Two Teachers’ Changing Views and Practices through Implementation of Writer’s Workshop

by

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Researchers continue to examine strategies on delivering effective writing programs for students (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007). The writer’s workshop has gained significant attention, due to its emphasis on process-oriented and authentic writing (Atwell, 1998). This study involved two elementary teachers initiating writer’s workshop in their classes. While one teacher had never used this approach, the other had only started using it recently. In order to support teachers in their implementation, the researcher facilitated Professional Learning Communities, which provided participants a venue to discuss articles related to writer’s workshop, as well as critically reflect on their teaching. The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers’ thoughts on writing, and views of their roles as writing teachers changed over the research period. Additionally, the researcher aimed to determine the factors which influenced these changes, including the unique school context in which the study took place.

The study employed a qualitative case study design, and data was collected over a five month period through observations of teachers, weekly seminars, monthly PLC sessions, as well as from teachers’ conferences with students. The researcher found that over the research period, teachers’ views of writing and roles as writing teachers became more closely aligned with the writer’s workshop approach. Four factors influenced these changing views, including teachers’ willingness to make changes in their teaching, the notion of collaboration, the success of writer’s
workshop, and the school context. The study is beneficial to the field of writing because it provides insight into the experiences of new writer’s workshop teachers. Additionally, the study has important implications for leaders who wish to carry out change initiatives in their schools, as it provides them with information on the factors that may support or negate their efforts.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

I can still remember the days of being a researcher and conducting my master’s study. My master’s research took place at River Lake Elementary School, and investigated the possible factors behind the school’s success in achieving high scores on standardized testing, in the areas of reading and writing. My research involved conducting observations of Ms. Sandra, a veteran Grade 6 teacher at the school, in order to discern the methods and strategies she used to support students’ learning. However, from my observations and discussions with my research supervisor, I realized that most of Ms. Sandra’s teaching practices were actually traditional, product-oriented approaches. These instructional methods included asking students to complete spelling and grammar worksheets and answering questions related to texts. When students were engaging in writing, tasks mirrored those found in standardized tests. These teach-to-the-test writing exercises involved students writing narratives or articles on topics selected by the teacher, much to the dismay of students. As a result of my master’s research, I became interested in learning further about writing instructional approaches, which not only enhanced students’ writing skills, but also cultivated their interests and passion for writing.

I recall Ms. Sandra’s remarks of intending to “be more creative” and wanting to “learn from the fresh grads” working at the school, but she found it difficult to have these conversations due to her busy schedule. Indeed, I realized that Ms. Sandra was genuinely interested in enhancing her teaching, but did not have the time to collaborate with others. Eventually when I began working at River Lake, I realized that most teachers were similarly
working in isolation, and did not have opportunities to collaborate with each other. Professional
development practices at the school consisted of attending staff meetings, workshops, and
conferences. However, teachers were not given many real opportunities to have meetings with
grade partners, in order to discuss teaching strategies and methods of supporting students’
learning. This made teaching very challenging for me, because I was afraid to ask questions and
seek assistance from others. Furthermore, I had ideas for many new lessons that I wished to
implement, but with the lack of support, I felt discouraged from taking such risks in my
teaching. I began to wonder how professional development could support teachers in having
regular opportunities for face-to-face conversations with grade partners and colleagues at the
school.

These experiences led to my interests in conducting research on effective professional
development practices as well as research in the field of writing. Hence, I decided to carry out
my study at River Lake Elementary School in order to introduce a professional development
model that provided teachers with regular opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and
conversation, in order to support their development and enhance students’ learning. This
professional development model was coupled with an approach to teaching writing which
encouraged teachers to use more engaging pedagogic practices that fostered sociocultural views
of writing. Thus, my research not only signifies the importance of professional development
models that encourage teacher collaboration, but also draws attention to further research in the
field of writing.

This study was important to teachers, students, and parents at River Lake Elementary
School. The research was important to the teachers because it provided them a means to interact
and critically reflect on their practices. As the study was carried out successfully, other teachers
may also engage in similar professional development. It was important for students and parents
because the teachers used more authentic and engaging lessons, which enhanced students’
learning. Students at the school also had opportunities to participate in motivating and
meaningful writing tasks, in comparison to product-oriented methods that their previous
teachers may have used. The study was also significant to students because it likely led them to
develop more positive perceptions towards writing.

**Importance of Research on the Teaching of Writing**

My reasons for conducting research in the field of writing and implementing writer’s
workshop are deeply rooted in my personal experiences as well as research in the field of
writing. In my years as an elementary school student, writing was always an anxiety-inducing
task. This was due to teachers engaging product-oriented approaches of assigning and
collecting writing work on the same day. Rarely was I afforded opportunities to compose my
writing over a period of several days. As a teacher candidate, I was exposed to the writer’s
workshop approach through my host teacher, and this experience cultivated my interest in this
approach to teaching writing. My host teacher used this method with her Grade 3 class, giving
me the chance to observe its benefits first-hand. I realized that her approach was effective
because it provided students with ample writing time, enabled them to personally connect to
topics on which they wrote about, and receive on-going feedback on their written work. In
comparison to my experiences, writing in this class seemed to be a positive endeavour for
students. Thus, I learned that it was important for writers to have meaningful and engaging
writing experiences.

My beliefs on writing are also shared by other scholars in the field of writing, as research
has shown that teachers must create authentic and motivating writing opportunities for students
(Duke & Hall, 2006; Rief, 2003; Saulsburry, Kilpatrick, Wolbers, & Dostal, 2015), otherwise
they may struggle and experience decreased motivation in writing (Nolen, 2001; Troia, Shankland & Wolbers, 2012). When students are not motivated to write, they are less likely to become proficient writers (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). Thus, I wanted to use writer’s workshop at River Lake Elementary, to not only enhance students’ writing skills, but to also provide them with opportunities to engage in writing in authentic and meaningful ways. As many teachers solely use product-oriented approaches in their classes, I believe that it is important for students to be exposed to process-oriented approaches to teaching writing as well. These reasons provide further insight into my use of the writer’s workshop approach in this study.

Indeed, writing is a fundamental skill, which must be developed at a young age. It serves many purposes, including expressing ideas, posing questions, and communicating with others. Writing facilitates problem solving and critical thinking (NCTE, 2008), provides “a means of extending and deepening students’ knowledge”, as well as “acts as a tool for learning subject matter” (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 9). Writing is also an important cross-curricular skill, which aids students in communicating ideas across different subject areas (Graham & Perin, 2007). Indeed, the benefits of writing are extensive.

Contemporary technological and cultural shifts heighten the importance of being literate in today’s society (Juzwik et al., 2006; Light, 2001; NCTE, 2008). Jameson (2007) argued that,

Literacy is the most important thing we can give our children. Without the ability to decode, comprehend, write, synthesize information, and think critically, one’s chance of succeeding in school and beyond is greatly diminished. In this ‘future shock’ society, a person who lacks this skill set will be lost in the bombardment of information she or he will encounter day by day, minute-by-minute. (p. xi)
Due to increasing educational and workplace pressures, “Demand for written communication has never been higher” (Juzwik et al., 2006, p. 452). Essential writing skills are required to complete high school, obtain a post-secondary education, gain acceptance into graduate study programs, and even to develop cover letters and resumes when applying for jobs. Similarly, 90% of 40-year old college graduates reported using writing on a daily basis in their work (Light, 2001). One’s life may be extremely limited without having successfully grasped this vital skill.

Results of surveys by the Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC, 2009) show that 30% of Canadian students did not have sufficient reading or writing abilities by the end of Grade 6. The Canadian Education Statistics Council (2009) added that students who were not able to write well by the end of Grade 3 were at risk of dropping out of school or failing to graduate. Additionally, a recent study by the Education Quality Accountability Office (2013) reported that 29 percent of students who were identified as being ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at-risk’ in kindergarten, were less likely to develop adequate writing skills in higher grades.

An Approach to Teaching Writing: Writer’s Workshop

Considering these reports and the many others which continue to highlight the difficulties that many writers face, it is important to conduct further research examining ways to strengthen students’ writing. As the NCTE (2008) alleges, “Research cannot identify one single approach to writing instruction that will be effective with every learner because of the diverse backgrounds and learning styles of students who respond differently to various approaches…” (p. 1), it is, therefore, important for researchers and teachers to continuously seek new and innovative strategies to support students’ writing development.
Teachers in my research study initiated the writer’s workshop approach to deliver their writing programs. While one teacher had never used this approach, the other had started to only use it during the previous school year. My rationale for introducing writer’s workshop to the teachers was based on research that highlights its benefits, and shows that it is an effective approach to enhancing students’ writing skills (Atwell, 1998; Bright, 2002; Clippard, 1998; Hachem, Nabhani, & Bahous, 2008; Helsel & Greenberg, 2007; Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Some researchers have even alleged that writer’s workshop is the best instructional method to teach writing and implement the writing process (Corden, 2007; Graham & Harris, 2005; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Writer’s workshop places value on the process as well as on the final product, and does not restrict students to follow the writing process in a linear order (Graves, 1983). Thus, while some students may be drafting, others may be editing, while a few may be seeking feedback from their peers (Fisher, 1995). Additionally, the writer’s workshop approach encourages teachers to allow students to select topics of interest to them, rather than giving them their own prompts. This freedom in topics enhances students’ motivation and engagement towards writing (Casey, 2009) and makes writing more authentic for them (NCTE, 2004; Rief, 2007). As research shows that students compose better writing pieces when given more time (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Higgins & Brush, 2006), another strength of writer’s workshop is that it encourages students to use ample time when drafting their writing (Atwell, 1998). Students writing in this approach also have regular opportunities to interact and share ideas with their peers (Atwell, 1998). Finally, as students require safe and predictable environments to compose their writing pieces (Bruce-Crim, 1991), proponents of writer’s workshop similarly advocate for structure and routine (Atwell, 1998).

Writer’s workshop has five elements which include mini-lessons, writing time, conferencing, sharing, and evaluation (Atwell, 1998). It is assumed that the teacher plays a
significant role in each of these phases (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). During mini-lessons, teachers may model techniques, their work, or the use of mentor texts for students. They may also provide direct instruction to teach a concept, or address issues that students may be experiencing in their writing (Atwell, 1998). During writing time, teachers usually circulate around the room to confer with students about their writing, and provide suggestions to improve their work. Furthermore, teachers may facilitate peer feedback sessions for students who wish to obtain feedback on their writing from their partners. After students have completed their writing, teachers conduct sharing sessions, in which students share their writing pieces with their peers. Finally, teachers evaluate students’ writing by providing them with feedback on their written work (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Elbow, 1973).

Limitations of Traditional Professional Development

Scholars have argued that traditional forms of professional development are ineffective, but still continue to be highly prevalent in schools (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Lieberman & Mace; 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Speck & Knipe, 2005). These professional development practices include conferences and workshops, which have been strongly critiqued for their reinforcement of one-size-fits-all models, as well as their failure to differentiate instruction based on teachers’ individual needs, grade levels, and the socio-political environments that they are working in (Guskey, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2002). Many teachers equate the term ‘professional development’ with the notion that teachers need to be “fixed” (Guskey, 2000, p. 2) and view it as a waste of time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Workshop training, which Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2009) described as the “most criticized” form of traditional professional development (p. 920), is usually offered by outside experts who present pieces of knowledge, but offer minimal support and follow-up after delivery. Thus, teachers are left in isolation when attempting to implement professional
development strategies. As these practices are externally driven, they do not adequately equip teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills they could use in their classrooms.

The short-comings of traditional professional development have made it challenging for teachers to embrace and implement its ideas in their classrooms (DuFour & DuFour, 2007; Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005). Thus, Fullan (2005) proposed that schools ought to adopt new models and practices which foster teacher collaboration, support student learning, and embrace sustainable change. Effective professional development practices engage teachers in authentic, job-embedded, collaborative, and on-going learning activities (Elmore, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003). Moreover, effective professional development enables teachers to test their learning in their classrooms, and also provides them with supportive contexts to share their findings as well as obtain feedback from their colleagues (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Little, 2006).

**Contributions of Professional Learning Communities to Professional Development**

One professional development model that has been successfully implemented in school settings, and has led to sustainable change in enhancing teachers’ and students’ learning, is known as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The current literature repeatedly demonstrates that PLCs have positive effects on student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). PLCs involve groups of teachers working in learning teams in order to develop a common vision to enhance students’ learning (Dufour, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Jolly, 2005, Jolly, 2008). Wenger (1998) noted that this type of collaboration and interdependence has been around for centuries, when tribes learned to work together for their survival needs. In the PLC framework, teacher learning is seen as a collective and collaborative effort, as teachers share practices, develop corresponding plans of action, and work towards
solutions that best support students’ development (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Foord & Haar, 2008). The PLC model is grounded in constructivist understandings, that 1) knowledge is situated in the lived experiences of teachers, and best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experiences, and 2) actively engaging teachers in PLCs will increase their professional knowledge and enhance student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006).

In contrast to traditional professional development practices, the PLC framework has many benefits for teachers. Firstly, as the PLC is not a top-down approach, it encourages all participants to develop and share ideas equally (Hord, Roussin, & Sommers, 2010). Secondly, due to its emphasis on collegial collaboration, PLC teachers are less likely to experience isolation (Liebermann, 2000). Finally, with its focus on collaboration and on-going reflection (Hord, 2007), PLC practices reflect qualities of effective professional development.

Unlike traditional professional development practices, PLCs also support change that is long-lasting and sustainable in educators’ teaching practices. The notion of change was important in my study because my research examined factors that impacted teachers’ changing thoughts on writing, as well as their views of their roles as writing teachers. Researchers have found that four key components associated with PLCs may influence the change process. These include individuals’ orientation to change, collaborative work and discussion among PLC members, the success of the change initiative based on student data, and the school context, including its culture, programs, and practices (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Foord & Haar, 2008; Fullan, 2007; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Talbert, 2010). While a significant amount of research has examined characteristics of PLCs, more research is needed to provide insight into these factors and other potential factors related to PLCs, which may support or hinder teachers’ change efforts.
Due to the several benefits outlined of PLCs, I chose this method of professional development to introduce writer’s workshop in my study. While writer’s workshop has been implemented in schools from the 1970s, the aim of the research was to combine writer’s workshop with PLCs, in order to make writing more authentic, engaging, and meaningful for students. I facilitated PLC sessions for teachers by giving them research-based articles related to facets of writer’s workshop. These sessions provided the teachers with collaborative opportunities to discuss, analyse, and critically reflect on their practices. I was optimistic that combining PLCs with writer’s workshop would deliver a more robust and effective writing program at River Lake, thereby catering to students’ academic and social needs.

**Purpose of the Study**

My case study involved the examination of two teachers’ delivery of writer’s workshop. The first was a teacher who had never used writer’s workshop before, while the second was a teacher who had only started using writer’s workshop recently. The purpose of my research was to examine how these teachers’ thoughts on writing as well as their views of their roles as writing teachers changed over the research period. Additionally, a significant objective of my research was to determine the factors that influenced these changing views, including aspects of PLCs which teachers participated in throughout the study. As Yin (2003) asserted that the cases being studied cannot be separated from the larger context in which they exist, an important purpose of the study was to also explore the impact that River Lake had on teachers’ views. While the school placed heavy emphasis on standardized testing, the research project was a momentous undertaking, as it placed significant pressure on teachers when modifying their teaching practices. This was largely due to administrative and parental pressure. By conducting research in a school with institutionalized traditions and practices, my research explores how the school’s culture both supported and hindered teachers’ changing views and practices.
The three research questions that guided my study were:

1) How do teachers’ views on writing and their practices change when participating in PLC discussions to support writer’s workshop implementation?

2) How do teachers’ views of their roles as writing teachers change?

3) What factors influenced these changes?

**Significance of Research and Contribution to Present Literature**

This study is significant for the educational community for several reasons. The findings from this study should be useful to educators who lead change initiatives within their schools, as well as practitioners and scholars who may analyse the effectiveness of PLCs in school settings. My research offers a detailed and rich discussion of the role of PLCs in the change process. It examines how aspects of PLCs, including the collaborative relationship amongst the teachers, the several discussions that took place between them, and the support they received through scholarly articles, facilitated the change process. Additionally, the research explores how the school context both supported and negated change efforts. This is important because if leaders or administrators wished to carry out change initiatives in their schools, my research provides them with insight into the factors that may support their efforts and the challenges they may experience.

Furthermore, my research is important to the Principal, staff, students, and parents at River Lake Elementary School. As my study involves developing and using a more effective professional development model than practices that are currently in place, my research may inspire the school administration to making modifications to their existing professional development practices. Thus, my research is significant to the teaching staff, as adoption of
PLCs will provide them with more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. Finally, as my research combines PLCs with writer’s workshop, my study is important for students and parents, as it may lead to teachers delivering more meaningful and engaging writing programs for students.

My research makes valuable contributions to the scholarly literature on PLCs and writer’s workshop. While a significant amount of research exists that has examined characteristics of PLCs, research concerned with the specific factors associated with PLCs that influence change seems to be lacking. As my study examines how PLCs can serve as a vehicle in producing changes in teachers’ views and practices, my research will make important contributions to this field of study. Additionally, more research is needed that examines teachers’ use of writer’s workshop for the first time. As my research involves highlighting the experiences of how two relatively new teachers used this approach in their classes, it makes valuable contributions to this field as well.

**Framework for Dissertation**

The introduction of this paper has established the rationale for the study, identified the research questions, and outlined the significance of this important study. Chapter 2 examines the theoretical framework for the paper and reviews the literature on professional learning communities and writer’s workshop. Chapter 3 outlines the research questions, offers a detailed discussion of the case study method, and concludes with a description of the study’s research design. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study, including a close examination of how teachers’ thoughts on writing and teaching practices changed. Chapter 5 highlights the prominent findings of the study, including a discussion of the implications for the research, as well as suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory provides the framework for my research, due to its emphasis on dialogic practices, social interaction, and the co-construction of knowledge. All three of these notions are essential elements of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and writer’s workshop. Many scholars in the fields of PLCs (Rigelman & Ruben, 2010; Van Lare & Brazer, 2013) and writer’s workshop (Brown, 2009; Laman, 2011) have similarly drawn on sociocultural theory as a framework for their research. This theory suggests that learning and development are a result of an individual’s environmental and social experiences. The theory largely draws on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) a Psychologist whose philosophical ideas related to ‘the development of higher level mental functions’, ‘relationship between learning and development’, and ‘interrelationship between thought and language’ have gained international recognition, and have had major implications in the classroom.

Embedding thought, cognition, and mental processes in social contexts, Vygotsky’s (1978, 1987) sociocultural theory is based on two central tenets: 1) Cognition is socially and culturally mediated by cultural tools and symbolic language, and 2) Individuals’ development occurs through their interactions with others, which impacts cognition. This theoretical framework will examine both of these important tenets.
Language Mediates Thinking

To further explore the sociocultural theory, it is important to examine the relationship between thought and language. Vygotsky posited that individuals’ cognitive development could be traced to social activity, and is mediated by psychological and symbolic tools. Vygotsky (1987) argued, “Just as humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labor activity, which allows us to change the world, and with it, the circumstances under which will live in the world, they use symbolic artifacts to establish an indirect, or mediated, relationship between themselves and the world” (p. 9). Tools could be understood as, “artifacts created by human culture(s), over time and are made available to succeeding generations” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 197). Tools can be categorized as being either physical or symbolic (Kozulin, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Physical tools may include pencils, pens, desks, and other physical items in the learner’s environment. Examples of symbolic tools are arithmetic systems, music, art, and language. Kozulin (2003) believed that these tools vary per culture and context. Development occurs when individuals are able to successfully appropriate tools. Meanwhile, the notion of mediation could be broadly understood as “the manner in which thinking occurs by means of a medium, particularly speech; without such a medium, there is no means by which to think or communicate” (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 13). Mediation is thus, the process through which thinking or ideas could be expressed in physical, oral, or written forms.

Several scholars have contended that language is the most significant tool that mediates learning. Vygotsky (1987, p. 219) argued “…thought is not merely expressed in words: it comes into existence through them… thought finds its reality and form [in language].” Language as a cultural tool is a central theme in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, as language
provides the primary means through which the construction of knowledge and understanding are enabled. Smagorinsky (1998) believed that thought and speech were intricately related: “The process of rendering thinking into speech is not simply a matter of memory retrieval, but a process through which thinking reaches a new level of articulation” (p. 172-173).

Consequently, language plays an important mediating role, as it enables individuals to access and make sense of the ideas in their mind as well as express them to others. Through language, individuals can direct the attention of others to aspects of the environment, rehearse information they are to learn, or develop a plan to solve a problem (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). Additionally, language serves as “an agent in the making of meaning” through which individuals articulate their thoughts and transform them into more explicit forms (Swain, 2006, p. 96). In these ways, learning is mediated by language.

Due to its emphasis on dialogic practices and active learning, the PLC framework is based on sociocultural theory. PLC teachers are not required to follow prescribed teaching methods, but are rather viewed as active agents in developing their own strategies and ultimately, developing their own knowledge. Teachers in PLC sessions construct their own meaning and utilize their collective knowledge to solve problems, enhance their understandings through dialogue, and ultimately transform one another (Driscoll, 2000). Knowledge in this regard is viewed as being socially constructed, and situated in teachers’ experiences. Knowledge is constructed through critical reflection with other PLC members who share similar experiences. Thus, the significance of teachers having opportunities to share ideas, experiences, and questions lies at the heart of PLC. As members converse, individual and group knowledge develops, deepens, and changes. New ideas lead to questioning, exploring, and assessing of prior understandings, eventually leading to the development of new knowledge.
My PLC teachers read articles related to writer’s workshop and we used monthly meetings to discuss the articles related to the guidelines of implementing writer’s workshop, the carrying out of mini-lessons, process of conferring with writers, and assessment and evaluation strategies. Notions of thought, language, and mediation came into play, as language served as a tool which enabled the PLC teachers to mediate their thinking, and express their ideas. Language enabled the teachers to make sense of the ideas in their minds, as well as discuss their thinking. Furthermore, language also served as a vital learning tool. As individuals were sharing ideas during PLC meetings, they thought of new ideas and reached higher levels of understanding. For example, in one of our sessions, the Grade 5 teacher, Mr. Ronaldo was talking about the importance of developing engaging lessons, and while talking, he began to think of and provide specific examples of strategies that could be used to enhance lessons. Finally, the articles themselves served as tools as well because they provided the foundation for teachers’ discussions. Usually, the teachers did not merely agree with the ideas expressed in the article, but they thought critically and often challenged what was written. The teachers’ engagement in debate and discourse, demonstrates the principle of sociocultural theory that individuals create their own understanding of given phenomenon.

Sociocultural theory not only shares its philosophical underpinnings with the PLC framework, but also has obvious implications for teachers and students engaging in writer’s workshop. Writing in writer’s workshop is by no means a solitary act, as students are encouraged to regularly converse and share ideas during all phases of the writing process. It is anticipated that such dialogic practices will enable students to develop further understandings and enhance their writing.

Swain (2006) asserted that cognitive development occurs as a result of speaking and writing, as individuals think and talk through with themselves or others, which further
stimulates their cognition. She referred to this notion as *languaging*, which she defined as a “dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning” (Swain, 2006, p. 96) either in the form of inner speech or collaborative dialogue. Inner speech could be understood in Vygotsky’s words as “pure thought”, while collaborative dialogue refers to individuals’ interactions with others. Therefore, Swain postulated that languaging enabled individuals to generate new ideas and develop new understandings about given phenomena. Thus, language externally manifests as primarily a means of communication through various forms such as verbal or written speech, while language internally facilitates in the formation of intellect, memory, perception, verbal thinking, and inner speech.

Swain’s ideas on writing and inner speech are significant to both PLC teachers and students in writer’s workshop, as they add another dimension to our analysis. Prior to our meetings, the teachers in my study often made notes on items that they wanted to discuss. Using Swain’s arguments on ‘languaging’, it is likely that these notes would have led to further ideas for the teachers. For example, when Ms. Tina wrote in her notes on why she did not agree with particular assessment strategies mentioned in an article, she was able to elaborate on her points through the process of ‘languaging’.

Swain’s (2006) research demonstrates that when students reflect on their writing, have discussions with others about it, and think critically of their work, they can produce well-thought-out, dynamic, and more innovative writing pieces. The more such interactions occur, the more the process of ‘languaging’ can occur. These interactions may give students opportunities to express ideas that may otherwise have remained hidden in the mind. For example, during a feedback session, a student might pose a question for his/her peer, “How can you add more suspense to this story?” The student being asked may begin thinking-aloud and expel ideas in his/her mind. Thus, the ensuing dialogue and the process of feedback, will not
only result in the sharing of ideas, but will also stimulate the students’ cognitive activities, enabling them to enhance their stories. Additionally, when engaging in writing after feedback, the students will be able to reflect on the interactions that they had earlier, and use the ideas they had generated to facilitate their writing. Swain’s research therefore, shows that it is vital for students to have opportunities to dialogue with their peers on their written work, as it enables learning to take place.

Finally, scholars have contended that several factors play a role in the learning process. These include the learner’s personal characteristics (e.g. their attention, belief system, etc.), the setting in which the dialogue takes place (e.g. school, home, etc.), the tools being used, as well as the goals of the more experienced or powerful members (Smagorinsky, 2011). Smagorinsky (2011) explained that two individuals learning a similar concept could have drastically different learning experiences, depending on the conditions above. For example, my two PLC teachers may not internalize the exact same ideas after each PLC meeting, due to their prior knowledge and experiences. Similarly, individuals’ experiences on learning to write for the first time may vary greatly depending on the context they are being taught in, as well as how actively they are involved in the process etc.

**Social Interaction and Learning**

To further understand the sociocultural theory and the Law of Genetic Development, it is integral to discuss the *More Knowledgeable Other* (MKO) and *Scaffolding*. MKO could refer to a person with a better understanding or ability level, in regards to a particular task, process, or concept at hand than the learner (Vygotsky, 1987). The MKO may be in the form of a teacher, peer, or tutor who may use dialogue to scaffold performance, and/or transfer increasing levels of control and responsibility to those he/she is helping in order to help them take control over their
own learning (Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000). According to Schaffer (1996), the MKO’s presence, encouragement, challenge, and feedback, all shape the learning process. Thus, these MKOs facilitate students’ developments by ‘scaffolding’, which could be understood as an “instructional structure whereby the teacher [or peer] models the desired learning strategy or task then gradually shifts responsibility to the students” (Turuk, 2008, p. 252). Once the individual is able to take on more responsibility in the task, the MKO limits his/her scaffolding, providing the learner with an opportunity to handle the task independently (Rogoff, 1990). Furthermore, Van Lier (1996) discussed six principles of scaffolding related to language learning. These are:

1) **Contextual support** - a safe but challenging environment, where errors are expected, and considered to be part of the learning process;

2) **Continuity** - repeated occurrences over time of a complex set of actions, where there is a balance between routine and variation;

3) **Intersubjectivity** - mutual engagement, encouragement, and support: two minds thinking as one;

4) **Flow** - communication between participants occurs naturally, and is not forced;

5) **Contingency** – the scaffolding depends on learners’ reactions, as elements may be added, changed, deleted, repeated, etc.;

6) **Handover** – the learner is ready to undertake similar tasks without help, leading to the dismantling of the scaffold (Van Lier, 1996, p. 196).

These principles demonstrate the complexities involved in scaffolding, and the many factors involved in the process.
To further understand the role of the MKO and gain insight into how individuals’ social interactions influence others’ prospective mental development, it is essential to explore the construct of The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is one of the most widely known concepts that Vygotsky offered educators, and he defined it as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). While the ZPD is not a physical place situated in time and space, it metaphorically defines the distance between what a child could achieve on his/her own and what he/she could learn with peer/adult scaffolding (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Consequently, the notion of ZPD suggests that individuals’ interactions with others expands their potentials, and enables them to handle more tasks independently. Similarly, the ZPD emphasizes psychological functions that are developing, rather than those that are already developed (Kozulin, 2003). In order for learning to occur, interactions and work must be within individuals’ ZPD. More specifically, work within the ZPD must simultaneously be challenging, yet appropriately supported by peers or adults. If a student works with learning material that is too simple or too difficult, and/or the adult or peer do not adequately support the learning activity, then learning and development do not take place.

Certainly the notions of ZPD and MKO were very relevant in my study. For our PLC meetings, it was important for me to select articles that would offer information on writer’s workshop that were not too simplistic, nor too complicated. Consequently, I selected articles that I believed would offer information within the teachers’ ZPD, and gave copies of the articles to the teachers well in advance, so that they would have sufficient time to understand and digest the material. Additionally, when meeting with the teachers for the first time and explaining to
them what the study entailed, Mr. Ronaldo and I served as the MKOs due to my knowledge and Mr. Ronaldo’s prior experiences of conducting writer’s workshop. We explained to Ms. Tina what writer’s workshop involved and what exactly the study entailed. However, with the passage of time, it was Ms. Tina who often took on the role of the MKO, due to her many years of experience. Ms. Tina would occasionally guide Mr. Ronaldo and scaffold his thinking, by offering strategies he could use to incorporate technology and make his lessons more engaging. These changing roles demonstrate how fluid the concept of MKO is, as different people in different situations may serve as MKOs, depending on their overall competence and knowledge of the particular concept or process.

Teachers in my study similarly used students’ ZPDs to gain greater insights on their students’ present levels of knowledge, as well as to determine how to individualize instruction to support students’ development. As Chaiklin (2003) argued that individuals have varying ZPD sizes, depending on age and capability, it is integral for teachers to provide one-on-one assistance to review and teach concepts. Perhaps this form of teaching is best demonstrated through conferencing, where the teachers and students discussed writing and the teachers aimed to provide 1-2 meaningful suggestions that the child could implement to improve their work. For example, in one of her conferences, Ms. Tina explained to a student how to correctly use a period as he had many run-on sentences. She then guided him with the next few sentences, until he was able to successfully use his periods independently. Thus, in Vygotskian terms, Ms. Tina served as the MKO and used scaffolding to support the student’s learning within his ZPD. Vygotsky similarly states, “What lies in the zone of proximal development at one stage is realized and moves to the level of actual development at a second. In other words, what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow.”
(Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211) Therefore, it is anticipated that the concepts the students internalize, will eventually become part of their knowledgebase.

Thus, in the framework of writer’s workshop, where teaching and learning are conceptualized as interactive and collaborative processes, teachers and peers serve as scaffolds and facilitators of students’ construction of knowledge. When students were participating in writer’s workshop, they were similarly discussing their writing and engaging in collaborative dialogue. More capable students served as MKOs when providing support to their peers. However, MKO roles were again fluid, as MKOs changed throughout the feedback process. For example, in some instances I observed that a student was more knowledgeable than his/her peer in grammatical aspects of writing, while the other student was more knowledgeable in content additions.

Meanwhile, Smagorinsky (2011) challenged traditional understandings of scaffolding and ZPD, and instead advocated for the idea of the Collective Zone of Proximal Development (CZPD). He noted that CZPD was more effective because it emphasized individuals’ interactions at multiple levels, acknowledged that teachers and peers may simultaneously participate in different activities at the same time, while challenging themselves to reach levels of understanding that they were unable to attain earlier (Smagorinsky, 2011). Smagorinsky argued that support not only comes from individuals but also from sources such as books, newspapers, and handouts. This was a truism in my study as teachers’ support came from me as the researcher, each other, the handouts they read, as well any research they conducted independently. As all of these factors likely influenced the teachers’ learning, the CZPD is a more appropriate term to describe the learning situation of my teacher participants.
Similarly, in writer’s workshop, students’ learning occurred as a result of interactions with different individuals, and across a wide range of contexts. While some students were learning from their teacher, others were learning from their peers, and some were using the resources available in their environments. Often the teachers provided their students with articles, books, and handouts, which served as samples of good writing, as well as provided instruction on how they could improve their writing. Such an approach therefore, takes the emphasis away from the teacher as the ‘sole scaffold’, and rather emphasizes the focus of learning on students, peers, and their social contexts.

Research in the Field of Writing: Process Writing

Perspectives on Writing

While writing had traditionally been conceptualized as a solitary and product-oriented activity (Reid, 1982; Sommers, 1982), paradigm shifts have emerged that highlight writing processes and emphasize sociocultural perspectives of writing. This has led to the development of a pedagogical approach known as process writing (Calkins, 1994; Elbow, 1973; Graves, 1991; Murray, 1985). Goldstein and Carr (1996) defined ‘Process Writing’ as,

a broad range of strategies that include pre-writing activities, such as defining audience, using a variety of resources, planning the writing, as well as drafting and revising. These activities, collectively referred to as ‘process-oriented instruction’, approach writing as problem solving.” (p. 1)

The process writing approach is underpinned by the assumption that when given an opportunity, students can and will write. Process writing places value on the process as well as on the final product (Graves, 1983). This approach recognizes that writers engage in a series of phases, which include pre-writing, writing, revising, editing, and sharing (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994).
Pre-writing involves considering the purpose, content, voice, and audience of the writing. Students may brainstorm and/or make notes of what they plan to write about. Students write, revise, and collaborate with other students in the class to provide feedback on each other’s work. Finally, the students prepare their final product and share it with their peers.

However, scholars have cautioned that these stages should not follow a prescriptive or sequential order. Thus, as writing process stages are recursive; they may overlap and intertwine (e.g. Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Graves 1983, 2004). Graves (2004) recommended that teachers must maintain flexibility in the writing process:

Artful response, listening, flexibility in decision making, were replaced by attempts to regularize the process. I once overheard one teacher comment to another, ‘Do you use the five-step or the seven-step Graves?’ Writing theory was bypassed for brainstorming on Monday, writing leads on Tuesday, churning out a first draft on Wednesday, revising on Thursday, and publishing the final copy on Friday. (p. 90)

Emphasizing the non-linear patterns that children’s writing should take, Graves (2004) referred to writing as an unpredictable and “messy operation” (p. 90). Researchers similarly maintain that when teachers overly-regulate the writing process, children’s writing is negatively impacted (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002). For example, if a student is beginning to compose a narrative and already has a few ideas on how to begin, he/she should not be forced to brainstorm first, but should rather have the freedom to start writing and brainstorm later. Similarly first drafts do not need to demonstrate perfection in content, organization, and structure (Weinstein, 2001). Consequently, students may compose multiple drafts before they are satisfied with their writing.

In order to facilitate the writing process, it is integral for students to have a lot of time to plan, draft, and revise their writing. Atwell (1998) argued, “Regular, frequent time for writing
also helps students write well. When they have sufficient time to consider and reconsider what they’ve written, they’re more likely to achieve the clarity, logic, voice, conventionality, and grace of good writing” (p. 91). Additionally, it is important for writers to have ample time to weave through the phases of the writing process.

Writing in the process writing approach is also seen as a social process, as students are encouraged to seek feedback during all phases of writing. Writers may benefit from rehearsing information while talking to themselves, or by talking to peers and their teacher in small or large groups in order to exchange ideas. Such interaction should take place throughout the writing process, rather than at the conclusion of the writing (Atwell, 1998).

Students must have ownership of their writing and be given the freedom to select topics of their choice (Atwell, 1998; Graves, 1984). While teachers may narrow choice by asking students to write in a certain genre, students are still able to decide the topic of their writing within that genre. When students are able to select topics of their own interest, it greatly enhances their motivation and engagement towards writing (Graves, 1984). Furthermore, when students have choice in their writing, writing becomes authentic for students. Students must write for real purposes and real audiences (NCTE, 2004; Rief, 2007). For example, if a student is writing a letter, it should be based on a topic and audience related to his/her personal interests.

Duke, Hall, Purcell-Gates, and Tower (2006) deemed that authentic literature could facilitate in authentic writing. Such texts could serve as mentor texts and provide students with examples on how to draft their writing (Fletcher, 2011). Scholars have similarly argued that reading and writing are reciprocal processes, and that texts should be readily available for students as they complete their writing pieces. Rief (2007) asserted that “writing is reading” as both processes depend and develop with the other (p. 199). Reading allows writers to
synthesize prior knowledge with new knowledge, while writing enables writers to create writing pieces that reflect new knowledge (Smagorinsky, 2008).

Finally, some scholars have argued that writing is a tool for thinking (Fletcher, 2003; NCTE, 2004). The act of writing enables individuals to ponder more ideas, creating a cyclical effect. To facilitate this thinking process, Fletcher (2003) advocated for writer’s notebook, which they stated that students could use while preparing their writing pieces. Writer’s notebook enables writers to jot down ideas, both inside and outside of class, which they could use for future reference when drafting their work.

**Teacher’s Role in Writer’s Workshop**

Writer’s workshop is based on the process writing approach. Writer’s workshop has five elements which include mini-lessons, writing time, conferencing, sharing, and evaluation. It is assumed that the teacher plays a critical role in each of these phases. During mini-lessons, teachers provide direct instruction to teach a concept, model a technique, or address an issue (Atwell, 1998). For example, teachers may conduct a lesson on brainstorming strategies, plot development, or revision techniques. Teachers could use different strategies to conduct mini-lessons including modeling, shared writing, and thinking-aloud (Calkins, 2006). Modeling involves teachers demonstrating a new concept or approach. Shared writing is an instructional approach to teaching writing in which the teacher writes students’ ideas on a topic in either a small group or whole class setting. Finally, think-aloud refers to when teachers verbalize their thought-process while writing so students gain an understanding of what teachers are thinking. Graves (2004) stated, “Children need to hear their teacher talking through what she is doing as she writes on the overhead or the chalkboard. In this way, the children witness their teacher’s
When teachers use a variety of instructional approaches, students could adopt similar strategies when drafting their own writing pieces (Calkins, 1994).

In the second phase, students engage in writing (Atwell, 1998) while the teacher circulates around the room and conducts short conferences with his/her students. Atwell (1998) stated that conferences should be short and revolve around questions such as, “What are you writing about?” “What would you like to add?” and eventually provide 1-2 suggestions to the students on their writing. According to Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), it is important for teachers, especially at the beginning to be readers, rather than correctors. While readers praise the work of students and provide unconditional support to students, correctors critique the work and provide suggestions. Furthermore, they suggest that conferences should be short, and teachers should engage and listen to students carefully when speaking with them.

According to Calkins (2003), there are different types of conferences that teachers could engage in. These include content conferences, expectation conferences, and process and goals conferencing. While content conferences are typically used at the beginning of the year, in which the teacher focuses on the content of the writing, expectation conferences are used to highlight expectations of students during writing time (e.g. using pictures when drawing, or preparing multiple writing drafts). Finally process and goals are the most common form of conferences, and are used by teachers to discuss both writing skills and strategies with students.

Students then prepare their final drafts and share their written work with an audience (Atwell, 1998). Often referred to as the ‘author’s chair’, the writing of children is celebrated at this time, as teachers and peers may praise the students’ work. It is important for teachers to establish a positive classroom atmosphere where children feel safe in taking risks with their writing.
Finally, students’ work is evaluated, and teachers provide students with feedback. When providing feedback, teachers generally assess students’ writing pieces on several different aspects including its ideas, organization, voice, style, content, and use of vocabulary, spelling, grammar (Culham, 2005). Elbow (1973) argued that feedback is important because it gives the writer a sense of the effects that his/her writing is having on the reader. He identified two types of feedback that teachers could utilize which provide the writers with different kinds of information. Criterion-based feedback informs students whether their writing meets the assessment criteria. On the other hand, reader-based feedback refers to the effect that the writing had on the reader. Despite their distinguishing characteristics, Elbow (1973) acknowledged that the two forms of feedback could not be viewed as binaries: “A reader cannot possibly give you a piece of criterion-based feedback except from the basis of something having happened inside him; nor can a reader give you a piece of reader-based feedback without at least implying a criterion of judgement or perception” (p. 241). Therefore, teacher feedback usually contains elements of both criterion-based feedback and reader-based feedback.

Leki (1990) identified different ‘roles’ that teachers play when responding to students’ writings, which include ‘the reader’, ‘proofreader’, ‘facilitator’, ‘coach’ and ‘evaluator’. Keh (1990) similarly, found that she took on at least three roles as a writing teacher when providing feedback to her students. These included the teacher as “a reader interacting with a writer”, “a writing teacher concerned with points of confusion and breaks in logic”, and “a grammarian” (Keh, 1990, p. 301). The teacher as ‘a reader’ interacts with the writer, by commenting on his/her work and possibly affirming what he/she has written. For example, the teacher may state, “You have a nice character description”, or “I agree with what you are saying here.” The teacher as a ‘writing teacher’ identifies areas that may be confusing and suggests how they could be modified. For example, the teacher may write, “I think you can expand on this
section.” Thirdly, teachers may play the role of a ‘grammarians’ by identifying grammatical errors and/or commenting the correct grammatical rules for students (Keh, 1990).

**Challenges Involved in using Writer’s Workshop**

Although the preceding literature demonstrate the potential benefits of writer’s workshop on students’ writing, some research has discussed the challenges that teachers have faced in its practical implementation (Myers & Pough, 2002; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Some of these scholars believe that that proponents of writer’s workshop have presented idealized view of writer’s workshop practices in classrooms, and romanticized notions of pedagogy (Winograd, 2005). Sudol and Sudol (1991) examined some of the issues that Peg Sudol, a Grade 5 teacher faced in her implementation of writer’s workshop. While she initially reported difficulties in giving up control and offering freedom to students, she also experienced challenges in scheduling an hour of writing time on a daily basis, due to the necessity of meeting other curricular expectations, as well as school events which interfered with writing periods. Additionally, she reported that students had difficulties with pacing, and some were unable to complete writing assignments leading to management issues.

Sudol also stated that Atwell’s (1987) 1-2 minutes of recommended conferencing time was too short, and she often found herself spending more time talking with her students about their writing. Despite their recognition of the challenges of using writer’s workshop, the studies reported positive benefits and concurred that writer’s workshop was beneficial for students. Nonetheless, more research is needed to examine the experiences of teachers using the writer’s workshop approach, and particularly the challenges involved in its implementation (Feinberg, 2007).
Roz Ivanic’s Six Discourses of Writing

Ivanic’s (2004) conceptual framework is important to examine, as it provides further insight into elementary teachers’ thoughts, beliefs, and approaches to writing instruction. Scholars have applied her work for the purposes of analysing curricula (Peterson, 2012), as well as to examine teaching practices (McCarthey, Woodard, & Kang, 2014). Ivanic’s (2004) work is based on a meta-analysis of theory and research on writing and features a discussion of six discourses. She defined discourses as “constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 224). Thus, Ivanic’s (2004) conceptualization of discourses, constitutes particular views and assumptions of writing, and has important implications for teachers’ instructional and assessment practices.

Drawing on the work of several theorists, including Fairclough (1989, 1992), Ivanic (1998) and Jones (1990), Ivanic (2004) established a model to discuss how written communication takes place. Her framework featured a multi-layered conceptualization of writing with a set of four nested boxes, and she used it to explain how textual aspects of language are embedded within mental and social dimensions. At the center, in the smallest square is the ‘text’. This refers to the linguistic substance of the text, and includes text in both visual and material forms. Moving outward, are the ‘cognitive processes’, which consist of the mental processes involved in meaning making and using language. Somewhat broader is the ‘event’, which refers to the social context in which language is being used, the purposes of language, the level of social interaction, and the time and place in which language is being used. Finally, in the most outer square, is the ‘sociocultural and political context’, which takes into consideration the culturally available resources, as well as the discourses and genres that are supported by the cultural context within which the event is taking place.
Ivanic (2004) asserted that different discourses focus on different layers of the writing task. In her framework, the discourses are organized along a spectrum, from more restricted and narrower views of writing, to views where writing is conceptualized more broadly. At the most autonomous end of the spectrum is a skills discourse. This view of writing constitutes that writing involves learning a set of linguistic patterns and rules. It is presumed that the same patterns and rules apply to all writing, regardless of the texts that are being composed. Ivanic (2004) noted that a significant amount of writing curricula embodies this discourse and guides teachers’ writing instruction. Those who advocate for this view, explicitly teach correct handwriting, spelling patterns, grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Meanwhile, students’ work is assessed according to how accurately they have reproduced linguistic patterns. Advocates of this approach view writing as a separate skill from reading, as reading and writing are taught in isolation.

While the skills discourse could be traced back to the 19th century, Ivanic (2004) acknowledged that the degree of importance placed on skills-based teaching today is highly contested. Although teaching practices falling under the skills discourse may undermine the social context of writing, and be based on narrow conceptualizations of writing, Ivanic (2004) argued that skills-based teaching still has value. She deemed that many teachers and scholars believe in the importance of explicit instruction, and draw heavily upon this discourse. Thus, Ivanic (2004) acknowledged the skills discourse cannot be dismissed, as teachers must find ways to balance their practices and include elements of skills practices.

The second discourse discussed by Ivanic (2004) is the creativity discourse of writing. Those who prescribe to this view of writing place greater emphasis on a writing’s content and style than its linguistic form. Proponents of this approach emphasize the process of meaning-making writers use to develop their text. It is assumed that individuals become better writers
through writing, and that the more individuals write, the more proficient writers they become. This perspective of writing development draws on the ideas of multiple scholars in the field (e.g. Britton, 1970; Dixon, 1967; Graves, 1983). Teachers whose practices align with this discourse, view students as ‘authors’, and may ask them to compose texts, including essays, as well as personal and fictional narratives. Writers have the freedom to choose their own topics and are encouraged to use a strong voice and advanced vocabulary. Good writing is that which appeals to readers’ interests, imaginations, and emotions.

In contrast to the skills discourse, the teaching of writing is closely related to the teaching of reading under the creativity discourse. Thus, teaching practices falling under this approach involve exposing students to good texts, granting them multiple opportunities for writing, and providing them with feedback on their work. While many have argued that the creative discourse presents a romanticized view of writing with little value in the real world, Ivonic (2004) asserted that this conceptualization cannot be ignored, as it can be combined with other discourses of writing.

In the process discourse, writing involves both cognitive and practical processes. This conceptualization of writing is based on the work of several scholars in the field (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1980; Murray, 1985). While cognitive processes refers to the mental activity that may be learned implicitly, the practical processes are those that are shaped by the event, and taught explicitly by teachers. Aforementioned, while some teachers may reduce writing to a set of fixed steps, others may leave writing tasks open for writers to navigate through independently. Teachers inhabiting this discourse provide time for students to plan, draft, and revise their writing pieces. Students are offered multiple opportunities to seek feedback from their teacher and peers. While the approach contrasts with the skills approach due to its emphasis on the process involved in composing the text, it would be erroneous to presume that conventions are
not important in this view. Instead, the emphasis placed on conventions is less than that given to the content of the writing piece. Ivanic (2004) noted that the process writing approach appeals to many teachers and policy makers, particularly because it involves explicit teaching, and can be used to teach writing sequentially. While the process approach to writing certainly emphasizes the process involved in composing the writing piece, the process is seen as “a means to an end” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 231) as it is ultimately the quality of the final product which must show improvement and be assessed. For example, Ivanic (2004) argues that it would be of little value for a student to demonstrate excellent planning skills, but produce a writing piece of low quality.

Meanwhile, the genre discourse focusses on the purposes of writing of specific text types. In contrast to the process approach, proponents of the genre discourse emphasize the differences in text-types, contexts, and purposes for writings. Thus, the content, organization, and tone of a text depends on the genre in which an individual writes in. These views of writing originated from the work of researchers including Halliday (1978) and Martin (1989), who similarly argued that differences in texts were a result of the purposes for which they were written. Teachers whose practices fall under this discourse, provide explicit instruction of how to compose texts in different genres, while offering them opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences. Therefore, good writing in this discourse focuses on fulfilling the purposes they serve as well as demonstrating the appropriate linguistic features representative of the genre one’s writing is categorized under. Thus, this view of good writing is in contrast to skills discourse, which focuses on accuracy, as well as the creative discourse, which places emphasis on the reader’s interest.

In the social practices discourse, social interaction is at the heart of the writing event, as students compose pieces within “networks of support and collaboration” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 234).
Thus, the teacher’s role of providing explicit instruction is minimal, as students’ writing development takes place through interactions with others in their environment. In order to facilitate this dialogue, teachers aim to develop a sense of community in their classrooms so that students feel comfortable in exchanging ideas with each other. These views of writing originate from the work of theorists in the field of New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Proponents of this discourse additionally argue that writing is purpose-driven, “The principle of these approaches is that learners must as far as possible be involved in purposeful situated activities which require writing in order to fulfill goals…” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 236). Thus, teachers encourage students to write for authentic purposes and real audiences.

Instruction in the social practices discourse shares commonalities with teaching in the genre discourse, but takes the dimension of the social context in greater consideration. This writing is assessed according to how well it served the purpose it was written for.

Finally, the sociopolitical discourse focuses on social practices, but advocates for a critical literacy approach, in order for writers to become aware of power structures that are inherent in writing. Notions of privilege and representation are central to this discourse, as proponents of this approach argue that writers must become aware of the role that genres play in empowering some groups while marginalizing others. Ivanic (2004) stated, “The view of learning to write within this discourse is that it should include developing a critical awareness of why particular discourses and genres are the way they are: the historical and political factors which shaped them and shaped the patterns of privileging among them” (p. 238). Thus, teachers must explicitly teach students how to contest, challenge, and subvert marginalizing ideologies, and encourage them to create texts that help develop more powerful identities for everyone.

Ivanic (2004) cautioned that the six discourses cannot be seen as being discrete and homogenous. Consequently, she suggested that we develop more holistic, multifaceted and
comprehensive conceptualizations of writing. In this view, she imagined discourses as being “progressively embedded within one another, and intrinsically interrelated” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 241). Thus, she alleged that teachers may simultaneously combine elements and pedagogic practices pertaining to different discourses. However, teachers attempting such integration may face tensions, challenges, and experience contradictions, particularly when attempting to negotiate competing discourses and perspectives of writing. For example, teachers may experience issues in using a *skills discourse*, while also using elements of a *process discourse*, as the former focuses on the text while the latter on the cognitive and mental planning processes. Ivanic’s (2004) aim was for teachers to not only have dialogues related to the conceptualizations of writing, but also to be consciously aware of the various writing discourses, so that they carefully consider their pedagogic choices.

**Professional Learning Communities**

‘Professional Learning Communities’ (PLCs) is a form of professional development which aims to develop the collective capacity of staff members, as they work together to foster high levels of achievement for all students (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). PLCs can be comprised of a grade-level teaching term, a school committee, a high school department, or an entire school district (Dufour, 2004). The current literature repeatedly demonstrates that PLCs have positive effects on student learning and achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), while several scholars have used this practice in school improvement studies (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Louis and Marks, 1998; Strahan, 2003). In my research, the PLC involved two teachers and a researcher. PLC was an important component of my research because the teachers and I discussed the strategies they were going to use to in order to implement writer’s workshop in
their classes. In this review, I will define and present what the literature shows regarding how PLCs support teachers’ development and professional learning.

The literature offers multiple definitions of a PLC. While no universal definition exists, the commonalities in the definitions include the committee’s commitment to student learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Huffman, 2000), teachers working in collaboration (Bolam, Stoll, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Dufour et al., 2010), and continuous reflection on student data (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Graham & Ferriter, 2009). I use the definition created by Dufour et al. (2010) to guide my research, “Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators” (p. 11).

PLC teachers work collaboratively as practitioners to develop innovative strategies to enhance student learning. Within a PLC, teachers are actively collaborating, sharing their expertise, enhancing their own skills, and learning from each other (Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Wells, 2008). Collegiality and student success underscore PLCs, as committee members establish relationships and utilize their knowledge to promote students’ growth. Furthermore, the learning is ongoing. PLCs are not a one-shot professional learning initiative as Dufour (1997) explains: “... the teachers in a school and its administration continuously seek and share learning. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students’ benefits; thus this arrangement may also be termed communities of continuous inquiry and practice” (p. 9).
Notions of ongoing inquiry, reflection, and self-evaluation are paramount to the PLC philosophy. Through an inquiry-based model, PLC members examine and question their teaching practices, while developing plans of action on meeting students’ academic needs. More specifically, teachers share and analyse student data, while determining ways to assess the impact of their action plan.

The three words from the phrase ‘Professional Learning Community’ each hold significant meaning (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). They stated that a ‘professional’ is someone with expertise in a specialized field who remains aware of the evolving knowledge in the field. Meanwhile, ‘learning’ refers to educators demonstrating ongoing action and curiosity, while committing to continuous improvement. Finally, ‘communities’ spring from common understandings, provide members with broadly shared opportunities to participate in school-related activities, and emphasize the importance of collective responsibility amongst all PLC members. Therefore, committee members in a PLC regularly discuss and seek advice from each other, while demonstrating continuous curiosity and flexibility to modify teaching practices when necessary.

When compared to traditional forms of professional development, the PLC is part of an educational shift that aims to promote teacher collegiality and critical dialogue on best practices for meeting students’ needs (Hord, 1997; Stoll et al., 2006). Its emergence in educational contexts is in response to an increasingly changing world which promotes a test-culture and standardization across schools. To counter these forces for standardization, PLC advocates argue that PLC upholds teachers’ ‘professional autonomy’, by positioning them as generative agents who have the capacity of posing questions, solving problems, as well as developing theories on how the learning needs of students could be met (Hargreaves, 2003; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). In this approach, teachers take ownership of their teaching, and are
seen as the authors of their own successes and failures. In the wake of standardization, teachers should engage in professional reflection and collaboration to develop unique practices. From this perspective, teacher learning is no longer an isolated process, but rather, teachers’ knowledge is built through the collaboration of educators. Consequently, knowledge and ideas about teaching and learning are open to re-examination and critical exploration. When teachers examine and reflect on the results of their actions, they will question long-standing beliefs and widely accepted knowledge, in order to develop more innovative practices, which move beyond the standardization of teaching practices. Teachers conduct more formative assessments to gather ongoing evidence of student learning, so that they can report back to their group to discuss the latest progress (Dufour et al., 2008). As teachers are accountable to their PLC groups, regular formative assessments are fundamental to teachers, so that they could update their group accordingly. If assessment data fails to show significant improvement, teachers are likely to experiment with new practices, until the desired results are achieved.

**Characteristics of PLCs**

Effective PLCs have a shared mission (purpose), vision (clear direction), values (collective commitment) and goals (timelines and targets) (Burnet, 2002; Dufour, 2005; Dufour et al., 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hord, Roussin, Sommers, 2010). The shared vision should involve a focus on and a commitment towards the learning of all students (Dufour, 2005; Fullan, 2007). This vision evolves over time, as PLC members monitor and continuously plan on how to promote the learning of students. Moreover, PLC members regularly discuss and debate on how to achieve their goals, and these discussions are meant to find their way into improved classroom practice (Hord et al., 2010). The initial vision of the teachers in my PLC was to successfully implement writer’s workshop in their classes. Over time, the teachers developed more concrete goals, such as prospective topics for mini-lessons, and
resources/technology which they intended to use to successfully implement lessons. Upon recognizing how fascinated the students were with technology, the teachers decided to use specific apps to further enhance writing instruction.

A regular place to meet, regular meetings, and the scheduling of adequate time are important for the continuity of PLCs, especially because all members may not be simultaneously available (Buffum & Hinman, 2006; Hord et al., 2010). The teachers in my PLC met approximately every month in one of the teacher’s classrooms. Having a consistent room to meet provided stability and consistency in our PLC meetings. As relational factors such as trust and mutual respect are integral (Dufour et al., 2008), I encouraged my PLC members to share comfortably and respectfully with each other. While disagreements amongst us occurred, we remained respectful when sharing ideas. With time, the teachers became more comfortable in sharing experiences that were not positive, and in seeking advice from each other.

Fourthly, while in collaboration, PLC members continuously examine outcomes and commit to improvement (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003). Reflecting on student data is critical here, as teachers must continuously assess how effective their instruction was. Teachers share classroom experiences and discuss strategies that have been effective in their classes. In our PLCs, the teachers reflected on and discussed the strategies they used to deliver writing instruction, and pondered ways to enhance their delivery (Dufour et al., 2008). For example, in one of our PLC sessions, Ms. Tina spoke about the importance of interaction and student engagement during mini-lessons, leading Mr. Ronaldo to modify his mini-lesson approach, which involved merely talking to students with limited interaction. Mr. Ronaldo found that more interactions in mini-lessons led to more student engagement, and he reported his findings in the following PLC meeting. Thus, the de-privatization of practice encouraged the teachers to share within their community, while providing the members with additional learning
opportunities. Consequently, as Mr. Ronaldo demonstrated, it is integral for teachers to remain open to new possibilities, as well as show a willingness to modify their teaching practices when they may no longer be leading to optimum student learning.

Finally, within PLCs there is ‘shared leadership’, which empowers all members to share in the original mission and vision to improve student learning (Dufour et al., 2008). PLC is not a top-down approach but an approach in which all participants have voices and are able to express and share ideas equally (Hord et al., 2010). Administrators and teachers hold shared power and authority when making decisions. The teachers in my study equally developed strategies based on their experiences, rather than following what they were told by the school administration. One member did not hold power over the other and the positive and supportive relationships that the teachers developed were fundamental to the notion of shared leadership.

Due to the emphasis of PLCs on collegial collaboration, PLC teachers are less likely to experience isolation, because they are able to regularly interact with their peers (Liebermann, 2000; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). As teachers know that their efforts are being supported by the group, PLC members often feel more confident (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), have a higher morale, as well as experience greater job satisfaction (Hall & Hord, 2001). Having regular opportunities to collaborate and dialogue with their peers, leads to more informed and committed teachers (Wood, 2007). Additionally, when knowing they have group support, teachers are more likely to experiment and take risks in their teaching, potentially transforming their practices (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

**PLCs and Sustainable Change**

Research has examined how PLCs can be used as a vehicle for promoting sustainable and long-lasting change in educators’ teaching practices. According to Dufour and Eaker
(1998), “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (p. xi). Researchers have emphasized four key components to support the change process, including individuals’ orientation to change, collaborative work and discussion among PLC members, the success of the change initiative based on student data, as well as the school context in which change takes place in (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Foord & Haar, 2008; Fullan, 2007; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Talbert, 2010). Firstly, individuals participating in PLCs must demonstrate adaptability and a willingness to make changes in their teaching practices (Hall & Hord, 2001). Rogers (1995) noted that teachers are more likely to adopt a change initiative if it is perceived to be better than the practice they are using at the moment. If teachers adopt a change innovation, resistance, withdrawal, and defensiveness could impede PLC members in making changes. Thus, they must continuously remain flexible and open to modifying their existing teaching practices.

Secondly, structures for collaboration (DuFour, 2004; Talbert, 2010) provide the foundation for PLC change initiatives. Collaboration begins with the decision of undertaking the change initiative, with PLC members identifying the problem or concern that they wish to address (Donohoo, 2013). Foord & Haar (2008) similarly recommended that collaboration begins with holding meetings prior to the implementation of new initiatives, in which all members work together in developing targets and a vision for the course of action. These meetings support the change process because they provide participants with a clear direction on the changes they will be making, as well as the wisdom behind these changes. Hall and Hord (2011) stressed the importance of implementing change gradually, as it provides members with more time to plan. Gradual change also helps participants ease into their new roles and practices.
Additionally, the support and encouragement that members provide to each other during PLC interactions are powerful forces in producing change (Foord & Haar, 2008; Stoll et al., 2006). A supportive context enables individuals to feel confident when experimenting in their teaching practices, and not feel isolated if they do not experience optimum results. For example, PLC members could encourage and provide positive reinforcement to each other in the face of challenges and hurdles that their partners may be experiencing. Thus, collaborative structures create a nonthreatening environment in which members could question and reflect on their teaching practices. Questions such as “What do we want?”, “How is it working?”, and “What can help us?” are integral in driving the PLC process, as it allows members to closely analyse approaches they are using (Foord & Haar, 2008). PLC members could also support each other by sharing their classroom experiences and resources (Talbert, 2010). Talbert (2010) noted that resources support PLC members by providing them with a theoretical foundation of teaching practices. Similarly, Fullan (2007) stated that the sharing of information creates a collaborative culture and leads to a cyclical process of more sharing. Thus, sharing practices provide members with further insight on how to effectively carry out teaching practices, and/or modify existing practices. Consequently, collaboration creates a venue for sharing experiences and resources, ultimately supporting PLC members in their changes.

Change is also likely to sustain if it is implemented successfully. In PLCs, this success is based on student data. Thus, teachers reflect on student data to ensure that students are benefiting from change initiatives (Stoll et al., 2006). Teams examine the data by identifying patterns and themes and formulating conclusions. It is integral for teachers to regularly reflect on student work to examine the impact of their teaching, and adjust their instruction accordingly. When PLC teachers see that their teaching is having a positive impact on student learning, it reinforces teaching practices, and helps sustain the change process. Thus, when
teachers see that their changes are advantageous and of high quality (Rogers, 1995), they are more likely to continue with the innovations they have adopted. Fullan (2007) deemed that successful change requires three critical components. These include 1) the use of new or revised materials, 2) the use of new teaching approaches, and 3) the transformation of beliefs. Changes in educational practice are only achieved when these components take place simultaneously.

The final component associated with the change process is the school context in which the change takes place in. This includes the school’s culture, programs, practices, traditions, and staff members (Hargreaves, 2003). A school culture could have a positive or detrimental effect on change initiatives that take place (Deal & Peterson, 2002). For example, change is more likely to sustain in a positive school culture that focuses on a commitment to improvement, rather than a negative school culture where staff would lack such a vision. Thus, Fullan (1997) stated that while many innovations are adopted, they cannot be fully implemented if they were not compatible with the school culture. Change is also impacted by expected and unexpected events in the school, including new policies, parent complaints, or changes in school staff (Fullan, 2007).
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This chapter will begin by describing the methodological approach and research design I used in this study. It will then highlight the three research questions and objectives guiding this study and provide a description of the methods.

Qualitative Research

My study utilized a qualitative research approach. Many researchers have attempted to define ‘qualitative research’, leading to multiple definitions and numerous perspectives in the field. Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) definition encapsulates several prominent characteristics of qualitative research and guided my research.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Thus, qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem being investigated. They aim to uncover and interpret the meaning of phenomena in natural contexts. Thus, the up-close information gathered by qualitative researchers, by directly talking to people and observing their actions within their contexts, is an important characteristic of qualitative research. Significantly, qualitative research contrasts with quantitative research, which usually takes place in controlled settings or
contrived situations, usually with the goal of reporting on the frequency of behaviour. Contrastingly, qualitative researchers have face-to-face interactions with research participants over time.

A second major characteristic of qualitative research is that it uses an interpretive approach, which focuses on describing participants’ lived experiences, thoughts, behaviours, and values. Researchers study individuals in order to gain a better understanding of the world they live in and the factors that may influence them (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1996; Schwandt, 2007). In this regard, qualitative research is beneficial because it provides insight into how participants make meaning of their experiences, as well as how their context influences their actions. Thus, qualitative research usually involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the complex interactions of factors, and examining the larger picture that emerges.

Merriam (2009) described an interpretive qualitative design as a process where data is gathered from participants’ lenses, but interpreted through the researcher’s lens. Consequently, the qualitative researcher is seen as a key instrument in a study, as he/she gathers data through first-hand experiences and draws conclusions. This is in contrast to the role of the researcher in quantitative research, who usually creates experimental conditions with control and intervention groups.

Merriam (2009) outlined additional characteristics that could be used to further understand qualitative research. Firstly, qualitative research has an emergent design, which means that the procedure cannot be tightly prescribed. Therefore, it is important for researchers to remain flexible and understand that the direction of the research may change after researchers enter the field for data collection. Secondly, the data in qualitative research are obtained from multiple sources, including but not limited to, interviews, focus group sessions and natural observations. Finally, when analysing the data, researchers develop special categories or themes
in order to organize the data and gain further understanding into the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009).

Researchers have identified several purposes of qualitative research. Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative research is used when a problem or issue needs to be explored in great depth. This insight can only be obtained by speaking directly with research participants. Thus, qualitative research empowers individuals to share their experiences. Similarly, qualitative research is beneficial to use when attempting to understand complex social phenomenon (Stake, 1995). For example, if a researcher attempts to explore factors that may be contributing to the success of a school’s math program, they would utilize a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is also helpful when statistical analysis is unable to answer research questions or when variables in research problems are unknown (Creswell, 2007).

In this particular study, using qualitative research methods provided me the opportunity to conduct naturalistic observations of writer’s workshop in two teachers’ classes, as well as hold PLC meetings and seminars to follow and document their changing thoughts on writing. A qualitative approach provide a rich data source for examining factors which supported and hindered changes in teachers’ views and practices. Finally, a qualitative method of inquiry allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the school context and how it influenced teachers’ changing thoughts and practices.

**Case Study**

The research used the case study approach to examine teachers’ practices, as well as explore their changing views on writing and roles as writing teachers. Regarding case study design, Merriam (1998) stated,
A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

Indeed, case study researchers conduct in-depth explorations of phenomenon in real-life contexts in order to provide rich and detailed descriptions, and a holistic view of the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2009; Hancock & Algozine, 2011; Yin, 2003). These phenomenon may include individuals, groups, or programs that are connected by time or place. Significantly, the phenomenon being studied cannot be separated from the larger context in which it exists (Geertz, 1973; Yin, 2003). For many years, case study research has been successfully implemented across many disciplines (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2012). Yin (2003) asserted that case studies may be the most appropriate research method for examining the complexity of organizational phenomena, and Merriam (1998) suggested that case studies are an appropriate method for educational settings.

According to Yin (1984), “Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research” (p. 23). In my study, the two teachers served as the cases, whose changing views on writing and roles as writing teachers were closely examined. In case study research, multiple sources are used to collect data, including observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents (Creswell, 2007).

Yin (2003) identified three types of case studies which researchers could choose from depending on the purpose. These types of case studies are exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory case studies are used to explore situations in which the intervention
being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes. They can be used to look for patterns in the data and develop a model to view the data. These case studies ask questions related to ‘what?’ For example an exploratory case study may ask, ‘What strategies does a teacher use to deliver language arts lessons?’ Descriptive case studies examine an issue in greater depth by providing a complete description of a phenomenon. These case studies also explore questions related to ‘what?’ They may ask a question such as ‘What effects do teacher’s teaching strategies have on students’ learning?’ Finally, explanatory case studies examine an issue or phenomenon at the greatest depth. These case studies explore questions related to ‘why?’ or ‘how?’ A researcher using this type of case study may ask, ‘Why does a teacher use particular strategies to deliver lessons?’ My study is considered an explanatory case study because it is intended to explain how a myriad of factors may influence teachers’ views on writing and roles as writing teachers.

The case study design was selected for this study for several reasons. Firstly, as the research involved determining factors that influenced teachers’ views on writing and roles as writing teachers, it required an in-depth examination of the school context. The case study’s focus on in-depth and detailed descriptions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) necessitated the collection of data using the case study method. Secondly, as the study was contingent upon teachers’ willingness to be open about their thoughts and beliefs on writing, it was critical for the researcher to provide participants with varied and multiple opportunities to share and discuss their thoughts on classroom practices. Collecting data from multiple sources also triangulated data, which enhanced the study’s validity (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, the case study design was the best method for this study because it provided the researcher with an opportunity to examine teachers’ practices in natural settings, and observe how the school context impacted teachers’ views and roles. More specifically, the case study provided a means of observing
teachers in their everyday circumstances and contributed to an understanding of how they were influenced by the school’s culture, as well as by the web of their interactions, including PLC sessions and seminar discussions with the researcher.

As with any research methodology, case studies are also known to have limitations. Many researchers have argued that case studies lack external validity (the degree to which they can be generalized), as they are so intricately related to the contexts in which they take place (Giddens, 1984). Yin (2012) has responded to these critiques by stating that the same criticism could be applied to other forms of research designs (e.g. experiments, ethnographies, surveys, etc.), and that single studies need to be repeated/replicated multiple times to ensure that results are valid. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) argued that ‘researcher bias’ may affect the results of the study, as case study researchers may simply set-out to prove their own pre-conceived notions about a given issue. In order to mitigate this effect of bias, Flyvbjerg (2006) recommended that researchers outline their assumptions, biases, and prejudices in their papers prior to commencing their study, which would make it easier to conduct the research with a clearer mindset. Case studies require a significant time commitment on the part of researchers and participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Researchers spend a lot of time collecting data in the field as well as analysing that data. Furthermore, researchers conducting case studies require a large commitment from participants, and may experience attrition, or the loss of participants through the research process, particularly in longitudinal research designs. Despite these criticisms, case studies have been successfully utilized to examine phenomenon and have effectively contributed to scholarly research (Yin, 2012).

**Research Questions and Purpose**

The three research questions that guided my study were:
1) How do teachers’ views on writing and their practices change when participating in PLC discussions to support writer’s workshop implementation?

2) How do teachers’ views of their roles as writing teachers change?

3) What factors influenced these changes?

My case study involved the examination of two teachers’ delivery of writer’s workshop. The first was a teacher who had never used writer’s workshop before, while the second was a teacher who had only started using writer’s workshop recently. The purpose of my research was to examine how these teachers’ thoughts on writing, their practices, as well as their views of their roles as writing teachers changed over the research period. Additionally, an important objective of my research was to determine the factors that influenced these changing views, including aspects of PLCs which teachers participated in throughout the study. Finally, as Yin (2003) asserted that the cases being studied cannot be separated from the larger context in which they exist, I intended to explore the impact that the school, including its culture, practices, and traditions, had on teachers’ changing views.

**Description of Study**

**Context**

River Lake Elementary School (pseudonym) was the research site for the study. It is an Islamic school located in an urban area of Central Canada. The school ranges from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and featured a population of approximately 800 students. The school is divided in three divisions across two buildings. These are the Elementary Division, which includes classes from Kindergarten to Grade 5, the Middle School Division, which features classes from Grades 6 to Grade 8, and the High School Division, which contains classes from...
Grades 9 to 12. River Lake Elementary opened in the early 1990s, and had over 25 classrooms for elementary and high school students at the time of the study. All classes in the elementary division contained two sections. Most classes had 25-30 students with one teacher, and each student paid a fee of $400 a month. All teachers at the school held at least a Bachelor of Education degree, while some even had a Master of Education degree and/or had completed various additional qualification courses. The school did not have any additional support staff such as educational assistants. New students who wished to attend the school after Grade 1 were required to pass language and math entrance tests, and were required to perform well in an interview before they were admitted to the school. Additionally, their academic standing in previous schools was taken into account prior to their enrolment. Meanwhile, students already attending the school were expected to maintain a minimum overall average of 65%. Those students who performed below the minimum level were required to attend after school remedial held by the teachers, as well as seek additional tutoring.

River Lake Elementary School was equipped with basic facilities such as a library, computer lab, gymnasium, and a religious centre where students prayed during the day. The school followed the provincial curriculum in the subjects of Language, Math, Science, Social Studies, Art, Health, Phys-Ed, and had a separate curriculum for religious education, which was also taught on a daily basis. In addition to these subjects, students from JK onwards also learned Arabic, the language of their religious text, which was incorporated in their daily timetable. All instruction was conducted in English, except during the religious language periods.

River Lake Elementary School had received national recognition due to its high scores on provincial government standardized testing. The test is administered by the province to Grades 3 and 6 students and measures their reading, writing, and math skills. River Lake
Elementary School had participated in these tests for over ten years and the students at the school had annually excelled on these tests in all three areas. According to reports released by the Fraser Institute (2014), River Lake Elementary School had consistently ranked among the top schools in its province. Fraser Institute had previously awarded the school for this distinction. Consequently, the school has garnered media attention, as news reporters have regularly visited the classrooms and have published articles on the school’s success on these tests. The Fraser Institute rankings also increased the school’s popularity, and led to many parents moving closer to River Lake from different parts of the world, in order to enrol their children at the school.

Recently, the school opened a second branch in a neighbouring town. Notably, the Principal served as the administrator of both buildings. The second branch featured students from Kindergarten to Grade 8, with single sections for each grade. To help with the establishment of the new school, the staff at River Lake was encouraged to share experiences and resources during the school orientation with teachers at the new school.

In total, the school had approximately seven Professional Development (PD) days over the academic year. Three of these days would take place during teacher orientation week, while the other four days were spread out throughout the year. These PD days consisted of workshops conducted by school staff, and “outside experts”, including teachers in public schools, university faculty, agency workers (e.g. CAS) and prominent members of the community (e.g. local school liaison officer). Sometimes workshops were even conducted by parents of students attending the school, who fit in the above categories. Workshops were mandatory for all school staff to attend, including teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12, as well as Arabic language teachers. Thus, over 40 teachers attended these PD sessions. Workshops and presentations were held on a wide range of different topics including the teaching of math, literacy, use of Smart Board
technology, and assessment and evaluation procedures. Topics were selected by the School Principal, but were based on the school staff’s needs and inputs. The sessions lasted 2-3 hours and generally followed the format of a Power Point presentation, small group activities, and a whole-group discussion. During the group activities, teachers were usually divided in their grade cohorts. For example, Grades 1 and 2 teachers were grouped together, while Grades 3 and 4 teachers formed a group.

In addition to PD days, the school also conducted staff meetings. Usually these staff meetings would result in an early dismissal for students, so that staff would have ample time to meet after school. Meetings lasted between 2-3 hours. Again these meetings featured all staff from Kindergarten to Grade 12. In these meetings, the Principal spoke on various topics, including school initiatives, past and future events, and school policies. Occasionally, these meetings preceded additional workshops. Sometimes, staff meetings took place off of school property, such as in restaurants, or consisted of staff socials with activities such as bowling.

Teachers also attended monthly division meetings, which were conducted by the division heads. The purpose of these meetings was to more specifically discuss issues and events pertaining to the specific division. These meetings followed an agenda developed by the Head, and was emailed to teachers in advance for their input. For example, if a teacher attended a school trip, or held an event in the class, the teacher would share his/her experiences with the staff in these meetings. Finally, upon request, some staff members also received special permission to attend conferences outside of the school. After attending the conference, staff members were expected to report back and conduct workshops for their colleagues on the knowledge they had gained, and the skills they had acquired.
Grade partners were also encouraged to collaborate with each other through meetings, to plan as well as discuss relevant issues. These meetings often took place after school, but sometimes occurred during the day, if teachers shared common preps. Significantly, certain teachers had two preps. During their second prep, teachers were required to visit other classes and assist other teachers in marking or photocopying.

In addition to teaching their own classes, teachers at the school were expected to carry out numerous additional responsibilities. These included coordinating in-school and after school clubs and activities, organizing events, preparing monthly newsletters for parents, and maintaining a class website. All teachers were responsible for spearheading at least three clubs or committees. These included After-School Sports Programs, Student Council, Reading Club, Board Game Club, Spelling Bee, Mathematica, and Awards Assembly. Additionally, teachers were responsible for organizing school events. These included the MS Society Reading assemblies, Jump-Rope for Heart Events, and fundraising dinners for parents. Meanwhile, teachers also prepared monthly newsletters to provide parents with information on what the students had been learning at school, as well as what they would be learning in the future. Finally, the teachers were expected to maintain a class website which showcased the learning activities and events the students had participated in. This included uploading pictures and videos of students, as well as essential documents for parents to view (e.g. weekly schedules, subject outlines, etc.).

Meanwhile, River Lake also fostered a culture of leadership for students through its Student Council, prefects, and monitors. The Student Council consisted of a group of 10-15 students who were responsible for organizing Spirit Days, Bake Sales, Pizza Lunches, as well as coordinating Clothing and Food Drives to help those in need. In addition, students from Grades 4 and 5 also served as Prefects. They were responsible for ensuring that all students followed
the school rules, as well as assist in mediating conflicts that took place between students by utilizing conflict resolution strategies. Finally, Grade 5 students also served as monitors in the school and had a wide range of tasks they were asked to handle. These included morning announcements, hallway monitors, stair monitors, lunch bin monitors, and cafeteria duties. All of these tasks were not only expected to enhance students’ sense of responsibility and develop students’ leadership, but also facilitate in the smooth running of the school.

As expected in most private schools, students were required to display excellent behaviour at all times. To encourage good character, teachers regularly spoke to their students about following class rules and showing respect to others. Often these discussions were based on the Tribes program, which the school practiced. Tribes aims to foster a sense of community and feelings of positivity amongst students. Its four values are ‘Mutual Respect’, ‘Attentive Listening’, ‘Appreciation No-Put Downs’, and ‘Right to Pass’. These values were posted in all classrooms and discussed frequently with students as a reminder of behaviour expectations. Teachers at the school were also Tribes trained, as they had undergone training on how to implement Tribes in schools. Finally, character education assemblies were also held at the school, for which teachers were asked to prepare assemblies with their classes on specific character traits. Following these assemblies, students from each class who best exemplified the traits presented, were recognized on stage and presented with certificates.

While the school emphasized that parents were partners with teachers in children’s education, policies were also in place to prevent parents from dictating teachers’ practices. While parents were allowed to provide suggestions to teachers, they had to present them in a respectful manner. Additionally, parents were also prohibited from speaking negatively about the school or teaching staff with other parents. Instead, they were encouraged to voice their concerns directly with teachers, division heads, or the school Principal.
Parents at River Lake Elementary still played a prominent role in their children’s education. Particularly with younger children, parents were encouraged to assist them in homework, projects, and other school-related activities. The Awards Assembly was a special annual event, in which students’ hard work and efforts were recognized in front of parents, through trophies and medals that they received on stage. This assembly was for students in Grades 2 and up, and the awards were predominantly academic related. Students who achieved an overall average of 95% and above were presented with Academic Excellence trophies, while students with an average of 87-94% were given Honour Roll medals.

Participants

Two teachers, Ms. Tina and Mr. Ronaldo (pseudonyms), and 10 focus students from each of their classes, served as the participants for my study. These focus students were selected by the teachers, and represented a range of academic levels, and were of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Ms. Tina was a Grade 2 teacher at the school, and had previously taught for four years. All of her prior teaching experience was at River Lake Elementary School, teaching Grade 2. Prior to the study, Ms. Tina was not familiar with writer’s workshop, and had not taken any formal courses on writing instruction. Her writing program usually consisted of covering genres of writing through traditional teaching approaches, such as assigning writing prompts and following rigid timelines for completion. Before beginning the research, only one 40 minute period a day was devoted to language arts in Ms. Tina’s class. When undertaking the study, Ms. Tina’s goal was to inspire her students to become critical thinkers and creative writers who could think outside the box and were not afraid to take risks in their writing.
The second teacher was Mr. Ronaldo, who taught Grade 5. He was in his second year of teaching, and had taught Grade 5 in his first year as well. Notably, he was familiar with writer’s workshop and had used writer’s workshop in the final months of his first year. Mr. Ronaldo learned of writer’s workshop during teacher’s college, when one of his host teachers used it. Before using writer’s workshop, Mr. Ronaldo gave specific topics and/or writing prompts to his students for writing. When beginning the study, Mr. Ronaldo’s goal was to develop students’ abilities to transcribe their thoughts and ideas into words. He wanted to encourage students to use their imagination when they developed ideas for their writing pieces.

Ms. Tina’s class contained 30 students, 16 boys and 14 girls. The students were between the ages of 7-8. Meanwhile, Mr. Ronaldo’s class consisted of 20 students, 12 boys and 8 girls. The students in his class were between the ages of 10-11. Predominantly, the students attending the school lived in the surrounding urban area. Most of the students were of middle to upper social economic status. While students were of different ethnic backgrounds, they were all of the Muslim faith.

**Data Collection and Organization**

Prior to the commencement of the study, I met with the two teachers, and discussed what the study entailed. Using Atwell’s (1998) text *In the Middle*, I explained what writer’s workshop was and how it conceptualized the role of the teacher. In addition, I also conducted individual interviews with the two teachers before the study, in order to develop a profile of them as teachers and gauge their prior experiences with writer’s workshop (see Appendix A).

Various methods were used for the purposes of data collection. Observations, which involves selecting and recording behaviours of people at the research site (Merriam, 1998), were an important data source. According to Creswell (2007), observations are useful for generating
in-depth descriptions of organizations or events. Observations occurred over a five month period in which I visited each teacher’s class three times a week during writer’s workshop. Each visit lasted approximately 60 minutes. During observations, I used an approach identified by Kawulich (2005) as ‘observer as participant’. In this method of observation, participants are aware that they are being studied, but have very limited interactions with the researcher. While observing, my primary focus was to make notes on the strategies teachers used to teach, the content that teachers taught, and audio-recording the conferences that teachers held with their focus students. During my observations, I sat at the back of the classrooms, and out of view of the students so my presence would not be a distraction to them. During my observations, my interactions with the teachers and students were minimal.

If I had questions for teachers based on my particular events that I observed, I asked them during seminars. I held seminars with each teacher separately after school, approximately every two weeks. Each seminar was audio-recorded. During these seminars, the teachers were asked to reflect on the events of the prior weeks, what they had learned about writing, and their plans for the upcoming week (see Appendix B). Additional questions were also asked pertaining to specific events in the classes (e.g. Can you explain in greater detail the strategy you used to assist a certain student?). At the conclusion of the study, a second interview was conducted with the teachers to examine how their thoughts had changed over the research period (see Appendix C). Rubrics on which teachers had provided written feedback to students on their writing drafts were also collected from students, in order to examine the feedback that teachers were giving.
My PLC.

To further support the teachers in their implementation of writer’s workshop, four PLC sessions were held over the research period. These sessions took place approximately once a month and were an hour long. The PLCs consisted of the two teachers, Ms. Tina and Mr. Ronaldo, as well as myself. No other PLCs were taking place at the school during this time. My role in the PLCs was that of a facilitator, as I provided a copy of a chapter from a text pertaining to an aspect of writer’s workshop, along with a set of questions that I asked during the sessions (see Appendix D). The articles selected for the four sessions were:


The first article related to establishing rules and routines in writer’s workshop. Meanwhile, the second article was about conferencing, and the various strategies that teachers could use to conference with students. In our third PLC meeting, the teachers discussed an
article on mini-lessons, which not only provided examples of mini-lesson topics, but also provided strategies on how lessons could be more authentic and engaging. Finally, for the fourth PLC session, the teachers read two chapters on assessment and evaluation, which discussed rubric comments, as well as the use of portfolios. Before the first PLC, a youtube video was also shown to the teachers which featured a teacher carrying out a writer’s workshop lesson.

During the sessions, the teachers discussed their thoughts on the articles, what they agreed and disagreed with, as well as their teaching practices related to the topics in the article. Eventually, the teachers began asking questions and sharing concerns they had of students during PLC sessions. These sessions were also audio-recorded. During individual seminars the teachers reflected on how they applied the ideas they read in the articles to their own teaching practices.

Thus, the data sources of the study included observation notes, students’ rubrics, and transcripts from teacher interviews, seminars, PLC sessions, and teacher-student conferences. The observation notes, interviews with the teachers, the seminars, and PLC sessions were used to answer the first research question. The observation notes, interviews with the teachers, seminars, PLC sessions, and rubrics were used to answer the second research question. The observation notes, seminars, and PLC sessions were used to answer the third research question.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews, seminars, and PLC sessions with the teachers, as well as their conferences with students, were all transcribed. Inductive approaches outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2006) were used to analyse and interpret the data. Inductive approaches are intended to facilitate the understanding of complex data through the development of summary themes or
categories from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). Notably, inductive analysis involves examining particulars within the data, and moves to “looking for patterns across individual observations, then arguing for those patterns as having the status of general explanatory statements” (Potter, 1996, p. 151).

The data for each feedback source were separately coded, using my research questions as guides. Table 1 below shows the total number of pages of transcribing and analysis for each data source. Altogether, 555 pages were transcribed and analysed.

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data Sources and Number of Pages</strong></td>
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<td>Mr. Ronaldo</td>
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Based on the research questions, overarching categories were developed. These categories were teachers’ views of writing, and teachers’ views of their roles as writing teachers. Within these categories, subcategories emerged.

1) Teachers’ Views of Writing
   - Writing is a non-restrictive process, which involves ample choice
   - Writing process is non-linear and non-sequential
• Writing is completed for authentic purposes
• Writing should be incorporated in different subjects
• Writing is both objective and subjective
• Writing is a social process
• Writing is a tool for thinking and a form of experimentation
• Writing and drawing are inter-related processes
• Reading and writing are inter-related acts
• Writing should be shared with multiple audiences

2) Teachers’ views of their roles as writing teachers
• Moving towards student ownership
• Using more engaging, interactive, and hands-on lessons
• Providing conversational and reader-based feedback

**Ethical Considerations**

Before beginning the study, I obtained ethical consent from the University of Toronto. I also obtained the Principal’s approval through a consent form for his teachers and students to participate in the research project (see Appendix E). Next, consent from the two teachers was obtained through consent forms (see Appendix F). Consent was also obtained from the parents of the focus students (see Appendix G), as well as the parents of the non-focus students (see Appendix H). Finally, assent from the focus students (see Appendix I) and non-focus students (see Appendix J) was also obtained. Students who assented and whose parents agreed for their children to participate in the research, had pseudonyms developed for them in order to protect their identities. The pseudonyms were used to refer to the students in the report. Students who declined to participate were not mentioned in the observation notes or final report.
Chapter 4

Results

The research questions that formed the framework of the study were: 1) How do teachers’ views on writing and their practices change when participating in PLC discussions to support writer’s workshop implementation? 2) How do teachers’ views of their roles as writing teachers change? 3) What factors influenced these changes? In this section I will provide a description of the two participating teachers’ views on writing and their views of their roles as writing teachers. For each case, I will discuss the themes that arose from my analysis.

Case 1: Ms. Tina

Views on Writing

Over the research period, Ms. Tina presented many thoughts on writing. She learned that writing is a non-restrictive process which involves ample choice; writing process is non-linear and non-sequential; writing is completed for authentic purposes; writing should be incorporated in different subjects; writing is both objective and subjective; writing is a social process; writing is a tool for thinking and a form of experimentation; writing and drawing are inter-related processes; reading and writing are inter-related acts; and writing should be shared with multiple audiences.

Writing is a non-restrictive process which involves ample choice.

Prior to implementing writer’s workshop in her class, Ms. Tina rarely offered choices or freedom to her students in the writing process. Her approach to teaching writing was very traditional, as her students were expected to complete writing exercises in workbooks. These
exercises involved writing a few lines in response to questions. When students engaged in creative writing, it was Ms. Tina who selected the writing prompts for her students.

On a few occasions, Ms. Tina mentioned the apprehension she felt in conducting writer’s workshop, and worried that offering too much freedom to her students would take away from the structure and standardization that she was used to. Nonetheless, during writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina began to significantly change her teaching approach in accordance with the ideals of writer’s workshop, and offered more freedom to her students in writing. While she still decided on the genres that students wrote, they were free to choose their own topics and audience for which they wrote to. For example, in the first writing task, Ms. Tina introduced note writing, and brainstormed the different kinds of notes (e.g. thank you note, apology note, information note, etc.) the students would be able to write, as well as the audiences they could be writing to (e.g. family member, teacher, friend, etc.).

Towards the end of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina began offering students choices and freedom in other ways as well. While peer feedback was originally a regular part of Ms. Tina’s practices, she offered students the opportunity to self-assess their writing on the final writing task. Thus, rather than restricting her students to peer assessment, she gave students the choice to assess themselves on their writing pieces.

Upon her reflection on her views on writing, Ms. Tina stated near the end of writer’s workshop that “I didn’t think that writing could be such a free process, where you could start anywhere and end anywhere. It was very structured for me, it was like math. This is the way to do it, this is the process, step 1, step 2, step 3, step 4. And this is how you get to your final product. Writer’s workshop is changing that definition for me and my students.” Ms. Tina thus, recognized that writing was a free and non-restrictive process, and giving choices to students
was important.

**Writing process is non-linear and non-sequential.**

Another change observed in Ms. Tina’s thoughts on writing was her learning that writing was a non-linear and non-sequential process. At the beginning of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina created a rigid schedule where she announced to students that they would have a certain number of days for brainstorming and completing their rough drafts. She scheduled days for peer feedback and penciled a few days in her calendar for students to work on their good copies. However, with the passage of time, Ms. Tina began showing greater flexibility in her scheduling, upon realizing that her students worked at different paces. While some students would be nearing the end of their brainstorming, others would be half way through their rough drafts, and a few would be awaiting peer feedback. Upon this recognition, Ms. Tina no longer regulated the writing process, but encouraged students to work at their own pace. When asked about this change in her teaching practice, Ms. Tina responded,

Now I’m finding the way I look at writing, there is no well-defined path, the road map is not clear anymore, it is like a jungle now. It’s not like this is the road I am going to take and these are the signs I’m going to hit on the road. The signs are not there. It’s all up to you and it’s more of an adventure as you don’t know where you are going to be heading. Sometimes you find your way to the end and sometimes you go back and re-trace your steps and you might end-up at step 1 or step 3, and you might end up at step 2. It totally doesn’t matter where you are going as long as you are coherently able to put your thoughts on paper, and you are able to share what your ideas were, and you are able to put a lot of detail and thought, on paper… so writing is not that clear-cut step by step structured and linear anymore, it is kind of all over the place, it is kind of a little messy, you know it’s working out, so far it is working out.
Therefore, Ms. Tina began to realize that writing could not be conceptualized as a sequential process, but viewed it as an unpredictable and messy act.

In the middle and end of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina encouraged students to move back and forth between the writing phases. For example, some students brainstormed, wrote, and then brainstormed further when they found that they lacked ideas. Additionally, for procedural writing, Ms. Tina encouraged her students to give peer feedback after the first two days, when students’ ideas were only preliminary. This change in Ms. Tina’s approach was a result of her learning that feedback was important at all stages of writing. Thus, Ms. Tina’s thoughts dramatically evolved from her initial formulaic views on writing, upon her realization that writing was a non-linear process.

**Writing is completed for authentic purposes.**

Prior to writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina’s writing assignments were a means to an end for grading purposes. However, when she began offering more choices and freedom in writer’s workshop, writing started becoming more authentic for students. Students were free to write to individuals of their own choice. For example, while engaged in letter writing, some of the students wrote letters to family members and peers, which they actually gave to the intended audience members. Furthermore, when students prepared their procedural writing pieces, in which they described directions for making or preparing specific items, they had a certain audience in mind. These audiences made the tasks more meaningful for the students. For instance, one student wrote a procedural writing piece on “How to make orange juice” for his younger sibling, to teach him the steps involved in preparing this beverage.

Ms. Tina believed that writing was also authentic when she started incorporating apps in her teaching. Two apps that she used were SnapGuide and Novel Idea, which she projected in
front of the class. The students had a chance to observe first-hand how writing could also take place using apps. This was important for the students because many of the students and/or their parents owned similar gadgets. Ms. Tina remarked after these lessons, “Kids can see that their work has applications in real-life. There are adults using the technology as they are. Writer’s workshop is not something that you do for marks anymore, it is becoming so relevant to their lives, and it is showing them that it has real-life applications.” Ms. Tina recognized that while these students were unlikely to use the modeled apps at home, it would be possible that in the future, students would experiment with these apps with their writing. She believed that by incorporating app technology, she was cultivating students’ interests in writing.

**Writing should be incorporated in different subjects.**

Before writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina rarely incorporated writing in different subject areas. She stated that she had students write journal reflections during Religious studies periods in order to help them consolidate what they had learned during the lesson. However, Ms. Tina remarked that writer’s workshop helped her understand the value of writing, as well as develop a greater appreciation for it. Consequently, she began to incorporate writing more frequently in other curricular areas. Ms. Tina stated, “My students themselves have been looking at this as a writing period, and just as a subject. But now writing is being incorporated in so many different subjects. They are bringing things that they are learning from other subjects, and life in general into their writing.” In addition to writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina had students prepare written reports on an animal project that they had been working on. Additionally, students engaged in writing as part of 3D geometry math projects, in which they wrote about the process of building their structures. Thus, Ms. Tina recognized that writing should not be restricted to language arts, but should also take place during other subjects.
Writing is both objective and subjective.

Ms. Tina was quick to recognize the benefits of writing samples, and incorporated these as a regular part of her teaching practice. When beginning a new writing task, Ms. Tina would model writing of the genre they would be writing, and/or prepare samples of that writing, which she would distribute to all the students. She believed that these writing samples “showed students what the expectations are.” For example, for the first writing that the students completed, note writing, Ms. Tina provided students with “good writing samples” and “bad writing samples.” For the “good samples”, Ms. Tina projected the samples from her laptop on the front screen, and asked students to read them. Meanwhile, for the “bad writing samples”, which lacked details and contained mechanical errors, Ms. Tina asked the class, “What could be added to this writing sample to make it a Level 4?” Ms. Tina provided writing samples for subsequent writing tasks, including letters, post-cards, while modeling procedural and story writing.

During the middle of the research study, however, Ms. Tina’s perspectives on the value of writing samples changed. She stated that before when giving a writing sample she thought:

…this is how you achieve a level 4, so we would write a sample together, so this is what constitutes a good writing piece, this is what I am expecting, now I am expecting that when I give them a sample, it is just a sample, it can be completely different based on the content. Of course the format is similar but the content can vary so much based on student to student. For example when we were doing post-cards, there were many students who chose countries based on their personal experiences, yet there were some students who didn’t have a lot of travelling experiences, who chose to write about Springville [pseudonym] itself, but even in those post-cards, the amount of writing, the
amount of experiences that they had, their experiences, their views of Springville [pseudonym], is so different from student to student… so their own experiences are being reflected a lot in their writing, even though what I expected was that if they wrote about their own city, their writing would be similar but it is not the same at all.

Ms. Tina’s remarks demonstrate the tensions between objectivity vs. subjectivity in writing. While she previously upheld notions supporting the importance of objective standards, participating in PLCs helped Ms. Tina understand the value of students’ experiences which may be represented in their writing. Although the format that students use may be governed by the objective standards, the content of their writing may be different, depending on their unique thoughts and perspectives, an important tenet of writer’s workshop.

**Writing is a social process.**

At the beginning of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina viewed writing as a solitary activity and provided only minimal opportunities for students to socialize and share ideas/feedback with each other. Thus, students would be sitting quietly at their desks during writing time. Any talking that did take place between students was beside the trash can, where some of the girls would congregate, pretending to sharpen their pencils, while in actuality were having a conversation with each other. If students would try to converse with their neighbour at their desks, they were immediately “shhd” by Ms. Tina and reminded about the rule of not socializing during independent work time. The only voice which could be heard during writing time was of Ms. Tina’s, who would be conferencing with her students. If students had questions, they raised their hand and Ms. Tina would go to their desks to answer them. Conversations during peer feedback were also minimal as students were expected to complete peer feedback forms
independently at their desks, and then they briefly came together to discuss the suggestions that they had for their peers.

However, with the passage of time, Ms. Tina began to recognize the value of dialogue as well as the importance of sharing feedback during writing time. Towards the middle of writer’s workshop, she conducted a mini-lesson to discuss the importance of sharing ideas, and also established volume levels with students. A noise meter featuring 4 levels was placed at the front of the class, where Level 4 represented a point when the students could use outdoor voices, Level 3 and 2 were times for quiet voices, while Level 1 was a time for whispering. Thus, Ms. Tina regularly referred to the noise meter and began allowing students to socialize, but insisted that conversations be related to the task at hand. After this day, writing became more of a social process, as students would be freely sharing ideas and seeking assistance from each other. Conversations were almost always on task, and students seemed to be enjoying the new-found freedom of being able to talk during writing time. Ms. Tina stated, “For us to have such conversations and being social; humans are social animals so we can’t deny the kids the chance to have conversations.”

The tensions that Ms. Tina experienced in offering students the freedom to socialize, while managing the class were also evident. Despite her new-found appreciation for socialization, Ms. Tina still had moments where she insisted that students work quietly, perhaps due to her pre-conceived notions of classroom management, and desire to maintain control, or recognition that sometimes students needed quiet time to think and write. When Ms. Tina observed that some students were talking too much, she told them to work independently without any talking. Nonetheless, Ms. Tina’s practices evolved significantly over the research period, and she remarked at the conclusion of the study that the enthusiasm which the students
demonstrated towards writing was due in large part to them having opportunities to share ideas with each other.

**Writing is a tool for thinking and a form of experimentation.**

During the middle of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina introduced ‘writer’s notebook’ in her class, in which the students were free to write anything they wished. Students were encouraged to utilize the notebook to jot down ideas related to present or potential writing pieces that they were working on in class. Ms. Tina emphasized that she would not be checking the notebooks, and that students were free to use them as they wished. Students seemed very excited to have opportunities to write outside of the classroom, and many of the students remarked that they would plan on using their notebooks at home, and while on vacation during the March break. When Ms. Tina was asked for her reasoning for using the notebook, she responded,

So as far as writer’s notebook is concerned, I feel that it is a very useful tool for them because it allows for the thinking process to get started even when we are not in the writing mode, because random ideas can come to them at any time, and once they start writing those ideas down, the ideas and juices start flowing, and then it becomes a circle, so they think of an idea and they write it down and it helps them think of what may be the next step, and before you know it you have a pretty good idea about the direction in which you want your writing to be headed…

Ms. Tina therefore believed that the physical act of writing would lead to further thoughts, which would lead to further writing. In this way, students were able to experiment with their writing by thinking of and jotting down ideas that they intended to use. By referring to the process as being cyclical, Ms. Tina began recognizing the interrelations between thought and
language. Additionally, by providing students with a writer’s notebooks, students were encouraged to think about their writing outside of writer’s workshop as well.

**Writing and drawing are inter-related processes.**

At the beginning of writer’s workshop, students wrote but rarely drew pictures to illustrate what they had written. However, in the middle of writer’s workshop when students were working on post-cards, they were required to draw a picture on their good copies to illustrate the setting and content of what they had written. After Ms. Tina conducted a mini-lesson on drawing items that were relevant to the setting that the students were writing about, the students drew their pictures. Ms. Tina stated, “And they are learning that they can express themselves creatively not just through writing but also through their creations, and being artistic that way.” Upon recognizing the value of drawing, and its interrelationship with writing, Ms. Tina also encouraged students to draw pictures for subsequent writing tasks. Furthermore, she even permitted her students to draw in their writing notebooks, in order to help them think of ideas. Ms. Tina believed that drawing allowed students to think between text and images, as well as stimulated ideas for writing.

**Reading and writing are inter-related acts.**

Ms. Tina also discovered that reading and writing shared a strong connection. When students were writing their post-cards, many of them were having difficulty because they were unable to write from the perspective of someone living in a different country. It was difficult for them to envision the culture of a different setting, especially if they had not visited the country before. Indeed, many of the students were experiencing writer’s block. Consequently, Ms. Tina decided to take her students to the library to have them sign out books related to the country they were writing about. When the students returned with their books, many of them spent their
writer’s workshop time reading about the countries, and making notes on the food, clothing, and houses. The students were devoting much of their time to researching, while writing simultaneously. When asked about the experience, Ms. Tina stated,

…And even while they were reading, before we had got to writer’s workshop, before we had gotten to the rough draft, they were already sharing with me. Oh look I found this in my book, I found this information in Turkey you can say hello in this language. And oh look I found a picture on the clothing. And they had no idea. They were able to say it verbally, but I don’t think they were mentally picturing it, when they were doing it without the research. But now that they had books and pictures in front of them, it became a lot more real to them, and they could relate to it. And culture looks like this in real-life, it is fine to talk about it. This is what pictures of the food looks, and oh this is how it is different from my food, and so the books helped them out a lot, and they wanted to keep going, but there is always a time limit, and we asked them to pause with the book and do a little bit of writing. They brought their books with them so they had that option available so they can go back and refer to the books in their writing.

Ms. Tina recognized the importance of texts and how they provided visual images which helped the students imagine what it would be like to be living in another country. She visited her local library and brought relevant books for her students so that they could read while writing during subsequent writing tasks.

**Writing should be shared with multiple audiences.**

At the beginning of the research period, when students in Ms. Tina’s class completed their writing pieces, Ms. Tina conducted a sharing session where students sat on ‘The Author Chair’ and read their writing pieces to the class. The sharing sessions served as a celebration of
the students’ writing, where all the students sat in a large circle, listened attentively to the student sharing, and clapped at the end to acknowledge the reader. Ms. Tina also encouraged 1-2 students to share positive messages of feedback in order to encourage the readers. Occasionally Ms. Tina offered her own supportive comments (e.g. “I really like how you included so many details in your note”, or “I think that you have done a great job in your body”).

For subsequent writing tasks, Ms. Tina had students share their writing with different audiences. For task 2, Ms. Tina and Mr. Ronaldo paired their students together with each other. The teachers initially partnered the students, but then students were free to share their work with students of their own choice. During the sharing session, the Gr. 5s offered feedback related to the content of the writing. Many of them even remarked on the voice and volume the Gr. 2s used while reading their pieces. While the students stated that they enjoyed sharing their writing with their older peers, Ms. Tina also found that the experience was vital and beneficial for the students because it was “personal” and allowed students to “receive feedback from different points of view.” She elaborated, “When the session was over, the students said they really enjoyed it, they said it was one of their favourite experiences so far within writer’s workshop because they got to step out of that bubble of sharing with their classmates over and over, and they got to share with someone new.” When asked to specifically comment on why it was significant for students to share with a Grade 5 class, Ms. Tina stated,

So I think if we had not chosen a Grade 5 and chosen a younger grade, one that did not have much experience with their writing, or writer’s workshop, we wouldn’t have had such appreciative and such in depth comments that we got, that the Grade 2s really appreciated. Now they are even more excited and even more inspired to write further
and to share with someone new, because sharing with someone new was the highlight of the day.

Consequently, Ms. Tina’s remarks highlight the success of the collaborative sharing session, and demonstrate how important she felt about sharing with older audiences.

For the third writing task, Ms. Tina began to further expand her horizons and the notion of audience. She had been in contact with a Grade 3 teacher at another Islamic school located in a different province, and was able to arrange the sharing of writing with her class as well. Ms. Tina spoke about the importance of sharing writing beyond the classroom, “I’m really excited about that because it is a different audience from before, and kids get exposed to the world outside of the classroom and they get to see how writing is used in real life, and learn that postcards are written to real-life people.” Ms. Tina scanned and emailed all of her students’ postcard writing to students at the other school. A few weeks later, the other teacher emailed Ms. Tina scanned copies of her students’ responses to the writing they had read. Her students were excited to read the comments that they received on their writing pieces and Ms. Tina allocated some class time for her students to read the feedback. Therefore, Ms. Tina’s students were not only sharing their writing with students in their own school, but those in schools across other cities and provinces.

Views of Roles as a Writing Teacher

Over the research period, Ms. Tina’s views of her role as a writing teacher changed considerably. Three themes emerged, which included moving towards student ownership, using more engaging, interactive, and hands-on lessons, and providing conversational and reader-based feedback.
Moving towards student ownership.

Ms. Tina believed in the importance of establishing learning goals and success criteria when beginning new writing tasks. How she implemented this practice and the role she took on throughout the research period varied in each writing task. In the first two writing tasks, Ms. Tina simply wrote down the learning goals and success criteria herself on a chart paper for students. For example, she stated, “The learning goal for this task will be to write amazing notes”, and “Our success criteria will be to make sure that our note includes a greeting, body, closing, periods, and commas.” There was little interaction between the teacher and students on why this goal was made or why/how the criteria were selected. Ms. Tina was the teacher and the students followed her lead.

With subsequent tasks however, Ms. Tina began to utilize more student input when designing learning goals and success criteria. For the third and fourth writing tasks, Ms. Tina used a lot of questioning and prompting to facilitate in the development of the goals and criteria. By dialoguing and having a conversation with students, Ms. Tina began to see herself as a facilitator, rather than as an authoritative teacher. Ms. Tina and the students worked together in establishing the goals and success criteria. Her reasoning behind this change was, “I wanted the students to have more ownership of the task, rather than giving them the learning goals and success criteria myself.” Compared to the first two tasks which took only five minutes to outline the goals and success criteria, the next two tasks took over 20 minutes, due to the interaction involved.

Nonetheless, despite the interaction, lessons were still very much teacher-driven. It was not until the last writing task where Ms. Tina began giving students more say, as in the following example:
Ms. Tina: What is our goal today?

Felicia: Today we are learning how to do fantastic story writing.

Ms. Tina: Great! And what are some things that we should try to include.

*As students respond, Ms. Tina writes the learning goals and success criteria on the chart paper.*

Billy: Write a proper and amazing title.

Frederick: Have a very catchy hook.

Ms. Tina: Yes, it is important that you hook your reader.

James: You should also have transition words, like in procedural writing.

Ms. Tina: Good! And what three parts does a story have?

Stacey: Beginning, middle, and end.

Ron: We can say that the story has a clear beginning, middle, and end.

The dialogue demonstrates a stark contrast between the role that Ms. Tina occupied at the beginning of the research period to the role she took on at the end of writer’s workshop. Ms. Tina then took greater control of the lesson, as students had less of an understanding of the elements of stories. Ms. Tina helped her students develop criteria for having a detailed setting, characters, plot, problem, solution, and pictures.

Upon reflecting on her role as a teacher, Ms. Tina stated,

Well the thing I learned from writer’s workshop every step of the way is that every time I give my students a challenge, or an opportunity to do something that they have never
done before, I am a bit apprehensive going in, but they end up surprising me. They end up impressing me and exceeding my expectations every time. So I guess what I am learning is that I need to give my students more wiggle room to make their own decisions, more freedom to make their own choices, and to become part of the teaching process, not just the learning process. They make their decisions about what we are going to learn, how we are going to learn it, how we are going to assess it, and I think they will be taking more and more ownership of their work, not just in writer’s workshop, not just in language, in other subject areas, the more opportunities they get to be independent, the more creative they could be, I feel the more involved they feel in their learning. They feel more encouraged to participate because it is their own work, not just something the teacher has forced on them. So I think that is what I am taking away, that I need to give more opportunities to students to express themselves, to be free, and to make their own choices. Me myself, I need to step back as much as possible, as I have been doing throughout writer’s workshop, and apply that to other subjects, and let my students be part of that process of teaching.

Ms. Tina’s powerful remarks on her changing role as a teacher demonstrate her insight on the importance of stepping back and empowering students to make their own choices. She realized that when students had more opportunities to express themselves, they were no longer confined by their teacher, and were able to think more creatively.

Ms. Tina also showed changes in her role as a teacher through her implementation of rubrics. For the first four writing tasks, she created the rubrics and simply presented them to the class on a large screen. Ms. Tina discussed the categories that the students were being assessed on and the students took turns reading the level 4 statements in the rubrics.
However, for the final writing task, Ms. Tina allowed students to create the rubric rather than developing it herself. She accomplished this goal by projecting a blank rubric with only Levels 1-4 labelled on it. She asked students to refer to the success criteria, which the students had developed in a previous lesson, and asked to students to use it when developing the rubric categories. Students began suggesting categories to Ms. Tina (e.g. title, hook sentences, characters, etc.) while she typed them up in the rubric. She then asked the students to create level 1-4 statements for each of the categories that they developed. To facilitate this process, she scaffolded students’ thinking by asking questions. Over a period of 25 minutes, Ms. Tina and the students exchanged ideas and developed the rubric. Ms. Tina almost always used the students’ ideas, providing very little of her own input. The next day, Ms. Tina and the students revisited the rubric and Ms. Tina selected different students to read the Level 4 categories. She asked and confirmed that all the students were satisfied with the rubric before ultimately distributing hard copies to the students.

Regarding the process of creating rubrics as well as her role as a teacher, Ms. Tina stated:

It was very interesting to see how they were able to come up with the majority of things I would have put in the rubric. They were using similar terminology, and I think the fact that we had done success criteria in the past, helped them figure out what should go in the rubric, because that’s how they figured out what terminology the teacher was looking for, and what they should be looking for in a good piece of writing. So that went really really well… So they were able to give me a lot of key points that I could have written had I made the rubric on my own, which is very interesting. I hadn’t expected that they’d be able to but it was very impressive that they had learned so much from their
success criteria and their learning goal and they were able to apply it. And that is the actual final rubric that they made, which we will be using to mark their story writing.

By giving more ownership to students, Ms. Tina again learned that her students were more than capable of sufficiently handling tasks that were generally associated with teachers.

**Using more engaging, interactive, and hands-on lessons.**

At the beginning of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina’s approach to conducting mini-lessons was quite traditional. Interactions and dialogue were present, but very controlled. Dialogue only occurred when Ms. Tina asked the class questions and students responded. Students very rarely had opportunities to ask their own questions. If students did attempt to speak out of turn, Ms. Tina immediately told them to “listen attentively” and reminded students about the rule of raising a quiet hand. Similarly, lessons almost always involved Ms. Tina standing at the front of the class, while students were seated on the carpet or at their desks. While Ms. Tina used resources such as books, videos, and samples as visuals for students, she recognized that she could enhance her mini-lessons by incorporating more hands-on activities and by making her lessons even more engaging and fun.

In the middle of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina conducted a lesson related to procedural writing, where she and the class prepared a drink using Rooh-Afza, a traditional Pakistani and Indian drink made with fruit extracts. To begin the lesson, Ms. Tina had placed a ready-made bottle of Rooh-Afza, a large jug of water, a class-set of paper cups, and a stirrer in front of the class. She told the class that she would be selecting students to volunteer in order to create the Rooh-Afza drink. She asked the students to gather around the table and then selected a student to pour some of the Rooh-Afza inside the jug of water. After asking another student to
vigorously mix the Rooh-Afza, she asked the students to return to their desks and recall the steps they used to create the drink.

Ms. Tina: What sentence are we going to start with?

Giny: This is how you make a delicious jug of Rooh-Afza.

Ms. Tina: Yes. And you should have three capitals and one period in the sentence. Remember to start the next step in a new line. What was the first step we used?

Abigail: Pour the Rooh-Afza in the water.

Ms. Tina: Before that. Remember, first you need to have the supplies ready.

Ms. Tina wrote the steps on chart paper, at this point modelling procedural writing for her students. After the lesson, Ms. Tina reviewed the steps by asking students “What was the first step?” “What was the second step?” The lesson was unique because the students were not sitting at their desks or on the carpet, like many of Ms. Tina’s other lessons, but were on their feet and helping Ms. Tina.

Ms. Tina also made her lessons engaging by using apps and projecting her writing through the apps on the screen for the students to see. In one of her lessons, Ms. Tina used an app called SnapGuide for procedural writing. The app allows individuals to combine text with images, to create ‘how-to or DIY’ guides. Ms. Tina and the students decided to provide instructions on how to make a snowman similar to Olaf (i.e. a character from a popular children’s movie, Frozen). She first asked the class about the kinds of materials that would be necessary to create the snowman. She selected students one-by-one to input the materials they thought of on the tablet. The tablet was projecting on a screen, so that all students could see the writing. Following this, Ms. Tina asked students about the steps involved in building the
snowman and had a student draw a snowman on the chalkboard. She inputted the text on the tablet and included the picture with the text. As a follow-up to the lesson, Ms. Tina had some of the focus students type their writing on the tablet in the apps. As a sample of work completed by students, Ms. Tina posted the writing of one of her students on her class website.

When asked to reflect on these lessons, Ms. Tina stated that teachers should engage in “a collaborative approach in which there is interaction and the students are engaged.” Similarly, she began to value “student interruptions in mini-lessons”, so that the teacher was not the only one talking, but the students were sharing in the experience as well. Thus, towards the end of the research period, students would be asking questions more frequently during lessons. Finally, Ms. Tina spoke about how mini-lessons should create a sense of community, demonstrating that the teacher and students work together in mini-lessons to create knowledge and understanding.

Undoubtedly, Ms. Tina’s prior remarks had major implications for the role of a writing teacher. Rather than viewing the teacher as a knowledge dispenser, Ms. Tina believed that students must be actively involved in mini-lessons, and teachers and students must work in collaboration to facilitate students’ understandings’ of pertinent concepts.

Certainly with time, Ms. Tina began approaching mini-lessons differently. Before participating in the PLCs, Ms. Tina often decided mini-lesson topics in advance. Over the course of the research study, she came to realize that mini-lesson topics should be based on the difficulties that students were experiencing in their writing, and consequently began selecting topics based on her students’ needs. For example, when doing story writing, Ms. Tina learned that students were having difficulty in describing characters in their stories, and consequently conducted a lesson on character development. Ms. Tina came to see that her role teacher was to provide students with “tools” that students could use in their writing. She stated,
The teacher has to remember that the strategies are not something sent by God, and it is not something the teacher solely decides on but something that the students decide with the teacher. They can change it as they see, or apply it as they see, and that’s okay. The students need to have the freedom to see what they can take away from the mini-lesson and apply it to their writing. Mini-lessons should be open in that sense, they shouldn’t be saying that this is the right way, this is how you do it, instead this is a suggestion, this is a strategy, and you apply it, and people may apply it in different ways in different places. It’s not something that you teach and it is done. It is something that you apply again and again. It becomes part of their repertoire of strategies or part of their tool kit. It is something they should come back to… Eventually the students will have a wide range or tools that they would have collected that they could use in the future years. And then, slowly and slowly they become better writers because they have a whole set of strategies they can apply.

Ms. Tina’s perspectives on the role of a teacher changed over the course of the research study. She began to appreciate the number of ways in which students may have interpreted what she was teaching. Believing that students should have the choice to use the concepts and “tools” in ways that they wished, Ms. Tina became more flexible in her approach.

Ms. Tina’s changing views of her role as a teacher were not only evident in her mini-lesson approach, but also how she used mentor texts. Mentor texts were particularly used when introducing new forms of writing. Ms. Tina recognized the value of mentor texts, as they not only provided samples for students, but she believed that they promoted student engagement towards writing. For example, at the beginning of writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina read Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse as an introduction to note writing. While the lesson was interactive, the
reading of the text was very traditional. It was Ms. Tina reading the book, asking questions, and ultimately directing the lesson.

**Providing conversational and reader-based feedback.**

Prior to writer’s workshop, conferencing was a rarity in Ms. Tina’s classes. Ms. Tina’s role as a teacher during conferencing changed throughout writer’s workshop. In contrast to leading researchers’ suggestions on conferencing, it was the students who approached Ms. Tina at her desk, rather than Ms. Tina approaching students. When asked about this, she stated, “It seems to put more ownership on them to put the effort in improving their work, because now they are saying hey I would like feedback so they get up and come to me. So it puts the onus on them rather than on the teacher. So I hope this improves their responsibility and the effort that they are putting in their work.” Thus, Ms. Tina’s role in conferencing had important pedagogical implications, and she believed that when students came to her, it made them feel more empowered and responsible to seek feedback.

Before the first round of conferencing, Ms. Tina stated that she wanted to provide students with an opportunity to discuss what they had written, offer supportive comments, and provide 1-2 suggestions on how their work could be improved. However, when actually engaging in the conferences, Ms. Tina gave supportive comments, but made many corrections, and provided several suggestions to her students. After reading an introductory article on writer’s workshop by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), Ms. Tina realized that she needed to be a ‘reader’ and not a ‘corrector’. She stated, “I have been a corrector a lot of times, even when I’m sure I should have been a reader. I’ve realized that after reading this article and having these discussions. I often find that when I see students making mistakes, or they share something that
has mistakes. I often gave feedback of one positive comment of what they did well in, and giving them one constructive comment on how they could improve their writing.”

Later in the research project, Ms. Tina said that she began viewing conferencing as “chatting”, thus taking away the formalities associated with the process. Ms. Tina also intended to limit her talking, in order to hear what the students had to say. When providing suggestions, she wanted to use questioning and scaffolding, rather than directly imposing her ideas on students. Additionally, Ms. Tina no longer placed time stamps on her conferences, as she initially attempted to schedule two-three minutes per student, but now began allowing conferences to run organically. Significantly, some students sat with Ms. Tina for over seven minutes. Meanwhile, in order to position herself as a reader, Ms. Tina began sitting in front her students, rather than beside them. Finally, before conferencing she asked students if she could read their work. Ms. Tina stated that she made these changes, because she wanted students to be audience members for their own writing. She attempted to encourage greater student ownership by inviting them to hear and critique their work. When students read their stories to her, she began responding as an interested reader, which is demonstrated in the following example:

Ms. Tina: I am very excited to see what you have so far. I see that you have written quite a bit of your story so why don’t you read it to me so we could see if there are any suggestions that you want to add or I can think of that you want to add. Ready? And we can even delete things. Do you have a pencil so you can record things? Ready?

Felicia: Once there were…

Ms. Tina: Oh can you start from the top? The beginning, please.
Felicia: Hunt for the Golden Crown. Once there were three fairies who lived in Equestria. It was 2000 years ago when this happened. The land was very modest and trustworthy. But this land attracted a lot of robbers’ attention for the golden crown. The towns’ people never had to worry because the fairies would never let that happen. But one day this changed when the three young rulers were sleeping. A giant came in, snuck into the treasure room and stole the crown. The crown was very special because it kept all the happiness in Equestria. If it were stolen, the happiness would fade and disaster would strike.

Ms. Tina: Oh No! Okay.

Felicia: In the morning, the page… I read it in a story, I don’t know. Oh okay. You want to know what that is?

Ms. Tina: It is someone who can work for the government or in your case, for the fairies.

Felicia: Yeah.

Ms. Tina: And he is kind of like a messenger so he reads notes and news, and announcements and things like that.

Felicia: In the morning, the page read a royal decree to the young rulers. It said that the royal crown had been stolen. The princesses looked around in alarm. They knew it was very special and what would happen if it were gone. So Rosetta decided.

Ms. Tina: Who’s Rosetta?

Felicia: She is one of the fairies.

Ms. Tina: Is that something you can add in the story?
Felicia: Okay.

Therefore, rather than trying to critique students’ work, Ms. Tina tried to be a reader, rather than just a corrector, and listen to what students had to say. She began using more open-ended questions to guide students in the changes they made, so they did not feel compelled to use her feedback. Ms. Tina similarly talked about her struggle to conference with students and about working through her role during the process. She stated,

I guess at the beginning I didn’t have a clear idea of what conferencing is. I took it as an opportunity to tell the students which direction I wanted them to be headed in and bring them back when they are on a different track. So in our conferences I was talking a lot more at the beginning than I should have been and they were sort of agreeing with what I was saying and nodding along and that was it. But as we progressed, I noticed that I wasn’t giving the students enough time to tell me what their ideas are, I am just telling them what mine are. So I tried to change it a bit and I tried to ask them more questions rather than questions with just yes and no answers. And then after that instead of me reading their piece of writing, I asked them to read their piece of writing, rather than the other way around. So when they have read their own piece of work, rather than me telling them that there is something wrong or something missing, they were able to catch that something doesn’t make sense, and they were able to go back and change whatever needed to be changed or add more details of their own, so I think that as writer’s workshop progressed, I was able to give my students more and more independence in conferencing and more ownership over their work, and it became more of a conference where I was facilitating rather than I am directing them and being the leader of the conversation.
Through her experiences in conferencing with students, Ms. Tina realized the difference between facilitating and directing the conference. Additionally, she learned the importance of giving her students more independence and ownership in the conference.

Throughout writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina used rubrics to assess students. The comments she wrote for students varied in form and content throughout the research period. At the beginning of the research project, Ms. Tina’s feedback to students on their writing was minimal. She would simply write, “Excellent” or “Very good work”, or “More details needed.” However, she began realizing the importance of using more specific supportive comments and providing more suggestions to students. Ms. Tina thus, provided suggestions to students pertaining to students’ content as well as their spelling/grammar. For example, in the third round of assessments, Ms. Tina wrote on one of the rubrics, “All the creative details you wrote about Minecraft are fantastic. Perhaps you can add more examples of foods and more information about events or things to do there.”

Over the final months, Ms. Tina continued to provide more detailed feedback. Additionally, she also began to provide more personal remarks (e.g. “I really enjoyed reading your story” and “I was so nervous when the giant was tiptoeing towards the fairies.”) Such remarks demonstrate the changing role of Ms. Tina who initially was providing comments of a few words. However, at the conclusion of the study, Ms. Tina was not only providing criterion-based feedback, but also giving reader-based feedback.

When asked to reflect on the feedback she gave to her students over the course of the year, Ms. Tina stated,

Before, I was the one who had complete control on how the students were graded. It was rubric based that you got this level, and the level itself had descriptions of what
counts as level 4, level 3, and level 2. But I didn’t circle any further details of what
levels they were. I would just give them a few encouraging comments and that was it.
But after we discussed what feedback from a teacher should really be like and comments
on how they could improve their work, I tried to sandwich it in a way they would be able
to take it, not too negative. I would start off with a positive comment and then I
mentioned some constructive criticism on things that they could do better, or add more
details or provide more feedback on their grammar or conventions, or whatever else was
expected, and then I would end with something encouraging as well and then I would
grade them with the final mark at the end. That’s the plan--give them as much feedback
as possible, because that’s our final goal right? The more feedback you give, the more
they have to improve on and work with.

Half-way through the research period Ms. Tina realized that even though she was providing
more detailed feedback, students continued to focus merely on the grades they received, and
paid little attention to the comments that she actually wrote on their final rubrics. In order to
ensure that students were reading and understanding the feedback, she sent letters home to
parents, asking them to have their children rewrite their writing pieces at home using the
suggestions that she had provided them with. When asked about the re-writing process, Ms.
Tina stated,

This was an official assignment, like a homework letter went home with it, so the parents
were also in the loop and could help their child improve. I think that is the key, because
if I did not do that, then on their next assignment, I don’t think they will improve that
much, because they wouldn’t have learned anything from my comments. They wouldn’t
have taken them to heart, and they wouldn’t be able to apply them. So because they
were able to go back and rewrite it, they probably internalized it more, and of course
having to rewrite it probably wasn’t that much fun, so I figured that next time they
would probably do it better the first time, so they wouldn’t have to redo things.

Therefore, Ms. Tina believed that it was necessary for students to repeat writing tasks with the
assistance of parents and incorporate all of the changes that she had suggested.

Case 2: Mr. Ronaldo

Views on Writing

Over the research period, Mr. Ronaldo discussed several thoughts on writing. He
learned that writing is a non-restrictive process which involves ample choice; writing process is
non-linear and non-sequential; writing is completed for authentic purposes; writing should be
incorporated in different subjects; writing is both objective and subjective; writing is a social
process; writing is a tool for thinking and a form of experimentation; writing and drawing are
inter-related processes; reading and writing are inter-related acts; and writing should be shared
with multiple audiences.

Writing is a non-restrictive process which involves ample choice.

At the beginning of the research project, Mr. Ronaldo typically exercised control over
topics and forms for students’ writing, as well as the criteria for assessment. For the first
writing task, students were asked to select an advertisement from a newspaper or magazine, in
accordance with learning goals and success criteria that he had decided on in advance. While
students were free to select their own advertisements, they were expected to work within the
parameters laid out by Mr. Ronaldo, including a paragraph breakdown on how he wanted the
first task to be structured.
Over the course of the research period, Mr. Ronaldo began recognizing the importance of students having the freedom to make their own decisions. For subsequent tasks, Mr. Ronaldo only specified the genres, and students were free to choose their topics and audience. He would often help students choose their topics when they would approach him and seek his assistance in deciding between two topics. Furthermore, during the final writing task, story writing, he prepared a list of over 70 writing prompts for students who were unable to think of their own prompts to help them in making a decision. While Mr. Ronaldo realized that it was important for students to choose their own topics, rather than restricting them with his own, he provided assistance to those who were unable to think of their own topics.

**Writing process is non-linear and non-sequential.**

When asked to share his ideas on writing at the beginning of the research period, Mr. Ronaldo conceptualized writing as a step by step process. For the first writing task, in which students were asked to analyse an advertisement, Mr. Ronaldo used mini-lessons to discuss each portion of the assignment. Day 1 was devoted to discussing the introduction of the writing task, Day 2 was used to explain how to analyse an advertisement, and Day 3 was about how to write the conclusion. The students worked within the parameters laid out by Mr. Ronaldo to complete the task.

Nonetheless, with the passage of time, Mr. Ronaldo began realizing that writing was not a discrete step-by-step process, and he no longer attempted to regulate the writing process. He recognized that students moved back and forth between the phases of writer’s workshop. Towards the middle of the research project, Mr. Ronaldo regularly reminded students that they were not required to begin with brainstorming, and could choose to begin writing and return to brainstorming later. Furthermore, he encouraged students to share their ideas throughout the
writing phase, rather than only when students had completed their rough drafts. He began devoting the final 10 minutes on writer’s workshop days to students’ sharing of their writing with the class.

At the conclusion of the study, Mr. Ronaldo was asked to reflect on the remarks he made at the beginning of writer’s workshop regarding the writing process. He stated,

I think this is the most important thing I have learned as a teacher, and I think the kids have learned this as well. Before the traditional way of thinking about writing is brainstorming, rough copy, good draft, but now I have learned that it may take several rough copies to arrive at a good copy. I think the kids are starting to understand that now. And brainstorming is one of those things that is not necessarily done as a first stage. Sometimes the kids like to dive in and do their writing, and kids have come to me and said I have finished my rough copy, and then they move on to their good copy and say that I think I can do even better… so [writing] definitely is a process, but that process could be different for every writer. So it all depends on the students’ abilities, how they write, and how good of a writer they have become.

Mr. Ronaldo’s remarks capture the essence of the views of the writing process espoused by writers’ workshop theorists: the process varies per student, depending on personal abilities, characteristics, and prior experiences.

Writing is completed for authentic purposes.

At the beginning of the research project, students completed tasks for grading purposes. The first task, the advertisement analysis, was submitted to Mr. Ronaldo, which he assessed and
distributed back to the students. Similarly, the second writing task involved writing news articles, which were also written for Mr. Ronaldo.

It was not until the third writing task that there was clear evidence of Mr. Ronaldo applying what he was learning about the importance of authentic writing tasks. Students wrote letters and were excited because they were able to write to anyone. They chose topics they were passionate about, and related to their interests. While some students prepared letters for hockey general managers suggesting trades their teams could make to win the Stanley Cup, others proposed new laws or suggested amendments to laws that already existed, by writing to councillors. Regarding the experience of letter writing and authentic writing, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

Writing should serve a specific purpose or authentic purpose. It should be written for a particular audience in mind. Some students, a lot of them, pose this question like why are we writing this letter. A specific reason, or just a general reason. A lot of the students decide how they write their letter by thinking about the purpose and who they are writing to. Some students wrote their letter to a friend who they hadn’t seen in a long time because they were on vacation. Some students wrote letters to a councillor because there was an issue in their community that had to be dealt with. Some students in my class had a desire to become professional hockey players so they wrote letters to the general manager of their favourite hockey team of the NHL. Some students are Habs fans or Leafs fans. So once the students identified the purpose of their writing, then they start generating their ideas, and coming up with points on what they should be writing about.
Some of the students also mentioned that they wanted to mail their letters to the people that they were writing to. For the final task, Mr. Ronaldo told students that they would be writing stories, and because students could select their topics and audience, writing was an authentic experience for them.

**Writing should be incorporated in different subjects.**

Prior to writer’s workshop, Mr. Ronaldo rarely incorporated writing in other subjects. However, towards the middle of writer’s workshop, Mr. Ronaldo gained a greater appreciation for writing and recognized that it could be used as a tool for learning in other subject areas. When asked to share his perspectives on the incorporation of writing in other subjects, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

> What we have been doing is we have incorporated more language activities in other subjects. So for example, for math we had the students write a fractions storybook. So we are learning about fractions so they had the opportunity to write a storybook which they had to incorporate what they learned in math about fractions in a story. Once they were done, they actually went to an SK class, and read their story to the SKs. That actually has been great for them.

Thus, students began using writing in math to write storybooks. Additionally, Mr. Ronaldo began using writing more frequently in other curriculum areas. For example, he assigned religious studies brochures for new converts in order to teach them about the religion of Islam.

**Writing is both objective and subjective.**

Mr. Ronaldo often spoke about finding the right balance between establishing structure, while simultaneously offering freedom to students for their creative expression. He recognized
that writing was governed by certain rules, based on the genre, as well as the learning goals and success criteria that the students were expected to follow. At the beginning of writer’s workshop, Mr. Ronaldo stated, “writing involves some structure through the establishment of learning goals and success criteria. It is not entirely subjective.” Consequently, writing tasks at the beginning of writer’s workshop was very specific and restrictive for students. Navigating the tensions between the objectivity and subjectivity of writing was a challenge for him.

Towards the end of writer’s workshop, particularly when students worked on their narrative drafts, Mr. Ronaldo stated that, “Writing has a subjective aspect to it, in the sense that everyone has a different flare when they are writing.” While he used rubrics to assess objective criteria such as conventions and sentence structure, he also realized that all students wrote differently based on their ideas and their experiences.

**Writing is a social process.**

Feedback and idea sharing have always been a regular part of Mr. Ronaldo’s teaching practices. During writing time, students would be socializing and exchanging ideas. They would be asking each other questions, sharing what they had written, and sometimes even having off-topic conversations. While Mr. Ronaldo encouraged this socialization, he reminded students to remain on task. Occasionally, some students socialized too much and became a distraction to their peers. In those situations, Mr. Ronaldo asked the students to work in the library by themselves.

To further facilitate dialogue, Mr. Ronaldo even changed his students’ seating plan so that students were facing each other, rather than merely sitting beside each other in rows. While Mr. Ronaldo found that the seating plan led to more socialization, it also led to disengagement during his mini-lessons, and he consequently changed his seating plan back to how it was
Regarding the importance of socializing, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

It has become more apparent to me that watching the kids go through the process of writing, that writing is definitely a social process. There is this component of exchanging ideas. Students need to exchange their ideas and share their experiences with one another in order for them to feel more comfortable when they are writing and also to generate more ideas. I think the more perspectives from others and the feedback they get from a variety of different people, the more they feel enthusiastic about writing, and the more motivated they are to write. I think one major thing about teaching at this grade level and also about writing in particular is that motivation is a very key factor in order to have students work at their potential and I think the social process of having them communicate with each other, talking to each other about their writing pieces has really helped their motivation. It has really kept them engaged in their writing.

Mr. Ronaldo, thus, acknowledged students’ need to share ideas, and always provided them the time to have these conversations. He believed that such conversations were motivating for students, and having opportunities to collaborate and share ideas would strengthen students’ writing pieces.

**Writing is a tool for thinking and a form of experimentation.**

At the beginning of the research project, Mr. Ronaldo gave students a limited number of days to complete writing tasks. Students were expected to follow certain criteria and complete their writing accordingly. However, with time, Mr. Ronaldo discovered that writing was not a ‘one-shot’ process, but was a craft and involved experimentation. Students in Mr. Ronaldo’s class began writing with a topic in mind, but would change their topics and take their writing in
a different direction. Mr. Ronaldo encouraged students to continuously brainstorm and start again if they were not satisfied with their initial drafts. In fact, writing multiple rough copies was a common occurrence in Mr. Ronaldo’s class, as students willingly wrote 2-3 rough drafts before completing their final copies. When asked about the multiple drafts that students wrote, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

There seems to be an experimental aspect as well. That’s another good thing about the writer’s workshop, as the kids start seeing that writing is a craft, but at the same time they are playing with their ideas, and experimenting with writing so what they originally wrote, they may find that they may go back and change things around and make it a lot better, and what’s interesting to know is that sometimes kids feel it is best that they start over because they feel that their ideas that they have are very different from what they normally had.

In order to facilitate students’ experimentation of ideas, Mr. Ronaldo introduced writer’s notebook in his class during the middle of the research period. He distributed notebooks to students and told them that they could use the notebooks to record ideas when preparing their writing pieces. He even mentioned that the students could take the notebooks home, as ideas of writing could come at any time. Consequently, some of the students referred to their notebooks during the writing process, and used it to ‘experiment’ with ideas. As writing was a craft in Mr. Ronaldo’s class, students were not expected to perfect their writing in their first draft. Mr. Ronaldo acknowledged that students required multiple days to complete their work, and accordingly gave students more time to finalize their writing pieces.

Writing and drawing are inter-related processes.
At the beginning of the research period when students were completing their writing pieces, students were rarely encouraged to use pictures or other forms of text features to express their ideas. Nonetheless, when moving to the second writing task, news article writing, Mr. Ronaldo discovered the importance of text features, and how they may help students display information. He found a news article online, projected it on the screen, and used it to discuss the various features of the article. These included pictures, graphs, charts, and timelines. Mr. Ronaldo encouraged students to utilize similar text features in their writing pieces. He stated, “… so now the students and I are finding out that they don’t have to necessarily write a long writing piece, they could have visuals that could substitute so students can now include text features in their writing which can substitute words. They find it very valuable which they can use in their article.” For example, there was one student who wrote an article about a measles outbreak. He encouraged her to use a chart to show the rise and fall of measles cases, rather than explaining it in a paragraph. He asked another student, who wrote about a basketball trade, to add a chart with statistics. Additionally, Mr. Ronaldo encouraged the students to include charts and pictures in subsequent tasks as well, not only in their good copies, but also in their rough drafts. He believed that the act of drawing could help stimulate students’ thinking. Sometimes students also drew in their writer’s notebook to help them think of ideas.

**Reading and writing are inter-related acts.**

At the beginning of the research period, Mr. Ronaldo did not recognize the importance of sample texts for students writing. It was during the second writing task that Mr. Ronaldo learned about the importance of samples. He introduced news articles by projecting an online article for his students. The next day, however, when he asked his students to begin writing their own articles, many of them were confused, and asked for samples or frames of references they could use to draft their writing pieces. Mr. Ronaldo realized the importance of writing
samples and gave them to his students. Regarding the importance of writing samples, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

Samples give students some direction. A variety of different news articles, particularly from the Toronto Star were selected for the students to see. There was one about the girl that suffered the plane crash. One about the baseball players that were traded for each other. I also brought in an article about a hockey trade that took place. So it was important for them to have a variety of different articles that they can turn to when preparing their own news articles. I tried to use articles that they can relate to and involved children of the same age group as them. I also used news articles that involved things interested in. There were articles about hockey teams because a lot of the boys in my class are big hockey fans. And for the girls, some of the girls were talking about sharing their experiences. We also read an article about a tsunami that took place in Japan so I think that it was important to use articles that related to children. And then they found it a lot easier and they found it a lot better to use them as samples to help them generate their own ideas and writing their own article.

Similarly, Mr. Ronaldo brought sample letters for students for the third writing task, and asked students to bring novels and stories when they were working on their narratives. There were days where some students only looked at samples and did very little writing. That was acceptable to Mr. Ronaldo, provided that they engaged in writing the next day. During conferences, Mr. Ronaldo also recommended to students to look at samples in how text features were used, or how the setting of a story was developed.

For the final writing task, students worked on narratives. Mr. Ronaldo encouraged students to bring books from home, and use those available in the class to facilitate in their
writing. Consequently, during writing time, students were observed reading books to obtain ideas for their own writing.

**Writing should be shared with multiple audiences.**

Mr. Ronaldo recognized the importance of sharing writing. Even before participating in the research study, Mr. Ronaldo had aspirations for starting a pen pal program with a teacher in another city. He believed that, “Sharing writing is important for students because they need acknowledgement from their peers. When students share, they are more motivated to become good writers. Sharing writing also develops a sense of community.” His valuing of students sharing writing was reflected in his teaching practices. For example, for the first writing task, the students shared their writing pieces by reading their entire assignments or selected portions to the class. After each student shared their writing, Mr. Ronaldo asked the class to discuss something that they enjoyed about the writing piece.

For the second writing task, Mr. Ronaldo arranged a sharing session with the other Grade 5 class. While both Grade 5 classes had written news articles, the other Grade 5 section had written articles through a more traditional teaching approach. The students in that class admired the work that Mr. Ronaldo’s class had completed, and particularly liked the text features that they had incorporated. When Mr. Ronaldo’s class was asked how they felt about the experience of sharing with the other Grade 5 class, they stated that they found the experience to be very beneficial because they had a chance to hear feedback from different perspectives and different points of view. Regarding the sharing session, Mr. Ronaldo stated, “It opened up new opportunities for them to get feedback from someone else. I think this whole exchange of getting feedback and receiving feedback is ultimately leading to students becoming more proficient writers.”
For the third writing task, Mr. Ronaldo and Ms. Tina’s classes paired with each other. While the Grade 2s shared their procedural writing pieces, Mr. Ronaldo’s students read their letters to the younger audience. The Grade 5s mentioned that it was wonderful to have students listen to what they had written. Some of the Grade 5 students even stated that the Grade 2s offered feedback to them on how they could improve their writing piece. Sharing was an integral part of writing, even before writer’s workshop became part of writing activities in Mr. Ronaldo’s class.

**Views of Roles as a Writing Teacher**

Over the research period, Mr. Ronaldo’s views of his role as a writing teacher changed considerably. Three themes emerged, which included moving towards student ownership; using more engaging, interactive, and hands-on lessons; and providing conversational and reader-based feedback.

**Moving towards student ownership.**

Mr. Ronaldo’s views of his role as a writing teacher considerably changed over the research period in how he approached the establishment of learning goals and success criteria. For the first writing task, Mr. Ronaldo provided students a handout that outlined specific learning goals and success criteria. The learning goals were developed without the input of students, and Mr. Ronaldo believed that it was the teacher’s responsibility to establish the learning goals and success criteria. Some of these success criteria included, “An introductory paragraph which contains definitions of ‘media’ and ‘advertisements’ along with an explanation of why advertisements should be persuasive”, “A body paragraph which contains essential information of the advertisement, where the advertisement was found (e.g. newspaper’s or magazine’s name), and “A body paragraph with at least four reasons of how the advertisement is
persuasive.” Thus, he gave students a paragraph breakdown on how he wanted the assignment to be structured. Mr. Ronaldo insisted it was important for this particular group of students to have “a lot of structure” and “clear learning goals”, especially at the beginning of writer’s workshop, otherwise he felt that students would not be able to complete assigned writing tasks.

For the second and third writing tasks, Mr. Ronaldo continued to take responsibility of establishing the goals and criteria. These were usually written on the chalk board, and the students copied them down in their notebooks. However, for the final writing task, it was the students who played the role of developing the learning goals and success criteria. Students developed criteria such as “Brainstorming or ideas are well-planned and thought out”, “Interesting title that relates to the story”, and “Well-described characters.” In contrast to the criteria that Mr. Ronaldo developed for the first writing task, these criteria were more open and less rigid. This gave students greater freedom and flexibility when developing their writing pieces.

Regarding the process, he stated,

So it was definitely effective because now it was the students deciding on the learning goals and success criteria and at first the students were definitely excited to see that I was asking them what the learning goals are. So it was a good exercise and a good activity because it got the kids thinking about what the teacher expects from them, as opposed to the teacher giving them the learning goals. Because they had to generate the ideas themselves or generate the learning goals themselves, it helped them realize what is expected of them when they are doing their creative writing.
Mr. Ronaldo recognized the importance and benefits of allowing students to create their own learning goals and success criteria, as it enabled them to take more ownership over the writing task.

Mr. Ronaldo used a similar process in the implementation of rubrics. Initially, Mr. Ronaldo gave rubrics to students at the end of the writing task. Rubrics were developed by Mr. Ronaldo, and students had no input in how they were going to be assessed. However, for the final writing task, Mr. Ronaldo allowed students to create the rubrics. To facilitate this process, Mr. Ronaldo prepared level 1-4 categories for title, and left the remainder of the rubric blank. He encouraged the students to use the completed category as a guide. Regarding the process, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

Well I think the traditional way is that the teachers create rubrics and they go over it with the students in their class. But this time around we had the kids weigh in with their ideas and weigh in on the different things that should be included in the rubrics. That is beneficial for them because number 1, it identifies what the teacher is looking for, and instead of the teacher identifying what the teacher is looking for, the students themselves are identifying what the teacher is looking for.

Therefore, in contrast to previous tasks, Mr. Ronaldo did not develop the rubric but asked his students to make one. He acknowledged that by giving students more ownership in the development of rubrics, it provided them with a clearer understanding of how they were being assessed, and helped them feel a sense of empowerment.

Using more engaging, interactive, and hands-on lessons.

Initially, Mr. Ronaldo’s approach to mini-lessons was very procedural. He would talk to students for 10-15 minutes on topics he had selected using notes he had created in advance.
Occasionally, Mr. Ronaldo would conduct games and activities, but the majority of the lessons involved limited interaction. For example, in one of his lessons Mr. Ronaldo spoke about using ‘voice’. He stated that voice showed personality, had feelings and emotions, and brought the writing to life. Furthermore, he provided strategies on how voice could be added, including the use of big letters and word selection. However, the lesson had very little interaction, as students did not get an opportunity to experiment with using voice. Furthermore, they were not shown any examples of how to use voice in their writing.

It was not until Mr. Ronaldo read a chapter from Nanci Atwell’s (1998) text *In the Middle*, as part of a PLC meeting, half way through the research period that his perspective on mini-lessons began to change. He stated,

But I think now after reading this article, I see mini-lessons as being opportunities for students and teachers to engage and discover, things that they haven’t discovered before about writing, particularly about writing style…. In writing there is so much to discover, and more that students weigh in with their thoughts to the teacher, the more they discover, the more fruitful discussions come up from it, ultimately that shifts to a learning moment. So for mini-lessons before it was very technical for me, these are the things that students need to know and they would learn it, and I would expect them to apply it, but now there is this whole aspect of coming together for the mini-lesson and we would talk about something. What do the kids think, and what do I think? And when we discuss all the ideas, what can we learn from each other?

Mr. Ronaldo repositioned his role from a lecturer to a discussion-facilitator. Mr. Ronaldo acknowledged that he did not have to be the one always speaking, but both the teacher and students could share in the learning process. Emphasizing the notions of ‘discussion’ and
‘discovery’, Mr. Ronaldo acknowledged that he needed to step back, and allow the students to participate more actively in the mini-lessons.

Following the PLC meeting, Mr. Ronaldo repeated his earlier lesson on voice, making it more interactive and engaging for the students. He began the lesson by projecting four passages from a website. Each passage portrayed a different kind of voice. Mr. Ronaldo then played each voice, so that students could hear and read the passages simultaneously. The students then guessed the kind of voice that was being used, prompting a discussion of how specific words were used to promote a certain voice.

Mr. Ronaldo and the students also compared and contrasted the voices to gain a greater perspective on how some voices were similar and different than others. The lesson seemed to be much more effective because the students were engaged and involved. Thus, it was meaningful for them and the students could more readily apply what they had learned in their writing.

While Mr. Ronaldo learned that mini-lessons should promote student participation, he also stated that mini-lessons could create a sense of community. He stated,

After reading the article, I think that mini-lessons could be a forum for students to share what they know, [and] it sort of brings that sense of community, that was very different from what I was thinking about. It is an opportunity for students to share their ideas and their thoughts about what is being covered in one particular mini-lesson. It is something that I did not think of before. It gives me a sense that mini-lessons support the idea that the classrooms are a community and students like to share what they have and that would benefit all students in the class…
Mr. Ronaldo’s changing teaching practices supported this belief that teachers and students are co-constructors of knowledge. In one particular lesson on developing the setting of a story, Mr. Ronaldo took the students outside to the school yard, and asked them to choose a quiet corner and record everything they saw and felt. After 15 minutes students were asked to come back inside and the lesson took on a community type feeling. Students were given turns to share the things that they noticed, while Mr. Ronaldo wrote the responses on the chalk board. He then spoke to the students about using their imagination and paying attention to detail when describing the settings of their own stories.

In order to enhance the engagement levels of students and stimulate their ideas for their own story writing, Mr. Ronaldo began to show his students short films. In one film, a student is bullied by his peers in school, and picked on by his brother at home. The movie followed the ordeal that the young protagonist experienced, and examined how he dealt with the turmoil in his life. After each film, Mr. Ronaldo asked the students to reflect on the plot, the main message behind the films, as well as how students could apply what they had learned in their own writing. Regarding his reasoning for the use of short films, Mr. Ronaldo stated,

So we started our creative writing unit by showing some short films, and this was an opportunity for students to be exposed to creative writing, and drama as well, so they watched these short films to get an idea about how the story or a plot of a film is very important, and how it plays out in terms of how it is acted. One thing that we have been talking about in class is that usually writers are able to help the readers visualize the story being told in their own minds. By showing the short films, this was an opportunity to see how stories are played out and written in real life, and any good movie has a good story and a good plot. So we had a few discussions after watching the short films about the importance of having a good story in short films and movies and it gives the kids an
idea of what they should be thinking when they are trying to come up with their creative writing story.

The use of short films and the discussions that ensued represented a shift in Mr. Ronaldo’s view of his role as a teacher. Prior to this time, Mr. Ronaldo was not using resources to support students’ thinking, and was simply talking to his students about various topics. However, the films served as mentor texts because they provided frames of reference which students could use when composing their own stories.

**Providing conversational and reader-based feedback.**

Conferencing was a challenging aspect of writer’s workshop for Mr. Ronaldo. At the beginning of writer’s workshop, Mr. Ronaldo informed me that his initial goal was to use two questions to structure his conferences with students. He wanted to ask “What have you written so far?” and “What would you like to add to this writing piece?” as well as provide one or two suggestions to help students with their writing. In the first round, Mr. Ronaldo also conferenced with some students multiple times, in order to provide them the necessary assistance. Nonetheless, it was evident that Mr. Ronaldo’s style was very technical, as he was not engaging in a conversation, but was merely holding a question answer session with his students. Furthermore, Mr. Ronaldo’s suggestions were vague, as evident in the example below.

Mr. Ronaldo: Jason what have you written so far?

Jason: Why advertisements can be persuasive and why I would buy this product. I also wrote what advertisements mean, media, what businesses like to do to buy their ad. And how they are persuasive.

Mr. Ronaldo: What else would you like to add?
Jason: I would like to add more points on why the ad can be persuasive. Some examples of whether I would buy the product or not.

Mr. Ronaldo: Okay so far you are off to a good start. It seems as if you are able to organize your thoughts and express them well in your writing. Just a suggestion. When you are describing your advertisement and you are using some adjectives. Also that you are clearly explaining how the advertisement is persuasive so you can possibly use or own personal experience, and talk about your advertisement and why do you think it was persuasive. And make sure you reemphasize the main idea in your writing piece.

Upon reflecting on his first round of transcripts, Mr. Ronaldo realized that he needed to use more supportive comments, as well as provide more specific suggestions to his students. He also wanted to encourage the students to share more of their ideas in the conference. Mr. Ronaldo stated, “I think that the most difficult part of conferencing is just to get them going. Just to get them in the headspace where they start sharing. A lot of the times they have this approach of why do I need to talk about what they have written about. Sometimes they start reading what they have written. That sort of takes away from the effect that the conference would have.” In order to encourage student talk, Mr. Ronaldo began asking more spontaneous questions related to the piece of writing (e.g. where did you get your ideas from? Can you talk about who this writing piece is for?), as opposed to a script set of questions.

Mr. Ronaldo later talked of his role as a ‘reader’ when conducting conferences. He stated,

During the conferencing session you should approach the students as a reader, and someone that is reading their writing piece. I think that students see you in a different lens when you do it this way, and they no longer see you as a teacher for that moment.
They see you as someone who is part of that audience so you are a reader instead of being a teacher, or someone who critiques. Instead they are someone who enjoys what they have written so far. I think that is what the students need. They need to be acknowledged for their writing. They need to feel as though someone has enjoyed their piece of writing, rather than having someone critique it. You need to change this, you need to change that. I think once students feel as though they have connected with the teacher, as someone who is reading their article, then they take more ownership in their writing, and they feel as though they could take it to the next level. They develop an interest to take it to the next level and improving it. I think that is important and it is the greater motivator for students. It is important that when teachers are conferencing with their students, they take this approach, that they are just readers. And you should play it off like you are enjoying reading the piece of writing, like laugh at the funny jokes, enjoy any specific information that is shared in the writing. You can also ask questions like probing questions. So instead of critiquing their work, you are acknowledging what they have written, and have them elaborate on what they have written.

Consequently, in the subsequent rounds of conferencing, Mr. Ronaldo attempted to use a conversational approach. He began providing more specific suggestions, particularly those related to topics he had covered in mini-lessons, and also gave more supportive comments. Additionally, he tried to spend as much time with students as possible. Initially, Mr. Ronaldo limited conferences to 2-3 minutes, but later in the research project, his conferences ran an average of 4-5 minutes. The example below demonstrates a conference excerpt from the end of the research period, where Mr. Ronaldo attempts to take on the role of a ‘reader’.

Mr. Ronaldo: Alright Jason, what have you written so far?
Jason: Well my story is about when it is March Break, I am going on a trip to Seattle. We go to Six Flags, which is an amusement park. When we go there, one of the rides goes on very fast speeds. The characters are a green alien named Jaba, my mom, my dad, and my sister. And my green alien named Jaba is from another planet and when we are on the ride, it flings us in the air, and somehow we end up on Jaba’s planet.

Mr. Ronaldo: Okay so because it is a creative writing story, a lot of the things that you would have thought of maybe influenced by something you had seen like a movie, or a story you have read already, or your own personal experiences. Are there any movies, or personal experiences or stories you have written or seen, influenced your writing?

Jason: Yeah I got six flags from when we went last year in Boston and the ride also from Boston, and the alien Jaba from a few comic books.

Mr. Ronaldo: A few comic books. Okay. Now we have talked a lot about character development as well, I was wondering what were some of the things that you were thinking of when you were coming up with the characters of your story? What were some of the characters you wanted to create?

Jason: I wanted to create a funny character. I wanted him to be a bit slimy. I used a little bit of the comic book’s ideas to help me decide.

Mr. Ronaldo: Okay great, is there anything that you would like to add to the story that you are thinking about adding or considering to add to your story?

Jason: Yeah I’m thinking of adding that when we get to Jaba’s planet, it’s just a matter of getting off, so I am thinking of adding some things I see when I get off at Jaba’s planet.
Mr. Ronaldo: Okay great. Another thing that we talked in class about was the setting, and the importance of having a good setting for your story, that would set the tone, and set the whole idea of your story. What did you think about when you were thinking about the setting of your story?

Jason: Well I was thinking about creating a happy kind of story. So I started off with a sunny, hot day, in spring, first day of March Break. And when we went outside and did activities, it helped me a lot to think of the setting.

Mr. Ronaldo: Okay great, my suggestion to you would be that you can add some dialogue to your story. That will help show the relationship that exists between the characters. Thank you so much Jason.

Jason: You’re welcome.

It was evident that Mr. Ronaldo began asking more questions in order to elicit more responses from his students. In contrast to before, Mr. Ronaldo’s dialogical practices demonstrated a social constructivist approach to learning. He asked Jason where he got his ideas from, what helped him develop his characters, and what his thought process was when developing the setting of the story. Mr. Ronaldo likely asked these questions because it gave him greater insight into why Jason made the decisions he made. Furthermore, when Jason answered Mr. Ronaldo, Mr. Ronaldo gave supportive comments, and responded back to Jason, keeping the conversation moving. Ultimately Mr. Ronaldo discovered that conferencing was about “connecting with students’ life experiences” where the role of the teacher was to “help students transcribe their thoughts into writing.” Mr. Ronaldo also began using conferencing outside of writer’s workshop, as he and his students developed a greater appreciation for the
process. For example, he conducted conferencing when students were working on their speeches for the upcoming speech competition.

Similar changes were observed in Mr. Ronaldo’s feedback to students in rubrics. At the beginning of writer’s workshop, Mr. Ronaldo provided minimal feedback to students, as he wrote a couple of lines of general supportive comments and suggestions. However, with the passage of time, his feedback was not so rubric-rooted and evaluative, as he began to provide comments on portions that he enjoyed reading.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter will begin with a discussion on the four factors that contributed to changes in teachers’ views on writing and as writing teachers. These factors included 1) the teachers’ willingness to modify views and practices, 2) teachers’ collaboration 3) the success of writer’s workshop, and 4) the school context. Following this discussion, this chapter will explore the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research and practice.

Factors Affecting Change

Teachers’ Willingness to Modify Views and Practices

Fullan (2007) stated that change begins with a moral purpose, which aims to make a positive difference in the lives of others. This moral purpose must be shared by all individuals involved in the change process, who must show a desire to adapt and experiment with new teaching approaches (Hall & Hord, 2001). Thus, I initially met with the two teachers, explaining to them what writer’s workshop entailed, its benefits for students, and its close association with the process discourse (Ivanic, 2004). Advocates of the process discourse maintain that writing involves composing processes in the writer’s mind, and learning to write involves both mental processes as well as explicit teaching. However, prior to using writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina’s views on writing instantiated what Ivanic (2004) identified as genre and skills discourses. Proponents of the genre discourse understands writing as a set of text types shaped by the social context. Ms. Tina similarly believed that it was important for students to learn the rules associated with different genres of writing, and her teaching approach consisted of assigning students writing tasks through specific prompts, as she attempted to cover different
genres over the year. There was evidence of the *skills discourse* in Ms. Tina’s practices as well. When students were not writing, Ms. Tina gave them convention worksheets, which she believed were imperative to improve their spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Thus, when asked to participate in the study, Ms. Tina initially expressed some apprehension about embracing the *process discourse*. The feelings of apprehension were unsurprising, considering the binaries that exist between these two discourses (Ivanic, 2004). While the skills discourse of writing focuses on the writing product itself, the process focuses on the process involved in composing the writing. Eventually, Ms. Tina agreed to participate in the project after developing a schedule to ensure that she would be able to cover the various genres over the year.

Prior to the study, Mr. Ronaldo’s views of writing closely aligned with the *creativity discourse* (Ivanic, 2004), as he believed that writing should enhance students’ creativity, as well as allow for their self-expression. As Mr. Ronaldo explained in interviews, these beliefs likely stemmed from Mr. Ronaldo’s experiences with writer’s workshop from the previous school year, when he taught narrative writing, and allowed students to write stories on topics of their own interests. Mr. Ronaldo was more than willing to participate in the research study, likely due to his successful past experiences with writer’s workshop. Therefore, the teachers’ flexibility in modifying their views and practices was an important component in supporting the change process. If the teachers were unwilling to modify their views, changes in practices would likely have not occurred.

**Collaboration**

Collaboration also played an important role in encouraging the teachers to participate, as well as supporting their efforts in the changes they made. In the initial meeting with the teachers, Mr. Ronaldo played the role of an MKO to help alleviate Ms. Tina’s apprehensions
about writer’s workshop. An MKO could refer to a person with a better understanding or ability level, in regards to a particular task, process, or concept at hand than the learner (Vygotsky, 1987). As Mr. Ronaldo had used writer’s workshop in the past, he was able to use his prior experiences to speak about how effective writer’s workshop was in enhancing students’ writing skills, as well as their passion for writing. Consequently, he encouraged Ms. Tina to try it in her own class. Scholars have similarly contended that the support and encouragement which PLC members provide to each other during interactions are powerful forces in the change process (Foord & Haar, 2008; Stoll et al., 2006). A supportive context enables individuals to feel confident when experimenting in their teaching practices, and not feel isolated if they do not experience optimum results. As I informed the teachers that I will be guiding and supporting the teachers, as well as conducting regular meetings to discuss their progress, the teachers felt more at ease about undertaking the change initiative. Significantly, PLC efforts are more likely to sustain when teachers work in collaboration (Stoll et al., 2006), and have opportunities to ask questions to support their thinking (Foord & Haar, 2008).

Consequently, the teachers decided to use writer’s workshop in their classes and embrace the process discourse. Mr. Ronaldo assigned his class an advertisement analysis for his first writing task in which he provided very specific criteria for how he wanted the assignment to be completed. His approach demonstrated a stark contrast from narrative writing tasks he assigned in the past, in which he offered his students ample choice. This contrast was a result of Mr. Ronaldo’s struggles to meet media literacy curricular expectations, while offering students choice and freedom in their work. Nonetheless, upon seeing the kinds of writing that students produced in Ms. Tina’s class, Mr. Ronaldo began recognizing the importance of embracing notions of choice and freedom in subsequent writing tasks. Consequently, he began allowing students to select their own topics and audience, as students were free to write on
topics they wished to and people who they wanted to. Thus, conversations with Ms. Tina helped Mr. Ronaldo in negotiating tensions between *process* and *genre discourses*, which facilitated his understanding of how he could assign writing tasks that align with writer’s workshop. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also noted that change creates a state of disequilibrium, which can be uncomfortable for PLC participants, but an essential aspect for change. The PLC provided Mr. Ronaldo with a supportive context to help him navigate through difficult circumstances and challenging situations that arose during the change process.

Resources also played a significant role in supporting teachers by providing them with a theoretical foundation, as well as a framework for their discussions. At the beginning of the research study, writing was predominantly an independent task, especially in Ms. Tina’s class. She believed that students worked best when they were quiet, and not distracted by those around them. However, after reading Fletcher and Portalupi’s (2001) chapter as part of a PLC meeting, which stated that teachers should encourage students to exchange feedback using “quiet voices” (p. 43), she began realizing how integral it was for students to be able to share ideas and assist their peers with their writing. Mr. Ronaldo’s role was also important here, and he once again served as the MKO. As he had observed his practicum teacher using writer’s workshop during teacher’s college and he had used it in the previous year, Mr. Ronaldo knew that dialoguing was important for students. He stated that in his class he had posted anchor charts which guided students on what effective feedback was to keep students’ conversations on track. He believed that his students really benefitted from sharing ideas with each other. When hearing the benefits of student interaction, Ms. Tina felt more convinced and willing to try it out in her own class. The experience highlighted the critical role that resources play in the change process. Talbert (2010) noted that resources support PLC members by providing them with a theoretical foundation of teaching practices. Furthermore, sharing of information creates a collaborative
culture and leads to a cyclical process of more sharing (Fullan, 2007). Similarly, in my study, sharing of articles supported teachers by providing them with greater insight into facets of writer’s workshop. While the teachers did not always agree with the theoretical ideas they were presented with, the ensuing discussions deepened their knowledge, and gave them opportunities to share related experiences.

Further conversations during PLC sessions led to even greater changes in teachers’ views and their practices eventually began reflecting Ivanic’s (2004) social practices discourse. This discourse emphasizes notions of collaboration and dialoguing amongst students throughout the writing process, and fosters a view that students write for social purposes. To facilitate students’ interactions, the teachers conducted partner tasks and group activities in which students were free to share their rudimentary ideas with each other about their writing. They also began to make peer feedback a regular part of their teaching, enabling students to exchange ideas throughout the writing process. When the teachers saw how beneficial the practice was, they naturally continued to use it in their classes.

Proponents of the social practices discourse also believe that writing is purpose-driven and that learning to write involves real-life contexts and authentic purposes for writing (Ivanic, 2004). Consistent with Ivanic’s social practices discourse, the teachers recognized that writing was exciting and more authentic for students when they wrote to real people. Consequently, they began encouraging students to write for social purposes and real audiences. For example, when engaging in letter writing, students wrote their letters to family members and friends. Similarly, Mr. Ronaldo’s students wrote letters to the Mayor, General Managers of sports teams, and the School Principal. Furthermore, the teachers encouraged their students to share their writing, not only with peers in their own classes, but other classes in the school. Ms. Tina also had students write post-cards and share their writing with a class in a different province. These
constructivist views of writing represented a major change for the teachers, especially considering the context they were working in. Most teachers at the school had students write for contrived purposes, in preparation for standardized testing. However, these teachers recognized that writing was more relevant and meaningful for the students when they wrote for social purposes.

PLC discussions also influenced teachers’ views of their roles that they took on throughout the duration of writer’s workshop. During mini-lessons, both teachers initially viewed their roles as lesson directors, rather than lesson facilitators. While the former entails that teachers are directing and controlling lessons by directly transmitting knowledge to students, the latter assumes that teachers are using questioning and helping students to ‘discover’ knowledge. However, after reading a chapter by Atwell (1998) on mini-lessons, the teachers learned that they needed to incorporate more hands-on activities and use technology to facilitate students’ understandings of writing concepts. Inspired by the article, the teachers believed that their roles in mini-lessons were to provide students with tools and a paint brush and see what the students were able to create. Therefore, PLC article discussions strongly influenced the teachers’ roles in mini-lessons.

Similar role transformations were apparent in teacher conferencing. Ms. Tina initially viewed conferences as opportunities to correct students' writing and provide feedback to students on their writing in a limited amount of time. In contrast to Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), who recommended that teachers use their first conferences to praise students' work, Ms. Tina provided many suggestions to her students. Thus, at the beginning of the research period, Ms. Tina admittedly viewed herself as a corrector. She identified errors and provided numerous suggestions for improvement. Meanwhile, Mr. Ronaldo followed Atwell’s (1998) suggestion of keeping conferences short and asking two questions, “What are you writing about?” and “What
would you like to add?” He eventually provided 1-2 suggestions to the students on their writing. His suggestions would be very general and thus, unhelpful for the students. Mr. Ronaldo rarely deviated from this technical approach. Eventually, after reading Fletcher and Portalupi’s (2001) chapter on conferencing for a PLC meeting, and having an ensuing discussion, the teachers learned that they needed to serve as readers rather than just correctors. They realized that they should use dialogical practices to encourage their students to participate more in the conferences. Instead of directly pointing out errors in students’ writings, they also realized that they needed to ask more open-ended questions to elicit students’ responses. They believed that this approach would help students discover their own mistakes, and inspire them to make their own changes. Thus, the role transformation in both teachers was a result of teachers’ participation in PLCs and having discussions with each other.

Success of Writer’s Workshop

Researchers have argued that when undertaking initiatives, the innovation must be perceived as being advantageous, of high quality, and practical by those implementing it (Fullan, 1997; Rogers, 1995). Stoll et al. (2006) also stated that when PLC members reflect on student data, and acknowledge positive benefits of their initiatives, teachers are likely to continue on with change initiatives. During the first month of its implementation, the teachers began realizing how effective it was to grant students choices in their writing. For example, when Ms. Tina introduced note writing to her class, students were free to choose their audience as well as topics related to their personal interests. She began noticing that students were excited and looked forward to writer’s workshop, and also realized that students were writing with greater proficiency. Similarly, Mr. Ronaldo’s students also showed great enthusiasm for writing tasks, and he recognized that students’ writing skills enhanced due to all of the feedback they the students were receiving. When the teachers saw that their teaching was having a
positive impact on student learning, it reinforced their teaching practices, and helped to sustain the change process.

Fullan (2007) deemed that successful change requires three critical components: 1) the use of new or revised materials (e.g., curriculum or new technology), 2) the use of new teaching approaches (e.g. teaching strategies or activities), and 3) the transformation of beliefs (e.g., pedagogical changes). Changes in educational practice are only achieved when these components take place simultaneously. Thus, the success of writer’s workshop paved the way for teachers to further embrace writer’s workshop and the *process discourse*. Consistent with the research scholarship on writer’s workshop, the teachers not only offered choice in topics, but also in how they approached the writing process. Upon observing their students write using the writing process, the teachers recognized that writing was an unpredictable and messy process, and that regulating the writing process was unfair to students. Students in both classes were allowed to work at their own pace. Consequently, both Ms. Tina and Mr. Ronaldo began encouraging students to move back and forth between the various phases of the writing process. For example, students were asked to brainstorm throughout their writing, rather than solely at the beginning. Moreover, students began exchanging feedback with their peers throughout the writing process rather than at the end of their rough drafts. Mr. Ronaldo even encouraged his students to work on multiple rough drafts, until they felt satisfied with their writing. The initial success of writer’s workshop led to further embracement of the *process discourse*, leading to further changes in their views on writing.

Throughout the research, Ms. Tina and Mr. Ronaldo examined students’ performance on writing tasks by looking at their final grades and realized that students’ writing was significantly improving. This motivated the teachers to utilize writer’s workshop in its entirety. The teachers began encouraging students to use books when drafting their writing, which reflected Ivanic’s
creative and social practices discourse. According to Ivanic (2004), reading good writing by others provides students with models, and enhances their writing. Thus, a reciprocal relationship exists between reading and writing (Ivanic, 2004). Ms. Tina realized how vital texts were when her students were working on post-cards. When she asked them to prepare post-cards by pretending to write from a different country, she recognized the struggles that students experienced in writing about a culture that was otherwise foreign to them. Consequently, she had students visit the library and select books related to countries from which they were pretending to write from. When students returned, they read their books and wrote their post-cards simultaneously. Indeed, they successfully used information from their texts while composing their writing pieces. Ms. Tina believed that the texts not only provided helpful information, but also provided visual images which enabled students to imagine what it would be like to be living in another country. Consequently, for subsequent writing tasks, Ms. Tina had texts available for students in order to help them with their writing. Often it was observed that students were reading books and working on their writing simultaneously.

Similarly, Mr. Ronaldo realized that his students experienced difficulty when writing without samples. When students were working on writing their news articles, many of them were having difficulty and requested that Mr. Ronaldo bring in samples or examples of articles that they could use to write their own pieces. Eventually, when students engaged in narrative writing, Mr. Ronaldo encouraged students to bring texts from home, or use those in the class to facilitate in developing ideas for their own writing. Thus, Mr. Ronaldo ensured that for subsequent writing tasks, students would have samples and texts available to guide their writing. Such texts served as mentor texts, as they provided students with examples on how to draft their own writing (Fletcher, 2011). According to Mr. Ronaldo, these texts were beneficial to students
because they provided students with a framework of how to write articles, while helping them generate their own ideas.

**School Context**

The final component was the school context, which played an important role in impacting Ms. Tina’s decision to participate in the research. Prior to participating in the research, Ms. Tina believed that offering students too much freedom in their writing would detract from the structure of her class, and cause her to fall behind in the curriculum. This was a concern to her because she believed that the more time she spent on individual writing tasks, the less likely it would be for her to cover the different writing genres. It was imperative for Ms. Tina that her students write proficiently in all genres to be prepared for the challenges of Grade 3, which featured the provincial testing. As the school placed heavy emphasis on provincial testing, Ms. Tina knew that if her students’ writing skills were not adequately developed by the end of the year, she would be accountable. Aforementioned, Ms. Tina and I developed a schedule to ensure that she would be able to successfully implement writer’s workshop, as well as cover her genres of writing over the year.

The school context also influenced teachers’ views on writing. As the teachers began embracing the *social practices discourse* and allowed students to interact and exchange ideas, the school culture both supported and hindered teachers’ views on students’ socialization practices. Fullan (2007) identified “the social conditions of change, the organization or setting in which people work, and the planned and unplanned events and activities that influence whether or not given change attempts will be productive” (p. 93) as critical factors which affect implementation of new practices. As the school prescribed to the Tribes philosophy, which fostered a sense of community amongst students, the students felt comfortable in exchanging
ideas with each other. Furthermore, as Islamic principles promoted similar feelings of positivity and mutual respect amongst students, these factors also supported teachers’ views on socialization. Nonetheless, both teachers also experienced a level of discomfort in allowing student socialization to occur on a regular basis. Mr. Ronaldo’s classroom was small and located directly beside the school staffroom. On a few occasions, he stated that he did not want administrative school members to develop a bad impression of his classroom management if they were to see that his students were regularly socializing during class time. He believed that not all staff members at the school understood that students could be learning while talking, as they believed that students should be absolutely quiet during work time. Consequently, Mr. Ronaldo had to regularly manage the noise level of his class. When students were extremely disruptive, Mr. Ronaldo sent them to the library to provide them with a quiet space to do their work. Mr. Tina as well regularly circulated around the room, cognizant of the noise level. When engaging in writer’s workshop, Ms. Tina almost always kept her door closed, preventing noise to carry out of the room.

Reflecting Ivanic’s creative discourse, the teachers encouraged students to use books while drafting their writing, and these practices were supported by River Lake’s various reading programs and activities. The school implemented the DEAR program, which consisted of a daily 20 minute reading block. The school also participated in fundraising programs such as the Multiple Sclerosis Society, which motivated students to read with contests and prizes. A book fair also took place annually at the school, in which students purchased books at a nominal price. Additionally, River Lake featured a library which contained a wide array of books, and students visited the library at least once a week. The classrooms had books too, which were readily available for the students to read. In these regards, the school culture also instilled a sense of reading in the students and supported teachers in their practices.
Certainly, the school context largely impacted the roles taken up by Mr. Ronaldo and Ms. Tina throughout the study. For example, Ms. Tina experienced tensions in her role as a teacher when providing feedback to students in their writing. While Atwell (1998) suggested that teachers individualize criteria for students based on their needs, Ms. Tina stated that this was difficult for her to do because parents wanted objective criteria to see how their children were performing. In her opinion, parents were sending children to the school in order to give them a greater advantage over children in other schools. She also believed that as the school fostered a competitive feeling amongst students, she could not simply individualize criteria, but had to measure students learning against objective criteria. In this way, Ms. Tina felt restricted in implementing facets of writer’s workshop in their entirety due to perceived administrative and parental pressure.

The school context also shaped Mr. Ronaldo’s teaching practices. During the middle stages of the research period, Mr. Ronaldo requested that his class take a week’s break from writer’s workshop. He asked for this time because he said he was falling behind in other areas of the curriculum and had to use the time to get caught up in his other subjects. He also stated that some students were having difficulty handling the extraneous workload. He did not want parents to complain about the workload, or to be concerned that other subject areas were not being covered sufficiently. In this school, students were not only learning the academic subjects, but had additional work in two religious studies subjects, resulting in a significant workload. Hence, Mr. Ronaldo felt the need to manage the amount of writing students did, in order to address parental concerns and to carry out school expectations.

Fullan (1997) acknowledged that many innovations are adopted but cannot be fully implemented if they did not completely align with the school culture. Thus, while the teachers attempted to give greater ownership to students, they realized that they were restricted due to
administrative and parental expectations, as well as school norms. While they certainly gave greater ownership students in learning tasks, the genres of writing covered and the amount of time spent on them was still largely decided by the teachers. This was likely due to teachers striving to ensure that their students were adequately prepared for future grades. Despite showing a major shift in teaching practices, both teachers remind us of the role that school climate plays in supporting or hindering any change initiatives.

**Limitations**

Case studies give voices to participants and allow researchers to examine individuals’ thoughts and practices. This case study enabled the researcher to hear the voices of participants that are otherwise not heard; new teachers utilizing the writer’s workshop approach. More specifically, the study allowed the researcher to gain insight into teachers’ thoughts of writing and how these thoughts changed over time. However, case studies by nature are bound by time and place, and thus lack external validity (Yin, 2004). As this study took place in a unique context, an Islamic School with various institutionalized practices, traditions, and policies, results cannot be generalized to other settings, as other schools will have different cultures, practices, and programs in place. However, as the purpose of the research was to explore how the school’s various programs and practices impacted teachers’ views on writing, the context of the research was actually important to this study. Additionally, as more research is needed on how teachers could be taught to teach writing (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007) as well as new teachers’ experiences of using writer’s workshop (Feinberg, 2007), my study makes vital contributions to these fields.

Secondly, my own role in the study in regards to its limitations is worth exploring, as my own biases as a researcher likely also entered the study. Stake (2010) noted that all researchers
have biases. To mitigate the effects of research bias, researchers must self-disclose assumptions, beliefs, and biases that may shape their inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to triangulate data, by gathering information from multiple sources to better understand each case (Creswell, 2007). As there was a possibility that my views on writer’s workshop could have also influenced my interactions with the research participants, I tried to remain objective and did not consciously impose my perspectives on the teachers, nor dictate their practices, in order to mitigate their effects of my influence. I used multiple sources to obtain data about my cases including regular observations, PLC sessions, seminars, and interviews. During seminars and interviews, I asked open-ended questions, in order to allow the teachers to answer freely and openly.

Finally, it is also possible that the research participants purposely attempted to change their teaching, as they were conscious of the fact that they were being studied by their former colleague and wanted to help me with my research. Their willingness and openness to change may be reflective of their relationship with me, the researcher. Although I recognize that this is a limitation to the generalizability and validity of the findings, it can also be seen as supportive of my findings regarding the importance of positive relationships between the members of PLCs.

**Implications**

**For Research**

This study has highlighted that numerous key factors associated with PLCs help in sustaining change. Based on the findings from this study, further research could involve interviewing students and parents to see the impact that they believe the PLC model and the
teachers’ new practices have had on the students’ education. An interview could also take place with the school Principal to discern his perspectives on the PLC model, as well as to investigate how school administrators could impact the change process. Similar research studies could also take place in other public and private school settings, to compare and contrast factors that may impact the change process in different contexts. As a follow-up to this study, a similar study could be conducted on a larger scale to examine the impact that PLC has on change with a greater number of participants.

In addition, research could investigate how collaborative structures could be enhanced in PLCs and what roles change leaders play in this process. Researchers could also examine ways to assess the effectiveness of PLCs. What distinguishes effective PLCs from nominal PLCs? Finally, similar studies could be undertaken on a larger scale with more teachers across different schools and school boards. This will enable teachers to not only share ideas with colleagues in their immediate settings, but also with those working in other contexts. Such research could explore the logistics of setting up research studies involving multiple teachers across different districts, and perhaps examine the effectiveness of online PLCs in supporting the change process.

For Practice

My research supports the implementation of PLCs in school settings. As both participating teachers found the PLC sessions to be extremely beneficial, an important implication of the study is for teachers to use PLCs to enhance students’ writing. At schools such as River Lake Elementary, where professional development tends to occur through traditional approaches such as lectures and workshops, administrators must create more opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues in PLC sessions. Administrators can
accomplish this task by scheduling regular time for teachers to meet during or after school. These sessions must revolve around specific goals which are developed by the teachers and be based on mutual trust between teachers. They may involve teachers sharing specific experiences, ideas, and/or resources to support their overall development, as well as allow teachers to ask questions. PLCs will be beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, it will allow teachers to collaborate with others and not merely work in isolation. Secondly, it will enable teachers to develop more innovative practices to support students’ learning, rather than relying on traditional approaches. Finally, these PLC sessions will likely be more relevant and meaningful, because they will be able to discuss issues in their class first-hand and utilize approaches specific to their classes.

In addition, the administrator’s role in establishing a PLC culture in their school is also vital. Administrators need to be given some guidelines on how PLCs could be implemented. Consequently, administrators will require support from policy-makers, who must develop guidelines on how they could support the implementation of PLCs in school settings.

As my future plan is to work as a teacher, I hope to work with administration in order to initiate and facilitate PLCs and writer’s workshop at my new school. Whether I work at River Lake or another school, I will implement these practices by meeting with teachers in small groups and providing them with information on what these approaches entail, and how they could be initiated. Furthermore, I will discuss the benefits of PLCs and writer’s workshop with the teachers, so that they understand the research and wisdom behind these approaches.

At the conclusion of the study both teacher participants remarked that it was important for a wide-range of mentor texts to be readily available for teachers to be able to use. Thus, I plan to develop a writer’s workshop library at the school with books for varying grade levels,
which teachers could use to teach different aspects of writing. I will provide a list of the books to all the teachers, highlighting which aspects of writing they could be used to teach.

Additionally, the teachers participating in my study also mentioned that knowledge of writing apps would also be beneficial for them. Therefore, I will ask the School Principal for a budget to purchase iPads that will be available for the teachers to use on a sign-out basis. On these iPads, I will download various apps that teachers could use to enhance their writing programs. The creation of PLCs will therefore, allow writing teachers to share their experiences of successes and challenges.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Teacher (Beginning of the Study)

1. How long have you been teaching for?

2. How many courses have you taken on teaching writing?

3. Do you enjoy writing?

4. Do you write when you are at home? What do you write about?

5. Do you share your writing with others?

6. Can you talk about a piece of writing from the past that you still remember?

7. What kind of an environment do you prefer to write in (e.g. quiet, noisy, etc.)?

8. Do you try incorporating writing in other areas of the curriculum? How?

9. How did you learn of writer’s workshop?

10. What challenges have you experienced in using writer’s workshop?

11. Can you give an example of what has worked well under writer’s workshop?

12. What are your goals for your students as writers?
Appendix B

Guiding Questions for Weekly Seminar

1. How do you think writer’s workshop went this week?
2. What have you noticed about students’ writing since they started giving feedback?
3. What have you noticed about their feedback to their peers?
4. How have you helped your students in giving more useful feedback?
5. What have you been trying to do to help them with their writing?
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Teacher (End of the Study)

1. Can you talk about your overall experience of conducting writer’s workshop and examples of what you thought worked well?

2. What effects do you think writer’s workshop has had on students’ writing, especially in comparison to other approaches you have used in the past?

3. One aspect of writer’s workshop that was used regularly was ‘peer feedback’. How helpful do you think peer feedback was for the students’ writing? Which training strategies do you think were most beneficial?

4. What challenges have you experienced in using writer’s workshop?

5. How would you describe what a Professional Learning Community is? Did you find our Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings beneficial? If yes, how beneficial did you find our meetings, in terms of having opportunities to share ideas and experiences with each other?

6. In our 1st PLC meeting, entitled “Launching the Workshop”, we talked about establishing routines, providing time for students to socialize, and using mentor texts. How have you tried incorporating these ideas in your teaching?

7. In our 2nd PLC meeting, entitled “Conferring with Writers”, we discussed different conference strategies. How have your thoughts on conferencing changed from when you first started using writer’s workshop?

8. Our 3rd PLC meeting focused on mini-lessons. What have you tried to do differently in planning and carrying out mini-lessons after our article discussion?

9. Our 4th PLC meeting involved discussing assessment and evaluation strategies. How have you tried to incorporate the ideas from that PLC in your teaching practices?
10. Over the research period, you have expressed several different thoughts on ‘writing’.

Now that we are at the conclusion of writer’s workshop, can you share what your current thoughts on ‘writing’ are?

11. Would you like to implement writer’s workshop in your class again next year?

What aspects would you like to carry out again, and which parts (if any) would you disregard?

12. What kind of support in terms of resources would you like to support you in implementing writer’s workshop?
Appendix D

PLC Article Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts on the article?
2. Which parts seem workable and which parts seem unrealistic?
3. Which parts can you see yourself implementing?
4. What would you need to happen for you to be able to implement certain aspects of the article?
Appendix E

Consent Form for Principal

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5S 1V6

Dear Principal,

Ms. Tina and Mr. Ronaldo have agreed to take part in a research study on their implementation of writer’s workshop.

My study will take place over five months from December to April. I will visit the two teachers’ classes three times a week to observe their implementation of writer’s workshop during language arts periods. This approach will involve students writing in various genres, and giving feedback to each other. I will also be observing and audio-recording the teachers’ conferences with their students about their work, and will be making notes of the feedback that they give to their students on their final writing assignments. The teachers will also be taking part in interviews at the beginning and conclusion of the study, as well as weekly seminars at the school to discuss their thoughts on the week’s events. Finally, the teachers will participate in monthly Professional Learning Community sessions in which they will discuss articles related to writer’s workshop. All of these sessions will be audio-recorded.

Additionally, I will be closely observing ten students in each class, and audio-recording their peer feedback sessions. These students will also take part in interviews before and after the study. They will be asked about their writing habits and experiences with peer feedback.

I plan to publish and present my findings in scholarly and professional publications and conferences. The data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office for five years after completion of the study and then destroyed. The rights of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of all participants will be respected through the use of pseudonyms for all people and the school. Only I will know the actual names of participants, and I pledge not to reveal this information. There is no conflict of interest for me in this study. I will be happy to provide you with copies of publications resulting from this study. This study has been approved by the University of Toronto ethics review office and by the school board ethics committee. Ethics approvals are attached.
If you consent to have your staff and students participate in this research, please sign and
return one copy of the attached consent form, and keep a copy of this letter and the consent form
for your records. If you would like a copy of my final report, please check the appropriate box on
the consent form. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, if you
contact me at mobeen.uddin@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Shelley
Stagg Peterson at shelleystagg.peterson@utoronto.ca or 416-978-0329, and may contact the
University of Toronto ethics review office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by telephone at 416-
946-3273.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Mobeen Uddin, Ph.D. Student
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto

Please return one signed copy and retain the other for your records.
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I consent for my staff member and students to participate in Mr. Mobeen Uddin’s research. The researcher has explained orally and in writing the purpose of the study, what participation will entail and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study. My questions have been answered to my full satisfaction. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and am free to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. I understand that the researcher working on this study will keep the data confidential. Anonymity will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms for the school, teacher, and students. I understand that the researcher intends to present findings in scholarly and professional presentations and publications.

I understand that if I have questions or concerns about participant rights and ethical conduct of research, I can contact the researcher.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

Date: ____________________

Name (please print): ______________________________________

_______________________________________

Signature

Please send the results of the study ______Yes  ______No

Email address: _______________________________________
Appendix F

Consent Form for Teacher

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5S 1V6

Dear Teacher,

This is the formal invitation to participate in the research project that I am conducting. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study.

The study will examine your implementation of the writer’s workshop approach, your thoughts on writing and role as a writing teacher, and the types of feedback you give to students on their final writing products. Consequently, my observations will potentially lead to vital contributions to the scholarly field regarding teachers’ conceptualizations of writing and how these may change over the research period.

I am requesting that you allow me to visit your class thrice a week, from December 2014 to April, 2015 to observe your teaching as well as your interactions with students. I will be interested in the approaches you utilize to teaching writing and how you conference with students about their work. I would like to audio-record your conferences with your students for later analysis. I am also requesting that you can discuss your perspectives on writing and feedback with me through an interview before and after the observation period. Additionally, I would like to conduct weekly seminars in order to gauge your perspectives of writer’s workshop. Questions that I ask you at this time may include, “How did you find Writer’s Workshop went this week?” and “What do you think of teacher and peer feedback?” I would like to audio-record these sessions as well. Finally, I would like you to participate in monthly Professional Learning Community sessions which will involve reading articles pertaining to writer’s workshop, and answering questions. I would like to audio-record these sessions as well.

Additionally, I will appreciate if you can select a diverse sample of ten students, including boys and girls, students with a range of writing abilities, and some students with mother tongues other than English. I will be interested in observing these students during their peer feedback sessions and making notes of the feedback that they are giving to each other. Finally, I would like to photocopy the rubrics you give to the ten students to assess their written work, as well as photocopy the written feedback you give to them.
Results from this study will inform other teachers on how to implement writer’s workshop in their classes and how teachers’ thoughts on writing may change over the research period. As you will be regularly reflecting on your teaching, you could potentially become an even better teacher. Despite these benefits, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable with some of the interview questions regarding writing. You may decline in answering any questions, if this may be the case.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Please note that the research is independent of the school, and your decision to participate (or not) will not affect your job security, or reputation in the school. During interviews, you may decline to answer any question or any parts of the procedures/tasks. If you choose to withdraw during the research, any data obtained from you will be immediately deleted.

I plan to publish and present my findings in scholarly and professional publications and conferences. The data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office for five years after completion of the study and then destroyed. The rights of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of all participants will be respected through the use of pseudonyms for all people and the school. Only I will know the actual names of participants, and I will not to reveal this information. I will be happy to provide you with copies of publications resulting from this study.

If you choose to consent to participate in this research, please sign and return one copy of the attached consent form, and keep a copy of this letter and the consent form for your records. If you would like a copy of my final report, please check the appropriate box on the consent form. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, if you contact me at mobeen.uddin@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson at shelleystagg.peterson@utoronto.ca or 416-978-0329, and may contact the University of Toronto ethics review office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by telephone at 416-946-3273.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Mobeen Uddin, Ph.D. Student
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I consent to participation in Mr. Mobeen Uddin’s research. The researcher has explained orally and in writing the purpose of the study, what participation will entail and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study. My questions have been answered to my full satisfaction. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and am free to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. I understand that the researcher working on this study will keep the data confidential. Anonymity will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms for me, my students, and school. I understand that the researcher intends to present findings in scholarly and professional presentations and publications.

I understand that if I have questions or concerns about participant rights and ethical conduct of research, I can contact the researcher.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

Date: ____________________

Name (please print): ______________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Signature

Please send the results of the study ______Yes ______No

Email address: ________________________________________________
Appendix G

Consent Form for Focus Child

Greetings!

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto. Your child’s teacher has agreed to take part in my research study on *Elementary Teachers’ and Students’ Experiences with Writer’s Workshop*. Your child’s teacher is allowing me to conduct research in her class between December 2014 and April 2015. This research will involve observations of your child’s teacher as she implements writer’s workshop. Writer’s workshop is an approach in which students write in different genres and give feedback to their peers on their written work. I will be interested in how students’ writing progresses over the research period, as well as the kinds of feedback they give to each other on their work.

Your child’s name was of the ten recommended by the class teacher to be a focus child for this study. The sample of students selected, include boys and girls from diverse cultural backgrounds and of a range of writing abilities. I invite your child to participate in this research. If you agree, I will be audio-recording your child’s conferences with his/her teacher on their writing. Additionally, your child will take part in peer feedback sessions during class time, in which he/she will share their writing with their peers and provide feedback to them. These sessions will also be audio-recorded. I would also like to photocopy the written feedback as well as the rubrics that the teacher hands back to your child. Finally, I would like to interview your child before and after the study about their writing habits and experiences with peer feedback. Questions that I will ask your child may include “Do you like writing?”, and “How often do you write?” I would like to audio-record these interviews as well.

The benefits of participating in the study are those associated with taking part in writer’s workshop. By having many opportunities to write, the students should experience growth in their writing. Despite these benefits, it is possible that during the research, your child may feel upset with some of the feedback they receive on their work. However, before the feedback sessions begin, the classroom teacher will provide guidance on how to provide meaningful feedback that does not hurt peers’ self-esteem. Additionally, it is possible that your child may feel uncomfortable in answering an interview question regarding writing. Again, your child will be allowed to decline in answering any questions that he/she prefers not to answer. Please note
that your child’s participation, and what he/she says to me, the researcher, will not affect his/her grades.

Your consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time while we are working on this research. If your child chooses not to participate, I will not include your child in my observations, nor will I interview him or her. The information collected during this research will be stored in a locked cabinet in my room for five years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. I will ensure that no one knows your child has taken part in my research by using pseudonyms (fake names) for all people and the school.

If you choose to consent to your child’s participation in this research, please sign and return one copy of the attached consent form, and keep a copy of this letter and the consent form for your records. If you would like a copy of my final report, please check the appropriate box on the consent form. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, if you contact me at mobeen.uddin@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson at shelleystagg.peterson@utoronto.ca or 416-978-0329, and may contact the University of Toronto ethics review office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by telephone at 416-946-3273.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Mobeen Uddin, Ph.D. Student
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I agree to my child’s participation in Mr. Mobeen Uddin’s research study. He has explained in writing the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study from my child’s teacher. My questions have been answered and I know I can ask more questions about the research later. I understand that I can say no and that my child can withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that the researcher working on this study will keep the data confidential. He will keep my child’s identity anonymous by using pseudonyms for my child, the teacher, and the school. I understand that the researcher intends to present findings in magazines and conferences. I understand that the researcher will observe my child’s class, and there will not be any out-of-class assignments because of this research.

I understand that if I have questions or concerns, I can contact the researcher.

Finally, I say that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

Date: ____________________

My child’s name _________________________________

My Name (please print): ____________________________

___________________________________________

Signature

Please send the results of the study _______Yes _____No

Email address: _______________________________________

Appendix H

Consent Form for Non-Focus Child

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Mr. Mobeen Uddin, and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto. Your child’s teacher has agreed to take part in my research study on *Elementary Teachers’ and Students’ Experiences with Writer’s Workshop*. Writer’s workshop is an approach in which students write in different genres and give feedback to their peers. I expect that this research will provide great insight on how teachers can carry out writer’s workshop in their classes, how students’ writing progresses under this approach, and the kinds of feedback that students give to their peers on their work. I plan to present my findings in magazines and conferences for teachers and researchers.

My observations will take place between December 2014 and April 2015 and will involve focusing on ten students. I will be observing these students while they are discussing their work and giving feedback to each other during formal peer feedback sessions. Although your child will not be one of the focus children, it is possible that your child will partner up and interact with one of the ten focus students during these peer feedback sessions. With your consent, I would like to audio-record these sessions, in which your child may be included.

Your child will not be required to provide any samples of their work. I am sending this letter to let you know that I will be in your child’s classroom observing your child’s peers. I will ensure that no one knows your child has taken part in this research by using pseudonyms (fake names) for all people and the school.

The benefits of participating in the study are those associated with taking part in writer’s workshop. By having many opportunities to write, the students should experience growth in their writing. Despite these benefits, it is possible that during the research, your child may feel upset with some of the feedback they receive on their work. However, before the feedback sessions begin, the classroom teacher will provide guidance on how to provide meaningful feedback that does not hurt peers’ self-esteem. Please note that your child’s participation, and what he/she says to me, the researcher, will not affect his/her grades.
If you consent to have your child participate in this research, please sign and return one copy of the attached consent form, and keep a copy of this letter and the consent form for your records. If you would like a copy of my final report, please check the appropriate box on the consent form. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, if you contact me at mobeen.uddin@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson at shelley.stagg.peterson@utoronto.ca or 416-978-0329, and may contact the University of Toronto ethics review office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by telephone at 416-946-3273. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Mobeen Uddin, Ph.D. Student
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I agree to my child’s participation in Mr. Mobeen Uddin’s research study. He has explained in writing the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study from my child’s teacher. My questions have been answered and I know I can ask more questions about the research later. I understand that I can say no and that my child can withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that the researcher working on this study will keep the data confidential. He will keep my child’s identity anonymous by using pseudonyms for my child, the teacher, and the school. I understand that the researcher intends to present findings in magazines and conferences. I understand that the researcher will observe my child’s class, and there will not be any out-of-class assignments because of this research.

I understand that if I have questions or concerns, I can contact the researcher.

Finally, I say that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

Date: _______________________

My child’s name _____________________________

My Name (please print): ______________________

___________________________________________

Signature

Please send the results of the study _______Yes ______No

Email address: _______________________________________
Appendix I

Assent Form for Focus Child

Hello,

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto. Your teacher has agreed to take part in my research study on *Teachers’ and Students’ Experiences with Writer’s Workshop*. This research will take place between December 2014 and April 2015, and I will visit the class 3 times a week. For this research you will be writing during class and you will be sharing your writing with your teacher. I would like to audio-record your interactions between you and your teacher. You will also be giving feedback to your friends on their writing, and I would like to audio-record these conversations. I would also like to photocopy the written feedback as well as the rubrics that the teacher hands back to you. Finally, I would like to interview you before and after the study about your writing habits and experiences with feedback. Questions that I will ask you at this time may include “Do you like writing?”, and “How often do you write?” I would also like to audio-record these interviews as well.

The benefits of participating in the study are those related to Writer’s Workshop. Your writing should improve. If you feel uncomfortable in answering an interview question about writing, you will be allowed to decline in answering any questions that you prefer not to. Please note that your participation, and what you say to me, the researcher, will not affect your grades.

Your consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time while we are working on this research. If you choose not to participate, I will not include your name in my observations. The information collected during this research will be stored in a locked cabinet in our office for five years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. I will ensure that no one knows you have taken part in my research by using fake names for all people and the school.

Please let me know now if you agree to take part in this study by check-marking the appropriate box and signing below. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have at any time. Thank you.

______________________________________________________________________________

Name (Please Print): ______________________

________ I would like to participate in this research study.

________ I would not like to participate in this research study.

Signature: ______________________
Appendix J

Assent Form for Non-Focus Child

Hello,

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto. Your teacher has agreed to take part in my research study on *Teachers’ and Students’ Experiences with Writer’s Workshop*. This research will take place between December 2014 and April 2015. I will be visiting your class three times a week to observe you and your friends write as well as give feedback to each other. Although you will not be one of the ten focus children I will be observing, it is possible that you may interact with one of the focus children. With your approval, I would like to audio-record you in these feedback sessions.

The benefits of participating in the study are those related to Writer’s Workshop. Your writing should improve. Please note that your participation, and what you say to me, the researcher, will not affect your grades.

Your consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time while we are working on this research. If you choose not to participate, I will not include your name in my observations. The information collected during this research will be stored in a locked cabinet in our office for five years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. I will ensure that no one knows you have taken part in my research by using fake names for all people and the school.

Please let me know now if you agree to take part in this study by check-marking the appropriate box and signing below. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have at any time. Thank you.

____________________________________________________________________________

Name (Please Print): ______________________

______ I would like to participate in this research study.

______ I would not like to participate in this research study.

Signature: ______________________