The Effect of Viewing Art on Writing in Grade Four

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to implement a pedagogy that would improve all students’ writing, whether academically vulnerable or not. More specifically, the pedagogy implemented was designed to focus on the two aspects of the grade four writing expectations, *Meaning* and *Style*. To facilitate the development of these qualities, an instructional method was designed to improve writing ability by viewing art, with critical thinking strategies and collaborative talk acting as a conduit. The instrument used to measure data collected was the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4. Data included three writing with art and collaborative discussion assessments and three writing without art assessment each (Weeks 1, 4 and 8) in an eight week study. The student participants were comprised of nine Grade Four students from a small rural and socio-economically and culturally diverse community. Quantitative results showed improved writing ability in the areas of *Meaning* and *Style*, however, the area of *Meaning* showed the strongest growth. Qualitative results were encouraging as they demonstrate the “affective” quality of engaging students in this pedagogy.
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Chapter One: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of Study

In the province of British Columbia children entering kindergarten are tested by their teacher using an Early Development Instrument (Janus & Offord, 2007) which assesses the child’s readiness for school. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) assesses children according to the following five scales: Physical Health and Well-Being, Social Knowledge and Competence, Emotional Health and Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development and Communication Skills and General Knowledge. The assessment reveals whether the child is developmentally vulnerable or not. For the purpose of this paper the focus was on the area of language and cognitive development.

Children with deficits in oral language skills early on continue to have deficiencies in reading and writing skills throughout their school years (Flood & Anders, 2005). British Columbian children who arrive in kindergarten with vulnerabilities in language and cognitive development will likely continue to be academically vulnerable in the curriculum areas of reading, writing, and numeracy by Grade Four (D’Angiulli, Warburton, Dahinten, & Hertzman, 2009).

The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) produced the EDI results in 2011 for all school districts in British Columbia, indicating the level of vulnerability within each school district. The results for the rural community in which this research took place, Chemainus, British Columbia, located on Vancouver Island, revealed that the neighbourhood falls within the vulnerable category in one or more of the EDI categories. More specifically, nine to eleven
percent of the children were vulnerable in the area of language and cognitive development (HELP, 2011), which was focused on in this current study.

It should be noted that because of the extensive studies done in British Columbia using the information gathered from the EDI, the Ministry of Education has created initiatives like StrongStart BC and Ready-Set-Learn which address the needs of British Columbia’s children. These community programs are available to children age six and under, yet, the vulnerabilities continue beyond the age of six. It is incumbent upon educators to consider these vulnerabilities when designing their academic program.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine a pedagogy that may address these continuing language and cognitive deficiencies and lead to fewer academically vulnerable children, specifically in the curriculum area of writing for the purposes of this study. An instructional method was designed to improve writing ability by viewing art, with critical thinking strategies and collaborative talk acting as a conduit. Researchers have found that teaching children to examine and discuss visual art using critical thinking strategies, allows children to construct a deeper understanding (Housen, 2002; Tishman, MacCillivary, & Palmer, 1999). Practice using critical thinking strategies becomes a habit of mind if practiced regularly over time (Housen, 2002).

Verbalizing their ideas while viewing art not only helps children develop meaning, it also helps them retain semantic information (Koroscik & Blinn, 1983). In Grade Four, children are far more comfortable expressing their ideas verbally than in writing. Retaining semantic information is important as difficulties with spelling, grammar and grapho-motor skills interfere and slow the writing process down, making it more difficult to record ideas with precise language.
The goal of this study was to examine a pedagogy that would improve all students’ writing, whether academically vulnerable or not. More specifically, the pedagogy implemented was designed to focus on two aspects of the grade four writing expectations, *Meaning* and *Style*. To facilitate the development of these qualities, the children were guided through a process which taught them to use critical thinking strategies when viewing art and to extend and clarify their thinking through purposeful, structured collaborative talk.

**Justification of Study**

As educators, we hope to equip children with the tools to be clear and precise thinkers and communicators. The fact that children with cognitive and language deficiencies continue to be academically vulnerable in their school years is an issue that educators need to address within the classroom setting. How can educators design a curriculum which will help these vulnerable students meet the curriculum expectations?

Once British Columbian children reach Grade Four, they are tested using the British Columbia’s Ministry of Education Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) which measures academic skills including reading, writing, and numeracy. The FSA does not specifically test oral language skills but considers written language an appropriate form of communication assessment in this age group. As stated earlier, we know that students’ oral abilities impact later language skill. According to D’Angiulli et al. (2009), “children with early developmental vulnerabilities are about two to four times more likely to score below expectations in the FSA”. More specifically, vulnerability in the cognitive/language area showed the strongest relationship with all three areas of the FSA scores, reading, writing and numeracy.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education English Language Arts Curriculum for Kindergarten to Grade 7 (2006) is organized into three language arts organizers with six sub-
organizers: Oral Language (speaking and listening), Reading (reading and viewing), and Writing (writing and representing). The Ministry of Education (2006) recognizes that these organizers are rarely taught in isolation and are generally woven together in a balanced manner to achieve the desired language arts outcomes. “All the language arts (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, and representing) are interrelated and interdependent: facility in one strengthens and supports the others” (BC Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 15). Although writing achievement was being measured in this study, the organizers of Reading (reading and viewing) and Oral Language (writing and representing) were essential to the instructional method.

The English Language Arts document recognizes the three domains of Bloom’s taxonomy required for learning: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective; however the cognitive domain is emphasized. The cognitive domain deals with the critical thinking strategies such as predicting, connecting, inferring, summarizing, questioning, justifying, and visualizing. In the English Language Arts Curriculum for Kindergarten to Grade 7, the development of the cognitive domain is embedded throughout with the language of critical thinking strategies (predicting, connecting, inferring, summarizing, questioning, justifying and visualizing) reflected in learning outcomes (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006). The critical thinking strategies are incorporated within the learning outcomes of the English Language Arts curriculum, rather than taught as a separate entity. These critical thinking strategies provided a framework for the collaborative talk that was embedded in the pedagogy that was implemented in the current study.

Collaborative talk is essential to this study for all learners but especially for those learners who are vulnerable in the cognitive and language area. It was assumed that talk was an important bridge that constructed meaning between viewing art and the writing process. “The relationship
of talk to writing is central to the writing process” (Britton, 1975) and therefore worth investigating.

The talk that took place in this instructional method allowed children of all ability levels to scaffold their learning on the ideas of their peers. Talk allowed children to not only express their own thoughts, but also to listen to other children’s thinking thus broadening their own understanding and learning of new language. “Purposeful talk about a wide range of texts helps students extend their knowledge of themselves and the world, make new connections, and acquire insights that will deepen their reading comprehension and enrich their written work” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 29).

The British Columbia Ministry of Education English Language Arts curriculum document recognizes an expanded meaning of the word “text” to include visual forms. In this study, the text viewed was visual art. Visual art embodies meaning, which naturally draws the viewer into the process of making meaning or critical thinking (Efland, 2003). “Arts education activities and experiences foster development of students’ critical thinking skills including skills for describing, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating creative works (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2010).

In addition, viewing art to make meaning allows for the inclusion of all learners. Many children enter grade four with deficiencies in reading, however, they do not have deficiencies in thinking. Observing art gives all children the opportunity to think critically and demonstrate their understanding without the barrier of struggling to decode reading materials beyond their capability (Housen, 2002; Sarmiento Sierra, 2010). Children who are reading well below grade level in Grade Four can interpret works of art and elicit high level meaning. Without critical
thinking abilities, art is meaningless. Each viewer brings a different set of experiences from which they make meaning of the image they are viewing.

The pedagogy implemented in this study was designed to improve writing ability by viewing art, with critical thinking strategies and oral discussion acting as a pathway. Researchers have found that introducing a program of viewing and discussing art critically has led to children between grades two and six to view art independently in the same manner (Housen, 2002; Tishman et al., 2009). Not only did the children learn to use these strategies independently, they also transferred these strategies to other subjects using non-art objects (Housen, 2002; Tishman et al., 1999).

The focus of this research study was to examine whether or not viewing art, using a framework of critical thinking strategies and collaborative talk, would help children improve their communication skills in the area of personal/narrative writing, specifically in the aspects of meaning and style. During this eight week study, the participants viewed one or two pieces of artwork each week and were guided through a collaborative discussion using critical thinking strategies. After each discussion, the participants wrote a personal narrative in response to the art. Each written response was assessed according to the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 in the aspects of meaning and style.

Research Question

Given the research which supports the use of critically viewing and discussing art with peers, the following research question was explored: How can the use of viewing of visual art as a means to promote critical thinking strategies and collaborative talk as prewriting activities, improve grade four students’ narrative writing in the aspects of Meaning and Style, as measured by the British Columbia Performance Standards for Writing in Grade 4?
Hypothesis

As a result of using structured, purposeful talk and critical thinking strategies as a prewriting activity, grade four students expanded their oral language vocabulary and improved their narrative writing abilities in the areas of Meaning and Style, as measured by the British Columbia Performance Standards for Writing in Grade 4.

Definition of Terms

*Personal/ Narrative Writing* tells a personal or fictional experience or tells a story based on real or imagined events. Personal Narratives are written in first person and are also referred to as personal writing. The English Language Art K-7 document states that narrative writing should be “clear, focused personal writing for a range of purposes and audiences that demonstrates connections to personal experiences, ideas, and opinions” (BC Ministry of Education, 2006). Students were asked to create personal narratives with prompts such as “What do you think this picture is about? Give reasons why you think this way”. Students’ personal narratives were assessed using the Performance Standards. The *Performance Standards* in Personal Writing for Grade Four is the assessment tool produced and recommended by the B. C. Ministry of Education to measure students’ progress with respect to the prescribed learning outcomes for writing. The BC Performance Standards in Writing is divided into the four aspects of Meaning, Style, Form and Conventions. For the purposes of this study, improvement in the Performance Standards was interpreted as an improvement in writing. The focus will be on Meaning and Style for this research. *Meaning* is described as ideas that are easy to follow with supporting and engaging details, reasons, and explanations, as well as a point of view or an opinion. *Style* is defined as clear, direct language, experimenting with new words and using variety of language (Ministry of Education, 2009).
As a pre-writing activity, the students viewed and collaboratively talked about a piece of visual art. A pre-writing activity was an activity that was directly related to the writing activity, done before the writing activity and used to prepare children for writing. For the purpose of this study, the term visual arts referred to painting, drawing, photography and sculpture.

Collaborative Talk in the classroom involved students working together, using a structured, purposeful framework for talk as a method of constructing meaning. This framework for collaborative talk included critical thinking strategies which were based on the cognitive domain of Bloom’s Taxonomy. The specific critical thinking strategies that were focused upon were connecting, questioning, inferring, justifying, analyzing, predicting, and creating. Critical thinking strategies are a requirement of all Learning Outcomes as set forth by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2006, p. 45).

Assumptions

The participants in this study were assumed to have a variety of language backgrounds and experiences. The class as a whole consisted of students who were not yet meeting, minimally meeting, fully meeting and exceeding expectations as set forth by the British Columbia Ministry of Education for their particular grade level in Writing. Children with designated learning disabilities were expected to take part with the help of a scribe if required.

Brief Overview of Study

The goal of this study was to examine a pedagogy that could potentially improve all students’ writing in the aspects of Meaning and Style, whether the students were academically vulnerable or not. The pre-test consisted of two samples of writing by each participant. To complete one sample of the pre-test, the children viewed and wrote about a work of visual art with guided, collaborative discussion. The second sample of writing was based on a recent
personal experience rather than a piece of art work. These pieces of writing were assessed according to the Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2009) in the aspects of Meaning and Style. Both writing samples were used as baseline data. Writing samples based on personal experiences, but without viewing visual art, were repeated at week four and week eight for comparison purposes.

Each week for eight weeks, all students in the researcher’s Grade 4 class, participants and non-participants, were introduced to a new sample of visual art. Through collaborative talk, structured by the teacher, the children were asked to use the critical thinking strategies to orally puzzle over and make meaning of a sample of visual art. These activities provided opportunities for students to clarify their perspectives through talk and scaffold their ideas on the perspectives of their classmates.

The children were then guided through writing lessons which focused on writing their ideas, using pertinent language and adding details to “paint a picture” with their words. These pieces of writing were tracked over the period of the study to measure achievement, as they related to the expectations of the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (2009).
Chapter Two – Literature Review

Introduction

Children begin language learning in their homes, amongst family and friends. The language experience differs from home to home, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, cultural background to cultural background. A child’s vocabulary serves a purpose within the contexts of the home and familiar surroundings. Young children use words to ensure their needs are met, to express their desires and to learn about the things in which they are naturally drawn. Upon entering the school system, children must adapt their language to a new context. With each new setting, a need arises to adapt familiar language and learn new language (Healy, 2006).

Provincially, in British Columbia, studies based on the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results have shown that children who enter Kindergarten with vulnerabilities in the area of language and cognitive development continue to have vulnerabilities academically in the curriculum areas of reading, writing and numeracy (Lloyd & Hertzman, 2009). The EDI results in Kindergarten are highly predictive of academic achievement in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy at least four years in advance (D’Angiulli, Warburton, Dahinten, & Hertzman, 2009). Vulnerability in any one area of the five EDI scales is highly indicative of future academic success, but the language and cognitive scale showed the strongest associations to basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy (D’Angiulli et al., 2009). These local findings are consistent with research in the area of language and cognitive development (Flood & Anders, 2005). Overall, educators and researchers are in agreement that language development in the early years is a good predictor of academic success throughout the school years.
This chapter describes the theoretical foundations for the current study and reviews research and literature in the areas of art, critical thinking, collaborative talk and writing. Its undertaking is organized into the following sections: theoretical foundations, art and critical thinking, and collaborative talk and narrative writing.

**Theoretical Foundations**

This current study considers two theoretical frameworks as its foundation: constructivist theory and sociocultural theory. The constructivist theory is based on the idea that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their own experiences. The work of Jean Piaget (1970) contributed greatly to the constructivist theory in that he emphasized the learner’s construction of knowledge through active, exploratory transactions with their environment. According to Piaget, learners cannot be programmed with instantaneous knowledge (1970). They must actively construct new knowledge based on their experiences and developmental level. A constructivist setting allows children to build on their personal knowledge through interactions with each new experience. Constructivist theory provided a framework for the instructional method being implemented in this study which was designed to allow for learners of all levels to make meaning from the shared experience of viewing artwork.

Sociocultural theory is similar to constructivist theory in that the learner is building on previous experiences and knowledge. However, the sociocultural theory argues that intellectual development does not happen in a vacuum rather, it is achieved through dialogue that takes place between humans. In an educational setting, interactions between students and teachers are viewed as cultural processes. Knowledge is possessed individually and shared amongst members of the classroom community (Palinscar, 1998; Prawat & Floden, 1994). A culture of shared meaning is created.
The origins of sociocultural theory are attributed to the works of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky recognized the value of culture and social interactions. He suggested that language and communication enhanced the development of intellect. In Vygotsky’s theory, words are of particular importance, for it is through words that thoughts are formed (DeSantis & Housen, 2009). A child observes social interactions of adults or more experienced peers and listens to the words associated with particular interactions. Gradually, with practice and reflection, these words and interactions become familiar to the child and part of the child’s language repertoire for their own interactions (DeSantis & Housen, 2009). Vygotsky’s views on expressing thinking through language and communication were fundamental to this current study, especially in light of the fact that deficiencies in language and cognitive development impact a child’s ability to access the curriculum. To achieve clear and precise oral and written language, we must find ways to provide rich language and cognitive opportunities to construct meaning.

A third theory taken into consideration for this research was that of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin agreed with Vygotsky’s theory in regards to the role of social interaction in language and cognitive development. Bakhtin (1981) emphasized dialogue as an essential component in discourse and learning. He believed that learners need to consider alternative perspectives. In other words, in order for language and cognitive development to occur, the classroom setting needs to provide opportunities to exchange a variety of perspectives through dialogue. The term dialogic discourse is defined as the act of negotiating, constructing, and expressing meaning (Wertsch, 1991). Dialogic discourse played an influential role in the collaborative talk that took place in this instructional method.

D’Anguilli et al.’s (2009) results revealed that children with language and cognitive vulnerabilities will continue to suffer in reading, writing and numeracy during their academic
According to the constructive and sociocultural theory, children require social interactions in order to develop their thinking and put language to their ideas. The instructional method in this study attempted to address the needs of all children, including those children with language and cognitive vulnerabilities, by using collaborative talking activities structured around a framework of viewing art using critical thinking strategies. Ultimately the goal was to develop a deep understanding and broaden language abilities to improve oral and written communications.

**Visual Art and Critical Thinking**

In 2006, the British Columbia English Language Arts Curriculum for K-7 expanded its definition of text to include oral, visual, as well as written forms of text. Flood and Lapp (1997/1998) believe educators must recognize the need to expand thinking beyond traditional reading and writing and acknowledge the arts. According to Efland (2002) there is a belief amongst many educators that the arts make less of a demand on the intellect and are often set aside in favour of the more serious academic tasks like reading and writing. Efland’s concern is that “neglecting the arts will narrow cognitive potential” (2002).

Art theorist, Elliot Eisner, has spent his career speaking and writing about the importance of art education and the contribution it makes to the arts and life beyond the arts. Eisner argues that viewing art appeals not only to our aesthetic sensibilities but also stimulates us cognitively. The arts offer cognitive tasks that scientific tasks cannot. Not only do children recognize visual art, they perceive it. Art helps children notice the world around them and teaches them to tolerate ambiguity. It helps children explore the uncertain and allows them to exercise judgement free from rules and regulations. The visual arts celebrate multiple perspectives and teach children that problems can have more than one solution. Similar to Vygostsky’s theory, Eisner recognizes that
children make meaning of art based upon their knowledge, experience and culture. Children analyze visual art and make connections, inferences, and judgements. Through dialogic discourse, children must learn to consider others’ interpretations based on their knowledge, experience and culture. They must dig into their own knowledge and language base and hear others’ perspectives for their understanding to grow (Eisner, 2002). “Given the complexities of these demands it is ironic that the arts should be seen as non-cognitive” (Eisner, 2002, p. 15).

Art embodies meaning and naturally invites the process of critical thinking (e.g., questioning, interpreting, inferring, analyzing). In her research on visual art and thinking, Housen (2002) tested not only aesthetic growth but also looked for signs of critical thinking. Housen (1993) implemented a longitudinal study using a program called Visual Thinking Strategies (Housen & Yenawine, 2000). The causal-correlational study was implemented in a museum setting with elementary school children between grades two to six. The foundation of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is to guide children through increasingly deeper levels of understanding of pieces of artwork by asking the following open-ended questions: “What is going on in this picture?”, “What do you see that makes you say that?” and “What more can you find?” With time and the opportunity to discuss these questions collaboratively with peers, the children were able to employ critical thinking skills and build on the knowledge of their peers; leading to a deeper understanding of the art they had viewed. Housen likened the process to “a ‘critical thinking studio’ in which children observe carefully, evaluate, synthesize, justify and speculate – habits of mind which have a long history in education and which we find central to aesthetic growth and critical thinking” (2002, p.101). Ultimately, Housen found that implementing VTS, did in fact, cause the growth of critical thinking and helped children
construct meaning and develop a deeper understanding. Her project was replicated by Harvard’s Project Zero (Tishman et al., 1999) and Housen’s results were confirmed.

Housen’s study was important to the current study as the researcher is interested in finding a method through which to help children construct a deeper understanding through the use of visual art in order to increase mastery of language as measured through their writing. Coupled with recent research regarding the value of talk and its connection to thinking, Housen’s research on art viewing supports the methodology in my study as a viable approach. The three questions used in Housen’s study were used in this current study as a starting point to guide the children’s discussion.

When framed with the right of instructional method and good teaching, visual art in the classroom can serve as a wealth of inspiration which will meet the needs of all children, including those children deemed academically vulnerable. Art is accessible to all children. Children of all cognitive levels have the ability to view and make meaning of artwork. Children who have difficulty decoding written text can construct understanding well beyond their reading ability. Art has the potential to engage children’s attention, especially as interpretations change. Art doesn’t have a right answer or an end point. Its ambiguity invites endless speculation and the possibilities continue to unfold (Housen, 2002).

In a study similar to Housen’s, Marisol Sarmiento Sierra created the program, A Guided Reading of Images (2001) in response to modern curricula that include the teaching of critical thinking skills. Sierra’s qualitative, ethnographic study implemented the program, Guided Reading of Images, with the goal of teaching Columbian children in grade three to view images critically to develop a deep understanding which, in turn, was intended to help them learn to
speak and write the English language. Although the images chosen for the study were strictly photographs based on subjects familiar to children, Sierra did guide the children through an instructional method of open-ended questions which helped children critically observe and talk collaboratively about the meaning of the images.

Sierra found that the images encouraged communication. The children’s oral language did show improvements in both English and Columbian, however, in her analysis, Sierra, found that the students also felt a need to write about their ideas to help them organize and think critically about the meaning of the images. The images became a tool that facilitated the process of oral and written communication (Sierra, 2001).

Sierra’s study was relevant to this current research study, in regards to the oral and written language barrier. Sierra was interested in using collaborative talk and critical thinking strategies to construct a deeper understanding with the goal of improving speaking and writing English as a second language. Although this current study was conducted in an English speaking setting, many of the vulnerable children were English Second Language and English Second Dialect students. Sierra’s success in helping her students overcome the language barrier (oral and written) with the use of images and collaborative talk was supportive of the goals of this study.

Art naturally engages viewers of all ages cognitively. Children use their eyes to make sense of the world from their earliest days. This current study attempted to take advantage of this naturally developed instinct to make meaning and use it to help students harness and foster their thinking and communications skills. Art provides an accessible entry point into collaborative discussion regardless of culture, race, language or reading ability.
Collaborative Talk and Writing

The Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (2009) divides the rubric into the four aspects of meaning, style, form and conventions. The purpose of this study was to improve the aspects of meaning and style in writing using art, collaborative talk, and critical thinking strategies. The descriptors in the aspect of meaning require the children to present ideas, points of view or opinions, offer some analysis and reaction, and elaborate with reasons and explanations. The descriptors in the aspect of style require the children to use clear, precise language to communicate their ideas. This researcher proposed that structured collaborative talk would help children work towards meeting these descriptors, first orally, and then in writing.

Collaborative talk in the classroom involves students working together, using a structured, purposeful framework for talk as a method of constructing meaning. Although the value of collaborative talk in the classroom is widely recognized as beneficial to students amongst educators, it is rarely used (Alexander, 2005). Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, and Prendergast (1997) found, in a study of over 100 middle and high school students, that only 15% of instruction was devoted to dialogic discourse. Furthermore, Nystrand et al. (1997) found that when children with lesser abilities were added into the equation, dialogic discourse was non-existent. The range of abilities in a classroom must be taken into consideration when developing a program of instruction that hopes to transcend such gaps.

Many reasons exist as to why talk is not incorporated in the classroom environment. Lyle (2008) suggested that noise level is perceived as a lack of discipline and a noisy classroom is believed to be an out-of-control classroom. A concern amongst many teachers is that collaborative talk is often off-task, uncooperative, and of questionable educational value (Bennett & Cass, 1989; Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Some researchers reported that students need
to be taught how to talk collaboratively otherwise the quality of time spent talking is of little educational value (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999). Galton and Williamson (1992) suggested that the educational value of collaborative talk is dependent on how well the teacher has structured the talking activities. In other words, collaborative talk requires informed planning on the teacher’s behalf to ensure that the talk is of educational value.

Housen and Yenawine (1999) offered a questioning method in Visual Thinking Strategies which leads children through a dialogic discourse to help the children negotiate, construct, and express meaning. Their particular questioning method is taught and practiced with the goal that it be used in a whole class discussion or independently by children in smaller collaborative groups. Research has indicated that training in structured collaborative talk promotes efficient collaborative group work (Aitkinson & Green, 1990; Mercer et al., 1999).

In 2003, Mona Gelat conducted an experimental design study with children, age 10, in which collaborative student groups were compared with control groups. All participants were given the same argumentative writing task in which the students were asked to write an argumentative paper with supporting reasons and explanations. The experimental group used collaborative talk while the control group was taught in a traditional style with the teacher providing instruction and the students receiving the information and then writing. As a result, the experimental group performed significantly better on the task than the control group. Collaborative talk in small groups appeared to have enabled the experimental group to meet the expectations at a higher level than the control group.

The current study measured narrative writing based on the above mentioned descriptors for meaning and style and Gelat’s experimental study required the children to meet similar descriptors but for the purposes of argumentative writing. This suggests to the researcher that
using the collaborative talk, situated in the framework of dialogic discourse, will help improve grade four student narrative writing.

Gelat’s research supported the method by which this researcher conducted the structured collaborative talk in the current study. The collaborative talking activities (see Appendix C) were taught to all students with the intention of students being familiar with both the routines and the writing expectations.

**Chapter Summary**

As is evident from the literature review, a growing amount of research exists on the benefits of using art and collaborative talk to construct meaning, as a pre-writing activity. Viewing art is not only an aesthetic task; it is also a cognitive task. Researchers have found that providing students with a structured collaborative framework to engage in dialogic discourse promotes critical thinking skills such as evaluating, inferring, justifying and speculating. Using art as text allows for all students to discuss and construct meaning, regardless of reading level. Ultimately, critically viewing art and discussing it collaboratively is a pre-writing activity. The intention of this pre-writing activity is to broaden the language and deepen understanding which can then be communicated in writing. Research has demonstrated that collaborative talk, situated within the framework of dialogic discourse, improves the quality of writing related to the discourse.
Chapter Three: Procedures and Methods

Description of Research Design

The focus of this research study was to examine whether or not viewing art using critical thinking strategies and collaborative talk would help children improve their communication skills in the area of personal/narrative writing specifically in the aspects of Meaning and Style. During this eight week study, the participants viewed one piece of art work each week and were guided through a class discussion using critical thinking strategies. After each discussion, the participants wrote a personal narrative in response to the art. Each written response was assessed according to the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 in the aspects of Meaning and Style. Assessments from Week 1 were recorded as baseline data and assessments from Weeks 4 and 8 were recorded to measure growth in writing. In Weeks 1, 4 and 8, participants also wrote a writing sample based on a personal experience rather than a selected artwork. No collaborative talking activities took place with the non-art writing. These writing samples served as a comparison measure in the study.

Description of Sample

The research project took part in a Grade 4/5 classroom consisting of fourteen grade four students and twelve grade five students. Nine of the fourteen grade four students were participants in this project. The remaining students are referred to as non-participants. This study took place in a rural community school in the North Cowichan area, located on southern Vancouver Island. This rural community school consisted of 238 students from a variety of cultural backgrounds with 18% of the population being First Nations. The participants in the sample consisted of both males and females, between the ages of eight and nine who were
enrolled in a Grade 4/5 class in the 2012-2013 school year. This convenience sample was chosen for this action research, as the author/researcher in this study was also their classroom teacher. Consent forms were sent home to the parents of all fourteen Grade 4 students in this class to be signed and returned to the school office. To improve validity, the sampling was conducted in such way that the consent forms were not seen by the researcher. The participants’ writing ability spanned a range of abilities including not yet meeting expectations, minimally meeting expectations, fully meeting expectations, and exceeding expectations.

**Description of Instruments**

The specific instrument used to measure improvement in communication skills in this study was the Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (see Appendix A). The Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4 is a rubric which summarizes the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). The Quick Scale divides writing tasks into the four aspects: **Meaning**, **Style**, **Form**, and **Conventions**. Each of the four aspects is divided into four levels of achievement (not yet meeting expectations, minimally meeting expectations, fully meeting expectations, and exceeding expectations). Each level of performance lists specific achievement indicators. The aspects of **Meaning** and **Style** were the focus for instruction and assessment in this study.

To ensure consistency between instructional method and measurement tool, the research project was designed in accordance with the Grade 4 Prescribed Learning Outcomes as set forth in the British Columbia English Language Arts K-7 curriculum document (2006). The Performance Standards in Personal Writing for Grade 4 is the assessment tool produced and recommended by the B. C. Ministry of Education to measure students’ progress with respect to
the prescribed learning outcomes for writing. The instrument used in this study, the Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4 is designed for ease of assessment by classroom teachers. According to the B. C. Ministry of Education, the Performance Standards have been developed for voluntary use in B. C. schools. “They describe the professional judgements of a significant number of B. C. educators and expectations… in writing” (B. C. Ministry of Education, n.d.).

In addition, the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 includes exemplars of children’s writing at each of the achievement levels, not yet meeting expectations, minimally meeting expectations, fully meeting expectations and exceeding expectations. These exemplars were referred to for clarification during assessment to ensure that reliable and accurate assessments were being made.

**Explanation of Procedures Followed**

The following explanation of procedures describes how the author investigated the effect viewing art using visual thinking strategies had upon improving narrative writing in the aspects of *Meaning* and *Style* in Grade 4, as they relate to the B. C. Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4. The author of this study took on the role of both researcher and teacher in this action research project. To help clarify each role, the tasks were divided and are presented below under the respective sub-headings.

**The role of the researcher.**

In October 2012, the author arranged an after school meeting with the school principal to ask permission to proceed with the study and explain the study procedures. In the second week of October 2012, the researcher handed out consent forms (see [Appendix B](#)) in sealed envelopes to the potential participants. Potential participants were instructed to take home the consent
forms and pass them on to their parent/guardians to read. Participants returned the signed consent forms by Monday of the following week. All consent forms were returned and placed in a sealed box in the school office. These consent forms were stored in a locked cupboard in the office by the principal of the school. All consent forms would be deposited in a box at the school office and stored in a locked cupboard until the eight week term of the study was complete. This measure was taken to reduce threats to validity and to ensure that participants were able to freely consent to participate. As all students in the class would be receiving the same instructional method, participants remained anonymous to increase the likelihood that the researcher would remain unbiased towards the participants. At the end of the eight week term of the study all writing assessment data was given to a third party who collected the consent forms and compiled a list of participants. Data was removed for students who did not consent to taking part in the study. The remaining names of the students who did consent to be participants were removed and replaced with numerical codes. Reflective surveys were photocopied and the names were replaced with corresponding numerical codes. Despite best efforts to protect anonymity, there was a possibility, based on writing styles that the researcher might know who the participants were. The names of the participants were never revealed to the researcher/teacher and data was destroyed in June 2013.

The role of the teacher.

To develop baseline data for this research, two writing samples were obtained from all students (participants and non-participants). The first writing sample was completed after all students had the opportunity to view a piece of artwork. Upon viewing the art, the children were led through structured talk activities (see Appendix C) about the artwork with a partner. They were then instructed to describe in writing what they believed the artwork to be about.
The second piece of writing was completed in response to a recent event. Collaborative talk and artwork were not used in the second piece of writing. After all written work was completed the teacher collected each writing sample and stapled a copy of the Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4 to the front of each piece of writing. The teacher assessed all writing samples. These first two writing samples provided baseline data for the research in the aspects of *Meaning* and *Style*.

The following Monday, during writing block, the children were introduced to the Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4. They received instruction in the aspect of *Meaning*. The achievement indicators for the aspect of meaning were enlarged and posted clearly in the classroom to serve as a reference (see Figure 3.1).
The participants and non-participants then participated in guided collaborative talk using a discussion question based on a critical thinking strategy (see Appendix C) while viewing a previously unseen piece of artwork. This lesson was designed for the purpose of teaching the aspect of *Meaning*. The results of this writing sample, written in response to the meaning of the art viewed, constituted the sample for Week Two of the study.

At this time, the teacher informed the children that everyone could have a different understanding of the artwork’s meaning and that it was important to be able to justify their
understanding. It was also made clear that spelling would not be assessed in this writing sample. The teacher then had the children write about what they believed the meaning of the artwork to be and along with their justification. Each writing sample was collected and assessed in the same manner as the previous week.

The following Monday, the students received instruction in the aspect of Style on the Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade Four. The achievement indicators for the aspect of Style were enlarged and posted clearly in the classroom for the teacher and participants to reference (See Figure 3.1). The participants and non-participants were again guided through collaborative talk while viewing a previously unseen piece of artwork. The teacher structured the discussion on a question based on a critical thinking strategy (see Appendix C). Again, the teacher reminded the children that everyone could have a different understanding of the artwork’s meaning but it was important to be able to justify their understanding with details. In this lesson, the teacher also emphasized style as the use of powerful language to ‘paint a picture’ in the reader’s mind.

New artwork was introduced each Monday along with a collaborative talk activity based on a critical thinking strategy. Following these activities, time was provided to the children to write a response based on the artwork and the collaborative talk. Extra writing time was allotted if required.

The artwork viewed and discussed in this research study was preselected by the teacher. Some samples of the art chosen have been included below.
Figure 3.2. McCormack, Bernadette. Baby Blossom. 2009


Figure 3.3. Kurelek, William. Balsam Avenue after a Heavy Snowfall. 1972.

Reproduced with the permission from the Estate of William Kurelek
Other artwork selected for this study included:

“Just Deserts” by Chris Val Allsburg

“Paths of Choice” by Johnny Lee

“Davis Lagoon Bridge” by E. J. Hughes

“Maibaum” by Kristi Malakoff

“A Portrait” by Lindsay Joy Hamilton

In Week Four and Week Eight of the study, the students provided an additional sample of writing in addition to their writing after viewing art and participating in collaborative talk. The second piece of writing was completed in response to a recent event. Artwork was not used as a prompt in this writing sample. The children did not participate in a collaborative talk activity. The teacher created an assessment record of eight pieces of writing for each student over the term and well as the three non-art related writing samples (Week 1, Week 4 and Week 8).

In Week Eight, all students completed a survey in which they reflected on their writing by answering the following questions:

1. Did viewing art and talking activities help you come up with more Meaning (ideas and details) in your writing? Please explain why or why not.

2. Did viewing art and talking activities help you come up with more Style (words and phrases) in your writing? Please explain why or why not.

3. What goals can you set for yourself to improve your writing in the area of Meaning?

4. What goals can you set for yourself to improve your writing in the area of Style?
This survey allowed all children to summarize their learning and set goals for further improvement in the aspects of *Meaning* and *Style*.

**In the role of researcher.**

Upon completion of the study, results were compiled from all student assessments of the eight art/writing samples and three non-art/writing samples into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was given to a third party along with the reflective writing activity. Once the third party received the spreadsheet from the research, data was removed for students who didn’t consent to take part in the study. The remaining names of the students who did consent to be participants were removed and replaced with numerical codes. Reflective surveys were photocopied and the names were replaced with corresponding numerical codes.

**Discussion of Validity**

As the teacher was also the researcher, data collector bias was a potential threat to this study. To reduce the threat of data collector bias, all consent forms were returned to the school office and secured, by the school principal, in a locked office cupboard. Despite best efforts to protect anonymity, there was a possibility based on writing styles, that the researcher might know the identity of the participants. The names of the participants were never revealed to the researcher/teacher and data was destroyed in June 2013.

As this action research took place in a busy Grade Four/Five classroom, it is impossible to isolate this intervention from the other subject areas and skills being taught and assessed. Other factors may interfere with this study design. During the eight week term of this study, students were busy researching wolves in the library, taking part in talking activities in other subject areas and practicing the higher level thinking strategies of predicting and summarizing.
Maturation in students is another factor that cannot be disregarded. Students will learn on their own, over time. This factor was mitigated by having the study take place in a relatively short period of time, but long enough to take multiple samples of writing.

The students themselves may have had issues that impacted their writing abilities. For example, it is impossible to know what a child has experienced in the days or hours previous to arriving at school. Some students may have been impacted by their mood, hunger or illness which may have been reflected in the writing samples. To mitigate these factors several writing samples were completed which allowed the research to draw from many assessments.

The artwork viewed and discussed was preselected by the teacher. Although the teacher attempted to select art that would engage children and inspire conversation and higher level thinking, there were no guarantees of participant engagement or inspiration. Some pieces of art would naturally generate more ideas, details and language simply because of the students’ personal taste or connections they may have been able to make to the subject of the art. Although discussion with classmates would help to construct ideas, details and language, engagement in the artwork was an essential part of this pedagogy. The children had multiple opportunities to view, discuss and write about multiple pieces of art to help increase validity.

As a control measure, the students completed writing samples in Weeks 1, 4 and 8 in which the subject was based on personal experiences rather than pieces of artwork. This allowed for the researcher to compare Week 1 writing to Week 8 writing samples, as well as writing samples based on art and collaborative discussion to writing samples based on a personal experience.
Two valid tools were used in the design of this current study to minimize threats to validity. First the guiding questions used in this research study were based on a proven methodology from the longitudinal study titled “Visual Thinking Strategies” (Housen, 2002). Second, the assessment of writing samples was based on the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (2006). These writing standards were developed by teachers and are widely accepted as a valid tool to measure writing.

**Description and Justification of Data Analysis Techniques**

The data from each participant was collected for each piece of writing and assessed on the aspects of **Meaning** and **Style**. Each achievement level was assigned a value as follows: not yet meeting (NY) = 1, minimally meeting (MM) = 2, fully meeting (FM) = 3, and exceeding (EE) = 4.

The raw data from each student was examined for each aspect – **Meaning** and **Style** and in specific criterions of each aspect and results from Writing with Art was compared to Writing without Art for Weeks 1, 4, and 8 in a series of bar graphs. These graphs represented the raw scores assigned for each participant, with pre-test (Week 1), mid-test (Week 4) and post-test (Week 8) scores according to the achievement levels. The raw scores include only whole numbers. No half marks were given.

The achievement levels for each aspect in both Writing with Art and Writing without Art were averaged for all participants in both Week One and Week Eight. The difference between these averaged achievement levels represented improvement in each writing aspect. These averages along with the score reflecting improvement were represented in tables.
For the purposes of this study improvement by one achievement level is deemed to be a significant improvement. For evaluating the methodology, the researcher has deemed 5/9 participants improving in a writing aspect an indication that the methodology was successful. This number was chosen because it indicates the majority of students.
Chapter Four: Results and Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine a pedagogy that met the needs of all students in a classroom, whether academically vulnerable or not, and led to improved abilities specifically in the curriculum area of Writing. An instructional method was designed to facilitate the development of Meaning and Style in grade four writing. The children were guided through a pre-writing process which taught them to use critical thinking strategies when viewing art and to extend and clarify their thinking through purposeful, structured collaborative talk. The goal of this study was to examine pedagogy that could improve all students’ writing in the aspects of Meaning and Style.

The research project took part in a Grade 4/5 classroom consisting of fourteen grade four students and twelve grade five students. Nine of the fourteen grade four students were participants in this project. The remaining students are referred to as non-participants.

The pre-test consisted of two samples of writing by each participant. To complete one sample of the pre-test, the children viewed and wrote about a sample of visual art with informal partner discussion and no instruction in the aspects of Meaning and Style. The second sample of writing was based on a recent experience rather than a piece of art work. The second writing activity did not include partner discussion. These pieces of writing were assessed according to the Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2009) in the aspects of Meaning and Style. Both writing samples were used as baseline data. This process was repeated at Week Four and Week Eight of the study.

Each week for eight weeks, all students, participants and non-participants, were introduced to a new sample of visual art. Through collaborative talk, structured by the teacher, the children’s task was to use the critical thinking strategies to orally puzzle over and make
meaning of a sample of visual art. These activities provided opportunities for students to clarify their perspectives through talk and scaffold their ideas on the perspectives of their classmates.

The children were then guided through writing lessons which focused on writing their ideas, using pertinent language and adding details to “paint a picture” with their words. These pieces of writing were tracked over the period of the study to measure improvements, as they related to the expectations of the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (2009).

The specific instrument used to measure improvement in communication skills in this study was the Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (see Appendix A). The Quick Scale for Personal Writing in Grade 4 is a rubric which summarizes the British Columbia Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). The Quick Scale divides writing tasks into the four aspects: Meaning, Style, Form, and Conventions. The aspects of Meaning and Style were the focus for instruction and assessment in this study. Meaning is described as ideas that are easy to follow with supporting and engaging details, reasons, and explanations, as well as a point of view or an opinion. Style is defined as clear, direct language, experimenting with new words and using variety of language (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The aspects of Meaning and Style are divided into two criteria each and four achievement levels (not yet meeting expectations, minimally meeting expectations, fully meeting expectations and exceeding expectations). Each achievement level was assigned a value as follows: not yet meeting (NY) = 1, minimally meeting (MM) = 2, fully meeting (FM) = 3, and exceeding (EE) = 4. The raw data, for Weeks 1, 4 and 8, from each participant is represented in four separate figures (one for each criterion) titled Meaning – Ideas, Meaning – Use of Detail, Style –
Language and Style – Sentence Variety. These figures represent the raw scores assigned, with pre-test scores compared to post-test scores according to the achievement levels. This information is presented in the form of bar graphs to visually represent change in the levels of achievement for each participant throughout the course of the study. Weeks 1, 4 and 8 were chosen to illustrate the overall trend of improvement. The data was also represented as class averages to determine the growth in writing in the group.

For the purposes of this study improvement by one achievement level is deemed to be a significant improvement. For evaluating the methodology, the researcher has deemed 5/9 participants improving in a writing aspect an indication that the methodology was successful. This number was chosen because it indicates the majority of students.

Figure 4.1. Writing with Art in the Aspect of Meaning – Ideas (n=9).

Figure 4.1 represents the growth in Writing with Art in the aspect of Meaning – Ideas over the eight week study. In Week 1, four students achieved a score of three which reflects that they are fully meeting the expectations for this aspect. Four students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at achievement Level 4 (exceeding expectations). Five out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level between
Week 1 and Week 8 in the aspect of Meaning - Ideas. Four participants showed no change in achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8. The data reflected that the methodology was successful in this area as 5/9 participants improved one achievement level in the area of Meaning - Ideas.

Figure 4.2. Writing without Art in the Aspect of Meaning - Ideas (n=9).

Figure 4.2 represents the growth in Writing without Art in the aspect of Meaning - Ideas over the eight week study. In Week 1, eight students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at an achievement level of three (fully meeting). Five out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level while three participants increased their writing ability two achievement levels. One participant demonstrated no change in achievement level.
Figure 4.3 represents the growth in writing with art in the aspect of Meaning – Use of Detail over the eight week study. In Week 1, four students were fully meeting expectations for this aspect and received a score of three. Three students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at an achievement level of one (not yet meeting expectations).

Six out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8 in this aspect. Three participants showed no change in achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8. One participant maintained an achievement level of four through the study and one student maintained achievement Level 3.
Figure 4.4. Writing without Art in the Aspect of Meaning – Use of Detail (n=9).

Figure 4.4 represents the growth in Writing without Art in the Aspect of Meaning – Use of Details over the eight week study. In Week 1, eight students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at achievement Level 3 (fully meeting expectations) Five out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level while two participants increased their writing ability two achievement levels. Two students showed no change in ability when comparing Week 1 to Week 8.

Figure 4.5. Writing with Art in the Aspect of Style – Language (n=9).
Figure 4.5 represents the growth in Writing with Art in the aspect of Style – Language over the eight week study. In Week 1, five students produced writing samples that fully met expectations and received a score of three. One participant received a score of four, exceeding expectations. Two students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at achievement Level 1 (not yet meeting expectations).

Four out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8 in this aspect. Five participants showed no change in achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8. One participant maintained an achievement level of four through the term of the study and four students maintained an achievement level of three.

![Bar chart](chart.png)

**Figure 4.6.** Writing without Art in the Aspect of Style – Language (n=9).

Figure 4.6 represents the growth in Writing without Art in the Aspect of Style – Language over the eight week study. In Week 1, eight students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at achievement Level 3 (fully meeting expectations). Six out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level while one
participant increased their writing ability two achievement levels. One student showed no change in ability when comparing Week 1 to Week 8.

*Figure 4.7. Writing with Art in the Aspect of Style – Sentence Variety (n=9).*

Figure 4.7 represents the growth in Writing with Art in the aspect of Style – Sentence Variety over the eight week study. In Week 1, one participant was at a Level 4 (exceeding expectations), four students were at achievement Level 3 (fully meeting), three students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at achievement Level 1 (not yet meeting expectations). Three out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8 in the aspect of Ideas. Six participants showed no change in achievement level between Week 1 and Week 8. One participant maintained an achievement level of four through the study and three students maintained an achievement level of three. One student stayed at an achievement level of two on the test writes.
Figure 4.8. Writing without Art in the Aspect of Style – Sentence Variety (n=9).

Figure 4.8 represents the growth in Writing without Art in the Aspect of Style – Sentence Variety over the eight week study. In Week 1, one student was at an achievement level of three, seven students were at achievement Level 2 (minimally meeting expectations) and one student was at achievement Level 1 (not yet meeting expectations). Seven out of nine participants improved at least one achievement level. One participant showed no change in ability when comparing Week 1 to Week 8.

When comparing Week 1 to Week 8 in Writing with Art the data reflected that the methodology was most successful in the area of Meaning – Ideas where 5/9 participants improved one achievement level. Although Meaning – Use of Detail did not quite meet the designated indicator considered to be a significant improvement, 4/9 students showed growth in this aspect. Data in the aspect of Style reflected that 3/9 students demonstrated growth in the areas of Language and Sentence Variety.

The Writing without Art assessment samples in Week 1 generally scored a lower achievement level when compared to Writing with Art assessment samples from the same week. In Week 8, Writing without Art assessments had scores similar to those in Writing with Art. In
both art writing samples and non-art writing samples, *Meaning* demonstrated the greatest increase in achievement levels.

The following tables reflect growth in achievement levels based on a class average. Participant achievement levels in Week 1 and Week Eight were averaged and the difference between those averages reflected the growth in writing.

Table 4.1.

*Writing with Art and Collaborative Talk – Growth in Achievement Week 1 to Week 8*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Aspect</th>
<th>Week 1 Average Achievement Level</th>
<th>Week 8 Average Achievement Level</th>
<th>Average Growth in Achievement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning – Ideas</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>+ 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning – Use of Details</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>+ 0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style – Language</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>+ 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style – Sentence Variety</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>+ 0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2.

*Writing without Art and Collaborative Talk – Growth in Achievement Week 1 to Week 8*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Aspect</th>
<th>Week 1 Average Achievement Level</th>
<th>Week 8 Average Achievement Level</th>
<th>Average Growth in Achievement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning – Ideas</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>+ 1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning – Use of Detail</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>+ 1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style – Language</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>+ 0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style – Sentence Variety</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>+ 0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables 4.1 and 4.2 reflect that the greatest improvement in achievement level was in Meaning – Ideas. The average achievement levels in Week 1 of Writing with Art fell between 2.56 and 2.66. The participants’ improvement in Ideas and Details was almost double the improvement in Language and Sentence Variety over the term of the study.

The average achievement level in Week 1 of Writing without Art fell between 2.0 and 2.11. Writing without Art yielded a lower average score in Week 1 than Writing with Art. As a result, there was more room for growth. The average achievement level in Week 8 in Writing without Art was significantly higher than the average achievement level in Writing with Art. The improvement in achievement levels was higher in Writing without Art, but participants started with lower averages in Week 1 when they wrote without art or collaborative talk.

To best illustrate growth in writing, comparison writing samples are presented below for Week 1 and Week 8 in both art writing and non-art writing. A brief explanation of each sample reflects the writing qualities of ideas, details, language and sentence variety (Figures 4.9 – 4.11).
Figure 4.9 – Week 1, Writing without Art sample reads: “On Halloween night I was a zombie soccer player and this Halloween I’m going to be a hobo. with my friend David neighbour Mason this is the plan first we go to Mike’s my next door neighbour he is nice and then we go to Masons and then Davids. David has a big house.” – Participant #6

In Week 1, Participant #6 received an achievement level 1 in all aspects of Meaning and Style. This sample of writing (Figure 4.9) is brief with few details supporting the main idea. The details are disjointed. There is little attention to sentence structure or variety and the language is simple.
Figure 4.10 - A Week 8 Writing without Art sample reads: “My special place was two years ago. I was in bed at my house fast asleep and then I heard STUMP STUMP STUMP and then screech. “LUKE!! come on,” “OK.” The tree had red orange blue green silver ornaments on it. There was presents surrounding the tree I looked to the side I saw a yellow quad. My dad said come with me I say okay we went down stairs my dad showed me a car. Dad you have a new car. No you do. A real car? no a electric car.

The car was same size as a real car. It was red it even had cup holders and doors. and gears and brakes. Even had headlights. GPS and tons of stuff. Its a car just electric.” – Participant #6

In Week 8, Participant #6 received an achievement level of two in all aspects of Meaning and Style. Participant #6 is now able to fill out ideas with more details. Although this participant
continues to struggle with sentence structure and variety, this writing sample (Figure 4.10) reflects beginning signs of an understanding of the use of details and powerful language.

The language in this sample of writing (Figure 4.10) is interesting to the reader and the author now experiments with a variety of words.

Figure 4.11 – Week 1, Writing with Art sample based on E.J. Hughes painting, “Davis Lagoon Bridge”: “One day I was going home from Nanaimo with Cassie and her mom. We went to a sushi place and the mall we took the back roads after I asked Cassie if nows were we are. We got lost so we turned around we ended up back in Nanaimo so we called my dad. He picked us up eventually we waited for three hours at the mall it was 6:00 when we got home of course we
took the back road we past Davis Lagoon Bridge we noticed people camping down on the beach so we pared and went down the creekly stairs it was my Auntie Amy and cousin Landen so we stayed the night too. Cassies mom had to walk home because she didn’t want to stay the night.” – Participant #4

In Week 1, Participant #4 received and achievement level of two in all aspects of Meaning and Style. In this sample (Figure 4.11), this participant has developed ideas with details that are list-like and do not enhance the enjoyment of the writing. The author is beginning to use interesting words like “creeky” to describe the stairs but overall the language is generally simple.

Figure 4.12 - Week 8, Writing with Art sample based on William Kurelek’s “Balsam Avenue After a Heavy Snowfall”: “In this painting I think that it is Christmas break and all the parents in the neighbourhood had to go to work so they gathered all the kids for a meeting. All the kids came so the parents told the kids some rules like don’t go on the road if a car is coming and get along nicely. So the parents went to work and all the kids played in the snow. A girl or boy started riding a tricycle some other kids did snow angels some kids even built forts. When the parents get home they all have hot coco.” – Participant #4
In Week 8, Participant #4 has written (Figure 4.12) about a personal perspective on what is happening in the painting. This participant received an achievement level 4 in the aspect of *meaning* and a Level 3 in the aspect of *style*. Ideas are supported with interesting details, for example, “All the kids came so the parents told the kids some rules like don’t go on the road if a car is coming and get along nicely.” The author supports the idea about “rules” further by giving examples like “don’t go on the road” and “get along nicely”. The author has moved away from writing in a list-like fashion and the sentences flow together. This participant has experimented with many new powerful words like tricycle, snow angels, gathered and neighbourhood. This participant received an achievement Level 4 in the aspect of *meaning* and a Level 3 in the aspect of *style*.

In addition to the writing samples collected for this study, the participants also completed a survey about their learning in relation to becoming better writers as a result of using art and talking activities. The first question the participants answered was, “Did viewing art and doing talking activities help you to come up with more *meaning* (ideas and details) for your writing? Please explain why or why not.”

Eight of the nine participants were available to complete the survey. Participant #4 did not complete the survey. Of the eight participants, seven wrote that they believed that viewing art and doing talking activities did help improve their writing. One participant commented, “when you have a picture, it can be more easy to come up with ideas and more details.” Another stated, “Yes because it made me look at it from a new view.”

One participant did not believe that viewing art and doing talking activities helped improve their writing. Participant #8 said, “No because we didn’t get to do our own ideas. Otherwise I liked it.”
The second question asked, “Did viewing art and doing talking activities help you write with more *Style* (words and sentences)? Please explain why or why not.”

Again, with this question, eight of the nine participants completed the survey. Seven participants felt that viewing art and doing talking activities helped them write with more *Style*. Comments were focused on their thinking and the conversations they had with classmates. One student commented “when I think about the picture, it can help me come up with more words and phrases” Another student said, “When I look at the art and talk to my friends it does help me because I can take what they’re talking about and turn it into something that makes the words sound powerful.”

One participant did not believe that viewing art and doing talking activities helped to improve their writing in the area of *Style*. Participant #9 said, “No I knew the words but this time I put them into new phrases.”

Questions three and four asked the participants to set writing goals in the aspects of *Meaning* and *Style*. In the aspect of *Meaning*, two students set goals in the writing quality of ideas while five students set goals in improving details. In the aspect of *Style*, six participants commented on improving language and two students set goals to improve sentence variety. The survey comments were generally positive and reflected the use of the language associated with the aspects of *Meaning* and *Style*. 
Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to examine an instructional method designed to improve writing ability by viewing art with collaborative talk based on critical thinking strategies acting as a conduit. The researcher focused on the following question: How can the use of viewing of visual art as a means to promote critical thinking strategies and collaborative talk as prewriting activities, improve grade four students’ personal narrative writing in the aspects of Meaning and Style, as measured by the British Columbia Performance Standards for Writing in Grade 4?

The fact that British Columbian children who arrive in kindergarten with vulnerabilities in language and cognitive development will likely continue to be academically vulnerable in the curriculum areas of reading, writing and numeracy by Grade Four (D’Angiulli, Warburton, Dahinten, & Hertzman, 2009) concerned this researcher. The research project took part in a Grade 4/5 classroom, located in a small rural community made up of children from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Each year children arrive to elementary school with varying levels of cognitive ability and language experience.

The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) produced the EDI results in 2011 for all school districts in British Columbia, indicating the level of vulnerability within each school district. The results for the rural community in which this research took place, North Cowichan, British Columbia, located on Vancouver Island, revealed that the neighbourhood falls within the vulnerable category in one or more of the EDI categories. More specifically, nine to eleven percent of the children are vulnerable in the area of language and cognitive development (HELP, 2011), the area which was focused on in this current study.
How can the subject of writing be taught effectively to a group of children while addressing the range of backgrounds that continually shift and change as the economic and demographics of the area change? Are there enough data and significant results from this study to continue to use this pedagogy to overcome the vulnerability as suggested by HELP?

Each week for eight weeks, all students, participants and non-participants, were introduced to a new sample of visual art. Through collaborative talk, structured by the teacher, the children’s task was to use critical thinking strategies to orally puzzle over and make meaning of a sample of visual art. These activities provided opportunities for students to clarify their perspectives through talk and scaffold their ideas on the perspectives of their classmates.

The participants then wrote about the artwork. Writing samples from Weeks 1, 4, and 8 were recorded to measure growth in writing ability. During Weeks 1, 4 and 8, the participants also wrote about a recent event. These writing samples were done without viewing art or discussions and based solely on the children’s personal experiences. For the purposes of this study, improvement by one achievement level in Meaning and Style was deemed to be a significant improvement.

Discussion

Researchers have found that teaching children to examine and discuss visual art using critical thinking strategies, allows children to construct a deeper understanding (Housen, 2002; Tishman, MacCillivary, & Palmer, 1999). Practice using critical thinking strategies becomes a habit of mind if practiced regularly over time (Housen, 2002). The results of this research project indicate similar findings to Abigail Housen’s study on Visual Thinking Strategies.
Building on Housen’s study, by taking it one step further and having the participants represent their thinking in writing this research project achieved similar results. Not only did the participants improve in their writing ability with guided discussion and art viewing, but they were also able to transfer their new found abilities to independent writing samples (writing without art and collaborative talk). The results of the independent writing samples reflected marked improvement. These results should encourage other educators to investigate their own use of art and collaborative talk as a means to improve writing. Further to that, students, especially academically vulnerable students, were able to use the talk aspect of the study to validate themselves as thinkers. As Britton (1975) indicated, talk was an important bridge to construct meaning between the visual art and written pieces in the end, especially as a structured method of learning the hallmarks of good writing. Subsequently independent writing resulted in greater achievement in the areas of Meaning and Style.

The researcher observed that during the talking activities, the students were engaged and actively taking part in the discourse, both speaking and listening. The time provided for partner sharing was approximately one minute. The teacher allowed for more time if the students appeared to need more time. The carefully monitored time frame was intentional, giving the student enough time to share their ideas but not enough time to engage in off-topic conversations.

The sharing-out of ideas was also structured. During A/B Partner Talk, the partner responsible for reporting out would have a sentence frame, referenced on the board, to focus their speaking. One example of such a sentence frame was, “My partner (insert name) noticed …” All partner groups were expected to report out and if they were not prepared to do so, extra time was allotted for them after they had the opportunity to hear some of the other groups share.
This allowed students to build their ideas from the perspectives of their peers and reinforced the expectation of accountability.

After the structured partner talk, the discussion would open up to a less structured group discussion. The students quickly learned and became comfortable with the routines and expectations for collaborative talk.

The results of the current study were promising for the future use of art as a means to improve writing in the aspects of Meaning and Style. The greatest growth overall as a result of this study was in the aspect of Meaning. Meaning was divided into two writing qualities, ideas and details. Of the two writing qualities, the participants demonstrated greater growth in the area of ideas in both writing samples, with and without art. The use of the art as a structured method to lead the students toward independence in their writing supported the findings of Housen (2002).

Although group discussion generated language, the questions (What is happening in this artwork? How do you know? What else do you notice?) were designed to guide the children and were focused on constructing meaning. Thus, the questions were most beneficial to subsequent independent growth in the area of Meaning. Development of Meaning was a more natural by-product. The participants could create their own understandings. They were encouraged through the modelling activities to expand on ideas through the use of the guiding questions.

The Writing with Art pedagogy produced results that were immediate and consistent over time. The first writing samples in Week 1 yielded higher achievement levels in the Writing with Art than Writing without Art. The class average for Week 1 was between 2.56 and 2.78 in the aspects of Meaning and Style. On average, the growth in Ideas was .67 of one achievement level
over the term of the eight week study. Examining the Ideas score in Writing with Art results more closely, five out of nine participants demonstrated improvement by at least one achievement level. Meaning – Use of Detail scored four out of nine participants improving one achievement level. Style (language and sentence variety) showed that three out of nine participants demonstrated growth of at least one achievement level in Writing with Art.

In Week 1, many students fully met the expectations for Meaning and Style therefore, over the eight week period of the study room for growth was limited, for many participants, to one achievement level. Although some students’ writing abilities did not progress in achievement level, they did grow in their writing ability. For example, Participant #6 had limited improvement according to the achievement level measure, however in actuality, this participant did improve. The range within the categories in the measuring tool is broad and therefore the writing reflected in the category also has varying degrees of the indicated descriptors. For example, in achievement Level 2, minimally meeting expectations, the descriptors range from students whose writing abilities border achievement Level 1 (not yet meeting expectations) to those students whose abilities border achievement Level 3 (fully meeting expectations). There is plenty of room to grow within one achievement level.

By Week 4 of the study Writing without Art began to reflect improved changes in achievement level for most students. Writing with Art however, typically did not reflect any improvement in achievement level. This implies that changes were taking place amongst students in their understanding of how to write with Meaning and Style through the Writing with Art process. This new understanding made it easier for the participants to communicate through writing about real-life personal experiences (i.e., when they were writing without art).
The Writing without Art samples were based on the participants’ personal experiences rather than the art and discussion pedagogy. The first writing sample took place in the weeks leading up to Halloween and was based on a favourite Halloween experience. The researcher noted and was surprised that the initial non-art writing experience about Halloween appeared to be a struggle for the participants. The students had difficulty coming up with a favourite Halloween experience. Many of the writing samples were very brief, list-like and disjointed.

The Writing without Art achievement levels improved almost two times over the Writing with Art samples. The Writing without Art samples scored lower in Week 1 and reached the achievement levels of Writing with Art samples in Week 8. The achievement levels in Writing without Art sample reflected lower class average scores between 2.0 and 2.11 in Week 1 where most participants scored an achievement level of two across all aspects. These achievement levels scores are notably lower than the average scores between 2.56 and 2.78 in Week 1 of Writing with Art. This implies that Writing with Art as a pre-writing activity, impacted the writing results. Furthermore, the results suggest that Writing with Art had an immediate impact on children’s ability to write with Meaning and Style, even with minimal instruction on the characteristics of Meaning and Style in Week 1.

The researcher was encouraged that students were able to transfer the skills and ideas about good writing introduced through the structured experiences to their personal writing outside of the instructional model. Unencumbered by structure it is assumed by the researcher that competencies in writing hoped for (Meaning and Style) were improved.

Using art and structured discussion to draw out the qualities of Meaning and Style was an effective tool to teach writing to the Grade 4 participants. Delving for Meaning and Style through
the viewing of art addressed all ability levels. All students were capable of understanding at their own level. Art provided an accessible entry point for all academic levels.

The writing samples given in Chapter 4 show the range of expectations from Not Yet Meeting Expectations, Minimally Meeting Expectations, Fully Meeting Expectations and Exceeding Expectations. In Week 1, Participant #6 wrote about a Halloween experience without viewing art or engaging in collaborative discussion. The sample of writing is brief and the ideas are disjointed. In Week 8, this same participant was able to independently write about a Christmas memory with more Meaning and Style. The writing sample was filled out with details and powerful language that was more engaging to the reader. Although Participant #6 received an achievement level of two in both areas of Meaning and Style, his ability was a Level 2 that was closer to an achievement Level 1 than it was to an achievement Level 3 in Week 8.

In Week 1, Participant #4 received an achievement Level 2 in both Meaning and Style. This participant’s Level 2 was closer to an achievement Level 3 than an achievement Level 1. The Writing with Art sample assessed in Week 1 reflected clear language and some experimentation with powerful words. The writing was still very list-like.

In comparison, the Writing with Art sample from Week 8 (Figure 4.12) written by Participant #4 developed ideas with engaging details and examples. The language is clear and varied and the variety of sentence patterns flow smoothly to “paint a picture” in the reader’s mind. This writing sample is a representation of an achievement level 4 in Meaning and an achievement level 3 in Style.

As the study progressed, the students came to attach an understanding of what is meant by ideas, details, language and sentence variety through associating those writing qualities with
visual arts. The pedagogy helped children understand (assign meaning to) what exactly ideas, details, language and sentence variety entail. The skills transferred to independent writing. Because the writing was a real-life experience the children were better able to identify how best to represent their thinking.

Constructing meaning of a piece of artwork with peers is building on an artificially constructed understanding. For example, in the E.J. Hughes painting titled “Davis Lagoon Bridge” the children noticed a set of stairs leading down to the ocean. The children used their sense of sight to notice this detail however they needed to use their imagination and associated memories of stairs and the ocean to discuss and write about their other senses, like how the stairs might feel or the ocean might sound and smell. Those senses are artificially inserted in the Writing with Art samples because they were not experienced firsthand by the participants. In Writing with Art, the participants relied solely on the sense of sight, along with discussion to create a personal understanding of meaning and had to rely on associated memories and imagination to insert reactions, emotions and descriptions of senses.

Writing without Art about personal experiences may have shown greater overall improvement because the participants were drawing upon real-life memories in which all senses and emotions/reactions were experienced firsthand. The children did not need to discuss and scaffold their understanding on the perspectives of others. Emotions and reactions are descriptors in the aspect of Meaning – Ideas and senses help the students with Meaning – Use of Detail.

The participants demonstrated less improvement in the quality of Style. Style was divided into two qualities: language and sentence variety. Of these two qualities sentence variety
reflected the least change. The pedagogy didn’t focus on sentence variety although it was discussed incidentally throughout the project, as required.

Despite less change in achievement level in the aspect of Style, the participants felt the art was helpful in this area. The participant responses to the survey question “Did viewing art and doing talking activities help you write with more Style? Please explain why or why not” were generally positive in nature and referred to powerful language rather than sentence structure. One participant responded, “Yes it did. When I look at the art and talk to friends it does help me because I can take what they’re talking about and turn it into something that makes the words sound powerful.”

Only one participant made reference to sentence variety. Participant #8 responded, “Yes it did because I was not using word choice and I used a list.” Participant #8 is the participant who exceeded expectations for the majority of the eight week study.

These comments are encouraging as they demonstrate the “affective” quality of engaging students in this pedagogy. Anything that is engaging to students must be viewed as worthwhile.

In the survey question, “What goals can you set for yourself to improve your writing in the area of style?” only two participants out of nine mentioned sentence variety as an area to improve. In reality, most participants in this study could improve their skills in sentence variety.

According to Vygotsky (1989), a single word in a child’s inner voice is laden with meaning that would take many words to explain it in writing. Verbalizing while viewing art not only helps children develop meaning, it also helps them retain semantic information (Koroscik & Blinn, 1983). In Grade Four, children are far more comfortable expressing their ideas verbally than in writing. Retaining semantic information is important as difficulties with spelling,
grammar and grapho-motor skills interfere and slow the writing process down, making it more difficult to record ideas with precise language. The task of writing can be daunting to a child. Recording ideas may take priority over using powerful language and considering sentence variety. As a result, the effort spent on children’s writing often focuses on simple language and the sentences are recorded in a list-like fashion. This could explain why Style reflected less improvement than Meaning.

**Limitations**

One of the difficulties in the limited view of this study is that Language Arts is an interrelated and interdependent discipline. During the first four weeks of the study, the students received limited instruction in the writing aspect of Form. The researcher/teacher asked the students simply to write about the meaning they had constructed for themselves and justify their meaning. Participants were asked to write about the artwork in the “first person” perspective. As the weeks progressed, the children’s writing became creative story writing, written in “third person” rather than personal/narrative writing. At Week Four the researcher/teacher realized Form needed to be included as part of the instructional process. To help the children focus their ideas, the following, more structured aspect of form was introduced:

- **Paragraph 1** – Describe what you see.
- **Paragraph 2** – What do you think is happening?
- **Paragraph 3** – Tell about a time this reminds you of OR Do you like this artwork? Why or why not?

With the introduction of Form, achievement levels began to rise and stabilize from Week Five through Week Eight. The participants who had shown limited improvement and struggled
during the first four weeks showed the greatest improvement in Meaning and Style when the aspect of Form was introduced. The participants who began the study with strong ability in Meaning and Style maintained and, in some cases, improved their achievement level. For most students, providing the participants with a structured Form acted as an organizational platform to demonstrate their ability to write with Meaning and Style.

The teacher/researcher attempted to select artwork that would engage the children and inspire conversation and higher level thinking. As the artwork was teacher selected there was no guarantee of participant engagement. Some pieces of art would naturally generate more ideas, details and language in the participants simply because of personal taste and connection. Although the collaborative discussion with classmates would help to build on ideas, details and language, engagement in the artwork is an essential part of this pedagogy.

Writing assessments were done multiple times over the eight week term of the study, however this paper only presents the results from Weeks 1, 4 and 8. This was done to illustrate the overall trend of improvement. Writings samples from Week 4 were included in the results to reflect the marked growth from Week 5 to Week 8. Maturation was an issue in this research study. There is a possibility that student improvement may be affected due to instruction in other areas of the curriculum, however, the results show consistent improvement in both writing with and without art and it is likely that the pedagogy had a lasting and transferable effect on students.

The researcher noted that the expectation of producing one writing sample based on art per week and three more experiential writing samples in Weeks 1, 4, and 8 was at times overwhelming for the children. Each week the children worked diligently to complete their
writing assignment(s). As the weeks progressed, the students appeared to view their writing tasks as onerous.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Visual art and collaborative talking activities had an immediate impact on personal writing samples of Grade Four students, even without direct writing instruction. Participants were able to internalize the method for critically viewing art and create an understanding for themselves. These new skills transferred to writing samples based on personal experiences.

Results of this current research project support further investigation into this pedagogy. The researcher recommends this pedagogy be broadened and adapted to other subject areas and grade levels. It is an instructional method that focused in on constructing meaning and language for participants. Using the same pedagogy with non-art related objects could perhaps yield similar improvements in achievement levels according to the British Columbia Performance Standards readily available for other subject areas.

How would this change learning progression in math if the same instructional method were used with a mathematical object like a protractor? How might this pedagogy be applied in Kindergarten when studying Community and walking amongst the artifacts, for example walking by the post office or in the grocery store? How is post discussion and concept attainment enhanced through such living, visual representations? The current study focused on the curriculum area of writing, however, the fact that these strategies can be retained and transferred by children means that they are valuable to all educators when planning for all subjects.
Recommendations for Future Research

In the study presented, introducing Form played a pivotal role in improving writing in the areas of Meaning and Style. Using visual images as a beginning for instruction, the students were able to scaffold ideas from each other and have the benefit of a pre-constructed visual bank. The quick realization that the students needed a more systematic approach in order to address the elements of Form led to a more structured instructional sequence. The researcher had to focus them specifically on the area of the Performance Standard, Form. Once confidence in the aspects of Form was achieved to a more competent level the students, through use of the visual image as a start, were able to be more unencumbered with explaining detail and description as it was already there in the image for them to grab onto. They could focus on the story that they themselves would have to fill in. Because they were more focussed on Form and had become more versed in the importance of this aspect of writing it resulted in a higher level of achievement generally. This alone would encourage the researcher to carry forward to further use and hone this teaching pedagogy.

In the first 4 weeks of the study, the participants had little instruction around the aspect of Form, other than they were expected to describe the meaning they had constructed and justification about their meaning. The teacher instructed the children that the writing be in “first person”. As the weeks progressed, the children’s writing became storytelling in the third person. This was a natural progression for the children. After receiving more instruction in Form, the participants had a tool to better organize their good thinking and began to show improvement in the aspects of personal writing.
Upon providing the participants with explicit instruction in *Form* as it related to the Performance Standards for Personal Writing in Grade 4, many children’s writing reflected a marked improvement in the aspects of *Meaning and Style* in both art writing and non-art writing. As this current research project investigated personal writing, the teacher intervened to refocus the children when it became apparent that the children’s writing samples were no longer considered personal writing but writing that would best be assessed using the Performance Standards for Writing Stories in Grade 4. The question left unanswered is whether the participants’ writing would have shown as great an improvement in story writing had they been allowed to continue with the stories they were writing in the first 4 weeks.

*Meaning and Style* were developed through viewing art and collaborative talk. *Form* in the grade four writing curriculum in British Columbia, umbrellas many types of writing including story writing, personal writing, instructional writing and poem writing. A further area to be investigated could be to examine the how visual art and collaborative talking activities impact *Meaning and Style* through different types of *Form*.

Art has been a constant throughout history and across cultures; even cultures with no written language. It has played a practical role in societies and has been used to represent meaning, ideas, culture, community and religion. In the school setting, art has traditionally been limited to one block per week and has typically been viewed as a non-cognitive activity. This current study along with extensive research by others has proven that art is a valuable cognitive endeavour. Going forward it is important that the visual arts be seen as a viable method of helping children become strong critical thinkers and communicators both orally and in writing. The challenge of finding and using visual images and artifacts across the curriculum is looked forward to by this researcher.
References


### Appendix A: Quick Scale Grade 4 Personal Writing

**Quick Scale: Grade 4 Personal Writing**

This Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March-April of the school year. Personal writing is usually expected to be checked for errors but not revised or edited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Not Yet Within Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)</th>
<th>Fully Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNAPSHOT</strong></td>
<td>The writing is often very brief, disjointed, or illogical and is flawed by repeated basic errors. The student needs ongoing support.</td>
<td>The writing presents loosely connected ideas with little development; parts may be confusing or flawed by frequent errors.</td>
<td>The writing presents relevant, easy-to-follow ideas with some detail and explanation. Growing control of written language; few errors.</td>
<td>The writing is clear, focused, and developed with some elaboration and individuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEANING</strong></td>
<td>* purpose or topic may be unclear * few details; may be copied or unrelated to the topic; often very short</td>
<td>* retells; may give some opinions * few relevant details, reasons, and explanations; often relies on ideas from class discussions</td>
<td>* some analysis and reaction, often connected to retelling * some supporting details, reasons, and explanations (e.g., how student felt)</td>
<td>* develops a point of view or opinion with a sense of individuality * develops ideas with some engaging details, reasons, and examples</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>• use of detail</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STYLE</strong></td>
<td>* basic language; often errors in word choice * poorly constructed sentences; little variety</td>
<td>* generally simple language; little variety * simple and compound sentences; little variety</td>
<td>* clear, direct language; some variety * some variety in sentences</td>
<td>* language is varied; often tries new words * flows smoothly; has sentence variety</td>
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<td>• clarity, variety, and impact of language</td>
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<td><strong>FORM</strong></td>
<td>* beginning may be confusing * unfocused; ideas seem unrelated to topic; may be very short * disjointed; overuses a few connecting words (e.g., and, then) or omits them altogether * ending may be missing or illogical</td>
<td>* usually identifies the topic * middle is often simply a list of loosely related events * repeats a few simple connecting words (e.g., and, then, so); may omit them in places * often omits endings</td>
<td>* introduces the topic * middle is often simply a list of related but undeveloped reasons, examples, and details * uses a variety of connecting words * ending may be abrupt (i.e., ends, but does not conclude)</td>
<td>* introduces the topic, often in an engaging way * develops topic through relevant, appropriate ideas, logically organized * smooth transitions; range of effective connecting words * has a conclusion</td>
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<td>• beginning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• organization and sequence</td>
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<td>• connecting words</td>
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<td>• ending</td>
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<td><strong>CONVENTIONS</strong></td>
<td>* frequent, repeated errors make the writing difficult to understand * many incomplete or run-on sentences</td>
<td>* several errors; these may make parts hard to follow * most simple sentences are correct; some incomplete or run-on sentences</td>
<td>* some errors, but these do not affect meaning * most sentences are complete; few run-on sentences</td>
<td>* few errors; these are usually caused by taking risks * complete sentences; may include some errors in long or complex sentences</td>
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<td>• complete sentences</td>
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<td>• spelling</td>
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<td>• punctuation</td>
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<td>• grammar/ usage</td>
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Appendix B: Consent Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

“IMPROVING STUDENTS’ WRITING THROUGH CRITICALLY VIEWING AND DISCUSSING ART”

October 2012

Jane Cassidy     Rachel Moll, Ph. D. Supervisor
Masters in Education Student              University College Professor
Vancouver Island University              Vancouver Island University
jcassidy@sd79.bc.ca              (250) 740-6220

In addition to being your child’s teacher this year, I am also a student in the Master of Educational Leadership Program at Vancouver Island University. Gaining applied experience in designing and conducting research is a program requirement. To meet this requirement, I have designed an eight week research project to examine an instructional method to improve the writing skills of grade four students. The start date for this project will be October 15, 2012.

During this study, your child will complete eight pieces of writing in response to teacher selected artwork. Art will be selected based on themes about work, play and human relationships, which relate directly to a child’s life experience and can be interpreted from many different points of view. Artwork by artists local to British Columbia will be selected where possible. One such example is “Davis Lagoon Bridge, Saltair, BC” by E. J. Hughes.

As a pre-writing activity, your child will be involved in critical thinking activities and discussions centered around the selected artwork. The goal of this study is to examine an instructional method that teaches children strategies which will help them communicate their ideas effectively in writing.

Although all the students in the class will be participating in this unit of study as part of the regular literacy program, I would like to request your permission for your child to be a research participant in my project. If a student chooses not to participate in the study, he/she will still complete all of the writing activities, including written reflections on their learning. If you agree to allow your child to voluntarily participate in the research, then I will include the data collected from his/her writing samples and the written reflections. Conducting this study will not disrupt the regular routines and structure of the classroom nor will it result in the omission of required curriculum. If your child does not wish to participate then his/her responses will be used for regular classroom assessment only.
Your permission to allow your child to participate in the research study is voluntary. In order to avoid any pressure you or your child might feel because I am your child’s classroom teacher, I am requesting that you return this consent form to the school office in the envelope provided. This consent form will be kept in a locked cabinet in the school office. If you do not want your child’s words, writing or other information included in the study, you do not need to return the consent form to the school.

As the participants’ teacher, there may be a perceived conflict of interest. In order to mitigate the conflict of interest, the names of those students who have signed consent will not be revealed to me. The school principal will collect consent forms and will create a data set that includes only the data from the students who are participating and which has replaced names with codes. Quotations from the children’s written response to the research questions may be used in my research, however, they will not in any way reveal the child’s identity. Despite best efforts to protect your child’s anonymity there is a possibility, based on writing styles, for instance, that I may know who the participants are. This will not affect your child’s letter grade or treatment in class.

Data will be destroyed by shredding at the end of the project, approximately June 30, 2013. Electronic files will also be deleted at that time. The results from this study will be reported in a written thesis and an oral presentation at the VIU Educational Research Conference. Neither your name nor your child’s name will appear in either the written format or oral presentation.

There are no known harms associated with your child’s participation in this research. The potential benefits include improvements in oral and written communication, as well as, learning new critical thinking strategies to help your child view art and other visual images with greater understanding. As well, this research study will serve to improve my teaching practice.

Your child’s participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your child at any time for any reason without explanation and without penalty. Your child, on his/her own, may also withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty. If you or your child do decide to withdraw from the study, it is possible that the information provided prior to your withdrawal may have to remain among the study results, as at some point it will have been anonymized and may not be distinguishable from information provided by other participants.

If you should have any concerns about your child’s treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext. 2665), or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email address below:

Jane Williams
Master in Education Student
Vancouver Island University
jcassidy@sd79.bc.ca

If you agree to allow your child to participate in the research, as outlined above, please read the declaration below and sign where indicated then have your child return the signed form
to the drop box for the study located in the main school office. Thank you for considering this request.

I have read the above form, understand the information read, understand that I can ask questions or withdraw my child at any time. I consent to have my child participate in this research study.

____________________________________
Name of Participating Student

____________________________________
Parent/Guardian’s Signature Date
Appendix C: Structured Partner Talk Activities

Structured Partner Talk Activities

For both structured partner talk activities, children are partnered by the teacher with a nearby classmate. Over the term of this study it is expected that the children will have many different partners with varied ranges of language experience. The teacher will help the children decide which partner is A and which partner is B using an engaging decision-making tool (i.e., “Partner A is the partner with longer hair”, “Partner A is the partner with shorter socks”). The teacher will instruct the children to seat themselves in a particular manner according to the activity chosen, as seating formation is important. In both activities the teacher will tell the students the purpose for discussion and provide a time limit. All partner groups will be expected to report out to the class. Any group that is not prepared will listen to all other partner groups and then be provided a few extra minutes to develop an idea and report it out. The time allotted for both activities should be approximately 30 – 40 minutes.

A/B Partner Talk

Partners sit facing each other, knee-to-knee and eye-to-eye. Upon viewing a piece of artwork, the teacher will provide a frame for discussion, based on a critical thinking strategy and set a short time limit. Partner A will discuss the artwork using the discussion frame and justify their ideas while Partner B listens. For example, the teacher might say, “Partner A, you have one minute to tell Partner B what you think this piece is about and why”. When the time is up, all children face the front of the classroom and all Partner B children stand. The teacher invites Partner B students to share their partner’s ideas including the justification. The children will reversed roles and repeat the process. After the partner talk, a group discussion will be held to find out if, and how, any of the children’s thinking changed after they heard their classmates report out.

Split Image Partner Talk

Split Image involves two pieces of related artwork (e.g., two illustrations from the same picture book or two pieces of artwork from the same artist). Partner A views and describes the first piece of artwork to Partner B, who cannot see the art. Partner B will have the opportunity to ask question. After the specified amount of time, partners switch roles with the second piece of artwork. Upon completion of this activity, the children are given their task. If two picture book images are used, the frame for discussion could be, “Predict what this story might be about. Remember to justify your prediction”. If using two pieces of art by the same artist, the frame for discussion could be, “How are these pieces of artwork the same? How are they different?”
Group sharing – both pieces of artwork are revealed to the entire group and partner groups can share their ideas.

**Sample Discussion Questions**

To provide purpose to the partner talk, the teacher frames the discussion topic in the form of a question. The questions are based on critical thinking strategies. The following are sample questions frequently used by the teacher in this particular study.

**Inferring and Justifying**

“What is happening in this picture?”
“How do you know?”

**Predict and Justify**

“What is about to happen in this piece of artwork?”
“What evidence in the picture leads you to say that?”

**Connect and Justify**

“What does this picture remind you of?”
“Why?”

**Compare/Contrast**

“How are these pictures the similar?”
“How are these pictures different?”

**Visualization**

“Imagine you step inside this picture. Use your senses to describe what you might smell, hear, taste, feel and see?”
Did viewing art and doing talking activities help you come up with more meaning (ideas and details) for your writing? Please explain why or why not.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Did viewing art and doing talking activities help you write with more style (words and phrases)? Please explain why or why not.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What goal(s) can you set for yourself to improve your writing in the area of meaning (ideas and details)?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What goal(s) can you set for yourself to improve your writing in the area of style (words and phrases)?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________