

JOURNEY OF STRUGGLING WRITERS: STUDENTS WITH LEARNING  
DISABILITIES MAKE PROGRESS IN A FOURTH GRADE INCLUSION MODEL  
CLASS

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2012

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To Robert, Anna, Jonathan, and Lady Curls

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dr. Danling Fu for seeing my potential and believing in me. Without her encouragement, none of this would have been possible. One evening in November, 2005 Dr. Fu announced to our doctoral seminar that I would probably do my research on children's writing. At that moment a light bulb turned on and my life took a new course. My ability to complete this project came from Dr. Fu's ongoing support, gentle nudges along the way, and wise advice to "take one day at a time." These words helped me to manage through the difficulties that are a natural part of learning and striving. I am grateful to Dr. Lamme for influencing how I think critically and consciously about literacy learning. The time and effort that Dr. Lamme put into editorial work on drafts of my chapters helped me to clarify my language and taught me about writing well. Thank you to Dr. Dawson for cutting edge classes on education and technology that helped me to see the future of classroom learning and excited my interest in 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies. I still hope to bring digital literacies into more classrooms as a way to support children's literacy learning. I thank Dr. Griffin for being my external member and reading and commenting on my writing with such thoroughness and care. I have a clearer understanding of students with disabilities and new insights into struggling learners because of the help she gave me.

Dr. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg's qualitative research methods classes and research group guided me in all phases of designing and conducting my research. I thank Dr. Mirka for her dedication to methods and the commitment and enthusiasm that she shows for her students' work. This ongoing support enabled me to flourish and navigate problems as they arose. I thank all the faculty and staff at the College of Education. Each person I encountered helped me in some way and I am grateful for their

dedication and the work they do for the School of Teaching and Learning. Thank you to all the students whom I met in classes and who walked the doc student journey with me. I thank Kathy Garland for sharing friendship, stories, conference presentations, and ideas with me. I thank Joanne LaFramenta for friendship, lunch, working through the methods, and all the stuff of life. Chu-Chuan Chiu, Shih-Fen Yeh, Qing Liu, Zhou Li, Aliya Zafar, all celebrated milestones with me as we travelled to the completion of our projects. I thank Cindy Naranjo for her understanding and frequent phone calls that gave me time to voice my process and my progress.

Mrs. Linn, Mrs. Lane, Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone opened the doors of their school, their classroom, and their lives to allow me to complete this project. I thank them for inviting me to be a part of their learning and for answering all of my questions about writing. These generous children and adults were pivotal to my dissertation research.

My parents, Hans and Anne-Marie Jensen, life-long learners, fostered qualities in me that I needed to commit to such a large project. Their own love of learning and experiencing the world with wonder and curiosity sets an example for me. I thank my brothers and sisters Katrina, Anne-Marie, Peter, Brian, and Eric for sharing the bonds of family and celebrating my success with me. My life is rich and wonderful due to the many experiences we enjoy together. Thank you to Bruce Idleman and Brian Jensen for practical words of wisdom on the committee and dissertation process. Their advice guided me. I thank Lauren, Mark, Lars, Erika, Alex, Lukas, Ilona, Amy, Isa, Soren, Kim, Madeline, and William for being a wonderful, colorful, and diverse extended family. They add richness, value, and love to my life.

I thank my dear friends Susan Cliett, Bob Glazer, Linda Harris, Janie Gravois, Melissa Hammerle, Thomas Jackson, Luke, Thea, Ann Kiyonaga, Jennifer Donsky, and Laura Auerbach for their wisdom and kindness. My experience of learning has been richer and more fulfilling because of them. It is a comfort to know they are there with kind and caring words.

I thank my beschert, Robert for his unwavering commitment to me. Grace was with me on December 12, 1992 when Robert asked to walk me home to my New York City apartment. Robert made this dissertation possible by encouraging me to reach my potential as a person and to continue to strive, to reflect, and to grow. I thank Robert for staying by my side through thick and thin. I thank the two bright lights in my life, my beautiful children, Anna and Jonathan. Anna and Jonathan have made my life the rich and exciting adventure that it is and have encouraged me with enthusiasm every step. I thank my dog Lady Curls, for calling me out to walks in nature to refresh my spirit.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge Gurumayi Chidvilasanda and all the teachers who have bestowed their blessings on me and helped to show me the way.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By Patricia Jacobs

May 2012

Chair: Danling Fu  
Major: Curriculum and Instruction

The ability to write well is more important today than ever to prepare students for success in school and later in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global workplace. When children are able to express their knowledge and their beliefs in writing they experience the joy and power of making an impact on the world and reaching to their full potential. Children with learning disabilities experience special challenges when faced with the complex task of writing. While many approaches have been studied to help students who struggle with writing, little attention has been given to the whole system of support that enables them to succeed. This descriptive study that took place in a fourth grade inclusion model class examined how students with learning disabilities make progress in writing. Data was collected for eight months from multiple sources and included observational field notes, semi-structured interviews of both the participants and the teacher, and writing samples. Analysis of the data was done by open coding, focused coding, selective coding, and a constant comparative method that led to a grounded theory.

The grounded theory consisted of three areas of findings in how the participants made progress as writers: the support of the inclusion class, quality grade level

instruction, and the students' writing behavior. The students were supported both socially and academically by the inclusion model class. They enjoyed full social inclusion and were valued for their friendship and their roles in the class. They received daily grade level instruction and participated in academics by sharing their ideas, working with others, and learning among their peers. The teacher used a writing process approach and was an effective writing teacher. She was flexible, gave the students specific feedback, and individualized instruction. Finally, the children learned writing behaviors such as planning, revising, and writing with detail. They asked for help to work through areas of difficulty and expended tremendous personal effort and stamina to meet the challenges they faced when writing. All three students showed significant progress as writers and learners in the inclusion model class.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

Writing can be used to inspire others, share good and bad news, create persuasive arguments, document our knowledge, and fulfill school assignments. Writing can help us in our personal search for meaning and it can help us with mundane tasks such as making grocery and to do lists. It plays an important role in our personal lives, the social and communal lives of our families, communities, countries, and civilizations. Uses for writing and ways we write are as varied and diverse as humans are. When we have command of the written word, we can use our writing to make an impact on the world, to take part as democratic citizens of our classrooms, work, and community cultures (Graves, 1994).

Humans naturally have the urge to express themselves, to make sense of their worlds and experiences, and to leave behind information and messages for others to come. Transferring this information from one person to the next becomes a critical means of learning and communicating knowledge and thus is tightly woven to the ability to synthesize information and become educated. When young people do not have the ability to transmit their ideas (what they think or believe in) or share what they have learned from the printed word, they may miss out on the opportunity to rise to their academic potential and fulfill their talents to their maximum (Gregorian, 2007). Young people who are not able to express their ideas and experiences in the written word “lose touch with the joy of inquiry, the sense of intellectual curiosity, and the inestimable satisfaction of acquiring wisdom that are the touchstones of humanity” (Gregorian, 2007, p.2).

Writing and literacy learning have become the focus of attention by teachers, researchers, and national organizations because of new demands and styles of literacy and communication (National Writing Project 2010; NCTE, 2009). Although the ability to write well is more important today than before, many students do not have adequate writing skills.

According to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the majority of U.S. students struggle with writing. On the 2007 writing test, 57 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students scored at a basic level and only 29 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students reached a level of proficiency. The test was not administered to fourth graders in 2007, however, in the year 2002, 25 percent of fourth grade students scored at a proficient level, while 59 percent scored at a basic level (The Nation's Report Card, 2002; 2007). In the current high-stakes testing environment, children who have writing difficulties are at a clear disadvantage (Gregg et al., 2007) because high stakes tests determine whether or not a student will progress to the next grade. Students who have experienced failure and see little chance for success may decide to give up when faced with pressured testing situations (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson 2002).

Research has indicated that students with learning disabilities (LD) who struggle with writing need to develop a combination of strategic behaviors such as choosing a topic, considering an audience, planning, using conventions of language, and revising to succeed as writers (Lin, Monroe, & Troia, 2007; Saddler & Graham, 2007). Direct strategy instruction in combination with a process approach to writing has been found to be effective to help students with learning disabilities make progress (Dannoff, Harris, & Graham, 1993; MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991). The process approach to



writing guides students through phases of brainstorming, writing multiple drafts, revising, editing, and sharing writing with a wider audience. This approach gives students the practice they need to work through the problems and complexities of writing by focusing on the concept of writing as a process rather than a one-draft product. Students may receive direct instruction and modeling in areas such as how to choose a topic, write a first draft, extend writing through adding details, use stylistic elements of language, revise, and publish writing (Calkins, 1994).

Students with learning disabilities who are placed in inclusion model classrooms have the opportunity to learn alongside their peers for most of the day and then be pulled out for extra services that they need (Marston, 1996; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). When students are in a regular education classroom they experience grade-level instruction while still receiving individual attention to help them progress as learners. Students make social and emotional connections to their peers and learn not only from their teacher, but from each other as well (King & Youngs, 2003; Pickard, 2008). They become a part of a community of literacy learners (Smith, 1988). Through these connections in the environment of an inclusion model class, children with LD have the chance to receive high quality writing instruction and to gain the skills and confidence they need to take risks and succeed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Writing is a complex process that is necessary for success in school, the workplace, and active participation in our democratic society (Graves, 2003; Zimmerman, Rodriguez, Rewey, & Heidemann, 2008). Writing is a foundational skill for learning, problem solving, and communication. The demands to communicate effectively in writing are greater today than ever (National Writing Project, 2010).

Inadequate writing skills can inhibit achievement in all academic areas as well as in future careers. When children struggle with writing and do not develop strong literacy skills, they become at risk for school failure (Zimmerman et al., 2008). In a high-stakes testing year such as the fourth grade, students who struggle with writing are particularly vulnerable to failure. If writing skills of students with LD have not been well-developed in the early school years, it can be difficult to prepare them adequately to succeed in a pressured testing environment, creating a tremendous amount of stress for both the student and the teacher. In order to succeed as writers, students need accurate identification of their LD, accommodations, and support systems to make achievement possible. Accommodations are important to make sure that a students' true ability is measured in assessment situations. (Thurlow et al., 2002).

While writing is difficult for all students, it poses special challenges for students with learning disabilities (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006; Saddler & Graham, 2007; Graham, Harris, & Larsen, 2001). Writing involves a range of skills from handwriting and transcription to higher order planning, revising, and composition skills (Gregg & Mather, 2002). Research has indicated that children with learning disabilities have problems with a wide range of issues such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation as well as word production, organization, revision, and monitoring the writing process (Berninger, 1998; Englert et al., 1988; Graham, Harris, & Larsen, 2001; Patel & Laud, 2009). Writers who have learning disabilities often lack the knowledge they need to produce quality writing and have trouble understanding the genre and purpose of their writing as well (Graham et al., 2001). Overall, they have fewer strategies for writing and behavioral and motivational factors that impede success (MacArthur, 2009).

Success in writing depends on exposure to and practice in writing a variety of genres for diverse purposes and audiences (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994). There is often an assumption that struggling writers need specialized instruction that is different from their peers (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2009) however, these students need high-quality instruction that is “frequent, intensive, explicit, and individualized” (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2009, p. 3). Students with LD often spend most of their time practicing isolated skills such as spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure, which can rob them of the practice they need writing in diverse genres. While learning the fundamentals of writing is essential to success, students who receive this narrow type of isolated instruction do not gain a broader picture of the complexities of writing and do not learn how to work through the writing process (Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, & MacArthur, 2003; Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1996).

In order to progress as writers all students need regular and extended writing practice (Graves, 1994), however one recent survey of writing in grades 4-6 (Gilbert & Graham, 2010) showed that students spent only 20-25 minutes a day on writing. The writing activities most often reported were short responses to questions or material read, completing worksheets, and note taking in content areas, but not writing as a component of the language arts curriculum. Students with LD often receive less writing instruction than their peers (Berninger et al., 1998) and by 7<sup>th</sup> grade have been found to be four years behind their peers (Smith & Luckasson, 1995). Lack of time, focus on isolated skills, high stakes testing environments, and other challenges when facing writing can have serious consequences for students with LD.

Students with LD are at high risk for dropping out of school and not continuing with a higher education, which may be a result of their problems with literacy skills that are foundational to success. Twenty-seven percent of students with LD do not complete high school according to the U.S. Department of Education (2006). Only 27% of those students who graduate go on to receive a post-secondary education at a two or four college compared to 68% of the typically performing population (Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000). This fact alone demands consideration of whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of students with LD and how we can better help them to succeed.

Limited research exists on how students with learning disabilities progress as writers and what factors contribute to their success over an extended period of time. Studies have focused on identifying difficulties students with learning disabilities face as writers and what strategies can help them to overcome these challenges (MacArthur, 2009). However, there is little known about the impact of the inclusion model, quality of writing instruction, and the pressure of a fourth grade testing year on how students with LD make progress in their writing.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how students with learning disabilities in a fourth grade inclusion model class made progress in their writing. It documented the type and quality of instructional practices that included preparing students for a state mandated writing test and other types of writing for a variety of purposes and audiences. Finally, this study assessed what factors impacted student writing progress the most. Through this study, educators and policymakers may be able to gain a fuller understanding of effective environmental, social, and instructional practices that help children who struggle with writing make progress and succeed.

**This study is guided by one main research question:** How do students with learning disabilities make progress as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model classroom?

### **Significance of the Study**

Current research in the area of students with learning disabilities and writing have focused on identifying problems students face such as handwriting and transcription, spelling, mechanics and stylistic usage, generating ideas, selecting topics, planning and organizing, and revising (Graham, Harris, & Larsen, 2001; MacArthur, 2009; Patel & Laud, 2009). These studies have helped educators and researchers understand the difficulties students with learning disabilities face when writing and they have also provided strategies for students to overcome struggles and regulate their writing process. Through this work, advances have been made in how to provide writing instruction for students with learning disabilities.

However, there are few studies to date that investigate how students who struggle with writing learn and make progress over time, and what types of systems and processes are most supportive to their learning. Contextual factors that impact achievement and learning such as the pressure to prepare students for a mandated state writing test, teacher instructional technique and quality, and the inclusion model class setting have not been studied as a whole system to learn about what factors either impede or support student writing growth. Gaining a broad picture of multiple factors is important to understand the complexity of student learning in the context of their social and educational environment. Research is needed to understand how students with learning disabilities make progress in writing before teachers can implement changes in their methods (Englert, 2009).

Until the Individual with Disabilities Act of 1997 (IDEA) students with learning disabilities learned separately from their peers in special education settings called self-contained classrooms. In this context students had little contact with their regular performing peers and instruction was focused on the unique needs of the individual students. After the IDEA was passed, classrooms and schools were transformed so that students with learning disabilities could spend most of their time in regular education classrooms and be pulled out for individual services to help them strengthen areas of weakness. In this least restrictive environment (LRE), advocates for the inclusive model of education argue that students receive the highest level of instruction at the same time that they make emotional and social connections to their peers. In this model students are in class for the same writing instruction that their peers receive but also receive additional language support when needed to develop their fluency. Students find the desire to strive to reach the same achievement as their peers and benefit from friendships and social interactions. They have a chance to learn language and literacy from other students and also to offer help to others, giving them a sense of importance and belonging. This study will contribute to an understanding of how students learn to write and make progress in an inclusion model classroom. Studies have focused on the impact of an inclusion model in areas of math, reading, and science (Ferretti, MacArthur, & Okolo, 2001; Palincsar, Magnusson, Collins, & Cutter, 2001; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998), but there are few studies that focus on writing.

Through the work of scholars such as Lucy Calkins (1994), Nancy Atwell (1987), and Donald Graves (1994), effective practices of teaching writing are well researched and documented and have been adopted in classrooms today. Writing has come to be

more widely accepted as a holistic process that takes place within a social context where students engage in a cognitive experience of language learning and acquisition (Dyson, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978) rather than as a set of isolated skills. Preparing students for the test while also teaching them how to write well can be a challenging situation. This project is significant because it answers the call to teachers, researchers, and policymakers to understand how to best instruct students who struggle with writing in a school year that has tremendous pressure to prepare students to perform well on a state test. This research fills a much-needed gap in how students with learning disabilities respond to the demands of the curriculum while situated among their peers.

In a high-stakes testing year, prompt-driven writing instruction dominates the curriculum until the test passes. Given the fact that schools receive funding based on testing scores, the importance of preparing students adequately for the test cannot be underestimated (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2009). This study documents how students make progress in writing despite the pressure of the fourth grade state writing test and the necessary prompt-driven instruction to prepare students. Much has been written about the negative aspects of test preparation, the controversy that surrounds mandated testing, and the often troublesome results (Graves, 2002; Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006; Kohn, 2000). This study looks at adaptations that were made to help the students succeed on the test and to learn the skills necessary to write well. This project also documents what happens after the test, to provide a larger picture of a writing curriculum over the extended period of eight months.

This qualitative research study fills a unique gap in examining the intersection of multiple factors that affect student learning. It provides a new window to understand students' struggles with writing and how they make progress in an inclusion model setting alongside their regular peers in the pressured environment of a fourth grade testing year. It aims to help teachers, researchers, and policymakers, understand the complexities of student performance within the class setting and the larger institutional demands. It could help teachers make adaptations to teaching to the test and it could also help those who create the test think more broadly about its impact on instruction. Hopefully, this study will ultimately help children to receive what they need to learn so that they can become productive citizens in a global world that requires that skills of advanced communication.



## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to explore how children with learning disabilities make progress as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model class. Approximately one million children ages 6 through 21 in the United States are identified as having learning disabilities (LD) and receive some kind of extra support in school (29th Annual Report to Congress, U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Learning disability is a general term that describes learning problems in areas such as reading, listening, speaking, writing and math. Learning disabilities are caused by how a person's brain processes information and affect each individual differently. Children with learning disabilities frequently have trouble with written expression. Their symptoms often include disorganization in writing, trouble getting ideas down, lack of purpose, inappropriate text structure, poor handwriting and spelling (Kenyon, 2003). Writing has been found to be difficult for all children, but poses special difficulties for students with learning disabilities. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics indicate that only 28% of 4th grade, 31% of 8th grade, and 24% of 12th grade students are proficient in writing (NAEP, 2002; 2007). These statistics include, but do not differentiate students with learning disabilities.

Writing is a skill that is necessary to succeed in school, community, and later in the workplace. In the school setting, students need a set of strategies to write well such as planning, organizing, and revising for various purposes such as persuasion, presenting information, and expressing ideas and opinions. Another vitally important function of writing is to deepen and integrate knowledge in content areas. Writing becomes a tool for learning, analyzing, and synthesizing subject matter in areas such as science and

social studies (Keys, 2000; Shanahan, 2004; Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Low achievement in writing is associated with high drop out rates (Carnevale, 2001; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). These data are forcing policy makers and educators to think about how to improve the curriculum in ways that promote high standards of reading and writing, equip students with skills to succeed with writing knowledge and writing to gain knowledge, help prepare students for standardized testing, and prepare them with skills they need to succeed in school and later in the 21st century workplace (NCTE, 2009). Educators must ask why students are not achieving higher results in writing and how the curriculum can be improved to meet the challenges of the times. For students with learning disabilities in particular, new ways of teaching writing must be examined to help them overcome their struggles.

This literature review first presents a constructivist theoretical lens of language and literacy learning. Next, research on best practices in the teaching of writing followed by special characteristics and needs of struggling writers are presented. Research on the inclusion model classroom is presented as a means to understand the context of learning. Finally, I will point to ways that my study extends the current body of research on how students with learning disabilities make progress in writing.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

Through my studies of language, literacy, and culture, I have built a philosophical foundation that has grounded my ideas in theory and practice. My ideas, and my passion for language and learning, have been influenced by theorists M.M. Bhaktin, Jerome Bruner, and Lev Vygotsky. Their writings have helped me to create a framework for my studies and develop insights and knowledge about how children learn language. Although I will not use a critical literacy approach to analyze my data, I will

discuss the work and writing of Paolo Freire. His beliefs helped me to understand the importance of engagement and action. He has deeply impacted my thinking.

Ethnographers Shirley Brice Heath and Anne Haas Dyson guided me in learning about the importance of a child's home culture and how teachers can facilitate language progress when they open the doors of our school curriculums to invite children to bring their whole selves in the class. Their studies are fascinating. Finally, scholar and theorist Frank Smith has shown me how children need to feel part of a 'club' in order to become successful readers and writers and how relentless testing in different areas leads children to feel disengaged and disheartened.

### **Language and Literacy Development Theory**

The theoretical framework that guides how children learn language and build knowledge about literacy is based on the works of Bhaktin, Bruner, and Vygotsky. These theorists believe that knowledge is based on interactions and language activities that occur between individuals and their social environments. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky, Bruner (1986) states,

(M)ost learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. (p. 127)

Bruner sees learning as a negotiated process of discovery, invention, and sharing that leads individuals to become not only part of a school culture, but eventually an adult member of society. Bruner believes that human intelligence grows through social interaction with others in a cultural setting. Education must provide room for reflection and metacognition that permits the mind to reach higher ground by "objectifying in language or image what one has thought" (p. 129) and reconsidering it. He believes

that knowledge is not static or waiting to be discovered, but that the construction of knowledge is an active process that requires participation and meaning-making. Bruner insists that for a child to master language he or she must become adept at “taking multiple perspectives” (p. 109). Bruner focuses on language as a series of culturally produced narratives that allow us to both understand ourselves and make sense of the world. This relationship between language, meaning-making, and culture is inseparable. Once an individual has the ability to take multiple perspectives, he has tools with which to construct reality and realize his own power.

Bruner’s work draws on the foundations laid by Vygotsky’s (1978) theories of the social construction of knowledge. Both Bruner and Vygotsky emphasize the importance of the specific context and the specific needs for which language development and construction arise. They both posit that individuals construct knowledge that is socially and culturally mediated. Learning takes place in social environments through the process of mediation, or help from others. Individuals and their social worlds therefore are interconnected and interdependent. In this model, the human mind is never seen as isolated, but always regarded in a broader context.

Vygotsky’s concept of mediation is important in the model of knowledge construction. Mediation refers to the role that significant people such as peers, teachers, and parents play in a learner’s life. Learning takes place through a social process when two or more people interact with different sets of knowledge and skills. The person with more knowledge seeks ways to help the other or others learn. The role of the one with more knowledge is the mediator. Mediation does not imply that knowledge is deposited into a passive learner or that one individual plays a dominant

role. It is always an interactive process with each participant making a contribution. Bruner (1986) points out that within a context such as a family both children and parents have an effect on each other, hence, there is an interactional process of mediation, rather than a passive-active one.

Mediation also refers to tools, or anything needed to attain a goal or find a solution to a problem. One of the most important tools is the command of language. Language enables an individual to think, to negotiate with and make an impact on the world, to be a member of a home, school, and cultural community, and to make meaning and explain the world to oneself and others. Language, therefore, shapes and expands the human mind and experience (Bruner, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978).

Language not only shapes the human mind, but is the product of the human mind. It is the means through which learning occurs, first on a social level, and then on an individual level (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky views language learning as first an external process where children engage in any language activity with another person, text, or even with themselves. Eventually, the language (or tools) is internalized and becomes one's own, thus leading the individual to higher levels of intelligence. For internalization to take place, a point of equilibrium must occur between self and teacher, parent and child, or any self and others when both participants are able to find a moment of recognition, new learning, or the mutual ability to see from a new perspective.

This process of mediation and internalization is best explained by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD. The word 'zone' refers to a child's ability when he/she is working on his/her own in an inquiry or problem-solving setting. The level at which a child can move to with the help of a teacher, parent, or more skilled peer goes

to a new level of development. This zone relates to a child's actual or current abilities and his potential abilities when working with assistance or scaffolding. The zone of proximal development refers to intellectual capacities that have not yet been developed or realized, but can be achieved through the process of learning with guidance. "What children can do with assistance today they will be able to do by themselves tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87).

Bhatkin (1986) like Bruner and Vygotsky theorized that dialogue was part of a chain of past, present, and future discourse. Through these links of text and oral language meaning and knowledge both can be conveyed and created. The outer expression of signs can only take on significance through the process of meaning making between social units of two people or more. Similar to both Bruner and Vygotsky, Bhaktin states that language must be studied as a system of interdependence, and that it can never be studied as an isolated or independent phenomenon. According to Bhaktin, cultural and social groups, professions, religions, etc. each has their own characteristic way of speaking. Dialects reflect and embody both values and shared experiences. The words individuals 'utter' come out of complex chains of historical discourse. Meaning always takes place within a theme or context. All three theorists believe that speakers and listeners participate in a social and cultural context where the negotiation of language and values is a process of interaction and interrelation.

### **The Social Constructs of Literacy Learning**

The previous section discussed how language is developed in social and historical contexts. This section points to how students learn to write in the social and cultural contexts of home and school.

Literacy learning from a social constructivist standpoint is rooted in the works of Lev Vygotsky and other scholars such as M.M. Bhaktin, Anne Haas Dyson, and Frank Smith. Writing and literacy learning, like all higher ordered thinking processes take place through a process of social mediation (Vygotsky, 1978). Through interactions with more skilled members of their communities, children learn the tools they need to become proficient writers. Children learn about written language through membership in social and cultural communities both at home and at school. While interacting with parents, peers, teachers, and others children learn the form of language as well as purposes for its uses. Thus through both formal and informal social interactions children learn the value of literacy activities.

Scholar Frank Smith (1988) refers to this community as a 'literacy club.' He says,

They (children) learn—usually without anyone being aware that they are learning—by participating in literate activities with people who know how and why to do these things. They join the literacy club. People write with them and read with them—lists, notes, letters, signs, directions, recipes—any of the routine “literacy events” of daily life in which the child can share. Sometimes the child seeks help, instruction even, to achieve something that meets the child’s specific purposes. (p. 9)

Through this complex social enterprise and network of social and cultural relationships children learn the events of literacy, the tools needed to perform them, and the importance they hold in personal, school, and community life. The special advantage of this membership is that children learn to see the range of language uses. Slowly, they get involved in “an ever-broadening range of literacy activities that make sense to them” (Smith, 1988, p. 10). Members in the literacy club learn that (a) written language is meaningful, (b) activities are useful and for a purpose, (c) learning is continual, (d)

learning is incidental, and (e) literacy learning is collaborative, (f) vicarious, and (g) no-risk. (Smith,1988).

Vygotsky suggests that writing should be taught as a “complex cultural activity,” illuminating the importance that social activity plays in how children learn to write. Children learn tools of the written world as they “assume varied social roles and engage in valued cultural activities” (Dyson, 1993, p. 80). Therefore, the process of literacy learning and social engagement are closely woven together.

From a social constructivist stance, therefore, learning to write is not an isolated activity where a child places words on a page. In order to become literate, children must learn the tools and signs of the system of writing as well as how and why the written language is used within a social and cultural system. As children learn the system of writing in a social context, they also learn the power of impacting their social world. Literary researchers, who operate from a social perspective, examine the writing process in the context of children’s relationships and social lives both at home and at school. Written language is seen as a social discourse, not a set of isolated skills or units. Bhaktin (1986) emphasizes the social nature of writing when he discusses the “dialogic” nature of both oral and written texts. Any written work of any kind forms a relationship with past, present, and future literacy events. An individual writer is always among other writers, never alone. According to Dyson (1993), these relationships with the author’s text and context include “(a) her or his power and status vis-à-vis others, (b) the purposes that have brought them together, (c) the topic of their discourse, and (d) the history of other conversations, other dialogues, they have had” (p. 10). Thus, each spoken and written word that is uttered is part of a complex web of human literacy



events. A word is spoken or written, and a response is given. This chain of events links us inextricably with each other through what has been said, what is said, and what will be said. Our voices resound with one another to make meaning (Bhaktin, 1986; Dyson, 1993).

### **Literacy Theorists**

Literacy theorists, like social constructivists, believe that literacy development is socially constructed. They believe that our language, our ideas, and our identities are formed in and influenced by the cultural and political institutions that we interact with in our social worlds. These institutions range from home, to school, to places of work. Learning the power of the written word and how to impact our world as democratic citizens can be empowering and liberating (Graves, 1994). The work of theorists and researchers such as Paolo Freire, Shirley Brice Heath, Anne Haas Dyson, and Frank Smith have deeply impacted my thinking about literacy learning. They have uncovered issues relating to literacy and have helped me to better understand ways to help children of all abilities from all cultures find ways to learn and express themselves through the written word.

Paolo Freire, (1970) activist, theorist, and critic believed in dialogue as the tool of man to create and transform his world. Without dialogue or problem-posing, the individual, or student loses all power and becomes victimized, a powerless member of society. In this condition, a student waits passively for a teacher to deposit information, like a bank, and the student withdraws it (and loses it) when needed for a test. This dehumanizing state, Friere believed could be changed through the will of the individual to reflect and take action, in addition to participating in a dialogue. Like Bruner (1986) Freire believed the ability to use language to develop higher cognitive process and

critical thinking enables the individual to see multiple perspectives and to become a dynamic member of society who can leave a lasting and positive impression on his culture and his world. Through the process of learning to read, write, and speak, people can take on new hope, new awareness of themselves, and “a new sense of dignity” (Freire, 1970, p. 33).

Humans live in a world in which they are constantly re-creating and transforming...they are conscious beings—exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others, people overcome the situations which limit them. (Freire, 1970, p. 99)

Freire’s belief in the will of the human to learn and make lasting changes is inspirational.

Dyson (1993) and Heath (1989) both conducted ethnographic research that helped me to understand the importance of social communities of learning and the complex nature of language development. When literacy cultures of home mismatch the literacy of school, barriers to learning can hamper engagement (Heath, 1989). Heath spent years studying how children learn language based on their home culture. She found that when children entered school and progressed through the years, it was helpful if teachers brought the language and discourse students were familiar with at home into the class and used that as a base for building and progressing in literacy learning. Dyson as well advocates for bringing the informal worlds of home into the class. At home children often spend time with favorite media characters and Dyson suggests that at least some of the time, children be allowed to incorporate these popular culture interests into their writing. She used the term “permeable” curriculum to define the act of allowing children to bring these informal cultures into the formal culture of

school. She believed that this would allow children to build upon knowledge they already had.

Leading researcher Frank Smith (1988) states, “If we want children to read and write, ethnography tells us we should be concerned with making reading and writing interesting to them. Then they’ll learn the relevant skills better than we could ever deliberately teach them. When students are forced to learn to read and write, then reading and writing become aversive to them” (Smith, 1988, p. 122). Smith believes in the power of what he calls “the literacy club” and argues that teachers must make sure that each child is allowed entry in this club. Teachers must demonstrate the pleasures and possibilities for reading and writing as well as uses for different texts in order to hook children and help them to become club members. Members need to learn the language or discourse of the club and feel part of the culture of literacy learning in the class.

### **Effective Writing Practices**

In *Standards for the English Language Arts*, the National Council of Teachers of English (1996) discusses what students need to become proficient and skilled writers. Teaching the conventions of writing, the syntax, and the style in the context of real and purposeful exercises has been proven to benefit the writing abilities of students. Research has convincingly shown that isolated writing exercises and the study of formal grammar do not increase the ability of students to improve their writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Several studies that specifically investigated the effects of how grammar instruction impacts the writing of low achievers found negative results (Anderson, 1997; Saddler & Graham, 2005). However, teaching grammar in the context of writing and as a means of improving the quality has been found to help students progress (Fearn &

Farnan, 2005). It is important to learn the systems of language and language conventions such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. This knowledge is essential for the editing process. Students develop mastery of conventions and form as they work on writing different texts, experiment with structure, and learn the process of revision.

When students are taught the tools of writing in context they are able to make connections between techniques and real uses for language patterns and grammar to real communication. As a result, they have the opportunity to learn the craft of writing through a hands-on approach and are more likely to incorporate and assimilate these skills into a working knowledge base. Through the process of revision, students learn that it is possible to rethink and refine any piece of writing. The ability to see any written text from a new perspective with the goal of improving it is essential to good writing. Revision suggests stepping back and seeing again through different eyes (NCTE, 1996).

The characteristics demonstrated by good writers are defined by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) as,

a sense of purpose, an ability to frame expectations of a task by drawing on prior writing experience, a knowledge of various approaches and how to apply them, the capacity to reflect on the writing process as it unfolds, and a willingness to change approaches in response to audience needs. (p. 25)

In order to accomplish these tasks students have benefited from the process approach to writing that relies on different activities such as brainstorming, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing for a variety of purposes and audiences. Teachers can model different steps of this approach or teach them through direct instruction in mini-lessons. Ideally, the writing process is not taught in a linear fashion, but helps students

to work recursively while solving problems with their writing, crafting their text, and tackling all the challenges that arise when writing a publishable piece. Students need to learn the techniques of the writing process according to purpose and audience.

Since the 1980s much work has been done in the area of writing research, methodology, and teaching practices. Nancy Atwell (1987), Lucy Calkins (1994), and Donald Graves (1983) forged new paths of literacy learning through their work developing the writing workshop and the process method of teaching writing. The workshop allows children to write about topics they are passionate about that hold personal meaning and relevance. While prompt and test-prep writing can be problematic and cause children to see no purpose for their writing (Smith, 1988), writing about topics that children are familiar with can be a satisfying experience that helps them to progress and grow as authors. Because they are writing about experiences that they have lived, words, images, and ideas may come to them more easily. For children who struggle with formatted writing, choosing their own topic can be particularly helpful. Through their writing, they may have a chance to learn about themselves and to understand the world around them (Harwayne, 2001).

(A)s human beings we write to communicate, plan, petition, remember, announce, list, imagine...but above all, we write to hold our lives in our hands and to make something of them. Writing allows us to turn the chaos into something beautiful, to frame selected moments, to uncover and celebrate the organizing patterns of our existence. (Calkins, 1994, p. 8)

Personal topic choice and multiple drafts are not the only conditions needed for children to succeed at writing. Children need time and practice to write, especially children who find writing difficult. These researchers stress the need for children to write regularly in blocks of scheduled time. Donald Graves (1994) recommends that

children write four out of five days a week for 35 to 40 minutes. Graves does not mean writing short responses to questions; he is referring to time solely devoted to writing a variety of genres such as persuasive, expository, writing to explore, and other types of extended writing that involve time, thought, and the need to work through problems such as structure, language use, audience, and purpose of the text.

Three days are not sufficient. There are too many gaps between the starting and stopping of writing for this schedule to be effective. Only students of exceptional ability, who can fill the gaps with their own initiative and thinking, can survive such poor learning conditions. (p. 104)

The work of writing workshop researchers demonstrates that writing can be authentic and elicit personal response from peers and teachers. Children have a chance to share their writing when it is published for a larger audience. They learn that there is a purpose and function to writing and they can connect their experiences of home with the work they do in school.

Research in the area of writing process and writing workshop has helped to clarify effective teaching methods and best classroom environments that support the development of fluency and skill in the craft of writing for all writers. Writing process methods have been found to benefit both typical and struggling students to develop writing proficiencies by allowing students to write about meaningful topics, work on multiple drafts, revise and edit, and share their writing through publication. This method helps children find meaning in their writing and learn the tools real authors use. They develop fluency by practicing writing regularly for real purposes and audiences. Struggling writers can benefit from the writing process and have been found to have special frustrations and special needs. In the following section, I will discuss research specific to struggling writers.

## **Struggling Writers: Characteristics and Needs of Children with Learning Disabilities**

Research that has been conducted on specific ways to help students with learning disabilities (LD) who struggle with writing, points to specific techniques that can help struggling writers. This section discusses special difficulties students with LD face when writing, and research that has been conducted to address these issues.

Writing is a complex process that requires knowledge of a topic, ability to retrieve words and organize information, awareness of audience, and monitoring and evaluating the process. Writing requires the integration of many cognitive and social processes and is difficult for all children, not just children with learning disabilities (MacArthur, 2009). Students with learning disabilities face even greater challenges than their peers. Students with learning disabilities struggle with generating topics, planning and organizing, editing, revising, monitoring the writing process, and transcribing words (Patel & Laud, 2007; Troia, 2006). They struggle with all aspects of writing including transcription, handwriting, and spelling. They have fewer strategies for writing, less knowledge about writing, and behavior and motivational factors that impede success (MacArthur, 2009).

It can be helpful to look to the traits of expert writers to learn about how they move through the composing process and master both the art and craft of writing. Flower and Hayes (1980, 1984) studied the personal traits of expert writers and their composing process and have clarified aspects of the composing process that all writers work through in order to generate words, ideas, and a story. Their foundational work helps clarify the composing process, what is needed to succeed, and why some children may struggle. Their model provides a framework for the components of writing. It includes

the social context in which children write, a writer's knowledge, planning and text production, and the ability to evaluate one's writing. Finally, they discuss the importance of a child's ability to regulate or monitor their own writing process (Flower & Hayes, 1984). Flower and Hayes describe the composing process as planning, sentence generation, goal-setting, translating, reviewing, evaluating, and monitoring. They state that individuals store visual images, patterns, perceptual experiences, and procedural knowledge in the form of perceptual and kinesthetic cues (1981, p. 373). During the writing process this information needs to be translated into words. They describe this process as being quite difficult because it is necessary to retrieve abstract images and turn them into words (1981, p. 373). The cognitive process that enables a child to plan, produce, and revise is often lacking in children with LD (Harris, Schmidt, & Graham, 1996). Scardamalia and Bereiter (1986) found that struggling writers retrieve information, but have little ability to narrow topic choice, consider the needs of audience, organize the text, or develop and evaluate goals.

Researchers in the area of writing development and problems faced by students with LD have focused on areas such as strategies, knowledge, and motivation (Graham & Harris, 2000; Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000; MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991). Graham (2006) found that strategic behaviors such as planning and revising are both skills crucial to success as a writer and that teaching struggling students how to plan and revise can have a positive impact on their writing. Students with LD have been found to have little ability to use strategic behaviors. Analysis of their writing indicates that they compose by drawing an idea from memory, writing it down, and using each preceding sentence to generate the next one (Graham & Harris, 1989). These students



have little ability to consider audience, take time to organize, or rethink ideas through a revision process. Interventions that help students with prewriting, text structure, and writing strategies have resulted in increased planning time, longer essays, and some improvements in quality (Troia & Graham, 2002; Troia, Graham, & Harris, 1999).

Significant evidence exists to support the hypothesis that handwriting and spelling play a function in how well children write (Graham, 2006). Children with LD often misspell words and forget how to use capitalization and punctuation (MacArthur & Graham, 1987). They have been found to produce letters at half the pace of their peers (Weintraub & Graham, 1998). When students have to take time to focus on mechanics and spelling it undermines the writing process by causing them to lose ideas and forget to plan. They lose content because they cannot write fast enough to keep up with their thoughts. The process of metacognitive and abstract thinking is reduced when children focus their attention on the physical task of handwriting and the mental task of using correct mechanics. MacArthur and Graham (1987) have shown that allowing children to dictate their stories instead of writing them produces better quality texts. Providing extra instruction in spelling and handwriting improves sentence construction (Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000; Graham, Harris, & Fink-Chorzempa, 2002).

Less skilled writers do not have discourse knowledge about writing, varying genres, literary devices, and the basic conventions of writing. In order to succeed as writers, students need cognitive knowledge that they draw on during the writing process. They need to know how to choose a topic, compose for specific audiences and purposes, and use stylistic and linguistic elements. When children lack these cognitive tools and the ability to regulate the process of writing they place emphasis on writing as

an exercise in neatness, spelling, and making sure your name is on the paper (Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur, 1993; Lin, Monroe, & Troia, 2007; Saddler & Graham, 2007). More skilled writers develop a knowledge base over time based on direct instruction, practice, and school experience (Graham, 2006).

Students need language to talk about writing with one another, and they also need explicit ways to work through the composing process such as using graphic organizers, rubrics, and other tools to guide them through revising and editing (Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000). Raphael and Englert's research in *Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing* (1990) has highlighted the need for teachers to make writing processes visible and accessible to students with learning disabilities. They suggest the use of talking out loud to demonstrate writing processes, modeling writing, analyzing texts, and providing students with 'think sheets' to provide concrete strategies to organize and manage their writing. The goal of these methods is to transfer knowledge from the teacher to the students so that they may become independent writers who have control of the writing process (Raphael & Englert, 1990; Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000).

Common sense tells us that motivation and engagement are key factors to learning. Children who have faced failure and criticism when writing tend to develop poor attitudes and resist the writing process. Overcoming these psychological obstacles has been found to be an important part of helping struggling writers to improve. Research has indicated the need to consider the emotional frustrations that struggling writers experience such as self-doubt, frustration, and helplessness (Graham & Harris, 1989). Other characteristics such as impulsive behavior, difficulty processing information and lack of motivation have a significant impact on children's ability to

become proficient and skilled writers (Graham & Harris, 2009). Students who view themselves as poor writers, who have had negative experiences with writing, or who have learning disabilities that make writing challenging, need instruction that addresses all of these issues. Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) found that children who were motivated and had a positive attitude toward writing produced qualitatively better pieces. They concluded that when children have a desire to write, their performance improves and that enhancing a child's motivation has a positive impact on outcome. The downside to developing a child's confidence is that they may feel overly capable and fail to put enough time, resources, and effort into their writing, believing their product to be polished and complete when in fact it needs more work and attention (Sawyer, Graham, & Harris, 1992).

Scholars who study effective techniques for helping children with learning disabilities improve their writing skills have found considerable evidence that a process approach to writing combined with direct strategy instruction has been beneficial (Danoff, Harris, & Graham, 1993; MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991). Harris and Graham believe in an integrated approach that takes into consideration effective classroom environments and teaching methodologies while understanding the need for flexibility and change based on the culture and needs of the school, teacher, and individual students. Karen Harris and Steve Graham developed an instructional approach known as self-regulated strategy development (SRSD). This approach was designed to address behavior and emotions as well as a child's cognitive needs. The SRSD was developed based on findings from researchers and educators who have studied the diverse needs and problems of struggling writers. The SRSD gives students

strategies to plan, write, revise, edit, and manage their writing process. Children learn how to set goals, implement and assess them (Harris & Graham, 1996). The major goals of SRSD are:

1. Assist students in developing knowledge about writing and powerful skills and strategies involved in the writing process, including planning, writing, revising, and editing.
2. Support students in the ongoing development of the abilities needed to monitor and manage their own writing.
3. Promote children's development of positive attitudes about writing and themselves as writers.

The SRSD instruction method provides students with direct instruction in writing strategies, knowledge and procedures for how to use them, the writing process, and appropriate behavior. In brief, the strategies are (a) activation of background knowledge, (b) discussion, (c) modeling, (d) memorizing, (e) support through teacher and peer response, and (f) independent performance.

In two different meta-analyses (Graham, 2006; Rogers & Graham, 2008) that quantitatively studied the effectiveness of SRSD, findings indicated that SRSD is most effective when all of the steps are applied, that goal setting and self-assessment qualitatively impacted the writing performance of students with LD, and that SRSD is very effective with elementary age children at risk for writing difficulties (Graham, 2006).

This section establishes the fact that many children with learning disabilities are poor writers and lack the complex skills required to compose a written piece and regulate the writing process. I have discussed the problems children with learning disabilities face when approaching writing. Many strategies have shown to be effective in helping these children to plan, execute, and monitor their writing process. Next, I

would like to highlight some of the research on writing process and struggling students and why this approach to writing may lead to success for struggling writers.

### **Writing Workshop for Struggling Writers**

Children with disabilities often develop a self-concept that they are poor writers based on experiences of failure and struggles with mechanics and the composing process. They focus on handwriting, spelling, and stylistic conventions rather than on telling a personally meaningful story. Writing process focuses on what a child knows first, and then the conventions of writing second. “This approach has led to major breakthroughs for young writers, particularly those who have learning problems” (Graves, 1985). Children who struggle with writing often work alone on isolated skills that cause them to feel disconnected from their stories and their peers. If they are continually tested on these skills and do not see any purpose for writing, they begin to lose interest and see writing as a futile and meaningless exercise (Smith, 1988). When children work in a social context and learn to develop their ideas in writing based on personal passions and interests they become engaged and excited learners. Students with learning disabilities have been found to make improvements in their writing in a writing workshop setting that provides authentic writing experiences where students chose a topic, learn skills of revision, and have consistent amounts of writing time (Clippard, 1998; James, Abbott, & Greenwood, 2001; Keefe, Davis, & Andrews-Beck, 1997). If they have a chance to be included in the writing workshop with their classmates they hear the struggles of their peers, take risks as writers, and find a purpose for their communication. This experience can help them make progress as authors (Fu & Shelton, 2007). When the focus of the instruction is teaching the writer

versus teaching writing, children can benefit and grow in confidence and skill (Fu & Shelton, 2007).

Writing assessments as well as visual tools have been shown to diagnose and assist the problems that students with LD face when writing. The six-trait writing assessment (Spandel, 1996) and graphic organizers were used (James et al., 2001) to diagnose writing problems, make evaluations, and monitor progress of students. Graphic organizers helped students to organize their ideas and were color coded to generate sentences to go more in depth about their topics (James et al., 2001). Researchers found that because students had chosen familiar topics that interested them, they were engaged writers, felt a sense of empowerment, and were able to generate ideas based on their prior knowledge (Clippard, 1998; James, Abbott, & Greenwood, 2001; Keefe, Davis, & Andrews-Beck, 1997). This helped them to generate content, organize their ideas, revise, and monitor their progress through the writing process. Students revealed that they were able to use meta-cognitive strategies to write independently based on teacher modeling and demonstrations (Keefe et al., 1997). The focus on whole text instead of certain skills and formats, allows students to feel a sense of self-efficacy and success (Clippard, 1998).

### **Inclusion Model Classroom**

An inclusion model classroom is an integrated educational system where services are provided for students with special needs rather than having them removed and educated away from the regular environment. Typical and special needs learners are all provided with equal educational opportunities in the same class including those with severe handicaps. This model provides special need students the opportunity to participate with their age level peers with materials and support systems that may be

necessary to help them learn and prepare to become productive members of society (National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion [NCERI], 1995).

The inclusion model came about as a result of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] that was passed in 1997 and mandated that students with disabilities be educated along with their typically performing peers except in the case that they must be removed from the class because their disability is severe and the curriculum can not be adapted to meet their needs. Previous to the IDEA in 1997 students with disabilities were either barred from public schools or educated away from the regular classroom in a special education setting.

The IDEA strongly favors that students with LD be educated with their peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for most of the day. Students are required to have access to the general education curriculum and to be provided with the opportunity to make progress within a regular classroom setting. Parents are involved as active participants on behalf of their children to help the teachers to formulate an individual education plan (IEP) for their child. As a result of these laws and policies, administrators, teachers, and general education classrooms have had to respond to the needs of diverse learners.

Controversy and dilemmas still surrounds the implementation of IDEA and what type of classroom setting best serves children with learning disabilities (McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson, & Rentz, 2004; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Norwich, 2002). Concerns over how the inclusion model is structured, responsiveness of the curriculum, efficacy of pull out programs, and social concerns for students have been researched and written about (Manset & Semmel, 1997; Marston, 1996; McLeskey, Hoppey,

Williamson, & Rentz, 2004; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Norwich, 2002; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Studies highlight advantages and disadvantages of different settings and whether students with LDs are best served academically in an inclusive setting or smaller resource room setting, or a combination of inclusive classroom with pull-out instruction as needed (Marston, 1996; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Special educators once believed that a small student-teacher ratio would most benefit students by providing more attention to their needs (Madden & Slavin, 1983), however, a review of the literature conducted by Manset and Semmel (1997) and a study conducted in the Minneapolis public schools that looked at a combination of a variety of services for students with LD, have shown that students with special needs may achieve better academic results when placed with their peers for the majority of the day and pulled out for special services that provide more intensive individual instruction (Martson, 1996). For students with mild learning disabilities spending most of the day in a regular classroom has been found to have academic as well as social benefits (Madden & Slavin, 1983). Studies conducted in the math, reading, science, and social studies curriculum on learning gains in an inclusion classroom for students with LD (Ferretti, MacArthur, & Okolo, 2001; Palincsar, Magnusson, Collins, & Cutter, 2001; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998) show that students with LD made learning gains although not always equal to their peers. These researchers investigated factors such as advanced teaching practices to address unique learning styles, inquiry style learning, and small versus large group work.

One of the fundamental difficulties with an inclusion model classroom is the necessity for the teaching to be transformed. While teachers voice dilemmas and



struggles, they also express the academic and social benefits for children (King, & Youngs, 2003; Pickard, 2008; Skilton-Sylvesterr & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009; Berry, 2006). A commitment to including all students, modified instructional strategies, the need to work with special education personnel, or opportunities to co-teach are important to be able to include and accommodate children with LD as well as receive support for their individual needs (King & Youngs, 2003; Pickard, 2008). Rix, Hall, Nind, Sheehy, and Wearmouth (2009) reviewed the literature on pedagogical practices that include children with special needs in regular classrooms and concluded that one of the most important factors was the teacher's need to feel membership among a community of practitioners because teaching in an inclusive setting can be quite complex. Membership provides teachers with the ability to work through complexities, reflect, and learn from other professionals. Effective teaching practices were identified and summarized in the literature review. Some of these practices are: scaffolding social and content knowledge for students, carefully planning group work, exploring pupil understanding through questioning, exploring links to prior knowledge, meaningful learning activities, and holistically approaching embedded subject knowledge (p. 92).

Social benefits and equitable treatment for students with disabilities have been recognized as the main issues and possible benefits of the inclusion model classroom (Berry, 2006; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009). Building communities among all members of a classroom takes the courage to examine and become aware of the language of exclusion versus inclusion and how it may impact the participants at large (McPhail & Freeman, 2005). An inclusion model classroom offers a context for rich learning when teachers become aware of the civil and social

right of students and possible prejudices and are able to examine them. By creating a learning environment that highlights individual strengths, rather than focusing on weaknesses, students gain confidence in their abilities (Berry, 2006; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009). Research has discussed social benefits of the inclusion class as students enjoying close friendships, a rich social network, and a lack of stigma attached to their disabilities. An inclusive classroom culture that gives students personal voice, sharing of responsibilities, behavioral accountability, positive relationships, school spirit, collective concern and appreciation for each unique child has been shown to be desirable and benefitted not only the students' social development, but their academic achievements as well (Carreiro King, 2003; Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004; Parsons, 2003, Berry & Englert, 2005). Pickard (2008) found that through the implementation of an inclusion model curriculum, regular education students benefitted by working with special needs learners as well by developing awareness of their needs, willingness to assist when needed, and a general change in attitude. Students developed "a deep empathy for their peers and the willingness to assist them in any of their academic responsibilities" (Pickard, 2008).

In this literature review I presented a theoretical framework of literacy learning, discussed best learning practices in writing, and shared the special characteristics of students with learning disabilities who struggle with writing. Next, I wrote about the inclusion model classroom. This literature review helps provide the foundation for what work has been done in the area of writing, writing and students with LD, and the inclusion model classroom. It also points to the need for more research to study how students with LD make progress writing in an inclusion model class.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand more about how children with learning disabilities who struggle with writing progress in a fourth grade inclusion model class. Qualitative methods help us to focus on individual students to learn more deeply about their unique problems and perspectives. Through this process we can come to understand specific reasons children struggle with writing, how they are accommodated, how their classroom environment impacts them, and how they learn. By looking at the complexities of these individual experiences, we can gain insight into how we may find solutions. The project took place in the natural setting of a fourth grade classroom in order to gain a full understanding of the children and their experiences as writers. By visiting the classroom for eight months of the school year, I was able to make observations of the children, talk to and interview them, learn about teaching methods and the writing curriculum, and gain a full picture of the complexities of how students make progress.

This chapter begins by defining the characteristics of qualitative research. My research question is included as well as the theoretical framework for the study. The methods for research are described including an explanation of the research design, the site, and participants. Data collection and data analysis methods are discussed at length. This chapter also includes a discussion of special considerations when researching young children. Questions of validity and trustworthiness are addressed and a subjectivity statement is included.

## **What Makes Research Qualitative?**

Qualitative research has its own unique set of characteristics that distinguish it from quantitative research. Taking time to identify qualitative research approaches can help us to understand what is required in the process of collecting and analyzing data as well as what assumptions are being made throughout the investigation. Although this is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion, it is meant to define and clarify what makes qualitative research unique and suitable for my research.

Qualitative research mainly takes place in natural settings to understand the lived experiences of the participants and how they interact with and make sense of the social world around them (Glesne, 2006; Hatch, 2002). In order to accomplish this, it is necessary for the researcher to spend a significant amount of time with their participants. Researchers intend to include multiple perspectives and voices, especially the perspective of the participants in order to gain access to their subjective realities and learn about how meaning is made. The voice of the participant helps to capture and share their personal experiences. The researcher makes an assumption that reality is socially constructed and therefore complex and variable (Glesne, 2006). As a result a qualitative researcher takes a reflexive approach to interpreting and analyzing empirical data (Hatch, 2002). Data collection is done by the researcher themselves and usually includes multiple sources such as field notes from observations, transcriptions from formal and informal interviews, and archival materials suited to the study such as print and photographic documents (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). The researcher looks for patterns and tries to make sense of the complexities and nuances in the data through a systematic process of analysis (Grbich, 2007). When relationships in the data are identified, the researcher moves from

specifics to broader analytic generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a theoretical story of data is constructed and analyzed, it may be necessary to alter or change the design. Data are not reduced, but are presented in a descriptive write-up that respects multiple perspectives that includes detail and actual data in order to convey an accurate interpretation (Glesne, 2006; Hatch, 2002). A qualitative researcher assumes personal involvement in the meaning making process based on the fact the researcher is part of the world she is studying. Learning how to reflect on the personal impact we make as a researcher is an important step of the process of defining our positions, our biases, and being clear about our role. One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is to approach our investigations with an open mind and a willingness to encounter the unexpected. At times, this can require stepping back, revisioning, and allowing for chaos before organization. This can be an exhilarating, creative, and nerve-wracking process.

Through qualitative investigation, researchers can learn more about how meaning is made in particular experiences and gain new insight and understanding of how participants “construct the world around them” (Glesne, 2006, p.4; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This qualitative study offers an opportunity to learn more about the complex process of writing and literacy learning for children with learning disabilities in a fourth grade inclusion model class. My research questions have guided an exploration of children’s engagement, actions, reactions, struggles, and growth as they engaged in the process of writing during their fourth grade year. A systematic analysis of data shed insight on how children understood, perceived, and constructed knowledge in a writing curriculum. This research will help contribute to the growing body of knowledge of how

children negotiate and learn to write for a variety of genre such as narrative and expository writing for tests, writing for digital stories, and other types of writing. A quantitative study would not be the appropriate methodological choice for this research because it could not fully capture the children's personal experiences, struggles, and successes during the process of writing during the school year. A quantitative study could measure literacy gains, but would not be able to shed light on the more complex human expressions and communications that give an in-depth view into the process children with learning disabilities go through when engaging with multiple styles of literacy learning.

### **Background Information**

This section will give the reader some background information about my original research design and how it evolved over the course of the school year based on the classroom site and availability of data. This project started out as an inquiry into how children with learning disabilities in a fourth grade inclusion model class write for digital stories. My interest in this research grew out of work I had done at a local school where children who struggled with writing flourished when writing and producing digital stories. These same children who struggled with formatted prompt writing for standardized tests discovered different abilities when faced with the possibility of writing a personal story and creating a digital publication. Through the original design of this research project, I sought to learn about how children who have learning disabilities might benefit from choosing their own topic for writing and using multiple literacies such as sound, visual, and other digital technologies to publish their stories.

Based on a Kaiser Family Foundation study, youth today spend as much as 7 hours and 38 minutes a day engaging in media such as listening to music, watching tv,

playing video games, and spending time on Facebook or MySpace (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Young people are expert users of technologies and literacies and engage regularly in communication, writing, and other literate practices. Yet these practices have not been recognized as valuable in school settings. There is scant research in the area of writing and digital literacies and I hoped to add to the knowledge base to better understand how writing and technology can be used in educationally sound ways in our schools. Thus, my project was formed and designed. My original research question was:

How does writing for digital stories impact students with learning disabilities in a fourth grade inclusion model class?

Mrs. Lane, who was the teacher participant in my study was a firm believer in the use of technology in her class and believed that it has educational and creative potential. She also had strong beliefs about children's writing and the power of the written word. She had agreed to teach writing for digital stories starting in November, 2010 when she was teaching narrative writing for the upcoming standardized test in March, 2011. I began to collect data in October, 2010 and spent several mornings a week in Mrs. Lane's class making observations about her instruction in expository and narrative prompt writing. During this time, I also chose three student participants based on their IEPs and similar challenges with writing, interviewed them, and collected their writing samples. The purpose was to gain an understanding of the inclusion model class, Mrs. Lane's instruction, and how my participants were doing with their writing.

Mrs. Lane was juggling many responsibilities during the 2010-2011 school year. Her writing instruction time needed to be devoted to preparing students for the Florida Writes test and she needed to stay focused on the preparation. Although she had

anticipated time for digital stories, by the end of December the children had not produced one digital story and I became concerned. Although the students were writing narratives, Mrs. Lane could find no time for them to produce the digital stories because the schedule was packed. In early January I sent Mrs. Lane an email and asked if she could let me know when she planned to teach writing for digital stories, what the lessons might look like, and how long the unit would last. I did not receive a response to the email. During my next visit to class, Mrs. Lane said she could not at this time respond to the email because she did not know when or if she would teach digital stories. She needed to focus all of her energy on the writing test and the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test that took place in April. In mid-January I approached Mrs. Lane again to discuss writing for digital stories. During this meeting, she agreed that the children could write and produce digital stories in the afternoons three times a week. There was a student teacher, Ms. France, in the class who was teaching under Mrs. Lane's guidance. She would be writing the lessons and teaching the unit. While I felt some relief that my data collection would not entirely fail, I felt concerned about Ms. France's lack of experience with writing instruction. I also wondered how the unit would work because the children rotate through centers in the afternoon.

At the beginning of February, the student teacher began the digital story unit. The children learned about and wrote tall tales for the next several weeks and then worked on digital production of their stories using the imovie program on laptop computers from a travelling cart. The unit was problematic from start to finish. There was some (but little) whole group writing instruction. Ms. France did use model texts, and had the students brainstorm and plan their stories, but after that, the process of writing the story



was very scattered. Some children were asked to revise, but others were not. While a group of children were writing in the class, others were working on reading and social studies assignments in the other centers. While centers can work well for some assignments, they weakened the focus of the writing. The three participants in my study finished their stories with minimal instruction and guidance. When individual children finished writing their stories, they were allowed to take a laptop and begin recording their stories using Garageband software. Ms. France did not know how to use the software, did not take the time to learn it, and relied on the skills of the children to figure it out. There was no whole group instruction on how to use any of the computer applications that the children needed to learn and as a result they spent a lot of time learning, practicing, and trying to figure out the technology with each other.

During this time of digital production, there was a tremendous amount of discussion among the children about their stories. They worked together on finding visuals, creating narration, and making changes in their writing. This was unique to this unit and only occurred later on during poetry to a much lesser extent. The excitement in the air was palpable when the laptops came out. Daily, one of my participants would run to get the first computer. The children were engaged intellectually, academically, and socially. Many technology glitches occurred partly because this was the first time Ms. France had taught anything like this and Mrs. Lane was not an imovie expert either. It was difficult to record because of background noise, the visuals became a problem, and Ms. France found the imovie program complicated. After three weeks of digital production, the unit came to a quick halt. Not one of my participants had completed their digital stories.

It was extremely disappointing that the data I collected from this unit was not enough to substantiate a dissertation and yet it told an important story about the class and schools today. The need to prepare students for the test is real and has come to dominate the curriculum, at least for the writing test. While pressure to succeed can help to propel us to high standards, the very narrow focus of the test has driven out many other important units that children could benefit from. 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are not only valuable but are necessary for success in today's global and fast paced world of technology. Researchers and national organizations alike have recognized the need for students to be multiply literate, but little time and resources are allocated to fulfill this goal. Teachers are not given time and resources to learn the technology to be able to teach it with skill. Most of it happens through trial and error and wasted classroom time in between. During the unit I had collected one writing sample and made observations that were rich and provocative which I will discuss later in my findings section.

After discussion with my advisor and committee members, I came to reconceptualize my project to study all of the writing that took place in the fourth grade year—writing for test preparation, writing tall tale digital stories, and writing poetry and how students with learning disabilities make progress. For researchers, policymakers, and educators there is an important message to ponder regarding the focus of our curriculum and the results. Students and teachers are missing out on time to develop unique and creative abilities and be prepared for a competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century global and technological workplace in favor of focusing on narrowly defined skills to pass tests.

### **Research Question**

Writing is an essential skill for success in school and later in the workplace. Writing well requires a specific set of knowledge and abilities in order to be able to work

through the composing process (Calkins, 1994; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graham, 2006; Rogers & Graham, 2008). Additionally, writing helps us to learn and synthesize information when we are acquiring new knowledge. Yet, we are facing a crisis in national writing proficiencies. Many students today do not even have the basic ability to write well by the time they reach high school age (NAEP, 2007). Students who struggle with writing are at an even higher risk for not being able to succeed (Zimmerman et al., 2008).

The purpose of this research was to learn about how children with learning disabilities who struggle with writing progress in a fourth grade inclusion model class. Through investigating this topic, I hope to add to the body of knowledge about ways to help students who have learning disabilities by learning more about the particular circumstances of their personal struggles, how they are accommodated, and how individual students are impacted by the context of an inclusion model class, the writing instruction, and learning among their peers. My research was guided by one main question:

How do students with learning disabilities make progress as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model class?

### **Philosophical Orientation**

When embarking on the journey of research, it is important to become clear about the philosophical underpinnings of the methods we chose to employ. This philosophy, or epistemology, is concerned with laying a foundation for possible kinds of knowledge (Crotty, 2003). It is concerned with what counts as valid knowledge of our social worlds and examines what type of knowledge research methods generate (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009). There are different ways that humans make meaning and

develop knowledge in the world and our epistemology helps us to explain and justify these beliefs. In this qualitative project on how students with learning disabilities make progress in a fourth grade inclusion model class the epistemological position is constructionism.

Constructionism promotes the view that there is no single truth waiting to be discovered, but truth and knowledge come out of our existence and experience with the world (Crotty, 2003, p. 8). A human must have a mind to make meaning and “Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 2003, p. 9). Unlike objectivism that posits that meaning and truth lie waiting to be discovered and that accurate research can bring us certain and objective knowledge, constructionism views, “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, (a)s contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). Subjectivism holds on to the idea that there is no meaning made together but that meaning is placed on an object by the subject. Constructionism diverges from both objectivism and subjectivism in its belief that meaning is constructed as humans engage with the world and make meaning through the interpretation of their experiences. It recognizes that cultural differences and cultural understandings are diverse and can cause different interpretations of the same phenomenon. Therefore, there is no one truth or interpretation. Social constructionism emphasizes the social nature of meaning making. All reality is created in community through interactions and social networks. Our culture

and the community we grow up in helps us to form the lens that we see through and how we create and make meaning (Crotty, 2003, p. 54). It becomes our way of seeing and being in the world. In *The Foundation of Social Research*, Crotty discusses constructionism as a process that requires innovativeness and an ability to imagine and be creative. One of the major tasks necessary to conduct research is re-visioning, or taking the risk of remaining open to what meaning may come from the data by allowing ourselves to interpret it using a resourceful set of tools and methods (p. 51). The methods used to collect and analyze data in this study focus on the students and their experiences and are guided by a constructivist theoretical framework to understand how they learn as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model class. The researcher conducted participant observations and multiple interviews over an eight month period to learn about the students' honest ideas and opinions in order to construct a grounded theory. Approximately 25 archival samples of each students' writing were collected to evaluate their progress as writers. Multiple perspectives of the students, researcher, and teacher were welcomed and represented through in-depth analysis. The constructivist framework provided a lens to understand how the children made meaning and constructed knowledge both individually and through social processes and interactions.

### **Locating a Research Site**

The purpose of this study was to learn about how children with learning disabilities progress as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model class. My aim was to find an upper grade classroom with a teacher who had a strong writing curriculum with writing instruction throughout the year. Finding a research site for my project took special consideration. State-mandated testing has strongly influenced the style of writing

instruction in the fourth grade especially, forcing many teachers to focus their curriculum on writing to take a test. Writing in many classrooms has become five paragraph, drill and skill, one draft approach. While it was impossible to avoid writing instruction that was geared toward test-taking, this project necessitated a teacher that was able to focus on effective writing practices in spite of the pressure to prepare students for the test. I sought out a teacher who had a strong background in writing instruction, believed that writing is a powerful tool, and was a skilled and competent writing instructor. It was important to be able to observe a variety of genres of writing instruction and to be able to collect writing samples throughout the year to determine how students grew as writers. In terms of student participants, it was important to have boys and girls with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that identified them as having learning disabilities and challenges with writing.

In the spring of 2010, I began to search for a research site based on prior projects I had completed at local elementary schools. Willingness and access were practical considerations in choosing both a research site and finding participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I informally contacted two principals that I knew from my doctoral program and through my work at their schools. We set up meetings to discuss the possibility of finding a classroom site for my research. Both principals were excited about my project and were confident that teachers would be interested and willing to allow my involvement in their class. However, one of the schools was moving toward a community model, making it less viable as a potential site. The other principal sent out an email and asked for teachers who might like to participate. The following day I received an email from a teacher I knew well and who had previously participated in two

projects I had done for my graduate classes. She expressed enthusiasm for my research and we communicated through email. We have a good working relationship and she immediately offered her classroom in the fall of 2010 for this research project.

### **Description of Setting**

During my graduate program, I was fortunate to conduct two studies on writing process and the writing curriculum at Millhopper Elementary through contact I made with the school principal, Mrs. Linn. Millhopper Elementary is situated in the small town of Greenville surrounded by farms, pastures, and the scenic beauty of unspoiled country. As of July 2008, the population of the town of Greenville was 4,247. The farming community has been particularly successful at producing watermelon and since 1946 the town has enjoyed an annual Watermelon Festival. Other sources of employment include construction, business, education, and medical work in Millhopper and the larger neighboring town of Gatorland. Millhopper Elementary is an 'A' school based on FCAT testing scores for the school year 2008-2009. The enrollment at Millhopper Elementary is approximately 500 students per year, with 49% of the students on free and reduced lunch. It is located about one mile from the main traffic light in town and is situated in a residential area. The school's mission is "Millhopper Elementary School and community working together will provide a child-centered learning environment that builds the foundation for successful life-long learners."

Millhopper Elementary is a Title 1 school because of the large number of students that receive free and reduced lunch. The school receives funds to purchase reading, math, and science materials to supplement before and after school tutoring and to provide extra training for staff through professional development. The instructional and

administrative staff plan, collect data, and conduct lesson studies in order to make improvements for students who are not performing at grade level.

Table 3-1. 2010-2011 Demographics for Millhopper Elementary

| Racial/Ethnic Group        | # of Male Students Enrolled | # of Female Students Enrolled | Total |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| White                      | 180                         | 158                           | 338   |
| Black                      | 50                          | 44                            | 87    |
| Hispanic                   | 33                          | 31                            | 33    |
| Other                      | 22                          | 19                            | 35    |
| Disabled                   | 57                          | 22                            | 83    |
| Economically Disadvantaged | 160                         | 139                           | 251   |
| TOTALS                     | 285                         | 252                           | 537   |

### **Mrs. Lane, Teacher**

Mrs. Lane was the teacher participant in my study. Although the focus of my study was the children and their progress as writers, Mrs. Lane had a tremendous impact on their learning. Mrs. Lane taught a fourth grade inclusion model class that was a combination of regular performing children and children who had special learning needs. Mrs. Lane had her Master of Arts degree and was certified in Special Education. She had been a classroom teacher for ten years and had taught first and fourth graders in regular classes and third and fifth grade self-contained varied exceptionalities. She believed in the power of writing as a communication tool and hoped to become a published author one day. Mrs. Lane taught writing every day from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and had the pressure of preparing her students for Florida Writes, a state-mandated test that was administered at the beginning of March, 2011.

Mrs. Lane was an avid writer and had written several drafts of children's books that she hoped to publish one day when she had time. During a previous school year, she participated in a school-wide teacher support group to explore how to improve



writing instruction. The group read and discussed *The Art of Teaching Writing* by Lucy Calkins (1994). Mrs. Lane blended prompt writing instruction with a process approach that promoted revision, extended time for writing, conferencing, and on occasion, sharing. She helped children work through the complexities of writing by sharing examples of good writing, encouraging children to plan using a graphic organizer, and providing individualized one on one instruction. Students were given a graphic organizer and a rubric, so that they knew the expectations. What interested me most about Mrs. Lane was her ability to focus on effective practices of teaching writing while still meeting the demands of the test. In spite of the extensive preparation she provided, she still had enthusiasm for teaching children the power of the written word.

### **Technology in Mrs. Lane's class**

Mrs. Lane had five computers in her class and regularly used technology to support her reading and writing instruction. She believed that technology was an important way to help children learn because it is an integral part of their lives (Personal communication, 2010). In a previous year, she had a class blog that students used to write entries about class and school events. Mrs. Lane used the Smartboard on a regular basis to show visuals for quick writes, to display and analyze examples of writing with the class and for other more mundane chores such as attendance. Her students learned how to access the web for research with the goal of expanding ideas and findings references. The students in her fourth grade class used the computers on a daily basis for taking Accelerated Reader tests and visiting a math website called IXL. January through May 2011 they used the travelling Macintosh cart to do a digital character analysis and create imovies, to write and produce tall tale digital stories, to learn about figurative language and create a Comic Life page. Mrs. Lane became

interested in technology and literacy learning to help language impaired children. In a previous year, she used digital stories to help children verbalize and design areas of personal improvement and learning goals. She saw it as a way to expand literacy for all children regardless of their abilities and believed that it had creative potential. Mrs. Lane said, "It simply lends itself to a wide variety of options at every child's level of performance" (Personal communication, 2010).

### **Student Participants**

During the month of October, 2010 I began to make observations in Mrs. Lane's fourth grade class during writing instruction to gain a sense of which children might have the qualifications and willingness to participate. It was imperative that the children be willing to talk and share their experiences with me because interviews were an important part of the data collection process. I also needed to collect samples of their writing during the year and wanted them to be comfortable with me making copies of their writing. Because I wanted to learn more about struggling writers and how they make progress, three children with mild learning disabilities were identified with the help of the principal and the teacher and became the focus of my research. These children had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for writing and two of the children received speech language services for two hours a week in order to strengthen their literacy and language skills. All three of them had difficulties with writing and their IEPs contained goals for improving their writing performance. Two boys and one girl were chosen for this study based on availability and their willingness to participate. Including both genders provided comprehensive data to include multiple experiences. Students expressed a willingness to participate in the study and were enthusiastic. Teacher consent, parent consent, and student consent were obtained for all participants. It

would have been optimal to have a large group of students to choose from for the study, but this option was not available. Because Millhopper Elementary is a full inclusion school, students with learning disabilities were in class for most of the day with their regular education peers. Planning for the diverse learning needs of all of the students in the class required tremendous time and effort on behalf of Mrs. Lane. Only several children with learning disabilities were placed in the various classes to make sure their needs were accommodated.

### **Julia**

Julia was an 11-year-old Hispanic girl who had long black hair. She was short in stature and older than her peers. Julia was very social and enjoyed friendships with several girls in her class. She chatted so much when sitting next to one friend that her desk had to be moved to another location. Julia had behavior problems and was in trouble several times during the year. On one occasion she jumped up to touch the fire exit sign and accidentally broke it. She was punished with a referral for this incident. She also had been reprimanded for making fun of another student in class who had special needs. In the spring, Julia had in-school detention for using inappropriate language. Julia was older than her peers in class and came to the school in first grade. She was interested in cheerleading, dancing, and fashion.

Julia lived with her grandparents and her half brother. She was removed from her home because her mother had a drug and alcohol problem. Counseling was recommended for Julia to help with disappointments about her relationship with her mother. Julia attended church on the weekends and was involved in their youth group. She attended camps at her church, sang in the youth choir, and took trips with the youth

group. Weekend activities always included participating in church related events for Julia and her family.

Julia had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for specific language disabilities (SLD) and language impairment. Julia had less ability to complete language-based activities in class than other students and had difficulty with social interactions because of decreased clarity of meaning. Her educational priority as stated in her IEP was to increase her language skills in order to be able to participate more fully in school and gain access to the curriculum. Julia received speech language therapy twice a week to help her develop more language fluency. Several goals for this therapy were to be able to retell a familiar story, to be able to answer higher order comprehension questions, to use a graphic organizer, and to be able to write a well-developed essay with a topic sentence, main ideas and details. Julia almost always asked for help with her writing. She had the ability to work alone for some time, but inevitably her hand would go up and she would wait for Mrs. Lane. This was a typical pattern for her writing behavior. After talking through her areas of trouble and getting direct and specific guidance from Mrs. Lane, she got back to the process of drafting, revising, and completing writing assignments. Julia worked very hard on her writing and made visible progress by January.

## **Ryan**

Ryan was a mischievous nine-year-old boy with a twinkle in his eyes. His smile spread across his face and dimpled his round cheeks. Ryan was a big boy and clearly enjoyed the social connections he made with friends in his class. Whenever he had the chance, he made body gestures or whispered across the class to have some fun with one of his buddies especially when his teacher was not looking. Ryan's enjoyment of

school was motivated by his prominent social position within his class and the status he held among his peers. He was a highly social child and was sometimes in trouble for inappropriate behavior. Frequently his seat was changed during class time so he was isolated and worked alone. Ryan's behavior could be influenced by others and had the potential to influence others. Ryan was respectful and polite to adults and had good manners. Ryan neglected working sometimes and had a hard time sticking to the task of learning.

Ryan lived in a house on a river and enjoyed fishing, boating, playing baseball, and his favorite sport was hunting. He played Xbox live in his free time at home and enjoyed sports as well. He did not have a cell phone so he could not text. He did have a MySpace page. He lived with his two parents and older sisters, who were 16 and 14 years old at the time of the study. They attended high school and middle school. His mother was an administrator at an elementary school in the county and was very involved with Ryan's academic progress as well as proactive when behavior problems arose.

Ryan was diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (SLD) that affected his work in reading, writing, and mathematics. His mother expressed concerns regarding his writing skills in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade year because of the Florida Writes test that was administered in the beginning of March, 2011. Ryan's IEP indicated that he had difficulties using a graphic organizer, omitting words, and not adding enough details when writing. In order to pass the Florida Writes Test he was encouraged to use the graphic organizer, work on elaborating and writing with more detail, proofread his writing for spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors, and take frequent breaks. He was

always given extra time when needed for writing assignments and encouraged to cut and paste to add more details in his writing.

## **Tyrone**

Tyrone was a 10-year-old African-American boy. He was small in size, very quiet in class, and interacted easefully with his peers. Tyrone was always smiling. Tyrone was a pleasant child to talk to and work with and was always happy to converse with me. He had a gentle manner, was very polite, and had determination to continue making progress in his writing. Whenever I asked him how his writing was going he would say, "Great." I was impressed that in spite of his struggles, he was able to maintain a good attitude and smile.

Tyrone lived with his mother, 9-year-old brother, and 16-year-old half brother. His father lived in Atlanta and he saw him several times a year. He was born in a neighboring town and began attending Millhopper Elementary in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. He had previously attended two other elementary schools and had been retained for one school year. In his free time Tyrone liked to play football and loved electronic games such as the Wii and Xbox. On Mondays when I asked him about his weekend, he would usually tell me he played Xbox with his brother. He also liked movies and told me he got ideas for writing from movies. His favorite movie was *Despicable Me*.

Tyrone had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for specific learning disabilities and language impairment. He had a decreased ability to participate in and complete any activities that involved reading and writing. When interviewing Tyrone, I found he responded to questions inappropriately indicating that he had not understood what I had asked him. We had to spend part of each interview clarifying the meaning of the questions I was asking. He struggled with language fluency and questions that involved

higher order comprehension. Tyrone’s mother had expressed concern that he ask for assistance when necessary and keep making progress in all areas of the curriculum. Tyrone was tutored by a speech language pathologist twice a week for language development and fluency. Goals and objectives for Tyrone were to use a graphic organizer to organize his ideas before writing and when applicable during reading assignments. He needed to practice fluency daily to be able to write an organized paragraph with a topic sentence, main idea, and details. When reading Tyrone needed to develop strategies to be able to locate information to answer higher order comprehension questions. He also needed to be able to retell a familiar story, including the use of proper vocabulary and language, story elements such as beginning, middle, and end, descriptive details, and correct use of grammar. Through constant practice Tyrone’s teachers and speech language pathologist hoped that Tyrone would gain more access to the curriculum. Tyrone’s primary educational need was to practice fluency skills on a daily basis, use graphic organizers for both reading and writing, have extended time to complete work and seek help from modeling texts. Tyrone most frequently worked with concentration and focus on his writing. He completed his work very slowly and always needed extended time to complete assignments. He often sat quietly just thinking. He did not often ask for help, although Mrs. Lane always conferenced with him to provide support and guidance on writing.

Table 3-2. Participant information

| Name   | Age | Gender | Race             | Grade | Learning Disability          | 4th grade FCAT Score |
|--------|-----|--------|------------------|-------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Julia  | 11  | Female | Hispanic         | 4     | Language Impaired            | 5                    |
| Ryan   | 10  | Male   | Caucasian        | 4     | Specific Learning Disability | 4                    |
| Tyrone | 11  | Male   | African American | 4     | Language Impaired            | 3                    |

## **Special Considerations: Researching Young People**

While preparing to conduct research with young people, special considerations came to my focus based on previous research experiences, classroom discussions and reading in my graduate classes. I was provoked to think carefully about my interest in children's experiences with writing, my role in the class as a researcher, and how I might personally impact the study. As a teacher, educator, student, parent, and researcher I sought to do my work with honesty and personal consideration of both the institution and lives with whom I was about to interact. I do believe that with higher education comes a position of both power and responsibility and I strove to use this privilege cautiously.

Children are in the unique position of lacking both political and social power. They are seen as part of larger social units, such as families and schools where decisions are made for them by adults (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005). As a result, their voices may be interpreted and objectified by the adults who care for and educate them. Conducting research on youth can inadvertently reinforce issues of objectification and positions of power, thus, it is crucial to be aware of these potential problems (Heath et al., 2009). In educational settings particularly, program and policy decisions often take place without input from the students (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Youth researchers seek to give importance to the thoughts and perspectives of children in order to learn more how they experience and make sense of the world. Taking young people seriously can lead to new insights and a greater understanding of the social and educational needs of children. Allowing them a place in the research process and valuing their input can be a source of rich data that promotes an attitude of conducting research *with* rather than *on* children (Heath et al., 2009). Special considerations when



conducting qualitative youth research include differences in age and gender, position and role as a researcher, level of comfort in an interview setting, and overall sensitivity to the developmental stages of the children and their needs (Heath et al., 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). When designing and implementing my data collection process, I took into account these issues and made modifications in my research design as necessary. Explanations of these considerations will follow in each section.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection is a critical part of the research process. Through our data we gain new insights and reach new horizons of knowledge. Because data collection for this study involved observing and participating with children in their natural classroom setting, it was first necessary to receive permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Florida. My approval was confirmed on September 3, 2010 (Appendix A) and a proposal was submitted to the school district's office of research immediately thereafter. My research was approved by the county office on September 27, 2010. Mrs. Linn, the principal, was contacted by the school district's office of research to receive permission from her as well. At this point I was able to send out a formal recruitment email explaining my project and gaining permission from Mrs. Lane to use her classroom for my dissertation research. Parental consent forms were sent home to explain my research interests and to gain informed consent to work with three or four children with learning disabilities who have challenges with writing. By mid-October all permissions were obtained and the data collection process began.

Starting from mid-October, 2010 until May, 2011, I visited Mrs. Lane's classroom three or four mornings a week from 7:45 a.m. until 9:15 a.m. depending on writing instruction. During tall tale digital stories, I made observations in the afternoons from

12:30 p.m. until 1:30 p.m. I spent a total of 182 hours making observations. The first several weeks, I established a relationship with the students and the teacher to become familiar with teaching and learning styles and classroom practices.

Table 3-3. Observation log

| Month                     | Hours                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| October / 8 days          | 16 hours                    |
| November/ 17 days         | 34 hours                    |
| December/10 days          | 20 hours                    |
| January/17 days           | 34 hours                    |
| February/14 days          | 28 hours                    |
| March/16 days             | 32 hours                    |
| April/7 days              | 9.5 hours                   |
| May/6 days                | 9.5 hours                   |
| Total observation days/93 | Total observation hours/182 |

Data were collected in the natural setting of a fourth grade classroom from archival materials, participant observations, and interviews to help me to understand how students who have learning disabilities make progress during a fourth grade year. Each type of data collection is described in detail in the following sections. Archival material that consisted of samples of the students' writing, constituted primary data that were analyzed to evaluate how students wrote during their fourth grade year. Participant observations were primary data that allowed me to observe and take part in the daily writing routines and activities of the students (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Other sources of data in this study were individual and focus group interviews with the children, conversations with the teacher, a formal interview with the teacher, email communication, and curriculum material. More details about the data collection process are described in detail in the following sections.

## **Archival Materials**

Archival materials were primary data that were collected to further understand the participants and how they constructed writing knowledge throughout the school year. The main source of documents collected were the written pieces that the students produced. Approximately 25 samples of writing were collected per child. These samples reflected the writing curriculum during the year and included prompt driven expository and narrative essays to prepare for the standardized test, tall tale digital stories, and poetry. How students made progress in writing was understood through analysis of these writing samples.

## **Observations**

Observations were a necessary and important part of my data collection. I decided to use observations to provide a written account of the children and their experiences writing from October 2010 until May 2011. These observations were a critical step in learning about the students in their context of school, understanding the writing instruction and the process the children went through when writing. Through these observations, I hoped to identify “patterns of thought and behavior” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 100) to gain insight into how students made progress during writing for test preparation, tall tale digital stories, and poetry. I studied events, both daily and special, the acts that took place within those events, and the gestures that the participants made (Glesne, 2006). In my observations, I tried to be as conscious and as objective as possible to look for what paradoxes and problems stood out, so that I could ponder them and look more deeply into the interactions. Observing the children in their natural setting of an inclusive classroom allowed me a window into their world of school, and afforded me the opportunity to get to know and experience them firsthand. These

observations were critical in understanding the type and quality of instruction and how that impacted the writing the children were producing. They provided a means to study the inclusion model class and how students with learning disabilities and regular education students learned writing together.

Varying degrees of participation and involvement are possible during research. During this study my role was an observer with very little participation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Mrs. Lane had specific teaching methods and asked me not to help students. She had a goal in mind, knew each child's writing, and wanted to make sure they did not get incorrect advice. On occasion, I did sit individually with participants to help them through writing difficulties, but for the most part they relied on the help of their teacher. With the test atmosphere in mind, the children worked on their writing alone and were not allowed to talk to each other. Some days Mrs. Lane refused to help them as well, as she said this would prepare them to succeed. When the students were writing tall tales for digital stories and poetry, the classroom was much more relaxed and the students were often allowed to work together. During these times, I was able to participate more and have discussions with the children.

As often as possible, I did sit with or close to one child individually to make in-depth observations. If I sensed the child was uncomfortable, I sat in the back of the class. At other times, I walked around stopping to visit with each of the participants individually. During these observations, I watched each child's unique process with writing. I observed ability to develop a topic, planning, stamina, willingness to share writing with others, risk taking, willingness to revise, and seeking help from peers rather than the teacher or other adult (D. Fu, personal communication, 2010). I noted amount

of and type of help that the children asked for from Mrs. Lane or other adults in the room, questions they asked, other kinds of participation, and communication they had with peers. As much as possible, I listened to conversations among the students and between the students and Mrs. Lane. I noted classroom activities, body language of the children, mood and tone of behavior, and any and all other information that helped me learn about their experiences writing. I noted time when the children walked around the class, went to the bathroom, or got off task.

Mrs. Lane's teaching was also an important part of the observations. I wrote detailed notes about her teaching technique in order to capture her methods as a writing teacher. I recorded the focus of Mrs. Lane's lesson, noted how long she spoke, and tried as much as possible to capture language she used when teaching. When she demonstrated writing methods on the white board, I made note of this. I observed how she interacted with and spoke to the children while she was teaching. Finally, I watched and noted how the children reacted to her lessons and indicated in my notes when they participated.

Table 3-3 provides a listing of the hours of observations completed during this research study. Field notes were taken by hand in a designated notebook and transcribed into expanded protocol form immediately after observations when I returned to my office. As much as possible, I used time while at the school to take notes that were fresh and current with no delay. I wanted to capture as much data as possible and to have my descriptions be as accurate as well. When I did not have time for extensive writing while I was in the classroom, I jotted down words and phrases that later jogged my memory when I sat to write extended field notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

Following my observations I often wrote a small section of personal comments. In this section, I wrote about my own impressions, feelings, evaluations, questions, and wonderings. This exploratory writing helped me to focus on what I wanted to learn and how I could explore the complexities of writing and writing progress more deeply. The questions I raised often guided my observations and helped me to later develop interview questions. This allowed me to take into account what I might have missed and what I might need to investigate further. It helped me to crystallize questions and experiences and to follow hunches during my investigation.

My observations for writing took place two, three, or four mornings a week on a weekly basis from 7:45 a.m. until 9:15 a.m. during expository and narrative writing and poetry writing. During this portion of my data collection, observations lasted for one hour and thirty minutes for approximately ten minutes before and after writing instruction. My research took place in a fourth grade class, the year the Florida Writes Test is administered in early March. Writing instruction was a priority and occurred first thing every morning. When I arrived, the class was usually settling in. Children were reading, attendance was being taken, pets were being fed, and lunch money was being collected. I sat at a table near the door in the back of the class and faced the front of the room. During this time, I was most often asked not to give advice to the children about the writing and frequently not to talk to them. Because the children were preparing for a state test, Mrs. Lane felt it was important for them to get used to working on their own. She had a very specific method of instruction and did not want me interfering with the form she was teaching.

Observations for the tall tale digital stories took place from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. during center time. During this unit, I worked more closely with the students and was able to talk to them and ask them questions on a daily basis about their experiences and progress as writers in a digital format. It was difficult to take field notes in class during this time, so I immediately typed them out when I left the class and was in my office. I observed writing process during this unit and was especially focused on how the writing was different from test preparation writing. I watched writing behavior as mentioned previously and was very interested in the digital production. During this time I noted the children’s social behavior and contacts, how they used knowledge gained during the beginning months of the year to transition to a new genre, how they interacted with the technology, and how the print texts and technology worked together. I noted behavior, such as running to get a computer or shouting, “Yeah,” when told it was time for tall tale digital stories.

Table 3-4. Chronological list of observations

| Month/Dates   | Writing Topic             | Time       |
|---------------|---------------------------|------------|
| October 2010  | Expository Writing        | 15 hours   |
| November 2010 | Expository Writing        | 16 hours   |
| December 2010 | Narrative Writing         | 15 hours   |
| January 2011  | Expository/Narrative      | 19.5 hours |
| February 2011 | Tall Tale Digital Stories | 16 hours   |
| March 2011    | Tall Tale Digital Stories | 10.5 hours |
| April 2011    | Poetry                    | 8.5 hours  |
| May 2011      | Poetry                    | 9.5 hours  |

## Interviews

Focus group and individual interviews were used as secondary methods of data collection during this study. Interviews are special conversations that take place between the researcher and participant and are one of the most popular forms of data collection in social science research (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). By asking questions

and listening, we learn about how our participants think, feel, experience, and make sense of the world around them. An interview gives our participants the opportunity to interpret and voice their experiences while making meaning in the process. Through the process of interviewing, we can gain insight into our participants' perceptions and understandings (Glesne, 2006; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Kortessluoma, Hentinen, & Nikkonen, 2003). An interview is a time when knowledge can be created by the interviewer and the participant, and needs to be recognized as such (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Having this awareness and seeing our interviews through this lens brings a heightened awareness of possibilities and challenges that arise during these encounters.

Interviewing children provides them the unique opportunity to voice their own interpretations rather than rely on how adults interpret their lives (Heath et al., 2009; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). During interviews with child participants I hoped to give them the time to express their internal perceptions, feelings, and experiences into an external expression (Kortessluoma et al., 2003). Special considerations an interviewer working with children faces are the power dynamics that inevitably exist. Approaching the occasion with awareness that children face lower social status and lack power can offer sensitivity to the situation. Based on this fact and my previous experiences interviewing children during research projects, I interviewed the children in my study in focus groups and individually to discuss their experiences writing expository and narrative essays, tall tale digital stories, and poetry. The focus group interviews and the individual interviews were all recorded on a hand held digital recorder and later transcribed to convey their words accurately.



The focus group and individual interviews were problematic from the start of the research. All three participants in the study had learning disabilities that affected their language use and comprehension. This made interviews difficult. Julia seemed to enjoy being interviewed the most and was the most talkative of the three, but sometimes did not understand my questions and had to ask for clarification. On one occasion after the interview was transcribed and I reread the dialogue, it appeared that Julia and I may have been talking about two different subjects during part of the discussion. Ryan was extremely difficult to engage during interviews and did not like being pulled to the side to talk to me. He preferred to remain on task with the rest of the class. He typically answered in one word, seemed anxious to finish and get back to his desk. I was never sure if his answers truly reflected his experiences. Tyrone was the most difficult to interview because of his language impairment. He did not understand what I was asking most of the time and had a hard time answering. Most interviews we spent clarifying the question and his responses often did not quite match. Sometimes when he was stumped he would just sit and think or say, "I don't know." During focus group interviews the children tended to get silly and seemed more interested in having fun together than providing answers to questions they had difficulty understanding. I struggled to simplify the language I used, but ran into the same comprehension problems throughout my data collection. After presenting my transcripts to a research support group, I realized that I was not following through well with the children's responses by asking probing questions, but was too focused on my next question. Additionally, many of the questions I asked were conceptually too difficult. I learned several valuable lessons regarding interviewing children: Keep the language simple;

ask more general open-ended questions and see where the children go with their responses and; follow the direction of the children.

Another problem that occurred was finding time to interview the children that did not pull them away from their academic work. The daily schedule was hectic and packed. Throughout the year there were numerous field trips, assemblies, county assessments, and standardized tests that interrupted academics and the schedule. It was necessary for me to be patient and find a day and time when participants had finished their work or had a small break. For some interviews I arrived early before the academics had started, but this was difficult as well because it was a time for announcements and procedures for the class. Interviews took place in a small office in the back of the class or outside in the common area among the four classes in the building. I accepted interruptions for the need to go back to class as part of the norm for data collection. Although interviews proved to be difficult, they did provide valuable insight into how the students made progress in their writing during the year.

### **Focus Groups**

Five focus group interviews took place during the course of data collection. When contemplating the design of the focus group interviews my goal was to create a natural setting so that the children would feel comfortable and safe to express themselves freely. In educational settings children often feel pressured to know the correct answer—I wanted to avoid ‘correct answers’ and learn about the children’s honest experiences. The group setting reduces the power dynamics and gives the children a sense of comfort in the presence of their peers (Heath et al., 2009; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Children are more relaxed when they outnumber adults, they have the opportunity to feel in control, and they can develop a style of talk that is typical of their

youth culture. It also affords them the chance to make meaning collectively, to listen to each other, consider each other's thoughts and opinions, and to discuss a broader range of topics than a one to one setting (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I assured the children that what they revealed to me in interviews would not be discussed with Mrs. Lane, other adults in the class, or the school administration. I also told them that their names would be changed when I wrote my findings, so no one at the university would know who they were except me.

The first focus group took place early in December 2010 when the children and I had developed a rapport and there was a level of comfort between us. At this point, I had already interviewed each child individually twice and had a sense of their approach to writing as well their opinions about writing and their perceptions of what they were good at and what they needed to improve. I was curious to learn if the group dynamic would change the responses the students gave. I found that much of what the participants discussed with me individually was echoed when I interviewed them as a group. Based on the individual interviews that I conducted, I asked many of the same questions during the focus groups. The focus group interviews always took place after I had conducted individual interviews. I discuss the process of creating individual interview protocols in the following section based on how the focus of my data collection shifted during the year. Thus, I will not repeat it in this section.

The focus group interviews were recorded on a small hand held digital recorder and were transcribed. In order to avoid the feeling that there were right and wrong answers I used questions in a semi-structured format. As a qualitative interviewer, I hoped to elicit responses by asking 'how' and 'why' questions to discuss their processes

and perceptions (Heath et al., 2009). I tried to probe students by following leads to their answers and asked them to speak in depth, but as mentioned previously was not always successful. An interview guide for each focus group interview can be found in Appendix B. The following topics guided the discussion for the focus groups:

Table 3-5. Focus group interview schedule and topic

| Interview #  | Topic                        | Date       |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Interview #1 | Experiences with Writing     | 12/02/2010 |
| Interview #2 | Writing for Test Preparation | 1/28/2011  |
| Interview #3 | Success with Writing         | 2/08/2011  |
| Interview #4 | Writing and Technology       | 3/14/2011  |
| Interview #5 | Progress as Writers          | 5/17/2011  |

### Individual Interviews

Seven individual interviews were conducted with each child over the course of eight months of data collection. The tone of each interview was meant to be comfortable and relaxed so the children could speak easily and comfortably with me. During the interviews I hoped the children would feel a sense of empowerment in talking about their writing as well as have time to interpret and make sense of their experiences. I wanted to learn about their struggles with writing and their successes as well. Through this data I hoped to capture the uniqueness of each child and their processes and progress. Interview questions were prepared in advance of each meeting to guide our discussion. The interview protocol was not strictly adhered to as it was important to follow the conversation and probe the children when possible for further information. The list of interview protocols is included in Appendix C. The interview schedule is captured in Table 3-6.

Because the focus of my research project changed as I encountered problems with data collection, I also needed to shift the questions I created for the interviews to

reflect this change. The first two interviews that I conducted were to learn about the children's experiences writing expository and narrative essays. My goal for these interviews was to gain a sense of how the children viewed themselves as writers, their opinions about narrative and expository and narrative prompt writing, what they believed they were good at, what they needed to improve, and what they were learning about writing. Sample questions included, "How is it going with expository/narrative writing?" "What are you good at?" "What do you need to improve in your writing?" "What are you learning about writing?" The questions that I wrote for these interviews were to gain insight into the children's perceptions of themselves as writers and how they viewed their own strengths and weaknesses. At this point in my process of data collection, I was trying to lay a foundation to understand how the children approached and experienced writing. I was still focused on the children's experiences writing digital stories as my research topic. Once the children started writing tall tale digital stories, my interviews expanded to include both the writing process and the process of using technology to create their digital stories. Based on previous interviews, I continued to ask the children about their opinions about writing tall tales, how they got ideas, what they were doing well, what they struggled with, and what they were learning. I was curious to understand how narration of the story and the process of choosing visuals affected their writing experiences. I also wanted to gain insight into the social and participatory behaviors that were occurring during this time and how that impacted the children's writing processes.

After this point in the data collection process, it became clear that I would need to shift the focus of my research to include all of the writing the children did during the year

and how they made progress as writers. I did not have sufficient data from the tall tale digital story unit. This required me to think carefully about the remaining interviews as well. At this point, I drafted a protocol that focused on the children’s perceptions of how they were improving as writers. In addition to asking them how they thought they were making progress, I cycled back to questions asked earlier, “What are you doing well?” and “What do you need to get better at?” This helped me to understand the process of growth that was occurring for each participant. I was also curious to learn if the children could articulate what was helping them to become better writers.

Table 3-6. Individual interview schedule

| Interview#   | Topic              | Date       |
|--------------|--------------------|------------|
| Interview #1 | Expository         | 11/15/2010 |
| Interview #2 | Narrative          | 1/28/2010  |
| Interview #3 | Digital Tall Tales | 3/06/2011  |
| Interview #4 | Digital Tall Tales | 3/23/2011  |
| Interview #5 | Writing Progress   | 4/04/2011  |
| Interview #6 | Poetry Writing     | 5/16/2011  |
| Interview #7 | Writing Progress   | 5/17/2011  |

While the children were writing poetry, I interviewed them individually again to hear their thoughts about another new genre and form. My questions were new and repetitive as well. I asked about their process writing a poem and returned once again to what they were doing well and what they were struggling with as writers. The final interview I conducted with each participant at the end of the school year, focused on how they felt they had improved during the year in their writing skills. I drafted questions to help me understand not only areas of progress for each child, but also how the environment of the inclusion class and Mrs. Lane’s teaching supported the children as writers. In spite of multiple challenges with the interviewing process, the resulting

data provided rich insights into how children with learning disabilities make progress as writes in an inclusion class.

### **Discussions and Interview with Mrs. Lane**

During the course of the time that I collected data in Mrs. Lane's classroom, I also had informal conversations with her. Mrs. Lane gave me background knowledge and information about the children that I would not have had access to otherwise. While my main focus of interest was how the children make progress in writing, it was helpful to have multiple perspectives about the children's concepts of their writing process, their failures and success with writing, and their social and academic strengths and weaknesses. Mrs. Lane was a source for this information. It was extremely difficult to find any time to talk to Mrs. Lane because of the heavy demands of the schedule and the diverse needs of the children in her class. Any moment she had when she was not giving group or individualized instruction was used to talk with Mrs. Brown, Ms. Waters, or Ms. France. Often days would go by at a time when I would not speak to her at all. On occasion, I came during lunch or waited after school but she inevitably had an IEP meeting or a staff meeting or a parent conference. Our conversations were short, sporadic, and usually interrupted.

At the end of the school year, I interviewed Mrs. Lane one afternoon to capture her perception of how the students made progress in their writing. This interview was recorded on a small digital recorder and transcribed. The interview protocol is attached in Appendix D.

### **Informal Discussions with Participants**

As frequently as possible, I took the time to learn about the participants' daily and weekly experiences writing. Because of difficulties with the focus group and individual

interviews, I stopped by at the children's desk during writing time to chat with them. During these interactions, I wanted to learn about their struggles with writing, their triumphs, and the processes they were going through during different writing assignments. During expository and narrative writing instruction, it was impossible on many days to talk to the children at all because of the formal nature of the environment. The atmosphere of the class was more relaxed during tall tale digital stories and poetry and I was able to sit with the children, observe them more closely, and talk to them frequently. Questions that I typically asked were, "How is it going with your writing?" or "What are you working on today?" These discussions were not recorded, but included in field notes as part of observations. They helped give me insight into each child's writing style and behavior and I learned when it was appropriate to talk to them and when it was not. When the children were hard at work and concentrating on their writing, I knew it was not time to disturb them.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using tools that characterize grounded theory perspectives (Charmaz, 2006; Grbich, 2007; Morse et al., 2009). Grounded theory gained popularity and respect in the 1960s when qualitative research and analysis was proposed as a systematic and logical practice that could generate theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) moved qualitative research beyond descriptive results to a more analytical and systematic theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006) that gained legitimacy as a valid method of analysis. Engaging in systematic practices helps researchers to "control their research process and increase the analytic power of their work" (Charmaz, 2006). In this particular project data was analyzed in order to identify patterns and themes directly from the data to learn about how children with learning



disabilities make progress in a fourth grade inclusion model class. The constructivist theoretical perspective provided me the chance to consider the participants' opinions, views, ways of creating knowledge, beliefs, and experiences.

The process of theory generation necessitates that the researcher is involved with both data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Phyllis Stern (2009) in *Developing Grounded Theory* argues that objectivity is an impossibility in grounded theory because during the creative process of learning what is going on, you feel and are affected by it. She says, "You have to let it move you" (Stern, 2009). In a grounded theory study, everything is data (Glaser, 1976) and rather than reporting on a variety of events, a theoretical interpretation of a web of data is presented (Stern, 2009). These events are experienced, responded to, and interpreted by the researcher and therefore it is not the events themselves that are important, but the meaning that we ascribe to them (Corbin, 2009). Although Corbin (2009) espouses a view that theories are constructed, other theorists believe they emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whether the truth lies in the construction or emergence of data, we must remain open, flexible, and analytic in order to find relationships and to avoid "imposing preexisting frameworks (Stern, 2009, p. 55, in *Constructing Grounded Theory*). As theory starts to emerge we use our analytical minds to construct an analytic data story. Once data are collected, there are guidelines for how to proceed with analytic methods that provide a flexible path that can be adapted to the specific research project. In order to begin the process of analysis, line-by-line coding was used to look for meaning and actions. Field notes and transcribed interviews were coded. The process of coding begins to identify actions and events in order to create an analytic framework. Coding links raw data to theory generation and

helps to explain the data. First, coding defines the data and slowly it makes meaning and sense (Charmaz, 2006). During the first phase of initial coding, it is important to remain open to the data for surprises and to be careful not to be influenced by preconceived ideas. Glaser's (1978) coding mandate is: Study your emerging data. Some points that Glaser (1978) emphasized for the initial round of coding are to remain open, stay close to the data, choose precise codes, preserve actions, move quickly (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49).

The next step in coding is focused coding. Focused coding is the process of sorting through the codes to make decisions about which codes occur most frequently and make analytic sense (Glaser, 1978). The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the process of comparing data to data and comparing actions and incidents in order to identify focused codes and conceptual categories. Selective codes are used to name the categories of focused codes. These selective codes help to organize and make sense of clusters of data. The next step in the process is to move to a core theoretical code. At this point it is necessary to see the relationships that existed between the focused and selective codes in order to build a conceptual framework. The core theoretical code moves the data to an analytic phase and allows the analytic story to take form (Charmaz, 2006).

In this qualitative study the grounded theory analysis began with an initial phase of coding that attached a code to small sections of text and identified actions and processes. Some of the open codes from the study were "talking about planning," "feeling confused," "improving details, information." Cluster of codes were grouped together with common themes and patterns through the process of constant comparison

of the data across both the field notes and the interviews. This phase led to the identification of focused codes. The focused codes identified the elements of the students' experiences in the inclusion class that were supportive to learning, Mrs. Lane's teaching methods, and the resulting writing behaviors that the children practiced. The focused code, "support of the inclusion class" came from the field notes alone. The selective and focused codes in this area came from my observations and interpretation of the inclusion class. The focused code, "teaching methods" came from my field notes and from interviews with Mrs. Lane. Finally, the focused code "resulting writing behaviors" came from field notes and from interviews with the children. When coding across data sets, and working from open to selective to focused codes, I looked for similarities in actions and processes. Categories of codes fell together easefully across field notes and interviews and provided validation and a richness to the process of analysis. Some of the focused codes include "social membership," "analyzing with model text," and "getting ideas and planning."

Next, the focused codes were analyzed to understand how the incidents or clusters of data worked together to tell a conceptual story. Three selective codes wove the focused codes together: supporting factors in the inclusion class; teaching methods; consistent daily instruction; and resulting writing behaviors. These codes led to the core theoretical category: writing progress in the context of the inclusion class. Through this analytic process data returned to the original question, "How do children with learning disabilities make progress in writing in a fourth grade inclusion model class?" The coding trail is documented in Appendix E. Below is a sample of the process of moving from open to focused to selective codes.

Table 3-7. Coding process

| Open codes                  | Focused codes                    | Selective codes              |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sharing ideas               | Participation in inclusion class | Support from inclusion class |
| Reading aloud               |                                  |                              |
| Responding to question      |                                  |                              |
| Raising hand                |                                  |                              |
| Listening to instruction    |                                  |                              |
| Talking to friend           | Social membership                |                              |
| Fooling around              |                                  |                              |
| Looking for help            |                                  |                              |
| Working with classmate      |                                  |                              |
| Receiving praise on writing | Recognition among peers          |                              |

Memo-writing was used during all phases of the data collection and analysis process. Memos helped me to dialogue with myself to understand connections and relationships between the coding categories, to bring up questions, and point me in the direction I need to go in both my data collection and analysis. Memo writing allowed a process of discovery and the time for insights to take shape and become more concrete. Nuances often arise during the memo-writing process and point the need for further data collection and new venues of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Below is a memo written during the process of analysis:

Memo, April, 11, 2011

I am starting to put codes in categories. Thinking through some of my questions here...some preliminary categories:

Where ideas come from

Steps in composing process/writing process

Writing success/qualities of good writing

Progress in writing/improvements

Attitude toward writing

Difficulties with writing

Confusion and off task behavior

Teacher impact on writing

Social writing behavior—the literate child

Technology and writing

I am grappling with a couple of areas: composing process and writing process: should I break these apart? What I am thinking is that some or most of the composing process takes place mentally in the head and then the writing process is the physical steps that are exhibited by the child.....

Inconsistent writing production: Are these a reflection of R's LD or other problems such as lack of interest; what? Not entirely sure, but I don't want to attribute this to laziness. So the question that arises is: how do children with LD work through their writing difficulties? Ok, could be a question for the next interview.

Social behavior: The literate child. Ok. The child as a whole being, thinks, speaks, and writes...what is the importance of this or how can I understand this in terms of LD, social connections, teacher impact, and inclusion model? The children are interacting with multiple factors.

Teacher impact on writing: What are the teaching behaviors and attitudes that have an impact on writing progress for the kids with LD? How does this show up in writing outcomes?

Inclusion model: In what ways can this help a child with LD progress as a writer? How has the inclusion helped Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone? What are the benefits and stresses?

Technology: Collaborative, communicative, and eliminates learning differences.

Test preparation: Focus on good writing, not just test format.

These types of memos helped me to think through the process of data analysis. Putting my thoughts into words allowed my ideas to germinate over time. Eventually when I returned to the data, they made more sense. Another way that I achieved clarity in analysis of the categories was to turn to theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling allows a researcher to return to data collection to investigate initial theories more deeply by looking at initial findings. Then the researcher continues to collect more data based on weak areas that need to be explained more fully in detail. Through the process of theoretical sampling it is possible to see gaps in the data to predict what further data needs to be collected in order to saturate categories. As categories are compared and become full, relationships between them also become more concrete. Theoretical sampling allows the process of going back and forth

between the data and the analysis. It provides time for constructing tentative categories, looking for weak areas in the analysis, specifying what they are, making categories more precise and substantive, providing links and relationships among categories, and most importantly increasing the strength of the theoretical statements as a result of the process (Charmaz, 2006). In order to find answers to questions in the above memo, I returned to data collection and had one final interview with the children on their progress in writing. The children had difficulty answering some of the more theoretical and conceptual questions, so I turned to Mrs. Lane. My interview with Mrs. Lane helped me to sort through areas of confusion and helped me to solidify categories. After reviewing field notes, and interviews from students and Mrs. Lane, I felt that my categories were in fact saturated. When I needed clarification during the analysis process, I contacted Mrs. Lane by email to ask her questions, confirm hunches, or request her point of view.

### **Developing Theory: Sorting and Diagramming**

Sorting through memos, focused and selective codes, and then using these data to create a diagram helps to organize analysis and integrate it. Looking for categories across codes helps to define theoretical links and work through relationships between categories. During this process I looked for categories and grouped them together in order to see patterns. I did this by hand at first and then used wall space to hang and label my codes to create a visual representation of categories and experiences. Once the codes were organized I moved to a process of creating a visual diagram (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Visual diagrams offer a concrete way of representing data and relationships. Through the process of creating a conceptual map I moved my analysis

to a structural and organizational level to provide a framework from which to go forward in my analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

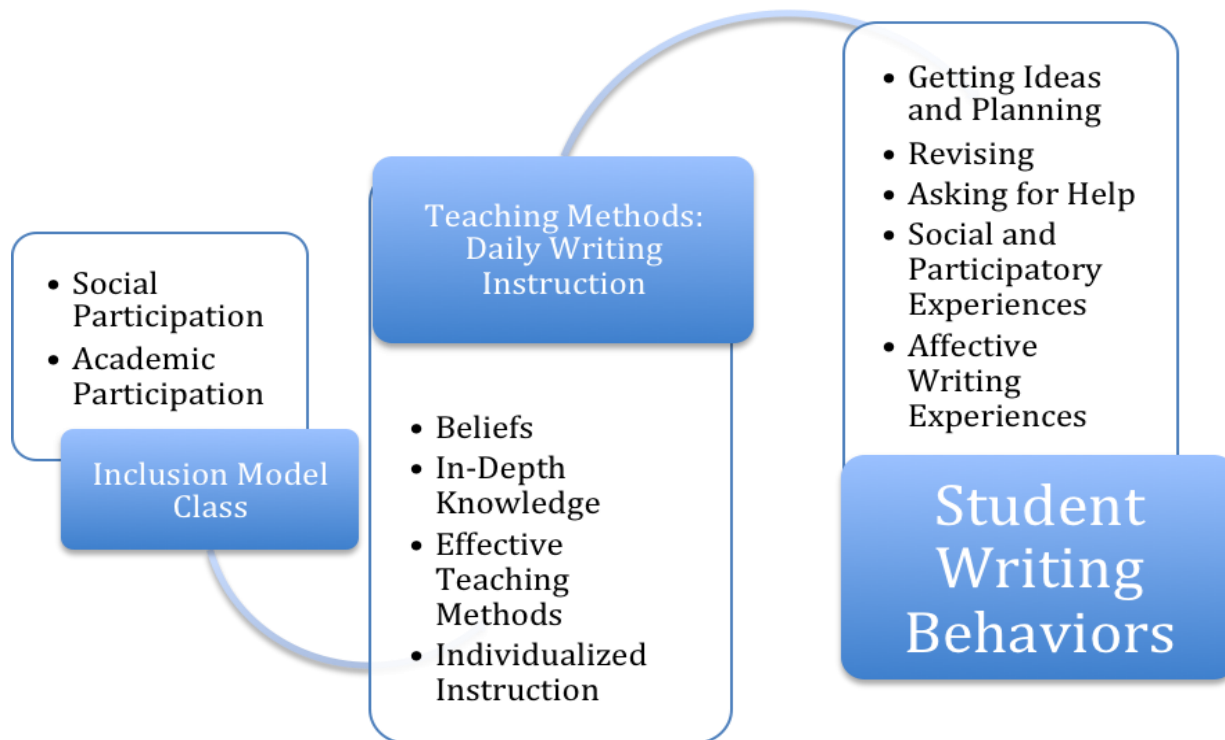


Figure 3-1. Theoretical diagram

### Writing Analysis: Growth as Writers

My primary research question, “How do children with learning disabilities make progress as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model class?” places focus on skill and ability of writers and how they experience the writing, therefore for a thorough analysis it was important to look at writing growth. As children become more proficient and confident in their writing skills, they grow as writers. Certain characteristics become visible in both a child’s behavior and his/her writing. Behaviors that were made note of during participant observations were: ability to plan, stamina for writing, willingness to share writing with others, risk taking, willingness to revise, and seeking help from peers

when possible rather than the teacher or other adult (D. Fu, personal communication, April, 2010). These behavioral traits indicate that a child has the abilities to work through the complexities of the composition process. While all writers young and old experience stumbling blocks along the way, successful writers draw from prior successes to move through difficult moments and improve their writing skills. When observing the children during the writing process, I made note of the behaviors that they exhibited to gain insight and understanding into their personal approach.

Each child's writing was analyzed holistically based on 6+1 Traits of Writing (NWREL, 2012) that is a widely respected and used scoring system for writing. Writing was assessed on ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. 6 + 1 Traits of Writing was developed in the 1980s by a group of teachers who were determined to develop a holistic scoring measure for writing that identified qualities of good writing and gave students and teachers feedback. Giving writing a single score or using standardized tests to score writing, they felt, did not portray a full picture of the complexities of writing, nor did it give enough guidance. After examining samples of writing at all grade levels, the traits of: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions and presentation were found to be common qualities of good writing. 6 +1 Trait model is used nationally and internationally.

Five samples of each participant's writing were selected for analysis. For validity measures and to look for growth, the same five writing samples were chosen for each child and represented pieces from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.



Expository and narrative essays were chosen as well as each child's tall tale digital story. The samples were analyzed by one outside reviewer who was a former English teacher, Mrs. Lane, and me. After scoring the writing, each reviewer was asked to answer the following questions about student progress:

- Based on your analysis of this student's writing, can you comment on how he or she made progress as a writer?
- What are his/her strongest areas of writing?
- What are his/her weakest areas of writing?

Observing each child's behavioral traits and characteristics associated with growing writers as well as scoring his/her writing on a holistic basis helped me to understand and gain information about each child as a writer and how he/she made progress in an inclusion model class.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

Establishing trustworthiness of qualitative research findings and interpretations of data are supported by systematic techniques of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement in the research setting with the participants ensures that the researcher invests enough time to build trust, to learn the culture, and to identify what is and what is not important to the study. Being involved with a site for an extended amount of time permits a researcher to become absorbed in the culture being studied to understand contextual factors and how they influence the phenomenon being investigated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It allows a researcher to gain a broad or horizontal view and to become situated within the environment. Persistent observations during the field visits help the researcher to pinpoint what is salient to the problem being studied and allows time for in-depth focus

(DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As an inquiry progresses, the researcher is able to determine what is interesting and deserves more attention as well as determining what is irrelevant. This exploration requires a sorting out of data, preliminary analysis, and a return to data collection in order to build and strengthen observations and emerging theories.

Triangulation of data, or collection of multiple sources of data, helps to establish the probability that the research findings are credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this particular study data were collected through participant observations, focus group and individual interviews, and archival materials. Recognizing themes across different data sources helps the researcher gain insights into the problem being studied and leads to the development of theory (Charmaz, 2006). Varied types of data can shed light on multiple dimensions and aspects of the phenomenon being studied and provides diverse and rich ways to understand and discuss the problem.

Peer debriefing was also used to develop trustworthiness and accuracy in interpreting data during the analysis process (Glesne, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Initial hypotheses were presented to a research support group that I was participating in so that I could clarify initial interpretations by answering questions. I received feedback, explored thoughts, and reflected on initial findings. Ideas were explored with my committee chair and other doctoral students as well. These conversations helped me to test and defend initial hypotheses and to become clear about the direction of my inquiry. As I moved to a later phase in analysis, findings from the study were presented to a qualitative methods research group for suggestions and feedback.

Member checking was used as a method to provide validity to this study. Member checking is when the researcher asks participants to review conclusions and interpretations that have been drawn (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the end of my data collection, when I was constructing a theoretical framework, I presented my findings to Mrs. Lane to gain her input and thoughts. During the process of analysis, I continually emailed Mrs. Lane to gain her point of view and to clarify questions.

Validity of the study was also enhanced through a thick and detailed description of the participants' experiences and perspectives and classroom culture that "allow the reader to enter the context" (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). Interviews were recorded and transcribed and detailed field notes of observations were produced to add to a rich written analysis. Finally, reliability, or the ability to reproduce the research, was enhanced through a detailed and systematic description of data collection and analysis methods (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of the study was the limited amount of time spent learning about how students with learning disabilities make progress as writers. There was a focus on writing in the fourth grade due to the state test, however, it would provide further insight into the process of how students learn to write had the study continued into the fifth grade year when students are in a different setting with a different teacher and are not preparing for a standardized writing test. It would be interesting to learn how students transfer knowledge gained in the fourth grade year and build upon that to face other writing tasks. Time for a longer study was not available for this project.

Additionally, my identity as a researcher, student, teacher, and parent limited the way I collected and analyzed data. No person is without racial and gender identities

and my own personal life experiences and views as well as the culture I was brought up in undeniably impacted how I interacted with the participants in the study as well as how I interpreted and represented the data.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

As a qualitative researcher I both collected the data and interpreted them. This unique role as the sole person who collected, analyzed and interpreted the data, forced me to consider and articulate my personal biases and continually be aware of them through my research process. In particular my own background as a language arts teacher, and the beliefs I hold regarding the teaching of writing came to my attention as crucial to bracket as much as possible. My experiences in teaching include teaching English as a Second Language overseas, teaching fifth and seventh grade language arts, teaching tenth grade English, and teaching a Language Arts Methods course for undergraduate students. I have been a teacher and student of the language arts curriculum for the past 24 years and consider myself to be an expert in the field of children's writing. Through these teaching experiences, I developed my own style and philosophy of teaching writing mainly based on the ideas of Lucy Calkins (1994) and Donald Graves (1994). I strongly believe that the writing process method is the most effective and best way to help students improve and that the writer's workshop model allows students to write about topics in which they have personal experiences and expertise.

Over time as schools have become more standardized and test-driven I have observed the emphases on writing being emphasized mainly during testing years. I struggle with how individual schools and districts have adopted writing curricula to prepare students for standardized tests and how writing has become the subject of

focus specifically in testing years, but less so in other years. While some prompt writing may have a place in a curriculum, I strongly disagree that writing should be taught as a subject driven by prompts and a standardized test. It is far too important a subject to reduce to several test taking grades with a drill and skill approach.

My strong beliefs that writing is critical to academic success for all students and that writing should be taught and given importance in every grade is a bias that I needed to be aware of so that I could remain open to Mrs. Lane's teaching approaches and how the students responded. Entering into Mrs. Lane's fourth grade classroom in a test preparation curriculum year was a challenge. It was important for me to observe Mrs. Lane's teaching, to learn about the students writing behaviors, and to remain as objective as possible. My strong beliefs and areas of expertise helped me to pick a site where I felt the teacher approached her students and their learning process in a way that would support the literacy learning theory and research design described in my project. I hoped to learn a great deal and when necessary turn to the more seasoned experts. All in all, my goal was to navigate my background experiences and subjectivities with awareness and remain open to the data and the participants.

Another area that merits discussion is my experience teaching struggling writers. When I taught middle school and high school, I observed some students who wrote with ease and others who found writing to be a tiresome struggle. Some children found the words easily and fluently and put together their ideas both mentally and on paper. Topics came naturally and when it was time to share, they volunteered with pride. Yet there were others who had ideas but could not organize, find words, and bring their ideas together to create a story or fulfill an assignment. I knew they had stories and

lived experiences that were rich and interesting, but I did not always know how to draw them out. In my remedial language class for tenth graders, I felt deep concern for students who had been pushed through the system, who had literacy skills at the elementary level. It seemed evident that preventative measures must be put more strongly in place at a much younger age to help these youth develop the skills that they would need to be successful in school and later in the work place. These were the students who challenged me to think deeply about my teaching methods and how I could reach every student so they could become literate and enjoy the beauty and power of the written word. I strived to place aside my concerns about struggling students in order to learn how their needs could best be met. I hoped not to place judgment on Mrs. Lane but to learn from her expertise. Mrs. Lane's background in special education and her inclusion class seemed to be an ideal venue for this research to take place.

A final area of subjectivity that is crucial to mention is my relationship to Mrs. Lane and my belief that she is an excellent writing teacher. I had done two previous projects with Mrs. Lane and was impressed with her teaching of writing. One project was conducted when she was teaching in a self-contained classroom. It was an action research project that focused on how children experienced writing when they chose topics that had personal meaning. For the second project, I interviewed Mrs. Lane about her beliefs and methods for teaching writing. Based on these two experiences, I felt that Mrs. Lane used effective methods for teaching writing. My opinion of Mrs. Lane was obviously a bias that I held during the research project. However, I needed to stay open to all possibilities when observing her teaching methods.

## CHAPTER 4 MRS. LANE'S INCLUSION MODEL CLASS

This chapter provides information about the physical setting of Mrs. Lane's class, the classroom culture, Mrs. Lane and her writing curriculum, the daily schedule, the demands of the inclusion model, the other adults who were present for some or part of the day, and finally the student intern who was in the class for part of the year. Mrs. Lane, her teaching methods and beliefs about writing were discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Millhopper Elementary: The School**

Millhopper Elementary was a school with a population of 537 students pre-kindergarten through fourth grade during the 2010-2011 school year. Millhopper Elementary was one of 25 elementary schools in the county and was of medium size with the largest school having a population of 856 students and the smallest school having a population of 228 students. Millhopper Elementary was a neighborhood school located in a residential area within a mile from downtown and close to the middle and high schools. Downtown was a half of a mile side-walked strip with quaint black antique streetlights, and a variety of stores. There was a consignment shop, feed store, hardware store, pizza parlor, antique dealer and several other stores. Many parents walked or drove their children to and from school. Additionally, parents were welcomed as classroom volunteers, PTA members, and chaperones on field trips. The theme of the school for the year was "Start Your Engines for Learning" and the racetrack and race to the finish theme were evident on the bulletin boards in the hall and in Mrs. Lane's class. The morning announcement at 7:50 a.m. that came over the loudspeaker started off with the principal's voice saying, "Start Your Engines for Learning."

The town of Greenville where Millhopper Elementary was situated was a picturesque and growing area as development spread from the larger neighboring town of Gatorland to the west. Greenville was developed as a mining town after phosphate was discovered in the late 1800s. Fourteen mines were operated and many people came to find work in the mines until 1914 at the start of World War I. During the 50s and 60s the economy turned to agriculture and was particularly successful at growing watermelons. Each year the town continues to have an annual watermelon festival. Greenville also had a history of racial tensions and in 1914 five African Americans were killed in a riot following the murder of a white police officer by an African American man. Greenville was populated with 3,630 people according to the 2004 census.

### **The Physical Class**

Mrs. Lane's class was housed in a new building that was separate from the main building and had been added to accommodate a growing student population. The new building housed four classes of 4th graders and was completed in 2005 but was still not large enough to find space for the fifth graders. The fifth graders were then moved to the middle school in 2006. Mrs. Lane's class was a large and comfortable space that was bright with light due to a wall of windows on one side. An interior door lead to a short hallway with bathrooms, large bookshelves with supplies, and an adjoining class that was home to another group of 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

Mrs. Lane's desk was at the front of the class to one side. She had a computer on her desk and a bookcase full of board games stood behind it. There were seven other computers in the room that were grouped together in the back of the class. Mrs. Lane had 23 students in her class whose desks were grouped in fours and fives. On a regular basis she moved students' desks so that they sat next to someone new. There was a



large white board across the front of the room and a Smartboard on one wall. A television set was also mounted in another corner high on the wall and was used to tune in to morning announcements. I never saw it used for other purposes. There was a large closet that contained books, supplies for science and other activities, snacks, and a desk with a microwave on it. Additionally, there were several bulletin boards where Mrs. Lane displayed writing samples, the word of the day, and the definitions and qualities of expository and narrative writing. One bulletin board was a racetrack that displayed students' AR points and was called *Supersonic Readers* that coordinated with the school's annual theme of racing. On the left side of the front white board was a bulletin board called *Flat-Out Math*. The class schedule was displayed near the entrance to the room. Class rules were written by the students and hung above the front white board: Stay in your personal space unless you have permission; be positive; treat other like you want to be treated by being respectful; stealing is disrespectful. In the back of the class was a bean shaped table with seven chairs where Mrs. Lane met with students for small group work.

Mrs. Lane had several pets that made her class unique. There was a pet rat that was in a glass cage on the floor and students were allowed to take him out before the official start of school. There were two other reptiles, a skink named Flick, and a gecko named Joe Bob in separate cages as well as a large fish tank on a back counter. The students took turns feeding and cleaning the cages and these duties were listed on a back wall with other class responsibilities. Additionally, Mrs. Lane had a large garden out in the back of her class with four raised beds full of vegetables. There was a door

that led out to the garden. The pets and plants all added richness and variety to the class.

### **The Daily Schedule**

The Daily Schedule was posted on the wall to right of the main entrance to the classroom. It was frequently referred to and was for the most part adhered to because of the demands of the curriculum. Although I did not spend the entire school day in Mrs. Lane’s class, I observed her follow the schedule when I was there at a variety of different times. It was a hectic day from start to finish.

Table 4-1. Daily work schedule

| M/T/TH/F    |                           |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| 7:30-7:55   | Morning Work              |
| 7:55-8:55   | Writing                   |
| 8:55-9:35   | Science or Social Studies |
| 9:35-9:45   | Recess                    |
| 9:45-10:30  | Specials                  |
| 10:36-11:06 | Lunch                     |
| 11:06-11:15 | Read-a-Loud               |
| 11:15-12:05 | Math                      |
| 12:05-1:35  | Reading                   |
| 1:40-1:45   | Pack Up                   |
| 1:45        | Dismissal                 |

Table 4-2. Wednesday work schedule

| WEDNESDAY   |                                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------|
| 7:30-7:55   | Morning Work                    |
| 7:55-9:40   | Writing, Reading, Language Arts |
| 9:40-10:36  | Math                            |
| 10:36-11:06 | Lunch                           |
| 11:10-11:45 | Reading                         |
| 11:45-12:30 | Specials                        |
| 12:30       | Dismissal                       |

### **The Inclusion Model**

Millhopper Elementary had self-contained special education classes to help children with diverse learning needs until 2007 when the school became a full inclusion

model school. Eleven of the twenty-three students in Mrs. Lane's class needed accommodations in reading, writing, or math. Mrs. Lane had one full time aide, Mrs. Brown, and another Exceptional Student Education (ESE) professional, Ms. Waters, who came to help in the class twice a week from 12:35 p.m. to 1:45 p.m. during math and twice a week during reading, both blocks of time in the afternoon. She worked with a child who needed organization, structure, and provided general support. There was a student intern in the class in the spring from January until April. She was a source of help (and a responsibility) for Mrs. Lane.

Mrs. Brown assisted for the entire day, yet Mrs. Lane regularly found herself feeling thinly spread among the demands of her students. She often gave individual or small group instruction to children who needed it and always welcomed help from other adults who were in the class such as Ms. Waters, and the student intern who was in the class from January until mid-April. Read alouds were required for seven students in reading and math both during reading practice and testing times, although students did not usually take advantage of this because they did not want to be different than their peers. Mrs. Lane shared her concerns in our informal conversations regarding how to accommodate the diverse needs of the students in her class. It was difficult for me to speak to Mrs. Lane at all because she was so busy during the time that I was there. On several occasions, I arrived during lunch or other free times only to find her attending meetings or trouble shooting other problems that had arisen.

The academic needs of Mrs. Lane's class were complex and she worked extremely hard to make sure that children were progressing. Mrs. Lane mentioned throughout the year that she felt she did not enough help to provide all the students with

what they needed in her class. She felt that more adult help in the classroom would have been beneficial to the learning needs of her students.

### **Mrs. Lane's Writing Curriculum**

Fourth grade teachers in the county were required to use *Just Write*, a curriculum written by Kathryn Robinson (1995) to prepare students for expository and narrative writing for the upcoming Florida Writes test. The Florida Writes is a writing test administered throughout the state in early March that all fourth grade students take as part of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). Students are given either a narrative or expository prompt and have 45 minutes to complete the test with no help from their teacher. The test is scored based on a 1 to 6 holistic grading scale by outside scorers. Students must achieve a 3.5 to pass the test. Students who receive lower grades are still promoted but recommended for remediation. The scores the students achieve are also one element that determine the grade the school is assigned by the state and affect how much funding the school is allotted for the next school year. In 2010-2011 Millhopper Elementary earned a grade of "A" which meant that students were showing progress in their standardized test scores. FCAT scores from math, reading, writing, and science factored into the school grade as well.

Mrs. Lane felt extremely pressured to help her students succeed on the test. She said,

I have enormous pressure from administration for my kids to perform. Enormous. It doesn't mean I am going to lose my job, but even as hard as I work and as well as my kids do until 100% of my class has a 4 and above I will not get a compliment. (H2:134-139.5/30/2011)

The pacing of the writing instruction was driven by the pressure to succeed on the test.

Mrs. Lane began the 2010-2011 school year by teaching expository writing until November. At that time she began to teach narrative writing as well. She focused

exclusively on expository and narrative prompt writing until the beginning of February when children wrote tall tale digital stories in the afternoons. She continued with prompt writing in the mornings. After the test was administered in early March and other FCAT testing had passed, Mrs. Lane taught poetry in April and May.

In spite of a curriculum driven by demands of an upcoming test, Mrs. Lane focused on writing process methods, not just writing to a prompt. Mrs. Lane frequently began her instruction with either talk about good writing, a quick writes exercise that lasted for four minutes, analyzing a successful piece of writing, or a writing demonstration. These instructional methods are discussed at length in Chapter 5 as findings of the study. Lessons such as writing interesting sentences, writing paragraphs, and elaborating with details helped students to learn to write to an assigned topic with a specific number of paragraphs. Mrs. Lane emphasized writing with detail so the reader could create a picture in their minds. Students were encouraged to “cut and paste” where they wanted to add more information and on almost a daily basis Mrs. Lane reminded them to elaborate. She also stressed using interesting verbs and being specific when possible. Frequently she discussed the importance of adding actions and feelings, similes and metaphors to provide the reader with interesting language. Even though Mrs. Lane was required to teach using *Just Write* to prepare for the test through constant practice with prompts for expository and narrative essays, she emphasized writing as a communication tool that could engage and interest the reader. Mrs. Lane provided variation in exercises and encouraged her students to be creative.

Students wrote tall tale digital stories and poetry in addition to writing narrative and expository essays. At the beginning of February, students began writing tall tales during

their afternoon center time. Ms. France taught the tall tale digital story unit under the direction of Mrs. Lane. Ms. France did not have the years of experience teaching writing that anchored Mrs. Lane's instruction. This was the first time she had taught tall tale digital stories and it was a hands-on learning experience for both her and the students. Students first used model texts to learn the elements of tall tales, then planned their own stories working with partners of their choice. They used a graphic organizer to help them with planning. There were several times that instruction occurred with the whole group on how to plan a tall tale and create a character with exaggerated qualities, however, instruction was not nearly as thorough during this unit as it was for narrative and expository essay writing. Students worked on their own or with friends in the center they were assigned to and received little individual instruction from Ms. France to help them work through problems they were having with their writing. As they completed the written portions of their stories, they created an imovie on a laptop computer. This was by far the most social and participatory writing unit of the year, yet lacked the rigor of other writing lessons. Students worked side-by-side on their writing and digital production and were given opportunities to talk and collaborate as creators of their stories and movie productions which was the main benefit of this unit.

Poetry was taught during April, poetry month, and continued until the beginning of May when other testing required by the county took place. Ms. France began the unit by teaching the students one poem and introducing them to the concept of poetry by reading and discussing a variety of poems. She then turned the teaching back to Mrs. Lane as her internship came to an end. Students learned a variety of poetry forms and

styles such as “I Am,” diamante, concrete shape, and funny poems. Students used a variety of planning rubrics during poetry and also learned about imagery, using the senses, rhyme, meter, and how words work together to create patterns. Mrs. Lane usually started her lesson by showing the children a poem on the Smartboard and having a discussion with the students to analyze the elements of the poem. On several occasions the class wrote and revised a poem together on the Smartboard. Often the students were asked to read aloud what they had written and the class was asked to listen to the sound of the language and the specific words that created images. This unit was a time when Mrs. Lane focused on language style and use, demonstrating the revision process, and analyzing the form and style of different kinds of poems. Students took time to plan their poems and find the exact words they needed. They were allowed to talk and work with one another and the atmosphere was more casual than preparing for the state test. In order to find rhyming words they were allowed to use an Internet website called Rhyme Zone. They were also encouraged to use a dictionary and thesaurus to discover new language.

### **University Intern**

Ms. France was a university intern who began her senior year internship on January 3, 2011 and completed it on April 15, 2011. She was a pre-service teacher earning a Master’s degree in Special Education and was completing her internship before graduation in May 2011. Ms. France was a Caucasian woman in her early twenties who wanted to be a teacher since she was in kindergarten. Her grandfather had been a high school teacher, but she preferred younger children and so chose to be an elementary school teacher. Ms. France began the first two weeks of her internship by observing and then took over full time teaching for a six-week period. She was

responsible for all subjects except teaching writing for the test preparation. She maintained the schedule and curriculum that had been set up by Mrs. Lane until the beginning of April when her assignment had been fulfilled.

Ms. France had taken Language Arts Methods as part of her teacher-training program and learned the writing process approach to teaching writing. She taught the tall tale digital stories unit and introduced the poetry unit, but was confined to these two experiences. Ms. France did provide individual instruction to Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone in the morning when they were writing expository and narrative essays. This assistance was extremely helpful to Mrs. Lane who was stretched thin helping students in her class with diverse needs.

Ms. France also had to get used to many different adults being in the class during the time she was teaching which placed extra demands on her. There were often up to six adults in the class at one time. The class was particularly busy in the afternoons when Ms. Waters was present, the school administrators would stop by for a visit, I was present, and other people from the university came for a variety of purposes. She was able to handle this pressure well and got acclimated to the diverse group of adults who participated in Mrs. Lane's learning environment.

### **Mrs. Brown**

Mrs. Brown was an African-American woman in her late 30s who was an ESE paraprofessional. Her presence in the class was an enormous help to Mrs. Lane who frequently found many children requesting help at the same time. Mrs. Brown was quiet in nature, always pleasant and even-tempered. She was the go-to girl in the class.

This was Mrs. Brown's second year with Mrs. Lane. Her primary responsibility was to help with the ESE children, specifically four children who had IEPs for learning



disabilities. Much of her time was spent with one girl in particular who was functionally mentally handicapped and needed one-on-one learning assistance. When Mrs. Brown was not helping this child she was helping children with projects and assignments, correcting papers, and generally assisting with helping the class to function smoothly. Mrs. Brown was not involved in the writing instruction and usually did not help the children with their writing assignments unless it was to answer basic questions. She did not impact the writing instruction per se, but was a person of tremendous importance to the class.

Mrs. Brown had credentials as a Child Development Associate (CDA) and was taking online classes at a local community college in elementary education. She had previously worked at a nearby elementary school as an ESE paraprofessional in a pre-K class for two and a half years and hoped one day to be certified in elementary education and have her own class.

### **Ms. Waters**

Ms. Waters was the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teacher who came to Mrs. Lane's class four afternoons a week from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday to work individually with children in the class who had IEPs or accommodations. Ms. Waters was a young woman in her early 30s who had her Masters degree in Special Education. It was her fifth year at Millhopper Elementary School. She spent time in Mrs. Lane's class to provide and oversee lesson plans for the child who was functionally mentally handicapped and to work with the others alone as needed. Ryan, Julia, and Tyrone worked with Ms. Waters occasionally on their writing assignments. She gave assistance in organization, topic choice, vocabulary, sentence fluency, and grammatical and structural issues in writing. Ms. Waters

communicated regularly with Mrs. Lane about what was needed in the class and provided extra support based on problems the students were having. Because Ms. Water's time was very limited in the class and writing instruction took place in the morning, she was not a major force in the writing development of the three participants. Her role in the class was mainly supplemental as she rotated between all of the inclusion model classes in the school and provided a supporting role in each of these classes.

This chapter describes Millhopper Elementary school, the class setting, Mrs. Lane's writing curriculum, and the other adults present in the room who had an impact on the children's classroom and writing experiences—Mrs. Brown, Ms. France, and Ms. Waters. Chapter 5 begins the discussion of findings from the study of how children with learning disabilities make progress in writing in a fourth grade inclusion model class.

## CHAPTER 5 CONTEXT AS A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR LITERACY GROWTH

Qualitative research methods were particularly helpful in gaining a deep understanding of how student participants construct writing knowledge in the natural setting of their elementary classroom. Collecting archival materials, making observations over an extended period, and conducting interviews helped the researcher to gain access to the multiple experiences and perspectives of the children in the study and how they made progress in writing. Triangulation of the data helped to uncover the complex influences of learning environment, pressures of testing, writing instruction, and social experiences of children with learning disabilities who struggle with writing. Through grounded theory methods of analysis the researcher was able to construct a theory to answer the primary research question: “How do children with learning disabilities make progress in writing in a fourth grade inclusion model class?”

The purpose of this chapter is to report findings about the system of the inclusion class setting and Mrs. Lane’s teaching that provided a foundation for student learning. Data from the observations and interviews was analyzed through grounded theory methods to understand patterns across the data sets. Through this process, it became evident that writing growth occurred because of a complex system of support from the classroom context, Mrs. Lane’s teaching methods, and writing behaviors that students practiced. As a result of three levels of coding, relationships became clear between focused codes, and led to selective codes to gain insight into how children with learning disabilities make progress as writers in an inclusion model class. Through the process of analysis, data showed that the context was foundational to all learning that occurred during the year, and within this context there were other important relationships and

patterns of writing behavior that emerged. The core category of “writing progress in the context of the inclusion class” was a result of the writing process and product, while the context provided the support system for this writing to take place.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the inclusion model classroom as an important component that supported students academically and socially to construct writing knowledge in a grade level setting with peers. The second section addresses the regular daily writing instruction. The third section describes teaching methods, instructional style, and teacher knowledge and beliefs about writing. Within these main sections, subsections address the focused categories and go into detail. The information in this chapter was captured primarily through observations and interviews and resulted from focused and selective coding categories.

In order to reference data from the study, I developed a system to indicate where the data came from. For example, field notes include the protocol number, lines of the reference and date (P17:20-25.5/10/11). Interviews were referenced as R1:40-43.2/15/11; ‘R’ indicating the first letter of the person’s name or ‘G’ indicating focus group; 1, number of interview, 40-43 are the lines from the protocol, and 2/15/11 is the date.

### **The Inclusion Model Class**

Data showed that the inclusion model class provided a system for Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone that supported them as individuals participating in a writing community. Mrs. Lane had pets, plants, computers, other technology for learning, and bulletin boards (P1:6-10.10/4/10). Each child had membership and a role to fulfill in the class. Three classroom pets--a rat, a gecko, a skink--and an outside garden made the work of school

seem more comfortable and home-like. In the morning children had a job that they needed to fill as indicated on the whiteboard at the back of the room. These jobs included feeding the pets, door holder, and line leader for the day. These procedures occurred on a daily basis and rotated on a weekly basis. Observations indicated that the walls and bulletin boards organized the class and daily schedule, celebrated success, and guided learning. A field note entry read:

On one wall is an AR reading chart in the form of a race track. The class theme is racing. Kids score points and their car moves along the track. To my right is the daily schedule. In the front is a poster called FINISH LINE WRITING. Students are not allowed to use the following words: good, things, stuff, fun, nice. Students are not allowed to use these words when writing. On the front white board are the words: Essay: Narrative—story, fiction, fantasy; Expository—explain, inform, clarify, instruct. (P5: 3-14.10/12/10)

Children created some guidelines and expectations for behavior during the year and they were posted at the front of the room above the whiteboard:

Class rules—1. Stay in your personal space unless you have permission; 2. Be positive; 3. Treat others like you want to be treated by being respectful; 4. Stealing is disrespectful. (P5:15-18.10/12/10)

During the year, examples of student success were hanging on the bulletin board in the classroom and also in the hall. Data showed that the classroom environment provided a rich setting for learning to take place among peers. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone participated in a class with special education and regular education students. They were seated with peers in the class and seating rotated periodically. Most frequently desks were grouped with five students together, giving the children a chance to interact with and learn from each other. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone enjoyed sitting with friends and classmates.

## **Participation in the Inclusion Class**

Instruction that took place for writing daily from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. was divided between whole group instruction and writing time. Participants took part in the group process of learning about writing by listening to instruction and participating in discussions. An essential part of the one hour of writing was time that Mrs. Lane took to give the children explicit instruction through examples of success, talking about writing, and modeling the writing process. This could last up to 30 minutes and is discussed in detail later in the chapter. During this time children often participated by sharing their knowledge and at times sharing their writing. It gave them an opportunity to learn from one another and to learn from each other's strengths. One of the main benefits of the inclusion model is the ability to learn from and along with peers.

Mrs. Lane often began instruction with a Quick Writes exercise and often spent 20 or more minutes of the group instruction time talking to the students about writing. Quick Writes lasted for four minutes. They were fast writing exercises designed to help students write as much as possible without being concerned about form. These exercises helped students to develop language and writing fluency. Students usually shared their writing after a Quick Writes exercise. Field notes from November 8, 2010 showed an example of a typical writing day:

8:13 a.m. Mrs. Lane talks to the students about making a picture in their minds when they write. She demonstrates this by sharing an oral story and asks the children to visual the story as she speaks. She tells the class that she brought cow manure to the garden boxes outside her class over the weekend. Her son and a friend went to a cow pasture and scooped fresh cow patties then put them in the back of a truck and brought them over to the garden. She said they need a couple of weeks to dry off before everyone can work the garden.

8:18 a.m. Now Mrs. Lane takes out two red horseshoe magnets and says this is the Quick Writes today. The children volunteer to put them together

but cannot. There is a lot of laughter in the room. A couple of students try and the magnets do not come together. Now the timer is put on for four minutes and everyone writes about what they saw.

8:25 a.m. Students have finished writing and share examples.

8:33 a.m. Now students work on their “hiking” essay.

8:53 a.m. The class is asked to finish up what they are doing to transition. Writing time ends. (P16:11/08/2010)

The students worked on Quick Writes for four minutes then shared examples from their writing. The time they had to work on their essays was 20 minutes.

Even though Mrs. Lane was directing the instruction, this was one of the times that the students could share their writing and learn from each other through examples and feedback from Mrs. Lane.

Observations made on Ryan showed that he frequently shared his ideas and liked to participate in class. Field notes indicated multiple times that Ryan participated in class:

Ryan participates with an answer, “Underline words in the prompt that will help you.” (P24:14-17.12/2/10)

He goes up to the white board to code a prompt and answers questions about what he did. (P26:17-19.12/6/10)

During a writing exercise when Mrs. Lane came out of the closet with a clown mask and Ryan looks around, smiles and continues looking around. He seems to be enjoying the fun and funny mask. He answers a question when the teacher asks about good writing. Participates. He is engaged and listening. (P22: 21-25.10/29/10)

Ryan raises his hand and shares his super power for his character that he will use on his next essay. (P40:48-49.1/24/11)

Ryan was the most social of the three children in the study and one way he learned about writing was from other children. The inclusion class gave Ryan the chance to

listen to and learn from diverse writers with diverse abilities. His participation gave him presence and status within the class.

Julia was a good listener and was usually focused during times when Mrs. Lane was giving direct instruction, but was more hesitant to participate by sharing samples of her work or her ideas. There were several occasions when she did share, but had to be asked first. One day Mrs. Lane was at Julia's table helping students work on their new prompt, which required them to have a super power. Mrs. Lane and Julia decided on shooting fireballs as the superpower. Then Mrs. Lane asked Julia to share her example and how she came up with this idea to demonstrate the process for other students (P40: 63-65. 1/24/11). Later in the year when Julia had developed confidence in her ability to succeed in writing she shared her ideas during a poetry unit. The class is learning about diamante poems and Julia raised her hand and connected the shape of the poem, a diamond, to the type of poem, diamante (P74:2-4.5/04/2011). These times when Julia read her writing out loud, gave examples, or answered questions, gave her the feeling that her ideas and expertise was valued and that she was growing as a member of the writing community.

Tyrone was extremely shy and never raised his hand to participate in class during any observations that were made. He listened to instruction but his quiet nature and difficulties with language prevented him from sharing during whole group instruction. Towards the end of the school year, during a poetry unit, Mrs. Lane solicited Tyrone's participation. She went over to his desk with a small microphone that she frequently used, but it was still difficult to hear Tyrone when he spoke. Mrs. Lane asked Tyrone to describe an apple by touch, but Tyrone responded so quietly she and the rest of the



class could not hear. She asked him to repeat what he said and then repeated it for the class because his voice was not audible (P72:56-62.4/27/11). Listening and being part of the inclusion class was important for Tyrone, yet he did not take part in a more public way and during academic time he had a tendency to isolate himself unless he was required to work with others.

Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were able to participate in writing instruction by listening and participating among their peers. This willingness to take part in the community of learners in the inclusion model gave them the chance to learn from peers and to share their own knowledge. Sharing their abilities and ideas with other students was valuable as were the social connections they made with the children in their class. Observations showed that the participants were active and valued members of the learning community.

### **Social Membership**

Social connections are important for all humans and were clearly a part of the experience of school for Julia, Ryan and Tyrone. Social experiences provide membership in a community and a way to feel part of the classroom culture and learning experience. Data from observations showed that social membership had a role in each participant's experience during writing time. Ryan was by far the most social child of the three and was motivated by connections with his peers. He held a position of status in the class and frequently made verbal contact and body gestures during Mrs. Lane's instruction, quiet writing time, and time when children worked together. The social experience of class was of high importance to Ryan and was clearly a way he was supported by the inclusion class. Ryan frequently made connections with students

in his group and across the room depending on where his friends were sitting in relation to him. Observations in field notes often described Ryan making social contact:

Ryan stretches, chats with neighbors, and has his chin in his hand. (P20: 27-29.11/16/11)

He is animated today and seems to enjoy himself. He is smiling and listening. He looks over to his friend, and they have communication going on between them. They talk across the tables and make body motions. As one of the suggestions for the story Ryan says, "Why don't you shoot the snake?" That brings a huge smile to his face and he makes the body motion of holding a large gun and shooting it down. He does this toward his friend. (P26:39-46.12/7/10)

Ryan finishes his first paragraph. In between writing he is enjoying social connections with the boy behind him. That child is making faces; Ryan is smiling. Ryan looks around for activity in the class. During his writing pauses, he looks over his shoulder at the other boy to see what is going on. The boys are quietly fooling around a lot while they are getting writing done. (P27: 24-33.18/8/10)

He is looking around and whispering to friends around the room. He is smiling and giggling and having fun. (P34:17-19.1/5/11)

Another entry in a field note read:

Ryan is very motivated by social interactions and holds a prominent position in the class. He is well-liked by peers and has a place of power. (P56:19-21.2/23/11)

Julia frequently looked to peers for help with her work when permitted and clearly enjoyed the social experience with friends in the class. Because of difficulties with her home life, firm membership within the inclusion class provided support for Julia in numerous ways. Observations recorded show that she benefitted from sitting with and working with peers.

Julia works with her group on the prompts. She has difficulty with some of the decoding. (P25: 9-10.12/3/10)

She talks to her neighbor about writing ideas and works on her planning. (P26: 69-17.12/3/10)

Julia worked hard and methodically on her writing throughout the year, but also peppered the experience with contact with her friends. For Julia, writing and socializing were closely intertwined.

I see Julia looking around a bit, talking to classmates, but mostly focused on her writing. (P27: 41-44.12/8/10)

Chatting with kids are her table and looking at their writing. (P43:13-14. 1/31/11)

When teacher leaves Julia talks with friend. They talk on and off the entire class. They play hand games. (P27: 27-29.12/14/10)

She is just sitting and smiling and talking to neighbors. (P34: 40-41.1/5/11)

When she sits back down she talks to her friend who is sitting next to her. (P77: 42-43.5/9/11)

And sometimes, the social time became very important and could even distract Julia from learning. During one grouping of desks when Julia was sitting next to her best friend, she talked so much that her seat had to be changed.

Tyrone was the quietest and least social of the three participants. He did not frequently talk with peers and often worked alone. In spite of his quiet nature, Tyrone was almost always smiling and content indicating that he was supported by being a member in the inclusion class. A personal comment in a reflection memo noted that,

Tyrone is working away quietly. He does not seem motivated by peer interactions. Does he interact less with peers because he has trouble with comprehension? He is so quiet in class and I do not often see him talking to other students. Yet he is happy and is usually smiling. He takes breaks by going to the bathroom or just sitting, but does not look around for social interactions. He seems to feel comfortable and be accepted and well-liked. (P57: 8-17.2/24/11)

Data showed he often worked alone, but sometimes looked around to find help:

He is looking around at other people at the table. (P7: 57-58.10/18/10)

Looking around to see someone else's paper. Reading off the kid's paper across from him. He is just sitting looking like he is not sure what to do. (P7:32-35.10/18/10)

He is pausing again and looking around, looking at the paper across from him. He also looks at the paper next to him. He does not seem to be engaged and working, but looking for clues from other people around him. (P7: 73-76.10/18/10)

He spent a lot of time looking around. (P18: 44-45.10/12/10)

Tyrone had difficulties comprehending oral language and his hesitancy to interact with others was exhibited most significantly at the beginning of the year. As the year progressed, Tyrone found his place and began to interact socially with peers. He was reluctant to ask for help or participate by sharing writing knowledge in class throughout the year and most frequently worked on his writing alone. Tyrone's social experience was not as obviously visible as Julia's and Ryan's and yet he clearly listened to instruction, looked to peers for help, and as he gained comfort in the inclusion class, made more social interactions.

### **Recognition Among Peers**

Gaining recognition in class is a way to feel important and to have status as a member in class. On several occasions, Julia and Tyrone received praise for their writing. Verbal praise helps children know they are doing well and making progress in their work. Observations recorded several moments when public praise occurred:

Tyrone writes steadily during quick writes, then pauses. He is chosen to read his aloud and smiles when the teacher praises him. In his writing he wonders what the scientist is going to do and the teacher thinks this is original. He smiles at the praise. (P15: 74-78.11/3/11)

Julia got a prize because she used the word 'example' in her first paragraph. (P41: 58-59.1/26/11)

At one special moment, Julia and Tyrone were acknowledged for their writing success with a group of children who had received a high grade on an essay. They were called to the back of the class where Mrs. Lane congratulated them. During a discussion after this event when I asked Julia and Tyrone what the teacher said, Julia replied, "That we, we improved because we were a little bit worse at the beginning. But we improved. And she said we climbed the mountain" (G2:6-8.1/28/11). Tyrone said, "She said we climbed the mountain" (G2:13.1/28/11). The children were animated by their recognition and knew that progress was being made.

Field notes record one occasion when Ryan was praised. Ryan read his writing out loud one morning when the class had been writing about how Life Saver candies smell, taste, and feel. Mrs. Lane said he did a good job (P20:17-19.11/16/2010).

### **Grade-Level Instruction Among Peers**

The previous sections discussed the inclusion class, social connections, and gaining recognition among peers. This section will discuss data that reported students profited from receiving writing instruction among peers at the fourth grade level. Types of instruction will be described in more detail later in this chapter. One of the primary benefits for the students with learning disabilities in Mrs. Lane's inclusion model class was that they received grade-level writing instruction among their peers on a daily basis from 8:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. This daily instruction was mandated by the principal in order to prepare the fourth grade students for the Florida Writers test in the spring. The fourth grade teachers were using *Just Writes* by Kathryn Robinson, a curriculum used to learn prompt writing for narrative and expository essays to prepare for standardized tests. The types of lessons included: planning using graphic organizers, adding details

to sentences, Quick Writes, and interesting action verbs. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were part of the whole group instruction on a daily basis.

Learning among their peers with diverse abilities provided Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone the opportunity to learn from writing of other students in the class while receiving grade level instruction. Mrs. Lane said, "One of the things you have to do throughout the year is to put up different kinds of writing that you want them to strive for" (H1:359-362.5/30/2011). Data indicated that the variety of writing from the diverse abilities of children in the classroom was particularly helpful, especially when in comparison to the self-contained special education classrooms. Mrs. Lane said,

I do not think of it so much as inclusion because having come from self-contained ESE, I have had some really good writers. But I think you have more varied kinds of writers. I prefer the regular ed inclusion because you have more variety writers... So you have got more variety to pull from. (H1:367-378.5/30/2011)

When using successful examples of writing to analyze, Mrs. Lane preferred to use writing samples from the children in her class and not from high scoring essays on the 2010 Florida Writes exam. When asked about benefits of the inclusion model, Mrs. Lane said, "It is one thing to put 6s up on a Smartboard from FCAT last year, for example. But really and truly, that is not as meaningful as the kids writing that you can pull up" (H1:360-365.5/30/2011).

Data from student interviews also indicated that learning among peers was beneficial. When Ryan was asked what helped him to do well in his writing he replied, "Uhhhhmmm.....to listen to other people's writing" (R1:13-14.11/5/10). When asked the same question in a focus group with Julia and Tyrone, Ryan gave a similar response: "To listen to other people's writing to get better at it" (G1:15-16.12/2/10). In Mrs. Lane's inclusion class, students with learning disabilities had the chance to learn from and

among their peers. These students received writing instruction for one hour a day and repeatedly witnessed a large variety of texts from their peers that helped them to strive to improve. They gained ideas and knowledge from their teacher and other students as part of this experience. The following section will report findings on the writing instruction, teaching methods, and teacher beliefs about writing.

### **Writing Instruction in the Inclusion Class**

Writing instruction in Mrs. Lane's fourth grade inclusion class was directed by mandates of the state to prepare students for the Florida Writes exam, mandates from the school to use the *Just Writes* curriculum, and the teacher's ability to use methods that would best help her students make progress and succeed as writers. This section will report findings from each of these areas in detail.

#### **Daily Writing Instruction**

The pressure to succeed on the Florida Writes fueled the pace of writing instruction that took place in Mrs. Lane's class. The impact of this institutional demand to perform well on the Florida Writes test trickled down to school curriculum mandates, to instructional intensity of the children writing on a daily basis from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. to get ready for the test. The consistent daily instruction was one of the ways that Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were supported as learners and made progress as writers during their fourth grade year. With a high-stakes test looming in the spring, writing instruction started immediately when the school year began and was consistent during the school year, especially before the test date. Data revealed the effect of the pressure to succeed in writing during an interview with Mrs. Lane:

I understand the importance of consistent writing at this point because if we didn't have Florida Writes there are teachers who would not teach their children how to write. So I understand especially from an expository essay

standpoint because everything that they are going to be doing from here on they need to know how to write in an expository way. (H2: 4-11.5/31/11)

The amount of time Mrs. Lane's students spent on daily writing instruction reflected research reported in the literature that students make progress when given the time, practice, and opportunity to work through the complexities of writing and that writing must occur at least four times a week in order for students to succeed (Graves, 1994). Mrs. Lane focused on writing process methods to help her students succeed as writers in a variety of genres, not just writing to a prompt. Her belief in the power of writing was foundational to how she approached writing instruction throughout the school year.

### **Writing Beliefs**

Mrs. Lane's belief in the importance of writing in a child's education was clearly an underpinning for her writing instruction. She had previously participated in a writing group that used ideas from *The Art of Teaching Writing* (Calkins, 1994) and worked on implementing instructional practices in their classes. The group supported each other's work through a blog and through monthly meetings at the school. In an interview with Mrs. Lane she said, "...if you do not know how to write you are at a distinct disadvantage because you can not show what you know in any way" (H2:102-102.5/31/2011). She continued by saying,

I think they...what the bottom line is, I want them to recognize the value of writing that writing can change the perceptions and lives of the reader. I want them to know they can make someone cry, they can make someone laugh. They can be entertaining, they can be informing. That is the bottom line. So from that they need to be able to know how to organize it, have it make sense, include all that elaboration that puts that picture into the reader's mind. (H2:118-127.5/30/2011)



Mrs. Lane's beliefs about the importance of both academic and personal writing were the underpinnings for her instruction. She clearly valued writing and this belief came through in her instruction and her dedication to helping her students make progress.

### **Teaching Methods**

The teaching methods that Mrs. Lane used were critical to how Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone made progress as writers. Mrs. Lane provided whole group instruction in writing on a daily basis as well as individual instruction on a frequent basis. Data in this section describe the teaching methods that were used from October 2010 until May 2011. Data reported here comes primarily from observations from test prep writing, writing tall tale digital stories, writing poetry, and from an interview with Mrs. Lane.

### **Writing Instruction**

Data from field notes indicated that Mrs. Lane used a variety of methods to teach her students writing skills and writing processes. She gave mini-lessons, modeled the writing process, analyzed successful writing samples, gave specific feedback, and individualized instruction. This continued through all the different types of writing units during the year and was an integral part of the writing hour. This instruction gave students specific tools and skills they needed to succeed in writing. This communication often lasted between ten to twenty minutes of the one-hour of instruction. During this time the class was expected to listen, asked to participate sometimes by answering questions or reading their writing, and were usually given time to write afterwards. One field note entry showed a day in Mrs. Lane's writing class:

8:07 a.m. Mrs. Lane asks students to take their notebooks out. She says some kids will work on their essays alone, and others will work with her on the process. Some students will fill in the who, what, where in their planner and then can begin writing their narrative. Mrs. Lane tells the class the essay needs to be two pages long, so not to get too involved with the topic.

She says she does not want to discourage people who want to write longer stories and says she would love to read them. She tells students she took a children's writing class and learned that when she wrote one paragraph, the instructor would take it and edit most of it out, and just keep a couple of sentences that were excellent. Now Mrs. Lane gives examples of exciting sentences using interesting verbs, versus sentences that are dull. She says that you need to get a picture in your mind first. Mrs. Lane asks the students to imagine an explosion and two cupboard doors blowing off. Asks after the doors blow off, she asks what it would look like. She says, "If you get stumped on the planning sheet, it is because you did not create a picture." Now she wants the kids to describe what happened and asks them to describe one scene. She tells them to focus on describing a scene with action and feeling. The children have four minutes to write.

8:29 a.m. Students take time to write about an object coming out of the cabinets using actions and feelings.

8:33 a.m. Students share their writing and Mrs. Lane works on improving verbs. She goes through this process with several students. She asks the class for input on how to improve the verbs and make them more interesting.

8:44 a.m. Mrs. Lane puts a visual of dry ice on the Smartboard and asks the class about what might happen and what might form. She reminds them that it is a narrative story and they can make up the events. Now the students begin their essay. The children work quietly on their writing while Mrs. Lane circulates around the class.

8:55 a.m. Students are asked to stop writing. (P36:1-29.1/11/2011)

During this particular day, students write for about ten minutes and the rest is instructional and Quick Writes time. Several times in the personal comment section of field notes, there are remarks that perhaps Mrs. Lane was talking too much and that this time could be used for the children to work on their writing. On many days, field notes report that Mrs. Lane talked for 20 to 30 minutes of the one hour of instruction time. Mrs. Lane's instruction had a noticeable impact on how the children learned to write. In a focus group with Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone, the children were asked what helped them to write. Julia responded, "Uhm, kind a like when we are uhm, like when we are reading

the prompt and when the teacher talks and says use expressions and stuff. I get it from them” (G1:8-12.12/2/2010).

Data from focused codes showed that Mrs. Lane’s teaching methods and discussions about writing were repetitive throughout the year. This talk was about planning, adding details and elaborating, demonstrating the writing process, analyzing with a model text, reviewing, reinforcing, and giving feedback, and individualized instruction. Individualized instruction is discussed first because it was a crucial instructional technique that Mrs. Lane used to help the participants succeed.

### **Individualized Instruction**

Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were supported by individualized instruction from Mrs. Lane that occurred either in small groups with children who needed similar help or one on one. After whole group instruction time, Mrs. Lane circulated around the class to help the children. In the back of the room was a small table with six chairs that she often used to work with several children at once. Early in the year, she held a meeting with Julia and Tyrone to help them with their planning process.

Mrs. Lane sits at the back table with Julia and another boy and works with them step-by-step. She keeps going over what needs to be included. She is very specific. She prompts them by asking how they get started when they are writing. Then she asks them to write down what they said. What do you do next she says? What would you do next? She works this way in small increments to get them writing. They spend all of the class time writing at the back table. (P21:24-34.11/17/2010)

Julia and Tyrone are sitting with two other kids at a small table with the teacher in the back of the room. She is going through the graphic organizer one step at a time with these kids. She is asking them to think of words, not sentences, prompting them by asking what time of day, what day of the week, and if they do not know just make it up. She reminds the kids it does not have to be neat. (P9:22-30.11/20/2010)

Mrs. Lane gave individualized writing instruction by visiting Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone during the time they were writing and asking them what they needed. She would often read their writing, ask them questions and give them verbal guidance with examples to help them proceed. Sometimes the children would raise their hands, indicating they needed assistance. Julia and Ryan did this the most frequently, while Tyrone never raised his hand to ask for help. The following interaction was a session that Mrs. Lane had with Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone after they had written about a favorite activity. She was helping Julia learn how to add more details:

Mrs. Lane: Julia, you have an introduction, two main ideas, and a concluding idea. She indented. What does that tell me?

Ryan: It tells you there is an introduction, then new ideas.

Mrs. Lane: What did she do here?

Tyrone: She indented to show main idea one and main idea two.

Mrs. Lane: Yes, I could see where she was going. What did she do? What is this paragraph?

Together: The conclusion.

Mrs. Lane: She was super organized and that got her a lot of points.

Julia: I used a simile.

Mrs. Lane: Look at this sentence, "Another one of my activities..." This is a great sentence. You transitioned right into the second main idea. Let's look at the end. "So now you know my favorite activities." Very good transitions. As a reader, I knew where I felt comfortable, knew exactly what you were trying to tell me. You were missing elaboration or details and that is what you need to get better at. Here is what you could do better. Please read your story.

Julia: My favorite activity is playing with my dog, Tickle. One of the things I like to do is play catch with him. One time I was playing catch, I threw his toy, it went flying and then it bounced off the wall then I looked over and my dog had hit the wall. He was fine. When he got back up he ran and started to lick me. He did bite me once.

Mrs. Lane: Stop there. The last sentence, “He did bite me once.” Does that relate to your other ideas in the paragraph?

Julia: Playing fetch?

Mrs. Lane: So that sentence, the reader is like, “What?” And then you didn’t say anything else about it. “My dog bit me once.” Can you see why that sentence did not belong there? Throw that sentence out. Now, question, what does her dog look like? What picture was in your mind?

Ryan: Short hair, German Shepard.

Tyrone: Bull Dog and running.

Mrs. Lane: What color?

Julia: I had no color.

Mrs. Lane: Oh, so he pictured his own dog. I just pictured a dog. I didn’t know what color or kind it was. So, this is what pushes your writing to be more precise. You need to describe the dog.

Julia: He uhm, on his neck, it is black, but he has three white triangles. I could write about the triangles.

Mrs. Lane: You could. How big is your dog?

Julia: He is about a foot and a half.

Mrs. Lane: Very precise. A small dog.

Julia: He is a mix between a Dachshund and a Corgi.

Mrs. Lane: Oh my gosh. I did not have a picture in my mind, so your sentence could start with, “My favorite activity is playing fetch with my dog Tickle.” Right there, you should put a picture in our minds of what kind of dog Tickle is—a mix between a Dachshund and a Corgi. Then you take another sentence and tell us what color he is. Then you go into your description of the fetch game. One more thing—you could add more information about the toy. Do you know what to do know? Get the picture in the reader’s mind first. Take one thing and describe it really well. You are awesome with ideas. Just remember to describe. (P25:20-91.12/03/2010)

Mrs. Lane frequently gave instruction like this to the children to point out very specifically what they were doing well and what they needed to improve. She guided

the discussion with questions and nudged children to find the answers so they would eventually be able to work on their own.

Once during poetry writing, Mrs. Lane sat with Julia and helped her revise her writing with very specific techniques. Observations read:

Teacher works with Julia on the language and style of her poem. She sits down at desk with her. She goes through the poem line by line and helps her to listen to the language. Teacher writes on her paper and shows her how to move the lines around and move the language around to make the poem sound better and flow better. She reads the poem out loud so Julia can hear. Puts numbers on the side of the paper to show Julia how to reorganize the poem. (P80:23-31.5/13/2011)

Mrs. Lane recognized the need for individualized instruction for children who struggle with writing. During an interview with Mrs. Lane she said,

The only thing I would add is that each one of those kids comes with a completely individualized...writing more than any area...In writing, just because of the nature of how it is, it is not a worksheet, it is not spelling words, it is not math facts. I feel like in writing more than any other subject area it takes time to get to know to get to know the ESE kids and then it takes time to figure out what will motivate and spark for that child. So it requires much more individualized one on one feedback specific to that child. (H2:212-225.5/30/2011)

Mrs. Lane felt that individualized instruction was a priority for her students, yet felt frustrated that it took time to get to know each child and their unique areas of need.

One of her priorities once class instruction was completed was to circulate and to help the children work through their problems on an individualized basis.

### **Planning and Getting Ideas**

Talk about planning and time spent planning writing using a graphic organizer occurred during the entire year of writing instruction. Two different graphic organizers were used for narrative and expository writing and students had to spend time on the planning process. The tall tale graphic organizer was similar to the narrative essay one,

and planning varied for poetry, depending on the type of poem. The student teacher, with Mrs. Lane's guidance, led a lesson one day on planning. She used the white board at the front of the class and walked students through the process of planning their stories. They had done this many times when working on their expository and narrative essays and were expected to complete this process again. Ms. France wrote the following on the white board, which the students copied into their notebooks:

Introduction, introduce character, physical description of character, character's special skill. (P44:18-19.2/2/2011)

Mrs. Lane encouraged planning as a way for children in her class to get ideas and organize them before they started writing, but also recognized that sometime children would get stuck in this phase. Children were allowed to skip planning if they were stuck and start writing their first paragraphs. Mrs. Lane recognized that getting started with writing was also a way to generate and organize ideas.

### **Details and Elaboration**

Mrs. Lane repetitively talked about the need for details, elaboration, and creating a picture in the reader's mind. She also focused on specific exercises in language style and usage to help the children improve their writing. One of the main ways that Mrs. Lane encouraged children to write in detail was through the use of Quick Writes, or four minute writing exercises. During this type of exercise Mrs. Lane displayed an image on the Smartboard, or put on a funny mask and asked the children to look at it carefully, and then write about it with as much detail as possible for four minutes. Or, she would hand out a food item and let the children, smell, taste, and feel it before they began to write. Food items that she used during the year included Cheese Doodles, Lifesavers candy, and Ritz crackers. This exercise was a way to reinforce Mrs. Lane's focus on

writing with as much detail and fluency as possible. After students wrote for four minutes, there was a share time when different children read their writing and Mrs. Lane commented. During instruction time in January 2011, Mrs. Lane refers to a video clip that she showed the children the previous day to engage them in a Quick Writes session. She said, "As good writers stop and think about what that looked like. Think about similes, metaphors, and onomatopoeia you could use. What are effective powerful words? What are some words that came to your mind? Explosion, sizzling. What came to your mind when you pictured that?" The students responded with words by shouting out examples such as erosion, fireworks, gunshots, blurring. Mrs. Lane said, "Those are words that put the picture in the reader's mind." Mrs. Lane continued by giving the children directions and reminding them to use action and feeling words, use precise language, and action or descriptive words (P37:1-13.1/2/2011).

### **Language Use, Mechanics, Grammar**

Mrs. Lane's oral instruction was varied and responded to what the children needed help with during a particular writing exercise. This talk could be about writing mechanics, getting ideas for writing, exciting sentences, and interesting verbs. Field note entries recorded the variety of topics addressed during these frequent discussions:

Students discuss a word that came to their attention yesterday, 'quintessential'. One boy had the definition that he says is perfect. Another child tells what this word means. Next word the class discusses is congenial. Someone says friendly. One girl looks it up on the computer. It says 'harmony'. (P11:1-6.11/26/2010)

On another occasion the class worked on using proper nouns and engaged in an activity to help them learn:

Teacher hands out a slip with common nouns on it such as ball, toy, doll. The point of the game is to use a proper noun instead of a common noun.



Teacher explains and gives examples. She goes through a couple of the words and kids shout out their ideas. (P8:10-13.10/19/2010)

Teacher does a mini-lesson on quotation marks for about fifteen minutes. She gives an example with a smile on the board and says the words that need to be quoted come out of that smile. Then kids look in their books for examples of quotes. (P29:1-5.12/10/2011)

Teacher suggests that the kids who do not have ideas draw a brainstorm box and write some new ideas down to see if that help. (P30:5-7.12/13/2010)

Kids are working on their tall tales today. Mrs. Lane says, "Tell the exaggerations about the character. How do you write this? Gives example of character pulls the moon for his love...sort of like a narrative but you do not need a real problem. Set the state for your character where they are from." (P56:1-6.2/17/2011)

She reminded students to get a picture in their minds first and describe each scene with action and feeling. (P36:11-20.1/11/2011)

Mrs. Lane taught a poetry unit to her class in the spring. Instruction was important during this time, because the form and genre were new to the class.

Mrs. Lane used visual presentations as well as verbal directions to help the children learn about different kinds of poems:

Starts with a visual presentation on poetry. It explains what a concrete poem is. Teacher then talks, "Poetry has a lot to do with imagery. Poems have patterns, rhythms, and musical rhythm, rhyme, and meter. Asks class to think about their five senses and uses an apple as an example." (P72:1-6.4/27/2011)

As poetry writing continued Mrs. Lane most frequently displayed examples of different kinds of poems on the Smartboard and the students then answered questions about the form and the language the authors used. This is discussed in more detail in the section 'Analyzing with Model Text.'

## Demonstrating the Writing Process

Demonstrating the writing process using examples on the white board or on the Smartboard occurred as a part of Mrs. Lane's writing instruction. These concrete examples that students could see and learn from helped them to learn the skills they needed to grow as writers. One of the parts of the writing process that was emphasized during the year was planning as discussed earlier. During this step, the class used graphic organizers, which differed according to the type of writing that they were doing. When students began narrative writing at the beginning of December, Mrs. Lane spent the writing instruction time by drawing the graphic organizer on the board and explaining the purpose of each step to them. In order to make the process very real, Mrs. Lane brought in ingredients for a 'narrative soup' one day.

Teacher draws the organizer on the board and brings in literal ingredients for a narrative soup! She has a big pot and step by step the class climbs and then descends the narrative ladder by adding ingredients to the soup.  
(P28:1-5.12/09/2010)

Learning the process of revision is an important component of learning to write well. In the spring one day, Mrs. Lane used the Smartboard to have an interactive demonstration about how to write a poem. Students began by sharing their ideas and working on the poem as a class.

Apple  
Apple juicy and sweet  
Apple, red as Santa Claus' cheeks  
Apple, red as a cardinal

During this group process, she asked students to practice the beat, to brainstorm together, and to repeat the poem out loud and listen to the sound and the patterns and the rhythm of that language. The students decided to take out Claus' and decided the last line did not fit well. They continued with this pattern of writing, listening, and

revising. During this exercise Mrs. Lane talked about the need to work with language when writing a poem and the importance of starting with a sloppy copy and brainstorming (P71:10-35.4/27/2011).

When Mrs. Lane began to teach the children about diamante poems, she also took the time to demonstrate how to write a poem. She took the time to write a poem with the kids on the white board before they begin to write their own. They brainstormed together.

Lifesaver  
Hard, sweet  
Sucking, smacking, crunching  
Cherry, lemonlime, grape, orange  
Chewing, grimacing, eye watering  
Soft, sour  
Starburst

Mrs. Lane taught writing from the writer's perspective with an insider's knowledge. By brainstorming with the children and talking through this process out loud, she exposed the thinking that occurs during the process of writing and revising. She did this to help students become aware of and learn this process so they could do it on their own. Mrs. Lane worked with the students with learning disabilities with knowledge, experience, and understanding of their special needs and what would help them to make progress and grow as writers.

### **Analyzing with Model Text**

Mrs. Lane used model texts throughout the year to demonstrate to her students what successful writing looked like. During this time, students had a visual depiction of a writing sample that correlated to what they were learning and trying to accomplish as writers. In a typical exercise, writing would be displayed on the Smartboard and Mrs. Lane would take the time to go through and identify language and stylistic elements of

the writing that made it a quality piece. This was a guided exercise in identifying parts of a written piece and articulating specific examples of what made it successful. Class participation was required during this exercise that was directed by Mrs. Lane. As described in field notes, Mrs. Lane used previous samples of high scoring test samples in her instruction:

Students look at the sample of writing on the white board which received a 6 on the Florida Writes. Teacher goes through different elements—sound at the beginning, chomp!chomp! catches the reader’s attention. Child introduces two reasons it would be great to have a pet alligator. She points out indenting, main idea one and two. She also points out punctuation and vocabulary, as well as transition words. She picks out certain phrases and asks if the kids could see a picture in their minds. Use quotation marks, simile, high vocabulary, elaboration, transition words. Teacher continues to go over the essay to look at what the writer did well and focuses on specific examples. Kids are getting prompted and answering. (P10:16-32.10/25/2010)

She pulls up a demo on the Smartboard. It is a narrative that earned a 6. Goes through line by line and reinforces what is good about the writing. Has kids notice the details, language, style of the writing that helped this child to succeed. (P22: 9-14.11/29/10)

First the teacher shows the class a 6 and goes through step-by-step pointing out high vocabulary, use of punctuation, places where the writer does not do well. (P26:2-5.12/3/2010)

On other occasions, Mrs. Lane read samples of writing out loud and held a discussion with the children about specific techniques the writer used. This exercise in analysis drew the children’s attention to qualities of good writing and helped them to know how to achieve this goal. During one class period in January, 2011 Mrs. Lane had the children close their eyes while she read an expository essay out loud. When reading was complete she asked the children what was good about the writing and what wasn’t good. She asked the children if they could create a visual picture based on what she read. She then read a second essay and stopped on and off to point out the

organizational structure of the piece. She said it was good because it came back to the prompt. Mrs. Lane talked about adding details to make it good and she asked for student input about how to improve writing. Students responded with “details, elaboration, and high vocabulary” (P32:1-12.1/3/2011).

Mrs. Lane continued to teach writing after the Florida Writes, because she believed that writing was an important skill and wanted the children needed to learn a variety of genres. During poetry writing that occurred in the spring after the test, Mrs. Lane most frequently showed the children a poem on the Smartboard and the children analyzed the language use, shape, and style of the poem. This was her primary method of instruction during this unit. The following field note entry captured her instruction during poetry writing:

Today the class is working on diamante poems. On the white board is a definition of a diamante poem. Teachers says, “I am going to introduce a poem. Read it to yourself. What do you think of this?” Maria participates and connects the shape of the poem to the name of the poem—diamante. Other kids participate noticing ‘ing’ words, use of adjectives. Teachers says, “We are going to look at the examples and puts two on the board—synonym and antonym poems.” She continues, “What do you notice about the words?” Students participate with answers about the language and what they notice. Mrs. Lane says, “How do we plan for this type of poem?” Students raise hands and enthusiastically participate. Mrs. Lane says, “You must have learned strategies and techniques that apply to all kinds of writing.” (P74:3-16.5/4/2011)

### **Reviewing, Reinforcing, and Giving Feedback**

Mrs. Lane’s writing instruction was repetitive and predictable, yet varied through the year as reported in observations. On many occasions, data showed that writing time started with Mrs. Lane talking about writing and the qualities of good writing. During this time, Mrs. Lane often reviewed and reinforced previous instruction and gave the children feedback. Sometimes this took place while the class was analyzing writing,

after children shared their writing, or during time the teacher was talking about writing. These processes usually were overlapping and took place at the same time.

Reviewing was a regular part of Mrs. Lane's instruction. Her lessons were repetitive in nature and she frequently went over a previous lesson before proceeding to the next. Observations and field note entries provide many times when Mrs. Lane was reviewing:

Reviewing what they learned. An exaggeration is a hyperbole. Going over the elements. (P46:3-5.2/4/2011)

They share and then teacher goes over different aspects of the writing. She asks, "How did they start?" Once upon a time. Good narrative still uses the same details, character, place, setting, time. (P22:2-6.11/29/2010)

Going over FL assessment now. Reviewing what needs to be in the first couple of sentences. Mrs. Lane says, "Fourth grade writing is all about details. Detail, detail, detail, detail, and elaboration. And information which is details." (P41:1-8.1/25/2011)

Teacher says, "Make a clear picture. Describe as many sensory things as you can. Go and look what you wrote the first week of school. See how good you were." (P4:30-33.10/11/2010)

Teacher went over the opening paragraph and what needs to be in it. (P38:1-3.11/18/2011)

During one lesson in January 2011, Mrs. Lane handed out each child's writing folder from kindergarten through fourth grade. The children looked at the progress they had made over the years and also looked at the most recent writing samples that were included. As a way to direct the children in reflection and analysis, as well as helping them to set future goals, Mrs. Lane asked them to think about their expository writing this year, what they did well, and what they wanted to improve (P32:11-15.1/3/2011).

During the poetry unit, Mrs. Lane also used reviewing as a technique to instruct they children. She reviewed the difference between concrete poetry and diamante and

said, “Diamante ends in ing/ly and is the shape of a diamond. Concrete is the shape of the topic” (P74:5/04/2011).

Field notes from early in November, 2010 record Mrs. Lane’s process of reinforcing and giving feedback to the students. This was a repetitive exercise in her class. On this particular morning, children wrote for four minutes and described what they saw in a short science video. After their writing time, a variety of children shared their writing. After children read, she reinforced what they did well in their writing. At one point, she said, “This sounds like a science book, discussing heat.” Mrs. Lane continued to choose what was good about each sample of writing that was read. She went on to talk about the importance of getting thoughts down. When the children began to write, they were asked to evaluate what they did well and to make revisions for areas that needed improvement. Mrs. Lane asked everyone to find a place to elaborate, a place to cut and paste (P12:9-17.11/1/2010). Field notes recorded times when Mrs. Lane was reinforcing and giving feedback:

Teacher praises and gives feedback by repeating what the child has done well. Asks kids to mark places with an x where they used one of the senses to describe. Then, she asks them to go and look back to the beginning of the year at their quick writes and see how they progressed up until now. Kids share about what they have improved on since the beginning of the year. Teacher talks for about 20 minutes about what a good job the kids have done. She talks about how they have improved and tells the kids this is the best class she has had in terms of writing. (P20: 2-14.11/16/2010)

Kids share their writing and she gave positive feedback. Oh, you are using background knowledge to make inferences. (P21:1-3.11/17/2010)

She tells the students they are good on using specific nouns and active verbs and now they need to work on extending their writing. (T)he reader should have a clear picture in their minds when they read the piece. (P15:5-8.11/3/10)

Data from observations showed that feedback was an important instructional technique that was used by Mrs. Lane. In an interview this was reinforced when Mrs. Lane was asked what instructional technique she thought helped the students the most to learn writing, she replied,

The thing that I try to focus on is that building blocks at square one giving them enough time and practice. And specific feedback over and over until they get it because those kids I will still focus on the basics. For example, beginning, middle, end when other kids the feedback I was giving them....so on an essay, the feedback on an essay I don't tell them everything they need to work on. I look at that individual kid and have them...those kids...if they don't have the basics, beginning, middle, end. There is no point in talking about elaboration. So my feedback to them it related to the instruction but it also related to the basics. So they got it. And when they got it, I told them repeatedly they got it to keep them doing it. (H1:212-227.5/30/2011)

Mrs. Lane got to know each child's writing and their unique problems, so she could help them to strengthen the skills they already had to make further progress. It took her several months at the beginning of the year to understand what would be most helpful to each student. She did this through assessment of their writing and spending time individually with each child. While some of the children in the class caught on quickly to the structure and organization needed for narrative and expository writing, Mrs. Lane made sure that Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone understood step-by-step how to plan and organize ideas and then move to writing their essays. For Mrs. Lane 'basics' means meeting the children at the point they need help and giving them explicit and individualized direction in how to improve.

### **Conclusion**

Mrs. Lane believed in the potential of the inclusion model and knew that it helped all students to learn. She understood that her children with special needs benefitted from being surrounded by their regular education peers and she strived to help them



achieve as much as they could. She held the same expectations of writing success for her special education students as her regular education students. Mrs. Lane's inclusion class and the writing instruction that occurred in that class proved to be essential in the participants' writing experiences and growth as writers. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone not only learned from the adults in the room, but were soaked in an environment where they were supported and influenced by their peers. Being a part of this community gave them membership and social experiences that were an important part of their writing progress. Learning with their peers and receiving grade level instruction was challenging for Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone and helped them to grow.

Mrs. Lane supported the children's literacy growth through her belief that writing holds an important place in the curriculum and through her skill as a writing teacher. She was committed to helping the children succeed as writers in a variety of genres, not just taking the state test. By receiving consistent daily writing instruction, having time to practice, hearing examples, analyzing samples of quality writing, receiving specific feedback, and getting ideas from their teacher and peers, the children were equipped with the tools they needed to grow as writers. The individualized instruction they were given by Mrs. Lane in addition to the whole group instruction helped them to work through their areas of weakness and addressed their unique writing problems. Data from the context of this study echoed what has been found in the literature—students with learning disabilities benefit academically and socially from learning among their grade level peers (King & Youngs, 2003; Pickard, 2008; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009; Berry, 2006).

## CHAPTER 6 THE STUDENTS' GROWTH AS WRITERS

The purpose of this study was to understand how students with learning disabilities make progress in writing in a fourth grade inclusion model class. Chapter 5 discussed the inclusion model class and daily writing instruction in this class as contextual factors that helped Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone to grow as writers during their fourth grade year. These factors provided critical foundational support to how the students learned and grew as writers. In order to best illustrate these data, the contextual support system was discussed first because it provided a setting for all learning to take place. Without the context of the inclusion model and Mrs. Lane's grade level instruction, Julia, Tyrone, and Ryan may not have experienced the same success.

Data from observations, interviews with the students and Mrs. Lane, and writing samples also showed that Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone engaged in patterns of writing behavior that were both solitary and social, and facilitated their writing growth. This chapter discusses patterns of writing behavior, affective writing experiences, and social and participatory behavior. It is organized as case studies in order to highlight each child's unique writing experiences.

The behaviors and experiences that became obvious in focused codes were fundamental to the participants' success as writers who were participating in an inclusion model class. While there were similarities between the three children, there were also differences in how they behaved, felt, and experienced the writing process. Writing requires a thinking process that writers must engage in and organize during the time they are composing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The children were not able to

articulate what cognitive process was occurring for them while they were writing when asked during the interviews. While the external behavior was concrete, it was necessary to interpret what type of cognitive process was occurring during the composing time. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone also had affective experiences of writing and shared their opinions and feelings in focus group and individual interviews. Feelings ranged from hating writing, to feeling writing was 'great' or 'awesome.' Students also expressed confusion and difficulties with writing throughout the year. Another aspect to the students writing experience was their social behavior as writers in a community. Being part of a community of literacy learners is fundamental to the success of children (Smith, 1988) and was one of the ways that the children engaged with their environment, ideas, each other, and their teacher. All literacy learning takes place within social and historical contexts (Bhaktin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978) and evidence existed in the data during this study as well that the children were provided with support through their social and participatory context. This social and participatory behavior gave them opportunities to act and talk like writers and to extend their learning.

One section is devoted to each individual child because of the different ways that they grew and participated as writers in the inclusion model class. The sections are organized as follows: getting ideas and planning, asking for help, revising and extending, affective writing experience, and social and participatory experience. While each category is distinct, there are often overlaps in the categories during the discussion of the findings because these processes and behaviors were fluid and often occurred at the same time. First, I will provide some background information about

student writing levels at the beginning of the year and discuss disabilities. Then I will write in detail about each child's writing processes.

### **Julia**

Julia was an 11 year old girl who was language impaired as indicated by her IEP. Julia's language impairment affected her ability to write well. Julia started the year with 1s and 2s out of 6 on her writing rubric that Mrs. Lane used in class. Julia, therefore, was at risk for not passing the Florida Writes exam. 3.5 out of 6 is considered a passing score. Mrs. Lane knew Julia needed a tremendous amount of work to help bring her up to grade level writing skills, and prepare her as a skilled writer who could face a variety of writing tasks competently. Mrs. Lane knew she had to strengthen Julia's skills to help her to pass. While discussing Julia's writing ability, Mrs. Lane said,

She was getting 1s at the beginning of the year.....She was getting 1s and 2s when she came in the fall. Was having trouble putting sentences together, all of the words in the sentence, plus the tense issue. All of the tenses, present, past mixed. And no elaboration. (H1:58-66.5/30/2011)

Julia was pulled from class on Tuesday and Friday mornings at 8:50 a.m. by the speech language pathologist for 30 minutes each day to work on language fluency issues. The benefit of this individualized instruction was that the speech teacher and Mrs. Lane worked together to help Julia strengthen her writing and she received guidance on how to elaborate more in her writing. However, she also missed the last ten minutes of writing twice a week, a time when children often shared what they had written or Mrs. Lane summarized the work that was done. Julia wrote more slowly than other children and was always given extra time to complete her assignments later in the day. This was an accommodation that was specified in her IEP. Julia received writing instruction mostly alongside her peers, but some of the time was also spent alone with Mrs. Lane,

with the speech pathologist, and working on her own or with Mrs. Brown in the afternoons to complete her assignments.

### **Getting Ideas and Planning**

The process of getting ideas and planning for writing were clearly linked together in the writing instruction in Mrs. Lane's class. Mrs. Lane encouraged, but did not insist, that the children plan, using the graphic organizers she distributed in class. If a child got stuck on the planning phase, she permitted them to move straight to their writing. Mrs. Lane was flexible and used the planners to help the children, but also understood that sometimes it was best for them to partially complete the planner and then begin writing. She knew that ideas would be generated during the writing process also. While teaching prompt writing, Mrs. Lane used a separate planner for expository writing and one for narrative writing. Julia was a student who planned her writing carefully before she moved on to the next phase of the composing process. When asked about Julia and how she planned her writing, Mrs. Lane said,

Planning really helped her because she is really methodical...She is one she would want to have that planning perfect, have everything on there. Which she did not really need it that way. It was more organizing their thoughts. Getting their thinking organized for how they are going to put the essay together. (H1:272-279.5/30/2011)

In a group interview when Julia was explaining her writing process, she said,

Like sometimes when I write the main ideas in the box and on the planner sheet and I will write it down and I will have more to say and I can go a little further and go down in the planner. (G1:212-216.5/30/2011)

Field notes also described Julia working through the process of planning in a methodical way,

She is working on the brainstorming process and draws out the form she needs on her paper. Once she talks out her ideas—a walk at camp with a partner in the woods looking for leaves, mushrooms, and plants, she easily

writes them down in the bubble. She is able to get through the whole organization sheet. (P15.50-60.3/3/2010)

Julia was consistently careful and methodical about planning her story before she started to write. She was a child who relied on the planning process to help her move forward with her writing. During this phase, she seemed to be organizing her ideas carefully. On occasion, Julia would get stuck in the planning phase, need to skip some information, and move into writing with what she had. At this point, she would ask for help by raising her hand. Julia's pattern of asking for help is discussed in the next section. If Julia did not complete some of the planner, she would generate ideas as she moved through the writing process. Julia's planning was most evident in her writing samples.

These figures show the extensive planning that Julia did before she started to write her expository and narrative essays. She took the time to generate ideas and to work through the entire graphic organizer before she began to write it on paper. These examples of planning were done to prepare for the Florida Writes exam. As the year progressed and Julia grew as a writer, her planning became more involved and extensive before she moved to other steps in the writing process.

The process of generating ideas happened concurrently with the planning for writing. Data from this research showed that these two processes occurred together and students were getting ideas and planning their essays, tall tales, or poems. While the observable behavior was filling in a graphic organizer, there was clearly a cognitive process at work that helped Julia to find ideas by talking to others, listening to the teacher, or drawing from personal experience. The inclusion model class provided a

community of writers and Julia looked to other students and adults in the class for help with ideas for writing.

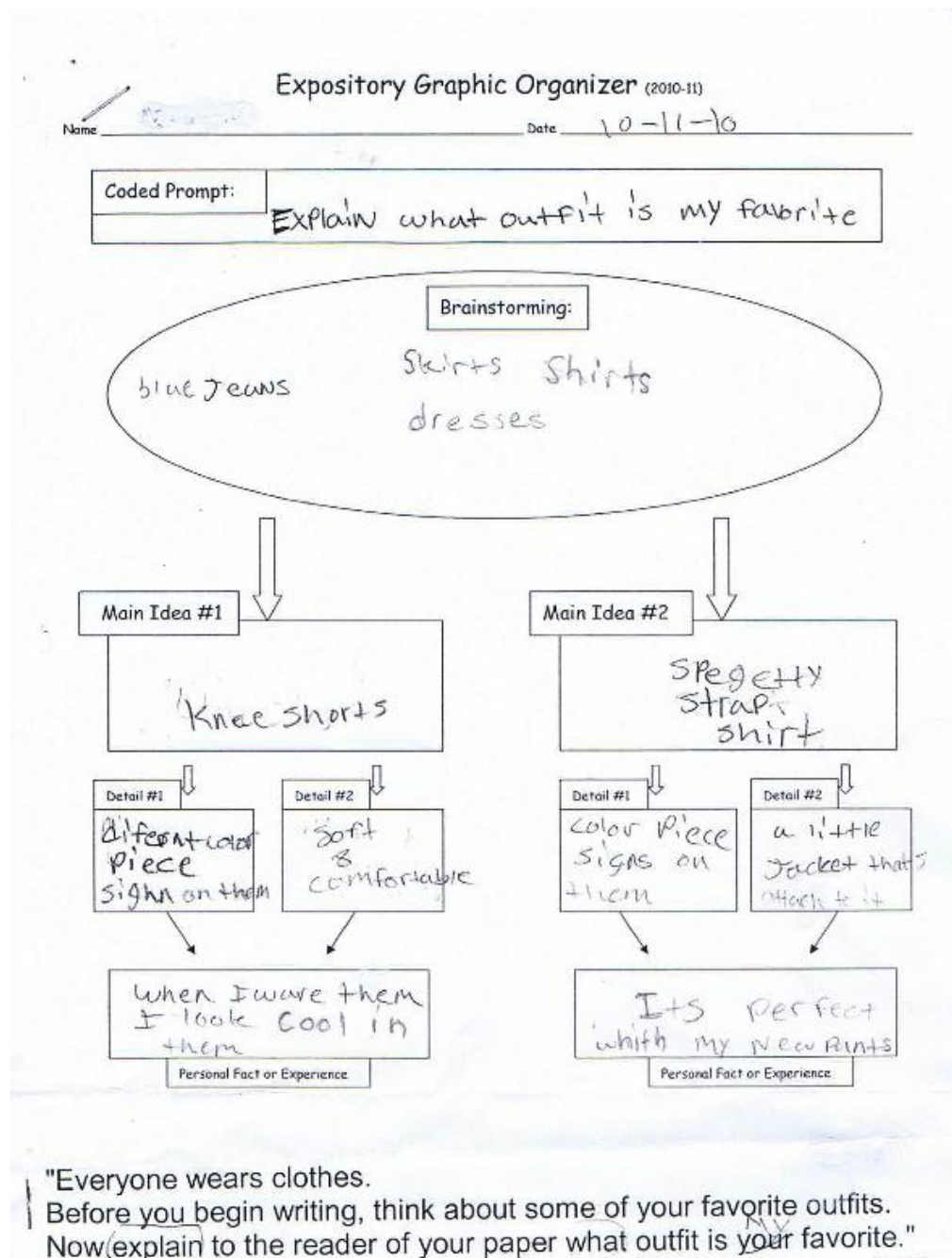


Figure 6-1. Julia plans an expository essay (10/11/2010)

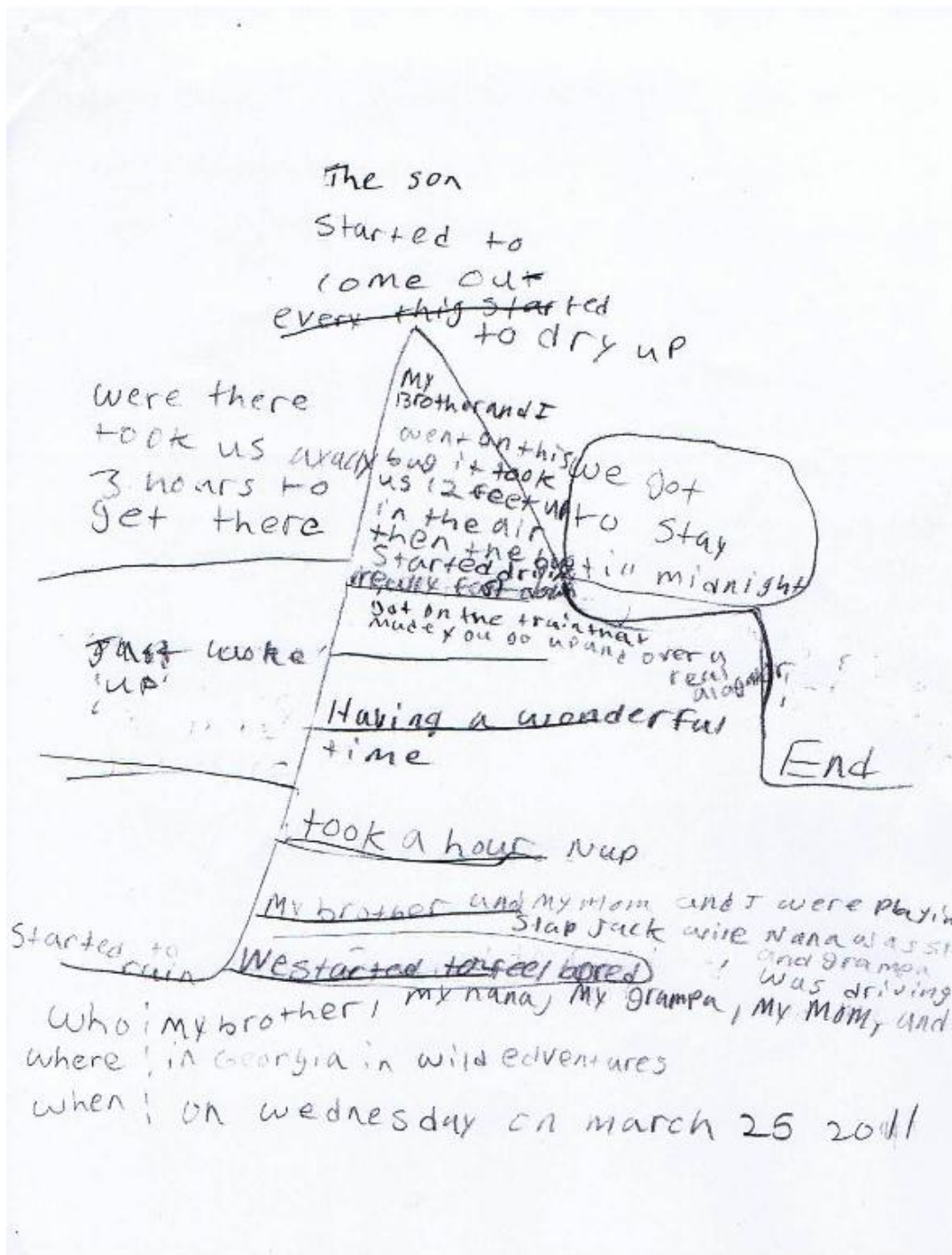


Figure 6-2. Julia plans a narrative story (2/10/2011)

This is also one of the ways that Julia participated socially and is discussed further in the section on social and participatory behavior. In a group interview with Ryan and Tyrone, Julia said,



I will listen to other people and see what they will be right about and how they do their expressions and like their ideas and I will get how I did the main ideas and so I will try to listen to them. (G1:36-40.12/2/2010)

In another interview when Julia was discussing narrative writing, she said,

Uhm...when Mrs. Lane asks the students to raise their hands and give ideas about their narrative. And that is where I get my ideas from. (J2:42-45.12/2/2010)

Getting ideas for writing from peers in the class was a way that the children benefited from grade-level instruction in the inclusion class. Julia said,

Uhm, like what he said first, I will listen to the other people and see what they will be right about and how they do their expressions and like their ideas and I will get how I did the main ideas and so I will try to listen to them. (G1:36-40.12/2/2010)

In another interview when asked how other students helped her to learn writing Julia said,

They will say some details about what they do on their writing and it will give me some ideas and stuff. (J6:48-50.3/23/2011)

Julia also used personal experiences to draw ideas from when planning her writing and choosing a topic. When Julia was working on her tall tale, she drew on personal experience for her ideas for her story. Julia and her family attended church on the weekends and Julia participated in the youth group at church. Her tall tale was a story about the youth minister at her church. Again during poetry writing, Julia drew from personal experience and wrote a poem about her friend Ariel. She got her ideas from her friend as she planned her poem with a brainstorming list:

Ariel made her goal

Nice  
Sweet  
Giving  
Caring  
Loveing

Se a prett girl for her aage  
Not a bully  
Sticks up for her self  
Yay, Ariel made her goal

In this example of planning for writing, Julia showed her connection to her friend and how important this relationship was. Working with friends and making social connections was an important way that Julia participated as a writer in her class.

In a quiz, Mrs. Lane asked students how they planned a poem. Julia wrote,

How do I plan for a concreat poem is First I will write down the five scencess (smell, taste, hear, sees, and feels) 2<sup>nd</sup> I would figaurate what were writing about eather a diamanta poem or concreat poem. 3<sup>rd</sup> and see if It would be in a diamond shape or the shape of a concreat poem 4<sup>th</sup> I would began writing. (Julia, 4/27/2011)

This response demonstrated the planning steps that Julia had learned and had been practicing since the beginning of the year. Filling in a five senses worksheet was a way that Mrs. Lane had instructed the children to plan a poem and Julia went through this process. She analyzed what type of poem she would be writing, what kind of form it would take, and then she would begin to write. These are similar steps that Julia learned earlier in the year when planning for an essay or writing a tall tale. Julia used this planning process consistently through all of her writing exercises. During this phase of the writing process, Julia worked individually and with help from her teacher and her peers to translate her ideas into a form that helped her create her story. With this part of the process at least partially underway, Julia would move to writing her essay, story, or poem. Julia moved between idea generation and planning. She sought help from her writing community. This was her typical writing pattern and is discussed at length in the next section.

## Asking for Help

Julia asked Mrs. Lane and her peers for help with her writing to work through challenges she was encountering. After Mrs. Lane's instruction when the children had time to work on their essays, stories, or poems, Julia almost always raised her hand and asked for help from one of the adults in the room—Mrs. Lane, Mrs. Brown, or the student teacher. This was Julia's typical pattern for writing. I frequently sat with her and helped her talk through her ideas, but did not advise her about the form of her writing. Mrs. Lane and the other teachers were most often responsive to Julia's request for help and provided her with individual attention and guidance so that she could work through problems she was having with her writing. Field note entries repeatedly showed Julia raising her hand and asking for help:

Julia has her hand up and teacher goes over to help. Now she is working again. (P7.52-54.10/18/2010)

She asked for a lot of help, but once she says something out loud, she is able to get the words on paper. (P14.38-41.11/2/2010)

Immediately when the kids need to start writing, she goes over to ask for help. Julia is talking through her ideas and labeling the parts she has already written. (P31.23-27.12/14/2011)

Julia works with her group on the prompts. She has difficulty with some of the decoding. She asks me for help and then the teacher suggests that the kids who need help can move to the back of the class to get some more explanation. (P25:9-13.12/03/2010)

Julia listens to the examples today and when she is asked to start the second paragraph she asks for help right away. (P28:9-13.12/10/2010)

She draws her planner but does not put any ideas down. She mouths to me, "I need help." This is Julia's motto. (P30:37-39.12/13/2010)

Julia's pattern of asking for help, talking through problems, getting ideas when help came seemed to help her significantly as a writer. Her willingness to ask for help

moved her through her writing assignments. She looked to the other students she sat with as well as other adults in the room. The inclusion model class provided membership for Julia as a writer and she sought connection to learn what she needed. Asking for help seemed to be one of Julia's strong points. Clearly she felt that this behavior was acceptable in the class and help was given to her with her writing. Julia drew on her surroundings to support her as a writer and to help her grow in her skills. Rather than just providing social opportunities, Julia's teachers and her peers gave her the chance to find ideas for writing, to work through obstacles, to plan, to add details, and to grow as a writer. The verbal connections she made with others when she asked for help and the time she had to talk through her writing difficulties, seemed to be key factors in Julia's growth.

### **Revising and Extending**

Julia learned to revise and extend her writing during the year. Mrs. Lane often asked the children to find a place in their writing where they wanted to add more detail. Sometimes they worked through this process by cutting and pasting their papers to add more room for writing. At the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Lane required the children to find places to add more details by cutting and pasting. In the writing sample below Julia added a new paragraph to her writing with more detail. She also added adjectives and adverbs to make her writing more descriptive.

Julia's first draft:

What I do At a birthday celebration.  
What I do is everybody would bring food drink & presents. My newfew was born on October 3 so his Birthday is on October 3. On October 3 we had a party for my little baby newfew Kaden. We had food drinks and baby toys.  
The different kinds of food & drinks we had is different kind of chips, hamburgers, hotdogs, and chillie. The drinks we had is sprite, 7UP, Pepsie,

Punch, and Dr. Pepper. We all ate around the bar and my brother spit chillie on me. I was really mad because the chillie was really hot.

We also had baby toys for the baby. We had a baby rocking chair. Were the baby can rock his self in the Rocking chair. He also has a bouncing swing. The baby bounces high on the bouncing swing it seams like he realy like it even though he's a baby. But I keep the Bouncy swing at our house were he can have something to do at our house.

Julia's revisions:

What I do At a birthday celebration.

What I do is everybody would bring food drink & presents. My newfew was born on October 3 so his Birthday is on October 3. On October 3 we had a party for my little baby newfew Kaden. We had food drinks and baby toys.

The different kinds of food & drinks we had is different kind of chips, hambergers, hotdogs, and chillie. The drinks we had is sprite, 7UP, Peppsie, Punch, and Dr. Pepper. We all ate around the bar and my brother spit chillie on me. ***I was at my oldest brothers house, in the living room. My 2 year old nephew Jeffry was frantically jumping up and down on the long tan couch. Then Jeffry suddly fell backward of the couch and on the hard tile floor. Then the chilly flew all over me.*** I was really mad because the chillie was really hot.

We also had baby toys for the baby. We had a baby rocking chair. Were the baby can rock his self in the Rocking chair. He also has a bouncing swing. The baby bounces high on the bouncing swing it seams like he realy like it even though he's a baby. But I keep the Bouncy swing at our house were he can have something to do at our house. (Julia, 10/21/2010)

This was one of the few times that Julia cut and pasted early in the year when she was required to do so by Mrs. Lane. Another time Julia cut and pasted her writing she was able to extend her work extensively.

Julia started writing:

What I demonstrated in sience. We had different kind of supplies. We had 4 steps to make our gue on Monkey. In mmy opinion it was fun to follow the steps and watching how it changes every time you put an egredinat in it.

Everybody had a spoon and a cup. The spoon was to stir. The cup was to put the ingredients in to it. Everybody loved mixing the ingredient together. We also had a pitcher full of water.

Now you have all the steps to make glue Now you can make glue. This was a lot of fun cause we got to take it home and play with it. I made a ball out of it and I made Jesus out of it.

Julia extended her writing:

What I demonstrated in science. We had different kind of supplies. We had 4 steps to make our glue on Monkey. In my opinion it was fun to follow the steps and watching how it changes every time you put an ingredient in it.

Everybody had a spoon and a cup. The spoon was to stir. The cup was to put the ingredients in to it. Everybody loved mixing the ingredient together. We also had a pitcher full of water.

**Everybody got a piece of paper with steps on there paper and squares for observations. There was 4 different steps. I will name from the order it's suppose to be in. glue, borax, food color, and water these are all the steps to make glue.**

**The glue had a bad, old building smell like mildew. One time I through a wet rag in the laundry and it mildewed. It smelled awful! The glue smelled just like it. It disgusting! The borax had a flowerie smell. It was as white as snow and it looks like salt. The food coloring is orange but it turned out to be yellow. It was in a little bottle. I stirred the ingredient than it turned into glue in 2 min. the glue was hard and slimy!**

Now you have all the steps to make glue Now you can make glue. This was a lot of fun cause we got to take it home and play with it. I made a ball out of it and I made Jesus out of it. (Julia, 10/26/2010)

As the year progressed, Julia avoided cutting and pasting because she found it time consuming and troublesome. Julia preferred to work meticulously on planning and adding details as she went along.

Mrs. Lane's writing instruction focused extensively on adding detail and elaborating and Julia clearly learned from the instruction and applied this to her writing. In an interview on January 6, 2011 about narrative and expository writing, Julia demonstrated her understanding of how to add details and elaborate:

J: I think I am better at narratives.

R: Oh. What makes you better?

J: Uhm...I, uhm...mmm...I like uhm...I make my sentences longer.

R: And what do you think you are doing well on your writing?

J: Uhm.....uhm...uhm.....I put a little bit more expression when I do. That is what I can think about.

R: And what are you trying to improve on? As you are working on your writing?

J: More details.

R: How do you put more details in? How do you do that?

J: Uhm...you like, I would sit for a little bit and I would think about it. And then it would uhm...come to my mind and I would put a detail in. (J2:36-90.1/6/2011)

Through the process of intensive practice, Julia learned writing process methods and ways to improve her writing. Julia's typical writing behavior was to ask for help with her writing. She would talk through her problems and then make progress with her work. Julia spent time planning her writing carefully and during this time she was also working on generating ideas for her story, based on the prompt or assignment. Learning how to add details and extend her writing was also significant for Julia. As the year progressed Julia was able to extend her writing by adding more details to her stories. She was able to articulate her understanding of this concept and evidence surfaced in her writing samples as well. Julia learned writing behaviors and techniques that helped her to succeed as a writer in Mrs. Lane's class. With daily time to practice these processes, knowledge of writing techniques took firm hold, and Julia developed fluency and knowledge with how to be a writer.

## **Affective Writing Experience: Opinions, Difficulties, and Confusion**

Julia expressed feelings about writing and her writing experiences during focus group and individual interviews. Evidence in the data showed that Julia had opinions about writing and also felt confused at times about the writing process. She engaged on both a personal and cognitive level by talking about writing, what confused her, and what she disliked. Julia repeatedly expressed her dislike for writing during the year and also gave reasons why she 'hated' writing. At the same time that Julia was expressing her dislike for writing and the difficulties she was having, she was also growing and learning as a writer. It was not clear whether she did not like the hard work and confusion she sometimes experienced or exactly what the word 'hate' meant. During interviews with Julia she said she felt confused about the process and different aspects of writing. This confusion seemed to be part of the writing experience. Julia expressed her dislike for writing and reasons as well in the following focus group interview with Ryan and Tyrone:

R: You want to tell me about your experiences with writing?

J: I don't like it.

R: You don't like it, Ok. How come you don't like it?

J: Cause' writing and pasting takes too much time and it takes forever to get finished.

R: Mmm. I noticed that it is hard when you guys are pasting and gluing. What about other than the pasting and gluing?

J: Uhm...going into other paragraphs. I definitely do not know anything.

R: What did you say? Going into other paragraphs?

J: Going into other paragraphs sometimes you do not know what to write about. You put too much in the other paragraph.

R: Oh. Ok. (G1: 59-84.1/27/2011)



Julia was able to understand and articulate what was difficult for her. This seemed to work to her advantage during the year. Knowing what was hard or confusing gave Julia the opportunity to ask for help, which was discussed at length in the previous section. A field note entry, showed one time when Julia felt confused, received help, and was able to continue writing:

I go over and she has an angry attitude, says she does not know what to do, doesn't understand. I talk her through, Ryan helps her too. We list ideas for her. She slowly gets started. (P21:20-24.11/17/2010)

When students worked on tall tale digital stories, Julia enjoyed the social experience of having the time to work with friends, but also continued to express dislike for writing. While her demeanor and behavior seemed to show pleasure and membership in a writing community, her words did not. It is possible that the social aspect of the writing was very important, but that Julia was struggling with her story. All of the writing that was done during the previous months was based on a prompt. This was the first time the students had to pick a topic of their own. While the class was writing tall tales, Julia also expressed confusion during the writing process:

R: What was hard for you on the tall tales?

J: When I uhm had to uhm had the uhm my planner done and then when I look at it and write stuff down it would get confusing and then I don't know what goes next and stuff like that. (J3:67-74.3/21/11)

The writing instruction and the time the teacher spent with each child was not nearly as consistent during the tall tale unit as it was during prompt writing. There was a minimal amount of whole group instruction, and then the children were left alone to work through their stories in assigned groups or individually. There was little to no small group or individualized instruction, and Ms. France was helping children who were not only working on writing, but also working on other assignments. Ms. France did not have the

time to spend with children to help them work through their writing problems. For a child like Julia who thrived on individual help, this may have been troublesome.

Julia displayed an engagement that was a necessary part of the writing process. Julia discussed her feelings about writing (not liking it) and frequently asked for help when she was confused. Becoming a skilled writer required tremendous personal effort and practice on Julia's part and at the same time took place within a social context of the inclusion model class. The social context that impacted Julia's writing experience and development was a critical part of her experience because she looked to her peers and Mrs. Lane for support.

### **Social and Participatory Writing Behavior**

During preparation for the state test, Mrs. Lane required the students to work alone on their writing to help them get ready for the testing environment. Julia made connections during this time by frequently asking for help. This was her typical writing pattern. Mrs. Lane's rule was that the children work on their writing alone, however, when Julia expressed a need for help, the help was given to her. Julia drew on her environment to work through problems, confusion, and areas of difficulties. This ability to ask for help was one of Julia's strong points and helped her to grow as a writer.

The most social and participatory writing time during the year was when the children wrote tall tale digital stories and worked on creating imovies on laptop computers. Ms. France taught this unit under the guidance of Mrs. Lane. During the time when the children were creating their digital stories there was a tremendous amount of collaboration among the students. Julia worked with her friend to find the right language and voice for her story and spent time talking about and working on writing. The atmosphere in the class shifted from a focus on solitary writing to a more

participatory community. During this time, students were given permission to work with someone else through planning phases, writing their stories, and creating a digital movie. The class was animated and lively, and excitement filled the air. The students were given elements of a tall tale and the freedom to choose their own topics. During this writing unit, group work was valued. A reflection memo that was written during the beginning of the unit says:

The atmosphere of the class changes once freedom of topic is given to the children. There is energy in the air and the kids are excited about being able to work with one another. Before teacher is even done talking, Julia is making verbal contact and eye contact with her friend, asking to work together. Teacher assigns students and puts Julia with another girl. Julia just stands and waits and does not move over to work with other girl. Then teacher announces that kids can pick a friend. Julia is so happy she can work with her friend. (P46:61-75.2/04/2011)

During the computer production phase, Julia had a friend at her side every day. They talked about writing, about what language to use, how to revise their stories, and how to create the best narration. A field note entry read:

Julia was sitting with Jane and working with her and Ariel. Jane brought in a religious song for Julia to read as part of her story. Julia is still working on extending and finishing her story. She was sitting out in the common area on the floor. The girls were talking about their stories and how they were progressing. (P61:26-31.3/02/2011)

On another occasion, Julia was working with her friend outside in the grass:

Julia is in the grass again working with Jane. They are sitting together. She is writing and extending her story. She reads to herself. She asks me to read it and I ask what the exaggeration is. She says it is Joel's hand shaking. Julia gets a laptop and works together with Jane with sound effects. Jane is showing her how to use garage band. She (Julia) asks Jane for help in learning how to use this new tool. (P62:52-62.3/03/2011)

During this unit, Julia was absent two days and was also sent out of class one day for bad behavior. These absences affected her ability to finish her work and she was not ever able to complete her story. Ms. France had to limit the time the children spent on

their digital stories because of other pressures in the curriculum. Still, Julia enjoyed and benefitted from working with her friends on learning how to write a tall tale digital story.

During an interview with Julia she discussed how the children in the class all worked together:

R: So, Julia, can you tell me about how everybody worked together or helped you when you were doing your tall tale and doing your recording?

J: Uhm...like when I was workin' on my tall tale I would get like kids that know a lot about computers and stuff, like I would get Jane and she would show me how to go to songs and pictures and then I would get Larson and he would show me how to go to the guitar thing to record and sometimes Gail would help like put my pictures on there and stuff and she would show me how to do that. And uh..that is all I can think of.

R: And what did people ask you for help with?

J: Uhm...they would ask me a question like how to uhm...how to have...more examples in there...how to make their story a bit longer or shorter.

R: So it sounds like everybody was helping each other.

J: So they can close their story up. (J4:5-30.3/10/2011)

When working on the digital stories, Julia's classmates asked her for help. Her learning disabilities did not disable her in any way, she was able to share her expertise about how to write with detail and extend or shorten a story, skills that are important for advanced writers. Julia showed that she had developed skill, expertise, and confidence in her ability to give advice to others in the class, which gave her the chance to be an equal among her peers, rather than a child who had learning disabilities and struggled with writing. By this time of year, Julia had a strong sense of membership in her class, had frequently asked for and was given help, and was now ready to offer help to others. It seems that Julia felt valued as a person and as a learner through her connections in class and this supported her grow as a writer.

Data from observations also showed that the poetry writing unit was a social and participatory experience for Julia. During this unit, children were allowed to talk and work on writing together. Julia participated by giving answers during instruction time (P74:2-4.5/04/2011). Julia did not frequently participate during writing instruction when Mrs. Lane asked students for answers or examples, however, at this late date during the school year, Julia had a solid place among her writing peers. When students had to choose a topic for a rhyming poem, Julia chose to write about her friend. Julia described Jane in the following poem:

Yay Jane made her A.R. goal  
She's an awesome safty patrol.  
She's caring, loving and for giving,  
She's always proud, laughing, living,  
She makes Honor roll  
Most of the time she likes to stroll.  
She rocks and rolls in A.R.  
In my opinion, she's a star!  
(Julia, 5/13/2011)

In this poem Julia drew on her environment and wrote about her friend and had the chance to work with other students and the teacher on this poem. Julia shared her admiration for her friend Jane and her accomplishments as well as her kind and caring nature. Julia's friendships were important and helped her to feel valued and part of the social community of the class.

On one day in class, students read each other's poems and worked together on the language. Julia read her friend's poem and they went to the computer together to look up new words on a poetry website. Julia and her friend also sat with two boys and they worked on poetry together. It was a very social time for the children (P79:35-41.5/12/2011).

Poetry writing was a time when the children were all given a chance to participate in a community of writers. Instruction started with Mrs. Lane demonstrating and asking for participation at the board. Everyone's ideas counted and were valued. Julia participated and shared her ideas. When children were given time to work on writing Julia looked to her friends for help finding her topic, and worked with them on rhyming words and language use. Julia felt that she was a valued member in her class and was confident to participate, asked for help, and helped others. Julia had gained confidence in herself as a writer and member of her class. Through practice, development of skills and social connections, she was thriving as a writer.

### **Writing Progress**

Julia made significant progress as a writer during her year in Mrs. Lane's class. Based on analysis of Julia's writing samples using the 6 + 1 Traits rubric, Julia showed several areas of improvement that helped her to succeed. In Julia's early writing in the fall, she struggled to develop her topic by adding supporting details. At times her writing would read like a list and often lacked organization and focus. Julia did not have the ability to use language that was interesting and colorful, and she struggled to find her own voice as a writer. Her sentences were constructed correctly, but lacked creativity. Julia struggled with the conventions of writing, failing often to use periods, misspelling words, and having difficulty knowing when to create a new paragraph. In an early assignment, Julia's difficulties are highlighted when she confused expository and narrative writing. Julia was assigned the following prompt to write an expository essay:

Many children like animals. Before you begin writing, think about some animals you like. Now explain to the reader of your paper what types of animals are your favorites.

Julia wrote:

My favorite kind of animals are dogs cats and Rabbits. The reason why I like dogs is because dogs you can train them to do tricks and you also can play fetch with them. The reason I like cats is because they are soft to sleep with and they are cute. The reason why I like rabbits is because they are soft and they run fast. Now I'm going to write a story I am going to use a dog because dogs are my favorite animals of all.

Once upon a time I used to live in Walkasasa one time I went to my friend's house and her dog had puppies she gave me one it is black and white she gave me a little basket to put him in I put the basket on my bike I put him in the basket and started to ride to my house.

Now I am home. I ran and told my mom and my brother they were so happy we called him Packo and his is a boy in 3 months later Packo got stolen every body started to cry.

Packo was stolen for 2 weeks I was riding my bike looking for Packo like in 30 minutes I found him. He was tied up on the tree everybody was so happy that I found him the end. (Julia, 8/23/2010)

Julia showed that she understood the topic, listed what type of animals she liked and gave reasons, but she went on to write a narrative story instead of an expository essay.

As the school year continued, Julia began to make visible progress in some areas of her writing. Students wrote tall tale digital stories and for this assignment had to pick their own topic and write about a character with an exaggeration. Julia drew on her personal experience at church with her youth minister:

On Wednesday 25 of January 2011 My grandparents and I were getting ready for church...were on our way to church. 10 minutes later we were there I hollered. My brother Cameron and I jumped out of the car ran inside I grabbed my guitar Cameron grabbed his guitar and we ran back outside. I stand by our youth leader Joel. Cameron stand in front of me. We are playing fore songs Halliaugh, how great is our god, All in All, open the eyes in my heart Lord, And last but Not least I'm singing by myself playing the guitar at the same time is Jesus take the wheel. So we practice. two hours later we did the real round in front of hundreds and hundreds of people, And were singing on stage.

After I singed every body started to give claps I bowed and said thank u, we were supposed to be done with singing, and our preacher Mr. Andy was suppose to preach but Joel said he has a surprise for us he said that he is going to sing a song by his self it is called alwise so he told all the youth to

go sit down while he sing so we did. He grabbed his guitar and the mike and started to sing and play his guitar...5 minutes later his hands started going crazy! His hands was going so fast it when I say fast it was like a cheetah running! everybody's eyes' were going up and down watching Joel's hands going up and down. Like 10 minutes later everybody started to leave setp the youth and there parents we put his hands in water seeing slow it dow but woo! His hands made him splash water every were. After we tried that we Ducted tape his hands...30 minutes later his hands were calm down so I unwrapped his hands he slapped me on axadint then we knew his hand wern't going crazy and every body left and I stayed and Joel clean the mess. Then while I was helping him he told me his hands went crazy because he was really nervous. (Julia, 2/28/2011)

In this tall tale, Julia developed more focus than her previous piece and related details of the story using anecdotes. There were still problems with organization of the story, but the story had a logical sequence that attempted to support the main point. Her voice was starting to come through her writing and the reader had some opportunities to make connections with the story and its characters. Word choice was becoming more colorful and engaging. For example, expressions and verbs "fast like a cheetah running," "grabbed," and "hollered" made the passage more interesting and created imagery for the reader. Julia still struggled with sentence fluency and conventions of language. There were spelling and grammatical errors and she did not use any paragraphs to break up the text for the reader.

One of Julia's best essays responded to the following prompt:

Everyone has someone who is very special to them. Before you begin writing, think about someone who means the world to you. Now explain to the reader of your paper what makes that person so special to you.

Julia wrote:

Everybody has someone that's special in there life time. My mom is special in my life time. My brother Cameron and I got serperated from our mom. My brother and I got adapted by our grandma. so really only what my brother Cameron and I have is each other. I pray almost every night to ask God to help my mom were she can get better, and for Cameron and I go live whith her.



My mom had No choice she had to give Cameron and me up. Cameron and I cried 24-7 each day thinking that will Never see our mom again. but stuff changed we got to see her. My mom broke Camerons and my heart all the time by not going to our birthday. Cameron and I would always be looking on the road hoping she would come, but she never did, but she turned everything around she did started coming to mine and Camerons birthday! My mom fixed everything and tried not let the Devil to force her to go get alcahall and drugs in my opinion I think she's doing a great Job at that. Now you pretty much see why my grama had to adapt my brother and me.

Now my mom would start to come over to our house like on the weekends and stay the night and go to church whith us. I love my mother whith all my heart and soul. but I hate my guts because Every time my mom came over I would always be a hog and I would not let my brother talk to her one bit and that's why I hate my guts. Now you pretty much know a lot of stuff about my mom, my brother, and me. (Julia 1/19/2011)

This expository essay that Julia wrote from experience captured the reader's heart and attention through use of details that were rich and engaging. This writing was well organized and had a logical pattern to the ideas that Julia wrote about. Julia's voice was strong and filled with emotion as she shared her difficult and painful story. The audience had a chance to make a personal connection with the topic because Julia took a risk by telling such an honest story. The language and expressions that Julia used enhanced her story as well. For example, "only what Cameron and I have is each other," "I cried 24-7," and "Cameron and I would always be looking on the road hoping she would come, but she never did" are creative expressions that helped the reader visualize and understand Julia's experience with her mother. The sentences began to have more fluency in this writing compared to other pieces and Julia used more conventions to help the reader move through the story.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the year, Julia grew most in her ability to write with detail. Her use of precise and figurative language engaged the reader with interest and expectation as her

stories moved forward. Julia developed a voice and personal flair to her writing as she became more experienced with writing and gained confidence in her abilities. Her stories became more organized and focused and she used the introduction and conclusion to highlight her story. Julia's weakest areas remained using the conventions of writing properly.

Julia made tremendous progress during the school year and scored a 5 on the Florida Writes that was administered at the beginning of March, 2011. She continued to succeed as a writer throughout the year. Mrs. Lane attributed several factors to Julia's success and increased skill as a writer during her fourth grade year:

I think partly the fact that I asked the speech language pathologist to let her take, because she was pulled not in the middle, but toward the end of writing. So she often was not here for any kind of summary type stuff. So she took her and also the fact that she was with Tyrone another student in our class receiving the same instruction. So and I asked her to help them elaborate. So she would focus on that when she pulled them when she could. Now, it was not a lot. But it was maybe fifteen times. So I think that in combination. She knew what we were doing. She knows how my instruction is. So, I feel like her support was helpful. And Julia just is a hard worker and I think it clicked. She always has been a hard worker. I tutored her last year and had a relationship with her coming into this year. I tutored her the whole year last year in reading. So, she was at a huge advantage coming in because she knew me. And she just responded to very explicit instruction and immediate feedback. She grew so obviously that I was able to praise her really specifically about her elaboration whether it was to the whole class, individually, or in remarks that I gave her on the paper. I could be really specific with her because she suddenly was putting in not just details, she got the details right away. She started adding in the details but the elaboration which is so much harder to describe. When she started getting I feel like, it was so clear when she was trying to do it to me that I could specifically point it out to her, so she knew what to do more of. (H2:5/30/2011)

By the end of the fourth grade, Julia did not see herself as a child who struggled with writing, but as an able, confident, and successful writer. Her success may be attributed to the inclusion setting, Mrs. Lane's daily writing instruction, and the consistent personal

effort and stamina that Julia exhibited throughout the year to overcome the challenges she faced.

Summary of Julia's writing behaviors:

- **Planning:** Extensive planning. Did not like to, but abandoned planner when stuck.
- **Asking for help:** Persistently looked to peers and teachers for help.
- **Revising:** Used cut and paste at the beginning of the year, but learned to extend writing and write with detail as she found cut and paste cumbersome.
- **Affective Experiences:** Said she did not like writing throughout the year. Felt confused at times.
- **Social and Participatory Behavior:** Very social child. Enjoyed friendships. Sometimes got in trouble for inappropriate behavior. Occasionally read writing or answered a question. Loved to work with others on writing when allowed.
- **Writing Progress:** Grew in confidence and image of herself as a successful writer. Developed organization, focus, ability to write with detail on a topic, use figurative language, and found voice. Struggled with conventions of writing. Scored a 5 on Florida Writes.

## Ryan

Ryan was 10 years old at the time of the study and had specific learning disabilities (SLD) that affected his ability to write well. He had a 30 percent memory retrieval deficit and had Individual Education Plans (IEP) for reading, writing, and math. Ryan's IEP for writing indicated he had problems planning his writing and adding enough details. He frequently omitted words and also struggled with conventions of language. He had poor spelling, punctuation, and often did not know when to use paragraphs. Ryan did not receive any pull out services to strengthen his writing, but had an accommodation for extra time on all writing assignments. Ryan's mother expressed concern about his ability to pass the Florida Writes test and requested that his teacher focus extra attention on his writing skills. Ryan had a good imagination, enjoyed humor, and especially liked writing narratives, tall tale digital stories, and funny

poems. He struggled at times during the year, yet with consistent practice and feedback from Mrs. Lane he was able to make improvements in the quality of his writing.

### **Getting Ideas and Planning**

Ryan's IEP stated that he had difficulty using a graphic organizer and that during the school year, he should learn to plan his writing better to help him improve his stories and essays. Mrs. Lane spent many lessons teaching the children to plan using the graphic organizer. She frequently reviewed the planning process and gave children individual help on their planning. However, she also knew that some children got stuck in this phase and needed to begin writing for their ideas to form. During an interview she said,

Those kids, especially language impaired have a really difficult time planning. Ryan had a hard time planning. And really for him, I let him abandon the planning. Because you are not going to...some kids...at some point you just have to say go ahead and write the essay. (H1:263-268.5/30/2011)

Ryan's use of the graphic organizer wavered. At times, he would fill it in completely, sometimes he would complete it partially, and at other times he would leave it blank and begin writing. It was not possible to determine why or when Ryan used the planner, but it was evident that his use varied. During one interview near the end of the school year, I asked Ryan if he used the graphic organizer and he said, "Uhm....no. Not most of the time" (R6:27-30.4/06/2011).

No correlation was noted between the quality of writing and how much information Ryan put in to his graphic organizer. Sometimes Ryan spent a lot of time on his organizer and had difficulties with his writing. On other essays, he did not use the

organizer and did well with writing. Field notes also documented Ryan's use of the graphic organizer during a two-week period.

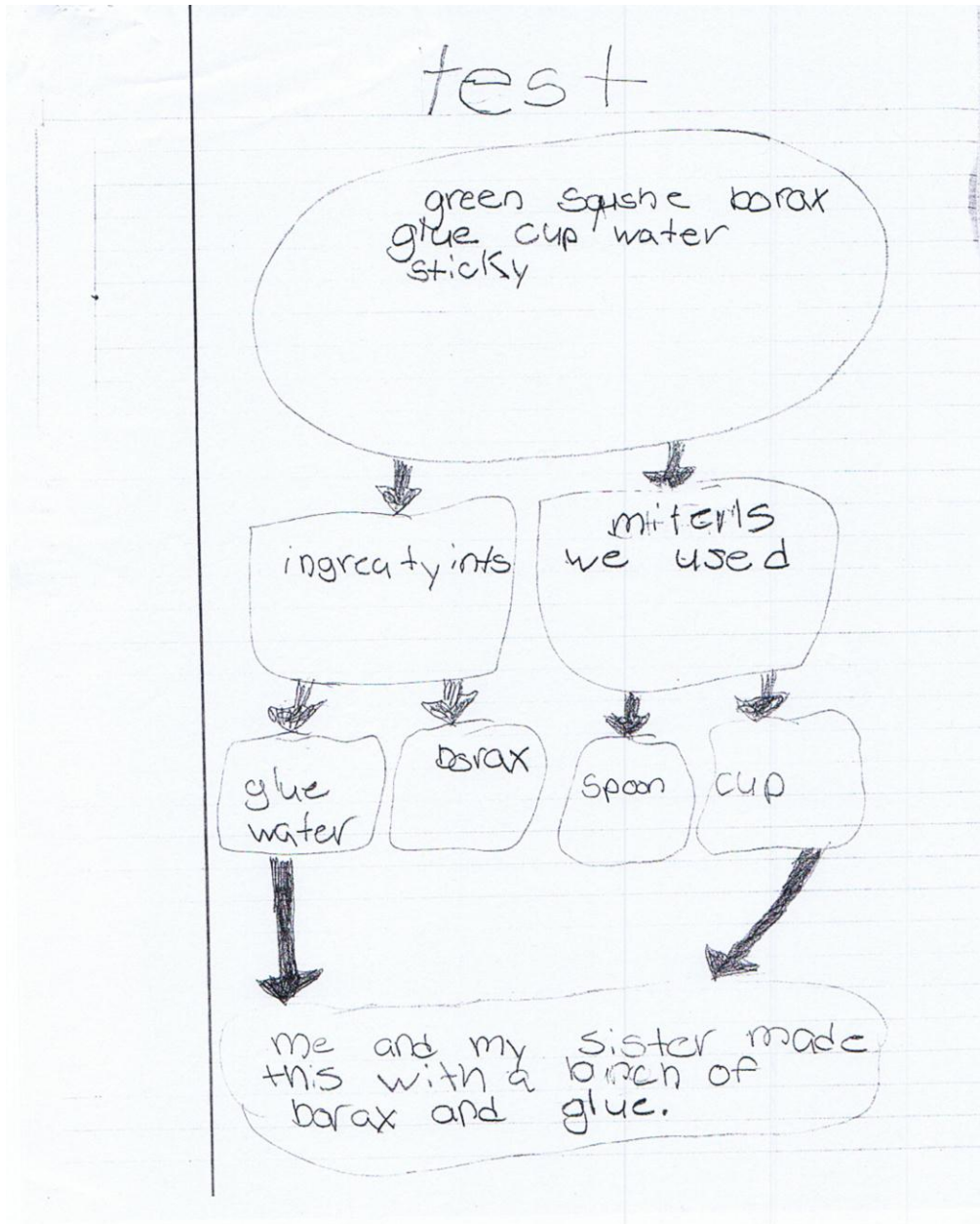


Figure 6-3. Ryan completes his graphic organizer (11/03/2010)

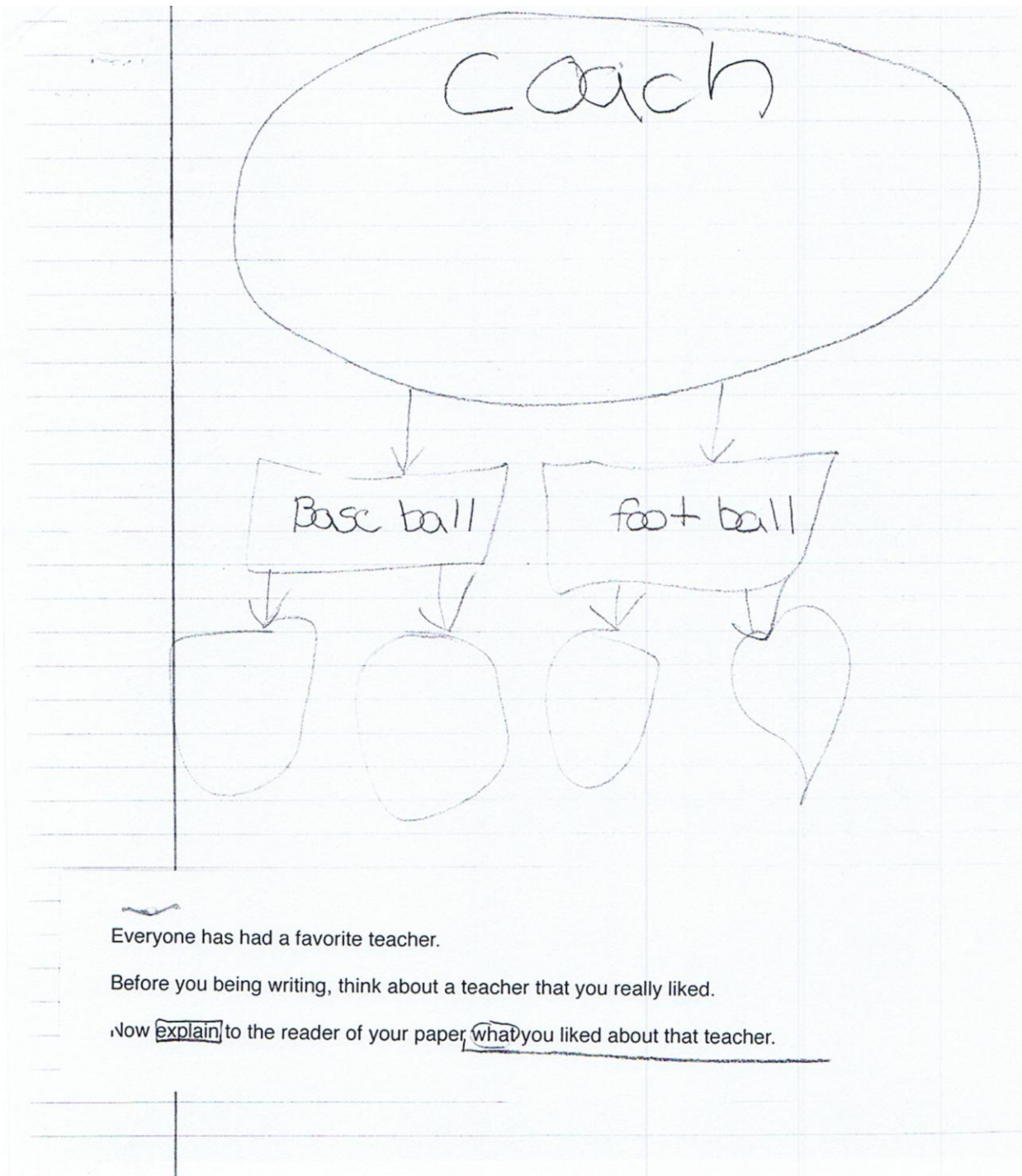


Figure 6-4. Ryan partially completes his graphic organizer (12/17/2010)

Everyone has done something that made them proud of themselves.

Before you begin writing, think about something you did that made you proud.

Now explain to the reader of your paper what you did that made you proud of yourself.

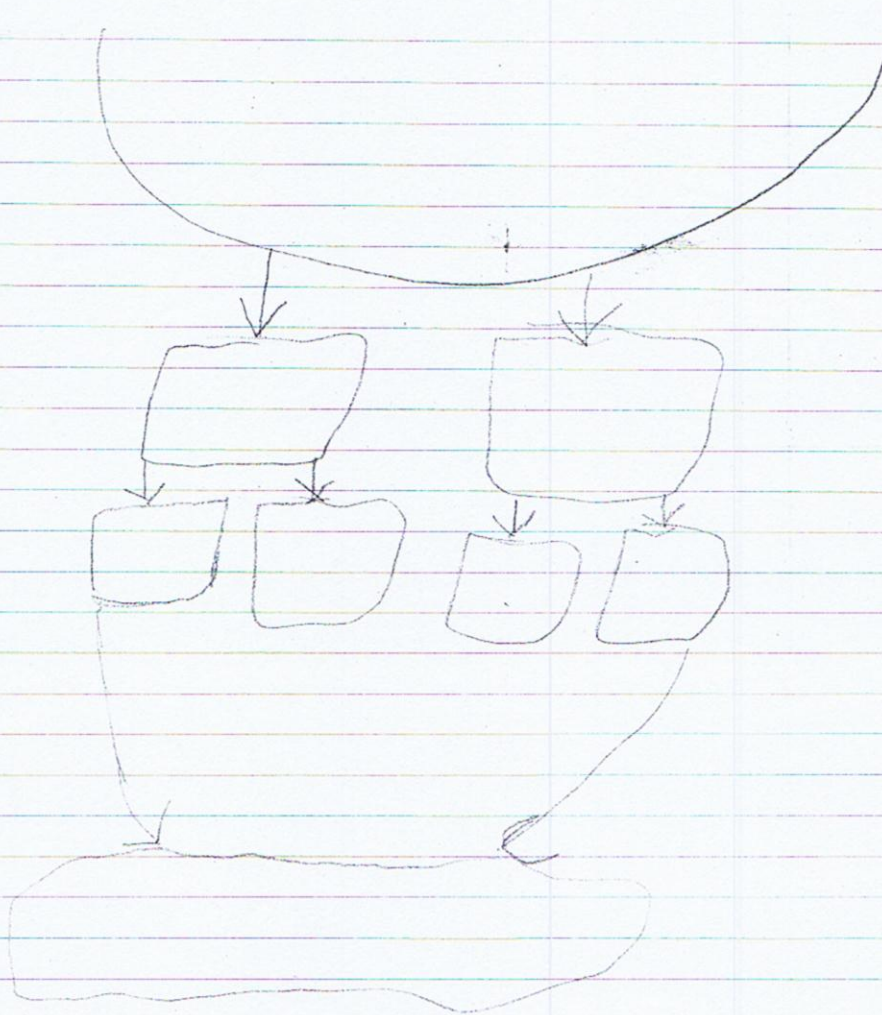


Figure 6-5. Ryan's does not use his graphic organizer (11/04/2010)

One day Ryan does not use the planner at all:

At the end of ten minutes, Ryan's planning sheet is completely empty and he moves on to writing. He is working on the first paragraph. He gets through the first paragraph steadily. He writes, erases, writes. (P19:42-48.11/04/2010)

Several days later using the graphic organizer was a breeze:

Ryan gets started right away on his hiking essay. He is filling in his planner and seems to have ideas coming to him. He works through the planner and then writes on paragraph in fifteen minutes. (P16:27-33.11/08/2011)

Sometimes, he filled it in partially and got stuck:

The class is working on a new prompt on how to write an expository essay. Ryan mainly sits for the whole time and has a lot of difficulty filling in the planning sheet. He stretches, chats with neighbors, and has his chin in his hand. He just sits and waits for help. Teacher wants the class to work on their own today. Ryan never finishes planning and does not start his essay. (P20:23-29.11/16/2011)

Sometimes when the graphic organizer was not working, Ryan went straight to writing. On the following writing sample, Ryan started to write without using the organizer and was generating ideas for his narrative essay:

On April 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 12:00 and I got some good news. I ran down to Joe's house to see if he new what the good news was I told him I was going to Mark's house he walk back in to his house then I sneaked to the back of his house he had a back door but it was locked so I crawled through the window on the left side of the house I figured out he was calling Joe to tell him not to tell me the good news. (Ryan, 2/10/2011)

He then moved to writing this piece:

On April 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 12:00 am I got some good news. I got news that my deer was back from being mounted. That ment I could put it on my wall. Then about an hour later I got some other good news. The four wheeler came back from getting worked on. Them are two things I told you that where good news.

I was running like a cheata down to see my deer that Just got monted. I told dady to get his drill and some nails and come to my room to put it on the wall. Dady never came up so I wen to go get his drill and do it myself. When I went up to my room I drilled a screw into the wall and put my deer



head on there and it was cricked (crooked). I told myself I would get dady to do it another day that is one good news thing I herd I will tell you the second good news I got was my four wheeler had come back from the shop so I ran down to the yeard so fast my shoes flew off my feet. I got the key and took off down the road when I come back from the house I told dady that It was running great. It sounded great to. I road it around the house and down to the boat ramp and I hit a big bump and flew up in the air about 10 feet and landed on the back wheels so I road down to my friend's house to see if he was home I found out he wasn't home he was at wallmart buy groces that is some other good new I got.

Them are two of 3 good news I told you getting my deer mounted and getting the four wheeler back from the shop. (Ryan, 2/10/2011)

Ryan started working on the process of getting ideas for his story by writing about them.

He transitioned to an essay that has two specific events of good news that he told the reader about. The first piece may have helped him put the process of thinking, organizing, and generating ideas in motion.

Data indicated that Ryan used multiple methods for getting ideas and planning. When the graphic organizer was not providing support, or when Ryan was stuck, he also looked to his peers and teacher for ideas. During interviews, Ryan discussed several ways to approach his writing:

R: How do you get ideas for writing?

RYAN: We do a planning sheet and that is how I get all my ideas. (G1:46-48.12/2/2010)

During the next interview, Ryan and I had the following discussion:

R: And how do you get your ideas for writing?

RYAN: My planning.

R: And before your planning do you sit and think or where do all those things come from?

RYAN: When people read their writing I get ideas from them. (R2:22-32.1/06/2011)

And yet during another interview Ryan gave a different response:

R: What did you say about where your ideas are coming from?

RYAN: My head. (G2:226-228.2/08/2011)

During the time that the class was writing tall tale digital stories they chose their own topics. When asked how he got his idea for the story, Ryan said, “Me and Ms. France came up with it” (R3:81-83.3/06/2011).

Ryan did not have a routine system for planning his writing and getting ideas, but used multiple methods to help him with his writing process. Writing down ideas in an organizer, sitting and thinking, listening to peers, talking to his teacher, and writing text were different forms and strategies that Ryan used to generate ideas and plan his essay, story, or poem. When one mode was not working for Ryan, he moved to another or used multiple modes. Mrs. Lane was flexible in how the children approached their planning. She allowed the students time to struggle and find their own unique way that worked for them.

### **Asking for Help**

Ryan asked for and received a great deal of help and individualized instruction from Mrs. Lane and the other teachers in the classroom. When Ryan got stuck, asking for help was one strategy he used to work through his problems. Data from observations, document times when Ryan asked for help:

After about five minutes Ryan raises his hand for help. Mrs. Lane comes over to help him. (P33:9-11.1/04/2011)

Ryan writes on his own for a long time, then has his hand up for help. (P38:9-11.1/18/2011)

Ryan sits and listens, then wanders around the class, talking to friends. Next he goes to Ms. France for help. (P50:8-10.2/10/2011)

Ryan looked for help with planning, spelling, grammar, using paragraphs, and adding enough detail to his writing. Mrs. Lane knew that there would be many instances in Ryan's education and writing experiences that would require him to work alone. She wanted to make sure he was confident making decisions and monitoring his writing process and therefore, sometimes she waited before she helped him or told him to try to solve his problems independently. Occasionally Mrs. Lane refused to help Ryan, so he had to work on his own.

Field note entries read:

Once Ryan starts writing he has his hand up for a long time and just sits and waits for the teacher. He has written three sentences for his opening paragraph and wants the teacher to check it for him before he goes to the second paragraph. She comes over to help him. She tells him not to repeat the word 'class' so he erases that and writes a bit, erases. (P27:16-23.12/08/2010)

Ryan raises his hand. He looks around as if asking for help and Mrs. Lane ignores him. He raises his hand again eventually. He gets up after a while and starts to cut and paste. (P21:7-15.11/17/2010)

Mrs. Lane wants the kids to work alone. Ryan just sits and waits for help for about 30 minutes. He never finishes planning and does not start his essay. (P20:28-30.11/16/2010)

Ryan was supported during the school year by asking for and receiving help from Mrs. Lane and other adults in the room. He received individualized feedback and instruction during times that Mrs. Lane or Ms. France worked one-on-one with him. This instruction was one of the factors that helped Ryan to make improvements and work through problems in his writing. The fourth grade was the first year at school with a requirement for daily writing instruction. The tight form of the essay and the requirement of writing to the prompt was quite challenging. During the year, Mrs. Lane

gently nudged Ryan to become more independent to insure that he would succeed as a writer in all kinds of situations.

### Revising and Extending

Mrs. Lane's instruction focused extensively on helping the children make revisions by adding details to extend their writing. She allowed the children to cut and paste their papers to add more information, rather than starting a new draft. Ryan used this technique on and off throughout the year. He said he liked cutting and pasting "because you get to put everything you know in the paper" (G1:90-91.12/02/2010). At the beginning of the year Mrs. Lane helped Ryan make decisions about how to add detail to his writing. She sat with him and coached him through this process. Ryan wrote the following first draft:

I am going to tell you about my favorite science directed inquiry. The ingreatyints we used were super cool and the miterels we used were awesome. Our class did a directed inquiry.

The ingreatyints we used are glue, water, borax and food coloring. What we did was put in the glue, then I put in food coloring and after that water and last borax. And it makes fluber!

The miterels we used wer a tbspc, 2 4 inch cups, and one 6 inch cup. I stir it for 2 min up and it bounces "bong bong" like a rubber ball it is flexibul. (Ryan, 11/03/2010)

With Mrs. Lane's help he added details and extended his writing:

I am going to tell you about my favorite science directed inquiry. The ingreatyints we used were super cool and the miterels we used were awesome. Our class did a directed inquiry.

The ingreatyints we used are **cup of** glue, water, borax and **2 drops of** food coloring. What we did was put in the glue, then I put in food coloring and after that water and last borax. And it makes fluber! **It smelt like a dead snake. The texture of the fluber was like rubber. It looks like a gint booger!**

The miterels we used wer a tbsp, 2 4 inch cups, and one 6 inch cup. I stir it for 2 min up and it bounces “bong bong” like a rubber ball it is flexibul. **One the experiment was done I put it in my back pack and It called out to me to excape “let me out. I want to roll around to check out newberry.” Surprise.**

**This was a spectacular directed inquiry we had a bunch of ingreatiends the miterels were all over my desk. I lerned how ingreatyents mix together and what they make.** (Ryan, 11/03/2010)

Ryan made some revisions to his writing though not extensive during the year and demonstrated that he understood how to improve his writing. Ryan cut and pasted to add more detail in the following essay:

On April 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 me and my dad went to Bass pro shop mall to buy a turkey call I waited on him a the bench in the middle of the mall. And there was a tree tha a huge sitting right beside me I got to the bath room and when I come out it is danceing.

So I go to my dads truck and get his chain saw. I come in side and right when I tried to cranck it it wouldent crank. **I checked the gas and there was none in there so I went to my dads truck to see if he had eny gas and he didn’t.** I looked around and said “What can I do” I herd something outside I went over yonder and saw a crane I army crawler over there and high jacked the crane and told every body to move or they will be crushed. I move forward. I life the ball p with the handle then drop it and miss him. I take another swing and mis so I get out and go high jack a car and go to my house and get my mud truck come back and slam on the gas and tak it out right in the middle of the mall every body cheered I saved the day that then my dad walked out and said Im don its about time now and we left with a nice turky call! (Ryan, 1/06/2011)

Sometimes Ryan added details and made improvements in grammar and spelling, added words, or erased and found a new word. Ryan often seemed to be revising as he went along, rather than writing a first draft and going back to make revisions. Ryan wrote slowly, often taking pauses, rereading what he wrote, erasing, and writing again. This was his typical writing pattern. Observations in field notes, pointed to this style and behavior:

Ryan is working on his first paragraph and writing as slow as a turtle. (P11:41-42.10/26/2010)

Ryan takes his essay out and is erasing now. He just sits. Talks to his neighbor and stretches. Yawns. He writes very slowly at a snails pace. He gets up and gets some more paper. He talks to another boy and they giggle. (P12:23-27/11/01/2010)

Ryan writes slowly and the moves his pencil slowly too. (P15:41-43.11/03/2010)

Ryan's writing process was most clearly documented by the following observation:

Ryan writes a sentence. Stops. Picks pencil up again and writes, erases, writes, erases, two words, head down, looks around, pauses, edits something, rereads. Stops. Looks around one or two words, erases, looks around, writes again. Writes a couple of words. Pauses. Writes a couple of words again. Pauses. Erases. Writes again. One or two words. Looks at what he wrote. Stops. Thinking again. Writes again. Still writing. Maybe a sentence. Still writing. Stops and thinks. Pauses 30 seconds. Writes again. Has filled one page and turns the paper over. Pauses for one minute. Looks around the class. (P16:52-66.11/04/2010)

Because Ryan was editing and revising as he went along, he often needed more time to complete his assignment. When Ryan did not finish his writing during the class period in the morning, he had extra time to finish in the afternoon.

Mrs. Lane's focus on writing with detail, creating a picture in the reader's mind, and cutting and pasting had an effect on Ryan's writing. As a result, he knew that if he didn't add enough information he would not get a good grade, yet if he did, this would make his writing strong. Revising writing is difficult for any writer and a dreaded task if children have to rewrite an entire page. Ryan made attempts as he wrote to make revisions by erasing and finding new words. He also used the 'cut and paste' method on occasion to add more details to his stories.

### **Affective Writing Experience: Opinions, Difficulties, and Confusion**

Ryan started the year saying writing was his favorite topic and particularly enjoyed using his imagination to write "because it doesn't have to be true" (R2:14.1/06/2011).

As the year progressed, this changed and Ryan repeatedly said he did not like writing, but was not sure why. Observations and writing samples show he continued to work hard and make progress in his writing abilities. The fourth grade is the first school year with a consistent focus on writing to a prompt. This was very challenging for all of the students, and especially for students with learning disabilities who had extra hurdles to overcome. The quality of Ryan's writing varied through the year indicating that he was sometimes having difficulties with his writing process. This was part of the experience for all of the participants, and when they made mistakes or wrote a poor essay, they had the opportunity to learn from the comments Mrs. Lane wrote.

In early January, Ryan struggled with an expository prompt about a science experiment and turned in this essay:

On April 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 in madison county at my school we where doing I experiment with dry ice and water when they where mixed it formed somthig indredible formed a deer. That had rabbies.

I try to trap him with a old made of rope foot trap but there was a giant hole in the bodem (bottom) so he got up and ran away. I got my beebee gun and try to enger (injure) it so I could give it a shot but my gin got jammed so I could not shoot. I went to go get my dart gun and my red lazer but the red dot right on his ches and pulled the trigger and he fell down like a big collder I got the shot out and stuck it right in him and let him go. (Ryan, 1/10/2011)

Mrs. Lane wrote the following comments, "You didn't use cool details that made your reader interested in the beginning. Remember you were supposed to describe the water and dry ice mixing. I was very confused. Not enough elaboration. Remember no guns!" Encountering difficulties in writing was a part of the process for Ryan. By learning from these mistakes, he was able to make improvements and understand what was necessary to succeed.

Ryan was most engaged during the tall tale digital stories unit and ran from his seat daily to get a laptop. His body showed excitement, he enjoyed the participatory and social aspect, yet he ran into problems writing and revising his story, and working through the technology to produce a digital story. When I probed him, he seemed to be unclear about his revision process:

R: How is it going with your digital story?

RYAN: Good.

R: What obstacles have you run into?

RYAN: I don't know.

R: What happened last week with your story? Do you want to tell me about your revising and everything?

RYAN: What do you mean?

R: Remember how we chatted last week about how you wrote one draft and you recorded it but then you couldn't find it on the computer or you erased it. Then you wrote another story.

RYAN: I am going to use it. (R3:1-18.3/06/2011)

Ryan was asked to make revisions to his story, but had difficulties completing the revisions. Ryan's first draft read:

On day in 1521 there was an man named grizzly. He lived in the woods in texas he lived in a little cabin just big enough for him. He found his own food and cooked it. One day he decided to go into town. He jumed on his moter cycle and headed to town. He got looked at by a bunch of people (people) he was hairy and very very stong his brother was big foot. He could pick up a dump truck with his pinky finger. He stared to go into town mor. The logging company was wanting a job for people to pick up trees he rode over to the logging factory to see what was up and he didn't even say eny thing and they hired him. He was so strong he didn't need a crain he ranked them out of the ground. They were tearing down a building I just ran really fast and nocked down the building. Then nobody saw him again.  
(Ryan, 2/28/2011)

Ryan revised his story to read:



On April 9<sup>th</sup> 1742 at 9:00 am the wood in texes there was a guy named Grizzly he was so strong he could pick up a car with on hand. Hes very hairy has long ginger nails and strong as a bear There wa a problem every body was askinghim to help them to pick the car off the grond to move it. So he went to work at a logging factory in his home town (texes) so he would not be far from home. He could pull up the trees from the ground with one hand he worked there because he never wanted to be seen again so he went there. He got paid 100\$ buy the hour. Nobody seen grizzly again. (Ryan, 2/28/2011)

The second story was shorter and more disjointed than the first and rather than improve the quality, it made it worse. Ryan was not sure why he had made the changes. An analytic memo expressed my desire to understand Ryan's process:

Memo, March 4, 2011

I am really puzzled by Ryan's behavior. His body shows tremendous excitement (running to get laptop) and at first when I asked him, he liked digital stories, but now he says he does not like them. Is this because he feels frustrated and cannot accomplish the task? Does he need more help? He answers in one word and cannot elaborate. He also wrote a one page story, then dropped it and recorded a very short vignette which he seemed to make up as he went along. I don't understand why he did this and he could not articulate it either. When I visited him yesterday, he was having a great time on the computer playing with sound effects and socializing but was not engaging in what he needed to do to succeed. Where is this resistance coming from and why? Inconsistencies!

Although Ryan enjoyed the freedom and the social aspect of working with friends on his story, he had a hard time working independently and structuring his time so he could complete his story. Ryan worked best on writing when he was clear what steps needed to be attended to and was reminded on a daily basis through both group and individualized instruction. During the tall tale digital story unit, the children worked with friends and in small groups. Without a written checklist or knowledge of exactly how to proceed, Ryan was not always sure what to do.

## **Social and Participatory Writing Behavior**

Ryan was a popular and well-liked child who thrived on social relationships and the friendships he had in class. He had the ability to be a leader and enjoyed a prominent position among his peers. His gregarious temperament led him to seek fun while at school and he was motivated by the opportunity to spend time and learn with his friends. The inclusion model class offered Ryan diverse social and academic opportunities. He participated frequently, got ideas for writing from his classmates, and made many social connections.

During the time when the children were writing in the morning, observations showed many instances of Ryan sharing his ideas, coming up to the board, and participating orally. He was very outgoing and jumped at the chance to share. This is one of the ways Ryan participated in the class. Data showed these occasions:

Ryan must be pleased because he shares his writing out loud. (P20:17-18.11/16/2010)

Ryan is finished writing early. He smiles and looks around. Seems to be enjoying the fun and funny mask. He answers a question when Mrs. Lane asks about good writing. He is engaged and listening. (P22:22-25.11/29/2010)

Ryan pays attention most of the time. He yawns a bit but seems to be listening. He quickly puts his hand up when asked about doing a graphic organizer in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. (P23:29-32.12/01/2010)

Ryan goes up to the white board to code a prompt and answers questions about what he did. (P26:17-19.12/06/2010)

Ryan enjoyed the unofficial world of school (Dyson, 1993) and this was an important aspect of literacy learning for him. He frequently was looking around at friends, making body gestures, whispering during lectures or when the children were writing quietly.

Data from field notes indicated that Ryan enjoyed humor, fun, and generally having a good time:

Ryan is animated today and seems to enjoy himself. He is smiling and listening. He looks over to his friend and they have communication going on between them. They talk across the tables and make body motions. They talk across the tables and make body motions. As one of the suggestions for the story, Ryan says, "Why don't you shoot the snake? That brings a huge smile to his face and he makes the body motion of holding a large gun and shooting it down. He does this toward his friend. Mrs. Lane gets very upset, stops the class and gives a mini-lecture on the kids not using guns and violence or they will have to go and talk to the guidance department because there have been shootings in school. Ryan seems to enjoy the whole event. He keeps smiling a huge grin and looking back and forth to his friend. (P26:40-55.12/07/2010)

In between writing, Ryan is enjoying social connections with the boy behind him. That boy is making faces, Ryan is smiling. Ryan looks around for the kids activity in class. During his writing pauses, he looks over his shoulder at the other boy to see what is going on. The boys are quietly fooling around a lot while they are getting the writing done. Once he has finished the two paragraphs he is done. (P28:26-34.12/08/2010)

Ryan seemed most engaged in the writing instruction and writing curriculum when there were opportunities for social participation, when he could be creative, and when there was a chance to explore his sense of humor and personal interests. Tall tale digital stories provided a highly social and participatory environment. Collaboration and the social experience for Ryan focused on using the computer. Ryan literally ran to the laptop cart on every occasion and always worked with a friend on choosing visuals and recording his story. He was highly engaged during the digital production of the unit. There was a shift in Ryan's dialogue with me during this time as well. He asked for help and we shared a conversation about how to use Garage Band to record his story. We sat and worked together on recording and saving his file. He knew the language and symbols of the computer and he displayed confidence. Field notes recorded his excitement:

Ryan ran with excitement to get his power charger so he could work on his laptop to create his Garageband and recording. He laid out in the grass for a bit and read and then he worked out in the hall to create his voice recording. He was with two friends working together. They were all working on their recordings. Ryan did several recordings that he did not like. He wanted to improve the quality of his voice and the sound, so he kept trying to get it right. In between he and his friends were having some fun and social time. He said the digital stores are more fun than other writing he has done. (P60:12-24.3/01/2011)

Ryan was the first one out of his seat and ran to get his laptop and find a place to work. Ms. France had to tell him to slow down. He went into the hallway and was working there with James. They were helping each other with technical difficulties. (P61:4-21.3/02/2011)

Ryan's story showed creativity and understanding of the elements of a tall tale. He was able to share his expertise with classmates and was no longer a struggling learner, but a computer expert. His desire and need to socialize and be part of a literacy group was fulfilled. Children in the class drew on their knowledge of technology and were able to share language and advice with each other.

In the month of April, when the students were writing poetry, Ryan was able to draw on his personal interests to find a topic and work with other children as well. The class wrote funny poems, and Ryan found this very engaging. He enjoyed working with his friends on finding rhyming words. Field notes read:

Ryan gets up right away and goes over to his friend Tom and is reading his poem. They talk about the poem. Now the two boys go over to the computer. They sit near each other. They make faces at John. They are talking together and get onto the website Rhyme Zone. They are laughing and having fun. They are socializing and having fun, but do not produce any writing. (P79:26-34.5/11/2011)

Ryan's funny poem drew on his personal passion for hunting to write his funny poem. He wrote and revised the poem with Mrs. Lane's help:

Deer

The deer was drinking

His rootbeer, and screaming with  
Some very loud cheer  
He happened to see Buzz Light Year  
So he put on his camo  
Gear and ended up getting hit by  
A spear.  
The deer eventually lost his ear,  
And began to think about his career.  
He wanted to volunteer because  
he really like mule deer!  
(Ryan, 5/13/2011)

The poetry unit engaged Ryan's sense of humor and his love of spending time with his friends. Ryan had a chance to play with language, to listen to and read poems to students in the class, and draw on his own interest in hunting as a topic for his poem. The space to talk about writing, to find words on Rhyme Zone, and to practice revisions in a community were beneficial to Ryan.

### **Writing Progress**

Ryan made progress as a writer during the school year and succeeded on the Florida Writes test with a 4 out of 6. In an informal conversation with Ryan's mother she said Ryan had progressed well in his writing and in her opinion he had learned to plan better. He had also gained more confidence of his ability to write and grew in creativity. Ryan's mom discussed the problems he faced with writing: plenty of ideas, but difficulty with mechanics and form which got in the way of his ability to tell his story and get it down in a logical format. Overall, she believed Ryan was doing well and working hard on his writing challenges (L. Deer, personal communication, June 15, 2011). Analysis of Ryan's writing samples point to several areas where he improved. Ryan's early writing samples from August, 2010 showed areas of difficulty. To the following prompt:

Many children like animals. Before you begin writing, think about some animals you like. Now explain to the reader of your paper what types of animals are your favorites, Ryan wrote:

I like monkes because they are smart. They can do favers for you. If there is something in a tree they can get it for you. I like lidzerds to I have one at my house I want a geco but my parnsts want get me one. My lidzerd has spikes on him and they are very sharp, long, and pony. He has a long tale and when you go down his back with your finger he will run. Next time I go to pets mart I going to buy me a lidzerd. I got my lidzerd at a pet mark I don't know what it was called but I got him when I was 6 years old. He was only about 4 inches now he is a foot and a half! The pet store had so many kinds of lidzerds I couldn't chose well finaly I found one I wanted and it was a beradragon. I was gona get one of the lidzerds that lookt like a snake. He looked so cool it was very long and it had a big tung. And momy said no because it was to much mony. So I seal have my lidzerd larry.  
(Ryan, 8/23/2010)

Ryan had trouble defining and sticking to his topic, lizards. He attempted to develop a story, but mainly created a confusing list of events. Later in the school year, Ryan showed improvement. The daily writing instruction in Mrs. Lane's class and the individualized instruction that he received helped Ryan to make progress in his writing. Ryan began to extend his writing and his stories started to show more organization and focus. Ryan was developing a clearer concept of how to structure an essay and provide details for the reader. His voice was emerging, although this was an area that remained difficult for Ryan. The following essay asked students to explain their favorite animal.

Ryan wrote:

My favorite animal is an Alligator because there eyes and the objects on his body are very neat.

Wooo look at them eyes The glow in the dark! When you shine a spotlight on them they glow so yo can find where they are at. That's why I like there eyes and another reason I like there eyes is because They are very big and have big puepls tha takes half of the eye ball up.

There is so many things on a alligator that can't even coun't. The coolest thing on his body to me is the spikes on his back. I like his back because you could sharpen it and make nife out of gator back that would be a awesome nife.

That's why I like Alligators because I like there eye and how they glow and the objects on there body like the spikes on there back. (Ryan, 1/04/2011)

Ryan introduced his main idea, an alligator, and provided details about why the alligator was his favorite animal. In comparison to the previous writing sample, this essay was organized with an introduction, conclusion, and paragraphs. There was a logical sequence to the story and Ryan made improvements to his language use. When he said, "Wooo look at them eyes The glow in the dark!" his voice became more personal and real. The reader was able to create a picture while reading because Ryan had used language that was descriptive. He told us about the big pupils and spikes that are sharp and we imagined the fascination this young boy had with gators. Ryan was making progress in his use of punctuation as well. In this essay Ryan managed the form and improved on his language use and organization.

Later in the year, Ryan enjoyed writing poems about topics of his choice. In this poem about baseball, Ryan had the chance to play with language and draw from his own experiences:

I'm lover of baseball. I steped up  
The mound to strike him  
Out I srew (threw) the ball strike  
One The unper (umpire) sad (said) the crowd  
Screamed "wuhoo" I got up to  
The mound again strike  
Two I count the ball went  
Back to the mounng I srew (threw)a  
Nucke ball and be hit in I  
Outfield the outfield caught the  
Ball. It was time to switch  
I was up to bat my  
Coach gave me a sign he lifted  
His hat and rubed his belt  
And claped tree (three) time when  
He srew (threw) it I wacked it in I  
Senor (center) field  
(Ryan, 4/06/2011)

Ryan had not yet developed knowledge about the form the poem needs to take, but with a careful reading we heard his voice and imagined his experience as pitcher and then as batter. He used specific details. This poem showed Ryan had potential for using visual language, "Coach gave me a sign he lifted His hat and rubbed his belt and clapped three (three) times." For Ryan, having some freedom with topics and time to participate in a literacy community was exciting. He could draw on his love of hunting and sports, and engage with friends, which was very important to him.

At the end of the school year, Ryan wrote the following essay to a prompt asking the children what they wanted to be when they grew up:

When I grow up for my career I would like to be an architect. An architect needs to have the right kinds of pencils and know every thing is going to be in the house.

Architects have to have the right kinds of pencils to draw the blue print of the house. You have to buy certain kinds of pencils so it looks good and the pencils don't break. You have to draw light so you can erase. There are the kinds of pencils architects need.

When you are an architect you have to know all the details from the person you are building it for. You need to know where every cord is going to run and the rooms how big they are going to be. One of the most important things is piping you have to put the pipes in certain places so when they build the house they don't hit and it bust. You are better off to put every thing you won't on the first time because it is hard to put it on later on.

I want to be an Architect but I need to have the right kind of pencils and I need to know all the details!

Ryan organized his ideas well and added supporting details, although his essay addresses what an architect does more than why he wants to be one. He was striving to capture his personal voice and use interesting language. There was still some work to be done in that area. Ryan advanced most during the year in his ability to organize his writing in a logical way, introduce ideas, and provide supporting details. Ryan and Mrs.



Lane were pleased with his progress writing structured essays during his fourth grade year because this was the first year there was a focus on expository and narrative writing.

## **Conclusion**

Ryan benefitted from the consistent grade level instruction in the inclusion model class. He learned from his peers, and grew as a writer from the group and individualized instruction that he received. At the beginning of the school year and occasionally during the year, Ryan scored 2s and 3s on his essay writing. His score of 4 out of 6 on the Florida Writes was evidence that he was a skilled and successful writer. Ryan slowly worked more independently through the individualized instruction Mrs. Lane gave him and knew what qualities his writing needed to receive a good grade. Ryan gained more control of the writing process and improved in several areas. Through hard work and practice, Ryan learned to organize his writing and use paragraphs to structure his ideas. His writing was always sequenced logically. Ryan extended his writing and began to use imagery, expressions, and interesting details. He made revisions to his stories and showed understanding that this was a necessary part of the writing process. He struggled with finding a voice, but this was emerging by the end of the year. Ryan had plenty of creative ideas and gained confidence in his abilities as a writer by the time the school year came to a close.

Summary of Ryan's writing behaviors:

- **Planning:** Inconsistent use of planner. No recognizable pattern. Sometimes used writing to generate ideas and plan.
- **Asking for help:** Frequently looked to Mrs. Lane for help. Rarely looked to peers or others for help.
- **Revising:** Liked to cut and paste to add information. Learned to extend writing with details. Made some revisions throughout the year.

- **Affective experiences:** Said writing was his favorite topic at the beginning of the year. Then said he did not like expository, but enjoyed narrative.
- **Social and participatory behavior:** Highly social and popular child. Loved the social aspect of learning. Often volunteered to participate. Expressed tremendous enthusiasm for tall tale digital stories and loved to work with others. Got in trouble regularly.
- **Writing progress:** Gained confidence in his abilities. Writing became better organized and structured, learned to add details, and at times was able to use figurative language. Struggled with voice and conventions. Scored a 4 on Florida Writes.

### Tyrone

Tyrone was 11 years old at the time of the study, had learning disabilities, and was diagnosed as language impaired. Tyrone worked steadily to make improvements during the year. At the beginning of the year, Tyrone scored 1s and 2s out of 6 on his essays. Mrs. Lane knew that she had to work hard to help Tyrone become a successful writer who could pass the Florida Writes test in March. Tyrone was usually smiling and had a very gentle and pleasing temperament. He had a good attitude toward writing and was always happy to receive additional help. Tyrone worked with the speech language pathologist on Tuesday and Friday mornings at 8:50 a.m. until 9:20 a.m. to strengthen his language fluency skills. Julia, one of the other participants, also worked the speech language pathologist at this time. Mrs. Lane coordinated lessons with the speech pathologist to reinforce what was being taught in class. She said,

I was really happy, and the fact that he and Julia could work together both language impaired I think was a huge asset to both of them. Because they were pulled at the same time by speech language. They were put in the same small groups and they had real similar issues with details and elaboration. But his sentence structure was much, he needed a lot more work on that because of leaving out words. He left way way a lot of words out. And still did at the end. (H1:165-177.5/31/2011)

This focus on language 30 minutes twice a week seemed to benefit Tyrone.

Additionally, he was always given extra time to finish his assignments because he

worked slowly and often needed help to understand how to complete the writing assignments. In spite of his struggles, Tyrone worked hard to improve his writing throughout the school year.

### **Getting Ideas and Planning**

Tyrone consistently used a graphic organizer for planning all of his writing through the year. In all of the writing samples collected, Tyrone used the graphic organizer to generate ideas and organize them before he began writing. Frequently, Mrs. Lane or Mrs. Brown would help Tyrone to work through his planner. Mrs. Lane said,

Tyrone got stuck on the planning and there is no point sitting and staring at the blank paper. Now we could coach him through the planning. At the beginning we would coach him through the ideas and then let him write. So at least he had the practice writing. But eventually he did get more of the planning. Language impaired kids have a really difficult time planning.  
(H1:256-265.5/31/2011)

No observations were recorded or archival material collected where Tyrone skipped the planning process and went straight to writing. No matter how long it took, Tyrone always used the graphic organizer to prepare for writing. If Tyrone got stuck in the planning process and Mrs. Lane, Mrs. Brown, and Ms. France did not have the time to sit with Tyrone individually and help him during the morning, he would finish his writing at other times in the day.

While Tyrone was planning, he was generating ideas for writing his essay, tall tale, or poem. Although Tyrone said sometimes he did not have ideas, his stories often showed creativity. He loved video games, TV, and media and drew from these sources for his writing. During an interview when we discussed where ideas for writing came from, Tyrone said, "I just use my imagination and uhm...I just watch tv and I think about something and I write it down" (P14:54-58.1/06/2011).

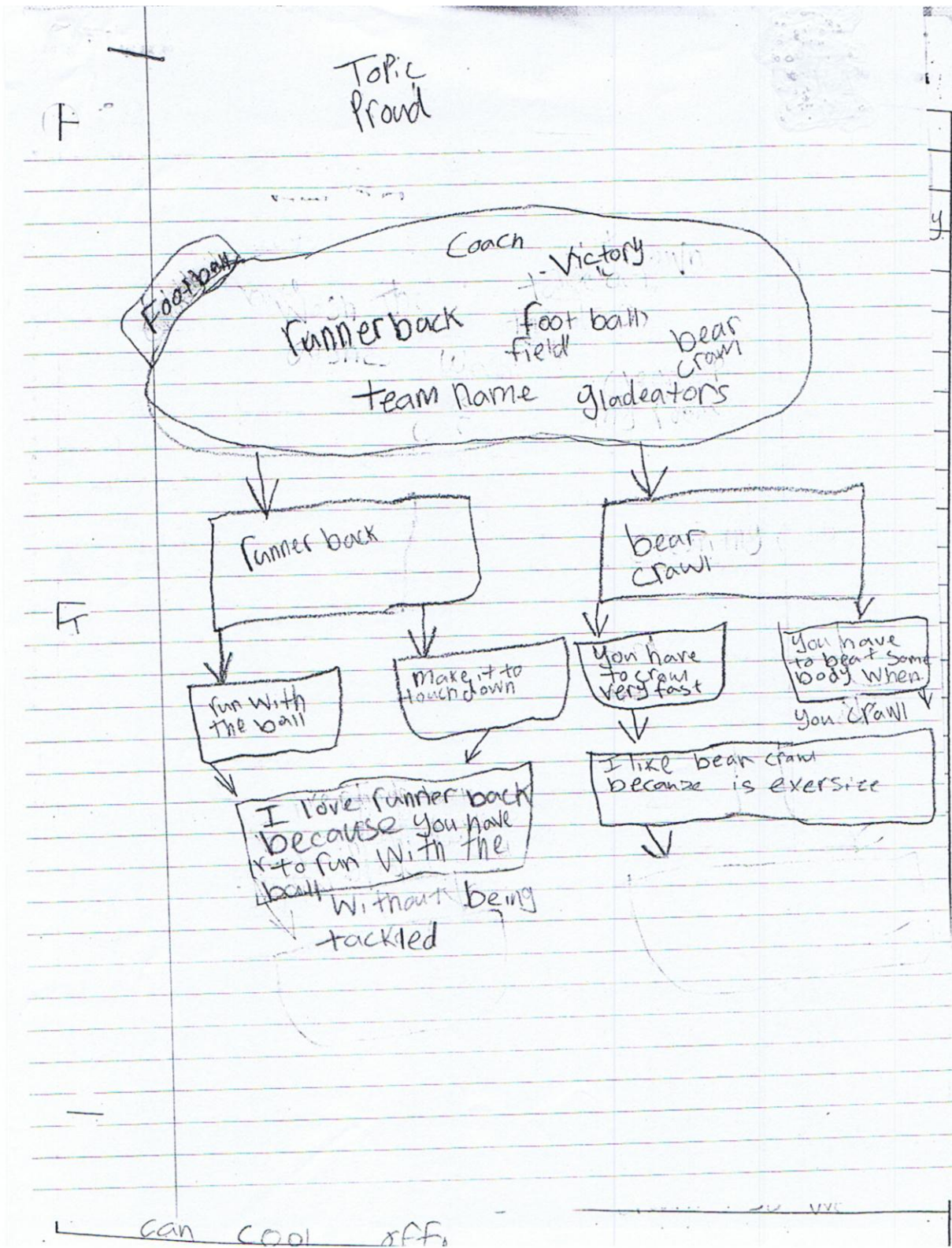




Figure 6-6. Tyrone plans his narrative essay (11/04/2010)

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| See   | The cracker look like it had sprinkles on it but it wasn't sprinkles it was cinnamon It look like Cinnamon Crackers |
| Hear  | I sound like it was about to crack into tiny pieces   |
| Smell | It smells like cinnamon cracker<br>mmmm <sup>smells</sup> good  |
| taste | It taste like cinnamon crackers<br>mmmm Cinnamon Crackers Yummy<br>Good   |
| touch | it feels bumpy a little It like the cinnamon on top of the cracker is like little tiny crums                        |

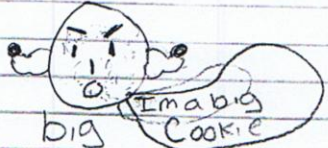
  



Small



Med.



big  
I'm a big  
Cookie

Figure 6-7. Tyrone plans a poem (5/04/2011)

Tyrone seemed to have an easier time getting ideas for writing when the topic sparked his imagination or was based on personal experience. When the class was given an expository prompt asking them to explain to the reader what made them proud,

Tyrone wrote about football. Tyrone's planning process for this story is presented in Figure 6. He was animated during class. A field note read:

Tyrone was more animated than usual and also is able to chat with me about his story, tell me details about it. He does not have trouble completing the planner and writing. (P16:53-56.11/08/2010)

Tyrone was usually so quiet in class, that his excitement on this day was noteworthy. A personal comment the same day read:

Tyrone seems to like his story about football because it is something he is interested in and has had personal experience with. He is more able to talk about his story and seems pleased with himself. He explains why he liked this writing and talks about the story. He receives no help today and is able to work on his own the entire time. (P16:67-74.11/08/2010)

Another story that sparked Tyrone's interest, responded to a prompt to tell about a day when you woke up a millionaire. For this story, Tyrone was full of ideas in his planner and he showed a great deal of enthusiasm when writing. The highest grade that Tyrone achieved during the year was an essay on someone special to him—his grandma. Tyrone wrote with voice and purpose about his grandma and the things they did together. He scored a 4 out of 6 on this story and was praised for his achievement by Mrs. Lane. When Tyrone was able to get his ideas from lived memories and experiences, he seemed to be able to write with more ease.

Tyrone always used his graphic organizer to get ideas and plan his writing. He frequently got help from Mrs. Lane or another adult in the room. Tyrone sometimes had a difficult time getting ideas and would sit quietly, yet with time he succeeded at planning and writing a story. Tyrone became animated when a writing topic sparked his interest such as football or becoming a millionaire and he would fill in his graphic organizer enthusiastically on his own. For these writing assignments, the ideas seemed

to come to him more easily and the process of getting ideas and planning was smoother than when he was given a topic that he did not have personal experience with.

### **Asking for Help**

Tyrone often sat quietly at his desk, not sure what to do, but not asking for help.

This was a major concern for his mother and for Mrs. Lane. His biggest challenge was that he often did not act on directions. Mrs. Lane said,

He is, he came into this school year according to his mother, does not breathe a word ever if he does not understand anything. Now compared to another child who would ask questions if they did not understand something. He will sit there and try to figure it out without asking, so that is a huge disadvantage. And that has to do with his personality of being extremely shy. (H1:181-188.5/31/2011)

Tyrone's IEP indicated that his mother had expressed concern over his extremely quiet personality. She wanted him to be able to learn to ask for help when he needed it in order to keep growing in all subject areas. Tyrone was reluctant to raise his hand or talk to a classmate, and would often sit for a long time not knowing what to do. This behavior was very isolating and slowed down his writing process. Mrs. Lane understood Tyrone's shy and quiet personality and made sure that he got individualized instruction even though he did not raise his hand when he was stuck or confused. Data from field notes affirmed Tyrone's quiet temperament, and tendency to work alone:

Tyrone sits for the entire 30 minutes and does not make any progress. He does not fill out the planner or start writing and is pulled out for speech at 8:50 a.m. He does not ask for help, just sits. (P20:42-46.11/16/2010)

Tyrone is quiet and working on his own. He is content and does not participate. He smiles and listens when Mrs. Lane is talking about writing. (P22:34-37.11/29/2010)

Tyrone continues to work while the kids are sharing ideas. He begins to write the introduction himself and never asks for help. He works independently the entire time. (P40:47-52.12/13/2010)

As the year progressed and Tyrone grew in confidence in his place in the classroom community and in his writing, he was able to go to Mrs. Lane and ask for help. Mrs. Lane said,

At the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade and would really timidly come to me and asked the questions rather than raise his hand. He will not raise his hand in class. So...how much of that is a processing issue with him in understanding directions is hard to say, but I am pretty sure it is a combination. (H1:199-206.5/31/2011)

It was a sign of progress for Tyrone that he was able to go to Mrs. Lane when he had a need. Flower and Hayes (1984) established that the phase of moving from planning to actual writing can be a difficult cognitive process and that this shift can be accompanied by confusion, writer's block, or hesitation. Tyrone may have been experiencing some or all of these difficulties and was wise to draw on different resources that were available to move ahead in his writing process. Mrs. Lane worked with Tyrone during the year on an individual basis and eventually he felt comfortable knowing that he needed to get help to work through obstacles.

### **Revising and Extending**

Tyrone learned to make revisions to his writing during the year with the help of Mrs. Lane's instruction and some individual coaching. Writing samples that were collected showed that Tyrone understood the revision process and was able to make changes to improve his writing. Mrs. Lane taught the children to 'cut and paste' their papers in places where they wanted to add more detail to their stories. This gave them room to write more without having to start from the beginning again. In the fall, Mrs. Lane worked with Tyrone individually to teach him to cut and paste to add more details. She helped him through every step of the process. Tyrone was writing an expository essay about participating in a science experiment. His first draft read:



Have you made demonstration or directed inquiry? I Have? In science we made Goo.

On Monday morning we made a Goo in science. I was excited we put out a lot of supplies and ingredients. The ingredients were borax, glue, food coloring, and 15 m. of water. The supplies were a cup, spoon, ingredients, and pencil and paper.

The Goo was green and it feels like bubble gum and looks like bubble gum. (Tyrone, 10/26/2010)

Tyrone's next version was improved with Mrs. Lane's help:

Have you made demonstration or directed inquiry? I Have? In science we made Goo. We had a lot of supplies and ingredeints. It took a lot of steps to make goo. It was exciting.

On Monday morning we made a Goo in science. I was excited we put out a lot of supplies and ingredients. The ingredients were borax, glue, food coloring, and 15 m. of water. The supplies were a cup, spoon, ingredients, and pencil and paper. I was happy because it make me feel like a real scientist.

*First, I got all my ingredients together. I lined them up on my desk. Then I poured the glue in a small cup. Next I added the borax and stirred it up* (Written by Mrs. Lane)! Then I put in food coloring I had green because I like green I pur 2 drops and stirred. Finally I pour 15 ml of water and stirred. I used a spoon to take out the Goo. It look like chewed bubble gum but it was fun to play with. (Tyrone, 10/26/2010)

Mrs. Lane worked individually with Tyrone through these revisions and wrote the first two sentences of the third paragraph for him. During the year, Mrs. Lane continually prompted Tyrone to add more information to his essays by writing comments on his papers such as, "Who, When, Where?" or "Needs elaboration!" or "What does that mean? Tell your reader!"

On another occasion Mrs. Lane coached Tyrone and partially scribed for him as well to start the first paragraph for a narrative essay on becoming Santa Claus for one night:

One night Santa Claus flew to my house with his raindeers. Santa wake me up and I was surprised that Santa Claus was in my room! Santa said Im taking a vacation. He said you have to be Santa Claus for the year. I was afraid to be Santa Claus. We went to the north Pole. We had a vote who will be Santa Clause all the elf pick me. (Tyrone, 12/08/2010)

With Mrs. Lane's help, Tyrone rewrote:

***On Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 2010, the town of Millhopper voted to make me Santa Claus. Later that day,*** Santa Claus flew to my house with his raindeers. He wake me up and I was surprised that Santa claus was in my room! **He** said, "I'm taking a vacation." He said, "You have to be Santa Claus for the year." I was afraid to be Santa Claus. ~~We went to the north Pole. We had a vote who will be Santa Clause all the elf pic me.~~ (Tyrone, 12/08/2010)

Mrs. Lane showed Tyrone the process of making revisions to improve the first paragraph of his story. She wrote a new opening sentence for him, added quotations, and deleted the last sentence.

Tyrone was able to make revisions to his writing during the year. He did this by rereading his writing and adding words or phrases to improve his essay with details as

Mrs. Lane had taught him. Words and phrases in bold have been added by Tyrone:

Have you ever got good news? I have. December 20, 2010. I was laying on the couch at My house. I was borded I couldn't hang with My two best friends because my friend Kevin went out of town, and My other friend Wyatt went to visit his grandma. So until My dad Charles cam in the house he said **excitedly** "Where going on a vacation and it's Daytonna" I was excited and I dance with Joy. So I ran to my room get packed up. I leaped down stairs and ran to the car and Waited patiently for Mom and dad.

They walked to the car and cranked it up. Then we started driving. When we got to daytonna we went to a hotel to get a room. So the people ~~gave~~ **that own the hotel gave** us the key to are room. So we check are room. It had there (three) beds **and a tv**. I said "This room is awesome." Mom and dad was suprized. So we left the room and went to the Skate Station. I hugged Mom and dad ran to the go carts. I was racing with some kids name Chris and Cole. Then we started are engine. The light was red, hellow, green When It landed on green we road **are go carts**. I was the last person that was In sixth place. Then I skiped two people and I was in Fouth Place. We was almost at the finish line we I skiped the other person I saw Chris and Cole. So I skiped Chris and Ketch up to Cole. But until we

went to the finish line...It was a tie. When It was a tie me and cole got out the go cart. We shake hands and said together "good game". So **we both** ran into the skate station building we put are skating shoes on we started skating. I was a copation. We have to limbo why were (while we were) skating and I was the last one. When every **body** lombo It was my turn and I was nervos. So I did it anyway **Because I was wasting my time** and I made it. Everybody claped there hands with Joy. I saw a guy running in to me and gave me a trophie for winning the skate competian. I was so proud of my self because I won.

Me, mom, and dad left **the Skate Station**. We went to the beach then I saw to people playing bally ball **and the two people was so** ~~so~~ saw my two friends best friends Wyatt, and Kevin I wave to them and played bally ball with them. When the beach was beach was closing I wave to my friends good bye and went back to my hotel. And fell to sleep. And that was the time I had good news. (Tyrone, 2/10/2011)

In this narrative essay, Tyrone showed that he was able to make changes to add more details to his writing. In an interview when we were discussing Tyrone, Mrs. Lane said,

He came writing; he might have had five words in the sentence. It made no sense. Ok. It was very disjointed. I did not understand what he was trying to say and that clearly by Christmas he was able to explain things in a way and I discovered that he had all kinds of action packed thoughts and he left out fewer words, so he could get the message across to the reader much better. (H1:154-163.5/31/2011)

Mrs. Lane understood that it was first important to get to know each individual child, their personality, what motivated them, and their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

Mrs. Lane wanted to encourage her children with special needs to continue improving, but not discourage them with too much critical feedback. In the case of Tyrone, he needed to make sure he had all the words he needed before he became better at revising. By adding words and more of the actions that were in his head, Tyrone was able to extend his writing during the year. At the beginning of the school year, he wrote the following narrative essay about a day he had off from school:

I would read a book. Play vido games with my brother. I would play football with my friends. Then I will watch a movie with my mom and brother. Me

my mom and brother will go to the pool because it's always hot outside but sometime we go to the pool on Sundays. Me and the whole family went on a vacation we went to Daytona.

We went to are hotel it was cool inside the hotel. We went to are room and it had a desk, tv, bed, and window view we can see the beach from up third. We got out the hotel and went to the beach we was having fun. We made sand catles (castles) and we went to the water. We pack are things and went back home. (Tyrone, 8/24/2010)

This story was disjointed, switching from a day off school to a vacation in Daytona.

Tyrone omitted words in his sentences, did not use correct punctuation, and listed events. By encouraging Tyrone to write down all of the words, he was able to improve and extend his writing within several months. Tyrone was able to structure his writing, write more clearly on the topic, and extend his ideas. Later in the fall he wrote a story about football. As discussed previously, Tyrone was excited to write this story because he loved to play football:

In 5:00 we have to go to the football field so we can practice. We was at the field are team name was Gainesville Gators. The real game is in Saturday I couldn't wait on Saturday. Every body was running laps so we can exercise every body was breaving hard every tiem we talk to are tam mates we have to do the bear crawl no body like the bear crawl but me. Were going to play the big game tommorow we was tierd to we went home and went to sleep. It was Saturday. We went to the big game. We ar against the Gladeators we put on are helmets, and pads I was ver hot outside. So we was on the field I had the ball I said ready set hike! I was running with the ball everybody was trying to tackle me I was running so fast I trip in slid to touchdown and we scored we had to scored. We didn't had a plan so we was in group and was thinking of a plan so we went to the field I said ready set hike! I was almost touch down until I got tackled I was thinking of another plan so said again ready set hike the guy was trying to tackled me so I shooked him and made it to touchdown It was a victory my team my team was happy I was proud everybody was proud so went to go and get icecream so we can cool off. (Tyrone, 11/8/2010)

During the school year, Tyrone was able to extend his writing a great deal and make some revisions. When I asked Tyrone during an interview what he was working on when he reread his writing he said, "I got back and uhm make sure uhm I am not

missing periods and question marks. Uhm. And I go back and look at the topic uhm to make sure uhm to make sure I got the right topic” (T1:37-42.11/15/2010). Tyrone worked on his “main idea and details” (G12:96-97.1/28/2011) and made improvements to his writing by staying on topic, organizing his ideas, extending with details, revising, and using correction punctuation and grammar. Tyrone applied his efforts to these complex processes and did so with a smile.

### **Affective Writing Experience: Opinions, Difficulties, and Confusion**

Tyrone began the school year by telling me he did not like writing and then changed his mind and said writing was ‘great’ and ‘awesome.’ During a focus group interview, I asked the children about their experiences with writing. We had the following conversation:

R: How is it going with your narrative writing Tyrone?

T: It is going great.

R: Ohhh (surprised). Now last time you told me you did not like writing, so what is the change?

T: Well, I didn’t like writing but it is going great. A little bit.

R: It is going a little bit great...ok. What is making it go better for you?

T: Uhm...uhm...my mom told me to get used to it, so...(T2:1-14.1/06/2011)

From this moment in the year forward, Tyrone said he liked writing although he experienced difficulties and it was hard for him. Tyrone was even more enthusiastic about writing in the next focus group interview and when I asked, “How are you kids doing with writing?” Tyrone replied, “Awesome” and “I like it” (G3:24-25.2/08/2011). During this time in the school year the children were writing expository and narrative essays and Tyrone was working hard to improve many aspects of his writing. Tyrone

liked writing narrative essays better than expository because “you do not have to use real ideas” (T2:49.1/06/2011). He also said, “I have plenty of ideas with narrative” (T2:57-58.1/06/2011). His pleasing personality and his good attitude combined with the individualized instruction Mrs. Lane gave Tyrone, supported him to keep trying and working hard.

One of the main difficulties that affected Tyrone was his decreased ability to understand meaning due to his language impairment. During our interviews, we always spent part of the time clarifying the questions and language. Tyrone also expressed the difficulties he was having with his writing:

R: How is it going with your tall tale digital story?

T: Digital story in writing?

R: Yes. How did it go with the writing?

T: Mmmm...hard.

R: Hard? It was hard. Ok. What did you find hard about it?

T: About like...mmm....sort of your main idea.

R: Ok. It was hard to get the main idea. (T7:19.5/07/2011)

Even though it was ‘hard’ Tyrone wrote a creative tall tale with a character named Rockin’ B Road who was funny, had a big smile, was fast, had green hair, was tall as a pole, and liked adventures. Tyrone used his imagination and the steps he had learned to plan and write his story. When faced with a ‘hard’ challenge, Tyrone persisted.

Data from interviews, observations, and writing samples indicated that feeling confused and experiencing difficulties was part of the learning process for Tyrone. On occasion, he ran into trouble with understanding what kind of essay to write to a prompt.

One day, the class was given a prompt to explain what they would do if they could talk to animals. Tyrone wrote a narrative to this expository prompt:

What I would do is take them to the park. Feed the Animals. Talk to the Animals. Bring one Animal for show and tell. Teach him tricks. Go to the zoo and talk to Animals like monkeys, zebras, lions apes, tiger, and all those animals. Then I will got to the woods to look out from some deers to be friends with the deers. I woun't talk to wild animals because there wild. When I go to school Im going to talk to the teacher's pets I will talk to cornice the snake, bob the lizard, flick the other teachers pets. That I would do If I can talk to animals. (Tyrone, 2/07/2011)

Mrs. Lane asked Tyrone to rewrite this correctly. Her comments read, "Use 2 ideas for 2 main idea paragraphs. Include an introduction and conclusion like you were taught for expository essays!" Tyrone rewrote his essay, but still struggled and wrote a narrative story, instead of an expository.

On morning I woke up to eat some breakfast I said hey to my dog rex he said "Whats up" in A deep voice. Then I frozed and ran back to rex "You can talk!" Rex said yes I can talk. I said "You talk like this woof woof" he said not anymore. I walked down the hall and went down stairs to eat my breakfast.

Until I was done eating breakfast I wen to rex grab his leash and went to the part when we went to the park rex keep saying "trees trees trees everywhere" I told rex to stop saying trees but he didn't stop so until he stop say trees we so some new dogs the dog was looking At rex They said All together "hey what sup" I frozed again I said quietly I can talk to dogs...

So when we left the park I went to my lab to figure out how l'm talking to dogs. (Tyrone, 2/08/2011)

Mrs. Lane commented, "Wrote a story for an expository prompt. Why did you forget to describe Rex when he's the topic? What was the way you were taught to write expository essays? You told a story!" Lapses in quality of writing, getting off topic, feeling confused did not stop Tyrone. He always showed determination to make corrections and to learn from the instruction that he was receiving in the inclusion class.

Mrs. Lane also accepted difficulties with writing as part of the challenge for the children

in her class, especially her students with learning disabilities. She encouraged them to succeed and gave them the necessary skills to do so, and was cautious with her comments and critiques.

Sometimes Tyrone's confusion manifested as silence and not acting on directions.

One field note entry documented a day when Tyrone was not sure what to do:

Ms. France is sitting with Tyrone and explaining what to do. Tyrone is confused and is not sure what to do with his writing. I find his writing for him in his notebook and help to remind him what he has done. I show him the planning he has done for his story both on his graphic organizer and in his notebook. He listens quietly and then goes back to his seat. (P50:29-36.2/10/2011)

Tyrone did not write his second poem but just sat thinking the whole class time. He wrote 'video' and 'ipod' at the top of his paper, but never moved beyond that. He seemed to be stuck. (P69: 29-32.4/07/2011)

All the children in Mrs. Lane's class faced difficulties with writing, but Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone faced even greater challenges. Just like any writer, Tyrone experienced difficulties and confusion and had a hard time during different phases of his writing process. In spite of his challenges with understanding language and working through the many complex aspects of writing, Tyrone never gave up. Through sustained effort through the year, hard work, a great attitude, Tyrone worked through his problems and make progress as a writer.

### **Social and Participatory Writing Behavior**

Tyrone was the least social of the participants and enjoyed writing on his own most of the time. His IEP stated that his language impairment interfered with his social interactions because he had a decreased ability to understand meaning. Tyrone was very content to work alone and was usually smiling and happy. He listened to his teacher and peers and was able to gain access to the writing curriculum by the lessons



Mrs. Lane taught and the individualized instruction that Mrs. Lane gave him when he was struggling. During the expository and narrative instruction, students were encouraged to work alone and did not frequently have opportunities to collaborate with each other. Tyrone's social interactions during this writing instruction were most frequently with one of the teachers. Data showed instances when Tyrone was working with Mrs. Lane or Mrs. Brown:

Mrs. Brown works with Tyrone the entire class period today. (P26:72-73.12/07/2010)

Mrs. Lane helps Tyrone and sits with him for a long time. She writes some things down for him to plan. (P31:42-44.12/14/2010)

Tyrone was not as visibly social as the other participants in the study because he was not as talkative and did not regularly ask for help, but enjoyed participating in class just the same. One day the students wrote for four minutes to an image of a science demonstration and Mrs. Lane asked students who added details to their writing to stand up. Tyrone stood up (P14:61.11/02/2010). Another day, he was chosen to read his writing out loud to the class and was pleased to do so (P15:77.11/03/2010).

Occasionally, Tyrone would raise his hand to go up to the board. When Mrs. Lane was teaching the class how to understand if a prompt was narrative or expository, Tyrone raised his hand and volunteered to underline significant words (P23:24-25.12/02/2010). When the students began to work on writing narrative essays, they were required to talk over their ideas with their neighbors. Tyrone participated in this activity with the students sitting close to him (P26:74-75:12/07/2010).

During the tall tale digital stories Tyrone was animated and thoroughly enjoyed the process of working on his story and his digital recordings. The children worked in groups to plan their stories and Tyrone participated in this activity. When the children

were making digital productions of their tall tales, they were allowed to work with a friend. While all the children were working with peers in the class, Tyrone chose to work by himself and with the adults in the room. He worked with Ms. France and me on most days and both of us helped him with his story and the technology. As usual, Tyrone seemed content and focused, readily accepting help from Ms. France when she stopped by to check on him. I wondered if he did not work with others because of his language impairment and decreased comprehension. A reflection memo documented these thoughts:

Tyrone is working away quietly. He does not seem motivated by peer interactions. Does he interact less with peers because he has trouble with comprehension? He is so quiet in class and I do not often see him talking to other students. Yet he is usually smiling and seems happy. He takes breaks by going to the bathroom or just sitting, but does not look around for social interactions. He seems to feel comfortable and be accepted and well-liked. (P57:8-15.2/24/2011)

Tyrone loved technology and was very absorbed in drawing visuals and making his voice recording for his imovie. He practiced many times over and over to have expression and clarity in his voice. He enjoyed using the computer for this learning activity and was extremely focused. Tyrone said the tall tale digital stories were exciting “because you get to add narration and pictures” (P65:9-11.3/08/2011). He also said he preferred to work alone (P61:37.3/02/2011).

Tyrone found a comfortable social place in his class, was accepted and well-liked by his peers, and by the end of the year had gained confidence in his ability to participate more fully in social groups. When the children were writing poetry Tyrone was working with a small group of friends and seemed to be having a wonderful time. A field note entry read:

Tyrone is working with Julia, Janet, and Patrick. They are sitting and laughing and reading their funny poems to one another. Tyrone and Janet read their poems to one another. They are looking for rhyming words and the group goes over to the computer together. Tyrone gets on Rhyme Zone to look for new vocabulary. This is a very social time for the children. (P79:43-49.5/11/2011)

Tyrone found social membership in the inclusion class through his quiet daily participation in the writing instruction and activities. Tyrone participated by being present, completing assignments, receiving individualized instruction from his teachers, raising his hand to go up to the board, reading his writing out loud, and working with other students in the class when required to do so. His participation was initially not as verbal as other participants, but increased as the school year continued and he became comfortable among his peers. The inclusion class gave him many opportunities to learn and grow in his ability to communicate orally and with the written word.

### **Writing Progress**

Tyrone made progress in his writing during the school year and scored a 3 out of 6 on the Florida Writes. Although this is not considered a passing grade, Mrs. Lane was still pleased because Tyrone had shown growth in writing. Both Mrs. Lane and Tyrone felt a score of 3 was a success. The writing instruction and daily practice in Mrs. Lane's inclusion class gave Tyrone the opportunity to make leaps of progress. Tyrone started the year as a very weak writer and was scoring 1s and 2s out of 6 on class assignments. With tremendous effort and a great attitude, he was able to improve his writing and began to score 3s out of 6 as the year progressed. Tyrone's first writing sample in August, 2010 revealed the problems he had with writing. The class was writing an expository essay about their favorite animal. Tyrone wrote the following piece:

My favorite animal is a lion. Because it can run fast and It have fur. Lions can chase another kinds of animal. Lions eat meat like people and animals. Little lions are cald cubs. Lions find food for the cubs will be a lion. Some lion don't have fur. (Tyrone, 8/24/2010)

In this piece, Tyrone stayed on topic and discussed his favorite animal, a lion, but did not develop his ideas at all. The story was too short to evaluate the organization or sequencing of ideas—there was not enough there. This essay did not have a personal voice to interest and engage the reader. Word choice was adequate to communicate ideas, but Tyrone struggled with sentence fluency and conventions of writing. After reading this first writing sample, Mrs. Lane knew that it would take a tremendous amount of work to help Tyrone become a writer who could succeed writing a variety of genres and pass the Florida Writes in the spring.

Tyrone participated in the daily writing instruction and was able to make significant progress within several months time. Tyrone received individualized instruction from Mrs. Lane during the class time and was also working with the speech language pathologist twice a week for 30 minutes each session to improve language fluency. Tyrone made improvements in many areas of his writing by December. He wrote the following story about a day when 4<sup>th</sup> graders were cooking the school lunch:

December 1, 2009 me and my friend Chris went to school went to the cafeteria to eat then we saw the principal Mrs. Linn and the lunch lady was talking the lunch lady said im going on my vacation. Mrs Linn said you can't leave who's going to feed the students? The lunch lady said you will have to pick somebody to my work. Me and Chris ran to Mrs. Linn. Me and Chris said Pick us we know how to cook. Mrs Linn trying to decide she said yes we ran to the kitchen. In the kitchen Bord (board) said were having tacos with pie so we looked at the ingredints to see how to make tacos and pie but we saw twenty pie's in the on the table we only suppose to have five pies in the in the oven. We had to make soft taco's Chris sais I know how to make taco's so Chris had the taco's and I had the pie we saw two people walked in the cafeteria they woaled to the kitchen and said do you guys need help? We said yes please there name was Michael and kevin kevin help me and Michael help Chris. I was almost lunch time It was 9:55 lunch

starts at 10:36 we had like 10 pies left. Chris and Michael was done until it was lunch time we had five left we put in the oven quickly it 5 min to warm up the pie until students got in they look hungry we gave them the taco's thee pies had 56 sec. It was fice people left Michael had to hold them until the pies were ready. Me and Kein counted to five, four, there (three), two, one, the pie was done after we was done we quickly gave it to the kids. Then I went to the pricible he said you made me proud he gave me 30 bucks I jup in the air 5 time I spend my money on a chair that vibrates and made me happy. (Tyrone 12/10/ 2010)

Tyrone was able to extend his ideas with details. In this essay he generally stayed on topic and the organization and sequencing made sense for the reader. Tyrone did not use paragraphs to break up the text. Clearly, there was an attempt to connect with the audience, and there was a hint of a personal voice. The language in the essay got the job done, but did not have flair or color. The sentences had more fluency than at the beginning of the year and Tyrone was getting his thoughts out more easily. Tyrone was still struggling with spelling, punctuation, and conventions of language.

Tyrone had a moment to shine early in January when his progress became very evident. He scored a 4 out of 6 on a class assignment and was called to the back of the room with several other students and praised for the tremendous progress he was making. Mrs. Lane chose five students who had made significant gains in their writing since the beginning of the school year. Tyrone was beaming to be part of this moment.

The essay he was praised for was about his grandma. He wrote:

Do you have a person that's special I do it's grandma. I have a few thing why I think she special. Grandma is funny she tells me and my brother jokes she have good jokes too she told me this good joke too I laugh so hard I could stop laughing my brother stop laughing neither sometime she do some action that's very funny. Grandma bring us to the park every Monday to feed the ducks she always watching me doing flips she push my brother on the swings she watch my brother on the monkey bars.

Grandma favorite subject is fish we love fishing to but its not my favorite subject grandma love catching fish she like catching a catfish that's her favorite thing to catch she is good catching fishes I cot a mudfish we didn't

like mud fishes so we throw it back in fishing is fun when your with grandma. The final thing about grandma is she make sure if were hungry she like cooking some ribs on the grill sometimes she cook chilly I love grandma's cooking it's very good if you try grandma's cooking your taste buds will call out more! More! That's all the things why I think grandma is special. I love grandma Joyce because she's there for me. (Tyrone, 1/19/2011)

In this story, Tyrone was able to support his topic, his grandma, with specific details and examples of what made her a special person. There was a structure and organization to the writing that supported the story. Tyrone's voice was emerging and we felt the joy and love Tyrone had for his grandma. When he wrote, "I love grandma's cooking your taste bu(d)s will call out more! More!" we shared the feeling! Tyrone was able to extend his writing and described his grandma's sense of humor, going to the park and cookin' on the grill with her. In this piece, Tyrone led readers to know his grandmother as a lovely, warm and funny lady through vivid language and examples. There were still some problems with language conventions, but overall Tyrone showed tremendous improvement from the beginning of the year. After he was praised, I asked Tyrone what he was doing well on and he said, "I did my main ideas and details" (G2:96-97.1/28/2011). Tyrone demonstrated in his writing and in our conversation that he understood Mrs. Lane's instruction and was able to apply these concepts to improve his writing.

Tyrone continued to work quietly and diligently on his writing and as the school year came to a close, it was clear that he had made progress in his ability to write and had gained more confidence in his communication skills. One of the final essays that Tyrone wrote was about waking up and finding out that he was a millionaire. He seemed to enjoy using his imagination for this! He wrote:

May 17, 2011 one morning I was waking up when I got up I wen to the kitchen until I saw some strangers in the living room they lok like they was millionaires so I ran to moms room. I said "Mom why are millionaire in are house?" Mom said "there in are house because you're a million" "Im a what" I said. "You're a million" Mom said. Im a million dollars. "No" Mom said "You're a millionaire" I frozed when she said millionaire It was echoing inside my head. Mom was shaking me to slap out of it. She keep saying "Tyrone." "Tyrone slap out of it Tyrone Tyrone!" Mom scream loudly. Oh sorry I said so I figure how to get the millioniares out of my house I had an idea I open the door and said "hey millionaire's" they look at me and they all said togeth What!!! I said its ranning (raining) a million dolars out side. So they ran to the door I move out of the way so they cant ran me over until they got out my house slam! They was outside and thought it was really raining million dollars outside. So I checked my bank account It was said your balance is one million dollars I was happy I jump around and dance mom said looks like your going to pay the water bill I said awww maan Well at least Im a millionaire. (Tyrone, 5/20/2011)

Tyrone accomplished many complex writing tasks in this essay. He was able to convey his message about becoming a millionaire with excitement and details. There was an organizational structure and he sequenced his ideas in an appropriate way. Tyrone's voice started to come through in his use of dialogue as if he had created the scene in his mind and was explaining it. Tyrone used some interesting language and phrases, "echoing inside my head" and "raining a million dollars." There were still some problems with fluency and writing conventions.

## **Conclusion**

Tyrone began the year writing only a couple of sentences for an expository essay and was able to improve many areas of his writing with daily practice, grade level instruction, and individualized help from Mrs. Lane, Mrs. Brown, and Ms. France. This was the first year of elementary school that Tyrone had the tremendous demand of writing a tightly organized essay with an introduction, two main ideas, and a conclusion. He had never been required to write with specific details and to make revisions. These were many challenges to face all at once, yet Tyrone showed growth in many areas.

Tyrone used his graphic organizer to plan his writing and organize his ideas. His personality was very quiet and he did not usually ask for help by raising his hand, but went personally to Mrs. Lane. Tyrone had a great attitude and made steady attempts to extend and revise his writing by participating in writing lessons and receiving individualized feedback and instruction. Within several months time, Tyrone was able to structure his stories and elaborate more on his ideas for his reader. Tyrone's habit was to work on his writing alone, yet by the time the class was writing poetry in April and May, he enjoyed reading his funny poem to friends and working with several students in a group to find rhyming words. Talking, laughing, and enjoying the social participation during writing poetry was a leap of progress for Tyrone. The inclusion class benefitted Tyrone as a social participant and a writer by stretching him to interact more with his peers, learn to ask for help and as a result make progress in his ability to share his ideas and unique creativity in writing.

Summary of Tyrone's writing behaviors:

- **Planning:** Consistently used planning and did not like to abandon the planner.
- **Asking for help:** Never raised his hand to ask for help. By the end of the year, got out of his desk to seek help.
- **Revising:** Extended his writing with Mrs. Lane's help at the beginning of the year. Made some revisions.
- **Affective experiences:** Said writing was "great" and "awesome." Was always smiling and pleasant. Did not act on directions and experienced confusion about the writing process.
- **Social and participatory behaviors:** Extremely shy. Never volunteered to participate and preferred to work alone. May have been affected by language impairment and difficulties with oral comprehension. Made friendships during the year and grew a great deal socially. Worked with other students by the end of the year.
- **Writing progress:** Learned to extend his writing. Gained more control of organization and was able to add information. Struggled with fluency issues, voice, and conventions. Scored a 3 on the Florida Writes.



## **Summary**

This chapter presented case studies of Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone and writing progress that resulted from Mrs. Lane's instruction in the context of the inclusion model class. The three children all made gains in their ability to write and to succeed as writers in a year where there was a daily focus on writing. There were commonalities among the children that became obvious during the process of focused coding that led to the sections in the chapter and to theory generation. The format of case studies was chosen to highlight how each individual child participated in and benefitted from the inclusion class, experienced the writing curriculum, and practiced writing behaviors in ways that were unique to them. Brief summaries were included at the end of each section for the purpose of comparing each child's individual style. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone had individual personalities and learning styles that made the process of growth as a writer different for each of them. The next chapter summarizes the findings and provides a discussion.

## CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the research and discusses findings presented in Chapter 5 and 6. Chapter 8 introduces implications for action and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this research was to examine how students with learning disabilities make progress in writing in a fourth grade inclusion model class in order to gain understanding of how factors such as the classroom context, teaching methods, and resulting writing behaviors contribute to writing success.

Students with learning disabilities face even greater challenges than their regular education peers to succeed as writers. Writing proficiency has been the focus of attention from national organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Commission on Writing, and the National Association for Education Progress, due to the low literacy rates of many youth and teens. Furthermore, inadequate literacy skills have been shown to correlate to 7,000 high school students dropping out per day nationwide and only 66 percent of students with learning disabilities reaching graduation (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Writing competency is a necessity today to succeed academically through the elementary, secondary, and college levels, and for participation in a high-tech global economy. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts were developed as a way to ensure that students are literacy ready by the time that they graduate from high school (CCSS, 2010). These standards apply to literacy skills not only in language arts, but also in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.

The Standards set requirements for what it takes to be a literate person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and address necessary competencies in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

This qualitative study espouses a constructivist theoretical lens. Three participants with learning disabilities were recruited in a fourth grade inclusion model class. For eight months, observations and archival materials were collected in the natural classroom setting. Participants were interviewed individually and in focus groups. Mrs. Lane was interviewed as well. Data from observations and interviews were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory methods that involved coding data by initial, focused, and selective coding. Constant comparison of clusters of incidents was used during this process as well as memoing, theoretical sampling, and diagramming. The core theoretical code, “writing progress in the context of the inclusion class” helped to present a story of the data. Writing samples from the participants were analyzed using a holistic grading score, 6 + 1 Traits, that evaluates ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. There is currently a need for more research to learn how struggling students make improvements in their writing. This research fills a gap in the literature and is potentially useful to researchers, educators, and policymakers.

This chapter summarizes findings from the study and makes a correlation to the current body of research. Making this connection will elucidate aspects of the inclusion model class, Mrs. Lane’s teaching methods and the participants’ resulting writing behaviors that are consistent with current literature. It will also explore how this study extends current knowledge of how students with learning disabilities make progress in

writing in a fourth grade inclusion model class. Implications for teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and future research will also be discussed.

Through the method of grounded theory analysis the core category of “writing progress in the context of the inclusion class” shapes a theory to understand how students with learning disabilities navigate the social and academic context of an inclusion model class and participate in the writing curriculum to adopt writing processes and behaviors that support them to make improvements. The three major areas of findings came from selective codes: supporting factors in the inclusion class, teaching methods, and resulting writing behaviors are consistent with the existing literature and extend it as well.

#### Summary of Findings:

- Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were supported socially and academically in the inclusion model class by enjoying full membership, participating, and receiving grade level writing instruction.
- Mrs. Lane had in-depth of knowledge of the teaching of writing; used effective teaching methods; and provided individualized instruction that supported Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone’s growth as writers.
- Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone practiced writing behaviors; had social and participatory experiences and behaviors; and had affective experiences with writing.
- Through a system of support in the inclusion class, Mrs. Lane’s quality teaching, and tremendous personal effort, Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone grew and made progress as writers.

## **Supporting Factors of the Inclusion Model Class**

The previous section summarized the findings from this project. The following sections make links to the current base of literature, discusses areas where there were connections and how this study extends the literature.

Research indicates that students with learning disabilities benefit from being valued members of an inclusion model class. When children with LD participate socially, they find membership among their peers, are able to make friends, and enjoy the social experience of school (Berry, 2006; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009). Students with LD who spend most of the day learning among their peers at the highest level of instruction for their grade, benefit academically through this participation (Ferretti, MacArthur, & Okolo, 2001; Palinscar, Magnusson, Collins, & Cutter, 2001; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). When academic strengths are emphasized, students gain confidence in their abilities and take risks to succeed (Berry, 2006; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009). As was the case for Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone, the combination of learning among peers and receiving additional services to strengthen areas of weakness is helpful to children who have learning disabilities (Manset & Semmel, 1983; Marston, 1996).

### **Inclusion Class**

As mirrored in the literature, the success of Mrs. Lane's class was not solely due to the academic experiences, but to the context and classroom culture that gave the students personal voice, sharing of responsibilities, behavioral accountability, positive relationships, and collective concern of and appreciation for each unique child (Carreiro King, 2003; Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004; Parsons, 2003, Berry & Englert, 2005). Mrs. Lane created a classroom community through the rich experience of pets, plants, and

involvement she offered the children. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone enjoyed close friendships, a rich social network, encouragement, and full inclusion among their grade level peers. They benefitted from being members of Mrs. Lane's class and added value to the experience of the class as community by participating socially and academically. This process of focusing on the community of students, viewing each child as a valued member with something to contribute, getting to know a child's strengths and building upon them rather than focusing on deficits are confirmed in the current literature as critical components to the success of children with learning disabilities (Berry, 2006; McPhail & Freeman, 2005; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009).

### **Grade Level Writing Instruction**

Studies done by Manset and Semmel (1997), Marston (1996) and Madden and Slavin (1983) all confirm that spending most of the day in a regular education classroom and receiving pull out services for individual instruction provides the most benefit for students with learning disabilities. The participants in this study received instruction in writing in an inclusive classroom with their regular education peers. Fu and Shelton (2007) found that children who struggle with writing who are included in writing instruction with their regular education peers learn by hearing the struggles of their classmates and may take more risks as writers, thus growing in confidence. Learning alongside their regular education peers gave Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone exposure to diverse writing styles, provided examples of quality writing, and fostered classroom participation as well. Additionally, Julia and Tyrone received speech language services for one hour a week to strengthen their language skills, and all three participants had an accommodation of receiving extra time to finish their writing. This extra support for all

three participants added extra focus to developing language fluency skills so that they could make continued progress and succeed as writers in Mrs. Lane's class.

Rather than emphasize deficits and differences, Mrs. Lane's inclusion class focused on the students as fully capable participants who had the potential to strive and achieve at high levels in the curriculum (McPhail & Freeman, 2005). Mrs. Lane expected that all of her students with learning disabilities would succeed as writers for a variety of genres and would be able to make improvements throughout the year. She got to know each child's unique strengths and learning styles and nudged them along to develop their literacy skills. The components of writing instruction that were identified in this study clearly had an effect on the gains the participants were able to make in their writing. The next section will discuss Mrs. Lane's teaching methods.

## **Teaching Methods**

### **Writing Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities**

Mrs. Lane's approach to teaching students with learning disabilities is consistent with research conducted by Jordan and Stanovich (2002) that students with disabilities have challenges but can be successful in an inclusion class learning alongside regular education peers. Mrs. Lane was flexible in her approach to teaching students with learning disabilities and had an understanding of what they needed to succeed as writers. She never isolated or grouped the special educations together, or singled them out in any way other than to provide them with individualized instruction and support. She believed in the richness of the inclusion model and in the importance of writing to succeed academically and personally.

The qualities Mrs. Lane embodied, her attitude toward writing, and the techniques she used to deliver instruction were pivotal to how her students learned. Studies done

by Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2002) and Graham, Harris, Fink, and MacArthur (2001) lay out the effective techniques that Mrs. Lane used to teach writing: consistent writing practice, process approach to writing, instruction in language and usage, and a belief that writing is a venue for purposeful communication. While every teacher may not be a writer, it is crucial that they understand the important role of writing in the curriculum. Time and effort must be devoted to writing in order for students to succeed.

### **Daily Writing Instruction**

Graves (1994) recommends that children spend 40 minutes a day for a minimum of four days a week on writing so that they have time to work through the difficulties of the writing process. Research indicates that children with LD need consistent amounts of time to learn how to choose topics for writing, plan, and learn skills of revision (Clippard, 1998; James et al., 2001; Keefe et al., 1997). Mrs. Lane devoted approximately one hour of time each morning for writing instruction and individual writing time. Students had ample opportunities to practice writing, to make mistakes, receive feedback, and work toward improvements. This focus and time given to writing has been shown to be necessary for students to work through the problems they encounter and become skilled writers (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994).

### **Effective Practices in Teaching Writing**

Mrs. Lane's process approach to writing as language system, rather than a set of isolated skills is validated by current research (Fu & Shelton, 2007; James et al., 2001; NCTE, 1996) as one of the best ways to teach writing. Teaching the steps in the writing process such as planning and organizing ideas, revising, editing, demonstrating the writing process, mini-lessons on using the conventions of language is based on findings from research on writing for writers of all abilities (Calkins, 1994; Graham, 2006;



Graves, 1994; NCTE, 1996; Troia & Graham, 2002). The techniques Mrs. Lane used in her instruction have been found to be effective with both typical and struggling writers and are consistent with Self Regulated Strategy Development (Harris & Graham, 1996) that was developed as a way to teach children with learning disabilities to plan, revise, and edit, to learn to monitor the writing process, and to develop a positive attitude toward writing.

Consistent with the literature (Danoff, Harris, & Graham, 1993; Calkins 1994; Graham, 2006; Graves, 1994; Harris & Graham, 1996; Lin et al., 2007; Saddler & Graham, 2007) one of the findings in the study was that children learned to edit and revise their writing as a means to making improvements. Mrs. Lane's teaching focused for the entire year, across all genres on writing with detail through the process of revision. Mrs. Lane continually pushed the children no matter what they were writing to add details. Mrs. Lane applied this attention to detail through focusing the children on a variety of details—expanding information, using proper nouns, creating a picture in the readers mind, using lively verbs, and adding feelings. Writing with detail as a way to think about revisions was Mrs. Lane's unique way of helping the students to understand how to revise. For her class, adding details became the primary way they approached improving their writing.

This study found that Mrs. Lane regularly analyzed model texts with students to help the students understand what good writing looked like and how to strive to accomplish it. Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing (Raphael & Englert, 1990) is a way to use and analyze model texts as a part of writing instruction and a way to help struggling students understand qualities of good writing. Another strategy Mrs. Lane

used was to model the writing process on the board in order to uncover the decisions and cognitive processes that go along with writing and revision. Consistent with current literature, teachers need to make writing processes visible and accessible to students with learning disabilities. Raphael and Englert (1990) suggest the use of talking out loud to demonstrate writing processes, modeling writing, and providing students with 'think sheets' to provide concrete strategies to organize and manage their writing. The goal of these methods is to transfer knowledge from the teacher to the students so that they may become independent writers who have control of the writing process (Raphael & Englert, 1990; Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000).

Mrs. Lane's most unique quality as a writing teacher was her understanding of the individual needs of students with learning disabilities. She took the time to get to know her students' personalities, their approaches to writing, and their special challenges. She held a flexible approach to helping each child rise to their full potential. Mrs. Lane had high expectations of each student participant and never doubted that they could make progress. She knew that in order to succeed her students needed to develop confidence in their writing abilities and needed specific feedback on how they could improve. She provided individualized instruction to help her students to improve their writing. Individualized instruction will be discussed in the next section.

### **Individualized Instruction**

Current research on students with LD has emphasizes the importance of providing for their individual needs (Kings & Youngs, 2003; Pickard, 2008). Dudley-Marling & Paugh (2009) discuss the importance of individualized writing instruction specific to the individual needs for students who have learning disabilities. Mrs. Lane gave each participant individualized attention to their writing and helped each child by spending

time with them alone or working in small groups to break down step-by-step how to move through writing difficulties. Mrs. Lane understood the special needs of Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone and also knew each child's approach to writing and problems with writing were unique. She took time at the beginning of the school year to get to know each child and their unique writing style. In order to help the children with their problems, she gave them specific feedback according to their level. This feedback helped to move each child forward at their own pace. Receiving specific feedback was a crucial way that each participant learned their areas of strength and areas that they needed to improve. Because the children came to recognize what they were good at, they developed confidence that they could succeed by working through their challenges.

### **Writing Progress**

The children practiced and learned writing behaviors in the social, cultural, and historical context of the classroom. This finding is consistent with literacy development theory of Bhaktin (1986), Bruner (1986), and Vygotsky (1978) that all language learning takes place in the social and participatory context of the classroom. While some of the social contact was formal instruction, the children also participated in more informal discussions or social dialogues that helped them to become part of the literacy community in the class (Dyson, 1993; Smith, 1988). Students were influenced by the culture of the classroom and influenced it through their participation, their interactions with Mrs. Lane, the curriculum, and other students in the class. The social dimension was extremely important to the success of the students as writers. From a Vygostkian perspective, students relied on 'mediators' or expert others by asking for help, working in groups, listening to others' writing and getting ideas. Through this process students

were able to develop tools that enabled them to negotiate the demands of their environment and to participate more fully to develop writing knowledge.

The tools, or skills the children adopted were writing behaviors and processes that have been documented as ways children can improve their writing (Calkins, 1994; Lin et al., 2007; Saddler & Graham, 2007). The three participants used graphic organizers to get ideas and plan their writing. They had opportunities to get ideas for writing by listening to each other's stories and talking to one another when permitted. When they were having problems with their writing, they talked through their difficulties with one of their teachers or a peer. This chance to listen and to talk helped them to learn the language and processes necessary to succeed. They learned the tools of editing and revision and practiced these processes regularly. They developed an awareness of what was needed to improve their writing through the repetitive instruction Mrs. Lane provided, ample time to practice, and individualized instruction. By internalizing these behaviors and the knowledge they needed to improve their writing, Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were able to make progress.

Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone had opinions about writing that they voiced throughout the year. Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) found that having a positive attitude toward writing, may contribute to improved quality. Being praised for accomplishments and feeling that it is possible to succeed enhances motivation and desire to make improvements. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone were praised for their accomplishments as writers during the year. Every step forward on the path to growth involved risk-taking. Mrs. Lane noticed the effort and progress the children were making and was sure to provide verbal and written recognition. Experiencing moments of success and feeling of

accomplishments despite moments of difficulties and confusion, seemed to help the children identify what they were doing well and helped them continue to build upon these areas of competency. These moments likely helped the children to feel good about their skills, and abilities to succeed. Tyrone had a great attitude toward writing throughout the year and this may have helped him to continue to put forth effort to work through his difficulties. Julia often said she did not like writing, yet continued to persist despite her difficulties. Ryan said writing was his favorite topic and also said he did not like writing. The variety of opinions may have reflected the challenges the participants were facing and the tremendous effort they had to apply to work on their writing.

### **Extending the Literature**

Effective practices for teaching writing to struggling students is well-documented in the literature and is consistent with the findings from this study. The findings from this study that extend the literature are the qualities that Mrs. Lane embodied as a writing teacher that made her teaching writing highly successful. Mrs. Lane had comprehensive qualities that helped her to succeed as a teacher of writing and helped her students with LD to make progress. She not only had knowledge of effective methods to teach writing, but also had a belief in the importance of writing, and knew how to implement the writing curriculum with strategies to help the students grow as writers. The findings from this study suggest that it is important to have in-depth knowledge about the teaching of writing and to have effective teaching techniques.

Another way this study extends the literature is by discussing the children's experiences of confusion and difficulties. All students had difficulties and felt confused at times. Navigating writing difficulties seems to be important to how a child makes progress. When Julia was experiencing a problem, she immediately raised her hand

and asked for help. Julia not only looked to Mrs. Lane for help, she was also comfortable asking her peers. Getting help to clear up confusion was likely a key to the success Julia experienced as a writer. Ryan frequently asked Mrs. Lane for help, but did not ask peers for help most of the time, except during the tall tale digital story unit. Tyrone was extremely shy and never raised his hand for help, but gained enough confidence by the end of the year, to get out of his seat and go to Mrs. Lane directly for help. When Tyrone was experiencing difficulties, he often waited at his desk for Mrs. Lane to come to him. Tyrone's persistence and his ability to seek help by the end of the year were indicators of his growth. Working through this phase seemed to be an important aspect of how the children were able to learn and make progress.

Finally, this study extends the literature by taking a comprehensive look at how students with learning disabilities make progress in writing. Many studies have been done on isolated aspects of how to help students who struggle with writing. There are many techniques and writing methods that have been researched and written about that were discussed in the literature review of this dissertation. However, this study is unique in that it investigated how students make progress when considering the teaching methods, the context, and the resulting writing behaviors that help a child to succeed. It studied the system and processes at work as a whole. Findings from this research found the inclusion class supported students with learning disabilities in several pivotal areas. Mrs. Lane was experienced with special education students and their unique learning needs, and she had a strong belief in the importance of teaching writing. The environment of the inclusion class was supportive socially and academically. Grade level writing instruction that included a workshop approach with

individual instruction and specific feedback helped the participants to learn and grow as writers. Finally, the students became confident as writers through positive feedback and learned to work through difficulties. They were motivated and put forth consistent effort. As a result of these factors, the student participants made progress as writers.

## CHAPTER 8 IMPLICATIONS

### **Context**

The findings from this study imply that it is important to consider classroom placement and the type of social and academic experiences that a classroom can offer students with learning disabilities. The context of learning is important to how a child perceives his or her abilities and how he or she is supported socially and academically as a member of a learning community. In order to foster success and positive learning experiences for all children they need to feel valued for their strengths and to have opportunities to participate as unique members (Carreiro King, 2003; Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004; Parsons, 2003, Berry & Englert, 2005). The inclusion class in this study highlighted the importance of children making friends with their peers, enjoying the daily routines of a class, and learning at grade level instruction among their peers as a component to their success.

The knowledge gained from this study may be helpful for teachers, administrators, and policymakers when considering how to best provide a supportive context for children with learning disabilities who struggle with writing. Practitioners must pay attention to the social aspect of a learning community and how it can best support children with learning disabilities. Children need to have the opportunity to make friends with whom they can enjoy social experiences and learn from as well. They also need to be able to make contributions to the class in order to feel like valued participants.

The second implication from the findings in relation to context is that it is beneficial for children with learning disabilities to be placed in an optimal learning environment such as an inclusive classroom so they can receive quality grade level instruction and



learn alongside more able peers. Learning alongside more able peers gives them the chance to learn from the diversity of other students' writing and turn to expert others for help (Vygotsky, 1978). Policymakers must think about how schools are designed to best accommodate children with special needs and what type of classroom arrangements can be made.

### **Effective Writing Instruction**

This study documents the importance of carving out a significant amount of time for students with learning disabilities to practice writing and to learn about writing. The complexities of learning to write and the challenges that students with LD face, make it a necessity for them to have time to struggle, feel confused, receive help and succeed through their efforts. An important implication from this study is that writing needs to hold a respected position in the curriculum at all grade levels, not just years when a state test is occurring. Writing for test preparation requires students to respond to a prompt, yet they also need opportunities for other types of writing for a variety of purposes and audiences. Children need the chance to pick their own topics at least some of the time as this allows them to draw from meaningful and personal experiences. Students in all grades need to learn to write to share knowledge and their personal beliefs in order to experience the power of the written word. If little time is devoted to writing, students who struggle with writing do not have the time they need to master writing competencies and they become at risk for not developing the literacy skills they need to succeed. Because of the national concerns with low literacy rates of many students, it is critical to devote time in the curriculum to teach writing consistently at all grade levels.

## **Quality Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities**

In addition to regular time spent on writing, students with learning disabilities need quality instruction at grade level. Teachers also need to have equal expectations that students with learning disabilities can learn and achieve as writers. In spite of the upcoming standardized test, Mrs. Lane's instruction was grounded in her strong beliefs and in her knowledge of how to teach writing effectively to students with special needs. Mrs. Lane's instruction focused on the writing process approach. She taught students how to plan, revise, and edit writing in all genres. In addition to writing process methods, Mrs. Lane also understood how to help her students who struggled with writing. She was able to give them a tremendous amount of individualized instruction and feedback that helped them to recognize areas of strength and areas that they needed to improve in.

Several other implications come about when considering that children with LD thrive when they receive quality grade level instruction and individualized instruction to identify and improve their areas of weakness. It would be helpful for teachers if there were comprehensive evaluations before and during the year to change the course of instruction if necessary and to make changes on behalf of the students. All teachers who work with a student, such as speech language pathologists, resources room teachers, and classroom teachers need to collaborate and work together to support the writing process of students with learning disabilities. While IEPs are helpful, Mrs. Lane also said it took about three months to get to know her children and their writing styles (H2:111-112.5/31/2011). For her, this was a loss of time to give appropriate individualized instruction. A looping system that allowed a teacher to stay with children for more than one year so she would not have to learn a child's style for several months

might also benefit children. In this case, a teacher and student would start the year with a relationship in place.

### **Connections to Literature**

Making connections to literature to support children's writing development has been shown to be a beneficial strategy (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994). While the children in this study were writing tall tale digital stories and poetry, Mrs. Lane used model texts and made connections to literature to help the children learn the elements of the new genre they were going to be writing. At the beginning of the tall tale and poetry units, books from the school library were brought into the class and made available for the children to read so that they could learn about these new genres. Mrs. Lane read out loud at the beginning of the lesson and worked with the class to identify the elements of a tall tale or poem. The students were encouraged to read tall tales and poems to learn more about the style, language use, and qualities. During the prompt writing for narrative and expository essays, however, Mrs. Lane did not refer to the literature or read fiction stories and expository essays out loud as a way to make connections to writing. The focus on the test preparation demanded that Mrs. Lane have a more narrow focus than during other writing lessons during the year. The stress and the demands of the Florida Writes may have caused Mrs. Lane to abandon what she knew as an effective way to support writing development: model texts and connections to literature.

### **Teacher Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing**

Teachers must be trained in writing process methods and effective methods to teach writing for students with learning disabilities and not let the standardized tests drive their curriculum. Teaching needs to be crafted with standards in mind, but not

solely for a standardized test. Teaching to a test robs students of important skills and learning experiences that they need and narrows the focus of learning. Student teachers need to understand the importance of writing in the curriculum and the time it takes to help students become proficient in writing. In addition to learning theory and methods, student teachers need chances to observe skilled teachers like Mrs. Lane to learn the hands-on practice of teaching writing. It is important for teachers in training to be able to observe writing instruction at all grade levels to understand not only the methods, but practices a teacher needs to effectively implement the curriculum.

### **Student Writing Behaviors**

Students need opportunities to internalize the habits of writer's and practice them, to participate in a community of literacy learners working with their teacher and peers, and to be able to ask for help to work through difficulties and confusion. Students need to be encouraged to ask for help when they are experiencing difficulties and confusion in their writing process. Teachers need to make room to be able to provide answers or allow students to ask each other for help. Findings from this study indicate that how a student navigates this murky juncture may have an effect on how much progress they are able to make. Teachers need to recognize this process as a way that students learn, work through problems, and have the opportunity to make improvements in their writing.

### **Writing Progress**

Students with LD make progress in writing when a system is in place that works well to support them socially and academically with attention to their unique academic needs. Teachers, administrators, and policy makers must pay attention and take into consideration factors of the inclusion model class that can help to support children who

struggle with writing. In order to monitor the progress of students with learning disabilities, assessments need to be done with care and regularity. A system that provides ongoing assessments would be the most beneficial way to record growth and ensure a way to meet the unique needs of each child. Documenting specific areas of need and unique learning styles can help a team of teachers to best support a child who struggles with writing. Each area in this system that has been described in detail holds importance for a child. No one part of the system alone can help children to make progress; all parts need consideration. Furthermore, a system needs to be strong, well-developed, flexible, and responsive to children's needs to best support struggling writers.

### **Future Research**

Using qualitative methods, this study explored how students with learning disabilities made progress in writing in an inclusion model class. This study provided an understanding of factors that contributed to the success of three children with learning disabilities. In addition to the findings and implications, several areas emerged as potential topics to further explore to understand more about the learning process of students with LD.

The first recommendation is for more research in how students negotiate their experience of difficulties and confusion during the writing process. In this study, it became obvious that this is a critical moment for the children and how they are able to make progress. Julia immediately responded to difficulties by raising her hand and asking for help. Tyrone, on the opposite spectrum, was often isolated and stuck. Because of his shy personality and his language impairment, he never raised his hand for help during the year, but eventually was able to go directly to Mrs. Lane. This finding

suggests that an environment that fosters and responds to children asking for help is conducive to learning and has the potential to enable growth. As Julia continued to look for help from her peers and her teacher, she was able to make tremendous growth in her writing, saw herself as an able writer and succeeded on the Florida Writes with a 5.

The practices of effective writing teachers and the methods and curriculum they use could be studied more in depth. Many teachers are familiar with writing process methods and other techniques for students with learning disabilities, but may not necessarily know how to develop and deliver a writing curriculum effectively. It would be beneficial to study practices and methods of writing teachers who have developed effective curricula for teaching writing to struggling students. Understanding more about teaching methods and a comprehensive curriculum that addresses the problems students with learning disabilities face may help to inform teacher education programs at the secondary levels.

One other implication for research from this study is how to assess student problems with writing before the school year or very early in the year and during the year so they can be addressed on an individual basis, especially for students with LD. There are many possible strategies to provide students with, yet educators need a systematic assessment procedure. Data might include observations of students during the writing process and how they manage difficulties they encounter; careful analyses of writing samples; and test scores from previous years. Once a plan is implemented for an individual child, ongoing examination of its effects needs to continue to find the best match and solution for the child and their teachers.

Another area of potential research is looking more closely at how teachers provide effective individualized instruction to children with LD. Findings from this study suggest that the individualized instruction the students received was important to their success as writers. Looking carefully at the techniques that teachers use during these sessions and how they correlate to writing products would provide tremendous knowledge to the research community, to practitioners, and to administrators.

This study was limited to one inclusive classroom. It would be particularly interesting to study many classrooms where children with learning disabilities are succeeding as writers and what the context and teachers have to offer the children. Further research is clearly needed for struggling writers. Over the past 20 years there has been considerable research in teaching writing process methods and strategies for struggling learners. More studies that take place in diverse settings that identify what elements contribute to the success of students with LD would provide educators for more resources to turn to for help.

It would be beneficial also for a study to span several years of writing growth of students with learning disabilities. This study only looked at the fourth grade year. It is possible that these three participants may have difficulties transferring what they learned to assignments in the fifth grade. Looking at growth over a longer period of time would provide valuable insights and a more in-depth understanding of the process of learning to write.

Studies on how the inclusion model class benefits regular education students grow socially and academically would further validate the benefits of the inclusion model class. The children in Mrs. Lane's class learned among and from each other's diverse

strengths and abilities. All of the children, whether special or regular education, added value to the class. Learning more about how regular education students develop from the inclusion experience would add another dimension to the outcomes of the inclusion model class.

Examining the writing curriculum and learning gains of students in resource or self-contained rooms in comparison to the inclusion model might expose more about how children with learning disabilities learn best. Factors such as the context, level of instruction, teaching methods, and student writing behaviors could be observed to learn about how to create an environment that best supports the unique learning needs of students with learning disabilities.

A final implication for research is how technological tools can help to engage children who struggle with writing, increase their motivation, and draw on digital home literacies that students. The tall tale digital story unit was the most participatory unit and the children felt like experts in front of their computers. During this unit, children worked together as collaborators, discussed, and helped each other on their writing. They were given the time and space to talk about writing and to work through difficulties together. Developing this discourse was an important experience for the children and was even noticed as significant by Mrs. Lane. Additionally, the children easefully navigated the multiple texts of print, narration, and visuals. They were able to draw on their strengths as users of digital tools. Studying how writing can be developed through use of a variety of computer tools in participatory learning environments would be interesting and beneficial to teachers, administrators, and teacher education programs. Children today all need multiple literacies to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global work place.



## **The Inclusion Model Class**

The inclusion model class provided many benefits for Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone in the journey to improve their writing. They enjoyed social experiences and friendships with their grade level peers. They were valued for their participation and contribution in daily classroom and school activities. Additionally, their participation as learners was valued when they shared ideas, read their writing out loud, and worked with other students. Learning to write among their peers provided a diverse group of writers to learn from and to turn to for help. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone benefitted from receiving grade level writing instruction among their peers on a daily basis and they were expected to improve and achieve in the same way that all the other students were. They were not singled out, other than times when Mrs. Lane was providing individualized instruction. These students were fully included in the literacy community of Mrs. Lane's class and they benefitted by growing socially and academically. There were many positive aspects to this particular inclusion class, especially for the participants, however, there were some challenges from Mrs. Lane's perspective.

Mrs. Lane's inclusion class had 11 out of 23 students with accommodations for a variety of special learning needs and expressed stress throughout the school year at how to meet all of the social and learning needs of this diverse group. The concept of natural proportions suggests that students with special needs are assigned to regular education classes based on the natural proportions of the students that attend the school (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000). If 12% of the student population has disabilities, then the school administration would place this percentage of students with special needs in a class. Usually, 20% would be the maximum number of students with special needs placed in a regular education class. Millhopper Elementary School had 79 out of

537 students with disabilities or 14.7% of its student population enrolled in the 2010-2011 school year. Although only 5 students were labeled as disabled in Mrs. Lane's class, there were 6 other children who had accommodations for special learning needs, placing a tremendous demand on Mrs. Lane. Mrs. Lane and one full-time aide, Mrs. Brown handled all of these needs to the best of their ability. Mrs. Waters also came to the class several afternoons a week to support the children with special needs. Mrs. Brown assisted Mrs. Lane during the day, but had to spend most of her time with a student who was functionally mentally handicapped. One of the students needed full transcription assistance when he was writing due to a neurological disorder and six students had accommodations for read-alouds during tests and at other times. For a part of the year Mrs. Lane had a student intern who was able to help her, but for the remainder of the time, she struggled to address the needs of her diverse students.

Clearly, the number of students who had special learning styles was out of proportion and impacted Mrs. Lane. This proved to be very challenging and took a toll on her. Mrs. Lane felt torn providing a curriculum, assessment, and the individualized time they each needed. This points to the issue of considering the individual demands of students with special needs and how they can be met in the classroom. Some students with special needs may not require intense support, while others clearly do. During writing instruction, Mrs. Lane always felt stressed that one of her students needed full transcription and she could not provide that while also working on an individual basis with students who needed more support. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone also needed considerable individualized attention when they were struggling.

In order for the inclusion model to work to its full potential, it is necessary to reflect on and assess how the system is working for both the students and the teachers. In this particular class, the benefits were high for the students, yet placed heavy demands on the teacher. To preserve and protect the advantages of this system for the special education students, it is crucial to consider how to configure inclusion classes. It is necessary to balance the resources available with the unique demands of students with disabilities. This requires an attitude of flexibility and the wisdom to not adhere to any one formula, but consider the intensity of student needs with the support available in each classroom for meeting these needs and the needs of regular education students as well. Schools are faced with many considerations, and this is yet another challenging but critical one if the inclusion model is going to thrive and continue to succeed.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined how three students with learning disabilities made progress as writers in a fourth grade inclusion model class. By participating with their regular education peers, being valued and finding membership in the classroom community, receiving grade level instruction as well as attention to their special needs, Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone made progress as writers. Mrs. Lane delivered her curriculum with enthusiasm and commitment, gave her children ample time to practice, and attended to their unique needs to support them as writers. Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone took on the hard work of becoming writers by adopting writing behaviors and asking for help to work through areas of difficulties and confusion. In the face of challenges, their sustained effort led them to have the knowledge and the skills they needed to succeed. If teachers created optimal writing environments by having the knowledge and methods

they needed to be effective, by carving out daily time for writing, and by supporting their students hard work and effort, all students would have the necessary support to make progress as writers.

There were many elements that worked together as a system to help Julia, Ryan, and Tyrone progress as writers. Hopefully, this study has shed light on the importance of writing in the curriculum, the classroom environment, the quality of the teacher, and the individual determination of the children with learning disabilities to become writers. If more young people felt that “writing is awesome,” they would experience the satisfaction, joy, and wisdom of sharing in the written word what they know and what they believe in to rise to their own personal potential.

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL



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September 3, 2010

TO: Patricia Jacobs  
5018 NW 65<sup>th</sup> Lane  
Gainesville, FL 32653

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair *ISF*  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol #2010-U-0764

TITLE: How Do Children with Learning Disabilities Experience Writing for Digital Stories?

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Your protocol was approved as an expedited study under category 7: *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.* Given your protocol, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from the parent or legal guardian of each participant. When it is feasible, you should obtain signatures from both parents. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research.

It is essential that the parents/guardians of your minor participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, *including the need to increase the number of participants authorized*, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

The approval of this study is valid through **September 2, 2011**. If you have not completed the study by this date, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl

APPENDIX B  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus group interviews were guided by the genre of writing the students were doing during the year. A non-directive, semi-structured format was used in order to allow children to feel comfortable and respond naturally.

1. Experiences with Writing

What has helped you to learn to write?  
How do you get ideas for writing?  
What are your experiences with writing?  
What kind of writing do you like to do?  
What are you good at?  
What is difficult for you?  
What are you getting better at?

2. Writing for Test Preparation: Expository and Narrative Prompts

How are you doing with your writing?  
How is it going with prompt writing?  
What are the differences between expository and narrative writing?  
Where do you get your ideas for writing?  
What are you getting better at?  
What do need to improve in your writing?  
How is Mrs. Lane helping you to be a better writer?

3. Success with Writing

What did Mrs. Lane compliment you on?  
What did you improve on?  
What have you gotten better at?  
What are you doing well?

4. Tall Tale Digital Stories

How did it go with your tall tales and working on the computer?  
How did you choose a topic?  
What parts did you work on with other classmates?  
What did you learn?  
What did you do well?  
What did you find difficult?  
How did you choose visual materials?  
How did it go recording your story?  
How did the computer make your writing and your story different?  
How are you making progress in your writing?  
How is Mrs. Lane helping you to become a better writer?

## 6. Progress in Writing

How do you think you became a better writer this year?

What helped you to improve?

What are you doing well in writing?

What is difficult for you?

How did Mrs. Lane help you?

What did you work on with other students in your class?

APPENDIX C  
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Expository Writing

How are you doing with expository writing?  
What helps you to write well?  
What do you think about when you take a break from your writing?  
What are you succeeding at?

2. Narrative Writing

How is it going with your narrative writing?  
How do you like the narrative writing compared to the expository?  
How do you get your ideas for writing?  
What are you doing well in your writing?  
What do you need to improve on?  
What are you getting better at?  
What are you learning from your teacher?

3. Tall Tale Digital Stories

How is it going with writing your tall tale?  
How did you get the idea for your story?  
What did you do well on?  
What was hard for you?  
How is it going with recording?  
Tell me about the pictures you are choosing.  
What new technology are you learning?

4. Tall Tale Digital Stories

What parts of the project did you work on with other students?  
What did you talk about together?  
How was using the computer for your story different?

5. Writing Progress

How are you becoming a better writer?  
What did Mrs. Lane teach you that helped you improve?  
What is the best writing you have done this year?  
What are you still having trouble with?  
How do other children in your class help you with your writing?  
How do your teachers help you?



## 6. Poetry Writing

How is it going with your poetry writing?

How do you get your ideas for poems?

What are the steps you use to write a poem?

How does it compare to other kinds of writing you have done this year?

How does writing poetry help you to become a better writer?

What are you getting better at in writing?

## 7. Writing Progress

How do you think you have become a better writer?

What has helped you the most to get better at writing?

What do you think you are doing well?

What is hard for you when you are writing?

What do you and your classmates talk about when you are writing?

How do you use what Mrs. Lane teaches you?

APPENDIX D  
TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about (student name) and his/her progress in writing?
2. What helped this student to make progress?
3. How do you think his or her LD effected his or her writing this year?
4. In terms of your instruction, what do you think helped them the most?
5. What are the benefits of an inclusion model class for these students?
6. Can you discuss the relationship between the Florida Writes and your writing curriculum?
7. Can you share your beliefs about writing?
8. If you could design an ideal writing curriculum for these students, what would you do?

APPENDIX E  
CODING TRAIL

| Open Codes                       | Focused Codes                        | Selective Codes                | Core Theoretical Code                                  |  |  |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Sharing ideas                    | Participation In the Inclusion Class | Support of the Inclusion Class | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |  |  |
| Reading aloud                    |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Responding to question           |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Raising hand                     |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Listening to instruction         |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Talking to friend                | Social Membership                    |                                |  |  |  |
| Fooling around                   |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Looking for help                 |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Working with classmate           |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Receiving praise on writing      | Recognition Among Peers              |                                |  |  |  |
| Congratulations on participation |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Showing knowledge                | Writing Beliefs                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Writing is valuable              |                                      |                                |  |  |  |
| Writing can evoke feelings       |                                      |                                |  |  |  |

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Writing can entertain                      |   |   |  |
| Explaining importance of writing           |   |   |  |
| Directions for organizing                  | Teaching Planning                         |   |  |
| Demonstrating graphic organizer-planning   |   |   |  |
| Talking about planning                     |   |   |  |
| Brainstorming ideas                        |   |   |  |
| Showing pictures                           |   |   |  |
| Providing fluency exercises                | Teaching Students to Write with Detail    |   |  |
| Requiring details                          |   |   |  |
| Teaching cutting and pasting to revise     |   |   |  |
| Teaching how to create a visual picture    |   |   |  |
| Discussion using the senses                |   |   |  |
| Lesson on action and feelings              | Teaching Language Use, Mechanics, Grammar |   |  |
| Teaching students to use quotes            |   |   |  |
| Lesson on proper nouns                     |   |   |  |
| Demonstrating how to use graphic organizer | Demonstrating the Writing Process         |   |  |
| Revising poem with class                   |   |   |  |
|  |   | Intensive Daily Writing Instruction Among Peers | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| Writing poem together                             |  |  |  |
| Discussing form of pome                           | Analyzing with Model Text                  |  | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |
| Analyzing writing success                         |  |  |  |
| Discussing qualities of good writing              |  |  |  |
| Asking questions about writer's technique         |  |  |  |
| Reminding students of yesterday's work            | Reviewing Reinforcing, and Giving Feedback |  |  |
| Asking questions about previous writing           |  |  |  |
| Looking at earlier writing                        |  |  |  |
| Praising good work                                |  |  |  |
| Praising progress                                 |  |  |  |
| Reminding class to revise                         |  |  |  |
| Comparing writing done earlier to see improvement |  |  |  |
| Helping student                                   | Giving Individual Instruction              |  |  |
| Answering questions                               |  |  |  |
| Teaching small group                              |  |  |  |
| Step-by-step guidance                             |  |  |  |

|   |                            |  |  |
|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| Getting ideas from teacher directions       | Getting Ideas and Planning | Writing Behaviors:<br>The Literate Child | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |
| Getting ideas from other people's writing   |                            |  |  |
| Getting ideas from planning                 |                            |  |  |
| Getting ideas from thinking and imagination |                            |  |  |
| Getting ideas from tv, video, media         |                            |  |  |
| Getting ideas from personal experience      |                            |  |  |
| Planning ideas                              |                            |  |  |
| Filling in graphic organizer                |                            |  |  |
| Raising hand                                | Asking for Help            |  |  |
| Asking for help                             |                            |  |  |
| Waiting for teacher's help                  |                            |  |  |
| Looking around                              |                            |  |  |
| Asking questions                            |                            |  |  |
| Talking to classmates                       |                            |  |  |
| Reviewing errors                            |                            |  |  |
| Identifying errors                          |                            |  |  |

|                                    |                        |  |  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| Looking for errors                 | Revising and Extending |  | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |
| Making corrections                 |                        |  |  |
| Extending writing to improve       |                        |  |  |
| Cutting and pasting                |                        |  |  |
| Adding details                     |                        |  |  |
| Correcting punctuation             |                        |  |  |
| Starting over                      |                        |  |  |
| Lack of writing knowledge          |                        |  |  |
| Not understanding the prompt       |                        |  |  |
| Problems with required form        |                        |  |  |
| Spelling and punctuation is hard   |                        |  |  |
| Lack of main ideas and information |                        |  |  |
| Elaboration is hard                |                        |  |  |
| Making a story is hard             |                        |  |  |
| Not sure what is being taught      |                        |  |  |
| Off task behavior                  |                        |  |  |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Forgetting directions                   | Affective Writing Experience: Opinions, Difficulties, and Confusion |  | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |
| Staring                                 |   |  |  |
| Walking around                          |   |  |  |
| Pausing                                 |   |  |  |
| Not sure what to do                     |   |  |  |
| Unsure how teacher helped               |   |  |  |
| Need to clarify                         |   |  |  |
| Unsure of reason for revision           |   |  |  |
| Feeling confused                        |   |  |  |
| Unsure of topic                         |   |  |  |
| Reasons for liking narrative            |   |  |  |
| Favorite types of writing               |   |  |  |
| Preferring narrative bc it is imaginary |   |  |  |
| Change in attitude toward writing       |   |  |  |
| Writing is hard and boring              |   |  |  |
| Dislike writing                         |   |  |  |



|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| Lack of interest                       |  |  |  |
| Digital stories are more fun           |  |  |  |
| Enthusiasm for digital stories         |  |  |  |
| Participating in discussion            | Social and Participatory Writing Behaviors |  | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |
| Answering questions                    |  |  |  |
| Talking about character and ideas      |  |  |  |
| Talking about story ideas              |  |  |  |
| Making social connections              |  |  |  |
| Working with other student             |  |  |  |
| Talking to friend                      |  |  |  |
| Teaching each other apps               |  |  |  |
| Talking about writing process          |  |  |  |
| Talking about steps in writing process |  |  |  |
| Working on computers together          |  |  |  |
| Sharing technical expertise            |  |  |  |
| Collaborating                          |  |  |  |
| Solving problems                       |  |  |  |
| Reading stories to friend              |  |  |  |
| Reading poem to friend                 |  |  |  |

|   |                   |  |  |
|---|-------------------|--|--|
| Doing well on expression                    | Improving Writing |  | Writing Progress in the Context of the Inclusion Class |
| Improving in writing                        |                   |  |  |
| Getting good grades in writing              |                   |  |  |
| No boring words is good writing             |                   |  |  |
| Doing well on actions and characters        |                   |  |  |
| Following the planner helps writing improve |                   |  |  |
| Improving details, information, punctuation |                   |  |  |
| Detail and main ideas improves writing      |                   |  |  |
| Longer sentences and paragraphs             |                   |  |  |
| Extending sentences                         |                   |  |  |
| Writing more                                |                   |  |  |

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Patricia Jacobs was born in Poughkeepsie, New York. She studied French Literature at the University of Albany in New York State and studied abroad in Paris, France for her junior year. Patricia taught English as a Second Language in Tokyo, Japan and when she returned home enrolled at Teachers College, Columbia University where she earned a Masters in English Education. Upon completion of her degree, she taught fifth and seventh grade Language Arts at a private school in New York City, and tenth grade English at Columbia High School in Lake City, Florida. After teaching for seven years, Patricia was inspired to learn more about how to teach writing to struggling students and went on to earn her doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. Most recently she teaches Language Arts Methods in the College of Education at the University of Florida and consults with local elementary schools on how to improve their writing curriculum. She has presented her research at numerous conferences from projects on how to integrate technology into the language arts curriculum to help children who struggle with literacy learning.