used the artifacts I brought to help make my story exciting for the students. The students followed along, and didn’t get off topic even though this was very different then what we normally do in the classroom. They followed along and paid
attention to the process I went through to choose a place to write about. By modeling my thinking out loud, it assisted the students when they chose their special place. They understand the questions to ask themselves to make sure they were picking a place that really interested them. The lesson went as planned, and the students really enjoyed the lesson.

Knowing my students interests helped me plan the whole pirate themed lesson. One student in particular I noticed was not motivated in the past lessons, and it was difficult to catch his attention, and encourage him to get started. He loves pirates, so I thought by including pirates in a lesson he would be motivated to get involved and write. After teaching the lesson, I learned that I was correct, and he did a wonderful job. He wrote more than I have ever seen him write. Also, other students in the class were very excited and more engaged than normal. The lesson was a lot of fun, and the students accomplished a lot that day. By knowing the students’ interests, I was able to create a lesson to catch their attention and help making their writing experience engaging.

This lesson taught me that I can never know every detail about the students in my classroom. Throughout the year, no matter how well I thought I knew each student, I was going to learn more. I learned that even though all of my students are not interested in pirates they are all interested in engaging in lessons that are out of the ordinary. This lesson inspired me to make sure at least one time a year I somehow bring one of each students’ interest to life in a lesson I teach. It was very motivational for the student who was interested in pirates, and he was able to bring his background knowledge to the table and allow all the students to benefit from all his knowledge. He was very excited about how much he knew, and he was very happy to share all his background knowledge with his peers. It was amazing to see what a difference it made by creating a lesson based entirely around one students interest.
On January 24, 2014 I taught lesson eight. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will understand some characteristics of personal narrative genre.

During this lesson, I started by defining what a personal narrative was. Then I gave the students time to discuss with their neighbor if they have ever written a personal narrative. After they were given time to discuss this with their partners, we talked about the same prompt in a whole class discussion. Many students gave examples such as when they wrote about winning a football game, or going on vacation. All of the students who shared talked about only exciting events, so, due to the confusion we had in the past, I told the students a story about cutting the grass and asked if that was a personal narrative. After discussing it, we all agreed that it was. Next, I had the students take out their special place list, their picture and their treasure maps they created. I then gave them time to choose what to write about, and reminded them to use vivid verbs in their writing. They were given the rest of the writing period to work on their writing. At the end of the class, students were able to share their writing in small groups. During this time, I circled around the classroom to listen to different students’ writing and be sure all students remained on task. The students loved this lesson because they were able to talk with a partner about a personal narrative that they wrote before, and talk about their story a little right at the beginning of the lesson. After giving the students ten minutes to share a story or two with their partner, we came back together and I told the students they could chose anything to write about from their list, picture or map. The students were very excited about getting so much choice today. They were then given the rest of the class to work on whatever it was that they choice.

Knowing one of my students allowed me to know ahead of time that it would be too much choice for her to pick what she wanted to write about with so many choices. I wrote three
different prompts on index cards. The cards said edit your favorite place, pick a new place, write a new About Me poem. Whatever card she picked she had to do the task it stated. She drew the new place card, and instantly picked a new place and got started writing. As I was walking around, I saw a few other students struggling with the amount of choice I gave them so I had them pick a card as well. I learned some students love choice and some need more structured instruction. I noticed that choice was hard for many of my students with disabilities. Reflecting upon this after the lesson, I noticed that the students with disabilities who struggled had a note on their IEP that stated they needed structure and guidance in the classroom. By giving the students a choice and seeing that they struggled from this I learned that those few students need more structure in my lessons, and do not adapt well to change and choice in lessons.

On January 27, 2014 I taught lesson nine. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will use a graphic organizer to organize one idea of a personal narrative and turn it into a first draft.

During the lesson, I introduced a graphic organizer, and explained to the students the importance of using one. The graphic organizer was divided into sections: opening, what happened first, next, finally, and I will always remember/ I learned. I modeled choosing a topic that I wanted to write about. After choosing a topic, I modeled to the students how to fill in the graphic organizer, and I kept stressing to the students that they will not be writing in complete sentences. After I modeled how to fill in the graphic organizer, I gave the students time to fill in their own. After they were done, I gave them time to pair and share with their neighbors what they came up with. This lesson went very well. The students were excited to get to choose what they wanted to write about and also they liked using the graphic organizer. Although the lesson
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went well, one thing didn’t go as planned. The students are so used to writing in complete sentences; they were trying to do that on their graphic organizers as well. They ran out of room, and I had to have them attach a separate sheet of lined paper to the organizer to finish getting their ideas down on paper. Along with writing in complete sentences, the students took longer than anticipated to fill out the organizer.

Knowing my students played a minor role in this lesson plan. I had my lower level writers use the block graphic organizer in strips. I cut the organizer into sections that were titled opening, what happened first, next, finally, and I will always remember/ I learned. Each section was then glued on to lined paper to assure my students that they had room to get their ideas down, and also this allowed them to only focus on one prompt at a time. Finally, knowing my students was important because most of the stories the students were writing about I have previously heard. Therefore, I was able to help the students record the correct events in the correct place on the graphic organizer. Also I was able to tell them if they were missing any key details on their graphic organizer. By interacting with the students daily and giving them the opportunity to share stories, I have heard many stories throughout the year. The stories that they share are usually stories that show up in their writing. If I didn’t take the time to listen to them each day as they enter my room with excitement, I wouldn’t have been able to help students fill in their graphic organizer the way that I was able to in this lesson. Knowing my students, and being able to help them when necessary, is a wonderful feeling as a teacher.

On January 29, 2014 I taught lesson ten. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will practice writing strong leads for their personal narratives.
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The lesson plan started by explaining to the students what a strong lead is, and why a strong lead is important in a writing piece. Next, I gave each student a strong lead handout to read and look over. I had the students then pick their favorite lead that they think they would be able to use in their own writing. After giving them time to pick, I had them talk about what they chose and why they chose it with their neighbor. After giving the students five minutes to talk with their neighbors, I regained the classes’ attention. We looked at a writing piece called *She Jumped In* (Yaccarin, 2009), and talked about the lead that was used, and also determined if it was effective or not. After having a group discussion, I let the students pick a topic to write about and include a strong lead in their writing piece. During the last five minutes of class, the students had time to share the lead they used in their writing piece. This lesson went better than I expected. The students were very engaged and enjoyed creating catchy beginnings for their personal narratives. After the students were happy with their lead, they were very excited to continue working on their writing piece. This lesson went better than planned for a few reasons. First, the students had many great ideas other than the ones on the handout I gave them. A few students knew writing questions can be catchy, and also they knew how to use different vocabulary to make the reader want to continue reading.

Knowing my students played an important role today. I had a few of my students write two leads they thought worked very well. After they had written two, the students shared their leads in a small group, and the group helped the students decide which lead was more effective. I knew from previous experience, there are a handful of students in my class who work better when they are given the opportunity to collaborate and get assistance before getting too far and having to erase or restart their writing. By giving them a chance to collaborate, they were able to have peers help assist them in choosing and editing their lead before getting started.
had the leads they were going to use, they continued writing their personal narratives. I circled around the room, and read each student's lead. I helped them edit the vocabulary if necessary to make their lead more catchy.

On January 31, 2014 I taught lesson eleven. The lesson plan objectives included the following:

1. Students will start new personal narrative writing pieces.
2. Students will apply the elements of personal narrative writing into their new pieces.

During this lesson I introduced to the students what sweet learning meant. Sweet learning is something you learn outside of school from someone you care about. I brainstormed a list of ideas of my sweet learnings, and gave a brief story about each one to try to get the students thinking. Then I gave the students five minutes to pair share with their neighbor about a few sweet learnings they remember from the past. Having the students talk about their ideas gave other students ideas of things they may have forgotten. After the students had a chance to talk with a partner, they were given time to brainstorm a list. After the students generated their lists, they were then given time to write their own personal narratives of a sweet learning on their own. This lesson didn’t go as planned. However, the students were very engaged, and wanted to understand what I was asking them to do. The students didn’t give up and, with more examples and discussion; the students began to understand what a sweet learning was. When I saw they were not catching on with my examples, I read them *Grandma’s Visit* (*Yaccarin, 2009*), and then discussed why this story was an example of a sweet learning (See Appendix D). It took many examples for all students to catch on and fully understand the task.
Knowing my students was very important this lesson. It was important for five students in particular. Knowing the relationships the students had with their families, and knowing their interests helped me ask question to lead students toward coming up with a sweet learning. For example, one of my students loves to fish. I got him thinking about who taught him how to fish, and from there he determined his sweet learning. If I didn’t know what his life was like outside of school, and if I didn’t know his interests, I wouldn’t have been able to help him chose a topic and help him get started and headed in the right direction.

On February 3, 2014 I taught lesson twelve. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will use dialogue in their personal narratives.

During the lesson the students and I reviewed what dialogue was and how to recognize it when we see it in writing. We used the short story *Grandma’s Visit* (Yaccarin, 2009), to help us with our lesson. We highlighted all the dialogue we found in the story as we read. After we identified all of the dialogue in the story, I read the story aloud without the dialogue to show the students how boring stories are when we don’t use dialogue to help our readers know what is going on. Next we looked at my sweet learning personal narrative that didn’t have dialogue in it. I re-read it to the students, and then had them and a partner identify a place I could add dialogue to make my story more engaging and interesting for the readers. After hearing the students’ ideas, as a class we added dialogue into my writing in two different places. After the students understood how to insert dialogue the students were given the rest of the class to add dialogue into their own writing. At the end of the class the students shared one sport where they inserted dialogue in a small group. I walked around the classroom to listen to the students’ ideas, and be sure all students remained on task.
This lesson didn’t go exactly as planned. The students weren’t as engaged as normal. The students were not very familiar with adding dialogue in their writing, so they struggled a little with this lesson. Besides the students not being as engaged as normal the lesson went as planned. The students were able to highlight the quotes in Grandma’s Visit, (Yaccarin, 2009) with no problem. They understood the dialogue made the story real and exciting for the reader; they just didn’t enjoy the lesson as much as different lessons from the past.

Knowing my students was important in this lesson because I knew a few students would need more assistance and modeling. I pulled a small group of students to the back table and modeled how to go back and see where dialogue would help improve their writing. I modeled this activity by having short paragraphs written on chart paper, and index cards with dialogue on them. We practiced inserting dialogue to make our short paragraphs on chart paper more engaging and pleasant to read. I only had them add dialogue to one place in their stories to check for understanding. I didn’t want to help them with too many examples because many of my students get irritated when I try to assist them more than necessary, and it causes them to shut down. Many of my students have the modification of small groups and kinesthetic movement on their individualized education plans. Throughout the year I have learned what works for the students, and continue to learn more from them every day. I implement new strategies to help meet their needs and help them become as successful as possible.

On February 5, 2014 I taught lesson thirteen. The objective for the lesson is listed below:

1. Students will punctuate dialogue in their stories properly.

During the lesson, I read aloud a short passage from the book Frindle (Clements, 1996, p.32-33). After reading the two pages aloud I gave each student a copy of the two pages to look
at. I gave the students a few minutes to read the two pages to themselves and highlight all the
dialogue they found. After this was complete I gave the students two minutes to work with their
neighbor to talk about the punctuation they noticed around the dialogue in the story *Frindle*
(Clements, 1996). After the two minutes, I had the students share what they noticed when
working with their partners. I added to the discussion the important pieces that the students left
out, and wrote a few short examples of writing pieces using dialogue on the board. After the
mini-lesson I gave the students the remainder of the class to go back to their writing pieces they
worked on previously and fix the dialogue they inserted, and add more dialogue if they had
enough time using the correct rules. At the end of class I had the students show their partners the
changes, and help each other make additional changes if necessary. During the lesson the
students were very engaged. They enjoyed reading a section from the book *Frindle* (Clements,
1996), and getting time to fix up their writing from the previous lesson. The lesson went as
planned. All students were able to find and highlight all dialogue from the text. However, when
students were writing down the rules, they were very confused. We had to review different rules
and see many examples of how to use dialogue correctly in our stories.

Knowing my students was helpful today because a few of my students were struggling
with wording the dialogue in their stories. I gave the struggling students tape recorders to read
their stories into, and then play it back to hear where it didn’t make sense. They kept recording
and changing their writing with the tape recorder. They really enjoy using tape recorders to help
improve their writing because sometimes when the students read their writing silently they don’t
catch their errors. By reading it out loud into a tape recorder, I have found they are more likely to
catch their mistakes. I began implementing different strategies to try and motivate students to re-
read their writing since the beginning of the school year. Many students rarely re-read their
writing. However, since I have implemented the tape recorders, I have noticed the students are more motivated to re-read, and their writing is significantly benefiting.

On February 7, 2014 I taught lesson fourteen of my unit plan. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Writers will decide what piece they want to finish, revise and edit.

During this lesson I gave the students time to reread all of the drafts they had created throughout our personal narrative unit. I told the students to decide what piece they like the most and wanted to further develop. I gave the students time to work with their neighbors and discuss what they need to do to improve their chosen writing piece. After the students were done discussing the necessary changes, we made a checklist on the board of what they needed to include. The students and I came up with the following list:

1. Re-read
2. Add details
3. Include dialogue
4. Practice another lead
5. Add vivid words
6. Change all dull words

The students were then given time to work on their writing piece of their choice. When there were five minutes left of class, I had the students share their new drafts with a neighbor. I walked around the classroom to listen to the students and made sure they remained on task. The students worked independently, and the lesson went as planned.

Knowing my students was helpful this lesson because I knew their strengths, weaknesses and individualized education program goals. I pulled students to the back table one by one to talk about their writing and what they can do to make their writing stronger. The students responded
very well to the conferences. For many of my students I had to write on post it notes what to fix because they struggle focusing on more than one thing at a time. Also, they don’t like when I write on their work because it makes it look messy. By writing it on a post it, they get to keep their first draft nice and neat, and cross out my comments once they have fixed the necessary changes. The conferences helped the students know exactly what they needed to add or change to meet the expectations.

On February 10, 2014 I taught lesson fifteen of my unit plan. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will write an ending that leaves an effect on their reader.

During the lesson I introduced a variety of ending sentences to the students. We took time to compare the leads and endings of stories. The students were surprised to see they are written in a very familiar way. I gave each student a strong ending handout. Together we read over the handout so all students understood what I was asking them to do. I chose an ending that I liked from the handout and used it in one of my previous writing pieces. Before having the students try an ending on their own, we discussed why the ending of our stories are so important. The ending is that last part the reader will read, and it should be powerful, just like the lead. The remainder of the class the students added an ending to one of their previous drafts. When five minutes were left, I had the students share with their neighbors the endings they chose. I walked around the room to monitor the students, and assisted any of the groups that needed help. The students were very engaged during this lesson plan. I think they were engaged because they enjoyed creating leads and saw how similar the endings were to the lead. The students enjoyed hearing the different types of endings, and liked to see what ending would work best with their writing
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pieces. Although the students were engaged and excited to come up with strong endings, they were not very effective. For example, a few of my students wrote “I hope you enjoyed my story”, or “the end”. I let the students work with partners, and it made a huge difference. The fifth grade class does a great job collaborating and working together. Partner work is always very effective in this classroom.

Knowing my students helped me make the groups for this lesson. I tried to have a mixture of students in each group so they had a variety of different thinking styles. By having students that come from a variety of different backgrounds, and students that are at different levels helped the students get many different ideas from different views to create powerful well thought out endings to their writing pieces. If I didn’t know the different experiences my students had, it would have been more difficult to make groups. I was able to group the students by interests so I knew they had background knowledge of the topics their peers were writing about.

On January 12, 2014 I taught lesson sixteen of my unit plan. The lesson plan objective is listed below:

1. Students will use a revision checklist to make final changes to their drafts.

During the lesson I demonstrated the revision process on one of my previous writing samples. I gave the students a revision checklist handout. Also to help the students with their revisions and to be sure they had all their necessary pieces in the final copy I had them rainbow edit. They highlighted their lead, vivid verbs, dialogue and ending in different colors. This helped the students identify all the parts of their writing, and also they made changes to their writing if necessary. After the students completed the checklist, highlighted and identified the key components they rewrote their stories with the correct changes. At the end of the class period
the students shared their stories with partners of their choice. I walked around the room to listen to the stories as the students read, and also to make sure the students were remaining on task. The students were very engaged and excited about the revision lesson. Once I introduced how we were going to revise our work they became very eager to get started. The students did very well using the different color highlighters and the check list. They took their time and made many corrections to their writing pieces. After the lesson was taught, the students were given independent work time. During this time, I spent a time with each student to check their understanding and help them make corrections if necessary.

Knowing my students was very important this lesson. I had to differentiate instruction for my students with disabilities. I had the students only concentrate on one paragraph at a time. Also, they knew they could ask their revision partner for help if necessary. I included the variety of colors and the editing checklist to help meet all students’ needs. Students were able to focus on each component one at a time, and it helped them stay on task and make the changes that were necessary. By using the different colors for each type of revision (capitals, punctuation, grammar and so on) it allowed the students to look for one element at a time and they didn’t feel overwhelmed. Also, using colors helped my one student who is a very spatial learner remain focused and track the necessary changes.

On February 14, 2014 I taught lesson seventeen of my unit plan. This was the final lesson plan in the personal narrative unit. The objectives for the lesson include the following:

1. Students will learn and apply editing techniques.
2. Students will finish the final copy of their personal narratives.
During the lesson I handed out an editing checklist to each student. We read over the check list together. I had the students circle anything in their writing that looked funny to them. Next, I had the students circle all the punctuation they had in their writing. Between the circles, I had the students count the number of words to help them identify run on sentences. Next, I had the students circle all the dialogue they had in their writing and look at it closely to check for quotation marks and correct punctuation. Finally, I wanted the students to check the fluency of their writing. I had them read their writing out loud so they could see if it sounded the way they wanted it to. As a final point, I gave the students the rest of the class period to complete their editing check list, and also rewrite their final copies of their personal narratives. At the end of the class, I had the students share their final writing pieces in small groups because they were very proud of their hard work. I walked around the classroom and listened to many students share their writing. I was very pleased with how wonderful many of the students did (See Appendix E). This lesson went very well. The students were very excited to edit their draft and write their final copy. Since the students could finally see the end of the unit, they were very motivated.

Although the students worked hard during the lesson, it didn’t go exactly as planned. I should have done editing and final copies two separate days. Very few students finished everything I thought they would. I had to extend our writing block for all students to finish their final copies before winter break.

Knowing my students was very helpful today. Many students struggled catching their own mistakes reading to themselves. I had students read their narrative out loud and it helped the students find the sentence fragments that they missed when reading their stories to themselves. A few students asked if they could use the tape recorders to help assist them when finding mistakes. Using the tape recorders is very motivational for the students. The students really
enjoyed writing personal narratives, and many want to write another personal narrative over winter break.

**Themes**

**Theme 1 – Student Interest and Planning**

One theme I uncovered throughout the analysis of the lessons in my unit plan was how knowing students’ interests helped me plan and implement my lessons. For example, in lesson plan 1, part 1, a few students were having a hard time coming up with a list of topics that they could write about for their “All About Me Poem”. By knowing my students on a personal level I was able to say to each one who was struggling “You told me about ___ last week, why don’t you add that to your list”. Knowing each student I was able to give them different suggestions they could write about when they got stuck.

In lesson plan four, part one I saw the theme reoccur. One student was unsure what to write about when we were beginning our special place writing piece. I asked the student where a good place to go fishing is, where a good place to hunt is, or where his favorite place to watch the Buffalo Sabres play hockey is. After brainstorming his favorite place to hunt, fish and watch hockey, he was able to add the three places to his list of special places.

I also saw this theme reoccur in lesson eleven where the students were asked to write about a sweet learning. One student couldn’t come up with a topic to write on his own. I knew the student loved to go fishing with his sisters and parents. I began asking him questions about how he learned to fish, and who taught him. This sparked his memory, and he was able to write about his experiences learning to fish from his father.
Another place this theme reoccurred was in lesson fifteen. In lesson fifteen, the students were struggling to come up with different endings to their writing pieces. I decided to group the students so they could have peers to collaborate with. Since I knew my students’ interests and variety of background knowledge, I was able to group the students more effectively. I grouped the students based on what topic they were writing about, and their variety of background knowledge. I don’t like to group by ability so knowing my students helped me to effectively group my students based on interests. Knowing my students’ interests helped me give students suggestions to write about, and effective ways to group my students.

Another way knowing my students’ interests helped me was when I was planning my lesson keeping each individual’s interests in mind. One lesson in this unit plan I kept one specific student in mind to help motivate him to try his best when writing. He was having a difficult time writing to the best of his ability, and finding a way to motivate him was very difficult. One student in my class is very interested in pirates. I decided to create a lesson with pirates as my focus. This lesson we were writing about our favorite places. I decided to bring in different artifacts from my favorite place to try to help the students get a few ideas that they could write about. However, I brought the items in in a treasure chest. As soon as the students saw the treasure chest I knew by the look on their faces I caught their attention. This lesson I had the students draw their favorite places, and mark their favorite places with an X. For example, I drew my grandma’s house and the land around her house. I placed an X on the creek, on the tire swing, and in her basement. The students were then given time to draw their treasure maps to mark their special places. Keeping the one student in mind not only benefited him, but it benefited all the students by engaging them all in a fun lesson plan. It also benefited the students learning. It benefited their learning because the students were very motivated which led to
stronger writing pieces. By surprise more students than the one were very interested in pirates. Therefore, they applied their background knowledge to assist them while creating their treasure maps. Having a well-planned treasure map then led to successful writing because the students were able to include more descriptive details by using their maps to assist them.

**Theme 2- Knowing students’ individualized education plans, strengths and weaknesses**

Another theme I uncovered throughout the analysis of the lessons in my unit plan was using the information on the students’ individualized education plans (IEPs), their strengths and their weaknesses to help drive my instruction. Using what I knew about students and using strategies to help them reach their goals was very useful in this unit plans. In this unit plan I tried many new strategies to help the students reach their IEP goals, and also find what would motivate the students and allow them to become successful.

One example of using the students’ individualized education plans, strengths and weaknesses was by having smaller groups, guided instruction and collaboration. In lesson plan one, part two, after teaching how to effectively stretch out ideas into a story, I knew a few students needed more assistance. I assisted this group of students by pulling them to the back table and providing the students with more guided practice. When pulling the students to the back table, I have learned that the students feel more comfortable asking questions in small groups, and I can teach new concepts at a slower pace to help the students have a better understanding of what I am teaching.

I saw this theme reoccur in lesson six as well. In lesson six, I noticed a few students were struggling with the spelling and vocabulary in their writing. I pulled a group of students to the back table to help them use a dictionary, thesaurus, or use the computer to help improve their
spelling and vocabulary. By providing the students with the support necessary, they were able to improve their writing.

Another time, pulling the students to the back table was effective in lesson ten. After teaching the lesson about writing effective leads in our personal narratives, I noticed a few students were struggling. I knew the students benefited from collaboration, so I pulled the students to the back table, and provided them with more assistance, and gave them a chance to collaborate with their peers. The students helped one another use strong vocabulary and write a catchy lead that the reader would really enjoy.

Another time I saw this theme reoccur was lesson twelve. During lesson twelve, I taught the students how to use dialogue in their writing. After the lesson I knew some of the students needed more support. I called the students to the back table and provided them with extra examples and more guided practice. This allowed the students to successfully use dialogue in their own writing piece.

The final time I used small groups from the students’ IEP was in lesson fourteen. In lesson fourteen I gave students time to work on a writing piece of their choice. When the students were working, I called them one by one to the back table to have a writing conference with them. During the writing process we discussed what they were missing, and what they needed to change. By having the chance to work with each student one on one, I was able to give each student the support he or she needed to be successful.

Another way I used the students’ IEP, strengths and weaknesses was when I decided to break assignments in to smaller parts to help the students become more successful. I did this in lesson five. The students were working on a story which contained an introduction, body
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paragraphs, and a conclusion. Many students felt overwhelmed with this assignment, and benefited from direct feedback. I decided to break the assignment into sections to help assist them. The students would write their introductions, I would look the introduction over and then tell them they could start the next paragraph. They would finish the next paragraph and I would look at that and so on. By chunking the assignment and giving the students immediate feedback, it helped them become more successful.

Another time I saw this theme occur was in lesson nine. The students were filling out a graphic organizer in this lesson, and looking at all the sections on the graphic organizer was very overwhelming for a few students. I helped them by cutting the graphic organizer into parts, and gluing them on a lined sheet of paper for the students. The students then were able to focus on one component at a time. Breaking the whole into parts is very important for a few of my students.

The final time I used chunking was in lesson sixteen. During this lesson, the students were revising their stories using the different colors to help them identify different components. I had a few students look at their story paragraph by paragraph. This allowed the students to not feel overwhelmed and only worry about one section at a time. By using colors and breaking the story up by paragraph, it helped my students to be successful.

Another example of using the students’ individualized education plans, strengths and weaknesses was by motivating the students to re-read their writing in a fun engaging way. A group of my students’ individualized education plans state it is necessary for the students to re-read their writing. However, the students dislike doing so. I found a fun, easy way to motivate the students to re-read their writing. I allowed them to use tape recorders. In lesson thirteen the
students were beginning to edit and revise their writing pieces. Many students in my class are reluctant to re-read their writing to find mistakes, and when they read it to themselves they often don’t catch their mistakes. I have the students read their story into the tape recorder and play it back to catch mistakes that may be present.

Another time I had the students’ use the tape recorder was in lesson seventeen. The students were revising their final writing piece before they published it, and a few students were struggling to catch their errors. By having the students use the tape recorders, the students were able to catch many mistakes they missed when reading it to themselves.

Another example of using the students’ individualized education plans, strengths and weaknesses was by using the students’ modifications to help them become successful. One of my students is a spatial learner, and learns best from using different colors. In lesson two the students were learning how to write an “All About Me Poem”, and the student was struggling to see different stanzas. By having each stanza represented by a different color the student was able to grasp the concepts of stanzas.

Another time I used the students’ modifications was in lesson number three. A few students benefit from graphic organizers. I helped the students fill out graphic organizers before having them get started on their writing pieces. By organizing their writing before writing the stories, they were able to be sure they included all necessary components.

Another modification I implemented into the unit plan was giving students more wait time, and re-wording questions whenever I asked them. For example in lesson plan four, part two I was asking the students a variety of questions about the story we read as a class I was sure to ask each question a few different ways to make sure all students knew what I was asking, and
also give the students enough wait time to develop their answer in their heads. By giving the students extra time to think all students were able to participate and answer questions.

The last way I used the modifications from my students’ individualized education plans was in lesson eight. In lesson eight I gave students the chance to add on to a previous piece of work, or begin a new writing piece. Two of my students struggle when making choices, so ahead of time I wrote on three different index cards. The cards said edit your favorite place, pick a new place, and write a new “All About Me Poem”. The card the students drew indicated the topic to write about. This helped the students who struggled making a choice know what to write about. I learned some students feel overwhelmed when they are given choices.

Throughout the personal narrative unit plan, I used many strategies from the students’ individualized education plans, strengths and weaknesses to help plan and implement my lesson plans. Small groups, collaboration, chunking, motivation to re-read, and making modifications all were implemented because I knew each student’s strengths and needs. If I didn’t have a one on one relationship with each student I wouldn’t have known how to successfully help each student.

Theme 3- Coming to knowing my students and using what I learn about each one daily

The final theme I uncovered throughout the analysis of the lessons in my unit plan was discovering that learning about my students is a process. Each day I learned more about each student, and I needed to use what I learned each day to help plan for the following lessons. I never reached an ending point about learning about my students. Learning about my students is like climbing a stair case. Each day the information I gathered took me one step closer to knowing my student. However, I need to accomplish many steps to reach the top of the staircase.
This theme was uncovered in lesson plan one, part one and two. In both of these lesson plans the students were working on their “All About Me Poem”. When the students were engaging in this activity they were writing about themselves. This helped me learn more about them, and I was able to use what I learned in these two lesson plans to help me later on in the unit plan. Also, I was able to learn more about the students’ families’ interests and what their lives are like outside of school. This activity helped me add more to my student matrix that I created in the beginning of the school year. The matrix is never finalized: I learn more about my students daily, and add newly learned information when necessary.

Another time this theme was uncovered was in lesson plan four, part one and two. During these two lesson plans the students were writing about their special places. When they were writing about their special places I learned a lot about each student. I learned where they spend their time at home, on the weekends, and what they do over the summer. Some students’ special place was alone in their tree house, some was being at the beach, and some students’ favorite place was at grandma’s house. Seeing how unique each student is helped me learn more about each individual student, and notice how diverse each student in my classroom truly is.

This theme was also uncovered in lesson plan seven. During this lesson the students had to choose one of their special places and draw it on a treasure map. By drawing their special place I was able to learn more about what it looked like, where it was located, and what there was to do there. Learning about the students is an ongoing process, and if teachers pay attention to their students daily, they can learn a lot from them that will help to create and implement lessons plans to meet their individual needs.
Summary

This qualitative study answered my question; how does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and implementation of writers workshop? When students were writing personal narratives they had to deeply think about many different events that have occurred in their lives. They also had to be able to learn new concepts and build upon the knowledge in each lesson. They got to have independence during writing time, and also were given assistance when it was necessary. As a teacher, I was able to help each student to be effective at writing his or her personal narrative because I developed a personal relationship/one-on-one relationship with each student to be able to assist every student in many ways throughout the personal narrative unit plan.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find an answer to one research question regarding how student-teacher relationships influence my implementation and planning for writers workshop. My research questions was:

How does knowing my students on a personal level impact my planning and teaching in writers workshop?

In this chapter I will discuss conclusions I have made based upon my findings from the study. I will discuss how the findings, as outlined in chapter four, benefitted my future teaching practices. Recommendations for future research will also be given along with final thoughts on my research.

Conclusions

Student interest, motivation and planning

There were many benefits of having one-on-one relationships with each one of my fifth grade students. One benefit of knowing each student on a personal level was I knew what each student’s strengths were. Knowing each student’s strengths allowed to me teach to their strengths, rather than always dwelling on the student’s needs (Heward, 2009). Also, knowing what the students were each interested in, and what motivated them, I was able to plan lessons that would catch the learner’s attention. By making school engaging, the students are more likely to be engaged and motivated. Students are also more motivated to engage in age appropriate behaviors when they have high-quality relationships with their teachers (O’Connor et al., 2010).
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Students who like their teachers strive to please them, and want to try their best. I was sure to plan each lesson with the student’s interest in mind because “it is engagement of the mind that transforms the mind” (Costa, 2001). If students are not engaged in the lesson taught in the classroom they are not truly internalizing the information the teacher is hoping they learn. Many students I worked with learned the newly taught information one day, and understood it very well. However, the next day it was forgotten. When the students are active during the lesson they can retain the newly learned content for a longer amount of time. The teacher can assure the students are engaged by creating lesson plans based around the students’ interests and motivations. The true purpose of education is to enhance the students’ understanding of a variety of content areas (Harvey, 2007). Students need to build stores of knowledge in order to construct meaning. When students build the stores of knowledge they are turning the newly learned information into their background knowledge which they will then use as a stepping stone later on. Caring teachers listen to their students, and are very responsive. Teachers can infer certain needs from their students when they are actively listening and taking time to talk to each student daily (Noddings, 2006). When taking the time to talk to each student the teacher can learn a lot from one conversation. The students often share stories, which helps the teacher learn about the students’ home life and various interests. When the teacher knows more about what the students enjoy doing, and a little about their backgrounds, she/he is able to create strong lesson plans that will benefit each individual student in one way or another.

**Knowing students’ individualized education plan, strengths and weaknesses**

Knowing the students’ individualized education plan goals, strengths and weaknesses was also a benefit. This was beneficial because I knew how much support each student needed, and I was able to assist the students as needed and use the gradual release model with the
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students differently depending on their needs (Fisher & Frey, 2014). According to M. Fallon, teachers can use the individualized student matrix when they are writing lessons plans to be sure they are keeping all their learners in mind (personal communication, December, 2010). Different sections on the matrix include students’ strengths/weaknesses, interests, hobbies, different tools that work well for the students and so on. Creating individualized student matrices after getting to know each student is very helpful for teachers when creating lesson plans. By creating an individualized student matrix the teacher is able to create a relationship with the students. The students must be able to sense that their teacher cares about them individually in order to be successful (Noddings, 2006). A teacher can do so by creating lessons that focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Also, students who have an individualized education plan have different modifications that work best for each student. By seeing what modifications help each student to become successful and including them in each lesson plan the teacher is showing the student that they are willing to support each one of them and help them to become successful.

**Coming to knowing my students and using what I learn about each one daily**

The best teaching and learning can be done only when there is a direct individual relationship between a student and a good teacher (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). This happens best when students are given time to discuss their ideas, make connections to their learning, talk with their peers, and discuss their thinking and confusion. After, the teacher takes away what he or she learned about each student and adds it to their individualized student matrix so they can refer back to it. Getting to know each individual student never has an end point. Every day when I learned more about a child I was taking one step up on the staircase. However, it takes many steps to reach the top of their stairs. Everything that is learned about a student should be used to help the teacher plan and implement lessons. Also, by knowing about the students, extra prompts
can be given to help support each one of them when necessary. As an educator it is important to keep in mind that every student is different, and it is very important to get to know them individually. By knowing each student individually, they will be more likely to reach their goals and become successful.

**Implications for Student Learning**

Relationships are at the heart of educational encounters (Giles, 2012). By building relationships with each one of my students before the study began, I was able to assist them as I introduced the personal narrative writing unit. The students were exposed to many different elements of personal narrative writing; such as significant, characters, setting, plot, movement through time and life change. If I didn’t know a lot about my students’ lives outside of school (home life, interests, sports, hobbies, siblings, and family) I wouldn’t have been able to support the students and help them generate ideas of what they could write about when they became stumped. Therefore, knowing my students on a personal level allowed them to receive more direct and personal support. I was able to help them create different topics to write about, and prompt them based on what I knew about them to stretch their writing and make it stronger. My students were able to engage in a positive writing experience because I knew what each student needed to be motivated and successful.

By modeling each step of the writing process to the students before getting started with the lesson, they were able to form a deeper understanding of what they were being asked to do. Also by engaging the students in a class brainstorm each day about different topics to write about, they were all able to come up with something to write about or use a memory of a friend to remind them of as past event they have also encountered. By using the gradual release model
and extra guided practice it helped each student understand the steps that were necessary to take when they were completing each task daily. The students all had the amount of support they needed in order to complete the task to the best of their ability. This was done through whole class discussion/lesson, then small group discussion/lesson. Also, when necessary, students were given the one on one attention they needed. Throughout this unit plan the students all received the support they needed to create their own personal narrative.

**Implications for My Teaching**

Aside from student implications, this study helped me enhance my own learning as an educator. This study has benefited my career goals in that it has enlightened me about the importance of student-teacher one on one relationships affecting the implementation and planning of writers workshop. It has shown me that keeping each individual student in mind when planning lessons is crucial in order to create an effective lesson. I also learned it is important to be flexible when working with any students, but especially students with learning disabilities. Finally, I learned it is very important to use the non-formal assessment/observations that I make daily, and use it to edit my lesson plans for the following days to come along with the current situation in the classroom. The following section will explain implications for my own teaching, as I have determined though analyzing the results from this study.

**Keeping each student in mind when lesson planning**

The best teaching and learning can be done only when there is a direct individual relationship between a student and a good teacher (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). This was done throughout my study. Each day when I was planning the lesson or delivering it to the students, I was keeping each student in mind as an individual with different strengths, needs, motivations
and interests. When planning for the lessons I thought about what example from my own life I wanted to share to catch the students’ attention or what props I wanted to bring in to motivate each child. Planning my unit plan and implementing the plans when keeping each individual in mind was a challenge. However, it was a very effective strategy, and I saw all my students benefit from implementing our one on one relationship into the unit plan.

**Be flexible during lessons**

Planning lessons, and changing them as I instructed is very important when implementing lessons. I found this to be very true throughout this study. My lesson plans never went exactly as I anticipated them to go. I found that either my students knew more than I expected, grasped a concept faster than I thought they would, needed more modeling and guided practice, or simply needed more work time. If I followed my lesson plans exactly, the unit I taught would not have been as effective.

It is also important to make the students feel comfortable to ask questions, and share their ideas. In order for the students to feel safe the teacher has to show the children that she/he cares and is willing to re-teach a concept if necessary. First, this can be done by the teacher making the ultimate goal in the classroom a focus on what the students are learning rather than what the teacher is trying to teach (Phillip & Thanheiser, 2010). By doing so the students know they are driving the instruction, and they know the teacher is more concerned with their learning than getting through everything she/he had planned each day. Also, teachers can infer certain needs from their students when they are actively listening and taking time to talk to each student daily (Noddings, 2006). Listening to my students work in small groups I was able to quickly check for understanding. From there I was able to give the necessary students extra
modeling/guided practice to be sure I was meeting each student’s needs. If I was not flexible with my lessons, I wouldn’t have received the same outcome in my study.

**Differentiate Instruction**

The most valuable lesson I learned during this study is to be sure to have differentiation of instruction in every lesson that is created. All students learn differently and need a different amount of support. This is especially true in an inclusive setting, which is where this study took place. Positive student-teacher relationships are proven to be very important for all students, especially students with special needs. High-quality relationships are marked by high levels of closeness, and low levels of conflict (O’Connor et al., 2010). Within high-quality relationships teachers may provide children with positive behavioral supports and teach them appropriate coping skills that will encourage the student’s development of emotional regulation skills. Many of the students in this study had emotional issues, and needed to have a sense of belonging. By having the one on one relationship with the students we created a classroom community to make everyone feel safe and included. Students may also be more motivated to engage in age appropriate behaviors when they have high-quality relationships with their teachers (O’Connor et al., 2010). Students with special needs often have to be reminded to act appropriately. When the teacher and the students know the expectations and are given reminders they accept the reminders easier when they feel close to their teacher (O’Connor et al., 2010). Providing students with high-quality relationships gives students a positive role model in the classroom that has a direct correlation with their behavior.
Recommendations for Future Research

Implement in multiple classrooms

This study only focused on one fifth grade class that was learning how to write a personal narrative. I recommend that in the future this study be repeated with more than one class. Repeating this study with a larger group of students can affect the results of the study. The more students in the classroom the more conclusions that can be drawn from the research study. Also, different teachers may get to know their students in a different way, and that could change their findings as well. By expanding the number of classrooms the researcher would have more reliability and validity in the research study.

Teach a variety of different writing genres

This study focused on teachers knowing their students on a personal level to help the implementation and planning of writers workshop. However, during the writers workshop block more than the topic of personal narratives is taught. Future studies could be constructed on different genres in order to determine if personal relationships between the teacher and the students influence students’ writing in the same way as it has in this personal narrative unit. In the personal narrative unit, it was very easy to learn more about each individual child. However, if a different topic of writing was covered the teacher may not have learned as much about each child’s interest and home life.

Implement in diverse classrooms

This study took place in a fifth grade classroom that is made up of all Caucasian students. This study should be recreated in a more diverse setting to see if that would have an impact on
the findings. Being in a classroom with one race and many males could have an effect on the results of the study. By implementing this study in a classroom with more diversity, the researcher will be able to determine if race and gender played a factor in this study.

**Final Thoughts**

As I reflect back to my initial thoughts when I started this study, I realize that teacher-student one on one relationships can help teachers plan and implement their writers workshop to meet the needs of all learners effectively. When teachers know each individual student the teachers know the students’ strengths, needs, interests and much more about each student. Thinking about the qualities of an effective teacher one of the most important aspects is knowing the students, and knowing how much support they need in order to be effective at the task they are presented with. I still have questions concerning how much the teacher needs to learn about the student before effectively teaching the student writers workshop. I also wonder how much knowing the students on a personal level will affect a different genre of writing. This study has given me proof that knowing fifth graders on a personal level does impact the planning and implementation of writers workshop. Finally, knowing students on a personal level gave me the opportunity to see how the information I gather and learn about them throughout the year can drive my instruction and help me reach the students’ needs in a whole group, small group and one on one settings. As I implemented the lessons I created based on the strengths, needs and interests of the students they were able to all become more actively engaged, interested in their writing and able to take ownership for the work they were producing. By having specific lessons that motivated and engaged different students they were able to see how much I cared for and knew each one of them on an individual basis.
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Lesson #1, Part #1

"All about me poem"

12/18

Standards:
ELA.5.WRT.11 - Use of variety strategies to prepare for writing
ELA.5.WRT.1.4 - Choose the form of writing, poetry, that best suits the intended purpose.

Objectives:
* Students collect a list of ideas based on a variety of sentence starters
* Students begin an "All About me" poem

Materials:
* All about me graphic organizer
* Examples

Procedure:
* Introduce the graphic organizer
* Model completing the organizer
* Give students 10 minutes to record their own ideas
* Share ideas with a partner
Informal Assessment:
- Look at students' graphic organizer to check for understanding.
Lesson #4 Part #1

Where writers get ideas: “Special Places”

Standards:
ELA 5 wrt.1.2. Discuss ideas for writing with classmates and teachers.

Objectives:
- Students understand that authors get their ideas from personal experiences.
- Students use drawing as prewriting to generate ideas about places that matter to them.
- Students draft about their special place.

Materials:
- Secret Place - Eve Bunting
- Chart paper for “Good Writers Chart”
- Plain paper, crayons/markers/colored pencils

Procedure:
- Take notes on “ideas” page
- Teacher models how to write down important places
- Allow students to record their ideas
have students close their eyes
and visualize their favorite place.
Share ideas with partner

Informal Assessment:
view students list of places.
lesson #7
Finding Stories in Maps

Standards:
ELAS WRT 1.1: Use a variety of strategies to prepare for writing (ex: mapping)

Objectives:
* Students will create maps of places from their life
* Students will identify possible Personal Narrative topics from that place

Materials:
* loose leaf
* brainstorm page

Procedures:
* Look back at our "special place" list and see if we can add more ideas
* Give students 5 minutes to add to their list.
* Today we are going to look closely at a new place.
* Model going through and placing an "X" next to places we remember a lot of stories from.
* Model picking a place and sketching a map
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- Give students time to pick & sketch
- Model placing an "X" on your drawing where the story takes place. Like treasure on a pirates map
- Tell a few brief stories about where you placed the "X"
- Give students time to place the "X" with a few key words (can place up to 3 "X's")
- Talk about how to chose what "X" to write about
- Give students 1 minute to pick what "X" to use
- Tell your neighbor a short version of the story
- Give the rest of class to student to draft
- Share with your neighbor

Assessment:
- Formal: read student stories
- Informal: look at sketch map.
Lesson #10
Sweet Learning

Standards:
ELA5
WRT 2.1 - write for a different purposes and to a specific audience tone and style as appropriate

Objective:
- Students will start new Personal Narrative writing piece
- Students will apply the elements of Personal Narrative writing to the piece.

Materials:
- Good Writers Chart
- Personal Narrative Element Chart
- Sweet Learning Story
- Loose leaf paper

Procedure:
- Sweet learning - something you learn outside of school from someone you love.
- Teacher brainstorms some of their sweet learning (dad teaching soccer)
- Pair share “what have you learned?”
- Allow students time to make a list
• Remind students to use good writers chart
• Go over "sweet learnings" from Grandmas visit.
• Pick a "sweet learning star it"
• Pair with neighbor
• Give time to write
• Share draft to partner

Assessment:
• Read personal narrative
Lesson #17

2/14

Editing

Standards:

ELA 5
WRT 1.9 - Edit and proofread own writing as well as the others using the writing conventions.

Objectives:

- Students will learn editing techniques

Materials:

- Editing checklist

- Sample piece

Procedure:

- First step is to re-read piece
- Read editing checklist
- Read each piece together out loud
- Circle anything that looks funny
- Give students time to work on their piece
- Next look at punctuation
- Circle all punctuation
- Count number of words (run-ons)
- Check dialogue, circle all of it to check for accuracy
check for fluency
read out loud & see if it sounds smooth.
give the rest of the time to make changes/re write.
pair share
Assessment:
check FINAL personal narrative.