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Using Learning Stations in the Secondary ESL English Classroom

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the use of learning stations in the secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) literature classroom. The various learning stations included journaling, independent reading, vocabulary practice, and small-group writing instruction. In a suburban New Jersey high school, eleven students from seven different countries participated in this study.

This study found the implementation of learning stations to be an effective method for teaching ESL students. The study led to the development of five main findings. First, students spend more time on task when using learning stations instead of whole-group instruction. Next, the needs of second language learners can be more effectively met through learning stations. In addition, using learning stations in the secondary ESL classroom increases small group instruction time, therefore increasing a student's variety of tasks and learning experiences. Furthermore, students are more involved in a class that incorporates learning stations and small group instruction. Finally, teacher questioning and reminding leads to changes in teacher planning. Therefore, this study shows the efficacy of implementing learning stations with high school ESL students.

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## **RESEARCHER STANCE**

Although many traditional educators try to use a one-size-fits-all approach to education, the reality is that all people entering education come with varying abilities and interests. The kindergarten class ranges from nonreaders to readers; the middle school classes have students who have always excelled and those who think about when they will be old enough to drop out of school. High school classes are no different. In my district, many students have moved through the elementary schools to meet at the middle school and progress to the high school. The majority have come from either neighboring districts or similar districts throughout the state. The academic programs in Bridgewater-Raritan Regional High School are not all that different from the others within the state. However, they are vastly different from the programs in other countries. The problems students encounter when immigrating to Bridgewater from another country range from social and community acceptance to the difficulties of assimilation into the Bridgewater school system. At the high school level, these displaced students are the ones with whom I work. Their education suffers because the district assumes they will be able to catch up with their American counterparts within a few years. As anyone who works with non-native students knows, this level of growth is usually impossible given the combination of language they must acquire and material they must learn.

My academic experience was very different from students' experience. I had never moved from another country; English is my first, and only, language. In fact, English was always one of my best subjects in school. However, my experience in math was not nearly as positive as my experiences in the humanities. When I was in my high school math classes, I often felt as if the teacher was speaking another language. Although I took notes religiously, I often could not complete homework successfully and was constantly frustrated. Through attending extra help sessions with my teachers, I was able to ask the questions I held back during class time. The teachers were willing to explain the assignments and procedures in different ways until I understood what I had to do. Even then, I understood a teacher would not be able to provide this individual instruction in the classroom, but I wondered if other students were having the same problems. Diversity, though limited, may have been present in the classroom, but it was not present in the instruction.

With this in mind, I wrote the curriculum for Language and Literature Transition. I was overwhelmed by how I was going to help the ELLs (English Language Learners) at the high school level, let alone how I would go about teaching literature to them. After the first year of teaching the class, I knew the program had to be expanded to include two years of sheltered instruction. The students, although hard working and dedicated, had so much literary content to uncover, that one year could hardly suffice. When I explained this to my

department chair, I was pleased to discover he agreed and so another year was added to the program.

During the first year of the second part of the program, I embarked on a pilot study concerning teaching formal, analytical writing to ELL students. I was lucky because the class was small and I was able to address the writing problems on an individual basis. The students had been in my class the previous year and I knew many of their writing problems. However, this still left me with the problem of further differentiating instruction. They needed more individualized programs in reading and vocabulary, as well as writing, but forty-minute periods in one extra school year just did not allow for enough time to meet with all students independently. Through tackling Shakespeare, Steinbeck, and Kidd, I attempted to meet as many of the needs of these students as was possible, but I still felt I must do more. Many of the students would be eligible to take the TOEFL test for college admittance, but some would be relying on an SAT score. Some could maintain the twenty to thirty page nightly reading assignments of their American counterparts, while others could barely read ten pages within an hour. When asked to write a full page on a given topic, some could write more than the requirement and others strained to write half a page.

The current class of Language and Literature Transition Two consists of students in grades ten through twelve. Most of the students have tested out of ESL III, but one remains in that class. They have varying ability levels in all areas

and vastly different family lives. They are from a number of different countries, including Russia, China, Taiwan, Costa Rica, The Dominican Republic, Japan, Korea, Iraq, and the Philippines. With these differences come different understandings of English. The grammar and usage issues vary with each background and with each student.

Although I understand and appreciate the importance of learning skills in context, I am concerned about the limited opportunities my students have for more basic vocabulary, writing, and reading skills. They may use their known skills constantly, but they need the isolated opportunities to practice and advance these skills. However, I simply do not have enough time to isolate these individual skills based on student need during each class while addressing each student's individual needs. Instead, I needed to find a way to address these problems while teaching the whole class, working in small groups and helping individual students. The advanced students need more opportunities to be challenged. The less proficient students need more help to keep them from becoming confused, getting lost in an assignment, and resorting to off task behavior when they are confused.

The combination of these problems caused me to think of different ways I could address the varying needs of my students. How could I help them to become independent learners while exposing them to the material they would need to be successful in mainstream classes and beyond? How could I teach all

students while actually only working with a few at a time? How could the students working on their own be guaranteed a valuable experience and not busy work? Slowly, the solution came to me in a series of even more questions. What if I created different learning environments for the students so they could participate in varying activities? What if I focused on the more difficult lessons with a small, rotating group of students instead of the whole class? What if I could find ways to incorporate reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning? What if I could find the time for more independent, differentiated work? What if I used the elementary school technique of learning stations or centers to teach the rest of the class while I work with the small group? These ideas led me to my research question: What will be the observed and reported experiences when learning centers are used in the secondary ESL English classroom?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In the ever-changing climate of American education, teachers are being asked to do more than ever before. Not only does a teacher have to be in tune with what is happening outside the classroom, she has to address problems students may encounter within her own classroom. Not only does a teacher have to be able to challenge students, she has to be able to help those who face challenges outside the academic realm. Students enter classrooms from all walks of life, yet they all need to be educated in one classroom.

One of the fastest growing populations in American education today is that of the English language learners. These students have come from countries around the world, as well as neighborhoods throughout America. Although these children come to school hoping to learn, addressing the special concerns of ELLs may be more difficult than one might think. Each student has different language backgrounds and different language needs.

The ELL population has a need for a classroom which differentiates learning. These students can benefit greatly from one-on-one time with the teacher, independent work, and small group work. This specially-designed time in the classroom, combined with whole-class instruction, can help a student more quickly meet the grade-level skills of his peers. The goal, then, is to provide

independent learning stations that address vocabulary, reading, and writing, along with opportunities for small and whole group instruction.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

In order to better facilitate learning for all types of students, a teacher must differentiate instruction.

Differentiated teaching is responsive teaching. It stems from a teacher's solid (and growing) understanding of how teaching and learning occur, and it responds to varied learners' needs for more structure or more independence, more practice or greater challenge, a more active or less active approach to learning and so on (Tomlinson & Cunningham Eidson, 2003, p. 2)

The most important aspect of differentiated teaching is the teacher's understanding of the needs of the individual learners. The teacher must then be able to address these needs on a per student basis. Closing gaps in skills and comprehension is the goal of the teacher. In this way, the teacher can "maximize the capacity of each learner" (Tomlinson & Cunningham Eidson, 2003, p. 2).

To continue differentiating effectively, the teacher must assess the skills and attitudes of her students constantly. "Assessment is ongoing and diagnostic. Its goal is to provide teachers day-to-day data on students' readiness for particular ideas and skills, their interests, and their learning profiles" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 10). This type of assessment does not need to be formal. The teacher can observe

a student's behavior in class, his feelings of acceptance or frustration, and his work products. Once a teacher is in touch with a student's capabilities, she can then continue to modify instruction to best meet the needs of the student.

However, an effective classroom also includes whole-class instruction. "The teacher does not try to differentiate everything for everyone everyday. . . The teacher selects moments in the instructional sequence to differentiate, based on formal or informal assessment" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 14). Although the differentiation should meet the needs of the students, this is not enough. The students should be challenged so they can improve their current skills. Teachers must provide instruction just beyond the students' current skills. The students then can perform with guidance in student-centered lessons, instead of teacher-directed lessons (Purcell, 2000). This ability to challenge students within their zone of proximal development allows teachers to push students to be challenged while maintaining a safe, secure environment. In this way, teachers can continue to differentiate instruction by meeting every child on every level of learning.

This idea of challenging students is also evident in the reasons the teacher must differentiate instruction. "Differentiation is an organized yet flexible way of proactively adjusting teaching and learning to meet kids where they are and help them to achieve maximum growth as learners" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 14). The teacher must be able to meet this adjustment in ways that foster learning and students' self-confidence. According to Tomlinson (1999), there are certain ways

a teacher can meet these goals within the classroom. First, a teacher must be clear in setting goals for the students. Within these goals, a teacher should understand, appreciate, and encourage student differences while meeting them through instruction. All content and products must be adjustable to meet student readiness and their interests. Through all of this, the teacher's goal should be the growth and success of her students.

To adequately prepare her students for growth, the teacher must always teach up to the students and their developing skills, never teach down to the current level of the students (Tomlinson & Cunningham Eidson, 2003). Because of this, differentiating instruction must not be reactive, but proactive (Tomlinson & Cunningham Eidson, 2003). In this way, the teacher can continue to challenge her students while aiding them in improving their skills and increasing their knowledge.

### **Learning Stations**

In a classroom of many varied skill levels, the most effective way to differentiate instruction is through the use of learning stations. "For the purposes of differentiated instruction, stations allow different students to work with different tasks" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 62). The teacher can assign students to different stations throughout the room to allow the students to improve weaknesses as well as address challenging material.

When implementing learning stations, the teacher should begin with a series of mini-lessons which demonstrate what is expected of each student within the station. These lessons “provide intense, direct instruction in a skill or understanding that children will use immediately after the moment of instruction” (Hoyt, 2000, p. 1). It is crucial for students to have a clear understanding of what they should do before they are allowed to begin working. Hoyt (2000) provides five steps for effectively leading a mini-lesson. The first of these is introduction. The teacher should explain each of the stations to the students so they know the topic or skill being addressed. Next, the teacher should model how to complete the station so students understand what they should do in their independent time in the stations. This will allow the teacher the freedom to observe students at work, as well as lead small-group instruction. Then, the teacher must provide guided practice. This could be accomplished on the first day the students are in stations, while the teacher circulates the room to make sure they are on task and doing what they should be doing. In the same way, the teacher should allow time for independent practice. This can be accomplished before the students will be evaluated on what they have done. In this way, they have the opportunity to explore the stations without the fear of a low grade. Finally, the teacher must allow and encourage self-reflection about the time a student spends on a particular task. This reflection will not only benefit the student, but will allow for the teacher to decide if changes need to be made to the current stations.

## Vocabulary

For students to be successful in class and in life, they must have an active working and growing vocabulary. This vocabulary differs for each student, as does the ways in which the students develop their vocabulary. Before teaching vocabulary, one must understand the way a student's vocabulary develops.

“If teaching new vocabulary is to be effective, it must be integrated with both the student's preexisting knowledge and other prereading activities designed to build background knowledge” (Carrell, 1984, p. 335). If a student lacks this prior knowledge, especially if the student is an English Language Learner (ELL), the teacher must find ways to improve the student's knowledge. Fondas (1992) states, “Students with greater background knowledge have better comprehension of text rather than students with less background knowledge, regardless of reading ability” (p. 29). This is again evident in Gaudio's study of improving reading skills of ESL students. He states, “Students who lack a solid vocabulary are destined to struggle when attempting to gain meaning from text” (Gaudio, 2003, p.13-14).

According to Loucky (1998), there are five major components of vocabulary development for ELL students. First, the students learn words they are seeing for the first time. Next, they must “establish previously met vocabulary” (Loucky, 1998, p. 2). Third, they “enrich previously met vocabulary” (Loucky, 1998, p. 2). Finally they must “develop vocabulary strategies” and “develop

fluency with known vocabulary” (Loucky, 1998, p.2). Using these vocabulary strategies in the developmental stage of language is crucial to the learner. Loucky (1998) explains that children usually develop their vocabulary incidentally, through hearing, seeing and speaking. However, for ELLs this type of incidental learning is insufficient for learning a new language. Instead, these students need more direct instruction to adequately learn a new language. Bush (1998) agrees by citing Graves’ (1984) classification of vocabulary words into three groups. The first group is words students are learning to read that are already in their oral vocabulary. The second group is “learning to read words which are in neither oral nor their reading vocabularies but for which they have an available concept” (Graves, 1984, as cited in Bush, 1998, p. 2). Finally, Graves’ third category is the learning of words “for which there is no available concept” (Graves, 1984, as cited in Bush, 1998, p. 2).

Most importantly, the development of vocabulary is crucial to students’ success in all areas of academics. Stahl (1983, 1985) “has remarked that to ‘know’ a word, a person has to have both definitional and contextual information about the word” (as cited in Fondas, 1992, p. 12). This knowledge of words must be taught and practiced with ELLs consistently and constantly to facilitate their vocabulary development.

In this realm of teaching vocabulary, many arguments arise. Although there are many strategies to consider, the research does not promote one strategy

over another. Instead, it is seen that all strategies have some common ground in the success of students. The first highly debated approach to teaching vocabulary is the idea of teaching words and their definitions in isolation versus teaching context clues to determine the meaning of a word. In Szymborski's (1995) study of fourth grade students using varied methods of context clues and words in isolation, she found no significant difference in the obtained skills. Her students were as successful using both methods of vocabulary study. Bush (1998) found the same results in her study of high school students. Bush (1998) cites Parker (1986) in saying that junior high school students "learned word meaning by looking them up in a dictionary" (p. 2). Peitz and Vena (1996) found the same to be true in their study of first grade students and vocabulary recognition. They state that both words in isolation and the use of context clues aids students in vocabulary development and retention of words. However, Bush (1998) also notes, "Sometimes students can simply be given definitions of words and such knowledge is sufficient for understanding of a given text. Other times students will need a strategy for using context to figure out word meanings in order to maintain comprehension" (p. 8).

One cannot, however, be limited to two types of vocabulary instruction. Instead, addressing different means of teaching and learning is important to reach all students. Booz (2001) found that his ESL students learned vocabulary best through the use of worksheets. They viewed the worksheets seriously and used

them to guide and aid their understanding of the words. Anderson (1998) states the importance of a teacher's positive approach to vocabulary learning. This approach is an important factor in students' mastery of vocabulary. She also offers the ideas of "writing everything down, utilizing graphic organizers, producing tapes, avoiding distractions, training the attention span. . . and training the memory" (Fry, 1996, as cited in Anderson, 1998, p. 15). Other strategies include cooperative learning and appealing to a student's multiple intelligences. However, it is important to note that prior knowledge and the building of background information are still the most effective strategies for vocabulary instruction.

Finally, Glowacki, Lanucha, and Pietrus contend "the most effective way to increase vocabulary growth is to get children to do a lot of reading of good texts" (2001, p. 31). Fondas (1992) agrees, recognizing the connection between reading comprehension and a student's knowledge of words. This connection demonstrates the importance of high quality vocabulary instruction as an integral part of literacy instruction.

### **Independent Reading**

The importance of reading is a concern for all learners and their teachers. According to the research, students who read independently advance in their

reading skills, as well as their vocabulary comprehension. These skills are necessary for advancement through school and success in life.

In order for students to increase their vocabulary and reading comprehension, they must be given opportunities for independent reading. This reading strategy consists of giving students time to read a book of their choice in class. “Both school and classroom libraries are integral parts in this process because access to books has been shown to encourage more frequent reading” (Krashen, 1998; McQuillan, 1998; Neuman, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2001, all cited in Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006, p. 734). This access to different genres of writing allows students to choose books which meet their interests. This, in turn, increases the students’ desire to read. Once this desire is recognized, teachers need to allow students ample time to explore their own reading interests in class. They also need to continue to add to the classroom library as the students’ reading proficiencies and interests mature (Vardell, Hadaway, & Young, 2006).

This concept of student choice is crucial to “student ownership over literacy learning” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 6). Ivey and Broaddus (2001) concluded that students with more ownership over their reading and literacy skills became more successful when participating in literacy activities. Because these students were given class time to complete independent reading, “the students saw silent reading as a time to make more sense of the text at hand, since time set

aside freed them to concentrate, comprehend, and reflect” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 17). Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that the students who were given time for personal reading benefited more from that practice than they had from small- and whole-group instruction. In addition, their “students reported that time to read alone in materials of their own choice allowed them to think, learn, and understand new concepts” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 19).

### **Writing**

The next important aspect of the differentiated classroom lies in how the language arts teacher approaches writing. The students who have poor vocabularies and are low level readers tend to shy away from writing or believe they are poor writers. In order to be effective and enhance a student’s writing, the teacher must approach the teaching of writing in a nonintimidating way.

To meet the motivational needs of students to write, a variety of strategies should be employed to help reluctant and struggling writers to become more fluent. The first of these is the concept of freewriting. “In freewriting. . . students develop ease in putting language on paper by writing nonstop for a set amount of time about anything that enters their mind” (Romano, 2004, p. 2). This ease can then be carried over into other parts of the writing curriculum. Without this ease from freewriting, a student may still block his ideas when it comes to writing a more formal essay.

One major strategy in increasing writing fluency and appreciation for writing is the use of journaling in the classroom. Furr and Bauman (2003) contend that student writing will improve when the student has the opportunity to make it more personal. This personal connection to writing should be in all curricular areas. In this way, students have the opportunity to have their voices and opinions heard. Wanket (2005) offers five benefits of journal writing: “Journals provide an opportunity for reflection; journal writing improves essays; journals can reveal trouble; journals help students and teachers bond; daily journal writing is an excellent way to begin class” (p. 2). By using journal writing to the fullest of its potential, one can see the benefit the students can gain through the implementation of journaling in the classroom.

This concept of journaling paves the way for students to become more comfortable writing. The students must also see that writing is a priority for both the teacher and the class. Writing should not be addressed as something added because the teacher had time left in a class period. “When writing time is important enough to be scheduled, it’s important enough to think ahead and plan the next literary adventure” ( DeLisle-Walker, 1996, p. 2). In this way, students can come to value their writing time, as well as their written word.

### **Conclusion**

As one can see from the preceding literature, differentiating instruction is the most effective way for a teacher to meet the growing needs of students. Using learning stations throughout the classroom and the school year can provide the teacher with the flexibility she needs to meet the needs of her students. She will be able to tailor instruction for each child as he is working in a topic-based station, as well as address challenges to students through small group instruction. The teacher should not make every lesson different for every child. Instead, whole-group instruction is important for the class to meet goals as a group.

In today's changing academic climate, a teacher needs to be able to prepare her students to have strong vocabularies, be independent readers, and write effectively. Through these skills, students should develop a love of learning that will inspire them to become lifelong learners. To meet all of these goals for all of students, a teacher should implement learning stations throughout classroom.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Setting**

My study was conducted in a suburban high school of nearly 3,000 students in central New Jersey. The high school had a growing minority population, although the majority of the students were white. The socioeconomic differences were the most noticeable within the school community. We had some students on welfare and government assistance and some whose parents' income was over one million dollars a year. Although the students in my study were all ELLs (English Language Learners), this population only contains approximately 100 students in the high school.

My study was conducted in a regular classroom with 28 student desks, two teacher desks, and two student computers without printers. The class met five days a week for forty minutes per day.

The English as a Second Language (ESL) program in this high school consisted of three levels, ESL I, II and III. The determination of a student's level depended on the score received on a standardized language test administered by the ESL teacher. This test evaluated a student's speaking, writing, listening, and reading abilities in English. Based on these scores, students were placed in the appropriate level of ESL. They were assessed at the end of each school year to decide their placement for the following year. Once a student was exited from the program, he was no longer eligible for ESL services. The Language and Literature

Transition courses, however, also included students who had exited ESL. This was the only class where students were still taught as English Language Learners.

### **Participants**

The subjects in the study were high school students in grades ten through twelve, ages fifteen through eighteen. The majority of the students had been in the United States for fewer than two years. They were enrolled in ESL III or had just tested out of the district's ESL program. The students had varying language backgrounds including Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Tagalog, Romanian, Italian, Japanese, and Arabic.

Eleven students enrolled in this transition class for the 2006-2007 school year. Although the students had similarities in the fact that they were non-native speakers, they were as different from one another as in any other heterogeneously-grouped classroom. Their academic abilities ranged from students enrolled in basic skills to those taking honors classes. This also served as a reflection of their varying English abilities. Some students had studied English in their native country before coming here. Others had attended school in other areas of the United States. Still others had never studied the language and did not have any English-language contact once they left school at the end of the day.

### **Getting Approval**

In order to complete the MEDU program, a graduate candidate must design an action research study to be submitted to and approved by the HSIRB

committee at the college. This committee ensured the student's research project did not endanger any students or interfere with their education.

For this approval, I completed an HSIRB approval form. In doing this, I outlined the types of students I had, the ways I would protect their confidentiality, and how I planned to conduct my study. This information was then reviewed by the committee, and I was granted permission to complete my study.

### **Data Collection**

The purpose of this research project was to assess the effects of using learning stations in the secondary English classroom of ESL students. The majority of the students involved in the study had been living in the United States for more than two years, but they were still struggling academically due to their rate of English language acquisition. If the students had more independent activities to enhance their learning, I believed their language acquisition would improve (Pettig, 2000) (Tomlinson, 1999). Through the use of learning stations with differentiated and scaffolded lessons, the students were able to work at their own pace to learn English. I designed these learning stations to meet district and state standards for the English curriculum. The stations did not replace whole class instruction, but instead were enrichment activities or skill-building activities, depending on student need, which were directly linked to the unit being studied in whole-class instruction.

The study began with my submission of an outline of my plan to Moravian College's review board. Once permission was obtained from this committee (See Appendix A), I sought and received permission from the school's principal (See Appendix B) to conduct the study in my class. Finally, students needed to receive parental permission to be involved (See Appendix C). All students had the opportunity to be involved in the study, but they were not required to be involved as part of the class. Any student who did not wish to be involved in the study was not penalized in any way. Once permission was received, students spent time responding to a questionnaire about their English language ability. The students were able to evaluate their abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing (Ford & Optiz, 2002) (Brick, 1975). Once students completed the questionnaire, I evaluated the responses and determined a starting point for each student's assignment to a learning station. Then students received instruction about the learning stations in the classroom (Ford & Optiz, 2002). They had four class periods of forty minutes each to explore the different stations and learn what was required in each station. Once students were clear about the expectations of the individual stations, they began working in them.

Although many elementary learning stations span the curriculum, the focus of the stations in the secondary English/ESL classroom was on literacy skills. The purpose of station one was to enhance English vocabulary. The students completed vocabulary activities developed by textbook publishers and me. When

students finished the written work, they had access to an answer key to review their work or they submitted their work to me for evaluation. Then, they used the words they learned in writing to help other students understand the definitions and to demonstrate their own understanding.

Station two allowed students to have time to complete independent choice reading. They had opportunities to choose from magazines and both fiction and nonfiction books. They were allowed to bring their own materials or choose from the in-class library. At the end of the class period, students used Independent Reading Log forms to ask questions, make predictions, discuss the characters and setting, keep a list of unfamiliar words, and/or react to what happened in the plot.

In the third station, students had the opportunity to expand their writing skills. The majority of the writing in this station was in their journals. They were assigned topics based on the whole class reading. They were then given class time within the writing station to complete the journal assignment. The focus of the assessment varied. The students were evaluated on defending their opinions, writing in their best English, and producing a specified amount of writing within a given time. In addition, when the class was working on a formal essay in whole group instruction, the students continued their work in this writing-focused station by collaborating with others of similar ability levels. Students had limited access to computers while working in this station. Technology was used during the

formal writing period, and all journal entries were handwritten in their classroom journals.

For the first few days students were in stations, I assigned the students to them. Once the students became more comfortable with the stations, they were allowed to choose where they wanted to work. While the majority of the class worked in the learning stations, I led small group instruction with a selected group of students (Pettig, 2000). Just as the station assignments changed, so did the students working with me. All students had the opportunity to work in the stations, as well as with me. The small group instruction topics varied from skill building to literary analysis, depending on student need.

As the semester progressed, I collected data about the students' performance in the learning stations. The first method of data collection was the use of observational notes (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005). While the students were working in the stations, I was usually working with some students in small group instruction. From time to time, I assigned all of the students to a station, and I circulated while they were working and took notes on what they were doing. I observed whether they were on task, what they did when they finished an assignment, how they handled frustration, and how they worked with others. I noted these observations in my field log. When I was puzzled by a student's behavior during one of these problems, I took him aside to see how we could fix the issue. When I did this, I recorded his reaction to being asked about

his behavior, as well as how he changed his actions. On the days I was working with the small group, my notes focused on what I was able to accomplish with them. However, I was still watching the students at the stations, so they were also included in these notes, depending on what happened in the class. The students did not work in the stations everyday, but two to four times per week. I observed and took notes on each of these days.

I was fortunate enough to have my lunch period scheduled after this class. While I took observer notes in class, I was able to add more specific detail as I typed them during my lunch period. In this way, I was able to keep an accurate field log of the happenings in my classroom (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005).

In order to decide which students were assigned to certain stations frequently, I developed a student questionnaire. I administered the questionnaire before starting the stations so I was able to analyze and assign specific students to specific stations. After the students were comfortable with the way the stations operated, they had the opportunity to choose their own stations, but from time to time I still assigned them to certain areas, depending on their weaknesses. After working at the stations, I spoke with the students about their comfort level and English ability. I discussed questions similar to the ones present in the questionnaire, so I was able to compare some of their answers (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005).

I also used journal entries to find out how the students felt about using the learning stations. The journal prompt was very open-ended, such as “How do you feel about working in the learning stations?” I used these journal entries to help me decide what changes needed to be made to the stations (See Appendix D).

When a student’s response in his journal was unclear, I asked him to clarify, through interviewing, what he wrote, so I could be sure I understood. Because many of the explanations were clear, I did not use many interviewing techniques. My reasoning was that my students had a very difficult time finding ways to meet with me. When they were able to, they wanted to know if there was extra credit involved. I felt if I offered extra credit for a student to participate in the interviewing, the results of this interview would be tainted (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005).

Because the students were working on scaffolded assignments, I collected some of their assignments from the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. These assignments included journal entries, vocabulary lists and sentences, quizzes, and essays. I collected more than three assignments from the students for evaluation because their output may have varied simply based on the unit we were working on in class. This, then, would not show the effectiveness of the learning stations. However, since I collected two or three assignments at various times

throughout the semester, I was better able to evaluate their progress (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005).

Once I distributed and collected the permission forms from the students, I assigned pseudonyms to students to be used throughout the study. These pseudonyms did not bear any resemblance to their given name. The areas of performance I looked for throughout the data included time off-task, feelings of frustration, student progress, and the ability to work independently. I recorded my findings in my field log so I would analyze the information later. I knew that once I began the analysis, I would find other areas I needed to code, but I started here (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005).

The actual analysis needed to begin somewhat early in the semester, so I could be sure the stations were meeting the students' needs. In the beginning of October, I explored the students' concerns about the learning stations, as well as how they spent their time on each of the assignments. This gave me about three weeks of data from the students working in the stations. In addition, I was able to evaluate the students' perceived progress with their English abilities. The information I gathered from my research methods allowed me to see how the students' English proficiency was increasing. I compared my notes to the work they submitted to determine their progress. At this point, I could still make changes to the stations if the students needed them.

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

In any reliable research study, the researcher must adhere to guidelines which will ensure the quality of the research, as well as protect the subjects of that research. Teacher action research is no different. Because teachers who perform research in their classrooms are studying varying students, the privacy of the students must be maintained for their protection.

While conducting my research study on using learning stations in the secondary classroom, I considered a number of viable methods to use to preserve the confidentiality of my students. First, I received permission from the review board of Moravian College to conduct my study. Then, the principal of my school reviewed the proposal of my study and signed a consent form. This allowed me the opportunity to conduct the study (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Next, all students had the option of participating in the study. All students and their guardians were required to sign a consent form which explained their understanding of the study. The consent form also explained the option to not participate in the study or to drop out at any time (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Any student who chose not to participate for any reason would not have been treated differently in the classroom. For example, the students not participating would be responsible for completing the same work as the participating students. The only difference in this aspect was which work would have been used as evidence for the study. Those not giving permission to be studied would not have

been recorded and their work would not have been used in the study in any way. However, all students in the class chose to be a part of the study.

In addition to allowing the students to choose not to participate, the information concerning those involved in the study remained completely confidential. All students in the study received pseudonyms and all of their work was labeled with these pseudonyms. In this way, readers of the study will be unable to identify any of the participants. Any notes I recorded while researching also used the students' pseudonyms and were kept completely confidential. These notes, as well as the students' work, were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. I was the only one with access to this research material.

In order to collect information throughout the research process, I needed to use differing methods of data collection to be able to triangulate the data. I collected student work, recorded field notes in my log, distributed surveys, and conducted brief interviews. Although I know I have many students of differing ability levels, all participating students were recorded through research. This study did not focus on only the high or low achieving students, but instead on how the learning stations affect all of them. Therefore, all students were represented through my data collection (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005).

Finally, one of the most important steps in the teacher research process is to make sure I am constantly being self reflective. After recording the students' information, I kept notes on my own practice. Without these notes, the research

conducted would not paint an accurate picture of what was happening in my classroom. These notes also helped to identify biases which were unknowingly present in the study (MacLean & Mohr, 1999). These biases may have included, but were not limited to, prior knowledge of a student's ability, prior knowledge of a student's work ethic, prior knowledge of a student's strengths and weaknesses, and prior knowledge of his attitude toward school, literature class, and me. By reviewing and reflecting on these notes, I was able to explore any evidence of the biases and make sure they did not influence the research. As the study progressed, I was able to share the data I was collecting with my teacher research support group. In this group, we discussed how to continue to collect data and how to evaluate data that was already collected. The researchers in my group were able to offer suggestions and assistance throughout the research process.

Although my research question focused on the reported experiences of students learning through stations, all assignments in class were viable research material. Many of the skills that students learned or practiced in the stations could easily be transferred to their performance in other aspects of the class. Any skill or attitude transferred during this study was noted and analyzed a possible result of the study. In my role as teacher researcher, I must prepare myself for many outcomes, both positive and negative, which are results of the study. Failure to do so would negate the importance and value of the study.

### **THIS YEAR'S STORY**

“Mom, do you use these learning center things in your class?” I asked as I flipped through an elementary teaching magazine.

“Centers? Sure, I use them for different units and when I need to work with a small group of kids.”

“Do you think I could use them with the high school kids, the ESL kids?”

“I don't see why not. My kids love them. Give it a shot. The worst that can happen is that you change it later.”

#### **September 2006: “I don't see why not.”**

A new year, a time to make changes, a time to try something new. I explained to the class that I was completing my Masters' Degree this year and I was going to need their help. After answering their questions that, no, they would *not* have to call me master once the project was finished, I jumped in to the explanation.

“I was thinking we would try something different this year. I know some of you felt that you didn't understand everything I taught last year. I know some of you are getting worried about taking the SATs and HSPAs and you want to be able to write better before you take the tests. I think I might have a way that I can help all of you reach your goals. I haven't tried it before, so I really don't know how it is going to go. What do you think? Want to try something new?”

I waited nervously for their responses. Did they think I was crazy? We had already spent a year working together; they knew I was crazy.

“Ms. Marvin, if you say it will help us, we’ll try it.”

I passed out the permission slips, explained what they meant, and hoped for the best.

I spent more and more time thinking about what I really wanted to accomplish in the learning stations. I wanted the kids to be able to work independently to focus on the skills they needed. I wanted them to look forward to writing, reading, learning new words, but I also wanted them to appreciate the time they would have working independently with me. I was hoping they would be able to see the work I was putting in to the planning of the stations, so they would want to put as much work in as I did. I revisited the idea with them. They would be able to choose their own stations, but sometimes I would assign the stations based on what I knew they needed to improve.

While I waited for the permission slips to come back, the students began reading The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier. Because this was the first book of the year, I was hesitant to let them off on their own in the stations without more guidance from me. The vocabulary in the novel was causing them difficulty; they were growing frustrated and it was only September! How was I ever going to let them continue on from here more independently than they had been before?

Once the permission-to-participateslips were returned, the students were excited to move into their own work stations. Instead of splitting them up from the beginning, I decided I would teach the class what should be happening at each station in one group. That way, they could feed off one another's questions and help each other to understand what each station would mean.

For the first two days of center time, we held a book pass in class. In order to help them choose books they wanted to read, and to show that these books exist, I taught them how to do a book pass. We used the classroom library and each student chose three books that had interesting covers or titles. Using these three books, the students filled in a chart (See Appendix E) to track the books that seemed interesting to them. They then checked out one book to use for their independent reading. Although it seems as if this would be an easy process for students to understand, it was more challenging than I thought.

*Alejandro*

*Is she kidding me? We just started reading The Chocolate War and now she wants us to read another book while we are in class. She can't think I am going to take this book home with me and sit around and read for fun. How many times do I have to remind her we don't speak English? Maybe those American kids can read all these books at the same time, but I can't handle all this and my*

*other classes and working and making sure my mom gets home from work safely at night. It's just too much.*

*"Jose, did she say that we can leave the book here?"*

*"I think so."*

*I can leave the book? She is gonna give us class time to read something we want to, instead of The Chocolate War? I don't get it.*

*"Ms. Marvin, I can pick any book I want and read it during class?"*

*"Sure, as long as you are assigned to the independent reading station."*

*Hmmm. This might not be so bad. I can pick one of her books and just sit back and read a good story during class time and get credit for it. There must be a catch.*

Independent reading was ready to go. Everyone in the class was able to find a book he liked and I was ready to give them some time to read. We spent one day that week on independent reading in class. Although this would become a center later, for now it was a whole class assignment so they could get used to filling out the reading log (See Appendix F) and reading in silence.

*Sally*

*I like having the time to read on my own, but let's be real. I have the TOEFL test in a few weeks and I know I haven't improved my vocabulary enough*

*to be able to do as well as I need to. She's letting us read, but I was looking forward to the vocabulary station she was talking about. When are we going to start that? I won't ask, no one else wants to work on vocabulary; they'll be annoyed with me if I remind her she said we would do that. She'll probably get to it eventually.*

*Well, maybe I could ask her after class when no one else is around. That might be easier. No one would know I asked about working on vocabulary, but she might be able to get us started a little earlier.*

The students seemed to like independent reading once we got passed the confusion about the book logs and they understood exactly what to do. Our next job was to tackle the vocabulary station. The class consisted of eight students who had exited ESL and three who were still enrolled in the program. The vocabulary they used in their speaking and writing, however, was still below grade level. Many students were able to recognize words in print, but not able to then use these words on their own. The goal of the vocabulary station was to increase word recognition and usage.

I gathered two-pocket folders from the supply room and labeled each with the students' names. This way, they did not have to be responsible for bringing the assignment to class for the station work; we kept them in the classroom. I photocopied exercises using words that consistently appear on the TOEFL (Test

of English as a Foreign Language) exam. Students who took this exam had been in the country for fewer than five years, and their scores were then sent to their chosen colleges. I thought the students would see these exercises as valuable because many of them were eligible to take the test that year.

“Ms. Marvin, I hate vocabulary. I know enough words.”

“More vocabulary? We just did that in history last period.”

“Do we have to do it?”

“Vocabulary? We do vocabulary in every class!”

“This stinks. Will we get class credit for the work we do? ‘Cause I’m not doing this unless I get something.”

“Okay, guys. I know you don’t like vocabulary. I know you feel as if every class you are in makes you focus on vocabulary until you are blue in the face. I know you have been doing vocabulary practice since you started learning English. But. . . I also know that without a good vocabulary, you’re not going to be as successful in school or in a job as you could be with more words. You’re not going to have as many opportunities. But even before that, you will understand more about what people are saying around you if you practice your words. Your reading will be easier and you will do better on the TOEFL, the SAT, and the HSPA. Have I led you wrong before? Why don’t we try it? I am only trying to help you learn as much as you can in the time we’re together.”

Into the TOEFL packets we jumped, straining to keep morale high and work productive. Students who were eligible to take the TOEFL worked steadily to complete the packets. In addition to doing the exercises, they had to write their own sentences using the words from the lists. The sentences showed they understood the words and the exercises were done correctly when the students were able to keep their lists in front of them. However, reviewing the words and committing them to memory was left up to the students.

*Sally*

*I know I need to learn these, but I really hate studying vocabulary. I wish I just knew the words already. It's unfair because it seems so much easier for other people. Look at Alejandro, his English isn't better than mine and he barely studies, but he speaks Spanish and a lot of the words sound alike. None of the words sound like anything I know in Korean. He doesn't care if he knows the words or not. I don't think he even cares if he passes, but I do. I want to do well and I want to be able to do even better in college next year. If I don't do well on the TOEFL, I won't be able to go to college. Even if I can, how will I ever know what the professors are saying? How will I be able to keep up with the American student?. I am so tired of making flashcards for all of the words in these packets, but it seems to be the only way I can remember the words. I know this is something I have to do if I want to do well; I guess I am just frustrated.*

Back to The Chocolate War we went, together, not in centers. The students were falling behind in their regular classwork because they were unsure how to balance the regular work and the work we were doing in the stations. Was this a bad plan? Should I have implemented the stations in a class that did not have as much work to accomplish this school year? I was in it now, and I could not make a change that big. Besides, it had only been a couple of weeks; I could still make this work.

“Okay, guys. We need to figure out how we are going to balance all of this. How can we use our time to our advantage? We have to work on The Chocolate War. We have to work on our independent reading, and we have to work on the vocabulary. We haven’t even started working in the journaling station and I, for one, am feeling a little overwhelmed. Any suggestions?”

Silence...for once.

“Alright then. Here is what I am thinking. We will spend tomorrow working in the journaling station. Once we get through that, you will all know how to use the individual centers. Then, when you come in, I can assign you to a station and you can get to work. While some of you are working on your own, or with the people in your station, I can work with a smaller group. This was the original plan, anyway. I guess I just didn’t think enough about how we were going to get there. What do you think?”

“Can we pick our own stations sometimes?”

“Yes! There will be days when I will let you sign up on the board and choose your own station. You will have to get here quickly, though. You will sign up when you get here, so if you are late, you might not be able to do what you want that day.

“So tomorrow when you come in, be ready to journal for the period. Make sure your journal is here.”

At least writing in their journals was something the students knew how to do already. They had journals last year and, for the most part, wrote pretty well in a casual, journal style. They knew how to read the topics, use examples, and include an opening and closing. The question was to see how much of that information carried over to this year. On top of this, many of these students would be taking the HSPA, New Jersey’s graduation test, in March. They needed to be able to write as much as possible within a given time frame.

Finally, a day of introducing centers went smoothly. All of the students got their journals, their topic slips and started writing. The classroom was quiet except for the sounds of pens scrolling across notebook paper. The students were focused and worked for thirty minutes. Could I have them all in a journaling station? Even just once a week?

*Alejandro*

*I wouldn't say it out loud, but I kind of like the journal writing. Well, I like it if she gives us a good topic. Sometimes, she gives a topic I don't understand and*

*I have nothing to say about it. So, then I just pretend to write, but I rip the page out before I hand in the notebook. It's easier to take the zero for the assignment than to say I didn't know what to write about. Some topics are okay, though. I like when I get to write about myself or my friends or my life. I don't really like when we have to write about the books. Sometimes, I don't understand the book and then I don't have anything to say. Sometimes, I can't figure out how the topic goes with the book. I like when we journal in class, though. It is quiet and I can just sit and write and not have to worry about answering anything out loud. No one knows if I am lost because I can just be silent and do what I have to get done.*

Before the students were assigned to their learning stations, I administered a pre-station survey (See Appendix G). The survey asked the students their feelings concerning their abilities in English. The majority of the students believed they could easily understand English, but they worried about responding during conversations. They believed they could not use the correct vocabulary words when speaking. They also worried about whether or not people would be able to understand them with their accents. In addition to worrying about their speaking, they were also concerned about their writing. According to the surveys, they saw the same problems in their speaking and writing: Do they know enough words to express themselves? Finally, they felt most confident about their reading abilities. They knew they could use a dictionary or read at their own pace. Also,

no one was waiting for or reading their responses. They could read for themselves without the fear of feeling inadequate.

I like to speak in English, but sometimes I am shy to pronounce the wrong word.

It's hard for me to read out loud because I think I am saying words wrong, but I like to read in my head.

I think I am good at writing and I get many ideas come to mind.

I feel that listening to English is annoying sometimes because I need to pay more attention than my own language.

I can't concentrate on both listening to the teacher and understanding the information.

I can speak English, but can't get the right words to express my feelings. I am also not always confident to speak English in front of an American person. The words don't flow out of my mouth. I have to think before I speak English.

My reading skills need improvement.

I write slowly. I am used to write from the right, but now I am writing from left to right.

When I was in the other classes, sometimes I felt nervous to speak English to teacher or classmates.

There's many words that sometimes when I'm reading I don't understand, but sometimes it sounds like a Spanish word.

Originally, I thought we would be able to jump right into the stations and the students would be able to read The Chocolate War on their own for the days we would discuss it. The plan was to have them working in the stations three days

a week and discussing the novel two days per week. Instead, using the stations got off to a very slow start. The reading level of the novel and the vocabulary included in the novel presented more problems than I had anticipated. The students were unable to interpret the book any further than the literal reading level. Although I taught symbolism, imagery, and figurative language to this class last year, they had not carried the information into this school year.

Because of these problems, I tried revisiting the journaling station using a topic that would tie in to the novel. I wrote the word “conformity” on the board and we had a class discussion about its meaning and the experiences they have had with conforming. Many of the students shared valuable insights because they all felt the need to conform when they moved to America. After this discussion, I handed out the journals and told the students to write about their experiences.

## Writing in the Journaling Station 1

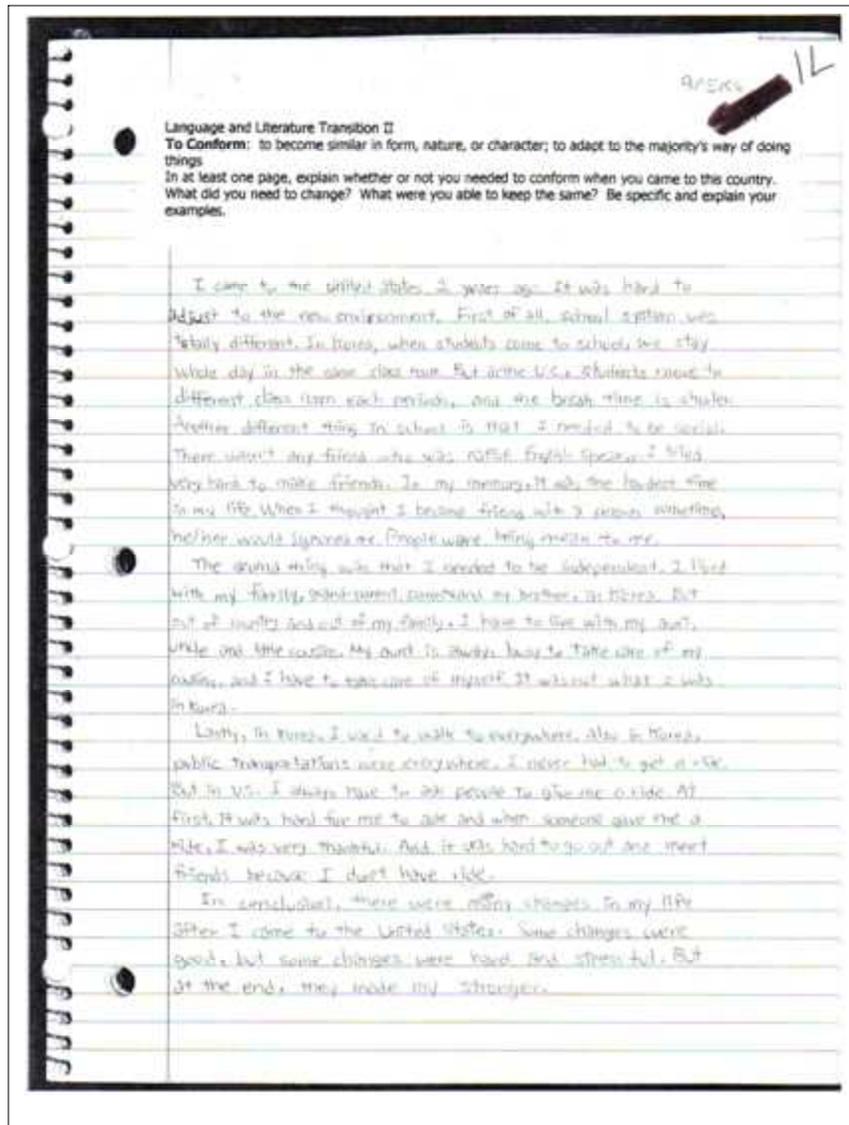


Figure 1. Journal entry written in journaling station by an eleventh-grade ESL student

## Writing in the Journaling Station 2

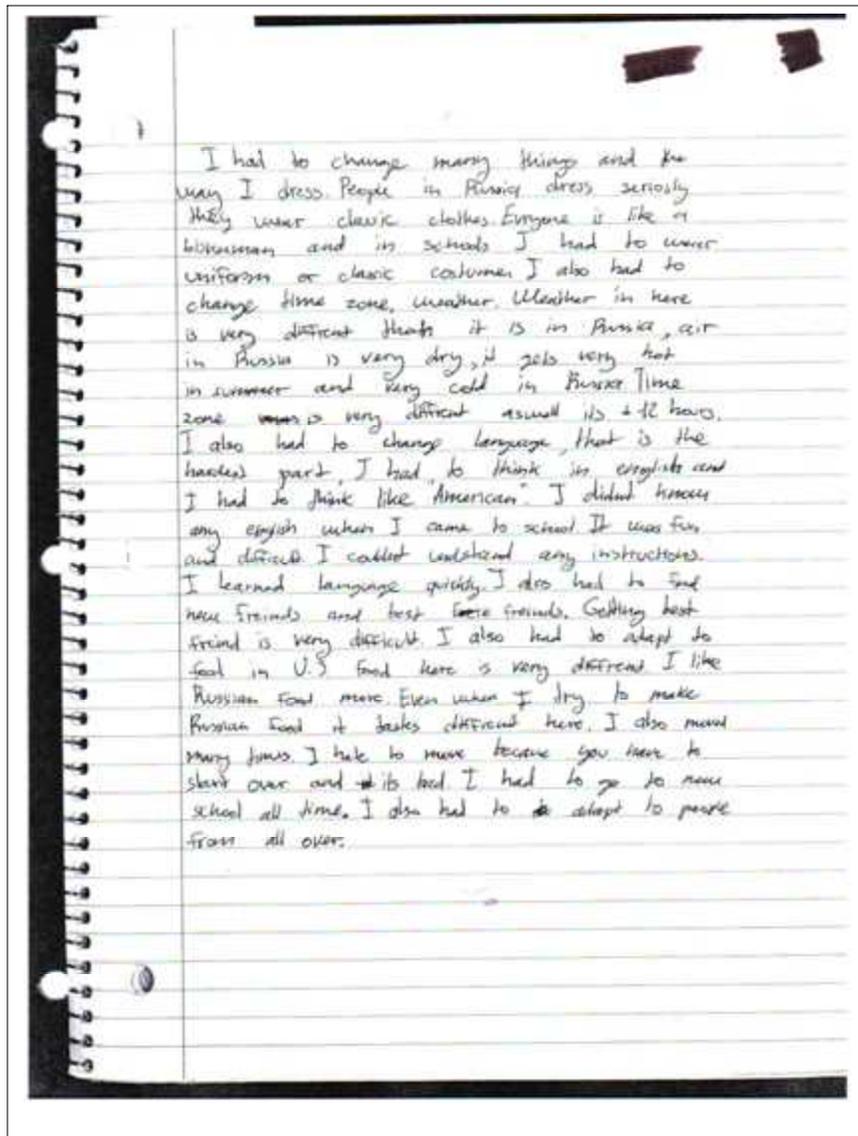


Figure 2. Journal entry written by a tenth-grade ESL student

I reminded them journal writing was the same type of work we would be doing in the learning stations. All of the students wrote in their journals. Because of this, I decided we would continue to use the journal station most frequently so the students would still have a connection with the use of the learning stations, but we would be able to discuss the novel more frequently.

When the students came in the next day, I told them we were starting with the journaling station. They had read articles about peer pressure for homework, and their next assignment was to write about an experience they had that involved peer pressure. At this point, I thought we would be able to use the stations for part of a class period three times a week. Although this was a change from my original plan, I was feeling overwhelmed by the work I needed to accomplish for my department standards and the integration of the learning stations into classroom work.

*Alejandro*

*I like writing in my journal in class. It's better than doing it for homework because everyone has to do it at the same time. That way no one sees me writing in my journal and no one is going to ask me when I am going to be done. The only thing I don't like is when Ms. Marvin doesn't give us a lot of time to write. It is hard for me to think about what I want to say and then know how to say it in*

*English. I was proud of myself because I was able to make some connections between the main character in the book and how I felt when I came to the high school. I mean, he didn't have to worry about not understanding people, because he already knew English, but he did feel weird about being a freshman. I felt that way last year. Now that I have this connection, I am a little more interested to see what will happen to him in the rest of the book.*

Based on their surveys, I knew I had to confront the issues of their vocabulary use. Although we were working on the vocabulary I had chosen from the novel, I also assigned them words from a TOEFL workbook. Many of these words are commonly used in English, but the students were not familiar with them. Instead of moving the students into different stations, I decided to try the whole class instruction again. From doing this, I would be able to see what word attack skills some of them had, and hopefully I would be able to assign stations to students who would be able to help each other.

I gave the students a list of vocabulary words from chapter three of The Chocolate War. I moved them into groups and gave out dictionaries.

Ms. Marvin: Okay, guys. I read what you wrote on the surveys I gave you. I know some of you are worried about vocabulary. So, instead of getting into the stations today, we are going to use another day to work together. I am hoping this is going to make your vocabulary go a little more smoothly.

Alejandro: Can we always do vocabulary in class? I don't have a dictionary at home.

Ms. Marvin: We will do a lot in class, but I can also lend you a dictionary to take home.

Sally: I have a dictionary, but I can I just use my translator? I hate using the dictionary.

Ms. Marvin: You can use a translator, but remember what we said about them last year? Sometimes, the translated words don't give you the same meanings we need. Why do you hate to use the dictionary?

Sally: Sometimes I don't understand the definitions. It uses the word in the definition or it uses other words I haven't heard before. Then, I have to

look up those words. By the time I am done, I can't even remember what the first word was.

Ms. Marvin: Does anyone else have this problem?

*Many students nod.*

Peter: That's why sometimes I just don't do the homework if it is vocabulary. I would rather take the zero than have to do all that work!

Ms. Marvin: Has anyone ever used a thesaurus? Do you know what a thesaurus is?

*Students look at each other, confused.*

Ms. Marvin (*taking thesauruses from the shelf*): This is a thesaurus. When you look up a vocabulary word, it gives you a list of synonyms. You can use this instead of a dictionary if you think it will be easier for you. You can also find a thesaurus online or in some of the typing programs on your computer. Let's use the dictionaries, the thesauruses, and the computers to work on the vocabulary today.

Once the students found there were easier ways to complete their vocabulary assignments, I was hopeful vocabulary lessons would run more smoothly. As we completed the vocabulary lesson of the day, the students had defined the words they were given. They all seemed to understand the ways to use the different methods of finding the definitions for vocabulary words.

Since the students had already chosen their independent reading books, we spent another day with all of the students in this station. As they read and filled in their reading logs, I walked around the room and read over their shoulders. I tried to get a better sense of their feelings about independent reading. Did they find this valuable? Did they think this was a waste of time? Were they enjoying the books they had chosen?

As I approached the desks where Jose and Alejandro were sitting, I could hear Jose trying to involve Alejandro in conversation. Although I wanted to stop their discussion, I was also curious to see whether Alejandro would allow himself to stop reading and start talking. I turned my back on them to seem as if I was watching another group of students.

Jose: Alejandro. Alejandro. Are you coming to my house after school today?

Alejandro: *Looks at Jose briefly, but does not respond.*

Jose: Alejandro, are you coming over? Did you hear me?

Alejandro: I'm reading. It's a good part. Leave me alone.

The boys returned to their work and I could not help but smile. I could not believe Alejandro just avoided a conversation so he could continue his book. Could this really be the same student who almost failed last year because he would not complete the reading homework? What was different about this book that made Alejandro want to complete his reading?

Ms. Marvin: Okay, guys. You have about five more minutes left in class today.

Please make sure you have filled in your book logs and put them back in your folders so you have them for next time. Then, you can put your books back in the box.

Peter: Ms. Marvin, do we have to put the books in the box?

Ms. Marvin: Well, Peter, we agreed that's where we would keep the books so everyone knows where their books are the next time we read.

Peter: I really like this book about the kids in prison. I thought maybe I could take it home so I could read some more on the nights we don't have homework. I don't want to have to wait until we do the independent reading station again.

Ms. Marvin: Sure, Peter, you can take it home. Can you stay for a minute after class so I can check the book out for you?

*The bell rings and the other students leave the room.*

Ms. Marvin: Peter, I don't want to sound like I am being mean to you, but I am a little surprised that you want to read outside of school. I thought you didn't really like to read that much.

Peter: It's different when I get to read this book. Some of the books we have to read for class aren't as interesting as this one. This is about a guy my age who is in prison. We never get to read books like that. On the days there is a late bus, I have been going to the library to do my homework. Sometimes I get done early and then I have nothing to do. I am bored and then I get in trouble for being too noisy. If I had this book with me to read when I get done with my homework, maybe I wouldn't get in

trouble anymore.

**October 2006: “My kids love them.”**

One month into school, and we were finally able to really get working in the learning stations. Admittedly, I had some concerns about the students working in the stations. Would they be able to focus on their work while others worked on something different? Would they want to switch stations and only work at their strengths? Would I be able to work with a small group of students while the rest of them worked independently? Would they leave me alone while I worked with their peers?

On the first day of the learning stations, I did not take a small group of students for instruction. Instead, I assigned all students to stations so I could observe how they were using their time and working in their stations. I thought the journaling station would be the most successful, but I was mistaken. The students in the vocabulary station worked well together to define and write sentences using their new words. They worked quietly, even though they were working together. The independent reading group worked well because all of them were already invested in the books they were reading. They knew exactly what was expected of them in their station and used the time to enjoy their reading and to write in the log.

The journaling group, though, presented problems I had not anticipated. As this group sat down to begin working, I explained I was looking for them to be

able to get out as much writing as possible in the time we had together for one day. I explained the goal was to write five paragraphs, but I also knew this would be a lot to expect in forty minutes. I urged them to concentrate and complete as much writing as possible. I knew this would help me to be able to see what we would need to practice before many of them would take the HSPA test in March. Before working, I handed out the journal topic and asked if anyone had questions about the assignment. No one did; at least not until it became time for them to start working.

When the students were given the time to start writing, Jose spent the first ten minutes looking for his pen. I asked him more than once if he needed to borrow a pen or pencil, but he was determined to write with his own. This problem also gave him the time to delay his writing. Roman suddenly became concerned that he did not understand every word in the assignment. He asked about the meanings of many of the words, which allowed him, too, to delay his writing.

*Jose*

*I usually don't mind writing in my journal during class because Alejandro is usually next to me. He knows I can't write as much as the other people in this class, but he doesn't care because he is my friend. Today, Ms. Marvin assigned different people to my station. I didn't get to pick who I sat with. I knew she said*

*she would assign people to the stations, but I really thought she would keep us with the people we usually work with. Not today! Today, I have to work with Michael, Roman, and Sally. They all understand the topic and have the examples they want to use, and I can't even think of where to start. Do I know all these words? It doesn't really seem fair that I have to sit with the people who are good at writing. It makes me look even worse than I usually do. I don't even want to start writing. That is why I had to pretend to lose my pen. There is no way I can write five paragraphs in forty minutes. Maybe the other people in my group will think I didn't finish because I had to spend so much time looking for my pen.*

If Jose was so unhappy about his writing skills, I knew he had to be the first one to be able to work with me in the writing group. He would have the most work to do to complete the essay, along with the other struggling writers: Sally, Kim, and Jim. When the students arrived in class to start their essays on The Chocolate War, I had already determined who would be working with me. I put their names on the board and directed the rest of the class to sign their names on the board under whichever stations they wanted.

The whole class was assigned the same essay topic, but did not receive the handouts until they met with me in their writing groups (See Appendix H). I started by reviewing the writing topic with the students in my group.

Ms. Marvin: Now that you have the topic, can someone tell me what you have to write about? Remember, the first step in writing a good essay is making sure you know what the essay topic is expecting from you.

Kim: We have to show about Jerry and Archie.

Jose: Yeah, about Jerry and Archie and what they do in the book.

Ms. Marvin: Do we have to show how they are alike or how they are different?

Jim: Both, I think. But the topic says about point of view, too. Do we have to talk about point of view?

Sally: We must have to if it is in the topic.

Ms. Marvin: What do we have to say about point of view?

Kim: Ummm, the point of view is changing in the book, right? Sometimes Archie tells the story and sometimes Jerry tells the story, I think.

Ms. Marvin: Yes! You are right. How does that tell us more about Archie and

Jerry?

Sally: Well, I think we can tell what they are thinking because they are talking in their heads.

Jim: I think that's right. Like, we know Archie is a jerk because we see that he doesn't care about anyone. He isn't just mean to Jerry; he is mean to everyone, even his friends.

Ms. Marvin: Okay, so we have to look at what we learn about these characters when the author uses different points of view in the book. What are your feelings about Jerry?

Jose: He is kinda nice. He is a little weak sometimes, but he seems nice. And he wants to help Goober.

Ms. Marvin: Excellent. What do you think about Archie?

Kim: He is a jerk. He is mean to everybody and nobody likes him, but they are scared of him.

Ms. Marvin: Great. Why don't you guys split into two groups and one group can find examples showing what we learn about Jerry from his point of view. The other group can find examples about Archie. Who wants to be in which group?

The students chose their groups and started using their study guides, books and notes to find examples about both characters. Sally had the interesting idea to look through the study guides to see which chapters asked questions about Jerry and which asked questions about Archie. She shared this idea with the rest of her group, which surprised me because she is usually very hesitant to share any of her ideas aloud.

At the end of the period, the other students had completed their independent reading logs and vocabulary. The writing group that had started with me decided what they should complete for homework, so I would be able to look over their ideas before they wrote more about the topics. I agreed I would look at their ideas tomorrow, told the rest of the students who would be next in my group, and dismissed the class.

When the class came in the next day, I thought we would be able to get right into the groups I assigned the day before. The students sat with their groups, but the group who had worked with me immediately started asking questions about their essay-planning sheets. I told them I could give them the first few

minutes of the period, but I also had to get the other groups started on their essays. I knew this group would need the most instruction and assistance with their essays, but I also thought they would be able to be more independent than they were at this time.

After the few minutes I spent with the first group, I moved to the group who I had decided would also need more help in writing. This group consisted of Peter, Roman, and Alejandro. I was confident that Peter would emerge as a leader because he would realize the other boys would need his help. Roman, however, tended to follow whoever had the strongest personality. I knew if I could get Peter to be interested in the essay, Roman would follow him, and, in turn, so would Alejandro. If, however, Alejandro was able to persuade Peter to stray off-task, I would lose the whole group. I felt that my whole new instructional system was under fire. This would be the test. Would the small-group instruction be effective in motivating the boys to do the work? Would sitting with me and only a few students keep them focused?

I reviewed the essay planning packet with them and explained the best way to get started would be to find examples for both of the characters to prove their thesis. Peter decided to use his study guide and notes to find examples about Jerry. Roman, ever the follower, worked with him to find the examples. Alejandro decided to branch out on his own.

Ms. Marvin: So, Peter, you and Roman are going to find the examples about  
Jerry, right?

Peter: Yeah. I think Jerry is the easier character. We can probably finish him first  
and then start working on Archie.

Alejandro: You don't have to work on Archie. I'm gonna do that one on my own.  
I get that guy, you know?

Ms. Marvin: Alejandro, that's a lot to take on by yourself. Did you finish the  
study guide?

Alejandro: Most of it.

Ms. Marvin: I just hate to see you get in over your head and then feel like  
you are under a lot of pressure to get the work done on your own.  
How about you start and if you still need more examples when they are  
done with Jerry, they can help you?

Alejandro: Okay, but I will probably be done before them anyway.

Ms. Marvin: You are probably right, but it would make me feel better  
if you would let them help you if they finish first.

Alejandro: If it will make you feel better, I'll do it.

As my group set to work to find examples for their essays, the three students assigned to the independent reading station approached me to discuss changing books. I had explained to them when we started the stations that reading for pleasure can often mean you have to abandon a book. They were surprised that a teacher would tell them they did not have to finish an assignment, but eventually understood they could change if they were not enjoying their reading experience. Ken, Kim, and Jim took advantage of being able to change books when their reading was not going as they had hoped. I was not surprised Kim changed; I knew she was not too involved in her choice from the beginning of the reading. I believed Jim was changing his reading because the book was too difficult for his reading level. Ken, however, was a different story.

*Ken*

*I wouldn't say I hate being in this class. But do I have to be? I know I am an ESL kid, but I also know I am much smarter than the rest of the people in this class. I guess I should have talked to my guidance counselor about changing out*

*of this class into an eleventh grade class, but I thought it might be nice to have a class that was easy for me. Instead, I am stuck in this class of people who don't know as much English as I do and I know I will be behind next year.*

*I could get higher grades in this class, but I can also get a B+ without working too hard. Why bother working harder than I have to? Now, she wants us to read on our own? Is she kidding? If there isn't going to be a test, essay, quiz, discussion . . . what is the point? What is she going to grade us on? Does she think I am going to spend my time reading for fun when I could be accomplishing something that is going to be graded? Sure, it's great she wants us to get more English, but really, a college is looking for grades. Doesn't she get it?*

By the end of the period, seven students had completed most of the essay-planning packet, and three had changed independent reading books. Although I felt we had taken a step backwards in the independent reading, I was pleased with the planning of the essay writing. I had four more students to introduce to the essay. If my planning was right, they would only need one class period to complete their essay packet.

Ms. Marvin: You are the last group to work on the essay planning packet.

I am hoping you will be able to complete most of the packet within this class period. You should know that next year, when you enter

a grade-level literature class, you will be expected to plan an essay within one class period.

Ken: So, we just have to fill out this form and write an essay?

Ms. Marvin: Well, you want to use your notes, study guides and books to make sure you find examples that fit the information you need.

David: Can't we just have the examples in our heads and just write the essay? I don't understand why we have to complete this packet first.

Ms. Marvin: Because this is the first essay of the year, I need to see the planning you have put into the essay. I can then see if you understand how to write a formal essay. If you have trouble, I can also see it before you have written the whole essay and I can help you. Also, it is always good practice to plan before you write.

Stephan: I will find examples for Jerry.

Ken: Okay, I will work with you.

Ms. Marvin: David and Michael, will you be okay with finding examples about Archie?

Michael: That's fine.

Because this group was capable of working independently, I was able to check in on the other groups without having to worry about this final group. The groups started working immediately, but Alejandro and Kim were off task across the room. They seemed to think I could not hear them because I had my back to them. I had to remind them that part of working in the learning stations meant that they had to be able to work independently and in small groups while I was working with other students.

While the final group finished the first page of the planning, I was able to pull Peter, Sally, and Roman out of their station to work with me to complete the essay modeling page. These students were friendly and supportive of their peers, so I planned to review the modeling page and have them teach it to the rest of the groups while I helped some students. The final group was able to complete the planning page of the packet within the class period. Peter, Sally, and Roman were able to circulate the room and review the modeling page with the other students. I assigned the completion of the modeling page for homework.

**November 2006: “Give it a shot.”**

The next day, everyone came to class with his planning packets completed. The pages showing the model of the essay were complete and the students were ready to work on their essays. I rearranged the groups and let the students work together to proofread their modeled paragraphs. They reminded each other how to include correct MLA citations for direct quotes and reviewed each other’s papers to make sure they were following the required formal writing rules.

Ms. Marvin: I rearranged your groups so you would see a variety of essays.

Remember, the more people who can help you review your essay, the more likely you will be to correct more mistakes. Yesterday, you read each other’s essays. Today, we are going to try something a little different with the stations. You should choose your own groups. We need to make three groups and spread out.

Alejandro: Does it matter who is in our group this time?

Ms. Marvin: No, but it should be people who you think will be honest with you about your paper.

Jose: I don't think my essay is very good, but I will work with anyone.

*Students move into groups and get their journals.*

Ms. Marvin: Group one, you are going to work with me for ten minutes. While we are doing this, group two, you are going to write a ten minute journal entry about the essay writing process you used to complete this packet. You want to focus on what was difficult about writing, what was easy and what you would do differently in the future. At the same time, group three is going to write a ten minute journal entry about the test you took on The Chocolate War. When ten minutes have passed, we are going to rotate; I will work with a new group and you will write a different journal entry. Does everyone understand what we have to do?

Alejandro: So we only get ten minutes in your group?

Ms. Marvin: Yes.

Alejandro: But what if we have more questions? My essay is really bad and I don't think I can fix the whole thing in ten minutes. What am I supposed to do?

Ms. Marvin: Well, if we see we need another day of meeting, we can get together again tomorrow. You also want to make sure you are listening closely to what other students are saying about their essays. Some of the problems you are having may be the same problems other people are having. You can use the advice you get to improve your own writing. If you are still stuck, you can always come in for extra help after school or you can meet with other students outside of class to help you.

The students moved quickly between the stations because they knew they did not have a lot of time to meet with me or in their groups. I also explained that they needed to push themselves to write as much as possible within the ten minute time span for each journal entry. I reminded them to focus on what they were writing more than on the grammar, spelling, and mechanics.

We spent three days with students working on independent reading, vocabulary and essay writing. The class was divided into three groups and rotated their assignments each day. Each day I worked with a different group to proofread and revise their essays. When I was not with a group, the students were working in the other stations. Students were given ample time to complete their essays and they were not assigned additional homework.

As the students worked, I announced the essays would be due on Thursday. When the students came to class on the due date, I again separated them into groups for peer editing. I asked them to go through each other's essays, looking for any mistakes in formatting, spelling, or content. Once the students worked in their groups to edit the essays, I gave them the option to take their essays home one more time to correct any mistakes. The entire class wanted this last opportunity to fix any errors. The essays were collected on Friday and for the first time that year, everyone submitted a paper. Success!

Writing an Essay: The Finished Product

Did we want to write about the character's points of view? OR the author's use of point of view?

L.L.G II  
Mrs. Toro  
11/16/06
} write out

Archie and Jerry

At trinity high school we learned that every person has different point of views. Archie's point of view was to make people struggle and make them feel bad and make them do things for him without him deserving it. Jerry's point of view is to be in peace not make bad things to people and don't let anybody control him. In this essay I will prove the points of view of each of the characters.

Through Cormier's use of points of view, we can see how Jerry is feeling throughout the novel. "He was angry at the way the disease had ravaged her, he was angry at his inability to do anything about saving her. His anger was so deep and sharp in him that it drove out"(Cormier pg.48). In this example, Jerry feels "He had never felt so lonely in his life, abandoned and defenseless"(Cormier pg.7). I picked this quote because he has no one to defend or support him. He had no control over that situation, out in able to have some control over what happens with the vigils.

Next, Archie's views and feelings can be seen because Cormier changes the point of view in the novel. "At the way Archie sat there in the bleachers his blond hair tossing lightly in the breeze, enjoying himself, for crying out loud, even though he knew that Obie would be late for work and yet keeping him late, stalling, killing time". In this

i2i#?

explain  
 this quote

Figure 3. Sample of a completed essay on The Chocolate War

example, we see that Archie is the person who tortures people and the tough person, because he always controls the teachers, students and he always is the one that makes deals in the school. Cormier changes point of view within the novel; we are able to learn more about Archie's personality.

) Run on  
) R.C

Finally, Cormier shows us the difference between Jerry and Archie by changing the points of view within the novel. "See? I'm doing you a favor. Enough of these late afternoons and the boss'll say, "You're all done, Obie baby. Set free! And you'll have one, right in front of him" (Cormier ~~pg. 12~~). Through these <sup>what examples?</sup> examples, we learn that Jerry and Archie have opposite personalities. While Jerry is the person who doesn't want war at the school and refuses to sell the chocolates, Archie is the one <sup>R.C?</sup> that causes problems and tells people what to do and does what ever he wants to do. Using the changing points of view makes Cormier's book more effective.

In conclusion throughout the book we learned that Jerry and Archie are very different from each other. Jerry is the calm <sup>WHD</sup> down person that always was being bullied by Archie and all he wanted was peace. Archie was the total opposite of Jerry he always used to ~~be~~ bullying Jerry and the other people from the high school. In the end every one who was torture<sup>d</sup> by Archie let go their fears and none of them were afraid of Archie.



This is a very good example of your writing. Spend extra time proofreading for errors that you know how to fix. Make sure you have explored the topic you were assigned. (B)

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The students wanted to know if they were still going to be working in the stations even though the essays were done. When I said the stations were something we were going to continue in the class, they were pleased to know they would still have the opportunities to work on their own. I only assigned two stations for a few days and asked the students to work on their independent reading at home instead of regular homework. I distributed quotes from their next book, The Secret Life of Bees, and they used these quotes as their journal topics. I originally thought this would be an easy way to introduce the more universal themes of the novel. Some students, though, thought this made their assignment more difficult. They wanted to use their class writing time to look in the book to find the quotes, instead of applying them to their own lives. The students who were assigned to the vocabulary station worked on defining words from the novel. These lists were divided by chapter so the students would have them for reference while reading the novel. The students worked independently in the journaling station, but were permitted to work together in the vocabulary station. They explained the definitions of the words and helped each other to create sentences using the vocabulary words. Usually, the students liked to work together on vocabulary because they did not like to look up words and they often did not understand some of the definitions the dictionary provided. When they worked together, they were then able to explain the words to each other, therefore increasing understanding of the words.

## Working in the Vocabulary Station

thesaurus.com



11/17/06

Language and Literature T2

## The Secret Life of Bees

## Chapter One Vocabulary

1. presumptuous (adj) <sup>overstepping due bounds, taking liberties</sup>  
arrogant, bold, self-confident, presuming, ~~arrogant~~
2. paradise (n) Heaven, a place or state of bliss
3. insomniac (n) <sup>prolonged and usually abnormal sleeplessness</sup>  
alive, careful, restless, unsleeping
4. ornery (adj) <sup>bad-tempered, difficult, and often do things that are mean</sup>  
conflicting, unfriendly, negative ~~spite~~ <sup>spite</sup>
5. fury (n) violent or very strong anger <sup>bluster, mad</sup>
6. overwhelm (v) <sup>affects very strongly and don't know how to deal</sup>  
beat, grab, crush, overcome, ~~with a feeling or event~~
7. mercantile (n) relating to or involved in trade  
exchange, market, sales, profitable
8. cease (v) stop happening or existing (stop, end, finish)
9. despise (v) <sup>dislike them and have a very low opinion of them.</sup>  
(look down on, loathe, scorn, detest, revile, abhor.) ~~dislike~~
10. makeshift (adj)  
temporary and usually of poor quality,  
but they are ~~you~~ used because there is nothing better  
available  
(= temporary, provisional, substitute, expedient, stopgap)

09/11/06/21

Figure 4. Completed vocabulary work from an eleventh-grade ESL student

## Continued Work in the Vocabulary Station

1. It would be presumptuous to tell their parents what they are wrong.
2. For me, coming to the United States was like the paradise in a desert.
3. My brother does his work only at night like insomniac.
4. A child is ornery when they want something.
5. Her face was filled with fury and pain when she saw the scary movie.
6. I was overwhelmed when she screamed at me.
7. New York is mercantile city.
8. When he told us about his mom's death we ceased to laugh.
9. The murder killed her, because he despised her.
10. The cardboard boxes become a makeshift shelters for homeless people.

Figure 5. Vocabulary sentences written by an eleventh-grade ESL student

Sally

*I know we are supposed to work together to do these vocabulary words, but I really hate working with other people. It's not really that I hate working with them, but I hate doing vocab with them. A lot of people in the class just want to do the vocab to get it done. They never listen when Ms. Marvin says these are words*

*we are going to need to know. They ignore the fact that these words might show up on the TOEFL or the SAT or the HSPA. Instead, they rush through the work just to get the assignments done.*

*Ms. Marvin says that when we work in groups, we are supposed to work together to find the correct answers. We aren't supposed to split up the lists and then just share the answers. That is what they do unless she is standing there watching us all the time. Whenever she moves away to check on the other students, they go back to copying the answers from each other. I am pretty good at using the dictionary or a translator so I get a lot of the words done first. Then, everyone wants to copy mine. It isn't fair because I did most of the work and they just copy it.*

Although the students liked working in the stations, they were not as adept at working independently as I thought they would be. Even when the students were working in the vocabulary station, which allowed them the chance to work together, they easily strayed from the assignment. As time passed, I thought the students would become more focused in their groups because they would have to complete the work within forty minutes. In addition, they were quizzed on the vocabulary as their groups were assigned to the station. However, with only eleven students, even one person can distract the whole class.

Ms. Marvin: If you are in the vocabulary group and you have finished the assignment, you should be working on studying the words. You should not be fooling around or be off-task. Ken, have you finished your work?

Ken: Almost.

Ms. Marvin: If you aren't done, then you should be working. You shouldn't be talking or doing other work.

Jose: Can I do my vocabulary with Ken's group since I finished my journal?

Ms. Marvin: You can, but I do not want you to rely on Ken's translator to find the meanings of the words. You have to use a dictionary and discuss the meanings of the words.

Jose: Okay.

*Students worked quietly in their groups.*

Ms. Marvin: You have about ten more minutes to complete your work today.

Ken and Jose, have you finished all of the vocabulary? I am noticing you aren't working anymore.

Ken: That's because we're done with the assignment.

Ms. Marvin: Really? That was fast. Okay, hand them in.

Jose: Here. Look, all done!

Ms. Marvin: Where are the sentences you wrote?

Ken: Sentences? What sentences?

Ms. Marvin: After you find the meanings of the words, you are supposed to write a sentence for each word that shows you understand the meaning.

Did you do that?

Ken: I didn't know we had to.

Ms. Marvin: We have done that for every chapter. It is also explained  
in the directions on the vocabulary list and written on the board.  
We have talked before about paying attention to directions. I really  
need you to focus on things like this, okay?

Ken: Can I do them for homework?

Jose: I will do them tonight, too.

Ms. Marvin: You can, but you are going to lose some points because of  
the class time you wasted. Does that make sense?

Jose: Yeah, that's fair, I guess.

Ms. Marvin: In the future, I want you to make sure you understand  
exactly what you are supposed to do for each assignment. If  
something seems wrong or it seems like I didn't give you forty  
minutes worth of work, then you need to double check the  
requirements with me.

Ken: Okay.

As students lost focus in the vocabulary station, they were also easily distracted in the journal writing station. Roman frequently lost his journal and spent valuable minutes each class period looking for it before deciding to write his entries on lined paper. Jose often came to class without a pen. Instead of asking to borrow one when he arrived, he spent time searching his backpack and pockets, only to remember he did not have one with him. Constantly asking students to get back on track or concentrate on what they were doing was not working. I asked the students what I could do to help them focus on the work they needed to accomplish. They explained they liked working in the stations, and they liked having some freedom in their assignments. Jose asked if he could listen to his iPod while writing in the journaling station. He explained he was able to block out the other people in the room while he was listening to music. He said he could think about what he was writing, instead of what other people were doing in the classroom.

**December 2006: “The worst that can happen is that you change it later.”**

Something had to change. I liked the students working in their small groups and working on different assignments while I was able to work with some of them or observe how they were working. I did not like the way some of the students felt that any time they were not being directly instructed by me was a

time to lose focus or socialize with other students. I had to revamp the approach I was taking. I had to make the work more valuable to the students.

I assessed the students' reading of chapter one of The Secret Life of Bees and was surprised to see that a number of students had done poorly on the quiz.

The Secret Life of Bees Reading Quiz

Name: XXXXXXXXXX

**The Secret Life of Bees**

Chapter One Quiz

1. Who is Rosaleen?

She is Lily's best friend. Also SLO is Lily's first name

2. Who is T. Ray?

He is Lily's father.

3. What are the "Martha Whites"?

4. What happened to the narrator's mother? Be specific.

She died because of Lily. Lily shot her mother by an accident when her parents were arguing.

5. Where is the novel set?

The novel is set in California.

6. T. Ray finds Lily in the woods. What does he think she is doing?

Ray thinks Lily is dating with a boy, but SLO is not.

7. Why is Rosaleen going to church on July fourth?

Because she can get some stuffs from there.

8. What does Rosaleen steal from Lily's church?

She steals

9. Explain what happened when Rosaleen and Lily arrived downtown. Be specific and provide details. (You may go on to the back if you need more space.)

They met three white men who insulted Rosaleen. Rosaleen got angry and spilt their tobacco-juice on their feet. The men called the police who took Rosaleen and Lily.

Figure 6. Novel-reading quiz by a tenth-grade ESL student

Instead of returning the quiz and discussing chapter one as a whole class, I decided to use the quiz as an opportunity to try something new in the learning stations. I divided the students into groups based on their quiz grades. I then distributed their original quizzes and blank copies of the same quiz. In groups, the students used their books to respond to the questions they had gotten wrong on the quiz. In addition to the correct answer, they also had to include the page number where they had found the answer. I felt this would prevent students from simply sharing their answers.

I also incorporated technology into the learning stations by allowing the students to use the computers in the classroom to respond to the literature we were reading in class. The students used their accounts on nicenet.net to answer questions about the reading they had done. While they were working in other stations in the classroom, they rotated through the two computers to respond to the questions I had posted online.

The students' responses to the online questions showed they had a clear understanding of the chapter. In addition, their corrected quizzes showed they had gone back through the book to respond to the questions. When we approached chapter two, I knew I had to continue using the stations to help the students with their reading comprehension. I divided the students into groups again to discuss chapter two of the novel. Instead of giving them questions about the chapter, I asked them to develop discussion questions about what had happened in the

chapter. They worked together to develop these questions that they then traded to review and understand the chapter. The students had trouble creating questions about the chapter. Although they were able to ask questions, they encountered difficulty when they had to look for themes that would lead to discussion, instead of questions about plot and characterization.

We continued working on the novel in this way throughout the remainder of the reading. The students studied vocabulary from the chapters in the novel instead of arbitrary words. The words they studied were then used in class discussion and in the discussion questions the students developed. In this way, I felt the vocabulary was more useful for the students. They were able to see the words in context because they were present in the chapters. They were also able to use the words in context in their own speaking.

Their journal writing was also more closely connected to the novel. To elicit responses, I used quotes from the chapters they were reading and questions about the themes. For the journal assignments, they had to show the connections between the book and real life. Because of this, they were able to make text-to-self connections about the novel, increasing their comprehension of the novel.

Although I made changes to the other stations, I did not adjust the independent reading station. Students continued reading their chosen novels and completing book logs that I collected. They were allowed to abandon any book if they chose to, although no additional students made that choice.

Students continued reading The Secret Life of Bees, and we used the stations to begin another essay. This time, the students completed a less-structured packet about the essay topic to plan their writing (See Appendix I). They worked in the same essay groups and with me in small-group instruction to complete the writing assignment.

Once winter break arrived, the students and I were more accustomed to working in small-group scenarios. The structure offered by this type of classroom arrangement enabled students to work independently and at their own pace. More importantly, though, it allowed students to work with me in a less-threatening environment in groups of three or four. Students who were normally shy were more open to asking questions or expressing their confusion. More advanced students were able to ask higher-level questions without wondering if they were embarrassing themselves. Finally, students were able to see each other's strengths by helping each other in the independent stations.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Throughout my data collection, I needed to keep focused on my research question. With so much activity, learning and dialogue in my classroom, I could easily have lost my way. Instead, I kept copies of my research question available for frequent access. Whenever I opened my desk drawer, my question greeted me from an index card. When I opened my files on my computer, I did not “have mail,” I “had question.” Through this availability of my question, I kept myself focused and constantly reflective.

### **Gathering the Information**

My original data-collection plan dictated that I was to observe, interview, survey, and collect student work. The majority of my information grew from observations, surveys, and student work. Although I conducted a few interviews, my students were not able to schedule much time with me. When time allowed, I interviewed a few students during class. Their responses were more in-depth in writing than when they took the time to speak with me.

The most beneficial of my data-gathering techniques was the use of observational notes. Originally, I had planned to take notes whenever the students were working in the stations. As my study progressed, I saw that they were transferring some of the knowledge they gained from working in the stations to the days I conducted whole-class instruction. Because of this, I also took

observational notes in these class sessions. While the students worked, I kept track of who was working with whom and how these groups were collaborating. I also noted who worked best in each station and who was emerging as a leader. I noted students' opinions of the stations and the work through their facial expressions, their commitment to their assigned tasks, their spoken reactions, and their time off-task. My notes were not just limited to classroom actions and the way the students worked in the stations. I also kept track of who was experiencing difficulty with the work and who seemed to rise to the presented challenges.

While I was in class, I wrote notes in a steno pad, on notecards, and on sticky-notes. After class, I typed these notes and my comments about them into my field log. Once this was saved, and backed up, I destroyed the original handwritten copies. Once these pages were printed, I read through the notes looking for successes and failures of the stations. I looked for off-task behavior and checked to see if it was a result of perceived frustration on the students' part or my own. I also looked to see how students were able to confront problems when they worked in the stations and whether these coping strategies differed when the students worked with me in small-group instruction.

Throughout the semester, I revisited the notes to begin my analysis. I constantly reread what I had written and made additional notes in the margins. These notes then became codes which I kept track of on a chart in my field log.

Also included in my field log were the questionnaires the students completed prior to beginning the station assignments (See Appendix G). The majority of the questions were multiple-choice, but the students also had the opportunity to expand on their responses in short-answer format. Many of the students responded clearly and expressed their opinions about their knowledge of the English language. Those whose answers were unclear or needed more information met with me during class to elaborate. As they spoke, I documented what they were saying on their questionnaires so I could review them later. I used these questionnaires to determine which students would begin in which stations. At the end of the semester, the students completed the same questionnaire so I could compare their responses.

In addition to these methods, I collected journal entries written by the students. These entries asked students to explain their feelings about the learning stations (See Appendix D). I used the information from these responses to aide me in determining the types of changes I made to the stations. When students seemed confused about what to write in response to these prompts, I changed tactics and gave them sentence starters that they completed to express their feelings.

Finally, I collected and photocopied student work to analyze. I made copies of their quizzes, journal entries, vocabulary lists, vocabulary sentences, and essays. As I reviewed their products, I compared some of their work to my observational notes from the same day. For example, when someone was more

successful than usual with vocabulary, I investigated who had been in his learning station the day of that assignment. Also, when a student's work looked rushed or was incomplete, I made the same investigation. In this way, I was able to see if the learning stations had an influence on student achievement.

All of this information was filed in my field log, which I kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. I frequently reviewed the data and made changes to the codes I was using to mark the notes, samples, and other documents. These codes were combined on a chart which allowed me to see which were related. From these relationships, I developed bins to keep connected ideas together. These bins and the insights gleaned from them became the theme statements of my findings.

### **Reviewing and Organizing the Information**

The more I reviewed my data, the more I began to see the possible results of my study. Certain students were emerging as beneficiaries of my study. Some aspects of my classroom were more successful than others. As these ideas broke through the surface, my study was more easily focused on that ever-present question: What will be the observed and reported experiences when learning centers are used in the secondary ESL English classroom?

With all of this information in my head and in my growing binder, I needed to reorganize my thoughts, ideas, and data. I reorganized my data in different ways to see if the information seemed to change. I looked at student

work by date along with the notes that matched these dates. When that was finished, I rearranged the work by genre to see if students were improving in one aspect more than another. I made duplicate photocopies of the students' work and kept it in different organizational sections of my field log. That way, I was able to explore both types of connections without having to constantly rearrange the information. In addition to this, I wrote a series of analytical memos. My methodological memo reevaluated what I was doing and how I was accomplishing what needed to be done. I created a chart that showed a day-by-day breakdown of what I had accomplished thus far and what I was still planning to do. Later, I completed a mid-study memo which afforded me the opportunity to see where I had been and where I was going. I checked to see if there were ideas I needed to explore further or ones that needed more detail. Finally, I explored my use of figurative language in the classroom. I was able to see how the students' use of language affected their learning. I was also able to see how my use of this device sometimes delayed their learning because they were unclear about what I meant with some expressions. Because of this evaluative and reflective practice, I was able to curtail my use of figurative language to provide the students with clearer instruction.

I gathered the codes I was using and created a chart which helped me to see the different connections between the codes in use. From these codes, I was able to see the relationships between different aspects of my class. Grouping these

codes, I created a graphic organizer that included the theme statements I created from the relationship between the codes. In this way, I was able to explore the results and findings of my study. My theme statements were:

*Using learning stations in the secondary ESL classroom increases small group instruction time, thereby increasing a student's variety of tasks and learning experiences.*

*Teacher questioning and reminding leads to changes in teacher planning of student time in learning stations.*

*Class behavior is more frequently appropriate when students work in learning stations.*

*Small group instruction and the implementation of learning stations effectively address the problems of second language learners.*

*Student involvement in the classroom is increased by the use of learning stations and small group instruction.*

Once I was able to review and reorganize the information I had collected, I realized more questions were developing. I kept a running list of the additional questions that were emerging from the original study. These questions broadened my original scope, but still pertained to my original ideas.

Throughout this process, I read educational philosophers, including Dewey, Vygotsky, Friere, and Delpit and Dowdy, whose thinking and writing encouraged me to continue in my data analysis. Through these readings, I was able to see more clearly that the study I was conducting was benefiting my students in a positive way. Their freedom to choose what they were learning and

how they were learning helped them to become interested in their education. In this way, I was in alignment with the philosophers I was reading.

### **DATA ANALYSIS: FINDINGS**

Once my data were collected and organized, my next step was to analyze what I had discovered through this study. I developed a number of theme statements that summarized what I learned.

*Using learning stations in the secondary ESL classroom increases small group instruction time, thereby increasing a student's variety of tasks and learning experiences.*

Before incorporating learning stations into my instructional practice, I did not have much time for small group instruction. When I used small group instruction, it was often to remediate a problem in a unit. For example, if I noticed a number of students were struggling with forming the past tense of verbs, I would develop a mini-lesson about the problem area. Then, in class, I would pull out the students experiencing the trouble. We would sit at a table in the back of the room to review their work and execute the mini-lesson. In the meantime, the rest of the class would work on grammar issues. Usually, these would be higher-level lessons that would include instruction and practice. Because this class was strictly ESL students, grammar lessons usually contained rules and forms of English they had not yet learned. However, the students working on remediating their skills with me then did not receive the higher-level lesson, or, if they did, it was as a homework assignment. As high school students, they did not view this as

beneficial to their language acquisition; rather, they saw it as a punishment for not understanding, or as busy work. DeLisle-Walker (1996) found that students saw assignments, particularly writing, as more important when specific time was scheduled for them. In my first attempts at small-group instruction, students knew I was trying to fix their errors, not necessarily teach something new. Once the learning stations started and I was able to plan more effective small-group lessons, the students began to see the value of what we were doing.

Before I started using the learning stations, the rest of the class was frequently off-task during small-group instruction. They seemed to believe that working on their own meant I was not watching them. In addition, they assumed their independent work was of less value than their regular classwork. Because of these beliefs, the work they submitted was often rushed, sloppy, and lacking detail. Meanwhile, the students chosen for small group instruction often felt as if they were assigned to the group because they were doing poorly in class.

When I began developing my study, I knew there had to be a way to work with a small group of students while others could work independently, yet effectively. By providing choice in the independent reading station, I believed the students would have greater interest in completing their work. I also knew the students had to work with vocabulary words that would pertain to their lives, instead of simply for assignments. The words I assigned were chosen from a TOEFL practice book and from the novels we read in class. Finally, I had to

develop journal entries that would illuminate the connections between the reading assignments and the students' lives.

Once we began working in the learning stations, the students demonstrated the value of their independent learning. They were responsible for choosing their independent reading books. Students had the opportunity to review the books available to them in the classroom library or the school library or to bring their own book to class. The students were frequently on task and engrossed in their reading. Students who were usually the first to take the opportunity to stray off-task found themselves involved in their reading. For example, as I observed the students in the independent reading station, I overheard a conversation between Jose and Alejandro. Jose was trying to talk to Alejandro about their plans for the weekend. The more he whispered Alejandro's name, the more Alejandro continued to ignore him. Finally, Alejandro turned to him and said, "Stop talking. I am trying to read my book."

Because of the increase in learned vocabulary, the students had a greater understanding of the texts they read (Gaudio 2003). Many of the words we studied from the TOEFL prep books appeared in our reading. In addition, defining vocabulary words from the novels before reading gave students the opportunity to have prior knowledge of these words when they encountered them.

The same response was found when students were assigned to vocabulary work. They saw that the words they were learning would benefit them beyond the

vocabulary quiz. Because of this, students worked collaboratively to complete the vocabulary assignments. As Szyborski (1995) found, the students were just as successful learning these words in isolation as they were learning words by using context clues. They defined the words and created sentences that demonstrated their understanding. They then used these words in conversation and their journal writing. Students also began using words they had seen in their independent reading books. Often these words were slang or technical terms the students had not known. Although I knew their vocabulary could increase through increased reading (Glowacki, Lanucha & Pietrus 2001; Fondas 1992), I was surprised to witness concrete examples of this improvement. For example, Jose, whose English vocabulary skills are very limited, was trying to explain why Archie, the character in the novel we were reading, was so evil. Finally, he said he felt Archie was evil because he was always manipulating people. I agreed and asked him why he chose to use the word manipulate. He responded that it was on the vocabulary list and it was the only word he could think of that really meant what he wanted to say.

In addition to using the words in their journals, they were able to make connections between the novels they were reading and their lives. The journal topics they completed asked the students to use examples from the novels and their own experiences to discuss the universality of the literature. In turn, this

aided their understanding of the essay topics. As Furr and Bauman (2003) also found, this time spent journaling improved students' essay writing.

While the students were working in these stations, I was able to provide small group instruction about formal essay writing. These groups were determined by skill-level and ability. Therefore, in these groups I was able to address lacking skills for lower-level students and provide enrichment for higher-level students. In this way, I was able to confront the issues that had plagued my earlier attempts to conduct small group instruction. From these different types of classroom instruction, I was able to increase the variety of assignments available to my students.

*Teacher and student self-reflection leads to interactive planning of classroom time.*

As with any effective teaching practice, the most important aspect of making change is being reflective and using the information gleaned from this reflection to approach the work differently. This process of questioning and reflecting led me to make changes in the way I used the learning stations in my classroom. As Tomlinson (1999) explained, a teacher needs to be in tune with the needs of her students. Once the teacher has an understanding of these needs, she can then make decisions in reaction to them to better benefit her students. "The

educator by the very nature of his work is obliged to see his present work in terms of what it accomplishes, or fails to accomplish, for a future whose objects are linked with those of the present” (Dewey, 1997, p. 76). If I was going to help my students to be successful, I first had to be reflective. Each lesson I planned had to begin with thinking back to what worked and what did not work in the past. If I could grab my students’ interest, they could be more motivated to keep these interests in reading and English as they aged. If they could let themselves enjoy school now, and see they had an active role in their education, they might gain a love for learning that would grow with them.

As the students worked in groups, I discovered I had more questions about the stations I had assigned. Although I knew they needed to work in each station frequently, I was curious about how the different grouping affected the students’ performance, especially in the vocabulary station. In the other station, the students worked independently. In the vocabulary station, however, the students worked collaboratively to complete their work. Originally, I had grouped the students by ability level. Once they had worked in the stations, though, I realized that some low-level students were actually high achievers when studying vocabulary. In turn, some high-level students were low achievers when working on vocabulary lessons.

As I questioned their placement in the groups, I made changes to my original plan. However, it was not simply the group placements that changed as a

result of my questioning. After a few months in the stations, the students fell into a routine of spending some of their class time off task. They had been so successful in the beginning of using the stations; I wondered why they were beginning to stray off-task. As I questioned this, I made more changes to the assignments in the stations. For example, the students began vocabulary lessons using a TOEFL instruction book. Instead of using this book, I began choosing vocabulary words from the chapters the students were reading. Once I made this change, the students had a more valuable connection to their work. Hoyt (2000) suggested using both teacher and student reflections to aide in classroom decisions. The incorporation of the students' feedback about the stations and my own reflection led me to be able to make positive changes to the way I was conducting the stations. Because of their reflections about the stations, I was able to make additional changes. Sally once told me she liked the independent reading station best, but knew she needed more work on her vocabulary skills. After this conversation, she began choosing the vocabulary station more frequently when given the opportunity. In addition, Roman said that he had trouble in the journal writing station. He knew he would need to be able to write in a timed format for standardized tests and other class assignments, but he did not want to work on journal writing. Whenever the students were given the opportunity to choose their stations, he avoided the journaling station. After class one day, I asked Roman what he thought we could do to solve this problem. I did not want to assign him to

a station he dreaded, but he had to work at all of the stations to be successful.

After much thought, Roman suggested using smaller chunks of class time in the different stations. Instead of spending thirty minutes in one place, he thought we could spend about ten minutes in three places. Although this plan was not as successful as he and I had hoped it would be, I experimented with the change in class. Through our combined questioning and reflecting, we were able to make a change in the way our time was used in class. Not only did this change help Roman to begin to overcome his dread of the journaling station, but it also showed him that I was willing to listen to his ideas about what could happen in our class.

Finally, my questioning led to changes in the way I taught essay writing. Normally, I would use whole class instruction to review the necessary steps to plan the essay and then conduct another lesson for the whole class about writing the essay. This time, though, I used three days of small group instruction to present the essay planning. I was able to work with three or four students at a time, so I could easily tell who had a complete understanding of the process. Once the students had completed this step, they worked in their groups to create the foundations for their essays. After they had the planning pages done, I met with the small groups again to continue the essay. This resulted in higher quality essays. The students also had fewer questions on the second essay assignment.

Overall, the process of reflecting and questioning the actions in my classroom led me to make changes in the way I was teaching. It also led me to consistently make changes as I continued with the learning stations. These changes benefited the students because they led to a variety of activities and assignments.

*Class behavior is more frequently appropriate when students work in learning stations.*

One of the reasons I was looking for a new way to involve my students in their classwork was because of their behavior. Last year, these students were easily distracted from my lessons. Although I frequently varied my instruction, students would take any available opportunity to socialize or participate in off-task behavior. Part of this came from the students' close relationships. Being in ESL classes created a certain bond for the students. In many of their other classes, they were the only people who spoke another language or who had trouble understanding the teacher. When they came together for an ESL class, they were with other students they knew had similar problems. This often led to a close relationship other students could not understand. These classes were usually closer and more familial than others. Although this could be a benefit to the students and the teacher, it could also lead to class management problems.

In ESL classes, the students had so much information to learn to be able to catch up to their grade-level peers, they did not often have the opportunities for choice in their curriculum. Because of the independent reading station, students were allowed to make their own decisions regarding what books they would read. Because of the availability of high-interest books in the classroom library, students felt they had a more active role in their own learning. This increased their interest and, therefore, their success (Krashen, 1998; McQuillan, 1998; Neuman, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2001; all cited in Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006).

“Reading and writing must be something the child needs” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 117). For the students in this class, reading and writing in English was something they all needed. They had to have these skills to be able to communicate in English. This communication, then, transferred to their success levels in other classes, as well as in the real world. By having the ability to effectively communicate in English, the student could be more successful academically, and be better prepared for employment. Because the students were able to see this connection, they took on a more active role in their own learning.

In addition to the increased comfort level, students also tended to stray off task when they felt too challenged. When the students struggled with a concept, they would often engage in conversations with classmates. It seemed the students would rather be reprimanded for being off-task than admit they did not understand what was happening in class. Some students were embarrassed to express their

frustration or lack of understanding of the lesson. This embarrassment led them to act out and disrupt the rest of the class.

When the students were placed in learning stations, they did not have to let other students see when they were having trouble. For example, some of the slower readers did not like to read aloud in class because they did not want the others to know they were having trouble reading. When students had the opportunity to work on independent reading, the other students did not see if they were reading quickly or struggling. This increased on-task behavior because the students were not worried about impressing their peers. Kim told me she liked the independent reading station more than she liked our reading aloud in class. She explained that her mind did not know when she was pronouncing something wrong. She did not have to worry that other students would not understand her or she would say something wrong.

In addition to the reading, the students completed journal entries they only shared with me. Therefore, they and I were the only ones who knew how much they were able to produce in forty minutes of class time. When Jose was assigned to the journaling station, he often spent ten minutes looking for a pen, or sharpening his pencil, or getting more paper. Finally, I kept him after class to find out what was preventing him from working on his writing. He explained that he thought people were going to be looking at how much he was putting on his paper and he was worried he would not have enough to say about a topic. When I

explained that the other students had the same concerns, he did not seem to believe me. I went on to say that this was one of the reasons we were working in these groups. That way, no one had to feel as if he could not keep up with everyone else. The next day in class, I told the students we were going to add something new to the journaling station. I explained that I had done a lot of thinking about how to make the station work for everyone. From that point, we would have certain days when people in the journaling station would receive different topics than the other people in the station. In addition, they would be required to write entries of different lengths. Because of this new approach, no one in the station knew what the other students had been assigned or how much they had to write. This, too, lessened the pressure they put on themselves.

Finally, students were permitted to work together when they were in the vocabulary station. If a student did not know the answer, he could move on to another question and receive help from a peer. Students who did not normally work together often chose one another in the vocabulary station. Jose and Ken, for example, barely spoke to each other in class. However, when Ken discovered that Jose was good at figuring out Spanish and English cognates and Jose discovered that Ken had an electronic translator, they started to pair up in the vocabulary station.

The students also had ample opportunities to choose their own stations. This allowed them to see the choices they had in their own education. Many

times, I allowed the students to sign-up on the white board for the stations they wanted. The catch, however, was the first-come, first-served approach I used for the sign-ups. If the student spent too much time socializing in the hallway, he would have less of a chance of getting the station assignment he wanted. On days when students were allowed to choose their stations, they were usually on time or racing to class. As Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found, students participated more frequently because they felt they had ownership over the material and their interactions with the material. Although I varied the make up of the groups often, students were usually paired with someone of their own ability level. In this way, they were able to complete more work confidently.

Because of this individual and group work, the students felt more comfortable in their surroundings. This comfort allowed the students to increase their work products. It also allowed the students to work at their own pace, decreasing the time the students spent off-task. Their behavior, then, was more conducive to learning.

*Small group instruction and the implementation of learning stations effectively differentiate instruction for second language learners, therefore addressing their varied language needs.*

Second language learners tend to experience many of the same problems when studying English. Students from similar backgrounds can have the same

types of grammar errors in common, but more often the language issues need to be addressed individually. When students are able to learn in small groups, they can address their language issues. When they have the opportunity to work in a small group with the teacher, they can more effectively focus on the skills they need.

The use of learning stations in the classroom allowed students to be able to work on their own language issues. Tomlinson and Cunningham Eidson (2003) explained that differentiated instruction responds to learners' individual needs. Using the learning stations was one way to effectively differentiate instruction to meet the varying needs of English Language Learners. The rotation of students through the different learning stations allowed students to practice their English skills. They did not have to continuously work on the same problem until they got it right. Instead, they varied their experiences, therefore producing a more rounded approach to learning. For example, many students struggled with being able to write a page or more on a given topic. Implementing learning stations in the classroom made addressing the needs of each learner more productive (Tomlinson, 1999) However, for state tests and graded assignments in other classes, the students need to be able to produce a large amount of work in a small amount of time. Writing in the journaling station allowed students time to practice writing in this format.

Moreover, students also had a difficult time understanding the tone of a written piece in English because they did not have a strong enough grasp on the language. While participating in the independent reading station, these students had ample opportunities to practice their reading skills. Because there were no deadlines or specific page assignments per session, the students were able to read at their own pace to ensure understanding.

Students were also able to increase their vocabulary skills in another station. Many of the students were familiar with words they heard, but they were unable to transfer this knowledge into their own writing or speaking. Through the writing of sentences in the vocabulary station, students practiced using new words in a nonthreatening manner. These sentences were then checked for correct usage. The assigned words were ones that are common in English speaking and writing. In this way, students increased their English vocabulary skills. While reading The Chocolate War, students learned the word nemesis. Once they understood the meaning of the word, they began incorporating it into their conversations. As I was walking around the desks checking homework one day, I overheard a conversation between Alejandro and Jose. They were talking about a boy they knew who was being overly-friendly to Jose's girlfriend. Jose said that he would just have to explain to her that the boy was his nemesis and tell her not to talk to him anymore.

“Language is an everyday, every minute matter” (Kohl, 2002, p. 147). I needed to address my students at levels and through language they could understand. However, beyond that, I also had to be aware of their problems with the English language. Often, students meant one thing but expressed quite another. They were unable to fully express their thoughts in English. In addition to this, they also struggled with the ways to correctly use grammar and syntax in their speech. When the students wrote sentences, they were able to explore the different forms of the vocabulary words. Alejandro liked to change the forms of the vocabulary words to see if he could get them right. For example, when the students were assigned “attractive” as a vocabulary word, he changed his sentence and used the verb attracted. He then brought me the sentence to review so he could know if he used the word correctly. As I looked over his work, we were able to talk about how to change words to use them as different parts of speech. It was through dialogue and the learning stations that I was able to address these issues and help the students improve their English.

Whenever I interacted with my students, be it before class, during downtime, through lessons, or after class, I was constantly monitoring the ways they expressed themselves. Many students struggled with using the correct ending of a verb, formulating the right noun, and using the correct pronoun or preposition. Because the students trusted me and knew that I was trying to help them, I corrected them when I could, although not usually in front of the class.

Once I saw that many students were struggling with the same problem, I was able to address it in small-group lessons or in the learning stations. In this way, I was able to review the problem of writing the correct form of a verb to make sure it agreed with its subject. Although many of the students were able to use verbs correctly in speech, they encountered problems while writing. As I worked with one group of essay writers, I explained the verb problem. I went through their papers with a highlighter and marked the verbs that were used incorrectly. Jim wanted to know why people do not correct him every time he speaks. I explained that he does not usually make these errors in speech, which was part of the reason I was confused about his writing. He said that when he hears himself start to say something he knows it sounds wrong, but he does not think out loud when he writes.

Through the implementation of learning stations, ESL students had the opportunity to focus on their language learning issues. Whole class instruction did not afford this same type of opportunity to these students who needed to address their individual learning and language problems. Individual and small group methods more effectively addressed these issues.

*Student involvement in the classroom is increased by the use of learning stations and small group instruction.*

When a student is not confident about his ability in a class, he can easily slip between the cracks. He can easily rely on other students to answer questions and participate in class discussion. In this way, he does not have to take responsibility for his own learning. He can easily glide through class depending on other people to involve themselves as he sits back and listens.

When this same student is taught through small group instruction, he has no choice but to participate. When there are only three students working with the teacher, every student has to participate. Students are then more responsible for being involved in their learning.

Before beginning to work in the learning stations, I used a few days of class time to introduce the idea to the students. We spent time in each station so they would know what was expected of them in each place. Because of this instruction, I was able to allow the students to have more control over their time in the stations (Hoyt, 2000). They had a clear understanding of what to do and were able to help other students in case of confusion. When students had an interest in what was happening in the classroom, they were more involved with the lessons.

As we began reading The Secret Life of Bees in class, the students were curious to know more about the author and the South. We had learned a little

about the Civil Rights Movement and segregation last year, but they wanted to know more about the setting of the novel. I explained the author had grown up in the South and I was about to show them her website when Alejandro interrupted me. He wanted to know if the Sue Monk Kidd was still alive. I explained that she was and she lived in South Carolina. He said he was surprised that people still write books. He thought authors were “all dead guys like Shakespeare.” When I explained that many people write books, articles and stories, he said he thought he could write a book about his life. He told the class he had a pretty interesting story and maybe someday Ms. Marvin would teach his book to the class. Peter told him he would probably have to write his homework before he could write a book. Alejandro explained that he was going to do it more now so he could practice becoming a writer.

The students did not only become involved with writing. Last year, Peter never completed one of the books I assigned. He was content to do enough work to pass, but not more than that. One day after he was in the independent reading station, I noticed he was not putting his book and reading log back on the shelf like the other students. When I asked him to put his things away, he replied by asking if he could take the book home for the night. The surprise on my face must have been evident because he said he was really enjoying the book and wanted to see if he could find more like it to read on his own.

When I was working in small groups to review essay planning and writing, I was able to discuss each essay in depth with its author. Although many of the students had simply copied examples from the board last year, this year they did not have the chance to do this. Instead, they had to provide at least one new example while completing the worksheet. I was then able to check for understanding and make sure the students were not relying on their peers. This individual attention changed the way the students viewed working in class. Instead of simply writing what other students had or copying ideas from the board, they could introduce their own ideas in a nonthreatening environment. This increased their involvement in the class and the day-to-day lessons.

In large classes, many students are able to pretend they understand by remaining quiet or misbehaving. It is difficult for a teacher to monitor exactly what each student knows in this large setting. However, when students and teachers are able to work in small groups, their relationship is fostered. The teacher can also keep a closer eye on exactly what the student is gaining from the lesson. In this way, the students are forced to be involved in the classroom.

**ESL PROBLEMS**

- \*Incorrect Grammar
  - \*Language Problems
  - \*Literal Readings
  - \*Reading Level Concerns
  - \*Incorrect Vocabulary
  - \*Vocabulary Questions
  - \*Work Too Difficult
- Small group instruction and the implementation of learning stations effectively differentiate instruction for second language learners, thereby addressing their varied language needs.*

**What are the observed and reported experiences of using learning stations in the secondary ESL English classroom?**

**LEARNING STATIONS**

- \*Small Group Instruction
  - \*Independent Reading
  - \*Vocabulary Use
  - \*Journals
  - \*Writing
- Using learning stations in the secondary ESL classroom increases small group instruction time, thereby increasing a student's variety of tasks and learning experiences.*

**STUDENT INVOLVEMENT**

- \*Homework
- \*Student comments
- \*Insightful student comment
- \*Student initiative
- \*Student need
- \*Student question/connection
- \*Taking Notes
- \*Text-to-Self Connections

*Student involvement in the classroom is increased by the use of learning stations and small group instruction.*

**CLASS BEHAVIOR**

- \*All on task
  - \*Off task
  - \*Class Participation
  - \*Environment
- Class behavior is more frequently appropriate when students work in learning stations.*

**TEACHER ACTIONS**

- \*Teacher question
  - \*Planning
  - \*Reminders
- Teacher and student self-reflection leads to interactive planning of classroom time.*

### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

As with any new approach to teaching, I found there to be positives and negatives in the implementation of learning stations. As my study affirmed, the most valuable thing I can do as a teacher is reflect on what happens in my classroom and make changes based on what I see. Although I was pleased with many aspects of the learning stations, there are things I would change in the future.

Working in the learning stations was effective because of the limited number of students in the class. The method of instruction was effective with eleven students, but I do not know if it would be as effective with a larger class. Therefore, I would not be able to determine if I would use this method of instruction in future school years until I received class lists to know how many students are enrolled in the class. In addition, I used this method in an ESL class, so I do not know if I would be able to transfer the learning stations to a native speaking class.

Working in the learning stations was most effective when I allowed the students the opportunity to work with me in small groups. This type of personalized, differentiated instruction gave me the chance to see exactly where my students were struggling and to help them to be more successful. In the future, I plan to continue to use this method for teaching essay writing to ESL students. Although I will continue to use whole-group instruction to review the rules for

writing an essay, I will divide the students into groups for the actual essay writing so I can more easily assist them with their work.

I also plan to continue using the learning stations for independent reading opportunities. For one reason, the students do not have many opportunities to read on their own. Secondly, many ESL students are so overwhelmed by the amount of reading they have to accomplish for school that they are turned off by the thoughts of reading any more. When my students were given the chance to read something of their own choosing that met their interests, they became more involved in their books than I had originally thought they would.

In addition, I will continue to use the journaling station in my classroom. In the past, I have assigned students to work on their journals for homework as well as in class. I plan to go back to this method so the students can see that journaling is not just something we do in school. I am also curious to compare the finished products to see if there are noticeable differences in the assignments completed at home and the ones completed in school. I will also increase the amount of journal writing the students complete in class. I think the chance to write more often will only benefit my students.

In the future, I will need to change the way I approach vocabulary instruction in the learning stations. Although my students worked well together in the vocabulary station and learned the words they were assigned, I believe more effective ways exist to teach vocabulary to ESL students. I plan to research more

intensive ways to teach vocabulary to students and implement new instructional methods during the next school year.

I plan to make other changes to the learning stations for future classes. For example, I would like to have more uniform sets of work for the students to complete while they are in the stations. I think using a grammar station would be more effective for ESL students. I plan to develop grammar mini-lessons and units that are based on problems I see the students encountering in their writing. I would use the entries they complete in the journaling station to give them opportunities to practice the new skills they learn in isolation. I would also like to incorporate a station that provides the students the practice they need to prepare for the state graduation assessment. Although the students need to develop the skills needed to pass the test over time, I have found that specific preparation for standardized testing relieves some of the anxiety students feel before the test. If I can include a station that addresses the types of exercises seen on the test, I believe I can help the students to become more confident about the actual testing.

Overall, the most important change this study has inspired me to make is in the way I attempt new methods in the classroom. In the future, I plan to develop and research new methods to use in my classes. Once I have this information, I plan to continue to follow the steps I took while completing this study. I will take observer notes and collect data to determine if what I am doing is the most effective method of teaching my students. Finally, I will continue to

reflect on everything I do in my teaching. I believe this had value in changing the way I am able to help my students. The processes of reflective change and reflective teaching will benefit my future students.

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## APPENDIX A



August 18, 2006

Melissa E. Marvin  
2121 Blossom Lane  
Bethlehem, PA 18018

Dear Melissa E. Marvin

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Using Learning Stations in the Secondary ESL English Classroom" Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail ([medwh02@moravian.edu](mailto:medwh02@moravian.edu)) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board  
Moravian College  
610-861-1415

## APPENDIX B

September 5, 2006

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

For the past two years, I have been taking courses towards a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. These courses help me stay current with the most effective and innovative ways of teaching in order to provide the best learning experience for all of my students.

Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. My research will explore the effects learning stations will have on a student's English ability. Because my class consists of an extremely diverse population, I believe providing students with individualized instructional activities can help them be successful in English. Through this understanding, I will be able to adapt my teaching, therefore ensuring greater success for the students enrolled in Language and Literature Transition II.

As part of my research on learning stations, I will be collecting research information through student journals, questionnaires, work samples, and observation. All students will have the opportunity to provide feedback using these methods. The research used in my study will be only from those students who have received written permission to participate in this study. All student, teacher, staff and school names will be kept confidential. Any details which could be used to identify a child will be altered to protect that child's identity. No names or identifying characteristics will be included on the work samples in the study. Any materials pertaining to this study will be kept securely at my home. At the end of this study, all collected data will be destroyed. There are no anticipated risks in this study.

All students in my classroom will be involved in the current curriculum and classroom activities, whether they choose to participate in the study or not. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and students' grades will not be affected in any way. Any child may withdraw from this study at anytime with no penalties. If a child or his parent/guardian chooses not to participate in this study or decides to withdraw, I will not use any information pertaining to that child in my study.

All student names will be kept confidential. The name of any student, faculty member, or cooperating teacher will not appear in any written report or publication of this study. Only my name and the name of my sponsoring professors will be present in my study. All research materials will be kept secure in a protected location.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be contacted at Moravian College by phone (610)625-7958 or email [mccr01@moravian.edu](mailto:mccr01@moravian.edu).

If you have questions or concerns pertaining to my in-class study, please feel free to contact me. If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this form. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Melissa Toro

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this study, that I have read and understand this consent form and received a copy. Melissa Toro has my permission to conduct this study at \_\_\_\_\_ High School.

Principal's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 9/5/06

## APPENDIX C

September 6, 2006

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am currently pursuing my Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The courses I am taking aide me in implementing effective teaching methods and reflecting on my teaching practices.

During this semester, August through December, I am required to study my teaching and classroom practices. My research will explore the effects learning stations will have on a student's English ability. Because our class consists of an extremely diverse population, I believe providing students with individualized instructional activities can help them be successful in English. Through this understanding, I will be able to adapt my teaching, therefore ensuring greater success for the students enrolled in Language and Literature Transition II.

I will be collecting research information through student journals, questionnaires, work samples, and observation. All students will have the opportunity to provide feedback using these methods. The research used in my study will be only from those students who have received written permission to participate in this study. All student, teacher, staff and school names will be kept confidential. Any details which could be used to identify a child will be altered to protect that child's identity. No names or identifying characteristics will be included on the work samples in the study. Any materials pertaining to this study will be kept securely at my home. At the end of this study, all collected data will be destroyed.

No student will be singled out as a participant or non-participant in the study, as all students will continue to follow the required curriculum and be a part of all classroom activities. Your child will only be considered a participant in my research if I receive your written permission below. Your child may choose to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty to grades or classroom experience. If you child chooses to withdraw, I agree not to include any information pertaining to your child in any written reports of my research. Please notify me by phone or in writing if your child chooses to withdraw from this study.

If you have questions or concerns about my research at any time, please contact me by phone (908)231-8660 ext. 2775. My faculty sponsor is Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be reached at Moravian College by phone (610)861-1482 or by email mecrz01@moravian.edu.

If you consent to your student being a participant in my teacher research, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Ms. Marvin

I understand that Ms. Marvin will be collecting data as part of her research on learning stations in the ESL English classroom. My child has permission to be a participant in this study.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**Language and Literature Transition II  
Journal Entry

Please explain your feelings about using the learning stations in class. Be as specific and honest as possible. All of your thoughts and feelings will only be read by me. Your input will have an effect on how we continue using the learning stations throughout the year.

Language and Literature Transition II  
Journal Entry

Please use the space below to discuss your thoughts and feelings concerning the station you worked in today. Why did you choose this station? Do you feel you accomplished a lot of work today? What would you do differently the next time you are in this station?

Language and Literature Transition II  
Sentence Starter

Please complete the following sentences. You may add more information if necessary.

Today, I worked in the \_\_\_\_\_ station. I chose this station because...

**APPENDIX E**

Name:

Independent Reading: Book Log

As you explore the books available to you in the classroom, please complete the following book log. You will be able to refer to this log whenever you need to choose an independent reading book.

Title and Author of Book	From reading the back of the book, I discovered that it is about...	From skimming a few pages of the book, I think the vocabulary looks _____ because....	Write an X in this column if you think this is a book you would like to read.

**APPENDIX F**

INDEPENDENT READING LOG

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Author of Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Spent Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Pages read: \_\_\_\_\_

In your own words, summarize what happened on the pages you read:

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In your own words, write your reaction to what you read;

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## APPENDIX G

Name:  
Student English Survey

Directions: Respond to each of the following questions as honestly as possible. You may add any comments you think will help me to understand your feelings.

1. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English listening ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. When someone speaks English to me, I *always* understand what is being said.
- B. When someone speaks English to me, I *usually* understand what is being said.
- C. When someone speaks English to me, I *sometimes* understand what is being said.
- D. When someone speaks English to me, I *never* understand what is being said.

2. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English listening ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. When someone speaks English to me, I *never* feel he is talking too fast.
- B. When someone speaks English to me, *sometimes* feel he is talking too fast.
- C. When someone speaks English to me, I *usually* feel he is talking too fast.
- D. When someone speaks English to me, I *always* feel he is talking too fast.

3. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English listening ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. When I watch TV or a movie in English, I *always* understand what is being said.
- B. When I watch TV or a movie in English, I *usually* understand what is being said.
- C. When I watch TV or a movie in English, I *sometimes* understand what is being said.
- D. When I watch TV or a movie in English, I *never* understand what is being said.

4. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English listening ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. When I am in class, I *always* understand what the teacher is saying.
- B. When I am in class, I *usually* understand what the teacher is saying.
- C. When I am in class, I *sometimes* understand what the teacher is saying.
- D. When I am in class, I *never* understand what the teacher is saying.

5. In your own words, explain how you feel about your English listening skills.

6. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English speaking ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I am *always* able to express my thoughts in English.
- B. I am *usually* able to express my thoughts in English.
- C. I am *sometimes* able to express my thoughts in English.
- D. I am *never* able to express my thoughts in English.

7. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English speaking ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I can *always* find the right word to say my thoughts in English.
- B. I can *usually* find the right word to say my thoughts in English.
- C. I can *sometimes* find the right word to say in English.
- D. I can *never* find the right word to say in English.

8. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English speaking ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I am confident in my English speaking skills.
- B. I am somewhat confident in my English speaking skills.
- C. I am not confident in my English skills.

9. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English speaking ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. When I am in classes other than ESL, I am *never* afraid to speak in English.
- B. When I am in classes other than ESL, I am *sometimes* afraid to speak in English.
- C. When I am in classes other than ESL, I am *usually* afraid to speak in English.
- D. When I am in classes other than ESL, I am *always* afraid to speak in English.

10. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English speaking ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I love to speak in English.
- B. I like to speak in English.
- C. I dislike to speak in English.
- D. I hate to speak in English.

11. In your own words, explain how you feel about your ability to speak in English.

12. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English reading ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I am *always* able to understand what I read in English.
- B. I am *usually* able to understand what I read in English.
- C. I am *sometimes* able to understand what I read in English.
- D. I am *never* able to understand what I read in English.

13. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English reading ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I think reading English is very difficult.
- B. I think reading English is somewhat difficult.
- C. I think reading in English is easy.

14. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English reading ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I love to read in English.
- B. I like to read in English.
- C. I dislike to read in English.
- D. I hate to read in English.

15. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English speaking ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I am confident in my English reading skills.
- B. I am somewhat confident in my English reading skills.
- C. I am not confident in my English reading skills.

16. In your own words, explain how you feel about your ability to read English.

17. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English writing ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. I am *always* able to express my thoughts while writing in English.
- B. I am *usually* able to express my thoughts while writing in English.
- C. I am *sometimes* able to express my thoughts while writing in English.
- D. I am *never* able to express my thoughts while writing in English.

18. Highlight the sentence which best describes your English writing ability. You may only highlight **one** sentence.

- A. Writing in English is easy.
- B. Writing in English is somewhat easy.
- C. Writing in English is difficult.

19. What is the hardest part of writing in English? Circle the topics you think are the hardest. You may circle more than one.

Spelling words correctly

Using grammar correctly

Using punctuation correctly

Finding the right words

20. In your own words, explain how you feel about your ability to write in English.

**APPENDIX H**

Name:  
Language and Literature T  
The Chocolate War  
Essay Writing

Whenever you write an essay, you must have a thesis statement. A thesis statement tells your reader what your essay is going to prove. Usually, you will invent your own thesis statement. For this essay, however, I will be giving you the thesis to prove.

While reading the novel, we explored the changing points of view used by the author. In some chapters, Cormier (the author) writes from the point of view of Jerry. Through this, we can see the struggles Jerry is going through while trying to adjust to Trinity High School. In other chapters, Cormier (the author) writes from the point of view of Archie. In this way, we can see how the evil in the story thinks before his actions.

Because of the changing points of view in the novel, Cormier's writing is more effective. Therefore, your thesis statement is:

In this essay I will prove that the changing points of view make the story more effective.

To support this opinion, you will need to find examples from the novel of effective storytelling through Jerry and Archie's points of view. You will need to find three quotes from each point of view to support your thesis.

Keep in mind: Any old quote from the novel won't do! You need to be able to show how storytelling is very effective. You MUST show Jerry and Archie's feelings!

Remember: A quote is when you copy words right from the book. You must use quotation marks around words you use.

This packet will be collected at the end of the period. You will receive a class work grade for your accomplishments. You will receive a lower grade for talking. If you have questions, bring them to me.

Name:  
Language and Literature T  
TheChocolateWar Continuing Essay Writing

Now that you have your thesis statement and your six quotes, the next step is to start writing your essay. When you write a formal essay, you have to write differently than you would in your journal or in a letter. Your writing has to sound more professional and be more organized. Because of that, we will be spending some time learning how to write a formal essay.

What to know:

1. All formal writing must revolve around a thesis statement. This means that every example you use in your essay **MUST** have a connection to your thesis. Do not include a summary of the book. You should assume your reader has already read the book you are writing about!
2. Your examples must prove the ideas you are trying to get across. In other words, your examples should **SHOW** what happens in the book, not **SUMMARIZE**.
3. Every new idea gets a new paragraph. Do not include examples that do not relate to your topic sentence.
4. This essay will be five paragraphs long. Your first paragraph is the introduction. It explains to the reader what your essay will be about. Your thesis statement is the **LAST** sentence of the introduction.
5. The next three paragraphs are body paragraphs. Each of these should deal with a different main topic which connects to your thesis statement. In this essay, you may want to talk about Jerry's point of view in body paragraph one; Archie's point of view in body paragraph two and the use of both points of view in body paragraph three.
6. When writing the body paragraphs, you want to include at least one quote in each body paragraph. After the quote, you must write the page numbers in parentheses ().
7. Finally, you want to have a conclusion. (This is the fifth paragraph.) You must begin this paragraph by rewriting your thesis statement. Then, you should summarize the main points of your body paragraphs.

Name:  
 Language and Literature T  
 The Chocolate War  
 Writing the Essay: A Model

You should use the following models to write your body paragraphs. The beginnings and endings of the paragraphs have been written for you. Use the examples you have found and your notes to fill in the missing information.

Body Paragraph One:

Through Cormier's use of points of view, we can see how Jerry is feeling throughout the novel. Now, write your example(s) from the novel to show how Jerry feels. Make sure the example really tells your reader a lot about Jerry. In this example, Jerry feels fill in how he feels because explain the example(s) here. We understand more about Jerry because of Cormier's use of point of view.

Body Paragraph Two:

Next, Archie's views and feelings can be seen because Cormier changes the point of view in the novel. Now, write your example(s) from the novel to show how Archie feels and/or acts. Make sure the example really tells your reader a lot about Archie. In this example, we see that Archie is describe Archie's personality here because tell what he has done to make us able to see into his personality. Because Cormier changes point of view within the novel, we are able to learn more about Archie's personality.

Body Paragraph Three:

Finally, Cormier shows us the differences between Jerry and Archie by changing the points of view within the novel. Show how Jerry and Archie are different by providing examples from the book. Through these examples, we learn that Jerry and Archie have opposite personalities. While Jerry is describe Jerry's personality, Archie is describe Archie's personality. Using the changing points of view makes Cormier's book more effective.

In this essay, I will prove that the changing points of view make the story more effective.

Quotes from Jerry's point of view:

	Page #
	Page #
	Page #

In this essay, I will prove that the changing points of view make the story more effective.

Quotes from Archie's point of view:

	Page #
	Page #
	Page #

## Body Paragraph One:

Through Cormier's use of points of view, we can see how Jerry is feeling throughout the novel.

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\_\_\_\_\_. In this example, Jerry feels

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because

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\_\_\_\_\_. We understand more about Jerry because of Cormier's use of point of view.

## Body Paragraph Two:

Next, Archie's views and feelings can be seen because Cormier changes the point of view in the novel.

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\_\_\_\_\_. In this example, we see that Archie is

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because

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\_\_\_\_\_. Because Cormier changes point of view within the novel, we are able to learn more about Archie's personality.

Body Paragraph Three:

Finally, Cormier shows us the differences between Jerry and Archie by changing the points of view within the novel.

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Through these examples, we learn that Jerry and Archie have opposite personalities. While Jerry is

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Archie is

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Using the changing points of view makes Cormier's book more effective.

\* Please remember to write these as joined, complete paragraphs! You must fill this in before you move on to lined paper!

## Appendix I

OK, so you're pretty well set up with your introduction. Use the compositional risk and the thesis to develop your introduction, but don't forget to include the title and author of the book!

What comes next?

All body paragraphs begin with a \_\_\_\_\_ word that starts the \_\_\_\_\_.

What is the purpose of the topic sentence?

What comes after the topic sentence?

What is the function of the last sentence of the body paragraph?

Now you know the way a body paragraph should work. Using that information, let's complete the prewriting for your essay.

Reminder: Write your thesis here so you have it handy for reference.

Body Paragraph One:

Transition Word:

Topic Sentence:

List details and/or quotes that support your topic sentence/thesis. (You should have at least five. That way you have more to choose from when writing your essay.)

Reminder: Write your thesis here so you have it handy for reference.

Body Paragraph Two:

Transition Word:

Topic Sentence:

List details and/or quotes that support your topic sentence/thesis. (You should have at least five. That way you have more to choose from when writing your essay.)

Reminder: Write your thesis here so you have it handy for reference.

Body Paragraph Three:

Transition Word:

Topic Sentence:

List details and/or quotes that support your topic sentence/thesis. (You should have at least five. That way you have more to choose from when writing your essay.)

You have made it through the hard part! The introduction is done; the body paragraphs are planned out, and all we have left to do is the conclusion. The conclusion is the easy part! You're not allowed to introduce new material in the conclusion, so you don't have to stress out your brain!

The conclusion begins with a \_\_\_\_\_ word. You should avoid using the transition \_\_\_\_\_.

Transition word:

Restatement of theses (remember to rephrase!):

Reference to compositional risk (bring your essay full circle by ending with a reference to how you started.):