

Running Head: STUDENT LED CONFERENCING

**Will student led conferencing
lead to deeper understanding of language arts concepts
and increase in post assessment data?**

By

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Abstract

The purpose for this action research study was to investigate if individual conferencing would lead to better understanding and comprehension of grammar topics as measured by pre and post test data. The students would participate in regular classroom activities but then would be given the additional task of independently conferencing with the teacher. A qualitative analysis of post test scores would help to indicate if conferencing was beneficial to students study habits. Though simple data analysis and t-tests indicate positive benefits and results for conferencing, they were only statistically significant for one unit of study. The other two units were not statistically strong enough to form a definitive conclusion due to other possible confounding situations.

Introduction

In today's classrooms, teachers acquire data from a variety of sources to drive instruction and monitor students' understanding of concepts in order to provide interventions when necessary. In addition, the student driven classroom is becoming more prevalent. A student driven classroom requires the need for differentiated instruction to meet the needs of each individual student in the classroom; therefore there is no longer a concept of "one size fits all". Through differentiation of lessons and activities teachers facilitate opportunities for students to learn the same material but at different paces, using different avenues for content delivery and through a variety of experiences.

As a reflective teacher, I began to notice some changes were needed in the grammar unit studies that occur in my classroom. Students appeared to be gaining knowledge in language arts skills, but there was minimal carry over after a unit of study was complete. They would forget concepts covered previously, or mix up topics that should not be mixed up. In addition, I observed that my students study skills were very weak. I was brainstorming with coworkers on strategies for providing simple yet effective study skills for our students. During class time last winter, I had large and small group discussions with my students on their personal progress with daily grammar work and assessments. Students indicated they were happy to be making progress from pre to post tests, but they were still attaining subpar grades and they wanted to do better.

After reflection, brainstorming and research, I developed a plan for individual student conferencing. The question then became, ***will student led conferencing/ conversations lead to deeper understanding of language arts concepts and increase in post assessment data?***

Furthermore, I questioned that if students can verbalize concepts in an informal conversation

throughout the unit; will they gain that deeper knowledge base and investigate material more thoroughly? I predicted that the goal or outcomes would demonstrate that through student led conferencing, students would gain comfort with concepts being studied, and learn study skills in questioning and small group conversations that would carry over to other areas of study. Upon initial use of conferencing, it was decided to consider student motivation as an indicator for an outcome as well. Students know they are to conference with the teacher as it is talked about daily, but since this is to be a student driven activity, I wondered if individual motivation to conference would come into play with assessment results. I sought to use statistical analysis to tell the story of these relationships and help further guide classroom activities for the students engaging in language arts units of study.

Literature Review

Metacognition

As students grow as independent learners, they need to develop self-motivation to study, learn and share knowledge. According to Flavell's studies in the 1970's, the definition of metacognition is: the process of thinking about your own thought processes (Pressley, 2006, p. 303). His theory says that metacognition includes the processes of monitoring, regulating and carrying out the mental processes (Pressley, 2006, p. 303). In middle school, students need to enhance their personal styles of study skills and strategies for learning a variety of material each and every day. One avenue to increase study skills is to provide students the opportunity to process information more thoroughly and guide them on how to think about their own thinking. Teachers use the following strategies to increase metacognitive skills through modeling and interactions: *reciprocal teaching skills, questioning skills, discussion skills and writing skills.*

Middle school teachers often question: “Do these students know how to think? Why can’t they grasp this concept? They need to think more?” Harvey and Goudvis (2013) helped to answer these questions. Yes, students innately know how to think and each student has many skills, talents and knowledge that they bring with them every day to the classroom. Though middle school teachers know this, what may actually be happening in middle school that gets in the way of learning is developmental. Students are developing cognitively at different rates; students are moving from concrete thought processes to abstract thought processes. In addition, they are going through puberty and many other biological changes that can disrupt their emotional, social, and academic skills. To guide the best we can, classroom teachers need to assure the students that they can think about their thinking and skills, and as teachers we need to assist and model ways to engage students in metacognitive processes.

In their article, *Comprehension at the Core*, Harvey and Goudvis (p. 432) bring up three goals teachers should keep in mind when teaching students:

- Be aware of thinking--building meaningful connections to learn from information
 - *Reflection/Connections: Students bring background knowledge with them and as they grow in school, many connections can be made from previous to new knowledge*
- Think with a strategy --have a plan of attack for learning...what will make sense
 - *Reflections/Connections: This brings to mind goal setting, practice skills activities and what can students learn from planned units of study*
- Be confident and understand the power of their own thinking --all students can learn
 - *Reflections/Connections. Middle school is tough. Self-confidence can take a hit, and students need cheerleaders to assure them they know many concepts, are creative and bright individual students.*

Harvey and Goudvis (2013) share that through participation in these three strategies; students may begin to evaluate and process new information into meaningful connections, thus becoming more successful students. This influenced the goal of this study, for students to be better able to

use metacognitive strategies to identify the concept, use the concept, and then further, be able to explain the concept on a deeper more meaningful level.

Reciprocal Teaching

Once students can begin increasing their metacognitive skills, they can begin to understand concepts in a better way, they can peer teach and investigate deeper into materials with which they are studying. Metacognitive skills then can lead to reciprocal teaching. In a chapter in *Reading Instruction that Works*, Pressley (2006) shares information on the theory of reciprocal teaching, which was earlier studied by Palincsar and Brown (1984). The theory, developed in the mid 1980's, revolves around teaching comprehension strategies to students. Pressley (2006) provides a definition of reciprocal teaching as a process where teachers model prediction, questioning and personal dialogue, and then model sharing thoughts (p. 306). Through these processes, students can begin to increase their reading comprehension skills. Students can move from simply decoding the words, to actually making connections, identifying concepts and sharing learned knowledge.

Palincsar and Brown (1984) delved into the reciprocal teaching model, investigated student questioning and conversations in a classroom lab setting that was controlled through initial assessments and carried out with an investigator. They did a follow up study in a more naturally selected classroom setting with teacher/students. Palincsar and Brown (1984) began their research, with teachers leading small group reading tasks. Teachers modeled student skills in reading, questioning and summarizing then increased gradual release of responsibility of those tasks to the student group members (p. 131). They found that through repetition, some participants showed increases in students' ability to carry out question/summary tasks, increase passing scores, where others did not receive passing scores but showed significant growth (p.

135). Palincsar and Brown (1984) indicated that reciprocal teaching is a very effective classroom concept, that can benefit the individual differences of students and all students can benefit from techniques. In addition, their research indicates that not all students may earn passing scores, but through introduction and practice of reciprocal teaching, lower achieving students can demonstrate an increase in knowledge and skills.

Reciprocal teaching can occur through a variety of avenues. A specific reciprocal teaching strategy called the ReQuest strategy, (Peleaux, 2013), used in a high school history class involved large group work with gradual release to independent work. In the ReQuest strategy, students used their history textbook to participate in large group readings. The teacher modeled questions during reading, and then guided students in slowly formulating independent questions as they read on their own (Peleaux, 2013). What Peleaux found is that the strategy worked for some students. Students were asked to recall information from the text as well as from memory to help lead their classroom discussions. Peleaux also noted a ceiling effect where students might feel stagnant in the strategy (2013), concluding may be that it helps some, but those who can independently carry out this strategy in the first place may not follow it, or use it at all.

This strategy could be a good option, because it allows students to use a text for reference, but yet also hold them accountable for memory recall and making connections to information learned from the reading. ReQuest could be a beneficial step for building metacognitive skills and turning facts and information into knowledge. However, as with any strategy it does have some gaps, or areas where students may not benefit.

In addition, comprehension does not only occur during reading and writing, it occurs in all content areas as reading is involved in math, science, social studies, even music and physical

education. Palincsar and Brown (1984) shared a concluding thought that students began to actually demonstrate increased “thinking” skills not only in reading but other content areas (P. 166-67) . They indicated from both student and teacher reports, that skills used in the reading session were now being used in other classes, and there was an increase in demonstrating use of academic skills.

When investigating carry-over of questioning and reciprocal teaching skills, one study by Di Teodoro, Donders, Kemp-Davidson, Robertson & Schuyler (2011) considered comprehension in mathematics. In their research they evaluated three key concepts when helping students formulate their own questions. Those considerations were:

- “What does a good question look like;
- Can they apply good questions over time;
- Can students independently have discussions with peers and teachers with high quality questions?” (DiTeodoro et al 2011 p. 2).

These appear to be great starting points when modeling question--answer--discussion points for student conferencing. As a teacher, it is imperative to guide students towards independence, and provide them the opportunity to focus on deeper questions and applications, not just surface recall. They suggest first starting out with a group discussion on what really is a deeper question (DiTeodoro et al, 2011). The class can make a guide list to post in the room as a starting point for independent question building. Students’ skills will increase with this modeling behavior, which sometimes gets skipped.

From the DiTeodoro research, it is clear that a carry-over of strategies can be used across many content areas and can help bridge the gaps that exist between courses. Often times teachers hear “why are we doing math in science?” or “why do we need to know about grammar

for social studies?" when really, content areas are intertwined and students need skills from each area for the other to be successful learners.

In the DiTeodoro et al study (2011), the second/third grade students read a book, *Six Dinner Sid* (Moore, 1990), and participated in math activities that went along with the book. Students worked in small groups to solve the problems while building questioning skills during reading. The idea of small groups and questioning should help both the comprehension of the text and a better understanding of the math problems presented (p.22). To solve problems, students and teachers created surface level and deeper thinking questions, arranging them to solve certain problems (DiTeodoro et al, 2011). In doing so, students could see which questions offered better responses for problem solving. This concept seems beneficial. To be a productive learner, students need to use both surface level and deeper thinking questions to obtain and use knowledge. The modeling of this type of questioning would help students carry the strategies over to other courses. If individuals can learn these questioning skills, their knowledge should grow from this kind of group work.

Along with individual and group work, reciprocal teaching should be a hands-on activity for students. Stricklin (2011) has suggested many simple techniques that are effective, especially for struggling readers. The hands-on materials can be student made, provide places to take notes, reminders for questioning and ways to take notes while reading, almost anything to engage them and to help them make connections. Modeling each strategy is important and with modeling and scaffolding students can use the skills. Stricklin (2011) based her research on Lori Ozkus' (video 2010) strategies of the Fab Four, the essential reading strategies teachers should already be using: *prediction, clarification, questioning and summarizing* (Ozkus, video 2010). Many great activities can help implement the Fab Four, and can include charts for vocabulary, bookmarks,

character puppets, paper plate dials to mark a strategy to be used, and sticky notes for beginning, during and after reading activities. In addition, providing sentences starters for students helps them to begin the summarizing activities. Included are metacognitive reflection starters like “What helped me when...” In this way, Stricklin (2011) reports that student comprehension is now an active process where students are reading, writing and talking about whatever concept they are learning. It may also carry over to comprehension during reading for fun, reading a newspaper or other content area material.

Many students are visual learners, so by providing them hand-on tools would help to make sense for struggling readers, or for those students trying to learn the grammar skills. The conversations to be had with students in this action research project, could lead to student created book marks or charts for learning grammar skills and topics. If students feel comfortable and can understand the grammatical parts of individual sentences, their overall comprehension of larger texts should improve.

Independent questioning activities

Levels of questioning

As teachers we ask questions, and what we expect back are detailed answers from our students. What we end up doing usually is having “lightweight” (Williams, 2010) or surface level thinking questions because they are quick and easy. The goal of student conferencing is to model the skill and gradually have the students move from those surface level questions to the deeper “heavyweight” questions (Williams, 2010) or descriptions of examples. Logically, classrooms could have a richer conversation with the heavyweight questions, as students should be hearing examples, making personal connections, and using more information about the topics being studied. Williams (2010) revisits reciprocal teaching where the students begin to produce

the questions and answers at a deeper level and the classroom then becomes more student driven and less teacher driven, even if the teacher is still there for coaching and guidance.

In a study by Peterson & Taylor (2012) literal questioning to higher order student driven questions were investigated during reading class. Their goal was to see if students could progress to journal writing and responding to higher order questions. Instead of just pulling specific information from the text, they engaged students in applying and sharing knowledge at a deeper level. Peterson & Taylor worked in what we now would call a PLC (Professional Learning Community) to discuss and reflect on classroom practices. Their discussions lead to positive changes for the students in their reading classes (Peterson & Taylor, 2012). Students were able to journal with more detail, and the teachers began to see deeper explanations in their journals and students were increasing their writing skills through their reading journals (Peterson & Taylor 2012). In addition, the student journals not only demonstrated knowledge gained or shared, but also represented independent ownership in students' learning and reading skills (Peterson & Taylor, 2012).

In regards to my own classroom goals and conferencing, this was exactly what I wished to see happen. Students should be able to use their examples and information to share with me in a casual conversation about grammar topics being studied, as well as, make connections to other areas of grammar study or while editing personal writing projects.

When you provide students with the opportunity to practice questioning techniques, the results intended are higher quality and more accurate answers. These answers are a reflection of what the students have learned. The questions, if developed for deeper understanding, should help guide summarizing skills. In the present action research study, students will be engaged in classroom activities, using study guides and clear conferencing expectations, supporting them in

being able to identify, use and explain grammar topics. Marzano (2010) identifies five strategies for helping students summarize text. He states that comprehension is vital to the study of language arts, and if you build skills with simple texts, then you can progress further to more complex texts. The five strategies Marzano (2010) has studied and feels are key pieces to students comprehension of material (P. 83-84):

1. Clarification of important information: students work to identify important and specific parts of text
2. Become familiar with multiple texts: know the different genres--description, generalization, argument, definition, comparison, problem/solution
3. Recognize layers: texts can be complex, starting small and building to more complex will allow for success
4. Encourage graphic representations: use a variety of graphic organizers to help summarize
5. Understanding vocabulary: preview, encourage and support vocabulary instruction that goes with content area, and support entertainment reading vocabulary investigations.

When considering Marzano's top five strategies, I can see where aspects of them will be implemented in this study. Therefore, based on his report, students should benefit from grammar conferencing. These conferences use the basic concepts of smaller texts, building an initial metacognitive foundation, and then students can transfer those conversations, confidence, and skills to more complex texts.

Large and Small Group Discussion, Individual conferencing

According to psychologist Lev Vygotsky's social learning theory, learning is a social activity that involves individualized connections from social interactions, (Pressley 2006 p. 100-101). In other words, students learn from interactions first and then individualize learning so it makes sense to them. In this way, students model skills for one another and learn from each other as they interact with new information. Students who understand concepts can model for those still working to put the pieces together. Classroom discussion can be beneficial in this area, but teachers need to be cautious. In the ideal world, every student will participate in

discussions equally and everyone will share the appropriate information, however, this is not the case. Teachers tend to rely on those who answer quickly and correctly, and often students get left behind.

Lehmann (2000) conducted research that investigated changing ways student discussions were held in the classroom. Lehmann monitored understanding of material and wondered if classroom discussions were effective learning practices (Lehmann, 2000). Items discussed in the findings were: students' self-evaluation of participation in discussion, grading of discussions, and does discussion lead to taking responsibility for students own learning (Lehmann, 2000). This triggered an intriguing thought about my own research. The idea of discussions being a great informal assessment grade for my students was a thought, however, this article made me rethink that plan. I questioned that if my goal was to increase casual conversations with students and amongst students, should a grade be applied to this type of assessment? Student improvements should be able to be noted on the post test scores and on student writing workshop projects, if the proper casual conversations are occurring.

Lehmann (2000) found that discussion can help increase students' listening and speaking skills, however one caveat is that students need to pay attention and be actively involved in the discussion. They cannot be passive students. As with anything, the teacher needs to begin with modeling correct discussion etiquette and time; if done with fidelity and established norms, the individual ownership of learning and discussion involvement will occur. One way to overcome some of these issues is by offering both large discussion and smaller group or individual conferencing. From the Lehmann (2000) study, students were allowed to provide feedback. This aspect is highly important for student driven learning and ownership of classroom relationships. It gives the students a voice and a chance to be proactive in their learning environments.

Along with conferencing, comes the added feature of immediate or almost immediate feedback for students on work they are doing. Research from J. Hattie's meta-analysis study and his "Visible Learning" book (1999-2009; 2012) introduces and ranks the top factors that influence student learning. From chapter two of Hattie's *Visible Learning For Teachers*, some of the factors in the meta-analysis study included: reciprocal teaching, class size, self-reporting grades, feedback and student teacher relationships. Hattie offered a list of 30 influences on student performance in the classroom, and had teachers rank the list as high, medium or low influence. The top five influences on student learning were found to be (Hattie 2012, p 269)

- Student Expectations 1.44
- Teacher credibility in the eyes of students .9
- Providing formative evaluation to teachers .9
- Feedback .75
- Reciprocal Teaching .75

This helps support the need for conferencing with students. During these student led conferences, students can share what they have learned, via reciprocal teaching methods, but they can also receive feedback from the teacher in the form of a conversation. Hattie (1999-2000) indicates that feedback through these conversations may be most beneficial to both students and teachers. This could possibly be because teachers can hear students' knowledge and misconceptions and adjust teaching to meet the gaps that are still present. In addition to Hattie's thoughts on feedback, student teacher relationships are also high for student success (p. 269). Through conferencing and providing feedback, the students may become more comfortable approaching the teacher to clear up misconceptions, as well as conferencing with them about what they are learning and making connections to. This builds upon the reciprocal teaching philosophy and a student driven classroom concept.

Discussion in the 21st Century

Following the concept of reciprocal teaching, is the idea of peer teaching and student led conferencing in the classroom. However in today's changing educational system, technology is playing a larger role in communication and delivery of discussion. Classrooms are no longer limited to just face to face discussion, rather, blogs, instant messaging and other technological apps and programs are utilized. Our district is fortunate to have a 1:1 computer program for our middle school students and we utilize technology every day. Last year we explored blogging in reading class, and we just jumped in and tried it.

To investigate the integration of technology tools in classroom discussion, I did find an article by Zawilinski (2009) "Hot Blogging" A Framework for Blogging to Promote Higher Order Thinking". In the research, the rationale was that students are already tech savvy with Facebook, Instagram, and even blogging on their own. As an educator, it made sense to explore incorporating proper and positive uses of the programs that are available to students. The research shared four key stages to establishing blogging etiquette and positive uses in the classroom in combination from previous studies; Zawilinski (2009) shares a plan to follow (P. 654-55):

Stage 1 "Bolster background": Background is where teachers begin the process of introducing the topic; with this teachers find what students already know and will bring to the table. This can include: asking what experiences students have had with the topic and resources the students found to help through the unit.

Stage 2 "Prime the pump": Share information, ask questions. Students can use the blog page to interact with one another, read other students' posts and either respond or share them in conversations. This can be a time for students to make connections to text, self and world and share those thoughts and ideas with classmates on the blog and in classroom discussions.

Stage 3 "Continue the conversation": This requires students to "synthesize" (Zawilinski 2009) information being learned. The blog posts should represent new thinking, sharing of ideas, collaboration with classmates, and critical thinking skills.

Stage 4 "Make Multiplicity Explicit": Through blog posts, students can see differences in thinking. This may cause a ripple effect, of re-reading, thinking and analyzing of the

text. If students use textual evidence to support their thoughts, other students may go back to that part of the text and revisit the readings to see how their thinking is the same or different.

The stages described above help the students proceed past the surface level of the technology to building a skill set that makes it a useful tool. Throughout the research, Zawilinski (2009) found that the blog was not the only place where discussion took place, the blog was just a tool that helped lead and guide classroom discussion. Research indicated the conversations were deeper level thinking and students felt more confident in both settings (Zawilinski, 2009).

Following the four stages, teachers should be able to see growth in students' responses and questions about material being covered in any class. If students are taught to find the value in blogging, the positive gains should be seen throughout. Not only does it help discussion, but this can lead to other avenues of sharing information. I could see this being beneficial to my individual student conferencing. We could do a combination of blog postings and individual meetings to accomplish the deeper level connections to the content material.

Student led conferencing

The goal of reciprocal teaching is to have students learn and share knowledge with other students and the teacher. When thinking about the concept of student conferences, most research focuses on the parent teacher conference. However, if students can conference with a teacher, the parent-teacher conference would just be an extension of that activity. As a teacher, I want my students to gain the same attributes as Countryman & Schroeder (1996): exercise choice in learning, take responsibility for learning and for students to do their best work (p. 64). If students can take this ownership in their learning, they become invested in what they are learning and they will demonstrate they now understand. Conferencing in the classroom can also lend itself to other student outcomes that will benefit students in their journey through school.

Countryman & Schroeder (1996) list these outcomes as: being a literate communicator, self-

directed, a complex thinker, an involved citizen and a collaborative contributor. In addition, Borba & Olvera (2001) report that student led conferences keep the focus of the classroom learning, evaluation, and goal setting for education centered around the student and not other factors. The student is involved and is present to share their experiences, which, thinking about it, should be the goal of every classroom teacher.

Summary:

This research was combined when carrying out and evaluating this action research project: *Will student led conferencing/ conversations lead to deeper understanding of language arts concepts and increase in post assessment data?* Three key questions I wanted to be able to report on are: 1. Did conferencing lead to a statistically significant increase in post test score data? 2. Did study skills improve through observation and conversations? & 3. Did students change their approach and ownership of their learning as noted in conferencing and discussions. The following action research study investigates the questions and reports findings.

Methods (location, participants, qualitative, materials)

Location and Participants:

Participants in this study are seventh grade students attending middle school in a rural community in a mid-western state. The school district has a population of just under 400 students grades preK-12. The community is of working class families with only 11% of the adult population having higher education degrees. In addition, high unemployment rates among parents leads to a district wide 61% free and reduced lunch population. However, the school district is doing all it can to provide technological advantages for students with 1:1 Chromebook

programs grades 4-12, with grades 11 and 12 under a bring your own device option. The participants in this study include 12 female and 17 male students. This is the second year in a row that I have had these students in language arts and writing workshop classes, so they are familiar with classroom expectations, programs and activities. Among these 29 students:

- one female student is Autistic, she receives limited modification services in language arts but receives additional instruction in speech, language and reading;
- one male student is classified with a language learning disability who receives modifications on tests.
- In addition, six of the students score lower than grade level on reading assessments (SRI Lexiles, Benchmarking and AIMSWeb --CBM and MAZE data). The participants in this group also struggle in language arts courses due to the complex grade level material being studied, and one reason for the direction of this study.

In addition, Students in the seventh grade class are in their second year of the digital curriculum so they are accustomed to skills needed to navigate the e-text, online assignments and assessments.

Our middle school follows a personalized learning philosophy where students are encouraged to seek their independent learning styles and approaches to student activities. For our core subjects, we have mini lessons, guided practice and independent work time. Students can progress through units at their own pace with teacher guidance. Often after the first quarter the class divides itself naturally into two groups. One group is more independently project driven and the other group is more traditional in their learning styles.

When we begin a unit of study, students are given the opportunity of testing out of a unit. If they score 90% or higher on the pretest, students can opt out of unit work. If they choose, they may do some/any/all activities or move ahead. So far during this school year and in these three units of study, no students tested out of units. However, during our next two units on

prepositions and conjunctions I did have 5 students test out of both units and they instead, created projects that demonstrated knowledge of material.

Type of study:

Quantitative Analysis: The statistical analysis for this project will be *quantitative analysis* of pretest and posttest assessment data. I will compare post test scores of students who conferenced with me 2-3 times compared to those who conference 0-1 times. In addition, qualitative data will be collected from student conferencing, student study guides and student observations.

Materials used:

- The Writing Coach--On-line assessments and e-text
- Grammar Review Packets
- Conferencing Sheets
- On-line videos, teacher created videos for reviews

The district has implemented *The Writing Coach*, by Pearson as the curriculum used for grammar study in grades six through eight. The program is digital and provides an e-text, practice quizzes and assessments all on-line (there is also a hard copy of the text which is identical to the e-text). The grammar program is used in combination with a writing workshop approach to student writing. Concepts are taught in combination, but grammar does have some isolated activities and units of study. Each unit of study includes a pre-test, discussions, study guides, guided practice, practice problems, short assessments, and a post assessment.

For unit study purposes, students are provided with a teacher created grammar review packet with which they can take notes, write down examples and use during practice problems, studying for assessments and their individual or small group conferencing. The packets were developed two years ago and have been a work in progress. The packets are designed to put all

information together and to lead students to the following: “I Can identify _____, use _____, and explain _____” (see Attachments, Deitelhoff 2014).

Participant notification

Before the action research began, participants were informed about the study and student/parent permission letters were sent home for permission purposes. It was noted that all students would be participating in the activities, even if they did not want data to be used, as it was part of the regular classroom activities. All students were given permission to participate, so all data from 29 participants would be used.

Action Research Study Process

The first three chapters of grammar study in the Writing Coach would be used for this study. These chapters should be review information for the students with some new concepts being added. The chapters included were nouns/pronouns, verbs and adjectives/adverbs. In addition to grammar mini lesson time, topics would also be discussed during writing workshop activities.

To begin, students were given pre-tests on all three units. Student pretest scores were recorded by both teacher and students. From this, participants began their noun unit study. They began mini-lessons and filling out their grammar review packet (See attachment, Deitelhoff, 2014). Participants were guided on one goal, they selected a goal for their post test score, then they created two other learning goals for the unit. From these four goals, participants created a plan for study that includes: class discussion, guided practice, independent practice, videos, and student conferencing. Goal examples included:

- I want to understand concrete and abstract nouns better (BD)
- Apply more descriptive nouns in my writing (MG)
- I would like to gain a better understanding of pronouns (CF)
- I would like to ask more questions (AH)

- I want to figure out what an antecedent is (AL)

During class discussion, participants were encouraged to think about the following statements as they were working. Those included: I can identify _____. I can use _____. I can explain _____. These guiding statements would be used to begin the process of student led conferencing. Through research, students need modeling and discussion starters (Stricklin, 2011) and these are simple starters for conferencing. In addition, when participants were conferencing with the teacher, these statements could guide the conferences and allow for feedback using the conferencing sheet (see attachment, Deitelhoff, 2014).

With the grammar review packet in place and the guiding statements introduced, instruction began. Instruction included a 5-10 minute mini lesson and guided practice on anywhere between one and four grammar concepts, e.g.: concrete/abstract nouns, count/noncount nouns, common/proper. Then participants were provided with 15-20 minutes of independent and small group work time. After about four class sessions conferencing times were encouraged with the teachers. These conferences could be done with an individual or a pair/trio, mainly for time consideration for all involved. The conference would cover up to five concept areas and were driven by the participants. They were rated on the following scale, as well as individual notes were taken on participant responses.

I can identify, use and explain	3 Needs no assistance, has examples, notes, and can carry on conversations	2 Needs some guidance, needs me to provide examples, has some notes.	1 Needs prompting, does not have notes or examples
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(Deitelhoff 2014)

During conferencing participants were encouraged to bring their grammar review packets, notes, examples and anything else that would help them throughout the conference. Of

course, the real goal would be to conference note free, but this was just the beginning. A good conference was where the teacher didn't have to provide much other than feedback or ask for additional examples. Conference notes: students used Identification, definitions and explanations. See Appendix for conferencing examples.

If I had to provide examples and questions, I encouraged students to investigate further and I would check in with them later. For students where I did a majority of the conferencing, I made sure to spend more time with them during independent work time the next day. As a teacher, this conferencing took the "hiding" away from students. It was easy in a less than five minute conversation to see who was grasping material and who was not accomplishing the tasks given.

After our first unit of study, we had a large group review session and students took a look at their goal sheets. We talked about strategies, hints and tricks, and participants were asked to discuss the role conferencing helped in this first unit. Total posttest percentage scores for the first unit of study were those who conferenced two or three times (M= 80.9%), and those who conferenced zero to one time (M= 77.5%). As with research from Countryman & Schroeder (1996), and Borba & Olvera (2001), the goal was to have students gain ownership and become independent with their learning strategies. I wondered if after guidance and teacher modeled activities, would students begin to take the lead and begin to have these conferences with the teacher and other students? It was interesting to note about half of the students took independent initiative to meet with the teacher, and half either had to be asked or reminded, or were made to have the conference with the teacher.

Student comments after this first round of analysis included:

- I felt like I actually knew what I was supposed to study (KH)
- I was able to ask more questions and felt ok asking questions in conference (MG)

- This year I understand why you give us the review packet, now it makes sense.(CF)

Following the student comments and reflection on the unit, we moved on and followed the same procedure for the next two units of study.

Data Results

Unit	Conf. 2-3 Times Posttest mean	Score Range in %	Conf. 0-1 times, posttest mean	Score range
Nouns/ Pronouns	80.9	30 - 100	77.5	65 - 90
Verbs	67.3	53 - 83	54.1	30 - 86
Adjective Adverb	70.3	40 - 90	63.7	40 - 85

Statistical results noun unit:

On the noun unit assessment data, *T*-test analysis (two sample assuming equal variance) indicated the group of students that conferenced ($N=21$ $M=80.95$ $SD= 17.93$) were higher than the students who did not conference with the teacher ($N = 8$ $M = 77.5$, $SD = 8.86$), $t(29) = .51$. What I can say is that participants who tend to conference do have higher post test scores. The data is not significant enough to say that conferencing makes a substantial increase in test scores. Other factors may come into play that confounds the study: student skills and small sample size to name a few.

Observational Results:

I did expect higher scores considering this should have been a brief review on nouns. Students begin studying nouns during kindergarten, and by seventh grade, it would be an easy concept for students to work with. I was pleased with the eight students who scored 100% or

95% on this unit's final assessment. These students are the top students in their class of 29 and are very diligent with their grammar review packets, conferencing and study skills. During our conversations students did mention, they didn't think they knew how to study, and this process was either assuring them they were on the right track with skills, or they were starting to change their study habits.

Another observation was during writing workshop and editing their personal narratives. During peer editing and editing meetings, students who conferenced more often began to actually use the names of specific nouns (compound, abstract, collective) during editing conversations. This came into play when working on creating more descriptive language. I encourage them to get rid of words "stuff, got, things", so during editing, I could overhear dialogue about suggestions for different types of nouns. In this way, though not data driven, I could monitor conversations and note an increase in carry-over of the grammar topics to their writing, which was a goal as well from this project.

Statistical Results verb unit:

During the next unit of study, we investigated verbs. Statistical analysis shows, *T*-test analysis (two sample assuming equal variance) indicates with 99.5% confidence the group of students that conferenced ($N=15$ $M= 67.27$ $SD= 8.49$) were higher than the students who did not conference with the teacher ($N = 13$ $M = 54.08$, $SD = 14.35$). I expected slightly lower scores on the verb assessment; however, I did expect a bigger difference between the two groups. The Writing Coach curriculum introduces transitive and intransitive verbs to students and this are a complex topic for students to grasp as there are many other grammatical information that you need to know to better understand them. Concepts that are needed: prepositional phrases and direct objects. We do cover those concepts in sixth grade, however, we had not reviewed those

topics thoroughly yet this year. During our mini lessons, we did review these topics, but without complete study, students could not recall information effectively or efficiently.

Observational Results:

An interesting note, and one I was hoping to find, was that students were able to take parts of our conversations from our unit of noun study into the verb unit. During work time, students would reference their packets; they would seek out other students for conversations, and approach me with individual approaches to study.

One observational experience I can share was of two boys who would work in my room during independent work time. One is a struggler and is currently receiving interventions for reading. His friend, on the other hand was one student who was quoted earlier as saying “now I get why we have the grammar review packet.” I would listen to the two of them work through practice problems, one guiding the other and helping clear up misconceptions. At one point, they even made flash cards as the struggling student still has difficulty picking out nouns/pronouns/verbs. For some reason, he can’t distinguish the parts of speech. Throughout their conversations, I would over hear “when you conference with Ms. D. use this example, then identify, use it and define it. Let’s practice.” As a teacher, test scores are supposed to be important, however, listening to conversations like this validate the processes and the modeling we do for students. I provided them with tools to use independently and they were putting them into practice. This in turn will create independent, problem solving students who will be successful.

Another observation came from when I evaluated goals for this unit, I found many goals for post tests were lower:

- 70% is my goal (AB) vs 80% for nouns
- 85% goal (AH) vs 90% for nouns

- 75-80% is my goal (MF) vs 85% for nouns

This was an indication to me that the unit may be tougher and students were not as confident in their skills with verbs and some of the new concepts being covered. However, in posttest conversations about the unit students indicated that even though they didn't reach their goal, they felt the procedures helped them throughout the unit of study.

Statistical Results adjectives and adverbs

During our third unit of the quarter, we investigated adjectives and adverbs. Statistics of *T*-test analysis (two sample assuming equal variance) indicated the group of students that conferenced ($N=17$ $M= 70.35$ $SD= 13.88$) trended slightly higher, at 88% confidence, than the students who did not conference with the teacher ($N = 12$ $M = 63.75$ $SD = 14.47$). Again, data does not indicate significance in scores and the same reasons mentioned in the noun data could be a reason for this.

Observational Results

Observational information from this unit includes student confidence in independent work and conferencing skills. Students were coming to conference with examples from practice problems and their own writing. Those students who had established conferencing as part of their routine were beginning to really lead the conference and tell me about what they knew, and relied on my questioning less. They would take over and I would just jot notes or listen to what they were sharing. Sometimes, I would extend the conversation further, other times I would complement them on their independent skills, and confidence.

Observations of student ownership in learning

It is interesting that in our personalized/independently paced learning environment, students can't sneak away and hide. Since I know which students can take the lead in their own

learning, I am more motivated and have more time to seek out students who are trying to hide. If we had a day or two of independent work time and investigation, I would have time to sit with students who struggled and did not conference. So even though they thought they were getting out of part of their daily work, I was still checking with them and monitoring their progress. I did not push conferencing with them however, as the goal was to have that be independently driven by the students. So even though my statistical analysis was not showing a difference in post-test scores, I could tell a gap in skills and confidence with grammar material was growing between the two groups of students. These students still struggled with owning their learning. They were looking for me to give them the answers, whereas students who have bought into the process were able to take off independently, seek alternative resources and problem solve. In addition, they approach their work with confidence and are willing to share and teach others, thus, demonstrating reciprocal teaching that Palincsar & Brown (1984) suggested; the independent ownership of learning Borba & Olvera (2001) offered; and the self-directed learners that Countryman & Schroeder (1996) were suggesting as a goal for student work.

Conclusions/Further study

This study was interesting as it was an in depth look at the way I teach and what I have been using for the past year and a half. I have been tweaking the process each year and almost with each unit of study to try and allow my student the best tools for studying grammar and writing. My students are from backgrounds of lower literacy skills and minimal support from home in regards to school work. The challenge is that our curriculum is quite intense and we are constantly talking about getting students college and career ready. The students come to middle school with minimal grammar study, and then have to enter my program where everything becomes complex. Students are afraid of writing and grammar so that also makes a tricky

situation. I have worked to develop strategies and tools to help ease their anxiety and that allow them to build study skills.

The first thing I thought of was to create this grammar review packet. The packet was designed to help students learn how to take notes, how to record examples and how to keep their notes organized and in order. Over time, it has become what it is this year. I added the goal sheet to help students think about why they are actually filling out the packet, as a way to increase their metacognitive skills. Through the course of a school year, this process seems to work and students really learn how to personalize the packets for their own use. Some students have even adapted and I share the document online and they fill it out digitally. Either way, as long as they take notes, use them and study, I am all for whatever strategy works for them.

Some limitations for the study guides are purely student ownership. You will always have the “I lost it. I can’t find it!” students, to which I tell them they need to problem solve and see what they can do. However, these are usually struggling students who lack the skills to create a new packet, or to take notes independently. I have had a few of these students figure out options and strategies, but they still struggle or are behind everyone else. I do only give them one packet, as it is a responsibility of theirs and they need to work on those organizational skills.

Another limitation is conferencing time. I am fortunate that our daily schedule has independent work time built into our days and I have time to conference with students outside of mini lesson time or writing workshop time. However, with 60 students, time still becomes short and often I rush conferences or have to turn students away. This I know is not best practice, but there is only so much time in a day. I do try my best though to get to everyone when they approach me. In a traditional style classroom, I am not sure this type of conferencing would be quite as effective. It is a huge time management concern.

Overall, my goals are similar to Palincsar & Brown (1984); Borba & Olvera (2001); Countryman & Schroeder (1996) were suggesting as a goal for student work. I see my classroom as a place for students to explore and discover who they are as students. They each learn differently, have different interests and have different strengths and weaknesses. I foster individuality and have a trust level with my students that they can learn and work independently with me guiding their way. Student conferencing is a way that students can take that ownership in their learning. They have to make connections and be able to verbalize their knowledge to others. By incorporating these conferences, I help to give them that confidence in their study skills and their ability to share what they are learning. In addition, with their writing and editing of papers, we can use that time to conference about the grammar topics as well, therefore beginning that transfer of skills from isolated grammar study to overall writing skills.

I share with my students many things and have shared with them their statistical data from this project. Last week, classroom conversations lead to a class data spreadsheet on practice problems. They want to visually see the correlation of “who does practice problems versus who doesn’t” and post test scores. They suggested it and so I said why not. We are keeping track on a Google shared sheet of “yes/no” when they complete practice problems. We will then look at their post test scores (individually not whole class) and then look at the number of practice problems they completed to see if there is a correlation. I already know what the outcome should be, but this is new for them, so I am using it as a learning experience. We are also continuing with grammar review packets, building study skills and conferencing and I will share that data with them during our posttest discussion as well. This study not only gave me insights into my teaching, but it provided me with tools and strategies to become a better teacher. I can provide students practical study activities to increase their metacognitive skills and transfer

of knowledge through conferencing. The more tools they are provided, the more successful they will be as they become college and career ready.

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Appendix A

Grammar Goal Sheet

Name: _____

Grammar Unit: _____

Goals:

I can: 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

How am I going to meet my goal:

Progress: How am I doing? What questions do I have?

What have I learned?

Class discussion and Ms. D conference: Did you participate? Y N

Ms. D Comments and assessment understanding _____

Appendix B

Nouns/Pronouns Grammar Review Packet

Nouns and Pronouns 7

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

I can:

- Identify, use and understand nouns: people, places, things, ideas
- Identify, use and understand compound, common, proper nouns
- Identify, use and understand pronouns and antecedents
- Identify, use and understand: personal, reflexive, intensive pronouns
- Identify, use and understand: demonstrative, relative, interrogative, indefinite pronouns

You will read the pages related to the sections and fill in the chart, then do the practice problems for each section. When practice problems are done, you will have a check-in with Ms. D and then proceed to the WC online assignments with her approval.

13.1 Practice 296	Nouns	Name what 4 things:
Practice 296	Concrete Nouns	Def: Examples:
Practice 296	Abstract Nouns	Def: Examples
Practice 297	Collective Nouns	Def: Examples
Practice 297	Count Nouns	Def: Examples

Practice 297	Non-count Nouns	Def: Examples
Practice 299	Compound Nouns	Def: Examples
Practice 299	Common and Proper Nouns	Def: Examples
13.2 Practice 302	Pronouns	Def: Examples
Practice 302	Antecedents	Def: Examples
Practice 305	Personal Pronouns	Def: Examples
Practice 305	Reflexive and Intensive Pronouns	Def: Examples
Practice 309	Demonstrative Pronouns	Def: Examples

<p>Practice 309, 310, 311</p>	<p>Relative Pronouns</p>	<p>Def:</p> <p>Examples</p>
<p>Practice 312</p>	<p>Interrogative Pronouns</p>	<p>Def:</p> <p>Examples</p>
<p>Practice 312</p>	<p>Indefinite Pronouns</p>	<p>Def:</p> <p>Examples</p>

Appendix C

Nouns and Pronouns Conferencing sheet

I can identify, use and explain	3 Needs no assistance, has examples, notes, and can carry on conversations	2 Needs some guidance, needs me to provide examples, has some notes.	1 Needs prompting, does not have notes or examples
Nouns			
Concrete & Abstract nouns			
Collective nouns			
Count and non-count nouns			
Compound nouns			
Common/Proper nouns			
Pronouns			
Antecedents			
Personal Pronouns			

Reflexive Pronouns			
Demonstrative Pronouns			
Relative Pronouns			
Interrogative Pronouns			
Indefinite Pronouns			