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Using Oral Rehearsals to Develop First Grade Writing Proficiencies

An Action Research Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Kalmanovitz School of Education

Saint Mary's College of California

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Teaching Leadership

By

Teresa Sanchez

Spring 2019

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This action research project, written under the direction of the candidate's master's project advisory committee and approved by members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the faculty of the Kalmanovitz School of Education, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching Leadership degree.

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Abstract

Using Oral Rehearsals to Develop First Grade Writing Proficiencies

By

Teresa Sanchez

Master of Arts in Teaching Leadership

Saint Mary's College of California, 2019

Christina Nitsos, M.A., Research Advisor

Vygotsky (1978) can be referenced for understanding how language and talking is central to helping students write. This action research project focused on first graders writing and the use of oral rehearsals. Writing, when modeled, by the teacher and interaction with students and by the students created a process of collaborative learning based on Vygotsky's (1978) notion of how language and the interaction supported cognitive development and growth. Eight weeks of writing lessons were implemented with 22 students. Data collection instruments included a pre- and post-writing assessment, eight informational writing pieces which reflected the use of an editing checklist, a graphic organizer, and the use of the district informational writing rubric to score student work. This project supported the idea that the use of oral rehearsals with writing, alleviated the cognitive challenges that emergent writers face when having to hold their ideas, decode unknown words, transcribe them, and physically produce text.

Dedication

This action research project is dedicated to all my students. They have been the real teachers in this process. That I may share what they have taught me! To all the teachers who have served as mentors, teachers and friends in my many years in education! And, to my family for always supporting the teacher in ME. To Javier Angel, for his motivation and his support and his love of learning! To my husband, for his support in this process and for his patience and understanding!

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A big thank you to my SMC cohort. What a wonderful group of dedicated and extraordinary teachers! And, to Sarah for carpooling with me, for allowing me to vent when frustrated and for our many study sessions! You kept me on track! May all of your passions for teaching flourish and grow into benefits to all your future students!

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	x
Chapter	
I. Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Research.....	8
Action Research Question.....	13
Limitations	13
Positionality of the Researcher	15
Definitions of Terms	19
Implications.....	21
II. Literature Review	23
Overview of the Literature Review.....	23
Theoretical Rationale	24
Review of Related Research	28
Summary	45
III. Methods.....	47
Setting	49
Demographics of the Classroom.....	51
Data Collection Strategies.....	52
Procedures.....	57
Plan for Data Analysis	61
Summary	63
IV. Findings	65
Overview of Methods and Data Collection	66
Demographics of Participants	68
Analysis of Pre-Intervention Written Words Assessment	69
Analysis of Pre- and Post-Intervention Written Words	70
Analysis of Pre- and Post-Intervention Words Spelled Correctly	71
Analysis of Writing Score.....	72
Analysis of Graphic Organizer Scores.....	75
Analysis of Number of Details Added on the Graphic Organizer	77

Analysis of Average Number of Details as Compared to Average Writing Score for All Students and Students Receiving Special Education Services and Interventions	79
Summary	82
V. Conclusions	84
Summary of Findings.....	86
Interpretation of Findings	89
Reflections on Limitations.....	94
Summary	95
Plan for Future Actions.....	100
References.....	102
Appendices.....	107
A. Parental Consent for Child Participation.....	108
B. Student Assent Form	109
C. Curriculum-Based Measure (CBM) Writing Probe	110
D. School District First Grade Informational Rubric	111
E. Graphic Organizer	112
F. Graphic Organizer Rubric	113
G. Writing Prompts for Weeks 1-8	114
H. Editing Checklist	115
I. Student Performance Record.....	116
J. Primary Writing Paper.....	117

List of Figures

Figure

1. Pre-Intervention: Words Written and Spelled Correctly	70
2. Pre- and Post-Intervention Words Written on CBM.....	71
3. Pre- and Post-Intervention Words Spelled Correctly on CBM.....	72
4. Writing Score for All 22 Students	74
5. Cumulative Count of Student Writing Scores per Week	75
6. Rubric Score of Graphic Organizer for All 22 Students.....	77
7. Number of Details on Graphic Organizer for All 22 Students	79
8. Average Number of Details Added on Graphic Organizer and Average Writing Score for All Students.....	80
9. 16 Students Not Receiving Special Ed. Services.....	81
10. Average Writing Scores and Average Number of Details for Students Receiving Special Ed. Services.....	82

List of Tables

Table

1. Essential Questions Used in 5-Day Writing Routine.....	58
2. Schedule of Writing Instruction During the Study	60
3. Sample Growth of High, Medium and Low Student Work from Week 1 to Week 8 of Intervention	99

Chapter I

Introduction

First grade is a unique and very demanding academic school year. Students not only transition from a half-day kindergarten program to a full-day first grade program, but the expectation is that they will learn how to read and how to write. To read entails reading text accurately, with speed and with proper expression. To write entails writing with natural flow and rhythm: word to word, phrase to phrase, and sentence to sentence. Unfortunately, just one or two years into the educational arena, students are showing up in first grade with a wide range of skills in writing development. While some are scribbling, some are using letter-like symbols. Some students have letter strings; some have beginning sounds emerging. Some students have consonants representing words and some have initial, medial and ending sounds. In addition, some have recorded words and the more proficient writers are able to compose sentences. This poses the universal challenge to every teacher of young children of accepting the stage they are in and leading them forward. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research to demonstrate the process writers go through to transition from speech to written text. Shanahan (2006) states, that in terms of research available, there is a limited amount, on the connection between oral language and writing. However, it is not uncommon to walk into a first grade classroom during writing time and hear lots of children talking to each other while they write or talking to themselves as they sit intently writing on paper, or just sitting quietly, thinking. It would appear that the natural progression of speech to writing is expected, and had been understood as a linear and developmentally sequential event. An exploration into this much needed realm of learning might help shed light on how first graders process their ideas and then formulate their writing.

The works of Vygotsky (1978) can be referenced as an underlying theoretical framework for understanding how language is central to learning and eventually how language and specifically talking helps students write. As Vygotsky (1978) sat and watched children in classroom settings, he learned how language and the interaction as a result of language, supported cognitive development and growth. Vygotsky (1978) discussed language and how social interaction transformed the egocentric speech (young children talking to themselves) into inner speech (soundless speech/thoughts), and how the process supported cognitive growth. In this same light, this researcher believes that as first graders share their ideas orally, the transfer from thought to speech to text is supported and the cognitive transfer to writing is enhanced and made more attainable by the support of a more knowledgeable adult: i.e., the teacher. The role of the teacher to facilitate this transfer and this process is what Dixon-Krauss (1996) referred to as mediated literacy. In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) described the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as encompassing the gap between the child's level of actual development determined by independent problem-solving and their level of potential development determined by problem solving supported by an adult or through collaboration with more capable peers. It is clear that writing in a first grade classroom must be an interactive and language-based activity where students work with others, with adults and occasionally by themselves in order to produce the written word.

Writing as transcription is demanding on first graders. Cognitively, studies have shown that writing is more demanding than talking. The works of Bourdin and Fayol (1994) found that young children had by far better oral abilities to compose text as compared to their ability to compose transcription of text. Writing comes about as a result of student's practicing their writing orally before they start writing. This interaction between a writer and a partner is

produced speech, and is referred to as an oral rehearsal. For first graders who are just beginning to engage in the writing process it is important to consider the effects of oral rehearsals since writing challenges them cognitively as they juggle language with demands of the complex writing task. Teachers who mediate the lessons need to remember the cognitive challenges that the writers face. Oral rehearsals are just one strategy that might prove to support students as they move from speech to writing. Therefore, the goal of the action research project was to determine the effects of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing abilities when responding to prompts.

Statement of the Problem

With the passage of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in California in 2010, an increased emphasis was placed on preparing students with the needed writing skills to be ready for college and careers. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) has alarmingly noted that roughly 75% of sixth, eighth and 12th graders scored below the proficient level as indicated on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) writing exams. As the implementation plan and the new standards were presented and implemented in classrooms all across California, one set of words in the standards struck a note with this researcher. As first graders learn to write narratives, opinion pieces and informative text, and the production and distribution of their writing emerges, it is done with support and with guidance from adults (CCSS, 2010). The writing process is not one that is an independent student activity at the beginning of a first grade year. There is a great need, especially with emergent writers, for support from a knowledgeable teacher and from a writing partner that works collaboratively to engage, support and develop a piece of writing. Emergent writers need many lessons, modeled writings and someone who will initially guide them through the process of writing their ideas

down. One way of looking at this relationship is the teacher is a coach and her students are learning by practicing and by watching the coach write.

At the time of this study, I was a first grade teacher in a Title I school in Contra Costa County. We have approximately 620 students, and our racial backgrounds include 47.4% White, 39% Hispanic and 5% Asian. We have an English Learners Advisory Committee (ELAC) to address and monitor the needs of second-language learners (SLLs) and free and discounted lunch is available to 33.1% of our student population. Our CAASPP test scores last year indicate that 46% of third graders overall did not meet language arts proficiency standards. However, it is important to note that 33% of White students did not meet expectations compared to 55% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, 70% of the English learners, and 91% of students with disabilities. As these results show a huge disparity between the subgroups, I was motivated to teach all students the necessary foundational writing skills that they need to be prepared for the following year.

Since the implementation of Common Core in the district, my writing instruction has changed considerably. Prior to Reading Wonders, I had used a writer's workshop model to teach writing in my first grade classroom. With the implementation of the Open Court Reading Program in 2002, the writing instruction used in my classroom started to change with an increased focus on reading. The writers workshop model developed by Donald Graves in the 1980's that had been replicated in my classroom slowly began to disappear due to schedule limitations. Today, we use the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program and teach writing through isolated skill instruction and mini lessons. Students are expected to apply their learning skills and strategies. Progress in writing proficiency is assessed using a writing prompt and rubric adopted by our district as a formal assessment tool. Scores are reported on our Report of

Progress (formerly called a report card) and sent home to parents. I had 22 students in my class and found that a majority of my students were not always ready to become writers when they walked into my classroom. Prior to embarking on this research, I tried whole class instructional strategies to guide them in their writing development, but overall this method has not addressed the needs of all my students. Over time, I learned that many students continued to need individual feedback (conferencing), and smaller group instruction (intervention). Many students sat passively and waited for assistance and scaffolding as writing was taught in fragmented lessons and then assessed as students were asked to write in response to a prompt. In part, students were in the initial stages in their writing development and were not ready to compose written text. They needed more support, more writing opportunities, and more modeling by the teacher of what writing looked like. Unfortunately, the new standards had given little time for slowing down. As a result, students often fell behind early in their grade-level writing proficiencies.

Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa & MacArthur (2003) found in a survey of first- through third grade teachers in the United States that few had interventions for their struggling writers. In the study, struggling students needed lessons taught to them at their level. If there was no extra time or if there was no intervention in place that addressed the need of the struggling writers, the students were found to continue to struggle. At my school, we have reading intervention that targets the struggling readers. This intervention starts in kindergarten and follows them into the first grade. With the ample research in reading intervention, what comes to mind is the need for a writing intervention. Students that are placed in my class have red folders that follow them from kindergarten prepared by their former teachers. The kindergarten teachers place three writing samples (narrative, informational, and opinion pieces) in each folder that

were scored using the district rubric. It is not difficult to see where students are in their writing development. Beginning writers face many hurdles as they take on the difficult challenge of writing: visual-motor integration of the actual handwriting, spelling, application of concepts of print, and transferring their thoughts and ideas as they juggle all the previously mentioned tasks. Beringer (2006) reminds us that by the time students are ready to transfer the ideas and develop their story, they are tired and have a difficult time retrieving ideas because writing is demanding and a mental strain.

There are always students who fail to complete writing assignments given to them despite modeling, daily practice and ample literacy activities. In part, this may be due to having given writing a less important focus as compared to reading. I know reading happens five days a week. It is not uncommon to skip writing for the day. In addition, reading is very systematic and driven by clearly outlined lessons. Writing, on the other hand, is not systematic and is taught through many lessons that focus on teaching isolated skills. It was my intention to attempt an intervention to help more students succeed in writing in first grade. Since the implementation of the Common Core, my classroom writing program has changed from that of a writer's workshop that included topic choice, drafting, revising, editing, conferencing, and an opportunity to share finished works. Currently my writing instruction is driven by the teaching of skills in isolation and to administering writing prompts to my first graders as the mode of assessment. While the change in my instructional practices has first graders writing to different kinds of lessons, writing occurs and allows students to develop writing skills. It is my hope that a new, focused and explicit approach will bring about more successes. The gap that exists and is widened when students fail to show progress in their writing development might stem from a lack of needed intervention, more time spent on writing or the need for a student to orally practice their writing

to then be able to apply writing skills to record their ideas. I believed that while all might be applicable, more time to write, explicit instruction and differentiation in addition to allowing talk might be all that is needed.

A student facing difficulties in writing must be given ample opportunities to practice their writing orally before they address the writing onto paper. Teacher observation plays a big part in addressing the needs of the struggling writer. As a teacher observes her writers and identifies the students who need the extra rehearsal time, an explicit intervention plan must be in place.

Struggling students need to be given extra teacher support as they plan their narratives, as they use a graphic organizer, and especially as they begin composing the topic sentence, the details and the closing sentence of their narrative. Having the skills to orally compose a narrative helps the transfer to the written format. The actual writing takes more cognitive energy and needed support. Jones and Myhill (2009) believed that the use of oral rehearsals with struggling students may in fact reduce the cognitive demand placed on them during transcription of text. The more students practice what they are going to write, the easier it will be for them to shift their focus to the composing of their message. Hayes and Flowers (1980) described the process of writing as a complex process. They believed that two distinct processes are occurring while the writer is trying to compose a narrative: one is focused on the transcription and the other is focused on the message the writer is trying to compose. These two areas place a strain on the working memory of the writers. If the writer has to only focus on one area, the task becomes less cognitively demanding and the writer can have more success. When writing informational pieces in my class, the process takes approximately a week. We go step-by-step planning the writing. It is modeled by me and executed in a deliberate manner to allow students to practice concepts of print, grammar, writing and specifically narrative writing. In addition, we practice talking our

stories and orally rehearsing every part of our narrative to a partner and/or to the teacher if needed. This is meant to relieve the writer of the strain of having to remember what they want to say. If the writing is practiced enough and committed to memory, the struggling student can then focus on dealing with the transcription of the message. This instructional framework supports students by alleviating the cognitive load of composition, allowing them to focus on transcription. This action research project will incorporate daily oral rehearsals to alleviate the demands of writing.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was to examine the effects of oral rehearsals on first graders' writing abilities. This early stage is critical to examine in order to gain insight into how students become conventional writers. There is a need to address the writing at this early stage due to overwhelming lack of success in later years in students' writing proficiencies. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses how the students in the United States are writing. According to NAEP writing is one of the most important skills that young people can acquire and develop throughout their lives. Effective written communication is essential in today's environment that "reflects the transition to an "information-based economy built on speed, efficiency and complexity" (NAEP, 2011, p. 1). Fourth, eighth and twelfth graders are tested every year. Their recent scores reflect an alarming realization that three quarters of these students scored below the proficient level. If this trend continues, it is going to be of great importance that educators identify students who are in need of extra support early, address their needs, and provide intervention to prevent academic failure later as they move up in the grades. First grade is a great place to begin the examination of the development of writing proficiencies for elementary students.

The CCSS were adopted in California in 2010. This adoption came about in California via Senate Bill 1200, statutes of 2012 and in addition provided some changes to the original CCSS. Additional modifications were recommended by State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson. Of greatest importance were the addition of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards. This was:

to help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications. Each year in their writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources. (CCSS, 2010)

While this was to help students be ready for college and for 21st century careers, a lack of focus on writing instruction has always seemed to be prevalent in early elementary. It was my goal to implement oral rehearsals in my classroom five days a week in order to address the need to have writing activities daily and in an effective, structured writing program.

Writing as a process entails many components. In first grade, students are just beginning to take ownership of their ideas and beginning to record their thoughts onto paper. As they become more sophisticated in their writing, they begin to master writing skills as presented in lessons and then evaluated on a narrative rubric. Students in first grade need to write to a prompt in a manner that is: (a) sequenced; (b) includes details; (c) uses temporal words; and (d) provides a sense of closure. In addition, they need to demonstrate a command of English grammar and include the use of conventions such as: (a) capital letters; (b) ending punctuation; (c) commas; (d) the use of conventional spelling for words taught; and (e) phonetic spelling for those words that are not taught. Also, the use of words and phrases commonly used in language need to be

included. All these components in first grade writing are then scored on a 4-point rubric, with 1 being not proficient to 4 being advanced. In my 28 years of teaching first graders, I have found students start the year at a sentence level and then by the end of the year are able to write a 5-sentence paragraph. Carlson, Koenig and Harms (2013) described a study that used a 4-point rubric to score student writing samples in a journal. They found that while using the rubric with the students helped them perform better on an assessment, what had a greater impact on writing improvement was probably the use of an oral practice before writing began.

In addition, another very important aspect of writing research is understanding the development of writing for the struggling student. Beginning writers struggle trying to juggle the demands placed on them by the writing process. Dunn and Finley (2010) discussed the difficulty students have trying to address the cognitive challenges of trying to hold their ideas and compose text dealing with the manuscript printing of handwriting. Hobson (2002) advocated for visual supports to help guide struggling students in their journey from thoughts to talking to writing. In my first grade classroom, I always use a graphic organizer to begin the writing process. Students are not allowed to write words, they must organize their ideas in pictures and share their ideas with a partner. Later in the process they are allowed to transcribe their thoughts from their images after they have talked through their pictures with their partners and the teacher. This reinforces my belief that children are still at a stage where mediated literacy and a social cultural aspect is necessary for their writing development.

Jones and Myhill (2010) discussed oral rehearsals as the vehicle for allowing children the opportunity to practice their ideas and to rehearse out loud while preparing themselves before they have to transcribe their ideas conventionally through writing onto paper. Students may practice alone or with others through a shared and interactive process. This process is described

as working to allow students practice time, while they work through word, phrase or sentence level. Oral rehearsals are then described by Jones and Myhill (2010) as the “ideal bridge between the creative, spontaneous, content-forming talk used to generate ideas and the more ordered, scripted nature of writing” (p. 71). When walking into most first grade classrooms, the air is filled with talk, there is never a shortage of stories to be told by any first grader. The classroom environment is meant to foster and encourage students to share their stories but unfortunately, the task of sharing stories in a written format takes on a different feel. The strenuous task of putting the ideas into a written narrative shifts the fun, exciting talk into a strained, difficult and sometimes stressful environment for struggling writers. In my classroom the need for constant and continual support is critical when struggling students need to write narratives. What I feel I have lacked is the continual monitoring and the explicit language around the talk with my students as I guide them. The bridge becomes the structured, repeated oral rehearsals and the monitoring by the teacher of those needing the extra support of repetition. Like any memorization activity, with repetition, the more the possibility of it being committed to memory. Once ideas are committed to memory, then the transcription of the narrative can begin. While the writer spells and writes his ideas, the cognitive load is decreased, allowing ease in transcription.

Dixon-Krauss (1999) described a process of literacy instruction based on Vygotsky’s (1978) social historical perspective and how it applied to Western education. Theoretically the works of Lev Vygotsky have substantiated the need to allow students to talk before they write. Vygotsky (1978) believed in collaboration among children’s interaction as a basis for cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) watched children in the school setting and during instructional times and he “found that language development followed three distinct stages: (a) from external

or social speech to (b) egocentric speech, and then to (c) inner speech” (Dixon-Krauss, 1999, p. 11). Students have ideas in their minds. They need time to share and discuss their thoughts and then they might be ready to write. Jones and Myhill (2009) discussed the cognitive load that writers face in order to transfer ideas to text. They contended that the use of oral rehearsals may reduce the load that strains writers to the point of struggle. They present the scenario where a student orally rehearsed what they were thinking in a speech that sounded like reading aloud. This allowed the writer to be supported in the cognitive exercise that lessened the demanding cognitive exercise of producing text. Two activities were occurring and posing a strain on the writer. If the writer has the opportunity to practice their ideas, commit them to memory, then they are able to begin the transcription or writing of the message as a separate activity. This is my new intended focus in my writing practice. I plan to allow children ample time daily to verbalize and discuss their thoughts and ideas before they have to write them down. Oral rehearsals are not always on my lesson plan. However, by providing the students with the daily opportunity for this practice, with teacher and peer support, it will become common practice and all students should be successful according to Vygotsky. He believed that with support and guidance a child could move from a dependent to an independent learner (Vygotsky, 1978).

Through my research I plan to establish a blueprint, for myself and for other teachers of young writers, of what is needed to be able to support beginning writers as they navigate from the generation of ideas to the formulation of text and finally the composition of a written narrative. Of greatest importance is the oral rehearsal that needs to occur daily in the writing process. The writing process is sometimes perceived to be a linear process, but researchers Hayes and Flowers (1980) showed that this is not the case. A writer navigates from thoughts to transcription (writing) to talking about their writing in no given order. In addition, the necessary

supports to facilitate this process include: (a) modeling of the writing process; (b) interaction between the writer and other writers; (c) the fine motor demands on students; and (d) the interplay between the processes of planning, translating and editing. My ultimate goal is to gain: (a) a clearer understanding of this writing process; (b) an understanding of the supports a young writer needs; (c) and the importance of using language via oral rehearsals. The research should provide an overview of writing with young writers and a promising practice that will allow any teacher to provide the needed support for writers to compose narratives successfully.

Action Research Question

The action research question for this study was: *What is the effect of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing proficiencies?* My expectation is that through careful planning of modeled narrative writing lessons, through engaging in and reflecting upon an eight-week writing intervention based on incorporating oral rehearsals daily in writing activities, students would be able to write narratives with more success. With these skills in place, students will be able to continue improving on their writing development in other genres and in future grades. With success in writing usually comes enjoyment of writing. While this might be an afterthought, I hoped that this intervention would also lend itself to continued successes and enjoyment for all students involved.

Limitations

There were several limitations that might have influenced this research project's outcomes including: (a) schedule changes; (b) the sample size of the participants; and (c) the role of the teacher-researcher. This project focused on an eight-week implementation. Of the 22 students in my classroom, all 22 were included in the intervention. This is a small sample size and just one of five first grade classrooms at my school. The generalizability of this project is

limited in its results since it only addressed the students in my class. Other first grade classrooms at my school and across the district may have similar situations but different findings may result due to unique variables. Additionally, as the teacher-researcher, my biases and my teaching method might have impacted the research project and the students' performances. In addition, my unique population of subjects come from a suburban neighborhood. Demographics have somewhat changed due to the opening of other schools in the district. The number of second language learners has decreased significantly at my school. One example of a significant change is the number of English learners at the school. As a BCLAD (Bilingual Certificate of Competence) and former bilingual teacher, it was a common practice to place the group of neediest English Language Learners (ELLs), or those who were in the beginning stages of learning English, in my class. It was not uncommon to have a quarter of my class receiving ELD (English as a Second Language) services. This is no longer the case. This year only a few students require ELD services in the entire grade level. The results due to the unique nature of this population might affect the results, making them incomparable to other schools with different populations.

In addition, it is common for writing to be overshadowed by the increased focus on reading instruction in the early years. This implication has huge repercussions for teachers of young children. A need for change and a need to give writing a significant focus is important so that students gain necessary skills for the future. There is also a need to address the alarming failure of students in writing across the grades and across the nation. The sooner educators address the issue and begin teaching writing effectively beginning with the youngest learners, the sooner we will possibly see test scores and students' writing improve overall. Lastly, a control group was not used, limiting the insight of effectiveness of the intervention.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am a first-generation Mexican-American woman from a lower-class family of four children. My parents immigrated to United States of America in search of opportunity as both of my grandfathers had done earlier in the century, only to return to Mexico when their employment was terminated. As a result, my parents came to America legally due to the status my paternal grandfather had acquired for himself and for his family while working in the Bracero Program during World War II. Both my parents were literate and had received schooling up to the third grade. My paternal grandmother was educated by the Catholic Church, was highly literate and valued education; she sent her youngest son to the University. My father chose to stay home and support his mother after she became a widow. As a result of my parents' exposure to educational possibilities, I learned at a very young age the value and potential of an education through my interaction with my grandmother.

I was a product of the effects of Proposition 13 in the California in the late 1970's. As class sizes grew and the funding of California schools dropped from highest funded in the nation to one of the lowest, I recall vividly as teachers struggled to provide students with supplies in my classrooms. I attended a public school in the Bay Area and was sent to a private Catholic middle school due to my father's concerns about the public school. Unfortunately, here I learned of the haves and have nots. My new middle-class friends lived in very nice homes, and had parents who were educated and who provided their children with experiences of which I could only dream. My schooling here was short-lived because I then moved to the public high school two years later. This high school was considered inner-city and most students were socioeconomically disadvantaged, including myself. Despite these experiences, I excelled and was able to achieve excellent academic standing: I was accepted to and completed two degrees at

UC Berkeley. I became a bilingual teacher in the era of bilingual education and I completed a Reading Specialist Credential to address the literacy needs of my students. Before becoming a teacher, and afterwards, I always believed that no matter who you were or where you grew up, you could succeed if you wanted to. My schooling in both public and private schools were such that I believed the educational experiences in schools provided ample opportunities to learn, grow and succeed.

As a teacher-researcher, I was aware of my own positionality as I addressed the needs of writers in my first grade class. As a result of having taught in this school setting since 1990 and by being aware of the changes in our student population since I arrived, I have a stance of being a more knowledgeable mentor and teacher who has experience and knowledge in the field of early literacy, and specifically, for the purpose of this study, writing. I am aware of my pre-conceptions of my “most struggling writers” due to the fact that this population rarely meets grade-level expectations. This is partly due to 29 years of teaching and working with struggling students who, despite making growth, rarely meet grade-level expectations. These assumptions inherently limit my objectivity because I expect that a struggling student may remain a struggling student over the course of an academic year. If I were to look back over the years, it is not common for a struggling student to overcome the label. Nonetheless I have drawn on research studies and data collection to help me maintain a sense of objectivity when I address my struggling students’ writing. I have also searched for promising practices that will possibly alter the past patterns of the struggling writers and will keep my bias in check.

After 26 years of teaching first grade, I am well aware of the potential of my students. I have had great successes, and I have watched struggling students struggle in the beginning of the year and continue to do so at the end. I can say that a few do overcome the struggling student

label and achieve grade-level proficiency, but only a few. What I have never really addressed, and this challenges my ideological stance about struggling writers, is that I would need to change my teaching to address their needs. This past year, my objective has been to wait on those struggling students, to support their language needs, and to give them time, support and to work with them as they develop their skills. I created a writing environment that did not allow failure. As writers became aware of my “you will not fail” stance, they cooperated and worked with me to become better writers, and they even felt pride in sharing their work with others.

Over the years, I have gained acceptance and respect from the community due to my diligence and spirit of perseverance when it comes to supporting students struggling with literacy. I became one of the teachers who was known to be assigned the students struggling in literacy-related skills. This created a sense of pride that could have caused a bias since what I had done in my classroom had usually addressed the needs of most students. As I stood back and reassessed my practices and researched promising practices, I was challenged into humility as I accepted a new practice after so many years. My lack of objectivity could have been expressed in expecting the use of the same strategies to always meet the needs of young writers. It is my hope that the added practice of oral rehearsals will create a new experience for my young writers and will allow more of my struggling writers to become proficient writers.

As I worked with my students in writing over the course of this inquiry, my hopes of their overcoming struggles and achieving proficiency was not without biases of them not achieving. With this group, it was important to release my bias of always having the most struggling students fail. As I assessed my most struggling writers, I realized that they were not only the socioeconomically disadvantaged or the second language learners that usually struggled in my class: this year I had middle-class students who were struggling. My background as the bilingual

teacher who always got the struggling second language learners forced me to always be on the lookout for strategies that would support language acquisition and help writers communicate via writing. My background as a bilingual teacher should have reflected some biases towards the population who usually succeeded and were not the second language learners. I expected them to flourish and to be the role models in my class. I always had a good balance of writers with a range of abilities. In a class of 22 students, this allowed me to have students work together and help each other while I made my rounds and tried to help everyone. In performing my intervention, I had a core of effective strategies in place based on years of teaching writing to young writers. Oral rehearsals were my promising practice that was going to bridge language to writing more effectively for the struggling students, and any student in my class. In performing my intervention, I had my teaching experiences and research-based strategies in place to ensure the study was presented accurately and with utmost care to assist and support my students fairly. My lack of objectivity was expressed in expecting the use of the same writing strategies to always meet the needs of young writers. It is my hope that the added promising practice of oral rehearsals will create a new experience for my young writers and will allow me to gain a new insight into how to support and change my current practice.

I used three data sources to gauge student engagement in my project, and had feedback on tools used to ensure proper project implementation. I used the district narrative writing rubric to guide my scoring of writing. I included a Curriculum-Based Measure (CBM) writing assessment to measure discrete growth in writing skills. I also used a graphic organizer to document the development of students' ideas that may have resulted from the use of oral rehearsals as a result of collaborative interactions with others over the course of a weekly guided writing lesson. The lack of research that addressed the process from student talk to writing,

made me want to address students' needs for oral rehearsals even more precisely. As a promising practice, it made sense to attempt the intervention for the good of students, and with the intention of providing an additional foundational support, especially at a time when most third graders do not meet the CAASPP writing proficiency test expectation. Lee and Burkam (2002) discussed the inequalities present among children of color, and students of low socioeconomic status. The authors reviewed how the educational system magnifies the inequalities systematically. These students arrive at school with disadvantages from the very first day of their educational career. Instead of addressing and recognizing the social differences of these students and their needs, schools play the blame game. My goal was to empower and prepare the youngest, the struggling, and the most vulnerable population with needed writing skills necessary for school success. Well-equipped first graders, empowered with writing skills create a shift in usual patterns of failure in schools.

Definitions of Terms

English learners (EL). Students whose home language is not English as reported on the Home Language Survey and whose English language skills are not up to standards as measured on an approved assessment (California Department of Education, 2013).

California Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Content standards to be adopted by California that specify what skills students at every grade level should know (California Department of Education, 2013).

Egocentric speech. Young children speaking aloud to themselves without reference to an audience (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

External speech. Speech that is heard and verbalized by the student (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

Inner speech. Soundless speech used by older children and adults to structure and control their thinking (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

Individual Education Plan. An IEP is a document prepared for a public-school student who needs special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Mediated literacy. A model used to guide teachers' decisions on planning instruction and on adjusting the amount and type of support they provide students during instruction (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

Oral rehearsal. A technique used in classrooms that allow the students to practice and verbalize their ideas before they begin writing (Jones & Myhill, 2009).

Rubric. An assessment used to score a writing sample on a four-point scale (Bradford et al., 2016).

Scaffolding. The teacher or adult structures a learning task and provides directives and clues using dialogue to guide the learner's participation in the learning task (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

Socioeconomically disadvantaged student. A student who qualifies for a free and reduced lunch or whose parents did not complete high school level of school (California Department of Education, 2013).

Transcription. The writing down of text (Dunn & Finley, 2010).

Title I. Schools are designated Title I when they have large numbers of children from low-income families and as a result, they receive Federal funds to help meet state standards (California Department of Education, 2013).

Visual-motor integration. The ability by a student to see and be able to write down ideas (Dunn & Finley, 2010).

Writers workshop. A process where writing is taught inter-actively and students learn to rehearse, draft/revise, and edit their own work (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983).

Zone of proximal development (ZPD). The gap between the child's current or actual level of development determined by independent problem solving and the child's emerging or potential level of development determined by problem solving supported by an adult or through collaboration with more capable peers (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

Implications

The purpose of this action research project was to explore the effects of giving first graders daily oral rehearsal time before they write narratives. This action research project will potentially provide a much-needed intervention especially for struggling writers in first grade. In addition, it will address a gap in research in the area of the connection between language and writing. My hope was that struggling students would become better writers as a result of the intervention. Writers would begin enjoying writing because it became an easier task, and thus the skills would bring about successes in their academic future and would carry over into narrative prompts and on district exams. Overall, this would improve equitable access to the successes that are typically afforded to the middle-class students. The new group of capable writers could keep up and continue to develop their skills as they moved up the grades. This would create a shift in expected performance from these students. These successes could be read by other colleagues, and the oral rehearsal strategy may be implemented in classrooms for their struggling students.

At the completion of this study, I may decide that the benefits I encountered need to be replicated in the following year. However, instead of the program being implemented over only eight weeks, I can give myself the entire year to address my research question. It might be

interesting to have other first grade teachers attempt to use the strategy in their classrooms to see if the results are positive. For those teachers attempting the intervention, I would provide an eight-week log to gauge the intervention. I would be willing to share my research, my support and guidance as they attempt to implement the daily oral rehearsal strategy. The results for them might be positive, and they might even decide to incorporate the intervention for a duration of a year. I would also be interested to hear from the teachers of the students who participated in the intervention. I would be curious about their level of engagement and enthusiasm for writing, and if their writing skills continue to improve. Perhaps, those students will no longer be the struggling students.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The purpose of this action research project was to investigate the effects of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing proficiencies. I involved students in a week-long writing process supported by the addition of daily oral rehearsals. A daily talking routine was used to guide the support of first grade writers with their oral rehearsals (promising practice). Students used graphic organizers, partner talk and teacher modeling to address the weekly essential question presented in the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program as they composed a weekly informational writing piece that addressed a writing prompt.

The need to address the students' writing abilities at this early stage is due to the overwhelming lack of successes in students' writing proficiencies in later years. According to NAEP researchers, writing is one of the most important skills that students can learn (NAEP, 2011). Fourth, eighth and twelfth graders are tested every year and their recent scores reflect an alarming realization that three quarters of these students scored below the proficient level. If this trend continues, it is going to be of great importance that educators identify students with writing difficulties early, address their needs, and provide intervention to prevent academic failure later as they move up in the grades. Thus, the question that guided my research was, *What is the effect of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing proficiencies?*

Overview of the Literature Review

The intent of this literature review is to provide a background of foundational literature that informs this study. First, the theoretical framework that informs this study will be presented. The theories presented include: (a) Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social cultural learning; (b) Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development; and (c) Flowers and Hayes' (1981) cognitive

process theory of writing. Secondly, included is current research about the state of writing instruction in first grade classrooms, the supports provided in first grade classrooms for the writing process within the social context, and the role of language in the writing process. The articles included in the research were included due to their relevance to this research study's themes around writing with first grade students, using language to assist students with developing their ideas for writing, and placing the writing experience in a social context where students engage with others to develop their writing. All research studies used studies retrieved from databases including ERIC and Google Scholar. The literature search terms *writing*, *emergent writers*, *oral rehearsals*, *first grade writing*, *modeled writing* and *oracy*, *writer's workshop*, *writing prompts*, *rubrics* were used in this study.

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale was organized by three theories, which follow: (a) Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social cultural learning; (b) Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development; and (c) Flowers and Hayes' (1981) cognitive process theory of writing.

Vygotsky and the theory of social cultural learning. One theory that supported this action research project was Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social cultural learning. Vygotsky (1978) put forward the idea that children learn from their environment and about the world from those around them and from the interactions among them. Vygotsky (1978) recognized the role of *more knowledgeable others* (MKOs), and in this group included teachers, other students, and possibly authors being read by the student. The present research study will focus on the social and oral interactions between the student writer and other students in their class along with the teacher as the MKO. This foundational theory also lent itself to the importance of the interactions between students and the environment in which they are active

learners and co-constructors of how they see the world. This foundational theory allowed further application as linguistic researchers applied it to the importance of language, and social and cultural exchanges (Perry, 2012). In addition, social learning theory has gained acceptance in the realm of writing because the theory advances the notion that writing is no longer a solitary activity. The focus of this research around oral rehearsals makes it imperative that student writers talk to others in the classroom as they rehearse their writing before they attempt to transcribe it (write it). Writing to learn and writing as an avenue to incorporate knowledge from outside the classroom and prior knowledge supports the notion that writing is a collaborative process, and one that reflects the incorporation of information from many sources. Writing in the classroom then becomes a process in which teachers are an active part of the writing process as they model, guide, offer feedback and support to the writer. The social cultural element is exemplified and valued as the interaction between the teacher and student and between the student writer and other students. The written product reflects this interaction and is a product of it. To further exemplify this interaction, the role of the teacher as the MKO is seen in the interaction during conferencing in a writer's workshop model of writing, and when teachers offer support, scaffolding and guidance. The teachers give feedback and guide students as they edit and transfer their ideas onto paper. Later, as a result of the interaction, the student is able to self-regulate and edit their work further as they improve their skills and apply them in their writing and to take this step further, when they peer edit (Diab, 2011).

In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory also supported this action research project theory. This theory is of critical importance to this research because it supports the notion that writers need to work near their scope of actual performance in their writing development. The implication of this theory for teachers of emergent writers supports the idea that teachers must

accept and respect the students' actual level of performance and must work within a range (ZPD) to move them forward. Vygotsky (1978) stated that the ZPD was "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 125). In the process of guiding students to write, and with the expectation that the students reference other writers and access what they had learned from the teacher through instruction and through mini-lessons near their ZPD, students begin to write and approximate standard writing. Scaffolding for all students at whatever skill and language level they are in is necessary to produce writing and to guide progress in writing. The simplicity and complexity of lessons/language has to vary to engage all learners and to respect all learners' stages in writing. Tolchinsky (2006) made clear the need to provide focused instruction to become a skilled writer. To become a skilled writer in a first grade classroom, students needed ample writing opportunities and a print-rich environment. For the purpose of this research, students would have had ample writing opportunities for at least five months prior to implementing the promising practice, and would have been part of modeled mini lessons and collaborative conversations as included in the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program.

Flowers and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing. Lastly, the cognitive process theory of writing of Flowers and Hayes (1981) influenced this study. As the action research on the early writing process evolved, the need to address the connection of thinking to writing was imperative. As young writers interacted and composed text, a need to focus on what they were thinking became important for laying the foundation and the springboard to actual writing. The process of using an oral rehearsal allowed the writer the opportunity to practice and access their thoughts before having to actually transcribe the message via writing. The cognitive process

theory of writing determined four key points: (a) as a writer composes, they go through a thinking process; (b) a higher-level organizational process occurs; (c) setting goals is present; and (d) goals are set to complete the task (Flowers & Hayes, 1981). Flowers and Hayes (1981) addressed the recursive nature of the process of writing. They delineated three major processes in writing: planning, translating, and reviewing. In other words, the non-linear process can place demands on the writer that reflect an interplay of many complex activities. A writer will compose text and will draw from many sources at the same time. The young writer addresses thoughts, concepts of print, phonics, in a sporadic and non-linear fashion. The teacher, other students, and the environment provide the needed supports/guides to successfully transfer thoughts into transcription and finally into a narrative.

This process presented by Flowers and Hayes (1981) was not linear as some researchers had believed. Flowers and Hayes (1981) argued that as writers composed text, they navigated through a process that included brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. These steps did not occur in any particular order, but in an unstructured mode and in no way linear. A writer could revisit any step of the process at any time, for as little or as much time as needed. In this research a support in place is the use of a graphic organizer. It is utilized as a springboard for talking through ideas. This is supported by Flowers and Hayes' (1981) social cognitive writing theory. Students can get support from their graphic organizer at any time and can use it while pre-writing, drafting and editing. Flower and Hayes' (1981) theory allows insight and examination into how first grader emergent writers produce text. In addition, revisiting Lucy Calkins' (1994) writing workshop model also allows insight into effective teaching of writing and strategies that supported what was gained in Flowers and Hayes' (1981) theory of cognitive process theory of writing. Of greatest influence for this research was the value placed in the

writing workshop model in talking about writing with peers and with the teacher and the value in writers' interaction during the writing process. Both of these practices are reflected in Vygotsky's (1978) social cultural theory and in the ZPD. All students are encouraged, coached and take an active part in this process of writing at whatever state they are at in their writing development. In addition, the process allows all writers the opportunity to have their writing needs met as they navigate the writing process to meet their needs (Flower and Hayes, 1981), and interact and talk with other students and teachers to formulate their writing (Vygotsky, 1978).

Review of Related Research

The review of related research is presented in the three following sections: (a) the state of writing instruction for emergent writers; (b) instructional practices to support the development of emergent writers; (c) and talking to support emergent writers. Each of the three sections provide a background and foundation for the study of oral rehearsals and their effect on first graders writing proficiencies. In addition, each section includes a summary and a discussion the of the literature and how it relates and supports the present study.

State of writing instruction for emergent writers. This section examined the research that addressed the state of writing instruction for emergent writers and it addressed the importance of teachers' awareness of how writing instruction occurs. Of greatest importance is the teaching of critical foundational skills to writers as they progress in their educational journey from elementary, middle, high school and into college and later into the workforce.

I began by reading studies on the writing process for emergent writers. It was of critical importance to understand the writing process in which young writers have to engage in order to write and respond to prompts and to write narratives and informational essays. As schools face

the ambitious demands of CCSS in the specific area of writing, it is important to assess the instructional practices teachers are using to address the needs of their students. Unfortunately, the current state of instruction is lacking in research. As current emphasis is placed on reading, less is known about instructional practices used in classrooms to address the needs of emergent writers (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). The National Commission on Writing (2003) made the statement that writing is the “neglected r” (p. 9), while reading and arithmetic get a fair amount of attention comparably in curriculum. Wilcox, Morrison, and Wilcox (2008) noted that there is a definite decline in the number of publications of the National Reading Conference focusing on writing. This reflects the lack of focus on writing at the emergent level and the gaps in research in this area.

Donald Graves (1983) is considered the founder of the process approach to writing. He is credited with the writers’ workshop model of writing used across the nation. This approach to writing in a structured classroom included a classroom community that involved and reached all learners. Graves (1983) described a process that included four critical elements into his writing program: (a) write four days a week; (b) provide choice in topic selection; (c) response to child meaning; and (d) provide a community of learners. Of greatest importance to my research was Graves’ (1983) attention to language and to the oral development of children’s ideas before they actually transcribed them. The underlying understanding that communication is what drives the writing is discussed in a chapter Graves (1983) entitled *Help Children Speak First*. Graves (1983) described the role of conferencing with the writer, and set up principles as to how to guide the writer through talk. He designated his principles as: (a) follow the child; (b) ask questions you think the child can answer; and (c) help the child to focus. Through this

interaction as the teacher listens to what the child says and acts as the knowledgeable adult that models writing, the writer is guided to the path that leads to writing, from speech to text.

Clay (1975, 2001) addressed the need of teachers to know how writing occurs as a process and as a skill in order to better address the needs of writers in classrooms. This leads my research in addressing the writing process, the supports needed by a writer, and finally how language plays a large part in the writing process and how oral rehearsals can support a writer and provide equity through access and engagement in the process.

Korth et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study on how teachers perceived, implemented, and reflected on writing instruction in their classrooms. The researchers used surveys, interviews and observations to gauge the teachers writing instructional experiences. Opportunities and obstacles were identified as a result of qualitative analysis as two mega-themes. In addition, this study, although small in size (five primary grade teachers), built on two larger studies that examined the beliefs and practices of K-6 teachers in regards to writing instruction. Overall, the response to a need to increase writing instruction was apparent in all studies mentioned. The study addressed preparation, beliefs and dispositions, practices and then addressed obstacles: time, testing, student abilities and teacher abilities. Implications from this study led to a need for further teacher education, and the realization that the role of mentor teachers was invaluable in modeling effective writing instruction. In addition, a discussion followed regarding the disconnect between beliefs and practices. These seemed to stem from the obstacles presented earlier.

While teachers were aware of the need to increase instructional time in writing, teachers appeared to use process writing to teach. They used: (a) modeling; (b) conferencing; (c) student sharing; (d) daily writing in unstructured formats or “free writing”; (e) writing across the

curriculum; and (f) taught skills as needed. The plethora of activities to address writing would appear to raise the question of why writing instruction was failing so many. If the implementation of effective writing was so difficult, supports needed to be in place to ensure teachers were adequately in-serviced and allowed to observe master teachers who modeled age-appropriate activities that addressed the writing development of all students. In addition, the need to teach discreet skills was of importance since they are critical later. Supports to address testing, time issues and student abilities need to come from administration and district level supports.

Coker et al. (2016) wanted to gain insight into writing instruction in first grade classrooms. This study was a qualitative study where observers visited classrooms and coded activities. The authors wanted to see how much time was allocated, what the writing tasks were, and which instructional methods were used. The researchers wanted to look at writing for task and for complexity, and to see if there was a relationship between writing instruction and students' writing practices. The participants were selected from three school districts in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, and included 57 teachers and 50 first grade classrooms. The evidence was gathered through extensive classroom observations. Their findings of inconsistent time spent on tasks, instructional methods and practices was the greatest finding overall. While variability in materials used was reported in 137 different commercial curricula, 65% of teachers reported developing materials in-house. This study discovered that instruction reflected 33% time spent on skills instruction, 28% was spent on process writing, 17% was spent on composition instruction, and 10% was spent on sharing. Whole class instruction was present 82.4% of the time.

The Institute of Education Sciences (USDE, 2012) published a list of recommendations for instruction of writing based on what they considered “sufficient research” available. The recommendations were the following: (a) one hour of writing instruction; (b) writing lessons for varied purposes; (c) the teaching of fluent word and sentence level skills (e.g., spelling, handwriting, sentence construction and word processing); and (d) creating a writing environment that reflects community and fosters engagement. While these recommendations provided a framework, the exact instructions for how to teach to these recommendations is sparse and not addressed explicitly. In addition, not enough research has been done to assess the implementation of the recommendations made for writing instruction. This study points out the high level of variability in writing instruction, and suggests that teachers may be unsure how to best teach writing as a result of writing instruction not being a high priority. Skills and process writing need to be taught to first graders at all levels of language (USDE, 2012), but teachers need guidance and support so as to not “guess” their instruction.

While the Coker et al. (2016) study shed light on the state of writing instruction in the United States, of greatest importance are the inconsistencies of instruction and of methods used. If these findings are indicative of instruction in all of the US, it is not surprising why a large percentage of students is not performing at benchmark when they take writing exams. Limitations addressed by the Institute of Education Sciences (USDE, 2012) reflected the state of writing instruction in the primary grades. The teaching of writing in the primary grades show that there is a lack of emphasis on writing overall. Instruction is affected by so many factors. This study reflects these many inconsistencies in the teaching of writing. While this study mentioned the need to address the language needs of all writers, in addressing the teaching of

skills and writing process, it also included the use of “sharing” as a way to rehearse what had been written.

Carroll and Feng (2010) explored how students performed on a writing assessment when given a prompt or choice in a writer’s workshop. Would writing from a prompt have a more positive effect on first graders writing ability, or would the writers workshop have a more positive effect on first graders’ attitude toward writing? The study used a Likert scale to measure attitude toward writing, and a paired t-test was used to assess the writing using a rubric. The participants were: (a) 18 first grade students; (b) 8 girls, 10 boys; (c) 2 from Special Education (one with Asperger’s, one with Cerebral Palsy); (d) 7 were served in an Early Intervention Program; (e) one was gifted; and (f) 10 identified as White, 5 identified as multiracial, 2 identified as Black, and 1 identified as Hispanic. Carroll and Feng (2010) found that the students did better if given a prompt. Limitations may include the fact that there was only one writing sample, and only 18 students were tested. Another limitation could be the students’ attitudes toward writing may change if the students were tested at the end of the school year when they were older. Conclusions included a realization that both kinds of writing needed to happen, and that students really needed to have a positive attitude toward writing because it will affect them the rest of their lives.

In conclusion, these studies bring about awareness of the need to understand the writing process in order to guide emergent writers in their writing development. A finding that resonated though many studies included a need to increase the instruction of writing, and the fact that skills gained during process writing and in skills instruction supported growth but with many inconsistencies in how the instruction was carried out. While the teaching of writing for the emergent writers needs to include a balance of instructional practices, it is clear from these

studies that teachers need more collaboration, guidance, in-services and supports to carry out the task of teaching writing.

Instructional practices to support writing development for emergent writers. This section is organized and focused on the notion that instruction for writing is modeled by the teacher, but dependent on student needs and modified as needed. The interaction between the student and the writing task, the student and the teacher (MKO) and the students themselves, creates an environment that changes constantly and is based on individual needs. The following sections demonstrate the variety and complexity of the writing process in terms of what can be used to support the writer. The teacher's role is to model, observe, support and guide the writers in their journey in the writing process/task, and to provide what the writers need. This is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, where students learn in an environment where they are supported and where they learn with others and as a result of interacting with others.

On-the-spot-conferencing. Bradley and Pottle (2001) described a process they used in their kindergarten class with their emergent writers. They were aware of their students' development on a writing continuum, and assisted them with quick, on-the-spot-conferencing as needed. Addressing emergent writers with a short, quick, and explicit check-in as they work, is a quick way to assist them. Supporting writers in this manner allowed the teachers the ability to address the needs of many writers as they circulated and aided their writers, and made their teaching point. As teachers know their students' writing needs and guide them with these teaching points, the students retain the information.

Low-level scaffolds and high-level scaffolds. Quinn, Gerde, and Bingham (2016) described differentiated scaffolding as a strategy to support their writers. They distinguished

between low-level scaffolds and high-level scaffolds. This discussion shed light on how teachers need to know the writing process from the inside out in order to provide emerging writers with what they need. Graves (1994) referred to the inside and outside as teachers are writers themselves, and have personal experience in writing. Graves (1994) asserted that teachers have a knowledge of research on writing which provides a reference point from which they can gauge, from the outside, what should and can happen. A knowledge of spelling development, phonics, and handwriting are needed to address the needs of writers.

The use of graphic organizers. Tavsanlı and Bulunuz (2017) conducted a case study to analyze the literacy experiences of a single student at home, at school and through a university program. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized in this case study. The researchers used written expression outputs (writing samples), interviews and observations. A single seven-year-old first grade student was studied. He attended public school, and was similar in his reading and writing skills to his classmates. The study took place over eight weeks and was instructed by a researcher who was a specialist in writing. The student took part in a process writing workshop, and was supported by the use of graphic organizers. The student's work was graded on a rubric which included seven categories. Word count was also considered to see if the student wrote more. One factor that contributed to the success of the writer was the use of graphic organizers. The researchers noticed that this support allowed the writer to access and organize his ideas. This study supported the use of graphic organizers as effective tools that support the development of written expressive skills in student writing (Culbert, 2008; Katayama & Robinson, 2000; Tavsanlı & Seban, 2015). In addition, McKnight (2010) added that graphic organizers were useful tools in supporting students' abilities to understand information to be learned, and in organizing ideas.

While writing was the focus for this study, researchers contended that writing is one of the most important skills that needs to be addressed and developed in early childhood. They agreed that there is a clear correlation to the academic and personal success of students if advanced skills in coding, orthography, spelling, reading comprehension, recognizing words and phonological awareness are present (Aram, 2005; Blair & Savage, 2006; Bloodgood, 1999; Shatil, Share, & Levin, 2000). The need to write successfully was highlighted in this study, as was the need to give writing instruction importance at a very early age.

Guided writing context. Watanabe and Hall-Kenyon (2011) produced a collective case study with kindergartners that examined how complexity of writing changed after being exposed to story element instruction within a guided writing context. During the story element instructional time, students received instruction that included use of oral language, picture drawing and writing within the context of learning about characters, setting, problem and solution. They focused on six students from three different ability levels, including students performing at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels in writing. These students attended a middle-class suburban elementary school that was: (a) 83% Caucasian; (b) 14% Hispanic; (c) 2% Pacific Islander; and (d) less than one percent Asian, African American and American Indian. Activities in this classroom included: (a) read-alouds; (b) sharing reading; (c) guided reading; (d) guided writing; and (e) daily center activities. They began the year with journal writing and modeled the process, then they moved into modeling, supporting and practicing a five-step guided writing model. The five-step guided writing lesson included: (a) thinking, (b) telling, (c) drawing, (d) writing, and (e) sharing. The steps were taught gradually as students took part in lessons aimed at teaching a process. As the students worked through a writing process, they received daily modeling, support and practice. After six weeks of review,

the researchers found that all students made significant gains. One insight was the use and value of oral language, pictures and written text to support the development of the writers. Oral language, pictures and written text were all referred to as “text.” The beginning writers needed more accounting for all three types of “text” to access their thinking. The intermediate writers did not need to access pictures to transfer their thinking to text, and the advanced writers developed their writing in the more conventional space of mechanics; i.e., they were able to simply write. The overall finding in this study was that writers will improve given the opportunity and guidance to write. Baumann and Bergeron’s (1993) study also discussed how first graders were able to use the structure of story elements to guide their writing orally. Support and guidance within a structure seemed to guide writers successfully in their writing development. The researchers of this study also stated the need for more writing instruction in classrooms.

Writing processes in the classroom. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) conducted a mixed methodology design including qualitative and quantitative analysis and used a pre- and post-intervention survey and a systematic observational research as a checklist on student peer revising conferences, portfolios with rubrics and interviews in their research of first grade writers. The researchers examined the writing processes of drafting/revising and editing to support first grade students to become independent writers. The participants were first grade students that were five- and six-years-old. They included 12 boys and 9 girls. Evidence collected included observation checklists, interviews, rubrics and portfolios. The researchers found that the writers workshop process allowed students to become independent writers who enjoyed the process of writing and benefited from the instructional model that supported students’ growth in writing. Some limitations were due to the young age of the participants and

it was sometimes difficult to gauge answers to interview questions; researchers had to sometimes rephrase questions. They concluded that writers workshop allows writers to develop their skills through mini-lessons, conferences and whole class sharing. Writing is acknowledged as a social event where writers interact, get feedback and are able to process cognitively as they compose and recompose writing with adults and peers. The process supports writing development overall. The writing workshop approach contributed many factors to creating a positive writing atmosphere, and helped students increase independence in writing and enjoyment as well. The writers workshop model proved to be an effective instructional method. Fletcher and Portalupi (1998) validated the belief that writers need feedback from their teachers as well as their peers. Calkins (1994) validated this point by referring to teacher-student and peer feedback as central to the teaching of writing.

Rubrics. Carlson (2013) examined the effects of using a 4-point rubric and a list rubric with students as they wrote in journals and during prompts. The study was a quantitative study that gave insight into how writers interact with the process of writing both in journal writing and on prompts/tests. The participants were eight first grade special education students in a private agency day-treatment program for elementary students in an urban school setting. The researchers collected evidence while their students wrote in journals and responded to writing prompts. They found that by using the rubrics with their students, they were able to see improvements in their writing. This was not only because of the rubric, but because the researchers also added an oral rehearsal element to the writing process and thus addressed writing as a social process and not only a cognitive process. Limitations were obviously sample size and attendance. The researchers concluded that although the use of the rubrics allowed

students to self-regulate their writing, the use of oral rehearsal allowed positive impact on their writing outcome.

This investigation is a great resource for this proposed study because it discussed using a rubric for scoring and using oral rehearsals to allow students to practice their thoughts before they actually wrote them. The success these students experienced validated the need for writers to speak their ideas before they wrote them. This study validated the need to have writers self-regulate, orally rehearse text to a teacher or peer, and that writing needs to happen every day in different forms (e.g., journal, prompt).

In this section, the studies reviewed revealed a plethora of practices used by teachers to support and develop the writing skills of students. Lessons appeared to be dependent on the needs of the emergent writers as they navigated the complexities of the writing task. Lessons can be tailored and adjusted as needed by the teacher. While the task of writing was orchestrated by the teacher, the students benefited from the social interaction between all participants, thus creating: (a) a dependence on talk to communicate and share ideas; (b) a dependence on text for ideas; and (c) a dependence on the teacher for modeling, guidance and support. This interplay displayed the complexity of the writing process, and the decisions faced by teachers in selecting instructional practices to use in teaching the writing process and the challenges faced in meeting the needs of all students.

Talking to support writing: Equity for all. In this section, the researcher discusses the importance of language, especially the importance of talk, as students engage in literacy activities. By allowing students to talk and engage in discussions, they are in essence being allowed to develop their literate language under the guidance of an MKO. As students talk, their ideas flow. The more opportunities to talk, the more the opportunities they have to access their

thoughts, to rearrange and to prepare for when they are ready to transcribe. This allows students the ability to think, organize, plan and to be ready as they begin to write. With guidance and support, students will develop literacy skills for their future.

Talk. Dyson (1993) contended that talk is a crucial component of children's learning and their ability to become literate people. The development of reading and writing depends on the talk that the students engage in as they learn and as they socialize with others. This talk is referred to as "literate talk" and is driven by literacy activities planned and organized by teachers and entertained by students who engage in the activities. However, the realization that Kellogg (2008) described is that the process of writing is as difficult as playing chess; thus, needing talk to support and act as a springboard for ideas, while the writer works out the transcription of the text. The more the writer talks, the easier to recall ideas when ready to write.

Language is the foundation and the stage in which writing is developed and orchestrated. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "language is central to learning, and the interrelationship between thinking, talking, and learning is paramount: the process of verbalizing gives substance to thinking" (p. 115). It is within this theoretical foundation that studies aim to elaborate and help clarify the process of writing and the role of language. Tolchinsky (2006) described the emergence of written language and its recursive nature as writers attend to text to gain mastery of the transcriptional system and then revert back to spoken language to regain the intended message. Writing is described as an intricate process that needs to be looked at from the top-down and the bottom-up meaning that all processes, whether cognitively demanding or simply transcribing letters, are involved in the writing process and can be utilized by the writer at any time in the process.

Oral rehearsals. A study conducted by Jones and Myhill (2009) used a qualitative/exploratory study to determine if teachers had a clear idea of what constitutes an oral rehearsal. The researchers wanted to establish teacher instructional practices in classrooms to gauge effectiveness of oral rehearsals. The teachers were instructed to use oral activities based on three strands to assess if students were benefiting from the oral rehearsal. The first included oral generation of ideas to support writing. The second was the role of practicing reading/composing text aloud in supporting writing. The third was the role of talk in developing children's ability to reflect upon their writing. Children engaged in oral rehearsals together; children used oral rehearsals to capture thinking and to explain and share their ideas; children reformed sentences orally; children verbalized their ideas while writing; and the teachers supported oral rehearsals.

Jones and Myhill (2009) used videotapes of classroom sessions where teachers taught students using their conceived notion of what constituted an oral rehearsal. The participants were 171 students ranging from 5- to 7-years-old. The videotapes captured lessons and were analyzed for student participation in activities where oral rehearsal took place. The researchers found many discrepancies in how teachers taught children to use oral rehearsals in literacy activities. Discrepancies may have been due to the activity type, or the experience and understanding of the teachers to teach with oral rehearsals. The researchers concluded that oral rehearsals have a place in literacy activities and that as a strategy, children become better writers if they get a chance to rehearse.

Purposeful talks. Hawkins (2016) addressed the need for *purposeful talks* with young writers as they navigated through the writing process. The referred to talk can be "in the moment" but educators must be able to scaffold and lead the talk to be productive and

purposeful. Hawkins (2016) acknowledged the fact that this kind of instruction is messy and relies on flexibility. Hawkins' (2016) research was designed to shed light on assumed roles in writing conferences. According to Graves (1983), a writing activity needs to be student led, and the teacher needs to "follow the child, let the child talk, let the child understand that what the child knows is primary" (p. 101). The role of verbal rehearsals is addressed in this research. The student is given the opportunity to rehearse and try out their writing before they need to commit it to writing. In essence, the writer is given ample time to formulate what they want to write. This process with teacher support allows writers time and opportunity to practice and better their ideas. The author of this research realized that "there is not one purpose for conferring, no one conference type is ideal in all situations" (Graves, 1983, p. 104).

The following study focused on the role of talk in the classroom. The fact that a large body of research has shown that talk in the classroom helps students with their writing makes most ask the question of why talk is not a focus of instruction. Bignell (2013) pointed out that most American and English schools are not taking advantage of the fact that talk does improve success across the curriculum. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2006) found that most classrooms are teacher-led, questioning is usually a one-word response, students rarely have to think for themselves, and there is a lack of student-led discussions. In contrast, talk would encourage: (a) student dialogue would entertain collectivity (teachers and students talking together); (b) reciprocity (teachers and students listening to one another); (c) support (risk taking and working together to gain understanding); (d) cumulation (teachers and students building on each other's thinking); and (e) purposefulness (teachers teaching with particular goals in mind). This research included the discussion that talk is the vehicle that would allow equitable access to all learners. The fact that some students showed up

at school with “word affluence” allowed them better access to the curriculum. Some children who lacked “word affluence” and came to school with word poverty because of their home lives needed the extra opportunities to have their language/talk developed. The Talk for Writing program that was launched in 2008 in the U.K. that strove to prepare their teachers to support their writers through talk was reviewed. The three components of the program focused on: (a) teacher talk: teacher modeling, discussion and demonstrating; (b) supported pupil talk: student practice through scaffolded activities and talk; and (c) independent pupil talk: students practice writing with peers without the teacher. This program strove to create independent writers and provided oral rehearsals as a strategy for practice. The teacher was the more knowledgeable model who modeled, then scaffolded the lessons, then moved away to allow independence and practice. The overviews of talk in the classrooms reinforced the notion that talk supports, guides and leads writers to become independent writers.

Conferencing in writing is meant to help writers, yet there is no ideal method that has proven to work for all. In this next study the researchers wanted to explore how students employed art and technology in planning and composing narrative text. The researchers set up a summer program for the most at-risk students, and provided choice in how they addressed their writing using a strategy called *ask, reflect, text*. The study was qualitative in nature, it observed students as they wrote, created art/drawings, and/or used assistive technology to create a narrative/story. The researchers set up the summer program and chose three students to evaluate based on their writing process choices. In the study, there were 43 students in the summer program, but the researchers chose Brenda, Liam and Kyle. Their interpretation of the strategy and the process they each chose was different. No age or grade-level were identified. The researchers observed and worked with these students to gauge their activity and their insights.

Modeling of the strategy was instrumental for writers as they had discussion time to assess/discuss why a given story was good. The researchers found that students had different approaches to writing a narrative. In addition, they used a variety of art methods and technologies to address their needs. Students all attended a different number of times, received instruction for whichever day they were present, and benefitted from the lessons, but not from the same or all of the lessons presented. It appeared that with the engaging activities, all students had a desire to improve their skills. In addition, the students enjoyed working to create a written story and getting feedback from the teachers. The program was called *The Thirsty Thinkers Writers' Workshop*, and included many elements of a writer's workshop. One final reflection was included that shed light on the issue of equity: "Students who struggle with writing usually do not need anything different from other typically-achieving children; they just need more examples and practice" (Foorman, 2007, p. 40).

The research reviewed in this section reflected how oral language is a human necessity for communication and for making meaning of the world. While it may take on different forms – verbal or nonverbal – it still drives humans in a need to interact with others to connect, and to communicate. Literacy activities have included the component of oral language as an element and as a part of the writing process. Interestingly enough, the role of oral language in writing has often been ignored in research and stifled in classroom instruction. Talk is ever-present in first grade classrooms and incorporated in literacy activities such as readers and writers' workshop, sharing, whole-class reading time and center time. These arenas can be described as places in which literate talk is present, is developed and is necessary. In addition, the opportunity to talk allows students who arrived at school less affluent in language the opportunity to have their language develop, thus having more success in accessing the curriculum. Talk in the writing

process respects students and provides a stage for their ideas. As writers are guided in talk and in writing activities, the importance of student talk to generate writing becomes evident as writing success transpires. First grade emergent writers will benefit from expressing their ideas by accessing and practicing their thoughts through talk, and by seeing these same ideas in text as they become writers.

Summary

Vygotsky's (1978) social cultural theory and zone of proximal development and Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive process theory of writing guided this action research project. Reviewed research explored the state of writing instruction for emergent writers, instructional practices to support the writing development of emergent writers, and how talking as an instructional practice supports emergent writers. The major findings included the inconsistencies in the instruction of writing for emergent writers, and a focus on process writing and skill instruction. A majority of the studies concluded a need to have more instructional time of writing for emergent writers. Of most importance for this project was the validation of the importance of oral rehearsals/talking in the writing process. Most research either included a discussion of the need for emergent writers to talk/verbalize their writing before they wrote, or made evident that talking was a part of the writing process being described. Most studies included findings that supported the value of oral rehearsals in the successes of their students who engaged in talk to write. Most research reinforced the need to use talk in the process of writing, to access and generate ideas, and to allow the interchange of ideas amongst writers while concurrently tackling the transcription of text. While there was a gap in research on the actual talk to text process, there is sufficient research on the importance of language to generate ideas for writing and its presence in the writing process. As studies have examined the writing

process, it is clear that emergent writers need balanced instruction. The process of writing is complex and dependent on students' needs. Teachers adapted and used curriculum to guide them, but ultimately the driving force behind lessons was the needs of the students and their dependence on talk to generate their thoughts. Based on findings in this literature review, this action research project has incorporated the theoretical rationale and the principal themes in this research.

The following chapter will describe the methodology used in this project. This study was designed to investigate the role of talk in the writing process in first grade, to review what is happening in first grade classrooms with respect to writing, to review supports that were needed by all writers while focusing on language, and more specifically by implementing the promising practice of using oral rehearsals in writing with first graders. A pre- and post-intervention writing sample using the CBM writing probe, a prompt scored with a district rubric, graphic organizers to gauge the effectiveness of oral rehearsals, and researcher field notes were used to evaluate the effectiveness of incorporating daily oral rehearsals into the writing process.

Chapter III

Methods

The adoption of Common Core Standards (CCSS) in California in 2010 emphasized the need to prepare students with the needed writing skills for college and for careers. First graders learn to write narratives, opinion pieces and informational text. As the production and distribution of their writing emerges, it is done with “guidance and support from adults” (CCSS, 2010). The role of the teacher to facilitate this transfer and this process is what Dixon-Krauss (1996) referred to as mediated literacy. In addition, the works of Vygotsky (1978) can be referenced as an underlying theoretical framework for understanding how language is central to learning, and eventually how language – specifically talking – helps students write.

Writing as transcription is demanding on first graders. Cognitively, studies have shown that writing is more demanding than talking. The works of Bourdin and Fayol (1994) found that young children had by far better oral abilities to compose text as compared to their ability to compose transcription of text. As a result, students in this study came into the project facing challenges. This was due to the fact that although they were only one or two years in the educational arena, students entered first grade with a wide range of skills in their writing development. The students in the project included socioeconomically disadvantaged students, second language learners and students receiving special education services or waiting to be assessed for special education. As a result, students’ skills ranged from letter strings, to writing sentences, to having the ability to compose simple paragraphs.

The goal of the study was to implement an instructional practice designed to support the development of students writing proficiencies. I used *The Reading Wonders Language Arts Program* to provide daily writing lessons in conventions and in preparing students to compose

narratives, stories and informational writing. In this study, students were provided opportunities to orally rehearse their stories, peer to peer. Further, graphic organizers were used to help students organize their ideas and with the support of a more knowledgeable adult, students were given support and guidance as they composed their writing. Research investigating how students learn to write explored instruction, teacher practices, and the environment in which the students participated. Additionally, research indicated the use of oral rehearsals within the writing process contributed to support the writing experience and the development of the writing process by giving students additional time and opportunity to practice their ideas with a partner, with adults and with others. Research also indicated the use of oral rehearsals in the writing process, contributed to children becoming better writers when given the opportunity to rehearse what they were going to write. Bignell (2013) pointed out that most American and English schools were not taking advantage of the fact that talk does improve success across the curriculum. Based on the review of this related literature, I believed that first graders' writing proficiencies would benefit from daily oral rehearsals.

Several scholars support the use of oral rehearsals to further develop writing proficiencies for first graders. Research demonstrated that students participating in oral rehearsals were better able to develop their writing than those that did not. The works of Jones and Myhill (2009) and Hawkins (2016) supported the use of talk in the writing process, and concluded that children's writing improved as a result. I hoped to fill a gap in the research regarding the connection between talk and its effects on improving the writing of first graders. The goal of this research project was to investigate the effects of using oral rehearsals with first grade writers, and to determine if their writing proficiencies improved after an eight-week intervention using oral rehearsals systematically. In order to achieve this goal, I began with the question: *What is the*

effect of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing proficiencies? This chapter describes the setting of the research project, the participants, the data collection strategies used to measure students writing development, and the plan for the analysis of the data.

Setting

This study took place at an elementary school in a suburban city in Northern California. It is located in the East Bay, an area where the population has nearly tripled since the year 2000. Despite this fact, the surrounding farmlands continue to exist and provide an intersection between urban development and agriculture. In addition, the existence of interaction between farmers, workers and the new residents living in a suburban community creates an environment that is reflected in the neighborhood schools. The school campus is located in a middle-class neighborhood, but the school's boundaries also include neighborhoods that are low-income apartments. The school is described as an above average public school, as compared to other schools in California on the website greatschools.com. This website not only addressed academics but it addressed issues of equity and environment. It received an "A" based on a racial and economic diversity survey given to parents and students. Academically, the school is described as having half of the students proficient in math and reading.

School enrollment at the time of the project was approaching 800 students in K-5th grade. At the school site, 54% identified as male and 46% identified as female. The student enrollment based on race and ethnic background was the following: 42.9% White, 39.8 % Hispanic or Latino, 4.2% Black or African American, 6.1% two or more races, 2.5% Asian, 2.5% Filipino, 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In addition, school enrollment indicated that 12.9 % of the students were classified as English learners (ELs). The proficiency levels of the English Language Learners (ELLs) included: (a)

42.5% in a Level 4, which is well developed English; (b) 34.2% in a Level 3, which is moderately developed English; (c) 15.1% in a Level 2, which is somewhat developed English; and (d) 8.2% in a Level 1, which are beginners to learning English. The School Accountability Report Card (SARC) reported in 2015-16 the school qualified for Title 1 funding due to the fact that 31.6% of the population was eligible for free or reduced lunch due to the low-income of their households. These statistics, while reflective of the student population at the school, did not reflect the classroom demographics in terms of ethnic and racial makeup, male and female ratio, language learners or students with learning needs. A potential implication for the teacher and for the students was that students might have not gotten the supports needed to meet their academic needs in writing.

Student results on the 2016-2017 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) showed 58% of students in grades three through eight were meeting or exceeding the states standards in English Language Arts (ELA), and 48% of students in grades three through eight were meeting or exceeding the states standards in Math. These test results were higher than the State wide CAASPP results of 48% in ELA and 36% in Math. The district results were reported at 60% in ELA and 50% in Math. In light of the fact that the students at my school were outperforming peers in our district, there were still subgroups that were struggling. My research was intended to reach these populations.

There are approximately 33 teachers on the school staff, 30 are fully credentialed, Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certified, Bilingual Cross-Cultural Language (BCLAD) certified, and one is without a full credential. At the time of the study there were 30 female and three male teachers on staff. The following data is on the racial and ethnic makeup of the teachers: 29 White or Caucasian, three Hispanic or Latino, and one had no

response. The data on the teachers' racial/ethnic backgrounds shows that it is very different from that of the school population. While 42% of the students can identify with the majority White teacher population, the rest of the 58 % of students have no similar backgrounds with the teachers they work with daily. In addition, 30 % of teachers hold advanced degrees.

Demographics of the Classroom

The participants of this study were in my general education self-contained first grade class that I taught during the 2018-2019 academic school year (see Appendix A). All of the 23 students were enrolled in my classroom and were invited to participate in my action research project. All 23 students provided parent consent via written permission forms and student verbal assent via verbal consent (see Appendices B). However, one student was transferred into a Special Day Class (SDC) early in the action research project. The intervention was implemented for a period of eight weeks with 22 students (100%) and data from these participants was included in the action research project.

The following information on the 22 participants follows: eight were female-identified (36%) and fourteen were male-identified (64%). Ages in the participants ranged from six- to seven-years-old at the time of the study. The racial and ethnic makeup of the participants included: 52% White or Caucasian, 22% African American or Black, 17% Hispanic or Latino, 4% mixed race, and 4% Middle Eastern. It is important to note that two participants were classified as ELs and received ELD services five days a week. Six students received services from the Special Education Department (SPED) and an additional seven students received services at the Reading Intervention Program at our school.

Additionally, three of the seven received an additional 30 minutes of intensive reading intervention, and four of the seven students received only 45 minutes of intensive reading

intervention daily. This program was a pull-out program and students received small group sessions with some one-on-one reading time with a reading teacher. Most of these students were socioeconomically disadvantaged, SLLs, or are receiving support trying to rule out a learning disability. If the school-wide intervention does not succeed, the student might need to eventually go before the SST (Student Study Team) process and be assessed for SPED. The Reading Intervention Coordinator continually monitored progress of students, and summarized weekly data was available for review. All first graders were progress monitored and weekly data was available to track growth. The Coordinator was aware of the fragile state of the struggling first grade students, and worked diligently to involve families in the process of helping the students learn to read and write. She incorporated writing in a reading instructional routine as an intervention, and checked in often with the classroom teachers to monitor overall growth of these students. The classroom data gathered was aligned to the school data, and this researcher believed there is potential for every first grader to make growth in writing. Since this research project was focused on developing first grade writing proficiencies, students present and participating in the project had the possibility to develop their writing skills and to learn how to use their “talking” to rehearse their ideas and make their writing better.

Data Collection Strategies

In order to ascertain the effects of using daily oral rehearsals with first grader writers, a variety of data collection strategies were used throughout the study. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to guarantee reliability of the findings. I administered the CBM written expression probe as a baseline (see Appendix C). This assessment provided a starting performance point before I implemented my promising practice and given again at the end to assess growth. This probe offered quantitative data. Qualitative data were gathered during the

eight-week implementation in the form of researcher's field notes after facilitating writing activities with my first grade writers. Data were collected from student writing samples and scored using a district writing rubric (see Appendix D). Additionally, data were collected from a graphic organizer which students used daily to record and add details following oral rehearsals (see Appendix I).

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM): Written expression probe. This written expression probe (see Appendix C) is an assessment tool that was used routinely to monitor student progress. Further, the assessment aligned with school curriculum and measured the same skills over a period of time. This tool can be used to formulate instructional decisions. Probes are reliable because they assess the same skills (writing) at the same level. For this action research project, I needed a quick check to establish a baseline point for each of my participant's writing skills. My students were given a probe, with a story starter: "My school is a fun place. I like to _____." Students were read the story starter and given a minute to think about possible answers, and then given three minutes to write their answers. After the three minutes were completed, students turned in their finished story. The story was scored by counting total number of words, and then counting correctly spelled words. Students were given two scores from the probe: (a) number of words written; and (b) number of words spelled correctly. The probe was given again at the end of the eight-week intervention. These data were analyzed quantitatively for each participant from the pre- and post-intervention period. The data offered insight into whether the eight-week intervention with the oral rehearsals helped students develop their writing skills.

Researcher field notes. During the period of the implementation of oral rehearsals, I kept a daily log of field notes. I took notes on a daily basis, and kept the note-writing under five

minutes to ensure I did not overanalyze my data. I tried to capture the most important insights I gathered during the writing time. I wanted to see if students were “talking” to each other, I wanted to note any changes in schedule, and I kept track of absences and schedule changes that might affect the lessons. Since the oral rehearsals were the most important, I partnered students and focused on at least 10 students a day. I took the time to listen to them “talk.” I aimed to listen to 10 students every day. In this manner, I focused on everyone at least two or three times a week. I really wanted to make sure the students were aware I was listening to their “talk”, and I wanted to make sure they were talking about their writing.

Graphic organizer. A graphic organizer (see Appendix E) is a tool that is used in my classroom regularly. Early in the year, I use it to model how I organize my ideas to write. I modeled during a think-aloud, and then used the poster sized organizer to record what I had been thinking. As the school year progressed, I started incorporating student responses to my think-alouds, and rerecord their ideas to model the use of the graphic organizer: how to use it to organize ideas, then later write and record onto paper. Students used the organizer regularly as a tool to help them organize their ideas. As my action research project evolved, the graphic organizer became a familiar tool that was used with the added promising practice of oral rehearsals.

Students continued using the graphic organizer, and added it to a daily routine of “talk”/oral rehearsals during their worktime. On Mondays, students took part in a writing mini-lesson followed by time to work on a graphic organizer using pictures to record their ideas about the weekly essential question from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. They orally rehearsed the ideas on the graphic organizer with a partner. On Tuesday, after students were exposed to more literature/stories from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program and had

discussions around the essential question, they revisited their graphic organizers and orally rehearsed their ideas with a partner. They added details in a different colored pencil to their graphic organizer about any new information they wanted to include. On Wednesday, students started the writing using their graphic organizer (see Appendix E). They were reminded that they can add details to the graphic organizer if they would like, and any addition was to be in the colored pencil. The use of the graphic organizer was systematic, and was guided instruction to help students learn one way to organize their ideas. As they become more sophisticated in their writing development, they may choose to use other organizers.

The graphic organizer was collected every Friday for eight weeks during the intervention, and scored on a rubric that was co-created with my faculty advisor to monitor and score the effect of oral rehearsals on writing (see Appendix F). The rubric allowed us to see if the oral rehearsals helped writers develop or add details to their writing. They had three to four days to add details if they desired. The rubric was scored on the basis of how many details were added. No details added after day one reflected the writer is “not there yet”; a few details added (one or two) reflected a student was progressing; three or more details added reflected the writer met expectations; and details added in all areas of the graphic organizer reflected the writer exceeded expectations (see Appendix F). The overall goal was that after a writer has had the opportunity to orally rehearse their ideas, more details might emerge, and they might decide to record them and add them to their writing.

Gathering quantitative data and using an established classroom routine was an important element of the study. Therefore, I used a graphic organizer and a routine that was familiar in my classroom to allow familiarity and continuity to our lessons with oral rehearsals. I did not want to totally recreate lessons and routines, but only wanted to add a new layer to the writing process

existing in my classroom. Oral rehearsals were the added layer that I modeled, and then had the students try. Overall, the graphic organizer addressed my research question because it gave students a concrete visual tool where they were able to record their thoughts and oral rehearsals. In addition, as they revisited the graphic organizer they were reminded and able to add to the previous days recorded notes.

District writing rubric. Students took part in guided writing instruction to respond to weekly essential questions from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program (see Appendix G). They responded to eight questions over the period of the research. The students used a graphic organizer (see Appendix E), an editing checklist (see Appendix H), and the feedback of a peer and guidance of the teacher through mini-lessons and on-the-spot daily conferencing. The writing that resulted from a week of process writing was scored using the district writing rubric (see Appendix D). The writing was collected and scored at the end of each week.

As described above, the writing process followed a weekly routine wherein students rehearsed and planned their stories using a graphic organizer on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, students began to compose their stories, referring to the graphic organizer for structure and development. As the students moved through the composition process, I walked around and had the opportunity to offer support and guidance as students wrote their ideas from the graphic organizer. I could individually conference with students or simply offer assistance. At the conclusion of the writing block on Wednesday, students orally rehearsed their writing with their partner and edited as necessary using the editing checklist (see Appendix H). On Thursday they were asked to finish their writing, editing and again reminded to share with a partner what they had written. Again, I walked around and offered feedback. On Friday they

had the opportunity to share their writing with their fifth grade buddies. The finished product was scored by me using the district rubric (see Appendix D).

This quantitative data provided insight into the effectiveness of oral rehearsals over an eight-week period. The district rubric also offered insight into students' writing with respect to conventions, focus, organization, language and vocabulary, and the use of support and evidence. My hope was that growth in student writing proficiencies was also evident after eight structured weeks of process writing.

Procedures

This study took place over eight school weeks starting in January upon returning from the winter break. It lasted from early January to the end of February. One baseline assessment had been given to gauge where students were with respect to writing skills. The CBM writing probe measured words written and correct words written. The same probe was given at the end of the eight-week intervention.

This study consisted of eight week-long processes. During every week, students worked on developing an informational piece of writing based on the essential question of the week in the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. The essential questions included: (a) How do animals' bodies help them? (b) How do animals help each other? (c) How do animals survive in nature? (d) What insects do you know about? (e) How do people work with animals? (f) How do we classify and categorize things? (g) What can you see in the sky? and (h) What inventions do you know about? These questions were explored in literature, vocabulary building activities, and related to phonics instruction for the given week. These questions were talked about every day in an effort to have the students discussing their ideas, using the vocabulary, and formulating their own ideas about the essential question.

Table 1

Essential Questions Used in 5-Day Writing Routine

Week	Essential Question
1	How do animals' bodies help them?
2	How do animals help each other?
3	How do animals survive in nature?
4	What insects do you know about?
5	How do people work with animals?
6	What insects do you know about?
7	How do we classify and categorize things?
8	What can you see in the sky?

Note: Essential Questions are from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program.

The intervention consisted of using oral rehearsals to allow writers to develop and practice their ideas before they actually wrote them. Additionally, a part of the established routine required students to use a graphic organizer to record their ideas in pictures to start, then with written details. The writing lessons followed a weekly routine, and I gathered quantitative data from their writing.

Pre-intervention. All 23 of my students in my first grade classroom were invited to take part in my research study. Each of my students turned in their parental consent forms and all of my students gave verbal assent for 100% participation. Upon completion of this first step of the research, students were given a pre-intervention CBM writing probe. This probe was used to establish a baseline for each student participating in the research. This information simply provided a gauge to see where students' writing proficiency skills were. The data addressed how many words students could write in three minutes, and how many correct words students could write in three minutes. These data were used as a baseline, and was assigned again at the end of the eight-week intervention.

Intervention. During the intervention phase that lasted eight weeks, students were provided with routine opportunities each week to focus on using oral rehearsals and a graphic organizer to produce a written informational piece of writing. This writing was anchored in the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program provided by the district. Each week was centered on an essential question that was developed through fiction and non-fiction literature, and the teaching of key vocabulary and writing skills. All first graders took part in daily writing lessons as prescribed by the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. The students participated at our designated writing time, which was 11:00am-11:40am every day. The essential question was presented on Mondays in a big book as an opener for the week. The essential question was thematic, and allowed students to explore the theme throughout the week in decodable stories, literature, and writing activities. Writing lessons occurred in 30- to 40-minute blocks, five days a week. On Monday, students took part in a writing mini-lesson followed by time to work on a graphic organizer using pictures to record their ideas about the weekly essential question from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. They orally rehearsed the ideas on the graphic organizer with a partner. On Tuesday, after students had been exposed to more literature/stories from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program and discussions around the essential question, they revisited their graphic organizer and had time to orally rehearse their ideas with a partner and add details in a different colored pencil to their graphic organizer based on any new information they wanted to include. On Wednesday, students started writing using their graphic organizer. They were reminded that they could add details to the graphic organizer if they wanted, and any addition would be in the colored pencil. At the conclusion of the writing block on Wednesday, students would orally rehearse their writing with their partner and edit as necessary using the editing checklist (Appendix I). On Thursday, they were asked to finish their

writing, editing, and again share with a partner what they had written. On Friday, students had the opportunity to share their final product with their fifth grade buddy. All students were encouraged to share their final writing product.

Table 2

Schedule of Writing Instruction During the Study

Day of the Week	Language Arts Activity	Writing Activity	Oral Rehearsal	Time/Teacher Role
Monday	Essential Question Introduced Writing Mini Lesson	Graphic Organizer	Share with Partner what was drawn	40 minutes/Models Activity
Tuesday	Thematic Story Discussion around Essential Question Writing Mini Lesson	Adding Details/words/vocabulary to their Graphic Organizer	Share with Partner what was added to Graphic Organizer	30-40 minutes/Models Activity & conferences as needed
Wednesday	Review stories and Essential Question Teacher begins Modeling writing a story	Begin writing using graphic organizer	Share writing and Edit together	30-40 minutes/Models Activity & conferences as needed
Thursday	Teacher reads a finished story	Finish writing story and edit	Share story with partner and edit	30-40 minutes/Models Activity & conferences as needed
Friday	Students share with buddies	Students read their story to buddies	Buddies listen and give feedback	10 minutes

Post-intervention. After the last week of the eight-week intervention, this researcher administered the CBM to all of the students. Again, they were given one minute to think about their responses to the prompt: “School is a fun place. What do you like to do?” They were given three minutes to write their responses. Each participant’s score was compared to the pre-assessment given before the intervention began to assess the difference in scores, and to assess if there had been growth in their writing.

Plan for Data Analysis

The research question, *What is the effect of oral rehearsals on first grade students’ writing proficiencies?* was addressed by each data source used during the eight-week implementation of the promising practice. First, all participants took a pre-intervention CBM writing probe to establish a baseline as to where their writing was at the beginning of the eight-week intervention. In addition, this same probe was administered at the end of the eight-week intervention to establish any growth in the number of words written and the number of words written correctly. These data provided quantitative data that was helpful in measuring growth over an eight-week period. Students were graded on a 4-point rubric. The goal was to track their growth over the eight-week period and to analyze the data in terms of how student scores changed. As a teacher, having students grow in their writing development was of most importance, but the data helped quantify the amount of growth towards grade-level expectation.

Researcher field notes were written every day for no more than five minutes after the writing period. This data was used in the triangulation of data sources and provided additional insight to help interpret the data gathered. The purpose of triangulation was multiple perspectives into how oral rehearsals affected first grade writers. By using the multiple data sources, the effects of oral rehearsals were uncovered and analyzed. During the lessons, I looked

to see if engagement was occurring and if students were truly engaged and using the oral rehearsals. I wanted to make sure my participation and presence during the writing period was effective as a facilitator, and as the MKO in the classroom. I was interested to see students' behaviors during the mini-lessons, during student interactions, when they shared with their buddies, and overall how it affected their development as a writer. This information is only meant to inform me, the educator, and not to be coded or used in the analysis of the writing itself.

Quantitative analysis was utilized when scoring the graphic organizer rubric students used to initially begin their writing. On the rubric (see Appendix F), numerical values were assigned to each response/detail students added to their graphic organizer after they participated in oral rehearsals with a partner or adult on multiple days. The following values were assigned to student additions on the graphic organizer: (a) if no details were added after the initial details were recorded on the graphic organizer, the student was simply "not there yet"; (b) if one or two details were added, the student was "progressing"; (c) if student added three or more details, the student was meeting the expectations; and (d) if the student added details to all parts of the graphic organizer (topic sentence, body and conclusion), then the student was exceeding expectations. Student responses were recorded on eight consecutive weeks' work (see Appendix I). Each week had writers produce one graphic organizer with a different essential question but with the same process. These scores were then analyzed and graphed to gauge potential growth over the eight-week intervention period.

In addition, the use of the district writing rubric allowed quantitative analysis of a writing piece of informational writing produced during a week-long process of guided writing. The district writing rubric was scored on a numerical value from 4/3/2/1. A 4 reflected a writer was advanced, a 3 reflected a writer was proficient, a 2 reflected a writer was approaching

proficiency, and a 1 reflected a writer was not proficient. Writers were scored on: (a) focus/information written; (b) organization of writing; (c) support/evidence given in a piece of writing; (d) language/vocabulary used in writing; (e) language conventions of grammar and usage; and (f) language conventions of capitalization, punctuation and spelling. These six areas were scored with a rubric score of 4/3/2/1, and the scores generated an overall score for the student writer. These quantitative data were recorded and graphed on a bar graph. In addition, seven other pieces of informational writing were scored over the eight-week implementation and analyzed for patterns of overall growth for the entire class. Individual student growth was also addressed.

Summary

The goal of this action research project was to investigate the effect of using oral rehearsals on first grade writers' proficiencies. I have watched writers struggle with the writing process for many years now, and I decided to implement the strategy of using oral rehearsals to allow first graders more talk time to better organize their ideas. The oral rehearsals were implemented during an eight-week window when the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program was focused on producing informational writing. In the eight weeks, students were guided through mini-lessons, through partner talk and with teacher guidance in a structured routine of writing using graphic organizers, and oral rehearsals. Participants were encouraged to participate and practice writing using the new routine, and then were able to share their finished product with their fifth grade buddy. I measured growth with the pre- and post-intervention CBM, I used the district rubric to gain an overall score on their writing, and I used a graphic organizer to see if using an oral rehearsal helped students organize and generate more details for their writing.

This chapter included the setting of my action research, the demographics of my classroom, the triangulation with the data collection strategies, the procedures used for the action research, and the plan for data analysis. The next chapter will delve into the findings from the data that were collected during the implementation of this action research and its analysis.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this action research project was to study and gain a deeper understanding of the effects of using oral rehearsals in the writing process with first grade students. Oral rehearsals were used daily as students wrote and composed informational writing using a five-day writing routine. Hence, the action research question was: *What is the effect of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing proficiencies?* Over the past decade, I observed many students struggling with writing. This problem persisted despite a shift in curriculum and different instructional approaches. Routinely, some students entered first grade already behind in their writing development according to grade-level standards. I attributed this ongoing problem to several issues: (a) a lack of instructional rigor and fidelity to writing curriculum; (b) inadequate time for students to move through the developmental stages of writing; and (c) an instructional focus on early reading skills. The implementation of CCSS and its demands on preparing students with the needed writing skills to be ready for college and careers placed a huge responsibility on all teachers of writing. With 75% of sixth, eight and 12th graders scoring below the proficiency level as indicated on the CAASPP writing exams, it was clear that writing programs were lacking and failing many students. In addition, according to the NAEP, writing is “one of the most important skills a young person can acquire and develop in their lifetime” (NAEP, 2011). As I assessed my students, I considered many factors that were affecting their writing performance: (a) demands placed on teachers to teach with one curriculum while meeting the needs of all the students; (b) no writing intervention for struggling writers; (c) the fact that 33% of students were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and qualified for free and reduced lunches and had socioeconomic constraints; and (d) 10% of my class were second language

learners and needed additional supports to guide them in their academics. A review of the literature suggested that one instructional practice that can help support young writers is the use of language as a vehicle to allow children the opportunity to practice ideas and to rehearse them while preparing themselves before they have to transcribe their ideas conventionally through writing on paper (Jones & Myhill, 2009). Hobson (2002) advocated for visual supports to help guide struggling students in their journey from thoughts, to talk and eventually to writing. In addition, Dixon-Krauss (1999) described a process of literacy based on Vygotsky's (1978) social historical perspective that allowed students to talk before they wrote. Linguistic researchers also applied Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social cultural learning to their application of the importance of language and social and cultural exchanges while writing. In addition, Tolchinsky (2006) made clear the need to provide focused instruction to become a skilled writer with ample writing opportunities and a print-rich environment. Dyson (1993) contended that talk was the crucial component of children's learning and in their ability to become literate people. In sum, many sources attributed the use of language as a bridge to writing, but a few studies revealed how a teacher might support students' oral rehearsal as part of the writing process. With my research, I was hoping to fill this gap and contribute my findings as a new resource.

Overview of Methods and Data Collection

Data were collected over an eight-week period for this action research project. The study consisted of a pre-intervention assessment, an eight-week intervention phase and a post-intervention assessment. The pre-intervention assessment was given to all students to establish baseline data related to writing skill levels for all participants (see Appendix C). Once this baseline data were gathered, the eight-week intervention phase was implemented. The intervention phase involved using a five-day, 45-minute writing routine involving the use of oral

rehearsals with the participants during the writing block every day of the week. The writing routine on day 1 included writing a topic sentence, drawing ideas onto a graphic organizer, and sharing with a partner what had been written on the graphic organizer. Day 2 included adding additional details and/or information onto the graphic organizer and sharing with a partner. On day 3 students began writing their narrative or informational writing using primary-lined paper (see Appendix J). Students used the ideas from the graphic organizer as a resource. At the end of the writing period, students read what they had written to a partner. Together they could choose to edit using their editing checklist (see Appendix H). On day 4, students continued adding to their writing, editing, and sharing their writing with their partner. The overall goal of day four was to finalize the writing task. On day 5 students shared their final writing product with their fifth grade buddy. Buddies gave positive feedback to the first grade buddy, and turned in the final piece of writing to the teacher for scoring. I used the essential questions as prescribed by the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program (see Appendix G), and applied the five-day writing routine and the daily use of “talking” to write. The participants were involved in writing to these prompts. The prompts included: (a) How do animals bodies help them? (b) How do animals help each other? (c) How do animals survive in nature? (d) What insects do you know about? (e) How do people work with animals? (f) How do we classify and categorize things? (g) What do you see in the sky? And (h) What inventions do you know about? Data collection during the intervention phase included collecting the final writing sample and the graphic organizer used for the writing. All 22 students participated in the intervention phase of the action research project. Field notes were recorded daily to document any changes, problems, unexpected events or logistical constraints that could have affected the action research project.

Demographics of Participants

The participants of this study were in my general education self-contained first grade class that I taught during the 2018-2019 academic school year. All of the 23 students were enrolled in my classroom and were invited to participate in my action research project. All 23 students provided parent consent via written permission forms and student verbal assent via verbal consent. However, one student was transferred into a Special Day Class early in the action research project. The intervention was implemented for a period of eight weeks with 22 students (100%), and data from these participants were included in the action research project.

The 22 participants included: eight who were female-identified (36%), and 14 who were male-identified (64%). Ages of the participants ranged from six- to seven-years-old at the time of the study. The racial and ethnic makeup of the participants included: 52% White or Caucasian, 22% African American or Black, 17% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Mixed Race, and 4% Middle Eastern. It is important to note that two participants were classified second language learners and received ELD services five days a week. Six students received services from SPED, and an additional seven students received services at the Reading Intervention Program at our school.

Additionally, three of the seven receive an additional 30 minutes of intensive reading intervention and four of the seven students received only 45 minutes of intensive reading intervention daily. This program was a pull-out program and students received small group sessions with some one-on-one reading time with a reading teacher. Most of these students were socioeconomically disadvantaged, second language learners, or were receiving support trying to rule out a learning disability. If the school-wide intervention did not succeed, the student may need to eventually go before the SST process and be assessed for SPED. The Reading

Intervention Coordinator continually monitored the progress of students and summarized weekly data was available for review to the homeroom teacher. All first graders were progress monitored and weekly data was available to track growth. The coordinator was aware of the fragile state of the struggling first grade students, and worked diligently to involve families in the process of helping the students learn to read and write. She incorporated writing in a reading instructional routine as an intervention, and checked in often with the classroom teachers to monitor overall growth of these students. The classroom data gathered was aligned to the school data, and I believed there was potential for every first grader to make growth in writing. Since this research project was focused on developing first grade writing proficiencies, students present and participating in the project had the possibility of developing their writing skills and learning how to use their “talk” to orally rehearse their ideas before they wrote and improve their writing.

Analysis of Pre-Intervention Written Words Assessment

A CBM was used with all 22 participants. This assessment was used to establish a student’s mastery of writing mechanics and conventions. It was a quick progress monitoring assessment which could be used every month, and it was a quick four-minute assessment that could be scored quickly and used to guide decision-making with respect to instruction. Students in my action research project took the assessment and a baseline score was recorded. The first part of the assessment was the score that reflected the number of words written by each participant and the number of words spelled correctly. The assessment gave participants three minutes to write a response to a story starter after being given one minute to think about their possible story. The story starter remained the same for both the pre- and post-intervention assessment. The data in Figure 1 were reported to establish the number of words written and spelled correctly by all participants. This data revealed that although all students were able to

respond to the story starter, the range varied from nine words written to 35 words written by the participants ($N=22$) in the three-minute period given to students to write. In addition, the number of words spelled correctly by the participants ($N=22$) ranged from 1 word spelled correctly to 28 words spelled correctly. The average for the 22 participants was 16.1 words written, and 12.5 words spelled correctly.

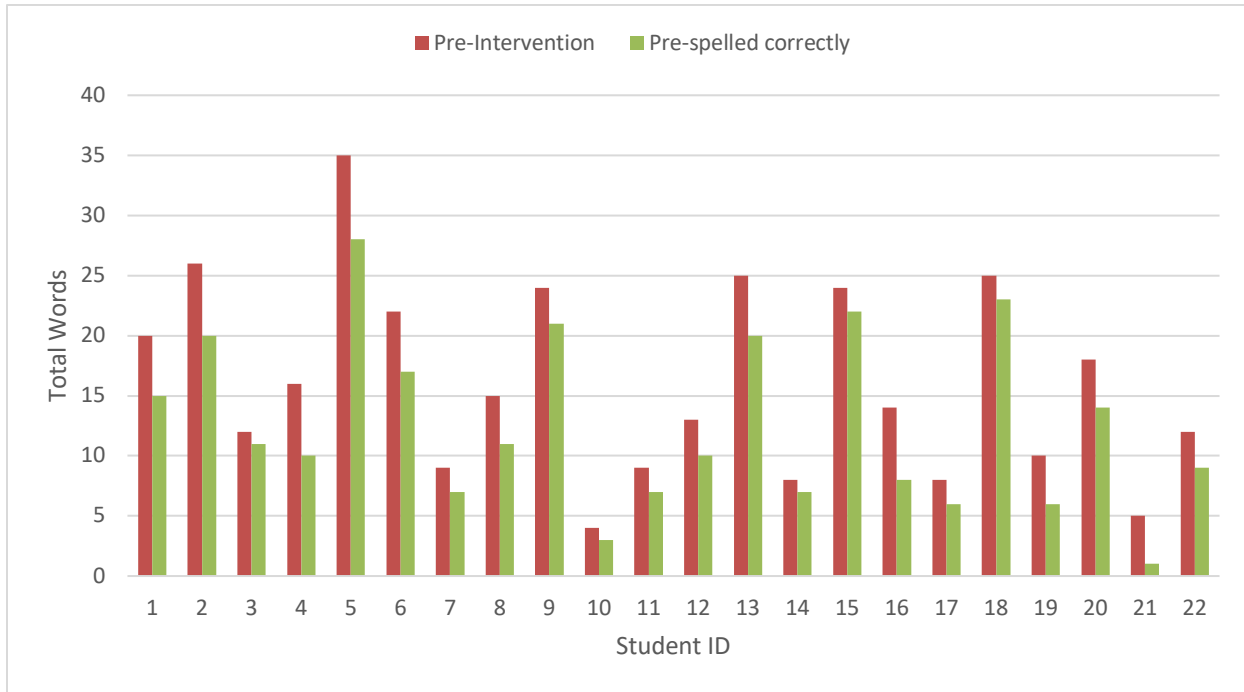


Figure 1. Number of words written and spelled correctly by each student in the pre-intervention CBM writing assessment. ($N=22$)

Analysis of Pre- and Post-Intervention Written Words

The post intervention data gathered in Figure 2 demonstrated the improvement of 73% of participants abilities to write words in the given three-minute time period. In addition, four participants improved with significant gains in the percentage of words written. Participant 3 made an overall improvement from nine words a minute to 21 words a minute (133% improvement). Participant 10 improved from four to eight words with a 100% increase. Participant 14 improved from eight to 26 words per minute with a 225% improvement.

Participant 21 had the most improved score and wrote 33 words where they had written five in the pre-assessment. This participant improved by 560%. This data revealed that overall, most participants improved in their ability to write words from the pre-intervention assessment to the post-intervention assessment. Further, the average words written increased from 16.1 words written in the pre-intervention assessment to 20.7 words written in the post-intervention assessment. There was an overall gain of 4.6 words written for all participants.

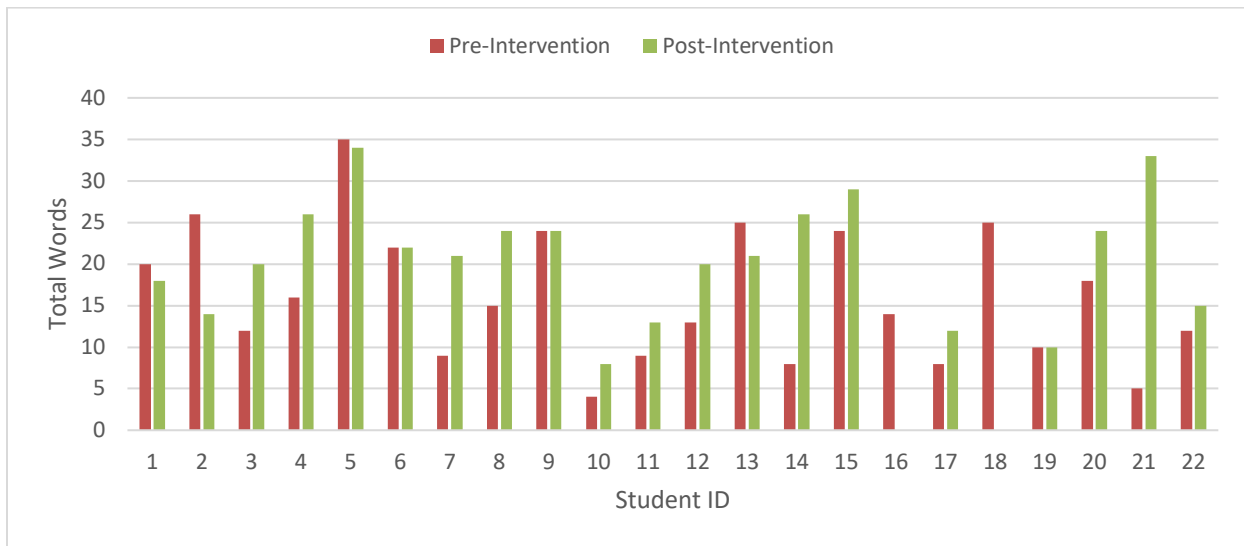


Figure 2. Pre-intervention and post-intervention number of words written on CBM writing assessment. (N=22)

Analysis of Pre- and Post-Intervention Words Spelled Correctly

The post-intervention data gathered in Figure 3 demonstrated that 77% of participants improved in their word spelling abilities in the post-intervention assessment, and 14% of participants' scores decreased. As with the word writing assessment, three participants made significant improvements. Participant 7's score indicated a growth of 114% and spelled 14 words correctly where they had only spelled 7 on the pre-intervention assessment. Participant 14 had an increase of 186% and spelled 20 words correctly as compared to 7 words spelled correctly in the pre-intervention assessment. Participant 21 had the most significant growth with a 2000%

increase. This participant only spelled one word correctly in the pre-intervention assessment and spelled 21 words correctly in the post-intervention assessment. The average for all participants words spelled correctly increased from 12.5 words spelled correctly in the pre-intervention assessment to 16.2 words spelled correctly in the post-intervention assessment with an overall gain of 3.7 words spelled correctly.

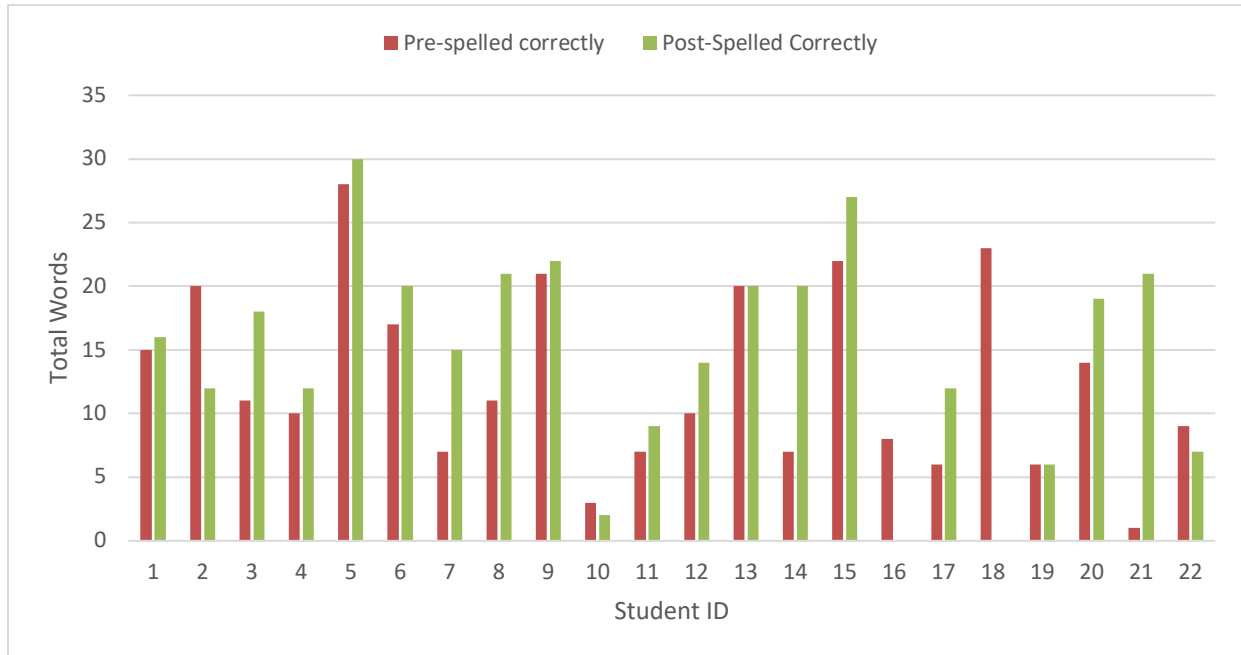


Figure 3. Pre- and post-intervention number of words spelled correctly on CBM writing assessment. (N=22).

Analysis of Writing Score

Prior to the intervention, students had written one narrative that had been scored with the district’s first grade narrative writing rubric. Students were given time to discuss collaboratively with a partner, given a graphic organizer and given time to write their narrative without support from others. This narrative was scored and shared with parents on the Report of Progress. As the intervention began, students continued to plan and develop their ideas through oral rehearsals during the five-day writing plan. As the students wrote their informational pieces, using the essential questions from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program (see Appendix G), and

the graphic organizer (see Appendix F), they were able to talk and collaborate with a writing partner throughout the entire process during the week it took to compose their writing.

During the eight-week intervention, students utilized oral rehearsals to collaborate, edit and write a weekly informational writing piece. The weekly writing that resulted reflected a week-long process that included student collaboration, student peer-editing, and most importantly the use of language and talking to support and enhance writing proficiencies. As students began writing their informational piece each week, they were guided and instructed with mini-lessons in organization, vocabulary, language conventions of grammar and usage, and language conventions of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. These mini-lessons were all part of the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. The intervention added the daily use of student interaction using oral rehearsals. The writing that resulted was assessed on the first-grade informational rubric (see Appendix D). Students could score a 1 (not proficient), 2 (approaching proficiency), 3 (proficient), and/or 4 (advanced). For the purpose of the action research project, all weekly writing samples were scored using this rubric. A student earned a rubric score based on which area of the rubric received the majority of their scores. For example, if a student received two 2's and one 3 on the rubric (see Appendix D), the student would score a 2 (approaching proficiency).

The results of the writing assessment given to all participants (N=22) reflected an average score for all participants in each week of the intervention. Week 1 reflected an average score of 2.1 with two participants having an outlier score of 3 and 1. Week 2 had an average score of 2.5, with no outliers. Weeks 3 and 4 had an average score of 2.3 with one outlier scoring a 1. Week 5 had an average score of 2.5 with one participant scoring a 4 and one participant scoring a 1. Week 6 had an average score of 3.1 with one participant scoring a 4. Week 7 had an average

score of 2.5 with one participant scoring a 4 and one participant scoring a 1. Week 8 had an average score of 2.6 with a participant score of 4 and one participant scoring a 1. Over the eight-week period there is an increase of +.6 in the overall gain in writing scores.

Figure 4: Average of writing scores for all students. (N=22). Box and whisker plot describes the distribution of data, a range: the mean=x, the median, upper quartile, lower quartile at the “whiskers”, and the interquartile range in the box. Any outliers are recorded with a dot.

The writing scores in Figure 5 showed a cumulative count of writing scores for each week of the intervention. Weeks 1 and 2 showed 22 participants and the following weeks reflected absences and only 19 participants in week 3 and 4, 21 participants in week 5, 15 participants in week 6, 19 participants in week 7 and 20 in week 8. Overall the trend reflected in this data showed the gradual increase of students earning a proficient score of 3 or 4. Week 1 showed 5 students earning a proficient score of 3. Week 2 had 12 students proficient with a score of 3. Week 5 had 11 students proficient or above. Week 8, the final week, had 12 students scoring a 3 (proficient), and one participant scoring a 4 (exceeds proficiency). These data reflected only 23% of participants scoring a proficient score of 3 in Week 1. By Week 5, 52% of

the participants earned a proficient score of 3. At the end of the intervention, Week 8, 60% of participants earned a proficient score of 3 or an exceeded proficiency score of 4.

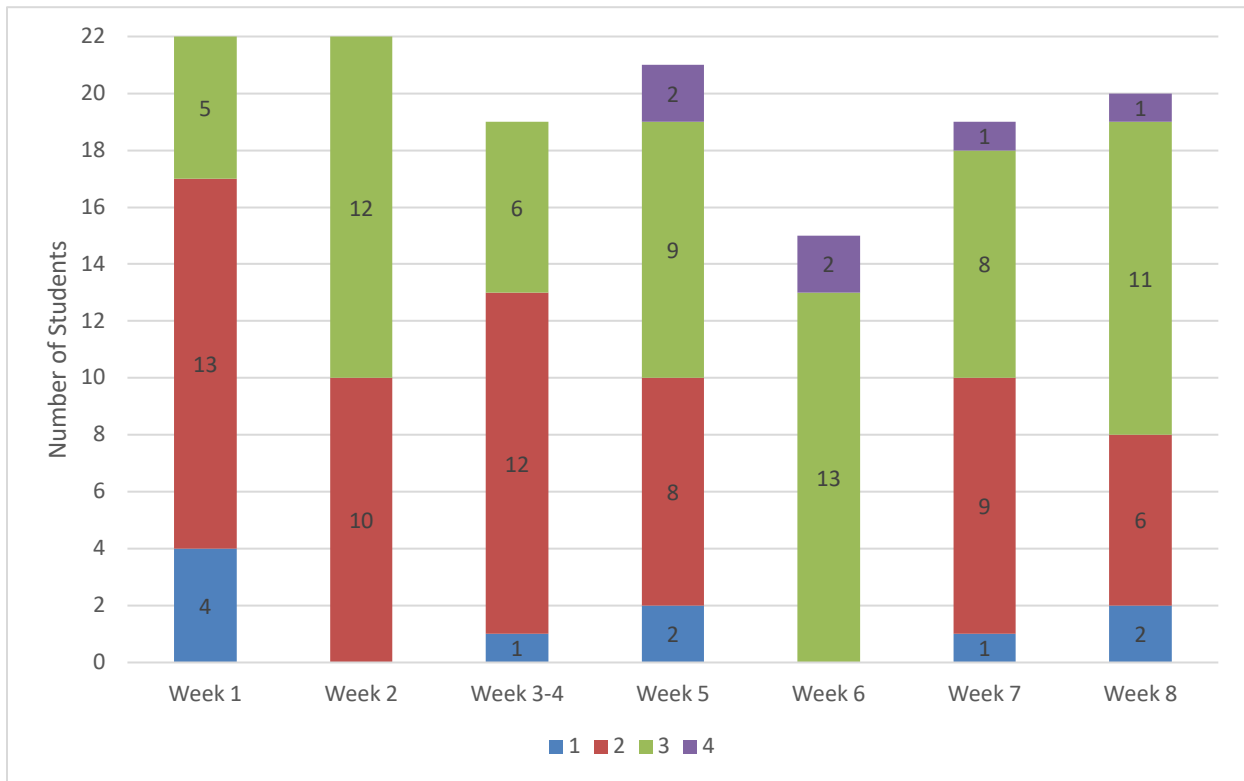


Figure 5: Cumulative count of writing scores for all students. ($N=22$).

Analysis of Graphic Organizer Scores

Before the intervention began, students used a graphic organizer to record thinking-drawing, labeling, and noting ideas. The graphic organizer introduced this year was part of the optional organizers that could have been used in the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. The graphic organizer was used regularly in lessons, and I modeled how to use the organizer on a weekly basis. A 4-point rubric corresponding to the graphic organizer was developed to assess student progress related to the students writing (see Appendix F). The rubric was co-authored with a faculty advisor to use for the eight-week intervention. The graphic organizer was designed to encourage participants to add details over the course of a weekly process writing

assignment. Students could add details after every oral rehearsal took place. At the end of the week, a score was given based on the number of total details added. A score of 1 reflected no details were added and the descriptor claimed: (student) not there yet. A score of 2 reflected one or two details were added and the descriptor claimed: (student) was progressing. A score of 3 reflected three or more details were added and the descriptor claimed: (student) met expectations. A score of 4 reflected details were added in all areas of the graphic organizer including the topic sentence, body and conclusion. The descriptor claimed: (student) exceeded expectations.

The results of the rubric score given to all participants over the eight-week intervention demonstrated that students added details to their graphic organizer on a weekly basis. Average scores based on the four-point rubric were reported and the results showed a slight increase overall. Scores fluctuated from an average of 2.8 words added during week 1 to 2.6 words added during weeks 2, 3 and 4. A slight decrease to 2.4 words added during week 5 that increased to 2.9 words added during week 6. Week 7 was reported at an average of 2.4 words added, and during week 8 students' rubric scores of 3 met expectations with three details or more added. These scores reflected students met expectations in that they added details to the graphic organizer adequately most of the time, as a way of recording ideas to later transcribe onto paper. The following analysis of the graphic organizer in terms of number of details added will allow analysis of students' abilities to record details after oral rehearsals.

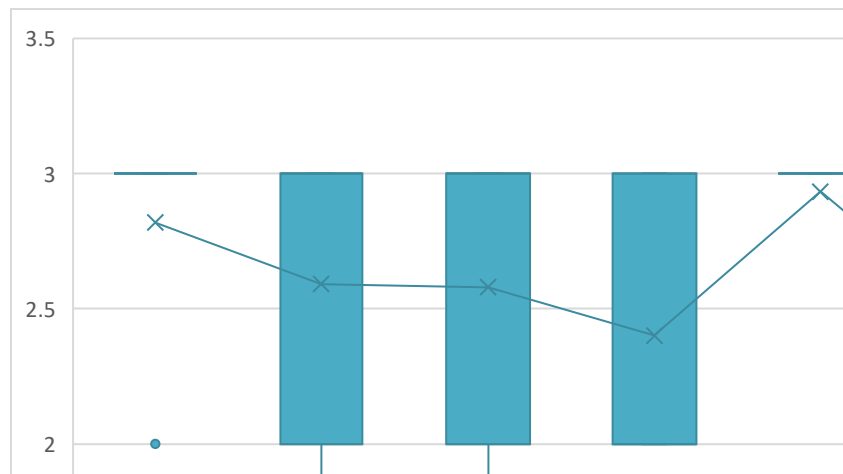


Figure 6: Average rubric scores for all students in each of the weekly produced graphic organizers. ($N=22$). Box and whisker plot describes the distribution of data, a range: the mean= x , the median, upper quartile, lower quartile at the “whiskers” and the interquartile range in the box. Any outliers are recorded with a dot.

Analysis of Number of Details Added on the Graphic Organizer

The graphic organizer was the assessment tool used to gain insight into how many details a student recorded over the course of a 5-day writing routine, and as a result of oral rehearsals. Students were given four days to add details to their graphic organizer beginning with drawings on Monday, to written details on Tuesday through Thursday. The details students added came from details gained from stories read in the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program, and from

conversations students had with others in the classroom. The details participant recorded were their choice and related to the essential question of the week. They could change their details from day to day. Based on the data collected, the average number of details changed considerably from week 1 to week 8 of the intervention. Week 1 of the intervention showed a median score of three details recorded, but with some outliers reflecting they added six, four, two, one or zero details. Week 2 showed an average of 2.4 details added, with the highest and lowest observed numbers of details as four and zero. Weeks 3-4 showed an average of 3.2 details added, with the highest and lowest observed number of details as seven and zero. Week 5 showed an average of two details recorded with an outlier of seven details added by one participant. Week 6 showed an average of 4.1 details added, with the lowest recorded number of details added as two. Week 7 showed an average of 2.4 details added, with one participant adding seven details. Lastly, week 8 showed an average of 4.9 details added, with zero and 10 being the lowest and highest number of details added that week. This data showed a gradual increase in the average number of details added by participants from three details added to 4.9. Of interest in this study was the increase overall of students adding details to their graphic organizer. Week 8 reflected the greatest growth in the number of details added and with 10 details being the greatest number of details added by a participant.



Figure 7: Average number of details recorded on the graphic organizer for all students in each week. (N=22). Box and whisker plot describes the distribution of data, a range: the mean=x, the median, upper quartile, lower quartile at the “whiskers” and the interquartile range in the box. Any outliers are recorded with a dot.

Analysis of Average Number of Details as Compared to Average Writing Score for All Students and Students Receiving Special Education Services and Interventions

The average number of details was compared to the average writing score for all participants (N=22). Figure 7 showed the gradual increase in the average number of details from 3 to 6.4 details recorded on their graphic organizer as compared to a minimal increase in the average score on their average weekly writing prompts from a score of 2 to 2.55.

In Figure 8, the same data were analyzed but only for participants not receiving special education services (N=16). Again, the analysis showed a gradual increase in the average number of details from 2.6 to 6.5 details recorded on their graphic organizer as compared to a minimal increase in the average score on their weekly writing prompts from 2.2 to 2.9. To be a proficient writer, a student must score a 3 by the end of the academic school year.

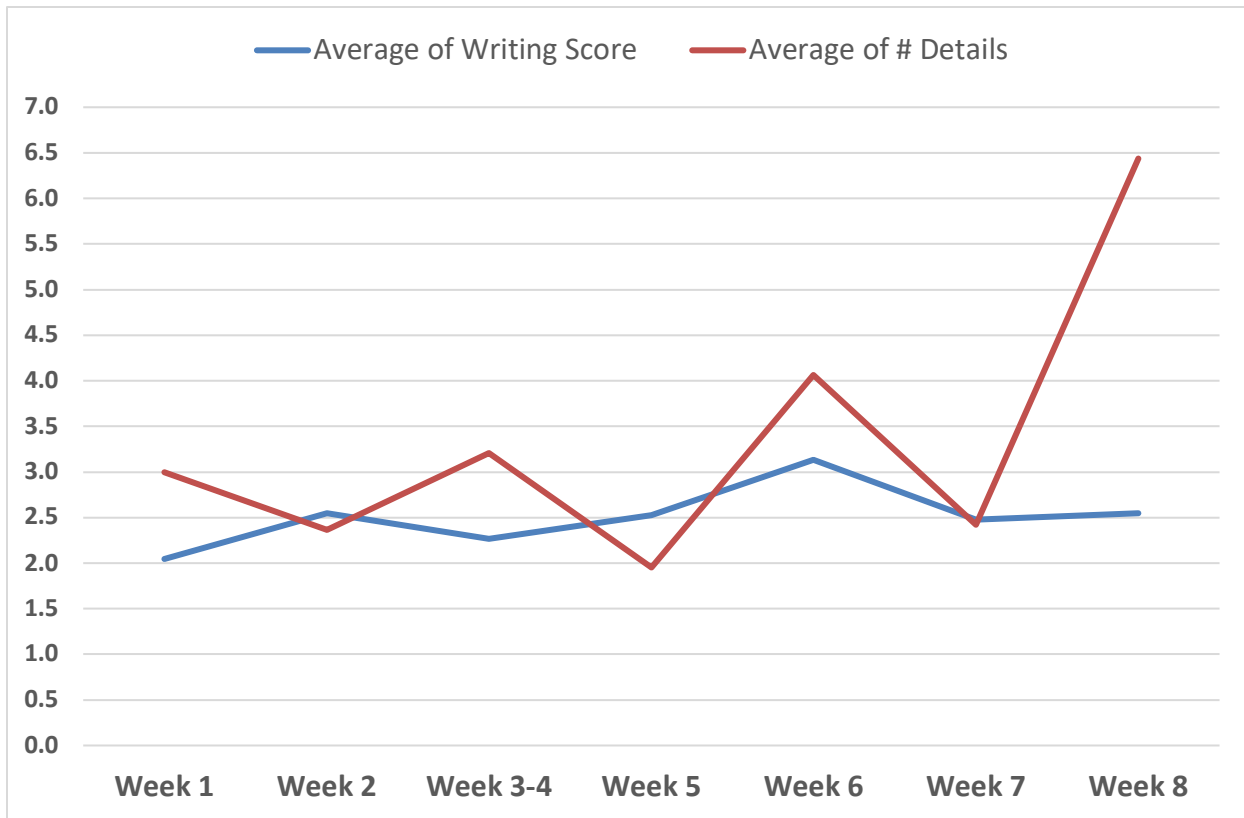


Figure 8: Average number of details added on the graphic organizer, and average writing score for all students in each week. (N=22).

Figure 9 was disaggregated for students not receiving SPED services (N=16). Again, the data showed a gradual increase in the average number of details students recorded on their graphic organizer from 3.1 to 6.5 as compared to a minimal increase in the average score on their weekly writing prompts from 2.6 to 2.9.

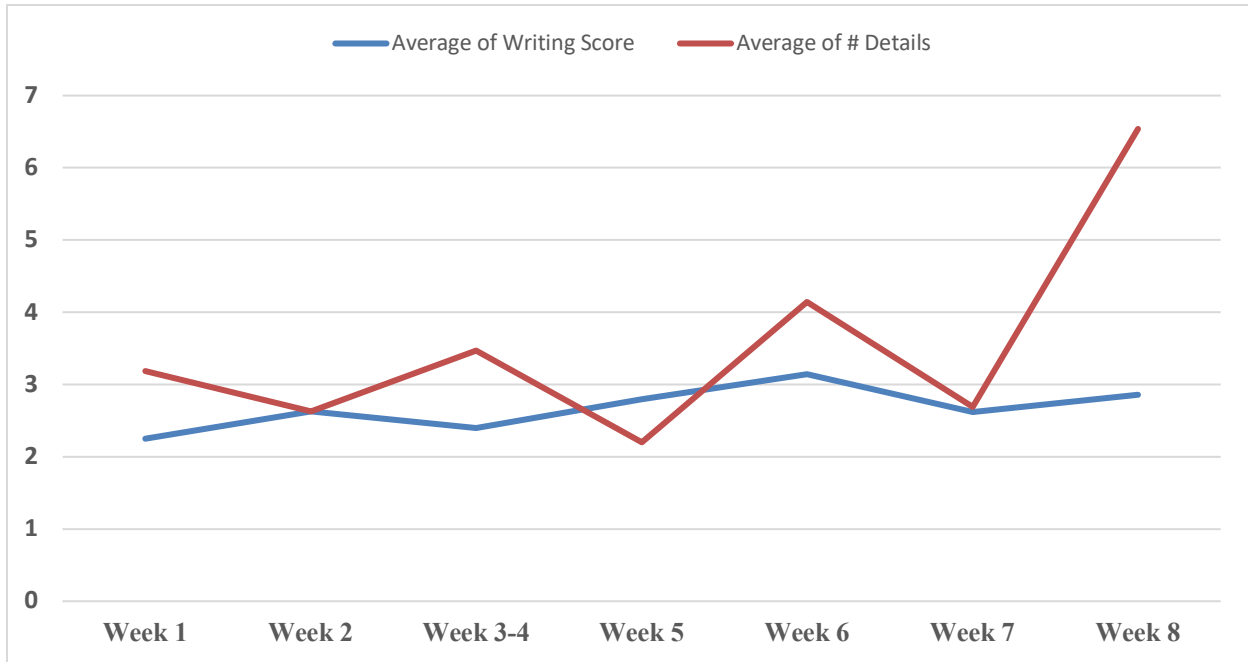


Figure 9: Average number of details added on the graphic organizer and average writing score for 16 students in each week. ($N=16$).

Figure 10 was disaggregated for students receiving SPED services ($N=6$). The data showed a gradual increase in the average number of details students recorded on their graphic organizer from 2.5 to 6 as compared to a minimal increase in the average score on their weekly writing prompts from 1.5 to 1.8. These data reflected an increase in students' abilities to record "words" as details with greater ease, than writing complete sentences.

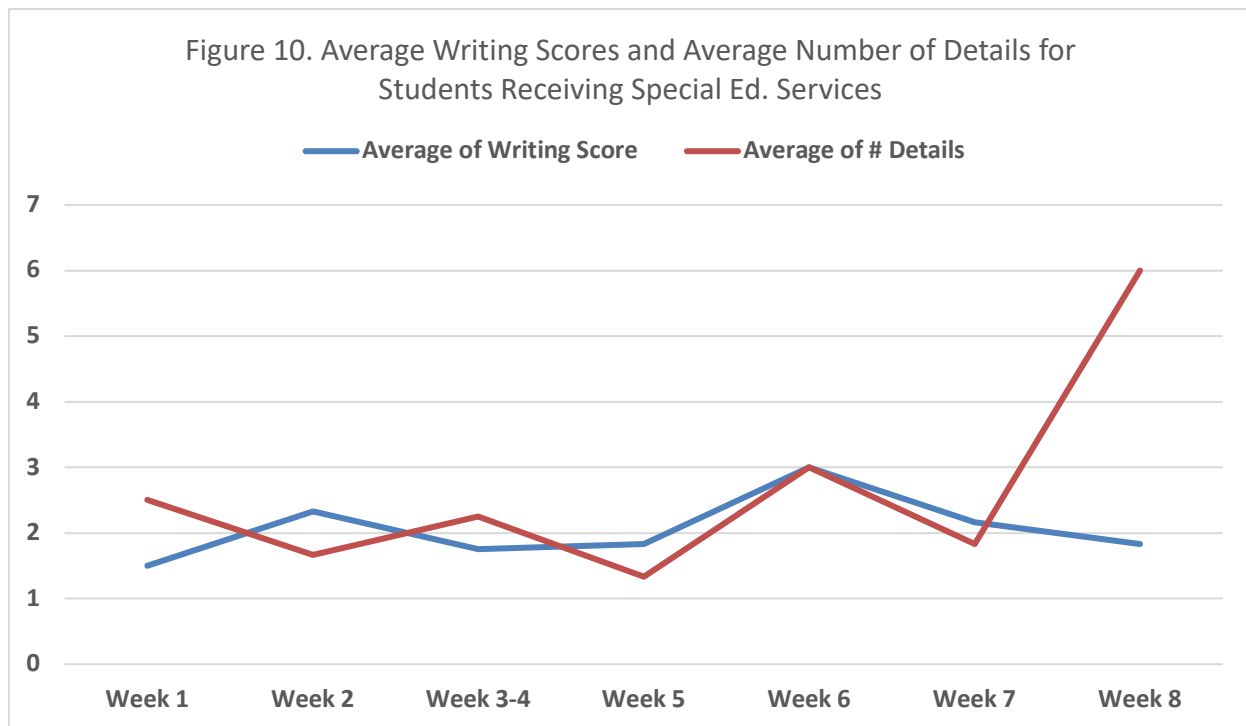


Figure 10: Average writing scores and number of details added on the graphic organizer for students receiving SPED services in each week. ($N=6$).

Summary

The purpose of the action research project was to determine the effect of using oral rehearsals daily in the writing lessons with first graders. The oral rehearsals were used to generate ideas, to record ideas on the graphic organizer, to share ideas as they were written and to help writing partners edit writing. Students were encouraged to talk during every activity and at the conclusion of every activity. The five-day routine was used to help students develop a process for their writing, and to make the oral rehearsals a part of every day. An intervention using oral rehearsals daily was implemented for eight weeks. This research project examined the effects of incorporating oral rehearsals into the writing process in a first grade classroom. Three data gathering strategies were used to examine the effectiveness of using oral rehearsals in the writing process: (a) a pre-intervention and post-intervention writing assessments; (b) a weekly writing prompt; and (c) a weekly graphic organizer.

Quantitative data were collected by means of the pre-intervention and post-intervention writing assessments, a weekly writing prompt and the use of weekly graphic organizers. The pre-intervention and post-intervention on the CBM showed that 73% of participants improved in the number of words written, and 77% of participants improved in the number of words spelled correctly. The scores of the writing prompts over eight weeks showed a minimal growth of 0.6, but the writing was scored on a 4-point rubric which minimized the possibility of showing greater growth despite the writing scores starting at an average of 2.0 (approaching proficiency) in week 1, and approaching an average of 2.6 (3=proficient) in week 8 of the intervention, which took place during February of the academic year. These data's upward trend give the impression that there is a possibility of reaching a proficient writing score for most students by the end of the academic year. The data on the number of details added to a graphic organizer also showed students' growth from an average of 3 details added in week 1 to an average of 6.4 details added in week 8. Additional data were collected in the form of the researcher's field notes. These notes were collected to record any events, such as schedule changes or absences, that could have affected the intervention. These sources provided ample data to support and determine that using oral rehearsals daily in writing with first graders supported their development as writers and allowed them to develop conventional proficiencies in their writing as warranted by grade-level standards.

In the next chapter, the findings of this research study will be shared. The results are compared to the studies discussed in the literature review, and this researcher explores the implications of this action research study. Chapter V will conclude with plans for future practice as a transformative teacher leader as a result of conducting this project.

Chapter V

Conclusions

With the passage of the CCSS in California in 2010, an increased emphasis on writing has placed increased responsibility on educators to prepare students with the needed writing skills to be ready for college and careers. Despite this realization, the NAEP has alarmingly noted that roughly 75% of fourth, eighth and 12th graders scored below the proficient level as indicated by the CAASPP. Educators must address these findings and analyze what is going on in classrooms across the nation and especially in writing instruction in order to change the statistics. To address change, educators must start addressing writing instruction in the earliest of years and not wait until the fourth, eighth and 12th grades when students are tested. In the state of California, and specifically in first grade, students develop their writing as they are taught, and they learn to write narratives, opinion pieces, and informational text. Students learn to write with guidance from adults and with their support (CCSS, 2010). Addressing all students needs early and providing instruction and intervention for struggling students will prevent academic failure later in writing. First grade is a great place to begin analyzing the state of writing assessment. As Vygotsky (1978) stated in his theory of social cultural learning, children learn from their environment and about the world around them from interactions. Vygotsky (1978) recognized the role of the MKO and included teachers, other students and possibly the authors being read by the students in this category. As students learn in their environment, they are active learners and co-constructors of their learning. Linguistic researchers applied Vygotsky's (1978) theory to the important role of language in social and cultural exchanges (Perry, 2012). Language was the vehicle that facilitated the exchange and initiated the writing process. Therefore, the role of language in writing instruction is as important as the social

exchange and the environment in which it occurs. Understanding the writing process is further enhanced when applying the findings of Flowers and Hayes (1981) as it addressed the writing process as in interchange of cognitive processes that are recursive and non-linear. As students plan, translate and review, writing develops but not in a neat, linear or orderly fashion. The works of Donald Graves (2003) and the introduction of the writing workshop model of writing delineated a social and interactive writing process that Lucy Calkins (1994) also presented where students, teachers, and text interacted in a social setting filled with language and modeled writing. With this in mind, teachers need to address the needs of all students while providing research based writing models/programs that will support and allow students to develop their writing skills in an environment that using language daily and takes into account what Vygotsky (1978) referred to as the ZPD: “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 60).

This action research project in a first grade classroom sought to address the needs of developing writers while identifying an instructional practice that would support all writers. I used a five-day writing routine and the use of a graphic organizer to support the organization of the informational writing. Of most importance was the implementation of the use of daily oral rehearsals in the process. The focus on language to support the transfer of ideas to transcription followed daily lessons and the sharing of fiction and non-fiction selections from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program. The teaching of writing skills to support writing development for all students provided a variety of experiences for all students. In addition, the five-day routine was followed and asserted the findings of Tolchinsky (2006) that made clear the need to provide focused instruction to become a skilled writer. Struggling students were given additional

support and guidance with volunteers and a student teacher who joined in week 3 of the intervention. The study investigated the following action research question: *What is the effect of oral rehearsals on first grade writer's proficiencies?*

Chapter IV presented data from the classroom intervention, and the triangulation of data collected. The data strongly suggested that students' writing proficiencies improved in their overall writing of informational text. Specifically, students improved in their ability to write words in a three-minute prompt (CBM) and in their spelling of words. Students' abilities to record details used for their writing also improved in the number of details they added to their graphic organizer and later in their writing. This chapter will address summary of findings, interpretation of findings, limitations, summary and a plan for future action.

Summary of Findings

The results of this study indicate that using oral rehearsals in the writing process supported the development of first grade writing proficiencies. Further, the results strongly correlate to the existing body of research, which supports incorporating oral rehearsals into the writing process. A total of seven essential questions from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program were used during the eight-week intervention. These questions helped guide the discussions and the information in the weekly stories, which gave students access to a wealth of information. In addition, as first graders used orally rehearsed new ideas, recorded key details, and shared their findings with their writing partners. Students did this daily in a guided five-day process to construct a piece of informational writing. The triangulation of the data allowed an understanding of the effects of oral rehearsals on first grade students' writing proficiencies. The instruments used by the students included a pre- and post-intervention writing assessment, a graphic organizer, and a writing prompt scored with the district rubric. Data were collected for

22 student participants. All participants in my general education classroom were invited to participate and all participants turned in parent consent forms (n=22). The data reported included all participants (n =22) with the exception of post-intervention data for participants 16 and 18. These two participants left the school during part of the intervention and the writing scores were left blank. These data were not included and did not affect the class averages.

Curriculum-based measure (CBM): Written expression probe. Analysis of the data gathered from the pre-and post-intervention writing assessment for first grade showed that participants scores increased in both word writing and word spelling overall. Of the participants, 73% improved in their number of words written (n =16). The average improved from 16.1 words written to 20.7 words written. This was an increase of +4.6. In the post-intervention assessment, students' spelling also improved. Of the participants, 77% improved in their number of words spelled correctly (n =17). The average number of words spelled correctly rose from 12.5 words to 16.2 words. An increase of +3.7 was recorded.

It is of interest to note that in the word-writing assessment, four students made significant growth. Participant 10 improved 100% and wrote 8 words where they had only written 4 in the pre-intervention assessment. Participant 3 improved by 133% and went from 9 to 21 words written. Participant 14 improved by 205% and went from 8 to 26 words written. The greatest improvement was shown by participant 21. This participant improved by 560% and wrote 33 words whereas in the pre-intervention assessment they had only written 5 words.

In correct spelling of words, three participants made notable growth. Participant 7's score indicated a growth of 114% and they spelled 14 words correctly where they had only spelled 7 on the pre-intervention assessment. Participant 14 had an increase of 186% and spelled 20 words correctly compared to 7 words spelled correctly in the pre-intervention assessment.

Participant 21 had the most significant growth with a 2000% increase. This participant only spelled one word correctly in the pre-intervention assessment and spelled 21 words correctly in the post-intervention assessment.

Informational writing assessment. Every week each participant worked on composing one piece of informational writing. This writing was usually composed in days 3 and 4 of the intervention and only after participants had a day or two of working on a graphic organizer and orally rehearsing the information gathered with a writing partner. The informational writing was written and edited with a writing partner and shared with a fifth grade buddy on Fridays. When the writing was completed and turned in, I scored it with the district's first grade writing rubric. After scoring the writing, an average score was recorded. Writing scores reflected a minimal increase for each of the eight weeks. Week 1 reflected an average score of 2.1. Week 2 had an average score of 2.5. Weeks 3-4 had an average score of 2.3. Week 5 had an average score of 2.5. Week 6 had an average score of 3.1. Week 7 had an average score of 2.5. Week 8 had an average score of 2.6. Over the eight-week period, there was an increase of +.6 in the overall gain in writing scores.

Graphic organizer. The results of the rubric score given to all participants over the eight-week intervention demonstrated that students added details to their graphic organizer on a weekly basis. The average scores were reported and the results showed a slight increase overall. Scores fluctuated from an average of 2.8 words added during week 1 to 2.6 words added during week 2 and weeks 3-4. There was a slight decrease to 2.4 words added during week 5, but then it increased to 2.9 words added during week 6. Week 7 was reported at an average of 2.4 and during week 8, students' rubric score of 3 met expectations with three details or more added. These scores reflected students meeting expectations in that they added details to the graphic

organizer adequately most of the time, as a way of recording details to later transcribe and turn into sentences.

Graphic organizer number of details added. Based on the data collected, the average number of details changed considerably from week 1 to week 8 of the intervention. Week 1 of the intervention showed a median score of three details recorded but with some outliers reflecting they added six, four, two, one or zero details. Week 2 showed an average of 2.4 details added with the highest and lowest observed number of details as four and zero. Weeks 3-4 showed an average of 3.2 details added with the highest and lowest observed number of details as seven and zero. Week 5 showed an average of two details recorded with an outlier of seven details added by one participant. Week 6 showed an average of 4.1 details added with the lowest recorded number of details added as two. Week 7 showed an average of 2.4 details added with one participant adding seven details. Lastly, week 8 showed an average of 4.9 details added with zero and 10 being the lowest and highest numbers of details added during this week. The data showed a gradual increase in the average number of details added by participants from three details added to 4.9.

Interpretation of Findings

Based on the quantitative data collected in this action research project, the finding surrounding the use of oral rehearsals in writing with first graders suggested that this instructional strategy along with the five-day writing routine using graphic organizers, supported the development of writing proficiencies. Providing students with routine opportunities for oral rehearsal – as they compose, revise, and elaborate over multiple days – allowed them to apply demanding metacognitive skills. All parts of this writing process complemented each other and cannot stand alone, but the use of oral rehearsals supported emergent writers as they faced what

Dunn and Finly (2010) referred to as the difficulty of trying to address the cognitive challenges of trying to hold their ideas, and trying to compose text while dealing with the manuscript printing of handwriting. Jones and Myhill (2009) described oral rehearsals as the “ideal bridge between the creative, spontaneous, content-forming talk used to generate ideas and the more ordered, scripted nature of writing” (p. 71). The writing process is complex and each element has its place and purpose for developing writing proficiencies. For emergent writers, using language via an oral rehearsal is necessary and critical to developing writing. The interpretation of findings will be examined within the context of the literature review.

Theory of social cultural learning. Vygotsky’s (1978) theoretical foundation was instrumental in this project. The idea that children learn from their environment and from those around them was evident in this action research project. The participants in the action research project interacted daily with others, with the teacher, and in the environment that was rich in print and in opportunities to develop their writing proficiencies. In addition, Vygotsky (1978) recognized the role of the MKO, and in the action research project this included the teachers, the adult volunteers, other students and possibly the authors being read by the students. In fact, the writing products produced can be said to be a product of the social interactions and the environment in which they were produced.

Zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) stated that the ZPD was “the distance between the actual development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 60). In other words, students work within a range and are led forward in their writing development by an MKO. As I reflected on the data and on the learning experiences provided for the students during writing, I became aware of the

supports students had and used to move forwards. Struggling students relied on writing partners for help in editing, and in writing. As I walked around and observed and guided writers, I was aware of the neediest students, and I provided on-the-spot conferencing (Bradley & Pottle, 2001). In these instances, I stopped and quickly provided assistance to move the writer forward within their zone. In this manner all students were met at their developmental writing state.

Cognitive process of theory of writing. Flowers and Hayes (1981) described a process where writers begin writing at a thinking stage. As this process begins, it triggers a higher-level organizational process and goals are set in the writing task and in the completion of the task. Within this process, writers go through planning, translating and reviewing what they are going to write, but in no given order. Young writers address thoughts, concepts of print, phonics, and handwriting all at the same time and in no particular order. As students in the action research project worked through a week-long writing process, the interplay of many complex activities were present and students addressed what they needed as they needed it. It was clear when students practiced oral rehearsals and I could hear their thoughts. It was clear when students were working through phonics and were sounding out words. It was obvious when dictionaries and the word wall were used and writing partners helped each other “find” the needed words. It was clear when students were addressing their use of concepts of print when they had their editing chart out and were checking off what they had done or were “fixing” a mistake. All these processes took place and were observed during the action research project. Participants explored them in non-linear fashion and only as needed.

Writing instruction for emergent writers. The teaching of writing to all emergent writers is at the forefront of CCSS’s ambitious demands. The National Commission on Writing (2003) noted that of the three R’s (reading, writing and arithmetic), writing is the “neglected R.”

With this in mind, it is of no surprise that even in my current school district, a writing curriculum has yet to be identified while math and language arts curriculums are never lacking. For the purpose of this action research project, I attempted to create a routine in which the teaching of writing skills (through the use of the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program) were taught and then were applied systematically (five-day writing routine), in which students could compose informational text with the support of language/oral rehearsals. Since there is no adopted writing curriculum in my district and the literature review validated the need for increased instructional time for writing, I attempted to use the five-day routine with fidelity and made sure process writing with skill instruction, modeling and conferencing were incorporated into my weekly plan. Coker (2016) discovered that writing instruction in first grade varied and was inconsistent in terms of time spent on tasks, instructional methods, and practices. The finding of the Institute of Education Sciences (USDE, 2012) revealed recommendations for first grade writing instruction: (a) one hour of writing instruction; (b) writing lessons for varied purposes; (c) the teaching of fluent word and sentence level skills; and (d) the need to create a writing environment that reflects community that fosters engagement. These findings were somewhat generalized, but shed light on certain factors that can be incorporated in a classroom. My action research project included daily writing, the teaching of discrete skills such as spelling, and the use of engagement among all students as they collaborated and shared and talked about their writing.

Instructional practices to support writing development for emergent writers. The literature review allowed me to view strategies and practices that could be utilized in my action research project. Instruction of writing was modeled but dependent on students' needs and was modified as needed. This was evident in the mini-lessons I presented and the level of

conferencing that took place with the students as I interacted with them during their writing time. I used on-the-spot-conferencing on a daily basis with many students. This strategy was necessary and supported writing development. As students wrote their informational pieces, they sometimes required conferencing. In addition, the use of graphic organizers was supported by Tavsanlı and Bulunuz (2017). In this study, the researchers found that the use of graphic organizers allowed their student to access and organize his ideas more effectively. McKnight (2010) also added that the use of graphic organizers was an effective tool that supported and allowed the writer to access and organize ideas. These studies seem to validate the use of graphic organizers. When I used them in my action research project, what I found was that graphic organizers were of great utility. Students used the graphic organizers with ease and familiarity, and they shared with others what they recorded on their graphic organizer. These organizers were then used to compose informational text. Further research with other students and in other grades would allow more insight and would give more data to compare results.

Oral rehearsals in the writing process. The presence of talk in literacy activities is highly regarded by researchers. Dyson (1993) contended that talk is a crucial component of children's learning and their ability to become literate people. Vygotsky (1978) stated that "language is central to learning, and the interrelationship between thinking, talking and learning is paramount: the process of verbalizing gives substance to thinking" (p. 60). As I conducted my research project, I referred to the work of Jones and Myhill (2009), where the use of oral rehearsals was examined and the final findings reflected that no matter how the oral rehearsal was implemented, oral rehearsals as a strategy had a role in literacy activities, and that children became better writers if they had a chance to rehearse. As a result of these findings, most

students would benefit from any form of oral rehearsals and most importantly the daily oral rehearsals. More research in this area should be conducted in order to compare data.

Reflection on Limitations

This action research project was limited by the eight-week time frame. Emergent writers need a lot of practice writing to develop this proficiency. While having students participate in eight weeks of writing, it was just a small window of time to gauge writing development. While writing growth did occur in this window of time, a year would be a better gauge of time to see writing development in first grade, since developmental readiness affects each writer differently. In addition, the sample size of 22 students limited the study. Due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to other groups.

Absences were another limitation. This year we had an unusual number of students absent due to the flu and this could have affected the data and the instructional possibilities with all students present. Students missed complete weeks of school, and one student missed three weeks of the intervention due to illness. This is not an uncommon occurrence in schools, but students who missed complete weeks were at a disadvantage in terms of the writing practice they missed. Their scores overall may have increased more if the students had been present for the complete intervention.

Taking on the roles of researcher and teacher could have affected how students performed writing tasks. It would be easy as a teacher to pressure students to perform to bring about positive outcomes. Students were aware that they were taking part in research and this alone could have affected how they chose to perform. Also, the demographics of the student population is a limitation that does not allow results to be compared to other schools with different populations or at other geographic locations.

While the literature review focused on the state of writing instruction, writing practices, and the use of oral rehearsals in writing, my action research only reflected what I interpreted from the Reading Wonders Language Arts Program, and what I applied in my classroom. In addition, I focused on writing practices from my experiences of 26 years in first grade. What occurred in my classroom is thereby different from other classrooms. Therefore, the use of oral rehearsals in my action research come with a unique interpretation posed by my influences and my understanding of what an oral rehearsal looks like.

Summary

As a first grade teacher, one of the most important skills I can teach my students is how to write. This statement is grand and says nothing unless I qualify it: I want to teach my first graders the ability to write sentences, to use capitalization, punctuation, vocabulary and to formulate a paragraph with topic sentence, details and with closure. To many this may seem simple, but to a first grade teacher it is one of the hardest tasks to achieve in 180 days of instruction. I was tired of seeing students struggle and fail with writing. This year my focus was on writing, and I helped my students make more growth in writing and hopefully enjoy the writing process more than in other years where I saw students struggle.

My research allowed me to view the writing process through a different lens. I knew the missing element in my instruction was the use of oral language. I knew students were full of ideas, I knew students loved talking to one another, I knew the difficulty of writing (handwriting) and transcribing (thoughts to written) ideas. I was aware of the cognitive load all of these created and used my 25 years of experience in first grade to guide me in formulating a plan for my intervention in writing instruction. My research led me to create a five-day writing routine which used oral rehearsals (talk) in every day of the writing routine. This routine incorporated

talk, mini-lessons, collaboration, sharing, drawing, labeling, and most importantly writing and editing. My action research question attempted to answer the question: *What is the effect of oral rehearsals on first graders writing proficiencies?*

The action research was based on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD. The interaction among the students and the talk that occurred as a result of the interaction helped students develop ideas, helped students expand on ideas orally and supported their development as they worked collaboratively within their zones, and move forward in their writing development. Bradley and Pottle (2001) described a process that allowed teachers to assist writers through on-the-spot-conferencing. Teachers are aware of students' levels of development, and are able to provide quick and accurate assistance to guide the writer along on their task. In addition, Herzog (1998) described a similar way of addressing emergent writers with a short, sharp and explicit check-in or quick assist. In this same manner students were able to assist, guide, support each other as they wrote, shared, and edited their work in during the writing block.

A total of seven essential questions were addressed in the eight-week intervention. Weeks 3 and 4 were shortened and combined due to Presidents' Day holidays. The five-day routine was adhered to and followed diligently to maximize the use of oral rehearsals in the writing lessons. Eight weeks of instruction reflected minimal, yet improved average scores for writing. During week 6, the district writing assessment had to be administered and I used the same writing routine and use of oral rehearsals to administer an opinion writing task to all first graders. Interesting results show week 6 having a greater overall average than other weeks. The average shown in Figure 4 showed an average of 3.1 where all other weeks rendered scores below a 3. This led me to believe that the five-day writing routine with oral rehearsals can be

applied to other writing tasks with satisfactory results. Writing scores minimally increased in the eight weeks and continued an upward trend at the end. Writing scores increased from a 2.0 in the beginning of the intervention to a 2.6 at the end of the intervention. It is important to keep in mind that the intervention started in January and ended in February. If students were expected to score a 3 (proficient) by the end of the year, they were well on their way there. Three solid months of instruction were still pending.

This action research project incorporated a five-day writing plan with the use of daily oral rehearsals. This structure, which was absent before the intervention, provided a much-needed guide for all students. In the course of the intervention, the structure allowed students a familiar routine that they followed, and were able to navigate with relative ease. After the intervention was over, my student teacher used the writing routine for a writing lesson she had to record and submit to her university. The lesson went well, she taught it with ease, and the writing that was produced over the course of a week was clearly better than that produced during the intervention. The validity of the routine and the success of the writing suggests that this weekly intervention can be replicated and applied to other writing situations. The action research project supports the fact that oral rehearsals do contribute to students writing proficiencies. In addition, the structure along with the oral rehearsals allowed students to build their writing stamina due to the fact that students worked within their ZPD, and they were able learn and work collaboratively in a social setting that allowed and valued the role of talk in the writing process.

When analyzing the data included in the action research project it was clear to see that a majority of students made growth in the areas of word writing, word spelling, average score on an informational writing prompt, and improvement in the number of details participants added to their graphic organizer used to write. One aspect that was missed in the data collection was the

showing of improvement in writing conventionally. I have added three samples of writing to add insight into the amount of growth that occurred for three students that I selected from all the participants. I selected a low, medium and high performing student to show how all participants benefited from the intervention. If I addressed the writing rubric, each student was able to improve in their ability to organize and keep their writing focused. In language and elaboration, each student was able to improve in their ability to include evidence and use vocabulary for the given prompt. Each student improved in the use of conventions such as capitalization, punctuation and spelling from week 1 to week 8. In addition, the volume of writing increased for all participants. These aspects were not visible and could not be analyzed in the data collection strategies but when looking at student samples it is clear that are an important piece to include due to the overall growth that they show.

Table 3

Sample Growth of High, Medium and Low Student from Week 1 to Week 8 of Intervention

Participant	Performance range	Week 1	Week 8
#23	Low	“Lif Diff lo ago crs fic has Hes has lis cos c bifenbo nis in fis.”	“I know infomatioin about a lot of insects. I like butrfly because a car fly. In my GrDn I like bees bedus ts al Gif Up huie pepo like inects bekus ts al Gif huie.”
#14	Middle	“Homes wroe diffet. cloes wroe difiresd. baths wroe difried. cres are difrited. you are in a spres passed.”	I have seen many inseks. I like about Ants because ther lags are strog and hel the. I like ladebugs because some can blend in in flawis the coolthing about ladebugs are that some dadebugs are difrint colors. I like skorpions because they hav a pichr. I like these insects because the are cool?
#22	High	“Life id diffrint. Now we have cars instud we yoost to have cariigis the clos are stoftr and fansyr. houseis have lectisut and lit. lif is detr now.”	I know a lot about insects. I know latebugs are red and black and I like to see latebugs fly. Butrflis flap thar wigs rilly fast and and the butrflys are rilly lite to fly In witr they Hibrnat like bars. Ants are black and they can’t fly like the butrfly can. Insects are intrusten.

Note. High, medium and low are student academic rankings in the classroom.

Plan for Future Actions

My school district is currently searching for writing curriculum that addresses the needs of our students. Of high importance is the value the district places on the role of collaboration and the role of talk in the writing process. As I have worked with first grade students for 26 years and as I have watched them learn how to write, the process is cognitively challenging and as Bourdin and Fayol (1994) found, young children had a far better oral ability to compose text as compared to their ability to compose transcription of text. As my district moves forward in the search for curriculum or staff development to assist teachers in writing instruction, I am eager to share with them my action research project and my findings and I am going to stress the role of language first, before transcription can emerge. I am currently on the Language Arts Committee and I look forward to collaborating with them as we move forward. In addition, I plan to share my finding at my school site, and will mentor any teacher who wishes to implement or try my intervention.

One of the positive aspects of this action research project was students' abilities to engage with one another as they collaborated in the five-day writing process. Vygotsky (1978) put forward the idea that children learn from their environment and from the interaction between students, the student and the teacher, and even from the interaction between the student and the authors they read. Additionally, Perry (2012) applied this foundational theory to the importance of language and social and cultural exchanges. The research in my classroom found that the more students talked to one another, the more details were recorded and the more the possibility of composing text that reflected authentic language with conventional writing. In addition, I noticed an increase in a positive attitude toward writing and students' levels of engagement in the writing process increased as students built stamina in their writing. By week 8, all students

appeared engaged and took on the writing task with minimal resistance. Findings reflected an increase in writing scores for students receiving SPED services similarly to students who did not receive special education services. I could conclude from these findings that the implementation of the five-day writing routine supported by the use of oral rehearsals was good for all groups present in my classroom.

Future plans in my teaching practice include the continued use of the five-day writing plan, and the use of oral rehearsals to support the transfer of ideas to transcription. As I watched the process, as I worked with students, as they talked, edited and shared their writing, it became very clear how effective process writing can be and how the use of oral rehearsals supports writing for emergent writers. I suspect that if I begin this process even earlier in the school year, students will benefit more than the participants in this action research project.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parental Consent for Child Participation

Dear Parents,

As some of you know, I am currently enrolled in the Master's in Teaching Leadership program at Saint Mary's College of California. As part of my degree program, I am required to conduct an Action Research Project. The overall goal of my research project is to find out about effective teaching strategies during whole group writing instruction. The strategy that I will be implementing in my classroom is using oral rehearsals to support your child's writing development.

During the innovation phase of my research, I will be adding oral rehearsals to our daily writing lessons to support the process of developing weekly narratives. All children will participate in these activities. To gauge the effectiveness of this strategy on student writing, I will be grading each writing sample as if it were a writing prompt. This research project will begin after Winter Break and continue through May 2019. I am writing to ask your permission to allow your child to participate in my research study. *Participation* means that I will include your child's writing results in my data analysis for the research. Your decision to allow your child's results to be included in my data analysis is completely voluntary. If you decide not to allow your child to participate, his or her learning experience and his or her interactions with me or with other students will not be affected.

At the conclusion of this study, the data collected will be analyzed, and a final report will be written and presented to Saint Mary's College Master's of Teaching Leadership faculty. A copy of the final report will be available in my classroom, should you want to review my findings. No individual student information or data will be reported in the written documents. I would greatly appreciate your cooperation in giving your child permission to take part in my valuable research project. The more student data that I can include in my analysis, the more accurate my results will be and I will be able to make more informed decisions about my instructional strategies.

Should you have any questions or concerns at any point during the duration of my study, please feel free to contact me by email at tsanchez@schooldistrict.k12.ca.us. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Heidimarie Rambo, by email at hrambo@stmarys-ca.edu or telephone at (925) 631-4617.

Sincerely,

Teresa Sanchez

Signing and returning this form means that you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information in this letter and that you give permission for your child to be included in the project.

_____ Student Name

_____ Parent Signature

Appendix B

Student Assent Form

Good morning [student]. I need to talk to you about a change in the way we will do our writing lessons in our class. Mrs. Sanchez is also a student just like you. I go to school at St. Mary's College in Moraga, and I am doing a project to learn how using talk (oral rehearsals) will help you with your writing. I would like to ask you for your help, so I can do my project. Let me tell you about what you would be doing. You will participate in writing time as you usually do, but we will add more talking time in a few weeks.

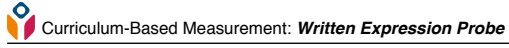
Because I am writing a report about this research and giving a presentation, I need your permission to include information about what you say and did in my report. When I write or talk about what happened, I will only write or talk about what happened to the class as a whole; I won't include any personal information such as your name in my report. If you allow me to include you in my research, you can still stop at any time by telling me, "I want to stop." You won't get in any trouble for stopping. Your parent(s) know that I am asking you to do these things.

Would you like to help me with my project? A YES or NO will be recorded on this form by the researcher and put in the safe with other consent forms.

Student ID #1.	#2.	#3.	#4.	#5.
#6.	#7.	#8.	#9.	#10.
#11.	#12.	#13.	#14.	#15.
#16.	#17.	#18.	#19.	#20.
#21.	#22.	#23.	#24.	

Appendix C

Curriculum-Based Measure (CBM) Writing Probe



Student Name: _____ Classroom: _____ Date: _____
--

My favorite thing to do at school is

Total Words: ____ Correctly Spelled Words: ____ Correct Writing Sequence: ____
--

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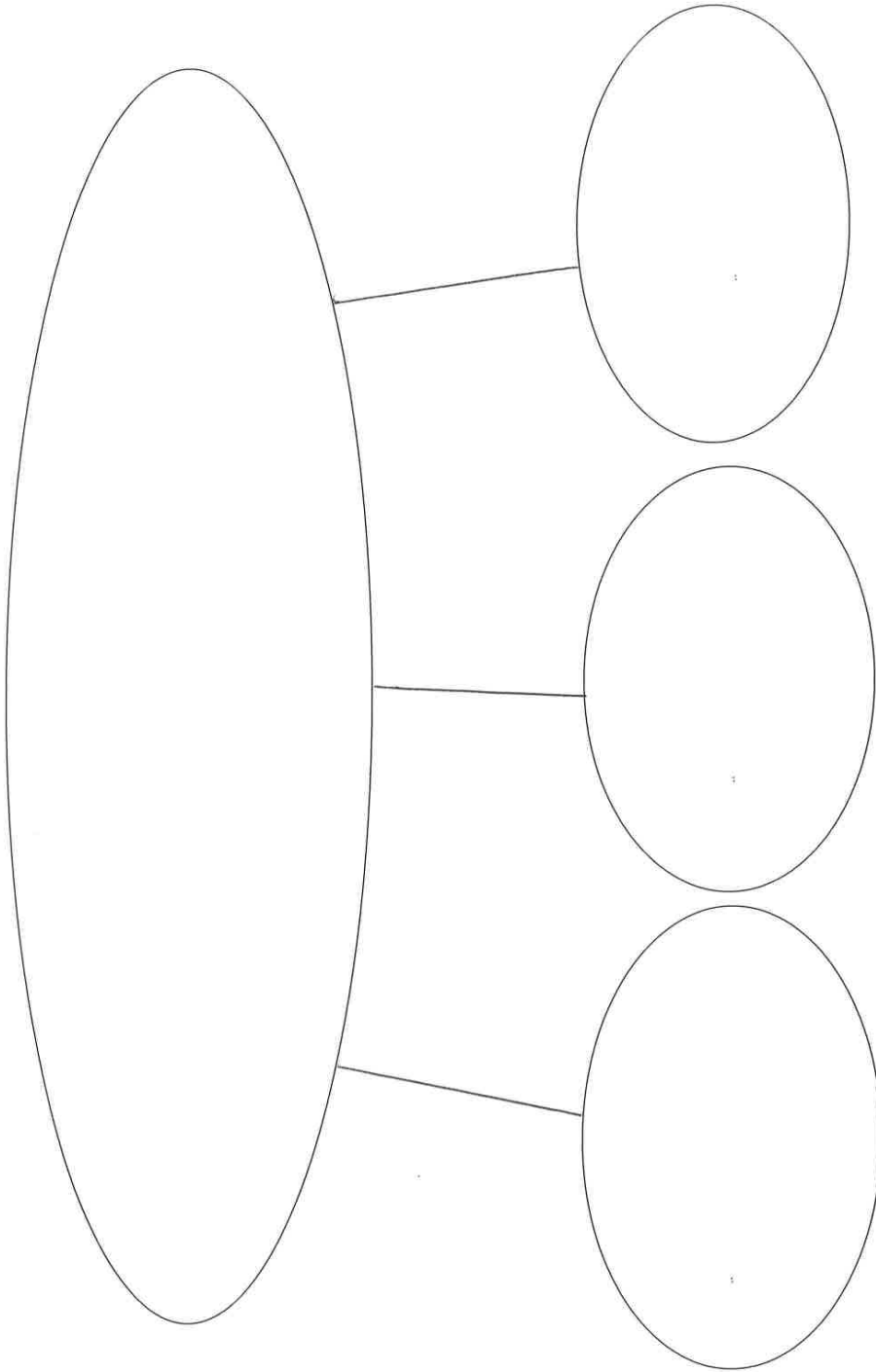
Grade 1 - Informational/Explanatory Rubric

	1 (Not Proficient)	2 (Approaching Proficient)	3 (Proficient)	4 (Advanced)
Focus/Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds with little or no statements related to the prompt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds with most statements related to the prompt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds with all statements related to the prompt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds skillfully with all statements related to the prompt
CCSS*: W-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little or no understanding of the topic/text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates limited understanding of the topic/text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates an understanding of the topic/text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a strong understanding of topic/text
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes with no evidence of paragraph structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes ideas and information in an incomplete paragraph structure (e.g., missing sense of closure) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes ideas and information into paragraph structure using a clear topic sentence, facts, and a sense of closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes ideas and information into paragraph structure using a clear topic sentence, facts and definitions, and concluding sentence
CCSS: W-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses few to no facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops the topic with limited facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops the topic with facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses linking words to connect ideas Develops the topic skillfully with facts and definitions
Support/Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses incorrect or simplistic word choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses basic word choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses strong and grade appropriate word choice including common conjunctions (e.g. like, because) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses precise word choices including adjectives and adverbs
CCSS: W-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prints few upper and lower case letters correctly. Student writing is not legible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prints some upper and lower case letters correctly. Student writing is somewhat legible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prints most upper and lower case letters correctly. Student writing is legible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prints all upper and lower case letters correctly
Language-Conventions of Grammar & Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not use common, proper, and possessive nouns correctly Does not use singular and plural nouns with correctly matching verbs Produces mostly incorrect simple and compound sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses few common, proper, and possessive nouns correctly Uses some singular and plural nouns with correctly matching verbs Produces mostly correct simple and compound sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses some common, proper, and possessive nouns correctly Uses singular and plural nouns with correctly matching verbs Produces correct simple and compound sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses common, proper, possessive, and collective nouns correctly Uses verb tenses and plural nouns correctly, including irregular forms Produces, expands, and rearranges simple and compound sentences
CCSS: L-1b, c, j	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalizes incorrectly with many errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalizes correctly and consistently with some errors: first word in a sentence, "I," proper nouns, and titles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalizes correctly and consistently with a minor error: first word in a sentence, "I," proper nouns, and titles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalizes correctly and consistently with no errors: first word in a sentence, "I," proper nouns, and titles
Language-Conventions of Capitalization, Punctuation, & Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses commas, apostrophes, and end punctuation Applies little to no sound/spelling correspondence of consonants and short vowels Spells little to no simple words phonetically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses commas, apostrophes, and end punctuation inconsistently but correctly some of the time Applies conventional spelling for most consonant and short-vowel sounds Spells simple words phonetically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses commas in a series and with a conjunction correctly; uses end punctuation correctly Applies conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and frequently occurring irregular words Spells untaught words phonetically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses commas, apostrophes, and end punctuation correctly all the time Applies conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and irregular sight words Spells with learned spelling patterns with untaught words
CCSS: L-2 a-e				

*CCSS – Common Core State Standards alignment ("W" = Writing strand; "L" = Language strand)

Adapted from Elk Grove School District

Appendix E
Graphic Organizer



Appendix F

Graphic Organizer Rubric

1. Students will use a graphic organizer to organize their ideas for the writing prompt.
2. Students will be given the opportunity to add details after their oral rehearsals with their partner. Students will use a different color pencil to track additions.
3. Students will be encouraged to orally rehearse their ideas on their graphic organizer daily.

4	3	2	1
Added details in all areas of graphic organizer: topic sentence, body and conclusion	Added Details: 3 or more details	Few Details Added: 1 or 2	No details added
Exceeds	Meets Expectations	Progressing	Not there yet

Appendix G

Writing Prompts for Weeks 1-8

Essential Questions for Writing Prompts: Weeks 1-8

Week 1: How do animals bodies help them?

Week 2: How do animals help each other?

Week 3: How do animals survive in nature?

Week 4: What insects do you know about?

Week 5: How do people work with animals?


Week 6: How do we classify and categorize things?

Week 7: What can you see in the sky?


Week 8: What inventions do you know about?

Appendix H
Editing Checklist


My Editing Checklist

I used a capital letter at the beginning of my sentences.  We see a dog.

I used a capital letter for the word I. 

I used punctuation at the end of my sentences. 

I used a finger space between my words. The dog  is brown.

I used neat printing. 

I used the word wall and stretched out my words. 

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Appendix I

Student Performance Record




Writing Prompt #1 Week 1: Essential Question:	4	3	2	1
Student				
#1				
#2				
#3				
#4				
#5				
#6				
#7				
#8				
#9				
#10				
#11				
#12				
#13				
#14				
#15				
#16				
#17				
#18				
#19				
#20				
#21				
#22				

Appendix J

Primary Writing Paper

Name: _____

5 Star Writing Rubric

- ★ Capital letter to start my sentence.
 I see a dog
- ★ Punctuation to end my sentence. . ! ?
- ★ Use finger spaces.

- ★ Use neat handwriting.

- ★ My sentences make sense.
