12-2015

Professional Learning Communities as a Professional Development Model Focusing on Instructional Practices Used to Teach Writing in Early Childhood

Jill T. Leonard
East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.etsu.edu/etd

Part of the Pre-Elementary, Early Childhood, Kindergarten Teacher Education Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.
Professional Learning Communities as a Professional Development Model Focusing on Instructional Practices Used to Teach Writing in Early Childhood

A dissertation presented to the faculty of the Department of Teaching and Learning, East Tennessee State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Education

by A. Jill Treece Leonard

December 2015

Dr. L. Kathryn Sharp, Chair

Dr. Rosemary Geiken

Dr. Rebecca Isbell

Keywords: writing, instructional practice, emergent literacy, professional learning communities, professional development, protocols
ABSTRACT

Professional Learning Communities as a Professional Development Model Focusing on Instructional Practices Used to Teach Writing in Early Childhood

by

Jill Treece Leonard

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skill in teaching developmental writing in grades K-3. This research is necessary to examine how offering teachers collaborative support needed for understanding and implementing research-based best practice approaches to teach developmental writing strengthens the quality of instructional practice necessary to meet rigorous standards being imparted from Common Core Standards. Through the development of a PLC, teachers have an opportunity for collaborating within the school building, which provides optimal environment for professional development (Lindeman, 1926; Lumpe, 2007). Analysis taken from the pre and post-survey information included the teachers’ beliefs and understanding of writing development, current use of instruction time for writing, and questions or concerns teachers have about teaching writing. Weekly PLC meetings using a protocol format offered teachers an opportunity to discuss personal experiences with writing instruction and to share any anchor charts, student work, or anecdotal records exemplifying the strategy of focus. Videotaping and reflective journaling collected during the six PLC sessions were transcribed and coded using predetermined and emerging themes within and across each measure. Presentation materials collected as data documentation of the experience aided in validation of the research. Major themes emerged under the code headed as management with sub-codes of planning and
classroom management presenting the strongest focus. Major themes also emerged under the code headed as instruction. The strongest areas of focus under the instruction code included sub-coded areas conferencing, minilessons, and teaching strategies.
DEDICATION

With great pleasure, I dedicate this work to many people whom I love with all my heart. To my husband Jack who brought the program to my attention and while handing me the brochure, said, “Here! Now it’s your turn!” To our three wonderful boys, Noah, Will, and Garrett who have helped me to reach this goal by being patient for many years, quiet when necessary, and often fixing their own meals. To my parents and extended family, for the gracious support and encouragement throughout my entire life. Especially to God, who has given me strength to do the impossible, direction when I did not know what to do, and wisdom to complete this and all tasks by providing me with a life verse to keep me going. Ezra 10:4 “Arise and go forth, this matter belongs unto you. We will be with you always. Be of good courage and do it!”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this entire program, I have been supported through the times of elation, nerves, excitement, and tears! I would like to acknowledge some people who have been instrumental in helping me on this journey. Dr Kathryn Sharp, thank you for your consistent diligence and encouragement. Thank you for your support and for always telling me every time that I completed a task, “You’ve just chipped away another piece of that boulder!” Your guidance will forever be a blessing to me as I consider this accomplishment!

To Dr. Rebecca Isbell, thank you for the example and mentor that you have been to me for very many years! Your participation and input in this journey have been invaluable to me. I am ever grateful for your service on my committee and the model that you set.

Dr. Rosemary Geiken, thank you for your willingness to help me. You came along beside me as a complete stranger and have been a wonderful encourager, offering helpful comments and guidance.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPYRIGHT</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overarching Question</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Key Terms</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standards</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories and Research on Writing</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories and Research on Instructional Practice</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer’s Workshop</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minilessons.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent student practice</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share.</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories and Research on Professional Development</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Learning Theory</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Research on Literacy Development</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles for Literacy Development</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Tools Theory</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restatement of the Purpose</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Setting</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Procedures</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre and Post-Survey</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceptions</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Instructional Practice</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Support in Writing Practice</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of Videotape</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 2............................................................................................................................................... 92
Research-Base........................................................................................................................................ 92
Presenter Information.......................................................................................................................... 93
Management........................................................................................................................................... 96
Instruction .............................................................................................................................................. 98
Teacher Perceptions ............................................................................................................................ 100
Knowledge .......................................................................................................................................... 101
Participant Reflection.......................................................................................................................... 101
The reflection comments shared after the PLC included: .............................................................. 101
Case 3.................................................................................................................................................... 102
Research-Base........................................................................................................................................ 103
Presenter Information.......................................................................................................................... 104
Instruction .............................................................................................................................................. 107
Teacher Perceptions ............................................................................................................................ 109
Knowledge .......................................................................................................................................... 109
Participant Reflection.......................................................................................................................... 110
Case 4.................................................................................................................................................... 111
Research-Base........................................................................................................................................ 111
Presenter Information.......................................................................................................................... 112
Management........................................................................................................................................... 113
Instruction .............................................................................................................................................. 116
Teacher Perceptions ............................................................................................................................ 117
Knowledge .......................................................................................................................................... 117
Reflective Journal Analysis ................................................................. 139
Management .................................................................................. 140
Instruction ...................................................................................... 141
Teacher Perceptions ....................................................................... 142
Knowledge ...................................................................................... 143
Presenter and Document Information ............................................. 143
Themes .......................................................................................... 145
Management .................................................................................. 146
Instruction ...................................................................................... 148
Teacher Perception ......................................................................... 153
Knowledge ...................................................................................... 154
Summary ......................................................................................... 156
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ......................................................... 157
Summary of the Findings ................................................................. 157
Overarching Question ....................................................................... 157
Research Question 1 ........................................................................ 159
Research Question 2 ........................................................................ 160
Research Question 3 ........................................................................ 161
Research Question 4 ........................................................................ 162
Study Limitations ........................................................................... 163
Recommendations for Future Research ......................................... 164
Conclusions ..................................................................................... 168
REFERENCES .................................................................................... 171
APPENDICES ......................................................................................................................... 184

Appendix A: Common Core State Standards for Writing K-3 ............................................ 184

Appendix B: Request for Permission to Director ............................................................... 188

Appendix C: Introductory Letter to Teachers .................................................................... 189

Appendix D: Tuning Protocol .............................................................................................. 190

Appendix E: Pre-Survey ...................................................................................................... 191

Appendix F: Post-Survey .................................................................................................... 193

Appendix G: Colleague Review Letter .............................................................................. 195

Appendix H: Colleague Review Form ................................................................................ 196

Appendix I: Reflective Journal Form ................................................................................ 197

Appendix J: List of Codes and Sub-Codes ....................................................................... 198

Appendix K: PLC #1 Coding Sample – Instruction ............................................................ 199

VITA ........................................................................................................................................... 200
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The use of writing becomes functional, practical, and creative for children as it develops. Jones, Reutzel, and Fargo (2010) explained that scribbles and lines children use as an important means of getting needs met quickly develops into an understanding for written text where symbols resemble mentor texts children are exposed to in personal environments. Bodrova and Leong (2006) discuss these uses of writing as the use of tools and part of Vygotsky’s (1978) principles of cultural development as the child gains power over performances. This developmental course allows children to socially construct meaning and develop symbolic tools useful to produce sophisticated writing and develop an encoding process (Dyson, 2003). The use of writing (as a tool) is at the heart of bringing meaning and understanding to our lives (Calkins, 1986). As an artist develops a love for the tools of art, a writer embraces the love of using writing as a tool to produce meaningful written expressions (Fletcher, 2002). This trajectory takes place in a sequence of events that develops into meaningful written communication (Clay, 1975) and leads to a flow of words that may sound rhythmic and musical to the ears of the listener (Spandel, 2012). The medium for producing an environment for these elements to come together includes interaction with a more knowledgeable person (Dorn & Soffas, 2001), and in the classroom this person is primarily the teacher.

Statement of the Problem

More than 20 years ago, Lucy Calkins (1983) commented on her observations of instructional practice of writing, “I watched my colleagues spend two hours a day on the teaching of reading and barely anytime on the teaching of writing” (p. 82). The National Commission on Writing in American Schools and Colleges (2003) also relayed a deficit in
teaching writing by commenting on the neglected state of writing education in schools. Comments focused on middle and secondary teachers and teacher educators’ familiarity with strong demands of writing expectations relating to high stakes writing assessments that primary grades have not been exposed to (National Commission on Writing in American Schools and Colleges, 2003).

While No Child Left Behind (NCLB), (2002) emphasized phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension as the tools for reforming literacy success, the Common Core State Standards placed great emphasis on writing as an “equal partner to reading” that should be returned to the place of one of the basics of education (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p. 102). Juzwik et al. (2006) offered support for early childhood years as the critical period for writing development. Meta-analysis findings show a need for concern for the neglect of the early practice and acquisition of writing in early childhood by the writing research communities (Juzwik et al., 2006). Although much research has been conducted on the instructional practices to improve student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001; Walberg & Paik, 2004; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005), limited research has included early childhood years.

Literature by Calkins (1983), Clay (2001), Gerde, Bingham, and Wasik (2012) also expressed a lack of instructional practice that contributes to deficits in providing students with tools to become fluent conventional writers. Calkins (1983) observed that little or no writing was found in classrooms, or when writing was addressed, it was put off, only used as a fill in activity if time permitted. While Clay (2001) stated, “When teachers do not expect children to be able to write, they do not give them opportunities to write, and therefore they will observe that the children do not write” (p. 14). She explained that parents and teachers do not understand the
importance writing plays in the development of reading skills for children’s later literacy success (Clay, 2001). Currently, Gerde et al., (2012), described that literacy development support is not recurrently found or consistently practiced in early childhood classrooms and creates and environment for devastation to later literacy success.

Catalysts for the current research included research describing the deficits in classroom provision in support of opportunities for writing (Calkins, 1983; Clay, 2001; Gerde et al., 2012), the lack of appropriate instructional practices to scaffold writing (Calkins, 1983; National Commission on Writing for American Schools and Colleges, 2003), and support for professional development to incorporate a more collaborative environment for the adult learner (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lumpe, 2007; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarless, & Shapely, 2007). Higher demands for routine and intentional writing instruction is necessary with a lack of writing instruction in classrooms (Calkins, 1983; Clay, 2001; Gerde et al., 2012) and the implementation of the more rigorous Common Core State Standards (National Governor’s Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) & Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2010). Research supports the inclusion of collaborative environments to develop effective communities of adult learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004) able to alter perceptions and practices using experiences, and self-reflection (Bandura, 1986) as a more effective professional development than a single presentation. The gap in the research presented provided the rationale for this qualitative case study to explore the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skill of the instructional strategies chosen to teach developmental writing in grades K-3.
This research is necessary to explore how offering teachers support needed for understanding the importance implementing research-based best practice approaches used to teach developmental writing while strengthening the quality of instructional practice assists meeting the rigorous standards imparted from the Common Core Standards.

**Research Questions**

The questions used for exploration of this problem were:

**Overarching Question**

How can the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) focused on writing instruction alter teachers’ perceptions of the knowledge and skills in teaching developmental writing in grades K-3?

**Research Questions**

1. What are teachers’ perceptions about teaching developmental writing since the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
2. How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC alter teachers’ perception about the ability to teach writing?
3. How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC provide guidance for teachers to implement research-based instructional practices for writing instruction within their classroom?
4. How do writing instructional practices change with the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC?

**Definition of Key Terms**

For purposes of this study, the following terms and definitions are used:

Assessment: Calkins (2003b) presents assessment as, “the evidence that allows us to teach in the ways we know are best for children” (p. 89). Assessments are information taken from students to use for informing the teacher or others about how to proceed with teaching and as an accountability measure for teachers.

Common Core State Standards: Developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), the Common Core State Standards provide an understandable, reliable description of the expectations for student learning in order for teachers and parents to be equipped to help students learn the material necessary for global competitiveness. The intention of the standard is applicable to the real world, with the rigor designed to prepare all students for college and careers (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Conferences: Writing conferences involve a teacher and a student or a small group of students having an informal conversation discussing the student work in writing (Calkins, 2003c). The four basic components of a conference included by Calkins (2003c) are researching the intentions of the child through observation, deciding on the necessary information and how to teach the information, teaching and providing guided practice, and linking the learning for the day’s work with future work so that the child will continue the work with accuracy.

Conventional Literacy: The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) (2008) defined the term
conventional literacy as skills such as oral reading fluency, writing, decoding, reading comprehension, and spelling.

**Conventional Writing:** Sulzby (1990) defined conventional writing as the construction of text that can be read by another literate person and when a child can read the text written using conventional literacy methods.

**Cultural Tool Theory:** The four-stage Vygotskian theory defined by Bodrova and Leong (2006) describes the process of the development of higher mental functions as progression is made from established routines, strong models providing tools or materials, independent practice with reliance on the tools, and finally internalization of the skill demonstrated through independent use of the skill.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP):** DAP refers to foundational teaching methods effective in early childhood teaching practices considering research on child development (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). It involves three significant understandings: 1) Knowing about child development and understanding their learning processes; 2) Knowing what is individually appropriate for meeting the needs of the specific child; 3) Knowing what is culturally relevant and important in the child’s life as the learning experience may relate to them (Neuman et al., 2000).

**Emergent literacy:** Referring to becoming literate or the start of literacy, emergent literacy was a term coined by Clay (1966). Emergent literacy was an adopted term for the topic of research incorporated in Teale and Sulzby’s (1986) book using the term as a title. They determined the necessity of using this term due to the new perspective toward reading and writing development during the early childhood years as compared to the historical perspectives of writing, beginning reading, and language acquisition and learning. The research that supported this new perspective
explained that emergent literacy examined the process of developing literacy in children from birth to the age of 5 or 6 years, which is usually when an adult recognizes children’s reading and writing abilities (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

**Emergent Writing:** The qualitative, developmental ways children’s writing changes over time most often resembling children’s use of drawing, scribbling, and long letter strings with no phonetic connections as representation of writing (Sulzby, 1990). These forms occur in a general developmental succession, descriptively of specific characteristics of writing (Sulzby, 1986). Distinct levels of emergent writing have been identified, and progression to each different level is characterized by letter formation differences, the connections among oral and written message, and the comprehensiveness of phonemic representation (Gentry & Gillet, 1993).

*Higher mental function:* Higher mental function refers to “the combination of tool and sign in psychological activity” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). This definition involves the use of signs as a means of accomplishing a problem mentally using remembering, choices, or comparison and contrast. Signs are inherently concerned with an internal function. The understanding of the purpose of a tool influences human activity as a conductor and is an externally oriented function (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Instructional Practice or Strategies:** Research-based practices that provide effective methods for student learning and can involve technology-based instruction, questioning practices, reflections before and after, best practice that equals effective instruction, and multi sensory approaches to learning. It involves the active construction of meaning as students strategically hear lectures or participates in discussions, read a text, or participate in inquiry approaches (Missouri School for the Blind, nd).
**Minilesson:** This is the teaching part of the Writer’s Workshop. The minilesson usually begins the workshop each day. They include creating a connection, presenting the teaching, active engagement through guided practice, models and discussion, and then a link of today’s work with the student’s independent work. This is all accomplished within a brief 10 to 15 minute period to help empower students to write (Calkins, 2003b).

**Planning:** Calkins (2003b) includes many elements for planning for Writer’s Workshop. The elements include:

- planning for children to do many pieces of writing
- planning all parts of a complete unit
- planning for the teacher and the students
- planning for coherence within texts, metaphors and language within a unit
- planning to support goals within a unit and ongoing writing
- planning for teaching a new tool for writing within each new unit
- planning for ending each unit with a celebration
- planning to save some writing from each child for portfolios (Calkins, 2003b)

**Professional Learning Community (PLC):** A PLC is the continuous process that educators take in working collaboratively in reoccurrences of action research and inquiry that results in higher achievement and learning for the students within the school or learning environment (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006)

**Protocols:** Allen and Blythe (2004) defined protocols within the educational setting as “Structures that enable educators and sometimes others (e.g., parents, invited guests) to look carefully and collaboratively at student and teacher work in order to learn from it” (p.9).
Record Keeping: In keeping records, a form of assessment is accomplished. This type of assessment is used to record when a child does or says something that is regarded as significant learning. A form or recording sheet is used to mark off or write down the finding. The information is used to develop further plans to scaffold the child’s growth in learning (Calkins, 2003b).

Scaffolding: Defined by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) as a “process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). The definition is further supported by Rodgers and Rodgers’s (2004) specific principles that define the scaffolding process including the use of observation; responding to observations by providing appropriate teaching; and providing appropriate materials.

Spiral, Cross-curriculum: The term spiral curriculum was described in the cognitive theory developed by Jerome Bruner (1960). The key features include a student revisiting material several times throughout the school career with a more in-depth complexity each time the material is visited and new information is assimilated. Calkins et al. (2012) expressed the term of a spiral, cross-curriculum to explain the mechanics of the CCSS as a curriculum that is spiral as explained by Bruner (1960), but also spans across each area of curriculum integrated into each other.

Webb’s Depth of Knowledge: A model used to aid in aligning expectations, planning, and assessments. The model includes four levels expressing the levels of cognition. The four levels of the depth of knowledge demonstrate the complexity of content for teaching students and include level one, recall; level two, skill/concept; level three, strategic reasoning; level four, extended reasoning (Webb, 2002).
Writing: Graves (1983) defined writing as a means of communicating with others. His thoughts on writing expressed that until something is written down it is not fully understood. With children, writing should be learned in meaningful activities. Calkins (1986) said, “We write ‘cause we want to understand our lives…children write about what is alive and vital and real for them—and their writing becomes the curriculum” (p.8).

Writing defined by the National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (2003) as thought on paper. Writing is increasingly and richly complex, but rationally connected through a blend of ideas, words, themes, images, and multimedia designs. Whether appearing on paper or on screen, writing is an overlooked key to transforming learning in the United States (p. 13).

Summary

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the definitions of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 traces the major trends in writing theory and research; examines the instructional practices used in classrooms to teach writing; explores the theory and research findings concerning professional development including the use of professional learning communities; discloses the Common Core State Standards. Chapter 3 contains the restatement of the purpose, the research questions, the research design, the role of the researcher, the participants, the research setting, the instrumentation, and the method of data collection and analysis, the research procedures, and a summary. The sections in chapter 4 elaborate on specific information related to the analysis and review of the current research. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings leading to the conclusions of the study, limitations on the study, success of the study, and recommendations for practice and further research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The teacher’s determination of the instructional strategies to meet standard requirements in writing is a major focus in planning from the beginning of the child’s formal education (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2008). An exploration to investigate the implementation of a PLC as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skill of instructional strategies chosen to teach developmental writing in grades K-3 is beneficial. Discovering effective methods to present writing instructional practices for teachers will aid in applying research-based instructional practices in writing imperative for increasing higher-level thinking vital to successful implementation of Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association (NGA) & Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2010). This is a crucial step in improving teacher quality and notably, student learning.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature. The intent to achieve the following objectives was: (a) explain the purpose and development of the Common Core State Standards; (b) trace the major trends in writing theory and research; (b) examine the instructional practices to teach writing that are used in classrooms; (c) explore the theory and research findings concerning professional development including the adult learning theory and the use of professional learning communities and; (d) look at the foundational theoretical base for the research.

Common Core Standards

Beginning with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002), federal administrative offices determined education needed to be based on the increase of student performance and
common goals implemented to foster improvement in student learning. Through this effort arose the proposal for equal learning opportunities throughout each local educational system with shared curriculum and best instructional practice enabled nationally (TDOE, 2012). However, the standards were specific in stating the effort was not to mandate curriculum, but to provide a set of expectations for learning with the determination of how to implement the standards left to each state (TDOE, 2012). The local education association would make the decision of curriculum while individual teachers with principal input would have autonomy in instructional practices (Calkins et al., 2012; TDOE, 2012).

Even with the NCLB (2002) efforts to standardize education, research by the America Diploma Project (2004) showed efforts resulted in reports that documented “most high school graduates need remedial help in college, most college students never attain a degree, and most employers say high school graduates lack basic skills” (TDOE, 2012, p.2). The report spurred the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) (see Appendix A) in an effort to create a level of comparability in reading/language arts and mathematics as students graduate from high school. The National Governors Association (NGA), and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) launched the current project (TDOE, 2012).

The mission statement of the CCSS by the NGA and the CCSSO (2012) states: The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy (NGA & CCSSO, 2012).

Factors considered inspiring in developing the CCSS involve the consideration of collaboration. The opportunity for collaborative efforts between states for sharing curriculum and best instructional practice is an effortful presence (TDOE, 2012). McTighe and Wiggins (2012)
strongly emphasized the use of collaborative examination of the CCSS. They feared that not using collaborative efforts to provide adjustments to old practice invited the use of same teaching practices without enhancements in performance from students as expected with more rigorous CCSS (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

Another consideration included the effort to assure students’ of strong preparedness with knowledge and skills necessary to compete within the United States and globally (NGA & CCSSO, 2012). A statistical report shared by Darling-Hammond, Barron, Pearson, and Schoenfeld (2008) showed that the information in the world produced historically is equal to the total amount of information that has been produced as new information today. This report caused educational leaders to consider old standards. Under old standards centering on skill and drill the outcome of education prepared students for low-level jobs constituting 95% of the work force. This percentage compared to only 10% of low-skill jobs in the economy today (Darling-Hammond Barron, Pearson, & Schoenfeld, 2008) demanding change in the core standards to meet the requirement for a higher skilled job force and global preparedness (Calkins et al., 2012).

Implementation of CCSS offered the provision for students to use higher mental functions involved in thinking strategies, writing and reading workshops, project approaches, and debates as the focus learning (Calkins et al., 2012). The CCSS presented a heightened understanding regarding the importance of writing and the balance necessary between reading and writing presented as a whole during the development of the standards (Calkins et al., 2012).

The emphasis on writing in the CCSS included several considerations according to Calkins et al. (2012). First provided the inclusion of three types of writing: narrative, opinion, and informational to offer versatility of written forms across various genres. Next, the consideration for writing taught as a process of planning, editing, revising, and publishing to
produce quality, high proficiency level work including information that is meaningful for the student across all curriculum areas (Calkins et al., 2012; Calkins, 1983; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; & Graves, 1994). Last, writing should be treated as essential for even early childhood students as a developmental process (Clay, 1975; Sulzby, 1986). The student should work at the level of independent ability with scaffolding necessary to increase knowledge, skill and ability provided by the teacher (Calkins et al., 2012).

The mention of writing had not occurred under the NCLB (2002) efforts of educational reform. However, the CCSS places writing standards in a parallel position with reading (Calkins et al., 2012). Changes in standards addressing the importance of writing presents several gaps in the curriculum of most schools and places a need for change in practice that supports higher levels of learning (Calkins et al., 2012). The recommendation of using writing workshop approach as a spiral, cross-curriculum in the K-12 grades is an enormous change but one that could be implemented inexpensively through the provision of teaching resources and professional development to apply this process approach to writing (Calkins et al., 2012).

**Theories and Research on Writing**

Writing research has shown a progression toward the understanding of the development of writing. Goodman (1986) helped bring attention to early literacy, developing a schematic understanding of the processes of literacy development. Prior to this newly implemented presentation of parallel reading and writing application, writing was traditionally considered a post occurrence after learning to read and an area missing from the early childhood curriculum (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). An emphasis focused on changed attitudes concerning the development of writing brought positive implications for writing and writing instructional practice only through the assertive efforts of research (Strickland & Morrow, 1989).
Dyson (1984) proposed learning to write is much like solving a puzzle with many pieces to be placed intricately. The many purposes and functions of writing come together to complete the literacy picture as the writer develops. The development includes predictability toward the understandings of what writing looks like, the system of signs, the story elements, the encoding process, and the ability to discern socio-cognitive nature (Dyson, 1984). In Clay’s (1975) research, she closely observed five-year-old children and found complex literacy learning even at the beginning of school months. Her work presented children’s discovery of how writing conveyed talking and the child’s eagerly sought desire to grasp the literacy conventions that adults use. Previous work by Gardner and Cass (1965) supported this observation with findings of children’s demonstration of literacy readiness in conjunction with development of understanding speech and print. Current work provided further understanding of the importance of oral language development and the crucial piece it plays in the development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; NELP, 2008).

Clay (1975) observed children filled with eager ambition to write ideas in meaningful ways. These observations included children engaged in drawing pictures, tracing script, copying words and captions, independently writing word forms from memory, generating word forms phonetically and conventionally, and teacher transcriptions. Teachers found these skills important to literacy development and pertinent in fostering written language (Clay, 1975). Clay’s work led to the development of several concepts and principles for understanding the development of writing. These concepts and principles outlined the developmental process that children follow in becoming conventional writers. The principles include:

- Recurring Principle, the understanding of writing in English as repeated patterns of shapes and lines;
Generative Principle, the act of generating new meanings by reorganizing letters and units;

Sign Principle, the understanding that print carries meaning and stands for objects not necessarily print;

Inventory Principle, the act of children making inventories or lists of names and words from personal schema and using it in practice (Clay, 1975; Sulzby & Teale, 1985).

These principles were instrumental in Sulzby and Teale’s (1985) development of the stages of writing.

Sulzby and Teale’s (1985) developmental stages of writing progressively move toward more conventional methods and include a series of levels that are not held to linear progression, often overlap, mix various stages, or revert to earlier stages. The classroom checklist of forms of writing includes drawing, scribble, nonphonetic letterstrings, invented spelling, and conventional writing (copying and produced) (Sulzby & Teale, 1985). They emphasize that the research conducted during that previous decade brought a significant change in the perspective of the development of writing. Direct implications from the findings of this research on education included the increased confidence in children’s ability to gain the valued strategies and skills necessary to develop into more conventional writers at much earlier ages; the classroom activities must meet the high demands that children’s increased schema towards emergent literacy requires; and the necessity for instructions to be built upon the prior knowledge and experiences that children have when they enter school to be effective and appropriate (Sulzby & Teale, 1985).

The compatibility of emergent literacy with the process writing approach offers teachers diverse resources to scaffold growth in composition writing (Dyson & Freedman, 2003). The
work of Graves (1994) and Calkins (2003a; 1986) took an in depth look at the process writing approach as the research conducted by these authors describes the process and the process in practice through descriptions and observations. This method to teach writing referred to as a Writer’s Workshop approach (Calkins, 2003a) is a means to meeting the significant change in the perspective of the development of writing as discussed by Sulzby and Teale (1985).

**Theories and Research on Instructional Practice**

Carol Chomsky (1971) wrote supporting children learning to read through the development of their own writing. “To expect a child to read, as a first step, what someone else has written is backwards, an artificial imposition that denies the child an active role in the whole process” (p. 296). Her view of this process supported children as active participants in teaching themselves to read by learning to trust their own judgment and understanding of phonetic accuracy sounding out letters to spell words and producing a written product for which they have understanding of its meaning. The realization became literacy as a product from self not a manifestation from someone else (Chomsky, 1971).

In an observational study conducted by Calkins (1983) in a Kindergarten classroom anecdotal records documented the independent active participation of a child’s personal writing to develop literacy skills. The anecdotal records documented a six-year-old child reading his own writing 27 times before finishing one sentence. The skills she observed included a plethora of proficiency that children considered non- readers used and developed through personal writing experiences. These skills offer the parallel between reading and writing that is expected in the development of the CCSS (Calkins et al., 2012) and included:

- writing, re-writing and conferring;
- selecting main ideas;
- organizing supporting details;
- adjusting and defending sequences;
- discovering cause and effect;
- developing challenging conclusions (Calkins, 1983).

The developmental trajectories, social intertwining, and comprehensive nature increases the complexity of literacy development. Richgels (2003) described literacy as “a complex unfolding of many kinds of knowing and many abilities such that no single snapshot of that process adequately captures the complexity” (p. 29). This complex nature creates an environment that breeds avoidance or neglect in teaching when teachers are unsure of how or what emergent literacy skill to teach. Calkins (1983) observed this neglect by watching her teaching colleagues spend two hours a day teaching only reading skills but spent rarely any time on teaching writing skills. The avoidance of teaching writing skills often causes teachers to undervalue the student’s ability to perform (Clay, 2001). Teachers need to accept and understand the child’s literacy schema and build on that existing knowledge (Clay, 2001). Forcing personal assumptions about literacy learning can hinder a child (Clay, 2001). The unfamiliarity and complexity of emergent literacy presents difficult decisions in where to begin instruction or what to teach for some teachers.

In April 2003, the National Commission on Writing for America’s Schools and Colleges developed The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution. The authors offer support for writing instruction by stating:

Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years… Of the three "Rs," writing is clearly the most neglected (National Commission on Writing for America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003, p.3).
The piece explains how writing neglected in school reform efforts of the past twenty years must be given the attention it deserves. Some of the recommendations encouraged include:

- every teacher takes responsibility for teaching writing while the state and local school district provides writing guidelines for accountability expectations;
- teachers be educated at all levels including common expectation of abilities in teaching writing beginning with training prospective teachers including novice and veteran;
- English-language learners considered urgent need to build on strengths of this minority;
- classroom practice considered a priority including early childhood years, middle school, and high school using developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum;
- professional development opportunities are provided for teachers and school administrators for presentation and explanation of common performance expectations for good writing extending beyond language formalities and grammar and including the use of technology. (National Commission on Writing for America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003).

The recommendations made for the classroom practice, specifically for early childhood include the use of talking, pictures, word play, spelling, drawing, and writing (National Commission on Writing for America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003). These recommendations align appropriately with the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) (2008) findings. The NELP (2008), developed to inform practice and policy of accomplishments during the years of zero to five, better prepares children for later literacy success. The meta-analysis conducted on approximately 500 articles determined 11 predictors for literacy success. Six of the predictors considered strong measures included alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters, rapid automatic naming of objects and colors, writing, and
phonological memory (NELP, 2008). The indicators found to be moderate predictors included concepts of print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing (NELP, 2008).

Although the information in the NELP provided the necessary information of what to teach, the key ingredient is choosing effective instructional strategies and the effectiveness of the teacher that increases the success of the instructional strategy. Rog (2001) stated that in order to build on the prior schema of a student, excellent instruction must be used to develop knowledge and skills that will transfer into lasting learning. The teacher is responsible for developing the environment that fosters reading and writing, accepts personal differences, and creates an instructional curriculum designed to meet the needs of all students (Rog, 2001). The process writing approach provides an avenue for the teacher to create an environment that fosters this responsibility.

The routines and procedures of a process writing approach used as an effective method for developing children’s knowledge, skills, and attitude toward writing can transfer into life skills as the child develops into a more conventionally literate person. Process writing as defined by Calkins (2003d) is a “radically different pace and classroom structure” (p. 23) involving the students participating by routinely planning, revising, and sharing the written text. In meta-analysis conducted on 29 experimental and quasi-experimental studies conducted in the grades 1-12, results showed a process writing approach a superior approach to writing instruction (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Results also showed the use of a process writing approach within general education classes improved the quality of the total writing produced (Graham and Sandmel, 2011).
Writer’s Workshop

The conduit for presenting process writing is generally a Writer’s Workshop approach. Process writing involves teaching writing as an interactive method incorporating skills for students to be exposed to and practice writing through processes of, “rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing” (Calkins, 1986, p.18). Studies conducted on writing workshop show this interactive approach to teaching writing is an effective method to increase writing abilities (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). They found first grade students gained better perception of the purposes of writing, and as those students became more comfortable with the methods of writing workshop, greater independence enabling them to review and edit writing with peers (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

The workshop approach to teaching writing, based on the theory developed and implemented by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (Calkins, 2003a) is reported to be the instructional process of choice to build writing skills for emergent writers (Calkins, 1986; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Calkins (2003a) explained the applications of teaching writing using a Writer’s Workshop method as offering teachers the ability to become researchers and study children in processes of producing writing with greater depth. Application of Writer’s Workshop gives teachers the ability to scaffold children to higher learning in reading through the development of authentic reading materials, the child’s personal writing.

The use of a Writer’s Workshop approach provides a more informal setting. Graves (1983) found this type of learning environment provided students with more variety of choice and increased the amount children write compared to amounts written from specific writing assignments. Recommendations declared each workshop session follow the same format, creating a predictable routine and time for writing permitting children practice for effectiveness.
at planning and developing strategies for their writing (Calkins, 1986). The uses of predictable routines also allow students a non-threatening environment to use and explore language (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005) while writing during each session. The main components of the Writer’s Workshop model generally include a minilesson, student independent practice, time for planning (rehearsal), drafting, editing, conference collaboration with peers and teachers, and a sharing time.

**Minilessons.** The minilesson is the beginning of the Writer’s Workshop. Graves (1994) referred to this portion of the workshop as a teacher demonstration. He expressed that teachers should use the time to present personal experiences from everyday events in their lives to use as a model for students. Routine use of this modeling time brings consistency to the approach. The children expect to join in a whole group meeting to begin each workshop session. These minilessons become the core of teaching the curriculum and function using patterns of making connections to previous lessons, teaching a skill or strategy, actively engaging the student to discuss or try the skill with a peer, and creating a link for the child’s current writing practice (Calkins, 2003b). These are applicable methods of presentation for all student developmental levels, which include strategies used over and again throughout workshops in both writing and reading. Strategies include the intentionality of teaching procedures, as well as strategies for writing, spelling, phonological awareness, vocabulary development, and developing fluency and comprehension (Calkins, 2003b). The lesson conducted within approximately a 10-minute time-span precedes the independent student practice.

**Independent student practice.** The independent student practice is a specifically planned time for the student to practice collaboratively with increasing autonomy, the use of skills introduced or developed during the current or previous minilessons (Calkins, 2003b). During the
20 to 40 minute independent student practice, the children return to their desk or writing area and proceed to write, developing new stories, working on previous stories, editing and correcting work, or publishing. Graves (1994) referenced this planning and practice time as a rehearsal where the student takes time to prepare thinking, collaborating, drawing, or making an outline. This is also a time conferences about the student’s work are held with a peer or the teacher.

**Conferences.** The conferring time is a time of collaboration with the student about the writing produced or the ideas and understanding that has resulted in the writing time (Calkins, 2003c, 1986). Discussions during these collaborations include a range of possibilities related to the student’s planned work, edited work, or completed work (Calkins, 2003b). Graves (1994) suggested that during a conference time the student should be doing the speaking at an 80% rate of the time, while the teacher should only spend about 20% of the time talking. Using this formula, the teacher will learn about what the student knows, and be able to more effectively help the student with writing skills (Graves, 1994).

**Share.** The sharing time held at the end of the writing workshop involves approximately five to 10 minutes. Graves (1994) suggested that the purpose of the social act of sharing time provided the writer and listener with positive effects. Sharing time is an opportunity for the writer to share the work accomplished during the writing time or any information that the student feels important for peers to be aware of that occurred during this period of focused writing (Calkins, 2003a, 1986; Graves, 1994). This portion of the workshop may include the use of whole group sharing where a few students chosen to share with everyone provides elaboration on the completed work with the whole class or to a smaller community of students. Share time may also include small groups of students taking turns to share among the groups of peers, or a
partner share, where two students take turns sharing the accomplished work (Calkins, 2003a, 1986; Graves, 1994).

As each part of the writing workshop flows into the next, the students develop the autonomy and security within the predictability of the schedule, using the time to develop and implement skills used for writing (Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1994; Routman, 1996). This predictable routine involves increasing longer lengths of time with clear expectations set by the teacher delineating the accomplishment of standards expected during this allocated time (Calkins, 1986)

Sulzby’s (1992) BRDKAWL studies supported Calkins and Graves’s process writing theory even at very young ages. The evidenced observation of planning included children taking time at the beginning of writing to think, ask for time to think, or talk about the writing. Drafting and revision often occurred simultaneously and spontaneously as the child would write then reread and find areas that they thought did not sound correct or needed word or phrase level revisions. Although the study did not incorporate a publishing element, children would often bring in written material such as stories or books produced in a published form with covers, illustrated text, and title pages (Sulzby, 1992).

Using this theoretical base for writing development provides better understanding of how children gradually develop deeper knowledge of print with the first efforts being invention, then copying. As the child gains control over the processes the occurrences of more conventional methods of construction develop (Graham, 2008). The teacher’s use of best practice educational methods scaffolds the child through transitions of development. The provision of more opportunities for varied literacy experiences based on the existing schema of the child also offer the assistance that children need to scaffold learning. The teacher provides these opportunities
through different routes of learning (Graham, 2008). He stated that comparing writing to other tasks in life, the adult, or the teacher’s role includes:

- being encourager for the child to complete tasks that they are able to complete independently;
- offering collaboration and cooperation where assistance is needed;
- providing the model necessary for children when exposed to a task or an opportunity that is unfamiliar.

This process of scaffolding a child’s learning creates the environment for an effective classroom. The view is in line with Allington and Cunningham’s (1996) expression that an effective school is created by the single most important element, an effective teacher in the classroom. The National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] (2008) stated that the benefit to children is empowering teachers to act as informed decision makers. The supportive research-base shows teacher interactions with students produce the most influential and positive outcomes in learning (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Graham, 2008; NAEYC, 2008). However, the understanding holds that necessary professional development must be provided to support teachers in becoming more skilled in practice and decision-making (NAEYC, 2008).

**Theories and Research on Professional Development**

The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (2003) implores the necessity for best efforts in providing professional development to teachers. The call includes findings that schools and universities cannot ignore the necessary obligation to improve writing skills at all levels of education. Lumpe (2007) stated, “When professional development is embedded at the school-building level around meaningful topics in a
collaborative format, student learning is impacted” (p. 126). Research shows that student assessment performance reaches greater gains when teachers participate in professional development (Cohen & Hill, 1997; Killion, 2003; Wenglinski, 2000).

Garet et al. (2001) conducted an empirical study on the effects of different characteristics of professional development on teacher learning. Findings from the study identified three professional development activities that have a positive and significant effect on teachers change in classroom practice, and their knowledge and skills. The activities included 1) content knowledge focus, 2) active learning opportunities, and 3) coherence with other learning activities. These professional development activities affected teacher learning and provided guidance for structural features including the forms of activities used, duration of activity, and collective participation of teachers from the same school, grade level, or subject (Garet et al., 2001).

Researchers Stigler and Hiebert (1999) also enlightened the positive aspects for teacher learning in the areas of in depth learning opportunities, high standards, and content focus. They reported that foundational features of these successful opportunities for teacher learning included ongoing collaboration for planning, improvement in student achievement, attention to improving curriculum, pedagogy, and student metacognitive skills, opportunities to observe and reflect on the effectiveness of different strategies and practice (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). These various professional development learning activities and means for teacher growth are applicable within the development of a professional learning community, providing the means for cohesiveness through useful collaboration.

**Adult Learning Theory**

Bandura’s (1986) theory contributes to the development of adult learners by expressing the importance of using personal experiences and self-reflection to alter perceptions and
practices. He describes the possession of values, beliefs, cultural experiences, and use of resources as mediators to personal cognitive development. Research expressing adults as learners in ways that are individually meaningful and contextually important (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999), professional development grounded in activities that foster these characteristics. Other recommendations concerning adult learning opportunities such as professional development exclaim that theories of adult learning should be considered foundational (Peixotto & Fager, 1998). Collins (1991) described adult learning theory as an interactive link of the adult learner gaining knowledge and understanding of a theory and then putting it in practice. People make sense of their experiences, explore their cognitions and self-beliefs, evaluate themselves, and alter their thinking and behavior through self-reflection. Bandura believed that one’s own perceptions of efficacy derived from self-reflection is the most powerful of the five fundamental human capabilities.

The primary figure on adult learning theory is Malcolm Knowles (1989). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) explained Knowles contrast of adult learning as “the concept of andragogy, meaning the art and science of helping adults learn, with pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn” (p.272). Knowles research and writings grew from the hypothesis that significant differences between people less than 18 years old and adults exist. The differences were identifiable and related to the ability of adult learners to self-regulate, being more experienced, and intrinsically motivated (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Knowles (1989) presented six principles for adult learning based on the work of Lindeman (1926). The adult learner assumptions he supposed included adults need: 1) knowledge and understanding of reasons; 2) experiential learning and understanding; 3) a desire for decision making responsibility in planning and instruction; 4) a readiness for learning; 5) to
apply newly gained knowledge to solve problems; 6) (added later) an intrinsic motivation to learn. Lindeman (1926) held that adult education involves small groups of adults who want to stay current in knowledge and practice, face important circumstances, research information, discuss matters collaboratively with peers, and seek understanding. The use of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) provides the ingredients necessary to adhere to Lindeman’s definition and requirements for adult education as well provides the necessities for adult learning to occur theorized by Knowles (1989).

Professional Learning Communities

A PLC has varying definitions. DuFour et al. (2006) define it as a continuous process of action research and inquiry in order to produce increased achievement in students. Hord (1997) explains that a PLC consists of a group of educators seeking, sharing, and acting on the learning that is taking place within the educational environment. Both define the practice as a process of ongoing learning in the professional community purposing the improvement of results in the teaching practice and ultimately student growth (DuFour et al., 2006; Hord, 1997).

Historically, research as early as 1935 documented the use of the PLC in innovative schools working to build relationships or communities of learners that would encourage and rebuild a secondary school in the Denver Public Schools (Aikin, 1942). Hord (2004) conducted further evidence of how a PLC builds community. The longitudinal research study on the school community reconnecting and strengthening the body of learners through the collaborative efforts of responsible adults by Hord (2004) identified the five dimensions of an effective PLC. These dimensions include:

- the use of the design as providing supportive conditions;
- shared personal practice;
supportive and shared leadership;

shared values and visions;

and collaborative collective learning and application of the learning (Hord, 2004).

The effective implementation of a PLC results in positive attributes including:

- encouragement for greater student achievement;
- increased opportunity for teachers to obtain higher leadership positions;
- use of conversations about teaching practice spurring inquiry into practices and application of learning;
- teacher involvement in collaboration; and
- support through collegial activities (Bullough Jr., 2007).

The recommendation to consider using a PLC as a means of professional development as an effort toward school reform is proposed as an opposition to a single shot workshop approach traditionally used and less effective (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Richardson 2009). The interconnected and collaborative learning environments that promote school change beyond the isolation of the classroom walls is of great importance toward improving teacher learning within an educational environment (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) discussed the design of effective professional development as teachers becoming support groups for one another while working toward the improvement of practice within a trusting environment providing a foundation for investigations, and examinations, including reflections (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Little, 1990). This effective design must include the consideration of how teachers’ best learn and offer them opportunities to be involved in modeling new strategies, practicing teaching strategies, and reflecting on personal practice (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). Wenglinsky (2000) found positive effects on teaching practices when providing teachers professional development related to developing skills for specific content or the increase of student learning.
The research of Yoon et al. (2007) directed attention to the findings that intentional and prolonged periods of professional development correlated with student achievement. The meta-analysis of more than 1300 studies examined the effect of teacher professional development on student achievement. They found only nine studies that met the requirements set for the study. Although the studies that involved less than 14 hours of professional development time showed no statistically significant effects on student achievement, all of the studies showed a positive relationship between student learning and professional development where workshops and summer institute attendance were present (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). The focus for the workshops included research-based instructional practices, active-learning experiences, and opportunities for individual practice adaptations.

The models generally included teachers working together; holding continual conversations examining teaching strategies and student practice; and development and implementation of stronger more effective instructional practices (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). The research supported the use of professional development in a positive and effective way and provided support for using PLC’s as an opportune approach. Guskey and Yoon (2009) asserted that all levels of educators have the provision of professional development when dealing with circumstances involving adapting to new information concerning curriculum change or instructional strategies.

Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) compiled a list of the professional development characteristics supported by research and aligned with the earlier research findings of Hord (2004). The characteristics include strengthening teacher content knowledge and understanding; provision of active learning for the acquisition of new knowledge for application in practice; time for reflection; provide avenues for school reform in curriculum; use
of standards and assessment; and is community oriented including collaborative efforts over a sustained period of time (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). PLC’s have the capacity to change instructional practice and transform student learning when implemented as a professional development opportunity with the appropriate structures and protocols.

Lumpe (2007) discussed the need for teacher collaboration. His discussion of research-based professional development identified teachers as generally isolating themselves by remaining in personal classroom walls. The meeting of teachers typically takes place in the form of informal meetings, staff meetings to take care of logistics, or single meeting workshops. He stated, “Seldom is there systematic structures designed to foster true collaboration focused on student learning. …during PLC’s a sense of collective efficacy is created, thereby creating a more positive environment (Lumpe, 2007, p. 126). Considering the need for a collaborative structure of a PLC, focus can be directed to the use of protocols. Allen and Blythe (2004) explained the use of protocols as being an important part of professional development through the use of learning from and with colleagues. They defined protocols within the educational setting as “Structures that enable educators and, sometimes, others (e.g., parents, invited guests) to look carefully and collaboratively at student and teacher work in order to learn from it” (p.9). Two significant features required for successful protocols include the conversation structure, and the specific role that each person in the group is assigned to carry out.

Lindeman (1926) expressed the need for organized means of discussion concerned with a purpose of educating. He stated that while conversations based on short responses proceeding from one person to another may be entertaining they are not particularly valuable in expressing information necessary for developing knowledge and understanding about a topic (Lindeman, 1926). His research on adult learning involved using organized talk encouraging educational
opportunity and following a set of rules for the conversation directed by a teacher acting as the *group chairman* (Lindeman, 1926, p. 188) currently referred to as a facilitator. Easton (2009) further elaborated on protocols describing them as:

- processes that help groups achieve deep understanding through dialogue;
- structures for groups that allow them to explore ideas deeply through student work, artifacts of educator practice, texts relating to education or problems, and issues that surface during the day-to-day lives of educators;
- guidelines for conversations based on norms that everyone agrees upon in order to make the dialogue safe and effective;
- facilitated set of steps permitting a kind of conversation that people do not usually have when they discuss things;
- constructivist approach to discussion that allows for deep development of ideas as certain people talk while others listen, and then the talkers listen and the listeners talk, with each round characterized by reflection and exploration;
- ways for educators to build collaborative communities, sometimes called critical friends groups (CFG’s) or professional learning communities (PLC’s) (Easton, 2009, p. 1).

The purpose of a protocol varies within the different professional context that it is used. The educational context depends on group collaboration and encourages conversations for a deeper look at the learning and teaching taking place. Specifically the promotion of problem solving, problem finding, or a mixture of the two occurs (Allen & Blythe, 2004). A protocol is divided into several steps that enable a specifically assigned task to be accomplished allowing groups to work together cohesively. The steps utilize various opposites including talking and
listening times; discipline and playing times; safety and risk times; and individual and group learning times (Allen & Blythe, 2004). The tensions release creativity within and among groups during the conversations. A protocol format as a tool becomes a co-facilitator relied on through prompts, provocations provided, or a time requirement, acting as reference to accomplish the specific task. Though sometimes awkward, the use of protocols improves with regular practice as the group becomes familiar with the steps and develops habits with use (Allen & Blythe, 2004).

Theory and Research on Literacy Development

The foundational theory for this research begins with connections to Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) theories, including perspectives on the principles of early literacy development and teaching and learning presented by the work of Bodrova and Leong (2006). Then, the work of Marie Clay (1966, 1975) enlightened the literacy development of written language behaviors in children. Last, the introduction to scaffolding is discussed through the work of Wood et al. (1976). The exploration of scaffolding is of importance as scaffolding through planned and intentional instructional practice develops higher-level thinking and is critical for understanding the importance of chosen practices teachers use.

Principles for Literacy Development

Vygotsky’s (1978) work helps us see how the internalization of sign systems produces transformations and creates individualization in earlier and later development. The research analysis conducted by the NELP (2008) supports this theory.

The origins of well-developed conventional literacy skills are found very early in children’s educational experience…showing that the consequences of falling seriously behind in the development of conventional literacy skills are likely to be long-lasting in the absence of substantial remedial efforts (p.68)

The findings were consistent and supported by research by Juel (1988). The research conducted by Juel (1988) found there was a correlation between writing and reading
comprehension. Her longitudinal data shows increases in the significance of the development of early literacy skills over a period from first through fourth grade. Children not developing the necessary skills for literacy became poor readers without the necessary interventions. In addition, findings show that children who become poor readers also demonstrated poor writing skill by the fourth grade.

With the research support showing that earlier intervention and experience increases literacy, it becomes more important to help teachers understand and put this information into practice. Bodrova and Leong (2006) helped preschool and kindergarten teachers see the great transformations in developing early literacy and increasing higher-mental functions using successful instructional practices of planning and providing purposeful support. They refer to this as giving teachers “Vygotsky eyes.” They discuss several principles from Vygotsky’s work already in practice in classrooms in America that illustrate the concepts and ideas. Their discussion of using the Vygotskian perspective and principles in classrooms, concentrates on the use of "cultural tools" for transforming human development trajectories including the relationship between literacy development from a Vygotskian view and development, teaching, and learning.

Cultural Tools Theory

The Vygotskian theory of “Cultural Tools” states that, “learning to read and write figures prominently in Vygotsky’s conceptualization of the relationship between development, teaching, and learning” (Bodrova & Leong, 2006, p. 245). The use of tools becomes more evident as children develop higher mental functions and young fluent writers develop the desire and skills necessary to put pencil to paper. Students become proficient creators of stories by combining the necessary development, effective instruction, and use of the appropriate literacy tools to develop
into successful conventionally literate readers of these stories (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). This process occurs through the development of Vygotsky’s theory with progression through four stages.

The first stage in the theory incorporates the process of natural behaviors of learning through associative processes or the use of making connections between various reactions and stimuli. The process of the child becoming and using literate functions incorporates the use of repetition and routine in learning the alphabetic symbols necessary for writing and creating words. The use of singing the alphabet or other rhyming songs for producing the phonological awareness connect the uses and functions introduced in the second stage (Bodrova & Leong, 2006).

The second stage builds on repetition and increases the context by introducing tools and symbols that are a necessary part of the developing literate functions. The process uses modeling behaviors that scaffold children’s understanding of literate functions and using tools necessary for learning the literate function (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). In the case for developing literacy using writing, the child observes the use of introduction and modeling literate functions necessary to produce a story while the teacher demonstrates (Jones et al., 2010). This modeling provides the scaffolding that encourages the child to use tools autonomously, which encompasses stage three.

In stage three, the child becomes the independent user of the tools necessitated by the function. In the case for literacy development through writing, the child may require prompts for developing the product intended, alphabet charts for remembering letters, or a story example for getting the order and flow of a story, but the work is executed independently (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Crain (2005) discussed the use of such tools as memory aids. In experiments Vygotsky
and colleagues conducted, measurements taken on various levels of metacognition explored children’s thinking and how various psychological strategies and tools are used to improve these processes and increase cognition (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). The experiments showed increased independence of literacy skills moving the child toward the internalized autonomy of the skills discussed in stage four.

As this independence emerges, stage four approaches and the child then internalizes the behaviors necessary for the function and transfers the knowledge gained to other functions. The “external tools” are no longer necessary for the process. The child functions independently literate and uses writing and reading interchangeably (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Incorporating the four stages into the functions and application of the daily classroom practices to develop writing skills increases the awareness of the non-negotiability of writing as a critical tool that is significant across all curriculum areas for increasing literacy skills (Calkins, 2003a).

The final principle incorporated into the current research involves teachers reaching children within the zone of proximal development that should be the goal of effective instruction (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). This discovery using effective instructional practices offers sustenance for literacy development through provision of purposeful and deliberate support of the behaviors Vygotsky defined as higher mental functions within the natural zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978).

Zone of Proximal Development

The ZPD figures prominently into the use of effective instructional practice to teach writing in kindergarten through the understanding that children must be met within their ZPD to gain the critical skills necessary for development. ZPD as described by Vygotsky (1986) is the difference in the child’s developmental age or accomplishments made independently and the
level of accomplishing tasks with assistance. He considered the only good instruction was practice that lead development by instructing ahead of the independent abilities. Vygotsky (1986) stated, “What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow” (p. 188).

Considering ZPD in the literacy development of written behaviors, Marie Clay (1991) enlightened the process by offering skills that the child typically can accomplish and encouragement teacher practices for scaffolding the child’s learning.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding includes the completion of a task beyond using assistance (Wood et al., 1976). Langer and Applebee (1986) presented instructional scaffolding as a process where learning is a “gradual internalization of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place” (p. 108).

The work of Wood et al. (1976) offered understanding in the development of gradual internalization using tutors to scaffolding learning for increasing higher mental functions of children. The dependency on forming higher mental functions is a major development of early childhood (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Higher mental functions unique to human development are acquired through social interactions with other humans by using and learning about tools specific to a cultural use (Vygotsky, 1978). The research findings of Wood et al. (1976) included the measures taken from 30 children involved in sessions with a tutor to complete building tasks using wooden blocks. The tutor assessed the child’s knowledge through observing play with blocks then the tutor modeled the task necessary for the next phase of building a pyramid. Once the child accomplished the task or appeared frustrated with the task the tutor provided more modeling. The results indicated scaffolding used as a means of “luring” the learner into confidence of personal abilities where the tutor can then interpret any differences in the
perception and offer assistance by modeling holds importance for instruction and the
determination of instructional practice (Wood et al., 1976). This is an imperative concern
because higher-level thinking operations of text interpretation and comprehension often fail due
to inadequate instruction (Rosenshine, & Meister, 1992).

Rosenshine and Meister’s (1992) meta-analysis of 50 third-graders through college
students looked at the development of cognitive strategies through successful practice of teachers
using scaffolds defined as forms of supports to bridge a gap between current abilities of the
student and the intended goals. The cognitive strategies were supports for learning and not
intended to be systematic instructions. The scaffolds included tools or supports such as teacher
modeling, concrete prompts, suggestions, hints, think alouds, and simplified problems. Both
intended to help students use the writing process by providing the tools to organize for writing
and use self-talk methods in revisions. The meta-analysis found that the use of scaffolds in the
various ways used in teaching allows teachers the opportunity to help students successfully
implement cognitive strategies across curriculum. Calkins (2003b) cautioned that although we
are the child’s initiator and supporter in the process of writing, it is important to remember that
the necessity of appropriate scaffolding is that we must pull back on our support and consider
that our help is just a nudge toward independence and encouragement for children to be the best
writers they can become (Calkins, 2003b).

Summary

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the direction that the CCSS provided for new avenues
of writing instruction through a shift in practice to the focus of a spiral, cross curriculum
standard spanning across grades K-12 (Calkins et al., 2012). This new national focus on writing
created heightened emphasis on teaching strategies to develop writing skills to show the positive
effects of paralleling writing with the skills used in becoming literate, previously considered reading skills (Calkins, 1983; Dyson, 1984; NELP, 2008). The use of Writer’s Workshop to teach process writing (Calkins, 2003a, Graves, 1994) discussed as an effective method found positive results across all grade levels (Calkins, 1986; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

With changes in the standards focus toward writing and the rigor of the new global standards administrators’ efforts to provide teachers with more effective means of professional development are increased. The necessity of professional development used in developing collegial, collaborative environments focusing on learning outside individual classroom walls presents a need for using a PLC as a positive choice for effective learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997; Lumpe, 2007). By conducting a PLC using the structure of a protocol, the collaborative group is able to achieve deeper understanding by focusing on exploration of current work and issues in constructivist approaches that allow reciprocal conversations and reflection provided by following a set of timed steps monitored by a group facilitator (Easton, 2009).

The information is supported by various theoretical perspectives including Vygotsky’s Cultural Tools Theory (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). This information provided the principles of early literacy development and the focus on uses of the principles within teaching and learning. The inclusion of the development of writing presented by Marie Clay (1966, 1975) expands on the written language behaviors. The importance and necessity of scaffolding in teaching and planning shows the intentionality necessary for developing metacognition (Wood et al., 1958).
Chapter 3 presents the methods required to conduct the research. The restatement of the purpose, and research questions, as well as an explanation of the role of the researcher, research design, research setting, participants, research procedures, instrumentation, and the methods of data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used to conduct the research. The layout of the chapter includes the restatement of the purpose, research questions, role of the researcher, research design, research setting, participants, research procedures, instrumentation, and the methods of data collection and analysis.

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills of the instructional strategies chosen to teach developmental writing in grades K-3. This research is necessary to offer teachers guidance needed for understanding and implementing research-based best practice approaches for teaching writing and to strengthen the quality of instructional practice for meeting the rigorous standards imparted from the Common Core Standards. With the call for standards to include writing that teaches students to produce meaningful, high quality writing that follows a process useful across multiple types and genres (Calkins et al., 2012; NGA & CCSSO, 2012), the instructional practice of writing is high stakes. The use of a PLC as an effective professional development model brings a means for teachers to plan, put into practice, study collaboratively, and act effectively (DuFour et al., 2006). This provision of a PLC offers teachers this opportunity to focus on learning within a collaborative culture of inquiry that is action oriented toward positive results.
The teacher must not only provide instruction at the level of the student but also ensure that the student is on path for global competitiveness upon graduating (NGA & CCSSO, 2012). These high expectations of the CCSS present possible challenges for teachers’ increased understanding regarding the magnitude of teaching writing (Calkins et al., 2012). Challenges include common performance expectations necessitating the ability to teach good writing skills. These expectations of developmental writing demand the inclusion of opportunities for professional development occasions for teachers and administrators to develop and expand knowledge (National Commission on Writing for America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003).

**Research Questions**

The overarching question for the research included:

How might the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) focused on writing instruction alter teachers’ perceptions of the knowledge and skill in teaching developmental writing in grades K-3?

The supporting research questions included:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions about teaching developmental writing since the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
2. How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC alter teachers’ perception about their ability to teach writing?
3. How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC provide guidance for teachers to implement research-based instructional practices for writing instruction within the classroom?
4. How do writing instructional practices change with the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC?
Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (2007), the qualitative researcher should conduct studies in the “field” where the participants are. The researcher, a teacher for the school used in the research, opened the research to all kindergarten through third grade teachers and the Data and Curriculum Instructor (DCI). This opportunity for professional growth and collaboration of instructional practices with a small group of peers at a school building level shown in research to be most effective as professional development (Lindeman, 1926; Lumpe, 2007). The opportunity for the researcher to be immersed in the research with the participants was presented with the determination for the researcher to act as the facilitator of the PLC. This opportunity provided the context for helping provide the reader more clarity in understanding the participants’ views with the researcher acting in such close proximity. According to Adler and Adler (1987), in the active membership role, the researcher takes place in the inner setting of the research site as an observational role and a functional role building the participants’ trust and acceptance of the researcher within the research setting while developing recognition of the researcher.

East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) safeguards participants from influential involvement within a study. The role of the researcher is to consider that all things are ethics (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2007), and the values set by our professions should guide the behavior and responsibilities of the everyday professional activities (Miller & Salkind, 2002). The IRB approves the research proposals and ensures every effort is made to conduct the research without causing any harm to the participants. Since the researcher is also a teacher in the school, IRB required assurance that teachers would not feel obligated to extend contractual requirements to participate in the study or feel threatened for lack of participation.
The researcher did not require participants to meet at additional times for discussing writing. However, the scheduled PLC’s were conducted through voluntary participation during after school hours only. The researcher made all materials, research information, presentation documents, and final analysis available to any teacher at the school whether they participated or declined to participate. Each participant reserved the right to withdraw from participation at any time within the study, but still receive any benefits from the study. The researcher kept the identities and information shared within the study completely confidential as names were replaced by identity codes and videos were deleted after transcriptions were complete.

The teachers and the DCI that accepted the opportunity had a desire for professional growth and understanding (Lindeman, 1926). The site offered the researcher the opportunity to conduct qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher had the occasion to gather information with participants in face-to-face interactions over an extended period (Creswell, 2007). Both the school district for the research site and the state has been under much stress changing standards and expectations for higher for student growth. State and district levels offered professional development in one-time opportunities or a few scheduled sessions over the duration of the school year since the implementation of the CCSS. However, research shows that this is not a successful way to conduct professional development opportunities (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004). Emphasis by Guskey and Yoon (2009) further declared appropriate provisions of professional development as a necessity for educators at all levels when situations requiring new information about instructional strategies or curriculum changes occur.

Stated in the IRB application, the researcher extended the opportunity for participants to volunteer to present materials, successes, or struggles related to teaching writing within their
practice. When no participants volunteered, the directions stated this as the role of the researcher, to present material based on the pre-determined topic from the collection of the pre-survey information. Therefore, the researcher also presented materials used in personal classroom lessons as a provocation for discussion within sessions. The participant responses were treated as valuable provocations for directing the conversations within the collaboration. They were encouraged to share successes or struggles that had occurred within their own classrooms as a comparison or companion event for the information that the presenter shared.

The researcher’s understanding of the context of the study could be considered a bias of the study. To control for this possible breach in the study, the researcher participated in self-reflective journaling at the close of each PLC (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Ortlipp, 2008). The purpose of this self-reflective process was to express her thoughts, opinions, ideas, feelings, and understanding of the PLC and to provide accountability and transparency in the researcher. The use of self-reflective journaling controlling for bias is an effective method of bringing any problems or areas of need to be addressed and brought to the forefront of the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Ortlipp, 2008). The content of the researcher’s self-reflective journal entries discussed within the data analysis insured understanding of the thought processes involved in the facilitation and analysis of the research.

**Research Design**

The study was conducted using qualitative research methods. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2008), “Researchers wishing to obtain a holistic impression of teaching and learning should consider utilizing the qualitative research method as it provides a more complete picture of what goes on in a particular classroom or school” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008, p. 421). The choice to use qualitative methods allowed the researcher a more comprehensive interpretation of
the teaching practices, including the successes and struggles that teachers face as they attempt to prepare children for more global opportunities as they advance in their education. The case study design was chosen to provide important findings and valuable information within the educational setting, which has been found to be beneficial in furthering educational research (Yin, 1993).

In defining qualitative research, Snape and Spencer (2009) discussed the meaning as a natural approach to considering the importance that people give to various experiences. Common key elements that are characteristic of qualitative research include:

- targeting a clear understanding of society through interpretive views and in-depth description;
- using small and intentionally chosen samples;
- collecting data through close contact;
- gathering detailed information;
- studying the information while understanding the potential for discovering standard characteristics brought to focus by creating a visual image of the data (Snape & Spencer, 2009).

Creswell (2007) offered nine similarly specific attributes. His description of essential elements of qualitative research conveys deeper understanding of the method. These elements include a researcher as a key element, a natural setting, several data sources, inductive analysis of the data, a focus on participant meaning, an emergent design, interpretive inquiry, using a theoretical lens, creating a holistic account.

In conducting qualitative research, specific attributes are defining for gaining an understanding of participants addressing particular issues or problems within a setting or context (Creswell, 2007). These elements were important in defining this study and providing the
guidance necessary for direction in determining why this and why this way. The study offered in a convenient school setting, allowed for a small sample size in an environment with a need for professional development the current research would benefit. The detailed data gathered within a close contact setting from teachers eager to sacrifice personal time over weeks and months, allowed for clearer focus of the outcomes provided from details triangulated in several forms. Case study design provided the ideal opportunity in conducting a comprehensive holistic exploration (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991).

Yin (2003) provided four criteria critical to case study design. Yin’s (2003) criteria critical techniques in the design of the current research included the ability to find out “why” and “how” questions, the absence of manipulation of the behavior of participants in the study, the relevance of appropriate circumstances of the study to the experience, and boundaries of the experience or context being unclear. With the ability to produce many views from a single context critical to developing richer understanding of a phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2009), the use of a case study design provided the means for producing holistic insights in answering the current research questions through a real-life phenomenon in order to bring deeper meaning of this account to the reader (Merriam, 2009).

To provide the opportunity for a reliable, comprehensive representation of each case, triangulation of the data was used. The use of triangulation included different methods of obtaining information in order to validate the reliability of the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2009). Creswell (2007) explained that the use of triangulation in evidence collection provides the opportunity to substantiate the information and focus on varying perspectives or themes. The triangulation approaches used for measurement in the current research included the use of pre and post-surveys, transcriptions of videotaped footage of PLC’s, and the use of participants’
reflective journaling. The additional documents used for discussion during PLC’s collected added validity to the study.

The pre-survey provided information for perceptions, interests, knowledge and understanding, and areas of need concerning writing instruction directing the focus for the PLC’s. The pre-survey was distributed at the end of the information session prior to beginning the PLC meeting times. The participants completed the survey and returned them to the researcher before leaving the session. The researcher used the pre-surveys to determine the PLC topics based on the highest areas of need indicated from the survey information.

Each PLC was videotaped. The researcher transcribed each video. The transcriptions were validated by member checking where participants were requested to check the information in the data for accuracy and the insurance of creditability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004), which assures that the reported participant meanings are truthful interpretations (Creswell, 2007). The transcription was coded for themes within each session and among the other sessions and measures.

The researcher kept participants’ reflective journals at the end of each session. These journals included both questions and comments that the participant felt necessary for clarification or ideas that may have developed during the PLC. The participants’ reflective journal forms (see Appendix I) were provided at the close of each PLC session providing the option for completion at the close of the session or returned before the next PLC. Only very few occasions did the participants take the journal with them to complete. Those participants choosing to complete the reflective journaling outside of the session returned them to the researcher promptly. The journals were coded for themes within each session and among the other sessions and measures.
The post-survey (see Appendix F) was distributed at the end of the final PLC research session. The participants completed the survey and returned them to the researcher before leaving the session. The researcher used the post-surveys to measure any changes in perceptions, interests, knowledge and understanding, and areas of need concerning writing instruction that were gained through the participation in the PLC’s as compared to the pre-survey information.

**Research Setting**

Frustrations of the teachers across the district in teaching writing partially from changes in the standards resulted in trials of many forms of one-day professional development on teaching writing and the writing process. Research has shown this not to be the most effective form of professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004). Chappuis, Chappuis, and Stiggins (2009) expressed the lack of success with traditional workshop approaches as uneven success. They presented these types of professional development breeding passivity; construing too much information within the short time, lacking reflection time, practice, and collaboration.

Lumpe (2007) supported that professional development held at the school building level include collaborative environments for discussion of areas affecting student learning. This information aided the focus on this school over an extended period emphasizing an optimal collaborative environment using each PLC as a distinctive case. The high frustration levels of the teachers at the early childhood level, the need for increased higher student achievement in writing at the chosen research site also prompted the school administrator to seek creative, inexpensive professional development opportunities for this school.

Upon requesting and obtaining permission from the district director of schools (see Appendix B), the research was conducted at the school located in the rural area of East
Tennessee with a population of approximately 300 students. The school improvement document reported a racial composition of 93.6% Caucasian, 0.4% African-American, and 6.0% Hispanic. The school includes 74.5% receiving free or reduced lunch. The school includes grades kindergarten through 8th grade. A total of 92 children were enrolled in the participants’ classrooms at the time of the study.

**Participants**

The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is required for all research. This ensures the provision of protection to the participants monitoring occurs through the IRB. The methods of ensuring anonymity of the participants in the current research occurred through several methods.

The researcher was careful to provide appropriate confidential storage for all of the research files and data collected throughout the process. This information included both paper and electronic materials. The use of videotaping required another element of protection. The researcher transcribed the videos, and as stated in the IRB, upon participant approval of the transcription, the videotaping was deleted so there could be no identifying documents of the participants. The assignment of codes replacing the names of the participants for the transcription and the discussion provided measures of assurance of anonymity. These measures carefully considered and followed through protect all participants.

The participants included Kindergarten through third grade teachers in a rural school in upper East Tennessee. The schools administrator expressed a weakness in writing. This information follows the historically presented research concerning a lack of instruction in writing and the support for writing opportunities to scaffold writing (Calkins, 1983; Clay, 2001; Gerde et al., 2012; National Commission on Writing for American Schools and Colleges, 2003). Added
stress with the implementation of the CCSS requiring the need for intentional writing instruction with a demand for routine (NGA & CCSSO, 2010), and the district adoption of a new textbook series presented the opportunity for heightened insecurities for the teachers at the school. The opportunity presented an optimal position for professional development toward building a community of learners working toward improving writing instruction at a school building level (Lindeman, 1926; Lumpe, 2007).

With writing appearing as a deficit area for the research site, an open field of opportunity for early childhood teachers needing support to help student growth, an available prospect opened for implementing a PLC as a professional development model providing a collaborative environment effective for improving instructional practices. This environment provided an opportunity for exploring the impact of the implementation of a PLC as the necessary sustenance for teachers to learn through collaboration. Increased benefits include the opportunity to expand research recommending professional development for adult learners be longer than single presentations and encourage opportunities for collaboration (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004). As expressed by Chappuis et al. (2009), this opportunity also provided an avenue for continued support of the less effective traditional workshops presented within the state and district.

An introductory letter sent to each of the teachers in grades K- third grade and the Data and Curriculum Instructor (DCI) (see Appendix C) served as an invitation to participate in the research. The total number of invitations sent included eight K-third grade teachers. Six female, Caucasian participants consented to participate in the research. The consenting participants included one kindergarten teacher, two first grade teachers, two-second grade teachers, and one DCI. The average teaching experience was 10 years with a range of one to 30. The number of
participants falls in the range of the recommended optimal participants for PLC’s, which recommends from three to six individuals meeting for a common purpose (DuFour et al., 2006).

**Research Procedures**

In order to increase the participants’ comfort levels and help ensure that a routine was followed for each PLC, a protocol was chosen to base each session on (Allen & Blythe, 2004). Using a protocol provided a tool for assisting the facilitator in keeping time moving, offering space for prompting, and providing a reference for accomplishment of specific tasks. The intent was to follow the Tuning Protocol (Allen, 1998; Allen & Blythe, 2004). The Tuning Protocol provides an opportunity for reflection in a collaborative environment. The design provides support for teachers’ refinement of teaching practices for student growth and performance. Since 1992, vast areas of schools used and adapted the protocol for professional development (Blythe, Allen, & Powell, 1999).

The Tuning Protocol, used for a presenter to share information encourages feedback from colleagues helping fine-tune presented materials related to specific standards or topics for improvement in the teaching practice (Allen & Blythe, 2004). Each PLC was conducted using the adapted Tuning Protocol format (see Appendix D). Collaboration materials presented with the group of participants included various kinds of work such as lesson plans, anchor charts, student work, and assessment and record keeping materials.

The PLC meetings held at the school site after school hours ensured there was no infringement on the teachers’ contractual requirements. Each PLC was scheduled for up to 60 minutes. The initial meeting organized as an information session explained the procedures used in conducting the PLC. During this time, the participants had the opportunity to ask any questions or voice concerns about the study before making a commitment to participate. The
researcher provided all necessary information, answered questions, and assigned each consenting participant an identification code used as part of the process of ensuring anonymity, for coding, and written or oral discussion purposes.

The pre-surveys (see Appendix E) were conducted at the information meeting. These provided insight into the perceptions and understanding that teachers have about writing and teaching writing. First analysis of the data collected presented the identity major topic areas where teachers struggle in teaching writing. They also determined that the topics for each PLC directly linked to current issues that teachers need assistance in for effectively teach writing during developmental years to provide the maximum foundation for growth.

The major topic areas compared with the research within the review of literature determined that concerns of the participants were consistent with each distinctive part of the Writer’s Workshop including planning, minilessons, conferencing, assessment, and recordkeeping (Calkins, 2003b). This information provided guidance for determining the topics for each session including the research-base necessary for encouraging deeper learning for the participants and ultimately student growth.

The researcher emailed participants topics to secure volunteers for presenting at each PLC. The opportunity to volunteer provided participants planning time for presentations based on personal needs to “fine-tune” instructional practice in a specific topic area. If no participant volunteered for the presentation, then the facilitator provided information on the topic determined for the PLC including provocations to encourage participant’s discussion for “fine-tuning” instructional practice in the topic area as described in the IRB approval.

The planned PLC’s sessions included meeting biweekly extending beyond one nine-week grading period. Each PLC included the presentation of a research-base for the topic given
by the facilitator. Then the participant presenter provided the provocation, with student work, anchor charts, assessments, or documents for explanation. The use of the adapted Tuning Protocol offered the stability of a routine for keeping the session organized and moving. The predictability of using a protocol provided participants the opportunity to know when to listen and when responses were appropriate.

At the close of the final PLC, the post-survey (see Appendix F) was distributed to each participant. The post-survey was collected at the close of the session or at the participants’ convenience. The data collected provided analysis for comparison with pre-survey information measuring growth and support in the other measures used in triangulating data.

**Instrumentation**

The triangulation of data involved three or more forms of instrumentation to collect data intended to compare similarities in results from each form. This triangulation of data added strength to the confirmability or objectivity of the research (Shenton, 2008). Triangulation of data provided the opportunity to use several different types of data to enlighten the problem or topic, which helped develop new perspectives from the evidence (Creswell, 2007). The instruments to obtain data for the current research included a pre and post-survey, transcription of videotaped footage, and participant reflective response journals. Coding each form of data individually isolated emerging themes within and compared for common themes among various sources.

**Pre and Post-Survey**

The pre and post-surveys (see Appendices E and F) design directed the researcher toward topics that participants felt were strong areas of need. These were used to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and feelings teachers held about abilities, knowledge and
understanding, and perceptions concerning writing. The division into three categories included Teacher Perception, Writing Instructional Practice, and Teacher Support in Writing Instructional Practices. The responses for the Teacher Perception and Writing Instructional Practice included answering on a Likert scale, and the Teacher Support in Writing Instructional Practice was open-ended response.

The information from the Likert scale of 1-5 with one, Strongly Agree; two, Agree; three, Somewhat Agree; four, Disagree; and five, Strongly Disagree analyzed and discussed the shifts in perspective toward agreement or disagreement with the statement. The open-ended questions and specifically the listing of three areas of most concern for teaching writing provided the topics used for the PLC.

The questions for the pre and post-survey and a rationale for each section were discussed. Variance in the surveys included the post-survey questions referred to information the participant planned to do in relation to collaboration and professional development opportunity, instead of what the prior practice had been before the opportunity of the PLC as the pre-survey information requested.

**Teacher Perceptions.** This section intended to address the research question concerning teacher perceptions about teaching developmental writing and include beliefs about the benefits of the implementation of the CCSS. Calkins et al. (2012) expressed that we choose our perception about the standards and that perception can benefit our teaching or hinder our energy and tone. This section has importance in directing the tone of the PLC depending on the teacher perceptions toward the CCSS. It helped determine whether the participant’s perceptions began and ended positive and receptive, or negative and in need of gaining new understanding of the
opportunity that the CCSS presented to educators as autonomous determiners for writing instructors (Calkins et al., 2012; TDOE, 2012).

Writing Instructional Practice. The rationale for the questions in this section were based on necessary determinations of teacher’s perceptions of the importance and use of a PLC for collaboration with colleagues concerning abilities to scaffolding student writing and the teacher’s ability to implement research-based instructional practices for writing instruction. Knowledge from research reporting the teacher as the most effective element of successful practice and encouragement in the classroom (Allington and Cunningham, 1996; Graham, 2008), stresses the perception area an important piece to the success of the implementation of the PLC.

Teacher Support in Writing Practices. The rationale for this section of questions intentionally addressed questions concerning research-based instructional practices for writing instruction occurring in the classroom. The measures determined changes occurring with participation in previous professional development opportunities compared to any changes occurring with the implementation of the PLC.

Prior to submitting the survey to the participant, peer reviewers were secured by presenting the colleague review letter (see Appendix G) and requesting the colleague review form (see Appendix H) to be completed on the existing surveys if changes were considered necessary. Upon return of the surveys and with changes or corrections considered, surveys were ready for presentation to the participants in the research. The peer reviews requested included a university instructor and former early childhood classroom teacher, a building level principal, and an Assistant Director of Curriculum. There were no requests for changes from the peer reviews.
Transcription of Videotape

Each PLC session was videotaped and stored on an SD card. The researcher transcribed the video after each meeting using NHC Software, Express Scribe Transcription Software, which was a free download. Each finished transcription was read and approved by a randomly chosen participant as a validity measure, known as member checking. Member checking, an external validity measure ensuring creditability of the findings and interpretations, provides the opportunity for the participants’ to review material or data and question or approve information presented as evidence (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ritchie & Lewis, 2009). Participants in the study randomly selected and approved each transcription for use of triangulated data.

Participants Reflective Journals

The purpose of participant reflective journals provided the participant an opportunity to reflect on information discerning the application of material pertinent to personal teaching practices. Reflection is a measure of authentic assessment in constructivist philosophy of learning (Devries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales, 2002; Kroll et al., 2005). Teacher reflections allow time to consider personal practice through questioning, hypothesizing responses, and collecting data for answers to the questions (Kroll et al., 2005). Kroll et al. (2005) stated that “…reflective teachers are saying that what they do really matters, which is why they ask questions rather that teach in rote and formulaic ways” (p.43). The participant reflective response journals provided at the close of each PLC session were voluntarily completed and collected for analysis. The information on the participant reflective journal form (see Appendix I) invited participants share two or more comments and one or more questions considered in response to the information addressed in collaborative PLC sessions. Although this was just a suggestion, the
participants were encouraged free expression of thoughts and ideas. Coding of journals included discerning themes within the journal entries, among the journals, and compared with other measures among the data.

**Data Analysis**

Data gathered from the triangulated information included pre and post-surveys, transcriptions of the videotaped footage, and participant reflective journals. The disaggregated pre-survey data provided the topics for the six PLC sessions based on participant needs listed needs. Each PLC session was identified as an individual case. Each case provided data for capturing a holistic view of using a PLC as a model of professional development, structured within a specific organizational context and centered on developing teacher knowledge and skill of effectively teaching writing within an early childhood classroom (Ritchie & Lewis, 2009).

Detailed descriptions of each case including researcher self-reflection and the transcription of the PLC provided identification of complex issues or themes within each case. The coded data methods included using multiple coding levels, within-case analysis, and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of themes, to enlighten the complexity of each case, not for the purpose of generalization, established the significance of the collective information by forming large groupings of detailed data obtained (Creswell, 2007).

Each of the descriptors; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability reference the trustworthiness of research. Within the current research, various provisions of trustworthy measures provided validity to the study. These measures helped to ensure fair and unbiased completion of the research to the best of the researcher’s ability.
Validity and Reliability

Conducting naturalistic research poses a different perspective of validity and reliability than considered by quantitative researchers (Shenton, 2004). In qualitative research, many descriptors express validity and pose trustworthiness in the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained alternative descriptors using four terms providing criteria understood by the positivist researcher. The four terms include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the internal validity. This includes the use of most recent and authentic research methods, frequent debriefing and member checks, peer scrutinizing, and tactics ensuring honesty (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The current research incorporated means for increased credibility by using current research materials and literature to support the project. The use of debriefing and member checking as validity measures secured accurate information taken from PLC sessions videos and transcriptions of data.

The researcher discussing or reviewing any questions, thoughts, or concerns about previous PLC sessions prior to beginning each PLC accomplished debriefing. The act of member checking completed after each PLC session video transcription is the review of data by research participants ensuring accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Readings of video and journal transcriptions collected from PLC meetings through random selection by participants provided evaluations of transcription checking for discrepancies and accuracy. Signing documents using the participants’ assigned code ensured anonymity. This was an important element in protecting the participant.

The assignment of codes was conducted upon return of the participant consent. The participants used the codes to sign all documents such as reflective journals and member checks.
Other ways the identification codes were used included transcribing the video footage. Discussion of identity codes with anyone other than the participant assigned to the particular code did not occur.

Peer review used for scrutinizing the credibility of coding and analysis of transcribed data, provided measures of credibility ensuring consistency and accuracy of codes assigned to the data in each area. The peer reviewer provided a signed letter agreeing with the coding, stating no concerns or questions for discussion.

**Transferability.** Transferability refers to the external validity or generalizability. The term includes the consideration of how the researcher conveys the research to the reader concerning the site, number of participants, data collection, period of the data collection, and the length of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description provided the reader with a clear vision of the cases as they unfolded addressing transferability in the current research (Creswell, 2007). The description included pre-survey data used to identify PLC topics, the case purpose, the research-base for the topic, the presenter information, and quotes stated during the PLC, and the comments from researcher reflective journals to present any biases.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to the reliability of the study. The term includes the design and implementation of the research, data gathering details, and the research reflections (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To provide trustworthiness by ensuring dependability of the study the researcher used protocols. Yin (1993) explained that the use of protocols as helping to guarantee following the same procedures for different or multiple investigators or cases within case study research. The protocols in place for the current research included using the Tuning Protocol (Allen, 1998; Allen & Blythe, 2004). This protocol allowed for a specific procedure of steps followed for each meeting, which created a foundation for collaboration supportive for helping
the participants in discussing teaching practices, which potentially leads to increased student performance (Blythe et al., 1999). The discussion of various instructional materials such as anchor charts, lesson plans, assessment and record keeping materials, and student work were used for presentation during the PLC sessions. The use of the protocol provided dependability by creating a routine that helped ensure participants a safe environment and effective means for collaboration among the group of colleagues.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the study including the use of triangulation, reflection, and creating an audit trail of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of the data is the inclusion of several collected sources with the intention of producing similar or like results from each form (Creswell, 2007). Measurements gathered from the triangulated information included pre and post-surveys, transcriptions of the videotaped footage, and participant reflective journals for comparison of similarities of data gathered from each source.

The use of both participation and researcher self-reflections were measures of confirmability. Reflection allowed the participant to review the information presented determining any questioning, thoughts, or concerns (Kroll et al., 2005). The researcher self-reflection as a confirmatory act revealed any thoughts, questions, or biases occurring throughout the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Ortlipp, 2008). Measures of peer review and member checks, discussed above confirmed the validity of the research.

**Case Descriptions**

Each PLC session was viewed as a case. A rich description of each PLC session as a case was provided. The use of thick description was included as a measure of validity ensuring the transferability of information from the researcher to the reader (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba,
Thick or rich descriptions are an important element of qualitative analysis. This provides the reader a detailed description of the data (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). The description set the stage for the PLC by describing the setting and environment for the research site. Each PLC description included information from the pre-survey used to identify the determination for the PLC topic, the purpose of each case, the research-base provided for the topic by the facilitator, the information presented for collaboration, and specific quotes that helped determine the emerging theme presented in the PLC. The inclusion of the researcher reflective journals added validity to the description, providing clarity of the researcher’s biases, thoughts, and position throughout the research data collection (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Ortlipp, 2008).

**Coding**

The cases were coded for recurrent themes within each individual case and across the multiple cases including each form of data collection. MAXQDA, 11.0.10 software was used to code the measures and compare the themes that emerged from the coding. Included in this discussion are the types and levels of coding and the determination of the emerging themes.

An exploratory strategy for qualitative case study research used for identifying issues includes within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007). This was chosen as a classical system for use when multiple cases are compared. Within-case analysis was used to identify themes within each case, while cross-case analysis aided in identifying themes that occurred throughout the multiple cases (Creswell, 2007).

The coding for the current research involved the use of various cycles. The first cycle of coding involved an exploratory method of Provisional Coding. Provisional Coding begins with a predetermined list of codes that may have originated from sources including the literature review, prior research findings, pilot studies, and contextual framework or guiding questions for the
current research, or researcher’s prior experiences and knowledge (Saldana, 2011). The use of the key terms from the study’s research questions determined the Provisional Codes. Shorter lists of five or six codes were used as recommended by Creswell (2007). This provided a starting point to analyze that data. Coding for each measure of data involved determining comments and words within the transcriptions relating to key words within research questions including: knowledge, perceptions, instructional practice, skill, or collaboration. Creswell (2007) explains that short lists of codes may expand into a list of 25 to 30 categories that work into five to six manageable themes for discussion.

The second cycle of coding for the current research began with the expanded 24 categories. The method used for the second cycle coding included the use of Pattern Coding (Saldana, 2011). Pattern Coding pulls together the larger volumes of information creating meaningful explanations of major themes of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using Pattern Coding allowed the research to narrow information in the 22 categories or groups of smaller themes for thematic analysis.

Summary

Chapter 3 included the methods used to conduct this research. The chapter also expanded on specifics of the research including the restatement of the purpose, and research questions, as well as an explanation of the role of the researcher, research design, research setting, participants, research procedures, instrumentation, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 comprised sections elaborating on specific information related to the analysis and review of the current research.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of the knowledge and skills of the instructional strategies chosen to teach developmental writing in grades K-3. The questions directing this research included an overarching question and guiding research questions.

The overarching question was:

How might the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) focused on writing instruction alter teachers’ perceptions of the knowledge and skill in teaching developmental writing in grades K-3?

The research questions were:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions about teaching developmental writing since the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

2. How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC alter teachers’ perceptions about the ability to teach writing?

3. How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC provide guidance for teachers to implement research-based instructional practices for writing instruction within their classroom?

4. How do writing instructional practices change with the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC?
The data obtained from the PLC sessions held with K-3 teachers at the school site included pre and post-survey information, transcribed and coded videotaped footage of each PLC using an inductive process, and discovery of emergent themes. Participant reflective journals taken as a culminating reflection on the presentation and conversations of the current PLC served as evidence of the presenters’ dilemma related to instruction in writing. Each area reported in this chapter elaborates on specific information related to the analysis and review of the current research.

The first section discusses the use of the protocol instrument. The second section includes the data obtained from the video transcriptions of the PLC discussed using thick description (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of each case including the presentation of the research-base for the topic area of need, the presentation of shared classroom materials, and participant comments within an analysis of the coded information including the major sub-code themes that occurred within the discussions. The third section includes the data obtained from the pre and post-survey of the teachers participating in the PLC including changes in the perceptions, interests, knowledge and understanding, and areas of need. Also included is any coded information with a discussion of themes that occurred within this evidence. The fourth section includes the data obtained from the reflective journals from each teacher participating in the PLC with analysis conducted from the coding and discussion of the themes that occur within. The fifth section includes the data obtained from the presenter’s notes and shared documents that are described and used to demonstrate the teacher perceptions of the strengths or weaknesses in the instructional practice that was used to obtain the document. The last section presents the predetermined and emergent themes occurring throughout the coding of the data.
Protocol Instrument

Allen and Blythe (2004) defined protocols within the educational setting as “Structures that enable educators and sometimes others (e.g., parents, invited guests) to look carefully and collaboratively at student and teacher work in order to learn from it” (p.9). The protocol instrument used in this research was the Tuning Protocol (see Appendix D), (Allen & Blythe, 2004).

Adjustments in the protocol were necessary because there were no volunteer presenters. As determined and stated in the IRB application, the researcher presented lessons and materials on the topics predetermined from the participants’ pre-survey data. The application of this data was important because it offered insight to areas that the participants perceived as deficit areas in the instructional practice of teaching writing. These responses used to prompt discussion about the materials presented included the successes and struggles the participants’ had related to the topic. The topics developed from the pre-survey were determined based on the major topic areas teachers listed as areas of struggle within teaching writing. The completion of the presentation aligned with the direction of the Tuning Protocol. However, modification to the protocol involved adjusting the remaining discussion time.

The adjusted protocol included the use of provocations that invited participants to share their perceived successes or struggles related to the presentation. The researcher, also the facilitator, offered provocations throughout the session to continue the discussion or redirect the topic back to the focus for the PLC. Notation and discussion of adjustments made occur in the researcher’s self-reflective journal entries.

In the self-reflective journal, the researcher expressed the adjustments necessary to accommodate the evolving nature of the each PLC. Several statements from the journal
addressed concerns with the protocol. At the beginning of the sessions, the researcher was clearly distressed that the wrong protocol had been chosen. The researcher stated in the self-reflective journal, “A concern is this Tuning Protocol. I’m just not sure that this is the format right for this research now that I have tried, maybe as we progress this will work out.” Continued use of the PLC’s using the chosen protocol, demonstrated a naturally occurring adjustment in the format. The researcher stated in the self-reflection, “The beginning of our discussion is aligning with the Tuning Protocol, but the next parts of participant feedback is where the routine changes. It becomes a discussion of struggles and strengths of the participants in relation to the presenter’s information,” and “We are in a routine of research-base, presentation, then discussion of personal classroom strengths and struggles related to the topic and presentation. It is working! I don’t feel like we can call this the original Tuning Protocol that was intended to be used, but a modified version that includes the use of personal classroom experiences discussion.” Through the progression of continuing to work through the process, by the end of the sessions the researcher made the determination that the protocol adjustment was successful for this research. The researcher’s ending session self-reflection stated, “The protocol continues to be perplexing. The discussions appeared successful to me and are providing information that I find fascinating and beneficial to practice and the development of a professional development model but the issue is how do I handle this change within the dissertation? This is definitely an adjustment to the protocol.” The consistent flow in the sessions and the naturally routine pattern of conversations for each session supported the use of this protocol format. Each session developed into a context-dependent inquiry (Creswell, 2007) of collaboration by sharing areas of perceived successes and struggles, or ah-ha’s and oh-no’s. The creation of a secure environment that offers support for teachers to divulge personal strengths and weaknesses provides support for both novice and
experienced teachers through collaboration as a team and is a necessity for growth in teaching practices and the benefit of improving student learning (Little, 1990).

The original purpose of the Tuning Protocol was to provide reflection opportunities for teachers to discuss instruction in a collaborative setting. The design provided support for teachers to refine teaching practices. Many adaptations to the original protocol to fit various areas of schools occurred for professional development purposes since 1992 (Blythe et al., 1999). By adapting the protocol for the current research, the researcher was able to obtain information about teachers’ perceived successes and struggles as they teach writing in relation to the presentation of material given at each PLC session. This professional development effort strengthened by producing a collaborative environment included provisions of a research-base, incorporation of a presentation of a teachers’ successes or struggles with a lesson, documents, or student work, and then discussion and recommendations on the presentation with relations to participant’s personal successes or struggles in teaching writing. Each PLC wrapped up with a brief summary, a preview of the next topic, and a final push for a participant presenter before the provision of participant reflective journals.

**PLC Case Discussion and Analysis**

The PLC topics were determined based on the data collected from the pre-survey information. The topics, based on the stated needs participants conveyed in the pre-survey question asking for a list or discussion of three areas of most concern about teaching writing included planning, minilessons, conferencing, assessment, and record keeping. Table 1 shows comments listed on surveys and disaggregation of data into the areas determining topics for each PLC session.
Table 1

*Research PLC Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Comments from survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 1</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporating resources into practice/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Pacing for grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting students to complete writing in an appropriate time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3</td>
<td>Minilessons</td>
<td>Modeling process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting students to add their own thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making certain students understand the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching lower students how to write using words not pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching topic sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporating grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 4</td>
<td>Conferences/Feedback</td>
<td>Conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting students to add their own thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making certain students understand the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching lower students how to write using words not pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 5</td>
<td>Assessment (Formative/Summative)</td>
<td>Share time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 6</td>
<td>Review and Summary</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minilessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher emailed the list of determined topics to each participant for review of the PLC discussion plan to secure presenters for each session. No volunteers came forward to present with the first email request or subsequent requests for presenters for each session. As stated in the IRB application, if no participants’ volunteered to present the researcher becomes responsible to provide the materials for the PLC presentation that included classroom experience in the topic area by sharing lesson plans, student work, anchor charts, or assessment tools. The
necessity of taking a functional role while completing an observational role is supported in research by Adler and Adler (1987) expressing this as an active membership role. The researcher takes a place in the inner setting completing dual roles providing the researcher opportunity for building trust, recognition, and acceptance from participants within the setting.

The data explored inductively from the specific to more a general perspective or thematically (Creswell, 2007), helped provide recognition of themes. The data from each area of collection was broken apart into larger categories and then separated into interrelated topics. The analysis of the data obtained began by using Provisional Coding (Saldana, 2011). This type coding included taking pre-determined key terms from research questions for the current research. These Provisional Codes pre-determined based on the expectation that information discovered in this exploration could align with the terms provided a starting point for first cycle inductive exploratory coding for disaggregating data that expanded into several emergent codes and sub-codes (see Appendix J). Then through second level coding, the use of Pattern Coding brought the large amounts of data together into narrow, more meaningful themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2011). Throughout the process, information unfolded descriptively within each case account.

**PLC Setting**

The setting for the research included the use of a private classroom designated by the school administrator. There was a door for privacy, but the area was comfortable and familiar to all the participants. At the end of the school day, the classroom was quiet with distant sounds of swishing feet hurrying in the hall or an occasional announcement made over the intercom. The video camera was set in one corner of the room far enough away so as not to attract attention, but close enough to pick up quiet voices, tired from a full day of teaching. Two tables were pushed
together in the center of the room with enough chairs placed around to compensate each participant comfortably.

A few minutes after the final dismissal of the students that were car riders, the teachers began to trickle into the room. The choosing of seats became comical as each one scoped out the video camera to choose the most distant chair facing backward to the camera to avoid maximum exposure. There were laughs and joking about being videoed, assurance and reassurance provided at each session that no one would see the video but the researcher during the transcription. The participants’ were also reminded that once the video was transcribed and approved by member checking (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the footage would be deleted. These reminders served in building trust within the investigative environment and as a provocation for reflection on potential support, each member of the research could provide for each other (Bryk et al., 1999; Little, 1990). Building an environment of interconnected and collaborative participants provided increases in the climate of change beyond just the classroom and helped to develop a more effective professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond & Richardson 2009; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997). However, the chair choosing ritual continued with each PLC session.

Case 1

The facilitator introduced the topic as planning, sharing that this would be the first of two sessions on planning. This session would include planning concerning the participants’ thoughts about teaching writing and the expectations for writing since this was an area listed as a concern on the pre-survey. Since research expresses perceptions towards standards can benefit or hinder the quality and energy in our teaching (Calkins et al., 2012), the plan incorporated discussing the
expectations about writing to develop a deeper feel of the participants’ perceptions and feelings toward teaching writing.

To begin, the facilitator shared that the information from the surveys included several “I don’t like this” statements. Immediately participants interrupted with reasons for the responses. Participants expressed very personal concerns such as, “I would like to share that. I didn’t write in elementary school. We wrote Halloween. We wrote Christmas. That was about the extent of it. So, I don’t know how to write, so I don’t know how to write therefore, I don’t know how to teach the writing. And it’s hard for me to come up with the right kind of format.”

Other inadequacies expressed from teaching practices and disagreement involved district requirements and text options. One comment included, “I think that why I don’t much care for it is ‘cause we have four different types of writing and that first nine week is journal writing and then personal narrative. I feel like I run out of things to teach them on that specific type of writing. It’s like I’m teaching them the same types of minilessons over and over and over and over. I find it hard ‘cause I don’t know how to incorporate grammar well enough in my writing, so that why I don’t like it.”

Another statement included, “And I don’t like writing and I’m sure it’s an old school thing…they don’t have enough foundations of a books emphasis and nouns and verbs and with the series that we use it’s let’s do brainstorming today and next we’re going to teach nouns, and then we’re going to teach pre writing and then adverbs. But we skipped verbs and we skipped adjectives and you’ve skipped agreement and the fact that you have to have a noun and a verb or a subject and a predicate but let’s put this all together and make stories.” After hearing these indicators of frustration coded as negative perceptions, other participants included support for the text and alignments with CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) by encouraging that it may all map out
in a couple of years and through consistent teaching and building up of the program the format will help us in the future. As the sharing stalled, the facilitator continued elaborating on the research-based introduction of Calkins work (2003a).

**Research-Base**

The researcher facilitated the discussion of the research-base including the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Calkins, 2003a). The facilitator shared the set of seven books with the participants and explained that Calkins expressed the benefits of using a Writer’s Workshop with kids who do not know the alphabet progressing through the writing stages of drawing, scribble, nonphonetic letterstrings, invented spelling, and conventional writing (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Sulzby & Teale, 1985). The presentation provided information incorporating teaching writing as a balanced literacy, and using the senses in a process of learning including thinking, speaking, writing, reading, and always listening (Nestor & LaRiche, 2002).

**Presenter Information**

The presentation of classroom experience included the presenters’ foundation for the use of Writer’s Workshop at the Kindergarten level in order to establish a foundation for all other grades. The presenter shared a quote that became the foundation for using Writer’s Workshop in her classroom. The quote by Lucy Calkins (1986) stated, “Writing allows us to turn chaos into something beautiful, to frame selected moments in our lives, to uncover and to celebrate the organizing patterns of our existence” (p. 3). The discussion continued, explaining balanced literacy (Nestor & LaRiche, 2002) as an intertwining of skills within the time of writing and often times an integration of curriculum by including Writer’s Workshop within other learning opportunities.
The presenter explained the importance of developing knowledge and understanding that patterns play in literacy development. Research by Juel (1988) stated the students not learning and developing the organization of positive patterns in literacy development are at a loss of literacy skills without great interventions. Her research found that students who are poor readers are going to be poor writers secured the importance of developing positive patterns in the expression of research and that children who could write well are going to be better readers (Juel, 1988). The presenter’s personal classroom experience included an example of teaching students at the beginning of a school year with expectations for students to fall into routines and procedures without properly modeling and practicing. When students act confused and do not know where to begin, the realization becomes self-reflective for the teacher, and the teacher must back up and begin by re-teaching the expected routines and procedures. This time with baby steps in order for the students to learn the process and expectations for participating in Writer’s Workshop successfully, by developing the patterns of becoming experienced writers and readers and not continue assuming that students will understand or realize the process or routine.

The presentation continued by expanding on how the teacher provides the opportunity for children to use multiple senses within a Writer’s Workshop. The information shared included having students to watch, look, and visualize ideas using their eyes, listen and hear others as they are discussing ideas or reading their writing to one another, and the continued process of thinking about what they are going to write or are writing.

The provocation for discussion on the presenters information included “What do you think when you think of Writer’s Workshop?” The participants’ discussion began by sharing one-word answers including graphic organizers, conferencing, a minilesson, individual writing time, and mentor text. Then the participants were silent. The facilitator elaborated on the opening
provocation by stating, “What do you expect the classroom environment to be like when you are having Writer’s Workshop?” This restatement opened a floodgate of responses including the discussion of participants understanding and approaches to using Writer’s Workshop through management issues, teaching strategies.

Management

The information the teachers shared regarding management coding included concerns within the sub-code classroom management needs of keeping students on task, focused, and creating a positive environment. A participant shared her use of music in the classroom. “I call it writing music. So, I turn on the writing music. If the writing music is on, you know what to do, and go from there. If you need help, I will be around or you can ask a buddy. That’s what we use.” One participant began encouraged stating she did not want it completely silent in the classroom during writing but felt that some students were distracted by noise even if it was on topic noise. However, then she defeated herself by stating, “Maybe I don’t have good control.” This thinking indicated the negative perception the teacher had of her own teaching practice, but was countered by anecdotes that included offering ways to provide time for more talking using knee-buddies and helping circles.

Knee-buddies defined as the inclusion of assigning a partner for children to have discussions with, provide an opportunity for the students to have a talking time, and then independent writing time would be a more quiet time for thinking and putting information on paper. The participant that provided the knee-buddies idea continued to elaborate on her experience with issues that occurred in management by sharing some struggles with students becoming off task with chosen partner creating an environment of chaos within the session. This prompted another participant to share her success with the use of the helping circle.
She explained that a helping circle was, “…one way of getting the kids that needed all the same things to come together.” Her explanation of using helping circles included a few people that needed help in a particular area of the writing process came together for discussion providing an opportunity for positive talking time for those that needed it while others were free to work in a quiet space. The helping circle provided for any topic such as developing ideas for topics through the writing process to editing, could be adjusted for various grade levels.

Instruction

The coding for instruction (see Appendix K), included a strong focus on the sub-coded areas of teaching strategies and conferencing. The participants sharing success with the helping circle prompted discussion of other successful teaching strategies as means of instruction. One participant shared an idea she learned through collaboration with an upper grade level teacher for sharing work using a document camera. This strategy included students showing work on the document camera then classmates offered positive comments. Discussion included classroom management issues of keeping the environment positive with only voluntary sharing.

The conversation began to slow as time ended. The facilitator provided a last opportunity for sharing with no one commenting. The topic for the next PLC, planning long and short-term goals for writing instruction, introduced using graphic organizers as a planning tool. The participant reflection sheet was provided for each participant.

Teacher Perceptions

“I have read often and seen in my own frustrating years of practice, but today I was taken aback by the apparent frustration level of the teacher’s open and honest opinion of writing! Several teachers in the beginning of the session really opened up and shared that they do not like to write and therefore they don’t like to teach writing. WOW! This was so much in alignment
with research that said teachers do not think they are good writers so they avoid teaching writing.” This quote was taken from the researcher’s reflective journal. The research, as suggested in the reflection, expressed that teachers avoid teaching subjects such as writing or show indecisiveness on what to teach or how to teach when there is unfamiliarity with the complexity of emergent literacy (Calkins, 1983; Clay, 2001; Richgels, 2003). The teacher perceptions in the first PLC held true to this research. The researcher’s self-reflective journal reported surprise in negative perceptions and the apparent frustration levels of participants.

Negative teacher perceptions were a major theme of codes in this PLC session under the teacher perception code. The quotes representing negative comments included teachers feeling of inadequacy in teaching writing due to their perception of their own ability to write. Comments such as ,“I didn’t write in elementary school. We wrote Halloween. We wrote Christmas. That was about the extent of it. So, I don’t know how to write, so I don’t know how to write therefore I don’t know how to teach the writing. And it’s hard for me to come up with the right kind of format,” “I think why that I don’t much care for it is ‘cause we have four different types of writing,” and “I think writing is one of the hardest things that you teach ‘because there’s no set pattern.” Other comments that led to negative teaching perception included insecurity from a lack of knowledge of how to teach skills within a Writer’s Workshop model. Comments included, “I find it hard ‘cause I don’t know how to incorporate grammar well enough in my writing, so that’s why I don’t like it;” “And I don’t like writing ‘cause and I’m sure it’s an old school thing…they don’t have enough foundations of a books emphasis;” and “The part that I dread the most is the conferencing because it is hard sometimes to get them to understand without basically saying please write this.”
Knowledge

The information coded as knowledge shared by the participant throughout the PLC included mentioning times of collaboration, metacognitive thinking, and prior knowledge. Comments shared included speaking with another teacher about teaching strategies, sharing personal learning strategies using visualization and thinking, and discussion related to understanding how planning for and laying foundations at early childhood levels will, “build up,” “map out,” or “help us in that format” in the years to come after following the CCSS.

Participant Reflections

The participant reflection journal provided the opportunity for the participant to offer comments and questions related to the PLC. The comments that participants stated for the first PLC included:

- using the 5 senses to teach writing- great foundation/strategy not just for students but as a guide for myself;
- setting a routine/mood so kids know expectations-music, conferencing;
- Writer’s Workshop is balanced literacy;
- concern among fellow colleagues about teaching the writing process;
- I liked using the 5 senses to teach writing;
- important to have a good writing community;
- writing is important to help make students better reader.

The questions that the participants’ reflections included were prompted by the discussion within the PLC. They included not only questions but statements that could be used as guides for necessary topics of discussion to include in future PLC sessions. The questions and wonderings included:
• best approach to kick off a new year to keep students excited and engaged;
• planning process is important;
• Should we start out next year basically at the beginning with labeling, so to speak;
• steps to take to set up a good writing community.

Case 2

The second PLC was held in the same setting. The facilitator presented the topic as planning for long and short-term goals. She explained that this would hopefully answer some of the questions from the previous PLC participant reflections and help pave the way for the future topic of minilessons. The use of the adapted protocol for the PLC incorporated the research-base, the presentation of classroom experience, and a time for responses by participants to include sharing successes and struggles related to presentation materials.

For the current PLC, the research-based included a five to ten minute description on information helpful in planning for writing workshop. The materials for the presentation included planning that the presenter had accomplished for the current school year. Then, the participants were ready to discuss their personal planning strengths and weaknesses.

Research-Base

The shared research briefly included the district requirements, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Writing Curricular Calendar (Calkins, 2011) and Units of Study (2003a). The requirements provided by the district include a 45-minute period for Writer’s Workshop. The time is to incorporate the various components of minilessons, independent writing with teacher conferences, and sharing-time. This general schedule provides teachers the autonomy to distribute the minutes as necessary among the components. The district also provides a pacing guide in order to keep all schools on the same teaching topic within an
assigned grading period. This aids in more continuity in curriculum for transient student populations if change occurs within the system. It also helps to ensure that information taught within a grade level is consistent for students regardless of the class that the student is placed within.

For possible use in conjunction with the district-pacing guide, the facilitator discussed another beneficial planning tool. The calendar provided by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, Writing Curricular Calendar (Calkins, 2011), which is a revised curricular calendar in the Units of Study (2003a). The updated version was created to align with the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The various writing genres have been broken down across the calendar and then lessons beneficial for each month are shared. The Kindergarten calendar reviewed during the PLC by the participants provided information on planning for small moments, non-fiction writing, procedural writing, use of informational books, authors as mentor, science informational books, and poetry and songs. The explanation expressed by the presenter that the calendar was available for each grade level and would be sent to the participant if desired. The facilitator suggested this might as a resource the participants could spend more time reviewing.

**Presenter Information**

The presented material included the process of planning used by the presenter in preparing for the new school year. The presenter began by showing a basic four-column graphic organizer chart, each column representing one nine-week period of school. The columns were divided into ten rows, one row for each week within a grading period, and a heading row. For each week, the presenter shared her thoughts on the topic(s) covered within that grading period. Then, she considered the information taught based on the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) standards and the district requirements. This information plugged into each week also built on
the previous week. The planning process allows teachers the opportunity to see at a glance the pace needed to proceed in order to accomplish requirements, effectively meeting needs of the children, while not overwhelming themselves.

The presenter also shared some of the plans that were in place for the first nine weeks of school and a couple of the week’s plans successfully implemented. Big items emphasized in plans included focusing with students on the use drawing, producing good drawing habits, developing more confidence in drawing, and modeling student planning for writing.

The presenter discussed her focus on drawing first provided help for students to see value in the work they can produce at the typical current stage of writing (Sulzby & Teale, 1985). It served to help build comprehension by being able to express visually the ideas they have or have heard about. It will also allow them to begin building on the skills of illustrating their own work or the work of others. Drawing gives all students a way to be successful in writing considering development and the stage of writing that most kindergarten students begin school with being the drawing stage or higher (Sulzby & Teale, 1985).

The presenter shared the plan of incorporating the use of senses in teaching writing processes. A classroom chart developed by the presenter included each of the steps (see Figure 1). As the chart was shown, the presenter shared the chant taught to the students. She said, “First we think (pointing to her brain). Then, we talk (moving her pointing finger out from her lips). Then, we write (using her finger as a pen against the other hand laid out flat like a page of paper). Then, we read (opening her hands like a book opening). Last, we are always listening (cupping her hand behind her ear).” She explained this as a very helpful tool for her students in thinking about writing. The tool brought understanding for students that just because they have writing time does not mean that they must always use pencil and paper. The knowledge of
writing including other parts of a process before putting words on paper helped to build metacognitive strategies necessary for literacy development.

Figure 1. Metacognitive Steps to Producing Writing for Young Children. An anchor chart used for teaching young children the metacognitive skills necessary to think about and produce writing. The chant produced includes an echo chorus stating, “First we think (pointing to brain). Then, we talk (moving pointing finger out from lips). Then, we write (using finger, as a pen against the other hand laid out flat like a page of paper). Then, we read (opening hands like a book opening). Last, we are always listening (cupping her hand behind ear).

Created by Jill Leonard

Once the presentation was complete, the facilitator offered an opportunity for the participants to voice their thinking considering how sharing this planning informed them. Were
there any pieces of information that sparked an idea or created a connection to a success or struggle that they had or were having in planning? The participants began sharing.

Management

The comments in the management code fell into the sub-coded area of planning and the routines and procedures sub-code. The conversation began with one participant sharing her self-reflections from the beginning of the school year. She elaborated, “I need to go back and do the think, talk, and then write, so that they’ll have their own ideas and know that one sentence isn’t a whole story. Especially for my grade level, it needs to be more than that. Baby steps! I have some that will write four, five, or six sentences, some will write a good paragraph and then there are some that write one sentence. That would be where I would go.” Another participant questioned her teaching practice saying, “I think my biggest problem is trying to find a way to get them past the “how much do I have to write?” “How many sentences?” with the writing assessments, “Do I have to use all three pages? They see it as a chore and not something fun. And it’s always how many, how much? It’s trying to get them past the how many doesn’t really matter right now, just trying to get them in the groove of things. So…” The apparent frustration presented a negative perception of teaching writing as participants released defeated tones in statements reflecting creating a routine for Writer’s Workshop and working it into the schedule. The comments expressed by the teachers demonstrate that there is not enough modeling of routines and procedures or sharing of expectations from the teacher to let the students prepare for the depth of expectations (Jones et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976).

The management code also included the minor sub-code of schedules specifically how to work with constraints when scheduling is not completely autonomous. Comments such as “I’m still trying to get used to this new schedule. I know that it is just 10 minutes difference, but… it’s
still 10 minutes.” “I find that as we’re going through things I’m a little bit more on the clock watching, that I’m going to miss something.” “…even if it is just 5 minutes I find that as a struggle. But you know we are at the end and we’re trying to get to the next thing.” The apparent struggle with small changes that alter the pace of the day became a major deterrent in accomplishing a flowing schedule. This created a ripple in the management of developing the routines and procedures necessary to establish a successful Writer’s Workshop.

The discussion about changes in the schedule occurring this school year produced a negative influence on a larger concern in the management code with discussions of routines and procedures. The participants were concerned that a few weeks into the school year, the routines and procedures were not set in stone and the production of multiple pages of writing had not already begun. “We have done some writing, but we’re still on routines and procedures, still even after a couple of weeks. It takes a while. Drilling them and answering “What come next?”

Another participant voiced her concern that with the push for reading she felt like she did not have an opportunity for establishing a routine for Writer’s Workshop. The frustration was evident in her comments,“Ok well let’s see. Hum! Putting it together. I mean seriously we’ve done some writing, but I mean I don’t know… I don’t have a good handle on it yet. I’ve been trying and I’ve been concentrating on the reading, getting it going, getting it settled, your partner, your share, your book, your reading, your duties, you know and so we’ve written just about every day but it’s not really where I pull them to the carpet and we do a minilesson, then they go to their seat and no it’s not going like that.” Then after some discussion about how routines and procedures were established in the presenters classroom the participant had an ah-ha moment where she developed a plan within her thinking. She stated,“OK! So that’s what I need to work on is pulling them over and saying this is a Writer’s Workshop and saying ok… this is… and we
may not sit here every day…we may not literally write every day…that we may have a thinking
day today and we may think and then share with our friends and then tomorrow we may actually
write what we shared with our friends as a refresher.”

The comment “So it’s just getting all the routines“ simply elaborated in simple the
sentiments of Calkins (2003b) stated teachers need to establish structures spanning throughout
each day of teaching in order to accomplish teaching writing. Further encouragement from
Calkins (2003b) emplored our understanding of the importance of teaching writing. She
stated,“Writing is far too important to be relegated to the status of busy work, with teahers
leading one reading group after another while children write without the benefit of instruction“
(p.2). The participants included instructional strategies to collaborate with each other to bring
order to the routine and greater understanding about the process of teaching writing.

**Instruction**

The comments prompted other participants to think through some anecdotes for these
planning woes. A variety of teaching strategies discussed coded as a way of encouraging one
another.

The use of helping circle was mentioned again, as was the school requirement of
completing a Thursday journal letter to parents about what the student has been learning that
week. A participant shared use of copying at the beginning of Thursday journals and discussing
areas of concern by holding a conference with students before they go back and make
corrections. The students then have a model for the next Thursday journal. Scaffolds of models
to copy and less involved models are gradually removed, and the student begins to write the
letters independently. The teacher shared this as a success and included a very positive
perception by stating with laughter, “For me that was just… today I was very happy!”
A couple of other topics prompted more discussion. One participant shared information from a previous workshop attended in the summer. The description of topic lists included “…having them make a list of things that they know a lot about, things that they wonder about and then things that they would like to talk about and just have them create the ideas first.” Sharing her enthusiastic thoughts concerning this idea related to benefits throughout each genre, she stated, “I thought that was pretty cool to have them make a list ahead of time. You know, what are you really good at, what do you really like to do. You know, what’s something that maybe you could teach somebody? ‘Cause when we get to the procedural writing, writing those steps, it’s just taken care of. I thought that was a neat way to get that thinking process started. It’s just too kind of gives them some ideas and let them come back with some ideas to get started with something they know.”

Another participant agreed, “We kept a vocabulary list of things.” While another shared more in depth about helping students keep their list personal and independent. She stated, “We used to do a topic list. Just have a topic list that we just generated together and then if this was something that you would like to add to your list, you know if somebody brought up about raccoons and you didn’t want to use it then you didn’t have to put it on your list.” A different method of increasing vocabulary and encouraging independence in writing was the provision of word rings kept in a central location in the classroom where students could get up to look for words for spelling purpose or gleaning ideas for writing topics. This was taught in conjunction with using the word wall. The teacher shared the success of this by stating about specific students, “…it’s like that frustration level’s been lowered a little bit.”

This collaboration and the positive atmosphere in the discussion demonstrated the excitement of sharing knowledge that benefited in the classrooms. The participants appeared to
fall into line with research by Easton (2009) expressing how teachers are more able to achieve deeper understanding by concentrating on the exploration of current work and issues in constructivist approaches where reciprocal conversations are allowed or encouraged. The benefit of the collegial and collaborative environment shared outside individual classroom walls also presented the opportunity to show an increased need for the use of a PLC as a positive choice for more effective learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997; Lumpe, 2007).

Teacher Perceptions

The teacher perceptions drawn from this PLC included a variety of both negative and positive comments occurring throughout the discussion. These comments enlighten strong negative perceptions concerning teaching writing, but also encouragement for taking opportunities presented as learning opportunities for gaining new research-based instructional practices. One participant shared her feelings concerning the change in anxiety levels from the first year as being, “That nervous… ohhhhh! What am I doing?” While another more seasoned teacher chimed in, “The, oh I dread this…” The novice teacher continued by stating, “…it has changed.” She referred to her confidence in presenting information through collaborating within the group and her greater depth of knowledge and understanding.

Another comment expressed the difficulty of teaching writing experienced by all levels of teachers came from a seasoned teacher. She shared her feelings, “I think writing is one of the hardest things that you teach ‘because there’s no set pattern. You kind of have to make it fit your style of teaching. You have to follow those steps and it makes it difficult a lot of times for people to teach writing, ‘cause it is hard. You have to keep going over those same things all the time and you think, ok I’ve got a wonderful lesson today, and then next week nobody remembers anything
and you have to start over for them to remember the steps.” Her openness prompted a note in the researchers self-reflection, “Teachers must be confident in their teaching ability to be able to make teaching writing or any subject successful.”

Knowledge

Throughout the discussion, a variety of learning opportunities shared included all subcodes of knowledge. The information coded in the sub-code of new understanding shared included information from reading about making topic lists from a journal or website. The prior understanding sub-code included the use of topic lists, helping circle, various books that had been read, and a previously used writing program. Sub-code previous workshop knowledge shared included discussion of attending workshops or classes and learning about making lists for writing topics, and CCSS training. While the sub-code metacognitive strategies involved the discussion of using topic lists as a way of getting students thinking, and using the think, talk, then write as a way to plan for writing. Also incorporated in the metacognitive strategies sub-code was how teaching writing allowed students the opportunity to write things down when they are thinking of or reading information and want to remember something.

Participant Reflection

The reflection comments shared after the PLC included:

- a better grasp of a successful time schedule for Writer’s Workshop;
- a fantastic way to organize each 9 weeks writing requirements;
- the graphic organizer provided broke down each grading period’s planning and content;
- I like the idea of topic pages/vocabulary pages for student reference;
- I think I could implement peer coaching/conventions to allow more conferencing time;
- vocabulary sight words on rings for students to use during writing time;
• conferring with journals;
• generate topics;
• I thought the daily journal introduction was very helpful;
• I plan to use the topics list in class;
• the think, talk, draw, write plan is a helpful tool and could be used on many levels.

The reflective questioning prompted discussion on planning for long and short term goals including:

• I’d like to know more about literature circles;
• how is the best ways to get students to use the plan (see Figure 2);

Figure 2. **Writing Plan Across the Hand.** A visual provided for children to remember and use the writing plan of information to include when writing especially personal narratives and fiction. The plan reminds students to think about *when* the story took place, *who* is included in the story or *who* are the characters, *where* did it take place or *where* is the setting, *what* happened, and *how* did it make you feel.

Created by Jill Leonard

**Case 3**

As encouragement to participants who expressed struggles with their overwhelming feelings that they were not teaching enough reading skills and they could not get to writing because of so much reading to teach the facilitator shared Calkins’ (1983) research in
Kindergarten observing a six-year-old child as he read his own writing 27 times before he finished writing one sentence. She described the skills used by a child who is typically considered not a reader as writing, rewriting, and conferring, selecting main ideas, organizing supporting details, adjusting and defending sequences, discovering cause and effect, and developing challenging conclusions. The introduction of this research presented by the facilitator was an opening thought provoker for the many aspects of reading taught while teaching writing by modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. This provided an avenue to introduce the topic of the third PLC, a focus on minilessons.

Research-Base

Other encouragement came from the current Research-Base: Units of Study for Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing (Calkins, 2013). The third research principle encourages teachers to offer direct instruction, with guided practice, including independent practice. The explicit reasoning stated,

…writing improves in palpable, dramatic fashion when children are given explicit instruction and lots of time to write, clear goals, and powerful feedback. When teachers explicitly teach the qualities, habits, and strategies of effective writing that writing becomes better and the improvement is evident within days and weeks, not just months (para. 15).

The facilitator then provided the stages of the Cultural Tool Theory (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). The theory described in four stages included establishing a routine, the provision of a tool, the child using the tool, and then the child internalizing the skill and discontinuing use of the tool. This closely relates to the process of a minilesson as a means for providing the tools students need for learning to write. The definition and framework shared for a minilesson included a10
minute snapshot of modeling for provisions of guidance of a skill. The teacher provides direct instruction, guided practice, with students practicing independently with tools provided until they are confidently independent.

**Presenter Information**

The presenter shared a lesson taught on journaling called “What is a journal?” Using the District’s textbook series, she shared that she read the book that explained journaling. Then she and the class created a topic list of what could be written in a journal as a comprehension check of information from the book. She explained that they would go back and add items to the list if other items are discussed in future lessons. She shared plans for future lessons including writing in journals and modeling labeling, which is a skill that will carry over into other genres and curricular areas.

The presentation continued as the presenter shared a continuous struggle to find what minilesson to teach and an appropriate anchor or mentor text to use in minilessons, and the continuous need to repeat lessons or reteach until the students develop independence in a skill by internalizing the use. After sharing this information, the provocation was provided. What are some successes or struggles that you are having with minilessons?

**Management**

In considering collaboration in the management code that took place during this PLC, the participants’ discussion included mainly the areas of classroom management and planning.

One participant jumped in with a struggle that obviously was a large area of stress for many of the participants. She stated, “Time’s always mine. I never have enough time. I don’t care what I do, I never have enough time. By the time I do my minilesson and they start writing and I get around to two or three…our times gone.” She continued, changing struggles to discuss
a problem with classroom management stating, “…most of the time they’re talking. That’s my problem. I can’t get the talking stopped this year. No matter what I do.”

Another participant provided help with the talking issue that she learned in collaboration with another teacher. She shared the management techniques that had been successful for her. “…this week my kids were helping me create a chart about what the teacher would do during a minilesson and what they would do during a minilesson and they realize…like I had a couple that said, ‘It should be short’ and ‘You should be teaching us’ and ‘We should be listening’ and one even said, ‘We should be sharing the pen’ and I was like, ‘Excuse me!’ (Laughs). But, I mean they know, or they know what is expected. Now getting them to be quiet is a different story. Also, a success that I had this week, I did like a teacher suggested and put them in spots around the room and my writing time was a lot quieter. I gave them a clipboard and you would have thought it was the greatest thing in the world just to spread them out and they said…we had a minilesson about what do we do during our try it out time independent writing time and they said, ‘We stay in our spot,’ ‘We write the whole time,’ ‘We don’t talk to our neighbor,’ ‘We don’t talk to our neighbor,’ They were pretty good about giving me what they should do. You know we’re trying to build their stamina, how long they can actually sit there and write and it’s been fluctuating from day to day, but yesterday they went almost about 18 minutes.” The participants appeared to be excited for her success. She was encouraged to continue to develop that routine. Trying to manage talking in the class prompted thoughts of what provisions were necessary for assisting participants in helping students channel talking into productive discussion or talking for purpose should be made in the classroom management. Fisher, Frey, and Rothenberg (2008) addressed the management of student talking by analyzing talking as the product of thinking, which is a backwards view of Vygotsky’s (1986), thinking expressed is talking. They determined from
these ideas that talking should fill classroom, since independent thinking should be the ultimate goal of an educator (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008).

Another participant expressed a need for consistency in her class schedule. She felt that she had too many interruptions to teach with the consistency she needed. At another point in the conversations, schedules were brought up again and discussed more at length. The frustrations were more specific and directly related to the time required for the literacy block. One participant expressed that she had been given two science/social studies blocks while one participant was given three, one within the literacy block, which she changed for Writer’s Workshop time so it completed the 120 minute literacy block. Once the participants felt they were all in accord as to how to successfully reorganize the allotted minutes to include writing, the conversation changed to planning and instructional issues.

The information in the management code incorporated various elements of the sub-code of planning and some classroom management. Discussion on planning included how preparations could be made to teach various topics. A couple of main topics of planning included planning resources and incorporating grammar within the writing lessons.

In conversations that included planning for grammar one participant curiously asked, “How do you…throw your grammar in your minilessons? I find that hard to do. And the coach is always like, ‘You need to teach that grammar in with your writing.’ And I’m going, ‘Show me!’” Another participant agreed, “I can’t teach all that. Now when they start writing a sentence, I say you know, ‘What’s the noun in this sentence?’” A third participant shared one way she planned for incorporating grammar into other curriculum areas, “I teach it in with the spelling and with writing. I do like some of both and in morning work, where we do the daily review, the daily language reviews. I kind of hit it in spelling, the morning review and in writing.” The final
suggestion encouraged participants struggling with how to plan for this integration of skills to be accomplished during the writing time as separate minilessons that teach the skills for grammar. The suggestion was made to use the textbook as a resource and not to be followed page by page, They stated that it does not follow a logical order to teach grammatical skills.

Further suggestions were made to teach the material in order that is necessary for the students to make sense of how it is used. The participant shared that she taught nouns with her labeling lessons because naming words are nouns. Then she taught the verbs adding action for the nouns to create a sentence. Next, she added descriptive words or adjectives and the process continued through each skill. The response to this suggestion was, “Right…ok…,” from one participant and a positive, “Well, hot dog!” from another.

**Instruction**

The discussions that took place concerning the instruction code included topics related to the sub-code of teaching strategies, which closely mingled with management/planning. Other sub-coded topics include a discussion of district text and minilessons.

A variety of teaching strategies were shared during the discussion of spelling and grammar and many areas were cross-coded. One participant shared that although she had not taught a minilesson on *kid-spelling* this year, she had success with the strategy used in previous years. She shared that she taught a minilesson on spelling strategies and encouraged them to “...sound out the word and whatever they heard was what they wrote down.” She explained that she often had to tell them she was not going to spell for them. They had resources such as the word wall and they had spelling strategies to use for success.

Another participant brought up a spelling strategy she had read in a professional development material provided by the principal. She shared that the material had encouraged
“…not to do that, ‘cause once you teach them the wrong spelling or they write down that wrong spelling then that’s what you’re going to remember. She further explained that she did not agree with this, “I always say, ‘Sound it out and then write what you hear.’ Then when we go back over it then I’ll put the correct spelling above or below…” Other participants agreed with the strategy interjecting that helping student’s sound out words, use resources such as sight words, or finding words on a word wall are better choices teaching students independence and building their confidence level.

The participants shared resources for ideas for minilessons and finding anchor texts include the internet, and the district text providing stories used within some grade levels. Collaboration between participants encouraged one participant who admitted that she never used anchor text in teaching writing. She did express an interest stating, “I’m going to be honest…I don’t read an anchor text during my minilesson. I never have…But, I would like to!” She shared that she researched lessons on the internet and the material incorporated a book in the lesson, but she did not have access to the books even in the library. She said, “So what do you do when you don’t have it?” Participants responded, “You make a list for the librarian to purchase!” and “Start yelling ‘Who has this?’ ‘Who has this book?’” All the participants laughed and agreed that they could rely on each other for materials and support. This aligns with research and the use of PLC’s for building effective collaborative environments (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond & Richardson 2009; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997).

In closing the PLC, the facilitator provided material from Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product (Tomkins, 2010). The chapter offered participants a picture of what writers look like when using the strategies taught and completing the writing process. Spandel’s (2009) six traits to writing techniques presented in the material by Tompkins (2010) provided
information on what the writers are doing that influences the reading skills. The information provided a section listing anchor or mentor texts used to teach skills during minilessons. This discussion was enlightening to the fact that the participants struggle with using mentor text as a resource for teaching. A deeper understanding struggles offering understanding of the need for development of resources to aid with this deficit. The transcription coding indicated that participants appeared to respond favorably with several mentioning this information on the participant reflections.

Teacher Perceptions

The data revealed in the coded perceptions portrayed during this PLC included a mix of both positive and negative teacher perceptions. There were frustrations but then another participant retorted with encouragement or positive words. When someone said, “I feel like I’m being too repetitive.” They were told, “No, you’re great!” Another commented negatively about not being able to teach grammar and spelling within writing, but “Well, hot dog!” was the response of another participant after an ah-ha moment of understanding how she could teach the grammar within using minilessons. In the end, all participants reacted positively to the final provocation for responses and when asked if these were helpful tools, the participants shook heads up and down with various answer responses of “Yes” being heard around the table. Lumpe (2007) reported the use of PLC’s as building an increased positive environment through the growth of the mutual efficacy such as the collaborative discussions demonstrate in the current PLC’s.

Knowledge

The discussion during the third PLC included a variety of topics coded as knowledge. The new understanding shared included material that participants had read on the internet and
from materials provided by the principal for professional development. The prior understanding shared included discussion about information that the participants were already familiar with or using in classrooms to teach the spelling and grammar. The comparisons of information made with prior knowledge and information shared that was new understanding were not always in agreement. Statements made disagreeing with the new knowledge that opposed their prior knowledge and practice include, “I’ve dog tagged it and read it and don’t agree with it about a lot of things.” Also, “…there are a lot of things in that book that I don’t agree with.”

Collaboration was evident in several discussion topics. The material coded as collaboration included shared discussions and suggestions made by teacher discussions outside of the PLC in order to benefit the other participants in the group, and suggestions on how more collaboration could take place within the group to secure teaching materials and information.

Participant Reflection

The comments from the PLC participant reflection included information that shared material the participants felt was helpful to them and would benefit their teaching. The comments included:

- how to incorporate grammar into my minilessons;
- mentor texts for the 6 Traits of writing;
- cultural tool theory;
- the 6+1 traits;
- working grammar into Writer’s Workshops;
- using parts of anchor texts instead of whole;
- spacing students out for writing;
- how to include grammar into my writing;
• ways to control talking during writing, put in special spots.

The questions that the participant included areas that they found to be perplexing during the collaboration. The questions of wonderings included:

• what other grammar ideas to be used in writing;
• more information about grammar use and writing lesson incorporation;
• how to stop the talking.

Case 4

The fourth PLC comprised of collaboration on conferencing with students. The facilitator opened by recognizing the concerns the participants had at the previous session with grammar and managing minilessons. Reassurance was given to the participants that another opportunity to collaborate on that topic. The facilitator then proceeded to share the research-base for the current PLC.

Research-Base

The research for the session was taken from *The Conferring Book* (Calkins, 2003c). This book is one of the seven books included in the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Calkins, 2003a). The information contained in the book included a series of minilessons for teaching conferencing for various genres of writing. The author suggested that often we consider minilessons the heart of Writer’s Workshop, when actually we should give that distinction to the time spent conferencing with children. Conferencing is where the bulk of teaching takes place within a small group of students or in a one on one with the teacher and the child. The research included how Calkins (2003c) expressed the demand for organization using the “architect for conferencing.” This begins by watching or observing the child or that child’s work, deciding
what and how to teach, teach, and then link the work to ways that others have used work like this or they may use in future work.

Calkins (2003c) also included various types of conference that can be held including content, expectation, and process or goals conferences. Primary teachers generally hold content conference at the beginning of a school year. This provides the opportunity for the teacher to elaborate and develop the child’s content to make the writing more complex and include stronger details. The use of an expectation conference provides an opportunity to share with the child what is seen in our observation of the practice and the expression of the expectation that is to be accomplished during this writing time. This type conference provides an avenue for redirection in practice or actions. The process or goals conferences are the majority of conferences conducted. These conferences provide for the teacher to monitor the goals and processes that the child is already accomplishing and then offer guidance to increase and adjust those skills to make the writing even better.

Presenter Information

The presentation for the topic included sharing a conference the presenter had with a student that week. The conferencing example shared was an example of an expectation conference (Calkins, 2003c). The presenter shared that the class was working on journal writing. They learned that a journal was personal, something that you think, something that you feel, something that you see, or something that you do. The presenter shared about one little boy who was a great storyteller, but he wrote all fiction. It was all something that he thought about or from a scenario, he had seen on television. He did not include anything personal. The expectation was for his journal entries to be personal. The desire was for the student to go deeper than only drawing a bunch of red scribbles and dictating, "I saw a bloody finger."
The teacher held a conference with the child after watching him draw and listening to his conversation about his picture with other students at the table. During the teaching, the child was reminded of the expectation for journal writing to be personal. The presenter shared that she explained to the child that personal meant something that belonged to or happened to him as a person. After talking with the child, he then shared with the teacher about how he had once smashed his finger and how it had bled a lot. He then said, “I smashed my finger and it got bloody.” Then the teacher wrote that instead and read back to the child, "This is my finger that got smashed, and it bled." This conference was important for this child to make a connection to journals with his experience instead of just making up only fictional stories. The presenter closed by sharing her hopes that even though it may take a few more conferences like that, just maybe with consistently, telling him, "This is the expectation that I have for you in journal writing.”

After the presentation, the provocation encouraged discussion of ideas and promptings that this presentation may have encouraged. What are any successes or struggles that you have had in conferencing this year, even if it is not an expectation conference, but may have been a content or process/goals conference? What can we do to help that somebody else may have an idea about?

Management

The conversations concerning management included a variety of sub-coded topics related to classroom management, planning, and routines and procedures. However, the majority of the conversations involved the dual sub-codes of classroom management and conferences. The participants discussed concerns of management including conferring, and managing the student using partner work.
During the discussion that involved conference management about organizing children and how often to conference with students, one participant shared her concerns and questions about conferencing, “I have a question. I fret a lot over conferencing, not a lot, but just here and there. In one book it says to pull one-on-one conferences or small groups of children over to the side that were struggling with the same element of writing or you know have the same difficulty, but then I read that by meeting with that same child in his table group with children that are not struggling with that same concept it serves as a reinforcement for them to hear that. Which one do you or do you think is more effective? When you have that one on one time with them or is it more effective to do it in a...just go to their table and let people hear what you are discussing with that child?” Offering encouragement and sharing practice, a participant responded, “I mean I find myself, and maybe there just is not any consistency to it, but then I think they’re benefiting either way.”

Another participant shared her organization including the method she chose to manage her conferences included a variety of options. She shared, “I hold them individual, and a little bit of small group, three or four at a time, but then if I see it’s something big...say one day we're writing and I notice multiple students doing something, then I may have them come back together as a whole group and say ‘This is something that I saw a lot of...’ If I see a bunch of them are doing it. Not necessarily a whole lesson all over again about it, but then you'll see people look at their papers and start changing things.” Continued struggles were shared, “I guess my struggle is feeling like the same thing with my small group meeting. I kind of feel like I have to get to everybody, everyday. And I know that's not really realistic. I mean I could get to everybody, everyday, but it would be very short. So, I haven’t found that happy medium.”
One participant presented question and wonderings in response to collaboration that she had with another participant. She stated, “I know you said that you meet with one group one day a week, but I kind of felt like that too I need to meet with each one every day. and then another thing that I was wondering, which I think you just answered, was maybe all your stronger writers as they worked on this, then maybe group them together when it comes to writing time. And you know, the ones that need more help just group them together where you could sit with them a little bit more frequently. As far as grouping them, that's what I was trying to think, which way would be better?”

An illustration provided an example of a classroom experience where conferring in a group of three or four students at a table had been successful even when there was a heterogeneous grouping. “Just like…with the one little boy and his drawing all over the page. I mean he still is writing all over the lines and I’ve tried to get them in a habit of drawing at the top where there is no lines, and then write words on the lines. But, I have this one child that is writing just all over the paper and when I said, ‘Where am I going to write?’ He said, ‘Well, you can write right here.’ He found me a little space. Then another little girl was doing it the way that I was teaching her to do it, she said, ‘You need to draw up here.’ So she was the example to him. Coming from a peer…” This example helped explain the opportunity in using varied methods of conferencing. The questioning participant responded, “They had gotten it…they had understood the concept of what you were trying to get them to do. And that's what I was wondering. For some things it’s hard for me ‘cause some things I think it is better to group all the kids that doing one thing, not necessarily by level but by understanding, to where the ones who aren’t understanding. Then I do see those moments where you’ve got to say look at this or do it this
way or she's trying to do this and they're helping. So, I think it's trying to figure that piece out. When it might be beneficial and when is it not.”

The conversation switched to discussion of what students can do during conferencing. The idea shared to use writing partners to aid in student responsibility and accountability included, “I’m doing writing partners which I’ve never done before. They just tell each other about what they’re writing and when they’re finished, they switch or they read it to their partners or their partner looks at their paper and looks for those things like finger spaces and capital letters, periods and...” Clarifying questions included, whether conferences held with both students would occur at the same time, or did the students separate at some point? The participant responded that the partners separate and complete writing at the assigned table group. Information provided included the partners only sharing what they are going to write and a couple of days later they share the writing produced from the idea.

Instruction

The instruction code included conversations about the impact of writing partners as a means of instructional support for one another. One participant shared her strategy, “They just tell each other about what they’re writing and when they’re finished, they switch or they read it to their partners or their partner looks at their paper and looks for those things like finger spaces and capital letters, periods and...” She was excited to try this, but apprehensive about how it would work and how to get students prepared to this technique.

Another discussion of instructional practice included information that one participant shared from downloads she had taken from the internet. The material included rubrics for aligning instruction with given assessments and teaching the students to complete self-assessments for greater success. She shared, “It's just like, ‘I will work on capital letters at the
beginning of my sentences.’ ‘I will work on finger spaces between my words.’ ‘I will work on neat handwriting.’ I'll just send it to you all. Here's another one that's sort of similar. It's writing goals.” She was encouraged by the direction that these teaching aids provided.

**Teacher Perceptions**

The majority of comments coded in the teacher perception code were negative in this session. The participants were questioned the ideas and work completed for Writer’s Workshop. Some of the negative comments included admitting that there is “fretting a lot over conferencing,” not having “found that happy medium,” and trying to “figure out” pieces of Writer’s Workshop. Participants made positive comments providing or repeating encouragement from others about practice and that it is always worth trying to see if it will work.

**Knowledge**

The discussion during the third PLC included a variety of topics coded as knowledge. The material included in the sub-code of new understanding included material one participant found in gaining understanding about managing the class during writing and working at a specific space for independent writing. The prior understanding sub-code shared included instructional information from the internet one participant had success with using self-assessment tools she taught students how to use.

**Participant Reflection**

The participant reflections comment on the material covered in the PLC that they felt was important. The comments from the fourth PLC reflections include:

- you can’t meet with everyone everyday;
- one on one and groups can vary depending on needs;
- different types of conferences;
• the benefits of student conferences;
• conferencing in small groups vs. individuals – either is fine depending on writing issues;
• setting up a system to track individual’s progress so students can self-monitor as well.

The reflections include the questions and wonderings that were inspired through the collaboration with other participants. The questions include

• should I try to meet with very low struggling writers daily;
• how can I successfully document and keep track of topics discussed during individual conferences?

Case 5

The fifth PLC included materials and information on assessments and record keeping.

This topic was an area of concern taken from the pre-survey information, but also would further address the comments and questions from the previous PLC participant reflections. The need for more information on monitoring conferences and anecdotal documentation was evident from these sources.

Research-Base

The research-base was taken from The Nuts and Bolts of Teaching Writing (Calkins, 2003b), which is the first book in the Units of Study for Primary Writing (Calkins, 2003a) series. The research discussed included the chapter on assessment and the benefits of assessments, including main key points of necessary assessment tools. Calkins (2003b) enlightened the term assessment by making it personal.

When we take what we learn about our students from assessment and use that information to teach them more or differently, to place them in helpful learning context, and to show them how their hard work has made a difference in their ability to make sense of and participate in the world, then our assessment has truly been worthy of us and worthy of our students (p.89).
To further prompt thinking about assessment practices within personal classrooms the facilitator presented provocations the quote had inspired. The participants were asked to think about how worthy or useful the assessment tools or the assessments used for writing were and if these assessments helped accomplish what was necessary? After contemplating this for a moment, the facilitator shared the tools for assessment recommended by Calkins (2003b) in this chapter. The tools included a writing folder, a portfolio, anecdotal record sheet, and conferring sheets.

The writing folder used to keep the student’s current work for the present unit and a method of having everything needed for conferencing became the first focus of discussion. The folder provides a place for storing the students’ current work either finished or unfinished, and it is easy for students to stay organized and for the teacher to have access to. The writing folder, considered the main assessment tool, holds the best assessment measure, the students’ writing.

The portfolio, considered another great assessment tool (Calkins, 2003b) is a place to store all writing taught from previous units. This is a great tool because when finished with each specific genre the writing removed from the writing folder filed in the portfolio organized in a central location in the classroom provides samples of student writing throughout the school year. The students do not have to worry about keeping up with so many writing papers in their folder. The teacher does not have to search for past writing samples to use for assessment as a tool. Everyone is more organized and writing is not scattered.

Calkins (2003b) warns that studies anecdotal notes taken during conferencing found that often teachers get lost in writing a note and fail to teach. Therefore, while this may be a great way to assess, she recommends using a conferring record sheet containing a checklist of skills on a rubric as a way of teaching in conferences that does not aid in getting lost in the recording
process. These recording tools become assessment tools to organize one to one conferences. However, the rubrics as assessments are provided by the district, these rubrics also become a self-assessing tool for the students to check their work independently.

**Presenter Information**

The presentation included recording sheets the presenter used for anecdotal records and conference notes. She shared one type of conference note recording sheet created on address labels. The labels included a place for the child’s name, date, and brief notes about the discussion. The label peeled off and placed on the back of the child’s paper so as not to distract the child, serves to give the parent a record of the teaching concerning the writing sample. Other uses include anecdotal purposes with labels peeled off and kept on a portfolio folder as a recording method. This method ensures writing and records are kept together for assessment or conference purposes.

Another version of a recording tool included an anecdotal recording sheet. This page included 20 boxes on a sheet of paper. Each box contained the name of a student, a place for the date, and a recording space. The teacher would prewrite the names and copy one sheet for each week. Throughout the week, she conferenced with each child at least once. She had a record to make sure she had conferenced by checking the conference record. Those missed she could confer with before the week ended. The pages were kept and referred to for parent/teacher conferences or for other assessment data if necessary.

The presenter shared a district provided rubric for scoring writing prompts. She suggested teaching the rubric to students as a means of self-assessment with students understanding expectations from the beginning and able to work toward continually improving writing by correcting the writing themselves. Upon completion of the presentation, the provocation
provided included, “What kinds of assessments do you use or what do you think that has been presented would be beneficial to you?”

**Management**

The areas discussed in the management code were under the sub-code of planning. The comments coded planning included areas of ideas that the participants intended to incorporate in the Writing Workshop. The comments included the plans to incorporate the use of a record keeping monitoring system and the use of a rubric.

The record keeping monitoring system included a clipboard system to write individual comments and notes about each student on an index card for each child attached to a clipboard in a stair step style. Notes or information can then be written on the cards or, as in the case of the participant, the information can be kept on a label and then transferred to the card at the end of the week, the unit, or the grading period. The participant described this plan as taking, “…large index cards and when you do your address labels and keep them on your clipboard, but when you’re done you just take everybody’s that you’ve conferenced with and you stick them on these index card and then if parents come to conference you just flip to their index card and say, ‘Well, this is what I’ve noticed...’ and they can see what you’ve noticed. It’s not in the writing that they did, but you could match your date with the date on the paper that they did.”

The other area incorporated in the planning sub-code included the use of a rubric for visual and self-assessing. The participant description stated, “I have a rubric that I am going to use with my kids when we start personal narratives…, they get a circle if they’re low; they get 2 eyes and a smiley that makes a smiley face and an exclamation point. But this is just a rubric that I found from a writing unit.” The participant use of an alternative rubric offering a visual aids
young students in self-assessing writing produced independently in a developmentally appropriate way.

**Instruction**

The discussion areas incorporated into the instruction code included the sub-coded areas of record keeping, assessment, and conferencing. Some of the coded discussions overlapped and incorporated other areas.

The participants’ discussion of labels and checklists were used in each of the areas of recording, assessing, and conferences. One participant explained her use of labels as beneficial for record keeping, as an assessment, and in conjunction with a conferring sheet. She stated, “I used the labels, last year. I have not yet started this year we are still dictating. But I love the labels! That was great last year. And then I find that my records that I keep and I put like your conference sheet and mines not that neat. You know just writing down what you talked with them...that's more beneficial to me than the requirement. You know the ones that they take at the end of the nine weeks. I find out more in those and have a more accurate picture of what they can do through those (gestures toward the label sheets) because it's over time.” Another participant explained her use of labels as a plan to incorporate an index card system of management, and record keeping as well as assessment for use during Writer’s Workshop especially during conferencing.

Another area that covered all areas of record keeping, assessment, and conferencing within the instruction code included a discussion of a rubric. One participant shared her plans to incorporate a rubric she found on an internet source into teaching writing. She shared, “I have a rubric that I am going to use with my kids when we start personal narratives, but them just, they get a circle if they're low; they get two eyes and a smiley that makes a smiley face and an
exclamation point. But this is just a rubric that I found from a writing unit. But the things that they have to do are: Can they sustain their attention; can they focus while writing; Their picture tells a story; Are they able to generate a topic independently; Are all their letters recognizable and; Can they put the letters they hear in the words that they say. But that’s it. It’s a simple rubric, but then she also, the lady that I got this from, it’s the behaviors from emergent all the way up to a transitional writer. And it has six instructional directionalities: spacing, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, supporting details, and word choice and ideas of focus. You could easily make a rubric.”

The last discussion incorporated all three areas in the instructional code including the use of checklists described by one participant as “really good” when measuring developmental or emergent skills. The participant shared her use of checklists as a tool used during conferences. She stated, “That's when I do my checklists, the developmental writing checklist during my individual conferences. I’ll look at their work and then if they’ve mastered punctuation. If I’ve seen that three days consistently or if I’ve seen it over a period of weeks then I’ll check that off. So I guess that’s using it in a way as an assessment.”

Another topic incorporated the use of portfolio as an assessment tool. The writing folder used as an effective management tool for organizing writer’s daily writing (Calkins, 2003d) also aids assessment portfolio as shared in the presentation. One participant explained her realization of the use of the writing samples as a means of assessment. She shared, “I mean it seems like simple teaching techniques, but I hadn’t thought of like every nine weeks getting their writing out of their folders and putting it together. I haven’t done that. I’ve just always kept it all together and at the end of the year stapled it or took out their best writing, but it sounds so much easier to do it at the end of every nine weeks. Less work at the end, I guess!”

123
Teacher Perceptions

The teacher perceptions during this session were minimal in comments. The positive comments included the love of using labels in record keeping and as an assessment tool and a celebration share of a conference the participant described as “fun and exciting.” Her recounting of the experience included this explanation, “Cheers! Yea! Ok good. Ok, the best writing that I have seen in all my seven years in my grade, I took a picture of it! Melissa said, ‘I’m done with my writing.’ And I said, ‘Ok, let me read it.’ And I read it and got so tickled. It said, ‘My mom is 50 and she dyed her hair black, but her hair is really gray.’ All participants appeared to enjoy her positive experience with a child’s successful personal narrative experience supporting research on the need for professional development that helps to build a more positive learning environment for teachers includes the development of collaborative and collegial environments that emphasize learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997; Lumpe, 2007).

Knowledge

The discussion during the third PLC included a variety of topics coded as knowledge. Collaborative knowledge shared included incorporated shared assessment materials. Participants referred to collaborating on using labels, documents, and checklist sheets used in previous years. The prior understanding shared included the sharing and discussion of materials used in previous years with success. The example of successful materials shared included the use of rubrics and checklists. The new understanding shared included the discovery of using students’ current writing samples as a daily or weekly assessment tool or at the end of a grading period. One participant shared the discovery of compiling writing from the writing folders into a portfolio every nine weeks as a simple teaching technique not previously considered.
Participant Reflection

The reflections from the participants shared the thoughts and ideas prompted from the collaboration during the session. The comments included:

- putting (anecdotal conference) labels on the back of students writing (as a means) to keep record of student progress;
- anecdotal recording sheet;
- conferencing labels;
- portfolios;
- I really liked the labels/log sheets for tracking each student.

The questions that were prompted from the session included:

- is it a good idea to take grades on writing;
- how many pieces of writing should I collect over a week?

Case 6

The facilitator explained that the protocol for this session had to be adjusted further to accommodate the direction of the discussion for this session. The difference in the protocol included a preparation time for discussion by taking a few minutes for the participants to read the research material, which included the informing principles for planning, minilessons, and conferencing during a Writer’s Workshop (Calkins, 2003b). With so many requests for more discussion time of the previous components of Writer’s Workshop, this time was set aside for a review of all the components so the participants could air out any confusions, ideas, or questions that continued to linger within their practice. The PLC for an overview of topics was planned to further assist the teachers with professional development in Writer’s Workshop and to continue to strengthen the collaboration among one another. There was no presentation from a participant.
The research presented by the facilitator included the principles for planning, minilessons, and conferencing from *The Nuts and Bolts of Teaching Writing* (Calkins, 2003b). Each topic included a page of principles included in the book as a compiled list taken from the chapter on that topic. Under each main idea on the topic, Calkins (2003b) described addressing skills within the Writer’s Workshop according to her research and examples within the text. There were several pages of information in the handouts that the facilitator provided a ten minute period for the participants to read over the material, make any notes necessary on the copy provided, and prepare for discussion of each topic would begin.

The material during this session appearing to reflect the management code included the sub-code planning and included a review of the participants revisited conversation topics prevalent in prior discussions, and areas that appeared as lingering thoughts, questions, or ideas.

One participant commented that she liked the graphic organizer used for planning, which included the four columns for use of each nine weeks and then ten rows, one row for a heading and then nine rows for each week of the nine weeks for topics to be covered. This was a self-created general graphic organizer, but a useful tool for some participants.

Other topics revisited were sharing resources for planning and incorporating the area of instruction codes. One participant shared general information about resources used in her own planning. She shared, “I have a set of books prefixes, suffixes, and similes. They are awesome! They are awesome! Then I have one about pronouns, and one is really good about why you can’t manage without apostrophes ‘cause we talk about apostrophes in my grade. Then there is this set, which I got from the book guy, and they are hilarious. It's about adjectives and there are two of
those. A noun one, more nouns, a verb one, adverbs, more adjectives, and I have a synonym one and a homophone one and they are phenomenal and I use those when I teach and go over things they are writing. I'll say remember when we read...look in your work and see if you find any of these words." And so those are just some of the books that I had and use and they love them, love them!” She agreed that she would be willing to share the resources with the teachers, which were available in her classroom.

Another planning sub-code area revisited during the review included the sub-code conferencing. Participant questioning and comments relating to conferencing included, “Do you conference with every kid, everyday?” Responses to this question from one participant included an answer and explanation on how she teaches during conferences using questioning. She shared, “I do. I try to do five. Five a day and I kind of just base it on just doing a table a day or try to. And sometimes I don’t even do a table, I just skip around to five. And I don’t really know if I'm even doing it right. I just sit down with them and I say, "What are you writing about?" "Let me see your writing." and I just look and see if they’ve started their sentence with a capital letter. Did they end it with a period? Are they using lower case letters in the rest of their sentence? Is it neat? Can I read it? Do the letters make sense in a word?”

Addressing comments referring to managing conferencing and the use of teaching specific topics such as spelling everything for each student occurred in conversations. One participant asked, “Are you correcting as you go?” A participant responded, “No I only correct words that are on the word wall and like today one of my girls spelled went "wint" and I said "That's not right." and I wrote it very lightly in pencil above. I said, "Just erase mine when you write it and it'll be ok." And I don’t know if that's right. I just like when I'm finished I say, and I really give them a positive, "I really like this..." and then you know if there is more than one
thing for them to work on then I say, "I want you to work on these two things. Making sure you have...capitals at the beginning and periods." I don’t know if it's right or not, but...” Another participant responded, “One of the workshops I went to about writing, it was talking about that you should never have the child erase what they have. You should mark it out with just one line through it so that they’re not going back and erasing. So if you didn’t want them to use that word, like for example, the student used "wint", you just put a line through it and then above it have her write the word instead of going back and making her erase.” After clarifying the use of the line instead of erasing as a way to save time and not defeat student confidence in writing, one participant reminded the group of a similar success, she had experienced marking students’ “Thursday journals.” Using this method of correction or commenting as a means of self-correction, creative flow is less stifled, but the enhancement of encouraging correct form during creation is promoted. The use of the PLC as a review for clarification and comments appeared helpful. The participants were intentional with requests for prior information and the added collaboration time for reviewing all topics of each PLC provided the necessary occasion for discussing the material again.

Teacher Perceptions

The comments that appeared to show negative perceptions included information where participants questioned themselves or the teaching practices. Comments such as “I was just reading something a while ago that makes me thinks "Uh-oh!" “And I don’t know if that's right” are example of self-doubting. Other comments included wondering whether another way of doing something would make more sense, and realizing that the methods used to accomplish teaching were different from the methods introduced to within the research.
Knowledge

The comments expressed that demonstrated various kinds of knowledge included a majority in the sub-coded areas of new knowledge, and prior knowledge. The participants expressed prior knowledge by sharing material used as resources in teaching practice for planning and teaching strategies such as books and knowledge charts. The new knowledge discovered within the session included sharing understanding of how to use a student’s writing to expand and build on for a new topic, the discovery of new resources available within the peers for planning and teaching, and how to spread out teaching a specific topic over a longer period so students are not overloaded within formation and have longer periods to process information.

Participant Reflection

The reflections for this session incorporated a variety of comments coded over several topics that showed to be a great review of how this session helped to clarify questions and wonderings from previous sessions that needed to be addressed. The comments included:

- use charts- to pull information out over a few days, not just 1;
- different types of conferences don’t just confer about content;
- conference topics/organization;
- how to include grammar in your writing lesson;
- how much time should be spent with charts (anchor) during a minilesson;
- use of charts (break it up into several days worth of lessons);
- conferences (small groups, whole group, individual depending on need);
- conferencing no more than 5 students (each day);
- watch our conferencing (positive);
• not to teach (do) the whole anchor chart in one day, but to spread it out over several days;
• how best to conference with students, not having to confer with more than three or four a day.

There was only one question included in participant reflections. This question was addressed later independently with the participant by the researcher. The question asked included:

• how to use a student’s saved work to continue on to the next?

Pre and Post-Survey Analysis

The second section includes the data obtained from the pre and post-survey of the teachers participating in the PLC including changes in the perceptions, interests, knowledge and understanding, and areas of need. Also included is any coded information with discussion of themes that occurred within this evidence. The surveys divided into three parts included Teacher Perception, Writing Instructional Practice, and Teacher Support in Writing Practices. Each section of the survey is discussed.

Teacher Perceptions

Analysis of the pre and post data of teacher perceptions included some shifts in perceptions. The survey used a Likert scale to gather data on the perceptions that teachers have concerning various elements of writing and teaching writing. The Likert scale was based on choosing answers of 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat Agree; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree. The results from this section tallied for both the pre and post-survey then compared. Table 2 shows statements that presented a shift toward agreement or the positive increase in perception or a shift toward disagreement that showed a declining perception when comparing the answer choices on the pre and post-survey.
The shifts in agreement mainly included the perceptions of teaching attitudes toward writing. This appears to show support for the collaborative efforts. One important aspect included the decline in agreement with how the CCSS had increased understanding of writing instruction and the provision of guidance needed for writing instruction. Both statements showed a shift toward disagreement with the statement.

Table 2

*Improvement or Decline of Teacher Perception on Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shift toward agreement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am a good teacher of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shift toward disagreement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has increased my understanding of writing instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of the CCSS has provided the guidance needed for writing instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Writing Instructional Practice*

The statements in the Writing Instructional Practice section of the surveys concern the perceptions of agreement or disagreement on the implementation of a PLC for collaboration with colleagues. The participants responded using a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat Agree; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree). The results from this section were tallied providing mixed opinions. There appeared to be a shift toward agreement in the statement concerning the ability to collaborate with colleagues on developmental writing and this collaborative effort aiding the teachers’ ability to teach writing. However, there appeared to be a
shift toward disagreement with the statement concerning collaborative opportunity in helping implement more research-based instruction practices to teach writing (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Pre and Post-Survey Writing Instructional Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of a professional learning community for collaborating with colleagues on developmental writing instruction would help with my ability to teach writing.</td>
<td>Pre-Survey Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Survey Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of a professional learning community for collaborating with colleagues on developmental writing instruction would help me to implement more research based instructional practices to teach writing within my classroom.</td>
<td>Pre-Survey Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Survey Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher Support in Writing Practices**

Analysis for the *Teacher Support in Writing Practices* section of the pre and post-survey addressed using several techniques. The information analyzed and disaggregated through tally marks counted responses, reviewed the comments in response to tally marks, and coding the comments using MAXQDA, 11.0.10 software for comparison of the themes that emerged from the coding.

The survey question required responses that analyzed using tally marks showed the occurrence each respondent chose. The discussion included the question provided on the survey
or surveys if any differences in the wording occurred between pre and post-survey. Then, a statement explaining how the participants answered in response with a comparison between the pre and post-survey responses is provided. For the responses requiring a comment or list of response answers given are listed and discussed.

The first question in this section on the pre-survey was a request for the participant to list the types of professional development activities attended or participated in that pertained to writing, writing instruction, or CCSS concerning writing within the last two years. The participants gave one response for each area including System – Balanced Literacy training, nothing specific to writing, ETSU Early Childhood Conference, CCSS Reading/Language Arts, CCSS Rubric Training and four responses for System Writer’s Workshop. There was no question asking participants to repeat this response on the post-survey.

The next question on the pre-survey asked how often participation within formal or informal collaboration with teaching colleagues took place. The choices included daily, weekly, monthly, and once each semester. The responses included one for daily, one for weekly, and four monthly and no responses. The post-survey question changed slightly to ask how often the participants planned to participate in formal or informal collaboration with teaching colleagues after participating in this PLC. The responses for the post-survey responses included three for weekly and three for monthly with no responses for daily and once each semester. These responses appear to show desired consistency in collaboration with teaching colleagues.

The next pre-survey question asked participants to list the types of collaborative discussions participated in. The pre-survey provided examples so the participants listed from those choices provided. The selections included three participants collaborated for lesson plans, four participated in collaborating on teaching strategies, and four listed teaching ideas as a
collaborative topic of conversation. The results for this question on the post-survey revealed the
types of collaborative discussions the participants planned involvement in that would benefit
teachings practices. The responses for each participants included lesson plans with grade level,
plans and strategies, teaching strategies and lesson plans, teaching ideas, and two listing lesson
plans.

The pre-survey asked participants, how often participation in collaboration with teaching
colleagues about instructional practices used to teach writing occurs? The responses chosen
included one weekly and four monthly, with no responses for daily and once each semester. The
post-survey question was changed to ask, how often plans to participate in collaboration with
teaching colleagues about instructional practices used to teach writing occur? The participants
responded four choices for weekly, and one for monthly, with no daily and once each semester.
This selection appears to show a shift in plans for more collaboration with teaching colleagues
about instructional practices used to teach writing.

On the pre-survey, the participants were asked to describe the collaborative discussions
held with teaching colleagues concerning teaching writing or writing instructional practices. The
listed responses from each participant included the following list:

- discussion about how to implement in class and teaching strategies;
- progressive;
- we talk about anchor chart ideas and minilessons;
- strategies and ideas;
- writing strategies, techniques, types of graphic organizer to use, chunking writing
  sessions;
- we discuss what and how to best teach writing.
The request on the post-survey invited participants to describe the collaborative
discussions held during the PLC’s concerning teaching writing or writing instructional practices
that benefitted their instructional practices. The listed responses from each participant included
the following list:

- writing conferences;
- conferences and how to incorporate grammar;
- conferencing and planning;
- hearing how other colleagues teach writing;
- graphic organizers, examples of how to proceed in certain areas;
- sharing of books to use when teaching writing.

**Management**

The information in the pre-survey data in the Teacher Support section coded under the
management code included comments more closely related to the sub-code planning. The
comments included incorporating resources into practice/class, expectations, incorporating
grammar, how to get students to make a plan and use it, writing strategies, techniques, types of
graphic organizer to use, chunking writing sessions, discussing what and how to best teach
writing, using mentor texts for specific writing. Other comments were related to routines and
scheduling. They included concerns for pacing and getting students to write for an allotted
amount of time.

When looking at the codes for the post-survey data in the Teacher Support section, the
comments most closely related to scheduling, with the area of planning to be of less concern. The
comments related to scheduling included minilessons time-frames, using the time frame from
Lucy Calkins’ components of Writer’s Workshop, minilessons should be short, more time for
student writing, minilesson time-management, pacing of lessons, minilesson can be short time and you build on it throughout the week, the majority of time should be spent writing, time, time management, and pacing. The comments related to planning for the post-survey included conferences, how to incorporate grammar conferencing and planning, sharing of books to use when teaching writing, planning minilesson content, and pacing of lessons.

Instruction

The information in the pre-survey data in the Teacher Support section coded under the instruction code included comments that more closely related to the sub-code teaching strategies and minilessons. The comments included in the sub-code teaching strategies were

- incorporating resources into practice/class;
- teaching lower students how to write using;
- words not pictures;
- teaching topic sentences;
- how to use the ideas given to them to write, logically, getting students to add their own thoughts;
- making certain students understand the prompt;
- discussion about how to implement in class and teaching strategies;
- strategies and ideas;
- writing strategies;
- techniques;
- types of graphic organizer to use;
- chunking writing sessions;
• using mentor texts for specific writing.

The comments included in the minilessons sub-code were

• minilessons;

• incorporating grammar;

• teaching topic sentences;

• teaching lower students how to write using words not pictures;

• modeling process;

• talk about anchor chart ideas and minilessons;

• modeling of writing process;

• how to introduce topics, conclusions, add ideas to the process;

• conferencing;

• modeling;

• follow Benchmark Literacy curriculum minilessons;

• writing strategies, techniques;

• types of graphic organizer to use;

• chunking writing sessions.

The instruction codes for the post-survey data in the Teacher Support section the comments most closely related to minilessons and conferencing. The comments related to minilessons included

• conferences and how to incorporate grammar;

• minilessons time frames;
• minilessons and conferring;
• minilessons should be short, more time for student writing;
• minilesson time-management;
• minilesson can be short time and you build on it throughout the week;
• use of charts;
• planning (minilesson content);
• minilessons (grammar);
• texts to include.

The comments related to conferencing included
• writing conferences;
• conferences and how to incorporate grammar;
• conferencing and planning;
• minilessons and conferring.

Teacher Perceptions

The last portion on the survey included a space for teachers to comment freely. The comments on the pre-survey and post-survey both were positive. In the closing comments on the pre-survey one teacher wrote, “Excited about group! Hope to take away valuable knowledge about writing that I can use in my teaching!” On the post-survey the comment made was, “Thank you for teaching this class. It has helped me to become a little more comfortable about teaching writing.” Although considered a learning opportunity such as a class, it was still considered beneficial to helping with the improvement in teaching writing.
Knowledge

The information in the pre-survey data in the Teacher Support section coded under the knowledge code included comments about previous workshops, and collaboration. The comments included about previous workshops included Lucy Calkins material, work for Master’s Degree, reading Lucy Calkins books on writing and discussion with peers. The comments for collaboration were reading Lucy Calkins books on writing and discussion with peers, and working with a master teacher and following the process.

The knowledge codes for the post-survey data in the Teacher Support section the comments most closely related to collaboration and new understanding. The comments related to new understanding included help for becoming more comfortable about teaching writing, using the period from Lucy Calkins components of Writer’s Workshop. The comments included hearing how other colleagues teach writing, and sharing of books to use when teaching writing in the collaboration sub-code.

Reflective Journal Analysis

The third section includes the data obtained from the reflective journals from each teacher participating in the PLC with analysis conducted from coding and discussion of the themes that occur within. The reflective journals taken at the close of each PLC provided participants the option to complete the journal before leaving or taking it with them to finish. According to the researchers’ journal, all participants chose to complete the journal entries before leaving the PLC with the exception of two instances where participants had to leave and did not have time to complete the entry at that time, but later returned the forms.

Participants completed the PLC Reflective Journals using a standard form (see Appendix I) at each meeting. This form included the suggestion of concluding two or more comments
concerning the information discussed during the PLC and one or more questions that may still be perplexing the participant. Although the participants were encouraged to complete the information, there was no requirement to complete the form.

Management

The comments analyzed and coded in the management section predominately found occurred in the planning sub-code with some codes in the sub-code scheduling. Planning comments coded included:

- a fantastic way to organize each nine weeks writing requirements;
- the graphic organizer provided broke down each grading period’s planning and content;
- generate topics;
- I plan to use the topics list in class;
- mentor texts for the six traits of writing;
- working grammar into Writer’s Workshops;
- use charts to pull information out over a few days, not just one;
- not to teach (do) the whole anchor chart in one day, but to spread it out over several days;
- use of charts break it up into several days worth of lessons;
- how much time should be spent with charts (anchor) during a minilesson;
- concern among fellow colleagues about teaching the writing process;

The comments relating to schedules included:

- a better grasp of a successful time schedule for Writer’s Workshop;
- I think I could implement peer coaching/conventions to allow more conferencing time;
- how much time should be spent with charts (anchor) during a minilesson;
• setting a routine/mood so kids know expectations—music, conferencing;

Questions included:

• how is the best ways to get students to use the plan like who, what, when, how, where;

• I’d like to know more about literature circles;

• should we start out next year basically at the beginning with labeling, so to speak;

• planning process is important;

• best approach to kick off a new year to keep students excited and engaged;

• steps to take to set up a good writing community.

Instruction

Analysis of the information in the instruction code reveals the major themes of the reflection comments. Broad spectrums of comments dispersed among the sub-codes included conferencing, minilessons, teaching strategies, and record keeping. Table 4 shows the disaggregated sub-coded comments.

Table 4

Reflective Journals/ Instruction Major Themes of Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conferences</th>
<th>Minilessons</th>
<th>Teaching Strategies</th>
<th>Record Keeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think I could implement peer coaching/conventions to allow more conferencing time.</td>
<td>How to incorporate grammar into my minilessons and writing</td>
<td>Using the 5 senses to teach writing—great foundation/strategy not just for students but as a guide for myself</td>
<td>Setting up a system to track individual’s progress so students can self-monitor as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferring with journals</td>
<td>Mentor texts for the 6 Traits of writing</td>
<td>I liked using the 5 senses to teach writing</td>
<td>Putting labels on the back of students writing to keep record of student progress. Anecdotal recording sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can’t meet with everyone everyday</td>
<td>Working grammar into Writer’s Workshops</td>
<td>I like the idea of topic pages/vocab pages for student reference.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (continued)

| One on one and groups can vary depending on needs | Using parts of anchor texts instead of whole | Vocabulary sight words on rings for students to use during writing time | Conferencing labels |
| The benefits of student conferences | Use charts to pull information out over a few days, not just 1. | I thought the daily journal introduction was very helpful. | Portfolios |
| Conferencing in small groups vs. individuals – either is fine depending on writing issues | How much time should be spent with charts (anchor) during a minilesson | The think, talk, draw, write plan is a helpful tool and could be used on many levels | I really liked the labels/log sheets for tracking each student. |
| Conferencing labels | Use of charts- break it up into several days’ worth of lessons. | I think I could implement peer coaching/conventions to allow more conferencing time. | |
| Different types of conferences- don’t just confer about content. | Not to teach (do) the whole anchor chart in one day, but to spread it out over several days. | Concern among fellow colleagues about teaching the writing process | |

Conference topics/organization

Conferencing no more than 5 students (each day)

Watch our conferencing (positive)
How best to conference with students, not having to confer with more that 3 or 4 a day.

Teacher Perceptions

There were no responses or tones to indicate negative teacher perception in the reflective journals. The comments and questions that were listed were positive statements using “I think I could try…” or “I like…” Mostly statements included direct statements, comments, and questions without elaboration. There was not a request for opinions that would indicate a positive or negative perception. Any comments stated in a positive manner were in direct correlation to the perception of the participant reflecting on the material gleaned during the PLC session.
Knowledge

The information coded as knowledge on the reflective journals only pertained to the new knowledge sub-code. The information listed included ideas participants gained during the PLC and shared within the collaborations. There were no questions sub-coded in the knowledge code under any sub-code. The comments listed for the new knowledge sub-code included:

- the 6+1 traits;
- Cultural tool theory;
- mentor texts for the 6 Traits of writing;
- writing is important to help make students better reader;
- Writer’s Workshop is balanced literacy.

Presenter and Document Information

The presenter and document information section includes the data obtained from the presenters notes and shared documents that are described. There were no volunteer participants to present documents or materials on the determined topics for each PLC. As described in the IRB application, the researcher presented documents and material in alignment with and supporting the research-base for the topic of each PLC.

PLC 1 and 2 related to the area planning including the participants’ perception of writing and both short and long-term planning goals. The information presented in PLC #1 included the presenter’s use of the senses to teach writing as a balanced literacy and a metacognitive activity. The presentation involved modeling the writing process as thinking, talking, writing, reading, and always listening. Information shared included quotes and research from Calkins (2003, 1986), and Juel (1988). Other material included sharing various graphic organizers as planning tools for short and long-term goals. PLC 2 provided information concerning tools for planning
goals. A curricular calendar used by the Teacher College Reading and Writing Project (Calkins, 2011) was discussed as a means of pacing and planning used in accordance with the district pacing guide and the CCSS materials.

During PLC 3, minilessons were the topic of discussion. The research presented included the research-base used to support the Units of Study for Primary Writing (Calkins, 2003a) and updated for support of writing within the CCSS (Calkins, 2011), the cultural tool theory as presented by Bodrova and Leong (2006), Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product (Tompkins, 2010), and Spandel’s (2012) six traits of writing. The presentation included how the presenter included the use of the district chosen text to present the use of journaling to Kindergarten over several days. The presenter expressed a struggle within planning of how to determine what minilesson to teach, the continual need to repeat or review information, and finding an anchor or mentor text to use as a model for the lesson.

The fourth PLC detailed conferencing. The Conferencing Book (Calkins, 2003c) was used as the research-base for this collaboration. Calkins (2003c) described conferencing as hard. However, she stated that it could change the way a writer writes when executed well. The presenter shared a conferencing experience with the participants where a student was not meeting the expectations of the journaling because he continued to write fictional stories that did not relate to personal experiences with was the goal of that genre. The conference time was used to explain the use of a personal experience or feeling and to help the student understand the use of a journal for this purpose. The intent of the conference with this student was to prepare him so that by assessment time he would be able to narrow his focus. This prompted questions and discussion on participant conference experiences and personal struggles with conferencing.
PLC 5 discussion included assessment and record keeping. The research presented was *The Nuts and Bolts of Teaching Writing* (Calkins, 2003b) assessments chapter, which includes the benefits of assessments and the key points of what assessment tools are necessary. In accordance with the research the presenter shared the tools that are used in her classroom including writing folders for each child, a portfolio file for keeping a collection of the students writing, and anecdotal recording or conferencing forms. A model of how the use of forms was demonstrated.

PLC 6 included a time of reviewing each element and reflecting on material that may still be perplexing. The presentation included a review of *The Units of Study of Primary Writing* (Calkins, 2003a) specifically the overview charts for each topic and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge chart (Webb, 2005) as a model of insuring that the level of expectation in the CCSS is met with the instruction presented in the writing lessons and a support for teacher evaluations. A discussion reviewed each topic previously discussed with the researcher acting as the facilitator and presenting provocations to prompt discussions.

Each of the PLC presentations provided a rich research-base for the participants to glean information and develop knowledge of effective teaching strategies for improving writing instruction. This is in accordance with the adult learning theory described as an interactive link of the adult learner gaining knowledge and understanding of a theory and then putting it in practice (Collins, 1991).

**Themes**

The themes presented from the research and discussed include each area of data collection. The concluded themes were both predetermined and emergently determined. The predetermined themes derived from the research question shown to be valid concerns included
the codes of teacher perceptions, and knowledge. The major codes that emerged from the data included management, and instruction.

The areas were determined based on the analysis of the data beginning with the inductive preliminary code headings. The final code headings emerged within the coding as the various comments, statements and perceptions in the data were disaggregated throughout reading the material. In the beginning, key terms in the research questions known as Provisional Codes (Saldana, 2011) were determined. These key terms taken from the study’s research questions included a short list of five or six codes as recommended by Creswell (2007). This provided a starting point to analyze the data inductively. The coding involved the determination of placement for comments and words within the transcriptions, surveys, and reflective journals related to key words from the research questions including knowledge, perceptions, instructional practice, skill, or collaboration. Major themes emerging within the data discussed in the following sections include sub-codes or minor themes.

Management

The management code consisted of 144 coded comments. Within the code, there were five sub-codes planning, routines and procedures, classroom management, schedules, and environment. The major themes within these sub-codes appeared in the planning and the classroom management sub-codes.

The planning sub-code incorporated 51 of the total coded comments. The information obtained from this sub-code provided vision into planning what to teach, how to change the practice, areas considered for incorporation into the teaching, and questions about planning minilessons, and conferences. The largest amount of coding concerning planning was included in
the reflection journals comments where participants included elements of the PLC conversations planned for use in personal practice.

The sub-code of classroom management integrated 32 coded comments. The discussions for this sub-code integrated a plethora of comments including questioning classroom control, techniques to use for classroom management, and management of the workshop routines and procedures. The most discussion of classroom management found occurred in the fourth PLC, which was on conferencing. A review of the transcript showed that participants questioned the practice of conducting conferences with students and questioned personal practice by stating, “I don’t know how this will impact my writing.” “So I think it's trying to figure that piece out. When it might be beneficial and when is it not.” “I guess my struggle is feeling like the same thing with my small group meeting. I kind of feel like I have to get to everybody, everyday. And I know that's not really realistic. I mean I could get to everybody, everyday, but it would be very short.”

However, they also showed great collaboration by sharing information about how conferences are conducted or strategies that were effective such as, “Also for the first time this year, and I don’t know how this will impact my writing, I’m doing writing partners which I’ve never done before.” In addition, “…we just used our folders and there was a dot on one side and it was red and a dot on the other side and it was green. Green means, ‘I’m still working,’ red means, ‘I’m finished. I’m ready for you to look at it and see that I’m finished and help me with whatever needs to be fancied up so that I’m ready to publish.’ But as far as having their name or sticker or whatever with a magnet and their name to say I’m here or here, I’ve not done that.”

The management code was a strong area of collaboration topic. The information that the participants shared and took from this code provided many opportunities for participants to
shared perceived struggles and successes. These conversations were beneficial in providing
information in an area that may need strengthening for more productivity in classroom practices.

**Instruction**

The instruction code consisted of 207 coded comments. Within the code, there were six
sub-codes teaching strategies, district text, record keeping, assessment, minilessons, and
conferencing. The comments coded within these sub-codes appeared dispersed throughout the
sub-codes. However, the areas of conferencing, minilessons, and teaching strategies
encompassed the majority of the codes.

The conferencing sub-code included 57 coded comments. The discussions for this sub-
code integrated many comments within the PLC sessions pertaining to encouragement for using
conferencing, difficulty with conferencing or questions about conferencing and explanations of
the conferencing that took place in the participants’ personal practice.

Examples of comments related to encouragement included:

- “One of the best ways to take care of that when you confer with those kids, when you do
  a one-on-one to do that.”

- “You give them a positive and then you give them a way to fix whatever it is they’re
  struggling with and that helps them to continue their writing.”

- “My kiddos get excited, well not this year yet, but over conferencing.”

Examples of comments related to difficulty with conferencing include

- “The part that I dread the most is the conferencing ‘cause it is hard sometimes to get them
to understand without basically saying, ‘Please write this…’ Sometimes, I’m just like
(motions pretending to pull a rope toward her).”
• “I guess my struggle is feeling like the same thing with my small group meeting. I kind of feel like I have to get to everybody, everyday. And I know that's not really realistic. I mean I could get to everybody, everyday, but it would be very short.”

Examples of comments related to conference explanations include:

• “Small group conferencing or sometimes I just do it with one or if several are struggling with the same concept then I’ll bring two or three back, but they look forward to that.”

• “I normally just get the rolling chair and leave them at their groups and then I go from person to person and do individual conferences. And I may just choose just one thing that day or maybe two, like capitalization and periods. ‘Did you make a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence and is there some kind of punctuation at the end.’ Then the next time I conferences, ‘Oh did you make a complete sentence?’ or we may talk about subject and verbs. ‘Show me your subject?’ or ‘Where's you verb?’ So, that's what I do. It may or may not be right, but...And it may be here...I may be really good at it and then it may be a long stretch before they see me again.”

• “That's when I do my checklists, the developmental writing checklist during my individual conferences. I'll look at their work and then if they’ve mastered punctuation. If I’ve seen that three days consistently or if I’ve seen it over a period of weeks then I’ll check that off. So I guess that’s using it in a way as an assessment.”

The minilesson sub-code included 56 coded comments. The discussions for this sub-code integrated many comments within the PLC sessions pertaining to struggles with minilessons, resources for minilessons, and examples of minilessons taught or planned for teaching.

Examples of struggles with minilessons include:
• “I never have enough time. I don’t care what I do, I never have enough time. By the time I do my minilesson and they start writing and I get around to two or three…our times gone. Because they don’t know how to spell, they sit there, they wander, most of the time they’re talking. That’s my problem, I can’t get the talking stopped this year. No matter what I do. I’m fixing to have a bunch of parent meetings, ‘cause I don’t know what else to do.”

• “I was just reading something a while ago that makes me thinks "Uh-oh!" Tips for minilessons: Don’t over-rely on charts and use concrete visuals (Calkins, 2003). It said don’t over use your charts and don’t make your chart like the... when we did verbs I made a verbs chart with them, but I don’t think I could drag it across two or three days, like that was one lesson. But this was saying make sure that..."A rule of thumb, be sure your minilesson will be rich without writing on a chart and be sure that you spend no more than five percent of your minilesson time doing this writing. A chart that usually lists more than 5 strategies will usually record more than a week not one day of minilessons. (Calkins, 2003b). Well five percent of my minilesson was not...it was more than that. My whole minilesson was writing on that chart pretty much. It that wrong or is that just... are they talking something more...”

• I feel like I’m repeating myself and I don’t want to bore them by saying, ‘Ok, we’re going to do another personal narrative. Help me write my sentence!’ ‘Today we’re going to write another personal narrative…’ Because that’s what we do for nine whole weeks is personal narrative writing and I just feel like that I am just reiterating the same thing over and over.

• “More information about grammar use and writing lesson incorporation.”
- “What other grammar ideas to be used in writing?”

Resources used for minilessons include:

- “…where do I find minilessons? I Google. Then I’ve found good ones online.

- “Reading mentor books and showing them what they can write.”

- “…sometimes I’ve read a book like with personal narrative. I know I read last year When the Relatives Came (Rylant, 1985).

Examples of minilessons taught or planned for teaching include:

- “I’ve been doing it all at once and then do stuff through the week to try to drive that back home again.”

- “So basically, you’re just talking about it may be the first day and telling them what you’re working on and a lot of talking. And then the next day, ‘cause you said you just had them pick things. So the next day you just list it and then maybe the third day you go back over it and maybe add stuff to your list instead of trying to do it all at once.”

- “One time I wrote about Ivan and going to the beach and Ivan going to preschool and you know…But like the first minilesson was this is how I draw a picture and here’s the water and the beach and I labeled everything and then I added my sentence to it. And the next time they helped me with spelling. You know, ‘How do you spell went?’ And they spelled it wint. But when I sounded it out, I said, ‘Help me spell this.’ And I said ‘wah,’ ‘enn,’ and ‘tuh’.

- “You have to keep going over those same things all the time and you think, ok I’ve got a wonderful lesson today, and then next week nobody remembers anything and you have to start over for them to remember the steps.”
The teaching strategies sub-code included 46 coded comments. The discussions for this sub-code included questions about teaching strategies participants’ may have considered, struggled with, or learned about. The comments included suggestions for teaching strategies used successfully within participants’ classroom. Questions coded in the teaching strategy sub-code include:

- “One thing that I think and I don’t know what the thought on this is but with the upper grade teachers with the document camera, she said that she would have them write and then they came up and presented the paper under the document camera and then the class gave positive criticism.”
- “Getting all students to complete their writing”
- “Delivery techniques”
- “Making certain students understand the prompt”
- “How is the best ways to get students to use the plan”
- “Teaching topic sentences”
- “Teaching lower students how to write using words not pictures”
- “Concern among fellow colleagues about teaching the writing process”

These examples were shared during the sessions as teaching strategy successes.
- “I explain what our topic is or we talk about a topic and I make a chart and then the children can select something on there that they want to write about. Then I tell them to shut their eyes and visualize what you’re going to write about and then turn and talk to your shoulder partner. Then they tell each other what their topic is and what they’re going to write about. Then we break off and do like brainstorming on a piece of paper with like
a story bubble and our topics here and the shoot outs all around and we will go around and help them or give them ideas.”

- “Graphic organizers, how you get prepared.”
- “Mentor text, what do I want to show or what story do I want to read.”
- “One of the things I used was the helping circle. That was one way of getting the kids that needed all the same things to come together.”
- “We used to do a topic list. Just have a topic list that we just generated it together and then if this was something that you would like to add to your list, you know if somebody brought up about raccoons and you didn’t want to use it then you didn’t have to put it on your list.”
- ” And I think a lot of times the spelling also comes with whatever spelling pattern your teaching”
- “I have a set of books prefixes, suffixes, and similes. They are awesome! They are awesome! ...a noun one, more nouns, a verb one, adverbs, more adjectives.”

Teacher Perception

The teacher perceptions code consisted of 55 coded comments. Within the code, there were two sub-codes: negative teacher perceptions, and positive teacher perceptions. The sub-codes for the teacher perception code were almost equal in coded statements. The data showed no patterns in increase or decline of the type of statement throughout the PLC’s. However, the majority of coded statements for positive teacher perceptions appeared to be within the second PLC and the reflective journal coding.

The second PLC session topic held at the beginning of a school year included long and short term planning. Participants were just beginning Writer’s Workshop and in the middle of
thinking and planning the execution of information. The participants were very receptive of the information provided. Comments coded as a positive teacher perception included:

- “That would be where I would go.”
- “I like that!”
- “We used to do that too.”
- “…today I was very happy!”
- “The “What am I doing?” and I mean, it has changed.”
- “So, I was worried, but I do like that, so…”

The coded comments in the participants’ reflective journals including the use of vocabulary expressed, enjoyment, or enthusiasm for a strategy presented or discussed. The comments in the participant reflective journals coded as positive teacher perceptions included:

- “I liked using the five senses to teach writing.”
- “I thought the daily journal introduction was very helpful.”
- “A fantastic way to organize each 9 weeks writing requirements.”
- “The graphic organizer provided broke down each grading period’s planning and content.”
- “I like the idea of topic pages/vocab pages for student reference.”
- “I think I could implement peer coaching/conventions to allow more conferencing time.”
- “I really liked the labels/log sheets for tracking each student.”

Knowledge

The knowledge code consisted of 80 codes. Within the code, there were six sub-codes collaboration, confusion, new understanding, prior understanding, previous workshop, and
metacognition. The major themes within these sub-codes appeared in the new understanding, prior understanding, and collaboration sub-codes.

The comments coded as new understanding included comments representing information that the participant shared from self-learned material that put into practice currently, and information that was understood or useful within the PLC sessions. Some of the comments in the new understanding sub-code included:

- “There were a lot of neat ideas on that site. I’ll have to check back and find that one, ‘cause I’ve tagged it.”
- “I haven’t, but I kind of like that idea, where you know where each child is.”
- “…I hadn’t thought of like every nine weeks getting their writing out of their folders and putting it together. I haven’t done that.”
- “Mentor texts for the 6 Traits of writing”
- “Cultural tool theory”
- “Writing is important to help make students better reader.”

The comments coded as prior understanding included comments referring to information the participant learned prior to attending the PLC sessions. Some of the comments in the new understanding sub-code included:

- “We used to do a topic list.”
- “We did that in the helping circle all the time because that was part of it.”
- “And I had this writing program…”
- “Do you still have that book of checklist that I borrowed last year? Because that was really good. Speaking of emergent and development…”’cause it broke it down...”
The comments coded as collaboration included information the participant discussed with a peer, which may or may not be a participant and the referred to the collaboration during a PLC session. It also involved times of sharing ideas for future collaborative efforts. Some of the comments in the collaborative sub-code included:

- “I remembered you saying…”
- “I think that my hardest, and we just talked about this yesterday, is them doing.”
- “One of the things they were talking about in the TNCore training this summer…”
- “Just presenting, like we’re doing the writing topics that the librarian sent.”
- “Also, a success that I had this week, I did like you suggested…”
- “Start yelling ‘Who has this?’ ‘Who has this book?’”
- “Cause you sent it to me last year, I used the labels, last year.”
- “Hearing how other colleagues teach writing”
- “Sharing of books to use when teaching writing”
- “Reading Lucy Calkins books on writing and discussion with peers”

Summary

Chapter 4 included the data analysis and review of information collected in this research. The chapter is comprised of the analysis of data discovered through the videotaping and transcription of PLC’s, the pre and post-survey, the reflective journals, the presenter and document information and themes found in the data. The discussion occurred including both major and minor themes from the predetermined and emergent codes. Chapter 5 is comprised of a summary of the findings, conclusions, study limitations, and the recommendations for future research.

156
CHAPTER 5  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contains the summary of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and conclusions of the results of the research. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills of the instructional strategies chosen to teach developmental writing in grades K-3. The study conducted using qualitative methods allowed the researcher to “obtain a holistic impression of teaching and learning” (Fraenkal & Wallen, 2008, p. 421). This opportunity provided a more complete understanding of teaching practices of writing instruction, including the successes and struggles teachers face daily through the analysis of collaboration between teachers during PLC sessions on writing instruction. Using inductive methods also provided insight into adult learners’ collaborative efforts with the provision of attending regular meetings focused on topics related to volunteer participants professed needs for improving instruction in writing.

Summary of the Findings

The summary of the findings for each research question is discussed below.

Overarching Question

How can the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) focused on writing instruction alter teachers’ perceptions of the knowledge and skills in teaching developmental writing in grades K-3?

This study offered valuable insight to the use of a PLC as a model for professional development for teachers. The presentation of the current research upholds and depicts the
culminating ideas that align with the adult learning theory principles set by Lindeman (1926). As stated in his principles, this research study involved a small group of adults with the desire to stay current in knowledge and practice, discover new information to develop a stronger research base, and possess the willingness to discuss teaching practices used to teach writing collaboratively with peers to seek deeper understanding of writing instruction.

The participants came together each week to discuss their teaching strategies used to teach writing and their perceptions about instructional or assessment challenges. The use of a protocol to focus on a specific topic or dilemma was beneficial for creating a PLC routine. The researcher acted as the facilitator and the presenter for each meeting. Adler and Adler (1987) explained a researcher’s dual role as an active membership role with the researcher taking a place in the inner setting including an observational role and a functional role. Taking an active membership role builds trust, recognition, and acceptance of the researcher with participants within the setting. The practice of researcher self-reflective journaling provided greater validity by exposing the researcher’s thoughts, biases, and perceptions of the events occurring within the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Ortlipp, 2008).

This dual role was necessary because of lack of volunteerism from the participants to present materials used in personal classrooms. The negative perceptions and the comments implying the continual questioning of personal practice offers insight to participant insecurities as potential reasons they did not volunteer to present. Some comments listed as negative perceptions included, “Oh I dread this…”; “I can’t teach all that”; “And I don’t know if that’s right.”; “I kind of struggle when I make minilessons too, ‘cause I feel like I’m being too repetitive. So…so…I’m going to shut up!” These comments presented the perception of insecurity and frustration in teaching writing.
Even though statements indicated negative perceptions, the perceptions appeared to change throughout the study. A shift toward agreement in the statements concerning the teachers’ perceptions toward writing indicated support for collaborative opportunities to discuss the instructional elements of writing and teaching writing. In addition, a decline in the negative perceptions expressed from the first PLC to the sixth PLC meeting could indicate that there was acceptance of the opportunity for the participant to glean new information. The decline in negative perceptions indicated that offering the PLC meetings provided an opportunity for the participants to come together to collaborate, possibly lessening frustrations with teaching writing and benefitting the teachers, creating a more positive trend in the use of such a model of professional development.

**Research Question 1**

What are teachers’ perceptions about teaching developmental writing since the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

The information obtained from the pre and post-survey information offered insight into the perception of teaching writing since the implementation of the CCSS. The data showed a decline in agreement with the survey statements on how the CCSS increased understanding of writing instruction and the provision of guidance needed for writing instruction. There were no comments throughout the PLC meetings that specifically mentioned the CCSS. The statements in reference to CCSS included comments made concerning the use of the district text aligned with the CCSS. These comments included materials used in the text, text arrangements, and dissatisfaction in the arrangement of the curriculum.

This information led to the discernment that perceptions of the CCSS are not positive. Frustrations occurred with the lack of support the CCSS implementation materials and training
offered with writing instruction. The CCSS placement of writing as a high priority, with integration throughout the standards as a necessary skill created a demand for strong teachers in this area (Calkins et al., 2012). However, this information supported the recommendation to use a writing workshop approach as a spiral, cross-curriculum for K-12 grades, and the PLC as a model of professional development that would provide the inexpensive implementation of teaching resources and professional development to implement this process approach to writing that Calkins et al. (2012) recommend.

Research Question 2

How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC alter teachers’ perception about the ability to teach writing?

The pre and post-survey data illustrated a shift in agreement in participant attitudes toward writing. This information paired with the positive comment codes within transcriptions from the PLC’s ascribed to “ah-ha” moments of new strategies that would work or that a participant would like to try, offered support for the usefulness of collaborative efforts that this professional development opportunity provided. Little (1990) suggested that developing these collaborative environments creates supportive teams providing a safe place to discuss weaknesses and strengths, builds confidence, and offer support for teachers while increasing the opportunity to obtain resources from peers.

The data aligns with research by Garet et al. (2001) that described positive and significant teacher changes in practice, knowledge, and skills when the provision for collaborative efforts within professional development opportunities are made available. The references from the pre and post-survey comments regarding time for collaboration with peers and resources occurred in several comments. Some of the time suggestions included school informal settings, workshops,
and book studies. Means of collaboration included sharing materials and books, mentor teachers, and listening to colleagues. Within the coding, themes emerged from the coded transcriptions that indicated an altered opinion of the participants’ ability to teach writing. Later PLC comments included, “I think I can do that!” “Well, hotdog!” and “I can try!” These comments are a shift from the first PLC stating, “I can’t write and that is why I can’t teach writing,” or “I never liked to write, so my kids can’t write.” These shifts in perceptions are increasingly valuable with the growing importance of writing with the requirement of writing across all curriculum areas and with the inclusion of writing support for answers given on assessments under the new CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Research Question 3

How does the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC provide guidance for teachers to implement research-based instructional practices for writing instruction within their classroom?

The provision that the PLC offered participants for implementation of research-based instructional practices for writing instruction is best illustrated by referring to the sections in the previous chapter discussing the research base presented for each PLC. Each PLC session began with a specific research-based topic that correlated with the predetermined topic for the PLC derived from the specific areas of need as expressed by the participants on the pre-survey completed at the beginning of the research. The participants expressed interest in this material and referred back to information shared on several occasions, also asking for copies of materials shared by the facilitator and participants during the PLC’s. This indicated an expansion of knowledge spread among several classrooms represented in the research. This expansion made the knowledge more beneficial and valuable than if the participant had not been given the
opportunity to participate or if they had not accepted the invitation to share within a group of adult learners eager to grow in knowledge and understanding in order to improve personal practice, which ultimately results in higher student accomplishment. Considering the information provided through the reflective journals, and the comments that the participants listed as information that was new or useful information for personal practice on the post-survey, indications that the participants did gain a deeper understanding of research-based strategies to use in practice were probable.

**Research Question 4**

How do writing instructional practices change with the opportunity for structured, frequent collaboration among teachers within a PLC?

Considering change in the practice of writing instruction, a comparison of the pre and post-survey data sheds light on the changes in instructional practice after having the opportunity for frequent collaboration. The data presented a more even distribution of responses during the pre-survey in the instruction sub-code of teaching strategies with a strong focus on planning as a sub-code of management. The data indicated participant’s possible struggles with management of planning for teaching writing across many areas. However, in the post-survey data, there was a shift in responses toward the sub-codes of instruction on minilessons and conferencing, indicating participants received information that provided a stronger directional focus on areas in need of planning.

Looking deeper into the management sub-codes revealed planning continued to be of concern, but the sub-code schedules, which participants have less control over, grew in concern throughout the sessions. With greater awareness of the components of writing workshop and the
necessities to build a successful program, the coded data indicated the participants understanding and focused direction on specific targets for improvements to teaching writing.

Study Limitations

The outcomes of the study cannot be generalized presenting a limitation to the current study. With a convenience sample for the current research that consisted of six volunteer participants, the information gleaned from each PLC session as a case was considered collectively. However, this provides opportunity for further research growth and increased understanding of the benefits of using PLC’s as a professional model in professional development discussion topics. The use of a convenience sample provided a means of saving money, effort, and time, while still yielding valuable data to gain a deeper understanding of these key questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The length of the PLC for the current research presented possible limitations for the study. Although the duration extended longer than one grading period, the definition of a PLC is the continuous process of teachers working collaboratively resulting in greater achievement and higher learning for students within a school or learning environment (DuFour et al., 2006). The chosen data collection period reflects the growth and change in teacher instruction and perceptions based on the opportunity for planned formal collaboration. Success was obtained in the provision of this opportunity and the doors are now opened for future growth opportunity through the continuation of PLC’s within this setting.

Another limitation within the study included the lack of volunteer presenters. This constraint was anticipated and addressed within the IRB application due to the anticipation that participants may be hesitant to share personal experiences in a new environment. The
consideration for future research could possibly include the use of random selection for presenters for PLC topics and a clearly identified set of presentation requirements.

The researcher as a participant in the PLC can present an inadequacy to the study. This limitation was addressed using a researcher reflection journal (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Ortlipp, 2008). The journal entries included questions, thoughts, concerns, and biases about the information discussed and kept as a reflection after each PLC. The use of this journal provided validity to the study through the open divulgence of the researcher’s thoughts and mind-set throughout each session.

Recommendations for Future Research

The CCSS demand for a shift toward the inclusion of more writing in the curriculum created greater need for change in instructional practices supporting higher levels of learning for most schools (Calkins et al., 2012). Even though the inclusion of a spiral, cross-curriculum in grades K-12 would be an enormous change, this recommendation would be easily implemented inexpensively providing effective teaching resources and professional development for the implementation of the process approach to writing (Calkins et al., 2012) through collaborative methods. Cooter, Jr. (2003) stated, “Teachers… require high-quality and ongoing professional development to remain on the cutting edge of effectiveness” (p. 198). In order to help determine the most optimal professional development methods, further research on the topic of using a PLC as an effective professional development would benefit teachers with the functionality of the model and the ease of setting up the collaborative environment. Research is needed to further investigate the effectiveness of meetings over a longer period to determine if more change is indicated in knowledge growth areas, and positive teaching perceptions. Also, the impact of the provision of professional development for all levels should be further researched considering the
emphasis by Guskey and Yoon (2009) implicating the need for professional development for educators at all levels with the advancements of new information about instructional strategies or curriculum changes. Lindeman (1926) stated conversations of short one-to-one responses are entertaining but not valuable in articulating information necessary for developing knowledge and understanding about a topic. Embracing his theory and considering the data in the current research provides more support for investigating further the use of PLC’s at varying lengths. This consideration also provides the occasion to determine optimal lengths for collaborative opportunities in formally planned settings with small groups as opposed to informal daily collaboration.

Although participants for the current research were continually engaged in the collaborative discussions that took place during each PLC, the lack of volunteer presenters opened recommendations for other prospective research. This consideration for future research includes the examination of using random selection for presenters for PLC topics and presentations including a clearly identified set of presentation requirements. This would provide the opportunity to study changes in teacher perceptions of the research topic when deeper participation is required for the project and would allow for potential and more in depth growth in knowledge.

One area of potential interest to the participants, continually returned to as a topic of discussion throughout many PLCs included the discussion of what minilesson to include in a Writer’s Workshop and the use of mentor texts within a minilesson. These topics being of concern to participants need further review and explanation. The participants felt as if they were continually teaching the same lessons repeatedly within a genre and among various genres. This redundancy of teaching frustrated them and created an attitude of confusion that added to
avoidance in teaching writing (Richgel, 2003). Further research is necessary to determine a method to organize minilesson topics and mentor text to support the topics providing relief for teacher planning for Writer’s Workshop and executing more effective lessons, producing greater growth, deeper learning, and stronger writing skills in students.

The recommendation for the use of larger sample size is also important. The inclusion of research using more PLC groups at various sites with similar or varying demographics would expand the research and make it more beneficial to others exploring the use of PLC’s as a model for collaborating on teaching practices. This type of expansion could be extended to the inclusion of PLC’s among other schools or broadened to include multiple school systems, even nationally or internationally. The multiple methods of technology would allow the research to open to a wider network of educators including international development with the benefit of using technology such as Skype, or Face time. Additionally, use of a chat room could provide an anonymous means for teachers to participate, which would offer a safe means of free expression of concerns or questioning.

Cohesiveness of curriculum is of great importance to the success of the student. DuFour et al. (2010) express this importance with key areas of essential learning to consider including collaborative study should promote dependable and clarity of priorities, help in the delivery of a common curriculum paced appropriately for formative assessments, and create a desire of ownership of the curriculum for anyone asked to teach it. Considering this information and multiple levels of faculty and staff working in schools toward student growth, an area of benefit for further research extending to other schools, and larger areas includes involving school paraprofessionals and administrators in PLC sessions.
Ellery and Rosenboom (2009) stated the need for inviting all parties involved in the education of children to the professional development in order to provide an environment of learning, reflection, and application of the knowledge. As part of daily teaching and interacting with children during writing and literacy, the inclusion of paraprofessionals would provide the necessary training for support staff to help teachers with small group instruction and conducting conferences that are more effective. The students would benefit from exposure to more highly qualified instruction.

Collaboration through organized PLC’s would also serve as a form of professional development to enlighten administrators of the successes that teachers accomplish in presenting material to students. It would inform them of the struggles teachers face in accomplishing the tasks placed before them. The inclusion of administrators may create a different level of stress for the collaborative effort, with teachers not feeling as comfortable in sharing honestly with the administrator, but if a means of breaking beyond that barrier could be attained then the sessions could be of greater benefit on a broader spectrum.

A recommendation for further research including participant sharing of authentic student work creates an opportunity for participants to share a piece of student work related to the topic of the session. The explanation of student work would serve as a great learning opportunity for each participant to develop information from the completed work. If the teachers were provided the opportunity to explain the teaching behind the sample, and the relation to the topic of discussion, while sharing the success or struggle with the student work, this process would make the use of authentic student work a great opportunity for learning in effective and cost efficient methods, which would be easy to implement.
Other research areas that may be beneficial to consider were discussed by the participants during the collaboration or listed on the post-survey comments and included the use of portfolios, helping circles, and peer coaching. The consideration of these areas could further the understanding of each of these topics, while providing new or deeper knowledge for teachers. The use of portfolios as an assessment tool would be helpful in providing an authentic measurement of the progress of students by keeping samples of the work accomplished and assessing this for growth data. The study of helping circles would provide information on understanding teachers’ provision of assisting students that need or want help more frequently and how the needs of all students are being meet. The exploration of peer coaching could help in finding ways to expand student knowledge by providing the opportunity for challenging higher functioning students and expanding their skills, while offering valuable help to others in greater need.

Conclusions

The teacher participants in this study appear to struggle overall with the management of instructional practice specifically teaching writing. They continually collaborated on what to teach or how they are teaching. The alignment of the findings fall into place with Richgels’ (2003) description of the complexity of literacy as a breeding ground for a natural environment of avoidance or neglect in teaching with teachers continually unsure of how or what skills to teach. Again, this complexity paired with unfamiliarity of emergent literacy presents difficulty for some teachers in deciding where to begin instruction or what to teach. Progress appeared throughout the current research, according to the pre and post-survey as a shift toward agreement shown in the participant perceptions toward understanding children as writers and the view of themselves as a comfortable, good teacher of writing with the necessary skills.
The data illustrates that the participants in the current research showed a desire for more discussion in the area of classroom management techniques specific to use during writing instruction with the coding presenting a constant return to these discussion areas. The components of planning and classroom management for effective teaching has been a focus of research reviewed by Oliver and Reschly (2007), which provided data showing positive educational outcomes when teachers demonstrated the ability to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of students within the classroom.

The data from the current research also revealed more discussion topics related to conferencing, minilessons, and teaching strategies in the instructional code. These conclusions are based on the results of the predetermined and emergent themes discussed previously, which showed these areas to be a discussion priority across all methods of data collection as a consistent theme. These areas of need further encourage the benefit of ongoing collaboration for teacher learning in foundational features including planning, attention to improving curriculum, student achievement improvement, pedagogy, and student metacognitive skills presented by Stigler and Hiebert (1999). These topics for professional development learning opportunities and means for teacher growth are pertinent for development through a PLC.

The data showed that the provision of initiating a PLC appeared beneficial to learning through the collaboration and discussions that occurred. This opportunity provided teachers new strategies and interventions or support for the present instruction and is in alignment with prior research (Little, 1990). Positive comment codes recognized the “ah-ha” moments of strategies new to the participants, support the effectiveness of collaborative efforts that this professional development model provides. This information also aligns with research calling for professional development efforts to expand collaborative environments with mutually respective focus on

The understanding gained from this research has been valuable in deepening the author’s desire to teach children writing skills, as has the desire to assist educators in deepening the strength and knowledge of teaching in order to aid growth in students. The increased desire comes from the realization of a greater necessity and demand for helping both currently practicing and pre-service teachers to become stronger and more confident in instructional practices and classroom management skills. The reality is the simplicity of providing the means to accommodate the desire by implementing an organized opportunity for teachers to talk and express the successes and struggles of the day-to-day practices within a PLC setting.

The need for more research and growth will not subside but only grow in the future. As more globally prepared students are expected to graduate with increases in depth of knowledge and growth in technology, higher expectation will be placed on students and on educators. Therefore, the demand for more knowledgeable and confident teachers will expand. This research has provided a starting point to develop more effective and inexpensive means of providing the professional development. Just as Calkins (1986) presented writing as a means of being able to, “turn chaos into something beautiful” (p.3), the inexpensive collaborative environment of a well planned and organized PLC, offers the means to calm the chaos, confusion, and isolation teachers often find themselves within classroom walls and creating a beautiful opportunity for teachers and students to learn more (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 1997; Lumpe, 2007).
REFERENCES


No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), 20 U.S.C. 6301; PL107-110; 115 STAT. 1425


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Common Core State Standards for Writing K-3

English Language Arts Standards » Writing
http://www.corestandards.org

Kindergarten

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.1 With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.2 With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.3 With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.4 Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.5 Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.6 With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.7 With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an illustration depicts).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.9 With prompting and support, compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.10 Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

First Grade

Text Types and Purposes

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3 Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

Production and Distribution of Writing
- (W.1.4 begins in grade 3)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.5 With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

**Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of “how-to” books on a given topic and use them to write a sequence of instructions).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.8 With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.
  - (W.1.9 begins in grade 4)

**Range of Writing**

- (W.1.10 begins in grade 3)

**Second Grade**

**Text Types and Purposes**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.3 Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

**Production and Distribution of Writing**

- (W.2.4 begins in grade 3)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.5 With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

**Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.
  - (W.2.9 begins in grade 4)

**Range of Writing**

- (W.2.10 begins in grade 3)

**Third Grade**

**Text Types and Purposes**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1a Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1b Provide reasons that support the opinion.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1c Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1d Provide a concluding statement or section.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2a Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2b Develop the topic with facts, definitions, and details.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2c Use linking words and phrases (e.g., also, another, and, more, but) to connect ideas within categories of information.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2d Provide a concluding statement or section.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3a Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3b Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3c Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.
  o CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3d Provide a sense of closure.

Production and Distribution of Writing

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 3 here.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.6 With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.7 Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

(W.3.9 begins in grade 4)

Range of Writing
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Appendix B

Request for Permission to Director

March 2014
Ron Dykes, Director of Schools
Washington County Schools
405 W College St.
Jonesborough, TN 37659
Dear Mr. Dykes,

I am conducting my dissertation research for the Doctor of Philosophy of Early Childhood Education at East Tennessee State University. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a professional development model effective in altering teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skill in teaching developmental writing in grades K-3. Rigorous demands placed on teachers with the implementation of the Common Core Standards necessitate the provision of ways for teachers to be supported in their teaching practice including having the comfort of expressing both successes and struggles with peers through collaboration. A perception and needs assessment of writing instruction and practices will be taken using a pre and post-survey (attached). The needs identified will be addressed and discussed during a PLC using the Tuning Protocol (attached). Measurements will be taken on the changes in the teachers’ perception and practice of writing instruction after participating in six (6) PLC meetings. Each meeting will be videotaped which will be deleted upon approval of the transcription. The transcription will be prepared using pseudonyms instead of names of participants, school name, and district name. Each transcription will require participant validation upon completion. The data from the research will be kept at the primary researchers’ home in a locked file. Confidentiality will be considered foremost throughout the research in order to protect the participants. Following the prescribed procedures will ensure anonymity.

The purpose of this letter is to request your written consent to implement the PLC at South Central Elementary School with the teachers in K-3rd grade. All teachers in K-3 will be invited (attached) to participate on a voluntary basis. The decision not to participate will not result in any penalty. There are less than minimal risks in participating in the study. The participant will be free to terminate participation at any time without repercussion.

Sincerely,
Jill Treece Leonard
Principal Researcher
Appendix C

Introductory Letter to Teachers

Month, day, 2014

Dear Teachers,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Early Childhood Education program at East Tennessee State University. As a part of the dissertation research requirements, I am asking teachers in grades K-3 to participate in a study to explore the use of a professional learning community (PLC) as a professional development model for developmental writing instruction. The study is designed to give teachers the collaboration and support that is shown through research findings to present opportunities for change in practice that benefits student learning. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a 10 minute survey at the beginning of the three month research period and then again at the end of the period. In addition to the surveys, you will also be asked to attend a series of 6 PLC’s that will be scheduled to meet alternating weeks. The committed time for each PLC would be 1 hour for each meeting.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and withdrawal from the study any occur at any time without penalization. All responses will remain confidential. No identifying information will be used in the final draft of the report. Results of the study will be available for your review upon completion of the study.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. Your assistance is valuable to gain information that may improve professional development at the school level, teacher collaboration, and ultimately student performance. Please complete the consent form below and return it to me in the envelope provided by ______________________. Any questions about this research, contact me at (423) 483-5692 or (423) 753-6552. Any questions regarding the rights as a participants contact the IRB at East Tennessee State University at ____________________.

Sincerely,
Jill Treece Leonard

I have read and understand the information in this letter. I understand that any information obtained from this research will be kept confidential. My signature indicates my consent to participate in this research.

____________________________________  __________________
Signature                                      Date

189
Appendix D

Tuning Protocol

1. The facilitator introduced the standard of focus, or topic and presented the research-base for the focus. An introduction of the presenter was made. (5 minutes)

2. The presenter shared and explained the lesson plans, anchor charts, student work or assessment materials and may have provided a rational by expressing a structural question to be answered. (10-15 minutes)

3. The colleagues ask questions to clarify understanding of the presenters needs. (5 minutes)

4. The colleagues studied the work presented, considered the topic, research-base explained by the facilitator, and structural question that may have been presented by the presenter. The brief period was used for the colleague to reflect on the feedback necessary to provide to the presenter. (10-15 minutes)

5. The presenter listened while the colleagues provide both “warm” and “cool” feedback to address the materials or structural question. The colleagues offered comparisons of personal connections. (10-15 minutes)

6. The presenter had a period for reflection on the collaborative feedback. (5-10 minutes)

7. The facilitator lead a debriefing on the process and the information (5-10 minutes)

(adapted from Allen & Blythe, 2004).
Appendix E

Pre-Survey

Pre-Survey for Writing Instructional Practice PLC

Dear Teachers:
Your participation is valuable. Please fill out the following survey and return it to Jill Leonard in the attached envelope. Your feedback is confidential. Your participation is appreciated!

Please choose a rating that best describes your reaction to the statement. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat Agree; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF SERVICE</th>
<th>QUALITY RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the development of a child as a writer.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can write well.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am a good teacher of writing.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable with teaching writing.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach writing.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy teaching writing.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has increased my understanding of writing instruction.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of the CCSS has provided the guidance needed for writing instruction.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Instructional Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of a professional learning community for collaborating with colleagues on developmental writing instruction would help with my ability to teach writing.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of a professional learning community for collaborating with colleagues on developmental writing instruction would help me to implement more research-based instructional practices to teach writing within my classroom.</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Support in Writing Practices (Discussion Questions)

List the types of professional development activities have you attended or participated in that pertained to writing, writing instruction, or CCSS expectation concerning writing within the last 2 years?

How often do you participate in formal or informal collaboration with teaching colleagues? (circle one)

**Daily**  **Weekly**  **Monthly**  **Once Each Semester**

List the types of collaborative discussions you have participated in? (i.e. lesson plans,
How often do you participate in collaboration with teaching colleagues about instructional practices used to teach writing? (circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Once Each</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describe the collaborative discussions held with teaching colleagues concerning teaching writing or writing instructional practices.

What are the writing instructional practices used in your classroom that are based on research and considered best practice?

How did you gain knowledge and understanding of the research-based best instructional practice listed above?

List or discuss the three areas that most concern you about teaching writing:

1. 
2. 
3. 

Other COMMENTS:
Appendix F

Post-Survey

Post-Survey for Writing Instructional Practice PLC

Dear Teachers:
Your participation is valuable. Please fill out the following post-survey based on your concluding knowledge and understanding after participating in the PLC. Return it to Jill Leonard in the attached envelope. Your feedback is confidential. Your participation is appreciated!

Please choose a rating that best describes your reaction to the statement. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat Agree; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF SERVICE</th>
<th>QUALITY RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the development of a child as a writer.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can write well.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am a good teacher of writing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable with teaching writing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach writing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy teaching writing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has increased my understanding of writing instruction.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of the CCSS has provided the guidance needed for writing instruction.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Instructional Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of a professional learning community for collaborating with colleagues on developmental writing instruction has helped with my ability to teach writing.</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of a professional learning community for collaborating with colleagues on developmental writing instruction helped me to implement more research-based instructional practices to teach writing within my classroom.</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Support in Writing Practices (Discussion Questions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you plan to participate in formal or informal collaboration with teaching colleagues after participating in this PLC? (circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Once Each Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

193
What types of collaborative discussions do you plan to participate in that would benefit your practice? (i.e. lesson plans, teaching strategies, teaching ideas…)

How often do you plan to participate in collaboration with teaching colleagues about instructional practices used to teach writing?
(circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Once Each Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Describe the collaborative discussions held during the PLC’s with teaching colleagues concerning teaching writing or writing instructional practices that have benefitted your instructional practices.

What writing instructional practices that you plan to or have implemented in your classroom that are based on research and considered best practice as a result of participating in this PLC?

What knowledge and understanding did you gain of the research-based best instructional practice listed above through the participation on the PLC?

List or discuss the three areas that are still of the most concern you about teaching writing:

1. 

2. 

3. 

Other COMMENTS:
Appendix G

Colleague Review Letter

Month, Day, 2014

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your willingness to review the instruments intended to collect data to explore the use of a professional learning community (PLC) as a professional development model for developmental writing instruction designed to give teachers the collaboration and support that is shown through research findings to present opportunities for change in practice that benefits student learning. Your feedback is necessary for survey revisions to ensure content validity and reliability.

The survey and directions are enclosed. Upon completion of the survey and response to the questions listed at the bottom of the page, please return the material to me in the enclosed envelope no later than ________________.

If you have questions or need to schedule a conference concerning the review, please call (423) 483-5692 or (423) 753-6552.

Thank you for your feedback and your willingness to aid in the review of the survey.

Jill Treece Leonard
Appendix H

Colleague Review Form

Expert Review

1. What are any other areas of content that should be added?

2. Should any other selections be included?

3. Should the rating scale be revised in any way?

4. Is the length of the survey appropriate?

5. Additional comments of suggestions:
Appendix I

Reflective Journal Form

Reflective Journal
Meeting Date ______________
ID Code__________________

Provide two (2) or more statements about information gained or concerns you have developed during this PLC.

Write one (1) or more questions you have about the information presented during this PLC.
Appendix J

List of Codes and Sub-Codes

1. Management
   a. Planning
   b. Routines and Procedures
   c. Classroom Management
   d. Schedules
   e. Environment

2. Teacher Perceptions
   a. Negative Teaching Perceptions
   b. Positive Teaching Perceptions

3. Instruction
   a. Teaching Strategies
   b. District Text
   c. Record Keeping
   d. Assessment
   e. Minilessons
   f. Conferencing

4. Knowledge
   a. Collaboration
   b. Confusion
   c. New Understanding
   d. Prior Understanding
   e. Previous Understanding
   f. Metacognition
## Appendix K

### PLC #1 Coding Sample – Instruction

| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | One thing that I think and I don’t know what the thought on this is but with the upper grade teachers with the document camera, she said that she would have them write and then they came up and presented the paper under the document camera and then the class gave positive criticism. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | I explain what our topic is or we talk about a topic and I make a chart and then the children can select something on there that they want to write about. Then I tell them to shut their eyes and visualize what you’re going to write about and then turn and talk to your shoulder partner. Then they tell each other what their topic is and what they’re going to write about. Then we break off and do like brainstorming on a piece of paper with like a story bubble and our topics here and the shoot outs all around and we will go around and help them or give them ideas. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | Graphic organizers, how you get prepared. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | mentor text. What do I want to show or what story do I want to read. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | I tried the knee buddies, |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | 4: One of the things I used was the helping circle. That was one way of getting the kids that needed all the same things to come together. But I didn’t have K-1 but they signed up if they needed help. If we started the first part…If they couldn’t do that first part when we started…if they couldn’t do that, like the introduction or they didn’t understand the prompt or they couldn’t do that, then those people got together and they would come up with ideas to help their buddies. You know you could only ask one…you know you ask or tell what’s good about it or tell what I can do to make it better and then those kids got a start from somewhere and then any time during the writing process we used that. It’s time consuming, but you don’t get everybody. You just get a few, just the people that needed help in that area and so that works but that’s at a different level. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | 4: But they learned how to do that and they weren’t ugly to each other. They told what was wrong with the paper. What could you do to get more to it? Here’s the way you can get started. Here’s something you can write on. They would do that. So…I had a lot of success with that. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | 5: I call it writing music. So I turn on the writing music. If the writing music is on, you know what to do, and go from there. If you need help, I will be around or you can ask a buddy. That’s what we use. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Teaching Strategies | Individual writing time |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\District Text | And I don’t like writing because and I’m sure it’s an old school thing…they don’t have enough foundations of a books emphasis and nouns and verbs and with the series that we use it’s let’s do brainstorming today and next we’re going to teach nouns, and then we’re going to teach pre writing and then adverbs. But we skipped verbs and we skipped adjectives and you’ve skipped agreement and the fact that you have to have a noun and a verb or a subject and a predicate but let’s put this all together and make stories. So Benchmark doesn’t make it… |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Minilessons | I can do a minilesson. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Minilessons | A minilesson |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Conferencing | One of the best ways to take care of that when you confer with those kids, when you do a one on one to do that. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Conferencing | And that’s the hard part of writing is doing the conferring with those kids to get that out of them. It’s pulling it out literally one on one. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Conferencing | The part that I dread the most is the conferencing because it is hard sometimes to get them to understand without basically saying please write this. |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Conferencing | Sometimes, I’m just like (motions pretending to pull a rope toward her) |
| PLC #1 5-21-14 Instruction\Conferencing | Conferencing |
VITA

ANGELA JILL TREECE LEONARD

Education:

East Tennessee State University
Ph.D. in Early Childhood

Tusculum College
Attended: Nov. 1994 - May 1996
Degree earned M.A. in Education

East Tennessee State University
Degree Earned: B.S. in Education

Professional Experience:

Teacher: Washington County School System
405 E College St., Jonesborough, TN 37659: Jan. 1994 - current
Kindergarten: 1999 - current
First grade: 1995 - 1997
Second grade: 1994 - 1995

Washington County School System
405 E College St., Jonesborough, TN 37659

Presentations:

“Effective Writer’s Workshop in the Early Years” 2012
Presented workshop at the
Early Childhood Conference in Johnson City, TN

“Strategies for Effective Teachers” 2011
Presented at a Sunday School Teachers training at
Trinity Baptist Church

Created Study Group Guides for Professional Development opportunities
for Washington County Teachers using: 2010
Reading with Meaning, Debbie Miller
The Project Approach, Sylvia Chard
Nuts and Bolts of Writing, Lucy Calkins

“The Family Dynamics of Dealing with Children with Special Needs” 2010
Presented workshop with Sarah Bates at the
TN Hemophilia Conference in Pigeon Forge, TN
“Preparing for Kindergarten: What Kindergarten Teachers
Wish Providers Knew” 2010
Presented training with Linda Cutshall at the
Early Childhood Conference in Johnson City, TN

Washington County Science Pacing Guide Committee 2010
Developed Science Pacing Guide for the Kindergarten level

Washington County Math Pacing Guide Committee 2008
Developed Math Pacing Guide for the Kindergarten level

Honors and Awards:

Golden Key International Honor Society 2015

Tennessee Association for Childhood Education International Classroom Teacher Excellence Award 2012

Building Level - Teacher of the Year, South Central School 2011, 2009, 2006, 2001

System Level – Teacher of the Year, Washington County 2011, 2006

QUEST, STEM grant ($3400 grant) 2012

Eastman “Putting Children First” ($500 grant) 2005, 2007

American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics ($200 grant) 2002