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Effective Strategies for Teaching Writing: A Professional Development Workshop

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Abstract

In light of recent changes that have taken place in my school district with regards to our writing curriculum, I have created a professional development workshop that will enable teachers to examine our previous writing curriculum, Lucy Calkins (2006), in comparison to our new adoption, Benchmark Advance (2017). This professional development workshop will look at different theories of writing, practices for teaching writing and the components of effective professional development programs. I will examine the two writing curriculums, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), to make informed decisions to implement a quality writing curriculum that is aligned with the third grade Common Core Standards for writing and includes effective teaching strategies. The information I gain from my research will be used to educate my third-grade team so that we can improve our teaching practice and improve student writing performance.

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Chapter One: Introduction

As a third- grade teacher, I am responsible for teaching writing to my students. Although I enjoy teaching writing, I am not confident in my ability to teach writing and believe there is room for improvement. One reason for this is due to a lack of formal training in my teacher preparation program on how to effectively teach writing. Resulting from this project, I learned that my lack of formal training on how to teach writing is shared by many other teachers. In a study conducted by Brindle, Graham, Harris and Hebert (2015) on 157 third and fourth grade teachers from the United States, “three out of every four teachers who were surveyed indicated they received no to minimal preparation to teach writing in college and rated their college preparation to teach writing lower than their preparation to teach reading, math, science or social studies” (p. 929). Furthermore, this same study found that of 997 third and fourth grade teachers throughout the U.S., 76% of teachers reported having minimal to no preparation in teaching writing in their credential coursework (Brindle et al., 2015). This is very troubling to me! How can teachers be expected to be good writing teachers when we have not received the proper training?

When I looked at the standardized test data for my own school, I found that only 39% of the students scored proficient or advanced in ELA on the CAASPP test in the 2016-2017 school year according to the School Accountability Report Card for Mt. Woodson Elementary School. This is an 11% drop from the previous school year (2015-2016) when 50% of the students scored proficient or advanced in ELA (California Department of Education, 2017). When students are tested in Language Arts, they are tested on many different skills. Those skills include reading, writing, listening, and research/inquiry. Each student receives a score in each of the above-mentioned areas and those scores are then combined to give a total score for English Language

Arts (ELA). Due to our low ELA scores, our writing scores have declined as well. Our declining ELA scores provide evidence that there is a need to improve student's writing as well as provide professional development for teachers in writing instruction. If students are not writing at a "proficient" or "advanced" writing level, teachers need to adjust their instruction to meet the needs of the students better so that they may reach levels of "proficiency" or "advanced" in writing. This problem has sparked my interest in this topic.

Problem Statement

In 2018 my district adopted a new Language Arts curriculum, Benchmark Advance (2017). I piloted this curriculum in 2017 and experienced first-hand how rigorous and different the program was from any other program I had taught before. The Benchmark Advance (2017) program aligns with the English Language Arts and Writing Common Core State Standards for third grade and engages students in activities designed to meet these standards. One piece of the Benchmark Advance (2017) language arts program is writing.

The problem was that our district already had a writing program in place, Lucy Calkins (2006). The writing program in Benchmark Advance (2017) is very different from Lucy Calkins (2006). The Lucy Calkins (2006) writing program is designed to be a writing workshop. The curriculum is divided into units of study (narrative, opinion, information). Within each unit of study there are multiple lessons that are composed of mini-lessons, teacher modeling, guided practice, peer conferencing and student/teacher conferencing. Within this program students are given the freedom to choose the topics for their writing. Throughout the unit of study, students are given the opportunity to work on several different pieces of writing and at the end of the unit of study they choose a piece of writing that they would like to publish. At my school site, when we were teaching the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, we dedicated an entire trimester to

teaching one unit of study, meaning students were only working on one genre of writing at a time.

In contrast, the writing component of the Benchmark Advance (2017) program is very different. In this program, students are exposed to multiple genres (narrative, informational, opinion) throughout a unit. The program does not focus on one genre for a set amount of time and then introduce a new genre. Secondly, this writing program is not set up to be a workshop structure. The Benchmark Advance curriculum is a language arts curriculum that includes a writing component. The reading and writing lessons are interwoven and the writing becomes an extension of what the students have been studying and reading. Finally, in the Benchmark Advance (2017) program, students are asked to write to specific prompts that are connected to the reading they have been doing in their language arts program. For example, they may be asked to compare two texts they have read and write an opinion paper on what text was more informative and cite text evidence to support their reasons. This type of writing is very different because it is incorporating both the writing and reading standards for the Common Core State Standards. In my opinion, it is not possible to teach the two programs simultaneously without significant revisions to one or both programs. This has led me to question, how can teachers teach both programs and meet the needs of the students?

The school district realized the dilemma that teachers were facing and gave us leeway in how we taught writing for one year. They allowed teachers to use their professional judgment to make decisions about both writing curriculum that they felt would best meet the needs of their students. While I appreciated this decision and the faith that they were putting into teachers, I also felt nervous. I felt nervous because our test scores were so low, and I felt as though we could not afford to make a poor decision.

While working on this project, first I looked at what the current research states about effective strategies for teaching writing. Second, I examined the two writing curriculums, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), to make the best decisions about how to implement a quality writing curriculum that incorporated effective teaching strategies for writing and was aligned with the third- grade Common Core State Standards for writing. Together, the information I gained from my research and the examination of the two writing curriculums would be used to develop a professional development workshop to educate my colleagues on effective strategies for teaching writing to improve our teaching practice and student writing performance.

Significance of the Research

It is my belief that researching effective strategies for teaching writing will help my third-grade team make informed and educated decisions about how to implement an effective writing curriculum. If we can learn more about effective strategies for teaching writing as well as gain a deeper understanding of the third- grade level standards for writing, we can make informed decisions about which curriculum and or what pieces of each curriculum are most vital to our students writing instruction.

I researched the components of effective professional development programs so that I could develop a useful professional development workshop. I needed to know what components of professional development workshops have been found to be effective so that I could incorporate them into my workshop. I wanted my workshop to be practical for teachers. To meet these goals, I needed to do research.

Preview of Literature

This review of literature examines the Cognitive Theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and Sociocultural Theory of writing (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout my research, I found these two theories support different kinds of writing instruction. It is important to be aware of multiple perspectives and theories so that educators have knowledge of why writing is taught in different ways as well as making informed decisions

Secondly, I examined research-based strategies for teaching writing. After reviewing the research literature, I learned that choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), direct instruction (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012), task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017), writing frequently (Graham et al., 2012), teaching students to become self-regulated (Gadd & Parr, 2017) and creating a supportive environment (Graham et al., 2012) have all been shown to be effective practices when teaching. When we as educators are aware of effective strategies for teaching writing, it informs our implementation.

Finally, I examined the components of effective professional development programs in general. I wanted to be knowledgeable about the components of useful professional development programs so that I could create an effective and productive professional development workshop for my colleagues. I created a workshop for my colleagues that provided an opportunity to examine both the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing curriculum and the Benchmark Advance (2017) curriculum, look for similarities in both curriculums, identify the standards being addressed within each program, and make decisions about how to implement both curriculums based on effective strategies for teaching writing.

The sources I selected for my research discussed theories of writing, effective strategies for teaching writing, and components of effective professional development programs. My sources provided background knowledge and insight for my project.

Preview of Methodology

An in-depth review of the research literature related to theories of writing, effective strategies for teaching writing, and the components of an effective professional development program were used to identify effective practices for teaching writing and creating a professional development workshop for my third-grade team. The professional development workshop I created, consists of five two-hour sessions that focus on the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) curriculum as well as theories of writing and effective strategies for teaching writing. Throughout the workshop, I designated time for teachers to reflect on the theories, strategies, the writing curricula, and provided opportunity for teachers to make revisions to their writing instruction based on what they learn. The workshop is a collaborative experience for those who are involved, providing them with ample time to talk, discuss and reflect upon the two different theories of writing, effective strategies for teaching writing and how they are or are not a part of the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculums.

Definitions

Task purposefulness. Task purposefulness refers to the purpose of a task. Tasks that are purposeful to students are those that they had choice in choosing, are related to the content they are learning, they have prior knowledge of, or hold an interest in.

Self-Regulated. Self-regulated refers to the ability of one to regulate them self. For the purposes of this project, self-regulated is used in reference to the actions students engage in on their own when composing or completing a piece of writing.

Modeling. Modeling is the demonstration of a task for an audience.

Summary

The purpose of this project was to first look at what the current research states about effective strategies for teaching writing. I examined the two writing curriculums, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), to make the best decisions about how to implement a quality writing curriculum that incorporated effective teaching strategies for writing and was aligned with the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. Together, the information I gained from my research and the examination of the two writing curriculums would be used to develop a professional development workshop to educate my colleagues on effective strategies for teaching writing to improve our teaching practice and student writing performance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the research literature on the following themes: Cognitive (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and Sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) theories of writing, effective strategies for teaching writing, and the components of an effective professional development program. The purpose of my project was to look at what the current research stated about effective strategies for teaching writing. The information I gained throughout my research would be shared with my third- grade colleagues and used to develop a professional development workshop to help us make curricular decisions regarding our writing program. Secondly, I examined the two writing curriculums, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), to make the best decisions about how to implement a quality writing curriculum that incorporated effective teaching strategies for writing and was aligned with the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. Finally, I researched the practices of effective professional development programs to help guide the creation of a quality professional development workshop for my third-grade team to develop a quality writing curriculum for our students.

First, I examined the Cognitive Theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and the Sociocultural Theory of writing (Vygotsky, 1978). Cognitive theory is based on the belief that writing is a “complex system of inter-working cognitive processes” (Hodges, 2017, p.139) while the Sociocultural Theory posits that the social context is at the heart of the learning and communication process (Barnard & Campbell, 2005). Within the Sociocultural Theory of writing, writing is viewed as a, “collaborative, social activity in which novice writers can learn from more experienced writers” (Hodges, 2017, p.141).

Second, I researched effective practices for teaching writing. After reviewing the research literature, I learned that choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), direct instruction

(Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012), task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017), writing frequently (Graham et al., 2012), teaching students to become self-regulated (Gadd & Parr, 2017) and creating a supportive environment (Graham et al., 2012) have all been shown to be effective practices when teaching writing.

Last, I examined the components of effective professional development programs. In my research I found that effective professional development is focused on content (Borko, 2004), incorporates active learning (Darling-Hammond, Hylar, Gardner & Espinoza, 2017) incorporates collective participation (Harris, Lane, Graham, Driscoll, Sandmel, Brindle, & Schatschneider, 2012), utilizes models of effective practice and modeling (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), incorporates feedback and reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), is coherent (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001), and is job-embedded (Hunzicker, 2010).

Throughout this review of literature, I examined these themes in more depth to gain a greater understanding of these key concepts.

Cognitive Process Theory

There are many theories on how to teach writing, and one most appropriate for grounding this project is the Cognitive Process Theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This theory informs research and practice about the thinking processes that occur during the writing process. The Cognitive Process Theory (Flower and Hayes, 1981) is grounded in four key points:

1. The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes, which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing.
2. These processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other.

3. The act of composing itself is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer's own growing network of goals.
4. Writers create their own goals in two key ways: by generating both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals which embody the writer's developing sense of purpose, and then, at times, by changing major goals or even establishing entirely new ones based on what has been learned in the act of writing (p.366).

The Cognitive Process Theory states that writing is a “complex system of inter-working cognitive processes” (Hodges, 2017, p.139). Within this theory, writing is viewed as a process that involves many steps. Those steps include planning, translating (writing) and reviewing (editing). Throughout the writing process, one will revisit these steps many times while composing a piece of writing. “Based on the cognitive process view of writing, writers do not follow a linear process for writing but constantly revisit different steps in the process” (Hodges, 2017, p.140).

One example of the Cognitive Process Theory is writing to learn. While students are writing to learn, they are given time to write about different topics and ideas as a way of learning and creating knowledge. Another example of an activity supported by the Cognitive Process Theory is the use of graphic organizers. There are many kinds of graphic organizers such as mind maps, T-charts, and timelines. These organizers can be used by writers to organize their thoughts and ideas. Writers can use these graphic organizers as they progress through the various stages of writing including prewriting, drafting and revising (Hodges, 2017).

Sociocultural Theory of Writing

A second theory on writing is the Sociocultural Theory of writing, which is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky believed that learning occurred through interactions

with more experienced peers who could guide the novice learner (1978). These more experienced peers were referred to as MKOs (more knowledgeable others). In the classroom setting, MKOs (more knowledgeable others) can be other students, teachers, or authors” (Hodges, 2017, p.141).

One of the ways that novice learners learn from MKO’s is through scaffolding. Scaffolding is the temporary support that is provided to another to enable them to perform a task (Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, 2018). Some of the ways that teachers can provide scaffolding in the classroom are with the use of modeling, direct instruction and conferencing. Over time, the amount of scaffolding and the type of scaffolding needed by the novice learner will change. As they gain more knowledge and skills, they will require less support.

Another way that learning can be scaffolded for novice learners is through collaboration. Collaboration can take place between a student and teacher or student and student. Collaboration is seen as a tool that students can use to learn from one another and improve their writing abilities. Within the classroom, this could be teacher-student conferences to discuss pieces of writing, students editing each other’s writing, students collaborating on pieces of writing together, or referencing mentor texts to learn what exemplary pieces look and sound like.

Another important concept in Sociocultural Theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of Proximal Development is, “the distance between the actual development levels as determined through independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86). Children who are in the zone of proximal development for a specific task are not yet able to perform a task independently, however, with

an appropriate amount of assistance, they will be able to complete the task successfully. The assistance and support received by the child is the scaffolding mentioned above.

Within the Sociocultural Theory, the social context is at the heart of the learning and communication process (Barnard & Campbell, 2005). There are many different social contexts in which learning takes place including the classroom, the home, and the community. The Sociocultural Theory posits that in addition to social contexts, learning is also influenced by the culture in which one lives (Cherry, 2018). Cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place. The type of instruction and learning that is valued in one culture is not the same as another. Therefore, depending on where one lives, and the type of instruction and learning valued in their culture, this will play a role in the learning and instruction they engage in. In other words, learning is influenced by adults and peers as well as one's culture (Cherry, 2018).

Effective Teaching Strategies

Research has identified many instructional strategies that have been shown to have a positive impact on student's writing performance. One strategy is task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017). When students are writing about topics that they are familiar with or have an interest in, it gives them a purpose for writing. For example, students may choose to write about their personal experiences, interests, topics of which they have prior knowledge of or topics that stem from their current content knowledge base (Gadd & Parr, 2017). Allowing students to have choice allows them to write about topics that are meaningful to them. When students choose their topics, it can lead to an increase in motivation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Another aspect of task purposefulness is that students understand how the learning task is related to their development of becoming a more proficient writer (Gadd & Parr, 2017). This

means letting students know the purpose of the assignment. For example, a teacher might say, “today we are learning how to write a friendly letter because this is an important skill that you will use throughout your life. You may write letters to your boss, your friends, a pen pal, etc. This is a real- life skill that you will need to know how to do.” It is important for students to know why they are learning the skill. When students understand why they need to have certain skills, it helps them to understand the purpose of the assignment. Also, it can also lead to an increase in student motivation because they understand why they are learning that skill and why it is important for them to master that skill. Students are motivated because they see the importance and how it relates to their life. “Providing students with authentic writing tasks, or writing activities designed with real-world audiences and purposes in mind, can also stimulate student motivation and engagement in the writing classroom” (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012, p.351).

A second strategy that has been identified as having a positive impact on students’ writing is direct instruction (Graham et al., 2012). Direct instruction is when the teacher explains or demonstrates what the students are expected to do, learn, and achieve in the lesson. The demonstration involves teachers modeling how to perform a specific skill. The skill being demonstrated might be how to write a paragraph, how to combine simple sentences into a complex sentence, how to revise a piece of writing, how to provide feedback to a peer, etc. When demonstrating, the teacher can actively model a skill for her students, meaning the teacher and students are actively composing the piece together, or receptive demonstrating in which the teacher instructs from a previously written text. The purpose of this type of instruction is to model the desired skill until the students can perform the skill on their own (Graham et al., 2012). Before teachers can deliver direct instruction, they need to know what their students can

do and where they are in their learning process. Knowing their students' strengths and weaknesses allow them to plan their instruction and guides their next steps. According to Zumbrunn and Krause (2012), "it is also important that writing instruction be guided by each student's individual needs and goals" (p.352).

A third strategy that has been shown to have a positive effect on student's writing is writing frequently. When students write frequently across the curriculum and write for many different purposes, it has a positive impact on their ability to become skilled writers (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, "beginning in first grade, the panel recommends spending a minimum of one hour a day on writing (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Thirty minutes should be spent working on different writing strategies, techniques, and skills with the remaining 30 minutes spent practicing the writing skill they have learned through their writing instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). One way that this can be accomplished is by having students write across the curriculum. Doing so gives students more time to write as well as opportunities to learn while writing (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012).

Another strategy that has been shown to have a positive effect on students' writing is self-regulation (Gadd & Parr, 2017). Some examples of this are: allowing students to write about topics they have selected, allowing them opportunities to write that are outside of the instructional time, allowing students to collaborate and teaching them to seek support when needed (Gadd & Parr, 2017). This includes teaching students to set learning goals, self-assess their writing, and manage the writing strategies they have learned (Graham et al., 2012). Self-regulation can be accomplished through meetings between the teacher and the student in which they discuss the student's writing in relation to their learning goals and success criteria.

Another factor that has been shown to have a positive effect on students' writing is creating a supportive environment (Graham et al., 2012). Some examples of this would be providing praise, focusing on the process not the product when giving feedback, allowing students opportunities to collaborate and provide feedback to one another, setting clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish while writing, assessment and feedback, analysis of model texts, and scaffolding the instruction (Graham et al., 2012). According to the National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, creating a supportive environment in the classroom can have a positive effect on students' motivation to write well because they learn that writing is important, valued and rewarded. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Professional Development

For my final project, I wanted to create a professional development workshop for my third- grade team that was both valuable and informative. Before I could create this workshop however, I reviewed the current research literature to learn what the components are in an effective professional development program. According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, and Espinoza (2017), effective professional development is, "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes" (p.v).

One component of an effective professional development program is that it is focused on content (Borko, 2004). It is important that teachers understand the content they are responsible for teaching so that they may pass on this understanding to their students. According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001), "professional development requires a dual focus on both knowledge of subject matter content and an understanding of how children learn specific

content” (p.924). Kennedy (1998) found that professional development that focuses on specific content and how students learn that content has more significant effects on student achievement outcomes compared to more general professional development.

Another component of effective professional development programs are active learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). “Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students” (Darling-Hammond et al., p.v). Some examples of this are observing other teachers, being observed by other teachers, providing feedback, analyzing data, planning classroom implementation, reviewing student work, and trying out new teaching strategies. Active learning is much different from the older model of professional development, which consisted of sitting in a course all day being lectured on a topic. Instead, the learner is actively engaged in the learning process through a variety of activities as mentioned above.

Collective participation is another component of effective professional development (Harris, Lane, Graham, Driscoll, Sandmel, Brindle, & Schatschneider, 2012). Collective participation refers to the participation of those who attend the same school, department or grade level. According to Garet et al. (2001), collective participation allows teachers the opportunity to discuss concepts, skills, and problems that may arise during professional development experiences. It allows teachers who share the same students to discuss students’ needs across classes and grade levels, and it may sustain changes over time as teachers develop common understandings of instructional goals, problems, and solutions.

Effective professional development programs utilize models of effective practice and modeling (Hammond et al., 2017). “PD that utilizes models of effective practice has proven

successful at promoting teacher learning and supporting student achievement” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.11). This includes curricular and instructional models as well as modeling of instruction. Some examples are demonstration lessons, unit or lesson plans, observations, student work samples, and videos.

Feedback and reflection are another component of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). After teachers have modeled lessons or had lessons modeled, they need opportunities to receive feedback and reflect on what they have learned. “Professional development models associated with gains in student learning frequently provide built-in-time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by providing intentional time for feedback and/or reflection” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Professional development that is of sustained duration has also been found to be effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). According to Darling-Hammond et al., (2017), “professional development that is sustained, offering multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices, has a greater chance of transforming teaching practices and student learning” (p.15). The learning that teachers are doing takes time and it takes time for change to happen. Teachers need time to learn, try things out and reflect. Professional development that is of longer duration allows teachers an opportunity to have in-depth discussions about content and pedagogy as well as time to try out new practices and receive feedback (Garet et al., 2001). “Effective professional development is an ongoing process, not an event” (NJCLD, 1999, p.6).

Coherence is another component of effective professional development (Garet et al., 2001). Professional development is sometimes criticized by teachers because it does not relate to what they are teaching in their classrooms or they learn something once, but it is never

revisited again. According to Garet et al., (2001) “a professional development activity is more likely to be effective in improving teachers’ knowledge and skills if it forms a coherent part of a wider set of opportunities for teacher learning and development” (p. 927). Some of the ways this can be accomplished are by building on what teachers have already learned, emphasizing content and pedagogy that is aligned with state and national standards and supporting teachers in developing sustained communication with those who are trying to change their teaching in similar ways (Garet et al., 2001). According to Hunzicker (2010), “when teachers’ varying professional development experiences are related to each other as well as to school goals or state learning standards, they are able to see the “big picture” (p.8).

Last, effective professional development is job-embedded. According to Hunzicker (2010), “effective professional development for teachers is job-embedded, which makes it both relevant and authentic” (p.4). Job-embedded professional development is relevant because it is related to what teachers are doing in their classrooms, and it is authentic because teachers can incorporate what they are learning into their classroom.

Summary

Chapter two presented a review of current research pertaining to theories on writing, effective strategies for teaching writing and the components of an effective professional development program. First, I looked to the Cognitive Process Theory of writing which discusses that writing is a complex cognitive act that requires the writer to engage in many different activities such as planning, translating, and reviewing. Second, we studied the Sociocultural Theory of writing which discusses that writing is a social and collaborative process that involves less experienced writers learning from more experienced writers. Next, I investigated effective strategies for teaching writing. Throughout my research I learned that task

purposefulness, choice, direct instruction, writing frequently, creating a supportive environment, and teaching students to be self-regulated are all strategies that have been linked to positive student outcomes in writing. Finally, I examined the components of an effective professional development course. After a thorough review of the literature, I learned effective professional development programs focus on content, incorporate active learning, include collective participation, utilize models of effective practice, provide coaching and expert support, offer feedback and reflection, are of sustained duration, are coherent, and job-embedded.

Understanding what the research shows about the different theories of writing, strategies that have been identified as having a positive influence on student writing, and the components of an effective professional development program provided me with the needed resources to create a professional workshop for my third grade team to help make informed decisions regarding how to implement an effective writing curriculum for our third- grade students. It is my desire to gain knowledge about the best ways to teach writing so that my third- grade team and I may apply this knowledge while examining the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculum to improve instructional practice and student writing. In the next chapter, the methodology including the participants, setting, design, and instruments will be described.

Chapter Three: Project Methodology

The purpose of my project was to look at what the current research stated about effective strategies for teaching writing. The information I gained throughout my research would be shared with my third- grade team and used to develop a professional development workshop to help us make curricular decisions regarding our writing program. I examined the two writing curriculums, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), to make the best decisions about how to implement a quality writing curriculum that incorporated effective teaching strategies for writing and was aligned with the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. Finally, I researched the practices of effective professional development programs so that I could create a quality professional development workshop for my third- grade team so that we could implement a quality writing curriculum for our students.

After researching effective strategies for teaching writing and the components of an effective professional development program, I have created a workshop for my third-grade team to help us make an informed decision about how best to create an effective writing curriculum for our students. This professional development workshop will allow teachers to examine both curriculums, look for patterns that may exist in both curriculums, identify the standards addressed within each program, and make decisions about how to implement a quality writing curriculum based on what the research identifies as effective strategies for teaching writing.

Design

During the 2017-2018 school year, teachers within my district used the Lucy Calkin's writing program (2006) to teach writing to their students. The program was used solely to teach writing. At the time the district did not have a Language Arts curriculum that was being used to

teach reading fluency, comprehension, and grammar. As a result, teachers were left to their own devices to find resources to use to teach the foundational skills, reading standards for literature and reading standards for informational text that are part of the Common Core State Standards for third grade.

Our district adopted a new Language Arts curriculum, Benchmark Advance (2017) at the start of the 2018-2019 school year. Benchmark Advance (2017) is a Language Arts curriculum that not only teaches the writing standards for third grade but also the foundational skills, reading standards for literature, and reading standards for informational text that are part of the Common Core State Standards for third grade. The Benchmark Advance (2017) program is divided into ten separate units. Each unit is divided into three- week sections. Each week there are multiple writing activities that students complete. The writing activities that students participate in are different from week to week. For example, in unit 1 of the third-grade curriculum, students are exposed to narrative writing and how to write a letter (Benchmark Advance, 2017). In unit 1, week 2 of the third-grade curriculum, students learn how to write an informative text and in unit 1 week 3, students learn how to draft an opinion text (Benchmark Advance, 2017).

During the 2018-2019 school year, our district allowed teachers and school sites to determine how they would like to teach writing. We were given the freedom to make decisions about which curriculum we used to teach writing. Our options included teaching Lucy Calkins (2006), teaching Benchmark Advance (2017), or some combination of the two. I used the information I gathered from my research to put together a workshop for teachers that enabled them to make these important decisions about how best to teach writing to their students.

Participants/Setting

The participants for this workshop are my third- grade team. We teach at a Title 1 school in southern California. Our school has a student population of 473 students throughout grades TK-6. Of the three participants in this workshop, two of the teachers have over twenty years of teaching experience, and I have over ten years teaching experience. Two of the participants have worked at our school site for two years, and I have been at the school for four years.

This workshop was designed to take place at our school as part of our professional development training. The workshop was intended to take place over the course of five consecutive days with each session lasting two hours. It is not my intention or expectation that this workshop will answer all the questions surrounding how to implement the two curriculums, but rather to give teachers a starting point to begin a dialogue about how best to go about making these important decisions. It was my recommendation that multiple workshops take place throughout the school year on this topic and expand to examining other pieces of each curriculum.

Instruments

Throughout the course of this workshop, I utilized many different resources. I used a PowerPoint presentation to give background knowledge about different theories of writing as well as practices that have been identified as effective for teaching writing. Focusing on the pedagogy and content is one component of effective professional development as identified by the research literature (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). According to Borko (2004), “professional development can lead to improvements in instructional practices and student learning” (p.3). If teachers are aware of the theories of writing and effective strategies for

teaching writing, they can implement these practices in their classroom to improve students' writing performance.

In the workshop I also used graphic organizers to map out what skills and activities took place throughout the writing assignments in each curriculum, the Common Core State Standards that were addressed in each lesson, identify any similarities that could be found between the assignments in each program and a place to plan out future lessons. The various graphic organizers that I created were designed to allow teachers to map out what they were being asked to teach and plan future lessons. These types of activities are referred to as "active learning." According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001), "a second core feature of professional development concerns the opportunities provided by the professional development activity for teachers to become actively engaged in meaningful discussion, planning and practice" (p.925). Teachers are involved in "active learning" while completing these organizers because they are outlining the curriculum, analyzing the curriculum, discussing, collaborating, and planning their next steps.

During the workshop, teachers completed surveys that I created to identify background knowledge at the start of the program, at the end of the program, strengths of the program and desired next steps. The purpose for incorporating surveys was to track the learning that took place within the workshop, evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop and give teachers an opportunity to determine the learning that they would like to engage in next. According to a report from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1999), "evaluation is an integral component of any professional development plan" (p.4). In addition, the use of surveys allows teacher to give feedback on their experiences throughout the workshop and reflect on their learning. This feedback will be used to make changes to future workshops.

Feedback and reflection are another component of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Last, I provided teachers time to collaborate and share their ideas and experiences surrounding this topic so that they could learn from each other. I believe that it is important to give teachers time to gather, discuss, and share ideas so that they may work together to come up with solutions. Different teachers have different perspectives and areas of expertise. When I provide them with time to meet, they have an opportunity to learn from one another. As mentioned by the research literature, providing teachers with the opportunity to collaborate is another component of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hunzicker, 2010).

Procedures

This project began with a thorough review of the literature regarding theories of writing, effective practices for teaching writing, and effective methods of developing and delivering professional development. It was this research that guided my plan for this professional development workshop. After I reviewed the literature, I created a professional development workshop for teachers that allowed them to examine and evaluate the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing programs. The workshop provided teachers with research-based information that they could use to make curricular decisions about these two writing programs.

On day one of the workshop, I began by distributing a survey that gathered information about our experiences teaching writing, our confidence in our ability to teach writing, our familiarity with effective strategies for teaching writing, and our confidence in evaluating writing curriculum. I created this survey as a baseline to gather information about what everyone knew

about writing, strategies for teaching writing, and our familiarity with evaluating writing curriculum prior to the workshop. At the end of the workshop, I administered a second survey, which I compared to the first to evaluate the effectiveness and knowledge gained by the participants in the workshop.

Second, I created a PowerPoint Presentation on theories of writing. Specifically, I focused on the Cognitive Process Theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and the Sociocultural Theory of writing (Vygotsky, 1978). I selected these two theories because, throughout my research, these were the theories that were most relevant to my circumstance. The slides provided information on the ideas contained in each theory as well as examples of classroom activities supported by each theory. The purpose of this activity was to build background knowledge and inform my colleagues what the research states about different theories of writing. Understanding the various theories on writing helped build knowledge on how students learn to write, and the processes involved in writing.

After discussing the theories, I presented my colleagues with a worksheet, which allowed us to reflect on the two theories (Cognitive Process Theory and Sociocultural Theory). Reflection is one component of effective professional development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Next, I provided teachers time to discuss the strategies they use to teach writing in their classroom. It is my belief that all teachers have a wealth of knowledge gathered from their experiences and that we can all learn from one another when we are given the time to talk. The research literature sees value in teachers being given opportunities to share their viewpoints, ideas, and discuss problems as well (Hunzicker, 2010). Collaboration is one component of

effective professional development programs. (Darling-Hammond, 2017; NJCLD, 1999; Hunzicker, 2010).

Afterward I presented a second PowerPoint presentation outlining what the research stated about effective teaching strategies for writing. The PowerPoint presentation was composed of slides that named the effective strategies for teaching writing and gave examples of how those strategies could be used in the classroom. Those strategies were: task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017), choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), direct instruction (Graham et al., 2012), writing frequently (Graham et al., 2012), creating a supportive environment (Graham et al., 2012), and teaching students to become self-regulated (Gadd & Parr, 2017). It was these strategies that I incorporated into my project. The purpose of this activity was to inform my colleagues about practices that have been identified as effective strategies for teaching writing as well as evaluate the two- writing curriculum on how well they implemented these practices into their lesson plans.

Last, I provided teachers with a worksheet that allowed them to reflect upon the knowledge gained from the PowerPoint presentation on effective strategies for teaching writing. Specifically, the strategies they were currently using in their classroom to teach writing, naming new strategies for teaching writing that they wanted to incorporate into their classroom and identify how this would take place, as well as identify any questions they had regarding strategies for teaching writing. According to Darling-Hammond, reflection can help teachers move toward the expert visions of practice that they have learned about during professional development (2017).

On day two and day three of the workshop, I provided teachers with a series of graphic organizers they could use to document the daily writing lessons in each writing program (Lucy

Calkins and Benchmark Advance), identify the standards addressed in each lesson (or not), the teaching strategies used in the lessons, and modifications they would make to the lessons based on their prior learning from day 1. The graphic organizers were created in a word document. Collecting and documenting the information from each writing lesson would make it easier for teachers to evaluate the two writing curriculums (Lucy Calkins and Benchmark Advance), which is what they did on day 4. It also gave them an opportunity to apply their learning from day 1 about effective teaching strategies and theories of writing. According to Garet et al. (2001), “a second element of active learning involves the opportunity to link the ideas introduced during professional development experiences to the teaching context in which teachers work (pgs. 925,926). Giving teachers an opportunity to look at the curriculum and make connections to what they have learned in the workshop is important because it allows them to apply what they have learned to their teaching practice.

On day four, teachers used what they had learned from day two and day three about the components of each writing program, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) and used this information to evaluate the writing curriculums. Using a graphic organizer that I created, teachers looked for similarities between lessons in the two-writing programs, alignment with the Common Core State Standards, and the use of effective teaching strategies in writing lessons.

On day five, I provided teachers with a template they could use to plan their writing lessons for the first week of school. On this template, teachers documented the content of the writing lesson, the writing standard(s) addressed in the lesson, the teaching strategies they would use and documented which writing program the lesson was adapted from. This activity was a culminating activity which allowed teachers to use the knowledge they had gained throughout

the workshop and apply it to their teaching practice as they planned out their writing curriculum for week 1. The resources that I provided throughout the workshop on day one, day two, day three and day four provided teachers with the knowledge and resources they need to accomplish this goal.

Finally, I provided teachers with a post-survey to complete so that I could gauge their learning from the workshop. The post-survey was identical to the pre-survey delivered on day one. To evaluate if teachers benefited from the workshop, I compared the responses on the pre-survey to those on the post-survey. In addition, I provided teachers with a reflection sheet to reflect on what they had learned throughout the course. What did they learn in the workshop? What information was presented that they were already familiar with? Would they recommend the workshop to others? What information was not covered that they would have found useful? What would they recommend as next steps for a follow up workshop? Their responses helped guide the course of upcoming professional development on this topic as well as any changes needed based on teacher feedback. Both the survey and the reflection from day five, enabled me to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of this workshop. A report from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities states that, “evaluation is an integral component of any professional development plan” (1999, p.4). As mentioned earlier, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), identify feedback and reflection as a component of effective professional development because it helps teachers move toward the expert visions of practice they have learned about in professional development. I have included the survey and reflection in my professional development workshop because they have been identified in the research as one of the components of effective professional development.

Summary

This professional development workshop was created for my third- grade team to help us make curricular decisions about which writing program and or pieces of each writing program to use with our students in the upcoming school year. The resources that were included in this workshop were meant to be helpful in evaluating the two writing programs, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), for their content, alignment with the Common Core State Standards and use of effective teaching strategies as referenced by the research literature. In creating this workshop, I implemented practices and procedures that were identified as effective in the research literature. This workshop will provide teachers with a starting point while trying to make these important decisions regarding which program or which pieces of each writing program to implement with their students.

Chapter Four: Professional Development Workshop

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to look at what the current research stated about effective strategies for teaching writing. The information I gained throughout my research was used to develop a professional development workshop to help us make curricular decisions regarding our writing program. I examined two writing curriculums, Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017), to make the best decisions about how to implement a quality writing curriculum that incorporated effective teaching strategies for writing and was aligned with the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. This workshop consists of five two-hour sessions that focus on the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) curriculum, theories of writing, and effective strategies for teaching writing.

Agenda

Day one provides teachers with background knowledge of the different theories of writing. Specifically, we looked at the Cognitive Process Theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1978) and the Sociocultural Theory of writing (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, we looked at instructional strategies that research has identified as effective for teaching writing. Teachers have an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practice as they identify their strengths and weaknesses and set goals, grounded in the theory, to implement throughout the academic year.

Day two focuses on the Benchmark Advance (2017) writing program as this is our newly adopted language arts curriculum. Within this curriculum, there is a writing component that teachers may choose to follow in place of or in combination with the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing program that has been used by the district up to this point. Teachers will look at unit one, week one, and identify the lessons being taught, the content of the lessons, the standards addressed in the lessons and teaching strategies suggested by the program. Additionally, teachers will reflect on their own teaching practice and make connections between their teaching practice, the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, the Sociocultural Theory of Writing, and the teaching strategies suggested by the Benchmark Advance (2017) writing program.

Day three focuses on the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing program. Teachers look at *Launching the Writing Workshop* (2006) and identify the content of the lessons, the standards addressed in the lessons and the teaching strategies suggested by the program. Additionally, teachers look for connections between the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, the Sociocultural Theory of Writing, and the teaching strategies suggested by the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing program. The information gathered on day two and day three will then be used to analyze and evaluate each writing program on day four.

Day four provides teachers with the opportunity to look at both writing programs and identify any similarities or differences between them. It provides teachers time to make decisions regarding both programs based on their content, alignment with the Common Core State Standards and effective teaching practices. The goal is that teachers will take the knowledge they gained on day one about writing theories and best practices in writing instruction to aid in their analysis of both writing programs. Day five provides teachers with an opportunity to plan out their writing lessons for the first week of the program. It also provides teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their learning throughout the workshop and make suggestions for desired next steps.

Professional Development Writing Workshop Day 1

Activity 1:

Day one begins with an overview of the workshop. I explain the purpose of the workshop is to look at what the current research states about effective strategies for teaching writing and share this information with my colleagues to help us make curricular decisions regarding our writing program. My interest in creating the workshop was sparked by the adoption of our new language arts curriculum and the freedom our district has given us to choose whether to follow the writing portion of the Benchmark Advance (2017) program or our old adoption, Lucy Calkins (2006). I thank my colleagues for attending and express how important the learning we will do throughout the workshop is for ourselves and our students. After this brief introduction and explanation, I distribute a pre- survey to my colleagues. This is a survey that I created to gather information about teachers' experiences teaching writing, their confidence in their ability to teach writing, their familiarity with effective strategies for teaching writing, and their confidence in evaluating writing curriculum. This serves as a baseline of information for me. Once the surveys are completed, I collect them. At the end of the workshop, a post-survey will be distributed and collected to gauge the knowledge gained by the teachers throughout the workshop and the usefulness and effectiveness of the workshop.

Pre-Survey

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5:

5=very strong 4=strong 3=average 2=below average 1=no experience

1. How would you rate your ability to teach writing?

1 2 3 4 5

2. How would you rate your confidence in your ability to teach writing?

1 2 3 4 5

3. How would you rate your knowledge concerning effective teaching strategies for writing?

1 2 3 4 5

4. How would you rate your ability to make curricular decisions concerning evaluating writing curriculum?

1 2 3 4 5

5. What do you feel is one strength that you possess as a writing teacher? Why?

6. What is one area that you would like to improve on as a writing teacher? Why?

Activity 2:

This activity provides teachers with a review of the literature on theories of writing. I displayed the PowerPoint presentation I created on the Cognitive Process Theory as well as the Sociocultural Theory of writing. Throughout my research, I found these two theories to be the most relevant to my circumstance. I reviewed each slide with my teammates and explained the beliefs that each theory is based upon. When discussing the Cognitive Process Theory of writing, I explain that this theory was created by Linda Flower and John Hayes in 1981. This theory is based upon the belief that, “writing is viewed as a complex system of inter-working cognitive processes” (Hodges, 2017). The Cognitive Process Theory (Flower and Hayes, 1981) is grounded in four key points:

- 1) The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes, which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing.
- 2) These processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other.
- 3) The act of composing itself is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer’s own growing network of goals.
- 4) Writers create their own goals in two key ways: by generating both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals which embody the writer’s developing sense of purpose, and then, at times, by changing major goals or even establishing entirely new ones based on what has been learned in the act of writing (p.366).

The thinking processes that writers progress through are: planning (generating ideas, organizing, goal setting), translating (putting ideas into a visible language) and reviewing (evaluating and revising). These steps are not linear, meaning a writer will move between the

steps in any order at any time. In addition, the goals that writers set for themselves fall into two categories: process goals and content goals (Flower & Hayes, 1981). An example of a process goal would be to write an introduction. An example of a content goal would be to specify the things a writer wants to relay to his/her audience. It is these goals which aid writers while composing.

When discussing the Sociocultural Theory of writing, I explain that this theory was created by Lev Vygotsky in 1978. Vygotsky believed that learning occurred through interactions with more experienced guides who could guide the novice learner (1978). These more experienced guides were referred to as MKOs (more knowledgeable others). In the classroom setting, MKOs (more knowledgeable others) can be other students, teachers, or authors” (Hodges, 2017, p.141). Another important concept in Sociocultural Theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of Proximal Development is, “the distance between the actual development levels as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86). Children who are in the zone of proximal development for a specific task are not yet able to perform a task independently, however, with an appropriate amount of assistance, they will be able to complete the task successfully. Last, I would like to discuss the impact that cultural beliefs and social contexts have on one’s learning. Within the Sociocultural Theory, the social context is at the heart of the learning and communication process (Barnard & Campbell, 2005). There are many different social contexts in which learning takes place including the classroom, the home, and the community. The Sociocultural Theory posits that in addition to social contexts, learning is also influenced by the culture in which one lives (Cherry, 2018). Cultural

beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place. The type of instruction and learning that is valued in one culture is not the same as another. Therefore, depending on where one lives, and the type of instruction and learning valued in their culture, this will play a role in the learning and instruction they engage in.

After discussing the key points of each theory and displaying the slides, I asked if anyone had any questions about either the Cognitive Process Theory or the Sociocultural Theory of writing. After answering questions, I distributed the Theories of Writing Reflection sheet. The purpose of this activity is to allow teachers to reflect on the key points of each theory and how their instruction reflects aspects of each theory. Approximately ten minutes was given to complete the reflection- sheet. More time can be given if necessary. Teachers keep this sheet for their own reference so that they may use it for other activities in the workshop.

THEORIES ON WRITING

COGNITIVE PROCESS THEORY

FLOWER & HAYES (1978)

THIS THEORY INFORMS RESEARCH AND PRACTICE
ABOUT THE THINKING PROCESSES THAT OCCUR
DURING THE WRITING PROCESS.

COGNITIVE PROCESS THEORY

- Writing is a complex cognitive process .
- A process that involves many steps.
- Pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing.
- Not a linear process.
- Students will revisit the steps many times throughout the process.

ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY THE COGNITIVE PROCESS THEORY

- Writing to Learn
- Quick Write
- Graphic Organizers- mind maps, T-charts, timelines

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY OF WRITING

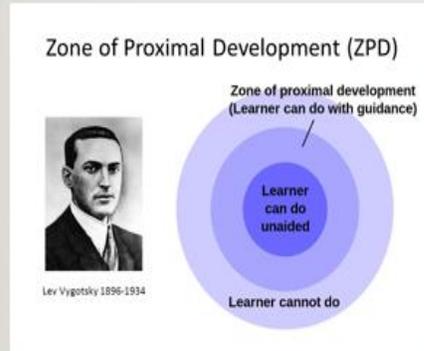
Vygotsky (1978, 1981))

Vygotsky believed that learning occurred through interactions with more experienced guides who could guide the novice learner.

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY OF WRITING

-
- Writing is viewed as a social and collaborative activity
 - Less experienced students learn from more knowledgeable others (MKO's)
 - MKO's can be students, teachers, authors

ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT



- According to Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of Proximal Development is, "the distance between the actual development levels as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p.86).
- Children who are in the zone of proximal development for a specific task are not yet able to perform a task independently, however, with an appropriate amount of assistance, they will be able to complete the task successfully.

CULTURAL BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

- Cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place.
- The type of instruction and learning that is valued in one culture is not the same as another. Therefore, depending on where one lives and the type of instruction and learning valued in their culture, this will play a role in the learning and instruction they engage in.

**ACTIVITIES
SUPPORTED BY
THE
SOCIOCULTURAL
THEORY OF
WRITING**

- Scaffolding
- Collaboration between students
- Collaboration between student and teacher
- Student-Teacher conferences
- Students editing each other's papers
- Students collaborating on pieces together
- Referencing mentor texts to learn what exemplary pieces look and sound like

Theories of Writing Reflection:

1. Briefly summarize the beliefs of the Cognitive Process Theory of writing.

2. Briefly summarize the beliefs of the Sociocultural Theory of writing.

3. What aspects of your teaching are aligned with the Cognitive Process Theory of writing?

4. What aspects of your teaching are aligned with the Sociocultural Theory of writing?

Activity 3:

This activity allows teachers time to discuss the teaching strategies they use for writing in their classroom. How do they teach writing? What strategies have they had success with? What strategies have they tried that were not successful? What do they feel is important to incorporate when teaching writing? During this activity, teachers have a chance to discuss these questions as a group. The above-mentioned questions are written on the board. I will pose each question to my colleagues and they will be given time to share amongst themselves. Teachers have approximately five minutes to discuss each question in their groups. More time can be given if needed. At the end of the time- period, I ask teachers to share out some of their responses. I then pose the following questions to the group:

- What did we learn from our group discussions?
- Were there any similarities in responses that emerged?
- Were there any new ideas that emerged from the discussions?

I call on volunteers to share their responses.

Activity 4:

Throughout my research I identified six strategies that have been found to be effective strategies for teaching writing. Those strategies are: choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), direct instruction (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012), writing frequently (Graham et al., 2012), task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017), teaching students to become self-regulated (Gadd & Parr, 2017), and creating a supportive classroom environment (Graham et al., 2012). I created a power point presentation that outlines each of these strategies and gives examples of ways to incorporate these strategies into the classroom.

To begin this activity, I explain to my colleagues that we will be learning about effective strategies for teaching writing. I inform them that we will be looking at a PowerPoint presentation that outlines these strategies. I encourage them to share out throughout the presentation ways that they incorporate these strategies into their classroom. I then display and read the content of the slides.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WRITING

WRITING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2018

BY THERESA KAUFMAN



CHOICE

- Allow students to choose the topics they would like to write about, choose the format of their writing (written, typed), modify teacher selected prompts.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Teacher models how to perform a specific skill.

Examples: How to revise, how to write an introductory paragraph, how to use a rubric to self-assess.



TASK PURPOSEFULNESS

Interesting things
YOU like & ❤️.

- Set a purpose for writing. Allow students to write about their interests, experiences, prior knowledge, etc.

WRITING FREQUENTLY

- It is recommended that students write for one hour a day. Students are encouraged to write throughout the day and across the curriculum.



SELF- REGULATED



- Set learning goals
- Self assess their own writing
- Allow students to collaborate
- Seek assistance when needed

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Providing praise
- Focusing on the process not the product
- Collaboration
- Scaffold instruction
- Feedback
- Analysis of model texts
- Set clear and specific goals



Activity 5:

In activity four, teachers learned about effective strategies for teaching writing and discussed how these strategies are used in their own classroom. In this activity, teachers have an opportunity to reflect on the strategies they use when teaching writing and set instructional goals for themselves with their writing instruction. In this activity, I displayed the slides once again and teachers were given five minutes to discuss the content of each slide and ways that they plan on incorporating the strategy into their instruction. At the end of this activity, teachers had an opportunity to complete the teaching strategies goal setting and reflection sheet. I distributed the goal setting and reflection sheet to the teachers and they were given approximately ten minutes to complete the worksheet. As teachers were working, I was available to answer any questions they had as well as offer suggestions of strategies they may not have utilized in their classrooms.

Effective Teaching Strategies Reflection and Goals

1. Which of the effective teaching strategies do you use in your classroom when you are teaching writing?

2. Pick one strategy that you are not currently using that you would like to implement into your teaching practice. Which strategy?

3. How do you plan on implementing this strategy? What will this look like in your classroom?

4. What questions do you have about effective teaching strategies for writing?

Professional Development Writing Workshop Day 2:

Activity:

In this activity, teachers examined unit one, week one, of the Benchmark Advance (2017) writing program. Teachers used the Teacher's Edition Manual to identify the writing lessons taught on each day of unit one, week one. Using the spreadsheet provided, teachers identified the lesson (using Day 1, Day 2, etc.), the content of the lesson, the third grade Common Core State Standard for writing that was addressed in the lesson, and the teaching strategy used in the lesson. The purpose of this activity was for teachers to analyze the program to see how it aligned with what the research identified as effective teaching practices, the third grade Common Core State Standards, as well as the Cognitive Process Theory of writing and the Sociocultural Theory of writing. The goal was that teachers would take the information they learned by doing this analysis and compare it with the analysis they did on day three with the Lucy Calkins writing program. They could then take a closer look at each of the analysis' they had done with each writing program to make a final evaluation comparing both writing programs on day four.

Day two is meant to be a day for teachers to dive into the curriculum and collaborate with one another as they take an in depth look at the writing lessons in the program. To participate in this day's activities, teachers need their teacher's manual for Benchmark Advance and a copy of the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. In addition, they need a copy of the Benchmark Advance Writing Curriculum Map, Benchmark Advance Reflection Sheet, and Benchmark Advance Writing Program Suggestions Sheet which I have created below. Teachers are given a copy of the documents as seen below and have the entire two hours to map out and analyze the Benchmark Advance writing curriculum.

Benchmark Advance Reflection Sheet

1. Which lessons are aligned with the Cognitive Process Theory of writing?

2. Explain how they aligned with this theory.

3. Which lessons are aligned with the Sociocultural Theory of writing?

4. Explain how they are aligned with this theory.

5. Identify lessons that you could enhance by incorporating effective teaching strategies that are absent from the lessons. Which lessons? Which strategies do you recommend incorporating into the lessons?

Benchmark Advance Writing Program Suggestions

| Lesson | Strategy Recommendations |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Professional Development Writing Workshop Day 3:

Activity:

In this activity, teachers examined Launching the Writing Workshop in the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing program. Teachers used the Teacher's Edition Manual to identify the writing lessons taught each day. Using the spreadsheet provided, teachers identified the lesson (using day one, day two, etc.), the content of the lesson, the third grade Common Core State Standard for writing that was addressed in the lesson, and the teaching strategy used in the lesson. The purpose of this activity was for teachers to analyze the program to see how it aligned with what the research has identified as effective teaching practices, the third grade Common Core State Standards, as well as the Cognitive Process Theory of writing and the Sociocultural Theory of writing. The goal was that teachers take the information they learned by doing this analysis and compare it with the analysis they did on day two with the Benchmark Advance writing program. They could then take a closer look at each of the analysis' they had done with each writing program to make a final evaluation comparing both writing programs on day four.

Day three is meant to be a day for teachers to dive into the Lucy Calkin's curriculum and collaborate with one another as they take an in depth look at the writing lessons in the program. To participate in this day's activities, teachers need their teacher's manual for Lucy Calkin's Launching the Writer's Workshop and a copy of the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. In addition, they need a copy of the Lucy Calkins Writing Curriculum Map, Lucy Calkins Reflection Sheet, and Lucy Calkins Writing Program Suggestions Sheet which I have created below. Teachers are given a copy of these documents and have the entire two hours to map out and analyze the Lucy Calkin's writing curriculum.

| | | | | | |
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| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

Lucy Calkins Reflection Sheet

1. Which lessons are aligned with the Cognitive Process Theory of writing?

2. Explain how they aligned with this theory.

3. Which lessons are aligned with the Sociocultural Theory of writing?

4. Explain how they are aligned with this theory.

5. Identify lessons that you could enhance by incorporating effective teaching strategies that are absent from the lessons. Which lessons? Which strategies do you recommend incorporating into the lessons?

Lucy Calkins Writing Program Suggestions

| Lesson | Strategy Recommendations |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| | |
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| | |
| | |
| | |

Professional Development Writing Workshop Day 4:**Activity:**

During this session, teachers were given an opportunity to utilize the information they were given over the past three days to evaluate and modify the lessons found within the two writing curriculums, Benchmark Advance (2017) and Lucy Calkins (2006). At the beginning of this session, teachers are given the Benchmark Advance/Lucy Calkin's Analysis worksheet. The purpose of the worksheet is to help teachers analyze the lessons found in both writing programs. Teachers will work in groups as they complete the worksheet. To aid them in this task, they will need the worksheets they completed in day two and day three of the workshop (Benchmark Advance Writing Curriculum Map, Benchmark Advance Reflection Sheet, Benchmark Advance Writing Program Suggestions Sheet, the Lucy Calkins Writing Curriculum Map, Lucy Calkins Reflection Sheet, and Lucy Calkins Writing Program Suggestions Sheet). As they complete the Benchmark Advance/Lucy Calkins Analysis worksheet, teachers look for lessons in each writing program that were similar and could be combined. Second, teachers looked for lessons in either program that were not aligned with the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing and therefore could be eliminated from their lesson plans. Next, teachers looked for evidence of effective teaching strategies embedded within the writing lessons for each writing program. For those lessons that did not include effective teaching strategies for teaching writing, teachers mapped out how they could incorporate those strategies into their lessons. After completing the Benchmark Advance/Lucy Calkins Analysis worksheet, teachers were given the Program Planning Overview Worksheet. This worksheet allows them to document the lessons from each writing program they were combining, eliminating, or modifying. Teachers work in groups as

they complete this worksheet. This worksheet was then used on day five of the workshop when teachers planned out the first week of their writing curriculum.

Benchmark Advance/Lucy Calkins Analysis

1. Are there any lessons in the two programs that are similar and can be combined into one lesson? If so, which ones?

2. Are there any lessons that are not aligned with the grade 3 Common Core State Standards for writing? If so, which ones?

3. Are there any lessons from either program that can be eliminated because they are not aligned with the standards, are being combined with other lessons, or are not an effective use of classroom time in your opinion? If so, which ones?

4. Are there any lessons that do not utilize effective teaching strategies? If so, which ones?

5. How could you modify these lessons to incorporate some of the effective teaching strategies?

6. Are there any lessons that you would like to modify and improve using the knowledge you have gained in this workshop? If so, which ones?

Program Planning Overview Worksheet

| Program Lucy Calkins (LC) Or Benchmark Advance (BA) | Lessons Being Combined | Lessons Being Eliminated | Lessons Being Modified |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Professional Development Writing Workshop Day 5:

Activity 1:

In this activity, teachers were given an opportunity to plan out week one of their writing lessons. To do so, they were given a lesson plan template. Teachers have the option of completing this template on their own or in groups, whichever is more beneficial for them. While planning their lessons they used the information they learned on day one of the workshop regarding effective teaching strategies. As mentioned earlier, the research has shown that task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017), choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), direct instruction (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012), writing frequently (Graham et al., 2012), creating a supportive environment (Graham et al., 2012), and teaching students to become self-regulated (Gadd & Parr, 2017) have all been shown to be effective practices when teaching writing. As teachers were planning their writing lessons, they were looking for evidence of these strategies in the writing lessons and incorporating them into lessons where they were absent. In addition, teachers were looking for alignment with the third grade Common Core State Standards for writing. To help them with this process, teachers used the spreadsheets they completed on day two (Benchmark Advance Writing Curriculum Map, Benchmark Advance Reflection Sheet, and Benchmark Advance Writing Program Suggestions Sheet) and day three (Lucy Calkins Writing Curriculum Map, Lucy Calkins Reflection Sheet, and Lucy Calkins Writing Program Suggestions Sheet) that identified the lessons being taught, teaching strategies and standards addressed in each lesson. Finally, teachers used the information they gathered on day four from the Benchmark Advance/Lucy Calkins Analysis sheet and Program Planning Overview Sheet to help them identify lessons they wanted to combine, eliminate or modify. All these documents are needed and utilized while completing the writing lesson plan template.

Teachers have approximately an hour and forty-five minutes to plan out their first week of writing instruction and fill in the template. Teachers are encouraged to ask questions and share ideas as they move through this process.

Writing Lesson Plans- Week 1

| Day | Activity | Teaching Strategy | Standards | Program L.C., B.A., or combination |
|------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
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Activity 2:

In this activity, teachers had an opportunity to take a post-survey to gauge their learning in the workshop, how valuable they felt their learning was, and make recommendations for next steps in their professional development learning. To conclude the workshop, teachers were given the post-survey and reflection sheet. Teachers were given as much time as they needed to complete these documents. When they were done, the documents were turned in so that I could evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop as well as make changes for future workshops. I thanked teachers for the time and effort they put into their learning. Finally, I encouraged teachers to incorporate their new knowledge into their teaching practices.

Post-Survey

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5:
5=very strong 4=strong 3=average 2=below average 1=no experience

1. How would you rate your ability to teach writing?

1 2 3 4 5

2. How would you rate your confidence in your ability to teach writing?

1 2 3 4 5

3. How would you rate your knowledge concerning effective teaching strategies for writing?

1 2 3 4 5

4. How would you rate your ability to make curricular decisions concerning evaluating writing curriculum?

1 2 3 4 5

5. What do you feel is one strength that you possess as a writing teacher? Why?

6. What is one area that you would like to improve on as a writing teacher? Why?

Reflection

1. What did you learn from this workshop that you did not know before?

2. What information was covered in the workshop that you were already familiar with?

3. Did you find this workshop helpful while trying to make curricular decisions concerning the Lucy Calkins and Benchmark Advance writing programs?

4. Would you recommend this workshop to other colleagues? Why or why not?

- 5. What information would have been helpful to have had that was not included in the workshop?

What would you recommend as next steps for the next Professional Development workshop on this topic?

Chapter 5: Introduction

My district adopted a new Language Arts curriculum, Benchmark Advance (2017). The problem was that our district already had a writing program in place, Lucy Calkins (2006), and it is not possible to teach the two writing programs simultaneously because they take such different approaches to teaching writing. The school district realized the dilemma that teachers faced and gave us leeway in how to approach the teaching of writing for one year. They allowed teachers to use their professional judgement to make decisions about using both curriculums in a way that they felt would best meet the needs of their students.

The purpose of this project was to look at what the current research stated about effective strategies for teaching writing. The information I gained throughout my research was shared with my third- grade team and used to develop a professional development workshop to help us make curricular decisions regarding our writing program. My goal was to provide teachers with resources they could use while examining and evaluating the two writing curriculums so that they could make informed decisions on how to implement an effective writing program. This professional development workshop allowed teachers to examine both the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing curriculum and the Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculum, look for similarities in both curriculums, identify the standards being addressed within each program, and make decisions about how to implement both curriculums based on what the research identified as effective strategies for teaching writing.

Lessons Learned- Effective Strategies for Teaching Writing

Throughout my research I learned there are many effective strategies for teaching writing. While analyzing the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculums, my colleagues and I searched for evidence of these effective strategies for teaching writing in the curriculums. Throughout my research, I learned the following about effective strategies for teaching writing:

One strategy is task purposefulness (Gadd & Parr, 2017). When students are writing about topics that they are familiar with or have an interest in, it gives them a purpose for writing. One of the ways this can be accomplished is by giving students choice in what they write about. Moving forward, as I began to plan my future writing instruction, I incorporated an element of choice into my assignments. Choice over the topic they were writing about and choice about the format of their final product (e.g. typed vs. handwritten). Doing so, had a positive effect on student motivation. I noticed students were more excited about writing when they had an element of choice surrounding their assignments. There was more excitement when it came time to write as opposed to the grunts and groans that I would sometimes hear. Students were excited to write because they got to choose some of the elements of their writing.

Another aspect of task purposefulness is that students understand how the learning task is related to their development of becoming a more proficient writer (Gadd & Parr, 2017). This means letting students know the purpose of the assignment. When students understand why they need to have certain skills, they are more likely to engage with and exert effort on the assignment. This can also lead to an increase in student motivation because they understand why they are learning that skill and why it is important for them to master that skill. One of the ways that I incorporated this into my lessons was through learning intentions. My lessons now begin

with a learning intention which is a brief explanation of the skill that the lesson is addressing and how it relates to their life. For example, today we are learning how to write a friendly letter because this is an important skill you will use throughout your life. As an adult you will write letters to your friends and your colleagues. This helps to take the guesswork out of why we are learning various skills. Students have a clearer picture of what they are doing and why they are doing it. It provides a purpose to their assignments. I have found that when students understand the purpose, they are more willing to engage in the task.

A second strategy that has been identified as having a positive impact on students' writing is direct instruction (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012). Direct instruction is when the teacher explains or demonstrates what the students are expected to do, learn, and achieve in the lesson. When teaching writing to my students, I model the task that I am asking them to do. I provide exemplary pieces that we can examine as well as guide them step by step in the process of creating their own pieces of writing. This direct instruction serves as a guide for them and clarifies what I expect them to do. It also serves as an opportunity for them to ask any questions they may have before they perform the task on their own. I have found this strategy to be very effective with my students because it makes invisible cognitive processes visible so that they can recreate them. I have found that using direct instruction leads to a higher quality product from the students because it helps to clarify what I am asking them to do and how I want them to do it.

A third strategy that has been shown to have a positive effect on student's writing is the opportunity to write frequently. When students write frequently across the curriculum and write for many different purposes, they become more skilled writers (Graham et al., 2012). As a result, I try to provide time every day for my students to write. We write in journals, we write responses to literature, we compose compositions, and we write to explain our thinking. Before

this project, my students wrote predominately when they were composing compositions. After this project, I have expanded the amount of time my students write throughout the school day as well as the type of writing experiences they engage in. As a result, I have seen an improvement in my students' writing. For example, they are can write various compositions and write for longer periods of time. Their writing has punctuation, paragraphs, dialogue, and is richer in content. The more they wrote, the more skilled they became as writers. The more skilled they became, the more confident they became.

Another aspect of effective writing instruction is the importance of creating a supportive environment (Graham et al., 2012). Some examples of this are providing praise, focusing on the process not the product when giving feedback, allowing students opportunities to collaborate and provide feedback to one another, setting clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish while writing, assessment and feedback, analysis of model texts, and scaffolding the instruction (Graham et al., 2012). One of the ways I created a supportive environment is by scaffolding my instruction by breaking each assignment into manageable chunks. One day we may focus on just writing an introduction. I show an example and model how to write an introduction and then we talk about what we notice in the introduction. They then practice writing an introduction on their own. This scaffolding and direct instruction provides them with the guidance and support they need to be successful. As a result, I have seen an improvement in my students' writing.

Another way that I created a supportive learning environment for my students was through peer editing. I provide opportunities for students to both peer- edit and self-assess their own writing. Students use rubrics to use evaluate their own writing as well as the writing of their peers. These rubrics provide a clear example of what I am expecting in their writing. I have

found that using rubrics allows students to have a greater sense of control over their writing because they know exactly what they need to do to create a quality product. It takes the guesswork out of the grading process for them.

Self-regulation has also been found to have a positive effect on student's writing (Gadd & Parr, 2017). Some examples of this are: allowing students to write about topics they have selected, allowing them opportunities to write that are outside of the instructional time, and allowing students to collaborate and teaching them to seek support when needed (Gadd & Parr, 2017). One of the ways that I have incorporated this into my instruction is by allowing students to collaborate on their writing. Students can choose to work on pieces of writing together as well as peer edit one another's work. I have found this to be especially beneficial for my struggling writers. They benefit from working with higher performing peers because the higher performing peers serve as a model for them. They assist their classmates through the writing process and provide support by editing one another's papers or providing feedback. I have noticed that many times these higher performing peers enjoy helping their classmates who are struggling because it gives them a sense of pride and confidence in their abilities as a writer.

Lessons Learned- Components of an Effective Professional Development Program

In addition to learning about effective strategies for teaching writing, I have also learned about the components of an effective professional development program. In creating this project, I have taken what I have learned about the components of an effective professional development program to create a workshop for my third- grade team in which we analyze the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculums.

One component of an effective professional development program is that it is focused on content (Borko, 2004). It is important that teachers understand the content they are responsible

for teaching so that they may pass on this understanding to their students. This workshop was designed with the intent to provide an opportunity for teachers to explore, examine, and analyze the curriculum found in both the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) programs. Giving teachers the time and opportunity to explore both curriculums has led to a greater and more in depth understanding of the curriculums, which allows them to make intentional decisions about how to use the content in their daily instruction.

Another component of effective professional development programs are that they incorporate active learning (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, & Espinoza, 2017). “Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students” (Darling-Hammond et al., p. v). Some examples of this are observing other teachers, being observed by other teachers, providing feedback, analyzing data, planning classroom implementation, reviewing student work, and trying out new teaching strategies. As I designed this workshop, I provided opportunities for teachers to plan classroom implementation of their writing curriculum. I provided them with information on effective strategies for teaching writing and allowed them time to plan out the strategies they would like to incorporate into their teaching. When time is not carved out for this type of learning and planning to take place, most of the time it does not because teachers have so many responsibilities that consume their time. It is important to provide the time and space for teachers to engage in the planning and learning that is necessary to transform their teaching practice because this has a positive effect on student learning and performance.

Collective participation is another component of effective professional development (Harris, Lane, Graham, Driscoll, Sandmel, Brindle, & Schatschneider, 2012). Collective

participation refers to the participation of those who attend the same school, department or grade level. Within this workshop, teachers were given the opportunity to work with their grade-level colleagues. The workshop was designed for my third-grade teaching partners whom all work at the same school. This was a purposeful decision because it was important for my colleagues and me to work together so that we could share ideas and give feedback to one another. I also felt that working together would be more powerful than working alone because we all bring different strengths and experiences with us. Putting these experiences and strengths together allowed for richer conversations and different ideas than one could come up with on their own.

Effective professional development programs utilize modeling (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017, p.11). This includes curricular and instructional models as well as modeling of instruction. When creating this workshop, I researched best practices for teaching writing. I created a PowerPoint presentation that outlined best practices for teaching writing so that my colleagues could learn about methods that have proven to be effective. This was very helpful because this was knowledge that was never taught to us in our teacher credential programs. It is important that teachers know about these practices so that they may implement them and improve their instruction.

Feedback and reflection are another component of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This professional development workshop provided many opportunities for teachers to reflect on their learning. They were asked to reflect on the Cognitive Process Theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981) of writing, the Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) of writing, effective practices for teaching writing, the Lucy Calkins (2006) writing curriculum, the Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculum, as well as their own

teaching practices. Once again, I feel that providing teachers the time and space to reflect is important because it can transform their teaching practice.

Professional development that is of sustained duration has also been found to be effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). According to Darling-Hammond et al., (2017), “professional development that is sustained, offering multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices, has a greater chance of transforming teaching practices and student learning” (p.15). This workshop was designed to take place over the course of five days so as not to overload teachers with an abundance of information and too little time to process it. Instead teachers were given multiple days to explore the content and given time to reflect on the material.

Last, effective professional development is job-embedded. According to Hunzicker (2010), “effective professional development for teachers is job-embedded, which makes it both relevant and authentic” (p.4). Job-embedded professional development is relevant because it is related to what teachers are doing in their classrooms, and it is authentic because teachers can incorporate what they are learning into their classroom. The learning that teachers engaged in throughout this professional development was job-embedded and authentic because it directly related to what they were doing in their classrooms. In my experience, this type of professional development is more meaningful because teachers can take what they have learned and apply it to their practice. It is relevant to their practice and therefore is meaningful.

Recommendations

This professional development workshop was created for my third- grade team as a resource to help us make curricular decisions for our writing program. I recommend that other elementary teachers in the district attend this workshop as well because they are confronted with

the same decisions regarding their writing curriculum. Other teachers would benefit from learning about the theories of writing and best practices for teaching writing. As elementary teachers, we are responsible for teaching writing to our students. Knowing about various theories of writing and best practices for teaching writing enables teachers to make informed decisions about the most effective ways to teach writing to their students.

Limitations

One limitation of this project was that it only analyzed a small piece of both the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculums. The workshop was designed to allow teachers the time and resources needed to analyze unit one week one of the Benchmark Advance (2017) curriculum and the 17 sessions of Launching the Writing Workshop in the Lucy Calkins (2006) curriculum. This professional development workshop did not analyze and review all lessons found within each curriculum to keep the workshop within a manageable time frame.

A second limitation of the workshop is that it is limited to one grade level. I chose to focus on one grade level as a starting point to begin discussions about both writing curriculums. It was my opinion that the learning would be more relevant to teachers when it was directly tied to their grade level. Secondly, I felt that teachers would have a more collaborative experience if they were working with others at their grade level as opposed to many different grade levels.

Lastly, this workshop was geared towards my colleagues who all work at the same school site. Working with other teachers at other school sites may bring up new perspectives and ideas based on their experiences. As a result, the conversations are focused on issues that we see at our school. The conversations would perhaps be different if they included other participants from different school sites that have different experiences from ours.

In the future, district administrators may choose to expand this workshop to include an analysis of both writing curriculums over the course of the year. In addition, they may choose to expand the workshop to include other grade levels and other school sites so that other teachers may benefit from the information on theories of writing and effective strategies for teaching writing that were explored in this workshop. With the knowledge they gain from this workshop, they can make informed decisions regarding writing curriculum and best practices for teaching writing to their students.

Future Directions

Moving forward, it would be beneficial for teachers to continue this professional development writing workshop and expand it so that all sections of both the Lucy Calkins (2006) and Benchmark Advance (2017) writing curriculum are analyzed. The decisions that teachers are being asked to make about which curriculum to use will impact their students' academic achievement and writing development. It is important that teachers be given the knowledge, time and space to make these important decisions so that they may make the best decisions possible using the research literature as a guide. Using the research as a guide allows teachers to make informed decisions that have been proven to be effective and are more likely to have a positive effect on student achievement.

In addition to meeting to discuss the rest of the curriculum, it is important that teachers come back together to meet and reflect on how their lessons went. Are there things that didn't go as planned? Are there parts of their lessons that weren't as successful as they anticipated? What changes would they make? Giving teachers the time and space to discuss these issues is important to help them learn from one another and improve their teaching practice. Without a time and place designated for these discussions, they likely won't take place.

These discussions are a valuable learning opportunity for teachers that they can in turn pass on to their students. The knowledge teachers gain is passed on to students in the form of teaching strategies, lesson plans, modifying lesson plans and student achievement.

In the future, I think it would be beneficial for grade level teams throughout the district to get together and discuss their opinions and experiences with the two writing programs. Each school site has its own unique culture and needs. Bringing these different perspectives and experiences together would create a richer discussion in my opinion. This would give teachers a chance to learn from one another and brainstorm solutions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to look at what the current research stated about effective strategies for teaching writing. This project looked at the different theories of writing, effective teaching strategies for teaching writing, and components of effective professional development programs.

It is my belief that the decisions we are being asked to make about which curriculum to teach are important decisions. Important decisions that require our time, attention, and careful thought. By reviewing what the research tells us about effective teaching strategies, theories of writing, and examining the Common Core State Standards in third grade for writing, I believe that we as educators can equip ourselves to make the best instructional decisions possible for teaching writing. I believe that we as educators should be given the time and space to collaborate with our colleagues to make these decisions. Without the time and space to collaborate and examine both curriculums, we run the risk of making poor decisions because we do not have the necessary information we need to make these decisions.

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