

TEST PREPARATION AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LITERACY LEARNING
IN UPPER ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Education

Wagner College

2012

Wagner College Education Department

Graduate Studies Master's Thesis

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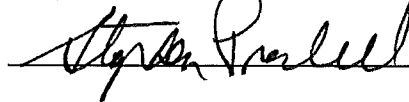
Title of Thesis: Test Preparation and Student Engagement in Literacy Learning
in the Upper Elementary Classrooms

Degree: Master in Science in Education

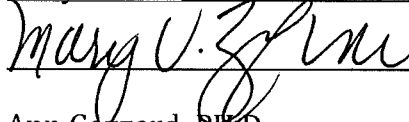
Date of Graduation: May 2012

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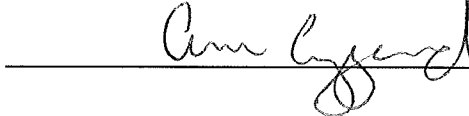
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Abstract

This dissertation explores how educators teach test preparation to upper elementary students. Since the No Child Left Behind Act, educators have been faced with increasing pressure to meet the standards of accountability set for their state, and school district. Teachers have to prepare students for the material that will be presented to them on high-stakes testing. Are educators truly preparing students for high-stakes testing? This dissertation examines how test-preparation is being taught in the upper elementary grades. Also it gives insight into how matching test-preparation to a students learning style can increase engagement.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, there has been increasing pressure on schools to meet the standards of accountability that were set for their state, and school district. There is annual testing for students in grades 3- 8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress toward proficiency goals will be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures. With this increase in pressure on schools, there is an increasing pressure on teachers to prepare students for the material that will be presented to them on high-stakes testing. The problem is what strategies for teaching reading are most effective at engaging students in test preparation.

After the implementation of No Child Left Behind, many educators claim that more instructional time is spent on the basics such as literacy and mathematics, with little emphasis on social studies and science. Educators also claim that the curriculum is narrowing to include only the material that will only be tested. Under this theory of teaching to the test, educators are shifting from student centered learning, which consists of cooperative learning and discovery and inquiry, to more teacher-centered learning, which consists of drill and practice. Teachers organize their instruction around the timing of high-stakes testing as well as making their local assessments practices similar to those that students would face on high-stakes test.

As a young teacher, I have been taught that in order to educate my students I must understand truly the ways in which they learn. With this idea, I have learned to vary my

lessons to include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities. Unlike the recent trend of educators to teach to the test, I have been taught to create lessons that are engaging to all learning styles and to be creative with how I approach the material. I have learned to include a range of assessments that give a broad view of students' performance. However with teachers being held accountable for student performance on high-stakes test, I am interested in seeing how test preparation, and students learning styles are incorporated into the curriculum.

Research Questions:

With this research, I hope to address the following questions:

1. What types of test preparation are teachers using? What is the impact of these types on the level of student engagement?
2. To what extent does matching test preparation to students' learning style influence the students' level of engagement?

Definition of Terms

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Proposed by the administration of George W. Bush. Sets standards-based education reform, which is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A goal set by state that schools must reach which encompasses four areas: participation rate, percent proficient, additional indicator, and graduation rate.

High-Stakes Tests: A test with important consequences for the test taker.

VAKing: Identifying the best way for a person to learn new information. The three VAK learning styles are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Paired- Passage: Two passages that connect through a central theme presented to students on the third day of ELA Standardized Testing.

Readers' Theater: The performance of a literary work by an individual or group, wherein the text is read expressively, but not fully staged and acted out.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Changes to Curriculum since High-Stakes Testing

If a test is used to hold individuals or institutions responsible for their students' performance, the test is commonly called a test-based accountability measure or high-stakes test. The belief behind test-based accountability is that by relying heavily on standardized achievement tests, student performance will improve. According to Supovitz (2009), the period of the early 1990s through the mid 2000s saw two streams of reform that focused on testing and accountability. The first set of reforms included efforts to widen the forms of assessment beyond multiple-choice tests by incorporating a range of more real-world assessments. This was because many educators believed the "decontextualized nature of multiple choice testing, with emphasis on recall or isolated bits of knowledge", represented a narrow band of human behaviors (Supovitz, 2009, p 216). With education moving towards a more contemporary constructivist and socio-cognitive way of teaching, educators tried to find a way to create a form of high-stakes testing that related to their current practices. This concept seemed to lead educators to alternative forms of assessment, including portfolios, performance assessments, and open-ended tasks, which are meant to give teachers a truer measure of student performance. However, Supovitz (2009) explains that, states such as Kentucky, Vermont, and Maryland that implemented alternative assessment options into curriculum as well as high-stakes multiple-choice tests, found that that these new options were not cost effective and had unreliable scoring practices. Supovitz (2009) also found that these

assessments influenced teacher and administrator behavior and pressured teachers into organizing their instruction around the timing of high-stakes assessments. Performance assessments also influenced educators' choice of curricular activities and their local assessment practices to be more in line with what states required. This narrowed the emphasis of the curriculum to what teachers thought would be on tests and the curriculum was orientated away from larger learning goals and toward test preparation.

The second set of reforms was focused on the frequency of high-stakes assessment. In the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, President Bush required states to adopt test-based statewide accountability systems which stipulated that states test annually in reading, mathematics, and science from grades 3 to 8 and at least one year in high school. States were to redefine both proficiency and adequate yearly progress to get all students to proficiency in 12 years. The impact of this reform has led to the narrowing of curriculum to focus on reading and mathematics and reduce instructional time for other subjects. Herman (2004) claims that accountability pressures direct attention of teachers toward testing instead of standards and leads to de-emphasizing non-tested content. However, Anderson (2009) claims that teaching has changed little over the past few decades and that the implementation of NCLB has had little impact on how teachers teach. Robert Pianta and his colleagues (2007) found that highly traditional approaches such as whole-class, teacher-directed instruction coupled with student seatwork constituted almost 90 percent of instructional time. This related to Burns (1984) study, which found individual student seatwork accounted for more than 85 percent of

instructional time. If audiovisual presentations were included as a whole group activity and tests are individual seatwork, the percentage of time spent in whole-class instruction plus individual seatwork would increase to about 90 percent. According to these researchers there is evidence, therefore, that little has changed since long before the implementation of NCLB. Thus, the claim that NCLB has narrowed teaching and the curriculum is not well grounded.

Teaching to the Test

Since the implementation of NCLB, developmentally appropriate practices have been reduced to provide additional time for test preparation. In many classrooms across the country, heavily tested subject areas, such as reading, writing and mathematics, have been given more instructional time, which has diverted attention from students' electives, such as, art, music, and dance. Musoleno and White (2010) claim that the middle school curriculum was intended to be broad and exploratory in nature to allow young adolescents to explore their world and gain insights into who they are and how they fit into their environment. Since NCLB, there has been a demand for higher test scores in basic skills. It may be the case that NCLB is responsible for this narrowing. But as Anderson (2009), and Burns (1984) show, it is just as plausible that the ideals associated with middle school were never fully implemented. Also, according to the participants in Musoleno and White's study (2010), interdisciplinary curriculum and an integrated approach to instruction is slowly disappearing. One participant stated, "Increased testing and test preparation means that we have less time to actually teach engaging and

interesting material that would leave a lasting memory on the student” (Musoleno, 2010 p. 264). Since the curriculum focus of middle school has been narrowed to high-stakes testing subjects, students too often lack opportunities to explore and discover in a student-centered classroom environment. Teachers feel that the materials that are used to entice students to learn and interact with the curriculum have been replaced with drill and practice instruction (Musoleno, 2010).

Not all researchers regard test preparation as contrary to good instruction. Sturman (2003), through the use of online surveys and close observation of science instruction, developed two differing perspectives of “teaching to the test”. The first highlights teachers who are ‘teaching more’, ‘working harder’, and ‘working more effectively’ (Sturman, 2003). These teachers are giving students positive, quality feedback and allowing ample opportunities for students to work on areas needing improvement. Enabling pupils to apply their knowledge as well as requiring them to recall information might be a more integrated approach to test preparation that yields more accurate test results. Firestone, Monfils, and Schorr (2004) claim that teachers who knew more about the state standards and were confident of their own teaching ability are more “willing to explore challenging instruction approaches and use didactic approaches somewhat less” (p 83). Their instruction is more inquiry-oriented allowing for more learning opportunities which result in students being more prepared for high-stakes testing.

An alternate more traditional view of teaching to the test is reallocation of resources, alignment of tests with curricula and coaching of substantive elements without introducing active teaching strategies (Sterman, 2003). This would be

aligned with the narrowing of curriculum to focus primarily on the basics, reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as explicit test preparation. Intensified didactic instruction associated with “gam[ing] the test” helps children succeed whether they understand the material or not (Firestone, 2004). This view of memorizing facts, and coaching to the test will artificially raise test scores while reinforcing a more negative view of teaching to the test.

Literacy and High-Stakes Testing

Standardized reading tests are designed with an underlying theoretical view of reading that defines what reading means and determines what will be tested. Wang (2006) composed a study that looked into students’ ability to locate explicit details, generate a local and global inference, and draw on prior knowledge. Wang (2006) found that out of 55 test-takers, 78 percent of students were capable of locating and recalling detailed information tested in basic locate and find questions, displaying strength in locating textually based clues only. Forty-one percent of students showed solid language skills such as extensive vocabulary and paraphrasing measured by questions in which answers were implied but not stated in the text. This suggests that students have a general weakness in basic as well as sophisticated language skills. Lastly, 45 percent of students lacked the prior knowledge necessary to understand the test passages and the ability to read critically. Through the breakdown of questions tested on standardized reading tests, Wang (2006) was able to highlight the weaknesses students have in today’s classroom. Through examining this, educators may understand where literacy

instruction may need to be reexamined to include mini-lessons on contextual clues, detecting the message, and paraphrasing. Wang's research (2006) implies that students need to be taught higher thinking skills that allow them to make connections with text to self, text to text, and text to world.

Balanced Approach to Literacy Instruction

In contrast, Wang, Coleman and Goldberg (2011) write about how to help English Learners face the challenges of interplay between oral language development and literacy development. According to Coleman and Goldberg (2011), teachers must differentiate instruction to manage, promote, encourage, and stimulate oral and written language development. The foundation of an effective English literacy program for English learners is similar to that of a literacy program for English speakers. Teachers should instruct students in phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. Coleman and Goldberg (2011) believe that success, as a reader, is not "determined solely by reading skills such as decoding, fluency, or use of reading strategies" (p. 15). Readers need to know content and vocabulary in order to comprehend and make connections with text. Explicit instruction, which includes clearly stated objectives, modeling, repeated practice and regrouping at the end of lesson, should be used to teach literacy.

Building on Coleman and Goldberg, but also moved beyond them, Clark and Graves (2004) recommend scaffolding as an effective literacy instructional strategy. Scaffolding is a "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out

a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (Wood, 1976 p.32). Scaffolding is effective because it enables a teacher to keep a task whole and to pose an appropriate challenge to students, while they learn to understand and manage the parts (Clark, 2004). Clark and Graves (2004) break down scaffolding into five components. First, an explicit description of the literacy strategy should be conducted as well as when and how to use it. Second, “teacher and/or student models the strategy in action” through the use of a text (Clark 2004, p 577). Third, the teacher should allow for “collaborative use of the strategy in action” (Clark 2004, p 578). This gives students an opportunity to receive help from their teacher as well as their peers and practice using the skill actively. Fourth, the students will use the strategy with the teacher gradually releasing responsibility for utilizing the strategy. For example, a teacher will move from oral guidance to written guidance. Lastly, the student will use the strategy independently. Students still “receive some scaffolding but it is in the form of a silent, visual reminder that clues students into the strategy that was taught” (Clark 2004, p 578). What these authors contribute that is especially important is the role the teacher must play in helping students to become independent readers. To an extent, standardized tests can capture this, but only up to a point. The complex process of becoming an independent reader through scaffolding can ultimately escape even the most effective testing expert.

Key reading strategies include rereading, scanning, summarizing keywords, context clues, question-answer relationships, inferring, thinking aloud, activating prior knowledge, setting a purpose, and drawing conclusions. These reading strategies are useful when implemented before, during or after reading. Hsieh and

Dwyer (2009), on the other hand, explored the trend of educators using online learning environments. Hsieh and Dwyer (2009) wanted to “discover the ways of employing online reading strategies and explore the effects of those online reading strategies and different learning styles on academic achievement” (p 36). This study selects three reading strategies: rereading strategy, keyword strategy, and question and answer strategy.

The rereading strategy helps students obtain meaning from their favorite reading sections and guides them in making meaning with texts. Rereading a longer text may be time consuming, although using cues and rereading students’ favorite sentences can help students familiarize themselves with the texts. Hsieh and Dwyer (2009), found that students who used the rereading strategy obtained higher scores than did others, regardless of their learning style. Hsieh and Dwyer (2009) conclude that the rereading strategy has the greatest effect on students’ comprehension because it increases reading fluency and creates a critical connection with the text.

High-Stakes Test Preparation in Literacy

In contrast, in order to keep in line with effective literacy development techniques and prepare students for testing, Kontovourki and Campis (2010) made recommendations for content and focus of preparation for high-stakes testing. Kontovourki and Campis (2010) provide an example of a public school, third-grade classroom where effective reading instruction and test preparation were taught as a genre unit. The literacy curriculum in the classroom consisted of a workshop model, which combined phonics instruction with more holistic experience in the context of

a workshop. Their reading and writing instruction included a mini-lesson led by the classroom teacher, students' independent practice, and a shared session to reiterate strategies and skills (Kontovourki et al, 2010). Test preparation genre studies might include practices like analyzing testing as genre study starting with what students already know about the test, then developing test-specific vocabulary, using materials that resemble the test, analyzing past responses, and increasing students' reading stamina (Kontovourki et al, 2010). For a vocabulary test preparation genre study, teachers could use vocabulary or wording that is commonly found on tests, such as "author's purpose", "according to", and "except". This was done through the recognition that high-stakes test vocabulary is similar to a quirky or fancy code. The teachers in Kontovourki 's (2010) study challenged students to meet this challenge of high-stakes test and learn this *new* language.

Through the use of incorporating test preparation similar to Kontovourki (2010), Turner (2009) focused on aligning instruction with standards and teaching students how to interpret information to enhance understanding. Turner (2009), much like Wang (2006), explains that integrating different types of questions and question formats, including factual, inferential evaluation, and opinion, can be an embedded activity instead of a separate lesson. A fourth grade teacher from New Jersey expanded on Turner's idea, "if I can incorporate something in a lesson that they need on a test, to me that's a life skill; it's not a test skill" (Turner 2009, p.40). This implies that students need to engage in explicit test preparation that involves higher level thinking which prepares students for real world situations.

High-stakes testing has been found to decrease young adolescents' motivation to perform their best on tests. Turner (2009) suggests discussing the importance of the tests and establishing learning goals that are co-developed by teachers and students. Authentic connections should be made between the curriculum and personal experiences of students to keep students involved and actively learning.

Active Learning

Anderson (2009) states "learning depends on the active engagement of the learner" (p. 416). He suggests that students are more engaged when teachers pay attention to and accommodate students' interests, needs, and concerns. Anderson (2009) continues to maintain that teaching-as-conversation is superior to teaching-as-lectures or demonstrations. Dialogues are more engaging and enable students to develop understanding as well as check their understanding. Conversations can occur between teachers and students, individually or collectively, or among students themselves. McNamee (2006) agrees with Anderson, but expands upon teaching-as-conversation to conclude that conversation gains the attention of students because the students are the ones who make meaning of the conversation.

Active learning may include creative learning style activities that under specific circumstances can benefit the student. According to Prashing (2005), it is important to distinguish between information intake and information output when trying to diversify activities for different learning styles. Curriculum delivery skills acquisition, and increasing understanding about studied material are all examples of information intake. When students are taking in information, Learning Style

application can make a difference between learning success and failure. Prashing (2005) explains, “learning styles need to be accommodated to ensure understanding, long-term memory and the best possible learning outcome” (p 6). However, information output is when students have to demonstrate their knowledge under time pressure. If students are given the chance to learn in their own way, in the right environment and with appropriate study techniques for their learning style, then the student should be prepared to cope with test situations. This is because students should have learned enough flexibility to be able to present the knowledge they have learned on the exam (Prashing, 2005).

Learning Styles and Test Preparation

Learning styles are aimed at contributing to the understanding of personalized education, differential pedagogy and learning differences in the classroom. According to Rayner (2007), in order for teachers to be effective and successful they must respect their students individual learning styles and differences, be responsive to students’ learning styles, utilize a range of teaching strategies, and teach thinking skills across the curriculum. This concept has been around for decades however the inclusion of learning styles has not. Rayner (2007) continues to explain that the concept of learning styles is a “work in progress”, yet an important contribution to the growing interest in a personalized or enhanced curriculum (p.25). There is no cookie cutter way to apply a learning style approach to a curriculum or classroom, however it offers a rich potential for developing approaches to diversity and individual needs in the classroom (Rayner, 2007).

Scheurs and Moreau (2006) define learning style as a “student’s consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning” (p.1). Simply meaning that each student learns best by using a specific learning strategy or method which best matches his or her needs. Scheurs and Moreau (2006) looked into using the VAK style to assess the presentation of e-learning content. The VAK Learning style uses three main sensory receivers, visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Learners use all three to receive information, however, one receiving style is normally dominant. Auditory learners may have difficulty with reading and writing tasks. Visual *linguistic* learners learn through the written language and prefer to write down directions and lecture notes. Visual *spatial* learners do better with charts, demonstrations, videos, and other visual material. Kinesthetic learners tend to lose concentration if there is little to no stimulation or movement. When kinesthetic learners listen to lectures they may want to take notes and review notes with colored highlights and include pictures, diagrams, or doodles. Scheurs and Moreau (2006) agree with Rayner in that the presentation of content or activity should be addressed in multiple styles so that learners can better receive the material.

Rayner (2007) did a case study of John, a twelve-year-old boy experiencing a specific learning difficulty with spelling and writing. John was experiencing difficulty with specific skills linked to spelling such as groups and patterns of word structure including individual and combinations of letters and sounds. John also struggled with writing specifically syntax and textual structure. Due to John’s low self-esteem linked to his difficulties in the classroom, John’s parents, teachers, and

the Special Education Needs Coordinator, developed an intervention plan using the information of his personal style of learning. John's cognitive style was assessed as analytic and verbal. John rarely pictured what he read, however, he interpreted text as conversation and preferred to listen to audiotapes rather than watch a film. The SENCO team developed a personalized education plan which adopted a mix of traditional skills with an emphasis on the learner's voice and conversation. With John's personalized learning plan he was accepted into his peer group, slowly improved his literacy skills and left school years later with five A Levels, all grade A (Rayner, 2007). Personalized learning plans that take into consideration a student's style of learning can help the student develop the motivation to learn.

William and Carolyn Fridley (2010) explore how VAKing can be a dangerous thing for educators to use blindly. "If VAKing is correct, then once a student's learning style is identified we would see an increase in learning if instruction is geared toward that learning style" (Fridley 2010, p.23). Stahl (2010) researched reading styles between 1978 and 1992 and found that a student's reading style cannot be readily relied on. He continues to explain that learning is primarily meaning based rather than based on the mode of learning. This implies that it does not matter the way the information is handed to an individual as long as that individual can make meaning of it. William and Carolyn Fridley (2010) explore that one problem with VAKing is that by catering to a student's perceived learning style factors such as the nature of the subject matter, the developmental level of the student, and the difficulty of the subject matter is often ignored. For example, someone who wants to learn how to play tennis must actually play tennis. That does

not make them a kinesthetic learner, but that is how someone learns how to play a sport. William and Carolyn Fridley (2010) agree with Moreau and Rayner that to keep material engaging and interactive, variations in how information is presented to student should be stressed. However, William and Carolyn Fridley (2010) bring to the forefront that VAKing is not a scientific theory and that by creating lessons for a specific learning style will not definitely support a student with that learning style.

All of this research on learning styles is included to understand better its possible role in developing more effective test preparation that is specifically tailored to a student's learning strengths. Since there has been little research on learning styles and their actual effectiveness in the classroom, this study is an attempt to fill the gap. This study will hopefully provide some insight into how adapting lessons to our students learning styles can improve engagement specifically during test preparation.

Chapter III

Methods

Participants

The subject selection included one teacher and her 9 students. The classroom teacher has taught for 13 years at this current placement and teaches in a 12:1 4th/5th joint special education classroom. The teacher was selected by the principal of the elementary school based on previous success in improving students' indicator scores. The previous year students' indicator scores were taken into consideration to help determine if test preparation is effective in increasing student performance.

Setting

The setting was an elementary classroom during literacy instruction. The classroom teacher instructed students as if an observer was not present; therefore, the researcher had no control over where students were seated during instruction.

Instrumentation

Letter of Consent (Parents)

In order to gain permission, a cover letter was sent home to the parents of the potential participants. The letter explained that the study was being conducted to obtain research for a thesis study in order to gain a master's degree. The letter also provided detailed information of the study being done and the potential significance of the outcome results (Appendix A).

Informed Parent Consent Form (Parents)

An informed consent form was sent home with each student to obtain parental permission to begin conducting the study. The consent form states the reason for conducting the study and the significance of the research and results. The letter informed parents that students will not be required to participate if not given permission, and only would be a part of the study if consent forms were returned (Appendix A).

Letter of Permission (Teacher)

A letter of permission was given to the classroom teacher to obtain permission to include his or her students in the study. The permission letter outlines the activities that will take place in his or her classroom, if they so choose to participate. Also, the permission form states the reason for conducting the study and the significance of the research and results (Appendix B).

Letter of Consent (Teachers)

In order to gain permission, a cover letter was given to the classroom teacher of the potential student participants. The letter explained that the study was being conducted to obtain research for a thesis that would answer important questions about test preparation and would lead to a master's degree. The letter also provided detailed information about the procedure of the study and the potential significance of the outcome results (Appendix B).

Teacher Informed Consent Form

An informed consent form was given to the teachers whose writing and reading workshops the researcher will be observing. The consent form stated the reason for conducting the study and the significance of the research and results. The letter was given specifically to teachers prior to the activities to receive permission from them directly for their participation in the study (Appendix B).

Student Informed Consent Form

A child friendly version of the informed consent was given specifically to students prior to the activities to receive permission from them directly for their participation in the study (Appendix C).

Thank- You Letter

On the final day of the study the participants received a thank you letter to show appreciation for the parents' permission, and teacher and student overall participation in the study.

VAK Learning Style Questionnaire

A questionnaire was created to get background information from the participants regarding the ways in which they learn best, such as visual, auditory or kinesthetic. The questionnaire was modified from its original version to be more child friendly and therefore, easier for children to answer more accurately. Students were asked to score their own questionnaires (Appendix D).

VAK Learning Styles Hand Out

A hand out was given to participants after the conclusion of the VAK Learning Style Questionnaire. The hand out explained the different learning styles and the different activities that someone with either auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learning style enjoyed or performed best. The VAK Learning Style was modified to be easier for the participants to read and understand (Appendix D).

Scale of Engagement Chart

The scale of engagement chart was created to get information about whether or not participants were actively engaging in the lesson being observed. The chart includes tasks that a student participant can perform which shows active participation in the lesson. There are seven tasks listed on the chart, which include, asking questions, answering questions, and tracking the speaker (Appendix E).

Measurement Lesson Chart of VAK Learning Style

The measurement lesson chart was created to allow the researcher to break down the teacher participant's lesson into different learning styles depending on the activities included. The VAK Learning style breakdown was taken from the hand out that was given to student and teacher participants. The activities were then modified in order to relate to a reading or writing workshop (Appendix F).

Teacher's Interview Questions

Questions were created to ask the two classroom teachers that participated in the study about test preparation in their classroom. If the question resulted in a simple yes or no answer, the researcher added a second question to allow the participant to expand on his or her answer.

Procedure

Permission and consent forms were acquired from one inclusive, elementary school teacher to carry out this study. Additionally, consent forms were sent home to the parents of the children in the classroom that participated and returned to the researcher with parent signatures. An assent form was given to the students in the classroom and questions will be answered if the students have any. The researcher spent one day administering a VAK learning style questionnaire to assess the learning strengths of each student as well as the classroom teacher. Students were informed of their learning strengths. This questionnaire allowed the researcher to assess each student and teacher's learning style. The researcher observed Reading and Writing Workshop twice a week over a four-week period, a total of 8 observations per classroom. Each observation lasted about 90 minutes and a significant segment of these observations included test preparation. Students were assessed on how well they mastered the skill being taught based on their finished product. The researcher continued to observe the students in the classroom and gather information about the technique(s) actively taught and the ways in which students were engaging in the classroom using a specially designed engagement

scale. The researcher compared the different types of learning styles indicated by the students to the teaching technique(s) to see if there is a relationship between the learning style and test preparation. The researcher conducted an interview with the classroom teacher about his or her test preparation program and implementation. Thank you notes were given to participants at the end of the study. The data was then analyzed to identify possible links between test preparation procedures, learning styles, and level of engagement.

Results

VAK- Learning Style Self Assessment

Students were read an adjusted Self- Assessment Questionnaire to determine which learning style they preferred. The questionnaires were adjusted to be relevant to 4th and 5th graders who heavily rely on technology, such as a cell phone, to communicate to one other. Six out of nine students who completed the questionnaire were assessed as kinesthetic learners primarily. Two out of nine students were found to be visual learners. One out of nine students was rated as an auditory learner.

Student Number	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
1	4	9	12
2	11	4	12
3	5	6	15
4	8	10	11
5	8	6	15
6	11	9	10
7	10	9	9
8	3	10	13
9	5	17	7

Table 1: Student number with results from VAK Learning- Style Questionnaire

Test- Preparation, Student Engagement, and Measurement Chart

I observed two different types of literacy work. I observed the class develop and write a class fable about gossip. The teacher helped students develop the plot, setting and character development relying highly on the situations that occurred in their classroom. She evoked different feelings from the students from why would someone gossip to how one feels about being gossiped. The classroom teacher tied their classroom fable into their study about the Inuits.

In contrast, I also observed the class during their test- preparation for New York State ELA test, which was taking place on April 16. The classroom teacher focused on pair-passages and developed a formula for students to compose their final essays. Students were assessed throughout the reading of each passage as well as through each passage's individual questions. However, students were pushed to complete the comparative essay with minimal help.

Observation #1:

Prior to the class beginning to write their class fable, students were asked to brainstorm about the different possible settings, characters, and plot. However, many students did not complete the homework assignment. Therefore, the classroom teacher posted possible morals that the class could write about. There was an active discussion about possible morals and a vote. Students were highly engaged in this action. Student 3, 4,5,6, and 8 were asking questions for clarification, starrng the morals they liked, and orally engaging with classmates about morals they wanted to write about. Student 2, however, had his head on his desk and was playing with his pencil box. Student 2 was redirected when he asked, "What are we doing again?". Student 7 fell asleep with his forehead on his arm. Student 9 was engaging in conversation unrelated to the task at hand. Also, when her moral was not chosen she argued saying that it was unfair and that she "didn't want this stupid one..." and placed her head on her desk. This particular lesson was heavily weighted towards visual learners (pictures of possible animal characters, fable theme/ moral handout as well as posted on board, and chart of Title, Protagonist, Antagonist, Problem). The lesson also included auditory components such as an oral vote on protagonist, and antagonist, oral instructions, and read aloud of choices. Lastly, the lesson did have some kinesthetic components such as connecting the moral to students past experiences, and actively voting.

Observation #2:

Classroom teacher and students began to collaborate about how to begin their fable. The moral chosen was “Never Gossip”. The classroom teacher asked students to think about what their title should be. Student 1, 3, 6 and 9 responded with “The Betrayers”, “The Pack”, “The Gossipers” and “The Problem Starters” respectively. The classroom teachers compiled a list of all of the responses and had a vote. Students were asked to pick their favorite title. The classroom teacher put together the top two and created “The Betraying Friends who Gossip”. Student 9 immediately had an outburst of, “ I didn’t want that. I’m sad no one voted for me!!”. Student 9 then placed her head on her desk until she was asked a direct question about how the fable should proceed from the classroom teacher. Student 1 was on the edge of her seat, calling out possible lines for the characters to say. Student 2 had his head on his hand and was unable to keep up with copying the fable off the board. Student 2 also played with his pencils while grunting at the teacher and other classmates. Student 3 provided vivid adjectives and adverbs to enhance the story. Student 4 was absent. Student 5 was taking notes and raising her hand to answer questions asked by the classroom teacher. Once student 5 was not called on, she placed her head down and stopped copying the play. The classroom teacher reengaged her by asking her a series of questions. Student 6 answered the classroom teacher with soft call-outs and was not heard. She continued to copy the fable and answer questions. Student 8 mumbled and talked to himself. The classroom teacher engaged him in the discussion by telling him, she would be calling on him next. The lesson included a visual aid of the fable, an auditory aid of the

discussion of what each character was going to say, and a kinesthetic aid of voting and physically copying the fable.

Observation #3:

The classroom teacher began the lesson by introducing what is a Thesis Statement. She explained that a Thesis Statement is what one believes or what one will prove. Students were told that they must use the information and details provided in the passages in their comparative essay. Students were instructed that the question is asking them to compare and contrast today's computers with the computers of tomorrow. Students also created a Venn Diagram as a class to help support them through their essay. Student 1 kept her head down while she copied the Venn Diagram, offered to read the text once more for the class, and interrupted her classmates 4 times with unrelated chatter. Student 2 played with his pencils and his fingers. He was also asked to talk out his thoughts to the classroom teacher. Student 2 did not complete the assignment by the end of the period. Student 3 had his head down and discussed with the classroom teacher what to place in the Venn Diagram. He called out three times about unrelated topics. Student 4 acted out the different gadgets that were mentioned in the essay. Student 5 mentioned that she slept well last night and completed the assignment proudly and prior to the end of the period. Student 6 was absent. Student 7 was falling asleep. After he was sent to the bathroom to wash his face, he spent most of his time erasing and redrawing the Venn Diagram circles. Student 8 talked with his fellow classmates about the

different gadgets mentioned and completed his assignment on time. Student 9 was absent.

Observation #4:

Students and classroom teacher continued to write their class fable. The lesson included visual aids (pictures of animals, script, and ways to gossip), auditory aids (discussion of ways to gossip, and read aloud), and kinesthetic aids (connecting to the situations of gossip, and coping the play). Student 1 came late to the period and proceeded to call out answers to each of the classrooms teacher's questions. She actively played the role of the penguin. Student 2 had his head down and was slow to copy down the act and called out for the classroom teacher to wait for him 5 times. Student 3 quietly copied down the act and actively played the part of the antagonist. Student 4 actively participated in conversation about each character's lines by answering questions posed by the classroom teacher. Student 5 copied the act down quietly and only answered questions when specifically called upon. Student 6 was unable to answer questions related to the direction of where the fable was headed. She was playing with her gloves under her desk. Student 6 only answered questions when specifically called upon, however, she needed to be guided back to where the class was in the script. Student 7 answered questions when called upon and was ready to participate. Student 8 answered questions when called upon and was able to provide helpful and relatable information to the class. Student 9 was absent.

Observation #5:

The students and classroom teacher finished their class fable. The lesson was composed of two visual aids (previous acts script, and new act on chart paper), two auditory aids (read through previous acts, and discussed a new act), and two kinesthetic aids (copying the story, and readers' theater of the previous acts).

Student 1 answered 10 questions but called out 3 times. She was sitting up with correct posture and following directions during the entire lesson. Student 1 also played the role of the penguin and gave the lines for her part. Student 2 answered one question that he was directly asked. He had 5 unrelated comments to add to the discussion that related to his role as the muskox. He giggled and laughed when the story was reread. Student 3 asked one question and answered seven questions but called out four times. Student 4 answered eight questions and called out four.

Student 5 answered five questions and three were directly addressed to her. She needed some redirection to connect back to the fable and she took some help from her fellow classmates. Student 6 answered six questions and called out twice. She helped her classmates answer questions. Student 7 answered two questions and noticed some typos the classroom teacher had made. Student 8 answered six questions, two were directly asked of him and one was a call out. He was able to build upon the discussions happening in the story and made connections to the characters. Student 9 answered four questions but called out the classroom teacher's name three times to gain her attention. She was unable to answer the question directly asked to her. She had 5 unrelated comments.

Observation #6:

After completing their classroom fable, the students had to write a reflection about it. Students also had to draw a picture of their character for the cover of their script. The lesson had two visual aids (the pictures of the animals from the script, and their script), one auditory aid (the directions), and kinesthetic aid (to draw a picture, and to complete their reflection). Student 1 answered two questions and asked three questions for clarification. Student 1 also talked out her reflection with #9 and was redirected to include their discussion in her reflection. Student 1 engaged her classmates in six unrelated conversations, however she completed her drawing. Student 2 answered and asked one question related to the task at hand. Student 2 played with his pencils and put his head down. He was redirected to finish his reflection. Student 2 did not complete his reflection. Students 3 and 4 discussed their reflections orally. Student 3 asked one question by screaming across the room. Student 4 asked two questions for clarification. Both students 3 and 4 completed their reflections and began their drawing. Student 5 immediately asked, "Why do we have to do this? This is unfair! I don't want to do this. I can't do this." Student 5 did not complete the reflection. Student 6 used the classroom teacher to help stretch her answers. Student 6 completed her reflection and her cover. Student 7 answered three questions and asked one question. Student 7 reread his reflection to himself to edit and used the classroom teacher to help explain his ideas more. Student 8 asked two questions and used the classroom teacher to help start and end his reflection. Student 9 engaged both Student 1 and 3 in conversation unrelated to reflection. Student 9 handed in incomplete work to begin drawing her cover.

Observation #7:

The classroom teacher led a mini-lesson on the format of how to write a comparative essay for the ELA standardized test. The students were given two visual aids (a Venn Diagram, and both the passages to take notes on), an auditory aid (both passages were read aloud), and a kinesthetic aid (shaking it out and taking a break). Student 1 asked four questions and was on task from beginning to end. Student 1 asked to read the passages and questions for the class. Student 1 used her questions to begin her essay and used what she collected from the passages in her final essay. Student 2 answered the one question he was called on for and was only able to complete copying down the information the classroom teacher provided. Student 3 answered three questions about the different cultures for clarification. Student 3 spent time scanning the classroom looking for someone to engage in conversation. Student 4 asked three questions about different new vocabulary and how to include different details from each of the passages. Student 5 answered one question and when given a summary of both passages orally began to complete the questions for the passages. Once student 5 reached the essay, she placed her head down and said, "This is too long." Student 6 completed her essay quickly and silently. Student 7 fell asleep after being directed to stand. Student 8 was redirected to answer each bullet point that the question asked. Student 8 was asked two questions directly that helped him to continue to write his essay. Student 9 spent most of the time mocking student 8 and claiming, "He has a disease". Student 9 was redirected four times to use the information that the classroom teacher had provided to answer each bullet point. Student 9 did not complete the assignment.

Observation # 8:

Students are asked to complete the last essay from their last paired passage package independently. The classroom teacher provided students with two visual aids (sentence starters, essay format, and Venn Diagram), auditory aids (orally reading sentence starters), and there were no kinesthetic aids provided. Student 1 quietly worked and was reminded to put the passages into her own words. Student 1 read her essay to the classroom teacher and accepted feedback. Student 2 spent three minutes with his head down. Student 2 was redirected to sit up nicely. Student 3 had his head down and was redirected with the threat of a progress report. Student 3 claimed he did not get the directions. Student 3 was redirected to use the bullet points as guidance. Student 4 used the classroom teacher as a way to develop his ideas orally. Student 5 worked with student 6 on brainstorming what to include in their essay. Student 6 completed her essay and helped student 5. Student 7 and 8 were absent. Student 9 asked how to spell different words, and asked questions posed to the entire class. Student 9 spent 7 minutes walking around classroom. Student 9 also did not complete her assignment and asked, "How do I start?" six times.

Summary of Reading and Writing Workshops Observed:

Students were more actively engaged in their classroom fable discussion than when participating in their ELA test-preparation. As the class worked together to create and write their classroom fable, students wanted their ideas to be heard and added to the fable. Many were upset when the classroom teacher did not use

their ideas and only then stopped participating. However, students would rejoin the discussion when the classroom teacher asked them a direct question about where the fable should go next.

In comparison to their ELA Test-preparation, the classroom teacher focused on day three of the ELA Test: Paired Passages. The classroom teacher composed nine paired passages. I only observed four. There were no mini-lessons taught prior to students beginning work on their paired-passages. However, the classroom teacher read aloud the passages and summarized answers for her students. The classroom teacher did compose Venn Diagrams and T-charts on the Smart Board, however, there was no discussion of what information should be added and where it should be placed on either the Venn Diagram or T-chart. Students often argued with the classroom teacher about the importance of completing their test-preparation packet. Students were reluctant to aid the classroom teacher in completing Venn Diagrams and T- charts because many had not completed reading the passage. Students readily placed their heads down and told their classroom teacher, “I don’t know how to start”. During ELA test-preparation, students would chatter with one other about irrelevant topics and often start arguments simply to avoid completing the task.

Test- Preparation Mini-Lessons:

After observing a couple of ELA Test-Preparation sessions, I realized that my research question, “how is student engagement influenced by matching student learning style? ”, would not be readily answered. Therefore, I decided to create a

four part mini-lesson intervention to test my hypothesis that if learning is matched to a student's specific learning style then the student will be more engaged with the material. I developed four lessons to see if specific reading skills could be taught and then reproduced in a test- preparation packet. I removed two kinesthetic learning styled students from the classroom. After observing a couple of paired-passages packets, I noticed that students struggled with the time restraints of the test. As a result, I slowly shifted the questions I asked from explicit questions to implicit as well as from multiple-choice to open-ended. I tried to incorporate reading strategies such as context clues, pre-reading questions, scanning, predicting, drawing conclusions, and making inferences.

MINI-LESSON #1:

The kinesthetic lesson worked on improving comprehension by allowing students to hear the story orally, read along, and then pause to draw a picture in figure paints. The figure paints allow children to feel as they draw, as well as putting less emphasis on how the drawing actually looks. Questions asked of students were explicitly stated in the text and were all multiple-choice questions. Both Student 1 and 8 were able to answer the multiple-choice questions correctly.

MINI-LESSON #2:

The visual lesson worked on improving comprehension by having students draw scenes of the story with pencils and crayons to depict the key events. Student 8 initially spent a lot of time trying to draw accurate depictions of the Inuit people

and the polar bear. But student 8 quickly changed tactics and made sure he included key details to help him answer the questions. He answered only one question wrong. The question involved looking through the entire passage and locating the reasons why the Inuit wanted light. Student 8 and I had a long conversation about whether it was right for Crow to steal the light. He explained that, “You should always ask before you take something even if it is for a good cause”. He was able to use detail from the passage and his drawings to support his claim. Student 1 drew basic photos to tell the story. She quickly answered the multiple-choice questions correctly. Student 1 also answered the open response question quickly and dismissed herself.

MINI-LESSON #3:

The second kinesthetic lesson worked on using details to draw conclusions and to make inferences. The board game was designed to use relatable clues for each student to help them make personal connections. Student 1 was able to draw the right inferences from each clue except for one, “Both of us or nothing”. Once placed in context such as, “You and your friend just got in trouble for running on the playground. Your friend says, ‘It’s both of us or nothing’”. She was able to understand that one can conclude that the two friends are really good friends.

MINI-LESSON #4:

Second visual lesson also worked on predictions and conclusions. The lesson used photographs, pictures, and t-charts to help support each student. The students were shown a picture of a construction site and had to write down their observations and then the conclusion they could make from that observation. Student 1 and Student 8 both said their observations orally to me and then wrote down their conclusions and inferences. The students were then shown the picture that relates to the passage. Students were asked to do the same thing again. Student 1 observed a barn and concluded that the setting would be on a farm. Student 8 noticed a hen. I asked student 8 to look more closely. At that request, student 8 noticed that it was a Rooster instead of a hen. He then responded with, "Maybe, it will be about the animals on a farm". Student 1 asked to read the passage. Student 1 was stopped so that students could use context clues to help understand the new vocabulary as well as get students to connect with the characters of the story. Student 1 answered the two multiple-choice questions correctly. She also answered the three open-response questions correctly. Student 1, however, did use me as a resource to make text- to-self connections. Student 8 did not answer the two multiple-choice connections correctly; however, he answered the three open response questions correctly. Student 8 was able to make a text-to-self connection however he forgot to give details from the passage to prove the parallel.

Summation of Mini-Lessons

The two students were highly engaged in the material. The mini-lessons allowed the students to converse with one another as well as with myself. The students stayed on topic and often asked me questions about the passages we read. The students were able to answer both the explicit and implicit questions with minimal help and were able to reproduce what was taught in the mini-lesson in their responses. The students engaged in discussion with me about their responses and, often with some direction from me, took their responses even further. Student 8 still struggled with some implicit questions but when asked to explain his choices, he was able to see where his thinking went wrong and correct his answers.

Chapter IV

Discussion

Limitations of Study

The classroom size was small and attendance was inconsistent. There was also confusion between the classroom teacher and myself about how the students should be observed. Many times during observations, I was used as a second teacher, which hindered some of the observations. It often made my observations focus on one or two students who I was working with closely. The classroom environment involved more disruptive and avoiding behaviors that led the classroom teacher to have to do more classroom management than actually assess and teach students different strategies. The students had a range of moods and often began to talk with fellow classmates to avoid completing assignments. Lastly, I only observed the classroom in the morning due to previously scheduled work. The classroom teacher often extended their reading period into their writing period, which took place after lunch. Unfortunately, I missed observing some of the ELA test-preparation sessions completely from start to finish.

Conclusion/ Discussions

This study was conducted to better understand the possible role in developing more effective test preparation that is specifically tailored to student learning styles. This study showed that students were more inclined to complete assignments when some part of the lesson was tailored to include more kinesthetic and visual aids such as displays, pictures, moving, or making personal connections

to the text. Upon completing their classroom fable, students wanted to participate in the classroom discussion and were upset when their ideas were not heard. Students responded to acting out the role of a character with excitement and eagerness to help develop that character. Students may not have copied the entire class fable by hand; however, many were able to complete their reflection quickly with some insight. Students used conversations with their peers as well as their classroom teacher to help think out loud and to stretch their thinking, making their reflections more personal and specific to their experience through the process. The classroom teacher enticed students to learn and interact with the curriculum, which allowed students to complete their reflections with thoughtful discussion about the process and what they learned (Musoleno, 2010).

When the teacher led ELA test-preparation and the students were actively involved, the results were more positive. Students were more engaged when asked to read the passages aloud for the class. Students also wanted to read aloud the questions and often asked questions for clarification, all behaviors indicating high interest. Once students were asked to complete the final essay comparing both passages and developing a thesis with support, however, most students began to place their heads down or began unrelated chatter with peers. Some students wrote quickly to complete the assignment without reviewing their essay and without checking to make sure all questions were answered to the best of their ability. Most students refused to look back on their work leading up to the comparative essay. The classroom teacher developed and always displayed the same format for the essay as well as key vocabulary and ideas. The classroom teacher also composed

multiple Venn Diagrams for the students to use. Similar to Sterman (2003), this classroom teacher was giving ample opportunities to work on areas needing improvement, but without the instruction and strategies to support their weaknesses. While the classroom teacher would grade students' work based on the rubric used for the ELA Standardized test, she would also provide feedback on how to improve their grade for the next time. The classroom teacher did not conference with students to pick specific goals to work on in the next assignment or share with them their final grade. While the classroom teacher was provided ample opportunities, she was giving them didactic instruction associated with "gam[ing] the test" so that her students could succeed without understanding the material (Firestone, 2004).

During test-preparation, the classroom teacher often pushed students to the next passage and set of questions without allowing students to complete the previous one. This always led to students not having enough information to complete the essay. The classroom teacher explained that this was to prepare them for the time allotted to them for the ELA test, but student behavior once pushed to quickly move ahead changed to poor posture and negative attitude (ex. head down, student chatter, and call outs). Many students struggled with the time allotment and spent more time arguing with the classroom teacher asking why it was important for them to practice. Students needed oral redirection to help refocus them and to keep them working on the material constantly. The classroom teacher tried to scaffold instruction by giving the comparative essay as independent work, but students were unprepared and unwilling and hence, most students quickly became

disruptive and unmotivated. Clark (2004) states that scaffolding is effective because it enables a teacher to keep a task whole and to pose an appropriate challenge to students, while they learn to understand and manage the parts. In this classroom, students were expected to learn the parts about how to complete the comparative essay without understanding how the parts come together to form one whole.

The classroom teacher by forcing students to move quickly from one section to the other, did not allow students time to reflect on what they read. The classroom teacher should discuss the importance of the tests and have students make authentic connections between the curriculum and personal experiences to keep students involved and actively learning (Turner, 2009). The rushed atmosphere is developing bad reading habits in the students. Instead of rereading passages, reflecting on content and vocabulary as well as drawing conclusions, students are pushed to make quick decisions and therefore making it harder to complete the comparative essay because the material is barely understood.

Test- Preparation Mini-Lessons:

The test-preparation mini-lessons were designed to see if a student could respond better to a lesson tailored to their specific learning style. Both Student 1 and 8 were picked to take part in the mini-lessons because both needed support in pulling out relevant details to support their opinions or ideas. Both students made improvements in their comprehension of short passages by answering both explicit and implicit questions. Students were able to elaborate on their open response answers and make text-to-self connections while incorporating some detail from the

passage. Students were self-motivated throughout the lessons and discussed their open response questions prior to responding. Key reading strategies used to create the four mini-lessons included summarizing keywords, context clues, thinking aloud, making inferences and drawing conclusions. Students were engaged with the material and were made to draw depictions of the story, play a board game, or predict a story through the use of the cover illustrations. These aids allowed students to approach the material differently from how their classroom teacher was drilling test-preparation. Also, the mini-lessons allowed for teaching-as-conversation instead of teaching-as-lectures by engaging in dialogues to help facilitate the mini-lesson (Anderson 2009). Students were actively participating in the mini-lessons and even reciprocated the strategies from the mini-lesson in their next paired passage assignment by using evidence from the passage to prove their opinion or idea and to bring their mark up from a 2 to a 3. Similar to Prashing (2005), the two students had learned enough flexibility to be able to present their knowledge on the exam essay. It does not matter the way information is handed to an individual as long as that individual can make meaning of it (Stahl, 2010). This showcases that the four mini-lessons may have delivered the reading strategies of comprehension (context clues, pre-reading the questions, predicting, providing evidence to support ideas, and text-to-self connections) in a way that the students could finally grasp.

Implication for Practice

This study provides some more information about the different ways to tailor test-preparation to different students' learning styles. In order to keep students motivated through test-preparation students should be taught different comprehension and inference techniques using all three learning styles (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic). Text-preparation can include using premade packets that are similar to what students may see on an ELA standardized test, yet a mini-lesson including the different learning styles should be taught prior. To keep students motivated to complete assignments, test-preparation should shift from explicit comprehension questions to more implicit free response questions.

Test-preparation is too rushed to be conducted in the couple weeks prior to the standardized test. As well as being rushed, test-preparation also lacks thoughtfulness. Students should be actively learning how to be life-long readers throughout the academic year, not just during the test preparation time. Readers should use good reading strategies to comprehend the words on the page such as context clues, inference, thinking aloud, setting a purpose, and drawing conclusions. Students are developing the wrong habits by seeing reading as something that will be tested constantly. Students can be prepared for standardized tests by being taught good reading strategies throughout the course of the year, with explicit instruction and modeling by the classroom teacher.

Classroom teachers should develop test-preparation lessons that explicitly teach one or two good reading skills building upon the previous lesson. Reading packets can be manipulated or added to help students develop specific skills.

Students are more engaged when the material can lead to more discussions as well as involve different aids, such as board games, drawing, or pictures. Classroom teachers need to think outside the box and recognize that if the lesson is boring to teach, then something needs to be added to keep students' attention. Also, test-preparation should begin at the beginning of the year allowing teachers and students to build upon prior knowledge and build stamina to complete an entire ELA test within the time restraints. Similar to how students are separated into reading groups, different reading strategies can be taught with whole group as well as in small groups. By dividing the class into small groups, students would receive individualized help and will be supported while learning a new reading strategy. Teachers should want to prepare students for standardized test as well as develop good reading and writing skills.

Implication for Future Research

This study looked at only one classroom and the nine students in that classroom. The four mini-lessons were only taught to the same two students who were separated from the rest of the class. This provided each student with support as well as allowed me to push students to the next level of comprehension. In order to see if this study's findings are accurate, it would need to be reciprocated in a full class setting and in more than one classroom. More mini-lessons that include multiple learning styles would need to be created to build upon specific classroom needs. It was easy for me to create lessons for the two students because I quickly identified their weaknesses and strengths and was able to provide tailored mini-

lessons. However, once a classroom teacher has identified the key strategies and techniques that students need to work on, the classroom teacher can develop and formulate tailored small group lessons. By taking the time to think outside the box, students will be more inclined to complete assignments and would be able to build stamina when answering ELA test-preparation questions.

Future teachers should quickly identify students' areas that could use more instruction and develop mini-lessons that help teach those strategies in unconventional ways. By providing multiple approaches to teach the same strategy, students may be more engaged as well as more receptive to learning. Future researchers should identify avoiding behaviors that students have and specific activities students try to avoid. By identifying those behaviors and activities that students regard as negative, teachers will be able to identify strategies that are more likely to engage students and thus develop test preparation sessions that are both more meaningful and effective.

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Appendix A

Parent Consent Form Cover Letter

March 8, 201

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I would like to take this time to introduce myself. My name is Lisa Marie Vuono, and I am currently earning my Master's Degree in Literacy at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York.

I am currently conducting research that will lead to my master's thesis on Literacy. My thesis proposal, Test Preparation and Student Engagement in Literacy Learning in Upper Elementary Classrooms, has been approved by Wagner College's Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB).

With this letter, I am asking your child to participate in this study described in the consent form. Enclosed are two copies of my informed consent form. Please review it, and if you agree to allow your child to participate, please sign one and return it to your child's classroom teacher. You should keep the other consent form for your records.

The information collected during this study will not be associated with your name or your child's name. When my thesis is completed, I will be more than happy to share the findings with you.

If you have any question please feel free to contact me via email lisa.vuono@wagner.edu or phone (201) 723-5116. I thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Lisa Marie Vuono

Parent Informed Consent Form

The Department of Education at Wagner College supports the practice of protection of human participants in research. The following will provide you with information about the study that will help you in deciding whether or not you wish for your child to participate. If you agree for your child to participate, please be aware that you are free to withdraw him or her at any point throughout the duration of the study without penalty.

This study is meant to look at different test-preparation programs that are used in different grades and schools. This study will compare the test-preparation program of your child's classroom teacher with your child's specific learning style. I will be observing your child's classroom during reading and writing workshop twice a week. For each reading and writing workshop, your child will fill out a mini-survey about how he or she is feeling that day as well as reflecting on the writing or reading workshop he or she just participated in. I will also ask your child to fill out a questionnaire that examines his or her specific learning style, which will allow me to gain some knowledge about your child's learning preference. The mini-surveys will take place twice a week over a 20-day period during school hours.

If for any reason your child experiences any discomfort during the course of the study, she or he is free to discontinue participation in the study. All information will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name or your child's name.

When the study is complete you will be provided with the results and you will be free to ask any questions.

If you have any further questions concerning this study please feel free to contact us through phone or e-mail: Lisa Marie Vuono at lisa.vuono@wagner.edu , (201) 723-5116, or Dr. Preskill at Stephen.preskill@wagner.edu . Please indicate with your signature on the line below that you understand your rights and agree that your child may participate in the study.

Your child's participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary. All information will be kept confidential and your child's name will not be associated with any research findings.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Lisa Marie Vuono, Investigator

Print Name

Appendix B

Teacher Permission Letter

March 8, 2012

Dear Classroom Teacher,

I would like to take this time to introduce myself. My name is Lisa Marie Vuono, and I am currently earning my Master's Degree in Literacy at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York.

I am currently conducting research that will lead to my master's thesis in Literacy. My thesis proposal, *Test Preparation and Student Engagement in Literacy Learning in Upper Elementary Classrooms*, has been approved by Wagner College's Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB). This study is meant to assess the impact of test preparation on students engagement and the relation between the level of student engagement and the students' learning style.

In this study, I will observe a reading and writing workshop twice a week over 4 weeks. I will ask your students to reflect upon the lessons I observed with a short survey. I will also ask your students to participate in a questionnaire that focuses on their specific learning styles. This will give me a better understanding of the dynamics of your classroom. I will be in your classroom twice a week for about 90 minutes each day over a 20-day period, or eight days of 90 minutes each over this 4-week period of time.

If for any reason a student experiences any discomfort during the course of the study, the student is free to discontinue participation in the study. All information will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name or

the students' names. When the study is complete you will be provided with the results and you will be free to ask any questions.

With this letter, I am asking your permission to carry out this study described above in your classroom. Enclosed are two copies of the permission letter. Please review it, and if you agree to participate, please sign one and return it to me. You should keep the other for you records. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via email lisa.vuono@wagner.edu or phone (201) 723-5116. I think you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Lisa Marie Vuono

Your participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary. All information will be kept confidential and your name will not be associated with any research findings.

Signature of Classroom Teacher

Lisa Marie Vuono, Investigator

Print Name

Teacher Cover Form

March 8, 2012

Dear Classroom Teacher,

I would like to take this time to introduce myself. My name is Lisa Marie Vuono, and I am currently earning my Master's Degree in Literacy at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York.

I am currently conducting research that will lead to my master's thesis on Literacy. My thesis proposal, Test Preparation and Student Engagement in Literacy Learning in Upper Elementary Classrooms, has been approved by Wagner College's Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB).

With this letter, I am asking you to participate in this study described in the consent form. Enclosed are two copies of my informed consent form. Please review it, and if you agree to participate, please sign one and return it to me. You should keep the other consent form for your records.

The information collected during this study will not be associated with your name. When my thesis is completed, I will be more than happy to share the findings with you.

If you have any question please feel free to contact me via email lisa.vuono@wagner.edu or phone (201) 723-5116. I thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Lisa Marie Vuono

Teacher Consent Form

The Department of Education at Wagner College supports the practice of protection of human participants in research. The following will provide you with information about the study that will help you in deciding whether you wish to participate. If you agree to participate, please be aware that you are free to withdraw at any point throughout the duration of the study without penalty.

This study is meant to look at different test-preparation programs that are used in different grades and schools. The study will compare your test preparation program that you have implemented in your classroom with your students' specific learning styles. I will ask you to complete a VAK learning style questionnaire that will allow me to know your preferred learning style. I will be observing your classroom during writing and reading workshop twice a week over a four-week period. I will be assessing your students' engagement with a Student Engagement Scale as well as taking notes on what skills and strategies you are teaching. I will give each of your students a short survey after they have concluded any writing or reading workshop I have observed. I will also hold an interview with you after I have observed your classroom for a total of 8 observations.

If for any reason you experience any discomfort during the course of the study you are free to discontinue participation in the study. All information will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name. When the study is complete you will be provided with the results and you will be free to ask any questions.

If you have any further questions concerning this study please feel free to contact us through phone or e-mail: Lisa Marie Vuono at lisa.vuono@wagner.edu, (201) 723-5116, or Dr. Preskill at Stephen.preskill@wagner.edu. Please indicate with your signature on the space below that you understand your rights and you agree to participate in this study.

Your participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary. All information will be kept confidential and your name will not be associated with any research findings.

Signature of Teacher

Lisa Marie Vuono, Investigator

Print Name

Appendix C

Child Assent Form

Dear Student,

I am doing this study to learn how to help you prepare for tests better and to see how your teachers are teaching you reading and writing workshop. I would like to help kids your age be more ready for tests.

If you agree to be in my study, I am going to ask you to answer some questions about your reading and writing workshops and about how you learn.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to be a part of this study, you can ask to stop.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in my study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Please write your name if you agree to be in the study:

Date: _____

Appendix D

VAK Learning Styles Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Circle or tick the answer that most represents how you generally behave.

(It's best to complete the questionnaire before reading the accompanying explanation.)

1. When I get a new toy I generally:
 - a) read the instructions first
 - b) listen to an explanation from someone who has used it before
 - c) go ahead and have a go, I can figure it out as I use it

2. When I need directions to a friends house I usually:
 - a) look at a map
 - b) ask for spoken directions
 - c) follow my nose and maybe use a compass

3. When I bake something new, I like to:
 - a) follow a written recipe
 - b) call a friend for an explanation
 - c) follow my instincts, testing as I cook

4. If I am teaching someone something new, I tend to:
 - a) write instructions down for them
 - b) give them a verbal explanation
 - c) demonstrate first and then let them have a go

5. I tend to say:
 - a) watch how I do it
 - b) listen to me explain
 - c) you have a go

6. During my free time I most enjoy:
 - a) going to museums and galleries
 - b) listening to music and talking to my friends
 - c) playing sport or doing Do It Yourself projects

7. When I go shopping for clothes, I tend to:
 - a) imagine what they would look like on
 - b) discuss them with the shop staff
 - c) try them on and test them out

8. When I am choosing a new toy to ask for I usually:
- read lots of material about it
 - listen to recommendations from friends
 - imagine what it would be like to play with it
9. When I am learning something new, I am most comfortable:
- watching what the teacher is doing
 - talking through with the teacher exactly what I'm supposed to do
 - giving it a try myself and work it out as I go
10. If I am choosing food at a restaurant, I tend to:
- imagine what the food will look like
 - talk through the options in my head or with my partner
 - imagine what the food will taste like
11. When I listen to a band, I can't help:
- watching the band members and other people in the audience
 - listening to the lyrics and the beats
 - moving in time with the music
12. When I concentrate, I most often:
- focus on the words or the pictures in front of me
 - discuss the problem and the possible solutions in my head
 - move around a lot, fiddle with pens and pencils and touch things
13. I choose new clothes because I like:
- their colors and how they look
 - the compliments the sales-people give me
 - their textures and what it feels like to touch them
14. My first memory is of:
- looking at something
 - being spoken to
 - doing something
15. When I am anxious, I:
- visualise the worst-case scenarios
 - talk over in my head what worries me most
 - can't sit still, fiddle and move around constantly
16. I feel especially connected to other people because of:
- how they look
 - what they say to me

- c) how they make me feel
17. When I have to study for an exam, I generally:
- a) write lots of revision notes and diagrams
 - b) talk over my notes, alone or with other people
 - c) imagine making the movement or creating the formula
18. If I am explaining to someone I tend to:
- a) show them what I mean
 - b) explain to them in different ways until they understand
 - c) encourage them to try and talk them through my idea as they do it
19. I really love:
- a) watching films, photography, looking at art or people watching
 - b) listening to music, the radio or talking to friends
 - c) taking part in sporting activities
20. Most of my free time is spent:
- a) watching television
 - b) talking to friends
 - c) doing physical activity or making things
21. When I first meet a new person, I usually:
- a) arrange a face to face meeting
 - b) talk to them on the telephone
 - c) try to get together whilst doing something else, such as an activity or a meal
22. I first notice how people:
- a) look and dress
 - b) sound and speak
 - c) stand and move
23. If I am angry, I tend to:
- a) keep replaying in my mind what it is that has upset me
 - b) raise my voice and tell people how I feel
 - c) stamp about, slam doors and physically demonstrate my anger
24. I find it easiest to remember:
- a) faces
 - b) names
 - c) things I have done
25. I think that you can tell if someone is lying if:
- a) they avoid looking at you

- b) their voices changes
- c) they give me funny vibes

26. When I meet an old friend:

- a) I say "it's great to see you!"
- b) I say "it's great to hear from you!"
- c) I give them a hug or a handshake

27. I remember things best by:

- a) writing notes or keeping printed details
- b) saying them aloud or repeating words and key points in my head
- c) doing and practising the activity or imagining it being done

28. If I have to complain about someone mistreating me, I am most comfortable:

- a) writing a letter
- b) complaining to someone else
- c) talking directly to that person who mistreated me

29. I tend to say:

- a) I see what you mean
- b) I hear what you are saying
- c) I know how you feel

Now add up how many A's, B's and C's you selected.

A's =

B's =

C's =

If you chose mostly A's you have a **VISUAL** learning style.

If you chose mostly B's you have an **AUDITORY** learning style.

If you chose mostly C's you have a **KINESTHETIC** learning style.

Some people find that their learning style may be a blend of two or three styles, in this case read about the styles that apply to you in the explanation below.

VAK Learning Styles Explanation

The VAK learning styles model suggests that most people can be divided into one of three preferred styles of learning. These three styles are as follows, (and there is no right or wrong learning style):

- Someone with a **Visual** learning style has a preference for seen or observed things, including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-chart, etc. These people will use phrases such as 'show me', 'let's have a look at that' and will be best able to perform a new task after reading the instructions or watching someone else do it first. These are the people who will work from lists and written directions and instructions.
- Someone with an **Auditory** learning style has a preference for the transfer of information through listening: to the spoken word, of self or others, of sounds and noises. These people will use phrases such as 'tell me', 'let's talk it over' and will be best able to perform a new task after listening to instructions from an expert. These are the people who are happy being given spoken instructions over the telephone, and can remember all the words to songs that they hear!
- Someone with a **Kinesthetic** learning style has a preference for physical experience - touching, feeling, holding, doing, practical hands-on experiences. These people will use phrases such as 'let me try', 'how do you feel?' and will be best able to perform a new task by going ahead and trying it out, learning as they go. These are the people who like to experiment, hands-on, and never look at the instructions first!

People commonly have a main preferred learning style, but this will be part of a blend of all three. Some people have a very strong preference; other people have a more even mixture of two or less commonly, three styles.

When you know your preferred learning style(s) you understand the type of learning that best suits you. **There is no right or wrong learning style.** The point is that there are types of learning that are right for your own preferred learning style.

Appendix F

Measurement Lesson Chart of VAK Learning Style		
Observation:	Class:	Date:

	Pictures	Diagrams	Demonstration	Display	Handouts	Flims
Visual						

	Discussions	Songs	Playing with Words	Debate	Books on Tape	Lecture Style
Auditory						

	Touching	Feeling	Holding	Doing	Practical Hands-on	Other
Kinesthetic						