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Elements of Professional Development That Influenced Change in Elementary Teachers' Writing Instruction

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ABSTRACT

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Teacher quality has been identified as the most crucial factor in raising student achievement. In order for teachers—and consequently their students—to be successful, teachers must participate in life-long career development. For this reason, a great deal of time and resources are spent on professional development. However, professional development for teachers is not always effective.

This study was aimed at identifying those elements that led to success in professional development conducted in one rural Utah school district. The study operated within the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry, which consists of collecting evidence by interviewing successful participants to gather stories that reveal what works best in an organization. For this study, four elementary teachers in the district were identified as having made positive changes in their classrooms as a result of participation in the professional development. These teachers were interviewed and their stories were recorded. Then, their stories were analyzed and the following common themes emerged: validation, modeling with children, "doable" practices, reanimation of previously learned content and desire to learn more. These themes were then categorized into two sections that represent instructional strategies used by the presenter and teacher behaviors that were influenced by the identified instructional strategies. While research has identified many elements of quality professional development programs, these additional elements that emerged deserve further investigation. Results may provide useful information when designing professional development that will encourage teachers to take up promoted practices.

Keywords: teacher change, teacher belief, teacher practice, teacher education, teacher professional development, teacher in-service, elementary writing instruction

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Concern for student achievement continues to escalate. Federal legislation and funding initiatives have been implemented with the goal of improving both student learning and teacher qualifications through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In response, an increasing number of school reforms have been introduced that require teachers to alter their practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). While school reform may be mandated, implementation of school reform depends primarily on the teacher. Included in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is the provision for quality professional development for in-service teachers with the intent of allowing opportunities for teachers to keep up with changes in national and statewide standards of performance. Indeed, the United States Department of Education (2007) recognizes, "Teachers are the single most important factor in raising student achievement" (p. 700). However, it must be acknowledged that "teaching is an emotionally charged activity and that changing the way teachers teach is extremely difficult" (Scott & Sutton, 2008, p. 151).

Professional development is often seen as a way to improve instruction. It is critical to ensure that practicing teachers keep current on new methods of teaching in the content areas, learn how to facilitate the use of new technologies for teaching and learning, adapt their instruction to meet the diverse needs of student populations, and be aware of the core standards that are required for meeting the cut scores of NCLB (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). However, participation in professional development does not guarantee change. Multiple teachers can participate in the same in-service, and some will make changes, but others will not. Some will adopt new practices while others remain resistant (Richardson, 1998). This may be because professional development is often delivered in a one-size-fits-all fashion. Alvermann and Nealy

(2004) substantiated the ineffectiveness of such an approach: "It would be inappropriate to assume that mandating so-called best practices [in professional development] would work or look the same in different schools and classroom contexts" (p. 91). Burns and Stechuk (2004) suggested, "Professional development should address the needs of teachers at different career and skill levels" (p. 49). Since developing the instructional expertise of all teachers is widely recognized as essential to improving the achievement of students (Allington, 2005), researchers have investigated how best to develop that instructional expertise (Desimone, 2009; Duffy & Atkinson, 2001). Recent reviews of literature on professional development have identified key elements. These researchers argue that when professional development is designed using these identified features, teaching practices will change. However, the same reviews also suggest that teacher change does not automatically follow when teachers participate in these professional development programs. Thus, more research needs to be done to identify what elements of professional development programs, beyond those already identified, encourage participants to make changes in their instructional practices.

Statement of the Problem

Most of the research on teacher change has focused on why and how teachers do not change rather than examining more closely the elements of professional development that influence some teachers to change. Many school districts across the nation have used professional development to encourage their teachers to update their instructional practices. Likewise, one Utah school district utilized professional development to encourage teachers to embrace new practices. In an effort to encourage greater compliance to the district writing curriculum, personnel of this Utah school district initiated a yearlong professional development program. Attending to the research on successful professional development, the district designed

a research-based professional development program that focused on writing instruction and incorporated the elements that research identifies as central in promoting teacher learning and change. Almost all teachers who participated reported that the professional development positively influenced their writing practices. Understanding more clearly what aspects prompted these teachers to change could contribute to research exploring the relationship between well-designed, research-based professional development and teacher change.

Statement of the Purpose

In order to examine more closely what elements of professional development prompt teacher change, this study explored the positive stories told by teachers who noticeably altered the writing instruction in their classrooms after participating in a district-sponsored professional development on writing.

Research Question

The following question drove this study: *After participating in a researched-based, well-received professional development focused on writing instruction, how do teachers who made noticeable changes characterize the elements of professional development that were most influential in their decision to make those changes in practice?*

Limitations

This research is based on self-report data, which are subject to interpretation. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained that in some instances, to achieve their goals, people might be motivated to "fake good." For example, if a parent is hoping for a child to gain entrance to an advanced school, the parent may stretch the truth to make the child seem more qualified for admittance; on the other hand, if the goal is admission into a specialized school that caters to

children who need extra attention, the inclination might be to “fake bad” to increase the child’s probability of attending.

Despite these instances, there is value in self-report data, especially when accessing personal experiences. Ericsson and Simon (1993) provide strong evidence that supports the validity of self-report data when participants are asked to describe their experiences. “People can only report what they are aware of. In order for people to articulate their thinking they must be aware of it” (p. 3). To truly identify how teachers responded to the district professional development, teachers must be asked to articulate their experiences. Thus, self-report data seemed an effective choice for the research question that guided this study.

Definition of Terms

A clear definition of terms used throughout the study may be helpful. Understanding of the methods and results should be enhanced by the following definitions:

Professional development. Any professional growth opportunity in which teachers develop their craft, help share school practices, and build learning communities (Way, 2001).

Process writing. A series of stages that describe what writers think and do as they write; the stages are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The process involves recurring cycles rather than a linear activity (Tompkins, 2010).

Balanced literacy. A comprehensive view of literacy that combines explicit instruction, guided practice, collaborative learning, and independent reading and writing. Balanced literacy is often referred to as “reading and writing” to, with, and by children (Mooney, 1990).

Shared writing. A cooperative instructional activity during which the teacher serves as the scribe. Students contribute their ideas and the teacher negotiates the text (Boothe & Swartz, 2004).

Writing workshop. An organizational structure for teaching composition skills that can be modified as needed. Instruction can be organized into five phases: teacher sharing time, mini-lesson, state of the class, workshop activities, and student sharing time (Reutzel & Cooter, 2004).

Partnership facilitator. An on-site master teacher who has been released from classroom assignments and whose primary responsibility is to mentor beginning teachers and to participate in other activities involving the university and public school partnership (McKay School of Education, 2005).

Clinical faculty associate. An experienced teacher hired by the university and representing a partnership district. Responsibilities include mentoring, observing, and evaluating teacher candidates in practicum/field experiences, student teaching, and internship settings.

Intern. A university student who takes yearlong responsibility for a classroom under the direction of the partnership facilitator. The internship replaces student teaching and is completed just prior to graduation.

Preservice instruction. The preparation that students receive before they become certified teachers.

In-service instruction. The continuing education of certified, practicing teachers.

Teacher change. A change in a professional teachers' instructional practices, attitudes or beliefs.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the positive stories of change made by teachers in one Utah school district. These teachers noticeably altered their writing instruction after participating in a district professional development program focused on writing. The professional development was researched-based and well-received by participants. This literature review will focus on teacher change, the role of professional development, constraints to change**,** effective elements of professional development, and less effective elements of professional development.

Teacher Change

Teacher change in this context is when professionals alter their instructional practices or attitudes and beliefs about teaching. Even today, most researchers claim that many teachers do not change their practices and beliefs, that changing practices hurts and is too difficult to try (Cuban, 1990). These were the research-based findings of Richardson (1998) that prompted an article in which she explored further how teachers change. Based on her personal experience as a teacher, teacher educator, student teacher supervisor, and researcher, she took exception to this declaration. When looking more closely at teachers and their practices, she found evidence that teachers are always changing. She maintained that often teachers resist change because it is required from external sources. Her conclusion was that when some say teachers do not change, they really mean that teachers are not doing what someone else expects them to do. Researchers have continued to explore when and how teacher change does or does not happen.

Role of professional development. Most professionals involved in education see the teacher at the center of attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. In

fact, in a review of literature on teachers beliefs and knowledge, Calderhead (1996) posited that attempts to improve school reorganization, curriculum development, and teacher effectiveness all ultimately rely on the professional development of the teacher. Sykes (1996) even went so far as to label education reform and teacher professional development as synonymous. For this reason, Day (1999) advocated in his book on the challenges of lifelong learning, "Continuing career-long professional development is necessary for all teachers in order to keep pace with change and to review and renew their own knowledge, skills, and visions for good teaching" (p. 2). In an international literature review on professional development, Villegas-Reimers (2003) affirmed teachers as the most significant change agents in school reforms. Additionally, Darling-Hammond (1999), who has completed extensive research on teacher practices, identified teachers as the most influential factor in raising student achievement scores. Professional development activities, however, do not always persuade teachers to change (Yoon, Park, & Hong, 1999). In fact, in a review of literature, Lawless and Pellegrino (2007) state, "Despite national recognition of the importance of teacher professional development, report after report depicts the state of teacher professional development as inadequate" (p. 575).

Constraints to change. Simply knowing that it is difficult for teachers to make changes in their instructional practices is insufficient. Identifying reasons teachers give for resisting change may provide further guidance as professional development programs are planned. Two of the most common constraints voiced are external mandates and prior knowledge.

External mandates. As suggested by Richardson (1998), teachers are often resistant to change when participation is mandated rather than optional. In a theoretical article, Morimoto (1973) highlighted this reaction of resistance to mandated change:

> When change is advocated or demanded by another person, we feel threatened, defensive and perhaps rushed. We are then without the freedom and the time to understand and to affirm the new learning as something desirable, and as something of our own choosing. Pressure to change, without an opportunity for exploration and choice, seldom results in experiences of joy and excitement in learning. (p. 246)

Prior knowledge. Teachers bring to the profession theories that are grounded in their own personal histories. The value of tapping into students' prior knowledge is a principle that has been established as essential for learners who must come to understand new material. "Good teachers should work hard to help students access relevant prior knowledge and/or build it" (Holt-Reynolds, 1992, p. 326). However, in the case of in-service teacher professional development, prior knowledge or prior experience may even more dramatically outweigh new perspectives presented, because in-service teacher beliefs are supported by experience, beliefs, and practices. As Richardson (1998) reminded us, teachers may resist change because of their frequent experiences with cycles of reform and professional development.

Holt-Reynolds (1992) conducted a study that explored relationships among history-based preservice teacher beliefs, the content they were taught in methods courses, and the practices they implemented in field experiences; specifically, the study explored which literacy practices preservice teachers would most likely use. Even though their university professors modeled excellent practices and they demonstrated those practices in coursework, the preservice teachers rejected practices that did not match their original beliefs. Finally, Holt-Reynolds discussed the relationship between these preservice teachers' beliefs and the decisions they make. Her results showed that new teachers come to the classroom having had numerous experiences as students in the same content they are required to teach. These prior experiences and beliefs shape their

views on teaching and learning. Consequently, how a teacher views teaching and learning will greatly affect the outcome of the classroom instruction and environment. In a review of literature on learning to teach, Borko and Putnam (1996) supported Holt-Reynolds's (1992) findings concerning the effect of teachers' prior beliefs on their instructional practices.

Roth and Andersen (1988) conducted a study examining preservice teachers' interaction with science textbooks. They concluded there are times when students' "lay concepts are not quite contextualizing, illuminating, and helpful so much as they are powerful, potentially misleading, and unproductive as resources for learning the principles . . . [teacher educators] hope to teach" (p. 135). In a synthesis of international literature on professional development, Timperley (2009) further states, "existing assumptions about curriculum or about what particular groups of students are able to learn can prevent teachers from examining how effectively their own practice is in promoting student learning" (p. 20). Opinions differ on the potential benefits and the appropriate method for changing teachers and their prior beliefs, but most agree that these prior beliefs have a strong impact on what teachers will accept during preservice teacher education or professional development.

Theories of change. Contrasting theories exist on how best to change practicing teachers' beliefs and attitudes about teaching. Fullan (1991) supports the idea that teachers must first participate in teacher in-service, leading to a change in knowledge and beliefs, which in turn changes their practice in the classroom, with those changes in practice ultimately leading to change in student learning outcomes.

In contrast, in an article on the process of teacher change, Guskey (1986) argues that teachers will only change their beliefs and attitudes after they see a change in student learning outcomes. His model starts with participation in staff development where teachers are

introduced to new ideas that require a change in their classroom practices. The change in teacher practices then affects the student learning outcomes. Finally, when teachers see that student learning improves; they change their beliefs and attitudes, which leads to a change in their practices if necessary.

Catalyst for change. Studies with evidence of teachers changing instructional practices have focused on aspects of teacher knowledge that can encourage changes such as teachers' sense of identity, reasonable practices and content knowledge.

Sense of identity. Bullough (1991) explored personal teaching metaphors, or how a teacher characterizes his or her professional role. He studied preservice teachers participating in field experiences and reported that those students who had a clear consciousness of their identities as teachers were more likely to improve and branch out during their teaching practicum. Similarly, Tobin (1990) worked with a first-year teacher who struggled with classroom management. He found that as she changed her image of herself as a teacher, she was able to change her behavior and that of her students. In a research study exploring vital elements of professional development for high school mathematic teachers, Brown and Benken (2009) listed professional identity as a crucial factor in whether teachers accept new practices and move forward with their personal professional development as teachers. Until teachers recognize their personal beliefs and challenge them as they receive new information, little change is likely to take place. Routman (2005) wrote from her personal experience that "effective teachers are always examining, evaluating, and refining what they believe as a first step to improving instructional practices" (p. 8). Timperley (2009) even goes so far as to suggest that external experts presenting professional development need to purposefully design situations that will

challenge teachers' assumptions, causing them to articulate what they believe and then either accept or reject those beliefs.

Reasonableness. Teachers also change practices when they are introduced to acts of teaching that are reasoned and reasonable. Richardson (1998) observed in her study that teachers did try new practices and willingly embraced change if they saw results in student achievement, and if those practices aligned with their personal beliefs. Timperley (2009) confirmed that when teachers' personal theories about students, curriculum, and instructional strategies were at odds with the practices being promoted in the professional development, they needed evidence of how the new practices would impact their students' learning. This required a discussion about the limitations of current practices while demonstrating effective alternative practices. "Change appears to be promoted by a cyclical process in which teachers have their current assumptions challenged by the demonstration of effective alternative practice" (p. 18). Through this teachers also develop new knowledge and skills, leading to small adjustments to their practices. This causes improved student achievement, which in turn encourages the teacher to further examine their practices. Additionally, a small but growing body of evidence links the emphasis on developing subject knowledge in professional development to changing teaching practices in ways shown to increase student achievement (Brown & Benken, 2009; Desimone, 2009; Timperley, 2009).

Content knowledge. Cohen and Hill (1998) prepared a research report describing the link between instructional policy and classroom performance regarding the mathematics reform in California. They found that teachers with more mathematical knowledge felt more confident in teaching mathematics. Bowie (1996) completed a study looking at preservice teachers' perception of themselves as writers and found that teachers often did not feel confident in their

own writing skill or in their ability to teach writing. He suggested that one way to change and improve instruction is to help teachers improve their own skills in writing. This philosophy concurs with that of the National Writing Project, where participants engage in writing strategies to improve their own writing, resulting in an improvement of their classroom writing instruction. Research now acknowledges the importance of teachers' mastery of the content they are teaching as well as the pedagogical content knowledge needed to successfully teach that content (Cohen & Hill, 1998; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). With this confidence teachers are more likely to make changes to their beliefs and practices. This suggests that professional development must inform and educate teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, providing teachers with clear evidence in the performance of their students that suggested practices lead to improvement in student learning.

Professional Development

Professional development guidelines provided by the American Federation of Teachers (2002) suggest that "highly effective standards-based teaching requires radical changes in practice. If teachers are to move away from comfortable, long-established practice towards the uncertainty that accompanies change, . . . carefully crafted, well-supported professional development is required" (p. 3).

Current trends. The adoption of the NCLB Act of 2001 resulted in an increase of high-stake testing across public schools in America. As part of NCLB, provisions were made and federal funds allotted for greater support and mentorship of classroom teachers. Many school reforms have been introduced with the purpose of raising student test scores and meeting adequate yearly progress standards. Consequently, the need for meaningful professional development has been brought to the forefront of state and district administrators' attention. The

success of these reforms is dependent upon teachers' commitment to and knowledge of how to make it happen.

Desmione (2009) reported that "substantial resources are spent on professional development at the local, state, and federal levels; for example, in 2004–2005, the federal government spent about $1.5 billion on professional development for teacher development" (p. 181). In addition, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that in 2008, public schools spent about $20 billion annually on professional development activities. This is one more reason why it is critical to understand what makes professional development effective, and what encourages teachers to implement changes proposed in professional development.

The configuration of professional development programs has changed in recent years. Rinke and Valli (2010) observed in a study looking at teacher learning in high stake settings that current implementations of professional development programs look noticeably different than earlier models where presenters "delivered" information for teachers to take back to their classrooms for implementation (p. 646). In the past, professional development programs most frequently were isolated single events where administrators required attendance. Now more continual and on-going professional development programs are being initiated and attended by teachers wanting to improve their practice, and these programs result in increased student achievement. Traditionally outside experts were brought in to promote new practices where now teacher-led professional development programs are also seen.

Common components. Regardless of the configurations used, two components have been widely accepted as essential for professional development activities: structure and substance (e.g. Garet et al., 2001; Kennedy, 1998). Structure reflects the organization of the learning activities. Substance reflects the topic of study (Rinke & Valli, 2010). The same

researchers noted that recently, an additional component has been accepted: context, which refers to where and under what conditions the professional development takes place.

Structure. Structure reflects the organization of the professional development activities, such as how the professional development is arranged, the method of participation by teachers, and the timing of the in-service. Various compositions exist for structuring professional development programs: professional learning communities, workshops, study circles, sharing groups or inquiry groups, conferences, summer academies, or online learning opportunities.

Substance. Substance reflects the topic of study for the professional development. The training can focus on content, pedagogy, or both. Content-centered professional development focuses on content knowledge and identifying best practices for teaching that content. It has been found to be more effective when it also includes pedagogical training so that teachers are provided with a way to directly apply new strategies presented in a form that is useful in the classroom (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999). This is because content-centered professional development provides teachers the opportunity to work with the concepts connected to available classroom materials and also to address the practical problems of using those materials to help students understand the concepts. Little, Gearhart, and Kafka (2003) stated, "Professional development should not only be rich in ideas and materials about the subjects taught, but must also provide teachers with opportunities to incorporate and modify those ideas into their own teaching" (p. 186). This type of professional development, which has a central focus on content but which also involves pedagogy, has become increasingly prevalent with the focus on standards-based education, which defines what students should know in specific content areas.

Pedagogically centered professional development concentrates on improving teaching methods. The concept of what effective teaching strategies look like has undergone a major shift in the past 20 years. Traditionally, a set of generic instructional practices or steps was recommended, such as direct instruction, repeated practice, clear teacher presentation of materials, and increasing the time on tasks where students were engaged in learning (Brophy & Good, 1984). This meant that regardless of the content being taught, teachers were to break each topic into small parts, drill the students until they could complete the task quickly, and then move on to the next topic. The strategies were teacher-centered and fast-paced. Recently, the target in professional development has moved to a more constructivist, student-centered classroom where teachers help students construct their own learning—again regardless of content.

Context. Context reflects the circumstances in which the professional development takes place. Recognizing the many formal and informal pathways to professional growth allows for alternative options as providers structure in-service that will maximize experiences for teachers within their own context. Borko (2004) enumerates the many contexts where teachers increase their professional growth:

> For teachers, learning occurs in many different aspects of practice, including their classrooms, their school communities, and professional development courses or workshops. It can occur in a brief hallway conversation with a colleague, or after school when counseling a troubled child. (p. 4)

Researchers suggest that, ideally, professional development must be "part of the daily work, not an event that occurs on certain days in the school year" (Smith & Gillespie, 2007, p. 220). The goal of this philosophy is to form "site-based groups of learners who have professional development woven into the fabric of their school community, balanced at times

with new ideas from outside the school" (Hord, 1997). A positive element of this type of instruction is that the "teachers do the talking, thinking, and learning" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1042). However, a drawback is that it can lead to teachers feeling like they are the source of all answers instead of looking for and accepting other resources.

One of the difficulties of recognizing and replicating quality professional development programs is a lack of data that links student achievement, teacher change, and professional development activities. Most research on successful professional development asks the teachers to respond to surveys measuring their attitudes and opinions about their participation in the experience and about their implementation of new practices in their classrooms. There is no place to accurately document whether the success of the professional development extends to pedagogical change and student learning (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). Desimone (2009) also points out that the lack of consensus of core features found in quality professional development limits how researchers can expand the foundational knowledge base. This affects the implementation of professional development programs as well as their evaluation. Even though there has been no consensus when identifying core features of professional development, several reviews of research have identified the key elements that exist in quality professional development programs (Borko, 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Peressini, Borko, Ramagnano, Knuth & Willis, 2004; Wilson & Berne, 1999;). In these studies the concepts underlying the elements are the same but they are labeled differently.

Effective elements. All professional development operates within a framework combining structure, substance, and context. Beyond these three components there are also specific elements that vary and affect the quality of professional development. Little (1992) synthesized the research literature and defined quality professional development as being

effective when the results increase teacher knowledge and skills, improve teacher practice, increase student achievement, or contribute to a professional community. Across the collective research the following elements emerged: (a) *vision*, (b) *teacher autonomy,* (c) *coherence,* (d) *duration,* (e) *content focus,* (f) *active learning,* and (g) *collective participation* (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Hord, 1997).

Vision. Vision, in this context, refers to a participants knowing and working toward a common goal**.** Hord (1997) labeled vision as one of the most significant elements of professional development. His study reported high implementation of new practices by teachers after participating in a professional development where "a vision of the change and its attendant goals and expectations [were articulated]" (p. 2). This study observed that the more the principal focused on and spoke to a vision of what the school could become as teachers applied new practices, all the while consciously stressing the benefits to their students' learning, the implementation rate of the teachers continued to increase. Similarly, Griffin (1983) claimed, "Staff development programs are designed to alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (p. 12). When a common vision is present in the environment of reform, it becomes a catalyst for teachers to try new practices and increase their learning. Teachers are more apt to set specific personal goals, which increases the possibilities of implementation (Timperley, 2009).

Autonomy. Autonomy, or choice in participating in the professional development, is another significant feature to consider when expecting it to be successful. It is only when teachers have choice that they can welcome and accept new learning. The American Federation of Teachers (2002) guidelines for effective professional development affirm, "Professional development should be designed by teachers in cooperation with experts in the field" (p. 9). This

will help teachers to “buy in” to professional development and will promote teachers’ implementation of new practices.

Not only do teachers choose to attend physically, they also choose to attend mentally. Researchers clarify that teacher choices are affected by whether or not the experts are seen as credible sources of knowledge by those teachers responsible for implementation of the targeted practices (Guskey, 1986). In an article outlining leadership strategies for success, Lawler and King (2000) recognize the importance of professional development presenters establishing credibility among the participants they are hoping to instruct. One barrier with presenters who are not practicing teachers is that “traditional faculty may see continuing educators as outsiders with little or no knowledge and experience in the traditional life of a faculty member” (p. 15). They suggest that one way to build this credibility is through shared purposes of partnerships between schools and universities. By recognizing and including both school personnel and university scholars in professional development agendas and consulting together from the beginning, mutual respect and support are more likely to occur.

Coherence. This term refers to how relevant the professional development is to what teachers are expected to do in their current assignments. The Eisenhower Professional Development Programs found teachers were more likely to change their practices, gain greater subject knowledge, and improve teaching skills when their professional development was linked directly to their daily experiences and aligned with expected national, state, and district standards and assessment (Garet et al., 2001). Likewise, Cohen and Hill (2001) found that teachers who attended professional development programs that focused directly on the curriculum they were teaching or would be teaching were the teachers more likely to adopt the suggested practices. Borko (2004) insisted that teachers must have a rich and flexible knowledge of the subjects they

teach if they hope to foster students' conceptual understandings. As teachers are more comfortable and confident in their own understanding of content, they are better able to guide their students to deeper understanding. In the past those planning and organizing professional development programs did not connect opportunities for learning with actual classroom experiences. This resulted in inadequate training and sporadic adoptions of new practices. Sykes (1996) characterized the deficiency of traditional professional development as "the most serious unsolved problem for policy and practice in American education" (p. 465).

Duration. Duration has a dual meaning: "the span of time over which an activity is spread, and the number of hours spent in the activity" (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). The number of hours of contact cited as necessary to enhance professional development is broad and inconclusive, ranging from 5 to 120 hours, but research seems to indicate that a minimum of 8 hours, and ideally 30 hours or more, make a significant difference in whether teachers implement practices introduced through professional development.

Furthermore, ongoing duration and follow-up support embedded in the professional development seemed to be a significant characteristic. These two elements interact and provide space for each other. Penuel, Fisherman, Yamaguchi, and Gallagher (2007) studied effects of different characteristics of professional development during an inquiry science program and found that longer-lasting professional development was more conducive to opportunities for teachers to integrate new knowledge about teaching into their current practices. This was especially true when the changes promoted were part of the context of teachers' current practice.

Two major benefits occur when professional development is sustained over time. First, when more time is allotted for learning, opportunities for richer conversations are more likely to occur. Teachers are able to anticipate students' reactions to content and strategies, then problem

solve with other participants. Second, more time spent on professional development allows teachers to try out the practice in their own classrooms and receive feedback on their implementation. To acquire proficiency, teachers need to develop factual knowledge as well as procedural knowledge of how, when, and where to use their new skills (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). When given sufficient time in professional development, teachers can actually participate in a cycle of learning, trying, and reflecting upon their practice. This increases the probability of adopting, implementing, and sustaining new practices. This validates Schön's (1983) research about the benefits of reflection-in-action. Such reflection allows teachers to learn and apply new practices within their context.

Content focus. Content focus, or a focus on subject matter instead of pedagogy, is also considered to be a significantly influential feature in effective professional development. Cohen and Hill (2001) discovered that teachers who adopted the practices introduced in professional development were those teachers who were responsible for teaching the curriculum that was the focus of the professional development. Desmione (2009) found the following in her theoretical article on improving the measurement of quality professional development:

> A compilation of evidence in the past decade points to the link between activities that focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content with increases in teacher knowledge and skill, improvements in practice, and to a more limited extent, increases in student achievement. (p. 184)

With the current focus on standards-based teaching, a greater emphasis is placed on a deeper understanding of content rather than the traditional model of memorizing facts and procedures and pedagogical techniques. This necessitates greater understanding on the teachers' part to prepare them to guide the students' learning instead of merely dispensing knowledge

(Garet et al., 2001). One teacher explained the necessity of teachers' understanding of content knowledge as follows: "The flexible and interactive teaching techniques that [I use] are simply not available to [me when I do not] understand the topic to be taught" (Shulman, 1987, p. 18).

Active learning. Active learning reflects the level of engagement of the participants. This is identified as another significant feature of effective professional development. It is categorized by participants as "observing expert teachers or being observed, followed by interactive feedback and discussion; reviewing student work in the topic areas being covered; and leading discussions" (Desimone, 2009, p. 184). Just as students respond favorably when they are actively involved with opportunities to construct their own learning during lessons, professional development participants responded positively when they were "engaged in the concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection" during the in-service (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 13). The learning process has been defined as one of enculturation and construction. "Learning should be viewed as both a process of active individual construction and a process of enculturation into . . . practices of a wider society" (Cobb, 1994, p. 13).

Collective participation. Collective participation, or professional development programs that help teachers see themselves as a community of learners working together, are growing in popularity (Borko, 2004). Such a format is advantageous for several reasons. First, teachers who work together are more likely to have opportunities to discuss the new practices they are trying. Community learning provides a place for the reflection that has been identified as valuable as teachers implement new practices. Another potential benefit from having a community of learners is the likelihood of sustaining the changes over time. As more than one teacher is involved in implementing new practices and initiatives, the practice becomes part of the school or grade level culture. As some teachers leave and others join the faculty, they are

influenced by the current culture and adopt the practices as their own. Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggested a design for a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching, professing that improving teaching practices is difficult to do alone. Teachers need opportunities to communicate about teaching strategies, student work, content knowledge, and student development, as well as policy. Smith and Gillespie (2007) accredit the movement for teacher professional communities to the realization that teachers who were trained outside of their professional settings did little to disseminate their newfound knowledge upon returning to their schools. Instead they suggested, "Teachers need a community of teachers within the school so they can learn together about their work as they apply that learning" (p. 233). Teachers were more likely to adopt new practices when greater communication occurred among colleagues. Elmore (1996) claimed that such communication has consequential effects:

> Teaching practice is unlikely to change as a result of exposure to training, unless that training also brings with it some kind of external normative structure, a network of social relationships that personalize that structure, and supports interaction around problems of practice. (p. 21)

Many reformers agree that increasing teacher effectiveness, and consequentially student achievement, can best be accomplished when like-minded teachers have regular opportunities to have intellectual conversations.

Less effective elements. Researchers have identified many factors that support quality professional development. In the process, evidence of less successful components has also surfaced. One of the greatest threats to teacher change and school reform is the adoption of practices that compete against current teachers' practices (Timperley, 2009). Administrators must use prudence when suggesting changes that dramatically differ from what teachers believe

to be sound practices. When new ideas are promoted it is important to make certain they are theoretically coherent with other accepted practices.

Timperley (2009) also found that most researchers agree that content focus in professional development is an important element of quality learning. However, she cautions that experts need to have a complete knowledge of the content they are presenting. They should understand and demonstrate content-specific teaching and assessment strategies, organization and management principles, and connections of current theory to practice that is practical for teachers. "Not everyone engaged in promoting teacher professional learning has the knowledge and skills to do these things" (p. 20).

Another hazard is endorsing ideas that are not widely accepted by a credible research body. Programs that are created by developers who are promoting their own preferred practices are often less effective than those who involved practicing teachers in their conception (Timperley, 2009).

A missing element of many professional development programs is connecting theory to practice. Often presenters fail to help teachers see the theoretical constructs behind the focused content. Timperley (2009) alleged, "A skills-only focus does not develop the deep understandings teachers need if they are to change practices in ways that flexibly meet the complex demands of everyday teaching" (p. 11).

An attitude of challenge and trust is imperative to fostering professional growth in teachers. Changing practices and beliefs involves taking risks that can open teachers up to feelings of inadequacy. If teachers do not feel safe and do not trust those promoting change to support them as they encounter opportunities to change, they may become defensive and refuse

to try new practices. So while teachers need to feel challenged for optimal learning to take place, they also need validation that their honest efforts will be respected.

Summary

In summary, professional development programs are comprised of three components: structure, substance, and context. The elements of professional development that have been shown to make a difference between more and less effective professional development programs can be categorized by these components (Desimone, 2009). The components can form a heuristic for interrogating particular professional development designs to determine whether or not they attend to the elements that are most effective. Furthermore, they also provide professional developers with a set of components for planning for or analyzing professional development programs and practices.

Structure incorporates the effective elements of *coherence* or situating the instruction in teachers' current instructional focus, duration or attention to length of training, collaboration or bringing schools and grade levels to work together, and active learning or attending to opportunities for participants to engage actively with the material to be learned. Attention to coherence requires questioning the relationship between the professional development and the work life of the teachers participating. Sustained *duration* allows for intense and active participation of teachers and provides opportunities to reflect and make changes to beliefs and practices as new information is gained. *Collaboration* brings entire schools or grade levels together to work more efficiently to improve the learning climate and content. *Active learning* provides opportunities for the teachers involved in professional development to actively engage in concrete tasks to construct their own learning.

Substance incorporates content focus as well as a reconsideration of coherence. When professional developers consider whether and what the content focus of the professional development is, they are forced to determine the quality of the content, the balance between content orientation and mere strategy teaching, and the relevance of the content to the lives and practices of teachers. It appears to be most influential element of professional development when raising student achievement (Kennedy, 1998). A strong content focus allows professional developers to enhance teacher knowledge of content and more sophisticated curriculum development. The attention to content focus leads professional developers to reconsider coherence against the relationship between teachers' school lives and practices and the content of the professional development.

Context provides space for the essential elements of vision and autonomy. When professional developers consider the context of the professional development, they are asked to determine whether or not the content taught and the practices supported align with district or school goals. In addition, it asks professional developers to consider how much autonomy participants will have in terms of attendance or implementation. It reminds them that when teachers can have choice in participation, their learning is increased. Thus attending to questions of context help professional developers create an environment conducive to learning.

When planning professional development, it is wise to not only be aware of the effective elements of professional development but also the ineffective elements. There is evidence that attention to the components of professional development and the relevant elements attached to them can lead professional developer to avoid factors and practices that inhibit teachers willingness to take up the practices or learning advocated through the professional development. These factors and practices include the introduction of competing theories between mandated

and desired content and practices, under-qualified presenters, lack of creditable research, condescending attitude of presenter and missing connection between theory and practice.

The success of any educational reform relies heavily upon the classroom teachers. If students are to learn as well as perform well on high-stake achievement tests that states and districts have adopted, teachers are best positioned to provide education and assistance. Consequently, quality, continuous learning opportunities for teachers need to be thoughtfully planned and well implemented. Spellings, the former U.S. Secretary of Education, asserted that teachers are the key to student success, and that teachers should have the opportunity to engage in frequent professional development (United States Department of Education, 2007).

While there are research-based guidelines for designing quality professional development, research has not really explored exactly what experiences in a professional development actually influence teachers to change practices. In other words, when professional developers attend to and make certain that research-based elements are enacted, what specifically leads teachers to embrace the professional development and change or adjust their practice as teachers. This study explores the positive stories of those teachers who have made noticeable changes in their writing instruction practices while attending a professional development program that meets the criteria of a quality professional development in order to examine more clearly what experiences in such programs leads teachers to change.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to examine the positive stories of four teachers in one Utah school district who altered writing instruction in their classrooms while participating in a research-based, well-received district professional development program focused on writing. This chapter describes the theoretical framework for, context of, and procedures used in this study.

Theoretical Framework: Appreciative Inquiry

The theoretical framework that guides the methodology of this research is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This research strategy will be explained and justified.

Background. Appreciate inquiry is "the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives 'life' when the system is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms" (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 3). In describing theories of AI, Hammond (1996) states, "in every society, organization, or group, something works," and "whatever we focus on becomes our reality" (p. 20). Thus, through positive storytelling and specific questioning, participants discover what works so they can repeat and expand their successes. This is in direct contrast to the traditional problem solving method where the first step is to identify the problem so it can be fixed. This brings focus to the things that are not working in an organization. AI "is a habit of mind, heart, and imagination that searches for the success, the life-giving force, the incidence of joy" (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000, p. 12).

Methodology. The intent of this study was to analyze the positive experiences teachers had while participating in a successful professional development program. They connected these

experiences to changes they subsequently made in their writing instruction. The study is thus oriented toward looking for strengths so they can be replicated. Thus, AI as a research method is also a framework for change. There are five generic processes in AI. First, choose the positive as the focus of the inquiry. This involves choosing a topic for study. Because the AI theory posits that what we study becomes our reality, this is considered the most critical step. Second, inquire into stories of *life-giving force*-or what are the successful experiences when an organizations is at its best (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). Third, locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry. Embedded in this is determining what circumstances made the positive experiences possible. This allows for articulation and replication of those encouraging situations. The last two steps are beyond the scope of this research. They are fourth, create shared images for a preferred future, and fifth, find innovative ways to create that future. It is important to recognize that these definitions emphasize the essence of AI, but also to recognize the flexibility of these processes as used with different organizations.

According to AI, the positive process of change uses a 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design, and delivery. Each phase of the cycle has a specific purpose with a specific question to be answered. This research study was undertaken to explore teachers' accounts of which experiences in a research-based, well-received professional development led them to change. Since the purpose was to discover which aspects of professional development supported change, of the five generic processes of AI, this study focused on the first phase of discovery: appreciating what gives life (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

In AI, the collection of stories through interviews is the primary format for inquiry. The rationale behind this is that "stories have a depth and breadth that allow meaning to be conveyed

much more effectively than would a list of key points or other more analytical reports. Stories engage the imagination in ways that analytic discussions cannot" (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 77). Because stories are the goal of the research conducted, research takes the form of interviews. These interviews "are not soliciting facts and opinions so much as examples, stories, and metaphors. . . . The interviewer elicits the particular rather than the general. The purpose is to find those moments, events, stories of the best there is" (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000, p. 10). In this study, this meant seeking stories of positive professional development practices targeted on writing instruction from teachers who noticeably changed their writing instruction as a result. After stories have been collected through interviews, they are examined by the researcher or shared with a larger group to identify common themes of situations when performance was optimal. By collecting these data, the group discovers and can better articulate what circumstances prompted the successes.

Justification. This study was conducted in a small school district with four elementary schools serving a rural Utah community. In a continued effort to increase the quantity and quality of writing through the district, in 2008 to 2009 a yearlong professional development program was planned on the elementary level. The professional development consisted of an opening institute, school assemblies, and grade-level demonstrations in individual classrooms conducted by an outside consultant who was a respected expert in the area of writing instruction. Assistance from on-site literacy coaches and literacy nights at the individual schools where parents were invited to attend with their students were also part of the professional development. In June following the yearlong professional development, a follow-up survey was sent to all participants. Of the sixty surveys sent forty-two were returned for a seventy percent return rate. A high number of teachers claimed they liked the experience and had made changes in their

practices. While not directly related to the research question in this study, the results of this survey were used as a foundation. The positive results indicated that teachers generally felt the training was worthwhile, and that made the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry appropriate. For a specific questions and results of the survey see appendix A.

Context

In the district where this study took place, parents are actively involved in and aware of the schools' adequate yearly progress status or lack thereof. One area of concern was the consistently low writing scores on the annual state-mandated criterion reference tests and the lack of writing observed in the classrooms.

The district was supportive of literacy instruction. A full-time, in-school literacy coach for each elementary school was hired. A student publishing software was purchased and training on how to use the software was provided for teachers, parents, and students. Because the program is Internet based, students had access to the program both at school and home. Also, in place were two district literacy specialists who coordinated curriculum and supported literacy coaches.

Perhaps an explanation of why the professional development was well received can be attributed to the fact it was well designed, attending to all of the key elements of effective professional development except one—autonomy. (See Appendix B for a detailed description of the professional development.) However, because the professional development program was offered during regular school hours when teachers are required to be at school, the element of autonomy was ameliorated. Also, teachers had autonomy not in the choice of attendance but in the choice of whether or not to take up the practice. There was no retribution for teachers who chose not to implement the practices promoted in the professional development program.

Following is a summary of how the identified elements of effective professional development programs connect to this study.

Vision. The district where this study took place has a strong commitment to learning communities and shared curriculum goals. It has adopted a comprehensive framework for Balanced Literacy in the elementary grades (K-6). All teachers are expected to be familiar with and practice the accepted principles of a balanced literacy program. Consequently, improving writing instruction is acknowledged and articulated as a district aim. Lawless and Pellegrino (2007) enunciated that for quality professional development to occur, "there needs to be a clear articulation of the intended outcomes of professional development" (p. 580).

All elementary school teachers were brought together for an opening institute that was the initial session for this professional development program. Ideas, examples, and applications were shared so that all could gain a vision of what writing in the district might look like as all teachers applied and promoted practices in their individual classrooms. Timperley (2009) corroborates the power of this type of beginning. "Initial engagement can be promoted by identifying specific issues that teachers recognize as real and then offering a vision of how they might be solved" (p. 16).

Autonomy. Recognizing that autonomy has dual meanings (the choice of physically attending or the choice of taking up the promoted practice) it is possible for one to be enacted and not the other. In this study attendance of the professional development program sessions was not optional. Sessions were held during contract time and all teachers and students were expected to be in attendance. However, from the overwhelmingly positive results of the survey indicating that most teachers had made some change in their practice—76 percent—it is apparent that many teachers chose to implement at least some of the promoted practices.

Coherence. Fullan (1991) and Guskey (1986) are among researchers who emphasize that "the consistency of school, district, and state reforms and policies with what is taught in professional development is an important aspect of coherence" (p. 8). The professional development from this study was set directly within the teachers' context. Each of the four elementary schools in the district had on-site professional development, further differentiating the experience by separate grade-level instruction. All teachers in the district were expected to have a balanced literacy program in their classrooms, justifying the professional development focus of shared writing.

Duration. The duration of this professional development extended over one school year. This allowed teachers time to observe and listen to target instruction, then experiment in their own classrooms again and again. Smith and Gillespie (2007) defend this practice, agreeing that in order to develop expertise in both factual knowledge and procedural knowledge, teachers need to actually practice new skills and then reflect upon those practices before trying them again.

Content focus. The professional development from this study fostered teachers' knowledge of the writing process and writing workshop components by modeling, for teachers and for their students, the complete journey the presenter went through with a book he had written and published. As a result, the students and teachers could make visual connections to the writing process as it was implemented in their classes. Darling-Hammond (1999) expressed that "teachers who participated in sustained curriculum-based professional development reported changes in practice that, in turn, were associated with significantly higher student achievement scores on state assessments" (p. 313). After all, "Teachers are the first learners" (Carmichael, 1982, p. 59). (See appendix C for a description of the content presented.)

Active learning. Observation, not just explanation of the promoted content, was a significant design element of the professional development program studied in this research. Teachers and students watched role-plays of the presenter's experience of publishing his writing. Teachers observed as the presenter taught lessons in their classrooms. Students wrote stories as their teachers watched the presenter interact with children who were engaged in the writing process. Teachers additionally brought questions and samples of their students' work, allowing the presenter to give direction on how to further the development of a comprehensive balanced literacy program in their classrooms. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2003) commented, "Teachers need to be actively involved in professional development in practical tasks with opportunities to observe, assess and reflect on the new practices" (p. 2).

Collective collaboration. The professional development from this study incorporated this principle on three levels. First, all elementary schools from the district were involved in the same in-service. Second, entire school faculties were involved in the professional development. Third, grade-level teams were grouped for grade-specific demonstrations. This created a common language and purpose, combining forces to improve instruction across grade levels.

Procedures

This section will provide information about the study participants and the researcher. Data collection and data analysis will also be explained.

Participants. The participants of this study were four female teachers who attended the district writing professional development program. Selection was determined after interviews with facilitators, principals, and literacy coaches during which they identified a pool of 16 teachers whom they had observed making changes in their practices. Noted changes included more displays of student writing in the classrooms and halls, increased amounts of daily writing

instruction, more requests for assistance from literacy coaches in writing instruction, and positive comments from parents about quality and quantity of writing being done by their children. From this pool, the four teachers identified as having made the most observable changes were selected for this study. While four may not seem like a large sample, such a sample is consistent with AI protocol (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). All participants graduated from the same university and three of them had completed a yearlong internship during their preservice education.

Dru was a female first grade teacher with two years of teaching experience. Between the summer of her first and second year, she participated in a university-sponsored summer workshop focused on writing instruction. Sicily was a female fifth grade teacher with five years' experience. At the time of the district writing professional development, she was in the final year of a master's degree in instructional technology. Darci was a female third grade teacher with four years' experience who was in the process of completing a master's degree in math education. Ruby was a female second grade teacher with over 20 years' experience. She had also completed a master's degree in educational leadership and had served previously as a partnership facilitator.

Researcher. In my position as a Clinical Faculty Associate (CFA), I am hired by a major university to work in cooperation with a neighboring school district. My role is to bridge the gap between preservice teachers' university learning and their practicum teaching experiences in my district. My responsibilities are directly linked to the district and university interns who will be assigned to classrooms in that district. I teach education courses on campus and attend methods courses taught by others. I supervise, observe, mentor, and evaluate teacher candidates in university practicum, student teaching, and internship settings. Additionally, I am responsible to plan and implement monthly professional development sessions for all district elementary

teachers during their first year. Because of this responsibility, I was interested to explore the effects of the district writing professional development and determine if there were positive strategies I should incorporate in my monthly in-service. My experience as a CFA within the program allowed for a stronger relationship with the participants and a deeper understanding of the stories and commitment to comprehend what had happened as a result of the professional development. This also opened the possibility of researcher bias, which I attempted to balance by using additional researchers in cross-case analysis of the data.

Data collection. The AI protocols for the AI phase of discovery are as follows: (a) choose the positive, (b) inquire into stories, (c) locate themes, and (d) determine what circumstances made the positive experiences possible. Following these protocols, the first step to initiate this study was to choose a positive topic for study. As referenced previously, survey results indicated that a substantial majority of participants felt the professional development program offered by the district was positively received. Gathering positive stories of participating teachers experienced during the professional development was the next step in the discovery phase.

In order to increase the potential contribution of this study, the researcher strategically selected participants who indicated that they had enjoyed the professional development, had found it valuable, and had made changes to their classroom writing instruction. In addition their self-reporting of the experience coincided with observations by supervisors. This is a detectable difference from traditional protocols of AI theory where all participants of the professional development program would have been asked to share stories of success. However, as recognized by Desimone (2009), most research on quality professional development asks teachers to self-report on the effectiveness of that professional development. There has been

little corroboration to see if the teachers' perceptions can actually be backed up with evidence that the changes promoted in professional development programs have taken place in their personal practices.

Each of the selected teachers was contacted by the researcher to gain consent to interview them about their experience with the professional development program and what had happened in their classes pertaining to their writing instruction. They were notified that their colleagues had recommended them due to noticeable changes they had made in their writing instruction subsequent to the professional development. Interviews, lasting between forty-five and sixty minutes, were conducted in June of 2009 using questions based on the district survey with specific follow-up questions from the researcher aimed at answering the research question.

The researcher started by asking each teacher to describe encouraging activities that were occurring in her classroom, specifically in the area of writing instruction. Both clarifying and elaborating probes were asked (Creswell, 2008) to elicit more information. Questions were purposefully included to educe stories that were beneficial about the district writing professional development program. Each session of the professional development program was explored, including the opening institute, assemblies, classroom observations, publishing software, parents' nights, and the work of literacy coaches. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, allowing recurring access to the stories.

Data Analysis

The next step in the AI discovery phase was searching the interviews for stories with similar themes. As is consistent with qualitative data analysis, interviews were repeatedly read for commonalities among the stories (Creswell, 2008). AI protocols then require the common themes to be classified and labeled for further exploration. Initially two participants were

interviewed and their interviews transcribed. Stories from the transcriptions were identified and assigned a code word that accurately described the meaning of the story. In an effort to establish face validity and to check for clarity of definition, another researcher read the interviews and also assigned code words (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) to the selected stories. Codes were then examined and collapsed into broader themes in order to eliminate redundancy and overlap. The two researchers came to full agreement on the themes to be used. No predetermined codes were assigned prior to the study, and all codes emerged as data were examined. Next, an additional two participants were selected and interviewed. The same process was followed using the identified codes to categorize their stories, with a continual search for disconcerting variance in the codes. A member check was then conducted during which participants were contacted to see if the findings were accurate from their standpoint (Creswell, 2008). Finally, to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research, a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was conducted as codes and themes were revisited with the second researcher.

The last step in the discovery phase of AI invites the researcher to determine—in detail—what made the positive stories possible. To better facilitate this, a data reduction chart (see Appendix D) was used, which allowed the researcher to "sharpen, sort, focus, discard and organize data in such a way that conclusions may be generalized" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The themes the researcher identified were placed across the top of the chart and text segments were then placed in the column that best fit the descriptor. Several stories included multiple positive circumstances and therefore were placed in more than one category.

Results were then presented to a group of six researchers who were asked to critique the relationship between the codes and the evidence presented. These researchers agreed with the coherence and congruence of the codes and data.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine stories of four elementary teachers who altered the writing instruction in their classrooms after participating in a district-sponsored professional development. Five common themes emerged through the appreciative inquiry step of gathering and analyzing stories. These five themes were then categorized into two sections. The first represents instructional strategies used by the presenter: validation, modeling with children, and "doable" practices. The second represents teacher behaviors that were influences by the identified strategies: reanimation of previously learned content, and desire to learn more.

Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies are the approaches teachers use to engage students in learning. They can be either student-centered or teacher-centered. No one approach is considered best, rather the teacher must use his or her knowledge to fit the strategy to the content being taught. Following are three strategies used by the presenter that seemed to influence teachers' willingness to try the promoted practices.

Validation. Teachers in this study repeatedly felt validated by the professional development. As they participated in the experience, they realized they were already practicing many effective instruction strategies. Consequently, they were willing to do more and to improve present practices. In fact, validation was the first theme that emerged in the teachers' interviews. Dru reported the following:

> When [the presenter] came in my classroom and he noticed that I had a morning message on the board, he asked my class if we did journals. They were proud to say yes and show

> them off. He saw that I had my paper ready for a shared writing. He said, "You have the three elements—to, with and by. You are doing it." I went, "Oh, I don't have to do everything every day?" He said, "No." My attitude flipped almost 180 degrees. From then on I said, "I can do this. What I am doing is good. We are going to make it even better." It changed my attitude a lot. (transcription lines 164–170, June 2, 2009)

Later in the interview, Dru responded that she thought she would be more successful next year. She confirmed that validation was one reason why. Dru reported that the presenter's validation had made her feel more confident in her teaching, and that in turn made her want to improve. She valued the opinion of the presenter as an expert, so his positive comments motivated her to continue striving for improvement.

Sicily had a similar experience of feeling encouraged by validation, and then being motivated to strive for improvement:

> [The presenter] recognized what I was doing and said, "You are doing great. You are doing what you need to do to get students writing." That made me think, "Wow! Maybe I can do it. I can start with what I am doing and do better, just a little at a time." That was encouraging. (transcription lines 10–12, June 2, 2009)

Darci also found motivation in the presenter's positive feedback. In fact, she was motivated enough to become a leader among the teachers at her school:

> "You can make this happen. You just need to add this here and this there. Your kids are writing." That really influenced me. It made me ready to listen to what he had to say. So often I feel like when we are told of a new idea it is with the impression that, "Wow! Lady, you really are messing up." When that happens I turn a little rebellious. I don't

> even want to try. But this time, I was the first one on my team to actually get out there and try the new strategies. I soon became the one to give validation to others; within a few weeks I could help other teachers in our school. That felt really good. (transcription lines 175–182, June 12, 2009)

Ruby was more experienced and had actually been a presenter at other district professional development sessions, but she still was influenced by the validating words of the presenter:

> I am always amazed at the great things that are happening in other people's classrooms. I never think I quite measure up. When [the presenter] visited my room and saw the writing displays of my students, his recognition really excited me. He took the time to look at what was happening in my classroom and to comment on and ask about what I was doing. It gave me motivation to stretch my instruction and take some risks with more complex ideas. Just having someone who knows best practices acknowledge my practice was encouraging. (transcription lines 49–57, June 12, 2009)

These statements suggest that after the teachers received positive confirmation that they were implementing effective practices, they were open to continued learning. Validation was a key theme in these success stories of professional development.

Modeling with children. The second theme that was present in all interviews was that of modeling with children. As mentioned previously, the professional development presenter conducted shared writing in one classroom at each grade level in each school. Dru's comments about the effects of this follow:

> Then he came around to classes; he came into my classroom and did a shared writing lesson with my class. That was a trigger point for me to see him work with my own kids. Because, well, I had heard him explain how to do it a million times at the class that I went to. I went back to my classroom and I was doing it pretty well, but to see him actually implement it just—a light bulb just went off. I thought, "Oh, that's what he was talking about. I see. I understand now how I was supposed to do that." I could see the language he used to help the students in the writing process and how he helped them get the project done. After this I saw a really big change in my instruction. It was more focused. The time that I spent [on writing] had more purpose. It made more sense. I could see it was for a reason, not just because we have to write today. I felt like, "Okay, I have guidance now." (transcription lines 147–158, June 2, 2009)

Dru had a similar report to share. When asked what element of this writing professional development had influenced her to make changes in her writing instruction, Dru reported:

> The thing that helps me so much was to see it implemented: not see it with adults, not even with a video, but to see it right there with kids that I spend every day with. . . . To actually see it implemented with kids, using the words you use with kids, the body language you use with kids . . . then I can take it further and want to take it further and do it better. (transcription lines 315–320, June 2, 2009)

Sicily also focused on the experience of watching the presenter in an actual classroom working with students in the target age group, rather than simply watching teaching strategies implemented with adults.

> It was very helpful to watch him. I think this made the biggest difference for me. It was great when I went into [Mrs. Campbell's] class and watched him teach a shared writing lesson. Shared writing was something I hadn't done much of, but seeing the language he used while he worked with the students and the process he used to move the students through the writing was like, "Oh, that's what they meant. I can do that!" I also think watching him work with real kids was helpful. So often when I have been introduced to a new strategy I would think, "Well, this is great!" Then I would try it. It usually didn't go like it was supposed to. I think part of that was because maybe the people I learned it on were adults. They had background knowledge that made them know what was supposed to happen and how to do it. It was so helpful [to see the presenter] with a class of students. (transcription lines 12–21, June 2, 2009)

Darci mentioned that watching the presenter was helpful not only in general, but also in dealing with specific concerns. She appreciated seeing how the presenter helped students revise and how he directed students who had finished the assigned task early:

> It was good for me to see how he revised with students. I have always struggled to figure out how to help all the students revise their work so that it would make sense—so it really would improve their writing. Just seeing him, what he said to the kids when he walked around the room. How he made sure everybody was on task. Like at the last minute we had two kids who had finished their part. To keep them engaged he assigned them a dedication page. "Oh, you're doing a dedication page. This is what a dedication page is," [he said.] Those are real teaching situations—things that happen in a real classroom. It was so applicable for me as a teacher to see him do it. It was so helpful to

see it done with students, not adults like in other professional developments. (transcription lines 62–64, June 12, 2009)

For Ruby, the impact of modeling was also significant. In addition, she had the benefit of many years of experience that allowed her to create a classroom of children in her head as she watched the demonstration:

> I enjoyed seeing him work with students. I could put a name of a former student to each of the situations he encountered while teaching. I am a better learner when I watch someone modeling a new strategy. I like to see it, try it, see it again, talk about it, and try it again. I always feel a little timid when I go back to my classroom and try a new idea. I am not quite sure how to implement it. Seeing it done made the carryover much more fluid. (transcription lines 45–48, June 12, 2009)

Doable practices. The third element that seemed to make a difference to these four teachers was the idea of doable practices—learning something practical that could be used immediately without much additional preparation.

Darci was excited to report that since the demonstrations happened on a Wednesday she was able to recreate the lesson and teach it by Friday. She even said that she enjoyed the lesson so much she taught it repeatedly. Her thoughts on the doability of the presentation were as follows:

> His ideas were really so simple. I love it when I have a professional [development] moment. Especially if it is something that I can use when I go back to my class the next day. If it is something that I don't think is really realistic for my kids, I think it's kind of pointless to be there. This professional development really felt like it was for us because

> he went to every grade level and that made a huge difference because it applied to every grade level. That is how professional development should be. (transcription lines 127–132, June 12, 2009)

It is evident from Darci's comments that doability was a major factor in her attitude toward professional development and her likelihood of implementing new strategies. Sicily had a similar preference for ideas that could be implemented immediately. She reported as follows:

> He gave [me] some things that I could turn around and use right away. That was really helpful. I hate it when we get ideas from professional development that take forever to set up and prepare for. When I get an idea that I can turn around and use right away then I will try it. (transcription lines 134–138, June 2, 2009)

Sicily's comments continued:

> I'm really big on things where I can turn around and they are so practical and I can use them the next day or the next hour. What he modeled, I absolutely could have gone right back to my class and done. I think that was really helpful for me. [It was not just,] "Oh this is a good idea," but also, "this is a good idea that I can actually use now." (transcription lines 188–192, June 2, 2009)

Dru had a similar statement. She seemed to prefer implementing ideas from professional development in stages so that the transformation of her teaching practices would not feel overwhelming. Dru stated, "I decided to just implement little things one at a time, things that were doable and didn't require lots of preparation" (transcription lines 5–7, June 2, 2009). She continued in this line of thought, "One of the things that helped me so much was to be introduced

to techniques that I could see were doable and to know I could start with those. I then can take it further to make it better" (transcription lines 318–320, June 2, 2009).

Teacher Behavior

Changing teachers' instructional practices is a complex endeavor. In this study evidence was found that teachers behavior was influenced in two specific ways: reanimation of previously learned content and desire to learn more about writing instruction.

Reanimation of Content. Reanimation—or reappearance—of principles taught in university preservice classes or other professional development programs was a theme consistent with all four participants. Dru and Ruby gave specific evidence of this theme. Dru talked about the benefit of watching the literacy coach teaching a guided reading group. I asked for clarification: "Correct me if I am mistaken, but haven't you heard all this before?" She answered:

> I had heard all that before, I just needed to see it with children. It was huge. I had even seen it in my university class. We did it all the time, but we did it with adults. It's a whole different ballgame when you have a kid off to your side. You know you've got 15 minutes and you are working with a kid who can't read six words. I knew how to do it. I could write a great writing lesson and then I would teach it to my college class. But then when it came time to teach it to kids who don't know how to write, it was really hard. It was hard for me to figure out how to start from square one and go from there. (transcription lines 188–192, June 2, 2009)

I then clarified with, "So you felt like you had a foundation? Something you could connect to your prior learning?" Dru continued:

> Yes, I had all the right ideas from my university classes but didn't know how to make them work, to make them real. . . . I had taken the classes, but it's not until you get in the classroom with real students and you say, "Okay, that's what they were talking about. I see what [my instructors] were saying." But, I had to see it for myself for it to really make sense. (transcription lines 134–139, June 2, 2009)

Dru expressed a need to see the transfer of ideas learned in the university setting to the elementary classroom. Similarly, Ruby reported a need to repeat information that she had already learned, stating that while she had countless encounters writing with children, it continued to make more sense as time went on:

> Something else that is so beneficial is to see something again and again. I know that sometimes that gets boring, but I just need to peck and peck at it until I finally get it. I do connecting—lots of connecting. As I hear a new idea, I connect it to something similar that I have already learned or already done. Somehow when I do this it makes me better able to really embrace new practices. I guess even old teachers need to have schema for their learning. So things like this professional development helped in clarifying not necessarily new information, but information that needed solidifying for what I am trying to pull together in my classroom. I didn't quite get it all [in the university]. When I see it again, I'm able to [get it] a little more. (transcription lines 43–53, June 2, 2009)

Ruby's comments came not necessarily from her university training, but from her fifteen plus years of continued professional development. Her biggest "ah-hah moment" came when she could now see the reasons for what she was doing:

> I have been told to have my kids write every day. That was not as productive as I thought it should have been. I didn't have any products to really be proud of. But as I listened to the difference of writing to, with, and by, I realized I could write every day and have some purposeful learning just because of the ideas behind to, with, and by. The organization takes care of the various reasons we have children write. Now, when others ask "Why are you using journals?" or "Why do you spend so much time on shared writing?" I can answer and give the reasons why instead of just saying, "Well, I was just told it was a good idea." (transcription lines, 134–139, June 12, 2009)

Desire to Learn More. The final theme, desire to learn more, was perhaps the most encouraging theme in the stories of the participating teachers. All four teachers indicated that as a result of their experiences they would like to participate in additional professional development on writing instruction. They indicated that the practices of validation, modeling with children and doability increased their excitement and success as writing teachers. This then helped them remember previously learned content and motivated them to seek more instruction through working and collaborating with the professional developer or other teachers. They wanted to learn more so they could move writing instruction further. Darci indicated she needed and wanted to engage with others in problem solving in order to improve her practice after encountering a sluggish portion in a writing assignment:

> I was in the middle of helping my kids with a class book and I got stuck and they got stuck. It wasn't turning out like I wanted or like I saw the presenter do. I needed to go and talk with him or other teachers and see how they were getting over the humps—the parts that weren't working well. I would love to meet together as a team, with the

> presenter or with other teams of teachers and see how it is going in their classrooms and see if our classroom experiences could help each other. That is something that I don't do well. I don't take the time to think about what is happening and why—I just motor on to the next step. I think if I were to stop and think about, maybe even articulate with others what is going on-I would do better and hopefully that would transfer to my students' writing. (transcription lines 185-194, June 12, 2009)

Dru also wanted more guidance. She felt what she had gotten was good, but that she wanted it to go further, to help her while she was in the process of improving her writing instruction:

> The professional development this year was good but I felt like it could have gone farther. I felt like it felt really rushed cause it was like one or two days of like a lot of stuff all at one time. I would have liked to try it in my classroom and then to talk about what happened as I was teaching it. Then get ideas of where to go from where I am. Things don't go like clockwork. I find that I think I know where I am going with a lesson and then I get to a place and think what now? That is when I am ready to go back to the professional development and talk with others. To see how they got through hard parts. I think that talking about what you are doing right now in your classroom can be so beneficial. I can try it then not later when I have forgotten what I was suppose to do. It was terrific when the presenter came back to the school for the next part of the professional development—even if it wasn't in my classroom-I could see him in the hall and say "Hey this is what happened when I was doing writing, do you have any suggestions of how I could do better or where should I go next?" How wonderful would

> that be to know that I got to talk about how I was using the new practices in my classroom and how to do it better as I moved through the process. We talk about guiding our students' learning, now how about guiding our professional development learning. (transcription lines, 140-156, June 2, 2009)

It seems that because this teacher began trying out the instructional practices in her own classroom, she wanted to learn more. She wanted the professional development to last longer, to have ongoing conversations followed by trying things out and followed by more instruction. While Dru's commentary indicated that this was still anchored in having an external professional developer provide this information, Darci's indicated that she saw that given time and opportunity the teachers themselves might share their knowledge, experience and practice and thus, improve. From these teachers we learn that when validation, modeling with children and doability are added as additional features to professional development that adheres to the characteristics that research has already outlined as best practices, then teachers draw on past experiences in learning about practices and seeking more.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers have been labeled as a school's most valuable asset, and their effectiveness as educators can increase with participation in research-based professional development. Day (1999) expressed:

> [Teachers] stand at the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values. Teachers will only be able to fulfill their educational purposes if they are both well prepared for the profession and able to maintain and improve their contributions to it through career-long learning. (p. 2)

Thus, successful professional development is a vital tool for those who desire to improve the education of children in schools.

Past research literature on effective professional development programs is consistent in identifying common characteristics that make a difference in the quality of those programs. Additional themes that emerged in this study may contribute to the existing literature and provide information and support in designing quality professional development programs. After examining the five themes that emerged (i.e., validation, modeling with children, doability, reanimation of content, and desire to learn more), implications for future practice and further research in professional development will be discussed.

This was a study that explored the relationship between professional development and teacher change. It sought to understand how teachers characterized elements of a professional development program that influenced their decision to make changes in their writing instruction.

Using teachers' positive stories of success allows the development of a deeper understanding of what aspects of a research-based, well-received professional development program mattered to teachers—specifically, what motivated teachers to take a risk and to make changes in their own writing practices after participating in a program that included research-based best practices in implementing quality professional development.

Comparison Between Themes and Current Literature

Validation. Validation was one element research participants gave as influencing their willingness to make changes in their writing instruction after the professional development. In particular the presenter identified and praised successful practices already in place. The presenter's validation served to motivate teachers to further improve, because they felt more confident that they could be successful. Validation is supported by research done by Rooney (2010): "Teachers who are regarded as competent professionals and whose strengths are affirmed tend to get even better in the very areas in which they are affirmed" (p. 85). A mentor following up with a teacher who had participated in a professional development again confirmed this principle. "It was just like the manuals say. I commented almost exclusively on what she was doing that was working, and from that we were able to minimize the weaknesses in her lessons, by expanding what she was doing well" (Smith, 1993, p. 12).

Again, most teachers use this principle when working with children. They understand the need to praise the positive when helping children with their writing (Wilcox, 1996a). However, it may not be incorporated in teacher education, where supervisors are quick to see what is wrong and feel an urgency to fix the problem (Routman, 2005). Likewise, praise is not often seen in professional development, which is usually planned because of problems that have been

identified by school or district administration. Darci highlighted this idea in her interview; she spoke of her attitude of rebellion when she perceives that a supervisor is focusing on her shortcomings. Teachers often are mandated to attend professional development because of declining student achievement (Guskey, 1986). This can cause a hurdle that must be cleared before teachers willingly embrace the practices promoted in professional development.

Combs stated, "Perhaps the most important single cause of a person's success or failure educationally has to do with the question of what he believes about himself" (as cited in Pajares, 1992, p. 307). Change is risky for teachers. It requires them to step out of line from traditional methods (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996). Validation provides emotional safety and a secure environment where teachers are willing to take risks and try something new.

Modeling with children. All four participants in this study mentioned modeling with children as a major reason for trying the concepts introduced in the professional development program. They recognized how watching the presenter model a shared writing lesson with students enabled them to more confidently implement new ideas into their instruction. Massey (2004) followed three of her preservice teachers during their first three years of teaching after graduation. She reported that on numerous occasions, all three teachers asked her to teach for them while they watched. They all acknowledged the benefit of having her teach their students, adding explanations of why she was doing what she was doing. One participant replied, "It helps watching you. We never watched you actually teach kids" (p. 85). Modeling with children is not a common practice in professional development (Andrews, 2007). However in this research each participating teacher commented on the positive effect modeling with children had on changing her personal writing instruction.

Hunter (1982) stressed the importance of modeling as teachers present lessons to students. Oddly enough, while teacher educators may model preferred practices in teaching preservice teachers, they rarely if ever model those practices with public school students. It is even more rare for presenters of professional development sessions, even when presenting in the schools, to model promoted practices with children and to allow teachers to watch those practices in action.

The results of this study indicate that modeling, especially in the classroom setting with actual children, could lead to stronger professional development. It also indicates that instructors of university methods courses could implement modeling with children themselves and not rely solely on demonstration of preferred instructional practices with preservice teachers. "The thing that helps me so much was to see it implemented, not see it with adults, not even with a video, but to see it right there with kids that I spend every day with" (Sicily, June 2, 2009). Teacher education programs need to recognize the power of this pedagogy and include opportunities for preservice teachers to see master teachers modeling the course concepts. This practice is promoted by Lipton and Wellman (2005): "As novice teachers watch master teachers they internalize principles of teaching and learning and the images become mental resources for independently generating approaches and solutions to their own instructional practices" (p. 154).

Many elementary teachers indicate that the ideas and theory taught in schools of education are impractical. One teacher said, "They are ivory tower ideals that don't work in the real classrooms with real students" (A. Findlay, personal communication, March 16, 2010). Feiman-Nemser (2001) has written about the same attitude: "Cooperating teachers often feel the need to protect student teachers from 'impractical' ideas promoted by education professors who

are out of touch with classroom realities" (p. 1020). Perhaps if professors and others responsible for teacher preparation and professional development included modeling of research- and theory-based practices in classrooms with public school students, teachers would be less likely to label these practices as ivory tower and be more willing to try them, conceivably diminishing the gap between theory and practice and turn the ivory tower into a lighthouse

Doable practices. The next theme that emerged from the data is doability. Guskey (1986) argues, "The likelihood of [teachers] implementing a new innovation depends largely on their judgment of the magnitude of the change required for implementation" (p. 9). This refers to ideas teachers feel they can take back, easily implement, and see an increase in student achievement as a result of the new practices. Mann (1978) stated, "Though teachers are strongly committed to student learning and want to do all they can to improve learning outcomes, they generally oppose radical alterations to their present instructional procedures" (p. 99).

Doability also implies that teachers are instructed on how to implement changes and foremost that the changes in practice will lead to an increase in student productivity. All four of the participants in this study made reference to the ease with which they could take the instructional practices demonstrated in the professional development back to their classrooms and see immediate improvement in their students' writing. As noted by Richardson (1998) teachers are willing to and often do implement complex and time-consuming change when they are confident that the result will increase their students' learning. These results suggest the need for professional development to offer teachers practical ideas focused on content that can be efficiently implemented while directly improving students' achievement of desired learning outcomes.

Reanimation of content. The forth theme that this study addresses is labeled reanimation or reappearance of content. The idea behind this theme is that "teachers do not learn a new skill . . . in a vacuum; instead, individuals integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge" (Scott & Sutton, 2008, p. 166). Once again, all four participants acknowledged that they had been introduced to the concept of shared writing either in their teacher education program or in other professional development activities. They indicated that hearing and seeing it again helped them to put more pieces of the concept in place, making a more complete picture of what they had been trying to create in their classrooms. This mirrors effective teaching strategies used with children.

Schema development posits that students need to connect new learning to some form of prior experience before they can fully understand the new material. Teachers are encouraged to help students to access relevant prior knowledge or else to create foundational knowledge before introducing new topics (Holt-Reynolds, 1992). The participants from Massey's (2004) study commented on the advantage of being reminded of content and strategies they had been introduced to in teacher education courses. They reported that recalling prior learning in the context of their own classrooms helped make explicit connections to the content. Further validation of this finding states, "Activities that are linked to teachers' other experiences, aligned with other reform efforts . . . appear to support change in teaching practice" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 936). This has significant ramifications for teacher educators. Often, there are so many concepts to teach in university methods courses that only concise, quick explanations and examples are given. The findings of this study suggest that those introductions, even though brief, are still important to give preservice teachers a foundation they can later tap into and

strengthen when reacquainted with the concepts in their professional lives. This seems to be especially true when teachers develop the ability to appropriately reflect upon their practices.

Desire to learn more. Reflective thinking has long been thought of as crucial for teachers' professional growth. In fact Berliner (1986) suggested that unless teachers are taught how to explicitly examine their process of learning they will not experience optimum professional growth. Rather they will see professional development as the acquisition or refining of skills. This can reduce teachers to "mere technicians who carry out a cookbook approach of pat instructional strategies and . . . who evaluate their success by a checklist of tasks" (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005, p. 98). This type of reflection does not require teachers to challenge or change their current practices and beliefs. Parsons and Stephenson also acknowledge that reflection may not result in teachers changing their practice, but if no change takes place it is done thoughtfully and not just because it has always been done a certain way. Teachers are aware of their thinking and have made conscious decisions based on their individual learning and beliefs. When teachers' practices related directly to the professional development were validated, when they had opportunity to see someone model the practices being taught with children, when they saw that it was possible and would be helpful (doable) to take on new practices, then teachers were prompted to remember what they learned in earlier teaching and this led them to desire additional instruction. These teachers indicated that in learning more they were open to changing even more of their practice as teachers. Darci provides a clear articulation of how she could see how teachers could take responsibility for their learning in systematic ways:

> With all of my team and faculty having the same professional development there were many conversations, at the copy machine, in the lunchroom or even out on bus duty where we talked about our writing activities since the presenter had come. I think I would have been better at actually getting further with my students' writing if we had these conversations in a formal setting with the presenter or literacy coach their to guide our thinking. (transcription lines, 227-231, June 12, 2009)

While Dru's comments indicate she does not have as clear a sense as Darci that the teachers could provide this instruction for each other, she instead indicates that if professional development took up the practices uncovered she would like to experience this kind of professional development to guide her in developing practices beyond writing instruction. She further indicated that she would try harder to learn what was being taught. "I would love to have [the literacy coach] come in and do the same type of modeling in my classroom with other projects. If she would come and show what comes next I would have a stronger program. When I get it all at once I always forget some part of the process." (transcription lines, 225-228, June 2, 2009)

Implications

This study provides evidence that there are elements that when applied to quality professional development that adheres to the best practices identified (Desmoine, 2009; Garet, et al., 2001; Timperley, 2009), can encourage teachers to adopt new practices. This study identified validation, modeling with children, and doability as effective strategies for motivating teachers during professional development. These strategies increased teachers' implementation and understanding of new and previously learned content and actually left them with a desire for

further professional development on writing instruction. If these elements are included in the planning and execution of professional development programs, teachers will be able to reanimate previous teacher education content and seek to learn more about teaching. Thus, more teachers may adopt the promoted practices and improve their current instructional strategies. Even though they have not been articulated in the literature, these elements merit additional examination.

Certainly, the focus of teachers needs to be on improving student achievement. However, without quality learning opportunities for teachers to increase their knowledge and skills, the likelihood of consistent, continued student achievement decreases. The ideas identified in this study may provide helpful leverage points for enhancing the quality of professional development programs designed for teachers.

With the constant worry of decreasing education budgets, it is imperative that monies spent are producing the changes hoped for. Strategically designed professional development programs represent one way to meet this aim. Teacher efficacy might be improved if as professional development is planned, district, school, and professional development providers take the time to notice the good things that are happening that connect to the topics being focused upon. District curriculum specialists may find that time is well spent to not only preach reform but also to demonstrate the new practices in classrooms. As teachers see evidence that their students can employ the new practices and that those practices make a difference in achievement, teachers are willing to invest the time and effort to implement promoted ideas. Furthermore, past professional developments that have not been fully embraced can be used as schema to encourage new practices.

Direction for Future Research

Benefits of a deeper study of effective elements of professional development are far-reaching. To further the consequence of this study, thus moving forward the shaping of quality professional development, additional studies using the AI theory could be completed. Specifically, this study could be added upon by not only selecting teachers who had made noticeable changes in their writing instruction, but also by selecting teachers who had made noticeable changes and whose students had also made noticeable improvement in their writing skills. The analysis of their positive stories could confirm and enrich these findings.

Additional information pertaining to this study is also needed to generalize these findings. This study was small and needs to be conducted on a larger scale to see if the findings are consistent. Also, the focus of the study was on a professional development program for writing instruction. It would be profitable to replicate the research focusing on professional development programs in other content areas. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, are the changes teachers made sustainable? The four participants from this study need to be revisited. Are they still doing the shared writing? Has their writing instruction improved? Has it increased, decreased, or remained the same? The consistency of change must be anticipated and prepared for. Professional development must be a continued focus of study. If teachers are to meet the demands of educating students in a changing culture, they must be provided with the most up-to-date education about current practices.

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Appendix A

Details of the District Survey

This survey was developed and sent by district literacy personnel in the spring of 2009 to all 60 elementary teachers who participated in the professional development. Forty-two surveys were returned with a return rate of seventy percent. Participants responded to a 13-item survey that was sent and returned electronically. The survey allowed teachers to respond anonymously to encourage more truthful answers. The survey contained the following three open-ended questions:

1. What are you doing differently in your writing instruction since the presentation?
2. What in-service subject would you like the presenter to present the next time he is in the district?
3. How will the students score differently [on the CRT] and what has made the difference?

The most common answer to the first open-ended question was implementing shared and interactive writing. In fact, 37 percent of the responses specifically mentioned adding group writing to instruction. Teachers were also asked to indicate how often they were doing shared writing, and if this was more, the same, or less than the previous year. Sixty-two percent indicated they had increased the amount of shared writing from the previous year.

Additionally, teachers were asked to respond regularly, occasionally, or never to the following three questions:

1. How often were you doing shared or guided writing before the professional development? Thirty-four percent indicated they regularly engaged in guided and shared writing in their classroom. Thirty-nine percent said they occasionally did guided and shared writing with twenty-seven percent reporting never doing guided or shared writing

in their classroom.

2. How often are you doing shared or guided writing since the professional development? Ninety-one percent reported regularly engaging in shared or guided writing since the professional development with 7 percent participating in it occasionally. Only 2 percent claim to never provide opportunities for guided or shared writing experiences after attending the writing professional development sessions.
3. How often are you implementing the writing practices promoted in the professional development? Only two percent of the teachers indicated they had not made some kind of change in their writing instruction and never tried the promoted writing practices. Seventy-six percent reported regularly and twenty-two percent reported occasionally implementing the promoted writing practices from the professional development.

Finally, the following five yes or no questions were asked:

1. Was the presenter's presentation worthwhile? Ninety-six percent answered yes with only four percent negatively responding.

2. Were the demonstrations on guided writing effective? Ninety-three percent answered yes to this question and seven percent answered no.

3. Were the demonstrations on shared writing effective? Ninety-eight percent of the teachers indicated they found the classroom demonstrations beneficial.
4. Are you satisfied with your students' writing scores? Sixty percent of the teachers were satisfied with their students' writing scores.
5. Do you expect your students' writing scores to get better this year than they were last

in their classroom.

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3. Were the demonstrations on shared writing effective? Ninety-eight percent of the teachers indicated they found the classroom demonstrations beneficial.
4. Are you satisfied with your students' writing scores? Sixty percent of the teachers were satisfied with their students' writing scores.
5. Do you expect your students' writing scores to get better this year than they were last year? Ninety percent thought their students' scores would increase that year.

Percentages of Teachers Responding to Writing Professional Development Survey Items

	Likert Scale Items: (Frequency)		
	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
How often were you doing shared or guided writing before the professional development?	34	39	27
How often are you doing shared or guided writing since the professional development?	91	7	2
How often are you implementing the writing practices promoted in the professional development?	76	22	2
	Likert Scale Items: (Quantity)		
	More	Same	Less
How much writing are your students doing since the professional development?	62	31	7
	Dichotomous Questions		
	Yes	No	
Was the presenter's presentation worthwhile?	96	4	
Were the presenter's demonstrations on guided writing effective?	93	7	
Were the presenter's demonstrations on shared writing effective?	98	2	
Are you satisfied with your students' writing scores?	61	39	
Do you expect your students to get higher writing scores this year?	83	17	

In accordance with district goals and objectives, he reviewed the writing process and spoke of the importance of including writing in the curriculum, organizing writing time to include mini-lessons, student sharing, and work time during which students learned by writing alone or with the class. The six traits of quality writing, which the district had already adopted, were reviewed, and the presenter explained how they could be taught during mini-lessons, but also during shared and guided writing. He taught about ways to incorporate the six traits into classroom assessments.

District personnel were happy with the presentation, and feedback from the teachers both to administrators and to the presenter was positive. Many teachers expressed enthusiasm and a desire to do more writing in their classes.

On another day during that school year, he returned and modeled shared writing in four classrooms at each school. All teachers were able to observe at least one of the in-class demonstrations because substitutes were provided. Several months later, in October and November of 2008, the presenter returned and spent a day at each elementary school as a visiting author. During the day he spoke at an assembly about the writing process and promoted student publishing in both lower and upper grades. He answered questions raised by teachers and then visited various grade levels.

In lower grade classrooms, the professor completed an interactive writing using chart paper. He asked the children what they did in school, and with their help wrote responses on the chart. He then asked their assistance in revising the paragraph. Finally, he wrote a final draft on a different chart as children drew pictures that went along with what they had written. He hung both charts in the hall with the labels “Sloppy Copy” and “Glory Story.” The students’ pictures were posted around the story.

In third and fourth grades he asked students to give him words having to do with autumn, and he wrote their responses on the white board, creating a word bank. He then wrote a telephone number vertically on the board and explained that the class would now write a poem using the number of words prescribed by the phone number. Students volunteered sentences, which the professor wrote. He then revised and edited with the students, and he assigned each to do a final draft of one of the sentences on a paper and illustrate it. The presenter went from student to student, editing their sentences. As they finished, the sheets were picked up in order, a cover was added, and the class celebrated the publication of their picture book—begun and completed within about 30 to 40 minutes. The presenter encouraged teachers to help children learn to write by actually writing and not just talking about it.

In fifth grade the presenter introduced a story frame and then had students decide whom they wanted to write about, what that character wanted, the reason that character wanted this and why he could not have it, and then how he finally got it. The class voted on a variety of proposals and finally settled on a clear direction. The guest teacher then assigned each student to write part of the story, which was edited as children illustrated. The final story was then shared with the class.

Sixth graders did some expository writing. After reading a short book about Columbus, students answered questions beginning with who, what, where, when, why, and how. The presenter wrote their responses on the board, and the paragraph was revised using the six traits as a guide. Once the group edited it, individual sentences were assigned to students, who wrote a final draft and created illustrations. They were collected and organized into multiple copies of class picture books about Columbus.

The intent of the school visits was for teachers to see the presenter model the shared writing he spoke about at the beginning of the year. Teachers were encouraged to write morning messages and allow time for journals. They were also asked about the quality and quantity of their student conferences as they guided writing with individuals in small groups. However, the demonstrations were examples of shared writing.

Verbal feedback to the presenter from students and teachers was positive. Many expressed gratitude and renewed enthusiasm for writing.

The presenter visited two of the elementary schools later in the year as part of a literacy night for parents and families. At these events he encouraged reading and writing by students outside of school. He spoke of the online publishing resources that were available for all students on the Internet and encouraged participation in a writing contest by that web site.

That was the end of the professional development that had been planned by the district and the presenter. It had included a presentation to all faculty members, assemblies, and teaching demonstrations in each of the schools, as well as follow-up presentations to parents who attended one of two literacy nights.

Another element of the district professional development was the availability of literacy coaches in each school. These are full time certified teachers who are released from the classroom. Their primary job is to instruct, model, and provide support and in-service for teachers in literacy. After the visits from the university professor, each literacy coach made herself available to go into classes for follow-up instruction. This looked different from classroom to classroom and school to school. At the request of the teacher, some coaches visited the classrooms to observe the classroom teacher implementing new writing practices and to offer suggestions and support. Others presented lessons to the students while the classroom teacher

observed. Literacy coaches also attended the grade level professional learning communities, and answered questions, offered lesson ideas, and gave specific suggestions for individual teacher and student needs.

Appendix C

Review of Literature on Writing Instruction

Teaching Writing as a Process

The writing process is not the only way to teach writing. Educators have used other methods with success (Petraglia, 1999). However, in the district where this study was conducted, the expectation was that teachers would use the writing process.

Perhaps the earliest account of teaching writing requiring multiple drafts came in 1873 when Harvard University required a composition class for admission to the school (Wilcox, 1996b). The next documented mention of writing using multiple drafts was published in 1912 in various articles in *English Journal* (Nystrad, 2006). However, the 1960s and 1970s typically mark the beginning of a widespread focus on the process of writing. In 1968, Murray authored *A Writer Teaches Writing*. In this book he explained the process he went through when writing. This was different from the typical textbook "how to" instruction manuals often used in schools. Around the same time, educators were asking for help to strengthen inadequate practices that were being identified in English classrooms across the nation (Squire & Applebee, 1968). Emig conducted a landmark study in 1971 called *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders.* In this study she attempted to describe "an expedition into new territory, an investigation of the writing process" (p. v). She found several contradictions between what good students and established writers *actually did* and what language textbooks said they *ought to do* during the composition process. Emig noted that many teachers of writing were not effective because they did not write themselves; consequently, they "underconceptualize and oversimplify the process of composing*"* (p. 98*).* Emig also found that revision was not emphasized. She reported, "There is no time for major reformulation or reconceptualizations . . . no place where students can be

alone, which is requisite to all authors" (p. 99). Finally, she pointed out that "there is little evidence that persistent pointing out of specific errors in student themes leads to elimination of these errors, yet teachers expend much of their energy in this futile and unrewarding exercise" (p. 99). This study opened up new discourses, which "sought to describe how ordinary students write, not prescribe how they should write" (MacArthur et al., 2006, p. 12).

In the late 1980s the acceptance of the whole-language movement increased the amount of writing and the purpose of writing in elementary classrooms (Stahl, Pagnucco, & Suttles, 1996). In 1983, Graves' *Writing: Teachers and Students at Work* presented documented experiences of students engaged in the writing process. Graves asserted that when children learned to express themselves in writing by focusing on ideas rather than conventions, it provided them freedom to explore and experiment their way into written language. Routman (2005), who has encouraged teachers to teach from whole to parts for many years, explained further this experimentation. She advocated focusing on meaning first with skills integrated to make meaning clear. "When we start with a whole piece of writing for an intended reader we can then look at the parts and connect them back with the whole" (p. 15).

Though the focus on the writing process was far-reaching in the 1980s, early implementations of the writing process often resembled a checklist, a "linear progression of process components from prewriting through drafting and finally to revising" (Dahl & Farnan, 1998, p. 101). Consequently, this modeled an unrealistic concept of how writers actually write despite the advice of experts in the field. Murray (1985) wrote,

> The process is not linear, but recursive. The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage. . . . The process varies

> with the personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task. (p. 4)

Indeed, writing does not usually follow a linear checklist, but is rather a recursive activity, and it varies widely between writers. Truly, "writers need flexibility, and they need time to allow the sub-processes to cycle back on each other" (Dyson & Freedman, 1991, p. 760). This need for time to cycle back and forth among elements of the writing process was generally being overlooked in classroom writing instruction.

In the 1990s, process-oriented approaches were built on an interactive model of composition with teachers supporting the "development of planning and revising strategies through explicit instruction and interactive guidance" (MacArthur, Graham, Schwartz, & Schafer, 1995, p. 280). Three key features of process writing were emphasized: First, the communicative purpose of writing was stressed by establishing a community of writers in the classroom. Ideally, students participated in authentic, meaningful writing tasks and they shared their work with an audience. They helped each other develop meaning and voice in their writing. Second, instruction provided a flexible structure to support the recursive processes present in children's writing—planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Third, instruction provided for continuous mutually responsive interactions among teachers and students—teacher demonstrations, class discussions, and individualized instruction during one-on-one conferences. These elements were combined in what many educators came to know as the Writing Workshop.

The Writing Workshop

Calkins (1994) reflected that she once thought the teaching of creative writing required the planning of a creative lesson. It was ever changing, complex, and stimulating. Each day was a new experience, and this resulted in students waiting for direction from the teacher before their

thinking could begin. Because of the unpredictability of the classroom schedule, students were unable to develop their own writing rhythms and strategies. While trying to improve her students' writing, she made the following realization:

> The most creative environments in our society are predictable and consistent—the scholar's library, the researcher's laboratory, the artist's studio. Each of these environments is deliberately kept predictable and simple because the work at hand and the changing interactions around that work are so unpredictable and complex. (p.183)

Consequently, she adopted a workshop model in her writing instruction to provide a predictable environment in which students' creativity could flourish.

An essential aspect of the writing workshop is setting a predictable time for daily writing. Calkins (1994) maintained that when students knew that writing would take place regularly, they would naturally begin to think about and to plan their writing. This planning happened at various and unexpected times during the day: as the child was going to sleep or brushing teeth, during a walk or bike ride, or even at the dinner table. Since the children knew the "parameters within which they were working, they could be more strategic and deliberate writers" (p. 185).

Of equal importance to regularity in the writing workshop is allowing students to have plenty of time to write. Calkins (1994) claimed that if students are going to "live toward a piece of writing and let their ideas grow and gather momentum . . . they need the luxury of time" (p. 185). In typical school culture, fragmentation is the norm. It is what Graves (1983) referred to as a "cha-cha-cha" curriculum. The entire school day is fragmented into sections—ten minutes for spelling, six minutes for worksheets, fifteen minutes on class discussion, and twenty minutes for something else. Consequently, few chunks of time exist during which to write.

A structured daily writing workshop allows students to sustain their progress and interest in writing over time. "Those who write every day in a regular planned writing session produce about twice the volume and twice the number of ideas as writers who write when they feel like it" (Routman, 2005, p. 175). Additionally, more time spent in writing instruction leads to increased scores on writing assessments (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

As outlined by Calkins (1994), the structure of the writing workshop includes daily mini-lessons meant to inspire or instruct. The content can come from students' writings or from literacy standards. The teacher or a student can present the lessons, which generally last between five to ten minutes. Next is status of the class in which the teacher and students negotiate what will be happening during their upcoming independent and small group work time. Work time follows in which student's progress on their individual ongoing projects; they may be at any step in the writing process. Teachers use this time to conference and instruct individual students or small groups on their writing in unplanned and unscripted conversations called conferences.

Conferencing is vital as a teaching tool. It is meant to "give students a quiet and safe moment in which to receive help on a particular problem" (Spandel, 2001, p. 366). Conferencing does not need to be complicated. Teachers do not need to read everything a student writes and confer with every student daily. Clark (1987) suggested that teachers hold short conferences and "focus on where the writer is in the writing process and help with the most important obstacle they are facing" (p. 56). The purpose of the conference is not for the student to leave with a finished draft that is ready to publish, but to have guidance on where to go next (Spandel, 2001).

Peer conferring or response groups are also utilized in the writing workshop. Students meet in groups or pairs and report on the status of their writing. Members of the group offer

praise and suggestions to help classmates in their writing. Before returning to individual work, each student sets a goal that will be met by the next meeting. To prevent peer conferencing from becoming a social hour, students need to be explicitly taught skills and procedures for responding appropriately and with purpose during meetings. Checklists can help facilitate the efficiency of these conferences. They can be teacher or student created, and both students and teachers can use the lists to respond to the writing. The best checklists are short and have indicators that apply to narrative and expository text (Wilcox, 1996a).

Another component of the writing workshop is sharing. Sharing allows students to publically share their work and to get support from classmates and the teacher. This is potentially one of the most valuable and rewarding parts of the writing process; it is a chance to "play to an audience" (Spandel, 2001, p. 367). The format for sharing is formal, and often teachers provide a special author's chair where the child sits while sharing his or her work. Teachers may also choose to share examples of their own writing (Tompkins, 2010).

Finally, the workshop includes publication celebrations. While such celebrations may take many formats, the common purpose is to allow students to regularly publish and celebrate their finished writing. Publishing a piece of writing allows the students to view themselves as authors. Calkins (1994) suggested that one of the biggest motivations for students to continue and improve writing is "to have their words read aloud, and to see their text in print" (p. 265).

The writing workshop offers teachers an organized and structured way to help students advance as writers. "Teachers act as instructors and coaches, helping students develop the basic skills, strategies, and knowledge they need to progress as writers" (MacArthur, Graham, Schwartz, & Schafer, 1995, p. 280). Calkins (1994) summed up the writing workshop

experience by saying, “Children write about what is alive and real for them—and other writers in the room listen and extend and guide, laugh and cry and marvel” (p. 19).

While the writing workshop has been widely accepted, some research suggests it is not any more effective than other instructional practices. Pollington, Wilcox, and Morrison (2001) reported the writing workshop approach was no different than traditional approaches when looking at students’ self-perception. The biggest difference between the perceptions of students in their study was the teacher. This finding concurred with Smuin (1993): “The single most important ingredient of an exciting, creative, stimulating classroom is . . . the teacher” (p. 1).

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Appendix D

Example of Data Reduction Chart

Validation	Modeling with Children	Doability	Reanimation	Desire to Learn More	Comments
√					Sicily: First he recognized what I was doing and said, “You are doing great—what you need to be doing.” That made me think, "Wow, maybe I can do it better. I can start with what I am doing and do better, just one at a time." That was encouraging.
	√				Dru: And then he came around to classes; he came into my classroom and did a shared writing and example of a shared writing lesson with my class. That was a trigger point to see him work with my own kids. Because I had heard him explain how to do it a million times at the class that I went to and I went back to my classroom and I was doing it pretty well but to see him actually implement it just. A light bulb just went off—“Oh, that’s what he was talking about. I see. I understand now how I was supposed to do that.” I could see the language that he used to help the students in the writing process and how he helped them get the project done. After this I saw a really big change in my instruction.
	√				Darci: I know we talked about this in my preservice classes but I have a really hard time transferring the teaching to children. So watching someone do this with the students was good for me and actually for them because they heard someone else besides me.
	√		√		Dru: I knew how to do it; I could write a great writing lesson and then I would teach it to my college class. But then when it came time to teach it to kids who don’t know how to write, it was really hard. And it was hard for me to figure out how to start from square one and go from there. I had all the right ideas but didn’t know how to make them work. I mean 'cause I took the classes but it’s not until you get in there and you see and you say, “Okay, that’s what they were talking about. I see what he was saying when the kids do this and this and this.” I would have to see it for myself.
√		√			Sicily: Sometimes when you go to a PD I come back thinking I am not doing anything right. And it is too hard to fix that big of a problem. But when you get a pat on the back that says what you are doing is good it makes you want to make it better.
				√	Darci: With all of my team and faculty having the same professional development there were many conversations, at the copy machine, in the lunchroom or even out on bus duty where we talked about our writing activities since the presenter had come. I think I would have been better at actually getting further with my students’ writing if we had these conversations in a formal setting with the presenter or literacy coach there to guide our thinking