

TEACHER IDENTIFIED SUCCESSFUL STUDENT ACADEMIC CONFERENCING
CONSTRUCTS: EFFECTING UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING

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Dissertation Approval

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This dissertation has been approved and accepted by the faculty of the Education Department,
Carson-Newman University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of
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Abstract

Correlations exist between student and teacher communication and student outcome. The more positive the interaction between teacher and student, the more likely the student is to demonstrate increased learning and understanding. Conferencing provides the opportunity for student and teacher to discuss the student's current academic ability. The focus of this qualitative study was to identify the aspects of student conferencing that educators deem as beneficial to student understanding and learning. The participants were involved in a series of conferences with their teacher. Data were collected through qualitative methods, including classroom observations, an un-structured interview with the teacher, and artifact analysis of the teacher's conference notes. The analysis identified seven aspects of student conferencing: teaching, modeling, coaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice.

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Signature: Susan Kathleen Gant

Date: 3/23/2020

Dedication

I dedicate this to my husband Will and my daughter Maggie who gave me the space, time, and support I needed to complete this. I love you both.

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking my parents, Hal and Charlene McDonough for instilling in me a love of education and learning.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to Kuru (2019), humans are inherently social creatures and have been communicating with one another for centuries. Recent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) revealed different areas of the brain become activated when individuals engaged in social interaction than when the individuals engaged in strictly academic tasks (Laiti & Frangou, 2019). Moreover, it could be beneficial for learning when academic tasks are embedded within social interactions. This is consistent with Bozkurt's (2017) notion that social interaction is necessary for cognitive development. Moreover, Moody et al. (2018) cited research indicating that social interaction between students and knowledgeable adults leads to growth in student thinking. While progressing academically requires the teacher's coverage of the content, communication between teacher and student is also necessary for student growth (Lekwa, Reddy, & Shernoff, 2019).

The significance of teacher and student communication cannot be understated; a growing body of research supports student and teacher communication. A high-quality student and teacher interaction is an academic asset to the child (LoCasale-Crouch, Williford, Whitaker, DeCoster, & Alamos, 2018). According to Fletcher & Portalupi (2001), 75% of student success occurs on the other side of the desk when teachers actively engaging with their students. Al-Hattami (2019) argued communication is essential to the teacher understanding that which the student has learned. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2018) asserted that when they interact with students in meaningful ways, teachers are able to promote student engagement and positively influence their learning.

Calkins & Ehrenworth (2016) asserted that providing feedback is most effective when it is given to students who have not met mastery but are working at their instructional level. Thus,

general feedback given to the class as a whole may not be as beneficial as when a teacher conferences with the student to communicate feedback specific to that student. Nicholas & Paatsch (2014) argued that a one to one conference between teacher and student is an opportunity to provide a more focused interaction. According to a meta-analysis study, Feedback is one of the most effective strategies a teacher can utilize to accelerate student learning (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Hernandez, 2013). Only when the student receives feedback specific to what was done well and what needs to be refined can the student make progress in his/her learning (Calkins, 2013). According to Hawkins (2019), what teachers say and how they say it creates such opportunities for students to learn. Calkins & Ehrenworth (2016) asserted that feedback is most effective when it is given frequently, is timely, and is followed up with opportunities for practice. Although such one to one moments are rare and brief in the classroom, they provide opportunities for rich encounters between the teacher and student (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Hawkins (2019) reported that the exchange of dialogue between teacher and student changed not only for different students but also for the same students, depending on the type of writing conference, or writing conference purpose. This study therefore, focuses on student conferencing and the aspects of student conferencing that may positively influence student learning.

Statement of the Problem

This study address the problem of various aspects of conferencing that make it an effective and useful tool. While many teachers may support the positive effects of student conferencing, one of the barriers to conducting conferences is the lack of sufficient time during the school day. For example, high stakes testing is a priority, and teachers may feel increased pressure to devote every minute during the instructional day to ensuring their students are as prepared as possible to demonstrate achievement. According to Tennessee Educator

Acceleration Model (TEAM) (n.d.), a 15% achievement measure comprises the teacher's evaluation score each year. Consequently, teachers may feel they lack the time to devote to holding meaningful conversations with their students. Conferencing with students may give teachers a better understanding of the academic needs of their students, and the students may receive meaningful feedback from the teacher. According to Adie, Van der Kleij, & Cumming (2018), feedback is one of the most effective ways to enhance student learning. This feedback loop may ultimately contribute to overall student success in the classroom, in preparation for the next grade, on achievement tests, and graduation.

The nature of conferencing is also problematic. For example, one study of a school system where regular student and teacher conferencing was required found that teachers dominated the conversation, asked close-ended questions, and issued criticism in the form of mandates to students with regard to student work (Hawkins, 2019). These results do not bode well for producing strong student writers. A recent meta-analysis revealed that improving student writing ability is based largely on encouraging students to write, helping students become more motivated to write, and inspiring them to become more engaged in their writing (Liu, 2017). In a larger study of writers' conferencing in classrooms throughout the United States, researchers found that these teacher-student interactions functioned primarily as teacher-driven opportunities for lecturing rather than opportunities for student engagement (Hawkins, 2019).

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand what facets of student and teacher communication are most beneficial to student success. Riley, Riddell, Kidd, & Gavin (2018) asserted that teachers who regularly conference with their students have found numerous positive outcomes and a greater understanding of what is engaging for students. Therefore, the aspects of student conferencing that are most beneficial to student success is worthy of further research.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study on student conferencing.

Research question: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning?

Theoretical Foundation

Social constructivism informs the research question because it is based on the belief that learning is constructed within the context of social interaction. Social constructivism combines two prominent learning theories: constructivism and social learning. According to Miller-First & Ballard (2017), constructivism dates back to the 1930s, although it became popularized in the 1990s. West (2013) referred to constructivism as an internal making of meaning. Constructivism, according to Xu & Shi (2012), is the idea that knowledge is constructed by the learner. This is in contrast to previous theories that knowledge already existed and was merely to be discovered. Constructivism is based on the belief that individuals construct their own knowledge of the world through experiences and interactions with others (Al Mahmud, 2013). West (2013) explained that individuals construct knowledge within their environment through such processes as observation, trial and error, and interactions with others. With the facilitation of the teacher, students construct knowledge through participation and social interaction (Youngmi & Jinju, 2015).

Social learning theory has been the impetus for thousands of studies investigating human behavior (McLeod et al., 2015). One of the most influential theories of learning and behavior, social learning focuses on the idea that people learn from one another (Chavis, 2012). For student conferencing, the social interaction and subsequent learning occurs between the teacher and student.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was influenced primarily by the literature review and included best practices for conferencing. The concept of best practices is related to how students learn best. One trustworthy example is Calkins' (2013, 2015) model for student conferencing that occurs during writing instruction. The founder of Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, Calkins developed the workshop approach to teaching reading level in the primary grades (Feinberg, 2007). The writers' workshop is one of the most common approaches to writing instruction at the elementary school level (Williams, 2018). When the writers' workshop emerged, it was referred to as the conference approach to writing (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). This is largely due to the fact that the student and teacher writing conference is considered an essential component of the writers' workshop (Hawkins, 2019). The workshop model has its roots in the system of the apprentice learning skills from the trade by working alongside the master craftsman (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Similarly, students in the writers' workshop spend time with the knowledgeable and skilled master writer teacher, developing and honing the skills needed to master the specifics of writing (Hawkins, 2019). Unlike traditional writing instruction where the teacher is in control of the writing, the workshop model allows for cooperative experiences between the teacher and student (Hale, 2018). According to Fletcher & Portalupi (2001), the writers' workshop philosophy dictates that the teacher does not teach writing, but teaches the writer. Although they may appear as light and informal conversations, the writers' workshop conferences are highly structured encounters designed to accelerate specific writing skills (Calkins, 2013). According to Wallis (2010), the purpose of the writing conference is for the teacher to gain an understanding of how well the student is processing

information provided in previous lessons and for the student to improve or refine his/her writing based on feedback from the teacher.

Rationale for the Study

A review of the current literature revealed the significance of communication between teacher and student. Odemis (2019) described communication as the process of sending and receiving information. Communication in the form of feedback from the teacher to the student carries authenticity when it is specific and unique to that student and his/her ability (Hale, 2018). According to Adie et al. (2018), communication from the teacher regarding the learner's progress is an essential component of the formal and informal learning process. Because of its one on one format, the writers' workshop conference in particular is the ideal opportunity for teachers to provide specific feedback to students on their writing (Hale, 2018). According to Maliborska & You (2016), the student's writing is directly influenced by feedback from the teacher. Because communication between teachers and students may be beneficial to student learning, the subject of best practices for teacher and student conferencing is worthy of further research.

Researcher Positionality Statement

Interactions with students and teachers within the elementary school setting led to a curiosity in the topic of communication between the teacher and student. Serving as an exceptional education teacher within an elementary school provided opportunities to directly communicate with students and observe other teachers and students communicating. Knowledge of student conferencing as a structured form of teacher and student communication prompted the idea of researching and studying this construct.

Personal and professional relationships have the potential to create bias. To prevent

potential bias, a number of trustworthy techniques were used throughout the study. These techniques include peer-debriefing, triangulation, member checks, and detailed descriptions of contexts that were “sufficiently thick.”

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations, delimitations, and assumptions were considered for this study.

Limitations. There are two limitations for this study. First, this study took place in a private elementary school serving 480 students in pre-K through 6th grade. The student body is 99% white, the majority of whom are from upper middle class households. Therefore, the lack of diversity within the demographics of the school make it challenging to ensure a representative sampling. This study was also limited because it was conducted within a limited timeframe of 8 weeks.

Delimitations. Due to the nature of the study, convenience sampling was utilized.

Assumptions. It was assumed that the teacher being interviewed was honest in her answers to the questions.

Definition of Terms

Feedback: The use of timely and explicit information on student performance (Nicholas & Paatsch, 2014)

Engagement: Involves the act of high-level thinking, involvement, and enthusiasm (Carey et al., 2013)

Conference: A one to one conversation between the teacher and student (Nicholas & Paatsch, 2014)

Writers’ workshop: A form of writing instruction that involves the teacher actively engaging students in the writing process through modeling, providing opportunities for practice and

refinement, and sharing the finished product (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters: Chapter One, Introduction; Chapter Two, Literature Review; Chapter Three, Methodology; Chapter Four, Presentation of Findings; Chapter Five, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations. In Chapter One, background information on the topic of student conferencing is described, as is the basis for the study. Chapter Two is a review of the current literature that pertains to the topic of student conferencing. In Chapter Three, the methodology used in the research of this study is explained. Findings from the study are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study.

Summary

Based on a review of the current literature, student conferencing is essential to student success. According to LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2018), teachers have the ability to promote children's engagement and academic success when they are responsive to students' needs. Calkins (2013) argued that research indicates the best way to accelerate a student's learning is through the use of feedback. Hawkins (2019) asserted that children learn to become strategic thinkers through engaging in meaningful dialogue with another more knowledgeable individual. According to Hale (2018), giving feedback on a student's performance can generate feelings of confidence and can have a positive impact on the student's agency. Calkins (2013, 2015) stipulated that conferencing affords opportunities for learners to progress in dramatic ways. However, finding the time to conference with students on a one on one basis proves to be challenging for teachers. It is also problematic that conferences between teachers and students do not necessarily have the potential to accelerate student learning. This study explores the

specifics of student conferencing and includes the specific aspects of student conferencing that may enhance student learning and understanding.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Constructivism

According to Abtahi (2018), all human activity and learning presupposes one's interaction within one's culture and environment. Widely applied in the area of education and in teaching activities (Xu & Shi, 2018) constructivist learning theory, as explained by Liu and Chen (2010), is predicated upon how the student processes information rather than memorizes facts. Constructivism was a radical approach to teaching that challenged conventional teaching and popularized the concept of student-centered teaching (Al Mahmud, 2013). Krahenbuhl (2016) posed that proponents of this theory believe learning is built on a foundation of prior knowledge. McPhail (2016) explained that constructivism is not an objective entity; the student constructs meaning by building new information onto existing knowledge. The process of acquiring new knowledge is not done in isolation, but new knowledge is built on previously learned knowledge (Guseva & Solomonovich, 2017). Al Mahmud (2013) asserted that unlike previous theories, such as behaviorism and positivism, constructivism requires the learner to determine which knowledge is important enough to learn and therefore requires active participation on the part of the learner. According to Krahenbuhl (2016), constructivism is subjective and suggests that truth exists independently of the learner and is acquired as new knowledge through meaningful interactions (p.100). Xu & Shi (2018) found that in a constructivist classroom, students are active constructors of meaning; situation, cooperation, conversation, and meaning construction are essential features to the classroom as well. Hosseini (2019) argued that teachers in a constructivist classroom should be mindful of the fact that they are not the only source of knowledge for the students. In this contemporary learning environment, no longer would teachers dominate the classroom with such methods as the lecture and bank method through which the teachers take the role of the depositors of information. According to Ardiansyah &

Ujihanti (2018), the constructivist teacher acts as a guide and facilitator of knowledge in the classroom whose role is to provide opportunities to test the students' understanding of new information.

McPhail (2016) cautioned that constructing meaning is subjective and is problematic when the new constructed meaning is believed to be the way matters re. Al Mahmud (2013) explained that that individuals construct their unique beliefs and understanding of the world through their experiences and their reflections on such experiences. When applied to the learning environment, Xu & Shi (2018) further argued that different individuals have different perceptions and understandings of the world. Krahenbuhl (2016) asserted that although subjective, constructing meaning must be in line with reality.

Doolittle (2014) emphasized that constructivism is a broad term, although two kinds exist: social constructivism and psychological constructivism (Al Mahmud, 2013, p.239). According to McPhail (2016), both theories are radically different from one another; social constructivism refers to the nature of knowledge while psychological constructivism refers to the process of knowledge acquisition. Xu & Shi (2018) proclaimed that constructivism holds that knowledge is not in existence waiting to be discovered, but is constructed by humans through social interaction and their interaction with the world. While social constructivism has implications for content development in education, psychological constructivism pertains to ideas about how individuals learn (McPhail, 2016).

Psychological constructivism. During the past half century, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget created a psychological model representing how individuals make sense of the world around them (Woolfolk, 2001). According to Bozkurt (2017), Piaget asserted that one's intellect develops as an active process of disequilibrium and re-equilibrium. Piaget theorized that the

concept of disequilibrium is often set in motion by the teacher or other student, suggesting a new way of looking at occurrences and events (Woolfolk, 2001). Al Mahmud (2013) stated that the student experiences disequilibrium when he/she is presented with new information that conflicts with previously held beliefs or understandings. Presented with this contradictory data, the student has to change previously understood ideas with new information. This can be challenging for the student.

Social constructivism. Utilization of the theory of social constructivism, or social learning theory began in earnest in the 1950s as an approach to change human behavior (Chavis, 2012). In the early 20th Century, Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky composed over 100 books and articles contributing to social constructivism (Guseva and Solomonovich, 2017; Woolfolk, 2001). In his lifetime, he wrote extensively on language and thought, psychology of learning, child development, and the education of students with unique learning needs (Woolfolk, 2001). According to Eun (2016), Vygotsky sought to clarify the interactions of individuals and their immediate surroundings as well as within the larger culture and social context. Often thought of as the father of social learning theory (Churcher, Downs, and Tewksbury, 2014; Powell & Kalina, 2009), Vygotsky theorized that learners construct meaning from active involvement in the learning process through observing, emulating, and interacting with others (Liu & Chen, 2010; Mo, Ling, & Xie, 2019). Social learning theory has many of the same basic concepts of traditional learning, but focuses on the belief that people learn from each other (Chavis, 2012). According to Bofo-Arthur, Attah, & Akoensi (2017), social learning requires the interaction of one's personal belief system, the environment, and individual behavior and can occur through directly experiencing events or the observation of others. According to Chavis (2012), social learning has the potential to impact human behaviors across a variety of

environments. In fact, argued Lekwa, Reddy, & Shernoff (2019), student achievement is more readily understood as the result of the student's interactions within the learning environment.

During his lifetime, Vygotsky was faced with a large population of children with unique learning needs whose conditions were often the result of civil war, the October Revolution, and subsequent widespread famine and general neglect (Eun, 2016). Chavis (2012) explained that the cultural context refers to the environment and cultural influences, but also recognized that society, community and cultural heritage, values, beliefs, thinking, and traditions also greatly influence individuals. Cultural context was also significant in Vygotsky's social constructivist theories (Bozkurt, 2017). According to Chavis (2012), culture is a major factor in explaining and shaping human behavior and the social environment.

How important is social interaction in learning? Laiti & Frangou (2019) elaborated on the brain areas affected by social interaction:

A neuroimaging study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has suggested an alternative explanation for the mnemonic system. During memorization, the left anterior frontal gyrus and medial temporal lobe have historically been associated with memory encoding. However, during the social encoding condition, the encoding activity occurs in the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC), which is not considered a traditional memory region (Lieberman, 2012). This means that memories associated with a social context and those with an academic context may be stored differently. When academic work is accomplished through social interaction, a different brain area encodes the memories. Hence, it could be beneficial to establish socially motivating learning contexts that encourage the mastering of academic content in social interactions. (p.7)

Laiti & Frangou (2019) completed a study in Finland in which they explored social learning among the indigenous Sami people within the context of an online game programming course for ages 6-17. Because the Sami learning culture is based on social interaction, the researchers were anxious to ascertain the outcome of the study using a face-to-face platform (Laiti & Frangou, 2019). Results of the study revealed that the students naturally began to form knowledge together in the course environment, as the students discussed the games and collaborated with one another and their instructors,

Alsulami (2016) argued that social interaction is a part of constructivism that involves student and teacher communication. Communication comprises the foundation of human interaction (Palmer et al., 2019). Churcher, Downs, & Tewksbury (2014) provided the following background information on social learning theory by explaining that Vygotsky (1978) theorized that knowledge was constructed through social interaction. Knowledge is a combination of that which is learned through social interactions and the use of language to aid in constructing meaning. Bozkurt (2017) further explained that Vygotsky theorized that when guided by a more skilled adult or other individual, the student's social interaction through various activities and influences provide that student with cognitive development and an increased knowledge of one's culture and the world. Classroom social interactions are essential in cognitive development.

Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky theorized that cultural development occurs twice: first, on a social level, then later, on an individual level (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018; Bozkurt, 2017).

According to Eun (2016), the Russian psychologist developed a general law to explain that learning occurs in these two stages, first, between individuals in a social context, and second, from a cognitive and internal perspective. Known as the (ZPD), this theory refers to the gap

between what a student can do independently and what requires more support (Alsulami, 2016). The ZPD is comprised of a child's immature and maturing processes (Guseva & Solomonovich, 2017). Eun (2016) explained that individuals can accomplish more with the assistance of more competent individuals. Scaffolding, or temporary support of students throughout a task, is a form of constructivism (Gair, 2015). According to Moody et al. (2018), scaffolding between students and knowledgeable adults leads to improved thinking and cognitive abilities. Ultimately, what the student was only able to accomplish with the assistance of a more skilled individual later becomes internalized and can be accomplished independently (Eun, 2016). Within this zone is where true learning occurs (Danish, Saleh, & Bryan, 2017). In the ZPD, students' capabilities are stretched, thus leading to new forms of development. Teachers may facilitate this learning, thereby promoting significant developmental changes. This concept of the ZPD has important implications for teaching and learning. Once teachers understand the limits of what a student can do independently, then instruction can be successfully targeted. Once considered to be an internal process, cognition has since been recognized as that which can be shaped by an individual's environment through social interaction (Kim & Baylor, 2006). Intellectual development, argued Vygotsky, is achieved when the learner is involved in learning activities combined with social interactions. The ZPD maintains that in collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals, the learner can grow beyond the current capabilities.

Language and Social Interaction

Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky focused on the importance of language and social interaction in learning (Bozkurt, 2017). According to Carpenter, Nagell, & Tomasello (1998), it is highly unlikely that an infant or group of infants raised in isolation from adults would invent for themselves the complex social practice of language. Infants in the first year of life view adults as

social reference points and will attempt to interact with their environment in a way similar to adults. Around this same age, infants will begin to communicate intentionally with those around them. Referred to as joint or shared attention, this process refers to the complex system of social interaction that forms the foundation for language development. This notion of shared attention also contributes to one's understanding of the thoughts and beliefs of others as is characteristic by 4-5 years of age. In a study of the correlation between early communication and social-cognitive skills, researchers found these two variables were indeed positively correlated. Carr & Weinmann (2018) asserted that language development occurs through collaboration with other speakers. According to Fay, Walker, Swoboda & Garrod (2018), humans acquire language through social interaction. Actively participating in dialog ensures mutually agreed upon understanding. Language learning classrooms are essentially social events where the teacher acts as facilitator to ensure opportunities are made available to learners to interact in meaningful ways (Ahmadian & Tajabadi, 2017). Within the sociocultural framework of the classroom, the process of language learning may be directly attributed to student participation in the social setting. The advantage of peer to peer communication is that learners may act as novices and experts.

Student Engagement

Although academic achievement is contingent on teacher coverage of the critical content, student learning also depends substantially on the degree of student attention and participation in learning activities (Lekwa, Reddy, & Shernoff, 2019). Defined as the extent of a student's connection to or involvement in schooling (Yang, Bear, & May, 2018), student engagement also refers to the active participation of the student in the learning process. Krahenbuhl (2016) asserted that engagement of the student is essential to the learning process. According to Yang et al. (2018), student engagement relates to numerous important outcomes, including greater effort

in learning outcomes, increased academic achievement, and school completion. Research supports that lower student engagement correlates with negative school outcomes, such as violence, delinquency, and dropping out. Student engagement contains both a behavioral and an emotional component. Behavioral engagement, or academic engagement, refers to the academic involvement in learning activities. Emotional engagement refers to one's attitude toward other students, teachers, and the school as a whole. Academic engagement is comprised of two components: active engagement, and passive engagement (Lekwa et al., 2019). Active engagement refers to the degree of attention paid by students during a learning task. Passive engagement refers to attention paid to stimuli. The degree to which students are actively or passively engaged precedes learning to the extent that without academic engagement, students are unlikely to benefit from instruction. In a study of teachers' uses of evidence-based instructional and behavioral management strategies believed to increase student participation and engagement, it was determined students perceived these strategies as instrumental in increasing engagement.

Most teachers and researchers agree that on-task, or engagement in reading, is important because it leads to higher reading achievement (Carey, 2013). A 2016 study of off-task behavior revealed students who demonstrated on-task behavior tended to be higher achievers (Lekwa, Reddy, & Shernoff). In a study of the level of elementary student engagement during independent reading time, Carey (2013) found a high level of unengaged students who, instead of reading, demonstrated numerous off-task behaviors, such as going to the bathroom, browsing bookshelves, changing reading materials, turning pages but not reading, or choosing to do other work. For students who have difficulty with remaining engaged during independent work time, it was recommended that the teacher conduct a mini-lesson for students and have them draw

themselves during a time when they were highly engaged in learning. According to Talbot & Sofatzis (2017), one school persevered to increase engagement in reading by hosting a variety of author visits to expose students to professional writers, as well as engaging texts. This use of authors as educators allowed students to practice and obtain assistance with writing in order to develop stronger writing skills.

Feedback

Part of learning involves the use of feedback in the classroom (Reinholz, 2018). According to Carr & Weinmann (2018), a review of the current literature emphasizes the importance of feedback on learning. Fonseca et al. (2015) argued that teachers are essential in the success of student engagement within the classroom and school. Nicholas & Paatsch (2014) asserted that one way to foster student engagement by strengthening the teacher and student relationship is by providing feedback. Given the positive correlation between feedback and learning, improving the quality of feedback will likely improve the quality of learning (Reinholz, 2018). In one study of the effectiveness of feedback given orally from instructors to postgraduate students, investigators found that individual conferencing prepared students for meeting doctoral standards, helped these students to focus on their research, and helped them successfully complete their thesis work (Ali Abdulkhaleq, Hoon, & Abdullah, 2013). Moreover, revisions appeared in subsequent writings after the instructor discussed these revisions with individual students. Calkins (2013) argued that for a student to receive acknowledgement of what was done well and what changes need to be made to progress to the next level, then that student will begin to excel in dramatic ways. Percell (2017) defined feedback as a commentary designed to offer suggestions to students on how to advance from one level of competency to the next. A review of the literature indicates that feedback strategies are essential in promoting a stronger working

relationship between teacher and student, as well as an extremely important component of the learning process (Carr & Weinmann, 2018; Fonseca et al., 2015). According to Al-Hattami (2019), teachers play a major role in improving learning outcomes for students by providing constructive feedback to their students. Percell (2017) explained that while setting goals and expected learning outcomes is nothing new to teachers, imparting feedback to students is highly advantageous to meeting those goals and anticipated outcomes. Al-Hattami (2019) argued that feedback is one of the most effective ways for teachers to ensure their students are achieving specified learning outcomes. Teachers and students agreed on the importance of constructive feedback in improving student academic outcomes. Providing clear and constructive feedback is the most effective way for teachers to help close the gap between a student's current and the desired performance. It provides students with necessary information on what they are learning and what their next steps should be (Fonseca et al., 2015). For students who are having difficulty, teacher feedback can redirect them to the path that leads them to mastery of content knowledge and skill (Al-Hattami, 2019). It is also an effective tool for teachers to ascertain the current performance levels of their students, helps teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and allows teachers to identify areas of needed improvement. To be successful, feedback should be specific. However, the most common form of feedback, phrases such as "Good job," "Well done," or "Needs improvement" will have little impact on the learning process. When giving feedback, the focus should be on what a student does rather than who he/she is. It should be systematic and lead to improvement in student learning and teacher practice. To ensure feedback is effective, the learning outcomes and evaluation process should be clear to the student.

Teachers should give students praise when it is due.

Because of how it is perceived in various cultures, feedback can be a hindrance to some students and their writing progress (Ali Abdulkhaleq et al., 2013). In some cultures, the teacher is seen as the ultimate authority in school, resulting in some students avoiding engaging in discussions with their teachers. Such students are less likely to ask questions and make comments, but will passively accept whatever feedback is provided to them. Therefore, more cultural sensitivity may be required on the part of the instructor when providing feedback. The proficiency level of the student is an important consideration as well. The higher-ability student is more likely to engage in a more thorough conversation with the instructor. Instructors should be able to adjust their supervisory styles to meet the individual needs of each student.

According to Percell (2017), giving feedback to students is an essential component in the learning process, and yet in many classrooms, feedback occurs at the end of a course and serves as a post-mortem exam. Feedback given at the end of a learning cycle does little to further student learning (Fluckiger, Vigil, Pasco, & Danielson, 2010). In order to be effective, feedback must be timely, as well as specific and constructive (Fonseca et al., 2015; Nicholas & Paatsch, 2014; Percell, 2017). Calkins & Ehrenworth (2016) argued that to be effective, feedback must be given while the student is in the midst of working rather than after the student's work is done. Thus, emphasis is placed on feedback rather than on grading. According to Fonseca et al. (2015), successful classroom feedback should be under the teacher's control. It should also follow as soon as possible after the fact and should be specific. Feedback has both cognitive and motivational implications. Participants indicated that feedback about student performance enhanced the strength of the relationships between the teacher and student.

Feedback may also serve as a formative assessment as it informs the teacher on how to help students (Fluckiger et al., 2010). According Fluckiger et al. (2010), feedback should focus

on more than one aspect of learning; thus, formative feedback could be given on the product, such as an assignment or performance, on the process, and on the student's progress of learning over time. When feedback is given directly after completion of an assignment, it provides the student with information on strengths and weaknesses and allows the student to address these deficits before moving on to the next step or assignment. Detailed, descriptive feedback noticeably enhances the quality of student work. Purcell (2017) argued that feedback must be communicated to students by means to which they are accustomed. This researcher also found that one teacher reported that maintaining a conversational tone with his students allowed him to connect with them on an informal and personal level. Teachers in his study proved that not only is feedback essential to instruction, but is also a dynamic tool for communicating and motivating students to realize their potential.

Riley et al. (2018) explained that for one group of elementary teachers, feedback from students is obtained twice during the semester. One form of feedback is gathered through the use of a student survey. Students are asked questions about the classroom structure, learning activities, and their teacher. The students understand that they may address any issues they perceive as problematic and are encouraged to deliver the comments in such a way that the issues can be improved. The second form of feedback obtained is through regular conferencing with students. The teachers reported that individual conferencing with students not only provides opportunities for both parties to exchange feedback, but also fosters a sense of a safe environment and strong rapport between the teacher and student. The teachers observed a number of positive outcomes as a result of encouraging regular feedback from their students. For example, after inviting their students to review several international models of mathematics instruction, feedback from the students helped the teachers to redesign how they provided math

instruction. The teachers were also able to look for patterns in feedback. When large numbers of students had the same issue, the teachers believed that the issue should be addressed. The teachers also reported that allowing their students to have a voice in the classroom reduced the number of negative behaviors and improved the classroom atmosphere.

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is one of the more frequent, yet controversial, forms of feedback teachers provide (Isnawati, Sulistyono, Widiati, & Suryati, 2019). Although teachers provide WCF, doing so does not guarantee students are able or willing to use it to improve the learning process.

Feedback is particularly important in the English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Learner (EL) classroom. According to Irwin (2017), numerous ESL composition teachers argue that while important, providing feedback is one of the more time-consuming aspects of their role as an ESL Teacher. Many of these teachers provided written, rather than oral feedback, after the final draft of a paper for a product-oriented composition class. This use of feedback as a summative evaluation leads a number of instructors to become careless and insensitive in the written corrective feedback they provided. Ultimately, this type of feedback proves ineffective because it does nothing to reduce the type or frequency of errors.

Conferencing

Mikume & Oyoo (2010) argued that research indicates students receive more focused feedback during a face to face meeting with the teacher rather than merely through the use of written feedback. Saddler et al. (2014) asserted that research indicates young students can make effective and meaningful revisions to their work when provided with individualized feedback during conferences with their teacher. According Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh (2015), oral conferencing provides a more meaningful model of providing effective feedback. Mikume &

Oyoo (2010) asserted that conferencing permits students a time to absorb and ask questions with regard to written feedback. Nicholas and Paatsch (2014) asserted that student/teacher conferences are opportunities for a dialogue with opportunities for the student to respond to the teacher's feedback. Conferences are also beneficial in that teachers may nurture the student's ability to reflect on the work that has been accomplished (Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh, 2015). More than a casual check in, conferences are opportunities for teachers to address student understanding, help them organize their work, break down assignments and projects, and reteach specific concepts (Learned, Dowd, & Jenkins, 2009). Conferencing allows teachers opportunities to scaffold instruction to meet students' needs. Done well, conferencing can be a powerful teaching tool.

According to Riley et al. (2018), conferencing involves teachers meeting with students on a regular basis and helping the students set individual goals. In subsequent conferences, the teacher supports the students individually during conference time by offering strategies and ideas they may use to help achieve their goals.

According to Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh (2015), conferencing assists teachers in creating a collaborative classroom where learners are encouraged to engage in strengthening reading and writing skills. Clawson (2018) defined and described student conferencing as a meeting between a teacher and student that can be either brief or in-depth. According to Ali Abdulkhaleq, Hoon, & Abdullah (2013), conferencing was an excellent time for a teacher to clarify and answer questions about written feedback given to students. Conferencing with the student allowed the teacher to monitor the student's understanding and to adjust instruction accordingly (Nicholas and Paatsch, 2014). Conferences are conversations that provide insight into the thoughts and perceptions of the other party. Gair (2015) explained that conferences are a time to set aside the

teacher's propensity to correct. These are opportunities for the teacher to describe how the student's work impacts the teacher as the reader.

According to Learned et al. (2009), conferencing can be particularly beneficial to students with learning difficulties because it provides repeated opportunities to build self-confidence and reframe their perceptions of themselves as learners. To reap the benefits of these conferences, teachers must implement these practices on a regular basis and to address differences among the learners, tasks, and contexts. The investigators listed the following teaching practices to use during conferencing to promote student success and independence: understanding the curriculum and academic goals; motivating and building students' trust; and using strategic questioning and teaching. These researchers also described the following five strategies to help students to get started and stay focused on tasks: Focus on what the student needs to do once the student leaves the conference; move from general to specific when assessing the students' needs; observe how receptive the student is to help; create mini-goals and follow up on progress; and create an inviting learning environment.

In a study of the impact teacher-student conferencing on improving the accuracy of EL students' writing skills, Hamlaoui & Fellah (2017) found that students began making significantly fewer errors after just two conferences between the teacher and student. Moreover, the researchers found that students began showing progress in grammatical accuracy over time emphasizing the effectiveness of conferencing as a feedback method.

In one study of the interaction of oral and written teacher feedback and the perceptions of Japanese students, Irwin (2017) found most students believed the feedback they received helped improve their writing skills. In addition to the teacher providing written feedback, the teacher met with the students to conference with them. These conferences were a time for the teacher to

answer questions and further explain the written feedback previously provided. These conferences provided opportunities for the teacher to provide immediate feedback to the student. Reid (1995) noted that since some students are auditory learners these face-to-face conferences more closely match their learning styles.

Investigators for another recent study sought to compare the effects of oral conferencing with collaborative writing on EL students' writing abilities (Nosratinia & Nikpanjeh, 2015). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the oral conferencing group and the collaborative conferencing group. While the students assigned to the oral conferencing group were instructed to write their compositions at home, the students assigned to the collaborative writing group were instructed to write during class in collaboration with their classmates. An oral conferencing checklist was used that contained questions to be asked from all participants in the oral conferencing group for pre and post-writing assignments during the study. The posttest was given to all participants to compare the writing abilities of the oral conferencing group with the collaborative writing group. The oral conferencing group members participated in discussions among the participants and the teacher before and after all writing activities as well as teacher to student and student to student feedback. Writing conferences typically fall into the following four categories:

1. Rehearsal conference - The student receives help with formulating potential writing topics;
2. Drafting conference - The student receives help with developing ideas and determining the writing style or genre he/she desires to use in writing;
3. Revision conference - The student receives help with improving the first draft;
4. Editing conference - The student receives help in editing the final draft.

Students assigned to the oral conferencing group revised their writings based on the feedback they received in class during conferencing. In contrast, the collaborative writing group worked with each other and wrote their essays during class. Results of the study revealed that there were no noticeable differences in the standardized test scores of students in both groups. However, statistical analyses of the data indicated significant differences between the effects of oral conferencing and collaborative writing on the EL students' writing abilities. EL learners' writing ability was more affected by applying oral conferencing rather than collaborative writing activities.

According to Carey, Howard, and Leftwich (2013), conferencing allows teachers to share their experiences while also engaging in the text. Chaney (2011) explained that teachers remarked that one advantage of conferencing with students was that students were able to quickly make corrections recommended by the teacher. According to Nicholas & Paatsch (2014), reading conferences in the elementary classroom may occur during guided reading instruction. These daily 10-15 minute sessions allow teachers time to conference with individual students or small groups of 5-6 children. Although a number of different models for reading workshop exist, most teachers agree that the conferencing aspect is one of the most crucial pieces. The purpose of the reading conference is for the teacher to engage in meaningful conversation with the student to support the reader's understanding of text. The teacher should serve as a sounding board to help the reader engage in problem-solving while reading (Clawson, 2014). Conferencing with students is the time when the teacher can model thinking and talking about the text, as well as providing modeling and support for the specific needs of students. According to Lillge & Crane (2019), conferencing allows teachers to model inquiry thinking so that students view uncertainty as an opportunity rather than a limitation. These conferences would provide a window into the

student's thought processes (Costello, 2014). One teacher reported that reading conferences should permit more conversations with students about their reading and about themselves as readers. Another teacher reported that the information gathered during conferences determined how she designed whole group instruction rather than presenting content to students based on what she thought they needed as had been her previous practice (Lillge & Crane, 2019).

According to Weih (2018), research has also shown that teachers who model enthusiasm for reading will motivate students to become excited about reading. As a teacher researcher, Costello (2014) sought to investigate the connection between student conferencing and student engagement. According to Maliborska & You (2016), the format of the conference has an effect on students' perceptions. For example, teacher-dominated conferences are seen as less effective than student driven conferences. Active student engagement and discussion with the teacher in the conference resulted in subsequent revisions of drafts. By contrast, teacher-dominated conferences resulted in fewer corrections and less overall improvement to final drafts. ESL students also reported that when compared to their stronger counterparts, weaker students had shorter, teacher-directed conferences and revisions were focused on grammar and mechanics.

Conferencing can also serve as an opportunity for a formative assessment of the student's reading progress (Clawson, 2018). Qualitative data gathered during a conference allows the teacher to determine if the student has chosen an appropriate book. Students should choose high interest books to support an increase in comprehension, and teachers should help students understand how to choose an appropriate book.

Carey et al. (2013) reported that part of the conference included checking with each student that the book chosen was a good fit, as well as reading aloud from a book students enjoy. Conferences also focused on the re-teaching of reading strategies previously taught. One teacher

reported that reading conferences provided opportunities to better understand the students as readers. Conferencing, where the teacher modeled reading behaviors and student choice of reading materials, proved integral to student engagement during independent reading time.

Lillge and Crane (2019) wrote about a middle school teacher who began reflecting on her reading conferencing practices. During conferences, the teacher concluded that the lack of meaningful dialogue with her students was the result of her quizzing her students rather than asking open-ended questions. Once she began asking questions, such as, “What surprised you most in the reading?” the students began to speak more comprehensively about that which he/she had read.

Occasionally, a miscommunication occurs between what the teacher expects and what the student does. Sometimes, writing conferences are poorly designed. After a recent study of student conferencing during a writer’s workshop, Saddler, Saddler, Befoorhooz, & Cuccio-Slichko (2014) found the following results: little time during the school day was devoted to writing; more time on revising did not lead to a better final draft; peer-conferencing was widely used; the use of rubrics during revision was inconsistent; teachers were inconsistent in teaching revision strategies; and young writers made surface level revisions rather than changes to enhance the overall content and meaning. Chaney (2011) explained the complexity of teachers implementing student conferencing and that they require the teacher to meet with the individual or with a small group. While there is no simple way to create these opportunities, teachers naturally gravitate toward helping the struggling student. However, conferences can be designed to provide instruction to students at all levels of learning where the student is given the opportunity to practice and hone specific skills.

Clawson (2014) argued that because of time constraints, conferencing with a small group of students could be just as effective as conferencing with each student individually if the same students all required the same support.

According to Wallis (2010), effective teachers use different types of conferences to meet the needs of their students. One teacher reported that conferences allow her to differentiate the feedback she provides to her students based on their needs (Schimpf, 2014). This is especially true for literacy conferences where teachers must focus on the specific skills needed to develop strong reading and writing abilities in students. Unlike in years past, argued Calkins (2013), students cannot leave school today without strong literacy skills and expect there to be a job waiting for them. In the elementary classroom, there are two significant conference constructs: the writing conference and the reading conference.

Conferencing challenges. Similar to any other classroom endeavor, conferencing presents challenges. An individual interaction between teacher and student requires time on the teacher's part to attend to the needs of the individual student (Mikume & Oyoo, 2010). The other challenge is that some students become overly reliant on feedback from the teacher and are unable to proceed independently. Additionally, student participation in conferences with their instructor depends largely on their relationship with the instructor (Maliborska & You, 2016).

Peer conferencing. In addition to conferencing with their teachers, students have also begun to conference with their peers during class time (Saddler et al., 2014). Peer conferencing is also a potential solution to reducing the amount of time the teacher needs to work individually with students (Mikume & Oyoo, 2010). Many educators are using peer conferencing in their classrooms as a means of engaging more students and using student feedback as a formative assessment (Reinholz, 2018). During conferencing with individual students, teachers model how

to give constructive feedback so that each student in turn will know what conferencing with a peer should resemble (Riley, Riddell, Kidd, & Gavin, 2018). Saddler et al. (2014) reported that peer conferencing helps students develop a sense of audience in their writing while improving the strength and clarity of opinion writing. A 4th grade teacher decided to incorporate peer conferencing in the classroom as a way to develop writing mentors (Oskins, 2011). The teacher first permitted the students to conference with one another without any explicit instructions. These students were relying on a more skilled adult to help guide them through the conferencing process. Peer conferencing is an essential component to the student-centered classroom. One goal for her students was to for them to become independent thinkers and writers able to analyze and think critically. The conferences allow them to think through what they have written and talk through ways they can improve their writing. It was a goal was for her students to conference with one another - she sought a more student-centered classroom where her students are more likely to rely on one another to help and encourage their writing skills.

According to Reinholz (2018), quality of student feedback improves when they are taught how to provide feedback to one another as realized in a recent study. In one case study of classroom peer conferencing, students were given 5 minutes to silently read one another's writing followed by 5 minutes of conferencing. The conferences were supported by the use of a structured feedback form students were permitted to use. The students were to complete their peer conferencing during class, but had until the next day to revise and submit their work based on their conference partner's suggestions. The researcher in this case study observed that students were able to verbalize strengths in the writing of others without being prompted to do so.

Fugiel (2016), a kindergarten teacher, implemented partner time in her class for students to participate in peer conferencing as a component of writer's workshop. After the writing portion of the workshop, Fugiel permitted her students to meet with their partners and discuss their work they had done that day. Their work in writer's workshop typically included working on their books of blank pieces of paper stapled together in which they would write a story and use illustrations. Before implementing partner time, Fugiel modeled how to give encouragement and suggestions to one another. For example, when looking at a student's book together in front of the class, Fugiel would point out specific details in the story's illustrations and perhaps how well the ideas and story flowed. Fugiel would then make a suggestions for something else to include in the story. During class before partner time, Fugiel then reminded her students to give their partners encouragement and suggestions (using those exact words). By working with a peer, the student has a safe place to share and reflect on their writing, thereby improving their independent writing skills.

Restorative conferencing. According to Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz (2016), research indicates that restorative practice implementation as a whole is effective in strengthening the student and teacher relationship. When school infractions occur, Haney, Thomas, & Vaughn (2011) explained that restorative practices rely heavily on conducting group conferences with students. This restorative practice, or restorative justice conference, occurs during the school day and involves the offenders and the victims engaging in a teacher-facilitated discussion of how he/she can make amends and what actions need to be taken to be reintegrated into the social fold. This social process is an attempt in creating a school culture of accountability and responsibility. The process also is an attempt to create a positive and equitable school climate that does not become reliant on punitive approaches to behavior (Gregory et al.,

2016). Haney et al. (2011) indicated that this practice has been criticized as “integrative shaming,” and fosters an ongoing sense of guilt among the offenders before, during, and after the restorative conference occurs. The authors explained the difference between effective and derisive shaming. In effective shaming, emphasis is placed on the offense rather than the offender. By contrast, derisive shaming involves stigmatizing the offending student. Moreover, restorative conferences have the potential to become emotionally charged and volatile experiences where both the victim and offender leave feeling negatively shamed. Another concern is that the restorative conference may prove ineffective in reintegrating a student back into the classroom of which the student never felt a part. Gregory et al. (2016) maintained that quality restorative conferences have the potential to create trusting interactions between the student and teacher where the students feel supported and treated with equity. Ellerbrock et al. (2017) described a middle school teacher who, in an attempt to strengthen relationships with students, observed that student-directed conferences proved to be powerful learning experiences for the students.

Content area conferencing. According to Anderson & Lubig (2012), elementary teachers can implement the Collaborative Civics Conference Protocol (3CP) with social studies’ classes to engage students in meaningful collaborative assessments of their thinking and writing abilities as it relates to social studies content. The authors argued that the goals for Writer’s Workshop are similar to those in a social studies classroom. In the Writer’s Workshop, the teacher acts as a facilitator by monitoring the work of and engaging in conferencing with students about ways to improve their writing. Based on the Writer’s Workshop and social constructivist models, the social studies classroom requires the student to move from ideas to a production of the final product, or report by taking the following sequential steps: generate ideas

about issues on which to research; conduct research on the topic; draft the report/presentation; rehearse; present; and reflect.

Similar to how the social studies' classroom can adapt the 3CP, so too can the science classroom adopt an authentic literacy framework that supports science learning (Mortabito, 2017). For example, the science teacher can provide opportunities for students to confer with others and gain feedback on their writing. Writing in science is a response to that on which the student has completed research, observations, experiments, or investigations.

Reading conference. Educators and other researchers who view reading as a social practice espouse the value of conferencing (Lillge & Crane, 2019). Teachers desire for students to experience inquiry as a process of asking questions and seeking potential explanations, and they can use conferencing as a time to model inquiry and engage students in meaningful ways with conversations about the text. Reading conferences may also occur between the teacher and student before, during, or after reading the assigned text (Costello, 2014). According to Lillge & Crane (2109), conferencing provides teachers with opportunities to conduct formative assessments of their students' reading abilities.

There are two different types of reading conferences: the research-decide-compliment-teach conference and the coaching conference. The research-decide-compliment-teach conference structure is very similar to that of the writing conference (Calkins, 2015). During the research phase, just as in the writing conference, the teacher must understand what the student has accomplished with reading and where the student intends to go next. Therefore, the teacher should begin the conference with an informal check in by asking, "What have you been working on as a reader today?" or "What reading strategy have you used today? How is that working for you?" The teacher may also begin the conference by taking an informal running record, or an

observation of reading behaviors to determine the current skill level of the student in terms of reading ability. The research phase informs the decision phase for the reading conference. Based on the reading behaviors the student demonstrates, the teacher must decide what skill the student is ready to learn next. Perhaps the student relied too heavily on pictures to determine words and should start trying to decode rather than guess at words. Perhaps the student was able to decode most words but has difficulty with understanding what he/she has read. Whatever the current level, the teacher must decide what skill to teach next in the progression of reading. The compliment phase, similar to the one in the writing conference, requires the teacher recognize a successful strategy he or she sees the student use in hopes that the student will continue to use that strategy in the future. For example, the teacher might say to the student, “You do an excellent job of using picture clues to determine text meaning.” After the compliment, the teacher names the teaching point and begins teaching. The overall theme of the conference is to help the student gain self-confidence with reading ability (Gair, 2015).

In the coaching conferencing, the teacher acts as a reading coach while the student reads aloud (Calkins, 2015). A coaching conference may also begin with a compliment just as in the compliment phase of the research-decide-compliment-teach conference. While the teacher listens as the student reads, it is common for the student to look at the teacher’s face every few words for affirmation:

When the child looks to the teacher to see if she is reading well, she is not developing the ability to know when she has made a mistake on her own. Marie Clay lets us know that part of learning to read is developing a “self-extending system,” in which the reader begins to hear her own mistakes and correct those mistakes with a variety of strategies.

This cannot happen if the child is instead seeking constant feedback from the teacher.

(p.120)

If the teacher observes this happening during the reading conference, then the teacher should sit slightly behind the reader and keep eyes focused on the text.

The next phases of the coaching conference involve the decision, teaching, and linking phases that may occur in quick succession. For example, the teacher might decide that the student needs the opportunity to self-correct using context. If the student reads “that” for “the,” the teacher could ask, “Now does ‘that’ makes sense? Or, is there another word that makes sense in that sentence?” The teacher has decided to teach context as a decoding strategy, and will link it to future reading attempts.

Writing conference. Teacher-student writing conferences are one-on-one discussions between teacher and student about the student’s writing abilities (Bayraktar, 2013). With some variation, the writing conference follows the same format of student and teacher acting as partners in collaboration. The teacher’s role during the conference is to model thinking aloud (e.g., “I’m wondering what you mean here where you wrote...”), asking clarifying questions, and making recommendations that will improve the student’s writing. In some respect, the teacher is acting as the audience, thus lending authenticity to the student as a writer. Several studies reveal the positive impact of writing conferences on student writing ability. In one study of the interactions between teachers and students during writing conferences, the researcher found 72% of the conferences were student-centered, two out of 32 conferences were balanced between teacher and student, and 16% of conferences were teacher-centered.

Writing conferences between the student and teacher to discuss ways to enhance the student’s writing has been recognized as an essential component of writing instruction (Saddler

et al., 2014). According to Gair (2015), the writing conference is in itself a form of scaffolding. Wallis (2010) explained that the purpose of the writing conference is for the teacher to understand how well the student is processing the information presented in the previous lesson and for the student to evaluate writing based on feedback from the teacher. Talbot & Sofatzis (2017) proposed that conferencing is an effective tool for students to set learning goals and targets for improving the quality of their writing. Hale (2018) argued that conferencing with students provides teachers the opportunity to teach students about a particular strength in their writing about which they may have been previously unaware. To that end, teachers should provide positive feedback to all students regarding a specific academic aspect of their writing before providing support for areas of potential growth. Research has shown that when students are praised for their hard work, fortitude, and performance on a task, they are more likely to develop a growth mindset and view setbacks and challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than as evidence of personal deficit or character defect. Teachers should initially suspend the urge to focus on what aspects of the student's writing require improvement. Another shift in thinking on the teacher's part should be to evaluate holistically the overall quality of the student's writing rather than the individual components. To impart instruction to students by highlighting strengths in their writing, the teacher must ensure students not only understand what they did well, but should also understand the reason. The student who understands why this is a strength will become more purposeful in using a particular strategy or technique in future writing. An added benefit of the student having a firm understanding of writing strengths is the student becoming more involved and invested in conferences by demonstrating an openness to receiving feedback on how to improve writing. In subsequent conferences, the teacher can begin by asking the student to identify specific strengths has noted within the writing. The student can

use this same strategy to monitor individual writing progress and to identify areas that require improvement.

Gair (2015) argued that conferences should also function as the primary formative assessment of student writing. Conferences should not exceed 10 or 15 minutes and should occur with individual or small groups of students.

Children learn to become strategic thinkers by interacting with other knowledgeable individuals (Hawkins, 2019). During the student writing conference, the teacher may take on any one of the following roles: audience, writer, teacher, or communicator of expectations. In one study of student writing conferences, the researchers found that students responded well when the teacher acted as the audience and appeared to genuinely enjoy reading the students' writing.

In the writer's workshop, students are provided scaffolded instruction from their teacher and peers on ways to improve their writing abilities (Kissel & Miller, 2015). During the writer's workshop, the teacher conferences with one student at a time, or with a small group of students to provide during on a specific need or skill. During the conference, the teacher asks the student about the writing and offers encouragement, makes suggestions, and honors the student's work. The conference could last as little as 2-3 minutes, or up to 15 minutes.

Maliborska & You (2016) conducted an exploratory study on the perceptions of teachers and students of writing conferences during a yearlong semester course on second language writing. Students conferenced with their teacher every week for five writing tasks during the course.

Because it is such an essential component in writing, the topic of revising is worth exploring further (Saddler et al., 2014). Researchers for this study replicated and extended prior writing research to discern the extent that research supports revising practices, such as peer

conferencing, using rubrics, and other strategies implemented in the classroom. Investigators found that little time in the day is devoted to the skill of writing, and revising did not lead to a better final draft. While students did make changes to their original work, the changes were small and superficial and did not lead to enhancing the meaning and overall quality of their work. These results suggest that more time during writing instruction should be devoted to directly teaching students how to use revising skills effectively to enhance the content of their writing. During conferencing with students, teachers can provide this needed instruction and clarification (Mikume & Oyoo, 2010). This context subsequently provides opportunities for teachers to respond to the diverse cultural, educational, and instructional needs of their students and saves time spent on writing corrective feedback on papers. For students, conferencing also provides opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification.

According to Maliborska & You (2016), writing conference research has typically focused on its use in first language (L1) writing courses. Recently, student conferencing has begun to emerge in second language (L2) writing courses. This also marks a change from a product-centered to process-centered teaching approach to writing instruction. This study involves the perception of both teachers and multilingual students on writing conferences that occur during an English as a second language (ESL) writing course. In another study of the efficacy of conferencing as an assessment and its effect on Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' mechanical writing ability and attitudes regarding writing, participants in the conferencing group significantly outperformed their peers in the control group on the post-test and showed positive attitudes towards writing mechanics (Baleghizadeh & Zarghami, 2012).

According to Maliborska & You (2016), one of the most extensive studies on student perceptions of writing conferences involved an analysis of 1,800 students' evaluations of writing

conferences with their teachers. Results indicated that students appreciated the individualized attention paid to their writing and believed they could learn more about how to improve their writing from this form of teacher feedback. Data also revealed that conferences permitted shared responsibility where each party was engaged in the conference but was not dominated by the teacher or student. Investigators reported that research on conference patterns between teachers and L2 writers revealed active student engagement and discussion of meaning between student and teacher resulted in significant draft revisions. However, while students and teachers both appreciated the individualized feedback inherent in conferences, teachers required a significant amount of preparation time reviewing drafts prior to meeting with the students. Most teachers and students were not in favor of reducing these conferences, however, and both indicated an interest in extending the conference time. Of the classes surveyed, students indicated individual conferencing as their preferred type of instruction. Students saw conferences as opportunities to discuss feedback and revisions with their instructors and obtaining their individualized help. The teachers favored both conferencing and lecture as their preferred instruction type.

One of the most popular models of writing instruction on the elementary school level is the Calkins' model of the writers' workshop (Calkins, 2013, 2015). Initially referred to as the conference approach to teaching writing, writers' workshop is an approach to writing instruction comprised of conferences, minilessons, and small group work with time set aside for independent writing practice, as well as opportunities for responsive feedback from the teacher to the student, or from student to student (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). Conferences are conducted during any phase of the writing process, including prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing (Gair, 2015). During the conference, the student is actively engaged in discussions about writing. To be effective, the teacher should provide specific feedback about particular strengths or areas

of difficulty in the student's writing. Student writing is directly influenced by the teacher's use of feedback during the conference. Calkins & Ehrenworth (2016) asserted that to accelerate their learning, students must be able to answer the question, "Where am I going?" Isnawati et al. (2019) argued that research from numerous studies revealed the advantages of writing conferences. The teacher uses the conference as an opportunity to better understand and clarify individual student needs. For students who may be reluctant to ask questions during class, the conference is a time to ask questions, get clarification, and express their opinions. Conferences are also opportunities for helping students gain self-confidence in their writing ability (Gair, 2015). According to Hale (2017), teachers can reinforce student understanding by asking, "Can you tell me one thing you are good at in writing that we just talked about?" By providing oral feedback through conferencing, and particularly by posing the feedback in the form of a question, the teacher pushes the student to reflect on and make changes to enhance writing (Wallis, 2010). The writing conference provides the opportunity to strengthen the teacher and student relationship. In fact, the act of conferring centers around the interaction between the teacher and student. As a teacher, Gair (2015) used the writing conference as a time to explain to the student how writing impacts the audience, or reader. For writing to be authentic, there must be an audience. Secondly, the teacher should focus on one or two teaching points. Additionally the teacher should be kneeling or sitting beside the student during the conference to illustrate the collegial aspect of the conference.

One model of a writing conference involves the students working on independent writing while the teacher circulates (Sharp, 2015). The teacher may stop and address specific teaching points with individual students, or may do so with a small group of students.

During another writing conference model, the teacher is seated directly beside the student and engages in an informal conversation about the student's writing. Calkins (2013) described the four phases of the writing conference as researching, deciding, teaching, linking. The research phase requires the teacher to investigate what the child has done and what he/she is intending to do next. For example, the teacher may pose to the student, "Tell me what you are working on as a writer today." A good conference begins with listening and coaching on the part of the teacher. Students, especially younger ones, may need help articulating and explaining their intentions. If the student states, "I'm revising," then the teacher may say, "I see that you are revising by adding more descriptive words. Let's look at your writing before and since you have begun revising." The teacher may also continue with another line of questioning, such as, "What's another thing you plan to do with your writing piece today?" For the decision phase of the writing conference, the teacher must decide what and how to teach the next step. If the teacher is unable to ascertain what the child's intentions are or believes the intentions are misguided, then the teacher should help the child find a new intention. After establishing the student's next intentions as a writer, the teacher must work to help the student expand on those intentions. The teacher will do this through demonstrating/modeling, guided practice, explaining and providing an example, or inquiry.

During the teaching phase of the conference, the teacher begins by describing a writing strength of the child to increase the likelihood that the student will demonstrate this behavior in the future (Wallis, 2010). For instance, the teacher may begin by stating, "I like the descriptive language you used when you described your pet dog chasing a ball. I can actually picture his ears flapping as he runs!" (Calkins, 2013). Next, the teacher should provide the teaching point by stating, for example, "What I would like for you to try next is think about how you should write

if you are trying to convince the reader that having a dog is the best pet to have.” This teaching point may require the teacher to provide an example of a persuasive sentence so the student gains an understanding of how to proceed. During the conference, the teacher should initially provide the student with support followed by an opportunity for the student to practice with less support. The final phase of the conference, known as the linking phase, is the transition (or link) from guided practice during the conference to independent work. By this time, the student should understand what he/she should continue working on once the conference is complete. One of the most important goals of the writing conference is that the student comes away from the conference wanting to write.

Summary

As children, humans naturally rely heavily on the knowledge of other individuals in attempt to make meaning of the world (Brosseau, Penney, & Poulin, 2015). Unfortunately, not every individual is a reliable source of information. Based on the social constructivist theoretical framework, student conferencing increases student engagement, permits differentiated feedback, and strengthens the relationship between the student and teacher. Although classroom time constraints are the greatest impediment to student conferencing, research supports that regular student conferencing with the teacher, whether individually or within a small group, leads to improved learning opportunities and overall success for students.

Chapter Three: Methodology

According to Newman & Benz (1998), the research question should determine the research methodology. This chapter addresses the research methodology used in this qualitative study. This study allowed for a deeper understanding of the characteristics of student conferencing that positively influence student learning. A case study was selected as the qualitative research type, and the primary components are discussed in this chapter. They include the rationale for the specific research approach, a description of the study participants and setting, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, and a summary of the methodology.

Research Question

The following research question directed this study: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning?

Description of the Specific Research Approach

According to Ayiro (2012), research is the structured pursuit of an issue or problem with the purpose of adding knowledge or providing possible solutions. Essentially, research is simply the search for knowledge (Newman & Benz, 1998). *Qualitative research* is a broad term that refers to a wide variety of approaches and methods for study in the social sciences (Saldana, 2011). Qualitative research specifically is a means for gaining a deeper understanding of the significance of a specific human or social problem (Ayiro, 2012).

Research design. The design of qualitative research can adhere to any number of models. One such model is a case study. According to Saldana (2011), a case study focuses on a single unit of study - one person, one group, one class, etc. This research model produces a rich description of a single unit and is based on multiple sources of data (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). Unlike other studies that cover multiple settings to gain a broad and

representative sampling of perspectives, a case study is limited to a single setting to provide a deeper examination and understanding (Saldana, 2011). Therefore, a case study is the most appropriate research design model for gaining a greater understanding of the characteristics of student conferencing that educators believe contribute to increased student learning.

According to Ayiro (2012), qualitative researchers often use a theoretical lens, or framework, to view their studies. Imenda (2014) stated that theoretical framework refers to the framework for a study chosen to guide the research. The theoretical framework for this study is based on the theory of social constructivism. According to McLeod et al. (2015), social constructivism is based on the notion that individuals learn and construct knowledge through their interactions with others. For student conferencing, the learning through social interaction occurs between the teacher and student.

While a theoretical framework is based on a single theory, a conceptual framework is a synthesis of numerous concepts (Imenda, 2014). As Jabareen (2009) described, a conceptual framework is a network of interconnected ideas that aid in understanding a phenomenon. In this study, the Calkins' (2013, 2015) model for student conferencing is used as the conceptual framework. For the Calkins' model, student conferencing is an essential component of the workshop approach to reading and writing instruction in the elementary school classroom (Williams, 2018).

Data collection procedures. In qualitative research, quality of measurement is essential and requires a consistent and accurate data collection process (Ayiro, 2012). According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker (2014), the three most common data collections methods used for a qualitative study are observation, interviewing, and artifact analysis.

Observations. Observations were used to collect data for the study. According to Ayiro

(2012), “analysis begins as soon as data begin to be collected. Analysis and data collection proceed in a cyclical fashion, where preliminary analysis informs subsequent data collection and so forth” (p.194). Conducting observations is one of the most basic methods for obtaining data in a qualitative analysis (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). According to Dana & Yendol-Hoppey (2014), classroom observations may be documented through the use of field notes. The observer as participant is one model of observing where the observer may interact with the study participants but does not participate with the activities being observed (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). According to Dana & Yendol-Hoppey (2014), video recording is a powerful and often underused tool in qualitative research. While field notes are objective documentation of observations, researcher reflections, or observer comments, may also be used as part of qualitative research data collection (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). Since the purpose of this study is to determine what aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective to enhancing student learning, observing student conferencing in the classroom may add to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, observations were conducted in the classroom using the observer as participant model. Field notes and observer reflections were completed during the observations as well.

Interviews. One of the most widely and basic methods for obtaining data in a qualitative study is through the use of interviewing (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). According to Saldana (2011), most qualitative studies rely on interviews with participants as a data source. Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson & Walker (2014) explained that interviews can be structured, unstructured, or semi structured. While a structured interview consists of the same questions given to multiple participants, the unstructured interview is comprised of an outline of a topic rather than a list of questions and is meant to be a purposeful conversation where the subject’s responses determine

the next question. Ayiro (2012) asserted that unstructured or in-depth interviews are most often employed to generate explanatory data used to augment findings from other data sources.

Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker (2014) argued that interviews prove useful in a qualitative study because they quickly provide a large volume of in-depth information and provide insight on the participants' perspectives, meaning of events for those involved, background information about the setting, and information on unanticipated issues. For this study, an unstructured interview was conducted with the teacher after the completion of classroom observations.

Artifact analysis. Artifacts or documents related to the research topic are another common form of qualitative data collection (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). A document or artifact analysis is a focus of written or non-written documents that may be classified as one of the following: public records, personal documents, physical materials, and researcher-generated documents (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, and Walker, 2014). Artifacts for analysis were obtained from the classroom teacher that added to a deeper understanding of the characteristics of student conferencing that enhance student learning. The artifacts collected include "Reader's Workshop Conference Notes" completed by the teacher during and after each student conference.

Coding process. Saldana (2011) defined coding in qualitative analysis as a method of discovery and means of patterning, classifying, and reorganizing individual pieces of datum into categories for further analysis. According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, and Walker (2014), coding is the crux of qualitative research and includes identifying themes and patterns as they emerge throughout research. Conducted throughout the data collection period, the three-phase coding process was completed as follows: open coding, followed by axial coding, and followed by selective coding.

According to Rabinovich & Kacen (2010), open coding requires researchers to assign subcategories under a larger category with regard to three key components: conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences. After open coding, axial coding is then used by researchers to make connections across categories (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). Following axial coding, selective coding is then used by researchers to identify a larger category and clarify the interrelationships between collected data (Rabinovich & Kacen, 2010). The coding process was based on the three sources of data: observations, interviews, and artifacts.

Data analysis procedures. Described by Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker (2014) as the process of reducing and reorganizing data, synthesizing large pieces of information, searching for patterns and themes, and evaluating importance, data analysis is a non-linear process and requires qualitative researchers to read, review, and reflect. According to Rabinovich & Kacen (2010), the data analysis process reveals relationships among concepts not previously understood.

Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker (2014) argued that qualitative research requires consistency of the data, drawing valid conclusions from the data, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Throughout this qualitative study, measures were taken to ensure rigor.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involves a peer interviewing the investigator during various phases of the study (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Frels, 2013). According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker (2014), peer debriefing is a trustworthy technique often used to control for bias. To ensure credibility and confirmability in this study, an experienced researcher filled this role, was consulted, and periodically asked to review data.

Triangulation. Ayiro (2011) stated triangulation is also the process of corroborating data

from various sources. To support the credibility and confirmability of this study, triangulation was used with the following multiple data sources: observations, interview, and artifact analysis.

Member checks. Using member checks is a process of requesting study participants to verify or confirm whether the data collected is accurate and realistic (Jacobs, Ary, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). To support dependability and confirmability, member checks were used in this study. At the conclusion of the data collection period, participants were asked to review and/or critique field notes.

Detailed descriptions of context. According to Saldana (2011), transferability refers to the reasonableness that a study may be replicated. Throughout the writing, a rich amount of detail has been provided so that the reader may judge the transferability of the results.

Description of the Study Participants and Setting

In a small private elementary school of approximately students, research for this study was conducted at an elementary school of 480 students from PreK-6th grade. Classroom observations were conducted in a 1st grade classroom of 15 students. The teacher and five students comprised the study participants.

Eight classroom observations were conducted over 10 weeks. Each student was observed conferencing with the teacher at least three times during the observation period.

Ethical Considerations

According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker (2014), ethical issues are inherent in qualitative research and must be in keeping with professional ethics statements stipulated by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA), as well as in keeping with federal guidelines and regulations. In 1979, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research

released the *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Behavior Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (Adashi, 2018). This basic set of ethical guidelines for conducting research requires investigators to adhere to three main principles: autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Ayiro, 2012). One such requirement under the law is that colleges and universities engaging in research of human subjects must form an institutional review board (IRB) (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). The IRB serves as the university's oversight committee and is required to review and approve all proposed studies on human subjects. Research for this study began after permission was requested and IRB approval was obtained through Carson-Newman University.

Under the ethical principle of autonomy, as cited by the Belmont Report, researchers are ethically obligated to provide informed consent for all study participants (Ayiro, 2012). Consent must be voluntary, informed, and granted by a competent individual (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). The investigator is responsible for ensuring all participants have received a full disclosure of the risks, benefits, and alternatives to the study as well as the multiple opportunities to have questions answered (Ayiro, 2012). All participants of the study gave permission through the informed consent process.

Saldana (2011) explained that special consideration should be given when researching children. Investigators must also consider how privacy and confidentiality are addressed in their research (Ayiro, 2012). According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, any personally identifiable information pertaining to students may not be made available outside of the school without written consent from the student (if of age) or a parent/legal guardian (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). With regard to the student participants in this study, no personally identifiable information is included. Students are referred to by their first and last

initials.

Summary

Qualitative research has the potential to illuminate and provide a deeper understanding on various issues within the social sciences (Cox, 2012). Therefore, this research was designed as a case study to answer the following research question: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning? This was a case study of a group of five students and their teacher in an elementary classroom. To inform the research question, three sources of data were used: observations, interview, and artifacts. Data collection, data analysis, and coding procedures were aligned with IRB guidelines.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

Chapter Four presents an analysis of the findings from the data collected through a case study of the student conferencing aspects that educators deem as beneficial to student understanding and learning. Conferencing between the teacher and student is one form of communication and an efficient means of gathering information and providing feedback. Successful communication between the teacher and student is essential to student outcome. Therefore, the research question sought to determine what facets of conferencing are the most beneficial to student success.

The following research question guided this study: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning? The research question is aligned with the purpose and significance of the study. The question considers what characteristics of student and teacher interactions educators believe are beneficial to student success.

To obtain a deeper understanding of what makes conferencing successful, a case study was used as the research model in this qualitative study. One teacher and five students served as the study participants. Data were obtained through classroom observations, artifact analysis, and interview.

This chapter is comprised of the following nine major sections: descriptive characteristics of the participants, description of the setting, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, data sources, data analysis, emerging themes and study findings, trustworthy techniques, coding table, and summary.

Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants

This study occurred in a private elementary school serving 480 students in pre-K-6th grade. The student body is 99% white, the majority of whom are from upper-middle class

households. The case study was conducted in a 1st grade classroom. The participants of the study included one teacher and five students (Table 4.1).

The teacher participant was provided informed consent, as were the parents of all student participants. All participants were informed that their names, the name of the institution, and location would not be revealed. Alphabetic designation was assigned to each of the student participants to protect identity (Appendix A).

Table 4.1.
Summary of Conferencing Participant Characteristics

Conferencing Participant Characteristics	<u>Participant</u>					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Name	Teacher	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E
Gender	F	M	M	M	F	F
Role	T	S	S	S	S	S

Note. Gender: M = Male, F = Female. T = Teacher, S = Student

The participants completed the study by participating in teacher and student reading conferences. To capture the full content of each conference, classroom observations were scheduled at times to observe conferences in their entirety, as well as to observe multiple conferences for each student participant. The teacher interview was scheduled outside of school hours at a time convenient to the participant to minimize interruptions. To allow the participant time to prepare, interview questions were emailed a week in advance.

Description of the Setting

Conferences between the teacher and student occurred during independent reading time. During the conference, the other students were expected to be reading and were permitted to go sit somewhere other than their desk during this time. To conduct a conference, the teacher called one student at a time to meet with her for approximately 10 minutes.

The students brought their book box and decided on a book to read. During the teacher interview, the teacher participant explained that all students were provided a book box that held a few books that they should be able to read independently at the beginning of the year . The books can be read during conferencing and during independent reading time. Students could also take home one of the books in the evening as each student was expected to read at least 20 minutes each night. The teacher noted the students could also have books in the box that were more difficult to read. Initially, the teacher created the boxes for students at the beginning of the year based on individual students' reading levels, which were determined from beginning of year reading assessments. As they become more independent readers, the students are expected to choose their own books from the school or classroom library that are a good fit. Each week, students are responsible for selecting new books. When asked what strategy students should use in selecting a "just right" book, the teacher explained she would guide them toward a specific level or series in the classroom library. She tells the students, "If you take a preview and then start reading a book and you run into a lot of hard words... or you're noticing words that you're not able read...smoothly... then you know that's not a good fit and you need to put it back and try another one." The teacher also stated, "it's a trial and error thing. But then I'm also closely monitoring. So, a lot of times when I do conferences, I'll say, "Let's check out your book box and see like what you've been reading." If she finds the student has chosen a book that is too

easy, the teacher indicated she would say, “Hey, let’s try, you know, something more challenging.”

Before the student began reading, the teacher would review one or two strategies that the student had been practicing or one or two reading goals for the student which the teacher and student had previously discussed. The student would begin reading aloud while the teacher sat beside the student, listening to the student read, and providing feedback.

The position of where the teacher sits during the conference is significant. Instead of sitting across the table, the teacher deliberately positioned herself beside the student. In a recent study of engagement in the classroom, it was determined that teachers’ physical positioning in the classroom, as well as their social cues, appeared to be the most effective in increasing student engagement (Hazari, Cass, & Beattie, 2014). When the teacher sits beside the student and shares the book with the student, there is less hierarchical positioning. The teacher acts more as a partner during the conference, rather than as an authority figure. The teachers’ word choice is emphatic as she frequently begins by telling the students “I would like to give you some tips.”

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks identified for this study influenced analysis of the data. The social constructivist theory stipulates that individuals construct knowledge of the world through their interactions with others (Al Mahmud, 2013). The Caulkins’ (2013, 2015) model for student conferencing identifies best practices for conducting teacher and student conferences. Additionally, the Calkins’ conceptual framework influenced the coding.

Data Sources

Analysis from classroom observations, artifact analysis and teacher interview revealed the following aspects of conferencing that are beneficial to student understanding and learning: teaching, modeling, coaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice.

Observations. Eight classroom observations were conducted and were sufficient to achieve data saturation. Students A, B, C, and E were observed on four occasions, and Student D was observed on three occasions. Each observation lasted from 20-45 minutes, and the conferences ranged in time from 6-14 minutes. Each conference consisted of the teacher and one other student meeting while the student read aloud, and the teacher provided input on the student's reading ability. During each observation, handwritten field notes were completed. According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2014), field notes are the most common method for recording data during observations and consist of what the researcher has seen and heard. For this study, field notes provided the bulk of the data collection. These field notes were coded and contributed to the qualitative data analysis.

Interview. One unstructured interview was conducted with the classroom teacher after the completion of all classroom observations. One interview was sufficient to achieve saturation to promote reliability. Using the Temi application, the interview was transcribed and coded. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Artifact analysis. Conference notes completed by the classroom teacher were obtained. According to Calkins (2015), conference notes should include just a few words or phrases to help the teacher have a more meaningful conversation with the student. The classroom teacher completed these notes during and after conferences with the five participants. Conference notes were photographed using an iPhone and transcribed by hand. Analysis of the conference notes

was sufficient to achieve saturation. Conference notes were coded and contributed to the analysis.

Data Analysis

A systematic, five-step process described by Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2014) was used to analyze the data. These steps included the following:

Familiarization. To become familiar with the data, transcripts were reviewed multiple times throughout the data collection phase.

Organization. Data sources were organized by source and date.

Coding and reducing. Open codes were created based on the phrases and statements obtained from the participants and all data sources. During the open coding process, each category was assigned a coding color, and all significant phrases relevant to the research question were highlighted with the appropriate coding color. With the research question prominently displayed at the top, a table was created with three columns for the open code, its properties, and raw data. The highlighted phrases were then typed into the table with the correct corresponding color code. The following six open codes were assigned: fluency, compliment, teaching/coaching/modeling, questioning, reading challenges, reading behaviors. During the open coding phase, data were organized by participant, date, and data source.

After reviewing the data from the open codes, axial codes were created to provide meaning from all data sources and participants. This process involved separating the raw data from the open codes and rearranging the data into new categories. The data were printed and cut into slips of paper. The paper was rearranged into new themes, or axial codes. The paper slips with the datum were then glued onto paper with the corresponding axial code. The following five

axial codes were identified: fluency, comprehension, phonics/decoding, independent reading, book choice.

Interpreting and representing. Through selective coding, the aspects of student conferencing deemed by educators to be beneficial to student success were identified. Seven aspects were identified. Examples of the coding process that led to determining the aspects of student conferencing deemed by educators as important to student understanding and learning can be found in Appendix B.

Emerging Themes and Study Findings

Seven themes emerged as a result of this qualitative case study. One research question guided the study: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning? Analysis of all sources of data indicated that educators deem teaching, modeling, coaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice as important in fostering student understanding and learning.

According to Coakley-Fields (2018), the reader's workshop model is based on the idea that the teacher provides instruction on knowledge about reading and knowledge from reading through social interactions with the teacher. Conferencing with students is an essential component of the workshop model.

Modeling. According to the National Reading Panel, explicit instruction in using a reading strategy can lead to improved reading ability (Calkins, 2015). Defined as a mental tool that readers use to monitor and correct, a reading strategy can be either cognitive or metacognitive (Okkinga et al., 2018). Rather than assigning and assessing work, modeling is the explicit teaching of a specific skill or strategy. The explicit teaching involved in modeling is the teacher doing exactly what the student should do. According to Carey, Howard, and Leftwich

(2013), students become self-regulated readers when a more experienced reader models reading for them. In a meta-analysis of effective reading strategies, Okkinga et al. (2018) found that modeling of reading strategies was one of the most important similarities.

In this study, the teacher modeled metacognitive thinking for her students. According to Joseph (2006), the life-long skill of metacognition (i.e., thinking about thinking) is important for student understanding and learning because they are not only able to complete learning tasks, but they are also able to reflect on their own learning processes to use their academic strengths and work through their shortcomings. Most students require explicit instruction concerning metacognitive thinking. The teacher for this study provided instruction to her students through her modeling of metacognitive thinking during conference time.

The teacher participant also modeled reading fluency. During conferencing, the teacher modeled reading fluency numerous times throughout conferences with all students. In field notes from observations, modeling was coded on several occasions where the “teacher reads and student repeats,” or the “teacher asks the student to ‘match my voice.’” In these instances of modeling, the teacher would read a sentence or page and have the student repeat. When the teacher read, she modeled fluency. Calkins (2015) defined fluency as the ability to read text accurately and efficiently (i.e., automaticity) with appropriate expression, phrasing, intonation, stress, and tempo (i.e., prosody). The National Reading Panel identified reading fluency as fundamental to reading instruction (Paige et al., 2017). According to Daly and Kupzyk (2012), reading fluency interventions are most effective when they include modeling among the other components. Thus, students who read with fluency are demonstrating they have learned to rapidly decode words and have freed mental capacity to focus more on text meaning.

Student A. Modeled fluency was coded three times for Student A. In the second conference, the teacher stated, “I’ll read; you repeat.” During the same conference, the teacher required the student to match her voice a second time. At a later conference when she noticed he was reading an easier than normal book, she said, “Since the words are easier for you now, I’m going to model reading fluently. I want you to match my voice.”

Metacognitive modeling was observed when Student A encountered the word “nobody” in the text and had difficulty reading this word. When he stopped, the teacher stated, “I wonder if you can break that word up.” This prompted the student to break apart the word into the syllables “no” and “body” and read the word independently.

Student B. Modeled fluency was coded four times for Student B. For each occasion, the teacher read and asked the student to repeat.

Student C. The teacher modeled metacognitive thinking during one conference with Student C. During a conference, the teacher discussed how to check for understanding. She stated that after reading a book or chapter, the student should say to himself, “This is what I know about what I’ve read.” During another conference, Student C read a nonfiction book on wolves. Although he was able to decode the word “domestic,” the student was unable to explain the meaning of “domestic” to the teacher. The teacher then modeled thinking for the student by stating, “I wonder what that is.” She asked the student what the puppy looked like, and he said, “A puppy.” She modeled metacognitive thinking again by stating, “So ‘domestic’ must mean a dog that you might have at your house.”

Student D. Fluency modeling was coded three times for Student D. During one conference, the teacher read aloud and had the student “match my voice. We want it to sound smooth.” In the most recent conference, field notes read, “Teacher reads and student repeats.”

Student E. Fluency modeling was coded three times for this student. Instead of being a choppy and slow decoder, this student tended to read so fast that she skipped words or inserted incorrect words. Field notes indicate that the teacher stopped the reading at the beginning of a conference and told the student to slow down. The teacher then read and had the student repeat. The teacher stated, “It’s very important that you’re getting the words right.” The teacher allowed her to continue reading, but stopped her again, and said “I’m going to read, and I want you to listen.” The teacher read, then had the student try again. The student read at a slower pace, and the teacher responded, “That sounds so much better when you slow down!” The student began reading again, but started to read faster, skipping and inserting words. According to field notes, the teacher read aloud and had the student repeat one sentence at a time.

Coaching. Much as a running coach runs alongside the athlete and interjects brief but helpful pieces of information during the run, the teacher can also provide coaching to the student during reading to effect student learning and understanding (Calkins, 2015). Prior to the reading conference, the teacher taught the students a variety of reading strategies. During the reading conference, the teacher interjected reminders and prompted the student as needed regarding previously taught reading strategies. This manner of coaching the student, rather than simply telling the student the word, strengthens the student’s ability to apply the strategy and become a more independent reader.

During the interview, the teacher participant for this study referenced the following three reading strategies she has taught her students: look through the whole word; try it two ways; check yourself. The teacher explained that when an early reader encounters an unknown word, that student may look at the first letter of the word, look at the picture, and make a guess at the word (e.g., misreading “horse” for “human”). The student may also look at the first letter, the last

letter, and make a guess at the word (e.g., misreading “hat” for “hot”). The strategy of looking through the whole word is a reminder to the reader to pay attention to the letters in between the first and last letter. Frequently, these are vowel teams (e.g., ea, ou, ai), or blends (e.g., fl, gr) that the student is skipping. The strategy of trying the letter two ways typically applies to when a student misreads a vowel in a word. According to the teacher participant, “check yourself,” “do a double check,” or “do a slow check” strategy involves the student going back over the word the student just addressed and ensuring the word makes sense. Rather than moving on quickly, the teacher has taught the students to go back and make sure the word they had difficulty understanding is correct and understood. Another strategy observed during conferencing was that of breaking apart the word.

These strategies all pertain to students decoding words by applying their knowledge of phonics skills, or rather, their knowledge of the sound and symbol relationship. According to Paige et al. (2017), accurate and automatic decoding are fundamental to reading because they allow the reader to focus more on text meaning. Providing coaching on decoding strategies to students while they read during the conference improves student understanding of how to become successful at decoding.

On a few occasions, it was observed that the teacher participant also provided some nonverbal coaching in the conferences. Nonverbal cues provided by the teacher were significant for two reasons. First, it prompted the student to look at the word again. Second, it provided the student the opportunity to apply his own strategy to decode the word. In a study of whether student-selected reading strategies improved oral reading fluency, the authors found generalized reading improvements in all participants (Daly & Kupzyk, 2012). Moreover, choice adds motivational value to the strategy.

Comprehension strategies were also observed during conferencing. According to Calkins (2015), the National Reading Panel suggested that teaching comprehension strategies greatly improves reading comprehension abilities in young readers. Just as she did with decoding strategies, the teacher coached her students during the reading conference by reminding them of comprehension strategies they should be using. In several conferences, the teacher stopped the students mid-read to coach them about ensuring they are understanding what they are reading. In cases where the students had difficulty recalling what they had just read, the teacher coached them by reminding them they could go back and look in the story.

In later conferences, the teacher began having students bring a story retelling tool with them during the reading conference. The story retelling tool was a rectangular piece of construction paper folded to make three flaps with the letters B, M, and E on each flap. The student should open flap B to “tell what happened at the beginning” of the story; open flap M to tell what happened in the middle, and open flap E to tell what happened at the end. The teacher explained that the purpose of the retelling tool is so the student “can check your understanding of what you have just read.”

During the interview, the teacher participant was asked what aspects of student conferencing she deems most effective for student understanding and learning. The teacher participant stated, “Giving students immediate feedback is probably most important... especially if they are struggling with things like decoding... it’s basically in the moment coaching for them.” The teacher further explained that students have spent significant time reading independently at school and at home. Thus, they may not realize they are making errors if they are not self-monitoring. For this educator, the immediate feedback provided to the student through coaching during the conference is effective and important.

Student A. Conference notes for Student A indicate he was “using strategy of breaking words apart, covering parts of words to figure out - looks at parts he does know.” During a conference, Student A struggled to read the word “solid.” Field notes revealed the teacher coached him to “break it up.” In this case, the student was able to successfully put the word back together after breaking it into syllables. Conference notes on Student A also showed the teacher coached him to “check and double check after solving words.” On another occasion, the teacher said, “Let’s stop here and use the story retelling tool. What happened at the beginning of the story? What happened in the middle? What happened at the end?” The teacher stopped Student A reading and said, “Tell me what you’ve read so far.” Student A was able to give a summary of what he had read.

Nonverbal coaching was coded on one occasion for Student A. After reading “also” for “always,” the teacher then pointed at the missed word. This prompted Student A to go back and self-correct, and he was able to do just that.

Student B. In a conference with Student B, the teacher explained, “If you don’t remember what happened in the story, you can always go back and reread to make sure you understand what’s going on.” Student B often read nonfiction books on sports during his reading conferences. The teacher conference notes included that the student should “stop and think during reading especially when reading facts with significant/large numbers/facts.” During another conference with Student B, the teacher stated, “It’s important to stop and think about what you’ve just read.” On another occasion, the teacher demonstrated coaching by saying “we want to remember what’s going on” while you are reading. During the same conference with Student B, the teacher said, “Let’s go back and check our understanding.”

Student C. Student C had difficulty with the vowel team in the word “loaf.” With some coaching from the teacher reminding him that “oa” makes the long-o sound, the student successfully decoded the words. Before he has time to move to the next word, the teacher coached him to go back and “check yourself.” The student reread the word and could move on after deciding the “loaf” was indeed a real word and made sense in the context. In another conference with Student C, the teacher coached him by reminding him to use the story retelling tool while reading so he could check his understanding.

Student D. Conference notes taken by the teacher indicated that Student D was “not looking through the whole word and reading ‘chicken’ for ‘chase’ and ‘tries’ for ‘tried.’” During all three conferences observed with the teacher participant and Student D, the teacher was observed coaching the student to “read through the whole word” when the student encountered a difficult word. During another conference with Student D, when the student misread “bow” with the long-o sound rather than the /ow/ sound, the teacher coached the student by asking, “Can we try that ‘ow’ another way?” Student D tried the alternate sound and successfully decoded the word.

Student E. During a conference, Student E had difficulty reading the word “Pedro.” The student read it as “Peedro,” with the long-e rather than the short-e sound. The teacher coached her by saying “try it the other way. What other sound does ‘e’ make?”

Nonverbal coaching was coded once for Student E. Field notes indicate that during one conference, the student was reading rapidly and subsequently made numerous errors. Thus, the teacher was required to point to each word to help the student maintain an appropriate pace.

Teaching. Teaching refers to the explicit instruction that is typically provided at the beginning and at the end of the conference. Important for student understanding and learning,

teaching differs from coaching in that it refers to goals that are specific to the student and decided on before the conference. Conversely, coaching tips are mere reminders from the teacher to the student that occur spontaneously during the conference.

Student A. Teaching for Student A focused on reading with more expression and making sure what he has read makes sense. For example, after conferencing with Student A, the teacher ended the conference with, “One tip I want to give you is to reread and practice using more expression.” In another conference with Student A, the teacher stated, “You’re working really hard. I can tell. When you get to the end, reread and make sure it makes sense and that it sounds smooth. Good work today.” At the beginning of a conference with Student A, the teacher reminded the student that he is working on the reading strategy of “try it another way, “and “look at the whole word and try and make it smooth.”

Student B. In a conference with Student B, the teacher ended the conference by saying, “As you’re reading, think about what’s going on.” At the end of another conference with Student B, the teacher asserted, “Remember, as you’re reading to pause, or stop, or change your voice when you get to punctuation. I know you’re reading facts, but you still need to make it interesting.” Teaching was coded twice during a conference with Student B. At the start, the teacher said, “I want to see more expression. What do we do at periods? What do we do at commas? Question marks? Make it sound more interesting.” At the conclusion of the conference, the teacher reiterated that the student should “keep working on improving expression.” A teaching point on comprehension was coded three times in another conference with Student B. At the beginning, the teacher commented that “we want to remember what’s going on.” She stopped his reading, and said, “Let’s go back and check our understanding. Use your text to think

through this.” At the conclusion of the conference, the teacher once again stated, “As you’re reading, think about what’s going on.”

Student C. Teaching points with Student C also focused on improving his use of fluency and expression. Conference notes indicate the teacher found it difficult to get this student to change his voice as he read. Mid-conference, the teacher remarked, “Remember our strategy about reading smooth and lively? When you are teaching something, sound like a teacher. Read with expression.” After modeling fluency and having the student practice throughout the conference, the teacher concluded, “I’ll let you go but continue to work on reading with more expression. I want you to become a news reporter. You’re reading about exciting stuff!” In the next conference, field notes indicate the student “reads very quietly,” prompting the teacher to ask him to read a little louder. This request was ineffective. The teacher utilized the opportunity to provide a mini-lesson on reading with fluency. She says, “I’m going to read, and after each sentence, you’re going to match my voice. We want to read nice and loud so the listener can hear us. Even though you’ve read it, you need to read in the way the author intended and make your voice sound interesting.” After some fluency practice, the teacher ended the conference by stating, “I want you to practice changing your voice to make what you’re reading sound interesting.”

Student D. Teaching was coded three times for this student, and the focus was on decoding strategies. During the first conference, the teacher opened by reviewing reading strategies Student D had been learning, such as “look through the whole word,” and “try it another way.” During the second conference, the teacher stated that she should “look through parts, then the whole word.” During the third conference, the teacher began the conference with,

“Make sure we read through the whole word. What’s the first thing we look at? (the first letter) Then do we go to the end and skip the middle? No. We look through the whole word.”

Student E. Teaching was coded four times for this student. In the first conference, the teacher stated at the end of the conference, “I want to give you some tips. Slow down... There are so many hard words, so slow down and pay attention and make sure you’re reading the words correctly. During the second conference, the teacher said, “Let’s pause here. Really check yourself. You are putting in words that aren’t there because your brain is going so fast and trying to fill in gaps.” During the third conference, the teacher concluded by stating, “Let me stop you and give you some tips... Continue working on slowing down and checking yourself.” At the most recent conference, the teacher told the student to continue working on slowing down and making it sound smooth.

Complimenting. The concept of complimenting is another aspect of conferencing that educators deem effective in prompting student learning and understanding of the concept. According to Williams (2001), this is a time for the teacher to reinforce to the student a job well done. More than just a proverbial pat on the back, a compliment is used to support and instruct the student (Calkins, 2015). According to a study in Canada of elementary students, researchers found that the students performed well in response to an intervention that included timely and specific feedback, and timely and positive reinforcement in the form of verbal praise (Grunke, Knaak, & Higsen, 2018). In nearly all observed conferences, compliments from the teacher directly to the student were observed and coded. It was also observed that most compliments were specific to the student and to the reading behaviors. During numerous conferences, the teacher complimented the students on reading fluently or decoding difficult words without teacher assistance.

Student A. During a conference with Student A, compliments were coded five times during the 10-minute session. First, the student was able to identify his goals for reading: “Yes. Breaking words apart words, making it sound smooth, and going back to reread. Good job keeping up with those things.” Next, the teacher complimented the student two times on his ability to break apart and read some difficult words in the text by stating, “Good job on that word! It was a hard one; you’re doing a really good job on this reading.” After modeling fluency for Student A and having him repeat what she had just read with more expression, the teacher responded with, “Good job. That makes it sound more interesting.” After reading, the teacher asked him to retell the story. According to field notes, the “student gives lots of information... lots of details... comprehension was pretty good! He didn’t even need to look back at the book.” The teacher complimented him with, “Good job. You remembered so much! I like how you are understanding what you read.” Instead of saying merely, “Good job,” each time, the teacher directed the compliment to the student and to the reading task he had demonstrated. During a conference in which Student A struggled but eventually read a word, the teacher responded with, “I like how figured that one out on your own.” Another time, the teacher noticed Student A demonstrating more fluency, and she stated, “I like how you are changing your voice.” After observing fluent reading from Student A during another conference, the teacher remarked, “I notice you are doing a much better job of reading smoothly and fluently. I’d encourage you to keep practicing.”

Student B. Complimenting was coded two times for this student. Once, the teacher responding to his reading, “Pretty good! There are some hard words there.” Field notes indicated, “The student only struggle with [reading] names [in the story], but little else.”

Student C. Student C was a strong decoder and had a reading goal of reading of using more expression in his voice. Complimenting was coded three times for this student. After he successfully demonstrated reading with more expression during conferencing, the teacher remarked, “Great job reading with more expression... I could tell by how your voice changed that you were asking a question.” On another occasion, the teacher modeled fluency and had the student repeat. The teacher complimented him on reading with more expression by saying, “Better.” On the third occasion, the teacher asked the student to give a retell about what had happened in the story so far. Without any coaching, the student began to look back in the story. The teacher subsequently stated, “I like how you are going back and looking in the book.”

Student D. Complimenting was coded five times during conferences with this student. During the second conference, when Student D had difficulty with a word, but was able to self-correct, the teacher remarked, “I like how you stopped to check yourself here.” At another time, Student D had difficulty but is ultimately able to decode “puddles.” The teacher responded with, “Good.” At the end of the conference, the teacher observed, “As you read, it gets better and better.” The teacher closed the conference with, “Nice work today.” During the most recent conference, the teacher remarked, “You are doing much better with reading these harder words like ‘digging,’ and you’re looking through the whole word.”

Student E. Complimenting was coded three times for Student E. This student read with a great deal of excitement and emotion in her voice, although she tended to read too fast, make errors in decoding, or skip words without much self-correction. However, after noticeably slowing down her reading and self-monitoring, the teacher participant responded by saying, “I love how you’re reading with a lot of expression and making it sound interesting. You are doing a much better job not skipping words, and I also notice you self-correcting. Your fluency sounds

great.” During another conference, the teacher coached the student to pay special attention to the ending of a word. When the student read the work correctly, the teacher remarked, “Good.” On another occasion after coaching the student to slow down, the student responded by doing so. The teacher remarked, “Good.”

Questioning. According to Mustika, Nurkamato, & Suparno (2020), teacher questioning is considered an essential classroom component fundamental in activating student thinking. Yen-ju Hou (2019) argued that students who demonstrate increased critical thinking are more likely to achieve learning and understanding. Therefore, questioning helps students think critically and builds understanding.

Questioning was observed throughout all observations. The level of questioning is also important for student understanding. The deeper the level of questioning, the deeper the level of thinking is activated. Based on Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy, six levels of cognitive questioning may be used by teachers in the classroom: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, creating (Mustika, Nurkamato, & Suparno, 2020). Questioning observed during conferencing required students to demonstrate remembering and understanding.

Student A. Questioning was coded three times for Student A. During a conference, field notes show that he initially misread “smile” with a short-i rather than long-i. When he reviewed the word a second time and read it correctly, the teacher noticed and asked, “How did you know that was ‘smile?’” Student A responded with, “It made sense.” In another conference with Student A after the student struggled but ultimately persevered in reading the word “cut,” the teacher asked, “How did you know that word was ‘cut’ and not ‘cute?’” The student responded with, “I tried it two ways.” After finishing reading during another conference, the teacher asked, “What’s a good thing to do when we finish reading?” The student correctly responded with,

“Retell [what happened in the story].” The level of questioning provided by the teacher to Student B required the student to demonstrate understanding of what he had read.

Student B. Questioning was coded five times for this student. Noticing the student chose to read a book on football, the teacher asked, “Can you tell me what type of book this is?” The student correctly replied that the book was nonfiction. During the third conference, questioning was coded three times. First the teacher asked, “Can you tell me what has happened in the story so far?” After the student answered, field notes indicate the “teacher asks a series of clarifying questions (e.g., “Who is ‘they?’”).” Then the teacher asked, “What can you do if you don’t remember what happened?” During the last conference after the student read a book aloud on the Houston Rockets and basketball, the teacher asked, “Any cool facts you learned?” The student was able to provide several details about what he had read. The level of questioning provided to Student B required him to demonstrate remembering.

Student C. Questioning was coded seven times for this student, and the level of questioning required the student to demonstrate remembering and understanding. The teacher asked three questions throughout the first conference. At the beginning, the teacher asked, “What do we do when we start?” The student responded with “read the title.” The teacher then asked, “What is this called?” The student initially indicated that this is called the “Table of Continents,” although she corrects him that it is called the “Table of Contents.” After the student had a chance to read out loud, the teacher stopped him and asked “Can you tell me what you have just read?” In a later conference, the teacher again questioned the student about the Table of Contents by asking, “What is this feature called? How can it help us?” When the student misread a word but did not realize he had made an error, the teacher asked, “Does that sound right to you? Also check out the picture. Does that help?” During the same conference, the student had difficulty

reading the word “because.” The teacher asked, “Have you seen this word before? Do you know this word (covers up “be”)?” The student could figure out the word once the teacher visually helped him to break it apart. While reading during the most recent conference, the teacher stopped the student after a few pages and asked, “Can you tell about the beginning and the middle [of the story]?”

Student D. Questioning was coded three times for Student D and required the student demonstrate the skills of remembering and understanding. During a conference when the student struggled with decoding the word “puppy,” the teacher asked, “What strategy should you use if you get stuck? Should we go back and check it?” Field notes indicate that Student D “names the strategy and knew that “y” at the end of “puppy” makes the long-e sound.” At a later conference when Student D once again struggled to read a word with “y” at the end (“tiny”), the teacher asked “Remember our rule about ‘Tricky Y?’” When the student was unsure, field notes indicate the “teacher gets ‘Tricky Y’ anchor chart with words that end with ‘y’ with the long-e sound (e.g., tiny, very), or ‘y’ with the long-i sound (e.g., try).” During the same conference, the student misread “hearing” as “herring.” The teacher asked, “Does ‘herring’ make sense there? Is that a word you know?”

Student E. For student E, questioning was coded two times and required the student demonstrate the skill of remembering. At the end of the conference, the teacher asked, “Can you tell me what happened in the beginning? What about the middle? How about at the end?” During another conference at the beginning, the teacher inquired about the Table of Contents by asking, “What’s this feature called?”

Researching. Described by Calkins (2015) as the crux of effective conferencing, researching involves the teacher attempting to understand what the reader is doing and why.

Evidence of researching for this study was primarily gathered from the teacher's conference notes and summarized.

Student A. At the beginning of the year, this student was reading one word at a time and should practice rereading to make it smooth. He was not yet looking through the whole word. Teaching him this strategy will help this student significantly. He also uses pictures sometimes to make guesses at words.

By midyear, Student A's decoding was stronger. He could read digraphs and blend, but still had difficulty with vowel sounds. He was beginning to read more words that were challenging. It was observed that he was independently breaking apart words by covering up the unknown parts and reading the known parts.

Currently, the student still struggles with decoding but has begun self-correcting. He is working on reading with more fluency. He has begun to reread on his own.

Student B. At the beginning of the year, Student B had strong decoding skills. He had good comprehension of what he has read and independently cross checked while reading. He should be working on drawing inferences from what he is reading. Midyear, Student B required more work on reading with fluency. The teacher modeled ways to check for understanding by pausing and reviewing what has happened in the story. Currently, the student is able to decode more difficult words and is starting to use more expression.

Student C. At the beginning of the year, this student needed more practice with short and long vowel sounds. Although his reading rate was slow, he could monitor, cross-check, and self-correct. Comprehension was a strength for the student.

Midyear, Student C was decoding more difficult words, but required coaching to retell. Fluency was still problematic because it was difficult to get this student to change his voice.

Currently, Student C's decoding is still growing. The teacher continues to work on comprehension. It remains difficult to get him to change his voice and read with more expression.

Student D. At the beginning of the year, Student D is able to read high frequency words with a fair amount of automaticity. She makes guesses at unknown words. She freezes up and does not know what strategies to use. She is able to read most words with the consonant-vowel-consonant pattern (e.g., cat, dog, hat). By midyear, Student D continued to make guesses at words rather than looking through the whole word. She began to decode harder words and self-check. Currently, Student D has difficulty with words with consonant blends (e.g., drip, clip) and is not always able to hear whether a word sounds correct.

Student E. At the beginning of the year, Student E struggled to read consonant-vowel-consonant words with digraphs (e.g., thin, chat). She required practice slowing down her reading rate. She often went too fast and skipped or misread words. Midyear, Student E was selecting books that were too difficult for her to read independently. She began to self-correct, though not consistently. Currently, she reads with great expression. She still needs to be reminded to slow down and is not always aware when she has made an error.

Book Choice. According to Okkinga et al. (2018), providing the student a choice of reading materials improves the student's intrinsic motivation to read. The more motivated the student is to read, the more engaged the student will be in the process of learning to read. Moses (2019) argued that choice increases students' motivation and engagement. What follows is a summary based on field notes and conference notes of each student's choice of books used during conferencing. Field and conference notes also reveal how the teacher addresses when the student has not brought a "just right" book to the conference.

Student A. Student A reads a lot of nonfiction. During one conference, he read a book about polar bears. At a later conference, the student brought a graphic novel on video games to read. After the teacher realized this novel was too advanced, she recommended he “find a book that’s a good fit. Read this book at home with mom and dad.” According to field notes, “teacher helps student find a book in the book box that is a better fit.”

Student B. Student B chose mysteries from the *Nate the Great* series by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat. He then started reading more nonfiction, especially books about football and basketball.

Student C. Student C frequently chose nonfiction books, such as books on wolves, meteorites, and weather. Because the teacher was working with this student to read more fluently, she responded with, “I know you like nonfiction books, so I want you to practice reading more fiction.” At a later conference, the student brought a book from the *Pete the Cat* series by Eric Litwin. This proved an easier book for him to read, and he was able to practice reading with more expression.

Student D. During the three observations, Student D chose a nonfiction book on ducks, a nonfiction book on sea otters, and the book *Biscuit Wins the Prize* (Capucilli, 2004).

Student E. During conferencing, Student E chose biographies on Misty Copeland and Harriet Tubman. This student also chose books from the *Katie Woo* series by Fran Manushkin on two occasions.

Conference notes also indicated that Student E “still tries to read books above her level.” When Student E chose a book that was above her independent reading level, the teacher recommended that a “book like this is good to take home to read with mom and dad. It’s really

hard. Pick another book that's more appropriate." The teacher then helped the student find a "just right" book to read during the conference.

Trustworthiness Technique

To ensure the integrity of the data collection, specific protocols, actions, and strategies were implemented.

Credibility. To ensure credibility, a peer reviewer was consulted during the study. This experienced researcher provided objective feedback regarding the developed categories during the coding process. The researcher made the following recommendations: 1) Instead of identifying the open code category as "Reading Challenges," make the code more specific; 2) Split the open code category of "Modeling/Questioning" into two categories; 3) Combine "Modeling," "Coaching," and "Teaching" into a single category.

To support the credibility of findings, multiple sources of data were obtained. This process of triangulation was achieved through classroom observations, an artifact analysis, and teacher interview.

Transferability. A rich and thick description of context created vivid images of the setting and behaviors observed so that findings of the study can be generalized to other contexts and other groups.

Dependability. To support dependability of the study, member checks were used. The classroom teacher was provided with copies of field notes, a transcript of the interview, and was given the option to review and/or evaluate them.

A detailed audit trail was also maintained and included field notes from all observations, interview transcript, copies of teacher conference notes, semantic maps, dates and times of classroom observations and the teacher interview, and coding tables. Coding occurred after the

first three classroom observations. Thereafter, coding occurred following each new acquisition of data. The peer reviewer was also consulted during the coding process and made recommendations for changes. The peer reviewer also provided corroboration for the coding.

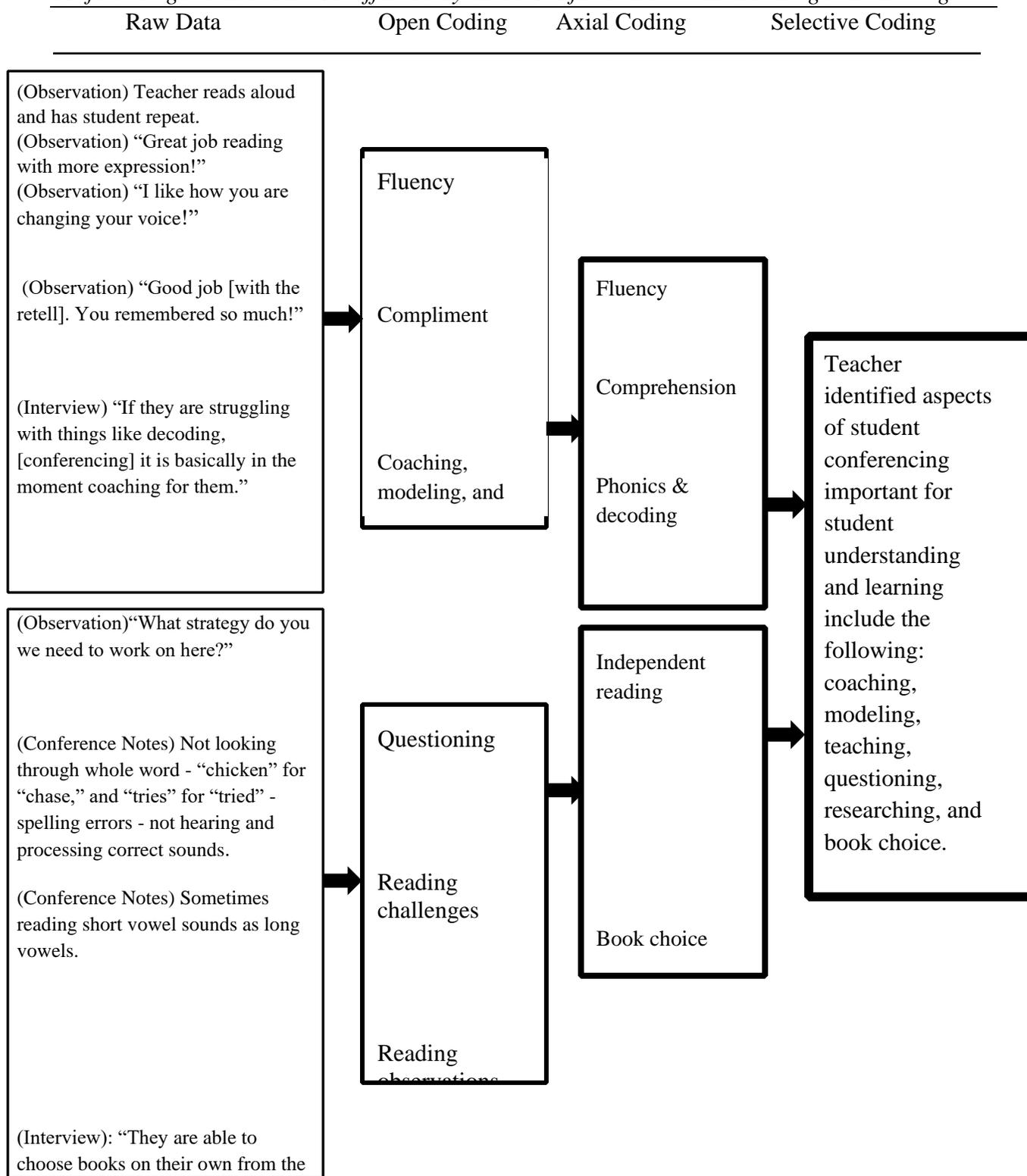
Confirmability. In addition to adding to the credibility of the study, the peer reviewer ensured confirmability of the findings. Confirmability was also achieved through the documentation and corroboration of the data collection and analysis of the audit trail. Triangulation also safeguarded confirmability of the study findings.

Coding Table

Figure 4.1 provides an example of coding, answering the following research question: What aspects of student conferencing do educators deem as beneficial to student understanding and learning? The figure graphically organizes examples of the raw data and its sources, as well as the generated open codes, axial codes, and selective code.

Table 4.1

Data sorted into Levels of Coding for the Research Question: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning?



Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the aspects of student conferencing deemed by educators to affect student learning and understanding. To answer the research question, a case study model was used. Through the theoretical lens of the social constructivist learning theory (Al Mahmud, 2013), combined with the conceptual framework of the Calkins' model for student conferencing (Calkins, 2015), seven aspects emerged as themes from the data analysis. These seven aspects are modeling, coaching, teaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice.

The theme of modeling is important to student understanding and learning. For this study, the teacher used modeling with fluency and with metacognitive thinking. To model fluency, the teacher would read with expression and prosody and have the student repeat. To model metacognitive thinking, the teacher would think aloud by saying, for example, "I am wondering if I could figure out that word by breaking it apart." By teaching fluency and metacognitive thinking through modeling, the teacher provides students with a model of how to think and read. Thinking and reading are essential for student understanding and learning.

Coaching also emerged as a theme. While the student read aloud during the conference, the teacher provided reminders of previously taught strategies for decoding and comprehension when the opportunity arose. Both verbal and nonverbal coaching were provided. Coaching helped students recall which strategies to use during reading. To enhance student understanding and learning, it is essential for student to know which strategies to apply.

Specific to the individual student, teaching is an explicit goal provided to the student usually at the beginning or end of a conference. In conferencing, teaching differs from coaching because the teaching points are planned in advanced and are tailored to the specific needs of the

student. The teaching may stay the same for several conferences until the student is ready to progress to the next skill. Teaching is inherently fundamental to student understanding and learning.

Similar to reinforcing, complimenting takes the form of verbal praise and is used by the teacher to communicate what the student is doing well. For complimenting to be effective, it must be timely and specific. Complimenting the student reinforces that which the student successfully demonstrates and is significant to student understanding and learning.

Questioning was also observed during conferencing. The purpose of questioning on the part of the teacher is to activate the critical thinking skills of the student. Critical thinking is necessary for student understanding and learning.

Researching involves the teacher determining what the student is doing and why. Researching provides the basis for instructional decisions. The evidence of researching for this study was obtained through the artifact analysis of the teacher's conference notes. Research involves documenting students' reading behaviors, such as their developmental level during the reading process, their strengths, their shortcomings, and what strategies appear to work well for them. Because it is the foundation for instructional decisions, researching is also important to student understanding and learning.

Research has shown that book choice provides intrinsic motivation for the student to read and increases engagement in the reading process (Okkinga et al., 2018). Because student engagement and motivation are essential to student understanding and learning, book choice is therefore fundamental to increasing student understanding and learning.

Chapter Four of this study details the collection and analysis of the data. An interpretation of these findings is presented in Chapter Five. A more critical analysis and discussion of the seven themes will be explored in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the aspects of student conferencing that educators deem beneficial to student understanding and learning. The conclusions, implications, and recommendations for this study are based on the findings obtained through a case study of five 1st grade students and their classroom teacher. The study is relevant to the greater theoretical idea of social constructivism, or rather, the idea that learning is constructed through social interaction (Al Mahmud, 2013). During conferencing for this study, social interaction occurred between the teacher and student. According to LoCasale-Crouch, Williford, Whitaker, DeCoster, & Alamos (2018), a high-quality student and teacher interaction becomes an academic asset to the student. A recent study of student and teacher interaction, or communication, revealed 75% of student success occurs when teachers actively engage with their students (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

This chapter is organized into six major sections: the research question, conclusions and summary of findings, limitations, implications for practice, recommendations for research, and summary of the study. The findings are viewed from the theoretical lens of the theory of social constructivism (Al Mahmud, 2013). Additionally, the conceptual framework of the Calkins' model for student conferencing (Calkins, 2015) aids in understanding the phenomenon of student conferencing. The discussion in this chapter includes major findings and their relevancy to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was closely aligned to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as to the study purpose. The question considers what educators identify as important constructs within student conferencing that are beneficial to student

outcome. The question considers the nature of the interaction between the teacher and student and how that interaction influences student performance. The following research question guided this study: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning? Analysis of the data revealed seven aspects of student conferencing that affect student understanding and learning: teaching, modeling, coaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice. With the exception of book choice, the other constructs are behaviors exhibited by the teacher during conferencing that positively influence student success. Book choice is demonstrated by the student and is equally important for student understanding and learning.

Conclusions and Summary of Findings

Although they revealed numerous similarities during conferencing, the student participants demonstrated varying levels of reading abilities. All student participants received teaching, modeling, coaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice as a part of the conference with the teacher. However, the student participants differed in their stages of skill acquisition. The relevancy to the theoretical framework and the seven themes that answered the research question are discussed in detail in this section.

Relevancy of Theoretical Framework. The theoretical framework for this qualitative case study is comprised of the two theories of social learning and constructivism. The latter theory of constructivism (Al Mahmud, 2013) is applicable to this study because of the emphasis of the theory on constructing meaning. Referred to as the intrinsic making of meaning (West, 2013), constructivism means that the student acquires understanding and learning during the conference (Xu & Shi, 2012). Social learning is based on the idea that people learn from each other (Chavis, 2012). According to Tomczak (2013), reading, like other higher order mental

processes, is inherently social by nature. Through the social interactions with their teacher during a conference, the students in this study acquired increased understanding and learning in their reading abilities.

Modeling. The teacher for this study used modeling during the conferences to interact with the students individually and specifically to improve their reading fluency and metacognitive thinking. According to Joseph (2006), teacher modeling involves specifically showing students examples of how to use a learning strategy. Modeling can also be linked to previous research on feedback. Based on previous findings, feedback is one of the most effective strategies a teacher can utilize to accelerate student learning (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Hernandez, 2013). Modeling is one way for the teacher to provide feedback to the student. By doing exactly what she wanted her students to do, the teacher is providing them explicit instruction. She is making clear to them the desired outcome. The teacher also followed up with opportunities for her students to practice under her guidance. This allowed time for the teacher to give feedback to the students and strengthen their fluency and critical thinking skills.

Fluency. In this study, the teacher modeled fluency to provide understanding and learning of how to read with increased speed, accuracy, and prosody. Paige et al. (2017) argued that teacher modeling of reading with fluency may lead to increased overall achievement in reading. Students who do not develop a strong reading fluency ability may not be able to read with speed, accuracy, and prosody, thus making them disinterested in reading in general (Masruddin, 2016). When a reader is fluent, that reader requires less cognitive effort for reading subskills (e.g., letter sounds, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme blending) and has the attention to focus on reading comprehension (Shengtian Wu & Gadke, 2017). After the teacher modeled fluency, she gave the student the opportunity to practice by instructing the student to “match my voice.” After the

student practiced, the teacher gave feedback by saying, “Much better,” or “Let’s try some more.” This exchange of dialog between the teacher and student was essential to that student becoming a stronger, more fluent reader.

Metacognitive thinking. The teacher for this study modeled metacognitive thinking to increase the problem solving and critical thinking skills needed for reading, as well as other subjects. In a recent study of the response of elementary age students to the teaching of critical thinking skills, Tomczak (2014) reported that the students benefitted when they received modeling of these skills by a more knowledgeable individual. When the teacher models metacognitive strategies, the teacher is exposing the students to new ways of processing information (Joseph, 2006).

Teaching. Teaching is the explicit instruction that occurs at the beginning and sometimes at the end of the conference. The educator for this study used teaching that was unique to each student. During each conference, the teacher took the time to go over the teaching point, or strategy with each student, provided time for guided practice, and reminded students before ending the conference that they should continue to practice this same strategy on their own.

Teaching can also be connected to previous research on feedback and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Similar to modeling, teaching provides input from the teacher to the student and is another effective means to shape reading abilities. Additionally, the scaffolded, individualized instruction provided during the conference is within the student’s ZPD and is vital to increased student understanding and learning (Alsulami, 2016). Because the student meets alone with the teacher, the teacher has the opportunity during the conference to provide instruction unique to the student. When the teacher and student conference the next time, the

teacher can continue with the same strategy, or can begin teaching another strategy to the student depending on mastery.

Coaching. The teacher for this study provided coaching for her students during the conference when students encountered an unknown word. The teacher used coaching to remind them of what strategy they could use to decode successfully. She coached them on ways to apply previously taught decoding and comprehension strategies. On a few occasions, the teacher also used nonverbal cueing by pointing to a word, which signaled to the student to go back and try it again. Without explicitly telling the student the answer, the teacher is providing opportunities for the students to practice using the strategies previously taught. According to Tomczak (2014), learning one strategy and overusing is insufficient for learning to read. A competent reader should be able to implement a variety of reading strategies and move flexibly from one to another. Coaching on the part of the teacher is beneficial in helping students use numerous different reading strategies and knowing when to use them. Similar to modeling and teaching, coaching can also be linked to prior research in that it involves the teacher providing immediate feedback to the student. The timeliness and specificity of feedback in the form of coaching has significant implications for increased student understanding and student learning.

According to Calkins & Ehrenworth (2016), feedback is most effective when it is given frequently, is timely, and is followed up with opportunities for practice. Coaching provided during a conference is timely and specific to that particular student. The student is reminded of what reading strategy to use and when. Likewise, the teacher is also able to understand more about why the student is applying strategies while reading. This will be discussed further in the section on Researching.

Complimenting. The teacher for this study also provided praise and reinforcement to her students when they demonstrated reading behaviors on their own that were important to their understanding and learning of reading. As explained in Chapter 4, the compliments were specific to the students' reading behaviors. According to Calkins (2015), it is important to take time during the conference to name what the child has done well in hopes that the child will continue to demonstrate this to the extent that it becomes part of that student's identity. The compliment conveys the message that the teacher has confidence in the student's ability. Thus, that student is more likely to listen to what the teacher has to say. Complimenting can also be linked to prior research on feedback. According to Hale (2018), complimenting in the form of feedback from the teacher to the student carries authenticity when it is specific and unique to that student and the student's ability. During conferencing, the teacher takes the opportunity to inform the student of what that student is doing well. This is important for the student to continue to be successful and have an invested interest of the other feedback on the part of the teacher.

Questioning. The teacher also demonstrated questioning during the conferencing as a way to stimulate students' critical thinking skills. According to Mustika et al. (2020), teachers can promote higher order thinking by using questioning as a strategy. Through questioning her students, the teacher motivated them to think more critically and inspired them to problem-solve. Questioning can also be linked to the previous research on feedback. Questioning as a feedback strategy can promote a stronger working relationship between teacher and student and is essential to the learning process (Carr & Weinmann, 2018; Fonseca et al., 2015). By using questioning, the teacher is modeling higher order thinking. Questioning is similar to modeling in that the teacher is doing exactly what she wants her students to be thinking.

Researching. The teacher for this study included researching as a part of each conference. Calkins (2015) cautioned that if the teacher fails to spend sufficient time trying to understand what the reader is doing and why, then what the educator decides to teach the student will be generic, a simple recap of a prior lesson, or help with reading one or two difficult words. Through questioning, listening, and observing, the teacher was able to research and determine what strategies the students demonstrated and why during the reading conference. The teacher used knowledge from her research to make decisions about teaching and coaching specific to each student. Moreover, researching can also be linked to previous research as it involves feedback between the student and teacher. Not only can it be given to students, but feedback also provides information to the teacher on the student's current ability level (Al-Hattami, 2019). To research, the teacher must observe and ask questions. The conference provides the opportunity for the teacher to learn why the student demonstrates various reading behaviors. Research provides the teacher input and feedback to make instructional decisions for teaching and future conferences.

Book choice. Students in this study were permitted a choice of what book to read during the conference with the teacher. During the year, the teacher spent time teaching book selection strategies to these students and how to find a "just right" book that was neither too difficult nor too easy. According to (Grice, 2018), self-selected reading is two times as powerful as teacher-selected reading. Allowing students book choice increases motivation and engagement (Moses, 2019). Okkinga et al. (2018) argued that providing the student with a choice of reading materials increases that student's intrinsic desire to read. When more motivated to read, the student will become more engaged in reading. By allowing students their choice of books, the teacher improved the student's internal motivation to read and increased engagement in the conference.

Limitations

Two limitations for this study were identified. First, the study occurred in a private elementary school serving 480 students in pre-K-6th grade. The student body is 99% White, the majority of whom are from upper middle class households. This lack of economic and racial diversity made it difficult to obtain a representative sampling. Second, the study was limited in that it occurred over a period of only eight weeks.

Implications for Practice

Relationships and communication between teachers and students have become an intense focus in recent years. According to Valiente, Swanson, DeLay, Fraser, and Parker (2020), socialization between students and teachers is important given that the student typically spends about seven hours a day in school, the emotional nature of interactions students may experience with teachers, and the emotions students may experience in the context of academic work. Conferencing between a teacher and student is one example of how to incorporate communication between the teacher and student and how to strengthen the teacher and student relationship.

During the conferences that occurred for this study, it was observed that the teacher and each of her students were able to communicate with one another in a relaxed manner. Students never argued with the teacher. Two-way communication continuously occurred. Students never appeared frustrated and never cried. In contrast, the students appeared receptive to the feedback from their teacher. While it was evident that the students and their teacher had a strong rapport, the conferencing provided opportunities for each student to further interact and communicate with the teacher.

This case study on student conferencing could be useful for others in the field of education as it highlights the specific mechanisms of conferencing that are important to student understanding and learning. For educators who seek to implement conferencing, this study provides an important framework of facets that should be included in each conference.

Recommendations for Research

Gaps in knowledge pertaining to student conferencing remain at the conclusion of this study. Future research to extend this study could be beneficial in two areas. First, this study should be replicated for a longer period of time. This would address the limitation of the study, which restrained the study to a period of eight weeks. Secondly, this study should be replicated in a more economically diverse setting. Doing so would address the limitation of diversity in this study.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative case study focused on the traits of student conferencing deemed by educators to be beneficial for student understanding and learning. The following research question guided this study: What aspects of student conferencing are deemed most effective by educators for student understanding and learning? To answer the research question, data were obtained from three sources: observations, artifact analysis, and teacher interview. Careful analysis of the data indicated seven concepts of conferencing that affect student understanding and learning: modeling, teaching, coaching, complimenting, questioning, researching, and book choice. This study was important because it addressed the gap in literature on teacher and student conferencing. The implications for this study are significant for educators who desire to implement conferencing in their classrooms.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Document

Informed Consent Document

PROJECT TITLE- Teacher Identified Successful Student Academic Conferencing Constructs: Effecting Understanding and Learning

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to join a research study on student academic conferencing in the elementary classroom. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you.

In this research study, I am studying the aspects of student conferencing that are beneficial to student understanding and learning.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to participate you will be asked to permit classroom observations and to participate in an open ended non-structured interview. This will take approximately 15 minutes.

The investigator may stop the study or remove you from the study at any time she judges it is in your best interest. You can stop participating at any time. If you stop, you will not lose any benefits.

RISKS

There are no risks involving this study. The IRB (International Review Board) of Carson-Newman University has given permission for this study. Additionally, the school system involved has granted permission for the study to take place.

BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

It is reasonable to expect the following benefits from this research: gain a better understanding of student conferencing and the aspects that influence student learning and understanding.

However, I cannot guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information I find in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will take the following steps to keep information about you confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: Names will not be used in the study. Data files will be kept in a locked cabinet and kept on a password protected computer.

INCENTIVES

No incentives will be used in this study

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any

penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, and it will not harm your relationship with the researcher or anyone involved in the study.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

Call Susan K. Gant at 615-427-8572 or by email at skgant@cn.edu if you have questions about the study, any problems, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, any injuries, or think that something unusual or unexpected is happening. The chair of this study may also be contacted:

Dr. Julia Price, Director of the Carson-Newman University Advanced Programs, jprice@cn.edu

.....

...

By signing below, you are giving permission to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Appendix B

Informed Parental Consent Form

Informed Parental Consent

You are invited to include your child as a volunteer in a research study being conducted by Kathleen Gant, Doctoral student, in the Education program at Carson-Newman University. The study will begin in January and continue for approximately 6 weeks. Please read this form and indicate whether you give consent for your child to participate. Your child was selected as a possible participant because his or her classroom teacher conducts student academic conferences during instruction. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing for your child to be in the study.

Researcher: Kathleen Gant, Ed.D., candidate, Carson-Newman University, Exceptional Education Teacher

Background Information

The purpose of this research study is to better understand what aspects of student conferencing are important for student understanding and learning.

Procedures:

Your child will be involved in classroom activities just as he or she normally would. With informed parental consent, your son or daughter may be observed during conferencing with the classroom teacher. Additionally, with informed parental consent, work samples or student test scores may be made available to the researcher so that she may gain a better understanding of the aspects of student conferencing that impact student outcome. Identifying information will only be provided to the researcher. The researcher will take precautions to protect participant identity by not using the names of participants, classrooms, or the school in her results or writing. The researcher will use the anonymous assessment results for dissertation, publication, and presentation purposes.

Participant Risks

There will be no harm to participants in this study and you have the right to remove your child at any time.

Participant Benefits

There are benefits for participating in this research project. The findings from this study may assist educators in planning effective conferencing opportunities with students. Also, information from this study may provide educators with information on the aspects of student and teacher

conferencing that are beneficial to student success. This knowledge may assist teachers in providing a more enjoyable environment and learning experience for students in the future.

Contacts and Questions:

The principle researcher conducting this study is Kathleen Gant. You may ask any questions you have now or anytime throughout the research. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the researcher at 615-427-8572 or by email at skgant@cn.edu. This research project is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Julia Price, Ed.D. Carson-Newman University and has been approved by the school.

The researcher will gladly answer any inquiries regarding the purpose and procedures of the present study. Please send all inquiries via email at susan.gant@mnps.org.

.....
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By signing below, you are giving your child permission to participate in this study.

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Appendix C
Interview Guide

**Teacher Identified Successful Student Academic Conferencing Constructs: Effecting
Student Understanding and Learning**

Interview Guide

- Tell me about the Fountas and Pinell text level assessments because these are referenced in your conference notes.
- Do you have benchmarks for your school that you use?
- Tell me about a student's book box. What books go in it and why? What is the process for selecting books?
- What is meant by a "good fit" book? How do students know what a good fit book is?
- In your opinion, what aspects of student conferencing with individual students are most effective for student understanding and learning?
- Tell me about some of the reading strategies you teach your students and how that ties in when you conference.

Appendix D
Example of Coding Process

Example of Coding Process

- Open Codes:
 - Identify patterns from raw data.
 - Organize by categories and data sources.
 - Give examples of raw data.

Open Code	Data Source	Examples of Raw Data
<p><u>Fluency</u> - involves ability to read text accurately and efficiently (automaticity) and with appropriate expression or prosody (phrasing, intonation, stress, and tempo) (Calkins, 2015).</p>	Interview	We use running records from Teacher's College as our, um assessments for students to see their reading levels and to check, you know, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension." (Interview, 2/26).
	Conference w/Student C. - Observation	T: "Remember our strategy about reading smooth and lively? When you're teaching something, sound like a teacher - read with expression" (C, 1/14). Listen to [me] and you are going to match my voice (C, 1/14)."
	Conference notes on Student E. - Artifact Analysis	Worked on slowing down a bit, so she can pay attention to questions - e.g., "Is it a bird?" instead of "It is a bird" (E, 9/25).
<p><u>Teaching</u> - an explicit teaching point about reading (Calkins, 2015); <u>coaching</u> - interjecting bits of advice to the reader while he/she reads (Calkins, 2015). In conference notes, these are decisions and/or recommendations about what next steps are for the reader; <u>modeling</u> - teacher demonstrating</p>	Interview	These are to be a "good fit" book or a series [of books that are a "good fit"]. As they go along and you start reading [or] take a preview and you're noticing words that you're not able to read or it's really hard for you read smoothly because it's so bumpy or hard for you, then you know that's not a good and you need to put it back and try another one. [It's] kind of like a trial and error thing. I'm closely monitoring. A lot of times when I do conferences I'll say, "Let's check out your book box and see what you've been reading [and] if you can trade anything out." Sometimes if they're way off, I can kind of help them find a better fit. Or if it's too easy, I [can] say, "Hey, let's try something more challenging." (Interview, 2/26).
	Conference w/Student A. - Observation	T reminds S to find a "good fit" book to read during independent reading time (A, 2/25).
	Conference notes on Student B. - Artifact Analysis	Encouraged him to stop and think during reading, especially when reading facts with significant/large numbers/figures (B, 2/25).

<u>Compliment</u> - offering the reader a specific compliment to support and instruct (Calkins, 2015). In conference notes, this would be described as a reading strength.	Conference notes on Student C. - Artifact Analysis	S identified that using expression was his goal for reading (C, 2/21).
	Conference w/Student C. - Observation	T asks S tell what's happening in story so far - S looks back in the book. T: I like how you are going back and looking in the book (C, 2/21).
<u>Questioning</u> - A question posed by the teacher	Conference w/Student E. - Observation	T: "Let's stop here and use the story retelling tool. What happened at the beginning of the story?... The middle?... The ending?" (E, 2/25).
	Conference w/Student B. - Observation	T: "Can you tell me what's happened in the story so far?" (B, 2/12). T: "Did you learn any cool, new facts?" (B, 2/25).
<u>Reading challenges</u> - any difficulties observed or noted that the student experiences while reading	Conference notes on Student A - Artifact Analysis	Read "starts" for "start" (A, 2/25). Read "sorry" for "sure" (A, 2/25). Pronounced "x" as /sk/ rather than /ks/ (A, 2/25).
	Conference w/Student E. - Observation	Struggles with "le" in "Winkle" (E, 2/25). Struggles with a name in the story (E, 2/25).
General observations of reading behaviors, book selections, and reading ability levels	Interview	It's really important that they pick something that's on their instructional level [to read] during [the] reading conference. (Interview, 2/26).
	Conference w/Student E. - Observation	S reads a fiction book on <i>Katie Woo and Valentine's Day</i> (E, 2/25). After struggling to read a character's name, S remarks, "This makes no sense!" T: "Names are hard!" (E, 2/25).
	Conference notes for Student B. - Artifact Analysis	Read Michigan Wolverines book (nonfiction) - straight facts but uses difficult words (B, 1/29).

- Axial Codes:
 - Cut code charts and reorganize them into emergent themes
 - Type emergent themes into new charts containing Axial Codes

- Organize by themes, and give examples using raw data

Axial Code	Emergent Themes	Examples
Fluency	Questioning, complimenting	<p>S reads aloud and T asks, “Now was that the smoothest it could be?” S: “No.” T: “Ok. Try reading it more smoothly” (A, 1/15).</p> <p>T: “Great job reading with more expression” (C, 1/14)!</p> <p>T: “I like how you are changing your voice” (A, 1/15)!</p>
Comprehension	Modeling	<p>T: Needs work on inferring skills (C, 10/9).</p> <p>T: “This is what I know about what I’ve read... “(B, 1/15).</p> <p>When asked to retell, S does so by giving a lot of rich detail and description without once looking back at the book (A, 2/6).</p>
Phonics/Decoding	Researching, coaching	<p>S read “ready” for “waiting” (A, 2/6).</p> <p>T reviews strategies and S names the “try it another way” strategy (D, 1/15).</p> <p>Remember to check and double check at the end of solving words (A, 1/15).</p>
Independent Reading	Researching	<p>Read Level H independently (B, 10/9).</p> <p>Making good progress on self-checking (D, 11/11).</p> <p>Read Level E book, but not independently (D, 11/11).</p>
Book Choice	Researching	<p>S chooses <i>Nate the Great</i> (B, 1/15).</p>

		Read nonfiction book on wolves (C, 1/23).
		Read nonfiction book on polar bears (A, 12/12).

- Selective Codes:
 - Analyze axial codes.
 - Look at emergent themes.
 - Give examples using raw data.

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
<u>Fluency</u> - involves ability to read text accurately and efficiently (automaticity) and with appropriate expression or prosody (phrasing, intonation, stress, and tempo) (Calkins, 2015).	Fluency	Modeling
<u>Compliment</u> - offering the reader a specific compliment to support and instruct (Calkins, 2015). In conference notes, this is described as a reading strength.	Phonics/Decoding	Complimenting
<u>Teaching</u> - an explicit teaching point about reading (Calkins, 2015); <u>coaching</u> - interjecting bits of advice to the reader while he/she reads (Calkins, 2015). In conference notes, these are decisions and/or recommendations about what next steps are for the reader; <u>Modeling</u> - teacher demonstrates.	Comprehension	Teaching
		Coaching
		Researching
<u>Questioning</u> - Teacher asks student questions	Independent Reading	Questioning
<u>Reading challenges</u> - any difficulties observed or noted that the student experiences while reading	Book Choice	Book Choice
General observations of reading behaviors, book selections, reading ability levels		

Appendix E
Classroom Observation Form

