INFLUENCE OF ORAL CONFERENCING
ON STUDENT NARRATIVE WRITING:
TWO CASE STUDIES

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the influence of teacher feedback that was provided to two third grade writers during individual conferences. Research questions for this study focused on how the teacher feedback given to the students during individual reading conferences affected subsequent drafts of the students’ narrative writing pieces. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine whether any patterns would emerge in the students’ application of teacher feedback to their written texts as a result of suggestions made during frequent individual student-teacher writing conferences.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What is the impact, if any, of teacher feedback delivered through individual conferencing on the narrative text composition of two third grade students?

2) What similarities and/ or differences, emerge in the response to teacher feedback of these two students?

It was concluded that while at least some of each kind (reminder, scaffolded, example) of prompt was taken by each student, the patterns that emerged from the feedback showed that the students internalized the feedback they took differently. While it can be said that teacher feedback affects student writing, it should also be noted that student use of teacher feedback appears to be specific to the individual writer.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

Students in the early elementary grades are natural authors. From their first scribbles, young children use drawing and writing to share their experiences or invent stories. Furthermore, a large body of research has demonstrated that even primary-age children are capable of following a basic process in their writing that allows them to move from brainstorming through publication (Calkins, 1994).

Graves (1981) identified three stages in the writing process of young children: prewriting, composing, and postwriting. During prewriting, students choose topics and gather their thoughts. Composing consists of drafting the text. During postwriting, students share what they have written with peers or others. In her book, The Art of Teaching Writing, Calkins (1994) identified developmental markers for young children to assist teachers in determining what different stages of the writing process “look like” at different levels. One of her recommendations, endorsed by many writing researchers, is that a workshop approach to writing instruction is the best instructional framework to support children’s natural development as authors (Atwell, 1987).

According to Atwell (1987), a writing workshop instructional framework supports writing development during all stages of the writing process, from idea generation to completion of the final product. Atwell defined the components of writer’s workshop as
minilessons, status-of-the class reports, writing and conferring time, and group sharing.
Minilessons are singularly focused on one skill, strategy, or procedure, and last ten to fifteen minutes. Minilessons typically begin writing workshop, but can take place any time within the workshop. Status of the class reports are short teacher surveys about what each student is doing in writing workshop, meaning what genre the student is writing and in which stage of the writing process the student is writing. This data is usually recorded on a checklist that a teacher can easily refer to before or during a writing conference.

During writing conferences, students engage in discussions about their written work with teachers. The purpose of a writing conference is twofold. First, the teacher has an opportunity to see what the student is writing and thus how he or she is processing the information presented in minilessons. Even more importantly, the students get to see their writing through the eyes of an adult who provides feedback (often in both written and oral forms) to help the writers improve his or their compositions. These conferences take place during all stages of the writing process, and can sometimes involve classmates. Finally, during group sharing, Atwell stated that student writers receive the opportunity to hear and react to individual students’ writing.

It is during the freedom of a writing workshop that teachers have the time and opportunity to examine the writing their students are producing (Routman, 2005). Graves (1975), as cited in Atwell (1987), argued: “Unless we actually structure our environments to free ourselves for effective observation and participation in all phases of the writing process, we are doomed to repeat the same teaching mistakes again and again” (p. 8). Knowing this, the question arises: what types of teacher feedback are most effective when provided to writers during the writing process?
Statement of the Problem

While descriptive feedback provided to student writers is an integral part of writing workshop, there is little information concerning the types of oral feedback that are most effective when provided to elementary grade students, particularly how this feedback affects further drafts of the writing composition.

Current theory and practice in regard to feedback indicates that when teachers provide oral feedback to writers, particularly when they pose the feedback in the form of questions, their questions can push students to analyze their piece more deeply, causing them to reflect on the changes they make (Smith, 2010). However, there is little work on the particular types of feedback students are more likely to respond to and use to make changes in their writing.

This study sought to investigate what types of oral and written teacher feedback were most influential for two third grade student writers in a classroom that used a writing workshop approach to instruction.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of teacher feedback that was provided to two third grade writers during individual conferences. Three types of feedback identified by Clarke (2003) and endorsed by the school district in which the study took place, were used: reminder, scaffolded, and example. Research questions for this study focused on how the teacher feedback given to the students during individual reading conferences affected subsequent drafts of the students’ narrative writing pieces. The researcher wanted to know whether the student writers were influenced by teacher feedback provided during regular student-teacher conferencing. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine whether any patterns would emerge in the students’ application of teacher feedback to their
written texts as a result of suggestions made during frequent individual student-teacher writing conferences.

Research Questions

Research questions for this study focused on how the oral and written teacher feedback given to the students affected subsequent drafts of the students’ narrative writing pieces. The researcher wanted to know whether the student writers were influenced by teacher feedback provided during regular student-teacher conferencing. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine whether any patterns would emerge in the students’ written texts as a result of their acceptance or rejection of the type of feedback she had provided.

To address this issue, data collection and analysis was guided by the following questions:

1) What is the impact, if any, of teacher feedback delivered through individual conferencing on the narrative text composition of two third grade students?

2) What similarities and/ or differences, emerge in the response to teacher feedback of these two students?

Overview of Research Methods

This research used a descriptive qualitative methodology to conduct a case study of two third grade students. Merriam (1988) described a descriptive case study in education as an approach that: “presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study” (p. 27). The purpose was to describe and interpret the impact of teacher feedback, provided in individual conferences, on these students’ written texts. To that end, descriptive data, such as writing interviews, writing conferences, and post-writing interviews were collected from both of the
students. In addition, data was collected about the students themselves as writers, as well as their perceptions about writing.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this case study.

1.) *Descriptive Qualitative Case Study*- “A descriptive case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1988). The goal of a qualitative case study is identification of pertinent themes that emerge within and across cases through inductive data analysis.

2.) *Expository Writing*- Expository writing is a type of written discourse that seeks to explain, describe, give information or inform (Tompkins, 2000). In this study, expository writing refers to written narrative compositions that inform the reader about a particular topic.

3.) *Example prompt*- Example prompts provided to writers are those that make suggestions, offer information, and give a range of possible answers to choose from. For example, the teacher would provide a list of possible outcomes that could be used for the piece, prefacing the oral feedback with, “Choose one of these statements and/ or create one of your own.” After the feedback is provided, the student may choose one of the teacher’s examples or create one of his own using the examples as a model (Clarke, 2003).

4.) *Genre*- In this study, “genre” will be defined as the type of writing that the student is composing. Writing genres consist of narrative (“stories” that can be real or fictional), expository (types of nonfiction writing), and persuasive
(writing written with the purpose to persuade the reader about a particular topic). Subgenres include poetry, biography, and mysteries (Atwell, 1987).

5.) **Graphic Organizer**- A graphic organizer is a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and or ideas within a learning task. Graphic organizers are also sometimes referred to as knowledge maps, concept maps, story maps, cognitive organizers, advance organizers, or concept diagrams (Hall & Strangman, 2002).

6.) **Minilessons or Mini-lessons**- A brief meeting that begins writing workshop where the whole class addresses an issue that has arisen during previous workshops or in pieces of students’ writing (Calkins, 1994).

7.) **Narrative Writing**- According to *The Literacy Dictionary* Harris & Hodges, 1995), narrative is “a story, actual or fictional, expressed orally or in writing” (p. 162). In this study, narrative writing refers to texts that the participants drafted. These narratives were composed in response to fictional narrative prompts.

8.) **Reminder prompt**- Reminder prompts provided to writers are those that draw the learner’s attention back to the learning intention, and relies more on reminding students what to do instead of showing or telling them what to do. Reminder prompts may consist of, “Remember to tell more about…” or “Describe the setting.” (Clarke, 2003).

9.) **Scaffolded prompt**- Scaffolded prompts provide more help to writers because they focus on specifics, helping learners to extend their current understandings and improve their work. Examples of scaffolded prompts include, “Describe
what you were feeling at that moment” or “Can you explain why?” (Clarke, 2003).

10.) **Skills-Based Approach**- The skills-based approach consists of written skills taught in isolation and isolated practice of these skills, in the form of activities such as completing worksheets (Weaver, 2002). In regard to the teaching of writing, this approach to instruction focuses more on the “nuts and bolts” (conventions) of writing, rather than content. This approach stresses the importance of neat handwriting and particular grammar and punctuation skills such as subject-verb agreement and appropriate punctuation assessed through skill practice worksheets rather than descriptive language or creativity.

11.) **Teacher Feedback**- In this study, descriptive feedback will be defined as one of three types of prompts provided to students within a one-on-one writing conference. These prompts may be written, oral, or both written and oral. Clarke (2003) identified three types of feedback: reminder prompts (where the teachers simply reminds the student writer to take a particular action with the piece), scaffoled prompts (when the teacher asks a guiding question to scaffold the writer to take action with the piece), and example prompts (where the teacher provides an example of the action that could be taken and gives the option for the writer to take action with one of their own ideas based on the example given).

12.) **Writing Conferencing**- A conference in a writing workshop occurs when the teacher sits down beside a student, finds out how the student’s writing is
going, and then in a very direct but conversational way, teaches the student something that makes sense at the time (Wood-Ray & Laminack, 2001).

13.) **The Writing Process** - The writing process refers to the stages writers go through when composing a piece of written work from conception to some form of publication. The writing process consists of topic selection, rehearsing, accessing information, reading, organizing, editing, and revising (Graves, 1981). Graves broke the writing process down into three stages: prewriting, composing, and drafting. It is important to note that these stages can be recursive.

14.) **Writing or Writer’s Workshop** - An approach to writing instruction that includes minilessons (brief lessons that focus on a particular need of the students in the workshop that they can apply to their writing that day), status-of-the-class reports (data about what students are writing that day and what stage in the writing process they are in), writing (independent and sustained writing blocks, or chunks of time) and conferring time (one-one-one discussions between student and teacher or between peers to discuss a piece of writing), and group sharing (an opportunity to share writing aloud with fellow students in the workshop or other selected audience). “In writing workshops, teachers invite children to do all the things a writer really does: research, explore, collect, interview, talk, read, stare off into space, co-author, and yes, prewrite, draft, revise, edit, and publish” (Wood-Ray & Laminack, 2001, p. 4).
Summary

Young children are natural authors who can successfully use a writing process approach in a writing workshop instructional framework to compose texts. To do so, however, children need the writing process modeled for them. Furthermore, they need specific, individualized feedback (often in both oral and or written form) to help them see the areas in their compositions that need clarification or have room for growth. This study sought to investigate the effects of teacher feedback on student narrative writing. Three particular types of feedback were investigated: reminder, scaffolded, and example prompts. The impact of this feedback on the narrative texts of two third grade students from the researcher’s classroom was the focus of this qualitative case study.
CHAPTER II.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study described the impact of regular student-teacher conferencing on the narrative writing of two third grade students. The literature review framing this study examines various aspects of writing instruction, including the writing process, writing workshop, writing conferences, and the genre of narrative writing.

Writing as a Process

Walshe (1981) wrote that the writing process is “the most fruitful single approach to the teaching and learning of written expression” (p. 6). Early writing researchers have divided the writing process into three stages. These stages were labeled by Britton (1970) as conception, incubation, and production. During the conception stage, students choose their topics and decide what to write. During incubation, student writers develop their topics and gather information. Finally in the production stage, students write, revise, and edit their pieces.

It is important to note that the writing process is recursive, meaning that students shift back and forth between stages in the process as they write (Britton, 1970). While all advocates of the process approach believe it is recursive, different researchers have identified the stages somewhat differently. Graves (1975) identified the stages in the process as prewriting, composing, and drafting. Flower and Hayes (1977, 1981, and 1986) further examined student writing and created a model that defined writing as a complex problem-
solving process. According to this model, the writing process involves three non-linear steps: planning, translating, and reviewing. Tompkins (2000) synthesized information from the aforementioned researchers and developed a five-step writing process. The five stages (completed in recurring cycles) are: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Prewriting includes choosing topics and organizing ideas. Drafting consists of writing a rough draft and thinking of techniques to use to “hook” the reader. Revising includes sharing writing with peers and teachers, and then making changes to the draft. During editing students confer with peers and teachers once more and consequently correct their mechanical errors. Finally, when it is time for publication, students publish their writing in an appropriate form and share their writing with others (Tompkins, 2000). All of these steps are clearly modeled for students when teachers first begin the writing process approach to instruction in their classrooms. According to Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2000), “In writing process programs, students are taught strategies to develop their level of competence as writers” (p. 10). Larson and Marsh (2005) conveyed the importance of modeling literate behaviors, and more specifically teachers modeling the writing process in their book, *Making Literacy Real*. They suggested:

> Writers’ workshop works on the assumption that students will learn to write like real writers do. Typically, ‘real’ writers are defined as professional authors. Through author studies, modeling, conferences, and sharing texts, students learn how people who are writers compose and publish text. (p. 21)

*How the Writing Process Differs from the Skills-Based Approach*

A shift of focus has occurred concerning writing instruction in America from its early days to the present. In the times of colonial America, it was traditionally believed that
children should learn to read and then write: “During this time writing instruction placed an emphasis on penmanship and transcription of text, and was only considered necessary if one planned to go to college or work outside the home” (Noll, 2010, p. 20). This approach became known as “the skills-based approach” to writing instruction.

The skills-based approach to writing instruction was exclusively used in elementary classrooms until introduction of the writing process approach, which became popular in the 1980's. Weaver (2002) observed that the skills-based approach consisted mainly of written skills taught in isolation and isolated practice of these skills, in the form of activities such as completing worksheets. Weaver noted that the writing process approach, often implemented in a writing workshop instructional format, allows more classroom time for genuine writing rather than independent practice of isolated writing skills followed by evaluation. Weaver also argued that written language skills taught with the skills-based approach are not practical, and that the writing process is more “real”, as it is a social process due to the opportunities within its stages for writers to conference with peers and teachers.

*Self-Selected Topics*

Self-selected topics are a standard feature of the writing workshop. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated, “Whenever possible, students should be allowed to ‘own’ their research topics- to pursue subjects that arise out of their own sincere interests” (p. 429). Similarly, Wood-Ray and Laminack (2001) stated that in writing workshops students decide their content for many writing projects throughout the year. Self-selection of topics within the context of writing workshop builds ownership for students over their writing. Honoring student selection of topics helps make the writing process meaningful to them. Wood-Ray and Laminack stated that teachers want students to have good reasons of their own to need to
write well, and that at the heart of needing to write well is personal topic selection. Au (1997) stated that, “…writing about self-selected topics- planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing- does more than anything else to build ownership of learning for students” (p. 188). Graves (1994) emphasized that it is essential that children write about things they are familiar with in order to be successful. Research by Bright (1995) suggested that in order for ownership and interest in their own compositions to take place, students need to be able to choose the genre and topic of their writing.

Atwell (1987) and Graves (1983) stated that in schools where the writing process is used that students take more ownership of their writing by choosing topics of personal interest. The idea of students’ personal interest in their writing as motivation for learning skills is supported by Au (1997):

I now believe that instruction should begin with interest, with activities that students can find personally meaningful….Once students are engaged in meaningful literacy activities, they have reasons to learn the skills and strategies they need to complete the activities successfully. (p. 11)

Writing Workshop

One of the most popular instructional formats for implementing a writing process approach in classrooms is the “writing workshop” (Atwell, 1987). In writing workshops, teachers provide both small group and individual instruction to help students develop communication skills. Wood-Ray and Laminack (2001) defined writing workshop in the classroom as: “In writing workshops, teachers invite children to do all the things a writer really does: research, explore, collect, interview, talk, read, stare off into space, co-author,
and yes, prewrite, draft, revise, edit, and publish” (p. 4). Routman (2005) defined writing workshop as the following:

1. Sustained, daily writing across the curriculum of mostly self-chosen topics;
2. Writing for purposes and audiences that the writer values and understands;
3. Experimenting with language and learning how to craft writing;
4. Conferring with students to respond to their writing, celebrate what they have done well, and teach the next steps for moving the writing forward.

Similarly, Atwell (1987) described writing workshop as the following:

Writers’ workshop is the heart of the writing class. The mini-lesson, status-of-the-class check, and share meeting exist to support what happens here. Of a typical fifty-minute class period, writers’ workshop consumes about two-thirds; during this chunk of time, within the structure of the workshop environment, writers are on their own, calling their own shots. (p. 83)

With each unit of study in a writing workshop, students move through the stages of prewriting to some form of publication. Routman (2005) further defined writing workshop as, “the time in which everything that writers do to create a meaningful piece of writing for a reader takes place” (p. 174).

Atwell (1987) defined the components of writer’s workshop as minilessons, status-of-the-class reports, writing and conferring time, and group sharing. Minilessons are brief lessons that center around one focus e.g., a skill, strategy, or procedure. Minilessons are to be from ten to fifteen minutes in length and can take place any time within writing workshop. Status of the class reports are short teacher surveys of what each student is doing in writing workshop. The data collected about the students (the data typically includes what stage of the
writing process in which the student is working) is usually recorded on a checklist. Writing and conferring time is the heart of writing workshop. During this time students engage in conferences with teachers and peers. These conferences take place during any and all stages of the writing process. Finally, during group sharing, the entire class has an opportunity to react to individual students’ writing.

Writing workshop was described by Cooper and Kiger (2003) as “a flexible plan that places students and teacher in a partnership for learning” (p. 442). In writing workshop, students do not follow a linear process of prewriting, drafting, and publishing. Students are transient within the steps of the writing process, producing pieces of authentic writing for real purposes: “During writer’s workshop, students use components of the writing process as they write for a variety of purposes and in a variety of modes” (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). McElveen and Dierking (2000) stated that writing workshop has been proven as a powerful means of writing instruction. This is perhaps because writing workshop lends itself to student freedom and independence as well as time for one-on-one student-teacher conferencing. Helsel (2007) described the process of writing workshop time in her classroom:

During our writer’s workshop time, the classroom is bustling with activity as students work independently and with others to draft and refine short stories, essays, poems, and other pieces of writing. Students engage in brainstorming and other prewriting activities, complete first drafts, make revisions in order to refine ideas, and edit for conventional errors. I frequently use focused minilessons to develop key concepts and to address particular problems that students encounter as they write. I serve as a model by allowing students to see how I move through the writing process as I work
on my own writing. I am often amazed by the progress that many students make when given the time and freedom to write. (p. 752)

Choice, time, and response, or feedback, are essential pieces when it comes to teaching students effective writing (Atwell, 1987; Routman, 1994; Wood & Dickinson, 2000). The writing workshop approach to instruction includes all of the aforementioned elements, and thus naturally allows teachers to value the process of a writer.

Importance of “Minilessons” Within Writing Workshop

It is necessary for students to learn the procedures involved in the writing process through explicit modeling of authentic writing pieces. Through minilessons, teachers demonstrate these procedures and then provide opportunities for them to practice them through writing workshop (Tompkins, 2000). During writing workshop, then, teachers provide direct instruction about how to move through the composition process, often modeling this process with their own pieces of writing so that students can conceptualize the process and make it their own.

Atwell (1987) described Lucy Calkins’ (1986) definition of minilessons as brief meetings that begin writing workshop, in which the class addresses an issue that has surfaced during previous sessions. McElveen and Dierking (2000) supported the importance of the minilessons for teaching skills to writers within the context of writing workshop by stating, “The daily minilesson often requires demonstration of a target writing skill. Precise examples, in the form of good writing models, are necessary for students to learn the target skills” (p. 362). Schunk (2000) suggested that writing competence develops from first observing models and then it becomes internalized. After minilesson instruction of the basic
process that writers travel through to create a final piece, students can make this model their own and experience success as accomplished writers.

The Value in the Writing Process

Au (1997) illustrated the importance of the writing process by stating that when students engage in the full writing process they have the best opportunity for the orchestration of skills and strategies. The value in the writing process is foremost that it is a way of looking at writing instruction that shifts the teaching and learning emphasis from students’ finished products to what they think and do as they write (Tompkins, 2000). Calkins (1994) and Graves (1983) as cited in Harvey and Chickie-Wolfe (2007) described the benefits of the process approach to writing:

The promotion of a positive attitude toward writing can be fostered by using a process-oriented approach to writing that includes frequent writing opportunities, min-lessons in critical writing skills, a community of writers producing authentic written work, conferences with teachers in which students receive constructive and individualized feedback, and opportunities for students to share their work (p. 188).

Writing Conferencing

It is imperative that teachers engage in one-on-one writing conferencing with students within the writing process and writing workshop model of instruction. “Writing instruction happens not only in minilessons but also in conferences. As children tackle new writing challenges, those of us who teach children need to expand our repertoire of ways to confer with them” (Calkins, 2003). Effective teachers use different forms of conferences to meet individual student needs (Routman, 2005). Calkins (1994) stated, “It is for good reason that
the writing process approach to teaching writing is also known as ‘the conference approach.’
Conferring is at the heart of the writing workshop” (p. 223).

Jenkins (1996) wrote, “Central to the success of the writing workshop is the student-
teacher conference” (p. 217). It is essential that student writers have frequent opportunities to
discuss their writing pieces with teachers. These opportunities often happen within the
context of writing conferences.

Wood-Ray and Laminack (2001) defined a writing conference as:
A conference in a writing workshop occurs when the teacher sits down beside a
student, finds out how the student’s writing is going, and then in a very direct but
conversational way, teaches the student something that makes sense at the time. (p. 156)

Effective writing conferencing includes specific, targeted feedback about particular
areas of difficulty or success within the student’s piece that the conference is centered upon.
Routman (2005) gave this example as to what an effective conference should sound like:
Note everything the student has done well, starting with content: opening, organization, specific language used. It is not enough to say I like your opening. Repeat the memorable language, the actual words the child has used….Praising high-quality language encourages students to use such language- or humor, or special punctuation- again. (p. 225)

In relation to what makes an effective writing conference, Atwell (1987) emphasized
the importance of students not becoming too dependent upon their teachers when it comes to
deciding what is or isn’t working in their writing. She defended, “Good writing teachers use
the conference as a springboard for student initiative” (p. 89).
Atwell (1987) stated that response helpful to writers comes during the composition of their pieces. She wrote that this help can come from peers as well as teachers, and that the teacher should consistently model restatements and questions that help them to reflect upon the content of their written work. Writing conferencing is crucial to students’ development as writers. Atwell wrote that although the points of conferences differ, they each have the same goal, which is to help student writers grow to independence.

Calkins (1991) further noted that, “…it will probably be our conferences that help writers to ask, ‘What is important to me?’….questions they can later ask of their work themselves” (p. 77). In other words, the teacher’s job in a writing conference is to draw the writer’s attention to points in his piece that need to be revised or edited.

It is not surprising, then, that students’ writing is directly influenced by the nature and regularity of conferences with their teachers. Atwell (1987) looked at writing conferencing a bit differently, by arguing that:

The point of a writing conference isn’t to get kids to revise. In fact, there isn’t any one point to be made by a writing conference. A whole range of different kinds of talk, suiting different purposes, goes on in a writing workshop. The nature of talk in my writing workshop depends on what a writer needs or what I need as a teacher of writers. (p. 88)

The quality of teacher-student interaction during a conference is, of course, critical. According to Calkins (1994), the teacher must strive to conduct the conference in a way that will result in the writer developing the ability to independently notice places in need of revision or editing in subsequent pieces. She observed, “Our job in a conference is to put ourselves out of a job” (p. 229). Similarly, Atwell (1987) used the words of Thomas J.
Carothers when she described conferencing: “A good teacher has been defined as one who makes himself progressively unnecessary” (p. 88). To further illustrate this idea, Calkins suggested that when teachers communicate what they notice about the student’s writing process, they learn something that not only applies to that particular draft, but also drafts they will craft in the future.

Calkins (1983) and Cambourne (1995) suggested that students require time in a school context to write and work collaboratively with teachers and peers who offer authentic, involved responses to their writing. Conferences allow teachers to have this collaborative time so that their responses to the students are meaningful. Routman (2005) stated that, “It’s our responsibility to know where kids are in their writing, celebrate their work-in-progress, and help them move forward, but much of that work can happen through quick, informal conferences” (p. 218).

Three Types of Feedback (Clarke, 2003)

While feedback to student writing may take a variety of forms, three specific types of feedback, identified by Clarke as effective, are representative of typical support needed by students to grow as writers. In fact, Clarke (2003) found that teachers can close the gap between the intended outcome and the production of the student with feedback structured in particular ways. Feedback can be oral and or written, or both. Clarke stated that if a child processes oral language more effectively, the teacher should provide the feedback orally. If a child responds better to written language, a teacher should use written feedback. Clarke continued that feedback can be provided through both of these forms simultaneously, however the feedback must be descriptive and targeted, meaning the feedback must only focus on the learning intention of the task being discussed.
Clarke provided three types of descriptive feedback that can be provided to students in oral or written form: reminder, scaffolded, and example. The reminder prompt draws the learner’s attention back to the learning intention, and relies more on reminding students what to do instead of showing or telling them what to do. Reminder prompts also tend to center on quick editing and surface corrections for clarity of communication. For example, a reminder prompt may be, “Add a title” or “The character’s name needs a capital letter at the beginning.” Scaffolded prompts give more help by focusing on specifics, helping learners to extend their present understandings and improve their work. Scaffolded prompts are administered for located areas of text where students can be encouraged to grow with their content. A scaffolded prompt may sound like, “Describe the expression on his face” or “Can you explain the feelings of this character in more detail?” Example prompts make suggestions, offer information, and give a range of possible answers from which to choose. Example prompts address specific information that affect the piece, or specific area within the text that requires a specific correction. An example prompt is typically prefaced by, “Choose one of these statements and/ or create one of your own,” after which the teacher will provide a few examples of the intended outcome for the student to choose or after which to model his own answer.

Clarke stated that whether the feedback takes the form of reminder, scaffold or example prompts, it can consist of elaborating and extending (asking the writer to ‘tell us more’), adding a word or sentence (‘add one word…’), changing the text (‘find a better word’), or justifying reasoning or feelings (‘why…?’). Teachers exercise their professional judgment about what kind of a change is needed at that moment within the composition, as well as their
knowledge of the student with which the conference is taking place when deciding what type(s) of feedback to provide.

The Process of a Writing Conference

Routman (2005) defined the writing conference as a meeting to discuss student work. The process that teachers follow within a writing conference is just as, if not more, valuable than the product the students produce after the conference. Calkins (1991) elaborated on the process of teacher-student writing conferences:

Conferring well is every bit as challenging as writing well… What writers need is time, ownership, reasons to care, responsive readers, and shoulders upon which to stand. Writers need environments that will allow them to grow and improve. In order to learn to confer well, teachers likewise need equally rich, supportive contexts for learning. We need to focus less on the product of effective conferences and more on the process of learning to confer. (p. 229)

Many researchers agree that the process teachers follow within a writing conference no doubt should be influenced by who the student is as an individual (Graves, 1994). Student needs and personalities affect what takes place during the conference. Calkins (1991) stated that if teachers are to grow in their abilities to confer with young writers, they need time to think about the writer and that writer’s individual writing patterns. She added that teachers need advanced preparation time to plan a writing conference, as well as the time required to provide feedback that gives the writer a new perspective or suggests alternative approaches to the work.

The teacher’s first priority in a writing conference is to be completely present as a listener, and to let the writer know that he or she has been heard (Calkins, 1994). The
teacher’s primary role in a writing conference, then, is to be a listener and guide. If they focus on listening, Tompkins (2000) observed, teachers learn a great deal about students and their writing. Atwell (1987) further supported this point when she described her process within a writing conference: “I invite the writer to talk, in this case by waiting and making space for her to talk, then listen hard, tell back, and ask a clarifying question about where the writer is going with the piece” (p. 94).

The aforementioned quote implies that the teacher’s next job in a writing conference is to get the writer to ask questions of himself about his piece. Calkins (1991) wrote, “Our job is to ask questions of children so that children internalize these questions and ask them of themselves and their own emerging drafts” (p. 89). Calkins (1994) referred to this question-asking as “the research phase.” Additionally, Calkins (1994) noted:

In order for young writers to learn to ask questions of themselves, teachers and peers need to ask them of young writers. Teacher-student and peer conferences, then, are at the heart of teaching writing. Through them students learn to interact with their own writing. (p. 223)

Calkins confirmed that these questions posed by teachers should be internalized by students. Students need to reflect by looking back and asking themselves what they have learned that could help them another day with another piece of writing (Calkins, 1991). Moreover, it is not enough just to ask a writer any question about the text being composed during a conference. Atwell (1987) wrote that when questioning students, the teacher should focus on the meaning in the piece, and ask open-ended questions about places she “is curious about as an inquisitive human being”. Atwell goes on to suggest that teachers pose these questions as,
“Tell me more about X” or “I don’t understand Y” because this kind of questioning gets a writer thinking and talking about the piece (p. 95).

Furthermore, teachers must teach writers to interact with their own writing through these questions. Before the conference, students should mentally rehearse for these questions. In that way, they learn to confer with themselves. These questions are intended to focus on the writer as an individual. Questions that grow out of a developing understanding of the writer are fresh, lively, and influential: “The lines of discussion that can guide us the most, early in the conferences, are those that focus on the writing process, on the writer’s assessments and hopes and concerns…” (Calkins, 1994, p. 226). Graves (1983) suggested that during a conference, teachers balance the level of their talk with the student’s talk. He advised teachers to reflect upon the child’s words, think about what responsibilities the child can take, and make sure the child understands the next step in what he is being asked to do with the piece or as a writer in general.

**Sharing Personal Literacy Experiences with Students**

Graves (1990) stated that teachers’ discoveries of their own literacy are the starting point for writing workshop. In his book *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Donald Murray (2003) suggested:

Teachers of writing do not have to be great writers, but they should have frequent and recent experience in writing. If you experience the despair, the joy, the failure, the success, the work, the fun, the drudgery, the surprise of writing you will be able to understand the composing experiences of your students and therefore help them understand how they are learning to write.” (p. 2)
This illustrates the point that teachers also need time and opportunities to write themselves in order to more effectively confer with students. Graves (1983) and Murray (1985, 1989) have both emphasized the significance of teaching children to write as “real writers” do; each insisted that teachers should be real writers themselves. Au (1997) suggested that teachers must show students that they engage in the same literacy processes as do students. When teachers regularly write, they can use the thoughts, feelings, and viewpoints expressed in their own writing as examples in their discussions with young writers: “Teachers must relate to students in new ways, such as sharing their own literacy with students” (Au, p. 188).

Larson and Marsh (2005) noted that once teachers understand their own literacy practices they can take that understanding into what they do in their classrooms. Similarly, Atwell (1987) wrote that children need to know adults who write, and that these adults need to share their own writing with children in the classroom. She continued that through doing so, they demonstrate what competent writers do as they compose e.g., that their drafts look messy and tentative, just like their students’ drafts. To support this, Calkins (1991) stated, “When we ourselves write, we react differently to young writers” (p. 239). Au commented that in whole literacy classrooms, teachers strive to be the type of writers that they wish their students to be.

Student-Teacher Relationship in Conferencing

Another factor that affects the process of writing conferencing is the relationship between the student and the teacher. In fact, the concept of conferring centers around the idea of the relationship between the student and the teacher. Graves, as cited in Routman (2005), observed, “When I confer with you about your writing, you are more important than the writing” (p. 205). Helsel and Greenberg (2007) also highlighted the importance of the
student-teacher relationship during conferencing by noting that: “learning is a collaborative experience between the teacher and student” (p. 754). Calkins further claimed that in order to become readers as well as writers, children need bonded relationships with an adult that finds joy in literacy (Calkins, 1991). Calkins further noted that in order to be a joyfully literate adult with whom a student writer can confer, teachers need to be in an environment filled with colleagues with whom they can share their own reading and writing. Calkins illustrated this with the example of Jeanne Rupp, principal of P.S. 138 in the South Bronx. Rupp’s reading group gives her “a well to draw on in her work as an educator” (p. 241). This is supported by Laeve and Wenger (1991) who stated that learning is ultimately a relationship among people.

Assessment Conferences

Assessment conferences consist of discussions that center on questions about the student’s writing that result in reflection about the student’s writing- when appropriate; assessment conferences can also include a grade. Tompkins (2000) defined assessment conferences as occasions when teachers meet with children after they finish their written piece. The purpose is to have a discussion with them about their writing growth and about their plans for future pieces. Tompkins believed that, “These discussions may focus on any aspect of the writing process, including topic selection, prewriting activities, word choice, writing group activities, types of revisions, consistency in editing, and degree of effort and involvement in the writing project” (p. 148). Tompkins further stated that, “Through the judicious use of questions, teachers help children probe their understanding of the writing process and their own competencies” (p. 149).
Narrative Writing

Tompkins (2000) identified narrative writing as text in which students use stories, fictitious or true, to entertain readers. Fully developed narrative stories involve a conflict that is introduced in the beginning, becomes more complicated in the middle, and is resolved at the end. Golden (1984) stated that stories are a part of children’s cognitive structure. According to Golden, “Stories are a mental representation of story structure, essentially an outline of the basic story elements and their organization” (p. 578). According to Tompkins (2000), “Even before they enter school, young children have a rudimentary awareness of what makes a story; that is, they have a concept of story or story schema” (p. 282). Tompkins goes on to suggest that this intuitive knowledge includes the understanding of some elements of story structure, for example, character, plot, setting, and conventions used by authors.

Applebee (1978) stated that the concept of story begins in the preschool years, and that children as young as two and a half years of age have a basic story sense. This awareness of story is acquired gradually, first by listening to read-alouds, later by reading stories on their own, and finally by telling and writing their own stories (Tompkins, 2000). Tompkins additionally noted that the majority of the research regarding children’s understanding of story structure and conventions has been applied to reading, but Golden (1984) noted that the concept of story is equally important in writing. Tompkins found that when children draw on their concept of story when reading stories; they likewise use this knowledge when they write stories. According to Dressel (1990), the quality of children’s story writing is directly correlated to the quality of literature they read. In other words, children who read better quality stories also produce them.
Not surprisingly, narrative writing develops more quickly than expository writing because children are less exposed to the expository genre, have less experience with it, and fewer demonstrations of it. The majority of what children read and hear is fiction (Routman, 2005). However, in recent years research has indicated that it is imperative that children have opportunities to tell the stories of their lives in school (Calkins, 2003). Calkins has observed: “Too many children don’t have opportunities at home to regale to her parents with little narratives from their day, nor do they hear parents retelling the funny, sad, or important moments of their lives. It is crucial, then, that schools provide opportunity for children to tell stories to each other, and to hear stories told by authors and teachers and peers” (pp. 75-76).

Whether true or fictional, Routman believed that the power of stories provides a basis for writing instruction, and can serve as a springboard for teaching and learning:

As kids listen to stories and sometimes dramatize them or draw them, they get ideas of their own—original ones or adaptations. Let students know stories happen everywhere— at home, in school, on the playground, on the bus, in the imagination. Stories get us going in our writing. (p. 23)

Routman (2005) found that stories are a way to bond with children. Stories are how individuals relate to others in the world and thus form trust-building bonds. She goes on to suggest that life stories are easy “hooks” for children to grab on to, and that all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, can relate and respond to stories. Children’s experiences with stories can also help them generate ideas and enrich stories of their own. According to Routman, “As kids listen to stories and sometimes dramatize them or draw them, they get ideas of their own—original ones or adaptations” (p. 23). Consequently, Routman concluded
that being exposed to stories improves children’s abilities to sequence and shape ideas and their understanding of how stories work.

To further support the importance of stories, particularly in regard to children’s narrative writing development, Rosen (1986) stated that elementary teachers need to provide multiple opportunities for both oral and written storytelling to teach students about narrative writing. Calkins (2003) illustrated this point when she described experiences with narrative storytelling in a New York City classroom. She wrote, “When the classroom brims with children’s stories, then each child in turn seems to brim with stories. This is a perfect context for a writing workshop” (p. 77).

Summary

A classroom environment that embraces the writing workshop model is organized around a belief that generating a composition is a recursive process of drafting, sharing (conferring), editing and publishing. Moreover, writers go through a similar process when crafting a piece of writing in any genre. No matter what genre a writer is using, it is essential that he or she have some freedom of choice about the topic and content. Writing about topics that are meaningful to the students is important when it comes to the initial application of the writing process in a school setting, as writing about authentic topics motivates students to produce quality pieces of written work for authentic purposes, such as to communicate feelings with others. Specific teacher feedback provided to students by teachers during conferences should allow students to look at their writing through new eyes. This feedback is a springboard for improvement not only in the current piece, but also, hopefully, subsequent pieces. In addition to listening to the student and showing he or she is valued as a writer, the teacher’s goal during a writing conference is, to demonstrate the value of the feedback so that
the student will use it to improve future pieces as well. Conferences not only foster a rich, supportive literacy environment, but also provide a natural place for reflection about the student’s writing, as well as an opportunity to develop a strong student-teacher relationship.
CHAPTER III.
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to determine what influence, if any, teacher feedback had on the narrative text compositions of two third grade students. Feedback occurred during conferences that were conducted over the course of eight sessions (16 hours) in the primary researcher’s class room after the end of the regular school day. In this chapter, methods and procedures used throughout the study are described and explained in this chapter. In addition to discussion of the research design, data collection and analysis, background is provided about the setting and student participants.

Methods

Research Design

Merriam (1988) noted that descriptive qualitative case studies are: “useful…presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (p. 27). This study was a descriptive, qualitative, case study, intended to interpret the influence, if any, of frequent teacher feedback given to two third grade students during a series of individual conferencing about their narrative text compositions. Its goal was to provide insight into a topic in education not widely covered in current research.

Researcher as Participant Observer

In this study, the terms “researcher” and “teacher” are used interchangeably. The teacher/ researcher acted as a “participant observer” in this study. Merriam (1988) has
written: “The researcher’s observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher’s role as a participant” (p. 92).

Research Questions

Data analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1) What is the impact, if any, of teacher feedback delivered through individual conferencing on the narrative text composition of two third grade students?

2) What similarities and/or differences, emerge in the response to teacher feedback?

Site

The site of this study was a Northeast Ohio suburban district. This district is located in an area where the residents earn above average incomes. In 2009, the median family income in this community was $94,953. (http://www.solonohio.org/PDF/plStats.pdf) In 2009, Money Magazine ranked this community as the twenty-third “best place to live” in America.

Based on its performance on state-wide standardized testing, the school district has earned an “Excellent with Distinction” ranking from the state of Ohio. Its rating on the State Report Card in the 2008-09 school year indicated that 30 of 30 standards had been met, thus the highest ranking from Ohio’s Board of Education. (http://webapp2.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/archives/RC_IRN.ASP?irn=046607)

Formal writing instruction in the district where the study took place follows the writing workshop model (Atwell, 1987). In this third grade classroom the writing workshop occurred during a sixty-minute writing block. It begins with a brief 8-12 minute minilesson that centers on a genre currently under study, or an area of writing conventions that the teacher has identified as an area of need for the students. For example, if the current class
genre study is about personal narrative, the minilesson that day will cater to whatever instructional support most of the students in the class need in order to work on their personal narrative for that day’s workshop. Such support includes teacher modeling “how to” craft the piece, as well as specific writing-related issues that the teacher has observed in the previous day’s conferences with students.

Following the minilesson, the teacher notes the “status of the class” by simply collecting data about what stage in the writing process each student is working on. During the remaining time, students are independently writing (although they may quietly converse with peers about their piece, as this allows for social construction of knowledge). As the students are working independently, the teacher is conducting five to ten minute one-on-one writing conferences with students either at their desks or at the teacher’s conferencing table. Feedback typically is focused on one or two specific learning targets (looking at the piece only for character development or descriptive language) so that the students are not overwhelmed by too many changes. The curriculum-based learning target is unique to the particular genre in which the student is writing, or to a specific writing convention (if the piece is at the editing stage), much like the whole-class minilessons. For example, if a student is writing a memoir, the learning target for the conference may be to ensure that the student conveyed to the reader how he or she was feeling during the particular moment or event about which the memoir was written. When the teacher next meets with the student writer, she will check that the student has acted upon the feedback.

Publication may consist of typing the piece and adding it to the student’s writing binder, or hand-writing a final copy. Before publication, the teacher often holds a final conference with the writer to focus on editing the conventions of the piece, such as
punctuation and grammar. Once a text has been published, the teacher holds a class “Author Share”, during which the student author reads the composition aloud to an audience of peers. At that time, the student may receive informal peer feedback, which is another aspect of social construction of knowledge.

The district uses common grade-level rubrics. The written composition of each student in that grade level in the district, therefore, is assessed by the same rubric. Separate rubrics for both content (genre) and conventions (such as grammar, format and punctuation) are used to measure the achievement of a final draft of a piece of writing by the students. (These rubrics were used to assess the four pieces of narrative writing of the participants and can be found in the Appendix.)

During the 2008-2009 school year, there was a district initiative that all primary teachers use the three types of feedback (reminder, scaffolded, and example) during writing conferences (Clarke, 2003). These feedback prompts are described in detail under the section, The Three Types of Feedback in Chapter II.

Participants

The following is background information about the two student participants, who will be referred to throughout the study as “Brian” and “Lori.”

Brian

Brian is a nine year old male of Chinese descent. Although he has resided in the United States for all of his life, Brian is identified as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. In fact, Brian receives ESL services from the district ESL teacher one half-hour per week. Both of Brian’s parents hold college degrees and hold academics in high esteem. Brian
lives with his mother and father, but his twin sisters reside in China with their grandparents. Not surprisingly, he and his parents frequently take long trips back to China.

Brian earns above average grades in all subjects, and generally experiences positive social interactions with peers. He tends to choose friends with backgrounds similar to his own; his closest peers are other children of Chinese descent. Brian is active in many extracurricular activities, such as attending Chinese language and Kung-Fu classes. He also enjoys playing basketball and tennis with his family.

Brian also speaks Chinese fluently. He attends “Chinese School” where he participates in discourse with others who also speak Chinese. At the suggestion of his parents, Brian has kept a journal of letters written back and forth between himself and his classroom teacher as a way of gaining more experience with written communication in the English language. This past school year, Brian began to read the books in the “Twilight” series by Stephanie Meyer. It is evident that Meyer’s writing has affected Brian. When asked in a written interview, “Who do you think is a good writer?” Brian wrote in response: “I think Stephanie Meyer is a good writer because she tells how the character feels.”

Perhaps surprisingly, Brian is a reluctant writer during writing workshop. He does not like to write during independent writing or time, and often rushes through pieces of writing in certain genres. Brian’s father regularly encourages him to write in both English and Chinese, which may be why he is reluctant to write during writing workshop in the classroom. When asked in the written interview, “How do you gather information in order to get ready for writing?” Brian wrote, “I write the best handwriting I could and think about what to write. My dad sometimes help me [sic].”
Lori

Lori is a nine year old female. She enjoys a close relationship with her family. When asked in a written interview “Are you a good writer? How do you know?” Lori wrote, “I think I am a good writer because all of my family members say I am.” Lori lives with her mother, father, and two brothers. Her mother and father both hold college degrees. At the time of this study, Lori’s mother was attending nursing classes as a part of her continuing education. Lori’s parents value education. Lori often tells me about how her parents help her with her homework in the evenings. When her mother would come to pick Lori up from the data collection sessions, she was always interested in the composition Lori had written that day, and often asked to read the piece.

Lori participates in weekly dance lessons as well as an extra-curricular soccer team sponsored by the school district. Lori earns above average grades in all subject areas. Lori has a wide circle of friends, including children of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as varied academic achievement.

It is clear that Lori enjoys writing, as she always embraces opportunities to write, including letters to peers, notes to her teacher, and extra writing assignments about topics she is interested in, such as animals. Lori also enjoys reading, and often uses the language she reads in her own written expression. During a conference between Lori and the primary researcher, she said that she used the word “sulky” to describe the character in her piece of narrative writing because it was in the Beverly Cleary “Ramona” book she was currently reading.
Data Collection

Data collection included interviews, student-generated written texts, and meta-analyses, and oral conference transcripts. Specifically, each of the participants completed a written “interview” (Cochrane & Cochrane, 1992), wrote drafts and revisions of four narrative compositions, experienced four teacher-student oral conferences and completed a meta-analysis reflection after each composition had been finished. Details of the data collection process, including the timeline, are provided in the following paragraphs.

Data collection began with a written interview entitled, “Writing Interview” (Cochrane and Cochrane, 1992) that was given to the students (see Appendix). Students wrote answers to twelve questions designed to provide background information about the participants’ attitudes, views, and thoughts about writing and themselves as a writer.

For each of the four compositions, students conferred with the researcher twice. Each conference lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. During the first session, the student was provided with a list of possible narrative writing prompts to choose from. These prompts were written by the primary researcher. The researcher considered both of the participants’ interests as well as age level when crafting the prompts. Since production of fictional narrative was the genre goal, these prompts used fictional or fantasy situations (see Appendix).

After the prompt was chosen by the participant, he or she was provided with a copy of both the Narrative and Conventions rubrics used by the district, so that they would be familiar with the intended learning goals (see Appendix). The student was encouraged to examine both the rubrics, focusing especially on the criteria for a “3”, which is the district standard for a piece of “on target” third grade writing. Following examination of the rubric,
the student decided whether or not he or she wanted to use a graphic organizer prior to beginning his or her first draft. For the remainder of the first session, the student crafted his or her first draft. This was done independently with no help or prompting from the researcher.

The second session began by inviting the student to read over his or her first draft, as well as the rubrics, so that the student could choose to make any edits or revisions prior to the researcher giving any feedback about the composition. Whether or not the student made changes at this time was recorded on the “Revising Writing” sheet (Rhodes, 1993). Next the student and researcher engaged in a one-on-one conference. This consisted of the researcher reading the piece aloud and providing feedback to the student orally. After the student showed that he or she understood the feedback given, the researcher numbered and wrote the piece of feedback down so that the student could easily refer to it if he or she wanted to consider the feedback when revising the draft. When the feedback session ended, the researcher asked the student to record one piece of feedback he or she planned on using and why, as well as one piece of feedback he or she did not plan on using and why. This information was also recorded on the “Revising Writing” sheet. See Appendix for a sample student draft and “Revising Writing” sheet.

The next step was for the student to write the final draft. After the final draft was completed, the student recorded all of the feedback (by number) that he or she used on the “Revising Writing” sheet. Next, the researcher read the final piece aloud to the student. Finally, the researcher interviewed the student orally about his or her final piece, asking three questions: 1) What did you like the most about your piece? 2) What needed the most
improvement in your piece? 3) If you were to write this story again, what might you do differently? See Appendix for a student sample of this interview.

The aforementioned process was conducted four times with each student to complete the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) described the first step in data analysis as “holding a conversation with the data”, which consists of reviewing the data while making observations and notes about what it is saying. All data sources (written interviews, written narratives, reflections, revising sheets, and conference transcriptions) were enlisted to answer the research questions. Data tables that recorded the kind of feedback and the frequency of its application were constructed to assist the researcher in identifying patterns in the feedback that addressed the research questions. Data tables were examined, for example, to determine how often each type of feedback was provided to the students, as well as how often each type of feedback was used by the students. Identification of frequency patterns that addressed the research questions generated initial findings that were confirmed or rejected when compared to students’ actual written texts and their reflective meta-analyses for each composition. Triangulation (Merriam, 1998) occurred by using multiple data sources to confirm incipient findings for each individual case.

Ultimately, a cross-case analysis was conducted to compare similarities and differences in the findings across both cases (Merriam, 1998). Based on this analysis, a theory was developed about the impact of teacher feedback on the narrative texts of those two third grade students.
Limitations

As with any qualitative study in which the primary researcher is a participant-observer, personal biases may interfere with the research outcome, because as Merriam (1998) noted, “All observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective” (p. 22).

This study examined only two students. Because the data was collected from such a small sample, findings cannot be used to represent how a majority of students would process the feedback that was given to make changes in their written work. Moreover, the two students who participated brought unique personal and academic histories to the project. Other students may have brought disparate factors which might have resulted in data that would generate a different set of findings.

A second limitation was the context in which this study took place. It took place inside the primary researcher’s classroom, but not within the context of writing workshop. The research was collected during 1.5 hour time periods after the regular school day. The implications of this are that the students did not craft the writing within the social learning context of writing workshop, thus, the students only had the primary researcher to talk to throughout their writing process, and they did not enjoy the social support that peers provide during the freedom of writing workshop within the regular school day.

A third limitation of this study was the fact that the researcher worked at the research site. As the primary researcher was the classroom teacher of the students participating in the study, the outcome of the feedback was looked upon through her lenses. The primary researcher held certain beliefs about how to teach writing and about what was important to
value. Additionally, the researcher had already established rapport with the participants, as they were students in her classroom.

Although not a direct focus of the study, the notion of teacher-pleasing or “doing school” may have been a factor in students’ acceptance of teacher feedback. “Doing school” refers to the idea that over years in school, students learn to do what it takes to please their teacher and earn good grades. Perhaps the student who chose to use all of the feedback was just “doing school” and did not in fact see the value in the feedback, but rather wanted to please the teacher.

Summary

This qualitative case study involved two third grade students in a suburban elementary school. The study focused on describing and interpreting patterns that emerged from teacher feedback provided to two students about for four pieces of narrative writing they had drafted and revised. Data collection included interviews, student-generated written texts and meta-analyses, and oral conference and interview transcripts. Data analysis involved construction of tables that recorded the frequency of application of the feedback and its impact on the students’ perceptions of their pieces. The tables were constructed to assist the researcher in identifying themes or patterns in the feedback that addressed the research questions. Findings of data analysis will be presented in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV.  
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The goal of this study was to determine the impact, if any, of teacher feedback provided during individual conferences about two third grade students’ narrative writing compositions. The following data was collected for each participant: conference transcripts, oral and written interviews, and student-generated texts. Data collection and analysis took place during the months of February through June.

Data for each of the two participants were analyzed independently and considered a case in and of itself. Results of data analysis of the individual cases were then compared through a cross-case analysis in order to identify similarities and differences in the students’ responses to the feedback (Merriam, 1998). The overall data analysis process, therefore, consisted of two stages of analysis as described by Merriam (1998): the within-case analysis in which each case was first treated as a comprehensive case in itself, and the cross-case analysis which allowed the researcher to compare cases and look for patterns which occurred across cases.

General Research Questions: Overview

Two research questions guided data collection and analysis: 1) What is the impact, if any, of teacher feedback delivered through individual conferencing on the narrative text composition of two third grade students? 2) What similarities and/or differences, emerge in the response to teacher feedback of these two students?
Three kinds of feedback were provided to each student i.e., reminder, scaffolded, example. The teacher’s decision about which type of feedback to give at each conference was based on her professional assessment of areas of greatest student need (e.g., content, organization, mechanics) in the draft under consideration. Across both cases, reminder prompts were given most often and both scaffolded and example prompts were given equally.

In one case, the student took all of the feedback provided to her. In the other case, the student some of all three kinds of feedback provided to him. Between the two cases, one particular type of feedback did not surface as having the most impact or being the most frequently accepted type. Moreover, when asked what they liked best about their texts after they had been completed, neither student made reference to any aspects of their compositions that was influenced by or related to the teacher feedback. Instead, both students’ responses identified story elements such as plot, characters and setting.

A profile of each individual case, with examples of significant patterns identified for each student, is followed by a cross-case analysis which compares results in order to generate findings that address the research questions.

*Lori*

Across all four of her written compositions, Lori was given twenty-eight reminder prompts, four scaffolded prompts, and eight example prompts (Table 1.1). Reminder prompts generally address surface corrections such as spelling and punctuation. Lori received reminder prompts that addressed spelling more frequently because her writing was filled with descriptive language and sophisticated words that were difficult for her to spell. Some of the words Lori misspelled in her texts and received reminder prompts for included
“nervousness,” “training,” and “absolutely.” She also included lengthy sentences which required reminder prompts focused on punctuation. One of Lori’s sentences that needed to be edited for punctuation was: “Of course I said yes who wouldn’t? [sic]” Another sentence that required a reminder prompt was: “One Monday morning I woke up got out of bed [sic], stretched, everything was going fine, until I looked in the mirror and saw my hair was bright blue!”

Although she received mostly reminder prompts over her four compositions, she required scaffolded and example prompts as well. For Lori’s first piece, she received an example prompt asking her to include more detail about how her character felt when she thought she was going to have to return her pet monkey Howie to the man who had originally owned him. The teacher said, “Okay, for here I’m going to give you more of a different suggestion to describe how you felt when you thought you had to give Howie back. Give the reader another word to explain how you felt other than sad. Like, maybe use ‘my heart felt low’ or another way of your own to express it other than sad.”

Lori also received a scaffolded prompt about the Howie narrative. The teacher wanted Lori to clarify the end of the story. “How could you tell the reader why the man allowed you to keep Howie?”

When asked in a post-writing conference about what needed the most improvement in her compositions, Lori’s answers reflected specific feedback that was given for each piece (Table 1.2). For example, in her fourth composition, Lori was given three example prompts about three places in her text that did not make sense and needed to be clarified for the reader:
T: I’m just going to write, ‘make exactly what happened when you got home clear.’ Maybe here you could write something like, ‘I walked in the door, and my mom looked at me like, ‘What are you doing home?’, and then the phone rang. I tried to listen to what I knew must have been going on on the other end of the phone, but I couldn’t. Okay? You can use that or something of your own. Something with just a little more detail so it makes sense.

When asked what needed the most improvement for that piece, Lori’s response indicated her awareness of the teacher’s feedback:

T: What needed the most improvement in your piece?

S: Probably my punctuation and the part where I got home. I needed to make it clear to the reader that I came home and my mom was wondering why I was home and the phone rang and it interrupted her when she was speaking to me.

Overall, the amount of feedback Lori required diminished as she progressed through her pieces. For example, after Lori’s first composition she was given ten reminder prompts, but by her last composition she only was given three reminder prompts. Since the majority of her feedback was focused on reminder prompts that called attention to the mechanical aspects of writing, the reduction of teacher feedback about mechanics suggests that the frequent reminder prompts may have drawn Lori’s attention to this aspect of writing.

With Lori’s first two compositions, she received 26 total prompts, and with her last two compositions her feedback decreased to receiving only 14 prompts total. Lori was aware of the reduction of feedback. During one conference she commented, “I was noticing that this time I only have seven suggestions, but the first story I wrote had a lot more.”
In their meta-analysis interviews for each composition, the participants were asked three questions: “What do you like most about your piece?”, “What do you think needed the most improvement in your piece?”, and “If you were to write this piece again, what would you do differently?” Although Lori took all feedback that was provided for each of her narratives, her meta-analyses of each piece indicates that the only feedback Lori received that seemed to impact her own evaluation of the compositions was related to the question of “What needed the most improvement in your piece?”

When asked what needed the most improvement in her first piece, Lori cited the teacher’s example prompt about “Howie’s return” noted above:

T: What needed the most improvement in your piece?
S: How I felt when I thought I had to return Howie to the man.
T: Great. So you needed to add some more detail there for your reader?
S: Yeah.
T: Great.

Yet when Lori was asked “What would you do differently if you wrote this piece again?” she responded, “I would probably make it in a different season because I did it in summer here, and I would make it an indoors zoo because he wouldn’t want to be seen out in the cold. An um, I would probably do something different, I would make it bright polka-dotted pajamas, I would make it that maybe even I would have to give away the monkey.” Lori did not make any connection to the suggested teacher feedback regarding a future rewrite.

For Lori’s second composition, she received 11 reminder prompts that addressed mechanics as well as four example prompts that focused on word choice and how to word
particular sentences in order for them to flow more easily. When asked what needed the most
improvement in that piece, she answered: “Probably ending marks and grammar, and things
that were just out of order.”

When asked what she would have done differently with the piece, she responded: “I
might have different pilots and I might have a different airport instead of Kent State Airport.”
This illustrates the point that although Lori was responsive and receptive to all of the
feedback, her responses do not illustrate that she internalized any of the feedback, realizing
that using it would allow her to craft a more quality draft next time.

Lori’s last two narratives developed more sophisticated plots, thus the nature of the
feedback changed from fewer reminders about conventions and more scaffolded and example
prompts about the structure of the stories. In the last two narratives there were sections for
which the reader needed clarification, because as they were written in the first draft, they
were not cohesive. When Lori was asked for both compositions what needed the most
improvement, she answered each time about the sections that needed to be written differently
in order for them to make sense. For the third piece she responded: “Maybe the part where I
was a little confused, because it went to just talking about how I don’t want to wear
something to gym class, so we had to fix that.”

Lori’s responses to these questions seem to indicate that the feedback had an
influence on the narrative writing. However, when asked what she would do differently if she
wrote the pieces again, there seemed to be no connection between her responses and the
feedback given. Although Lori took all of the feedback that was provided to her for each of
her pieces of writing, there was no apparent connection between the feedback she had been
given during her conferences and her reflection about her compositions concerning what she would do differently if she were to write the pieces again.

As noted earlier, however, the number of response prompts decreased, suggesting that Lori was becoming more aware of this aspect of writing. Interestingly, although Lori’s feedback decreased in frequency as she completed more narratives, suggesting that she was internalizing the feedback, there seemed to be little or no connection between the impact and Lori’s plans for how she would use it to write the compositions again.

Table 1.1
Lori’s Feedback Provided/ Frequency of Application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Composition 1</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Composition 2</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Composition 3</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Composition 4</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Took all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolded</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Took all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Took all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.2
Lori’s Interview Question Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection Question</th>
<th>Composition 1</th>
<th>Composition 2</th>
<th>Composition 3</th>
<th>Composition 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1- What do you like the most?</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2- What needed the most improvement?</td>
<td>Detail</td>
<td>Conventions (punctuation and grammar)</td>
<td>The part that needed clarification</td>
<td>Punctuation, part that needed clarified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3- What would you do differently if you wrote this again?</td>
<td>Setting and Plot</td>
<td>Characters and Setting</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Setting and Plot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brian**

Brian received a comparable amount of all three types of feedback across his four pieces (Table 1.3). Unlike Lori, Brian did not accept all the teacher feedback. He received twelve reminder prompts, but he only used eight of them. Examples of reminder prompts that Brian received are: “Change ‘was’ to ‘were’ in the second sentence”, and “Create a funny conclusion.” Brian was given nine scaffolded prompts and used four of them. A scaffolded prompt Brian received concerned his narrative, “The Magic Carpet.” Brian included a spell in the story, but not sufficient detail to explain what specifically the spell could do. The teacher asked, “Tell me what the spell is. What does the spell do?”
A scaffolded prompt Brian received concerned his narrative, “The Magic Carpet.” Brian included a spell in the story, but no corresponding detail to include specifically what the spell could do. The teacher asked, “Tell me what the spell is. What does the spell do?”

Although Brian received the least number of example prompts, he appeared most receptive to using this type. He was given 5 example prompts, all of which he used.

Overall, Brian was selective with the feedback he used, picking and choosing between the different types, with the exception of the example prompts. Much of Brian’s feedback centered on his need to clarify his language for the reader, necessitating several scaffolded and example prompts. Often the teacher thought she knew what Brian meant to say in the composition, but asked questions about his intent to make sure she was correct before any feedback was given. For example, during his second composition, Brian had used an incorrect word (i.e., “it”) in his sentence and received this reminder prompt:

T: (Reading aloud from Brian’s piece) Sid agreed the monkey if he could play with it. Hmm…Sid agreed the monkey if he could play with it/

S: Sid asked the monkey.

T: Oh, so you mean ‘Sid asked the monkey if he could play with it?’

S: Yeah.

T: When you say ‘it’, do you mean the monkey?

S: Yeah.

T: Okay, do you want your monkey to be a boy or a girl?

S: Boy.

T: Okay, so could you say ‘him’?
S: Yeah.

T: By using ‘him’, that tells the reader that the monkey is who you mean. I know what you meant, but that will just give a clearer picture to the reader.

The number of feedback prompts that Brian received across all four compositions remained relatively consistent as he progressed through his pieces. For example, after Brian’s first composition he was given five total prompts. After his second narrative he was given nine total prompts. Following his third and fourth compositions he was given six total prompts. While Brian never commented on the numbers of prompts he had been given, he did comment on the quality of the final draft of his third composition, in which he chose to use all of the feedback that he was given. After the post-final draft conference of his third narrative, Brian commented: “I think this was my best one.”

Although Brian was often selective about which feedback prompts he chose to use to change his compositions, the feedback did seem to have some impact on his overall perceptions of his writing pieces, especially when it came to the questions of “What needed the most improvement in your piece?” and “If you were to write this piece again, what would you do differently?” (Table 1.4).

For Brian’s first writing conference, he was given three reminder prompts that all addressed specific areas in the text that needed clarification in order for them to make sense to the reader. During the feedback session, the researcher said: “My first suggestion is that your first sentence says, ‘The carpet was so magical that can take anybody to anywhere,’ so I’m going to write, ‘Make second sentence make sense.’” In Brian’s post-final draft interview, when asked what had needed the most improvement in his piece, he responded: “Make the story make sense.”
Brian received two reminder prompts in the first conference over his second composition. This feedback was intended to help him clarify the setting of the piece. “You used the word neighborhood there. Neighborhood doesn’t mean that it is in his house. You need to be more specific about the setting.” When asked what needed the most improvement in that piece in his post-final draft interview, Brian answered: “What needs the most improvement in my piece is telling where the story takes place.”

Brian’s third narrative lacked detail, and the researcher encouraged him through a scaffolded prompt to add more detail to the ending: “I also would like to know, what did you do instead of sledding? Because if you said, ‘Maybe this [sledding] wasn’t such a good idea’, or, ‘maybe you can’t sled anymore.’ What I want to know as a reader is what you did instead of sledding?” Brian used this feedback to describe in his final draft what he did instead of sledding. When Brian was asked what needed the most improvement in his piece, he responded: “Finishing the story, like adding more to it.” Next Brian was asked what he would do differently if he were to rewrite the piece.

S: What I would do differently is, is, um… add more powerful words.

T: Add more powerful words? Good. Like what? Like powerful verbs or adjectives? Describing words?

S: Yeah. Describing words.

Brian’s responses to these questions show that he appeared to view teacher feedback as a positive influence on the overall quality of his narratives. For each composition, Brian’s responses in the post-final interview question “If you were to write this piece again, what would you do differently?” all connected to the feedback that was given. For example, when asked what he would do differently next time for his second composition, he responded,
“Um, I would tell, I would tell where they are, meaning where the story took place.” This connected to the three prompts he was given in the second piece that all concerned being more clear about the setting.

The number of prompts that Brian was given as he progressed through his narratives did not necessarily decrease, nor did the frequency with which he chose to take the feedback (with the exception of the third composition). However, when Brian used all the feedback to craft his third narrative, he did comment on the quality of the piece. Additionally, the connection between the feedback given and his perceptions of his piece were apparent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Composition 1</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Composition 2</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Composition 3</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Composition 4</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/ A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Took 3 out of 6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Took 3 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolded</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Took 3 out of 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Took none</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/ A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Took all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cross-Case Analysis

The two case studies provide insight into the impact of teacher feedback on two third grade writers as they constructed and then reflected upon four narrative texts. Although the students differed in the kinds of feedback they received, data analysis suggests that the narrative texts of both writers were impacted by teacher suggestions made during their individual conferences.

Most of Lori’s feedback was in the form of reminder prompts that provided suggestions at a surface or mechanical level. For example, during a conference the teacher said, (reading Lori’s piece aloud): “They said my training will start tomorrow. Change ‘will’
to ‘would’ because it’s past tense.” She accepted all of these reminder prompts, and over the course of four compositions, the number of reminder prompts declined. Data analysis further indicates that Lori became more aware of the need to provide such information in her written texts.

Brian received teacher feedback in the form of all three prompts. He accepted some, but not all, of the teacher feedback given in the form of reminder or scaffolded prompts. He did, however, accept all example prompts. While reminder prompts tend to be directive (e.g., “Describe the setting,”) scaffolded prompts are intended to push the writer to new insights (e.g., “Explain why”). Although these two types of feedback prompts differ in intent, data analysis revealed no insight about why Brian used both types of feedback selectively, Brian did accept all the “example” feedback, which was intended to elicit more detail or information by providing an acceptable alternative or urging the student to use it as a springboard for his or her own idea. Data analysis did not provide definitive information about why Brian chose to use all of the example feedback prompts. Perhaps because the example prompt provided tangible options, Brian found it easier as an English language learner to understand than the open-ended scaffolded prompt. This explanation does not, however, account for Brian’s inconsistent use of the reminder prompts.

Although Lori and Brian differed in terms of how often they accepted feedback and also how the feedback affected their overall perceptions of their final narrative compositions, both Lori and Brian took feedback and used it to generate final drafts. In addition, findings from this study did not indicate that one particular type of feedback (reminder, scaffolded, example) had a deeper impact on student writing than another.
Furthermore, both students indicated that the teacher feedback had affected their evaluation or meta-analysis of their own narrative texts. For Lori, the feedback influenced her view of what needed the most improvement of the piece. For Brian, the feedback affected both his perception of what needed the most improvement and his belief that he would generate a better quality piece of writing the next time if he wrote the piece with the changes suggested by the feedback. Ultimately, findings of this study suggest that different students respond differently to all types of feedback. These third grade students proved that feedback and its impact are unique to individual writers.

Summary

The goal of this qualitative case study was to determine the impact, if any, of teacher feedback provided during individual conferences about two third grade students’ narrative writing compositions. Data included conference transcripts, oral and written interviews, and student generated texts. Data collection and analysis took place over four months.

Data obtained from both students provided insight as to how two different students from the same classroom responded to and used teacher feedback to make changes in their written texts. Three types of feedback were used.

A profile of each student’s use of teacher feedback was developed independently. Results of data analysis for each case were then compared through a cross-case analysis that generated findings pertinent to both cases.

Although the two students were dissimilar in the frequency with which they received and chose to use different types of feedback, data analysis indicated that the narrative texts of both students were influenced by their use of teacher feedback. Furthermore, in individual interviews conducted after the completion of each narrative, both students autonomously
identified areas in which they had received teacher feedback as areas in which their texts had needed most improvement. This suggests that teacher feedback delivered through conferencing can have some impact on students’ written drafts.

In addition, findings from this study did not indicate that one particular type of feedback (reminder, scaffolded, example) had a deeper impact on student writing than another. Ultimately, findings of this study suggest that different students respond differently to all types of feedback. These third grade students proved that feedback and its impact are unique to individual writers.
CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of these qualitative case studies was to examine the impact, if any, of teacher feedback provided through individual conferences on the writing compositions of two third grade students, as well as to identify any similarities and/or differences regarding how the feedback affected the students’ perceptions of their narratives. Data was collected during eight conference sessions with each of the two students. During these sessions, rough drafts of fictional narratives were drafted, teacher feedback was provided and drafts were revised. Data consisted of conference transcripts, oral and written interviews, and student-generated texts.

Findings

Findings of this study suggest that teacher feedback provided during individual conferences can have an impact on student writing, just as the research suggests (Tompkins, 2000). Data analysis showed that the two different students processed and valued the feedback they received somewhat differently. One of the students accepted all of the feedback and thought that it reflected what needed the most improvement in each of her compositions, but when asked what she might do differently with the piece next time did not include any changes based on the teacher feedback. The other student did not accept all of the teacher feedback, but did think it reflected what needed most improvement in each of his
compositions. When asked what he might do differently if he were to write the pieces again, he cited changes that reflected teacher feedback, unlike the other student.

Another significant finding of this study is that neither student identified any changes in his or her compositions that resulted from teacher feedback as what they liked most about their pieces. In fact, both cited story elements such as plot and character, suggesting that the students were more focused on content than specific aspects of the writing process. Consequently, findings of the study also suggest that the specific impact of teacher feedback (e.g., student perception of the final text; transfer to other texts) appears to depend upon the child.

Conclusions

The results of this study confirm that the teacher feedback had an impact on the students’ final drafts of their written compositions as well as their perceptions of their writing, but not in all areas and not in the same way with each student.

As noted earlier, teacher feedback did not appear to affect what either of the students liked most about their pieces. When asked in the post-final draft interview what the students liked most about their pieces, none of their responses reflected the teacher feedback. It should be noted that teacher feedback was not focused on what students did well. Discussion during the conferences did include conversations about specific parts of the drafts that the students wrote particularly well, but no specific teacher feedback was given about those areas. Perhaps if such feedback had been provided, it may have influenced what students identified as areas they liked best about their compositions. The teacher feedback did impact what both students identified as what needed most improvement in their compositions. When asked in the post-final draft interviews what needed the most improvement in the piece, both students’
responses reflected the feedback she or he had received during each individual conference for each of the four compositions.

Furthermore, when asked in the post-final draft interview what they would do differently if they wrote the piece again, only one student responded with answers that reflected the feedback. Calkins (1994) wrote that after receiving feedback in a student-teacher conference, children need to look back and say: “What have I learned that can help me another day with another piece of writing?” (p. 89). While findings of this study indicate that such reflection did result in student agreement about specific areas needing improvement in the narrative drafts, teacher feedback only affected one child when considering future drafts. The results of this study are unclear, therefore, about whether teacher feedback about a specific piece of writing has any lasting influence on future texts. Results do suggest that while teacher feedback does have an impact on students’ drafts of their compositions, the specific use and long-term influence of teacher feedback varies with each individual student.

Implications and Recommendations

Individual Conferencing

Just as the research suggests, individual conferencing with students over writing is an effective way for students to “re-view” and revise a piece of writing (Graves (1994). Teacher feedback prompts that 1) draw the learner’s attention back to the learning intention and rely more on reminding the student what to do rather than show or tell him what to do (reminder); 2) are in the form of questions that promote critical thinking (scaffolded) or; 3) make suggestions, offer information, and give a range of possible answers to choose from (example), appear to be effective in calling student attention to specific aspects of a text and improving that composition (Clarke, 2003).
Research on teacher conferencing has suggested the importance of inviting students to reflect on their own compositions (Atwell, 1987). Tompkins (2000) commented on the importance for students to have a voice during conferencing: “At these conferences, children bring their rough drafts and talk with the teacher about specific trouble spots in their writing. Together the teacher and student discuss the problem and brainstorm ideas for solving it” (p.139).

In this study, however, teacher-directed prompts were the primary focus of each session. Students occasionally shared their own thoughts about what aspects of their texts needed to be revised when conversations ensued pertaining to how a particular sentence or area in the composition could be more entertaining or flow more effectively. They were not active critics who offered their own opinions or reflections about the text’s strengths or needs. After each composition had been completed, students were asked what they liked best about their compositions, consistently students cited aspects of each text that were not connected to the teacher feedback, perhaps suggesting that what the teacher emphasized was not connected to what the students valued most about their pieces.

One implication of this study therefore is that teachers need to recognize the importance of students’ active participation in the conferencing process. Teachers should use feedback sessions to invite students to identify strengths and needs. Atwell (1987) further supported this point when she described her process within a writing conference: “I invite the writer to talk, in this case by waiting and making space for her to talk, then listen hard, tell back, and ask a clarifying question about where the writer is going with the piece” (p. 94).

Furthermore, teacher feedback should also focus on what was done well in the piece and why. In fact, teachers should invite overall conversation during individual conferences,
focusing explicitly on the text’s strengths as well as needs. One conclusion of this study, then, is to corroborate Calkins’ (1994) observation that if the conference is focused exclusively on teacher-directed feedback about areas needing revision, students may have limited understanding and ownership of the composition.

**Importance of Knowing Students**

The importance of teachers knowing their students cannot be understated. In this study, the teacher provided specific prompts based on what she felt the students needed order to be successful with the composition. The teacher feedback in the form of specific types of prompts (reminder, scaffolded, and example) was chosen carefully based on the student’s needs. Just as the students’ responses to the feedback were idiosyncratic, the prompts that teachers choose to provide to writers during conferences should be specific to individual students. As teachers begin to know their students as writers through regular one-on-one conferences, they will learn what types of prompts they will be most likely to positively respond to and use in future compositions.

**Cultural and Linguistic Influences**

Findings of this study underscore that the way students internalize feedback is idiosyncratic. Additionally, it may be influenced by the unique backgrounds of each writer. For example, Brian’s cultural and linguistic background as a second language learner may have influenced his decision to use some feedback prompts and disregard others. While he rejected all reminder and scaffolded prompts, Brian did accept all the example prompts which provided concrete wording alternatives he could use to improve the draft. Routman (2005) noted the following about conferring with ESL learners like Brian: “…frame your response based on the meaning the child is attempting to make, being sure to choose your
words carefully. Also make sure the student understands what you’re saying; this is especially important for English language learners” (p.224).

Teachers must always be aware that each student brings unique cultural and linguistic experiences to his or her writing tasks. Moreover, this awareness also underscores the importance of continuing student-teacher dialogue within conferencing. Future studies need to examine this idea by analyzing transcripts of teacher-student conversation during writing conferences. These studies should be conducted with a variety of student populations that represent demographic and ethnic diversity.

*Feedback Through Prompts*

Findings of this study suggest that future research needs to examine the impact of a range of teacher prompts on student writing. In this study only three prompts developed by Clarke (2003) were provided. Future research should focus not only on Clarke’s prompts, but on other forms of teacher feedback as well. Use of these feedback prompts should be studied in different demographic settings with ethnically diverse student populations. Furthermore, future studies should compare the impact and influence of both.

One interesting factor in this study was that scaffolded prompts were the most difficult for both of the students to take. Although the duration of this study was too short and the sample too small for any significant findings to emerge, it may be that this was because scaffolded prompts require critical thinking. Scaffolded prompts are more cognitively demanding than example or reminder prompts because they require the highest level of student thought and initiative. Reminder prompts tell the students quickly and specifically what to do. In essence, they are “reminders” about fixing an area of the student’s writing that can be addressed easily, such as a spelling error, or to follow a basic direction such as, “add
more to your conclusion”. Example prompts provide a specific example about what the student needs to do. The student may model his or her response after the teacher’s example or use the teacher’s example. Scaffolded prompts are more open-ended in nature, as they are often no more than a question to get the student thinking about the area that needs to be changed, and thus require more critical thinking.

*Professional Development*

The results of this study show the importance of teacher feedback on student writing. Therefore, it is important that teachers receive professional development centered on the importance of individual conferencing over writing. Teachers also must be better informed about how to implement and plan instruction that allows for the incorporation of individual conferencing, preferably within the context of writing workshop. Ultimately, this professional development should seek to address the complex balance between structure and freedom that should be sought during writing instruction.

*Suggestions for Future Research*

This study suggests that teacher feedback does indeed have an effect on student writing. It is recommended that further investigations of a longer duration involving a larger group of participants and with writing in diverse genres be conducted.

Future research must also probe further about what effective one-on-one teacher-student conferencing looks like across all grade levels. Moreover it should also examine how to most effectively provide feedback to students facing a range of learning challenges (e.g., second language learners) or students with identified disabilities that require Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
Future studies need to examine the transcripts of different teacher-student conferences, comparing teacher-directed oral feedback to conversation in which students share reflection to see if there is any difference in the impact of teacher feedback.

Drawing upon findings of this study, aspects of individual conferencing need to be further examined.

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of this case study on the effects of teacher feedback delivered during individual conferencing on the narrative writing compositions of two third grade students from the researcher’s classroom. Conclusions from data analysis pertaining to the feedback and its effects on the students’ writing were presented.

While at least some of each kind (reminder, scaffolded, example) of prompt was taken by each student, the patterns that emerged from the feedback showed that the students internalized the feedback they took differently.

Recommendations for teachers about individual conferencing, teacher prompting, and the potential influence of cultural and linguistic facts were provided. Recommendations for future research were also provided.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
March 31, 2010

Jessica L. Wallis  
108 Falls River Drive  
Monroe Falls, Ohio 44262

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20100312 “Influence of Oral Conferencing on Student Narrative Writing”

Thank you for submitting an IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and has been approved under Expedited Category #7.

Approval Date: March 23, 2010  
Expiration Date: March 23, 2011  
Continuation Application Due: March 9, 2011

In addition, the following is/are approved:

☐ Waiver of documentation of consent  
☐ Waiver or alteration of consent  
☒ Research involving children  
☐ Research involving prisoners

Please adhere to the following IRB policies:

• IRB approval is given for not more than 12 months. If your project will be active for longer than one year, it is your responsibility to submit a continuation application prior to the expiration date. We request submission two weeks prior to expiration to ensure sufficient time for review.
• A copy of the approved consent form must be submitted with any continuation application.
• If you plan to make any changes to the approved protocol you must submit a continuation application for change and it must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
• Any adverse reactions/incidents must be reported immediately to the IRB.
• If this research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.
• When your project terminates you must submit a Final Report Form in order to close your IRB file.

Additional information and all IRB forms can be accessed on the IRB website at:  
http://www.uakron.edu/research/easpp/compliance/IRBHome.php

Cc: Evangeline Newton - Advisor  
Cc: Stephanie Woods - IRB Chair  
☐ Approved consent form/s enclosed
APPENDIX B

LORI PARENT PERMISSION LETTER
January 26, 2010

Jessica Wallis
108 Falls River Drive
Munroe Falls, Ohio 44262

To the parents of Erin Obert:

As you are aware, I am in the process of completing my graduate studies at the University of Akron. I have elected to complete a Master’s Thesis, conducting research with human subjects. The purpose of this study is to further understand how the different kinds of discussion and feedback teachers engage in with students over their written drafts influence the students’ writing. I have chosen your daughter Erin to be one of the subjects for this research.

I would like to ask that Erin stay for approximately eight after school sessions over several months time. These sessions would last approximately 1.5 hours each and would take place in my classroom. During these sessions, Erin will either be crafting works of narrative writing in response to prompts; will be engaging in oral feedback sessions about those pieces of writing, or revising her pieces based on the feedback sessions about her writing. Please note that for research purposes, the feedback sessions that take place between she and I will be recorded on audio tape. I will be using a pseudonym for Erin so that her work and our discussions will remain anonymous. I will contact you regarding dates for the after school sessions once I receive this letter back with your signature granting consent that I work with Erin.

By signing this letter you grant consent for Erin to participate in the activities above. Should you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact me via phone or email at 330-285-5779 or jessicawallis@solonboe.org

I give consent for Jessica Wallis to conduct research with my child, Erin Obert, in her classroom. I understand that the results of this research will be publicly shared, but that my child’s name will not be used in the publication.

Signed

_________________________________  _________________________

Date

I wish to thank you for considering me to work with your child. Surely this process will be a success due to the talent and maturity Erin possesses.

Sincerely,

Jessica L. Wallis
APPENDIX C

BRIAN PARENT PERMISSION LETTER
January 26, 2010

Jessica Wallis  
108 Falls River Drive  
Munroe Falls, Ohio 44262

To the parents of Thomas Liu:

As you are aware, I am in the process of completing my graduate studies at the University of Akron. I have elected to complete a Master’s Thesis, conducting research with human subjects. The purpose of this study is to further understand how the different kinds of discussion and feedback teachers engage in with students over their written drafts influence the students’ writing. I have chosen your son Thomas to be one of the subjects for this research.

I would like to ask that Thomas stay for approximately eight after school sessions over several months time. These sessions would last approximately 1.5 hours each and would take place in my classroom. During these sessions, Thomas will either be crafting works of narrative writing in response to prompts; will be engaging in oral feedback sessions about those pieces of writing, or revising her pieces based on the feedback sessions about his writing. Please note that for research purposes, the feedback sessions that take place between he and I will be recorded on audio tape. I will be using a pseudonym for Thomas so that his work and our discussions will remain anonymous. I will contact you regarding dates for the after school sessions once I receive this letter back with your signature granting consent that I work with Thomas.

By signing this letter you grant consent for Thomas to participate in the activities above. Should you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact me via phone or email at 330-285-5779 or jessicawallis@solonboe.org

I give consent for Jessica Wallis to conduct research with my child, Thomas Liu, in her classroom. I understand the results of this research will be publicly shared, but that my child’s name will not be used in the publication.

Signed

_________________________________ Date________________

I wish to thank you for considering me to work with your child. Surely this process will be a success due to the writing talent Thomas possesses.

Sincerely,

Jessica L. Wallis
APPENDIX D

BUILDING USE LETTER
February 2, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to grant Jessica Wallis, a third grade teacher at Arthur Road Elementary School in the Solon City School District, permission to use her classroom to conduct research with two students for her Master's Thesis which is titled, *Influence of Oral Conferencing on Student Narrative Writing: Two Case Studies*. She has obtained permission from the parents of these students to do this research. Additionally, the name of the school district, school building, and individual students will be kept anonymous in the publication.

Respectfully,

Mariann Moeschberger
Principal
Arthur Road Elementary School
APPENDIX E

CONVENTIONS RUBRIC
APPENDIX F

NARRATIVE RUBRIC
APPENDIX G

LORI NARRATIVE SAMPLE
Not Scary

3/26/10

Erin

One sunny summer afternoon I heard the phone ring. I went to go pick it up. When I did I could not believe my ears. Two pilots named Captain Jim and Captain Lori had just asked me if I wanted to be a pilot. Right before I could think about my answer the word yes just blurted out of my mouth. They said my training would start tomorrow. I was nervous and excited at the same time. But, I just wanted to be excited. My nervousness could not be blown away. It was the next day and I was at the Kent State airport unready to start my training. The reason why I was unready is because I was nervous. I couldn’t get it away,” and I wasn’t even flying yet, thinking about when I would be crashing the airplane to pieces.” Once the two Captains realized I was nervous they told me it’s not scary one little bit. So I believed them.
Not Scary

"After a few more days of training you will be ready to fly!" said Captain Jim. "Absolutely," said Captain Lori. They were right. I did fly, it was great. I've never felt more proud since I stopped being nervous. I...flew almost every day. In fact, each time I flew it was not scary one little bit! 😊
APPENDIX H

BRIAN NARRATIVE SAMPLE
The Gigantic Snow

It is the night before Christmas. I was really hoping Santa Claus would bring me a sled the next morning. The next morning, I rushed downstairs to take a peek at my sled. But out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that it had snowed 2 feet outside!!!

Once I saw it, I screamed at the top of my lungs and bolted outside with the sled. But as I got out, I could barely move! I fought to get free but it was no use. I was stuck! Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. I called for help. My parents grabbed a rope and started pulling me out. Finally, I got free. I never ran outside when it snowed that deep again. All I did on a day like that was stay inside drinking creamy hot chocolate and watch cartoons.
APPENDIX I

LORI WRITING INTERVIEW
Writing Interview — In order to get further insights into the student's view of writing, the following interview might be given.

WRITING INTERVIEW
Name Erin Obert Age 8 Grade 3

This interview is to gather information about writing as a construction-of-meaning process.

1. How do you pick a topic to write about? I pick a topic by either using a prompt or from things happen in real life give me a topic.

2. How do you gather information in order to get ready for writing? I use a graphic organizer to gather information in order to get ready for writing.

3. How do you ensure a good beginning for your piece? I let the reader get ready to read my story with a fascinating beginning.

4. What do you do when you are writing and you don't know what to say next? I put down my pencil, get up and stretch, get a cup of water, and try to think of what to say next.

5. What do you do if you have a problem of what to write in the next piece? I look for ideas around me, and see if I will get any ideas.
6. Who do you know who is a good writer? What do you like about that person’s writing? I know Barbara Park is a good writer. I like how she writes about a little girl who always gets into trouble.

7. What do you like about your writing? I like how I write about some things that relate to my real life.

8. What would you like to improve in your writing or in what you write? I would like to stop saying and then, and then, and then.

9. What would you say is the easiest thing about writing? The easiest thing to me is there is always a place to get ideas.

10. What would you say is the most difficult thing about writing? I would say that wrapping up the story with your conclusion is the most difficult thing about writing.

11. Are you a good writer? How do you know? I think I am a good writer because all of my family members say I am.

12. If you were to teach someone how to write, what are some things you would say that you think would be helpful to that learner? I would say try to hook the reader with a good beginning.
APPENDIX J

BRIAN WRITING INTERVIEW
**Writing Interview** — In order to get further insights into the student’s view of writing, the following interview might be given.

**WRITING INTERVIEW**

Name: Thomas Liu  Age: 9  Grade: 3

This interview is to gather information about writing as a construction-of-meaning process.

1. How do you pick a topic to write about? I think about what happened that day.

2. How do you gather information in order to get ready for writing? I write the best handwriting I could and think about what to write. My dad sometimes help me.

3. How do you ensure a good beginning for your piece? I double check to see if everything is how I wanted them to be.

4. What do you do when you are writing and you don’t know what to say next? I think deeply into what I did and try to write it in my neat handwriting.

5. What do you do if you have a problem of what to write in the next piece? I ask my dad and see if his ideas are ok.
6. Who do you know who is a good writer? What do you like about that person's writing? I think Stephenie Meyer is a good writer because she tells how the character feels.

7. What do you like about your writing? What I like about my writing is that I had a good introduction.

8. What would you like to improve in your writing or in what you write? What I would like to improve is adding more details and draw a picture in the reader's mind.

9. What would you say is the easiest thing about writing? I'd say the easiest thing about writing is starting at the beginning.

10. What would you say is the most difficult thing about writing? I would say the most difficult thing about writing is painting a picture in the reader's mind.

11. Are you a good writer? How do you know? I am a good writer because I think I have a good introduction.

12. If you were to teach someone how to write, what are some things you would say that you think would be helpful to that learner? If I were to teach someone how to write, it would be helpful that they paint a picture in the reader's mind.