"The Text Opened My Eyes": A Book Club on Teaching Writing to ELLs

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Abstract

This qualitative study looked at a book club for US teachers in public schools focused on teaching writing to English language learners (ELLs). To guide the study, the central research questions were: 1) What are teachers' perceptions about a book club professional development experience? 2) How are teachers' views about second language (L2) writing affected by a book club focused on teaching writing to ELLs? Participants were five in-service teachers who teach or have taught ELLs. They read a book about teaching ELL writers using a book club as the framework for professional discussion. Data consisting of intake forms, exit questionnaires, and exit interviews was collected and analyzed. The findings suggest that teachers participating in a book club found a sense of leadership and advanced their practices and knowledge about ELL writers and strategies to teach writing to ELLs.

Key words: book club, professional development, ELLs, L2 writing.

Introduction

Ashley is a seventh-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher in a US public school. She is a veteran teacher with Special Education experience and over 20 years of classroom teaching. Having been an educator for over two decades, she also has countless hours of professional development opportunities under her belt. However, none of this professional development has focused on how she might consider best serving the growing number of English language learners (ELLs) she serves each year in her ELA classroom:

> *I've had numerous students [ELLs] over the years – all in my regular ELA classes…The ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] teacher has always given the faculty general "tips" when dealing with the ESOL students [ELLs] in terms of reading. She was always readily available if we had any specific questions concerning a particular child.*

In terms of the district, I've never had specific professional development when it comes to supporting ESOLs [ELLs]. (Ashley, Intake form)

On the same intake form, Ashley said she wanted to gain, "A better understanding of the writing process and how it unfolds with ELLs" (Ashley, Intake form). As Enright (2011) notes these "New Mainstream" students Ashley has in her ELA classroom bring a variety of cultures and languages thus posing challenges for their teachers.

In this study, the researchers engaged mainstream teachers in a book club to consider the implications for using a book study as professional development and to understand how the book club participants might change the way they plan to deliver writing instruction to ELLs. This study falls under one of the TESOL Research Agenda (TESOL International Association, 2014) guidelines for future research to look at the role of professional development for in-service teachers' practices. To guide this study, the central research questions were:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about a book club professional development experience?
2. How are teachers' views about second language (L2) writing affected by a book club focused on teaching writing to ELLs?

The US No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 placed a premium on reading comprehension. As part of its design, NCLB held schools, local educational agencies (LEAs), and state departments of education (SDOE) accountable for ensuring that multiple subgroups of students (e.g., low-income students, minority students, special education students, and ELLs) perform at proficient levels on high stakes tests. However, with over 40 states adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as part of the Race to the Top Program or being granted a waiver from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we have seen a change in accountability. With the adoption of the CCSS, a new generation of high stakes, standardized tests were designed to measure students' disciplinary literacy skills. Because disciplinary literacy involves both reading and writing skills (Shanahan, 2009), schools, LEAs, and SDOE are no longer focusing solely on student reading. Rather, they are shifting to develop students' reading and writing skills. As such, new studies that analyze if and how teachers are developing their students' reading and writing are needed. Moreover, the ELL population across the USA continues to rise (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). ELLs represent a significant percentage of students in US public schools: 9.1% of the total school population in school year 2011-2012 (US Department of Education, 2014). Thus, there is a growing need for studies that investigate how teachers are developing their ELLs' as writers and explore the most effective ways for offering meaningful professional development to teachers advancing their practice.

CCSS and college and career readiness standards in the USA require that "literacy instruction is a shared responsibility among teachers in *all* [original emphasis] disciplines" (Bunch, Kibler & Pimentel, 2012, p. 1). In other words, the responsibility for teaching writing to ELLs is the responsibility of all teachers. Reading and writing, as described in CCSS, are skills required for ELLs to be successful in their Pk-16 school experience and beyond (Bunch et al., 2012). With current implementation of the CCSS in a large number of US states and development of new state standards that are college and career focused, the requirements for good writing performance have increased (Baker et al., 2014). Current standards focus less on writing personal narratives and creative fiction and focus more on

argumentative and analytic writing (Baker et al., 2014). These standards will most likely provide teachers with the same "challenges and opportunities" (Hakuta, Santos & Fang, 2013) to teach ELLs both the disciplinary content and the language skills of expression (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). To facilitate the necessary acquisition of disciplinary content and language skills of ELLs', it is recommended that educators consider the important role that writing has on this development (Baker et al., 2014).

Despite this heightened focus, writing is not a skill that US students in general excel at. According to the 2011 NAEP testing scores for writing, 24% of 8th and 12th graders are proficient in writing and only 3% were advanced with Hispanic students lagging behind their peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Many certified teachers are unprepared to teach writing to ELLs. Mainstream teachers are not prepared to teach ELLs (Ballantyne, Sanderman & Levy, 2008) and are even less prepared to teach writing as not all teacher education programs are required by states to have ELL-related coursework (Salerno & Lovette, 2012). In addition, teachers with less teaching experience are more likely to teach ELLs than are teachers with more experience (Dabach, 2015). Elementary and secondary ESL certified teachers report teaching writing on a regular basis, however, they also report they do not feel adequately prepared to teach L2 writing (Larsen, 2013; Larsen, 2014). Given that, "Even the most committed teachers cannot provide high quality education [to ELLs] without appropriate skills and knowledge [about ELLs]" (Ballantyne, Sanderman & Levy, 2008, p. 7) it is imperative more attention be given to supporting teachers' understanding of how to teach writing.

Teacher Book Clubs as Professional Development

In the present study, we defined the teacher book club as a series of meetings where teachers discuss a common professional text read for the purpose of developing pedagogical understandings and considering how these understandings impact student learning. Current research highlights the many benefits of such book clubs. In-service teachers report that participation in book clubs with colleagues from the same or differing schools promotes reflective discussions around topics of interest in a collegial and safe environment (Burbank, Kauchak & Bates, 2010). Teachers also report that participation in professional book club promotes discussions that continue outside the book club meetings (Burbank et al., 2010). Unlike more traditional lecture style professional development opportunities, book clubs create a setting where teachers have the opportunity to construct their knowledge by sharing their experiences and knowledge through discussion (Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin & Hesterman, 2013; Kooy, 2006). Finally, teachers mention finding professional development such as hearing talks, workshops or lectures given by visiting experts irrelevant and not useful, thus book clubs as professional development have the potential to enrich teachers' knowledge (Kooy, 2006).
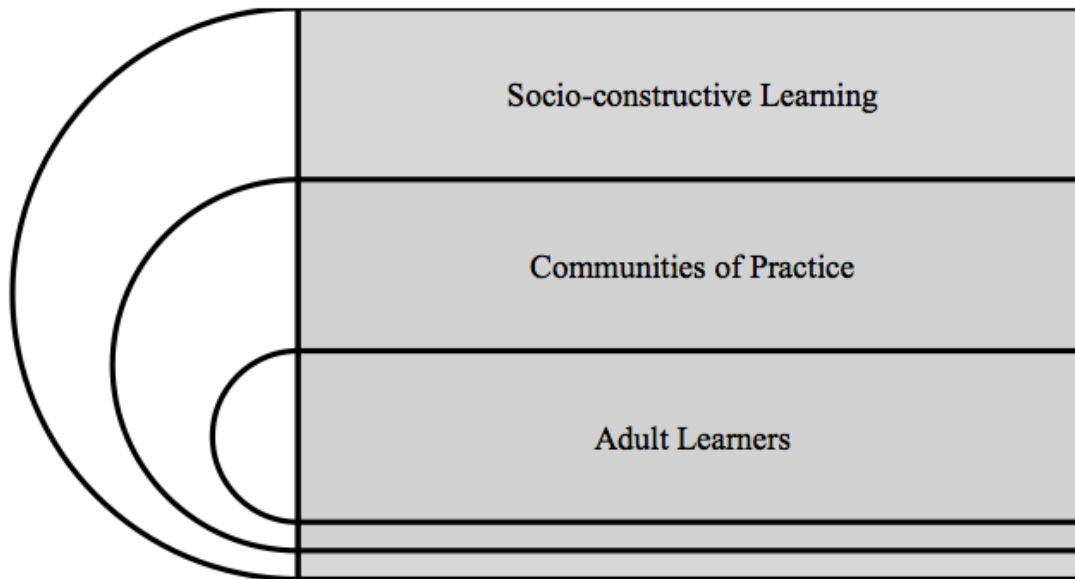
Conceptual Framework

As researchers, the beliefs we have about how individuals come to know the world had a direct correlation on the learning environment we aimed to create with the implementation of the book club as the framework for professional development. The conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 1) represents the nested way in which we worked to situate adult learners from differing contextualized communities to promote social interaction within a new professional community. Central to a sociocultural view of learning is the belief that developing understandings is a social and interactive process. Learning and development

are reciprocal processes that are nurtured between and among individuals through exploration, conversation, and problem solving (Vygotsky, 1978). As educators guided by this belief, we approached the professional development framework for this book club understanding that knowledge is not a fixed entity the participating teachers would merely absorb. Rather, we understood knowledge construction to be an organic process achieved through interactive participation in a setting that would create space for the situated contexts of both the participants' classrooms and this particular book club to merge together. We felt such space would allow participants to construct and reconstruct understandings from and through interactions that developed in the book club conversations themselves (Vygotsky, 1978). As such, we did not enter this professional development opportunity believing that the knowledge of working with ELL writers existed as a packaged set of curricular strategies that would be transmitted from one text or one person to another. Instead, it was our intention that the book club allow each individual knower to interpret and make sense of new information in relation to what she already knew about working with ELLs (Barnes, 1993).

Learning is a product of community participation that evolves through appropriation and internalization of the cultural ways of carrying out an activity. Wenger (2006) described such communities as Communities of Practice. He explained that, "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (para 1). Wenger distinguishes groups who come together around the intentionality of exploring a common interest and listed three characteristics of a community of practice: (a) exploring a common interest; (b) establishing relationships through joint sharing and construction of knowledge; and (c) creating resources, experiences, and tools that support learning over time. Our book club created space for such a community to flourish in that participants voluntarily came together to explore the common interest of effective pedagogical practices to engage the ELL writer.

As adult learners, the educators that were a part of this book study brought with them the valued resource of their classroom experience. Combined with the social interaction, which was enhanced by the sharing of personal experience, participants were well positioned to use their reflective judgment to examine their understandings, which emerged from the book study (Brookfield, 1986; King & Kitchner, 2004). As such, participants focused on understanding the ELL writer's experience in the classroom rather than on memorizing individual writing strategies that could be used in specific lessons. Participants were able to decide for themselves what information from the text studied was most beneficial for their specific classroom contexts. In our community of practice, defined by the contextualized space of our book club, members of the book study grew professionally because the formation of relationships with others contributed to the collective knowledge base of the learning community (Wenger, 1999). The book club as a professional development framework allowed for both nonjudgmental space to explore understandings as well as active motivation to engage in self-discovery (Brookfield, 1986; King & Kitchner, 2004).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Context

Research on L2 writing placed in local contexts that looks at the teachers who are in charge of teaching writing to ELLs is an area of need in L2 writing research (Lee, 2013). In addition, "L2 writing as a field … is also about people who teach writing" (Lee, 2013, p. 436). This study falls within the intersection of these two areas in that we explored what those who teach L2 writers in an elementary and middle school setting come to know and understand about teaching writing to ELLs.

The study was conducted during the Spring 2014 semester in a southeastern US state, and was supported by a $2,120 grant funded by a public university. The funds were used to purchase each participant one $100 Amazon, one $50 Office Depot gift card, and a copy of *The ELL Writer: Moving beyond Basics in the Secondary Classroom* (Ortemeier-Hooper, 2013), which was based on the author's research on ELL writers.

The participants for this study were recruited using purposive sampling, meaning that the researchers used contacts within the local school district to recruit participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The book club met six times during the semester, each meeting lasting around 90 minutes. To guide the meetings, the researchers prepared an agenda that consisted of: Check-in & Welcome; New Discussion; Look at Student Work; and Exit Slip. By opening with the "Check-in & Welcome," the researchers were able to review any lingering thoughts from the previous meeting and preview the upcoming meeting. The "New Discussion" was a time for comments to be made about the chapters read for the meeting. To guide these discussions, the participants were asked to come to the book club with text excerpts they wanted to discuss. The researchers also prepared questions to facilitate the conversation and used these only when needed. The "Look at Student Work" time was reserved for the participants to bring written assignments completed by their students in class that related to the readings. The participants and researchers looked across the student samples during this portion of the meeting, which often evoked connections between the reading and

participants' teaching practice. The "Exit Slip" consisted of a prompt that asked the participants to share their take-away(s) from the meeting. The comments written on the exit slips were then used to plan for the next meeting, with specific attention to addressing comments during the "Check-in & Welcome."

Participants

This study included five participants and three researchers who came from differing backgrounds. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the participants at the time of the study. All names are pseudonyms to protect their identity. For the purpose of this study report we used the terms ELLs and L2 writers to refer to writers whose first language is not English, and ESL teachers to refer to those teachers who are trained and certified and exclusively teach ELLs. However, the participants in this study often referred to ELLs as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students or to the ESL teacher as the ESOL teacher as this was the common acronym utilized by their school district.

Table 1. Snapshot of Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Native Language	Teaching Experience	Current School Context	Current Grade Level and Content Area
Courtney	Female	White	English	10 years	Elementary, Charter	4th grade, ELA and Social Studies
Melanie	Female	White	English	2 years	Intermediate, Public	4th grade, All subjects
Tamara	Female	White	Russian	4 years	Intermediate, Public	3rd -5th grade, ESL
Ashley	Female	White	English	29 years	Middle, Public	7th grade, ELA
Michelle	Female	White	English	9 years	Middle, Public	6th grade, ELA

At the onset of the study, the participants were asked to share their experiences and questions about working with ELL writers. Table 2 summarizes the intake information provided by the participants. Whereas Tamara was the only participant who taught ELLs exclusively in her capacity as an ESL teacher, the other participants had a range of previous and/or current experiences teaching ELLs in their classrooms. For example, both Ashley and Michelle were teaching ELLs in their classroom at the time of the study; however, Courtney did not have any ELLs in her class, but had taught ELLs in previous years. Melanie, like Ashley and Michelle, had experience teaching ELLs, but her experiences teaching ELLs were different. To explain, Ashley and Michelle both taught in the same public middle school, which followed a six-period day. Therefore, they only taught their ELLs for one period a day. However, because Melanie taught in an intermediate school where she had the same group of students for the entire day, she was focused more extensively on the achievement of ELLs across all content areas. These differences, although subtle, did create individualized contextual experiences for how each participant engaged ELLs.

Table 2. Participant Intake Form Information

Participant	Experience with ELLs	Current Strategies/Focus for Teaching ELLs	Questions about Serving ELL Writers
Courtney	Worked with ELLs and thought it difficult to communicate with parents that did not speak English.	ELL writers have the same challenges as first language (L1) writers have with conventions and sentence fluency.	Am I teaching it [writing] right? What strategies would help me better communicate with ELLs?
Melanie	At the time of the study had three ELLs. Two were "good" writers, and one struggled with development.	Use of brain drains, checklists graphic organizers, and ample talk and discussion.	What strategies can I use to help ELL writers stay on topic?
Ashley	Taught numerous ELLs during her career. At the time of the study, had two ELLs who were both strong writers.	Modeling, peer revision and editing, conferring.	None
Michelle	Some ELLs each year. At the time of the study had eight in total. Three strong writers in an accelerated class, two strong writers in an honors class, and one average writer in a grade level class. Two weaker writers in an inclusion class, and one in a grade level class, all of whom need a lot of repetitive teaching.	One-on-one work, write and rewrite, inclusion teaching in the regular classroom, a lot of prompting and repetition.	What can I do to help ELL writers become successful in life? I know writing is one of these steps.
Tamara	Case manager for 175 ELLs testing at level one [1], two, and three. Level three writers could brainstorm, create graphic organizers, draft personal narrative and descriptive pieces. Vocabulary was the primary area of need.	Teacher modeling, group study of model papers, peer interaction, visuals and anchor charts, integration of culture into the writing tasks.	No question given.

[1] The levels of English language proficiency the teacher used (Level one, two, and three) were based on the English language proficiency tests used in her school, with level one being a beginner level and three being a more advanced intermediate level.

It is often the case with qualitative research that researchers become part of the study (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2011). This holds true with this study as well, with all three researchers participating in the book club as both collegial participants in the book club and as researchers. The purpose of this participant/researcher role was to acknowledge our varied experiences both working with and researching ELL writers. In our first book club meeting, we introduced ourselves and expressed our desire to be active, collegial members of the book club. We read the required readings alongside participants and participated in the discussions, not as more expert others, but as members of this developing professional community. Table 3 provides a snapshot of the three participant/researchers.

Table 3. Snapshot of Researchers

| Participant researcher	Gender	Race	Native Language	Teaching Experience	
K-12	**Higher Education**				
Author 1	Female	White	Romanian	7 years, Middle Level	1 year, ESL, Emergent Literacy
Author 2	Female	White	English	11 years, Elementary	2 years, Elementary Literacy
Author 3	Male	White	English	5 years, High school	2 years, Secondary Literacy

Each of the researchers holds a doctoral degree in the field of education, had experience conducting qualitative research, and came to this study for individual reasons pertaining to his or her research interests. Author 1 holds a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction and has a research interest in L2 literacy, specifically writing. She served as an English as a foreign language teacher in Romania before coming to the USA where she served as an ESL teacher. Author 2 holds a doctorate in Language and Literacy, and has research interests specific to developing elementary readers and writers. She served as a teacher and curriculum coach in an elementary setting before moving into higher education. Author 3 holds a doctorate in Teacher Education with a focus on English and has a research interest in pedagogical knowledge. Before moving into higher education, he served as a high school English and Journalism teacher.

Data Collection and Analysis

Conducting qualitative research and reporting findings is an act of interpretation (Erickson, 1986), and even more so when engaging the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As such, we employed data analysis methods with the intention of building their findings' trustworthiness by collecting three different types of data, detailed below (Erickson, 1986; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The methods described in this section allowed us to interpret the data and write the findings. We conducted three rounds of data analysis and after each data analysis round was completed, we met to discuss and explain our findings. These meetings further ensured trustworthiness in that these conversations were intended to "member check" the findings (Sandelowski, 1993). Because all three authors served as participants and researchers, using ourselves to member check does serve, in this context, to validate our findings.

For this study, three types of data were collected. We designed this study to include three sets of data to increase its trustworthiness, and Figure 2 represents this triangulation.
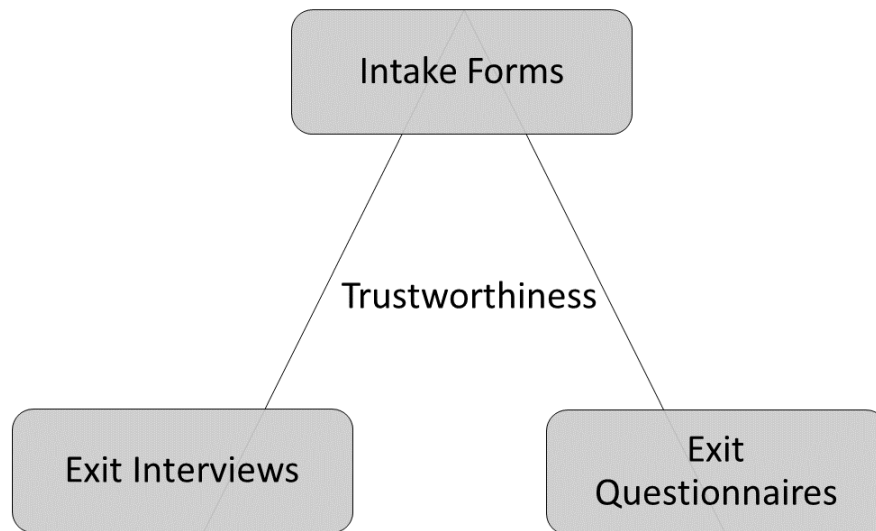
Figure 2. Triangulation of Data

The first set of data collected was intake forms (see Appendix A). On this form, participants provided information regarding their teaching experience, including years, grade, and subject taught; their experience teaching ELLs; their experience with professional development specific to teaching ELLs; and their reasons for wanting to be part of the book club. Each participant completed an intake form before the study commenced.

The second set of data collected was an exit questionnaire (see Appendix B), which participants completed at the end of the final book club meeting. The exit questionnaire queried the participants as to what they thought of the book discussed, and their opinion of using a book club as a framework for professional development.

The final set of data collected was an exit interview, which was conducted after the book club concluded. To conduct these interviews, each researcher interviewed one or two participants, using an interview protocol (see Appendix C). The purpose of the exit interview was to investigate which aspects of the book club were most meaningful, what the participant thought of the book club as a form of professional development, and what the participant envisioned taking into her classroom in the future to better develop and support ELLs' writing abilities. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

To interpret the data qualitatively, we conducted three rounds of analysis on each set of data collected. The goal for the first round of analysis was to allow patterns within the data to begin to emerge using open coding (Strauss, 1987). To explain, each researcher individually read each set of data, which included the intake forms, exit interviews, and exit questionnaires. After reading a set of data, each researcher created a memo that captured his or her individual ideas and thoughts about what the data seemed to reveal about the

understandings of the participants. A memo is a short note "about emergent insights, potential themes, methodological questions, and links between themes and theoretical notions" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 287). We then met to review our individual memos. During this meeting, each researcher reported the memos he/she created separately. This conversation lead to an iterative process of meaning making between the researchers where we shared our thoughts and ideas behind the memos created (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As we discussed our memos, we worked to understand the patterns emerging from the data from our multiple perspectives. This discussion then served to clarify how we were coming to understand the data. At the conclusion of this meeting, we operationally defined five initial categories that seemed to emerging from within the data and across our memos. These initial categories were instructional strategies, community of learners, professional development, shifts in perspectives, and misconceptions.

The purpose of the second round of data analysis was to apply the initial categories and definitions to the entire data set again in order to determine if the initial categories and definitions remained consistent. During this round of analysis, we each read through the entire data set again, applying the codes that emerged from the first round of analysis and remaining open to new patterns that may have emerged. We then met to share our coded excerpts to check for consistency across application of the codes and to refine the operational definitions of each category. At the conclusion of this second meeting, we determined that the initial categories were consistent and thus verified. We then used Dedoose (version 4.12) to mark excerpts of data from the data sets that would be used in round three of data analysis. Table 4 shares the final codes and definitions.

Table 4. Coding Categories and Operationalized Definitions

Socially Constructed Code Category	Operationalized Definition
Instructional Strategies	Techniques for engaging students actively in learning
Community of Leaners	Constructing knowledge by participating in a professional book club
Professional Development	Engaging in a form of professional development (e.g. book club, small groups, "facilitator-to-whole-group" model, and other forms of engagement)
Shifts in Perspective	Recognition of change between participants' past practices and ideas for future instruction (in both how they perceive who ELLs are and how to develop ELLs' writing abilities)
Misconceptions	Actions that did not align with the ideas either presented in the text or communicated by the participant

For the third round of analysis, each researcher was assigned one or two categories to systematically code (Strauss, 1987) across all three data sets. Each researcher read through each data set pulling small bits of language representing meaning connected to the code he or she was assigned. We then met for a final time to share the coded excerpts that best exemplified each category. Extensive notes were scribed during this conversation, and those notes were used to anchor the findings that will be discussed in the next section.

Findings

Professional Development and Shifts and Take-Aways emerged as the two prominent categories in this data set. Within the Professional Development category, patterns evolved around aspects of leadership and interaction, and within Shifts and Take-Aways, patterns evolved around strategies, aspects of writing, and specific needs and characteristics of ELL writers (see Table 5). Although analysis of the data for categorical identification provided insight into the role the book club played into creating space for teachers to develop personal understandings, it is important to note that these understandings did not develop in a linear fashion or uniformly across all participants. As such, we cannot say that each participant's understandings were equally developed or quantifiable across participants of the book club. What follows is a discussion of the patterns within each category.

Table 5. Patterns Identified in the Findings

Professional Development	Shifts and Take-Aways
Leadership • within self • within school • within district	Strategies • rubrics • sequenced and linked assignments • The Fingerold
Interaction • personal interpretation • perspective • professionalism • intimacy	Other Aspects of Writing • beyond conventions
	ELLs: Specific needs and characteristics • obstacles ELLs face in the classroom • cultural diversity

Professional Development

Leadership

Analysis of the data revealed that the book club created space for participants to develop their pedagogical understanding of how to support the ELL writer. The expectation that participants brought with them was to name personal understandings promoted a sense of being a more knowledgeable other and served to create a sense of advocacy for all participants (Wenger, 1999). Participants expressed both individual and shared responsibility to be agentive in sharing what they had learned and were coming to understand with their professional colleagues at the school and district level. Findings also revealed that participation in the book club created a sense of personal responsibility to keep learning beyond the conclusion of the book club itself.

The findings suggest that participation in the book club encouraged participants to name and take ownership of their learning and set a personal path for continued exploration of ELL writers that would extend beyond the conclusion of our book club. The level of personal

accountability, however, seemed to be dependent on both years of teaching experience, and the type of professional development in which the teacher was accustomed to participating. Ashley, who had the most experience in education, stated, "It [participating in the book club] raised a level of awareness not only for the obstacles many ESOL [ELLs] students face in the classroom on a daily basis, but also making me more aware of the teacher I "was" and how it's so important that I get back to that" (Exit Questionnaire). In her statement, Ashley acknowledged that participation in this book club prompted her to look back into her beliefs and values and consider ways to hold onto her truths as she continued to explore best practices for supporting ELLs in her classroom. Her statement shares her realization of a misalignment between theory and practice and suggests she would leave the book club in a quest of self-discovery to reconnect these. In fact, Ashley accepted an invitation from the researchers to continue the study of supporting L2 writers by conducting follow-up classroom research.

Another example of how the book club nurtured continued professional development within self was offered by Courtney who stated:

> *I bought a book called Interactive Notebooks and English Language Learners…the two middle school teachers were talking about it. And they brought some examples, and I've seen it on Pinterest, and I've seen it on teacher's teacher, but I've never tried it. So I want to try that. (Exit Interview, 06/08/14)*

Often, discussion from our book club text extended beyond its content as participants shared personal stories of pedagogical practices in their classrooms. During one discussion, participants shared strategies they used in their classrooms to encourage students to use writing to hold and share their learning through the use of interactive notebooks. Courtney's comment showed she took it upon herself to seek out a text about interactive notebooks and ELLs. Courtney was in her first year at a new school placement during our book club and in her previous school she was used to being a part of professional book conversations as professional development. One of the reasons she cited for joining our book club was that she missed the collegiality of book study in her new school. Courtney's comment suggested she internalized the value of reading professionally as a means of continued professional development, and that regardless of school based professional development practice, she would continue to use professional reading in pursuit of personal learning.

All participants felt the personal responsibility to share what they were learning with their peers at the school level. Three mentioned sharing ideas by exchanging resources and strategies through email or loaning their books to grade level colleagues. Michelle indicated that she had already," mentioned this [the text] to several of my peers" (Exit Questionnaire). Tamara indicated that she would "probably scan and send some resources…through email" (Exit Interview, 05/12/14), adding that she would provide classroom teachers who serve ELLs with copies of the strategies in the learning plans for the ELLs when she stated, "if I get to talk to them [teachers] next year when I go into the LPPs [learning personalized plans], these [strategies] would be part of my folder, some strategies for the ESOL [ELL] writer" (Exit Interview, 05/12/14). In addition to recommending the text to colleagues in her school and sharing excerpts, Ashley said it was, "[her] responsibility to share" (Ashley, Exit Questionnaire). Melanie also indicated that she and Tamara decided to "do an in-school staff development" (Exit Interview, 05/12/14) for teachers in their building. At the conclusion of the study, Melanie and Tamara were in the process of getting approval for such a staff development.

Findings further indicated teachers were considering the impact of this professional development book study at the district level. However, the time the teachers had been employed in the district revealed a dichotomy between teacher agency in sharing professional knowledge at the district level. Our veteran teachers, Ashley and Michelle, were involved on a committee to write curriculum for the district and expressed their desire to include attention to the ELL writer at the curricular level. Ashley articulated this when she stated, "I think there needs to be some consideration given or some awareness maybe…when we're creating the curriculum maybe that needs to be another piece that we need to pay attention with the ESOL [ELL] writer. We do something special for grade level. We do something special for accelerated. We do something for honors. What about…[our ELLs]" (Exit Interview, 05/20/14). Ashley's comment suggested that she recognized ELLs as an overlooked population in curriculum development at the district level and suggested she saw it as her responsibility to give voice to these learners as she continued to work with colleagues across the district to create curriculum. In contrast, Melanie, who was just in her second year in the district, stated, "I don't know if they [those in charge of curricular decisions, our emphasis] are going to get rid of writing and just have writing with science and social studies or if they [our emphasis] are going to get rid of stations. I don't know what they [our emphasis] are going to do" (Exit Interview, 05/12/14). Melanie's comment suggested that as a more novice professional she saw herself as being positioned to wait until she knew what decisions would be made about the writing curriculum before she could enact her new ideas generated from the book study.

Interaction

As participant/researchers, our goal was not to have participants leave any book club conversation with the same idea or set of strategies but rather to create space for and expectation that each book club participant would develop personal understandings. Comments offered by participants support that positioning ourselves in the book club as equal participants did create this type of learning environment. Ashley commented that, "The ones [book studies] I participated within a school we always had a set of questions we had to respond to. This one [our book club] wasn't so structured, and I thought the format of it lent itself more to better personal interpretation" (Exit Interview, 05/20/14). Melanie also supported this by stating, "You could have your own opinion…you didn't have to agree with everything she [author] said" (Exit Interview, 05/12/14). Courtney further supports this when she said, "I got to read and I internalize it [the text] and make notes the way I see it. But then, I like to hear other people's opinion even if it's controversial or even if it's just playing devil's advocate to make me think outside the box" (Exit Interview, 06/08/14). These collective comments suggested that participants appreciated and accepted the invitation to hold themselves accountable for the understandings they would personally take away from this professional development experience.

Participants indicated they appreciated the vertical exploration across grade levels and the cultural and pedagogical exploration of other school communities. The interaction between participants in the book club created space for varying perspectives to be shared, valued, and explored. For example, Michelle stated, "I learned so much from my peers… It was nice to hear different perspectives from other teachers (Exit Questionnaire). Ashley agreed: "It was interesting to get different perspectives from different schools, difference levels of teachers" (Exit Interview, 05/20/14). Both Michelle and Ashley indicated the vertical composition of our professional development (teachers from elementary and middle school

and higher education) allowed them to consider perspectives to which they would not typically be privy in a more traditional professional development setting where teachers from similar grade bands and often similar grade levels are grouped together. Courtney added to this by offering, "I like this one [book club] maybe a little bit more because with the book club I participated they were people I knew, and I kind of knew where they stood. We were all in the same environment, and it was different… to see other people's different schools and different children what they were bringing to the table" (Exit Interview, 06/08/14). This indicated teachers were able to expand their understandings of topics being explored in deeper ways when they had the opportunity to build their schema around multiple perspectives rather than only considering situations like theirs. Tamara also remarked that hearing about these perspectives helped her feel as if she was not the only one experiencing similar pedagogical challenges when she offered that, "I enjoyed the people…sharing information with other colleagues…good to hear each other because somebody maybe went through this…you can work it out a bit (Exit Interview, 05/12/14). The sharing of perspectives created conditions that encouraged educators to live into the experience of others as a way to think deeper about their own experience. Similar to the literature on book clubs, the teachers in our book club suggested that participation in book clubs with teachers from other schools promoted reflective discussions (Burbank & Kauchak, 2010).

Another benefit of the book club as a professional development framework was the personalization of the study. Data analysis revealed that the book club created interactive space for participants to engage as professionals rather than teachers who needed to be "professionally developed". Ashley comment captured the essence of this when she stated:

> Being a teacher … I have been professionally developed. I have gone to everything. I have listen to everyone, and it's always the same where you sit and someone is standing in the front and just delivering the information. This was different in that we were all the same. We were all in the same playing field, and it was equal participation. It wasn't just someone delivering. You were allowed to talk and discuss and think. (Exit Interview, 05/20/14)

Overall, the book club created the space and expectation that participants would leave this professional development setting with personal understanding they had constructed and reconstructed across conversations. This format meant that each participant might leave with different ideas she would enact in her classrooms, but our participants appreciated this and felt this acknowledged their professionalism.

The final pattern of interaction that emerged within the professional development category was the role of intimacy and collegiality that emerged in our book club, similarly with other studies (Burbank & Kauchak, 2010). Our participants expressed ways in which the intimacy of our small group encouraged them to share their voice for the benefit of developing the understandings of the whole group. For example, Melanie stated that, "With professional developments that are district wide, they are so big you have hundreds of people in this auditorium and I think it's more intimate you're talking with four or five people…intimate, close personalities. Talking with each other was really good for me (Exit Interview, 05/12/14). Michelle further offered, "We didn't have things we were specifically looking for – a comment or a strategy that we liked or maybe an interpretation or something…I felt very comfortable sharing because we were all learning from each other" (Exit Interview, 05/20/14). These comments suggested that the use of a small community of learners

created a safe space for our participants to learn both from and with one another (Gardiner et al., 2013; Kooy, 2006). The use of a small book club created conditions where all could be heard and all were invited to share.

Shifts and Take-aways

Strategies

The teachers liked the book we read as it had strategies they could start using in their classrooms. Michelle mentioned in her exit questionnaire, "This book offers many strategies for engaged writing. I feel that by using this book, I will be able to guide my students to be more creative, too!" Strategies specifically listed by the book club participants were the use of rubrics targeted to ELLs to evaluate writing, "sequenced and linked assignments" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013, p. 130), and the "Fingerholds" strategy (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013, p. 120) as it is mentioned by the teachers.

Ortmeier-Hooper (2013) discusses the importance of teachers tailoring rubrics for their ELLs to accommodate for the language innovations and minor mistakes ELLs might make. Melanie mentioned adjusting the rubric she already used to focus less on language and grammar by focusing on one aspect of writing at a time as her writers moved their pieces through the writing process:

> *I was going to put out each one [content and development, organization, and voice domains from the rubric], and just kind of take away conventions because that's the grammar part and just focus on one part of the rubric at that time. And that's one of the strategies that they said there you know, just get rid of the grammar part and focus and other part as well. So that's what I want to start with next year. It's just looking at each part of the rubric [laughs]. (Melanie, Exit Interview, 5/12/2014)*

Another participant mentioned "Sequenced and linked assignments" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013, p. 130) referring to writing assignments of various genres such as personal stories, research papers, interviews and essays on the same topic Ashley talked about the "Sequenced and linked assignments" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013, p. 130):

> *I definitely might try the structure thing. It was in one of those last two chapters. It really intrigued me where they took like a topic and they just kept delving a little bit deeper, a little bit deeper, and a little bit deeper. I want to do that with everybody next year, but definitely that peaked my interest." (Exit Interview, 05/20/14)*

Many participants said they would use the "Fingerhold" strategy with their students. The "Fingerhold" strategy is a chart, "...that serves as a problem-solving device for teachers to use as they think through their objectives for a given assignment and the needs of their students" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013, p. 120). The chart has four columns: Writer's position, Audience, Topic, and Genre and under each of these categories there are options for teachers and students to choose from based on their level of comfort, experience and writing proficiency (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013). In her exit questionnaire Melanie noted, "I enjoyed Chapter 7, "Specific Teaching Strategies," because it discussed specifically what to look for with ESOL [ELL] writing and activities to help them such as the Fingerhold assignment" (Exit Questionnaire, 05/12/14). In the same vein, Tamara said, "...and then I will use that finger hold chart because that can create – you can create a lot of different topics and that can help you as an ESOL teacher okay, where my students struggle" (Exit Interview 05/12/14).

Other Aspects of Writing

When sharing how they teach writing to ELLs on the intake forms the teachers mentioned using modeling, teaching the steps of the writing process (brainstorming ideas, organizing, looking at models, editing), and employing the same strategies they used for struggling students such as repetition. Overall, the teachers used a fairly traditional approach to their writing instruction. Another take-away noted by many participants after the book club experience, was the need to focus on other aspects of writing besides grammar and conventions. Tamara, an ESL trained teacher said, "Personally, it [the book club text and discussion] helped me to realize that conventions in writing should not be the focal point of our instruction. (Exit Questionnaire). Similarly, Melanie noted, "The text opened my eyes in the way I see all of my students writing. I need to steer away from their grammar and focus more on the how and why they came to this piece of writing" (Exit Questionnaire). Ortmeier-Hooper (2013) suggests focusing feedback on larger text issues such as topic or organization and leaving language level errors and mistakes for later in the writing process. Such attention is aimed at helping L2 writers build confidence and a develop a sense of identity as a writer.

ELLs: Specific needs and characteristics

At the end of the book club, the teachers reported they learned ELLs have their own needs and characteristics, and that ELLs represent a special population of learners and writers who bring their unique experiences and characteristics to their learning. The teachers acknowledged not being very familiar and/or knowing much about their ELLs and shared that they intended to begin the next school year with more focused attention on getting to know their ELLs as individual students; Michelle mentioned starting a new school year, "...I love being able to just start from the very beginning with them and developing some kind of relationship, learning about them" (Exit Interview, 05/20/2014). Ashley also shared that she was thinking more deeply about her ELLs as individuals by stating, "The ESOL Writer [the actual name of the book is The ELL Writer] was a GREAT [original emphasis] choice for this book club because for me, as an ELA teacher, it raised a level of awareness not only for the obstacles many ESOL students face in the classroom on a daily basis..." (Exit Questionnaire). On the same note, Ashley provided more details in her exit interview, "Well, I think it's the cultural stuff that they come with. I don't think I've paid enough attention or I didn't give back much, you know, just culturally how they come to me as a writer" (Exit Interview, 05/20/14).

The participants affirmed that they had a greater awareness of how ELLs viewed themselves as writers. As Melanie stated:

> *I wasn't aware that they were so conscious of their writing. I didn't – I – nine year olds, and ten year olds, I didn't think that they cared about their writing. I just thought that they were just like, oh well here's my writing. It's that, but it made me aware that they were subconscious of how they wrote and ESOLs you know they would erase and start over again. And they didn't know any words so they would just try their best, so I – that made me – aware of their self-consciousness so I mean that was interesting with that. (Exit Interview, 05/12/2014)*

Courtney further acknowledged this lack of awareness of ELLs as writers and students in the US classroom by sharing:

> *I've never really given much thought about teaching different, looking at them differently. They [ELLs] were just one of the kids and they are just one of my kids too, but them coming with a language barrier they do have a different need than regular struggling readers and other readers. So it was good to learn in those expectations and to be able to take that from things. I really couldn't use a whole lot this year, but hopefully in the future I will be. (Courtney, Exit Interview, 06/08/14)*

Courtney is very specific in sharing her shift of perspective. Before the book club experience that she viewed her ELLs and her struggling writers through the same lens and taught both groups using the same strategies, but her shift was clear. She mentioned this not only in her exit interview but also in her exit questionnaire:

> *Before the reading and discussing the book, I looked at the ESOL student as other struggling students, not looking that the ESOL student as a student with different needs as a writer. They do however, have some similarities, but there are also some differences. The book not only gave me some points to reflect on, but it also gave me some strategies to help the ESOL writer succeed as a writer. (Exit Questionnaire)*

Implications and Conclusions

The findings of this study are based on a small number of participants who volunteered to be part of the book club, so no generalization to the larger population of teachers can be made. However, the study sheds light on the possible value of book clubs as a framework for professional development that creates space for teachers to consider how to develop their ELL students as writers. In this way, the findings of the study can contribute to the existing body of research that shows the value of book clubs as a venue for professional development (Burbank et al., 2010; Gardiner et al., 2013; Kooy, 2006).

As recent literature supports, our participants, like many educators, felt a lack of preparedness when it came to teaching L2 writing (Larsen, 2013, 2014; Kibler, Heny & Andrei, in press). However, they gained valuable insight through participation in the book club. The participants in this study developed differing levels of leadership and advocacy, be it within themselves, within their school, or even within their district due to the understanding they developed and the strategies they learned. Through reading and conversation, all the ELA and the ESL teachers in our book club saw the need to reach their ELLs as writers first in order for their writing instruction to be authentic and personally relevant to the learners. The participants left the book club with a more realistic perception of who ELLs are and what they bring to the classroom; a more holistic view of teaching writing to ELLs; and a better idea of how convention and grammar should not be the first quality of effective writing emphasized when working with ELL writers.

The book club created a space where participants came to see that the issue of ELL writing was not a simple pedagogical undertaking but an undertaking that required consideration of the student at the center of the task. The sharing of perspectives, teaching stories, and pedagogical challenges created a space that allowed participants to shift their perspective from thinking that working with ELLs is merely a teaching task towards understanding teaching ELLs as a personal endeavor. The value of the book club for these teachers was clear from this study, both for their professional development, but also for their sense of self-efficacy and learning. More research needs to be done with a variety of teacher populations in other US contexts and with teachers from additional levels, such as high school. Finally, we believe this study has implications for the use book clubs as professional

development across various contexts. We believe schools and districts might consider how to incorporate small group book clubs as a means of establishing an expectation for teachers to hold themselves and their colleagues accountable for professional growth and learning. We also believe those that work with pre-service teachers should consider how book clubs could serve as a framework for supporting pre-service teachers' entry into a professional dialogue.

Our study suggests that if given an engaging professional development opportunity which allows exploration and discussion, teachers' knowledge and skills about ELLs and ELL writers specifically is advanced. The book club allowed teachers to have a voice and safe space for questioning, learning, and exploration where they could talk to each other, rather than being talked at, where they could get more knowledgeable and empowered.

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Appendix A

Intake form Intake form

Name:
Date:

Professional Experience

- What content area do you teach?

- What grade level do you teach?

- How many years of teaching experience do you have in total?

- How many years of teaching experience do you have in the current content and grade level?

- What is your experience teaching English language learners (ELLs)?

- Do you have ELLs in your current classroom? How many?

- Can you describe the writing skills of your ELLs in your classroom?

- What strategies do you use when teaching writing to your ELLs?

- What question do you have about teaching writing to your ELLs?

Appendix B

Exit Questionnaire

Name:
Date:

1. Was The ELL Writer book a suitable choice for the book club? Why or why not?

2. Would you recommend The ELL Writer to your peers? Why or why not?

3. What aspects of the book club, if any, did you enjoy?

4. In what ways did this text influence your ideas about teaching writing to ELLs?

Appendix C

Exit interview

Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate your time and I am eager to hear what you have to say. Before we begin, do I have your consent for the interview? Remember that what we discuss today will be confidential. Feel free not to answer any questions if you do not feel comfortable answering them. This interview should take about 30 minutes, and I will do my best to watch the time so we can address all of the questions. Are you ready to begin?

Topic 1: Book club as a professional development

1.   What can you tell us about your experience with this book club?

2.   Did the book club as a professional development meet your expectations?
a. Why do you say that?

3.   Do you think a professional development in form of a book club is a good format for you?
a. Why do you say that?

Topic 2: Plans for next year (classroom implementation; sharing with their peers and school)

1.   What is your biggest take away in terms of teaching writing to ESOLs from this book club?

2.   What are some of the things that you learned about teaching writing to ESOLs that you were not aware of?

3.   From what you learned in this book club, what do you plan to implement next year in your classrooms?
a. Why?

4.   Do you plan to share anything that you learned in this book club with your peers/school?
a. If yes, what would you share and why?

Last question:
Do you have any other ideas or comments you would like to share with us as part of this study?