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Implementing Writers' Workshop Into the Special Education Classroom

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Abstract

Writers' Workshop has developed prominence as a method towards providing authentic writing experiences. The purpose of this study was to determine what happens to student perceptions and quantity of writing when Writers' Workshop is implemented into a special education setting. This study took place in a self-contained special education classroom of third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders. Data was collected through focus group interviews with the teachers, focus groups with two students from every grade, perception surveys, and writing samples. Surveys and focus group interviews were completed before and after the implementation. Writing samples were collected at the beginning, middle, and end of implementation. The constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies or categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003), was used to analyze data. Through data collection and analysis three major themes emerged from this research: struggles in writing, attitudes about methods used, and understanding writing practices.

Implementing Writers' Workshop Into the Special Education Classroom

It was then and there that I realized something had to change. Multiple hands were raised, and every journal had three words in it, the same three words we had written as a prompt the few seconds prior, this weekend I____. How would I help every student at one time, and how does one help when nothing is written? It occurred to me in this moment that trying to find prompts that would be relatable and get these students to enjoy writing, were causing more chaos than anticipated. So now what? What do you do when writing seems contrived and inauthentic? Where is the passion that children have? Why is it not in their writing? This is the moment where every teacher begins asking themselves a series of questions. What do I do now? We have tried this for too long, and it just doesn't feel right. I have heard of things such as Writers' Workshop, but is it effective, and how do I start?

Purpose

Writers' Workshop is an approach in which freedom and time is given to students to write authentically and independently on their own chosen topics. There are four elements to this workshop model. The elements are the following: minilessons, direct teaching on various writing skills and strategies, independent writing time with conferencing, and then a share time (Schrodt et al., 2019, p. 428). I first learned about Writers' Workshop through a college education course. We practiced this model and tutored students using it. I saw many students take ownership over their writing and an overall excitement to write. The students in the special education placement I was in, however, did not share this same excitement, and I wanted a way to instill that in them. I figured what better way than to use the model I had seen working previously. The scenario and questions above are what led to this research study as well. The main purpose of this research was to figure out what happens to student and teacher perceptions and quantity of writing when

Writers' Workshop is implemented into a self-contained special education setting. My research questions were as follows:

Research Question: What happens when a Writers' Workshop is implemented in a special education classroom during writing time?

- **Sub question 1:** Does the model increase the amount of writing by the students?
- **Sub question 2:** What are the students' and teacher's perceptions of writing before and after the workshop is implemented?

When this study was conducted, I was a graduate student conducting action research in my clinical placement classroom. A co-teaching model was used for this placement at Burnett Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms) in Longhorn, Texas. The school was associated with the Longhorn ISD school district. The student body of Burnett Elementary was made up of 17.6% African American students, 44.9% Hispanic, 32.7% White, 0.2% American Indian, 1.1% Asian, 0.4% Pacific Islander, and 3.1% considered two or more races. About eight percent of the students were English learners, and 10.7% of students were in special education. The context of the classroom was unique. This was a self-contained classroom that consisted of special education students all ranging from third to fifth grade.

Literature Review

Clippard and Nicaise (1998) describe typical writing instruction as reductionism. They describe reductionism as writing being divided out into its own category or subject. It is then further divided by breaking the writing into segments of skills to learn at one time through daily or weekly lessons. This is still very familiar in many schools today. One can see it very clearly in secondary settings where each class period is focused around a subject matter, and students move through periods of the day based around these subject matters. Calkins (1985) said that

reductionism can be considered “inauthentic because teachers select the students’ writing topics; and they focus on the product, as opposed to the writing process” (p. 3). More authentic experiences in writing would help students to focus more on the writing process as described by Calkins (1985). Clippard and Nicaise (1998) describe Writers’ Workshop as a more authentic method of writing instruction that focuses more on the process rather than the product.

Writing uses many parts of the brain which can often make it difficult. Baum et al. (2012) describe some specific complexities that have been found to affect students while writing. Those complexities that affected student writers were “to clearly organize thoughts in a sequence, activate and sustain attention throughout the brainstorming and writing stages, and remember the rules of conventional writing, including word order or grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and formatting” (p. 10). These complexities were also observed within the researcher’s placement classroom. The process approach used in Writers’ Workshop has shown effectiveness in previous studies at addressing a few of these complexities. Schrodt et al. (2019) conducted a study and found the following:

As the intervention progressed, students did not ask for assistance from the researcher and became more independent in their ability to spell words as they began to learn and employ spelling strategies. Frequency checklists indicated students using self-regulation strategies to help them spell independently. (p. 436)

Another instance where Writers’ Workshop was found to be effective in addressing the previously discussed complexities was in a study done by Gericke and Salmon (2014) addressing the use of mentor texts often used within Writers’ Workshop. Gericke and Salmon (2014) found “after reading the mentor texts aloud, students were more productive and motivated during the mini-lesson and independent writing time” (p. 8). Interestingly Isom (2014) also describes

mentor texts that are often used within Writers' Workshop as being effective because students would actually "try out" new ideas noticed in the mentor texts when it came to writing/drawing time for kindergarteners. To be productive or try out new strategies, students would need to obtain growth in planning and other stages of writing that were addressed by Baum et al. (2012) as complexities.

Other benefits of Writers' Workshop are discussed by Seban and Tavsanli (2015) when they stated the following:

Writing as a process approach highlights the social aspect of writing because it puts the writer in the center of writing activities by allowing the writer to take ownership of writing, spend time on writing activities and respond to his or her own and others' writing in many different ways. (p. 218)

Yet another benefit within Writers' Workshop is the conferring with students that happens. Hawkins (2016) stated that during this time students are "taking ownership of their own ideas, advocating for their own learning, expressing their own desires, and conversing with their teachers as partners" (p. 9).

Only a couple of studies have examined the use of Writers' Workshop with students with disabilities. Clippard and Nicaise (1998) pulled students with writing deficits from general education classrooms to create a sample of participants. The researchers Clippard and Nicaise (1998) found that students in a Writers' Workshop model scored higher on direct writing samples. It was also found by Clippard and Nicaise (1998) that these students also enjoyed writing more and regarded themselves as stronger writers. Additionally Sturm (2012) specifically looked at Writers' Workshop in a special education classroom. He had a sample of students with developmental disabilities, and he implemented an Enriched Writers' Workshop model of

teaching. Sturm (2012) in his study explained different techniques used to teach Writers' Workshop with students who have developmental disabilities and found them to be slightly more effective than the traditional approach.

In this study, I examined what happens after a Writers' Workshop model is implemented during writing time in a special education classroom. Writing was difficult for my students using the current model where they were given a writing prompt to respond to in their journals. I researched using Writers' Workshop as an intervention and found in many cases it improved writing for students of all ages. There was substantial research on Writers' Workshop being used as a form of intervention; however, there was very little research on its use in special education settings specifically. The few studies involving special education did not implement a Writers' Workshop into a special education classroom; rather, they pulled a group of these students for a participant pool. This shows that there does need to be more research on what could happen when a Writers' Workshop is implemented in a classroom such as the one observed for this research. The context of a classroom can play a large role in how effective strategies may be. A self-contained special education classroom context is very different than general education or even pull-out special education. For this reason, researching the implementation of Writers' Workshop within an actual self-contained special education classroom can contribute to the knowledge of its potential to be used in more settings such as this in the future. Other studies have not focused on implementation in a self-contained setting which makes this one beneficial to further researching.

Methods

The following describes how the research study was conducted within a self-contained special education classroom, that included students ranging from third to fourth grade. I studied

what happens when a Writers' Workshop model is implemented into a special education classroom during writing time. I begin by explaining who the participants consisted of, how data was collected, and how that data was analyzed through the use of hierarchical coding. This study was conducted through a year-long clinical teaching position, so the students and teachers were comfortable giving their honest opinions about Writers' Workshop given the prior relationships established.

Participant Selection

The participants in the study consisted of students in the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade PALS (Practical Academics and Living Skills) or otherwise known as a self-contained special education classroom. There were 13 total students. The student demographics were as follows: 30% African American, 31% Caucasian, 23% Hispanic, 8% Philippine, and 8% mixed race. Of the 13 students, four were girls and nine were boys. Other participants included two teachers' aides and the teacher of the classroom. All 13 students who consented and turned in an assent form were chosen to participate in the study. A parent letter with a consent form for parents to sign was also sent home and returned for those who took part in the research. The teacher and aides also completed a consent form before taking part in the research. The teacher and aides were chosen as participants intentionally, because they worked closely with the participating students in the study and offered a good perspective. They were also chosen because they have worked with a large majority of the students for more than a year.

Data Collection

The data collection used was focus group interviews, student artifacts in the form of writing samples, and student surveys. The students served in this classroom were in a self-contained special education classroom. The Writers' Workshop was implemented for four

weeks. Writing time was from 9:00-10:00 and began with a minilesson. Next, students wrote independently, and then the workshop ended with a share time where I asked multiple students to share the skills they practiced during independent writing.

Focus group interviews took place with six students (two from each grade) and the teacher with the two aides at the beginning of implementation. The two students from each grade were chosen with purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Students in grade levels with more than two students were chosen based on the survey results to select diverse attitudes toward writing. One student with positive views of writing and another with more negative views on the survey results were chosen. The same focus group interviews took place again at the end of implementing the workshop. Focus group interviews with the students lasted about ten minutes. The teacher and aide focus group interviews lasted for about 20-30 minutes. All of the focus group interviews were semi-structured, with ten pre-planned but open-ended questions (Hendricks, 2017). The artifacts consisted of one writing sample per student which were collected before the model was implemented, two or three weeks after the model was implemented, and then again at the end of implementation. The student surveys also took place before and after the implementation of Writers' Workshop. These surveys consisted of smiley faces on a Likert scale. There was a total of ten questions on student surveys.

I wanted to collect data in a way that established credibility. I did this by looking to the words of Hendricks (2017) when he states, "credibility, dependability, and confirmability can be established through triangulation, a process in which multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed" (p.71). I wanted to make sure I was triangulating the data gathered within itself so that I was not just collecting data and not connecting it to the overall scheme of what was going on in the study.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed with mixed methods. The constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies or categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). For transcribed data such as the interviews and surveys, 15 to 20 level 1 codes that emerged in the first 20% of the data were used to code the remaining 80% of the data (Tracy, 2013). Then I developed three to five level 2 codes. The level 1 and 2 codes were important and recurring themes found within the data. These codes are displayed in a codebook (see Appendix A), that provides a color-coded list, definition, and example of corresponding data within the text. The themes that appeared from the coding of the data determined what additional data was collected. Memos were written for all level 2 codes. This method was how the focus group interviews and student surveys were analyzed.

Student artifacts were analyzed based on the quantity (number of words minus any excessive repetition of words) written. Writing artifacts were taken before, during, and after implementation. Each artifact was given a total number of words written. The samples for all students during each of the three samples were averaged to get an idea of the average number of words written by the class as a whole before, during, and after implementation. I also took an average of the artifacts taken before implementation and samples during and after so that I could compare numbers before implementation against during and after. The Writers' Workshop survey was analyzed through a Likert scale. Each question was rated one through four and then students were given a total number at the end. The higher the total number, the more positive perception of writing students had, and the lower the total number reflected a lower or more negative perception of writing.

Findings

Through data collection and analysis three major themes emerged from this research: struggles in writing, attitudes about methods used during writing, and understanding writing practices. These major themes were developed through the use of focus group interviews with the teachers/aides and the students, student artifacts, and student survey responses. There were two aides, one teacher and myself, the researcher in the study. Since both aides took part in many teaching activities they are referred to as teachers in the following findings and implications.

Struggles in Writing

During the before implementation focus group interviews with both teachers and students, I found many struggles in writing mentioned. A few struggles mentioned by teachers, that seemed to happen during writing a lot were reliance on teachers for editing, handwriting and spelling barriers, struggles in punctuation, getting stuck on a thought frequently, and even some dependency displayed by students due to not using environmental print. The students described many of these same struggles in writing as well. One similar struggle was a will to learn handwriting. Teachers stated that students “struggled a little bit more with just the letters.” Another teacher when asked what the students’ biggest struggles were stated, “writing words correctly.” Again, teachers mentioned students struggled with, “how to make a capital d or whatever.” Yet, another instance of this was when a teacher stated, “Well, some of them don’t know the difference between a D and a B.” Students also made their own statements regarding the issue. One student stated, “the letters and ABCs” when asked what was hard about writing. When asked what they had to get help with during writing, another student stated “numbers” and another said “the letters.” When asked if there was an agreement on this matter many other students chimed in with an accented “YES.”

Another common struggle addressed by teachers and students was punctuation. An example of this struggle being portrayed was when a teacher stated, "I think they get stuck on punctuation" when asked why students seemed to just be getting stuck in general. After implementation, this theme was found yet again. The students understood now that there needed to be some sort of punctuation, but now they were constantly seeking and asking where it goes. Students were able to identify this as a struggle as well. When asked what was hard about writing and what they needed help with, one student responded "periods." Another student gave an example of this specific theme when she described liking the new method of learning punctuation because it was easier, meaning that it was hard at some point before implementation.

The last struggle observed from students was disliking a productive struggle. This was hard to find because the theme hid itself in comments from students about teachers being mean, not giving them help right away, or teachers yelling at them and making faces. Students made these comments frequently, so naturally I had to figure out why. With much reflection I was able to determine that many of the instances students were speaking of were dramatized events in which teachers were pushing a little bit more of a productive struggle model for students, rather than just telling them exactly what they wanted. Right away they had to work to find answers on their own. When students had to work harder at spelling by using the room around them or other resources they became frustrated and assumed teachers were being mean. A few of these statements were as follows: "Mr. Holland doesn't help me sometimes when I need help", "Mr. Holland be like ya'll try to do it ya'll selves", "He looks at us like you better put that on there or you're gonna get a spanking", "He tries to make us sound it out." Overall, you would think we are just fire and brimstone in this classroom, but when I reflected back to these moments I saw an underlying theme of students seeing our push towards the zone of proximal development as

mean. This was one of the most eye opening and interesting codes I had found in the data because with further context that an interview doesn't provide, I was able to figure out what students were referring to in a more academic formation of words. Nobody was yelling or giving mean faces, but it was taken that way for some reason because they were being required to work a little harder on their writing.

When interviewed after the implementation, many of these struggles were no longer mentioned by teachers or students. The students did seem to struggle some still with productive struggle and seeing correction with a growth mindset. One specific struggle addressed by both teachers and students afterward was getting stuck on a thought. Students hardly mentioned at all getting stuck and that being an issue for them after the implementation, and teachers stated it was happening less. The struggle of handwriting and wanting to learn it specifically did not present itself much after implementing Writers' Workshop either. My thoughts are that students, and teachers both viewed writing as much more than words on paper, but rather saw it as a multifaceted craft in which the handwriting itself is just one small piece of that craft. So, it seems as if many of the struggles such as handwriting, punctuation, and getting stuck on a thought were solved to some extent, because they did not present themselves nearly as strong in the after-implementation interviews.

Teachers discussed one main struggle that seemed to have been solved as being getting stuck on a thought. The teachers discussed how drawing pictures and having an idea preplanned to write about seemed to help the students not get to writing time and just be stuck. Personally, I think another benefit to solving this was the fact students had next steps ready to go when they did get stuck. For example, when they were done drafting there was a step of revising, then they were to edit and so on. Students did not have to feel stuck because the Writers' Workshop model

gave them scaffolding and ideas of where to go next in their writing. I know this was a major struggle that was solved, because I did not see it occur as frequently during implementation. Teachers discussed how it was being solved, and students did not bring up getting stuck in their after-implementation interviews. Instead, students discussed about exactly what they liked writing about, whereas before there was not much discussion on that. Before, they didn't know what to write unless a teacher told them. Students still got stuck here and there; however, redirecting them became much easier than previously. We did have one or two students who refused to work during this time. I think they were stuck, because writing stories was harder for them in general. So, this behavior communicated that difficulty and again with more time in the workshop and being able to get to a point where we could have done some conferencing would have been beneficial for these students. It would have resulted in even less of those rare cases where students were getting stuck because we could have individualized it a little more for these few.

Students still needed a lot of help on going through each step of the writing process and having to be prompted during each step. I feel as if this would have resolved itself though with more time practicing the workshop model. This answers the research question though by showing us that their struggles in writing were addressed to some extent. This code is prevalent throughout the data; however, what it was specifically addressing seemed to have changed after Writers' Workshop was implemented. This leads me to believe that what was previously mentioned was no longer as much of a struggle to students as other struggles, such as mindset that presented themselves in the after-implementation interviews still.

This theme of struggles in writing is significant to the study because it gets at the heart of what teaching is. We collect data to figure out where students are struggling and then, in turn,

create a model that addresses their struggles. We wanted to know what happened if we implemented the model of Writers' Workshop, and now we know. This model had the ability to address specific struggles that students presented in their interviews before implementation of Writers' Workshop. The model appears to lend itself well to being able to address struggles, because it included a minilesson before students begin writing. In this minilesson teachers can target these specific struggles in precise ways. It even gave opportunity for students to see it done in the teacher's writing before they tried practicing it in their own. This scaffolding is what I believed to be helpful in addressing these struggles as the Writers' Workshop was implemented.

Attitudes About Methods Used During Writing

Students' attitudes about Writers' Workshop developed as a strong theme in the data. Much of the data used for this specific theme was found throughout interviews and surveys. As I indexed and read through the after implementation data, I found that students and teachers had many opinions on different methods or techniques used during the implementation of Writers' Workshop. Writers' Workshop used many different methods to teach writing, whereas, the journal prompts had fewer.

The students and teachers did, however, describe thoughts about methods that could be tried or were valued in the before and after implementation interviews. Teachers stated, "It helps dividing it up, and it's giving them this little part to do and then you move on to the next little part." The teacher was referring to how Writers' Workshop is set up to focus on each part of the writing process individually. Another teacher gave opinions about the methods used when he stated, "You can work more at your own pace. So like you said it's been good. I agree I like it." It was also mentioned by a teacher, "They like the sticky notes. They like doing that." Students

described their attitudes towards methods used in the implementation as well. Students liked using special publishing paper. One specific student stated “when we color paper” when asked what was fun about writing. Another stated, “We needed to have our own folders.” Many students also agreed they were happy about getting to use the COPS (capitalization, organization, punctuation, spelling) and sticky notes during writing.

The surveys showed that students had a slightly more positive outlook on fixing writing mistakes, planning writing, topics they get to write about, and displaying writing for others to see. These were all questions on the survey that addressed different methods used during the implementation of Writers' Workshop (see Appendix B). Methods used before implementation consisted of drawing after writing, reading writing to the class, using a sentence stem or prompt, and use of computers to do some editing every now and then. These were addressed in before implementation interviews when students discussed how they would like to draw pictures before writing, and then how the students would like to write about family, friends, or other familiar things to them. Methods that had many perceptions about them during the after-implementation interviews included the use of groups or flexible grouping, displaying work, drawing before writing, and even simple things like the use of sticky notes for revising and checklists for editing. When discussed, all of these methods were viewed with a positive perception. Students seemed to participate in and enjoy editing more when they had sticky notes.

The drawing before writing was a huge deal for the students and teachers. They all enjoyed doing this, and I saw many students take ownership and get into the mindset of planning their stories. They were always excited to start new stories, and I think it was because they were excited about drawing something new to plan. Teachers discussed how this method seemed to have aided in students getting stuck on a thought less and helped us to break down each step of

writing a story for them. One teacher even discussed, "Um, like Dylan and Travis and several others have drawn the picture, and they have been able to explain more." I was worried that practicing this method would contribute to students spending more time drawing and less time writing; however, they all did very well. Once they got to draw things out they were all ready to begin writing and didn't seem to spend extra time as I had thought drawing in order to avoid writing.

Another method used that was discussed in a positive manner in the after-implementation interviews was the ability to choose where students could sit and the ability to have different flexible groupings. There were only four weeks, so students were scaffolded by starting out by being put into groups with a teacher for writing. They then began moving into being able to choose what teacher they worked with and whether or not they needed to work with a teacher. Having choice of where to sit did present some moderate behavior of wandering and not writing because of the loose structure. With more time to fully set up each step of Writers' Workshop and work out the kinks for the individuals in this classroom though, I think this behavior would have resolved to some extent. These choices during writing time to me seemed to encourage slight misbehavior in work avoidance, but encouraged almost every student to write more than previously, because they had nothing to argue with in a way. They chose where they were going to work, they chose what they would write about, and this resolved more work avoidance than I feel it encouraged at times. All in all, many of the methods used in this Writers' Workshop model centered around choice, and they seemed to be beneficial.

Publishing, which occurred as part of Writers' Workshop, was positively received by students. The questions on the surveys also received more positive views than previously when asked about showing their work. The method used to display work in Writers' Workshop was

colorful notebook paper and making a big deal about publishing a piece. It was hung on the wall, students were asked if they wanted it shown on the board after writing and finishing a piece was overall valued highly.

The major research question in this study was, what happened when Writers' Workshop was implemented. One of the sub-questions inquired about exactly what perceptions were before and after implementation. This theme answered the sub-question directly by showing us how teachers and students felt about the methods and strategies used throughout writing before and after implementing Writers' Workshop. An example of perceptions from students can be seen in Figure 1 of perceptions before and after Writers' Workshop with a survey. A higher number is close to more positive views. To find a further breakdown of the survey see Appendix C.

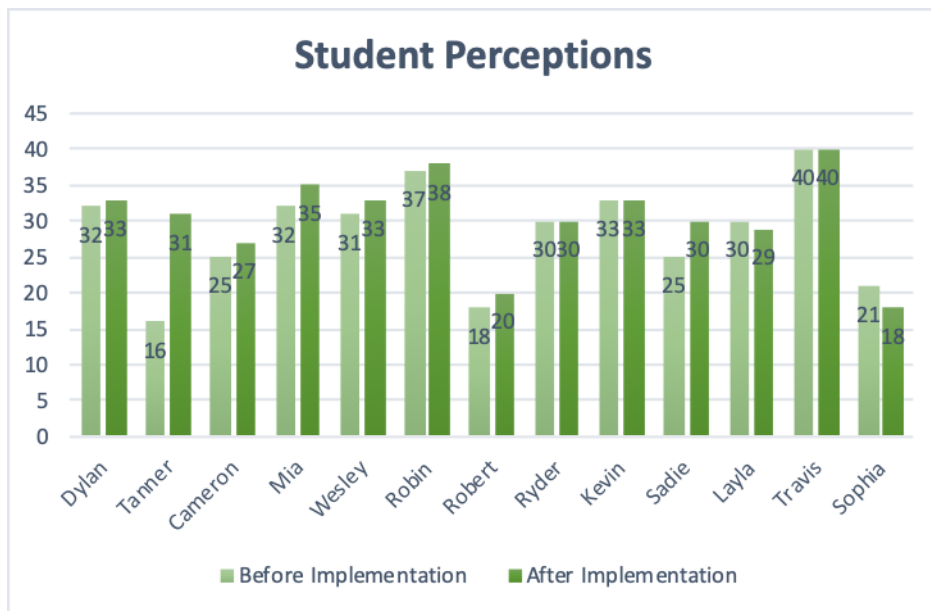


Figure 1. Survey results of student perceptions before and after implementing Writers' Workshop.

As you can see in Figure 1 students generally perceived this model with more positive feelings than the previous model. By following this theme throughout the data, I was able to determine the following perceptions: how writing was done before, what students and teachers

would like writing to consist of, and even how new methods were seen by students and teachers. I think the main idea with this theme was to show how versatile Writers' Workshop makes writing. There are a multitude of methods that can be implemented because of the design of Writers' Workshop. It is flexible, and it easily incorporates what students and teachers need at different times.

Understanding Writing Practices

This describes what it takes to go through the process of writing in the classroom. This theme was hard to name, but what it gets at is what writing was, and what it became. This is where many of the actual writing artifacts came into play, and the questions regarding writing itself in the interviews with students and teachers. The writing artifacts were taken before during and after implementation and looked at for quantity of writing. The table in Appendix D shows the number of words produced by students and averages of the entire class on production of words before, during, and after implementation. Writers' Workshop is a unique model where students could be working on the same piece of writing for a matter of days. Students start with a draft and go through revising, editing, and publishing. When implemented, students walked through their first story together as a class, and in the last sample of writing students were doing more writing processes on their own. Students at various points in the workshop were all at very different stages of writing as well. Therefore, I felt the averages of quantity of words produced needed to be provided so that it compared to journal prompts a little more fairly.

When writing practices are referenced what is meant is the quality and depth of writing, how much work teachers are having to commit towards writing time either before or during, the quantity of how much students are writing, and even what students are choosing to write about. For example, the theme of quality and depth of writing was discussed by a teacher when she

stated, "They are thinking more. They are thinking deeper." Another instance of this was when a teacher discussed a specific student's writing by saying, "Before we would get like one word out of him; this time it's more of a flow of thought." An example of the amount of work teachers had to commit towards writing is displayed by the following quote: "It is very time consuming, especially when you have three or four students wanting to know how to spell this or this word or that word, different words at one time."

Before implementation, students wrote about any number of prompts given to them. Many times, they would just finish the sentence stem and be done, so there was not much depth in their writing. Before implementing Writers' Workshop, teachers discussed how the time or work put in before writing was very minimal; however, during writing time the amount of labor and time was significant. One teacher said, "It is very time consuming, especially when you have three or four students wanting to know how to spell this or this word or that word, different words at one time." In my own words I would say preparing for writing required little to no work, but during writing time it was intensive, so it seemed much more stressful. The average number of words written before implementing Writers' Workshop was around ten to eleven (see Appendix D for exact percentages). In the previous model before Writers' Workshop, students were given one day a week to have a free write day in which they could choose what they wrote about.

During and after implementing Writers' Workshop these writing practices changed. The quality and depth of the writing was deeper. Teachers discussed how before implementation we might get two or three words from a particular student. After implementation, we got more in depth stories rather than a few words. Students told us the beginning, middle, and ends with some explanation in between making their stories deeper.

As far as the amount of work and time put into writing, that changed slightly. There was a little more time required to plan for writing beforehand as compared to the previous model of journal prompts. The time and work put in during writing stayed similar to what it had in the past, but the students were slightly more independent but needed help with more time consuming things. Many of the teachers discussed students still needing help. What they needed help with seemed to change though. Students were needing more help with revising or editing and just minimal amounts of spelling. For example, a teacher stated, "They know it's supposed to be there. They know it goes somewhere, yeah. They are just still trying to figure out where, where does it go." This comment was about students using punctuation. Students attempted their own spelling more frequently than before, but they still needed more guidance on what to revise or edit. Again, if the Writers' Workshop was implemented even longer, maybe students would get the hang of what to look for regarding revising or editing and start to rely less on teacher guidance with more time practicing.

The quantity of writing changed significantly. Before implementing Writers' Workshop students were writing on average ten to eleven words. During and after implementation that average increased to around thirty-five words (see appendix D for exact percentages). So, the overall amount students were writing increased which I feel in turn helped students to write with better quality and depth. Another method used during Writers' Workshop was giving students choice on what to write about. During after implementation interviews with teachers, it was discussed that students enjoyed this and did write at deeper levels when it was something familiar to them. As stated in the before implementation interviews, the writing of these students was tied to their experiences, and I believe that this finding supports those statements.

This theme specifically addresses the research sub-question of does the model increase the amount of writing by students? It also even goes deeper into that question by answering what helped the students write more, and what the quality of that writing actually was too. So, not only did we answer whether or not the model increased or decreased writing, we answered what that writing quality was like. This theme also relates to the research question about perceptions because in many instances, teachers discussed their perceptions about the students' physical writing as well as factors like time or choice that enhanced that writing in different aspects. This theme is one of the most significant to the study, because it actually highlights the data that shows exactly what did happen when a Writers' Workshop was implemented into a special education setting. We found in the data that students' quality and quantity of writing seemed to have increased along with the amount of time they were actually spending writing. More time during writing seemed to have increased growth in a few areas such as going through the writing process and writing more in depth content.

Implications for Teachers

Writers' Workshop is a model in which the teacher begins writing time by doing a short minilesson of about ten to fifteen minutes. Next, students move into independent writing time where they are practicing skills learned in the minilesson that day or from earlier lessons. This typically lasts about thirty minutes followed by another ten minutes where students share their work. During this share time the teacher may choose exemplary work to discuss and show in front of the class as well. Students may also choose to read their work during this time to gain peer feedback. This model of writing has a lot of moving pieces, but it can be very flexible. I was initially drawn to this model because of students' enthusiasm I had seen in previous placements while using it. I also tried to think of ways to address the students' struggles I was noticing such

as punctuation, spacing, depth, details, and much more. This model gave me a chance to address these specific struggles while fostering a love for writing and “becoming authors” of their own. I researched Writers’ Workshop being used in special education, and there was little research available. This lack of research in this area lead me to want to research this for myself and others to use in the future, because this model is definitely not limited to a general education classroom.

Something the students and I learned from this research project was that we all love the ability to choose what we write or even where we do our work. Being able to choose what they wanted to write about presented less disruptive behavior during writing; it’s hard to fight against something you chose to do. I also got to learn so much about my students’ lives by allowing them to show me that in their writing. I was scared to change writing completely in the middle of the year and use a model that was less restrictive in nature with special education students. My advice for other teachers in that mindset is to just do it. When researching anchor charts or different Writers’ Workshop lessons it can be overwhelming. Just do it though, start the model with a short lesson, do independent writing as long as the students can, and then share good work. You don’t have to do everything you see out there right away for any of this to work. Another major component of Writers’ Workshop is to do conferencing with students. I only go to do this at a very surface level by walking around between students during writing, and the results of the research still showed a lot of growth. So, don’t worry about getting it perfect or it being a disaster like I did. Chances are the students will love it and be willing to follow your lead to try new things as you go. After all, that will keep the model new and interesting all the time to retain engagement.

The findings I found in this study were that the model addressed many specific struggles students had such as getting stuck on a thought, focusing on learning handwriting to become a better writer, and even some punctuation struggles were addressed. It was found that students and teachers all liked a variety of methods used in the Writers' Workshop model such as choice in groups, drawing before writing, and use of materials such as punctuation checklists or sticky notes for revising and editing. Other findings included more depth and quality in the writing and more actual quantity of words written. Teachers discussed how Writers' Workshop was about the same amount of work in some ways, but easier in others during writing time. It was stated that the work was more worth it though. It was discussed in before implementation interviews that students' writing was related to their language and experiences. This research showed us this to be a possibility, because when we gave them a choice in what to write about, they did reflect deeper thoughts and more quality in their writing.

Many conclusions can be drawn from this research, and one interesting conclusion is that students spent more time writing, but they didn't seem to notice that their time requirement had lengthened. I think this was because they were more engaged and excited about Writers' Workshop and less focused on what they had to do and rather what they were getting to do. I think the ability to teach specific writing skills with a minilesson before students write independently also helped them to focus on deeper aspects of writing such as details, structure, and getting their story across effectively. I believe that it helped students and teachers to focus less on getting something on paper and more about communicating their story in more effective ways. The reason why I believe students and teachers liked many methods in the Writers' Workshop was because it gave students choice and power over their own writing. In the before implementation interviews students mentioned needing a lot of help and how they were

frustrated when they didn't get it. With Writers' Workshop they had to learn to self-regulate a little more, and I think that empowered some of them to a small extent. You have to be sure to give them the tools in order to do that self-regulation though. We did still have some small kinks to work out here and there in finding what students needed to regulate and become less reliable on teachers, but there was improvement shown in the area because the focus on what they were asking for help on changed slightly.

My teaching practice has definitely been impacted by this research. I see how important it is to allow students choice and control over their own work even though it may be scary to release that control to them. I was giving students in a special education classroom a less restrictive environment, changing their model of writing completely and requiring them to do a lot more work. I honestly had no idea what would happen, but I learned to take a chance, and it benefited students and myself. I was able to figure out exactly what skills in writing I needed to address and did just that which further improved the writing of students. This model also can be easier to grade with a rubric because students work longer on a single piece and give content to grade. Students learned how to begin taking control of their own writing in this research and gained a sense of empowerment from it. What they write and say is important, and this gave the teachers a chance to get to know students and show them that they do have the capability to write and do it well.

A few questions resulted from this research and would hopefully lead to further research in the future. One question would be what relationship does Writers' Workshop have with growth mindset? Another would be to figure out whether or not students take more ownership with their writing in Writers' Workshop. My last question that resulted from this research is does writing more improve students' dexterity or does it cause them to be more frustrated? I guess what I

would like to know is, is it worth it to require more writing to improve dexterity, and will students become less frustrated due to improvements in it?

The limitations of this study were that it was only about four weeks long. This population and model typically need lots of time to set up procedures, classroom management, and a view of students becoming writers themselves. Another limitation would be that this was the researchers first time planning and implementing a Writers' Workshop from the very beginning. In past experiences the model was previously set up beforehand. Other limitations included the following: the sheer difference of the journal prompts used before implementation as well as the actual time spent doing writing changed significantly.

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Appendix A

Codebook				
Color Code:	Level 2 Codes:	Level 1 Codes:	Definition of The Code:	Example of The Code:
	Struggles in Writing		Referencing difficulties during writing time.	“Like they didn’t know how to spell a word or they didn’t have an idea and they just sit.”
		Reliance on Teachers for Editing	The students not exhibiting independence and needing teacher assistance in order to edit and correct their work.	“They still expect me to do it. What do I add to this? What do I take away?”
		Handwriting/Spelling Barrier	When physical handwriting or spelling words hinders thoughts or writing.	“Struggle a little bit more with uh just the letters...”
		Productive Struggle Disliked	When students or teachers describe processes in writing with negative tones.	“Oh, sounding it out is hard? Yeah and it’s boring.”
		Don’t View Correction with A Growth Mindset	When students view teacher correction as yelling, making faces, or other negative views.	“Because we think we’re right when we’re not.”
		Dependency Due to Not Using Environmental Print	Students rely on teachers for writing heavily due to not using words, print around	“Because they are not thinking of looking up there.” (pointed

			the room, and other resources as much as possible.	towards sight word wall in the room)
		A Want to Learn Handwriting	The students or teachers mentioning wanting to learn handwriting to help with writing.	“And like learn our ABCs and our numbers.”
		Punctuation Struggles	Descriptions of students struggling to use or understand punctuation.	“Still trying to figure out where, where does it go?”
		Frequently Getting Stuck on A Thought	When students get a writer’s block of sorts due to not being able to come up with an idea or spell a word.	“The thought they get stuck on, just a thought of what to write.”
		Behavior During Writing	Descriptions of students’ behaviors during writing time.	“Kids are wandering the room. Like you have to get, make sure the behavior, but if they are all in their seat it’s not as much right? So it’s the behavior and the writing.”
	Attitudes About Methods Used During Writing		References to structure, materials, or methods using in writing.	“drawn the picture and they have been able to explain more”

		Use of Various Materials/Methods Liked	The materials, practices, and methods used during writing time to teach and help students write.	“We needed to have our own folders. Yeah cause you say grab your little folder and go to your reading spot.”
		Feel Good About Showing Work	The students describing how they feel about showing their finished and uncompleted work to peers or others.	“When they get to read our papers out in the hallways.”
		Choice of Groups Valued	The outlooks on how groups should look during writing time and perceptions of how the groups currently were.	“Umm when you tell us to go in our writing groups and we get to pick what group we want.”
		Drawing with Writing Helpful	The Drawing of a picture for beginning, middle, and end of the story before beginning to write and how it was perceived by students and teachers.	“So, draw the pictures and you know in your stages and then do the writing. So, I think the planning part has been really good.”
	Understanding Writing Practices		References to the physical writing content.	“everyone constantly needs help it’s a very active...So, during writing is a lot of work.”
		Quality/Depth of	The depth of	“Cameron

		Writing	thought students were using to write their stories or how far they were from being surface level, and the quality of that writing.	would say like my sister fell. Today it was like my sister and I went to the kitchen. She slipped on the water. I laughed. She was wet. Like you know, it was good.”
		Work During Writing Time	How much of a time requirement or amount of labor used during writing time.	“It is very time consuming, especially when you have three or four students wanting to know how to spell this word or that word, different words at one time.”
		Quantity of Writing	Descriptions of how many words or how much students physically write.	“Uh just writing in general. I mean they used to write just one word.”
		Writing About Familiar Things Easier (Choice)	The ability to choose what is written being well liked. Descriptions of students being able to write better work when it is familiar topics to them such as	“Write about um if we like write about our friendships and stuff.”

			family or friends.	
		More Time Writing Equals Further Growth	The longer periods of time students are writing and the benefits or growth perceived to come from that.	“Not just writing about their weekend, they are able to take their time.”

Appendix B
Writers' Workshop Survey

1. How does writing make you feel?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

2. How do you feel about fixing writing mistakes?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

3. How do you feel when your writing is displayed for others to see?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

4. How do you feel about the topics you get to write about?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

5. How do you feel when you are asked to write a story?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

6. How do you feel about planning a story to write?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

7. How do you feel during writing time?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

8. Do you feel like you get to write about what you want?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

9. How do you feel about how much you learn during writing time?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

10. How do you feel about reading your work to the class?



Very Angry



Upset



Happy



Excited

Appendix C Writers' Workshop Perception Survey

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Total
David	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	2	4	4	32
Trevon	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	16
Corey (C.J.)	4	1	2	4	1	2	3	1	3	4	25
Morgan	3	4	3	3	3	2	4	3	4	3	32
Wyatt	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	2	31
Roman	4	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	37
Ryu	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	18
Romeo	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	30
Kimaury	3	2	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	33
Sagnie	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	25
Lyrig	4	1	2	4	3	4	3	1	4	4	30
Te' Yah Zae	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	40
Sierra	1	1	2	4	2	3	1	3	3	1	21

Very Angry	Upset	Happy	Excited
1	2	3	4

below 30
30-35
35 and up



_ No change
* Showed higher outlook
L Lower outlook

Overall Score : **370**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Total	
David	4	1	4	4	3	2	4	4	3	4	33	*
Trevon	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	31	*
Corey (C.J.)	3	4	1	3	2	1	4	3	4	2	27	*
Morgan	4	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	35	*
Wyatt	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	2	33	*
Roman	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	38	*
Ryu	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	20	*
Romeo	3	1	4	3	3	4	3	4	1	4	30	-
Kimaury	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	2	4	3	33	-
Sagnie	3	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	4	2	30	*
Lyrig	2	1	4	4	4	4	1	4	1	4	29	L
Te' Yah Zae	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	40	-
Sierra	2	3	4	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	18	L

Overall Score : **397**

Appendix D
Writing Artifacts

Student	Writing Sample 1 (Before)	Writing Sample 2 (During)	Writing Sample 3 (After)	Sample 2 & 3 Averaged	Average Growth/Sample 1 Difference
Dylan	6	37	28	32.5	26.5
Tanner	8	37	19	28	20
Cameron	2	50	24	37	35
Mia	29	31	38	34.5	5.5
Wesley	6	26	74	50	44
Robin	4	17	24	20.5	16.5
Robert	0	17	15	16	16
Ryder	18	34	43	38.5	20.5
Kevin	17	30	38	34	17
Sadie	10	46	32	39	29
Layla	26	36	60	48	22
Travis	8	45	56	50.5	42.5
Sophia	6	25	34	29.5	23.5
OVERALL AVERAGES	10.77 Words	33.15 Words	37.31 Words	35.23 Words	24.50 Average Difference

- I felt it fair to provide an average of sample 2 and 3 because students received various levels of assistance during those times and were at various stages in the process of writing.
- I also felt it necessary for overall averages because the Writers' Workshop model did allow more time for writing than the first sample provided, and I felt this made the significant differences in the amount of words written a little less inflated due to students solely having more time.