ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study investigated the observed behaviors and reported experiences of 4th grade students when mentor texts were used to teach mini-lessons and model the writer’s craft to improve student writing. Writing was observed and assessed regularly during writing conferences using multiple forms of formative assessment. Data were gathered using surveys, student feedback, teacher observations, and student work. By coding and analyzing the data, several themes emerged. The action research showed that the use of mentor text is valuable in the writing workshop and does improve student writing by modeling the craft of professional writers. A baseline assessment was assessed and compared to a narrative that students completed through a process approach which demonstrated significant improvement in student writing. While the results of the survey and student feedback reinforced this theme they also brought to light a separate theme. The teacher, whether modeling writing or conferencing with the student, is central to the writing workshop. The mentoring process is not limited to mentor text; instead the teacher also needs to write with his or her students. For mentor text to be successful teachers need to explicitly teach students how to identify the writer’s craft and apply it in their writing. Teachers also need to differentiate and model the use of mentor text through one-on-one conferencing.