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Journal of Teacher Action Research - Volume 8, Issue 2, 2022,  
[practicalteacherresearch.com](http://practicalteacherresearch.com), ISSN # 2332-2233

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# JTAR

## Journal of Teacher Action Research Volume 8, Issue 2, 2022

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## About the Journal

Founded in 2013, the Journal of Teacher Action Research (ISSN: 2332-2233) is a peer-reviewed online journal indexed with EBSCO that seeks practical research that can be implemented in Pre-Kindergarten through Post-Secondary classrooms. The primary function of this journal is to provide classroom teachers and researchers a means for sharing classroom practices.

The journal accepts articles for peer-review that describe classroom practice which positively impacts student learning. We define teacher action research as teachers (at all levels) studying their practice and/or their students' learning in a methodical way in order to inform classroom practice. Articles submitted to the journal should demonstrate an action research focus with intent to improve the author's practice.

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# IMPLEMENTING WRITERS' WORKSHOP INTO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

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**Abstract** Writers' Workshop has developed prominence as a method towards providing authentic writing experiences. The purpose of this study was to determine what happens to student perceptions and quantity of writing when Writers' Workshop is implemented into a special education setting. This study took place in a self-contained special education classroom of third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders. Data was collected through focus group interviews with the teachers, focus groups with two students from every grade, perception surveys, and writing samples. Surveys and focus group interviews were completed before and after the implementation. Writing samples were collected at the beginning, middle, and end of implementation. The constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies or categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003), was used to analyze data. Through data collection and analysis three major themes emerged from this research: struggles in writing, attitudes about methods used, and understanding writing practices.

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**Keywords:** teacher action research, Writing, Writers' Workshop, Special Education, Authentic Writing, Process Approach, Elementary Writing

## Introduction

Multiple hands were raised, and every journal had three words in it, the same three words we had written as a prompt the few seconds prior, this weekend I \_\_\_\_\_. It was then that I realized something had to change. How would I help every student at one time, and how does one help when nothing is written? It occurred to me in this moment that trying to find prompts that would be relatable and get these students to enjoy writing, were causing more chaos than anticipated. So now what? What do you do when writing seems contrived and inauthentic? Where is the passion that children have? Why is it not in their writing? This is the moment where every teacher begins asking themselves a series of questions. What do I do now? We have tried this for too long, and it just doesn't feel right. I have heard of things such as Writers' Workshop, but is it effective, and how do I start?

## Literature Review

Clippard and Nicaise (1998) describe typical writing instruction as reductionism. They describe reductionism as writing being divided out into its own category or subject. It is then further divided by breaking the writing into segments of skills to learn at one time through daily or weekly lessons. A Writers' Workshop method differs from this significantly. Students spend around 15-20 minutes with the teacher doing a mini-lesson over a specific writing skill each day. After the mini-lesson, students are then released into an independent writing time with teacher conferencing. The skills of writing such as revising, editing, details, introductions etc. are not reduced to being taught at specific times during the year, rather they are focused on in student writing year-round and may even be revisited during a mini-lesson if needed. The mini-lesson is part of what helps to create the process approach to writing that is seen in Writers' Workshop. Clippard and Nicaise (1998) examined the Writers' Workshop approach by promoting the writing skills and self-efficacy of small groups of students with writing deficits in the fourth and fifth grade and found it to be effective. Calkins (1985) said that reductionism could be considered "inauthentic because teachers select the students' writing topics; and they focus on the product, as opposed to the writing process" (p. 3). More authentic experiences in writing would help students to focus more on the writing process as described by Calkins (1985). Clippard and Nicaise (1998) describe Writers' Workshop as a more authentic method of writing instruction that focuses more on the process rather than the product.

Specific complexities are described by Baum et al. (2012) that have been found to affect students while writing. Those complexities that affected student writers were "to clearly organize thoughts in a sequence, activate and sustain attention throughout the brainstorming and writing stages, and remember the rules of conventional writing, including word order or grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and formatting" (p. 10). These complexities were also observed within the researcher's placement classroom. The process approach used in Writers' Workshop has shown effectiveness in previous studies at addressing a few of these complexities. Schrodtt et al. (2019) addressed these complexities through a study that focused on examining the impact of adding self-regulation strategies and growth mindset on writing and motivation outcomes for kindergarteners, through a Writers' Workshop approach in which Schrodtt et al. (2019) describe as, allowing space for children to explore writing both individually and collaboratively in both approximations and conventional formats. When Schrodtt et al. (2019) conducted this study they found the following:

As the intervention progressed, students did not ask for assistance from the researcher and became more independent in their ability to spell words as they began to learn and employ spelling strategies. (p. 436)

Another instance where Writers' Workshop was found to be effective in addressing the previously discussed complexities was in a study done by Gericke and Salmon (2014) addressing the use of mentor texts often used within Writers' Workshop. Gericke and Salmon (2014) found "after reading the mentor texts aloud, students were more productive and motivated during the mini-lesson and independent writing time" (p. 8). Another implementation of Writers' Workshop was done by Isom (2014) when she used illustrations to support the development of her kindergarten students' writing. This was an inquiry-

based method of learning in Writers' Workshop where mentor texts were used to support students in creating their own picture books. Interestingly, Isom (2014) also describes these mentor texts used within Writers' Workshop as being effective because students would actually "try out" new ideas noticed in the mentor texts when it came to writing/drawing. A benefit within Writers' Workshop is the conferring with students that happens. Hawkins (2016) stated that during this time students are "taking ownership of their own ideas, advocating for their own learning, expressing their own desires, and conversing with their teachers as partners" (p. 9).

Only a couple of studies have examined the use of Writers' Workshop with students with disabilities. Clippard and Nicaise (1998) pulled students with writing deficits from general education classrooms to create a sample of participants and found that students in a Writers' Workshop model scored higher on direct writing samples. Additionally, Sturm (2012) specifically looked at Writers' Workshop in a special education classroom when he took a sample of students with developmental disabilities and then implemented an Enriched Writers' Workshop model. The Enriched Writers' Workshop model combined a differentiated writing process instruction with social communication and cognitive strategy instruction for students with complex writing needs across a wide range of ages.

## **Methodology**

To begin the methods section, participants are described along with data collection and how that data is analyzed using hierarchical coding during the research. This study was conducted through a yearlong clinical teaching position, so the students and teachers were comfortable giving their honest opinions about Writers' Workshop given the prior relationships established.

*Purpose.* In this study, what happens after a Writers' Workshop model is implemented during writing time in a special education classroom is examined. When one researches using Writers' Workshop as an intervention, in many cases it improved writing for students of all ages. There was substantial research on Writers' Workshop being used as a form of intervention; however, there was very little research on its use in special education settings specifically. The few studies involving special education did not implement a Writers' Workshop into a special education classroom; rather, they pulled a group of these students for a participant pool. A self-contained special education classroom context is very different from general education or even pull-out special education. For example, students within a self-contained room are all considered to have a disability and are in the classroom all day with a certified special education teacher. As a result, curriculum is condensed, instruction must include more visuals and modeling, and there are typically more instances of work refusal along with many other behavioral challenges. For this reason, researching the implementation of Writers' Workshop within an actual self-contained special education classroom can contribute to the knowledge of its potential to be used in various settings with similarities to the challenges discussed in the future making the study beneficial to research.



Writers' Workshop is an approach in which freedom and time is given to students to write authentically and independently on their own chosen topics. There are four elements to this workshop model. The elements are the following: mini-lessons, direct teaching on various writing skills and strategies, independent writing time with conferencing, and then a share time (Schrodt et al., 2019, p. 428). The main purpose of this research was to figure out what happens to student and teacher perceptions, as well as the quantity of writing when Writers' Workshop is implemented into a self-contained special education setting. My research questions were as follows:

**Research Question:** What happens when a Writers' Workshop is implemented in a special education classroom during writing time?

- **Sub question 1:** Does the model increase the amount of writing by the students?
- **Sub question 2:** What are the students' and teacher's perceptions of writing before and after the workshop is implemented?

When this study was conducted, the researcher was a graduate student conducting action research in a clinical placement classroom. This was a self-contained classroom that consisted of special education students all ranging from third to fifth grade. A co-teaching model was used for this placement at Burnett Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms) in Longhorn, Texas. The school was associated with the Longhorn ISD school district. The researcher and classroom teacher were responsible for planning instruction that was divided out equally through all subjects. During the study, all writing lessons were planned and implemented by the researcher, and the classroom teacher helped individuals throughout the room during independent writing time. The aides supported students in small groups if they needed more structured assistance. Writers' Workshop was the model implemented. This model started with a 10-15 minute mini-lesson teaching a writing skill such as editing, revising, adding details, creating introductions and much more. These skills were selected by the researcher based upon the steps to writing and publishing a piece of work, or areas of need for multiple students the researcher noticed during the independent writing time. The students were then released into an independent writing time where they would continue a piece of writing or start a new one. Students worked through the process of creating a piece of writing over several days. They would implement skills learned in the mini lessons when their writing required it until their piece could be published. Although, during the research we did not get to it; normally the teacher will pull aside students for individual conferencing over their writing during this independent writing time as well. Previously, writing was taught by giving students a sentence stem such as "This weekend I..." If students needed assistance with spelling, grammar, punctuation, or capitalization then they would raise their hand and it would be addressed on a case by case basis. The context of the classroom was unique in that we had multiple adults able to assist in this way.

*Participant Selection.* The participants in the study consisted of students in the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade PALS (Practical Academics and Living Skills) or otherwise known as a self-contained special education classroom. There were 13 total students. The student demographics were as follows: 30% African American, 31% Caucasian, 23% Hispanic, 8%

Philippine, and 8% mixed race. Of the 13 students, four were girls and nine were boys. Other participants included two teachers' aides and the teacher of the classroom. All 13 students who consented and turned in an assent form were chosen to participate in the study. A parent letter with a consent form for parents to sign was also sent home and returned for those who took part in the research. The teacher and aides also completed a consent form before taking part in the research. The teacher and aides were chosen as participants intentionally, because they worked closely with most of the participating students in the study for a year or more and offered a good perspective.

*Data Collection.* The data collection used was focus group interviews, student artifacts in the form of writing samples, and student surveys. The students served in this classroom were in a self-contained special education classroom. The Writers' Workshop was implemented for four weeks. Focus group interviews took place with six students (two from each grade) and the teacher with the two aides at the beginning and end of implementation. The two students from each grade were chosen with purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Students in grade levels with more than two students were chosen based on the survey results to select diverse attitudes toward writing. Focus group interviews with the students lasted about ten minutes. The teacher and aide focus group interviews lasted for about 20-30 minutes. All of the focus group interviews were semi-structured, with ten pre-planned but open-ended questions (Hendricks, 2017). The artifacts consisted of one writing sample per student which were collected before the model was implemented, two or three weeks after the model was implemented, and then again at the end of implementation. The student surveys also took place before and after the implementation of Writers' Workshop. These surveys consisted of smiley faces on a Likert scale. There was a total of ten questions on student surveys. The researcher wanted to collect data in a way that established credibility. She did this by looking to the words of Hendricks (2017) when he states, "credibility, dependability, and confirmability can be established through triangulation, a process in which multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed" (p.71).

*Data Analysis.* Data was analyzed with mixed methods. The constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies or categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). For transcribed data such as the interviews and surveys, 15 to 20 level 1 codes that emerged in the first 20% of the data were used to code the remaining 80% of the data (Tracy, 2013). Then the researcher developed three to five level 2 codes. The level 1 and 2 codes were important and recurring themes found within the data. These codes are displayed in a codebook (see Appendix A), that provides a color-coded list, definition, and example of corresponding data within the text. The themes that appeared from the coding of the data determined what additional data was collected. Memos were written for all level two codes. This method was how the focus group interviews and student surveys were analyzed.

Student artifacts were analyzed based on the quantity (number of words minus any excessive repetition of words) written. Writing artifacts were taken before, during, and after implementation. Each artifact was given a total number of words written. The samples for all students during each of the three samples were averaged to get an idea of the average



number of words written by the class as a whole. The researcher also took an average of the artifacts taken before implementation and samples during and after so that I could compare numbers before implementation against during and after. The Writers' Workshop survey was analyzed through a Likert scale. Each question was rated one through four and then students were given a total number at the end. The higher the total number, the more positive perception of writing students had. The lower the total number reflected a more negative perception of writing.

## Results and Discussion

Through data collection and analysis three major themes emerged from this research: struggles in writing, attitudes about methods used during writing, and understanding writing practices. These major themes were developed using focus group interviews with the teachers/aides and the students, student artifacts, and student survey responses. There were two aides, one teacher and me, the researcher in the study. Since both aides took part in many teaching activities they are referred to as teachers in the following findings and implications.

*Struggles in Writing.* During the before implementation focus group interviews with both teachers and students, the researcher found many struggles in writing mentioned. A few struggles mentioned by teachers, were a reliance on adults for editing, handwriting or spelling barriers, struggles in punctuation, stuck on a thought frequently, and some dependency displayed through not using environmental print. The students described many of these same struggles in writing as well. One similar struggle was a will to learn handwriting. Teachers stated that students "struggled a little bit more with just the letters." Students also made their own statements regarding the issue. When asked what they had to get help with during writing, one student stated "numbers" and another said "the letters." Another common struggle addressed by teachers and students was punctuation. An example of this struggle being portrayed was when a teacher stated, "I think they get stuck on punctuation" when asked why students seemed to just be being stuck in general. Students were able to identify this as a struggle as well. When asked what was hard about writing and what they needed help with, one student responded "periods." Another student gave an example of this specific theme when she described liking the new method of learning punctuation because it was easier, meaning that it was hard at some point before implementation.

The last struggle observed from the research was that students disliked productive struggle. This was hard to find because the theme hid itself in comments from students about teachers being mean, not giving them help right away, or teachers yelling at them and making faces. Students made these comments frequently, so naturally the researcher had to figure out why. With much reflection, the researcher was able to determine that many of the instances students were speaking of were dramatized events in which teachers were pushing a little bit more of a productive struggle model for students. When students had to work harder at spelling by using environmental print or other resources, they became frustrated and assumed teachers were being mean. A few of these statements were as

follows: “Mr. Holland doesn’t help me sometimes when I need help”, “Mr. Holland be like ya’ll try to do it ya’ll selves”, “He tries to make us sound it out.” Overall, you would think we are just fire and brimstone in this classroom, but after reflection of these moments an underlying theme appeared of students seeing our push towards the zone of proximal development as mean. This was one of the most eye opening, and interesting codes found in the data. Students were being required to work more independently on their writing, and they in turn took it as teachers being “mean”.

When interviewed after the implementation, many of these struggles were no longer mentioned by teachers or students. One specific struggle addressed by both teachers and students afterward was getting stuck on a thought. The teachers discussed how drawing pictures and having an idea preplanned to write about seemed to help the students not get to writing time and just be stuck. A benefit of Writers’ Workshop was the fact that students had next steps ready to go when they did get stuck. For example, when they were done drafting there was a step of revising, then they were to edit and so on. Students did not have to feel stuck because the Writers’ Workshop model gave them scaffolding and ideas of where to go next in their writing. Students hardly mentioned at all being stuck and that being an issue for them after the implementation, and teachers stated it was happening less. Students still got stuck here and there; however, redirecting them became much easier than previously. The struggle of handwriting and wanting to learn it specifically did not present itself much after implementing Writers’ Workshop either. My thoughts are that students, and teachers both viewed writing as much more than words on paper, but rather saw it as a multifaceted craft in which the handwriting itself is just one small piece of that craft.

Students still needed help with going through the writing process steps. This could have resolved itself with more time practicing the workshop model. This answers the research question of what happens when a Writers’ Workshop is implemented in a special education classroom during writing time, by showing us that their struggles in writing were addressed to some extent. This code is prevalent throughout the data; however, what it was specifically addressing seemed to have changed after Writers’ Workshop was implemented. This leads me to believe that struggles previously mentioned are no longer as much of an endeavor to students as present difficulties, such as mindset that still present in the after-implementation interviews.

This theme of struggles in writing is significant to the study because it gets at the heart of teaching. We collect data to figure out where students are struggling and then, in turn, create a model that addresses their struggles. We wanted to know what happened if we implemented the model of Writers’ Workshop, and now we know. This model had the ability to address specific struggles that students presented in their interviews before implementation of Writers’ Workshop. The model appears to lend itself well to being able to address struggles, because it included a minilesson before students begin writing. In this minilesson teachers can target these specific struggles in precise ways. It even gave the opportunity for students to see it done in the teacher’s writing before they tried practicing it

on their own. This scaffolding is what I believed to be helpful in addressing these struggles as the Writers' Workshop was implemented.

*Attitudes About Methods Used During Writing.* Students' attitudes about Writers' Workshop developed as a strong theme in the data. Much of the data used for this specific theme was found throughout interviews and surveys. As the after-implementation data was indexed and read through, it was found that students and teachers had many opinions on different methods or techniques used during the implementation of Writers' Workshop.

The students and teachers did, however, describe thoughts about methods that could be tried or were valued in the before and after implementation interviews. Teachers stated, "It helps dividing it up, and it's giving them this little part to do and then you move on to the next little part." Another teacher gave opinions about the methods used when he stated, "You can work more at your own pace. So, like you said it's been good. I agree I like it." It was also mentioned by a teacher, "They like the sticky notes. They like doing that." Students described their attitudes towards methods used in the implementation as well. Students liked using special publishing paper. One specific student stated, "When we color paper" when asked, what was fun about writing? Another stated, "We needed to have our own folders." In referencing their writing folders where they had personal word walls.

The surveys showed that students had a slightly more positive outlook on fixing writing mistakes, planning writing, topics they get to write about, and displaying writing for others to see. These were all questions on the survey that addressed different methods used during the implementation of Writers' Workshop (see Appendix B). Methods used before implementation consisted of drawing after writing, reading writing to the class, using a sentence stem or prompt, and use of computers to do some editing every now and then. Methods that had many perceptions about them during the after-implementation interviews included the use of groups or flexible grouping, displaying work, drawing before writing, and even simple things like the use of sticky notes for revising and checklists for editing. When discussed, all of these methods were viewed with a positive perception. Students seemed to participate in and enjoy editing more when they had sticky notes. Another preferable method that was discussed earlier was drawing before writing. Many students took more ownership and got into the mindset of planning their stories and breaking down each step of the writing process, in turn aiding them from getting stuck as mentioned earlier. One teacher even discussed, "Um, like Dylan and Travis and several others have drawn the picture, and they have been able to explain more."

Another favored method used in the after-implementation interviews was the ability to choose where students could sit and the ability to have flexible groupings. Due to there only being four weeks, students were scaffolded by starting out in groups with a teacher for writing before moving onto independently working in an area of the room. They then began moving into being able to choose what teacher they worked with and whether they needed to work with a teacher. Having choice of where to sit did present some moderate behavior of wandering and not writing because of the loose structure. With more time to fully set up each step of Writers' Workshop and work out the kinks for the individuals in this classroom,

this behavior could have been resolved to some extent. These choices during writing time to me seemed to encourage slight misbehavior in work avoidance but encouraged almost every student to write more than previously, because they had nothing to argue with in a way. They chose where they were going to work, they chose what they would write about, and this resolved more work avoidance than it encouraged at times. All in all, many of the methods used in this Writers' Workshop model centered around choice, and they seemed to be beneficial.

Publishing, which occurred as part of Writers' Workshop, was positively received by students. The questions on the surveys also received more positive views than previously when asked about showing their work. The method used to display work in Writers' Workshop was colorful notebook paper and making a big deal about publishing a piece. It was hung on the wall; students were asked if they wanted it shown on the board after writing. Finishing a piece of writing was overall valued highly.

The major research question in this study was, what happened when Writers' Workshop was implemented. One of the sub-questions inquired about exactly what perceptions were before and after implementation. This theme answered the sub-question directly by showing us how teachers and students felt about the methods and strategies used throughout writing before and after implementing Writers' Workshop. An example of perceptions from students can be seen in Figure 1 of perceptions before and after Writers' Workshop with a survey. A higher number indicates more positive views. To find a further breakdown of the survey see Appendix C.

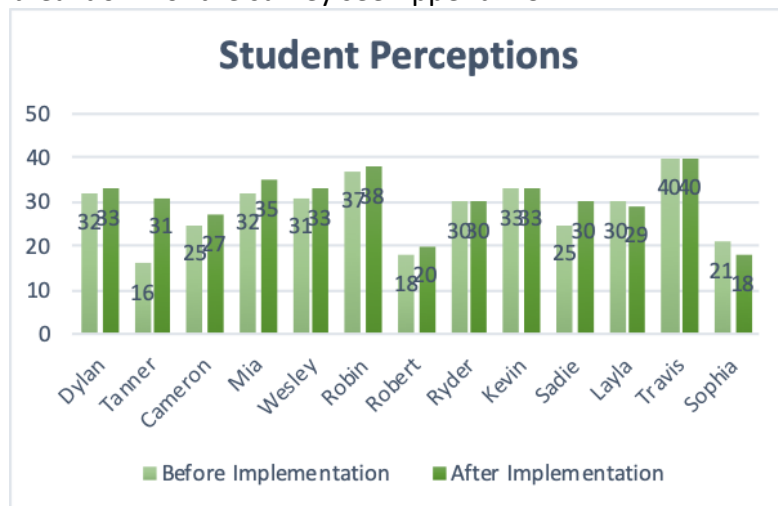


Figure 1. Survey results of student perceptions before and after implementing Writers' Workshop

As you can see in Figure 1 students generally perceived this model with more positive feelings than the previous model. By following this theme throughout the data, the researcher was able to determine the following perceptions: how writing was done before, what students and teachers would like writing to consist of, and even how new methods were seen by students and teachers. The main idea with this theme was to show how versatile Writers' Workshop makes writing. There are multitudes of methods that can be implemented because of the design of Writers' Workshop. It is flexible, and it easily incorporates what students and teachers need at different times.

*Understanding Writing Practices.* This describes what it takes to go through the process of writing in the classroom. This is what writing gets at, what writing was, and what it became. This is where many of the actual writing artifacts came into play, and the questions regarding writing itself in the interviews with students and teachers. The table in Appendix D shows the number of words produced by students and averages of the entire class on production of words before, during, and after implementation.

When implemented, students walked through their first story together as a class, and in the last sample of writing students were doing more writing processes on their own. Students at various points in the workshop were all at very different stages of writing. Therefore, the averages of the quantity of words produced needed to be provided so that it compared to journal prompts a little more fairly.

When the researcher references “writing practices” they are discussing the quality and depth of the actual writing from students, how much work teachers are having to commit towards writing time either before or during, the quantity of how much students are writing, and even what students are choosing to write about. For example, the theme of quality and depth of writing was discussed by a teacher when she stated, “Before we would get like one word out of him; this time it’s more of a flow of thought.” An example of the amount of work teachers had to commit towards writing is displayed by the following quote: “It is very time consuming, especially when you have three or four students wanting to know how to spell this or this word or that word, different words at one time.”

Before implementation, students wrote about any number of prompts given to them. Many times, they would just finish the sentence stem and be done, so there was not much depth in their writing. Before implementing Writers’ Workshop, teachers discussed how the time or work put in before writing was minimal; however, during writing time the amount of labor and time was significant as stated in the above quote regarding the time it took to commit towards actual writing time. The average number of words written before implementing Writers’ Workshop was around ten to eleven (see Appendix D for exact percentages).

During and after implementing Writers’ Workshop these writing practices changed. The quality and depth of the writing was deeper. Teachers discussed how before implementation we might get two or three words from a particular student. After implementation, we got more in-depth stories rather than a few words. Students told us the beginning, middle, and ends with some explanation in between making their stories deeper. As far as the amount of work and time put into writing, that changed slightly. There was a little more time required to plan for writing beforehand as compared to the previous model of journal prompts. Many of the teachers discussed students still needing help. What they needed help with seemed to change though. Students were needing more help with revising or editing and just minimal amounts of spelling. For example, a teacher stated, “They know it’s supposed to be there. They know it goes somewhere, yeah. They are just still trying to figure out where, where does it go.” This comment was about students using punctuation.

Students attempted their own spelling more frequently than before, but they still needed more guidance on what to revise or edit. Again, if the Writers' Workshop was implemented even longer, maybe students would get the hang of what to look for regarding revising or editing.

The quantity of writing changed significantly. Before implementing Writers' Workshop students were writing on average ten to eleven words. During and after implementation that average increased to around thirty-five words (see appendix D for exact percentages). The overall amount students were writing increased which I feel in turn helped students to write with better quality and depth. During after implementation interviews with teachers, it was discussed that students enjoyed choosing what to write about and wrote at deeper levels when it was something familiar to them. As stated in the before implementation interviews, many comments mentioned that the writing of these students was tied to their experiences, and this finding supports those statements.

This theme specifically addresses the research sub-question of does the model increase the amount of writing by students? It also even goes deeper into that question by answering what helped the students write more, and what the quality of that writing actually was. This theme relates to the research question about perceptions because in many instances, teachers discussed their perceptions about the students' physical writing as well as factors like time or choice that enhanced that writing in different aspects. This theme is one of the most significant to the study, because we found in the data that students' quality and quantity of writing seemed to have increased.

## **Implications**

This model of writing has a lot of moving pieces, and it can be very flexible. The researcher was initially drawn to this model because of students' enthusiasm she had seen in previous placements while using it. The researcher also tried to think of ways to address the students' struggles that were noticed such as punctuation, spacing, depth, details, and much more. This model gave a chance to address these specific struggles while fostering a love for writing and "becoming authors" of their own.

When researching Writers' Workshop being used in special education, little research was found regarding the topic. The lack of research in this area leads the researcher to want to research this for herself and others to use in the future, because this model is not limited to a general education classroom.

Something the students and the researcher learned from this research project was that they all love the ability to choose what they write or even where they do their work. Being able to choose what they wanted to write about presented less disruptive behavior during writing; students had no grounds to disagree with what was being written, because they are the ones who made the initial choice of what they personally wanted. When researching anchor charts or different Writers' Workshop lessons it can be overwhelming. Just do it though, start the model with a short minilesson over a writing skill, do independent writing

if the students can, and then share good work. You do not have to do everything you see out there right away for any of this to work. Another major component of Writers' Workshop is to do conferencing with students. The researcher only got to do this at a very surface level, and the results of the research still showed a lot of growth.

The findings found in this study were that the model addressed many specific struggles students had such as getting stuck on a thought, focusing on learning handwriting to become a better writer, and even some punctuation struggles. Students and teachers were all found to like a variety of methods used in the Writers' Workshop model such as choice in groups, drawing before writing, and use of materials such as punctuation checklists or sticky notes for revising and editing. Other findings included more depth and quality in the writing and increased quantity of words written. Teachers discussed how Writers' Workshop was about the same amount of work in some ways, but easier in others. They stated that the work was more worth it though. Discussion from before implementation interviews found that students' writing seemed to be related to their language and experiences. This research showed us this to be a possibility, because when we gave them a choice in what to write about, they did reflect deeper thoughts and more quality in their writing.

Many conclusions can be drawn from this research, and one interesting conclusion is that students spent more time writing, but they did not seem to notice that their time requirement had lengthened. It can be concluded that this was because they were more engaged and less focused on what they had to do and rather what they were getting to participate in. The ability to teach specific writing skills with a minilesson before students write independently also helped them to focus on deeper aspects of writing such as details, structure, and getting their story across effectively. It seemed to help students and teachers focus less on getting something on paper and more about communicating their story in more effective ways. The reason why students and teachers liked many methods in the Writers' Workshop was because it gave students choice and power over their own writing. In the before implementation interviews students mentioned needing a lot of help and how they were frustrated when they did not get it. With Writers' Workshop they had to learn to self-regulate a little more and gained a sense of empowerment.

A few questions resulted from this research and would hopefully lead to further research in the future. One question would be what relationship does Writers' Workshop have with a growth mindset? Another would be to figure out whether students take more ownership with their writing in Writers' Workshop. My last question that resulted from this research is does an increase in writing quantity improve students' dexterity or does it cause them to be more frustrated?

## **Limitations**

The limitations of this study were that it was only about four weeks long. This population and model typically need a lot of time to set up procedures, classroom management, and create a view of students becoming writers themselves. Another limitation would be that this was the researchers first time planning and implementing a Writers' Workshop from the



very beginning. Other limitations included the following: the sheer difference of the journal prompts used before implementation as well as the actual time spent doing writing changed significantly.

## Conclusion

Overall, this study uncovered many foreseen and unexpected findings within writing time. The most unexpected finding was how students presented disliking a productive struggle and a lack of growth mindset as teachers pushed toward the zone of proximal development, requiring students to be more independent in their writing. The focus on handwriting seemed to disappear in after implementation interviews. Students, and teachers both viewed writing as much more than words on paper, but rather saw it as a multifaceted craft in which the handwriting itself is just one small piece of that craft. The ability to have minilessons helped the researcher to target specific struggles seen in students' writing. Teachers and students both valued choice in what to write about and flexibility in groupings or where to sit. They also valued multiple methods used during Writers' Workshop, such as publishing paper, editing checklists, writing folders with personal word walls, and even sticky notes for adding details. When disaggregated to just words on paper, students produced more words than in the previous model of using journal prompts. Students also produced writing with greater depth.

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## About the Author

**Taylor Oliver** is a special education teacher and graduate from Abilene Christian University. She received her bachelor's in science in 2019 and went on to complete her M.Ed. in teaching and learning in 2020. Taylor has a family dedicated to teaching all learners. While student teaching Taylor recognized an area of need and began researching possible solutions. This is where the research Implementing Writer's Workshop started. Taylor is a continual learner and searches for best practices to use in her classroom to further learning. Email: tdoliver232@gmail.com

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**Appendix A: Codebook**

<i>CODEBOOK</i>				
Color Code:	Level 2 Codes:	Level 1 Codes:	Definition of The Code:	Example of The Code:
_____	Struggles in Writing:		Referencing difficulties during writing time.	"Like they didn't know how to spell a word or they didn't have an idea and they just sit."
		Handwriting/Spelling Barrier	When physical handwriting or spelling words hinders thoughts or writing.	"Struggle a little bit more with uh just the letters..."
		Dependency Due to Not Using Environmental Print	Students rely on teachers for writing heavily due to not using words or print around them.	"Because they are not thinking of looking up there." (Pointed towards sight word wall in the room)
		Frequently Getting Stuck on A Thought	When students get a writer's block of sorts due to not being able to come up with an idea or spell a word.	"The thought they get stuck on, just a thought of what to write."
_____	Attitudes About Methods Used During Writing		References to structure, materials, or methods used in writing.	"drawn the picture and they have been able to explain more"

		Use of Various Materials/Methods Liked	The materials, practices, and methods used during writing time to teach and help students write.	"We needed to have our own folders. Yeah cause you say grab your little folder and go to your reading spot."
		Feel Good About Showing Work	The students describing how they feel about showing their finished and uncompleted work to peers or others.	"When they get to read our papers out in the hallways."
		Drawing With Writing Helpful	The Drawing of a picture for beginning, middle, and end of the story before beginning to write and how it was perceived by students and teachers.	"So, draw the pictures and you know in your stages and then do the writing. So, I think the planning part has been really good."
_____	Understanding Writing Practices		References to the physical writing content.	"everyone constantly needs help it's a very active...So, during writing is a lot of work."
		Quantity of Writing	Descriptions of how many words or how much students physically write.	"Uh just writing in general. I mean they used to write

				just one word.”
		Writing About Familiar Things Easier (Choice)	The ability to choose what is written being well liked. Descriptions of students being able to write better work when it is familiar topics to them such as family or friends.	“Write about um if we like write about our friendships and stuff.”

**Appendix B: Writer's Workshop Survey****Very Angry****Upset****Happy****Excited**

1. How does writing make you feel?
2. How do you feel about fixing writing mistakes?
3. How do you feel when your writing is displayed for others to see?
4. How do you feel about the topics you get to write about?
5. How do you feel when you are asked to write a story?
6. How do you feel about planning a story to write?
7. How do you feel during writing time?
8. Do you feel like you get to write about what you want?
9. How do you feel about how much you learn during writing time?
10. How do you feel about reading your work to the class?

**Appendix C: Writer's Workshop Perception Survey**

Total Perception Score (Pre-Study)	
32	
16	
25	
32	
31	
37	
18	
30	
33	
25	
30	
40	
21	
Overall Score: 370	
Total Perception Score (Post-Study)	
33	*
31	*
27	*
35	*
33	*
38	*
20	*
30	-
33	-
30	*
29	L



40	-
18	L
Overall Score: 397	
Red	Below 30
Yellow	30-35
Green	35 and up
*	Showed higher outlook
L	Lower outlook
-	No change

**Appendix D: Writing Artifacts**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Writing Sample 1 (Before)</b>	<b>Writing Sample 2 (During)</b>	<b>Writing Sample 3 (After)</b>	<b>Sample 2 &amp; 3 Averaged</b>	<b>Average Growth/Sample 1 Difference</b>
<b>OVERALL AVERAGES</b>	10.77 Words	33.15 Words	37.31 Words	35.23 Words	24.50 Average Difference

- I felt it fair to provide an average of sample 2 and 3 because students received various levels of assistance during those times and were at various stages in the process of writing.
- I also felt it necessary for overall averages because the Writers' Workshop model did allow more time for writing than the first sample provided, and I felt this made the significant differences in the number of words written a little less inflated due to students solely having more time.