

Teachers' Perceptions, Students' Attitudes, and Strategies to Increase Writing Achievement Among  
Fifth Grade Learners

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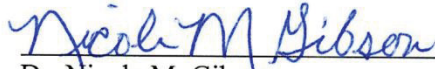
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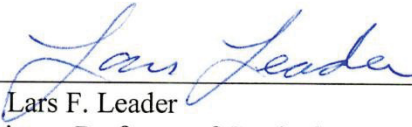


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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing, to determine students' attitudes about writing, and to implement and evaluate strategies for improving student achievement in the area of writing among fifth grade learners. These strategies were to augment the school's existing writing program, *Writing to Win*. Participants included third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers (N = 15) who provided instruction in the area of writing, as well as an additional fifth grade teacher who served as the researcher and a participant-observer. Additional participants included fifth grade students (N = 76). Surveys, interviews, observations, and documents were used as data gathering instruments. Data analysis revealed teachers had positive perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing; students held negative attitudes about writing; and strategies implemented in addition to the *Writing to Win* program resulted in a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| I. INTRODUCTION .....                     | 1  |
| Background and Personal Experiences ..... | 1  |
| Statement of the Problem .....            | 12 |
| Significance .....                        | 13 |
| Purpose of the Study .....                | 14 |
| Research Questions .....                  | 14 |
| Limitations .....                         | 15 |
| Definition of Terms .....                 | 16 |
| Organization of the Study .....           | 17 |
| II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....            | 18 |
| Critical State of Writing .....           | 19 |
| Writing Fluency .....                     | 21 |
| Writing Process .....                     | 23 |
| Traits of Writing .....                   | 26 |
| Student Attitudes .....                   | 29 |
| Teacher Perceptions .....                 | 40 |
| Models .....                              | 53 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Graphic Organizers . . . . .                   | 59  |
| Sentence Structure . . . . .                   | 67  |
| III. METHODOLOGY . . . . .                     | 77  |
| Setting and Participants . . . . .             | 77  |
| Ethical Considerations . . . . .               | 79  |
| Instrumentation . . . . .                      | 80  |
| Research Design . . . . .                      | 85  |
| Procedures. . . . .                            | 89  |
| Research Questions . . . . .                   | 87  |
| IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA . . . . .     | 90  |
| Qualitative Data Analysis . . . . .            | 92  |
| Quantitative Data Analysis . . . . .           | 110 |
| V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS . . . . .        | 112 |
| Overview of the Study . . . . .                | 112 |
| Summary of Findings . . . . .                  | 114 |
| Conclusions . . . . .                          | 131 |
| Implications for Future Practice . . . . .     | 134 |
| Recommendations for Further Research . . . . . | 135 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| REFERENCES .....   | 136 |
| APPENDICES .....   | 151 |
| Appendix A: Student Essays.....  | 151 |
| Appendix B: Developmental Stage/Scoring Guidelines .....                                   | 152 |
| Appendix C: Commendation and Recommendation Menu.....                                      | 154 |
| Appendix D: Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment Scoring Rubric.....                         | 156 |
| Appendix E: Georgia Writing Assessment Descriptive Statements.....                         | 161 |
| Appendix F: Informed Consent to Participate in Research .....                              | 164 |
| Appendix G: Parent/Guardian Permission for Child’s/Wards Participation<br>in Research..... | 167 |
| Appendix H: Verbal Assent Form for Children Ages 5-12.....                                 | 171 |
| Appendix I: Parent Letter .....  | 172 |
| Appendix J: Principal’s Letter.....  | 174 |
| Appendix K: Institutional Review Board Approval .....                                      | 182 |
| Appendix L: Writing Attitude Survey for Teachers.....                                      | 184 |
| Appendix M: Writing Attitude Survey for Students .....                                     | 187 |
| Appendix N: Teacher Interviews .....   | 189 |
| Appendix O: Student Interviews.....  | 214 |
| Appendix P: Observations and Participant Observations .....                                | 220 |

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I would also like to thank the teachers who participated in completing surveys, as well as those who engaged in interviews. I thank each student who participated in this project in any way. I extend a very special thank you to the parents who consented for their child to participate in this research project.

I especially want to thank my family for their support and encouragement. My husband, Ray, learned to cook, do the laundry, and clean the house so that I had time to study and do the research necessary for this dissertation. His belief in me was inspiring. When I became stressed and felt like I could not continue working on this dissertation, my daughters, Rachael, Ashley, and Tiffany were there urging me to persevere. I want to especially thank Tiffany for her help in typing, proofreading, and editing my paper, as well as coming to my rescue when I had issues with my computer. Additionally, my parents reassured me that I could complete this dissertation; in fact, every time they saw me they asked, "Are you finished yet?" To each of you, I offer my gratitude.

## DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this work to my husband, Ray. Your support and belief in me were unwavering and inspiring. The late night pep talks were motivating and gave me the energy and determination to continue. I am grateful you never allowed me to entertain the thought of quitting. I will never be able to express my sincere appreciation for all that you did to help me see this research study through to the end.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Helen Keller, born June 27, 1880, was less than 2 years old when she was stricken with an illness that changed her life forever. The illness, believed to have been meningitis, left Keller unable to see, hear, or speak (Zonderman, 1994). As a result, Keller became isolated and very frustrated; in fact, her teacher, Anne Sullivan, described her as a troubled, stubborn, and unmanageable child (Wilkie, 1969). Sullivan worked diligently with Keller and taught her to communicate by spelling words into her palms (Zonderman). This form of communication changed Helen Keller's life; Keller (1949) stated the following:

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the smell of honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water, and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul; gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! (p. 21)

Santrock (2006) defines language as “a form of communication, whether spoken, written,” or as in Helen Keller's case, “signed, that is based on a system of symbols” (p. 185). In order to give permanence to vocal, or spoken sounds, a system of written language was developed in which symbols graphically represented the phonological system (Yellin, Blake, & DeVries, 2004). Written language, the most complex form of communication, allows us to convey our thoughts and feelings (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007; Bryson, 1990; Rubin, 1995), which Graves (1994) asserts is a fundamental characteristic of being human. Written language

has allowed us to work in ways that have advanced our civilization and ushered us into the Information Age of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Even though we exist in a highly advanced technological world, many believe basic writing skills are lacking in schools, as well as in the workplace (Canavor & Meirowitz, 2005; Hoyt & Therriault, 2008; Schmoker, 2007; Schoeff, 2007). Quible and Griffin (2007) assert writing skills are more deficient than they were two decades ago; in fact, they describe the writing skills of college graduates as deplorable and eroded. In an effort to further advance the notion of college and career readiness, Budig (2006) asserts “to remain competitive in an increasingly global economy and to meet the needs of an ever-changing workplace, America needs to pay new and special attention to developing the writing skills of all students at all levels in school” (p. 663). Early writing helps develop foundational skills associated with children’s later reading success (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). These foundational skills include concepts of print, knowledge of the alphabet, and awareness of phonemes (Rubin, 1995; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). According to Cabell, Tortorelli, and Gerde (2013), in order to scaffold instruction and develop these writing skills, one must first understand the developmental stages of writing through which children progressively advance toward fluency and literacy.

Experts agree writing is developmental, but they may not necessarily use the same terms to label the stages. According to Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009), there are five stages or levels of writing development: awareness (exploration or role play writing), emergent (experimental writing), transitional (early writing), conventional writing, and proficient writing. According to Hennings (1994) and Rubin (1995), children in the awareness or exploration phase of writing development have the ability to hold a pencil and make marks on paper; they may write in a circular motion, indicating some control over the small muscles in the hand. Children’s scribbles, squiggly lines, and pictures are intended as writing, even though the reader will not know the child’s intention or message. The context in which the child scribbles may give clues to the writer’s message. Schickedanz and Collins (2012) contend children nearing the end of this

developmental stage will combine scribbles and figures that resemble letters of the alphabet; however, they will not understand the orientation of letters in space or the idea that print goes from left to right.

Children in the second stage of writing development (emergent or experimental) record random letters or letter strings that move from left to right (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2009). The letter strings have no separations that would indicate individual words or sounds. Children begin to write their names, and they write in mostly uppercase letters. Children are able to read back their own writing (Schickedanz & Casbergue). This stage of writing development corresponds to the pre-phonemic stage described by Graves (1989).

During the transitional or early writing stage of development, also called the early phonemic stage, the letter-name stage, and the transitional phase, children become aware of environmental print and will attempt to replicate the words (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2009). Students engage in beginning phonemic spelling by using a single initial consonant sound to represent words or syllables, such as using the letter “c” to spell “cat.” As children advance, they may use the first letter of words to represent entire words. For example, the child may write “HWFWP” to mean “He went fishing with Papa.” As children interact with print, they begin to hear the sounds of beginning, medial, and ending letters, including vowels, in words (Graves, 1989). For example, a child might record “I lik to bak caks” to mean “I like to bake cakes.” Children in this stage of writing development use spacing between letters and words, apply punctuation, and use upper and lowercase letters of the alphabet (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2009).

Students in the conventional stage of writing development are able to use the writing process to write for different purposes (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Students write correctly spelled words instead of relying on inventive spelling; they also demonstrate an understanding of the structures of writing and the correct usage of punctuation.

Learners in the proficient stage of writing development have often established a particular style of writing and can manipulate writing to suit specific purposes (Neuman et al., 2000). They exhibit control over the conventions of writing, and have acquired a more advanced vocabulary. According to Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009), their writing is cogent, cohesive, and coherent.

In summary, according to Hennings (1994) and Rubin (1995), writing begins in children even before they begin preschool. Their initial writing may be represented as nothing more than scribbling, squiggly lines, or simple pictures. As children participate in literacy events, their writing progresses along a continuum from emergent to a more conventional and proficient form; however, teachers must provide direct instruction in order for students to successfully make the transitions that eventually lead to mastery of writing skills as evidenced by fluent writing (Cabell, Tortoelli, & Gerde, 2013; Corden, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Singer & Shagoury, 2005; Troia & Maddox, 2004). The following accounts are actual final drafts of narrative essays written by two fifth grade students in two separate language arts classes at my school in a rural town in the southeastern United States. One of the essays was written by a student from the experimental group, while the other essay was written by a student from the control group (additional essays are included as Appendix A). While these essays are more than squiggly lines or simple pictures, they poignantly demonstrate the necessity for instruction and practice in the area of writing.

#### A Happy Time in My Life

Was my birthday because my entire family cam. I was turn nine. The party was at Aunt house in the back yard. We have cake and Ice cream. We dance and scary gost story. Then the Adult play a trick on us. They told my uncle to knock in the door an run back.

#### A Happy Time

The happiest time I had was whe I to Orlando for our family reunion. At our family reunion we went to Disney World and I rode the hulk it was kind of scary because you ride over the water an we stayed in big houses with a pool and

jucyzy so when it was knight me and my four cousins got in the pool and I walked round the pool because my cousin asked to but he tricked me and pushed me in the deep part and I thought I was going to die but my cousin came and got me. Then on my step dads birthday we thru him a surprise pool party we got to stay in the pool how long we wanted to. Then the next day we were going to go to Disney World but we didn because we over slept and when we got up every was gone the next day we left but my uncle left in the middle of the night because he had to get his daughter and when it was morning everybody left and when I got in the car I fell a sleep and when I woke up we were at the firework store in Havana and after the we went home.

In these essays, there is a lack of fully elaborated details, well-developed introductions and conclusions, engaging word choices, and varied transitional elements. There is no evidence of advanced sentence structure; in fact, some ideas are expressed as sentence fragments and others are written as run-on sentences. There are many errors in usage and mechanics, and some of these errors interfere with meaning. Many fifth grade students have mastered writing at their expected levels; however, these writing samples poignantly demonstrate that some students have not yet mastered even the basic skills of writing, despite reform efforts aimed at improving education and educational outcomes.

In 1965, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* was authorized to provide funding for primary and secondary education in the United States (Ornstein & Levine, 1993). Title I, part of the *ESEA*, allocates funding for professional development, educational resources, and parental involvement in schools and school districts where at least 40% of students are from low income families. In addition to narrowing the achievement gap among students, another goal of *ESEA* was to establish high educational standards and accountability (Ornstein & Levine). Reauthorization of *ESEA* occurs every 5 years.

One purpose of the Department of Education is to provide educational standards and instructional resources to enable all Georgia students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to participate as successful and productive citizens in society. (<https://www.gadoe.org/Pages/Home.aspx>). In order to fulfill this purpose, the *Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act of 1986* was implemented (Ornstein & Levine, 1993). The *QBE* led to the development of the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), a sequenced course of study students had to master before graduating from high school. Each state had different requirements, and each local system was required to include the QCC as the basic curriculum. Each grade, K-12, had designated learning objectives in writing, reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. One provision of the QBE Act required the Department of Education to make periodic revisions to the QCC in order to reflect increased expectations of students. In addition to teaching the QCC, each school system was required to administer a standardized test that measured achievement of these learning objectives. Information gathered from the test was used to measure school, teacher, and student success.

*The National Goals for Education*, published in 1990, outlined educational goals to be met by the year 2000 (Haas & Parkay, 1993). These goals addressed school readiness, high school completion, student achievement in all academic subject areas, citizenship, adult literacy, and school safety. These somewhat idealistic goals were adopted by the governors of each state, and resulted in revised curricula, increased graduation requirements, and competency tests for students and teachers. Boards of Education across the nation analyzed test data as a means of accountability. The next educational reform effort came about in 2002 as President Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* (Judson, 2007).

According to LaMorte (2005), the *NCLB Act*, the most recent reauthorization of the *ESEA*, is a bipartisan education reform that “redefines the federal role in K-12 education” (p. 10). The purpose of the federal legislation is to make certain all learners have the same access to a high-quality education in order to meet proficiency standards on state-mandated assessments

(Hursh, 2007; Judson, 2007; McCarthy, 2008). This includes students who are enrolled in schools receiving Title I funding. Additionally, *NCLB* requires the inclusion of students with disabilities and learners of a second language on these mandatory assessments. Title I, part of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, continues to provide funding to schools with a high enrollment of disadvantaged children (Cohen, Moffitt, & Golden, 2007; Manna, 2009). The funds continue to be used to promote parent involvement, provide professional development, and purchase educational materials and resources.

To meet the mandates of *NCLB*, each state must meet certain criteria. Each state must guide instruction and assess learning by developing academic standards and a state testing system that meet federal requirements (Hursh, 2007; Judson, 2007; McCarthy, 2008). The test results are used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers and schools. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), one component of the *NCLB Act*, is a measure of year-to-year student achievement on statewide assessments. After-school tutoring and remedial classes in reading, language arts, and math are provided to schools that have not met AYP for 2 consecutive years (McKenzie, 2003).

The most current educational initiative was the 2010 release of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (<https://www.georgiastandards.org>). Prior to the inculcation of these standards, student benchmarks were different from state to state; however, Georgia and 44 other states have adopted the standards as a way of providing consistency of benchmarks across states and districts. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) define the knowledge and skills students need to master in order to be successful in college and careers. With the recent emphasis placed on school and teacher accountability, educators have the tremendous responsibility of using the most effective means to ensure students' success (Duncan & Murnane, 2014.). Improved student achievement is critical in all areas of the curriculum; therefore, one must have insight regarding ways that instructional pedagogy, students' attitudes, and teachers' perceptions affect instruction and learning (Culham, 2003).

All students in Georgia's K-12 educational system are required to take annual assessments to measure achievement in all academic subject areas. According to LaMorte (2005) and Combs (2001), students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 are required to take a statewide assessment in writing. Prior to the 2006-2007 school term, writing instruction was based on the QCC objectives and content standards. Kay Ellen Rutledge, Ph.D., Testing Specialist at the Georgia Department of Education (personal communication, June 12, 2008) asserted that on state-mandated Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessments given prior to the 2006-2007 school term, students were given an assigned prompt which required them to write a narrative based on a personal or imaginary experience. The test was administered in two 60-minute sessions over a period of 2 days. According to Combs (2001), each student's paper was evaluated by at least two trained raters using the Developmental Stage/Scoring Guidelines (see Appendix B), and each paper was assigned a stage score. Every paper was scored holistically on the basis of a global interpretation, considering content, personal expression, and surface features such as spelling, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation. Content and personal expression were considered more heavily in determining the stage score of the writing piece. Each rater rendered a commendation remark and a recommendation remark from a menu of comments aimed at elucidating ways to improve upon and further develop students' writing skills (see Appendix C).

According to Dr. Rutledge, writing composition was taught based on the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) beginning in the 2006-2007 school term (personal communication, June 12, 2008). Since transition to the GPS, students are given prompts that address persuasive, informational, or narrative (personal experience or imaginative) genres. Students are required to complete the assessment in 120 minutes during a single writing session. Writing performance on the state-mandated assessment is then evaluated analytically on four domains: ideas, organization, style, and conventions. Analytic scoring involves evaluating more than one feature or domain of the written assessment. The components of each domain are then scored holistically. An overall

judgment of the writer's command of each component is assigned based on a scoring rubric (see Appendix D). The score reflects a balance of the students' strengths and weaknesses.

The four domains are assigned a weight based on the importance of contribution to the paper (ideas 40%, organization 20%, style 20%, and conventions 20%), and a point range of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) is used to derive a raw score. The raw score represents a continuum of writing ranging from poor to very good. The raw score is then converted to a scale score. A scale score and one of three performance levels (Does Not Meet Standard, Meets Standard, or Exceeds Standard), as well as domain descriptive statements are assigned to each student's paper based on the analytic assessment of the domains (see Appendix E).

Before the inculcation of the GPS, fifth grade language arts teachers employed at my school believed the scores were inflated on the state-mandated writing assessment. Students who were not performing well on daily writing assignments in the classroom were among those receiving scores in the top three levels: experimenting, engaging, and extending. Even though school administrators and the test coordinator were elated with the scores, the teachers were perplexed about how the students performed so well on the assessment, despite their classroom deficiencies, as witnessed in the essays at the beginning of this document.

Confirmation of the teachers' concerns occurred upon receiving the 2006-2007 writing assessment scores. These scores were based upon the GPS. Of the 76 students who took the test at my school, 21 students, representing 28%, Did Not Meet Standard; 49 students, representing 64%, Met the Standard; six students, representing 8%, Exceeded the Standard.

I then questioned if there was a correlation between the developmental stage scores previously used and the levels of performance presently used to specify a degree of student achievement in the area of writing. Dr. Rutledge explained there was no correlation between the two scoring systems (personal communication, June 12, 2008). Dr. Rutledge stated that the 2006-2007 writing assessment scores were indeed lower based on the performance levels, and she indicated this was because expectations for students had increased. Dr. Rutledge further asserted

performance levels were lower because the students had to be able to write in at least three genres instead of the usual one, and the test was administered in one day instead of the usual 2 days.

When the test was administered in a 2-day period, some students stated that they went home and thought about their writing or talked about their writing with friends and family members.

Students were sometimes offered new ideas, and they returned to the testing session the next day and inserted the new ideas into their writing. Since the test is now administered in one day with only a 10 minute break during the test, this practice is no longer possible.

Goals and instructional strategies specific to writing had not been fully addressed in the School Improvement Plan prior to the 2006-2007 school term. Upon receiving the writing scores, teachers and administrators analyzed the data to identify strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. The School Improvement Plan for the 2007-2008 term was revised to include specific goals and instructional strategies to improve the writing performance of fifth grade students. One goal was to decrease the number of students performing in the “Does Not Meet Standard” level on the Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment by eight percent. The second goal was to increase the number of students performing in the “Exceeds the Standard” level of the assessment by 3%. Teachers and administrators agreed on three modifications or strategies to be included during instruction in order to meet these goals.

Several instructional modifications were made in an effort to improve student performance on the writing test. All teachers who provided instruction in writing composition were required to post in their classrooms the GPS standards for writing, and students were required to maintain a copy of the document in their binders. The standards were dated in red ink by the students and by the teachers as they were taught. The standards were circled using blue ink as they were mastered. Administrators periodically made visits to the classrooms to make sure teachers were implementing this approach; in addition, they often asked to see students’ copies of the dated document.

A second modification implemented to improve students' writing performance was a revised writing schedule. *Writing to Win (WTW)*, the county-wide writing curriculum, was designed to engage students in process writing one day each week and journal writing 4 days each week (Combs, 2001). In an effort to determine if more process writing time than journal writing time would improve student achievement in the area of writing, administrators required fifth grade teachers to engage students in process writing 3 days each week and journal writing 2 days each week.

In addition to dating the standards as they were taught and modifying the writing schedule, all teachers who provided instruction in writing were required to administer a benchmark assessment upon completion of each genre of writing. All language arts teachers used the Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment rubric to score the benchmark tests. The results of the benchmark tests were intended to be used as an academic guide, as students' writing strengths and weaknesses were identified. Based on the benchmark findings, writing instruction would be further modified as needed. Teachers would follow the *Writing to Win* curriculum as outlined in the instructional manual and would follow the previously approved curriculum maps for content.

The writing scores for the 2007-2008 school term indicated a decrease in the percentage of students performing in the "Does Not Meet the Standard" level of the Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment by 5%, instead of the 8% goal outlined in the School Improvement Plan. The percentage of students performing in the "Exceeds the Standard" range decreased from 8% to 6%; although, the goal was to increase the percentage of students performing in this level from 8% to 11%. These scores were not those of the same group of students whose scores were analyzed in the 2006-2007 school year. Additionally, the 2007-2008 group of students was assigned a different writing prompt.

According to Combs (2011), all Georgia students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 are required to take a developmentally appropriate writing assessment that includes an informational, persuasive, or narrative topic. The purpose of the test is to improve student achievement through effective

writing instruction and to assess the aligned standards in the writing curriculum. The Georgia Board of Education uses the diagnostic data gathered from the test to support improved writing instruction (Combs, 2011). Results on the writing assessment, according to Saddler and Graham (2005), are not emphasized as much as they are on the reading and math assessments. In fact, students are not required to meet the standard for writing in order to be promoted to the next grade; however, students must meet the standard on the Georgia Grade 11 Writing Assessment in order to graduate from high school. Many experts maintain skills in written communication are as important as skills in reading and math since proficient communication skills empower individuals in school and in the workplace (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007; Graves, 1994; Quible & Griffin, 2007). Furthermore, Brozo and Simpson (2003) argue writing “engages students in higher thinking and reasoning processes” (p. 155).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Our society believes schools should graduate students who are able to communicate effectively in written form; however, the major problem is that many students do not have knowledge of the writing process and mastery of the basic skills necessary to produce fluent writing (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Conrad, 2007; Budig, 2006; Cannavor & Meirowitz, 2005; Graves, 1994; Quible & Griffin, 2007; Schoeff, 2007). Many students lack proficiency in usage and mechanics and in sentence formation; they cannot employ language that engages the reader. Many students are inept at arranging their ideas in a logical sequence, and they do not use genre-specific strategies when responding to a prompt. Many students lack the skills necessary to develop a controlling idea and to support those ideas with fully elaborated details. According to Greenwald, Persky, Campbell, and Mazzeo (1999), statistics collected by the National Assessment of Educational Progress demonstrated that less than 25% of fourth grade students tested in the United States scored a proficient level in writing. According to Dillon (2008), test results indicated that only about 30% of eighth grade students demonstrated proficiency on a nationwide writing test. About 25% of high school seniors demonstrated proficiency on the

writing assessment. Nippold, Ward-Lonergan, and Flanning (2005) further explained that college entrance exams require essay writing. Because of poor writing skills, growing numbers of college students must enroll in and successfully complete remedial reading and writing courses. To further elucidate the problem, over 100 corporations were surveyed in 2003, and the findings indicated 33% of workers employed in America's blue-chip companies wrote poorly (Dillon, 2008). The author stated that many of the surveyed businesses were spending billions of dollars on remedial training due to deficiencies in the area of writing.

### *Significance*

This study of students' attitudes about writing, teachers' perceptions about writing and writing instruction, and strategies designed and implemented to improve students' writing performance was significant for several reasons. First, as the GPS were introduced, expectations for students increased. In 1997, the state of Georgia requested an audit of the QCC (<https://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/>). Results of the audit revealed Georgia's curriculum was not rigorous enough to ensure in-depth student learning. Additionally, the curriculum did not provide a way to guide teachers' instruction and assessment practices. Inculcation of the GPS ensured a strengthened curriculum that included more rigorous standards and provided teachers a way to assess the level of student learning. Oral and written communication objectives were included in the new standards. The inclusion of the new writing standards was important. Quible and Griffin (2007) assert "employers have consistently ranked oral and written communication skills as among the most important, if not the most important, qualification their employees should possess" (p. 33).

Second, the ailing economy in the United States created conditions which led to drastic budget reductions among various programs funded by state governments (Rebell, 2011). Education was no exception. Deep budget cuts meant school districts had to find ways to prevent further expenditure of funds. According to Rebell (2011), "schools throughout the country have

shortened their hours, raised class sizes, cut back on curriculum offerings, and curtailed purchases of books and instructional supplies” (p. 1855).

Third, the *NCLB* legislation was enacted (LaMorte, 2005). This law increased the role of the federal government in education. The goals of *NCLB* were to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children in this country, to increase student achievement in all areas of the curriculum, and to close the achievement gap that existed among various groups (Desimone, 2013). The law created accountability at multiple levels. High-stakes testing and micromanagement of schools became the focus of many school districts, and teachers had to embrace curriculum reform, as well as evaluate their pedagogical practices (Desimone, 2013).

### *Purpose*

According to Fink-Chorzempa, Graham, and Harris (2005), learning to write is a complex process critical to students’ success in school and to employee’s success in the workplace. To be successful writers, students must have knowledge of the writing process and must possess effective strategies that can be applied during that process (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Poor writing skills resulting in low test scores, students’ need to effectively communicate in a variety of ways and settings, and society’s expectations of graduates serve as the impetus for this research project. The purpose of this study is to determine students’ attitudes about writing, to determine teachers’ perceptions about writing and writing instruction, and to implement and evaluate strategies for improving student achievement in writing among fifth grade learners. The results of this study will add to an existing body of knowledge.

### *Research Questions*

The research project was qualitative and quantitative (static group pretest/posttest) in design. The following three research questions were addressed during this study.

Research Question 1. What are teachers’ perceptions of writing and the instruction of writing?

Research Question 2. What are students’ attitudes toward writing?

Research Question 3. Will students receiving instruction based on the *Writing to Win* curriculum and additional instructional strategies demonstrate increased achievement in the area of writing as compared to the group of students who receive instruction based only on the *Writing to Win* curriculum?

### *Limitations*

Limitations of this study concern researcher bias, internal and external validity, and instrument reliability. One limitation of this study is the possibility of researcher bias. Since I am a teacher and a participant at the school under study, I must constantly guard against my own prejudices and opinions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The issue of bias must also be guarded against during data interpretation (Patton, 2002). I need to be very careful to note all the details of an observation, an interview, or a survey, and not just the details I want to see (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002).

A second limitation of this study is internal and external validity (generalizability) and instrument reliability. Because this study involves a limited number of teacher and student participants from a single school, the results may not be generalizable to populations with different demographics; however, Merriam (2002) contends that generalizability of skills might be considered more appropriate in research studies involving a small population because an in-depth analysis of a specific situation takes place. Validity may also be a concern as it relates to the teacher of the control group. The teacher of the control group is to teach writing based only on the *Writing to Win* curriculum. This teacher must not implement any strategies that are not a part of the district's writing program. Internal and external validity might be compromised because I designed a survey as a data collecting instrument. Validity and reliability of data are dependent upon the design of the survey instrument. In other words, the survey questions must actually address the issues under study and must relate back to the research questions. Teachers who provide instruction in the area of writing may not provide honest answers because they are

employed at the school where the research study is taking place. This may be especially true of teachers who have just entered the profession and are new to the school.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following definitions are taken directly from the GPS Glossary provided by the Georgia Department of Education (<http://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/>).

*Anchor paper.* An anchor paper is a sample of student work that exemplifies a specific level of performance. Raters use anchors to score student work, usually comparing the student's performance to the anchor.

*Benchmark assessment.* A benchmark assessment is a student assessment used throughout a unit or course to monitor progress toward learning goals and to guide instruction.

*Concept map.* A concept map is a document that outlines the concepts, essential questions, vocabulary, instructional tools, and assessments for each unit.

*Curriculum map.* A curriculum map provides an outline of the course content by units and may provide a suggested time schedule for each unit.

*Differentiation.* Differentiation is a broad term referring to the need of educators to tailor the curriculum, teaching environments, and practices to create appropriately different learning experiences for students. To differentiate instruction is to recognize students' varying interests, readiness levels, and learning profiles and to react responsively. There are four elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated: content, process, product, or the learning environment.

*Graphic organizer.* A graphic organizer is a pictorial or graphic way to organize information and thoughts for understanding, remembering, or writing.

*Performance levels.* Performance levels represent a range of scores that defines a specific level of performance as articulated in the Performance Level Descriptors. Each student receives a scale score and a performance level designation (e.g., does not meet standard, meets standard, or exceeds standard) when assessed on a state-mandated assessment.

*Performance standards.* Performance standards provide clear expectations for assessment, instruction, and student work. They define the level of work that demonstrates achievement of the standards, enabling a teacher to determine a student's level of performance. The performance standards incorporate content standards, but expand on them by providing suggested sample tasks, sample student work, and teacher commentary.

*Standard.* A standard is set up and established by authority as a rule for measuring quantity, quality, weight, extent, and value. A standard defines the broad expectations for an area of knowledge in a given domain and may include an expectation of the degree to which a student expresses his or her understanding of that knowledge.

#### *Organization of the Study*

Chapter 1 of this dissertation provided the background knowledge for this study. Student essays were examined, stages of writing development were outlined, and educational reform efforts were discussed. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature regarding the complex and challenging skill of writing. The literature review consists of seven sections: a) a discussion regarding the critical state of writing in this country; b) an explanation of writing fluency; c) a review of the writing process; d) an inclusion of the traits of writing; e) an examination of students' attitudes about writing; f) an analysis of teachers' perceptions about writing and writing instruction; and g) an evaluation of specific instructional strategies designed to maximize the effectiveness of an existing writing curriculum. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, including selection of participants, design of instrumentation, design of the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 discusses the quantitative and qualitative data analysis and results. Chapter 5 includes a summary of findings, conclusions drawn from the results, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future study in the area of writing and the instruction of writing.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Bryson (1990), writing dates back to our earliest ancestors as they painted pictures onto cave walls or inscribed messages onto ceremonial stones. Even though there was no official language, these cave drawings and stone inscriptions poignantly depicted stories that informed more advanced cultures of the ancient civilizations and how they lived. Civilization has advanced from cave drawings and stone inscriptions to the technological world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Technology has made vast amounts of information available to us at the click of a computer mouse. According to Lane (2008), “getting information is no longer a problem; rather, the ingenuity is in the way we think through, organize, and package that information” (p. 50). In some arenas, electronic mail has replaced the telephone and the conventional mail system as the preferred method of communication (Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Despite the form of communication, whether cave drawings, electronic mail, a well-developed essay, or a business proposal, fluent writing is a complex and challenging skill essential to the well-being of society (Alber-Morgan, Hessler & Konrad, 2007; Budig, 2006; Canavor & Meirowitz, 2005; Graves, 1994; Lane, 2008; Munyan, 2006; Quible & Griffin, 2007). Chapter 2 discusses the critical state of writing in this country, defines writing fluency, outlines the writing process, and provides an inclusion of the traits of writing. Following these discussions, the chapter examines three critical factors influencing student performance in the area of writing. These critical factors include teachers’ perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing, students’ attitudes regarding writing, as well as three strategies designed to maximize the effectiveness of an already existing writing curriculum. These strategies were chosen as a result of deficiencies diagnosed in the students’ writing samples.

### *Critical State of Writing*

The primary goal of education is to provide the tools necessary for individuals to develop skills which will enable them to think critically and coherently, communicate effectively, and function as successful, productive, and contributing members of society (Barlow 2004; Berlin, 1987; Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2008; Katz, 2008; Schmoker, 2007; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). The ability to write fluently is one of these tools; however, experts maintain there is a severe decline in the writing skills of numerous high school and college graduates, and these deficiencies are severely limiting educational and employment opportunities for many Americans. (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007; Canavor & Meirowitz, 2005; Graves, 1994; Harris, Graham, Friedland, & Laud, 2013; Singer & Shagoury, 2005). In fact, Baron (2003) reports that 20% of students enrolling in colleges and universities are required to take remedial writing courses which are costing institutions of higher learning in excess of \$1 billion annually. Furthermore, according to Quible and Griffin (2007), “the skills of new college graduates are deplorable - across the board: spelling, grammar, sentence structure. I can’t believe people come out of college not knowing what a sentence is . . .” (p. 34).

Survey findings issued by the National Commission on Writing (2004) indicate 80%, or 96 of the 120 companies surveyed presently require potential employees to complete a writing task as part of the employment negotiations. Those individuals submitting poorly written documents are not considered for employment. Additionally, the report indicates that nearly 70% of salaried employees working in American companies are responsible for writing tasks. Almost 50% of the 120 businesses responding to the survey provide educational opportunities for employees who exhibit deficiencies in the area of writing. Training to remedy these deficiencies is costing American companies almost \$3.5 billion annually. This figure does not reflect the companies’ credibilities or the negative impacts on productivity caused by poor writing skills (Quible & Griffin, 2007; Smerd, 2007).

Brimi (2012), Daisy, (2009), and Graves (1995) examined the curriculum requirements for teachers in training at 50 major universities in the United States. They found that less than 50% of our states even offered a course to prepare prospective teachers to provide instruction in the area of writing. Similarly, Norman and Spencer (2005) and Gentry, McNeel, and Wallace-Nesler (2012) found that teacher education programs failed to provide teacher candidates adequate instruction on how to teach writing composition; yet, these same programs provided specific courses designed to prepare teachers to provide instruction in reading and math. On the other hand, Rita Brown, committee chair for the International Reading Association and education professor at the University of Pittsburgh, maintains colleges and universities are restructuring teacher preparation programs to place more importance on the connection between reading and writing (Gewertz, 2012).

Graves (1995) reports that school and system administrators mandate effective writing instruction, but they are not aware of the professional development needs of classroom teachers. To further elucidate the critical state of writing, he asserts there is a lack of masterful writing teachers. Graves (1995) states, “Good writing teachers are a minority because what it takes to prepare a good writing teacher, well, we haven’t been willing to pay that price” (p. 42).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), over 24,000 eighth graders representing 950 schools and over 28,000 twelfth graders from over 1,200 schools participated in the 2011 Writing Assessment (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Students were required to write a persuasive essay, an informational essay, or a personal narrative. Assessments were scored holistically on the development and organization of ideas, the formation of fluent sentences, and the application of writing conventions. Findings indicated 20%, representing 4,800, of the students who took the writing assessment scored at Below Basic Level; 54%, or almost 13,000, students scored at Basic Level, while 24%, or 6,000, students scored at the Proficient Level; 3%, or 700, of the participants scored at the Advanced Level. At grade 8, Asian students’ writing scores were higher than those of students from any other ethnic

group. Female students demonstrated higher scores than male students. Participants attending suburban schools wrote more effectively than those students attending schools in cities or in rural locations.

Among twelfth grade learners, 21%, or almost 6,000, students who participated in the assessment scored in the Below Basic Level; 52%, or almost 15,000, respondents scored in the Basic Level; 24%, or about 7,000, student participants scored in the Proficient Level. Only 3%, or about 800, students scored in the Advanced Level. Among the twelfth graders, Whites, Asians, and Multiracial students achieved at a higher level than Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, or Alaskan students. As in the eighth grade group of participants, females scored higher than males, and those students attending schools in suburban areas scored higher than those attending schools in cities and in rural regions. Because of results such as these, effective writing instruction that leads to writing fluency is imperative.

### *Writing Fluency*

Writing is a fundamental process in education; writing is a way of learning, a way of thinking more deeply, a way to discover, convey, and construct meaning, and a way to communicate our thoughts and feelings (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007; Barlow, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2005; Marzano, 2003). Writing is a process that promotes metacognition and conceptual understanding (Baker et al., 2008; Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Learning to write well is a long process; however, students will advance toward writing fluency as they repeatedly experiment with language and language structures (Leu & Kinzer).

While much research has been conducted on reading fluency and comprehension, much less has been conducted on writing fluency and skill development, even though reading and writing are reciprocal processes (Gewertz, 2012; Harris, Graham, Friedland, & Laud, 2013; Jewel & Zintz, 1990; Leu & Kinzar, 2003; Marx & Harris, 2006; McCarthey, 2008). Based on a report by the National Commission on Writing (2003), writing receives the least priority in research and in the funding of research while the majority of the resources are dedicated to reading and math.

Fluent writing has been described in several ways. As defined by Fisher and Frey (2007), fluency is writing quickly without sacrificing quality. A fluent writer in fifth grade should be able to write at least 40 words per minute; furthermore, Kasper-Ferguson and Moxley (2002) assert as words per minute increase, so does the quality of writing. Similarly, Alber-Morgan, Hessler, and Konrad (2007) maintain as writing proficiency improves, so does student motivation.

Culham (2003) and Leograndis (2006) define writing fluency as the pace at which the setting, characters, and plot are revealed to the reader. As the writer uses specific word choices and varied sentence structures in developing these literary elements, writing develops a rhythmic flow that taps into readers' emotions. As quoted by Leograndis, "We know when music sounds good, when colors look right on a canvas, and when writing reads well. Good writing has a flow, a balance, a rhythm that our brain appreciates" (p. 77). As summarized by Fiderer (1997), fluent writing has meaning, is well-organized, is well-developed, engages the reader with clear, precise language, and demonstrates proper conventions and mechanics.

According to Noble (1994), writing fluency is a difficult skill for educators to teach and for students to develop. Teaching and developing writing fluency require sustained efforts of the teachers and the students (Gersten & Baker, 2001). Teachers must provide students an array of strategies and techniques designed to help them develop writing fluency. These strategies and techniques must be modeled by the teacher, as well as practiced and applied by the student (Baker et al., 2008; Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Fisher 1991; Katz, 2008; Kirby, Latta, & Vinz, 1988; Lane, 2008; Leograndis, 2006); however, Boice (1993) asserts that many students are not motivated to write because they do not understand even the basic skills of fluency. For this reason, students must develop an understanding of the traits of writing and how the manipulation of these traits will produce fluent writing (Culham, 2003).

In a meta-analysis of research studies, Alber-Morgan, Hessler, and Konrad (2007) concluded writing fluency was a difficult skill to teach because "writing requires synthesis of a

myriad of complex component skills” (p. 124). In addition, they reported that students must master the foundational skills in the area of writing in order to be successful at each successive grade level. Many experts believe writing fluency begins with direct and explicit instruction of the writing process (Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Calkins, 1994; Combs, 2012; Graves, 1994; Greely, 2003; Singer & Shagoury, 2005).

### *Writing Process*

According to Pollington, Wilcox, and Morrison (2001), the teaching of writing has changed over time. Traditional approaches to writing were directed by the teacher, consisted of an assigned topic, and required students to respond to that assigned topic. Grades were assigned based on spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and handwriting. There was no teacher instruction based on strategies designed to improve writing skills; rather, instruction was based on skills the teacher perceived as important. In addition, that instruction was not provided in a context of writing, but was taught in isolation (Canavor & Meirowitz, 2005; Quible & Griffin, 2007; Sams, 2003). The assignment was usually completed in a single session or as a homework assignment; the traditional approach was focused on a product (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Yellin, Blake, & DeVries, 2004). Introduction to the writing process approach changed the way we thought about and taught writing.

The writing process approach included direct instruction in the area of writing which was primarily based on students’ needs diagnosed through their writing. Lessons included strategies students could use to make their writing effective, coherent, and pleasing to the reader. Grades were assigned based on content, craft, and conventions of writing. A writing assignment was completed over time, as students worked through and received support during each stage of the recursive process (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007; Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Combs, 2012; Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Sitler, 1993).

The writing process consists of five stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing (Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Combs., 2003; Culham,

2003; Joshi, 2007; Routman, 2012; Yellin, Blake, & DeVries, 2004). Prewriting is the initial stage of the writing process. During this stage, writers generate potential topics and ideas that are of interest to them or that relate to reading experiences. Sitler (1993) argues prewriting is the most important step in writing. According to Robb, (2006) and Rubin (1995), prewriting is the thinking and talking phase of the process and adequate time should be dedicated to this stage. On the other hand, Gibney (2012) cautiously maintains that one should not spend too much time on prewriting, but should balance the amount of time spent between prewriting and drafting. During prewriting, students consider their purpose for the writing task, contemplate their knowledge about the writing topic, use tools and strategies to explore their thinking, and consider audience awareness and format of the paper (Robb, 2006). Sitler (1993) and Culham, (2003) argue that writers who use prewriting and revision strategies produce writing that is more organized and that evinces the writer's personal voice.

Drafting is the second stage of the writing process (Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Combs, 2003; Culham, 2003; Joshi, 2007). According to Rubin (1995), during this stage, writers record their ideas as rough drafts. They do not focus on neatness or mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, as these issues will be examined and corrected as necessary in a later stage of the writing process. The goal during drafting is simply to get ideas on paper (Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Students and teachers typically confer during the drafting stage of the process. Conferences are important because they provide a way for teachers to give students feedback during their writing, and they provide an opportunity for students to ask questions about concerns or topics that need clarification or that warrant further instruction. Writing conferences should focus on the content of the work recorded by the student. Many teachers prefer their students to read their work to them so they do not prematurely judge the piece based on writing errors students have made, but will attend to later in the process. Writing conferences may be conducted between a teacher and a student or as peer-to-peer (Culham, 2003; Sadoski, Wilson, & Norton, 1997; Yellin, Blake, & DeVries, 2004).

Revising is the third stage of the writing process (Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Combs, 2003; Culham, 2003; Joshi, 2007). During the revision phase of the process, writers reread what they have written to determine if their recorded ideas actually convey the intended message to the reader. Errors in conventions are not corrected at this time; rather, the focus remains on the ideas and the message. In one study by Barksdale-Ladd and King (2000), a teacher participant reported that drafting and revising were critical times to get students to take risks in their writing. Another respondent maintained that correcting errors at this stage would reduce students' creativity.

Younger students often want to improve neatness in their handwriting efforts, as well as correct spelling errors during the revision stage. For this reason, teachers need to stress the importance of word choice, sentence structure, character development, details and descriptions, and other elements of writing craft (Yellin, Blake, & DeVries, 2004). Leu and Kinzer (2003) support the notion that students should allow peers to read their work because writers "are often too close to their work to notice sections that are unclear" (p. 234). As part of the revision process, readers can offer writers ways to clarify and improve sections of their papers that are questionable and not well-defined or developed.

Students may wish to read their papers aloud as they consider important questions about their work. These questions include:

- Does the writing make sense?
- Is the writing smooth and clear?
- Are the ideas arranged in sequence?
- Are pieces of information or ideas missing?
- Did I consider word choice and audience?
- Does the writing reflect the intended message? (Fink-Chorzempa, Graham, & Harris, 2005, p. 65).

Singer and Shagoury (2005) assert writers must understand revision is not failure; revision is clarification and expansion of ideas. Changing, omitting, altering, and rearranging are

important elements to consider during this phase. Greely (2003) further maintains fluent writers will engage in multiple revisions before they are satisfied with their work. In addition, feedback during revision contributes to improved writing achievement (Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Baker et al., 2008; Joshi, 2007; Kirby, Latta, & Vinz, 1988; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Editing, which includes proofreading, is the fourth stage of the writing process. During the editing phase, students find and correct errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, and other conventions of writing (Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Rubin, 1995). Finding and correcting errors is a challenging process that requires the writer's attention to the details of writing. This is important so the reader does not lose the meaning of the message by focusing on errors. The revising and editing stages of the writing process approach become very important when considering the traits of writing and writing fluency (Culham, 2003).

Publishing is the final stage of the writing process. Greely (2003) and Peterson (2007) maintain students produce more effective writing when they know the piece is going to be made public or have an impact on someone else. However, Lane (2008) states that students should never be forced to make their writing public. Implementing the writing process approach and providing effective instruction in the area of writing move students toward writing fluency (Brozo & Simpson, 2003; Graves, 1994; Grisham & Wolsey, 2005). Effective writing instruction incorporates the traits of writing (Culham, 2003).

### *Traits of Writing*

According to Culham (2003), the essential traits of writing are ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentences, and corrective conventions. These traits of writing are used to help teachers and students identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing, thus serving as an assessment tool that guides instruction. In addition, the traits provide a common vocabulary for describing the qualities of effective writing (Gentry, McNeel, & Wallace-Nesler, 2012; Spandel, 2008).

According to Culham (2003), ideas are the thoughts that make up the content of writing. When students are required to respond to a teacher-directed or student-chosen topic, they must narrow the focus of the topic to a more manageable task. Students must develop the ideas and support them with relevant details. The purpose of the writing assignment (to explain, persuade, inform, or evaluate) must be considered as ideas are developed by the learner. These processes must be taught, practiced, and assessed multiple times in order to help the student develop writing fluency (Culham, 2003).

Organization is defined as the way a writer groups ideas and details; organization is the structure of a writing response (Heskett, 2006). Organizational structures vary among writing genres. These structures might include chronological order, problem-solution, cause-and-effect, compare and contrast, or other organizational patterns used to establish strong connections among ideas. As with ideas, this trait must be taught, practiced, applied, and assessed as we move students toward writing fluency. The following points should be considered regarding organization:

- An inviting introduction gets the reader started and gives clues about what is to come.
- Thoughtful transitions link key points and ideas.
- Sequencing should be logical, purposeful, and effective.
- Pacing – speeding up for wide angle and slowing down for close-ups – should be under control.
- A satisfying conclusion wraps it all up, yet leaves the reader with something to wonder about. (Culham, 2003, p. 71).

Combs (2012) further asserts a well-organized and fluent piece of writing has a clearly defined beginning, middle, and ending.

Voice is described as the way the writer shares his feelings with the reader

(Heskett, 2006). The writer and the reader emotionally connect because of the words, tone, or mood chosen by the writer. Culham (2003) asserts:

Voice is the writer's music coming out through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to you and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. It is flashes of spirit. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he or she imparts a personal flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his or hers alone. It is that individual something – different from the mark of all other writers. (p. 102)

The writer takes risks as he explores language and language structures. Writing purpose and audience awareness must be explored as the writer uses the trait of voice to convey meaning and tone. Some experts believe voice is the most difficult trait to teach; however, because writing and reading are reciprocal processes, extensive reading in various genres will further promote an understanding of this trait.

According to Culham (2003), word choice is defined as the language a writer uses to clarify and expand ideas in writing. As with other genres, word choice depends on the type and purpose of the writing; for example, words chosen in writing a business letter would be very different from the words chosen in writing realistic fiction. Word choice becomes more precise as we engage students in vocabulary development that is taught in context, rather than in isolation (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2004). The reader understands the writer's message as the writer uses words that relate to the sense of taste, smell sight, sound, and touch. To use this trait effectively, writers must use words and phrases that are specific, descriptive, engaging, energetic, accurate, and authentic (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2004).

Sentence fluency, sometimes called sentence structure, is described by Portalupi and Fletcher (2004) as an auditory trait that sounds like music to the reader's ear; additionally, Culham (2003), describes fluently written sentences as graceful, varied, and rhythmic. Fluently

written sentences are varied in length and pattern, and the writer often constructs them using devices such as figurative language and repetition. The writer's use of similes, metaphors, alliteration, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia in writing helps develop flow and cadence, as well as conveys meaning to the reader. Students must have multiple opportunities to identify and develop sentence fluency. These opportunities come through reading, hearing the sounds of words, and understanding the way words work together to make meaning (Ray, 1999).

Conventions are tools that give writing a polished effect (Hoyt & Therriault, 2008). Conventions include spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar and usage, and paragraphing (Culham, 2003). They are used during the editing stage of the writing process, and conventions play a critical role in how effectively the reader receives the writer's message. In summary, a writing process approach and effective instruction that includes the traits of writing will improve writing fluency; however, student and teacher influences must be considered in any discussion regarding achievement in the area of writing. These influences include students' attitudes, teachers' perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing, as well as specific strategies designed and implemented to improve student achievement in the area of writing.

### *Student Attitudes*

Mascle (2013) asserted effective writing is an essential skill for success in school and in the workplace; however, many individuals are not confident in their writing skills, and many do not view themselves as writers. Mascle, a writing instructor at Morehead State University, believes writing apprehension is a barrier to the development of effective writing skills. Writing apprehension is defined as behaviors that create avoidance to writing, as students view writing as unrewarding. An individual who experiences writing apprehension writes poorly and with brevity and is fearful of drafting, evaluating, and publishing his writing. Mascle believes strategies can be applied that can help students become successful writers who no longer experience anxiety related to writing tasks.

Masle (2013) maintained self-efficacy as the primary indicator of motivation and writing performance; as student self-efficacy increases so does motivation and writing performance. The author contends self-efficacy is positively influenced by active engagement in meaningful writing tasks within a supportive environment, by the use of appropriate models that reflect the writing task, by the application of constructive feedback, and by the reduction of stress. Masle agrees that discussing physical and emotional responses to stress helps to make students aware that writing apprehension is a common problem that can be reduced or resolved over time and with the efforts of supportive teachers and peers.

Halawah (2011) designed a quantitative study to determine factors that influence students' motivation to learn; the factors were identified through the perspectives of the student participants. Student participants were randomly selected using cluster sampling and included 232 students who responded to a 30-item Likert survey. Findings from the study revealed three main factors that students cited as motivational. These factors included teacher personality and practices, teaching methods, and classroom management strategies. Important personal qualities of the teacher were considered the most important factor influencing motivation. These teacher qualities encompassed prompt feedback after tests and assignments, instructor enthusiasm, knowledge about the subject being taught, patience, and fair evaluations. From the students' perspectives, a teacher's positive relationship with the learners was also valued.

The second most important factor students cited as motivational was teaching methods. Some of these factors included helping students find personal relevance in assignments, promoting active engagement of students, using models and examples during instruction, promoting cooperation among learners, and using a variety of teaching techniques and differentiated learning activities to create curiosity in each learner. Additionally, the students believed teachers must maintain a professional attitude.

Finally, the third factor reported by students as motivational was classroom management (Halawah, 2011). Some of these factors included assigning learning tasks that were realistic and

authentic, ensuring an environment conducive to learning, planning and effectively organizing the course, and setting learning goals. Students reported that increasing their self-confidence was the least important factor that motivated them to learn. In summary, the researcher concluded that even reluctant students can be motivated to learn as their perspectives, beliefs, and opinions are valued, and as teachers demonstrate their knowledge and seek to provide meaningful learning tasks while maintaining a safe and positive learning environment.

Chohan (2011) conducted a mixed methods research project designed to improve literacy achievement and students' attitudes towards writing through an elementary letter writing campaign to be implemented over one academic school year. The researcher, a teacher, designed and implemented a letter writing and mailing system for 122 student participants (68 male, 54 female) in grades 1 through 5, as well as one teacher from each of these grades. Students' attitudes toward writing were assessed at the beginning and again at the end of the study.

At the onset of the study, 30%, or 20, of the male participants believed they were good writers. At the completion of the study, 54%, or 37, of the male participants contended they were good writers. At the beginning of the study, 48%, or 26, of the female participants viewed themselves as good writers. At the end of the project, 75%, or 41, of the female participants maintained they were good writers; although, findings from the study indicated the number of respondents who enjoyed writing had decreased by the end of the study. Conversely, teacher survey responses revealed writing skills, including vocabulary usage, of students who actively participated in the project had greatly improved.

These findings support LeVine's (2002) notion that writing skills can be adequately developed through the student's active engagement during the writing process. Similarly, Slade (2010) contends students who have negative attitudes about writing are often those who do not engage in writing tasks. These individuals do not believe their writing skills will ever be adequately developed. In summary, literacy achievement and students' attitudes toward writing can improve as students actively engage in writing tasks that are relevant and authentic.

Paquette (2008) examined the writing attitudes of 35 second grade students and 50 fourth grade students selected to participate in a cross-age tutoring program. The student participants differed in gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and academic abilities. The cross-age tutoring program was designed to include fourth grade students who served as tutors in the area of writing for second grade students. The tutoring program consisted of 15 sessions lasting 40 minutes each. Treatment and non-treatment groups completed a writing attitude survey before the tutoring began and again at the end of the program. Quantitative data were analyzed. The researcher found there was no statistically significant difference in the responses between the treatment and the non-treatment groups; however, the qualitative data revealed different findings.

Individual interviews were conducted with all student participants (Paquette, 2008). Responses were analyzed to determine themes related to the tutoring experience. The analysis revealed students who participated in the cross-age tutoring program enjoyed the tutoring experience, displayed more positive attitudes about writing, would volunteer for the tutoring again, and became better writers as a result of the tutoring. The researcher suggested cross-age tutoring may be one way of improving students' attitudes about writing and increasing motivation and engagement of students during writing activities at the elementary level.

Brown, Morrell, and Rowlands (2011) engaged 27 participants in grades four through twelve in a writing project hosted at a National Writing Project Young Writer's Camp. The students had a variety of writing experiences; in addition, each camper had his/her personal beliefs and attitudes about writing, as well as his/her personal identity as a writer. On the first day of the two-week camp, each student completed a ten item Likert scale survey designed to determine his/her attitudes about writing.

During the camp, students were allowed to experiment with language and language structures as members of developmentally appropriate groups (Brown et al., 2011). Camp leaders who were certified teachers modeled different types or genres of writing in an effort to increase motivation and engagement of students. Each group completed a collaborative writing task before

individually developing a piece of writing. Near the end of the camp, students were allowed to submit a piece of their writing to be published in an anthology.

The survey initially used was administered again on the last day of the camp (Brown et al., 2011). Responses on the survey ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Each survey question was grouped as a negative statement (1-3) or as a positive statement (4-10). The results of the survey revealed positive differences in attitude for all statements. The findings indicated students were motivated to write when given a choice of topics, when given tools to guide them as writers, and when given authentic purposes for writing.

Wiseman (2011) designed and implemented a qualitative study to determine ways students could use poetry writing as a way to reflect on their personal experiences, as well as to demonstrate their knowledge in various learning environments or social contexts, while understanding that home literacy experiences positively or negatively influence students' attitudes about literacy. The study involved 19 African American students, two Hispanic students, and one Asian student from an eighth grade English classroom in an urban middle school in the United States. The researcher employed ethnographic techniques of participant observation, focus group sessions, and interviews as data gathering instruments. Students' writing products were also used as a means of gathering data. The study took place over a complete school term lasting from September through May.

The poetry lessons were taught by a community member who was a youth director and had a passion for poetry as demonstrated by his organization of a poetry writing club for high school students (Wiseman, 2011). The community teacher used models in his writing lessons. The models included other pieces of poetry, but also embodied musical lyrics that conveyed relevant messages. The models served to generate ideas and writing formats for students to use in their own poetry writing. The models also poignantly demonstrated the use of figurative language and how the literary devices help to create pictures in the readers' minds which further conveys the writer's message. Wiseman (2011) maintained:

The criteria for poetry writing in this workshop consisted of three main points; students should: (1) draw upon their own experiences to come up with writing topics; (2) use creative language to express their thoughts and ideas, and (3) write and revise their work to be precise and concise using minimal language for the maximum potential. (p. 72)

Mini-lessons based on students' needs and student-teacher conferences were integral components of the poetry workshop. Through the use of mini-lessons, models, and conferences, students were taught rhyme, rhythm, metaphors, and other devices, as well as how to use them to convey their ideas in writing.

Wiseman (2011) analyzed and coded writing topics for themes and subthemes. Four themes became evident through the analysis and coding; these themes included family, personal identity, religion, and community or current events. Students were able to use poetry as a way to communicate their feelings and ideas to others when they could not verbalize them directly. Poetry writing allowed students to reflect on their identities and personal experiences as they attempted to make meaning of their world. One student believed that God gave her the strength needed to write about and share her feelings with others. Poetry writing provided an avenue for students to share their fears as they wrote about their neighborhoods, violence, poverty, drug abuse, and crack houses. On the other hand, some students wrote about strength, love, courage, pride, and heritage. Participation in the poetry workshop allowed glimpses into students' thinking that allowed the teacher to support students emotionally, socially, and academically. In summary, Wiseman found "poetry writing provided students with opportunities to focus on their strengths, question their understanding, and communicate a desire for change" (p. 76). The students concluded the poetry writing experience was positive because their teachers cared about them and made their learning relevant; as a result, students reported more positive attitudes and engaged in more writing activities.

Orlinghouse, Zheng, and Morlock (2012) maintained more recent writing curriculums have acknowledged that motivation plays a vital role in student engagement and success in the area of writing. For this reason, they evaluated state writing assessments for the inclusion of motivational characteristics in the writing prompts. The researchers closely analyzed 222 state assessment writing prompts from 44 states within the United States. Six motivational features of the writing tasks and prompts were identified and evaluated. The motivational variables included time allocation, intended audience, audience intimacy, definition of task allowance, allowance for multiple perspectives, and real-world relevance and purpose.

Time allocation was identified as a motivational aspect of the assessment prompts (Orlinghouse et al., 2012). The researchers found that extended time limits positively influenced students' levels of motivation; on the other hand, they found that strict time limits negatively influenced motivation levels because they increased student apprehension. The researchers noticed that some state writing assessments allowed unlimited time to complete the writing tasks. Other states had suggested time limits, but provided additional time if needed.

Audience specification was identified as a second motivational feature of the assessment prompts (Orlinghouse et al., 2012). Over half (52%) of the writing prompts analyzed did not specify an audience to be considered during the writing task. Nearly 50 (23%) of the prompts addressed a specific individual audience such as a teacher or a principal. Approximately 20 (13%) of the prompts addressed a specific group audience, and about 18 (12%) of the prompts specified a broad, general audience. Middle school-level prompts most often represented the general group audiences. The elementary school-level prompts most often failed to include a writing audience. The high school-level prompts either did not specify an audience or included a general group audience.

Audience intimacy was identified as a third motivational characteristic of the writing assessment prompts (Orlinghouse et al., 2012). Audience intimacy was defined by the researchers as a writer's psychological sense of closeness to or engagement with an audience. Four categories

of audience intimacy were recognized and coded. Prompts coded as *zero* specified no audience; this category included 115 (52%) of the prompts. Prompts coded as *one* had a non-intimate audience and accounted for 51 (23%) of the prompts. Writing tasks coded as *two* interacted regularly with an audience; about 22 (10%) of the prompts comprised this category. Prompts coded as *three* represented an intimate audience interaction and consisted of 33 (15%) of the writing prompts. The proportion of each category remained consistent across grade levels.

Definition of task was cited as a motivational feature of the writing task or prompt (Orlinghosue et al., 2012). A well-defined writing task was one in which the topic and procedure were narrowly defined; this category consisted of 7 (3%) of the prompts. A partially-defined writing task was one in which the topic or the procedure was narrowly defined; this category consisted of 144 (65%) of the prompts. A loosely-defined task was one in which the topic and the procedure were not narrowed; students with prompts in this category had more choice and control over the task. This category included 71 (32%) of the writing prompts.

Multiple perspectives were identified as a fifth motivational feature of the prompts (Orlinghouse et al., 2012). These prompts consisted of a problem that students could explore from any perspective based on their personal beliefs, opinions, and views. About 68 (31%) of the prompts at the elementary level did not include a problem for the writer to explore because the prompts were narrative in nature. About 49 (22%) of the prompts specified a perspective for the students to follow in their writing tasks. About 68 (31%) prompts allowed students to write from multiple perspectives. About 37 (17%) of the prompts stated a greater context for the problem. This problem could be solved in multiple ways from multiple perspectives.

Real-world relevance and purpose were identified as a sixth motivational feature of the writing prompts (Orlinghouse et al., 2012). About 155 (70%) of the writing prompts were coded as non-applicable or irrelevant in a real-world situation. The assessment served no purpose other than taking a writing test. About 67 (30%) of the topics were considered relevant in a real-world situation. The elementary level prompts were the least relevant topics.

In summary, the researchers examined features of writing tasks and state assessment prompts considered as motivational. These features were discussed in the aforementioned summary. Olinghouse, Zheng, and Morlock (2012) found students functioned under time constraints about 65% of the time they were writing. They maintained time restrictions further increased student apprehension, eventually influencing self-efficacy. They believed state assessments should reflect the distribution of time and effort afforded during students' regular writing routines. They also found the time allocation of one hour remained consistent across all grade levels, but did not consider the increased complexity of writing tasks in the upper grades. The researchers also documented that 115 (52%) of the writing prompts did not specify an audience; about 155 (70%) of the prompts limited the writing topics in ways that diminished student choice, as well as motivation of the student to complete the task. Most of the prompts were also irrelevant and lacked purpose. While this study did not provide conclusive data on the best ways to design writing prompts for large-scale assessments, the findings warrant analysis and evaluation of their design and their influence on motivation, student performance, and instruction in the area of writing.

Lane (2008) examined the writing assessment scores of more than 160,000 eighth grade students. The scores were obtained from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Writing Assessment. The purposes of the study were a) to determine the relationships among gender, attitudes, and behaviors and writing performance; b) to determine the strengths of relationships between writing performance and students' attitudes, behavior, and gender; c) to determine the importance of attitudinal and behavioral factors in writing to demographic and language factors, and d) to determine if gender disparities in writing performance could be attributed to gender differences in attitudes and behaviors. The writing assessments consisted of seven narrative assignments, seven informational assignments, and six persuasive assignments; students were given 50 minutes to complete the tasks. In addition to the writing tasks, students completed a questionnaire that was part of the NAEP assessments. Students responded to

attitudinal and behavioral statements. Demographic items were obtained from school records. Scores on the assessments were defined as Basic, Proficient, or Advanced.

Findings regarding attitude toward writing and gender demonstrated that female students expressed more positive attitudes toward writing than did the male students (Lane, 2008). Results regarding learning behaviors and gender revealed that females were more engaged in positive learning behaviors, such as talking with their parents about school, talking with friends about books they had read and time each day spent on homework, than male students. Findings regarding writing achievement, attitudes toward writing, and gender indicated a significant gap between male and female students; girls demonstrated a higher writing ability than boys. Female students with negative attitudes about writing scored higher than male students with positive attitudes about writing. Findings related to writing achievement, learning behaviors, and gender revealed consistent findings across genders. Students who reported they were frequently engaged in desirable behaviors demonstrated higher scores on the writing assessment. The amount of time dedicated to completing homework assignments had the largest effect on writing performance, followed by whether students read for fun in their own time. Large gaps in writing scores existed among participants who reported the same categories of learning behaviors. The females achieved the higher writing scores. In regard to writing achievement, attitudes toward writing, and learning behaviors, findings revealed that higher writing assessment scores were achieved by participants who reported positive attitudes toward writing across varying levels of learning engagement behaviors. Additionally, more desirable behaviors were associated with higher scores by the participants who reported the same attitudes toward writing. The relationship of writing scores by attitudes, behaviors, and gender among the students favoring the highest, or most positive, categories on the attitudinal and behavioral variables and writing scores by attitudes, behaviors, and gender among the students favoring the lowest, or most negative, categories on attitudinal and behavioral variables revealed a significant gap between male and female respondents. Females demonstrated higher scores than males. Writing achievement, attitudes toward writing,

learning behaviors, and demographic background information were also examined. This category revealed a large effect size on writing performance for students learning English as a second language. Based on the 2007 NAEP writing scores, parental education showed the next largest effect on writing performance. The researcher concluded that significant gender disparities persist even when males and females share the same levels of attitudes and behaviors, and further suggested that future research focus on writing disparities that are not related to attitudinal and behavioral causes.

Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) conducted a research study involving 127 students attending undergraduate studies at a university in Texas. The purpose of the study was to examine factors that influence writing anxiety and self-efficacy and how these factors relate to enjoyment of leisure writing activities. Participants completed a writing attitude survey at the beginning of a course requiring writing and again near the end of the course. Information from students who did not complete the pre- and post-assessment surveys was not included in the data analysis.

Predictors of writing anxiety and self-efficacy were examined using a structural equation model. The researchers found that students with higher grade point averages (GPA) experienced lower levels of writing anxiety than students with lower GPAs. Female students experienced more writing anxiety than male students. Students with higher GPAs were less inclined to enjoy leisure writing activities than students with lower GPAs. Female students were not more apt to enjoy leisure writing activities than male students. Students who were more inclined to enjoy leisure writing activities had higher writing self-efficacy than students who did not enjoy leisure writing. Students who demonstrated low levels of writing anxiety had higher writing self-efficacy than students who experienced higher levels of writing anxiety. These findings suggested that grade point average and gender were significant factors influencing writing anxiety. In addition, the results further indicate that leisure writing and anxiety were significant predictors of writing self-efficacy. Further research and intervention strategies were implicated as a result of these findings.

### *Teacher Perceptions*

Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) interviewed seven leaders in the field of writing regarding their descriptions of effective writing instruction. As a result of the participants' interview responses, five major themes emerged in this qualitative study. These themes were discussed as guiding principles of effective writing instruction.

The participants believed effective writing instruction begins with the teacher (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). The teacher must be aware of her beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and practices as they can positively or negatively impact students' attitudes, motivation, and levels of learning. Karen Harris, one of the experts who was interviewed, shared that teachers' beliefs and attitudes spill over into the classroom, and these beliefs and attitudes can be unknowingly communicated to the learners, which further influences students' thinking about writing.

In addition to the influences of past experiences on teachers' attitudes about writing, the experts maintained teachers should write alongside their students (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Of equal importance, they believed teachers should share their writing with students because "there's power in making yourself as vulnerable as the students you're teaching" (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012, p. 347).

The participants also believed teachers must be confident in their abilities to teach writing and must be prepared for the task (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). One of the contributors noted teachers who are confident in themselves as writers and as teachers of writers, are more committed to teaching writing strategies, are more likely to engage students in writing activities, and are more apt to differentiate writing instruction so that all students experience success.

The participants contended the second principle of effective writing instruction involved student motivation (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Writing for real audiences and for authentic purposes were cited as ways to promote engagement of students. They further noted an environment conducive to writing benefitted the students, especially when they were given choices about writing topics and were allowed to use a variety of processes during writing tasks.

The writing experts maintained the third principle of effective writing starts with a plan that is flexible (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Instruction must begin with a learning objective. The teacher must be cognizant of what students must know and be able to do as a result of instruction; the learning objective and a description of the task needs to be presented with clarity to the students. The learning task must be modeled. They further believed instruction and assessment should be aligned to educational standards.

The fourth principle of effective writing instruction that emerged from the interviews was that students must engage in meaningful writing tasks every day (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). In fact, experts believed the time we spend on writing should be tripled. In order to find the time to write in today's testing environment, the experts maintained writing across the curriculum is an effective way to further engage students.

The fifth principle of effective writing instruction involved scaffolded collaboration between the teacher and the student (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). In order for students to advance their skills as writers, teachers must provide instruction based on the needs of the learners. Karen Harris, one of the expert participants stated:

We need to know every child. We need to know what each writer is capable of doing. How much do they care about the task? What prerequisite skills do they have? What are their cognitive and metacognitive abilities and needs?

And then you have to structure instruction to reach every writer (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012, p. 350).

The participants believed teachers should provide thoughtful and sensitive feedback to their students; however, they cautioned against giving students too much feedback. In conclusion, the authors believed effective writing is a complex process that requires time and practice. The participants maintained students will progress in their writing skills as these principles are applied.

Brimi (2012) conducted a qualitative study involving five high school English teachers regarding their writing instruction. These teachers taught in an affluent school in Tennessee; the school had been recognized as being among the top 5% of the most effective schools in the nation. Brimi individually interviewed the teachers to determine the impact of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), a standardized writing test, on their writing instruction, as well as other factors that guided or defined their writing instruction.

Several years before the writing test was officially adopted, a field test was administered (Brimi, 2012). Fourth grade students wrote a personal narrative, eighth grade students wrote an informational essay, and eleventh grade students wrote a persuasive essay. Researchers found the scores on the test to be unsatisfactory. Upon exploration, experts realized the classroom teachers had not been informed about the criteria of the test or the expectations of teachers; furthermore, they determined the state had not shared the criteria with the various school districts. As a result, teachers blindly designed writing instruction. As the experts further explored reasons for the unsatisfactory scores on the assessment, they found numerous schools had no writing curriculum at all.

Brimi's (2012) research, performed after the official adoption of the TCAP, revealed several findings. Teachers admitted the test made them focus more on the teaching of writing. He found teachers were willing to allow students to use a variety of format procedures, but at the same time, were afraid to deviate from the formulaic five paragraph essay because they feared failure as defined by test scores. Several of the teachers reported they modeled for students how to write the five paragraph essay. Teachers revealed that district administrators had even threatened their job security if the test results did not demonstrate students' adequate progress in the area of writing.

Only one of the teachers in this study admitted to teaching and requiring students to use the writing process; however, all of them placed emphasis on revision of students' essays (Brimi, 2012). Several of the teachers reported revision as correcting mistakes, and they indicated

students were reluctant to rewrite their corrected essays. Another teacher claimed she expected students to rewrite for content instead of surface features such as spelling and punctuation. The teachers in Brimi's (2012) study complained that they did not have adequate time to teach writing, but believed they could do a much better job if they had more time dedicated to the task of writing; in fact, "the teachers tended to state goals that expressed a desire to help students feel comfortable writing" (p. 72). Teachers maintained increased student comfort about writing tasks would have a positive effect on their motivation to write.

The results of this study also revealed the teachers did not require writing in multiple genres (Brimi, 2012). Since 90% of this school's students attended college after high school, the teachers believed their focus should be on preparing students for college rather than for a required writing assessment. They maintained students would benefit from instruction in and practice of literary analysis, and they were comfortable teaching this type of writing because they were English teachers. The findings of this study also revealed teachers were aware that their students wrote only for an audience of teachers. They had no real purpose for writing outside of grades and proper placement for next year's courses. In summary, the researcher concluded student writing may become more stultified as increasing emphasis is placed on test performance instead of authentic writing.

Daisey (2009) researched past and present writing experiences and beliefs of 124 students who were in their junior year of a teacher education program, and were enrolled in a required literacy course. In addition to these experiences and beliefs, the researcher also sought to determine the participants' attitudes and beliefs about writing upon completion of the course. Daisey also predicted the integration of writing in their content area classes.

At various intervals throughout the literacy course, the participants completed open-ended and Likert-scale surveys regarding their writing attitudes and beliefs (Daisey, 2009). The teacher candidates were divided into two groups. Group one consisted of 81 candidates who

enjoyed writing, while group two consisted of 43 candidates who did not enjoy writing. Chi-square and ANOVA analyses were performed to compare the pre and post quantitative data.

Group one participants indicated they had positive writing experiences during their middle and high school years (Daisey, 2009); in fact, they maintained their teachers “encouraged them, promoted their writing ownership, and provided good writing instruction” (p. 161). On the other hand, the participants who reported they did not enjoy writing indicated they did not know if any of their former teachers enjoyed writing. Both groups believed their college professors were the greatest negative influence on them as writers. According to Daisey (2009) the participants believed they were compelled “to write what the professors wanted to hear” (Daisey, p. 161). Members from group two believed their professors were too critical of their writing. In addition, participants who reported they enjoyed writing viewed themselves as writers who received encouragement from friends, teachers, and family members. Participants from group two, those who did not enjoy writing, stated that only grades and deadlines inspired them to write.

Participants believed the availability of resources and engagement in prewriting activities helped them become more effective writers who displayed improved attitudes and beliefs about writing (Daisey, 2009). Additionally, the students indicated the required literacy course made them aware of the different kinds of writing and the many ways writing could be used. They maintained prior knowledge about the writing topic and interest in the writing topic provided the necessary motivation for them to write. The participants agreed they would integrate writing into the content area classes, offer a variety of writing genres, promote ownership of writing, and be positive role models for their students. The researcher concluded teachers must be cognizant of their attitudes and beliefs about writing since they can become positive or negative influences on writing behaviors of present and future students.

According to Cunningham and Cunningham (2010), teachers who are not confident writers usually have limited knowledge about what makes good writing; but, in order for teachers to be confident about assessing and grading students’ writing, they must first be able to define the

characteristics of good writing. Nauman, Sterling, and Borthwick (2011) engaged in a quantitative and qualitative research study involving 12 professional writers, 26 classroom teachers, and 22 preservice teachers. The participants responded to a card sorting activity consisting of 31 statements related to writing and ranked the items from *most agree* to *most disagree*. The responses were analyzed, and three perspectives emerged: good thinking and communicating, structure and clarity, and purpose, voice, and mechanical correctness. Twenty four participants agreed that good writing constituted thinking and clearly communicating with the reader. This group believed the rules of writing stifled creativity. Complete sentences and correct conventions were identified as unnecessary characteristics of good writing; however, a sense of audience was essential. In defining good writing, twenty one participants believed structure and clarity to be important characteristics. This group valued strong introductions and conclusions. These participants believed writing should have a predictable structure that results in clarity and cohesiveness. Audience awareness was not important. The remaining 15 participants valued purpose, voice, and correctness in the mechanics of writing. This group contended good writing contained details, elaboration, and support of ideas. Punctuation, grammar, and correct spelling were important characteristics; however, strong introductions and conclusions were not as important.

The results of this study demonstrated professional writers and teachers of writing have different ideas about what constitutes good writing (Nauman et al., 2011). The reserachers concluded diversity in writing exists and should be tolerated. The researchers further maintained students need to understand that individual teachers place importance on different aspects of writing. Teachers must make their expectations for writing known to the students, and they must convey to students the purpose for the writing task, as well as the intended audience.

Norman and Spencer (2005) were involved in a qualitative research study that analyzed the experiences and beliefs about writing and writing instruction among pre-service teachers. The purposes of the study were to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions of themselves as

writers and to determine how individuals and experiences played a role in developing pre-service teachers' beliefs about writing instruction and learning to write. Fifty-nine pre-service teachers participated in the study. Fifty-three participants were female, and six participants were male; 69% of participants were Caucasian, 19% were Hispanic, and 12% were Asian. All participants were enrolled in 5th-year post-baccalaureate elementary education program in a university setting in southern California.

The 59 pre-service teachers engaged in writing autobiographies as a means of documenting their experiences and beliefs about writing and writing instruction, as well as their perceptions of themselves as writers (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Pre-service teachers were asked to recall writing experiences from their past. The autobiographies were recorded as chronological accounts or as critical incidents and were analyzed to identify themes. Almost 60% (35) of the respondents viewed themselves positively as writers, while over 30% (18) of the participants held a more negative view of themselves as writers. Four themes emerged from analyzing the autobiographies of the pre-service teachers. These included: a) personal and creative writing are the most interesting and meaningful types of writing; b) teachers have varied views regarding their identity as writers; c) teaching writing and encouraging writing development are not synonymous; and d) the importance teachers place on writing instruction are influenced by their beliefs about writing.

About 80% (47) of the pre-service teachers shared that former teachers at the elementary level had an impact on how they perceived themselves as writers. These respondents reported their teachers as enthusiastic, supportive, and encouraging. They also shared their teachers had allowed them to write on self-selected topics rather than teacher-directed ones. Additionally, two pre-service teachers claimed their teachers discouraged their writing efforts because of the emphasis placed on writing conventions.

Participants' responses were more evenly divided when high school teachers and college professors were considered (Norman and Spencer, 2005). While some respondents viewed their

teachers as encouraging, supportive, and caring, others were seen as insensitive, critical, uncaring, and ineffective. The latter view was poignantly demonstrated through an account of one student's experience:

She (her teacher) said that there was one paper that was a perfect example of an incorrect paper. This paper turned out to be my paper. She had made copies of my paper for each individual in the class. I was mortified and humiliated. (Norman & Spencer, 2005, p. 31)

Some of the pre-service teachers reported that when they wrote about literature they received criticism if their views were different from those of their teachers. In contrast, participants in this study also cited praise or affirmation as critical elements that encouraged their development as writers. One student wrote, "It is funny how praise will boost your confidence and will only make you want to work harder" (Norman & Spencer, p. 33).

The effects of direct writing instruction on the views of pre-service teachers were also examined (Norman & Spencer, 2005). About 34% (20) of the pre-service teachers believed writing instruction played a positive role in how they viewed themselves as writers. The pre-service teachers cited instruction in brainstorming and descriptive language helped them become more effective writers. On the other hand, nearly 50% (30) of the pre-service teachers described instruction and corrective feedback as having a negative influence on their self-efficacy. This notion was poignantly demonstrated by a student:

My pen did not have instructions for writing criteria, grammar, and spelling checks. My pen only held a creative mind that wanted to be expressed. . . (T)here were too many rules, and too much criticism and no creative writing. Writing never became fun for me again. (Norman & Spencer, 2005, p. 34)

Over 90% (53) of the pre-service teachers' ideas about writing ability were classified as fixed or malleable. Fixed writing ability was a gift or a talent; malleable writing ability could be improved with direct instruction of various writing strategies, ample practice, and corrective

feedback. None of the pre-service teachers who viewed writing as a talent viewed writing instruction and corrective feedback in a positive way; instead, they viewed the teacher as someone who established a supportive environment in which there were many opportunities for writing. Nearly 40% (24) of the participants viewed writing as malleable. This group believed direct instruction and hard work would improve their success as writers.

In conclusion, Norman and Spencer (2005) found the majority of pre-service teachers believed they were good writers who had productive skills and attitudes. The beliefs and attitudes of former teachers influenced the beliefs and attitudes of the pre-service teachers. The researchers believed meaningful writing assignments should be relevant to the students. The researchers found that teachers would be more effective if they identified the students' attitudes and beliefs about writing and writing instruction. Additionally, teacher education programs should focus on helping students develop theoretical frameworks for thinking about writing development and instruction.

Grisham and Wolsey (2013) conducted a research study involving 24 teacher candidates' writing instruction while enrolled in a teacher training program at a public university in the western United States. The researchers maintained while much emphasis has been placed on preparing teachers to provide instruction in the area of reading, very little attention has been placed on preparing teachers to provide instruction in the area of writing. According to Grisham and Wolsey, teacher candidates were ill-prepared to incorporate writing in their instruction, thus threatening student teachers' self-efficacy. Student-teachers expressed a lack of confidence in teaching descriptive and informational writing, a lack of knowledge about grammar, and a lack of knowledge regarding the curriculum standards.

Writing instruction was identified as a weak area in the teacher education curriculum (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). In an effort to strengthen this area, the researchers designed three literacy methods courses that included writing instruction and the addition of specific writing texts. The purposes of the study were: 1) to identify elements of writing instruction student-

teachers valued; 2) to determine which of these elements student-teachers included in their writing lesson plans; and 3) to determine the effect that direct teaching of writing provided in the literacy methods courses had on teacher candidates' knowledge of writing instruction and their self-efficacy in teaching writing.

Each teacher candidate was required to observe his/her cooperating teacher's delivery of a writing lesson, as well as submit to their professors a reflection of this experience (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). During their final student-teacher placement, they were also directed to co-construct a writing lesson plan with their cooperating teacher, teach the lesson, and write a reflection.

Data collection methods included questionnaires, observations, lesson plans, written reflections, and field notes (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). Findings indicated that minimal instruction in writing occurred at the schools where the student-teachers were assigned. Additionally, one of the cooperating teachers would not allow her student-teacher to teach the lesson they had co-constructed because the lesson did not align with the district's curriculum map. As a result, the professor had to modify course requirements.

Research findings indicated the student-teachers valued student choice and creativity, although their lesson plans did not reflect this belief (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). Prior to enrollment in the literacy courses, students' questionnaire responses were superficial and vague; however, upon completion of the courses, students' responses reflected increased understanding of writing instruction, as evidenced when students referenced writer's voice, organization of ideas, and differentiated instruction.

Based on information provided in the students' field notes, the researchers identified values that students placed on writing lessons they observed (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). These values included addressing students' needs, scaffolding of instruction, interest and engagement of the students, and literacy skills. One student-teacher reported "the teacher's obvious excitement about the lesson influenced the whole group's attitude toward the lesson. Her silly sentences,

body language, and hand gestures seemed to get the point across to all students . . .” (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013, p. 355).

The elements of writing instruction student-teachers used in their lessons were varied. Brainstorming activities appeared in 64% of the lessons (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). The prewriting activities using graphic organizers were identified in only four of the students’ lesson plans. Assessment, modeling, direct instruction, and scaffolding writing experiences were considered essential elements of writing instruction. Differentiating instruction and monitoring student work were often cited in the lesson plans as well. The majority of the participants in this study were disquieted about the lack of adequate time available for the teaching and practicing of writing.

The direct teaching of writing provided in the literacy methods courses impacted the student-teachers’ knowledge of writing instruction, as well as their self-efficacy in teaching writing (Grisham & Wolsey, 2013). Students were taught specific writing strategies, they learned about the writing process, and they were instructed on the traits of effective writing. Increased self-efficacy was poignantly realized in the students’ written reflections at the end of the methods courses. In summary, student-teachers gained confidence (self-efficacy) in their ability to effectively teach writing when they were provided direct instruction, resources as writing tools or models, and opportunities to practice and engage students in writing activities.

Brashears (2006) engaged in a research project involving the perceptions of teachers in a rural area of Kentucky and the students’ scores on the state writing assessment. The qualitative study was designed to determine the reasons teachers gave for their students’ success on the mandated writing test, as well as to identify factors contributing to the students’ inability to increase writing achievement scores beyond an average ranking. Participants included 22 classroom teachers from kindergarten through fifth grade, a music teacher, a physical education teacher, the school counselor, a family resource director, and the school principal. The researcher

collected data by conducting interviews, attending meetings, and completing observations. A system of coding was used to analyze the data.

An analysis of the data revealed reasons teachers gave for the students' performance levels (Brashears, 2006). The principal argued that better scores should not be expected when 50% of the students attending the school came from poor families, indicating socio-economic status influenced student achievement. However, he reminded the faculty that in previous years, students in lower socioeconomic situations scored higher rankings on the writing test; therefore, the principal urged the teachers against allowing this data to prevent them from having high expectations for all students. Teachers also cited students' abilities as another factor preventing the students from achieving above average scores. Teachers perceived writing to be a talent that not everyone possessed. They further argued that not all students will be effective writers, even with the best instruction. They also argued that differences in student IQ accounted for lower scores. The third finding from this study was that teachers questioned the validity of the test. They believed numerical scores were not true reflections of students' progress. The teachers argued that administrators should look at student progress from year-to-year. They further questioned the practice of comparing the scores of one group of students with those of another group, as they were not looking at the achievement scores for the same group of students. Student stress was cited as the fourth cause for average test scores on the writing assessment. Students realized the pressure of standardized testing, since achievement was measured by a number or a label. Additionally, teachers maintained the testing environment was too sterile because they were not allowed to offer their students encouragement during the testing session.

A lack of foundational skills in writing was another cause of mediocre scores on the writing assessment (Brashears, 2006). Teachers thought students should begin writing instruction in kindergarten and first grade, as this practice would provide prerequisite skills necessary for effective writing in successive grades. The teachers also believed that writing instruction was delayed or dismissed in order to prepare for the math and reading tests. A lack of teacher

experience and the subjectivity of grading writing were also mentioned. Several teachers said that they did not share effective strategies with other teachers because they believed others would perceive them as bragging. Some content teachers believed writing instruction was not part of their job description.

On the other hand, teachers gave reasons for students' success on the writing test. They believed the *Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)* was the reason for the renewed interest in the area of writing (Brashears, 2006). This educational reform was initiated as a result of Kentucky's low student achievement (Kentucky was ranked as 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation). New writing standards were written, as well as different forms of the state-mandated assessment. Writing portfolios became a requirement in grades kindergarten through fifth as a means of following year-to-year growth of each student. *KERA* forced the teachers to change their thinking on the instruction of writing. Teachers taught the writing process approach, and they devoted time for students to practice writing. Prior to the implementation of *KERA*, teachers admitted they engaged their students in very little writing; rather, they devoted most of their time to teaching reading. In addition, teachers set higher standards and expectations for student writers. The researcher noted teachers finally realized the benefits of writing across the curriculum and how that practice improved student achievement in areas other than writing.

Another reason teachers gave for improvement of student writing was that grammar was taught through mini-lessons and was based on students' needs (Brashears, 2006). This view of grammar instruction was not readily accepted, but teachers eventually began to see the positive influences of this approach. Engaging in professional development and changing negative attitudes also made positive differences in student achievement. The teachers in this Kentucky school district embraced the changes set forth in the school reform act and positively influenced student performance in the area of writing.

## *Models*

Jeff Anderson (2005), author of *Mechanically Inclined*, referred to himself as a sentence stalker who is “always on the lookout for great mentor texts: sentences, paragraphs, essays, articles, advertisements and novels. I also constantly look for well-written student sentences, paragraphs, and essays” (p. 17). Anderson maintained students become motivated when they see their own writing used as mentor texts. In addition, Anderson underscored the importance of reading aloud to students. He claimed reading aloud to students allows them to experience fluency, rhythm of language, and structural patterns in language. Through these experiences, students begin to use these words and patterns in their own writing; however, before we expect our students to perform a writing task, we must model our own thinking and writing.

Regie Routman (2012), a renowned literacy expert and author of *Literacy and Learning: Lessons From a Longtime Teacher* stated in her book, “We can’t teach a first-rate reading lesson with a second-rate book, and we can’t effectively teach craft in writing without outstanding literature” (p. 61). Routman further emphasized that as we read aloud to students, we must notice and point out the various strategies skillful authors use to make meaning in their writing, indicating we must read like a writer. As students attempt to use the strategies demonstrated in various mentor texts, teachers must afford them the time and multiple opportunities to practice and hone their skills.

Similarly, in her book *Practice with Purpose*, Diller (2005) asserted utilizing picture books as models for writing would improve students’ performance as writers. Diller also advocated the use of informational texts as effective models for writing. Katie Wood Ray (1999), author of *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*, maintained using children’s literature as models of writing was a very effective way of teaching students to write well. In her book, Ray (1999) emphasized “writing well involves learning to attend to the craft of writing, learning to do the sophisticated work of separating what it’s about from how it is written”

(p. 10). Reading like a writer is a way to help students see the varied structures available to them as writers, as well as creative ways of using words.

Slade (2010) conducted a research study related to students' perceptions of two writing models. Participants included 84 students enrolled as freshmen in the class. The purpose of the study was to determine which of the models students believed to be a more beneficial teaching tool for the writing course. During the course, the professor used a textbook that included writing samples completed by professional writers, as well as writing samples composed by students. The professor also used his former and present students' essays as models of good writing. One of the professor's points of using the model essays was to help students develop reading habits that would encourage them to notice and emulate techniques of good writers. His goal was to teach them to read like writers.

The researcher used a questionnaire to gather informational data. Findings revealed the students valued instruction and instructional tools they could effectively use in writing their personal essays for the class (Slade, 2010). In fact, they valued the five-paragraph format because they believed the formula would transfer to writing in other classes. For this reason, 75%, or 63 students believed the essays written by former and present students benefitted them more than the models from the textbook. To further elucidate the findings, the respondents believed they could produce similar papers as those written by former and present students, which increased their confidence levels. The students believed the models provided in the textbook were unattainable and daunting. In conclusion, findings from this study indicated student-authored essays provide writing models that demonstrate the elements and essential skills students need to develop proficiency in the area of writing.

Kaufman (2009) conducted a self-study that examined the pedagogy of modeling literacy practices and the potential academic benefits for students enrolled in university classes. Student participants were enrolled in teacher education courses at a university in the Midwest and at a university in a New England state. The study consisted of 75 pre-service or in-service teachers

enrolled in one of four different language arts courses which were requirements for students to be eligible to take the teacher certification test or to receive an advanced teaching degree. The purpose of the study was to establish a learning environment that publicly illustrated the complexities of writing as social and cultural events, and to determine the academic benefits afforded the students.

Throughout the four courses, the professor read and wrote for his own purposes (Kaufman, 2009). Additionally, he wrote for reasons outside of the classes he taught, and he shared his writing in ways the students could see the thinking and actions of an engaged writer. The professor also shared entries from his personal writer's notebook, as well as his writing portfolio and personal reflections of each item contained within his portfolio.

Near the end of each course, the professor asked each student to complete an evaluation that addressed experiences in the classroom that helped them grow as writers (Kaufman, 2009). He also asked for constructive feedback that would help him become a better teacher. Every student enrolled in the courses submitted written responses. An analysis of the responses revealed that none of the respondents viewed the professor's modeling of literacy as negative. None of the respondents offered ideas for improvement.

As additional responses were analyzed, other specific findings were revealed that were divided into five categories: a) teaching the craft of teaching, b) teaching the crafts of writing and learning, c) personalizing the teacher, d) demonstrating respect and care for students, and e) creating an environment of trust (Kaufman, 2009). Students reported the professor's modeling helped them conceptualize modeling as a legitimate teaching method. They also documented that modeling made them a better writer and caused them to value their own literacy. Sixty percent (45) of the students' evaluations also demonstrated more positive attitudes and emotions about writing. They became more motivated and more willing to take risks in writing. The students developed a personal connection with the professor that made them more motivated to read and write. This connection was demonstrated in the following student's evaluation response:

Thank you for always sharing stories. It lets us know that you are human too.

Many teachers create a façade as tough impenetrable teachers. Yet you let us right into your world about your daughter, your wife, house improvements and experiences with reading and writing. (Kaufman, 2009, p. 344)

Students further elaborated that some of the modeling practices made them feel important. This finding was evident as one student cited the professor's sharing of extremely personal pieces of writing with them. The professor's practice of sharing publicly before asking students to do so also created an atmosphere of trust and comfort.

The professor concluded that his modeling practices positively influenced his students as they became less fearful about writing and more willing to take risks in the writing environment (Kaufman, 2009). He also suggested that pre-service teachers have multiple opportunities to see their instructors model activities such as writing, as this modeling would provide a way to see thinking and learning in action before they were required to teach the concept in their own classrooms.

Thompson (2011) poignantly described her experience as a teacher of writing when she realized her approach and pedagogical practices were misplaced. She believed she was a good teacher of writing since she followed the writing process and provided graphic organizers. The graphic aids served to organize the students' ideas. Thompson directed them to use complete sentences as they structured and recorded their ideas into the graphic organizer. Her students spent the majority of their writing time engaged in prewriting activities. Thompson believed this practice "saved time in creating the final version of the students' writing" (p. 58).

Additionally, Thompson (2011) focused on the grammatical aspects of her students' writing. Because of time constraints, she corrected in red ink the grammatical errors in her students' papers but did not consider the traits of writing such as ideas, voice, fluency, and word choice. She returned the corrected papers, and the students recopied their drafts as final products to be submitted for grading.

Because Thompson's (2011) students did not demonstrate any improvement over time, she examined her own beliefs and practices about writing instruction. As a result, she resorted to the state website to study students' papers that had received outstanding evaluations. Thompson noted:

These papers were not grammatically perfect. They weren't neat or even indented. But the stories were exciting. They had substance. They were fun to read. I felt as though I knew the students who had written these stories. I could hear students' voices. I discovered that real student writing mirrored authentic literature. (Thompson, 2011. p. 59)

As a result of analyzing the essays from the website, Thompson modified her approach to writing instruction. She used the students' writing samples from the website as models of good writing; additionally, she sought relevant children's literature as models to guide her teaching and to support her students' writing experiences.

Thompson (2011) also developed a checklist of writing crafts for students to reference during writing activities. Some of the items on the checklist included figurative language, sentence fluency, interesting vocabulary, effective introductions and conclusions, as well as capitalization and punctuation. As she approached writing from a different perspective, she began to read like a writer and recognized many of the novel techniques and strategies used by authors of authentic literature. In summary, Thompson modified her role as a teacher and restructured her pedagogical practices which transformed the final writing pieces produced by her students. The use of writing models had a strong positive influence on students' writing outcomes.

Griffith (2010) conducted a case study involving six fourth grade students and their teacher who provided writing instruction using the Writer's Workshop approach. The study took place in a charter school located in an urban district in the southwest. The teacher taught her students to read like writers. Reading like writers involved focusing students' attention on the crafts of writing such as word choice, sentence complexity, novel use of language structures, and

writer's voice, as well as teaching them how to use these crafts in their own writing. The purpose of Griffith's study was to determine the role teachers play in helping students learn to read like writers. The study also provided an insight into how the strategy was taught through reading, but applied to writing.

Data collection was carried out using an ethnographic approach of participant observer. This approach allowed the researcher to witness the episode and events as they occurred. The researcher interacted informally with the students and the teacher as data collection took place. Data collection took place every 2 or 3 days from August through November, and data collection instruments included observations, field notes, Writer's Workshop lessons, interview transcripts, pictures, writing samples from the six student participants, and a list of children's books that had been read to them throughout the study. The data were analyzed, and six themes emerged. The themes included literature, craft, conventions, conditions for writing, routines, and teacher/researcher interactions. The researcher focused her attention on the teacher's interactions and instructional practices as she assisted students in learning to read like writers, and as she taught them to apply those craft techniques to their own writing. These interactions and instructional practices included the language the teacher used, the focus and presentation of mini-lessons, and the time allocated to the writing workshop. The teacher's role became one of facilitator, as she pointed out examples of good writing and provided guided and independent practice opportunities.

The teacher provided a risk-taking environment as she encouraged talking and collaboration during writing. She also praised the students for their efforts and even compared their writing to that of accomplished professional writers. The teacher also valued writing and engaged in writing activities with her students. She held high expectations for all students including those who struggled with reading and writing, and she offered encouragement and support during writing conferences. Each writing workshop started with meaningful children's literature as models. As the stories were read, the teacher pointed out examples of well-crafted

writing, and then, designed activities that required students to focus their attention on reading like writers. In conclusion, the teacher became a facilitator of learning as she provided her students adequate time, exemplary models, plentiful opportunities, and much support in reading and writing. Her students were eventually able to identify examples of well-crafted writing and were able to apply those crafts in their own writing.

### *Graphic Organizers*

A concept map, one form of graphic organizer, emerged as the tree diagram around 280 A.D. as a way to visually represent concepts and relationships, and today they are used worldwide, particularly in the educational arena (Tuan & Thuan, 2011). Boxes, lines, and arrows are used to demonstrate concepts and relationships.

Ojima (2006) used concept maps to assist three Japanese learners in the planning stage of the writing process. Ojima initially modeled the construction of a concept map, and required the students to use a concept map for all writing exercises. Findings from the study revealed the use of concept maps benefitted students in writing essays that were more meaningful and more clearly communicated.

Fisher (2001) maintained the use of graphic organizers improves students' essay-writing abilities and success in the content areas. Students' lack of understanding regarding text structure has impeded reading comprehension and writing skills (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2004). As a result, researchers developed graphic aids to provide ways for students to visually organize concepts of learning. The graphic organizers were designed based on the organizational patterns most often found in expository text which include main idea and details, cause and effect, problem and solution, sequence, and compare and contrast (McCormick, 1995).

Fisher (2001) created graphic organizers that matched the text structure of the science units to be taught. After instructional content was delivered by the science teacher, Fisher modeled using the graphic organizer as a way of taking notes in a visual format. The newly

constructed graphic organizers were compiled in a notebook, and were used as study guides for assessments throughout the unit.

Fisher (2001) found another particular benefit to using the graphic organizers. Upon completion of the science unit, the students had to construct essays based on the science content. Fisher modeled, through a think aloud strategy how to write an essay using the information outlined in the graphic organizer. After multiple opportunities to practice writing essays, the students had to complete an essay assessment on the science concepts. The implementation of graphic organizers in the content area proved beneficial to students in the area of science and writing as evidenced in more complete and well-structured essays.

DiCecco and Gleason (2002) designed and implemented a study to determine if middle school students with learning disabilities could gain relational knowledge if they employed the use of graphic organizers in content area learning. The 24 students who participated in the study were required to write a pretest essay to determine writing ability and relational knowledge of social studies concepts. They were also required to complete a pretest multiple choice assessment and several fact quizzes covering social studies concepts.

During the study, the control group was taught specific social studies concepts whereby the teacher used a scripted format to ensure instructional consistency (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002). The control group did not use graphic organizers; however, they were allowed to complete a guided note-taking worksheet. The treatment group received direct instruction of the same concepts through a scripted format as well, but this group used graphic organizers which had been developed for each specific concept in the social studies unit. Students in the control group and the treatment group received explicit direct instruction of social studies content for 20 days. The students also received instruction on how to write a summary using a predetermined format. After receiving instruction, the students were required to write a summary on each concept.

Participants in both groups received vocabulary instruction, identified the format design of each chapter studied (e.g., introduction, headings, subheadings, summaries, and chapter

questions) and orally read each chapter; the teacher also engaged the learners in discussing scripted literal and inferential comprehension questions (Dicecco & Gleason, 2002). The teachers in both groups spent instructional time making relationships between and among the concepts more explicit, but teachers in the treatment group modeled how to use the graphic organizers. The students in the treatment group completed graphic organizers that demonstrated relationships in a visual format. Students in the control group wrote guided notes on a note-taking worksheet, but there were no visual cues in the notes.

Upon completion of the unit, multiple choice tests, fact quizzes, and essays were used to determine if the use of graphic organizers had facilitated the retention and recall of the concepts taught, as well as the relationships among the ideas and concepts (Dicecco & Gleason, 2002). Findings indicated that multiple choice posttest scores of both groups had increased from their pretest scores. The group that did not use graphic organizers increased their scores from 22% correct to 63% correct. The group that used graphic organizers improved their scores from 30% correct to 67% correct. Both groups had similar scores on the fact tests, and both groups demonstrated higher scores on the posttest written essays. However, the graphic organizer group demonstrated significantly more relational knowledge statements in their second posttest essays than did the control group.

Lienemann, Graham, Leader-Janssen, and Reid (2006) designed a study to improve the writing performance of at-risk second grade students by providing an explicit instructional approach. The authors termed this approach self-regulated strategy development (SRSD); SRSD consisted of specific instructional approaches to teaching the basic skills of writing, as well as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement. The writing instruction focused primarily on the planning and drafting stages of the writing process, as well as the inclusion of the specific story elements of “main characters, locale, time, what the main characters want to do, what they did, how they felt, and how it all ended” (Lienemann et al., 2006, p. 69).

The researchers used a graphic organizer in the form of a mnemonic to instruct the students on the planning and drafting of their stories (Lienemann et al., 2006). The mnemonic device was called POW, which meant “pick my ideas (decide what to write about), organize my notes (develop an advanced writing plan), and write and say more (expand the plan while writing)” (Lieneman et al., 2006, p. 70). A second graphic organizer was used in addition to POW. This organizer was WWW, What = 2, and How = 2 which reminded students to include the story elements of who, when, where, what, why, and how. Prior to the writing instruction using the SRSD approach, each participant wrote at least three essays to determine basic writing performance. Next, the students received instruction using the SRSD approach. Each student practiced writing multiple essays until they were able to include at least five of the story elements. Findings of the study indicated direct instruction in the area of writing, including strategies such as graphic organizers for writing, resulted in more well-written essays by students. Students provided lengthier essays of better quality than the pretreatment compositions. Inculcation of early intervention for at-risk students resulted in a positive outcome in the area of writing.

Felton and Herko (2004) described a study in which 36 students participated in a writing workshop designed by two university professors and eight classroom teachers to improve persuasive writing skills. Even though students could orally argue a position, they could not argue the same position in writing; therefore, structured reading, oral debate, and metacognitive reflection became critical components of the writing workshop. In order for students to understand the vocabulary and structure of argument, the researchers provided a lesson for students to orally argue a position related to the minimum drinking age. Next, the instructors provided time for students to research the topic through structured reading which helped them understand multiple sides of the argument. Students were then assigned positions on the issue. A prewriting activity, in the form of a PREP graphic organizer, helped students structure their thinking before engaging in writing an initial draft of the persuasive essay. The acronym PREP

represents “a position on a topic, one or more reasons to support that position, explanation for those reasons, and proof to support both the reasons and the explanation” (Felton & Herko, 2004, p. 676). Upon completing a PREP graphic organizer for each claim in their argument, students wrote a first draft of a persuasive essay. Revision took place in the form of oral debate. As part of the students debated the issue, others listened and provided feedback. Next, the students completed another graphic organizer in the form of a critique. This graphic organizer identified the student’s position on the issue, reason for the position, criticisms by the opponents, and response to the criticisms. Then, the students switched roles as debaters and listeners, and the teams again argued the issue. A second critique graphic organizer was completed. Each student worked with a partner to discuss strengths and weaknesses of their arguments; finally, students completed an essay revision worksheet and wrote a final draft of the persuasive argument. Upon completion of the writing workshop, the researchers found students’ essays provided two-sided arguments that presented their positions, identified potential objections, and rebutted counterarguments. The researchers concluded graphic organizers were beneficial as they moved students from oral dialogue to well-written persuasive essays that contained all the elements of argument.

Zollman (2009) and nine middle school teachers in Illinois designed, implemented, and analyzed the results of an action research study using graphic organizers in mathematical problem-solving. This study was based on the pedagogical method of using graphic organizers in reading and writing to organize ideas and improve comprehension. The researchers examined pretest and posttest data of 186 participants. On the pretest measure, only 4% of the respondents met or exceeded the standard for mathematical knowledge, while 19% met or exceeded the standard in strategic knowledge. Eight per cent of the students met or exceeded the standard for explanation. After the pretest measure was completed, the students were instructed on how to use a four corners and a diamond graphic organizer in mathematical problem solving. This was a modified version of the four corners graphic organizer used in reading and writing instruction.

After much practice in math problem-solving using this graphic representation, teachers collected and scored (using the state's scoring rubric) students' papers. Posttest data indicated 75% of the students met or exceeded the standard for mathematical knowledge. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents met or exceeded the standard for strategic knowledge and for math explanation. The findings indicated the use of graphic organizers in mathematics helps students write and communicate their ideas in problem-solving situations.

James, Abbot, and Greenwood (2001) designed and evaluated a study which focused on ways to improve writing achievement of learners in high and low ability groups. A workshop approach to writing, graphic organizers, and a six trait model were among the tools used by teachers as they provided writing instruction. During Writer's Workshop, the students wrote on self-selected topics and were involved in prewriting and drafting activities. Students were encouraged to share their ideas with peers. The teacher functioned as a monitor and provided needed instruction through mini-lessons. Students' use of graphic organizers during writing assignments was required by the teacher. The graphic organizer promoted student accountability, as well as teacher monitoring. Students' initial prewriting was begun using a graphic organizer shaped like a light bulb, and then those ideas were expanded upon by using a color-coded outline format. The teacher held a conference with each learner before initial writing of the first draft.

Once the final draft was completed, the paper was assessed using a six trait model which focused on ideas and content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. According to the authors, "The emphasis for each composition was quality rather than quantity" (James et al., 2001, p. 35). Findings from the study revealed the posttest scores of both groups (high and low ability) had improved. The students in the low ability group demonstrated the most gain. The use of the graphic organizer provided these student writers, especially those in the low ability group, a way to visually organize their ideas so writing became more concrete.

Capretz, Ricker, and Sasak (2003) conducted a research study designed to determine if the use of graphic organizers would improve the organization of students' written essays. The study was based on developing specific writing lessons, incorporating a variety of graphic organizers, and utilizing diverse assessment measures. Participants included second, third, and fifth grade learners. Over a 15-week period, students received instruction on the components of narrative, persuasive, and expository modes of writing, as well as mini-lessons related to descriptive language, transition words, and sequence phrases. Each mode of writing was modeled as the teachers and students developed a whole class essay on the overhead projector. Simultaneously, the students received instruction related to the various graphic organizers to be used with each respective mode of writing. Next, students worked in pairs to develop an essay. Finally, each student independently developed an essay using the appropriate graphic organizer for the particular mode of writing being completed. Various assessment measures such as observations, checklists, surveys, anecdotal notes, and rubrics were used to score pretest and posttest essays. A pretest prompt was assigned to the students, and their performance was measured; instruction was applied, and finally each student wrote a posttest essay on the initial pretest prompt. Essays were then scored.

Capretz, Ricker, and Sasak (2003) revealed that findings initially indicated students became frustrated and confused by the graphic organizers because they were inept at "taking the information from the graphic organizer and displaying it in paragraph form" (p. 35). With continued practice in using the graphic organizers, students became more confident in their use as an organizational tool. In fact, the research data indicated 72% of students believed the graphic organizers were helpful in essay writing as compared to 18% prior to instruction and practice. Ninety-five percent of the learners maintained graphic organizers helped them focus on the writing topic. The data revealed organizational skills improved from 68% pre-treatment to 84% post-treatment. In conclusion, the use of graphic organizers improved writing achievement among second, third, and fifth grade learners.

Held (2010) provided graphic organizers for all writing assignments and spent much time modeling how to complete them. The focus was usually on generating a clear beginning, middle, and ending for each story the students wrote; however, Held was never satisfied with the results of her students' writing. Their writing usually consisted of a list of ideas the students copied from their prewriting graphic organizer. Elaboration of ideas and details was lacking.

Held dumped the graphic organizers and began using a shared writing approach in her instruction. She read stories of specific genres to the class and then offered a topic for writing. The students verbally generated a list of ideas for the topic. As a class, students decided on a single idea, as Held recorded students' responses in story format. As the students and the teacher interacted during the shared reading and writing exercises, Held witnessed stories containing clearly written beginnings, middles, and endings. Students wrote longer stories with more richly elaborated ideas and details. Held found graphic organizers hindered the writing ability of her students as they stifled the writer's creativity. Held modified her writing instruction for her first grade learners and witnessed significant improvement in students' writing.

Sundeen (2007) discussed how specially designed graphic organizers were used in writing instruction for secondary students with exceptionalities. The graphic organizers specifically targeted the prewriting and drafting stages of the writing process, and they demonstrated a five-paragraph approach to essay writing. Each graphic organizer was designed in a pattern depicting groups of "three columns for brainstorming ideas, three colored-coded bubbles for main ideas, three concepts that must be discussed in the introduction and conclusion, and three body paragraphs" (Sundeen, 2007, p. 34). Sundeen thought this pattern of three would help his students see a limited number of concepts to be discussed in their essays.

The researcher initially designed the graphic organizers as aids for students who could not organize their writing ideas, even though they had good ideas and could construct well-written sentences and paragraphs that followed the conventions of writing (Sundeen, 2007). Sundeen modeled the thinking processes involved during writing as he displayed and completed

the graphic aids during whole class instruction. The graphic organizers were color-coded so that students could see the link between prewriting and drafting.

Sundeen (2007) found that students who used the graphic organizers during the writing process were more able to visualize their plans and organize their ideas. Once the students made the connection between prewriting and drafting, they were able to write complete essays and were more willing to share their writing with others. The graphic organizers proved to be beneficial to students with exceptionalities, as well as to students in the regular education setting; however, Sundeen maintained these graphic aids should be removed after students realize the connections between thinking and writing in order for students to become truly independent writers.

#### *Sentence Structure*

Saddler (2005) defined sentence combining as a sentence-level writing intervention whereby students manipulate and rewrite simple sentences into more complex and varied forms. Saddler further maintained the sentence combining strategy increases the amount and quality of writing revision employed by students; however, he asserted students must frequently engage in sentence-combining activities to become proficient at the skill. Saddler concluded the following:

Sentence-combining exercises represent one component within a writing program. When they are a component of a well-rounded writing program that includes ample time for writing, conferences between peers and teachers, mini-lessons to increase skills, ample teacher modeling, and choice in writing assignments, they can provide every writer with controlled, disciplined practice in constructing interesting, meaningful, and varied sentences. (Sadler, 2005, p. 471)

Diliberto and Algozzine (2004) maintained that writing skills of elementary students, especially those who have learning disabilities, can be maximized. They suggested students who struggle with writing often develop negative attitudes about writing; struggling students often lack self-efficacy as they have negative images of their abilities as writers. One way to prevent students' negative attitudes about writing and the negative images of themselves as writers is to

include effective writing curriculum early in children's formal education. The writing curriculum should include strategies and interventions to guide students in becoming effective writers. Diliberto and Algozzine (2004) described an intervention developed by Dr. Jane Fell Green in which a six-stage process was applied to assist students in writing more elaborate and complex sentences. The writing intervention was initially designed for middle school and high school students. The intervention has been successfully modified for students at the elementary level; however, students must understand grammar concepts such as nouns, verbs, subjects, and predicates. Students must also understand the goal of a writer is to render words and ideas that paint pictures for the reader. These words and ideas must convey the intended message of the writer. Green's writing intervention is a multi-step process that teaches writers to task analyze during sentence construction.

Task analysis refers to the close examination of nouns and verbs contained within the subjects and predicates of simple base sentences, as well as the way in which descriptors can be included that will result in the construction of more elaborate and complex sentences (Diliberto & Algozzine, 2004). In stage one of the intervention, the students write a simple base sentence. Modification of stage one requires the students to identify the action (verb) within the sentence. In stage two, the students describe the predicate by answering: How? When? and Where? Next, the students rewrite their base sentences while incorporating the answers to the questions. Modification to stage two requires students to read their sentences to the class. After the students have read some of their newly constructed sentences, the teacher points out to the students the differences in their sentences, even though they all started with the same simple base sentence. During stage three, the students manipulate the descriptors that characterize the predicate. This gives the writer some choice of writing style. In stage 4, the students describe the subject by asking: Which? What kind? and How many? Again, the writer adds these descriptions to their recently modified sentence, thus constructing a new one. During modification to stage four, the

students again share their writing with the class. The teacher similarly shares how student's sentences differ for each writer, even though they started with the same simple base sentence. In stage five, the students examine word choices and further modify their sentences by using more specific words. Modification to stage five entails students' use of a thesaurus to determine effective synonyms to replace worn out words. In stage 6, the students revise the positions of words, phrases, and clauses and checks for accuracy of spelling and punctuation. At this point, the teacher includes instruction regarding proofreading and editing. In conclusion, engagement in this multi-step process allowed students to incorporate much more detail in their writing. These details painted pictures in the minds of their readers.

Myhill (2008) reviewed research studies conducted in secondary schools, grades 9-12, in an effort to determine the most effective strategies teachers could use to help learners develop and articulate with clarity their writing ideas. Findings revealed that complex sentence structure, revision strategies, and writing models improved students' writing performance. Findings further indicated students benefitted from multiple readings of their own writing. The review further elucidated the value of complex sentence structure in writing. A combination of short sentences and longer sentences produced a more fluent cadence in students' writing. The researchers found further evidence that supported the use of writing models. Students analyzed, practiced, and applied the various crafts of writing as they internalized the structures used in the models. In conclusion, the researchers found evidence in previous studies that administered the use of various sentence structures, the revision of writing, and the use of models as cogent strategies learners employed as they developed and articulated their writing ideas.

Berninger, Nagy, and Beers (2011) conducted two longitudinal studies involving children's construction and reconstruction of single sentences and construction of multi-sentence texts while considering syntax. The researchers sought to determine the relationship between word-level transcription and syntax-level sentence construction as students translated ideas into written language. They wanted to know if and how this relationship changed between the primary

grades and the intermediate grades. The first study required each participant to write one syntactically acceptable sentence based on an assigned writing prompt. Participants included 127 first graders, 123 second graders, 113 third graders, and 110 fourth graders who were tested annually for 5 years during the second, third, or fourth months of each school term.

Success was dependent upon the child's understanding of the components that comprise a complete sentence (Berninger et al., 2011). Without the understanding of syntax, participants produced sentence fragments or run-on sentences. Of the 127 first grade students, 88 or 69% of them wrote a complete sentence; 3 or 3% of the participants wrote a sentence fragment; and 36 or 28% of the students wrote a run-on sentence. Of the 123 second grade students, 105 or 85% of them wrote a complete sentence; 9 or 8% of participants wrote a fragment; and 9 or 7% of the students wrote a run-on sentence. Of the 113 third grade participants, 105 or 92% of them wrote a complete sentence; none of the participants wrote a fragment; 8 or 7% of students wrote a run-on sentence. In examining the fourth grade participants, 98 or 89% of them wrote a complete sentence; 2 or 2% of the students wrote a fragment; and 10 or 9% of the participants wrote a run-on sentence. An analysis of these findings demonstrated students were more likely to write complete sentences than sentence fragments or run-on sentences. Additionally, the number of students who could produce complete sentences increased in successive grade levels one through four. The researchers suggested students who consistently use sentence fragments or run-on sentences in their writing, coupled with repeated grammar usage errors, may need further intervention such as diagnostic screening. They further maintained identifying learning deficits early in writing development may improve students' self-efficacy and motivation to write.

Berninger, Nagy, and Beers (2011) conducted a study in which participants were asked to combine two sentences as one sentence. To further clarify this notion, the researchers defined sentence combining as reconstructing "syntactic structures in a flexible manner to express the same meaning with less words and new syntactic constructions" (Berninger et al., 2011, p. 154). Participants' sentences were scored as follows: 2 points were assigned for sentences that

maintained meaning, were syntactically complete, and made no mistakes in transcription; 1 point was awarded for sentences that were syntactically correct, but contained an error in transcription; no points were awarded for sentences that were syntactically incorrect. Among first grade participants, only morphological signals, such as suffix endings on words, explained variance in sentence combining. At the second grade level, spelling and morphological signals accounted for variance in sentence restructuring. Among third graders, handwriting automaticity, spelling, and morphological signals explained variance in sentence combining. Sentence integrity was correlated to sentence combining among the fourth grade students. In other words, knowledge of syntax enabled participants to alter sentence structure for a more succinct and concise expression of written ideas. In conclusion, the researchers suggested children's ability to successfully perform certain writing tasks, such as sentence combining, may be developmental since this finding was not demonstrated in learners before fourth grade. Additionally, they maintained the findings may guide further instruction in the area of writing.

Saddler and Preschern (2007) contended many students experience some difficulty in writing; however, they believed students could produce more fluent writing that keeps readers interested and engaged in their text. The researchers maintained this could be accomplished by using a variety of sentence structures. Sentence-combining was one way to produce more complex sentence structures that would eliminate redundant information in students' writing. Sentence-combining was defined as an instructional approach that involved combining two or more simple sentences and manipulating them to produce a more syntactically complex sentence. The strategy of sentence combining produces sentences of varied length and is typically applied during the revision stage of the writing process.

In this article, the writings of a third grade student with a learning disability were analyzed and evaluated over time. The student's initial writings early in the school year contained short, choppy sentences which made his writing monotonous. The teacher resolved to provide the student with sentence-combining instruction and was proactive through mini-lessons. Within the

first 2 months of instruction and practice, the teacher was able to identify more complex and varied sentence structures in the student's writing. In conclusion, repeated practice over time will help students hone their skills in producing sentences of varied length and complexity which will result in improved writing performance.

Andrew et al. (2006) reported on a review of research studies that sought to determine the effect of grammar teaching on the writing proficiency of English students who ranged in age from 5-16 years old. Formal grammar (syntax) and sentence combining were closely reviewed.

Grammar is the study of syntax (word order), clause and phrase structure, and the classification of parts of speech (e.g. noun, verb, predicate, clause, etc.) It can be both descriptive, in that it describes the existing patterns of sentences; and also generative or transformative, in that rules can be defined which can generate grammatically acceptable sentences (the transformation being from basic rules through to actual sentences.

(Andrews et al., 2006, p. 42)

Sentence combining was defined as joining simple sentences in order to form a more elaborated sentence structure, such as compound or complex sentences. Sentence combining also included sentence expanding, as well as simplifying complex sentences that are poorly structured.

The researchers reviewed 38 studies that concentrated on grammar instruction (Andrews et al., 2006). In one of the studies, participants included 248 students who were in ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. Three grammar classes were taught using three methods or approaches: a) transformational grammar, b) a reading-writing course, and c) traditional grammar. The students who participated in the study took a test during intervention and upon completion of the classes. Findings from the study revealed there were no significant difference in students' writing proficiency among the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students who had received the treatment.

Bateman and Zidonis (1966) engaged in a randomized controlled trial involving 50 students who were beginning their tenth grade year and two teachers in an American high school. The students were randomly divided into two groups. The experimental group received

instruction in formal grammar through curriculum supplied by the researchers. Written essays from members of the control group and the experimental group were completed, collected, and analyzed twice during the study. Findings from the study revealed there was an increase in structural complexity of sentences among the students in the experimental group; however, the increased sentence complexity was recognized in only four of the 50 participants.

O'Hare (1973) examined the effects of sentence combining on students' essays. Participants included 83 seventh grade students who were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Students in both groups took a pretest which consisted of writing a narrative, descriptive, and expository essay. Students in the two experimental groups were taught and practiced sentence combining strategies over an 8-month period. All students then participated in a posttest in which they again wrote narrative, descriptive, and expository essays. Results of the study revealed students in the experimental groups demonstrated significant growth in the quality of their writing, as demonstrated through inclusion of more complex sentence structures.

Saddler and Graham (2005) engaged in a similar study. These researchers examined the effectiveness of sentence combining instruction and peer instruction on improving sentence construction. Participants included 44 students who ranged in age from 9 to 11 years old. The students were paired in this individualized randomized controlled trial, and they were taught sentence combining strategies. Results of the study revealed sentence combining strategies improved the quality of the students' writing. The sentence combining skills were found to be especially effective during the revision of writing.

Combs (1976) engaged in a study with 100 seventh grade students from a suburban junior high school in Minneapolis. The study included two experimental groups and two control groups. Data were collected from pretest and delayed posttest narrative and descriptive writing samples completed by the participants. Seven teachers rated the writing samples of matched pairs from the experimental and control groups. Findings from the study revealed students in the experimental groups made significant gains (2 years) in syntactic maturity and quality of writing.

Hunt and O'Donnell (1970) sought to determine the influence of sentence combining on writing produced by fourth-grade students. The participants included 194 Black students and 141 White students. Writing samples were examined. Findings revealed significant gains (2 years) in syntactic maturity among the Black participants. The researchers did not elaborate on whether there were any gains among the White participants.

In summary, findings from this review of research studies revealed traditional grammar instruction had no effect on the quality of writing produced by 5 to 16 year old students (Andrews et al., 2006). On the other hand, the teaching of sentence combining strategies had a significant positive effect on the quality and accuracy of writing produced by students in this same age group.

Cutler and Graham (2008) developed and implemented a national survey designed to determine instructional writing practices in the primary grades. Research participants included 178 randomly sampled primary grade teachers from across the United States. The teacher participants responded to a 46-item Likert-scale survey. Forty-one of these items specified a writing activity or an instructional procedure related to writing; the teachers further indicated the frequency of use for each item. The remaining five survey items assessed the teachers' preparedness to provide instruction in writing, as well as their attitudes toward writing and the teaching of writing.

Cutler and Graham (2008) wanted to specifically ascertain whether the teachers provided instruction in the area of writing using the writing process approach or a more traditional approach that focused on language skills. Findings indicated teachers used more of an eclectic approach, a combination of methods, in the teaching of writing. In fact, 72%, or 128, of the teachers used the eclectic approach, while only 20%, or 36, of them used the process approach. Only 6%, or 11, of the teachers used the traditional approach. Two teachers used the 6 + 1 traits model. The researchers outlined 20 writing activities and included them as part of the survey. Examples of these writing activities or practices included writing stories and letters, responding to

reading, constructing personal narratives, writing summaries and book reports, and journal writing. Ninety percent, representing 160, of teacher participants reported they used most of the 20 instructional practices; however, the frequency of use varied among teachers.

About 164 of the teacher participants had graduated from teacher education programs (Cutler & Graham, 2008). Survey findings revealed 28%, or 46, of the teachers believed their training programs had prepared them very well to provide instruction in writing. Forty two percent, or 69, of the teachers maintained their preparation was adequate, while 28%, or 46, believed their training was inadequate. Additionally, teachers documented they “moderately agreed that they were effective writing teachers and managed their writing class effectively. They also moderately agreed that they liked to write and teach writing” (Cutler & Graham, 2008, p. 911).

In summary, Cutler & Graham (2008) in this study issued several recommendations for writing reform that supported those of the National Commission on Writing (2003). The first recommendation was to allocate more time for writing. In order to provide sufficient time, they suggested writing across the curriculum. Next, the researchers suggested that teachers monitor students’ writing progress, as well as make sure the assignments are aligned to the standards. Cutler and Graham (2008) supported the practice of integrating technology into the instruction of writing. About 67%, representing about 120, of teacher participants in this study reported they used technology in writing no more than twice during the school year. A fourth recommendation was to improve the preparation of teachers who will be providing instruction in the area of writing. This practice needs to start in teacher education programs across the country. Additional training should be provided to teachers in the form of professional development courses that further address writing instruction.

After a thorough analysis of the data, Cutler and Graham (2008) addressed several other ideas for writing reform. They suggested teachers adjust or modify their writing practices by balancing the time spent on actual writing, the teaching of language skills, and the learning of

strategies and processes that can be applied during writing activities. The researchers further indicated that factors influencing motivation must be considered in any dialogue regarding improvements in writing. They suggested students be given the liberty to write at their own pace, and they should be encouraged to share their writing with peers. They also believed the modeling of writing formats, genres, and various strategies by the teacher would prepare the students for the actual tasks they are asked to complete. Cutler and Graham (2008) maintained the notion that home/school connections would further enhance students' writing development. They advised teachers to assign various writing tasks that would allow students and parents to write together at home. The researchers further suggested teachers regularly inform parents about their child's development as a writer, and they believed parents should listen to their children as they read their writing to them. The practice of listening to children's writing not only promoted writing development, but increased students' desires to write. Cutler and Graham (2008) concluded "the findings from the study need to be replicated, as well as supplemented by research where practices are observed and not just reported" (Cutler & Graham, 2008, p. 917).

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

The purposes of this study were to determine students' attitudes toward writing, to determine teachers' perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing, and to implement and evaluate strategies for improving student achievement in writing composition among fifth grade learners. Students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions were obtained using a survey I developed, as well as through interviews, observations, and documents. Strengths and weaknesses in students' writing were identified through a pretest assessment. Learning strategies were then prescribed based on the findings of the pretest scores and were aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards. Chapter 1 of this study provided background information related to the deficient writing skills in this country, and provided some insight into the importance of effective communication in the highly technological world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several essays written by fifth grade students were included to demonstrate the lack of basic skills in the area of writing. Chapter 2 contained a review of pertinent literature regarding students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions about writing. Literature regarding three specific strategies designed to improve student performance in writing was discussed. This chapter explains the methodology of the study, including a description of the setting and participants, ethical considerations, instrumentation, research design, procedures, data collection, and data analysis.

#### *Setting and Participants*

This research project was conducted at an elementary school located in a small, rural county in southwest Georgia. According to Carol Lehman at the local Chamber of Commerce (personal communication June 10, 2009), the county had a total land area of 458 square miles, and a total population of 24,592 persons. The population density was 52 people per square mile. There were 9,118 total households that represented a housing density of 22 per square mile. The

per capita income for the county was \$15,406. The racial composition consisted of approximately 64% White, 30% Black, 5% Hispanic, and 1% Other. Less than 16% of the total population had attained a college degree. About 63% of the population was under the age of 45 years. The unemployment rate was 6.1%.

This rural community had seven schools. Three of the schools housed students in grades pre-kindergarten through 5th, two of the schools housed students in grades pre-kindergarten through 8th, one school consisted of students in grades 6 through 8, and one high school was comprised of students in ninth through twelfth grades. The high school graduated 185 students in 2008. There were 4,581 students comprising the county's public school enrollment. There were 354 teachers who served as faculty members in these schools. This research study was carried out at one of the elementary schools that consisted of students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grades.

The elementary school where this study was conducted had 669 students. The racial composition consisted of 48% White, 35% Black, 13% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 1% Asian. There were 391 students who received free lunches, 64 students received reduced price lunches, and 214 students paid full price for their lunches.

Student Participants. Initially, all fifth grade students who had a signed consent form and attended classes at my school were asked to complete a writing attitude survey. Additionally, students took the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR). Next, the STAR Reading Report Summary for the fifth grade classes was examined. Based on this report, the mean scale scores for the six classes of fifth graders were 597, 577, 553, 552, 522, and 501. In my homeroom class, 17 students had signed consent forms and were included in this study. Based on the STAR reading scores, this group had a mean scale score of 553. Three students scored below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on this assessment. Six students scored between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> percentile, three students scored between the 50<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> percentile, and five students scored in the 75<sup>th</sup> and above percentile rank. This group served as the treatment or experimental group. Seventeen

students in another fifth grade class were chosen as the control group. Every student in this class had a signed consent form. Based on the STAR Reading Report Summary, this group had a mean scale score of 552. Three students scored below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on this assessment. Six students scored in the 25<sup>th</sup> to 49<sup>th</sup> percentile, four students scored in the 50<sup>th</sup> to 74<sup>th</sup> percentile, and four students scored in the 75<sup>th</sup> and above percentile rank.

Teacher Participants. This group included all third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who provided instruction in the area of writing composition at my school. Third and fourth grade teachers were included in this study because I believed their beliefs and practices related to writing influenced writing performance of students entering fifth grade. Additionally, I sought to determine their perceptions about writing. The 16 teachers in this study included one White male, one Asian female, two Black females, and 12 White females. They had taught a range of grades from first through eighth, and their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 25 years. Eight teachers held Bachelor of Science degrees, and the remaining eight teachers had earned Master of Education degrees. Each member in this group of teachers was required to have a signed consent form in order to participate in this project. Finally, I gathered data by functioning as an observer and as a participant in the learning environment under study.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Initially, I obtained written permission to engage in a research study from the principal at the elementary school and from the county's school superintendent. Those two letters became part of the documentation required by Valdosta State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Next, I completed a training program suitable for investigators and staff conducting social, humanistic, or behavioral research on human subjects. Upon completion of this training, a detailed research proposal was submitted to my Dissertation Committee Chairperson, and the plan was subsequently approved. Next, the proposal was submitted to the IRB, with an Informed Consent to Participate in Research (Appendix F), a Parent/Guardian Permission for Child's/Ward's Participation in Research (Appendix G), and a Verbal Assent Form for Children

Ages 5-12 (Appendix H). Additionally, I submitted a Parent Letter to inform parents about the research project (Appendix I), as well as a School Consent Letter from the principal (Appendix J). Upon completion of all IRB requirements, I received a letter that stated the research protocol was approved (Appendix K).

Upon receiving approval from Valdosta State University's IRB, teachers, students, and parents or guardians were informed by me that participation in this research study was completely voluntary, and they could drop out of the study at any time without suffering consequences by their employer, the classroom teacher, the elementary school, or by Valdosta State University now or at any time in the future. This information was outlined in the consent forms. I explained the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential risks of participation.

Every effort was made to maintain confidentiality during this project. Teachers' and students' names did not appear on any survey or on any piece of writing; instead, they were number-coded to identify the teacher and student completing the survey. Only I knew each teacher's and each student's identifying number (the number key was kept in a locked desk drawer). The coded list was destroyed by shredding as soon as the data were collected and the requirements for the doctoral program were satisfactorily completed.

### *Instrumentation*

The study, *Strategies to Improve Student Achievement in Writing Among Fifth Grade Learners*, was a mixed methods study. The study's qualitative design allowed me to discover students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions about writing. The static group pretest/posttest design allowed for measurement of a dependent variable before and after an experimental condition. Intricate details related to the participants' behaviors and functioning in the learning environment were ascertained through a variety of data-gathering and analysis techniques. Instruments used to gather data in this project included surveys, interviews, observations, and documents.

Teacher and Student Surveys. According to Thorndike and Dinnel (2001) and Krathwohl (1993), a survey is a structured procedure or self-report measure used to determine the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of a target population. There were three important advantages to using a survey to collect descriptive information. First, the participants were more likely to respond truthfully because they perceived their responses as being anonymous (Bluman, 2001). Second, the survey took less time to complete than other data collection instruments (Stangor, 1998). A third advantage of the survey was that the questionnaire could be completed without supervision (Thorndike & Dinnel, 2001). Each student participant and teacher participant was asked to complete a writing survey. The surveys were coded for themes and subthemes until saturation occurred. Each of the Likert-scale items was assigned a number, and the measured values were the average of the responses across all the items (Stangor, 1998).

The teacher survey consisted of 11 open-ended and 7 Likert-scale items. The Likert-scale items had a rating scale of 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree, respectively). Validity of the teacher survey instrument was assessed in several ways. A field test was conducted using teachers from kindergarten through second grades. A Valdosta State University professor, members of the Curriculum and Instruction cohort, and the original committee chairperson examined the survey and offered their suggestions. The survey was revised based on those suggestions.

Listed below were several examples of open-ended questions and Likert-scale items taken from the teacher survey:

1. When I use the term “effective writing” the following ideas come to mind:
2. Do you view yourself as an effective writer? Yes/No Why or why not?
3. Writing is important in my classroom.

The complete teacher survey is included (see Appendix L).

The student survey consisted of eleven open-ended response items. Validity of the student survey instrument was assessed in several ways. Initially, issues of validity were addressed through a field test. The field test gave me the opportunity to clarify any confusing

issues faced by respondents. First, the survey questions were examined by a research professor from Valdosta State University. The professor offered several suggestions to improve the survey. Students in the Doctor of Education program in Curriculum and Instruction also examined the instrument and offered suggestions. These suggestions were taken into account as the survey instrument was revised. Finally, the original dissertation chairperson examined and approved the survey instrument.

In an effort to reduce bias, I did not complete a survey. This was important because my attitudes and perceptions about writing might have altered the findings of the study.

The following questions were examples taken from the student survey. Responses to the survey questions were used to qualitatively determine students' attitudes.

1. Do you like writing? Why or why not?
2. Do you think of yourself as a writer? If so, what makes you think you are a writer? If not, what makes you think you are not a writer?
3. What kinds of problems do you encounter when you write? What do you do about these problems?

The complete student survey is included (see Appendix M).

Teacher and Student Interviews. A second instrument of data collection was the partially structured interview. There were several advantages to using an interview as an instrument of data collection. First, an interview was a way to seek the perspectives of others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The interview allowed me an opportunity to identify and understand the thoughts and feelings that could not be directly observed (Kathwohl, 1993). As respondents reflected on their experiences, their stories became meaning-making processes (Seidman, 1998; Patton, 2002). Second, interviewing allowed the respondent and me to develop a sense of trust that lead to open, honest responses. Third, the interview was a way to gather information by asking probing questions and requesting additional information (Merriam, 2002).

In an effort to reduce bias and increase validity, I asked open-ended versus leading questions. Open-ended questions allowed me to establish the area to be probed, but allowed the participant the flexibility of going in any direction with the response (Seidman, 1998). Of equal importance, I did not redirect the thoughts of the individual being interviewed because I was seeking the thoughts of the interviewee (Stangor, 1998).

A teacher interview was used when responses on the survey needed clarification, or when a more thorough explanation added meaning to the study. During the six teacher interviews, I used some previously formulated questions found in the survey, but also probed for information by asking other open-ended questions about ideas that manifested during the actual interview process. In the partially structured interview, I added, deleted, or modified questions as needed (Krathwohl, 1993).

Examples of teacher interview questions were as follows:

1. How would you characterize yourself as a writer?
2. What do you mean when you use the phrase “good components?”
3. In your opinion, how similar would your staging score be to the state’s score?

The teacher interviews were tape-recorded, and the notes were transcribed as soon after the interview as possible (see Appendix N).

The student interviews were primarily in the form of student and teacher conferences. The eight student interviews were tape-recorded, and the notes were transcribed as soon after the interview as possible (see Appendix O). Examples of questions from student interviews were not included beforehand because the interview questions were dependent upon behaviors observed during writing activities.

Observations and Participant Observations. To extend and deepen the understanding of students’ attitudes and teachers’ perceptions regarding writing, I also used observations as a third data-gathering instrument. According to Patton (2002), if one wanted to fully understand a situation, participation and observation would be the preferred methods of research. Participant

observations included not only verbal messages, but also included non-verbal messages that further elucidated the students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions about writing (see Appendix P).

Taking on the role of participant observer was important for several reasons. Initially, I was able to more fully understand the concept of a writing environment by participating in the actual experiences of that environment, a firsthand encounter (Merriam, 2002). Second, I became aware of behaviors and interactions that might have otherwise been considered routine outside the realm of this research. Third, participant observation allowed me to work alongside participants; thus my personal knowledge was beneficial during the interpretive stage of data analysis (Patton, 2002). Observations occurred in only the experimental group.

At the onset of this study, students were informed that they would be observed during some writing assignments; however, they did not know the specific lessons or times in which they would be observed. Additionally, they did not know who would be observing them. Since I was the classroom teacher for the experimental group, I believed the students acted and thought in the writing setting in the same manner as they acted and thought in any lesson outside of writing. The students saw me as their regular classroom teacher instead of an unfamiliar intruder, which reduced the Heisenberg effect (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), but increased the validity of the study.

Documents. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) and Patton (2002) asserted that various documents serve as important instruments of data collection, and are often used in conjunction with interviews and participant observation. Through the use of documents, I identified rich descriptions from participants that revealed how the participants viewed writing and writing instruction. Among the documents examined were the students' journals, my journal, products from the students' process writing assignments, and data from state writing assessments.

All fifth grade students maintained a writing journal throughout the duration of this study; however, journals belonging to only the experimental group were examined for the purposes of this study. Many of the journal entries were content related; however, there were

occasions when I asked students to write about a specific topic that could be used in this study. One example of such topic was to write about how writing composition in the fifth grade was different from writing composition in the fourth grade. Soliciting responses to a single item was advantageous in that it allowed me to maintain control and direction of my study while probing for information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I maintained a journal as a way of documenting field notes throughout the school term.

Since specific writing strategies (discussed in the procedures section) had been taught to the students in the experimental group, their daily writing assignments were examined to determine product quality and writing fluency. Both groups of students engaged in a pretest and a posttest process writing assignment. In an effort to further reduce bias, these assignments were scored by the curriculum coordinator. In an effort to increase validity, all fifth grade teachers submitted students' writing samples to me so that none of the teachers would know which class was serving as the control group. All submissions, except for those which were from the control group and the experimental group were destroyed by shredding them. No data from these submissions were included in this research study.

Test scores on previous state-mandated assessments were examined. Test data based on the QCC objectives and the GPS were compared and discussed in an earlier chapter. Those state mandated test scores were not scores from the group of students participating in this study.

### *Research Design*

The research study was a mixed methods study. The qualitative design of the research study allowed me to investigate the nature of students' and teachers' experiences with writing curriculum in an elementary school setting. The study relied on the theoretical underpinnings of the basic interpretive process, ethnography, auto-ethnography, and symbolic interactionism. In addition to the qualitative design, this research study was conducted using a static group pretest/posttest analysis.

Qualitative Design. Based on the research questions, several theoretical perspectives framed this study. The basic interpretive process was used to discover and understand the perspectives of the students and teachers regarding writing composition. The goal was to describe and interpret what had occurred (Patton, 2002). Data was gathered through surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis (the advantages and disadvantages of these data gathering instruments were discussed earlier in this chapter). I analyzed the data for themes and patterns, and presented the findings as a descriptive account to be discussed in a later chapter (Merriam, 2002).

Ethnography was a second theoretical approach to this research study. The ethnographic approach allowed me to collect data and describe the culture of the group, specifically the experimental group. I described what the students did and what they knew (Merriam, 2002).

Auto-ethnography was a third theoretical approach used to frame this research study. The goal of auto-ethnography was to determine how my personal experience of a culture or cultural event connected with and offered insights about the culture (Merriam, 2002). “Any group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture” (Patton, 2002, p. 81). Students interacting with each other in a classroom over the duration of the school term constituted a culture. Auto-ethnography allowed me to function as a member of the group. I participated in the writing assignments just as students did. Data reflected my self-awareness, experiences, and introspections, thus connecting the personal with the cultural.

As participant observer, I became the primary method of collecting data. Interviews and records (documents) provided more details to the descriptions and events of the classroom culture. Data were categorized as I sought to describe the cultural practices of the group, as well as my understanding of the culture (Patton, 2002).

Symbolic interactionism was the final theoretical perspective to frame this study. The goal of symbolic interactionism was to determine how people interpreted their experiences, as well as the meaning individuals attached to those experiences (Crotty, 1998). Meaning was

defined as I put myself in the place of another participant and saw things from the perspective of that participant. In this study, I attempted to define the meaning students and teachers assigned to writing.

**Quantitative Design.** The quantitative design was a static group pretest-posttest comparison that used non-probability sampling. Narrative writing samples from the group that experienced *Writing to Win* instruction plus additional instructional strategies for writing was compared to the narrative writing samples from the group that received only *Writing to Win* instruction. The additional instructional strategies included the use of graphic organizers, the inclusion of mentor texts as writing models, and instruction related to sentence structure. These strategies will be discussed more in-depth in the next section of this chapter. Using the evaluative scores from the pretest and posttest narratives, a two sample t-test on the mean scores for the treatment and comparison groups was performed to determine any statistically significant difference between the two groups. Observed differences between the two groups were assumed to be the result of the treatment.

### *Procedures*

Three strategies designed to improve students' writing were implemented during the study. These strategies included instruction related to varied sentence structures, inclusion of mentor texts as writing models, and use of graphic organizers. Sentence structure was included because studies indicate that instruction that focuses on students' development of simple and complex sentences is an effective strategy to help learners in the area of writing (Diliberto & Algozzine (2004); Saddler (2005); Myhill (2008); Saddler & Preschern (2007)).

The use of mentor texts was another strategy used in my research. Anderson (2005), Lane (2008), Graves (1994) and Robb (2006) maintained that reading aloud to students allowed them to experience fluency, rhythm of language, and structural patterns in language. Through these experiences, students begin to use these words and patterns in their own writing.

The use of graphic organizers was a third strategy I used in my research. Tuan & Thuan, (2011) defined a graphic organizer as a way to visually represent concepts and relationships. Ojima (2006) used concept maps, one form of graphic organizer in working with Japanese learners in the planning stage of writing. Ojima modeled how to use concept maps, and then required the students to use them during writing exercises. Findings showed the use of concept maps benefitted students in writing essays that were more meaningful and more clearly communicated.

In addition to the evidence of strategy effectiveness, the three strategies were chosen based on deficiencies noted in students' pretest narratives. Students' writing lacked advanced sentence structure; in fact, some ideas were expressed as sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Additionally, the students' writing lacked genre-specific details and organization of ideas.

Beginning in early October, I initially provided direct instruction, as well as guided and independent practice opportunities, on constructing sentences that varied in length and complexity. Simple, compound, complex, and compound complex structures were taught and practiced since sentence structure was a mandated standard in fifth grade. I taught sentence structure for 9 consecutive school days and assessed student learning on the 10th day. As part of this assessment, students were asked to identify the varied sentence structures in a written test format. Additionally, students were required to write five examples of each sentence structure. Students who had not mastered the standard were provided differentiated instruction in a small group setting. Upon mastery of the standard, students were required to use varied sentence structures in their writing throughout the remaining school term, which extended beyond the scope of this study which concluded in late April.

The second strategy I implemented to improve students' writing was the inclusion of mentor texts as writing models. Fifth grade students were required to write in various genres which included narrative, informational, persuasive, and response to literature. The narrative

genre included personal and imaginary experiences. In early October, I delivered instruction on personal narratives. I used a variety of children's literature to model this mode of writing. As the stories were read to the students, I pointed out genre-specific techniques authors used in their texts. Direct instruction and the reading mentor texts were carried out for three days before students wrote their personal narratives; however, the books were then placed in a basket at the reading/writing table for students to reference during their writing, thus offering support throughout the process of writing. In addition to children's literature, I chose exemplary writing samples from former students (their names had been removed from the writing samples). Former students' writing samples were then placed in a binder in the basket at the reading/writing table. The inclusion of mentor texts in teaching writing also extended beyond the scope of this study which concluded in late April.

The third strategy I implemented to improve students' writing was the inclusion of graphic organizers. The graphic organizers provided a visual context for students to meaningfully organizer their writing ideas. Beginning in early October, students were required to use a graphic organizer with every process writing assignment. A different graphic organizer was used for each genre of writing; in fact, I chose a variety of graphic organizers to match each genre. For example, I chose three genre-specific tiered organizers for persuasive writing. Some of the organizers were more complex than others; however, this scaffolded approach was beneficial in differentiating instruction. The practice of including graphic organizers in writing continued beyond the scope of this study which concluded in late April.

### *Research Questions*

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of teachers who provide instruction in the area of writing? All third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers who provided instruction in the area of writing were asked to complete a writing survey. Third and fourth grade writing teachers were included in this study because I believed their attitudes and perceptions about writing influenced the writing behaviors and attitudes of students who entered fifth grade. This group consisted of 16

teachers, but I chose not to complete a survey because of the potential for bias. The remaining 15 teachers, representing 94% of respondents, signed consent forms and completed the survey within ten school days during early October. Once the surveys were completed and returned, I analyzed the responses and categorized them based on themes and patterns until saturation occurred, or until no further categories or themes could be identified. The teacher survey consisted of 11 open-ended items and 7 Likert-scale items.

In order to clarify or to further explain information documented in the writing survey, I found it necessary to interview some of the teachers. The interviews were recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-960PC. The recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews. The information documented on the surveys was analyzed and categorized based on themes and patterns.

Research Question 2. What are students' attitudes toward writing? All fifth grade students were asked to complete a writing attitude survey. Written consent was obtained from each participant and parent or guardian. Students completed the surveys during the class time designated for writing instruction. Once the surveys were completed by students and returned by their homeroom teachers, the researcher analyzed the responses and categorized them based on themes and patterns until theoretical saturation had occurred. The student survey consisted of 11 open-ended items.

In order to clarify or to further explain information documented in the writing attitude surveys, I found it necessary to interview several student participants. The interviews were carried out in the form of student-teacher conferences (which was a normal occurrence during writing activities outside the realm of this research). I utilized audio-taping, by using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-960PC. The notes from the recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview/conference. Information from the interviews was analyzed for themes and subthemes until theoretical saturation had occurred.

Research Question 3. Will students receiving instruction based on *Writing to Win* plus additional instructional strategies demonstrate increased achievement in the area of writing as compared to the group of students who receive instruction based only on the *Writing to Win* curriculum? Fifth grade students from my homeroom class were selected to receive instruction based on *Writing to Win*, as well as additional instructional strategies designed to improve student achievement in writing. This group consisted of 17 students. Similar students from another fifth grade classroom served as the control group and received instruction based only on *Writing to Win*. This group also consisted of 17 students.

All fifth grade students who had signed consent forms were asked to write a personal narrative about a happy time in their lives; however, the narratives from the control group and the experimental group were those selected for scoring. Each pretest essay was assigned a score, based upon the writing rubric, by the Instructional Coordinator. After receiving the appropriate instruction based on *Writing to Win* or *Writing to Win* plus additional instructional strategies, students were given their original personal narrative essays and were asked to revise them. Again, the essays were scored using the original rubric. The Instructional Coordinator was responsible for scoring the essays. Next, pretest and posttest data were analyzed using an online version of a *t*-test calculator (QIMacros by Know Ware). I performed a *t* test on the mean scores for the treatment and comparison groups. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine statistical significance. The results were analyzed and conclusions were drawn.

Chapter 3 described the methodology used to determine students' attitudes toward writing, and to determine the perceptions of teachers who provided instruction in the area of writing. Additionally, this chapter discussed the methodology used to determine if students receiving instruction based on the *Writing to Win* curriculum plus additional instructional strategies demonstrated increased achievement in the area of writing as compared to the group of students who received only the *Writing to Win* curriculum. Chapter 3 included discussion regarding the setting and participants, ethical considerations, instrumentation, research design,

and data collection procedures and analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the study findings and analysis of results. Chapter 5 includes the conclusion, discussion, and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to determine students' attitudes toward writing, to determine teachers' perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing, and to implement and evaluate strategies for improving student achievement in writing among fifth grade learners. These strategies served to maximize the effectiveness of an already existing writing curriculum. Students' attitudes were obtained through a survey of fifth grade learners, and teachers' perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing were obtained through a survey of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who provided instruction in the area of writing at the specific elementary school under study. Student and teacher interviews, observations, and certain documents were also used to obtain pertinent information regarding the issues addressed in this study. This chapter contains the results of the study.

#### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

Teacher Survey and Interviews. The teacher survey consisted of 7 Likert items (survey items 1-7) and 11 open-ended response items (survey items 8-18). The Likert-scale items were presented as declarative statements. Ratings ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 1 shows the responses of teachers to each statement.

Table 1

*Number (Percentage in Parentheses) and Mean Responses for Teacher Survey Likert Scale Items (N = 15)*

| Question   | Strongly Disagree<br>1 | Disagree<br>2 | Undecided<br>3 | Agree<br>4 | Strongly Agree<br>5 | Mean | SD   |
|--|------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------|
| Writing is important in my classroom                                 | 0 (0)                  | 0 (0)         | 1 (7)          | 6 (40)     | 8 (53)              | 4.47 | .64  |
| Teachers are given flexibility in writing instruction                | 2 (13)                 | 6 (40)        | 2 (13)         | 2 (13)     | 3 (20)              | 2.87 | 1.41 |
| Follow the writing process   | 0 (0)                  | 0 (0)         | 3 (20)         | 7 (47)     | 5 (33)              | 4.13 | .74  |
| All students can be effective writers                                | 3 (20)                 | 2 (13)        | 2 (13)         | 3 (20)     | 5 (33)              | 3.33 | 1.59 |
| Teachers should write with students                                  | 1 (7)                  | 2 (13)        | 0 (0)          | 5 (33)     | 7 (47)              | 4.00 | 1.31 |
| Teachers should provide feedback                                     | 0 (0)                  | 0 (0)         | 0 (0)          | 3 (20)     | 12 (80)             | 4.80 | .41  |
| Writing should be taught in the context of reading and content areas | 2 (13)                 | 2 (13)        | 2 (13)         | 4 (27)     | 5 (33)              | 3.53 | 1.46 |

The open-ended response items were analyzed for themes and subthemes until saturation occurred. Teachers considered writing fluency, pedagogical factors, and grammar/spelling as they defined effective writing. Teachers identified fluency as the leading factor characterizing effective writing. The most important elements of fluency included writing ideas and details, organization, sentence structure and flow, and word choice. Teachers maintained fluent writing is *organized* and *stays on topic*. Fluent writing uses *playful language* that allows the reader to *see pictures in his mind* as he reads. Pedagogical factors leading to effective writing included teaching specific writing strategies, providing adequate time to practice writing, as well as modeling and using mentor texts. Teachers believed student achievement in writing was impeded because they did not have *enough time* to devote to *meaningful practice*. Furthermore, teachers maintained their students *haven't had enough practice in process writing* to master the skills necessary to produce fluent writing.

Even though teachers believed grammar and spelling were important factors defining effective writing, they placed less emphasis on these elements than on writing fluency and pedagogical factors.

Teachers had varying views of their own effectiveness as writers. Only 67% (10) of the teacher respondents viewed themselves as effective writers. They maintained their writing ideas *made sense*, their writing was *organized*, their writing had *purpose*, and their writing had *varied sentence structures*. Five teachers, representing 33% of those surveyed, believed they were not effective writers. Lack of instruction or training, limited writing practice, and a lack of writing ideas were cited as reasons teachers believed they were ineffective writers. Most of the teachers surveyed commented their university curriculum *did not include a class on how to teach writing*.

Teachers evaluated themselves differently as teachers of writers (Survey Question 10). Eight, or 53% of the survey respondents, considered themselves effective teachers of writers. The teachers attributed their effectiveness to *teaching the writing process, differentiating instruction, and providing adequate practice*. One teacher responded modeling writing for students benefitted

them because the teacher *used think-aloud strategies as she engaged in the act of writing*. Additionally, one respondent reported she was effective as a teacher of writers because she *required her students to write in the content areas*.

Three, or 20% of the survey respondents, contended they were only moderately effective as teachers of writers. They attributed their level of effectiveness to *an ineffective writing curriculum* and *a lack of writing resources*. The teachers also reported *difficulty in motivating students and differentiating instruction* as barriers to their effectiveness as teachers of writers.

Four, or 27% of the survey respondents, described themselves as ineffective teachers of writers. An ineffective writing curriculum and a lack of training which began in college were identified as factors leading to teacher ineffectiveness. Additionally, two respondents reported they were poor role models because they *did not like to write and did not enjoy teaching writing*. Survey respondents identified a number of their strengths and weaknesses as teachers of writing (Survey Question 11). Teachers reported their greatest strengths as encouraging vocabulary proficiency, developing spelling and grammar skills, and following the writing process. Providing a purpose for writing was also reported as a strength for the writing teachers. Engaging students in daily writing, conveying positive attitudes about writing, and modeling or providing mentor texts as examples of good writing were seen as strengths as well. One teacher commented, "I would characterize myself as hardworking and interactive. I try to model the writing for the students." Three respondents reported they had no strengths as teachers of writers.

Respondents revealed a variety of weaknesses as teachers of writers. Nine respondents or 60% of those who completed the survey, indicated giving up writing time for additional reading and/or math instruction as their greatest weakness as teachers of writers. They indicated on their surveys that *reading and math were considered more important since fifth graders were required to meet county promotion policy, as well as meet the standard on the CRCT in order to advance to sixth grade*. Seven respondents maintained a lack of student-friendly graphic organizers contributed to their weaknesses as teachers of writers. Teachers maintained the graphic organizers

they were required to use were *not specific and meaningful*. Additionally, six teachers or 40% of survey respondents reported inadequate time devoted to writing instruction as a weakness since the time allocated for writing was only 30 minutes daily. On their surveys, the teachers asseverated “the writing block of time should be at least 60 minutes each day in order for instruction and practice to be meaningful.” Failure to motivate students, ineffective or absent instruction/lack of training, strict adherence to curriculum maps, and failure to share writing expectations with students were identified as weaknesses by teachers of writers. The three teachers who reported ineffective or absent instruction as a weakness reported they “did not know how to teach writing and were not benefitting students in this area.” The teachers also indicated they had requested training and/or additional resources in the area of writing; however, they stated that they had never received either.

Teachers shared where they got ideas for student writing (Survey Question 12). Six teachers who were surveyed reported they got their ideas for student writing from the reading curriculum and the content areas of science and social studies. One teacher even stated, “Writing across the content areas boosts students’ motivation to write.” Six teachers also reported they got ideas for students’ writing topics from other teachers and resource books they purchased. One teacher even stated, “Teachers need to be willing to share ideas and resources among their peers and stop reinventing the wheel.” The Internet was considered by five teachers as another important source for writing ideas. Teachers indicated they got writing ideas from the actual *Writing to Win* curriculum. Additionally, teachers documented students’ experiences as sources for writing topics.

Teachers reported the frequency of student engagement in writing activities in their classrooms (Survey Question 13). Seven teachers, representing 47% of those who completed the survey, reported they engaged their students in writing five or more times per week. Respondents maintained “learning to write fluently is a process that takes a long time and lots of practice.” Eight teachers, or 53% of survey respondents, reported their students were involved in writing

two to four times per week. None of the teachers reported they involved their students in writing activities less than twice per week.

Teachers shared what typical writing lessons involved in their classes. Eight respondents indicated a typical writing lesson involved assigning students a writing topic and instructing them to write; however, these teachers documented they provided no direct instruction in writing. In fact, one teacher responded, “I grade papers while the students work on their writing assignments.” Another teacher confessed, “I often text my friends while the students write.” Six teachers reported they followed the writing process. Three respondents expressed they often provided extra time during the school day to complete writing tasks. Two teachers provided a purpose for writing, provided a variety of graphic organizers, and provided feedback to students during writing. Teachers contended students need to “know what they have done well and they need to know what they can do to improve their writing.” Only one respondent reported he/she provided writing models or mentor texts as examples for students to reference during their writing, even though others maintained writing models would be beneficial to the students.

Teachers revealed they provided students feedback about their writing in a variety of ways. Eleven respondents reported they provided student feedback through writing conferences held during the writing process. Four respondents indicated they provided feedback using writing rubrics or written comments on students’ graded papers. One teacher admitted students did not see the rubric until “after they had submitted their final papers to the teacher.” In fact, one teacher reported, “Most of the time students don’t see the rubric or their writing at any time after it has been turned into to be graded, so they don’t know what they did well or not so well.” Three responses revealed teachers graded the papers and filed them in students’ portfolios without the students being afforded the opportunity to view the graded writing assignments. One respondent reported student feedback was rendered through peer review.

Teachers believed a variety of factors might impede student achievement in the area of writing. Nine respondents, or 60% of those surveyed, reported being a poor reader would hinder

writing achievement. In fact, one teacher stated, “Our students can’t read or write well enough to get their ideas on paper. They can’t express themselves clearly enough, and they don’t have a vocabulary to support writing.” Nine respondents also indicated a lack of effective instruction in writing as an impediment to achievement. Teachers believed students must *receive direct instruction in writing*. One teacher stated, “Writing is not a talent. You were not born with the ability to write; rather, it is a skill that must be taught and practiced over time.” Five teachers, or 33% of respondents, believed lack of personal experiences might lead to poor achievement in writing. Lack of self-confidence and increased anxiety were cited by four teachers as impediments to student achievement in writing. Teacher assigned topics, limited time, and lack of a purpose for writing were identified as factors that might impede student achievement in the area of writing as well. Limited time was a factor cited by many of the teachers. One of the teachers stated, “Based on Writing to Win, students should be allowed seven minutes to complete a journal writing, but none of my students can complete the task that quickly. Most of my students need about 30 minutes.” Lack of meaningful feedback, language barriers of migrant children, and IQ/specific learning disabilities were cited as causes of poor student achievement in the area of writing.

Teachers who were surveyed revealed a variety of ways their school could ensure students’ success in the area of writing. The factor cited by 53% of teachers was to adopt a more effective writing curriculum or to allow flexibility in using the existing curriculum, as well as flexibility in following the curriculum map. Teachers believed students should be producing *a final writing product every week – not every six weeks*. Six respondents (40%) indicated adequate training and resources for teachers would also ensure student success. One teacher shared she was not trained to use *Writing to Win* until well into her second year at this school. She stated, “I struggled trying to figure out the program. I had to fly by the seat of my pants.” Six respondents stated in their surveys that they did not provide adequate direct instruction in writing because they did not know how to teach writing. Teachers also maintained motivating students with self-

selected writing topics, requiring accountability for writing in the early grades, modeling writing, and providing adequate time for writing as ways to ensure students' success in the area of writing.

Teacher survey participants revealed diverse ways of helping educators become better writing teachers. The factors receiving the greatest response rates (67%) were curriculum and resources, as well as training for teachers of writing. One teacher indicated this training should begin in college with a specific class designed to help teachers-in-training learn how to teach writing. She further commented, "I had several classes that taught me how to teach reading, and I had classes that taught me how to teach math. But, I sure didn't have one that taught me how to teach writing." Another teacher stated, "I don't think the Writing to Win program is totally effective because I don't believe all of the teachers, including myself, have been trained well enough to properly implement the program." Four respondents (27%) believed flexibility to teach based on students' needs would help them become better teachers of writing. Three respondents (20%) indicated additional time allocated to writing, collaboration with other teachers, and the use of mentor texts would also be of benefit in helping teachers become more efficient at teaching writing. Teachers also believed a variety of appropriate graphic organizers would help teachers become better writing teachers. One survey respondent stated, "Writing to Win uses a graphic organizer, but there are more effective ones in other resource books. Those graphic organizers are more specific for each of the writing modes assigned to fifth graders."

**Student Survey and Interviews.** A student survey was used as a data gathering instrument for this project. The survey consisted of 11 open-ended response items. The open-ended response items were analyzed for themes and subthemes. The following information was data gathered from survey items 1–11 of the student survey.

Students were eager to share their affinity for writing. Twenty nine, or 38% of the students who took the survey, reported they liked writing. Twelve respondents shared they liked composition because writing allowed them to *express their feelings in a safe way*. One respondent in that group shared she used writing as a tool to communicate ideas *when I cannot look someone*

*in the eye*. Nine responses revealed students enjoyed writing more when they could self-select their writing topics. Six students maintained they enjoyed sharing personal experiences with others. One respondent shared that writing allowed her to *show what she had learned*. One respondent stated that writing allowed her to be *creative*.

The data further revealed 47, or 62% of the survey respondents, did not enjoy writing. Seventeen responses indicated students did not enjoy composition because writing was boring. Nine respondents stated they did not enjoy writing because they often had no ideas to write about especially on a teacher-assigned topic. This became evident when a student stated, “I can’t think of anything to write about a moving box.” Furthermore, one learner claimed he did not enjoy writing because he was *never allowed to write about things that interested him*. Nine students reported they did not like writing because the activity caused their hands to cramp. Eight students maintained writing took too much time, while two learners declared the teacher required too much writing on each assignment. One student stated, “You mean we got to write a whole page?” Two students reported writing stressed them out because they never had *good* writing ideas.

Survey responses demonstrated students like to write about a variety of topics. Fifty three responses indicated students like to write about personal experiences such as *vacations and holidays*. Students also maintained they enjoyed writing about their families. Imaginary characters, imaginary places, sports, as well as animals and pets were popular topics for students as well. Findings also indicated 18 survey respondents enjoyed writing about friends. Five respondents liked to write about informational topics, books, and movies. Two respondents reported they liked to write about problems because writing gives them a way to *vent*.

Survey responses revealed students’ opinions regarding whether or not they saw themselves as writers. Findings indicated 27 (36%) of the surveyed students thought they were good writers, and they shared reasons for their opinions. Seventeen respondents reported they were effective writers because they had *lots of writing ideas*. Ten students maintained their success as writers was due to encouragement by an adult or a peer. Eight respondents reported

they were good writers because they were *creative*. Additionally, seven learners conveyed their writing success was because their writing *made sense to the reader*; they thought their writing conveyed the intended messages. Other responses included *my writing grabs the reader's attention*; *my handwriting is neat*; and *I love to read*.

Further examination of the survey responses revealed 49 (64%) of the students did not think of themselves as writers. Sixteen respondents shared they were not writers because they did not have writing ideas. Seven learners viewed writing as *boring*. Six students reported their writing *did not make sense*, while another six maintained they were not *creative*. Five learners revealed they often strayed from the writing topic, while five students stated that writing was too difficult for them because they did not understand how to *organize their ideas* and did not know how to include meaningful *details*. Three additional respondents maintained they were poor spellers; three students shared they did not view themselves as writers because they could not *remember the rules* of punctuation. Other less frequent reasons described by students as impeding their success as writers were *writing takes too long*; *my handwriting is sloppy*; *writing stresses me out*; and *I have a poor vocabulary*.

The survey responses revealed students' strengths and weaknesses as writers. Twenty students reported their strength as a writer was conventions. They believed they were effective in the areas of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. Eighteen learners shared specific modes of writing as their strength. Fifth grade learners were required to write a personal narrative, an imaginary narrative, a response to literature, a persuasive essay, and an informational essay, and some students had a preference for one particular mode of writing. Thirteen responses indicated students had lots of writing ideas on which they could easily elaborate. Sentence structure was mentioned as a strength in the area of writing for six students. They reported they were *comfortable* using simple, compound, complex, and compound complex sentence structures. Six students maintained they had strong vocabularies, while five students responded positively to organization of ideas and details, as well as handwriting.

Four students revealed graphic organizers helped them organize their thoughts and plans for writing. In fact, one student commented, “The graphic organizer was so easy to follow. It totally helped me organize my ideas. If you just follow the graphic organizer, the hard part about writing is done. The graphic organizer kind of forces you to organize your thoughts and ideas before you even begin to draft.” However, the students requested a greater variety of graphic organizers than the writing curriculum included. Two of the fifth grade learners reported they had no strengths as writers, and they elaborated writing had never *made any sense to them*. Two of the students indicated adult support had boosted their self-confidence levels in writing.

In addition to students’ strengths in writing, the survey responses also outlined a diversity of students’ perceived weaknesses in the area of writing. Conventions were referenced as the greatest weakness in writing among 18 of the fifth grade students, even though this category was identified by 20 students as a strength in writing. Fourteen respondents reported organization was their weakness in writing because they could not sequence events in the order they happened. As with students’ strengths in writing, the writing modes were described as a weakness. Among this group of learners, the least popular mode of writing was informational writing. They maintained narrative writing allowed them to be more creative. Handwriting was referenced by eight students as a weakness. They described their handwriting as *sloppy*, and two of the students complained of *painful cramps* in their hands as they wrote. Students shared they often had to take a break from writing to relax their hands in order to complete the assignments. Eight students referred to sentence structure, as well as brevity as writing weaknesses. Students commented in their surveys that they often had no more than three sentences recorded on their papers when they turned them in to be graded. Students complained this happened more often when teachers assigned topics they knew very little about or in which they shared no passion. Six students reported revising and editing were weaknesses for them because they never understood why they had to *write it over*. They shared prior teachers had told them to revise their papers, but did not explain how they could accomplish this task. They stated teachers had told them to revise *because*

*revision was part of the writing process.* Other less frequently reported factors included lack of time, stress, ineffective graphic organizers, and laziness.

Students revealed several ways in which they decided what to write. Forty seven, or 62% of respondents, reported they got their writing ideas from teacher-assigned topics. Twenty six students (34%) maintained they thought about possible ideas until they decided on one that interested them. Additionally, two respondents reported they used the environment *to figure out what to write*. Several learners stated they *looked around the room* until they generated a writing idea; one student reported she got ideas for writing from books or other materials she was reading at the time.

Survey responses revealed a diversity of writing behaviors in which students performed when they were asked to write. Thirty three student respondents (43%) reported they initially brainstormed for writing ideas. Twelve students reported they wrote a title for the writing assignment. Ten students planned the introduction to their writing, while another seven students stated they wrote a main idea sentence. Six students maintained they indented to start the first paragraph of the writing assignment. Three students reported they initially capitalized the first word in the first sentence. A graphic organizer was completed by three students; two survey respondents claimed they thought about how their ideas *would sound as they were written on paper*.

Students reported they encountered a number of problems as they engaged in writing tasks. These problems were divided into eight categories. The categories included organization, ideas, conventions, word choice, sentence structure, distractions, painful hands, and anxiety. Organizational issues were problems for six students. This category was broken into three subcategories: introductions (two students), conclusions (two students), and paragraph structure (two students). Nineteen students complained they often ran out of writing ideas. Conventions presented problems for 23 respondents. This category was broken down into spelling (17 respondents), capitalization (one respondent), punctuation (four respondents), and grammar (one

respondent). Word choice presented a problem for three students. This became evident when a student said, “I can’t remember what words mean, so I don’t use any unique words.” Sentence structure was a problem for 17 students. This category was broken into three subcategories: choppy sentences (nine respondents), run-on sentences (seven students), and sentence repetition (one student). Distractions presented difficulties for five students. Painful hands were identified as a problem for seven survey respondents. Anxiety was an issue for one student.

Further examination of this survey revealed the different ways students tried to solve their writing problems. For solving organizational issues, two students reported they *looked back at their writing notes* for tips that helped them organize their writing more effectively, so that they conveyed the intended message to the reader. Another student maintained, “I try to relax because I feel myself becoming tense and stressed out.” One student claimed she resorted to mentor texts in the form of picture books and found novel ways of presenting her ideas in writing. Another learner maintained that he reread and revised often as he wrote his first draft. He stated in his survey that this practice not only helped him organize his writing ideas, but also helped him stick to the writing topic, instead of *trailing off in another direction* with his writing. Another student reported in the survey that she asked a peer or the teacher for tips and ideas for effectively organizing her writing in a way that made sense.

Students stated they often had problems with writing ideas, especially when they were required to write on teacher-assigned topics. Twelve learners maintained they would write, reread, and rethink often during writing activities instead of composing the complete draft and then rereading and rethinking. Two students shared they often conferenced with the teacher because sometimes, as they talked about what they were writing, ideas would *pop into their heads*. One student reported he would try to connect the topic to something he already knew, and another learner claimed he would return to jot-listing for possible ideas. He stated this strategy often *sparked* more writing ideas.

Conventions presented difficulties for many students, but they shared the ideas they used to try to solve those problems. Thirteen learners complained they had trouble with spelling words they wanted to use in their writing. Many of those students said they sounded out the words and hoped they spelled them correctly. Three learners reported they asked the teacher to spell the words for them, while three others used a dictionary to locate the correct spelling of the words. One student stated that he tried to visualize the word in order to spell the word correctly. Several students had issues with capitalization and punctuation. These students reported they would look up the rules in their English books. One student said, “I just keep writing and hope my editing peer will catch the problems and correct them for me.”

Three students revealed they had problems with word choice. In an attempt to solve those problems, one student shared that her teacher gave the students ten vocabulary words each week, and she worked very hard to memorize their meanings so that she could use those words in her writing. Two other students reported they wanted to use better words in their writing, but they could never remember what the words were or how to spell them, so they admitted they avoided using unique words in their writing.

Twelve learners had issues with sentence structure, but they offered ways to overcome the problem. Six students reported they often asked their teachers to review sentence combining; five other students requested their teachers to review strategies for correcting run-on sentences. One student stated during the revising stage of the writing process, she would read every sentence and underline the subjects once and the predicates twice in an effort to avoid sentence fragments, as well as sentence repetitions.

Five students revealed they had difficulty becoming distracted and sleepy. Two learners reported they often *forced* themselves to concentrate during writing activities. One student revealed she shook her arms like she was *flying* when she became sleepy, but she commented she was afraid this action might cause distractions for others. Another student maintained he splashed his face with water, or he got out of his seat to move about in the classroom. One student stated

she became very distracted when others came in and out of the classroom during writing activities, or when other students in her classroom would leave their seats to work with a peer. The student reported she could not complete the writing assignment until the environment was *quiet and free from other distractions*.

One student complained of writing anxiety. In an effort to calm himself, he practiced deep breathing and other relaxation techniques. This student reported walking always helped him *relax*, so he sometimes walked to the water fountain, the bathroom, or the library.

Students also remarked on what they liked the most and the least about writing. Thirty students or about 40% of the respondents reported they liked writing most when they were allowed to write about self-selected topics because they sometimes lacked knowledge necessary to write effectively on teacher-assigned topics. Eight of the students replied on their survey they liked writing the final draft the most. Five of these eight students added they liked the final draft most because that was when they were able to see how their ideas and efforts produced writing they *felt good about*; however, three of the students liked writing the final draft better because it meant they *were about finished* with the assignment. Seven students replied on their surveys they liked showing others how well they could write. Six learners liked journal writing and commented the topics were *fun* to write. Five students shared they liked writing the most as they built excitement into their stories. Four students liked organizing their thoughts, and four learners liked completing graphic organizers when they were allowed to use them. There were two responses on each of the following categories: brief assignments, conventions, and writing as a way of escape. The part of writing that one gifted student liked most was *adding my own style* into her writing piece. The same student remarked in her survey she liked writing the first draft because she could *splat* ideas onto the paper. A final student shared she liked creating characters the most.

Fifteen respondents (20%) reported the part of writing they liked the least was writing on teacher-assigned topics. Seven students claimed the part of writing they liked the least was

revising and editing; they maintained, “there is no sense in writing a paper just to turn around and write it again.” These students shared in their surveys they never made any changes in their writing between the first draft and the final draft. Students reported their teachers had never taught them strategies they could use to revise their writing.

Seven students remarked the part of writing they liked the least was content area writing because they could never remember the facts about the topics, and the teacher would not allow them to use their textbooks as resources. Seven additional students commented in their survey the part of writing they enjoyed the least was organizing their ideas so the paper *flowed* as they read it. Lengthy assignments, journal writing, brainstorming, and sentence structure were also cited as parts of writing students liked the least.

Four students replied on their surveys that conventions were their least liked part of writing. Spelling was the most difficult convention cited by the students. Three students documented in their surveys that losing their focus during the act of writing caused them to dislike some parts of writing. They revealed so much time was lost when they *daydreamed*, and this interfered with them completing the writing task. Three other students shared their least liked part of writing was when they had to share their writing because other students *laughed* at them. They reported they felt *embarrassed*. Adding details, process writing, painful hands, and writing tests were also cited as parts of writing students liked the least. One student commented his least favorite part of writing was when he used graphic organizers; one student responded her least favorite part of writing was when she *tore holes* in her writing paper during erasures as she tried to make her writing better. Students shared mixed ideas regarding whether or not they enjoyed sharing their writing and why. There were 33 (43%) responses that indicated students enjoyed sharing their writing. The most popular reason students gave for their *yes* responses was *others will tell you how to make your writing better*. Six respondents believed sharing allowed others to know how well you write. *Others will understand my feelings* was cited by five survey respondents as a reason they enjoyed sharing their writing. Three students remarked they enjoyed

sharing their writing if they *had put effort into the assignment*. Additionally, three other survey respondents believed their writing gave writing ideas to others. One student documented on his survey he *enjoyed others laughing at him*. A final respondent declared sharing made others think your writing was *good*. Forty three students (57%) who completed a survey did not like to share their writing with others. According to 15 students, the reason they did not enjoy sharing their writing was because they *did not like to talk in front of other people*. Eight respondents replied their writing did not *make sense*, and eight others remarked fellow students *made fun of their writing*. Additionally, eight students acknowledged their writing was *boring*. *I do not want others to know my thoughts* was a reason given by four students for not liking to share writing with others.

Students had a variety of ideas about what they would say to someone else if they were teaching them to write. Eleven students reported they would suggest *writing about something you know*. Nine students claimed they would tell someone to *stick to the writing topic*, while eight learners said they would advise others to *try hard and not give up*. *Use proper punctuation, use proper capitalization, and follow the writing process* were cited as important information to share with someone who is being taught to write. *Use correct spelling, use graphic organizers, use a variety of sentences, let the words flow off the page, and make sure your writing makes sense* were important to four respondents in each of these sections. Three students each maintained *adding details and organizing ideas* would be important to teach someone learning to write. The remaining ideas were varied and received very limited responses. Students believed a variety of practices would help them become better writers. Fifteen students, representing 20% of respondents, believed they could be better writers if they *believed in themselves* as writers and were more *motivated*. Fourteen students, representing 18% of respondents, acknowledged they could become better writers if they were allowed to *choose their own writing topics*. They believed assigned topics stifled their creativity. Five of the students reported they had lots of things to write about, but they were never allowed to write about their topics of interest. They

further added the teacher always assigned their writing topics. Twelve respondents, or 16% of the students, indicated they could become better writers if they constructed more effective sentences and practiced writing more often. Ten students, or 13% of respondents, believed they could become more effective writers if they had available to them a variety of graphic organizers that were more specific to the modes of writing required by fifth graders. Nine responses, representing 12% of the students, contended becoming *better spellers* would help them become better writers. Eight students, or 11% of those surveyed maintained they could be better writers if they could generate *more ideas and details* as they engaged in writing. Five responses in each of the following areas were indicated as factors students believed would improve their writing: write neater, analyze examples of strong and weak writing, and remain focused and not distracted during writing. Four students reported reading more would help them become better writers. Allowing more time to complete assignments and asking for help were also factors that 4% of the students believed could help them become more effective writers.

*Observation and Participant-observation.* Several interesting themes emerged as a result of the observations. Initially, I witnessed students who were not able to write on a teacher-assigned topic. For example, I assigned students the task of writing a personal narrative about their favorite vacation. I observed a student who was chewing on his fingernails and was not making any attempt to write. The student eventually raised his hand and told the teacher, "I have never been on a vacation before." As a result, I had to differentiate instruction by modifying this student's writing assignment.

Next, I modeled how to use the graphic organizer as it related to a story I had read to the class. Students were able to successfully use the graphic organizer with their own writing. Interestingly, this graphic organizer was specific to the mode of writing the students were studying, but this visual organizer was not a part of the *Writing to Win* curriculum. Finally, the students became very engaged in their writing when I wrote alongside them. Students were more

engaged in the task of writing and wrote longer pieces when I wrote with them. The students were eager to know if I was going to revise my writing, as well as share my writing with them.

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

To evaluate the hypothesis for Research Question 3, a two-sample *t*test assuming equal variances was conducted on the pretest scores and the posttest scores. The mean and standard deviation on the pretest scores for the control and experimental groups, as well as the posttest scores for both groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

### *Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) for Pretest and Posttest Scores*

| Group        | Pretest |       | Posttest |       |
|--------------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
|              | Mean    | SD    | Mean     | SD    |
| Control      | 56.94   | 13.16 | 60.94    | 13.0  |
| Experimental | 57.18   | 9.67  | 83.53    | 13.03 |

No statistically significant difference was found between the control and experimental group pretest means,  $t(32) = .06, p = .95$ . However, on the posttest the students in the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group,  $t(32) = 5.06, p < .001$ . An estimate of effect size using Cohen's *d* was calculated for the posttest means. The result,  $d = 1.74$ , shows that students in the experimental group scored almost two standard deviation units above the control group. According to Thorndike and Dinnel (2001), a large effect size would be considered as 0.80 standard deviations between the means of two groups. If the difference in the means is less than 0.20 standard deviations, the difference is insignificant, even if the *p* value is less than .05. Since the effect size in this study was considered large ( $d = 1.74$ ) and the *p* value was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), one can see the strategies implemented to augment *Writing to Win* were effective in improving writing achievement among fifth grade learners. Other grades

might experience similar success if these strategies (instruction in sentence structure, inclusion of mentor texts as writing models, and the use of graphic organizers) were used in teaching writing.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

An overview of this study, summary of research findings, conclusions, implications for future practice, and recommendations for further research are presented in this chapter. Findings from this study are compared to findings from other related research.

#### *Overview of the Study*

This research study was significant for four reasons. First, in 2002, President Bush signed *the No Child Left Behind Act* which redefined the role of the federal government in K-12 education (LaMorte, 2005). The goals of the *NCLB Act* were to ensure all students, including those attending schools that receive Title 1 funds, have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and meet proficiency standards on state-mandated assessments, to increase achievement in all areas of the curriculum, and to close the achievement gap that existed among various groups. The *NCLB Act* required the inclusion of students with disabilities and learners of a second language on these mandatory assessments. With the enactment of *NCLB*, each state was required to establish academic standards and a state testing system that met federal requirements. The test results were used to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.

Second, as the GPS were introduced and expectations for students were increased (Kay Ellen Rutledge, Ph.D., personal communication, June 12, 2008). In 1997, the state of Georgia requested an audit of the QCC (<https://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/>). Results of the audit revealed Georgia's curriculum was not rigorous enough to ensure in-depth student learning. Additionally, the curriculum did not provide a way to guide teachers' instruction and assessment practices. Inculcation of the GPS ensured a strengthened curriculum that included more rigorous standards and provided teachers a way to assess the level of student learning.

Third, the ailing economy in the United States created conditions which led to drastic reductions in educational spending (Rebell, 2011). As a result of the steep budget cuts, school districts had to consider options aimed at preventing further expenditure of funds. According to Rebell (2011), “schools throughout the country have shortened their hours, raised class sizes, cut back on curriculum offerings, and curtailed purchases of books and instructional supplies” (p. 1855).

Finally, many individuals believed that advanced technology diminished the need for effective writing; however, survey results of the National Commission on Writing (2004) indicated an even more urgent need for effective writers. Canavor and Meiorowitz (2005) proposed that public education was failing to teach students to write effectively. According to Baron (2003), this allegation was further affirmed when faculty members of America’s colleges and universities expounded high school graduates entering college did not possess the writing skills they needed in order to be successful; as a result, growing numbers of students were required to take remedial courses in writing and reading. Quible and Griffin (2007) further elucidated this notion when they asserted the writing skills of college graduates were deplorable. Because of the lack of proficiency in the area of writing, business organizations spend over \$3 billion annually to remediate poor writing skills of workers, while colleges and universities spend over \$1 billion annually. With the recent emphasis on school rigor and accountability, educators have the tremendous responsibility of using the most effective means to ensure students’ success in school.

Three research questions framed this study. First, Research Question 1 addressed teachers’ perceptions of writing and the instruction of writing. Teachers’ perceptions were obtained through a survey of third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers who provided instruction in the area of writing, as well as through interviews. Research Question 2 examined students’ attitudes toward writing. Students’ attitudes toward writing were obtained through a survey of fifth grade students, as well as through interviews, writing samples, and observations. Qualitative data were analyzed for themes and subthemes until saturation occurred. Research Question 3

sought to determine if students receiving instruction based on the *Writing to Win* curriculum plus additional instructional strategies would demonstrate increased achievement in the area of writing as compared to the group of students who received instruction based only on the *Writing to Win* curriculum. Quantitative data in the form of pretest and posttest scores on students' writing samples were loaded onto an Excel 2010 spreadsheet. QI Macros software was used to complete a *t*-test analysis on the data. Additionally, the Likert-survey items were analyzed. Scores above the mean represented positive perceptions, while scores below the mean represented negative perceptions.

#### *Summary of Findings*

Research Question 1 addressed teachers' perceptions of writing and the instruction of writing. In completing this research study, one can readily see that teachers perceived effective writing as fluent writing. Any educator who teaches writing must have a thorough understanding of this concept. The teachers defined fluent writing as organized and sequential, full of rich details, consisting of effective sentence structure and flow, and word choices that paint pictures in the readers' minds. These findings were consistent with Culham's (2003) traits of writing. Culham maintained the essential traits of writing used to develop fluency were interesting and important ideas, logical and effective organization, smooth and expressive sentences, and specific and memorable word choice. Similarly, Lane (2008) and Portalupi and Fletcher (2004) stressed the importance of vivid details, voice, organization, and ideas when defining effective writing. They further maintained these concepts must be taught, practiced, applied, and assessed as students progress in their writing.

This study revealed that as teachers sought to teach writing composition, they faced issues pertaining to their own effectiveness, the existing writing curriculum, the lack of resources and training, and the absence of adequate time. About one-third of the teachers in this study viewed themselves as ineffective teachers of writing who did not support the adopted writing curriculum, lacked training, and saw themselves as poor role models. Daisey (2009), Zumbunn

and Krause (2012), and Norman and Spencer (2005) concluded from their research that teachers must be cognizant of their attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and practices about writing since they can positively or negatively influence students' attitudes, motivation, and levels of learning of present and future students. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) also found teachers who viewed themselves as effective writers were more confident in their abilities to teach writing. Confident teachers were more committed to teaching writing strategies, engaging students in writing activities, and differentiating writing instruction so that all learners experience success. Norman and Spencer (2005) also found about 80% of teachers surveyed in their study maintained a former teacher at the elementary level had an impact on how they perceived themselves as writers. They reported their teachers as enthusiastic, supportive, and encouraging.

Pedagogical practices teachers associated with effective writing were evident throughout this study. These practices included teaching specific writing strategies, providing adequate practice, modeling, and using mentor texts with students. Baker et al. (2008), Barksdale-Ladd and King (2000), Culham (2003), Fisher (1991), Katz (2008), Kirby, Lotta, and Vinz (1988), Lane (2008), and Leograndis (2006) found teachers must provide students an array of strategies and techniques designed to help them write well. Norman and Spencer (2005) analyzed the experiences and beliefs about writing and writing instruction among pre-service teachers. About 34% or 20 participants maintained writing instruction, specifically in brainstorming and descriptive language, helped them become better writers. These researchers further asserted writing strategies must be modeled by teachers, as well as practiced and applied by students.

The lack of value placed on writing was a concern to teachers as well. Teachers maintained writing served no purpose except for assigning a required grade. Teachers contended they needed to get students *to see the need to write*. One teacher remarked that no one ever looked at the students' writing folders from year to year *so why beat your head against the wall* when students don't retain information they have been taught. Teachers maintained administration did not value writing because they were often required to give up writing time to

provide additional instruction and practice in the areas of math and reading. Teachers also expressed that administration needs to consider teachers' ideas and input in discussions about writing because they know what their students are capable of doing and what they need to help them become successful writers.

Providing adequate time for instruction and practice in writing was considered by teachers as they defined effective writing. Brashears (2006) engaged in a research project involving the perceptions of teachers in a rural area of Kentucky and the students' scores on the state writing assessment. The teachers believed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was the reason for their renewed interest in the area of writing. With the enactment of KERA, new writing standards were written, as well as different forms of the state-mandated assessment. Teachers taught the writing process, and they devoted additional time to writing instruction and practice. Prior to the implementation of KERA, teachers acknowledged they engaged in very little writing. They reported they devoted the majority of instructional time to teaching reading. Teachers who participated in the current study attributed students' success on the state writing assessment to adequate time spent on instruction and practice in the area of writing.

Students do not have enough time in the daily school schedule to adequately practice writing. In fact, teachers had concerns regarding the schedule of writing as outlined in *Writing to Win*. The teachers believed taking six weeks to complete a final draft of a writing mode was unacceptable and *ludicrous*. They believed students should *produce a final writing product every week*. The teachers also maintained there was not adequate time to practice writing before the administration of the Georgia Grade Five Writing Assessment. In fact, they reported the students had completed only three of the five required modes of writing before the test.

Furthermore, teachers maintained there was only 30 minutes during the school day devoted to the teaching and practicing of writing; however, they believed at least one hour should be devoted to daily writing tasks. Furthermore, the teachers reported they sometimes had to give up their writing time for additional math and reading instruction in order for students to be

prepared for the CRCT. They indicated on their surveys that reading and math were considered more important since fifth graders were required to meet county promotion policy, as well as meet the standard on the CRCT in order to advance to sixth grade. As previously discussed, Brashears (2006) conducted a study involving the perceptions of teachers in a rural area of Kentucky and students' scores on the state writing assessment. Teachers maintained students became more successful as a result of devoting time for instruction and practice in writing instead of devoting the majority of instructional time on the teaching of reading. One can conclude from these responses that students do not have enough time to practice and apply the writing strategies they have been taught, and reading and math are considered more important than writing.

In order for students to become effective writers, students must be engaged in daily writing activities. Leu and Kinzer (2003) maintain learning to write well is a long process, but students will advance toward writing fluency as they experiment with language and language structures. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) found in their study regarding effective writing instruction that students should practice writing daily; in fact, they contend the time spent on writing should be tripled. Brimi (2012) found that teachers often did not have adequate time to devote to writing instruction; however, the teacher participants believed they could provide more effective instruction if additional time was scheduled for writing.

Students should engage in writing at least 60 minutes each day. Teachers reported inadequate time was devoted to writing instruction, as the allotted time was only 30 minutes daily. On their surveys, teachers reported the writing block of time should be at least 60 minutes each day in order for instruction and practice to be meaningful. Brimi (2012) conducted a study involving five high school English teachers regarding their writing instruction. The teachers complained they did not have adequate time to teach writing, but believed they could do a better job if they had additional time dedicated to instruction in the area of writing. Lane (2008) stated that Graves maintained elementary students should write at least one hour daily on self-selected topics. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012), in an interview with writing experts, found that students

must engage in writing tasks every day. They maintained time spent on writing should be tripled. Additionally, Lane (2008) found if teachers do not have elementary students write at least one hour every day on topics of their own choosing, they are not even teaching writing.

From the responses of teachers in this study, one can conclude that resources used in teaching writing are vital to students' and teachers' success. These resources included writing models, mentor texts, and teacher collaboration. Routman (2012), Wood Ray (1999), and Diller (2005) advocate the use of notable literature as models for writing. They maintain as teachers read aloud to students, they should point out the various strategies skillful authors use to convey the intended messages in their writing. Anderson (2005) maintains student-written sentences, paragraphs, and essays can also be used as effective writing models. Anderson further asserts models and mentor texts are especially useful when read aloud to students as this practice allows students to experience fluency, the rhythm of language, and the structural patterns in language.

Availability of additional writing resources and the flexibility to use them affected teachers' writing instruction. For example, teachers responded they would *like to be able to use the English textbook for writing*; however, they maintain they have been told to *stick to our present program*. Teachers admitted they sometimes use their own money to purchase additional writing resources; even though, they are not allowed the flexibility to use them. Teachers are *digging to find what we need* to help students be successful writers.

Teacher collaboration could be a beneficial resource for writing instruction. McCarthy (2008) found teachers benefitted when they met in grade-level groups and across grade-level groups to develop a common language for writing and to reach a consensus about genres and topics to be taught.

The Internet was considered by five of the teachers as another important resource for writing ideas. Additionally, teachers documented students' experiences as sources for writing topics. Daisey (2009) maintained prior knowledge about the writing topic and interest in the writing topic provided the necessary motivation for students to write. Norman and Spencer (2005)

engaged in a study of 59 pre-service teachers and how they perceived themselves as writers. They found the teachers who viewed themselves positively as writers had been able to write on self-selected topics rather than teacher-directed ones. The researchers believed meaningful writing assignments should relate to the interests and backgrounds of the students. None of the teachers surveyed in this study reported students were given choices about their writing topics or were allowed to self-select their topics. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) found an environment conducive to writing benefitted the students, especially when they were given choices about writing topics and were allowed to use a variety of processes during writing tasks. For this reason, one can conclude that allowing students to write on self-selected topics may be a motivating factor in getting students to write.

Vocabulary development, grammar and spelling skills, and the writing process were important curricular aspects of effective writing. Portalupi and Fletcher (2004) maintain students must be given the tools necessary to develop an expanded vocabulary. They further contend “we want to develop in our students not merely a bigger vocabulary but also the ability to choose the word that says exactly what they mean” (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2004, p. 13). Culham (2003) maintains word choice is the language used by writers as they clarify and expand their ideas in writing. Additionally, word choice becomes more precise as we engage students in vocabulary development that is taught in context, rather than in isolation (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2004).

Grammar and spelling were important considerations in defining effective writing. The teachers reported they are required to teach grammar and spelling as separate and distinct subjects from writing. Quible and Griffin (2007) maintained teaching grammar as an isolated and distinct subject has not been effective at improving writing skills of students. They believed grammar should be taught in the context of writing and should be based on students’ needs. In the study by Brashears (2006), teachers asserted students’ success on the state writing test was due to providing instruction through grammar mini-lessons that were based on students’ needs diagnosed through their writing.

The teachers in the current study reported grammar instruction was provided, but was delivered in isolation. Culham (2003) and Hoyt and Therriault (2008) maintain spelling and grammar are important as they are the tools that give writing a polished effect. Quible and Griffin (2007) maintain spelling and grammar instruction is essential to effective writing; however, they found teaching grammar in isolation had only minimal effects on improving students' writing. They found students who were provided grammar instruction in the context of writing produced writing with fewer mechanical errors. Additionally, Culham (2003) contends grammar should be taught in the context of reading and writing.

Teaching and following the writing process is an essential component of any writing program. Writing experts contend fluency begins with direct and explicit instruction of the writing process which includes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing (Barksdale-Ladd & King, 2000; Calkins, 1994; Combs, 2012; Culham, 2003; Graves, 1994; Greely, 2003; Joshi, 2007; Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Routman, 2012; Singer & Shagoury, 2005; and Sitler, 1993). These researchers maintain the writing process approach is the framework that leads to effective writing. Throughout the writing process, teachers provide instruction based on students' needs diagnosed through their writing. Specific strategies are taught and modeled by teachers and practiced and applied by the students. Assignments are completed over time and are assessed based on content, craft, and conventions.

A majority of teachers reported being a poor reader would hinder writing achievement. Leograndis (2006) asserts that reading and writing are inseparable as reading is the creative center of a writer's life. Reading and writing are reciprocal processes (Gewertz, 2012; Harris, Graham, Friedland, & Laud, 2013; Jewel & Zintz, 1990; Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Marx & Harris, 2006; McCarthy, 2008). Students are influenced by the sounds and structures of language every time they read; therefore, teachers must encourage daily reading. Through daily reading experiences, students begin to understand what good writing looks like and sounds like. Likewise, Anderson (2005), author of *Mechanically Inclined*, stresses the importance of reading aloud to students.

Reading aloud to students allows them to experience fluency, the rhythm of language, and the structural patterns of language. Through these experiences, students begin to incorporate these words and patterns into their own writing. Additionally, Routman (2012) further asserts as we read aloud to students, we must draw attention to the various strategies skilled authors use in their writing to create the intended messages.

One area of concern about writing and the instruction of writing related to the actual *Writing to Win* curriculum. Teachers believed the program to be *somewhat effective* but not *totally effective*. Teachers maintained the program teaches the writing process approach which breaks the writing task into distinct and separate steps. *Writing to Win* teaches the students to brainstorm ideas and to revise their writing; although, revision strategies are not taught as evinced by one student who stated, “There is no sense in writing a paper just to turn around and write it again.” Furthermore, the revision strategies are grade specific which the teachers believe severely limits the students in revising their writing. The program also includes the use of rubrics as a way of providing expectations and feedback to students. One teacher stated, “We grade their writing using a rubric. We check off what the kids do well, but the mistakes in their writing are never addressed.” The teachers clearly are not involving students in the process of developing the rubrics; even though, one of the teachers stated, “Research tells us rubrics are more meaningful if the students have a part in developing them.” While *Writing to Win* contains a sentence-building component, the program does not teach paragraph structure. Additionally, the program uses graphic organizers; however, they are limited in number and in the degree of effectiveness based on the types of writing required in fifth grade. An effective writing curriculum would ensure student success in the area of writing and would help teachers become more effective teachers of writing.

The reading curriculum and the content areas of science and social studies are ideal places to turn to for writing ideas. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012), in an interview with seven authorities in the area of writing, found that writing across the curriculum was an effective way to

further engage students in writing. Additionally, Brashears (2006) and Brozo and Simpson (2005) found teachers saw the benefits of writing across the curriculum and how that practice improved student achievement in areas other than writing and engaged students in higher thinking and reasoning processes. Writing in the content areas also provided more time for writing practice.

From survey responses, one can conclude students must be taught writing strategies. Teachers indicated a typical writing lesson involved assigning students a writing topic and instructing them to write; however, these teachers documented they provided no direct instruction in writing. In fact, one teacher responded she graded papers while the students wrote. Singer and Shagoury (2005) contend students must be taught direct skills and strategies as they grow to be active readers, writers, and citizens. Teachers must assess where students are in their learning and then provide them meaningful instructional strategies and opportunities to practice them as they grow as writers and readers. Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, and McArthur (2003) found only 20% of teachers actually differentiated instruction for struggling writers.

Grisham and Wolsey (2012) engaged in a study involving eighth grade students, pre-service teachers, and veteran teachers who discussed elements of good writing and developed rubrics based on those elements. Teachers' expectations must be shared with the students, or they will not be able to meet them. Olson and Land (2008) found teachers of struggling students often fail to engage them in certain genres of writing because they believe the students are not academically capable of the task. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) concluded learning to write well is a long process that comes through teacher modeling, direct instruction, daily practice, and constructive feedback. Alber-Morgan, Hessler, and Konrad (2007) maintain students must have knowledge of teacher expectations before a writing assignment is begun. When expectations are known, students come closer to providing an acceptable product. Quible and Griffin (2007) similarly contend students should receive feedback during writing. They maintain teachers should identify and mark errors in writing "or students remain unaware of the magnitude of their writing

insufficiency and have no way of knowing what types of deficiencies need to be corrected. The result is they continue to make the same errors” (Quibble & Griffin, 2007, p. 34).

Spandel (2001) and Grisham and Wolsey (2005) conducted studies whereby students developed writing rubrics to be used in assessing their writing samples. Findings suggested students learn to write more effectively through meaningful evaluation. By designing and implementing the rubrics, students knew grading expectations before they submitted their papers for evaluation. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) asseverated feedback as an essential component in the assessment of learning. They concluded from their research that feedback should be constructive in nature, timely, and specific to a criterion.

Nine respondents also indicated a lack of effective instruction in writing as an impediment to achievement. Brashears (2006) conducted a study involving teachers’ perceptions regarding students’ scores on the Kentucky Writing Assessment. The teachers believed mediocre scores were the result of delayed instruction. They maintain writing instruction should begin in kindergarten and first grade in order to develop the prerequisite skills necessary for effective writing in successive grades. Additionally, the teachers contend writing instruction was delayed or dismissed in order to prepare for reading and math tests.

Lack of training was a common factor cited by some of the teachers in this current study. Brimi (2012), Gentry, McNeel, and Wallace-Nessler (2012), and Graves (1995) found teacher education programs failed to provide teacher candidates adequate instruction on how to teach writing composition; yet, those same programs provided specific courses designed to provide instruction in the areas of reading and math. Additionally, Grisham and Wolsey (2005) found that teacher candidates and veteran teachers reported a lack of confidence in teaching writing; although, they asserted they were confident in their readiness to teach reading. Grisham and Wolsey conducted a study in which students enrolled in a teacher education program were required to complete three literacy methods courses. Upon completion of the courses, the student-teachers believed they were better prepared to provide instruction in the area of writing as a result

of the direct instruction and the resources provided in the literacy courses. The student-teachers also reported their improved self-efficacy was due to the opportunities they had to engage students in the act of writing.

One concern teachers had regarding writing and the instruction of writing was the lack of training they received to properly implement *Writing to Win*. Teachers reported they had limited and sometimes untimely training on how to use the program in their classrooms. One teacher stated in response to her preparedness to teach *Writing to Win*, “I STRUGGLED – I mean I STRUGGLED. I didn’t even get to go to a training session until well into my second year here.” The teachers also shared there were certain components of the program, such as sentence-building, in which they had never received any training, but were held as *accountable* as those teachers who had received the training. Another teacher responded, “They might be just figuring it out on their own.”

Teachers also believed writing should serve a purpose. Grisham and Wolsey (2005) believed motivation to write increases when students’ writing serves an important purpose and is not merely for a grade. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) found writing for real audiences and for authentic purposes promoted student engagement and motivation.

Failure to motivate students and ineffective instruction were identified as weaknesses of writing teachers. Alber-Morgan, Hessler, and Konrad (2007) maintain student motivation increases as writing proficiency improves. There were three teachers who reported they did not know how to teach writing and were not benefitting students in this area of the curriculum. These teachers also indicated they had requested training and/or additional resources in the area of writing; however, they stated they had never received either. Strict adherence to the writing curriculum and failure to share writing expectations with students were listed as additional weaknesses as teachers of writers.

Teachers’ perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing were further ascertained through interviews with some of the teachers. Teachers expressed positive remarks

about writing such as, *I enjoy writing and I think my enthusiasm for writing is known by my students. They know that I consider it important.* Another teacher participant stated, “I am very passionate about writing, eager to read and share ideas with students about different writing styles.” A third teacher responded, “I love writing and I love teaching writing.” Similarly, most of the teachers who were interviewed believed they were effective writing teachers who are *hard-working*. On the other hand, one teacher when asked how she would characterize herself as a teacher of writing responded, “If you are talking about following Writing to Win, I am not very effective.” Based on the interview responses, five themes emerged as common concerns teachers had about writing and the instruction of writing: the present writing curriculum, training, writing schedule, writing resources, and the value placed on writing.

Teachers’ perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing were also determined through use of a Likert-scale survey. Responses on the survey indicated teachers had positive perceptions about writing. Based on the findings of the teacher surveys and the teacher interviews, the researcher is justified in concluding teachers have positive perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing.

Research Question 2 addressed students’ attitudes about writing. Based on this study, few students like writing. Less than 40% of respondents reported they liked writing. Students maintained writing allowed them to express their feelings, share personal experiences, demonstrate knowledge, and be creative. The students also expressed they enjoyed writing more when they could choose their own writing topics. Brown, Morrell, and Rowlands (2011) conducted a study involving 27 participants in grades 4 through 12 who attended a writing camp. Initially, the participants completed a 10-item Likert-scale survey designed to determine their attitudes about writing. During the camp, students engaged in writing activities as members of developmentally appropriate groups. Teachers modeled the various types of writing before the students were expected to complete a similar writing task. Finally, upon completion of the camp the same Likert-scale survey was again administered to the participants. The results of the survey

demonstrated students' positive attitudes about writing when they were given a choice of writing topics, when they were given the necessary tools to guide them as writers, and when they were given authentic reasons to write.

Additionally, Wiseman (2011) conducted a study to determine ways students could use poetry writing. Wiseman instructed the students to draw upon their experiences to identify writing topics, use creative language to express their thoughts and feelings, and to write and revise their work. Findings indicated students were able to use poetry writing to communicate their ideas to others when they could not verbalize them directly. Poetry writing allowed students an avenue to express their fears and their strengths. The workshop allowed glimpses into students' thinking that allowed the teacher to support them emotionally, socially, and academically. The students maintained the writing experience was positive because their teachers cared about them and made their learning relevant. As a result of the workshop, students reported positive attitudes and engaged in more writing activities.

On the other hand, the majority of students in this study maintained writing was boring, physically painful, time consuming, and lengthy. They also reported they often did not have ideas as writing topics, especially when topics were teacher-assigned. Additionally, several respondents reported that writing created stress for them. Orlinghouse, Zheng, and Morlock (2012) conducted a study and found that motivation played an important role in student engagement and success in writing. Based on my study, students preferred writing on a variety of topics. They preferred writing about personal experiences, family, imaginary characters and places, sports, animals, friends, books and movies, and problems. The students also preferred writing on informational topics that related to science and social studies. Halawah (2011) conducted a study to determine factors that influence students' motivation to learn. An important factor students cited as motivational was the teacher's help in finding personal relevance in assignments, indicating students were motivated to write when topics were relevant to the students. Similarly, Slade

(2010) maintained literacy achievement and students' attitudes toward writing can improve as students actively engage in writing tasks that are relevant and authentic.

Additionally, the majority of students did not view themselves as writers. Mascle (2013) maintains many individuals are not confident in their writing skills and believes writing apprehension is a barrier to the development of effective writing skills. Mascle contends self-efficacy is the primary indicator of motivation and writing performance. He believes self-efficacy is positively influenced by active engagement in meaningful writing tasks within a supportive environment, by the use of appropriate models that reflect the writing task, by the application of constructive feedback, and by the reduction of stress. Mascle further maintains discussing physical and emotional responses to stress informs students that writing apprehension is common and can be reduced or resolved over time with the aid of supportive teachers and peers.

Students shared a variety of dislikes they had about writing. They maintained they dislike writing on teacher-assigned topics, and they do not like to revise and edit their writing because *there is no sense in writing a paper just to turn around and copy it over*. The respondents shared in their surveys they never make any changes in their writing between the first draft and the final copy. Teachers are not instructing students on effective revision strategies. If they were, the students would see the difference revision makes in their writing. Students also shared the part of writing they enjoy the least is content area writing because they can never remember the facts about the topics, and the teachers do not allow us to *use our textbook as a resource*. Other participants indicated they dislike trying to organize their ideas in ways that make their writing fluent.

I realized students are willing to try various writing strategies when they are explained and shared in a positive and supportive learning environment. Providing feedback through conferences allowed the students to see the weak areas in their writing. In order to help students overcome their weaknesses and produce well-written pieces of writing, the researcher sometimes needed additional resources that were not a part of the *Writing to Win* curriculum. This was

particularly evident when the researcher sought more specific graphic organizers and models of writing or mentor texts for students to use as guides during writing activities.

I witnessed firsthand through interviews and observations, a small number of students were excited about writing and were successful when given the necessary tools and support. This became evident as I heard comments such as, *I hope you like my writing; That was neat! I'll go work on my paper;* and *Gosh, where have these graphic organizers been all my life? This is so easy.* On the other hand, there were students who were more reluctant writers. This was poignantly demonstrated through students' comments such as *do I have to; this is all I can write; and man, this ain't fair.*

Students enjoy writing when they are allowed to write on self-selected topics because they sometimes lack knowledge necessary to write effectively on teacher-selected topics. Students also reported they like writing the final draft most because that is when they are able to see how their ideas and efforts produce writing they *feel good about.* Other students like writing the final draft because that means we are *about finished with the assignment.*

I noticed several students had even greater difficulty with writing ideas. This was particularly evident when they were required to write on teacher-assigned topics and when they either did not use their graphic organizers or did not have the appropriate organizer for the particular genre of writing. This became apparent when a student submitted three sentences as a complete assignment. One student turned in his paper with only one sentence which read, *I can't think of anything good to write.* Similarly, another participant wrote rows and rows of squiggly lines, but not a single word. There was an occurrence in which one student had no writing ideas because he had *never been on a vacation.* Because the student had never personally experienced a family vacation, the researcher had to modify the teacher-assigned topic for this student.

Through interviews and observations, I was able to identify students who were beginning to recognize and understand fluent writing, as well as novel ways authors used words and techniques to help them create pictures in the readers' minds. This was illustrated when a student

remarked about a fellow student's writing, "Her writing just flows. It is just like you pick up a book and start reading a story. It just makes sense, and it is so easy to follow." Additionally, a student was able to identify figurative language in a class read-aloud novel. This created an opportunity for me to teach a mini-lesson on similes and metaphors and to then have students revise a former draft of their writing by including similes and metaphors.

I was able to identify several students who lacked self-efficacy. This realization was substantiated by comments such as *it ain't good* and *I just want to write like her*. Another student stated, "I don't have anything good to write." A lack of self-efficacy was also noticed when Student #17 kept questioning Student #8 about her writing ideas before she would begin writing. This behavior continued until eventually I had to intervene. Once the student was reassured that her writing demonstrated personal growth, she stopped the negative behavior.

As a participant-observer, I decided to write with the students as they drafted a personal narrative. She also sat in a student desk among the class. I immediately noticed the students were much more engaged in the writing task than usual. They wrote much longer and more sophisticated narrative accounts than previously. The students began questioning me with interrogative comments such as, *Are you going to revise your writing? Are you going to read your paper to the class?* This question prompted a painful memory for me as I recalled her fifth-grade teacher *rolled her eyes* in response to a writing homework assignment. At that moment, I poignantly realized how derogatory comments and negative reactions can leave writers with painful scars they will never forget.

During the final days of gathering data, students were asked to include in their journals a response as to how writing in the fifth grade differed from writing in the fourth grade. Based on their responses, students agreed that fifth grade writing had been more challenging as they described writing as *harder*. Students maintained the fifth grade teachers *expected more* from them. The students reported they were held *more accountable* for writing skills that had been

taught. You *pushed us hard*. Fifth grade writing *wasn't always easy*; however, the students documented they *felt prepared* for writing in the sixth grade.

Near the end of this research project, students were given their pre-test narratives and were asked to revise them. As the papers were returned, I heard the following comments from students:

- “Look at the run-on sentences!”
- “I didn’t even indent.”
- “I wrote only one paragraph.”
- “In the beginning, I did not understand how to use the graphic organizer.”
- “My sentences are so choppy.”
- “I see three misspelled words.”
- “I bet the teacher had a hard time trying to understand this. I’m having a hard time with it myself.”
- “My paper doesn’t have many details.”
- “I didn’t even complete the graphic organizer.”

Based on the findings from the student surveys, student interviews, observations, and participant-observations, I am justified in concluding the majority of student participants have negative attitudes about writing. However, the responses of students as they received their pre-test narratives to revise clearly indicated students had learned important concepts related to writing. Furthermore, based on their post-test scores, students had learned to apply those concepts in their own writing.

Research Question 3 addressed the quality of students’ writing samples based on *Writing to Win* instruction and *Writing to Win* instruction plus additional instructional strategies which included the use of graphic organizers, the teaching of sentence structure, and the practice of using mentor texts and writing samples as models of effective writing. The null hypothesis stated students receiving instruction based on the *Writing to Win* curriculum plus additional instructional

strategies will demonstrate no increased achievement in the area of writing as compared to the group of students who receive instruction based only on the *Writing to Win* curriculum. To evaluate the hypothesis for research question three, a two-sample *t* test assuming equal variances was conducted on the pre-test and post-test scores of the control and experimental groups. Pre-test scores for the two groups did not differ significantly,  $t(32) = -0.059, p > 0.05$ . Post-test scores for the two groups differed significantly,  $t(32) = -5.060, p < 0.05$ , thus rejecting the null hypothesis. Use of graphic organizers and mentor texts improved students' writing considerably. Their writing samples were more organized and logically sequenced ideas were supported with relevant details. Their writing consisted of an introduction, body, and conclusion. Additionally, instruction in and use of varied and advanced sentence structure improved the fluency of students' writing. A variety of sentence lengths and structures added style and clarity to their writing. Furthermore, the use of mentor texts as teaching aides resulted in writing that was more genre specific.

### *Conclusions*

Findings from the teacher survey (open-ended and Likert items) and the teacher interviews revealed the majority of teachers in this study had positive perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing. Two-thirds, or 10 out of 15 teacher participants considered themselves effective writers, and 11 out of 15 teachers maintained they were effective or moderately effective teachers of writers.

Even though teachers had positive perceptions about writing, they did not fully support the *Writing to Win* curriculum. Teachers reported the program did not include a component for teaching paragraph structure. Additionally, *Writing to Win* did not consist of a variety of graphic organizers specific to the modes of writing required of fifth-grade learners in Georgia. The major problem most teachers had with the writing curriculum was the schedule of writing.

Teacher participants in this study reported following the schedule of writing as delineated in the *Writing to Win* program would result in a final writing product every 6 weeks. Teachers

argued students should engage in process writing on a daily basis, resulting in a completed assignment each week. Additionally, teachers complained they only had a 30 minute block of time in which to teach writing. They argued they would be more effective teachers and students would be more successful writers if at least 1 hour daily was devoted to writing, as is common for the instruction of reading and math. Teachers also argued they had not been adequately trained to provide instruction in the area of writing.

Some of the participants complained their teacher training programs in college had not provided any instruction on how to teach students to write, even though they were required to take courses that taught them how to teach reading and math. Teacher participants in this study also maintained they had not received adequate or timely training in how to implement *Writing to Win* in their classrooms. Some of the teachers believed they needed additional training or professional development in the area of writing in order to be more effective teachers of writers. Additionally, a lack of available resources to improve instruction was a concern of teachers.

Teacher participants in this study cited they needed additional resources to augment writing instruction. Teachers believed the newly adopted Language Arts series was an excellent resource, but they had been told to follow the *Writing to Win* curriculum. Even though teachers were to follow the established curriculum, they reported they often purchased additional resources with personal funds in an effort to provide themselves with some useful teaching tools and to provide students more meaningful instruction.

Of particular interest, several teachers responded they were often frustrated with teaching writing. They maintained students did not possess the foundational skills of writing necessary to be successful at the fifth grade level. Furthermore, other teachers reported students did not retain information they were previously taught regarding writing which meant they had to start with basic instruction each year. The findings may be contributed to the fact that writing is not valued in this school. Perhaps writing serves no purpose in these classrooms other than a task whereby

the teacher can assign two mandatory grades each week. In other words, instruction and practice in the area of writing have not been meaningful.

Findings from the student surveys, student interviews, observations, and documents indicated the majority of student participants in this study had negative attitudes about writing. Sixty-two per cent of student participants documented they did not like writing, and 64% of them did not think of themselves as writers. Students maintained:

- “Writing was boring.”
- “They had no writing ideas on teacher-assigned topics.”
- “Writing caused pain in their hands.”
- “Writing took too much time.”
- “Writing stressed them out.”
- “They were required to write too much.”

Students provided a variety of topics on which they would enjoy writing; however, they shared teachers usually assigned the writing topics. This practice severely limits students because there are instances in which these students have no personal experiences with the writing topic. Students should write on topics that are of interest to them as this is when writing becomes relevant. Engaging in learning tasks that are relevant to the learner also serves to increase self-efficacy which is so important to any area of study. Students must believe they have the ability to complete a learning task.

Fifty-seven percent of student participants also reported they did not like to share their writing with others. Students maintained they did not enjoy talking in front of other people, and others sometimes made fun of their writing. Other students contended their writing made no sense, or their writing was boring. A small number of students shared they did not want others to know their thoughts.

When students were asked what would help them become better writers, the most popular response was *believe in myself*. Self-efficacy is positively influenced by active engagement in

meaningful writing tasks (Mascle, 2013). Several students documented in their surveys they did not mind sharing their writing if they had *put effort* into the assignment. Failure to put effort into an assignment is an indication the student is not meaningfully engaged in the task. The assignment does not serve an authentic purpose; in fact, Grisham and Wolsey (2005) stated, “Students’ perceptions about the importance of a task is a factor in how engaged the students are in the task.”

### *Implications for Future Practice*

Teachers in the current study have positive perceptions about writing and the instruction of writing. They realize the connection between reading and writing and understand effective instruction in both areas is paramount. Administrators and curriculum coordinators mandate the *Writing to Win* curriculum and the writing process approach to instruction; however, they are not adequately providing the resources and training to do either. Administrators and curriculum personnel must acknowledge the needs of teachers and provide the necessary tools for them to effectively deliver instruction in the area of writing. Additionally, administrators must allow teachers some flexibility in their teaching and pacing of instruction. Of equal importance, teachers need to know administrators value writing and support them in their efforts to teach students how to become effective writers.

Teachers reported students do not have the foundational skills necessary for effective writing when they enter fifth grade. *Writing to Win* instruction begins in third grade; however, there might possibly be merit in beginning this instruction in kindergarten or first grade. By the time students reached fifth grade, they would be familiar with the vocabulary and writing procedures common to the program.

With the strong negative responses by students about writing, teachers, curriculum personnel, and administrators must take a serious look at the writing curriculum, as well as what they are expecting of teachers who provide instruction in the area of writing. They must constantly seek ways to get students excited about writing since writing skills are even more

important today than previously. Teachers maintain they should not be held so rigidly to a curriculum map and to a program. According to Lane (2008), teachers must be given the flexibility of teaching in ways that are best for the students.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Writing is a required subject for students who attend school in the state of Georgia. Likewise, a state assessment is mandated by the *NCLB Act* (LaMorte, 2005). With the inculcation of the GPS, the school curriculum became more rigorous and provided teachers a way to assess the level of student learning. The ailing economy in this country created conditions which required a drastic reduction in educational spending. Additionally, advanced technology created an urgent need for effective writers. For these reasons, further research is recommended in the area of writing.

A study with a larger population of teachers and students may prove beneficial. Inclusion of content area teachers in the study may also be prudent. Using graphic organizers, teaching sentence structure, and utilizing mentor texts as writing models were strategies used to augment the *Writing to Win* curriculum in this study. Further research using different writing strategies would be of interest.

Effective writing is an essential skill in today's global economy. Former Senator Bob Kerrey, in an interview with Greely (2003), best summed up this notion as he stated:

We must learn to write in order to participate in the range of experiences available to us as human beings, including our spiritual lives, our economic success, and our social networks. Neither our democracy nor our personal freedoms will survive unless we as citizens take the time and make the effort needed to learn how to write. (p. A10)

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APPENDIX A

Student Essays

### Essay 3- My Happiest Day

Well...my happiest day was when we had all went to Panama City. Well the Reason that it was my happiest day was that we had all went as a happy family and it was fun really fun and I had seen this one rise where they had tool these two girls and they took then all the way in the air and took them back down. But whenever we got there the water was so beautiful and okay when we got there we had never done this before we got in the water. Dad always that he would never get in the water but he did and my oldest sister she said that she wouldn't but she did. And whenever we did get in the water we kept on seeing helicopters flyer over our head and there was a lot of people in the water.

### Essay 4- A Happy Day

I am tell you what made me happy. This is what all things made me happy when I wus going to get a new game. Then what made me happy when I got a my go cart and a new game it was call a tbox 360 and wus fun play it sometime. Next what made me happy wus when me and my Dad took me fishing on summer and it wus fun. Other we got done fishing we when to get something to ear we stop by Piazz Hut and we ate. Last me and my Dad when to pick up my aunt and we look at some house on my B day.

## APPENDIX B

### Developmental Stage/Scoring Guidelines

Writing samples produced by students at these stages exhibit most or all of the following characteristics:

#### Stage 1 – Emerging Writer

- Little or no evidence of topic development, organization, and/or detail
- Little awareness of audience or writing task
- Errors in surface features that prevent the reader from understanding the writer’s message

#### Stage 2 – Developing Writer

- A topic that is beginning to be developed
- The beginning of an organizational plan
- Limited awareness of the audience and/or the task
- Simple word choice and simple sentence patterns
- Errors in surface features that interfere with communication

#### Stage 3 – Focusing Writer

- A clear topic although development of the topic is incomplete
- An apparent plan with loosely organized ideas
- A sense of audience and/or task
- Minimal variety of vocabulary and sentence patterns
- Errors in surface features that interrupt the flow of communication

#### Stage 4 – Experimenting Writer

- A clear and developed topic although development may be uneven
- A clear plan with a beginning, middle, and end; the beginning and/or ending may be clumsy
- Evidence of writing for an audience
- Evidence of experimentation with language and sentence patterns
- Word combinations and word choice may be novel
- Errors in surface features that may interrupt the flow of communication

#### Stage 5 – Engaging Writer

- A topic that is well-developed
- A plan with a clear beginning, middle, and end; organization sustains the writer’s purpose
- Audience awareness techniques that engage the reader
- Effective use of varied language and sentence patterns
- Errors in surface features that do not interfere with the reader’s understanding of the writer’s message

#### Stage 6 – Extending Writer

- A topic that is fully elaborated with rich details
- Organization that sustains the writer’s purpose and moves the reader through the piece
- Audience awareness techniques that engage and sustain the reader’s interest
- Creative and novel language
- Errors in surface features that do not interfere with the reader’s understanding of the writer’s message

## APPENDIX C

### Commendation and Recommendation Menu

### Commendations

1. Your ability to write your ideas is developing.
2. The main idea of your paper is clear to your reader.
3. The details you included helped me understand your ideas.
4. Your great beginning made me want to hear more of your story.
5. Your paper demonstrated a novel approach to the assigned topic.
6. You know how to write different types of sentences so that you keep your reader's interest.
7. Your use of descriptive language helps the reader visualize your story.
8. Your paper was effectively organized.
9. Your paper was well developed and demonstrated control of surface features.
10. Your paper was clearly organized and fully developed with rich details.

### Recommendations

1. The topic of your paper is not clear. Before you begin writing, decide upon a main idea and the information you need to develop the main idea.
2. Try to choose and develop one main story, instead of writing about one idea after another.
3. Your writing loses focus because it strays from the topic. Try to stay with the same topic.
4. Organize your paper so the reader can follow your ideas. Try to rearrange your ideas so that you have a clear beginning, middle, and ending.
5. When you finish writing the first draft of your paper, reread to see where you need to leave out details that are not about the main idea.
6. Your paper does not tell a complete story. Think of all the events, actions, thoughts, and characters needed to tell a complete story. Try to fill in missing information to help your reader understand what happens.
7. Your paper would be better if it did not stop so suddenly. Try to include an ending.

8. To make your paper more interesting, try to use a richer vocabulary to help your reader feel, hear, and see what happens.
9. To make your paper more interesting to read, use a variety of sentences. Use sentences that vary in length, type, and structure.
10. Your paper was a pleasure to read. Continue to write effective stories.

APPENDIX D

Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment: Scoring Rubric

**Domain 1: IDEAS.** The degree to which the writer establishes a controlling idea and elaborates the main point with examples, illustrations, facts, or details that are appropriate to the assigned genre.

Components

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Controlling Idea/Focus Development</li> <li>•Supporting Ideas Completeness</li> <li>•Relevance of Detail</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Depth of</li> <li>•Sense of</li> <li>•Awareness of Genre</li> </ul> |
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| 5 | <p><b>Full command of the components of Ideas. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Fully developed controlling idea that addresses all aspects of the assigned writing task</li> <li>•Consistent focus on the assigned topic, genre, and purpose</li> <li>•Supporting ideas are fully elaborated throughout the paper and relevant to the writer’s topic, assigned genre of writing, and audience</li> <li>•Response contains specific examples and details that fully address reader concerns and perspectives</li> </ul>  |
| 4 | <p><b>Consistent control of the components of Ideas. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Well developed controlling idea that addresses the assigned writing task</li> <li>•Consistent focus on the assigned topic, genre, and purpose</li> <li>•Supporting ideas and elaboration are relevant to the writer’s topic and assigned genre of writing</li> <li>•Response contains specific examples and details that address reader concerns and perspectives</li> </ul>   |
| 3 | <p><b>Sufficient control of the components of Ideas. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Developed controlling idea that addresses the assigned writing task</li> <li>•Generally consistent focus on the assigned topic, genre, and purpose</li> <li>•Most supporting ideas are developed and relevant to the writer’s topic and assigned genre of writing</li> <li>•Some parts of the paper are well developed, while other parts of the paper are only partially developed</li> </ul>   |
| 2 | <p><b>Minimal control of the components of Ideas. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Minimally developed controlling idea that addresses some aspect of the assigned writing topic</li> <li>•Limited focus on the assigned topic, genre, or purpose</li> <li>•Supporting ideas are general and/or under-developed</li> <li>•Some ideas may be partially developed, while others are simply listed without development</li> <li>•Response lacks sufficient information to provide a sense of completeness</li> <li>•Some points/details may be irrelevant or inappropriate for the assigned topic, audience, and genre</li> </ul> |
| 1 | <p><b>Lack of control of the components of Ideas. The writing is characterized by the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•May announce the topic, but a controlling idea is not established</li> <li>•Little or no focus on the assigned topic, genre, and/or purpose</li> </ul>   |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Development is lacking due to brevity of the response or unclear supporting ideas</li> <li>•Majority of details are irrelevant or the response contains insufficient writing to determine competence in Ideas</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Domain 2: ORGANIZATION.</b> The degree to which the writer’s ideas are arranged in a clear order and the overall structure of the response is consistent with the assigned genre. |   |
| <u>Components</u>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Overall Plan Ideas</li> <li>•Introduction/Body/Conclusion Strategies</li> <li>•Sequence of Ideas</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Grouping of</li> <li>•Genre-Specific</li> <li>•Transitions</li> </ul> |

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| <b>5</b> | <p><b>Full command of the components of Organization. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Overall organizational strategy or structure (introduction, body, and conclusion) is appropriate to the writer’s topic and the assigned genre of writing</li> <li>•Logical and appropriate sequencing of ideas across parts of the paper</li> <li>•Introduction engages and sets the stage, and conclusion provides a sense of closure</li> <li>•Logical grouping of ideas</li> <li>•Uses effective and varied transitional elements to link all elements of the response: parts of the paper, ideas, paragraphs, and sentences</li> </ul> |
| <b>4</b> | <p><b>Consistent control of the components of Organization. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Overall organizational strategy or structure (introduction, body, and conclusion) is appropriate to the writer’s ideas and assigned genre of writing</li> <li>•Logical sequencing of ideas across parts of the paper</li> <li>•Introduction sets the stage, and conclusion ends the piece of writing without repetition</li> <li>•Related ideas are grouped together</li> <li>•Varied transitions link parts of the paper</li> </ul>   |
| <b>3</b> | <p><b>Sufficient control of the components of Organization. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Overall organizational strategy (introduction, body, and conclusion) is generally appropriate to the writer’s ideas and purpose of the genre</li> <li>•Generally clear sequence of ideas</li> <li>•Introduction is appropriate to the writer’s topic and the conclusion is clear</li> <li>•Related ideas generally grouped together</li> <li>•Transitions link parts of the paper</li> </ul>   |
| <b>2</b> | <p><b>Minimal control of the components of Organization. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Organizing strategy is formulaic and/or inappropriate to the assigned genre</li> <li>•Minimal evidence of sequencing</li> <li>•May lack an introduction or a conclusion or include an ineffective introduction or conclusion</li> <li>•Unrelated ideas are grouped together</li> <li>•Limited use of transitions (transitions may be formulaic, repetitive, ineffective, or overused)</li> <li>•Demonstration of competence limited by the brevity of the response</li> </ul>   |
|          | <b>Lack of control of the components of Organization. The writing is characterized by</b>  |

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| <b>1</b> | <p><b>the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•No evidence of an organizing strategy</li> <li>•Unclear sequence of ideas/ideas are not arranged in a meaningful order</li> <li>•Lacks an introduction and/or conclusion</li> <li>•Lack of transitions or inappropriate transitions</li> <li>•Insufficient writing to determine competence in Organization</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Domain 3: STYLE.</b> The degree to which the writer controls language to engage the reader</p>                      |   |
| <p><u>Components</u></p>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Word Choice</li> <li>•Audience Awareness<br/>the Genre</li> <li>•Voice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sentence Variety</li> <li>•Strategies Appropriate to</li> </ul> |

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| <b>5</b> | <p><b>Full command of the components of Style. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Carefully crafted phrases or sentences create a sustained tone that engages the reader</li> <li>•Varied, precise, and engaging language that is appropriate to the assigned genre</li> <li>•Sustained attention to the audience throughout the paper</li> <li>•Consistent and appropriate voice that is sustained throughout the response</li> <li>•A variety of sentence lengths, structures, and beginnings</li> <li>•A variety of genre-appropriate strategies engage the reader</li> </ul> |
| <b>4</b> | <p><b>Consistent control of the components of Style. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Language and tone are consistent with the writer’s purpose and appropriate to the assigned genre</li> <li>•Word choice is precise and engaging</li> <li>•Attention to audience in the introduction, body, and conclusion</li> <li>•Consistent voice</li> <li>•Sentences vary in length and structure</li> <li>•Some genre-appropriate strategies to engage the reader</li> </ul>   |
| <b>3</b> | <p><b>Sufficient control of the components of Style. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Language and tone are generally consistent with the writer’s purpose and appropriate to the assigned genre</li> <li>•Word choice is generally engaging with occasional lapses into simple and ordinary language</li> <li>•Awareness of audience demonstrated in the introduction, body, and conclusion</li> <li>•Writer’s voice is clear and discernable</li> <li>•Some variation in sentence length and structure</li> <li>•May include some genre-appropriate strategies</li> </ul>    |
| <b>2</b> | <p><b>Minimal control of the components of Style. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Language and tone are uneven (appropriate in some parts of the response, but flat throughout most of the response)</li> <li>•Word choice is simple, ordinary, and/or repetitive</li> <li>•Limited awareness of audience</li> <li>•Minimal, inconsistent or indistinct voice</li> <li>•Little variation in sentence length and structure</li> <li>•Demonstration of competence limited by the brevity of the response</li> </ul>   |

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| 1 | <p><b>Lack of control of the components of Style. The writing is characterized by the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Language and tone are flat and/or inappropriate to the task and reader</li> <li>•Word choice is inaccurate, imprecise, and/or confusing</li> <li>•Little or no attention to audience</li> <li>•Writer’s voice is not apparent</li> <li>•Lack of sentence variety</li> <li>•Insufficient writing to determine competence in Style</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Domain 4: CONVENTIONS.</b> The degree to which the writer demonstrates control of sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. <i>Note: In general, sentence formation and usage are weighted more heavily than mechanics in determining overall conventions score.</i></p> |                               |           |
|  | <u>Components</u>             |           |
| <u>Sentence Formation</u>  | <u>Usage</u>                  |           |
| <u>Mechanics</u>   |                               |           |
| •correctness<br>punctuation  | •subject-verb agreement       | •internal |
| •clarity of meaning  | •standard word forms          | •spelling |
| •simple, complex, and<br>paragraph breaks  | •possessives                  |           |
| compound sentences   | •contractions                 |           |
| •capitalization  |                               |           |
| •end punctuation   | •pronoun-antecedent agreement |           |

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| 5 | <p><b>Full command of the components of Conventions. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Clear and correct simple, compound, and complex sentences with correct end punctuation</li> <li>•Correct usage in a variety of contexts</li> <li>•Correct mechanics in a variety of contexts</li> <li>•Errors do not interfere with meaning</li> </ul>   |
| 4 | <p><b>Consistent control of the components of Conventions. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Correct simple, compound, and complex sentences with correct end punctuation</li> <li>•Correct usage with some variety of instances but not in all elements</li> <li>•Correct mechanics with some variety of instances but not in all elements</li> <li>•Errors do not interfere with meaning</li> </ul> |
| 3 | <p><b>Sufficient control of the components of Conventions. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Simple sentences formed correctly; some compound and/or complex sentences with occasional errors</li> <li>•Generally correct usage with some errors</li> <li>•Generally correct mechanics with some errors</li> <li>•Few errors interfere with meaning</li> </ul>  |
| 2 | <p><b>Minimal control of the components of Conventions. The writing is characterized by most or all of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Minimal control of the three components of conventions or one component may be strong while the other two are weak</li> <li>•Sentence structure is awkward and/or end punctuation may be missing or incorrect</li> <li>•May have frequent errors in usage and/or mechanics</li> </ul>                       |

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|----------|--|
|          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Some errors may interfere with meaning</li> <li>•Demonstration of competence limited by brevity of the response</li> </ul>   |
| <b>1</b> | <p><b>Lack of control of the components of Conventions. The writing is characterized by the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Frequent sentence fragments, run-ons, and incorrect sentences</li> <li>•End punctuation incorrect or lacking</li> <li>•May contain frequent and severe errors in both usage and mechanics</li> <li>•Errors may interfere with or obscure meaning</li> <li>•Insufficient writing to determine competence in Conventions</li> </ul> |

APPENDIX E

Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment Descriptive Statements

**Ideas****I = 4.5 or 5**

The paper contained a fully developed controlling idea that was consistently focused on the assigned topic, genre, and purpose and addressed all aspects of the assigned task. Supporting ideas were relevant to the topic, genre, and audience and were fully elaborated throughout the response. The response contained specific examples and details that fully addressed reader concerns and perspectives.

**I = 3.5 or 4**

The paper contained a well-developed controlling idea that was consistently focused on the assigned topic, genre, and purpose and addressed the assigned task. Supporting ideas were relevant to the topic and genre. The response contained specific examples and details that addressed reader concerns and perspectives.

**I = 2.5 or 3**

The paper contained a developed controlling idea with a generally consistent focus on the assigned topic and purpose and addressed the assigned task. Supporting ideas were relevant to the topic, genre, and purpose. Some parts of the paper were well-developed, but other parts were only partially developed. There was sufficient information to provide a sense of completeness and address some reader concerns and perspectives.

**I = 1.5 or 2**

The paper contained a minimally developed controlling idea with a limited focus on the assigned topic, genre, and purpose and addressed some aspect of the assigned task. Supporting ideas were general, and/or undeveloped. Some ideas were partially developed while others were listed. The response lacked sufficient information (due to brevity or repetition) to provide a sense of completeness. Some details were irrelevant or inappropriate to the assigned topic, audience, and genre.

**I = 1**

A controlling idea was not established although the writer may have announced a topic. There was little or no focus on the assigned topic, genre, or purpose. The majority of details were irrelevant. Development was lacking due to the brevity of the response or unclear supporting ideas.

**Organization****O = 4.5 or 5**

The overall organizational plan was appropriate to the writer's ideas and assigned genre. Ideas were logically and appropriately sequenced within paragraphs and across parts of the paper. The introduction set the stage, and the conclusion provided a sense of closure. Ideas were grouped logically. Varied and effective transitional elements were used to link all elements of the response.

**O = 3.5 or 4**

The overall organizational plan was appropriate to the writer's ideas and assigned genre. Ideas were logically sequenced across parts of the paper. The introduction set the stage, and the conclusion ended the piece of writing without repetition. Related ideas were grouped together. Varied transitional elements were used to link parts of the paper.

**O = 2.5 or 3**

The overall organizational plan was generally appropriate to the writer's ideas and assigned genre. There was a generally clear sequence of ideas. The introduction was appropriate, and the conclusion was clear. Related ideas were generally grouped together. Transitions were used to link parts of the paper.

**O = 1.5 or 2**

The organizational plan was formulaic and/or inappropriate to the assigned genre. There was minimal evidence of sequencing. The paper had an ineffective introduction or conclusion. Unrelated ideas were grouped together. Transitions were formulaic, repetitive, or ineffective. Demonstration of the writer's competence was limited by the brevity of the response.

**O = 1**

There was no evidence of an organizational plan. The sequence of ideas was unclear. The paper lacked an introduction and/or conclusion. Ideas were not arranged in a meaningful order. Transitions were lacking or inappropriate. There was insufficient writing (due to brevity or copying the prompt) to determine competence in Organization.

**Style**

**S = 4.5 or 5**

Carefully crafted phrases and sentences created a sustained tone. Varied, precise, and engaging language was used throughout the response. Figurative or technical language was used for rhetorical effect. Sustained attention to the audience was demonstrated throughout the paper. A consistent and appropriate voice was used throughout the response. A variety of sentence lengths, structures, and beginnings were used. A variety of genre appropriate strategies engaged the reader.

**S = 3.5 or 4**

Language and tone were consistent with the writer's purpose and assigned genre. Word choice was precise and engaging. Attention to the audience was demonstrated in the introduction, body, and conclusion. The writer's voice was consistent. Sentences were varied in length and structure. Some genre appropriate strategies were used to engage the reader.

**S = 2.5 or 3**

Language and tone were generally consistent with the writer's purpose and assigned genre. Word choice was generally engaging with lapses into simple and ordinary language. Awareness of audience was demonstrated introduction, body, or conclusion. The writer's voice was clear and

discernable. There was some variation in sentence length and structure. Demonstration of the writer's competence was limited by the brevity of the response.

**S = 1.5 or 2**

Language and tone were uneven (appropriate in some parts but not in others). Word choice was simple, ordinary, and/or repetitive. Awareness of audience was limited. The writer's voice was minimal, inconsistent, or indistinct. There was little variation in sentence length and structure. Demonstration of competence was limited by the brevity of the response.

**S = 1**

Language and tone were flat or inappropriate to the assigned task. Word choice was inaccurate, imprecise, and/or confusing. There was little or no attention to the audience. The writer's voice was not apparent. Sentences were not varied. There was insufficient writing to determine competence in Style.

**Conventions**

**C = 4.5 or 5**

Simple, compound, and complex sentences were clear and correct with correct end punctuation. Usage and mechanics were correct in a variety of contexts. Errors were infrequent in all components and did not interfere with meaning.

**C = 3.5 or 4**

Simple, compound, or complex sentences were correct with correct end punctuation. Usage and mechanics were consistently correct with few errors in any component.

**C = 2.5 or 3**

Simple sentences were generally correct with generally correct end punctuation. There were some errors in complex and compound sentences. Usage and mechanics were generally correct with some errors. Few errors interfered with meaning.

**C = 1.5 or 2**

Minimal control was demonstrated in sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. Sentence structure was awkward, and end punctuation was missing or incorrect. There were frequent errors in usage and mechanics which interfered with meaning. Demonstration of competence was limited by the brevity of the response.

**C = 1**

There were frequent sentence fragments, run-ons, and/or incorrect sentences. End punctuation was incorrect or lacking. There were frequent and severe errors in usage and/or mechanics. Errors interfered with or obscured meaning. There was insufficient writing (due to brevity or copying the prompt) to determine competence in Conventions.

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “Strategies to Improve Student Achievement in Writing Among Fifth Grade Learners.” This research project is being conducted by Joyce Joyner, a student in Curriculum and Instructional Technology at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

**Purpose of the Research:** This study involves research. The proposed research project “Strategies to Improve Student Achievement in Writing Among Fifth Grade Learners,” will provide valuable insight into students’ interests and attitudes toward writing, as well as the attitudes and perceptions of teachers who provide instruction in writing. Students’ interest and teacher’ perceptions will assist the researcher in implementing and evaluating specific strategies designed to improve student achievement in the area of writing composition.

**Procedures:** Participants in this study will include all teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 who are employed at this school. You will be asked to complete a writing attitude survey (attached). In order to clarify or to further explain information documented on the writing attitude survey, an audio-taped interview may be needed, only if you are willing to participate at this level. Only the researcher will have access to the tapes.

The researcher will leave the survey with you; your involvement in this research project is expected to last only long enough for you to complete the writing attitude survey (less than one hour). If, however, further clarification is needed in the form of an interview, and you are willing to be interviewed, the researcher will schedule the interview at a time that is convenient for you; otherwise, the researcher will return in one week to collect the surveys.

**Possible risks or discomfort:** Participation in this research project carries minimal risks. Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. If you should suffer difficulty or embarrassment by participating in this study, you will be allowed free services provided by the School Counselor. By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

**Potential Benefits:** This research project has several benefits. Completing the survey (and the interview, if warranted) will provide information that could ultimately lead to the development of additional instructional strategies for you to employ during writing instruction. These instructional strategies may help teachers better prepare students for the Grade 3 and the Grade 5 Georgia State Writing Assessments. The information obtained from the surveys and possible interviews may be used to modify instruction to make learning tasks more meaningful for the students.

**Costs and Compensation:** There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, academic credits, or services) for your participation in this research project.

**Assurance of Confidentiality:** Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.

Your name will not appear on any survey or any interview notes. Instead, the survey and the notes will be number-coded. Only the researcher will know each teacher's identifying number. The "number key" will be kept in a locked desk drawer, and only the researcher will have access to the drawer key. The audio-tapes will be locked in the desk drawer as well. Additionally, the room will be locked at all times the researcher is not in the room. The surveys will be coded for themes and sub-themes by the researcher. Information from the audio-taped interviews will be transcribed. Upon completion of coding and transcribing, the code list will be shredded, and the tapes will be destroyed by removing the tape from the cassette case and burning the tape. Data from this study will be reported in combination with information obtained from other participants. As part of the data, this information will be used to determine teachers' and students' need regarding writing composition.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. In you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

Since the project involves surveying and possible interviewing, you may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Additionally, should you decide to withdraw from the study before data collection from all participants is complete and the code list is destroyed, your information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in the research results.

**Information Contacts:** Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Joyce Joyner at 229-377-6383 or [j.joyner@grady.k12.ga.us](mailto:j.joyner@grady.k12.ga.us). This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

**Agreement to Participate:** The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

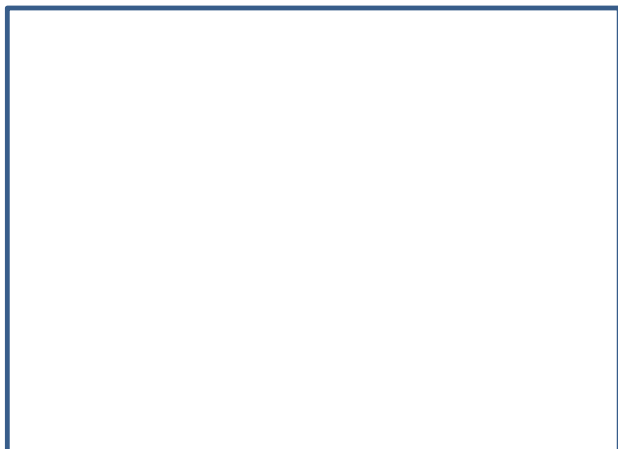
Date

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

**This research project has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants.**



Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX G

Parent/Guardian Permission for Child's/Ward's Participation in Research

You are being asked to allow your child (or ward) to participate in a research project entitled “Strategies to Improve Achievement in Writing Among Fifth-Grade Learners.” This research project is being conducted by Joyce Joyner, a student in Curriculum and Instructional Technology at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedure to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks to your child (or ward). You may ask the researcher any question you have to help you understand this study and your child’s (or ward’s) possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. From this point on in this form, the term “child” is used for either a child or a ward. Please read the remainder of this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed permission if you will allow your child to participate in this research project.

**Purpose of the Research:** This study involves research. The purpose of the study is to identify students’ attitudes and interests toward writing, as well as the attitudes and perceptions of teachers who provide instruction in writing. Students’ interests and attitudes and teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward writing will assist the researcher in implementing and evaluating specific strategies designed to improve student achievement in the area of writing composition. In addition, the research project will identify students’ and teachers’ needs in writing.

**Procedures:** As part of the mandated curriculum for all students in the state of Georgia, your child will be required to write in a variety of genres during his/her fifth grad year of school. These genres include informational essays, persuasive essays, and personal narratives. Students’ completions of these essays are required for course completion and academic credit. All fifth-grade students will be taught writing using the county-approved writing curriculum, *Writing to Win*; however, one group of students will receive additional instructional strategies designed to improve achievement in the area of writing as a requirement of the class.

If you choose to participate in this project, your child initially will be asked to complete a writing attitude survey. Sample survey questions include: What kinds of things do you like to write about? What kinds of things would help you become a better writer? If you decide not to allow your child to participate in this project, he/she will be allowed to leave the classroom while the experimental procedures are taking place with the participating children. Your child will assist first-graders in reading and testing on their Accelerated Reader books. This is a mentor program that was started about five years ago. If you give consent for your child to participate, in addition to the survey, your child may be interviewed by the researcher concerning some of his/her ideas about writing. These interviews will be audio-recorded.

Several additional means of gathering information may be used if your child is a member of the experimental group, those receiving the additional instructional strategies. Your child may be asked to record ideas about writing in his/her writing journal. Your child and the researcher will also discuss some of your child’s writing during student-teacher conferences. In addition, there will be times when the teaching of the lessons will be video-taped as a way to document the teacher’s participation in the classroom. The teacher will make careful observations of students during writing assignments and will record anecdotal notes about students’ behaviors; however, this practice is carried out daily in any classroom by all teachers, as observation is an effective assessment strategy.

This research project will be designed to use two groups of students. Both groups will be taught the required writing curriculum based on *Writing to Win*; however, one group will receive additional instructional strategies designed to improve student achievement in writing. These are not alternatives to the basic *Writing to Win* instruction. Additionally, all children in the experimental group will receive *Writing to Win* and the extra instructional activities (the research interventions) as a requirement for this class. At the beginning of the project, all fifth-graders will be asked to write on a topic relating a personal experience. These papers will be scored. At the

end of the project, after the research interventions have been carried out, the students will again write on the same topic as they did in the beginning. These papers will be scored, and a comparison will be made with the writing samples from the start of the project.

This research project is designed to begin in August 2008 and continue through May 2009. All writing assignments will be completed during the regular school day; therefore, there will be no homework given in this subject area.

**Possible Risks or Discomfort:** Participation in this research project carries minimal risks. Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. Additionally, if your child should suffer difficulty or embarrassment by participating in this study, the child will be allowed free services provided by the School Counselor. By granting permission for your child to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

**Potential Benefits:** This research project has several benefits. Since all fifth grade students are required to take the state-mandated Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment, students will benefit from this instruction. Receiving this instruction will allow your child to be better prepared to meet the challenges of this assessment. Additionally, findings from this study may lead to improved instruction in the classroom, particularly in the area of writing.

**Costs and Compensation:** There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, academic credits, or services) for your participation in this research project.

**Assurance of Confidentiality:** Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your child's confidential information.

Your child's name will not appear on any survey or on any piece of writing. The students' surveys and writing assignments will be assigned numbers. Only the researcher will know each student's identifying number. The "number key" will be kept in a locked desk drawer, and only the researcher will have access to the drawer key. Your child's writing projects will be kept throughout the duration of this study and will ultimately be destroyed by shredding. There will be times when writing lessons are video-taped as a way to document the teacher's participation in the class. The video-tapes will be kept locked in the researcher's desk drawer until she can review them and take notes. After the notes are made, the researcher will destroy the video-tapes. During the time between the taping and the recording of the notes, members of the researcher's dissertation committee at Valdosta State University may view the video-tapes to observe the research interventions as it is taking place. This is a practice commonly employed when the research is being done as part of the researcher's graduate degree program. As soon as observations from the video-tapes have been recorded, the video-tapes will be destroyed by crushing them with a hammer and burning. Your child may also be interviewed (interview will be audio-taped), and the tapes from the interview will be destroyed in the same fashion as soon as the data has been transcribed. Anecdotal notes from observations and the code lists will be destroyed by shredding as soon as the data has been collected.

Data from this study will be reported in combination with information obtained from other participants and will not be associated with participants by name.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to allow your child to participate and you change your

mind later, you are free to withdraw your child from the study before data collection is completed. Even if you give your permission and want your child to be part of the study, your child may decide not to participate at all, or he/she may leave the study at any time before data collection is completed.

By not allowing your child to participate in this study or by withdrawing him/her from the study before the research is complete, you are not giving up any right that you or your child have or any services to which you or your child are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University. Likewise, if your child decides on his/her own not to participate or to drop out of the study later on, he/she is not giving up any rights including rights to services from Valdosta State University to which he/she is otherwise entitled. Since this study involves surveying, possible interviewing, and conferencing, your child may skip any questions that he/she does not want to answer. As a parent, should you decide to withdraw the child from this study before data collection from all participants is complete and the code list is destroyed, the child's information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in research results.

**Information Contacts:** Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Joyce Joyner at 229-377-6383 or [j.joyner@grady.k12.ga.us](mailto:j.joyner@grady.k12.ga.us). This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

**Agreement to Participate:** The research project and my child's (or ward's) role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for my child to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am either the custodial parent or legal guardian of the child. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Child/Ward

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**This research project has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants.**



Parent/Guardian Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX H

Verbal Assent Form for Children Ages 5-12

My name is Joyce Joyner, and I am a student at Valdosta State University. Right now, I am trying to learn about improving student achievement in writing. I would like to ask you to help me by being in the study, but before I do, I want to explain what will happen if you decide to help me.

I will ask you to complete a writing attitude survey which is simply some questions about writing. I want to know what you think; therefore, there is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. In addition to the survey, I might want to interview you in order to get a more detailed answer to some of the questions. I will record the interview and later transcribe, or write down, your responses to the interview questions. There will be times when the lessons being taught will be video-taped in order to document the teacher's participation in the class. I will also observe and record your behaviors as you write. In addition, you will complete writing assignments throughout the year, and you will maintain a writing journal which I will read to help determine your ideas and interests about writing. By being in the study, you will help me understand ways (strategies) to increase student achievement in writing. In addition, you will help me to understand students' needs in the area of writing.

Your parents and classmates will not know what you said or wrote during the study. When I tell other people about my study, I will not use your name, and no one will be able to tell who I am talking about.

Your parent says it is okay for you to be in my study. But, if you do not want to be in the study, you do not have to be. What you decide will not make any difference in your grades or about how your teacher thinks about you. I will not be upset, and no one else will be upset, if you do not want to be in the study. If you want to be in the study now but change your mind later, that is okay. You can withdraw from the study at any time before data collection is complete, and your information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in the research results. If there is anything you do not understand, you should tell me so I can explain it to you.

You can ask me questions about the study. If you have a question later that you do not think of now, you can talk with me at school, call me, or ask your parents to call me or send me an email. Do you have any questions for me now?

Would you like to be in my study and answer some questions, participate in audio-and video recordings, and complete some writing assignments as we go through the year?

Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_ Parent Permission on File: Yes / No

Child's Voluntary Response to Participation: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Optional) Signature of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX I

Parent Letter

As many of you know, I am presently attending Valdosta State University in pursuit of a degree in Curriculum and Instructional Technology. As partial fulfillment of the requirements for this degree, I must complete a curriculum related research project. The project I have designed is called "Strategies to Improve Achievement in Writing Among Fifth Grade Learners." This is a timely project since improving writing test scores is one of the goals outlined in our school improvement plan. In addition, all students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 who attend schools in Georgia are required to take a state-mandated writing assessment.

The purpose of the study is to identify students' attitudes and interests toward writing, as well as the perceptions of teachers who provide instruction in writing. Students' interests and attitudes and teachers' perceptions toward writing will assist me in implementing and evaluating specific strategies designed to improve student achievement in the area of writing composition. In addition, the research project will identify students' and teachers' needs in writing, and findings will possibly lead to improved instruction in the area of writing.

Participation in the project is completely voluntary. If you choose for your child not to participate in this research, he/she will be allowed to leave the classroom to assist the first graders in reading and testing on their Accelerated Reader books, while other students are participating in the research activities. If you choose for your child to participate in the project, he/she will be asked to complete a writing survey. Samples of survey questions will be included in the consent form which will be sent home soon. Your child may be interviewed by me, and this interview will be audio-recorded. Additionally, there will be times when photographs will be taken to document the teacher's immersion in the project. All fifth grade students will receive instruction outlined in the county mandated writing curriculum, but one group of students will receive additional research based strategies and interventions. Students will submit writing samples throughout the school term, and their writing samples submitted at the beginning of the year will be compared with those submitted at the end of the year in an effort to determine the effectiveness of the learning strategies. Your child's identity will be kept confidential since the papers will be number coded instead of being identified by their names. The audio-tapes will be transcribed, and they will be destroyed to prevent any breach of confidentiality. The number code will also be destroyed.

There are potential benefits of participating in this research project. Since all fifth grade students are required to take a state-mandated Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment, students will benefit from this instruction. Receiving the instruction will allow your child to be better prepared to meet the challenges of this assessment. Findings from this study may also lead to improved instruction in the classroom.

Please consider allowing your child to participate in the research. While this explanation is abbreviated, the consent form fully explains every detail of the project. In addition to this letter and the consent form, I will be available to answer any questions or concerns that you may have regarding the study. Below is a list of phone numbers, my email address, and a physical address where I may be reached. I will also be available to meet with you at school by 7:30 A.M. each day, and I will remain at school until 5:00 P.M. each evening. My planning period is from 11:15 A.M.-12:15 P.M. daily. Please feel free to contact me for any further explanation.

Work phone: 377-8441  
Home phone: 377-6383  
Cell phone: 224-0432  
Email address: [j.joyner@grady.k12.ga.us](mailto:j.joyner@grady.k12.ga.us)  
School address: 1201 20<sup>th</sup> St. N.E. Cairo, Georgia 39827-5329

Sincerely,

Joyce Joyner  
Fifth Grade Teacher

APPENDIX J

School Consent Letter

**Eastside Elementary School  
1201 20<sup>th</sup> St. N.E.  
Cairo, Georgia 39827-5329**

**Kermit Gilliard  
Principal**

**Shelia Cain  
Assistant Principal**

Dear Parents,

Mrs. Joyce Joyner, a fifth grade teacher, is seeking a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instructional Technology from Valdosta State University. In order to complete the requirements for this advanced degree, Mrs. Joyner is required to complete a research project related to curriculum. Since Georgia's fifth-graders take a state-mandated writing assessment, she has chosen to design, implement, and evaluate a writing project. The strategies to be implemented in this study have been aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards; your child's state writing assessment will be evaluated based on these same standards.

This project will involve audio and/or video recordings of your child while participating in the writing project; however, the Grady County School District requires letters of consent from the parents/guardians of minor children before the students can engage in any research project involving completing surveys, participating in interviews, or engaging in audio/video recordings. Please indicate your decision allowing your child to participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and by signing the form.

Sincerely,

Kermit Gilliard, Principal

\_\_\_\_\_ My child has permission to participate in this study by being audio and/or video recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child does NOT have permission to participate in this study by being audio and/or video recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

APPENDIX K

Institutional Review Board Approval



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

**NEW PROTOCOL REVIEW REPORT**

**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** IRB-02356-2008

**INVESTIGATOR:** Joyce Joyner

**PROJECT TITLE:** Strategies for Improving Student Achievement in Writing Among Fifth-Grade Learners

**APPROVAL DATE:** 09/24/08

**EXPIRATION DATE:** 09/23/09

**LEVEL OF RISK:**

- Minimal
- More than Minimal

**TYPE OF REVIEW:**

- Expedited (Categories 6 & 7)
- Convened (Full Board)

**DETERMINATION:**

- This research protocol is approved. If you are using an informed consent form, you will receive a copy of the form, which bears an IRB approval stamp, in the mail in the next few days. **Please use this stamped consent form as the master** when making copies for use with participants. Once you receive the stamped consent form, you may begin your research project. **Please also see Attachment 1 for additional important information for researchers.**
- The approval of this protocol is pending. You may **not** begin your research until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of approval. You may send your responses to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

**Rich Vodde**

**9/25/08**

*Thank you for*

**submitting an IRB application.**

Rich Vodde, IRB Chair  
[irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or 229-259-5045.

Date

***Please direct questions to***

cc: Dr. Barbara Stanley (Dept. Head)  
Dr. Brenda Dixey (Advisor)

Form Revised: 10.26.2007

APPENDIX L

Writing Survey for Teachers

Directions: For each of the following statements, circle the most appropriate number that represents your beliefs and attitudes about writing. Consider the following scale as you evaluate your answers: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Part I

1. Writing is important in my classroom.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. I am given flexibility in teaching writing in my classroom.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. I consistently follow the writing process in my classroom.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. ALL students can be effective writers.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. Teachers should write with their students.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. Teachers should provide feedback to students about their writing.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. Writing should be taught in the context of reading and the content areas and not in isolation.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Part II

8. When I use the term “effective writing” the following ideas come to mind:

9. Do you view yourself as an “effective” writer?    Yes / No

Why or why not?

10. How do you see yourself as a teacher of writers?

11. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher of writers?

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|-----------|------------|
|           |            |

12. Where do your students get their ideas for writing?

13. How often do you engage students in the writing process?

\_\_\_\_\_ 1-2 times per week

\_\_\_\_\_ 2-4 times per week

\_\_\_\_\_ 5 or more times each week

14. In your classroom, what does a typical writing lesson involve?

15. How do you provide your students feedback about their writing?

16. What kinds of things might impede student achievement in writing?

17. What could your school do to ensure students' success in writing?

18. What kinds of things would help you become a better teacher of writing?

APPENDIX M

Writing Attitude Survey for Students

Directions: Answer the following questions as completely as possible.

1. Do you like writing? Yes / No

Why or why not?

2. What kinds of things do you like to write about?

3. Do you think of yourself as a good writer? Yes / No

If so, what makes you think you are a writer?

If not, what makes you think you are not a writer?

4. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|-----------|------------|
|           |            |

5. How do you decide what to write?

6. When you write, what do you do first?

7. What kinds of problems do you encounter when you write?

What do you do about these problems?

8. What parts of writing do you like the most and the least?

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|-----------|------------|
|           |            |

9. Do you enjoy sharing your writing with others? Yes / No

Why or why not?

10. If you were teaching someone to write, what would you tell them to do?

11. What kinds of things would help you become a better writer?

APPENDIX N  
Teacher Interviews

In addition to surveys as data gathering instruments, the researcher also interviewed some of the teachers and students. An interview was used when responses on the survey needed clarification, or when a more thorough explanation would add meaning to the study.

Since the researcher had taught the *Writing to Win* curriculum, she had to be especially careful not to allow her beliefs, assumptions, and preconceptions lead to bias. The researcher monitored this by carefully listening to the interviewees. The goal was to allow the interviewees to fully express their thoughts without interjecting her own. The researcher wanted to hear their stories. Self-reflective techniques were used to clarify ideas and to probe for more information.

Teacher #8 was interviewed in her classroom during her planning period. This teacher's classroom reflected learning focused strategies such as word walls and essential questions. The board was filled with notes on motion and forces. The interview was interrupted once by the special education teacher entering the room; however, she saw that we were in the process of an interview, so she quietly left the room. The following commentary is the dialogue that took place between the researcher and Teacher #8.

Researcher: "How would you characterize yourself as a teacher of writing?"

Teacher #8: "I would characterize myself as hardworking and interacting. I try to model the writing for the students."

Researcher: "Could you elaborate on how you model writing for the students?"

Teacher #8: "I actually try to show the students some examples of what an introduction should look like and how the beginning sentence should start. I show them what the body of the paper will be composed of, and I give them examples of that physically in their hands. I show them that on the board."

Researcher: "I noted in your survey you talked about training. Do you think you have had the proper training to teach writing, specifically the *Writing to Win curriculum*?"

Teacher #8: (*turns head from side to side as if she was indicating a “no” response*) “I think we have been provided some of the appropriate training. I don’t think that we have been given enough (*said with emphasis*) training.”

Researcher: “How did you get the training?”

Teacher #8: “Through the school. Staff development classes that we had to take throughout the school year. Having to go to other teachers’ rooms and observe Dr. Combs model how to use the *Writing to Win* program.”

Researcher: “When I use the term “effective writing” what ideas come to mind?”

Teacher #8: (*leans back in her chair*) “Writing that stays on topic and makes sense. Writing that is fluent, and students use their voices. The writing does not sound like it was written by someone else. It is unique, and the students are happy with the end products.”

Researcher: “What more can you tell me about the *Writing to Win* program?”

Teacher #8: “The *Writing to Win* program is the program that our county uses to help the children become better writers. I believe it is somewhat effective. I don’t believe it is totally effective. There are some good components about it. It uses a graphic organizer. I think if we needed Dr. Combs to come to our school to give us more training, he would do that. He would hold classes for us and model what we need to be doing in the classroom with our own students. There is research that supports the program. The program has been effective in many different counties. I think it has been effective in our county as well, but I think it could be much more effective.

Researcher: “What did you mean when you used the phrase “good components?”

Teacher #8: Good components in that the program is broken into parts. It is – it teaches the kids how to brainstorm, and it has a graphic organizer that goes along with that, even though there are many more effective ones in other resource books that are not part of Combs’s program. We actually create three first drafts, then the kids go back and choose one, and we revise it. There are revision strategies that are actually part of the program and are specific to each grade level.

Next, the students edit and proofread their papers. Then, the students publish them. The program recommends that we teachers publish them in ways that the kids can see them.”

Researcher: “A few moments ago, you used the term ‘not totally’ effective.” Could you tell me more about that?”

Teacher #8: “I don’t think the *Writing to Win* program is totally effective because I don’t believe all of the teachers, including myself, have been trained well enough to properly implement the program. I think the components are excellent, but I believe we need a better way to grade the students’ writing other than what Combs recommends. The children need to know when they have done something wrong, and they need to see something concrete. We don’t just need to tell them subjectively ‘this is what you need to correct on this paper.’ They need to see something in writing.

Researcher: (*looking puzzled*) “I am not sure I’m following you.”

Teacher #8: “We grade their writing using a rubric. We check off what the kids did well, but the mistakes in their writing are never addressed. The rubric is stapled to the students’ writing, and then they are filed away to go with them to the next grade. There’s just not enough feedback.”

Researcher: “You talked a little bit about revision strategies. Could you tell me more about that?”

Teacher #8: “We do use revision strategies. There are several involved in this program. There are sentence building strategies that teach the kids how to extend their sentences. There are strategies to help them implement and color their writing with adjectives. I can’t think of anymore off the top of my head.”

Researcher: “You talked about grading a little bit. What specific criteria are used to determine the students’ developmental stages of writing?”

Teacher #8: (*long pause*) “Can you stop the recorder? I have to think about it.”

(*The recorder was turned off until the teacher motioned for it to be turned back on.*)

“To determine a student’s developmental stage, we look at four areas in particular. We look at their topic development, organization, and how well they put their ideas together to organize their paragraphs. When we read their work, we talk about if they have –if their work addresses a sense of audience and an understanding of the task they were to complete. We also look at their word choice and sentence patterns. Lastly, we also look at surface features and that particular category allows you to take away points from their grade. When you total up the students’ points – well you take the areas and assign points, then you total up the points. When you get that number, you can actually subtract from it or leave it like it is, but you only do that at the end.”

Researcher: In your opinion, how similar would your staging score be to the state assessors’ scores?”

Teacher #8: (*laughing loudly*) “Do you really want me to answer that question?”

Researcher: “Yes, very honestly.”

Teacher #8: (*leaned in and propped on the table*) “I don’t think they would be very similar at all to tell you the truth. I would grade my students at least one stage lower than the state assessors would score them. I have worked with my students all year and know what they are capable of.”

Researcher: “Do you see the discrepancy in the scores as a problem?”

Teacher #8: “I do because it gives inflated grades. I think the children – their assessment is inflated. I think that as a county our scores are inflated which means that our state scores are inflated; although, everyone in our state is graded the same. Even though they are inflated, you are still getting some baseline data.”

Researcher: “Since there seems to be some discrepancy between the teachers’ staging and the state assessors’ staging, do you see that as a problem when these students go to the middle school in sixth grade?”

Teacher #8: (*using hands as she talks*) “I think so because if I recall correctly, I think that at the upper grades the students’ writing scores are not inflated. It seems that when the students

leave the elementary school and go to middle school, their writing skills get even worse. This means we are doing something wrong. There is a problem somewhere (*emphasizes 'somewhere'*) that needs to be addressed.”

Researcher: “How successful are your students in the area of writing?”

Teacher #8: “I think my students in particular are successful because I try to add so much to the program. I think unless you are a really good teacher and unless you try to be animated and access the kids’ backgrounds, they are not going to be good writers. I try to access all the children somehow. I try to get them involved in whatever topics we choose. I try to guide them to choose topics that are exciting to them and will create some emotion for them. I want them to choose topics that will help develop clear pictures for them. I also interact with them. I express things that have happened in my background that hopefully will bring some emotion for them. I want them to have a springboard into the writing and so far, I think that has helped somewhat.”

Researcher: “When you ask students to write on a topic, do you write with them?”

Teacher #8: “Not always. Sometimes I do, but because of our schedule, many times I am not allowed to write with them. Time just does not allow me to write with them. However, I try to model at least the first paragraph whether there are time constraints or not. I may not be able to write the entire paper, but I am able to model for them. For example, I might tell them, ‘This is how I would start my paper.’ And I would tell them why.”

Researcher: “Several questions back, you made reference to the students writing three drafts before they do a final paper. Can you tell me more about that?”

Teacher #8: “In the *Writing to Win* program, you write one draft per week. You write a draft on week one of the cycle, another draft on week two, and a third draft on week three. During the fourth week, students choose one of those drafts to revise. During the fifth week, they edit and proofread their papers. During week six, they publish their papers.”

Researcher: “If I understand you correctly, it takes six weeks to get a final copy of their writing.”

Teacher #8: “That’s correct.”

Researcher: “How do you teach the revision process?”

Teacher #8: “Usually what I try to do is I have other students’ work that we can use as examples, and we look at it as a whole class. After that, I allow them to try to use that strategy. I walk around and try to help them. I try to conference with them so I can point out details and things they need to do correctly or areas they misunderstand.”

Researcher: “What kinds of things might impede student achievement in writing?”

Teacher #8: “I think the schedule does not benefit the children to write one draft this week and then stop. Lots of time elapses between the first draft one week, a second draft the next week, and so on. This is a big negative with this program. I feel that it would be more effective to do a first draft one day, a second draft the next day, and a third draft on the third day. On day four, we would choose one of those drafts to carry through the writing process. Day four would be the day that we revise the draft. On the fifth day, students would edit, proofread, and publish their work. It is difficult for the kids to hop from week to week. It’s just not the best way to do it in my opinion.”

Researcher: “If you adhere to the writing schedule as the program is laid out, how many final papers have you written and taken through the writing process before the state assessment?”

Teacher #8: “This year, I think it is only three. We would have completed three final drafts before the state test. As a teacher, you would certainly want your kids to have much more practice before they take a test that measures what they have done for the whole entire year.”

Researcher: “How many modes of writing are you required to teach using this program?”

Teacher #8: *(using her fingers to count)* “This year we actually had another mode added, so we have five different modes we teach each year.”

Researcher: “When the state assessment is given in January, have you taught all five of the modes?”

Teacher #8: “We have worked on three modes of writing, so by the time we take the assessment, we have completed one final copy of three different modes.”

Researcher: Are three papers sufficient for the students to feel prepared for the state writing test?”

Teacher #8: “I don’t believe it is. I think if we did the writing schedule differently they would feel much more prepared. Spreading it out from week to week to week is just not productive. We are just defeating ourselves when we follow the program’s schedule.”

Researcher: “What could your school do to ensure students’ success in writing?”

Teacher #8: *(takes a deep breath and crosses her arms)* “Ask for the teachers’ input and then apply that input. I believe our county is trying to address the areas that we are weak in, but I don’t think they use all their resources wisely.”

Researcher: “Who is ‘they’?”

Teacher #8: “Administrators and curriculum coordinators.”

Researcher: “What input would you give them?”

Teacher #8: “For me, I think the scheduling is all wrong. It needs to be changed where the children actually get an opportunity to write the papers within a week, rather than a six week session. Teachers should have input about what needs to be done. It would help us so much if we were allowed to teach more of the writing skills before the kids had to take the test. I would like to be able to use the English textbook for writing, but we have been told to stick to our present program.”

Researcher: “Do you only do process writing with this program?”

Teacher #8: We do process writing and journal writing. The journal writing is supposed to be done every day, but it is not getting done daily, even though we try to do it. There are many days you don’t get the opportunity to do journal writing. The way the program is designed journal writing should take no more than seven minutes to write on a specified topic. This isn’t feasible. The students need more than seven minutes. My class needs at least 15 minutes, and even then I

have to make them stop writing. The objective of journal writing is for the kids to think critically, so you can see they need more than seven minutes.”

Researcher: “If the journal is used as a critical thinking tool, how is it used to promote effective writing?”

Teacher #8: “I don’t know that I would say the journal promotes effective writing. I think the journal does promote critical thinking. When you compare journal writing to process writing, well – you just can’t compare the two. Many things are lacking. If I graded their journals for effective writing, many points would be taken away. There are many errors and the kids don’t have time to proof their work. We have to move on to other subjects.”

Researcher: “You have to move on to what other things.”

Teacher #8: “We have got to give lots of time to math and reading. That is our focus now.”

Researcher: “What are you saying?”

Teacher #8: “I’m saying sometimes we teachers have to give more time to reading and math, instead of spending adequate time on writing. These kids have got to pass math and reading on the CRCT in order to be promoted to sixth grade.”

Researcher: “How could teachers infuse and implement more effective components into the writing curriculum?”

Teacher #8: “I think teachers at our school would personally have to add their own touch. They would have to access the kids’ backgrounds, and model more. To be an effective teacher, you need more time to do all of these things. We just don’t have enough time.”

Researcher: “Do you feel you are an effective teacher of writing?”

Teacher #8: “I have taught for 13 years. For a long time, we didn’t have a writing curriculum of any kind, so I think we probably need to keep *Writing to Win*; however, I think we should add some things to it. That would make me feel like I am doing a better job.”

Researcher: “Are sentence and paragraph structure taught in *Writing to Win*?”

Teacher #8: “Paragraph structure is not taught. I have to pull that piece from somewhere else. By the time students are in fifth grade, they should know how to write a paragraph. But, let’s face it – they don’t. Teaching paragraph structure is a huge missing component of our program.”

Researcher: “What about sentence structure?”

Teacher #8: (*wrinkles forehead and uses her hands while talking*) “Hmmm. I think Dr. Combs tried to put something in his program several years ago, but it hasn’t been made clear to the teachers about how to use it. Some of the teachers have implemented sentence building, but I don’t know if they received any training for it. They might be just figuring it out on their own.”

Researcher: “Why ‘some’ of the teachers?”

Teacher #8: “I don’t believe everyone was trained. Administration says we were all trained in sentence building, but we were not. At least I know I wasn’t.”

Researcher: “You have provided some thought-provoking ideas. Thank you so much.”

Teacher #8: “You are quite welcome.”

Teacher #4 was interviewed in her classroom on a Friday afternoon after school. The classroom reflected learning focused strategies, and it was painted in contrasting tones of blue colors. A live bird was contained within its cage, and a well-preserved three foot alligator was resting on top of the bookshelf. Lots of colorful posters and students’ work samples displayed on the walls. A large black and white silk canopy serving as a light filter was suspended from the ceiling. Every space in the room was filled with resources that students were allowed to use; yet, the room was not cluttered. A teacher’s desk was located in front of the room. Homework assignments were written on the board. Teacher #4 was very accommodating as she made sure I was comfortable before starting the interview. The following dialogue was an interview between the researcher and Teacher #4.

Researcher: “Thank you so much for participating in this project. I appreciate your willingness to do the interview. How would you characterize yourself as a teacher of writing?”

Teacher #4: (*shaking her head from side to side as if she was saying “no”*) “If we are talking about following *Writing to Win*, I am not very effective. I feel like a proofreader.”

Researcher: “You feel like a proofreader?”

Teacher #4: “Yes. There are so many errors in these children’s papers. You have to decode everything before you can even begin to make sense of it all.”

Researcher: “What do you think you could do to be more effective?”

Teacher #4: “Ok. To be more effective – hmmm. I think it would be better if I followed a more organized way of teaching writing. I don’t feel like *Writing to Win* provides us with a structure that I can follow effectively. For example, students write a first draft of a writing mode this week, a second draft the next week, a third draft the next week; then, on week four, the students choose one of the drafts to carry completely through the writing process. During this week, the students will revise their drafts, and during week five, they will edit and proofread their writing. During week six, they will publish their final drafts. These kids should be producing a final writing product every week – not every six weeks. This is ludicrous!”

Researcher: “Do you feel you were adequately trained to teach *Writing to Win*?”

Teacher #4: “No, I don’t (*with lots of emphasis on ‘no’*) We sat with Dr. Combs through a brief orientation, and we went from classroom to classroom at another elementary school to observe Dr. Combs and other teachers conduct lessons using *Writing to Win*. I just didn’t get the sense of his program through that brief orientation.”

Researcher: “How many of these workshops were offered to you?”

Teacher #4: “Only one workshop.”

Researcher: “Had you ever used this writing program before? Had you had any other training prior to this workshop?”

Teacher #4: “No. In fact, the first year I was here, I STRUGGLED – I mean I STRUGGLED (*with lots of emphasis on the word ‘struggled’*). I only had a manual to follow. I didn’t even get to go to a training session until well into my second year here.”

Researcher: “So, how did you implement *Writing to Win* in your classroom if you had not had the training?”

Teacher #4: “Trial and error. I had to fly by the seat of my pants. I picked up pointers from other teachers on my team. I actually went into Leslie’s (pseudonym) classroom to observe her teaching a lesson.”

Researcher: “A lesson?”

Teacher #4: (*shakes head up and down as if indicating yes*) “A lesson. Then, I followed her plan for writing instead of following *Writing to Win*.”

Researcher: “Instead of following *Writing to Win*?”

Teacher #4: “Yes. Leslie is a good teacher with years of experience. She knows how to effectively teach writing. She ditched the whole *Writing to Win* program. I just hope she doesn’t get caught. Gee, that would be trouble – for her and for me.”

Researcher: “When I use the term “effective” writing, what ideas come to mind?”

Teacher #4: “Writing for a purpose. Fluency. Proper grammar. Organized writing.” I think what we do is stupid. We have to grade journals as recommended by Dr. Combs. For every entry the students are writing, I am scoring that entry with a (+) if it is acceptable and meets guidelines, a (\*) if it is on the topic, but ideas are not fully developed, or a (-) if they miss the topic totally or don’t provide enough writing. It is just crazy.”

Researcher: “How would you do it differently?”

Teacher #4: “I think I would try to integrate more writing with the subjects we teach. I would rather follow the course of writing that is given in our new English textbooks because the writing instruction is much more organized and laid out; you can clearly see the purpose in each assignment. I just think it is much more effective than choosing to write only on topics that are recommended by the present writing curriculum. We are limiting what our kids can do.”

Researcher: “What criteria are used to determine a student’s developmental stage of writing?”

Teacher #4: A rubric provided as part of *Writing to Win*.”

Researcher: “Do students design the rubric?”

Teacher #4: “No. They have no input in making the rubric. In fact, they may have never seen it because we read the students’ papers, attach the scoring rubric for the developmental stage, and file it. So, most of the time the students don’t see the rubric or their writing at any time after it has been turned in to be graded.”

Researcher: “What do you think about that?”

Teacher #4: Well, research tells us that rubrics are much more meaningful if the students have a part in designing them. But, we are evaluated on whether we use those rubrics or not. Administration actually checks the students’ folders to see if they are there. Students need feedback. If they never see the mistakes in their writing, they will never improve.”

Researcher: In your opinion, if state assessors scored the fifth grade writing, how close do you think your scores would be to each other?”

Teacher #4: *(long pause; raises eyebrows)* “Not very close. The process of grading writing is so subjective. I look closely at the conventions of writing, but based on the rubric we are required to use, conventions don’t matter much.” To me, *(points at self)* if the person can’t compose in a way that their writing can be read and understood, it isn’t writing. It isn’t purposeful writing. There is no meaning to it.”

Researcher: “How successful are your students in the area of writing?”

Teacher #4: “They are not very good writers, AND *(emphasized)* they dislike writing. I have 17 kids in my class, and only three of them like to write.”

Researcher: “Why do you think that is?”

Teacher #4: I think a lot of them don’t enjoy writing because they don’t have to do it often enough to get good at it. They can’t read or write well enough to get their ideas on paper. They can’t express themselves clearly enough. They have so many errors. They can’t spell – just can’t express themselves well enough. They don’t have a vocabulary to support writing. I think a

fifth grader should be able to say something that is meaningful. They also lack experiences needed to write about topics they choose. That to me is a big (*emphasized*) problem. Their poor academic skills hinder them. Oh, yes – I want you to make sure this gets in your notes – they have poor language skills. Language skills are essential if you are going to be a writer. They don't know anything about punctuation, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, verb tense. I could just keep naming, but it would not change things. Nobody listens – nobody cares.”

Researcher: “What could your school do to ensure students’ success in writing?”

Teacher #4: (*starts laughing*) “Discontinue *Writing to Win*. Find something that is more organized and effective. Somehow produce students who can read on grade level or closer to it. I would like the liberty to use the English textbook.”

Researcher: “What does the writing schedule look like?”

Teacher #4: “We are supposed to stick to a schedule that has been built into the program. Based on the writing program, students should be allowed ten minutes to complete a journal writing assignment; however, our students are taking as much as thirty minutes each day to complete that simple writing task. After thirty minutes, I have to cut the time because some of the students just can't do it. It is so frustrating!”

Researcher: “How do you pace yourself with process writing?”

Teacher #4: (*throws her hands up*) “I tried following the writing outlined in *Writing to Win*. We wrote a draft each week for three weeks. On the fourth week, we chose one of those three drafts to complete. That wasn't the way to do it either. One day each week was not sufficient. Trying to remember from one week to the next was not effective. It was not cohesive enough. That's the reason I ditched the *Writing to Win* schedule. In my class we try to take a draft through the writing process each week.”

Researcher: “How do you get reluctant writers to write? How do you get them started?”

Teacher #4: “We do a jotlist. If it is a topic too many of them do not understand or have enough background knowledge about, then we really have to do a jotlist on the board. We talk

about it in order for the students to have some background information. That is pretty much all we do” (*shrugs her shoulders*).

Researcher: “How do you differentiate writing instruction using the current program?”

Teacher #4: (*long pause*) “I would say you couldn’t. I don’t know how you would differentiate instruction. I don’t know how you would do it. I REALLY (*said with emphasis*) don’t know.”

The interviewee’s phone rang, so we discontinued the interview.

Teacher #5 was interviewed in her classroom during after school hours. Desks were arranged in five straight rows. A teacher’s desk was positioned in front of the classroom. The room was painted a dull beige color, and the carpet was somewhat worn. One set of fluorescent lights were not working. Two small plants were neatly positioned on top of a bookshelf, along with a picture of the teacher’s husband. Classroom rules were posted in a clearly visible area above the whiteboard. Student work samples were displayed around the room in various locations; this teacher took a lot of pride in her students’ accomplishments. Before entering the classroom, I bought us a coke, and we started the interview.

Researcher: “How would you characterize yourself as a teacher of writing?”

Teacher #5: “I am very passionate about writing, eager to read and share ideas with students about different writing styles.”

Researcher: “Do you think you have had the proper training to teach writing, specifically *Writing to Win*?”

Teacher #5: ”Umm. Proper training? I think that I have taught myself throughout the years. I had some vague ideas of how it worked and that was all. I relied on other sources to help me teach writing.”

Researcher: “Did you get any training?”

Teacher #4: (*tapping fingers on the table*) Training was by county and grouped, so I was in a third through fifth grade training session. Dr. Combs, hired by the county school system to share his writing strategies, conducted the meeting.”

Researcher: “How did you implement *Writing to Win* in your classroom?”

Teacher #5: (*shrugging her shoulders*) “I guess I just used what little information I had and decided to follow the suggested schedule. As we progressed throughout the modes, I explained it to the students.”

Researcher: When I use the term “effective writing” what ideas come to mind?”

Teacher #5: (*looking at the clock and continuing to tap her fingers*) “Getting students to see the need for writing. Get them to focus on themselves and take their ideas to paper. Allow students to paint you a picture with their own words. I don’t think it should always follow a structured program. I bring in a lot of other resources.”

Researcher: “What criteria are used to determine a student’s developmental stage of writing?”

Teacher #5: I guess it would be how well they can develop a writing topic. Consider organization, ability to use details, sense of task, word choice, and sentence patterns. My students would score in any area between a one (very low) to a six (very high).”

Researcher: “Would you be surprised if I told you that teachers’ scores of students’ writings were very different from the state assessors’ scores?”

Teacher #5: “Really? (*raised eyebrows*) I think my scores would be very similar because the rating scales are not that bad. I will say that I don’t (*spoken with emphasis*) think this program allows students any creativity or originality.”

Researcher: “Does this affect how successful your students are in the area of writing?”

Teacher #5: The students have a hard time developing topics; they usually do not do well on their writing assignments because they are too worried about what is required and not about what is in their minds.”

Researcher: “Too worried about what is required?”

Teacher #5: “The kids constantly ask me, “How many pages does it have to be? Is this enough?””

Researcher: “What do you tell them?”

Teacher #5: “I try to stress to the students that the length of a writing piece is not what matters. What matters is that you had something meaningful to say.”

Researcher: “What kinds of things might impede students’ success in writing?”

Teacher #5: (*tapping fingers on the table*) “The structured time frames, the long drawn out process to get a finished paper. Not to mention I am trying to teach out of a grammar book and all the other lessons.”

Researcher: “What could your school do to ensure students’ success in writing?”

Teacher #5: (*Looking at her watch*) “Find a more innovative way to teach writing to get kids to see writing is fun and creative. Allow teachers to use other resources to help teach writing.”

Because the interviewee was tapping her fingers on the table and watching the clock, the researcher ended the interview and thanked the teacher for participating.

Teacher #14 was interviewed in her home over the weekend. We sat at the dining room table where we drank coffee and munched on butter cookies. The house was immaculate, despite the fact that her grandchildren had just left to go home after an eight day visit. Pictures of the grandchildren were placed on the coffee table and the piano in the den. The home was decorated in tones of deep hunter green and burgundy.

The rich colors and the oak furniture gave richness to the beautifully renovated farmhouse. After a casual chat about school, grandchildren, and husbands mowing grass, we began the interview that follows.

Researcher: “How do you characterize yourself as a teacher of writing?”

Teacher #14: “As a teacher, I am constantly learning techniques for effectively teaching writing. I enjoy writing and I think my enthusiasm for writing is known by my students. They know that I consider it important.”

Researcher: “Do you think you have had the proper training to teach writing, specifically *Writing to Win*?”

Teacher #14: (*sips her coffee as she brushes a crumb from her blouse*) “I do feel that I have had sufficient training for this program, but my main concern is how to incorporate language skills with my writing lessons. This is a struggle for me, and I am constantly seeking ways to do this. I can say that after teaching in a school system which had no structured writing program for many years, *Writing to Win* has been an asset to me. Many complain about it, but until we have another program that is more closely related to the GPS, we must use this with some modifications and additional resources.”

Researcher: “How did you get your training?”

Teacher #14: (*smiling*) “*Writing to Win* training was provided by the school system. I was given one full day of instruction as an introduction, with several half-day follow-ups. I found this helpful, as this gave me time to digest the program components, experiment, and then revisit problem areas. Dr. Combs gave the training I received.”

Researcher: “How did you learn to implement the writing program in your own classroom?”

Teacher #14: After the training, it was basically ‘jump in and get your feet wet.’ As the old saying goes, the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Experience is the best teacher.”

Researcher: “When I use the term “effective writing,” what ideas come to mind?”

Teacher #14: (*Her husband comes in and asks for a glass of iced tea. She makes him the tea, and then returns to the interview.*) “Effective writing is functional writing that serves an

authentic purpose, not just what it takes to pass a test or make a six on a rubric. It incorporates many elements, such as grammar and conventions and playful language.”

Researcher: “What criteria are used to determine a student’s developmental stage of writing?”

Teacher #14: “Because students are required to take the Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment, I use the same rubric as the state uses. This allows the students to get accustomed to writing expectations.”

Researcher: “Would you be surprised if I told you that teachers’ scoring of students’ papers were not similar to the scores given by the state assessors?”

Teacher #14: (*raised eyebrows*) “I was surprised last year when several students, who consistently scored at a level four according to my rating, scored a level five on the state test. I suppose it is better for me to underscore and continue to encourage students than to score them too high.”

Researcher: “How successful are your students in the area of writing?”

Teacher #14: “Last year, I conducted a survey and most of the students enjoyed writing. They enjoyed journal writing more than process writing because the final product was more easily attainable. I have seen more sophisticated writing this year, but these students have had an additional year of *Writing to Win*.”

Researcher: “What kinds of things might impede student achievement in writing?”

Teacher #14: (*starts laughing*) “Not enough meaningful practice with timely feedback.”

Researcher: “Is there anything your school could do to ensure students’ success in writing?”

Teacher #14: “Expectations must continue to be raised for writing. All teachers need to get on the same page.”

Researcher: “Get on the same page?”

Teacher #14: “Yes, we all need to do the same thing. We are not consistent in what we do. I do something different than the teacher next door, and she does something different than the teacher across the hall. You get the picture?”

Researcher: “Yes. How could teachers infuse and implement more effective components into the current writing curriculum?”

Teacher #14: We need to create units in which we incorporate the GPS grammar, writing, and language standards. Teachers need to be willing to share ideas among their peers and stop reinventing the wheel.”

Researcher: “If you could change one aspect of the writing curriculum, what would it be and why?”

Teacher #14: *(Pauses for a few seconds, then crosses her legs)* “That’s a tough one. I think we need continuous training and opportunities for teachers to come together to share ideas. I think that would help us enjoy writing more.”

The doorbell rang, so we concluded the interview.

Teacher #10 was interviewed during her planning period. This room was freshly painted with a light blue color. This classroom definitely had an apple theme. The table was covered with a hand-sewn cloth printed in red, yellow, and green apples. A valance covering the window was made of the same print. Four baskets of apples were placed around the room to enhance the theme. A burning candle filled the room with the aroma of apple pie. One got a feeling of “home” upon entering this classroom. Bookshelves had been custom made and installed along the entire back wall of the room. Accelerated reading books filled the shelves. Essential questions and word walls were present. The following account was the dialogue between Teacher #10 and the researcher.

Researcher: “How would you characterize yourself as a teacher of writing?”

Teacher #12: “I love writing, and I love to teach writing, but I get frustrated.”

Researcher: “Frustrated?”

Teacher #12: “Yes. Each year in the fall when I get a new group of kids, they act as if they have no clue about writing. They struggle with writing a complete sentence, much less a paragraph.”

Researcher: “Where do you start in teaching them to write?”

Teacher #12: “With the basics. What are sentences? What are the four kinds of sentences? What are sentence fragments? What are run-on sentences? Just the basics. Writing isn’t valued. Emphasis is placed on reading and math. Even though students write, their writing isn’t meaningful because it serves no purpose.”

Researcher: “What do you mean – it serves no purpose?”

Teacher #12: “Writing is just another assignment to complete. It is something used to get a grade. That is one reason students reach fifth grade and can’t write a decent paragraph.”

Researcher: “Do you think you have had the proper training to teach writing?”

Teacher #12: “No. All teachers don’t get the same training. I know that our program has a sentence-building component. I don’t think a single fifth grade teacher has had that training. We are all held accountable for it though. I asked for the manual containing that part of the program, but I was told there was no money – like I said, writing isn’t valued.”

Researcher: “Does administration know all the teachers have not had the training?”

Teacher #12: “Yes. They have been told several times.”

Researcher: “How did you get the training that you have had?”

Teacher #12: “I have been to two training sessions on *Writing to Win*, but I didn’t get much out of them. I just bring in my own materials which I have paid for out of pocket that I think will make the task a little easier and more meaningful. We’re supposed to use only *the Writing to Win* program, but I don’t think that program is sufficient enough to stand alone. Students need more. Fifth grade, according to our program, should use only certain revision strategies as outlined in the manual. That severely restricts the students in revising their work. Teachers need the flexibility to differentiate instruction. Not everyone fits into the same mold.

Students need meaningful feedback when they write. Student/teacher conferences should be a big chunk of any elementary process writing assignment. Our students don't have the opportunity to write enough because we are held so rigidly to the *Writing to Win* map."

Researcher: "Students don't write enough?"

Teacher #12: "No. They write a first draft on Monday; they write a second first draft on the next Monday, and they write a third first draft the next Monday. During the fourth week, they choose one of their first drafts to take through the writing process, and we use a prescribed revision strategy in an attempt to improve their writing. During the fifth week, students write a final paper to edit and proofread. During week six, they share their writing with others. The next week we start the cycle again. The writing is too spread out over time. In fact, the kids have only completed three papers by the time of the state test. They are not adequately prepared for the test. That's why I feel the state scores are inflated. The students haven't had enough practice in process writing to have mastered the skills they need to write a good paper."

Researcher: "How did you learn to implement *Writing to Win* in your classroom?"

Teacher #12: "I just had to find my own ways of doing things. I bring other materials into the writing. I especially bring lots of graphic organizers. The present writing program only uses one or two graphic organizers, and they don't always lend themselves well to the mode of writing we are doing. A well-developed organizer can help students generate writing ideas. I also have the students work with me to create meaningful rubrics that are shared with them even before they begin to write. Students need to know how they can make an "A" or a "B." They need to know what teachers' expectations for them are."

Researcher: "When I use the term "effective writing" what ideas come to mind?"

Teacher #12: Writing that makes sense. I want to see pictures in my mind when I read students' papers. Their writing should follow some sequence – you know, it should flow. Effective writing has clearly developed paragraphs, and the writer uses conventions correctly. I don't like to struggle in trying to figure out what the student is trying to say."

Researcher: “How similar would your rating scores be to those of the state assessors?”

Teacher #12: *(starts laughing)* “They are not that similar. The teachers’ scores are almost always lower than the state’s scores; however, I believe the teachers’ scores are more accurate. We are with these kids every day, and we know their abilities and skills.”

Researcher: “Why do you believe that happens?”

Teacher #12: “I don’t think the state people really look at conventions. When kids can’t use conventions when they write, the reader often loses meaning. They probably look at ideas, voice, word choice, and organization. Maybe not, but I think I am right.”

Researcher: “Are your students good writers?”

Teacher #12: *(laughing)* “Let’s put it this way – they are better toward the end of the year.”

Researcher: “What kinds of things impede student achievement in writing?”

Teacher #12: “Student achievement is impeded when our program doesn’t include all the necessary components so that teachers are not always digging to find just what we need. It is impeded when we don’t give our students any feedback. Achievement is impeded when we are forced to use rubrics and graphic organizers that are not specific and meaningful. I think we need a more analytical system for scoring papers. This would help make students accountable for writing skills that have been taught.”

Researcher: “What could your school do to ensure students’ success in writing?”

Teacher #12: “We need to focus more on mechanics and conventions; teachers and students need to develop rubrics that are meaningful; and we need to have the flexibility to use effective revision strategies, whether or not they are part of *Writing to Win*. We don’t need to be so locked in.”

Researcher: “How could teachers infuse and implement more effective components into the current writing program?”

Teacher #12: “Our English book, adopted two years ago, does a really good job with writing. The book has more purposeful writing assignments. Students can relate better using the English book; the book aligns with the stories we are reading.”

Researcher: “Why can’t you use the English book?”

Teacher #12: “We have been told they’ve pumped too much money into *Writing to Win*. Sometimes they make me sick about money.”

Researcher: “Make you sick?”

Teacher #12: “It sometimes seems that our system is so wasteful when it comes to money. They purchase these expensive programs, but then only partially implement them. This happens over and over and over. If we can’t use that English book in its entirety, why did we buy it? See what I mean?”

The students were returning from physical education class; therefore, we ended the interview.

Teacher #2 was interviewed in her classroom during her planning period. Her room had commercial resources on the walls. Student work samples were located on her bulletin board in the hallway. Essential questions were posted in the classroom. The following account was dialogue between the researcher and Teacher #2.

Researcher: “I noted in your survey response that once the third semester is over, you do not teach writing for the remainder of the school year.”

Teacher #2: “That’s right. The students are sick of it, and I’m out of ideas.”

Researcher: “How do you assign a writing grade for the fourth semester if you don’t teach writing anymore after the third grading period?”

Teacher #2: “I just look at the grade they got for the third semester and give them a similar grade. Nobody ever looks at the students’ writing folders from year to year, so why beat your head against the wall?”

Researcher: “Beat your head against the wall?”

Teacher #2: “The students just don’t get it. During the third semester, the students are still making the same mistakes they made at the beginning of school. All year long I literally teach how to write a complete sentence, how to organize thoughts to write paragraphs, how to add interesting details. They forget it all by the time we write again. What’s the point?”

Researcher: “Do you follow the writing schedule as it is laid out in *Writing to Win*?”

Teacher #2: “Yes, that’s part of the problem. There is not enough process writing in the schedule. I believe these kids should process write every day, instead of one day each week. If I have to follow the *Writing to Win* schedule, I just prefer not to even write. By the end of the third semester, I have had enough and so have the kids. That is all I have to say about it. I hope I don’t get in trouble for sharing my feelings like I have.”

I assured this teacher that no one would have access to this information. She seemed to trust me on this issue. We concluded the interview.

APPENDIX O

Student Interviews

Student interviews, in the form of student/teacher conferences during writing, were used to gather data for this project. The following accounts were excerpts from dialogues that took place between the students and the researcher.

Conference with Student #3:

Researcher: "Please read me your draft."

Student #3: "Here it is. I hope you like it."

Researcher: "Oh, no. I want you to read it to me."

Student #3: "Okay." (*reads draft*)

Researcher: "May I ask you why you started your story with "Hi, I am going to write a story about a time when I was embarrassed?"

Student #3: "To let the reader know what I was writing about."

Researcher: "Let me show you several examples of how you can let the reader know what you are going to write about without starting with "Hi, I am going to write about a time I was embarrassed." (*The researcher had a file folder and took out four examples of students' writings, and she shared the introductions with Student #3.*)

Student #3: "I see what you mean. Those beginnings sound a lot better than mine."

Researcher: "Would you like to borrow these examples? Go back to your seat, and try to redraft the introduction to your story. Let me know if you need anything."

Conference with Student #7:

Researcher: "After hearing your story, I think you have some good ideas, but you need to develop them more."

Student #7: "What do you mean?"

Researcher: "To show you what I mean, your story can be compared to a skeleton. Your ideas (the bones) are there, but there is no muscle (details) attached to the skeleton. Go look on the overhead projector for the example I showed you guys earlier today." (*The student brought the overhead transparency to the researcher.*) The researcher took two colored markers and

reread the example to the student. She underlined the skeletal bones (ideas) with one color and the muscles (details) with the other color, as they discussed the writing sample.

Student #7: "That was neat! I'll go work on my paper some more. That made total sense."

Researcher: "Take this overhead in case you need to refer to an example."

Conference with Student #8:

Researcher: "Wow! I am impressed. I think your introduction is so creative. I especially like that you started it with a question. That approach usually grabs the reader's attention right away."

Student #8: "Thank you. My teacher from fourth grade taught me about introductions and conclusions last year."

Researcher: "You are well on your way to a great story. Good job!"

Conference with Student #16:

Researcher: "Please read me your story."

Student #16: "Do I have to?"

Researcher: "Yes."

Student #16: "But, it ain't good." (*Reluctantly, the student reads the story.*)

Researcher: "Student #16, you only wrote five sentences."

Student #16: "I know, but this is all I can write about."

Researcher: "Bring me your graphic organizer."

Student #16: "I didn't do one because this is all I can think of."

Researcher: "If you didn't complete a graphic organizer, I want you to return to your seat and get it done. Come back to the conference table when it is finished."

Student #16: "Man, this ain't fair."

Conference with Student #17:

Researcher: "I have noticed once I assign a writing topic, you usually leave your seat and go talk with Student #8. We have talked about this briefly before, but why do

you continue the behavior?”

Student #17: “I was in her class last year, and she was a really good writer. Her stories were always so good. The teacher would brag on her all the time in front of the whole class. She even got a writing award at the end of the year. I just want to write like her.”

Researcher: “Do you think you are not a good writer?”

Student #17: “Not as good as her.”

Researcher: “What makes her writing so good to you?”

Student #17: “Her writing just flows. It is just like you pick up a book and start reading a story. It just makes sense, and it is so easy to follow.”

Researcher: “Let’s look at your writing today. I saw you were really focused on your draft, and as I circulated around the room, I saw you had some interesting thoughts in your writing.

Student #17: “You really think so?”

Researcher: “Yes. I just wanted to shout ‘HOORAY’ when I saw the simile in which you compared your embarrassed self to the belly of a tarantula crawling on the ground. That was so creative! In fact, I was thrilled when you pointed out how the author of our read-aloud novel used figurative language to help paint pictures in the readers’ minds. This shows me you are learning to read like a writer.”

Student #17: “What does that mean?”

Researcher: “Reading like a writer means that you notice novel ways authors use words and techniques to help them create pictures, as well as the message that is intended for the reader.”

Student #17: “What does ‘novel’ mean?”

Researcher: “Novel means unusual.”

Student #17: “I guess it is kind of like being a detective because you are always on the lookout for things you can do to make your writing better.”

Researcher: “Instead of always seeking writing ideas from Student #8, be confident in yourself because you have great ideas of your own. I want your writing to sound like you – not like another student. I think you are becoming a good writer because I can see growth. You are working hard, and I appreciate your effort.”

Conference with Student #9:

Researcher: Today when I began assigning peer review partners, I noticed you were softly saying, “Not me, not me, please not me. What was that about?”

Student #9: Well, I always seem to get paired with student #11.”

Researcher: “Is that a problem for you?”

Student #9: “Her writing is terrible! She doesn’t understand how to write correct sentences. There is only one period on her paper, and that’s after the very last word on the page. Most of her words are not spelled right. Her writing doesn’t even make sense when I read it. Usually I can’t figure out what she is even writing about. It’s like I have to rewrite her whole paper. It just isn’t fair that I always get paired with her.”

Researcher: “I understand. Would you mind peer reviewing with Student #1?”

Student #9: “No, that would be great.”

Conference with Student #13:

Researcher: “Student #13, let’s take a look at your writing.”

Student #13: “Okay” (as she collects her draft and her notebook).

Researcher: “Please read your draft aloud to me.”

Student #13: After reading her draft, she asked, “How did you like it?”

Researcher: “You had some great ideas in your paper, but I kept hearing short, choppy sentences. What could you do to get rid of those?”

Student #13: “I could combine some of the choppy sentences into sentences that are longer and sound more like a fifth grader wrote them.”

Researcher: “That’s correct. How could you do that?”

Student #13: “I can review my writing notes. I remember you gave us a handout on sentence-combining. I think I can fix them all by myself.”

Researcher: “Good. If you have a problem, let me know how I can help you.”

Student #13: “Thank you.”

Conference with Student #6:

Researcher: “Student #6, let’s take a look at your writing.”

Student #6 gathered his paper and his writing notebook and slowly walked to the conferencing area. He stated, “I can’t think of anything to write about a moving box.”

Researcher: “Well, let’s take a look at your graphic organizer.”

Student #6: “I didn’t do one.”

Researcher: “Where is your graphic organizer handout?”

Student #6: “It’s right here.”

The researcher again read parts of *Ming Lo Moves the Mountain* (mentor text) and modeled the graphic organizer as a frame for writing the story (which served as a reference for students as they wrote their own imaginary stories). The researcher asked the student to begin brainstorming some thoughts about the moving box. As the student did this, the researcher gave him three graphic organizers that could be used to help him write his story. He chose one that was designed especially for imaginary stories. This graphic organizer was not one of the choices specific to *Writing to Win*.

APPENDIX P

Observations and Participant Observations

Observation was another data gathering instrument used in this project. The following accounts were observations made by the researcher at various points throughout the project.

September 15, 2008

Today, the researcher assigned a writing topic entitled “My Most Embarrassing Moment.” The students logged the entry in the table of contents of their writing notebooks. About five minutes into the assignment, Student #17, who sits on the front row, left her seat and went to talk to Student #8, who sits on the back row. The researcher overheard Student #17 asking Student #8, “What embarrassing moment are you going to write about?”

Student #8 remarked, “About the time my swimsuit top came off when I dived into the pool.”

Student #17 stated, “I can’t think of anything to write.” Student #8 advised, “Go make a brainstorming list like the teacher told us to do.” Student #17 turned and walked back to her desk and started a brainstorming list. Nine minutes later she began writing her draft.

October 1, 2008

As the researcher circulated around the room today during writing block, she noticed three students completely covered their papers as she approached their desks. The researcher did not say anything to them; rather, she continued circulating around the room. They continued the behavior. The researcher took a mental note of the students who covered their papers.

During her planning period, while the students were in gym class, the researcher checked everyone’s writing notebooks, while paying close attention to the notebooks of the three students who kept their papers covered. One of the students had written three sentences on his paper. Another student had written, “I can’t think of anything good to write.” The third student had written row after row of nothing but squiggly lines. There were no words – just squiggly lines.

November 4, 2008

We have been preparing to write persuasive essays. In order to get the students ready to do this, the researcher read several texts written to persuade an audience. She had suggested the students pay close attention as the texts were read, as she wanted them to identify ways narrative writing and persuasive writing were similar and different. Next, the researcher modeled how to use a graphic organizer specifically designed for use with persuasive writing. The parts of the persuasive essay that had been recently read fit well into the graphic organizer used for this lesson. This graphic organizer was not part of the *Writing to Win* curriculum, but was from a resource purchased by the researcher.

After modeling how to use a graphic organizer to frame their writing, the researcher gave each of the students a blank organizer to use as they thought about and contemplated ideas for their writing. The writing topic was to persuade the principal to set up a video game room where students with good behavior could go the last 20 minutes of the school day. The students seemed very excited about this topic.

As the students started on the assignment, one student remarked, “Gosh, where have these graphic organizers been all my life? This is so easy.” Later today during a writing conference, the researcher asked the student, “How did the graphic organizer help you with your writing today?”

The student replied, “The graphic organizer was so easy to follow. It totally helped me organize my ideas. If you just follow the graphic organizer, the hard part about writing is done. The graphic organizer kind of forces you to organize your thoughts and ideas before you even begin to draft.”

December 4, 2008

The class is reading a novel called *Summer of the Monkeys* by Wilson Rawls. The book is rich with figurative language. As the story was read today, one particular student noticed how the author often compared things (such as the snake was as big and shiny as a new stovepipe). Since

students showed an interest in the comparisons, we talked about similes and metaphors as figurative language used in writing to help form pictures and details in the readers' minds. As we read the next several pages, students pointed out other examples of similes and metaphors. To make use of a teachable moment, the students referred to their draft of "My Most Embarrassing Moment" and revised their story by including two similes. During writing conferences today, each student had to read me their sentences containing the similes. Student #8 was so eager to share. Her original sentence read: I was so embarrassed. Her revised sentence read: I felt as low as a tarantula's belly as it crawled along in the desert sand.

The researcher responded, "Wow!"

As a culminating activity, each student wrote his/her original sentence on a sentence strip. Then, they wrote their revised sentence containing the simile on another sentence strip. These were posted on the writing board for other students to use as models as they wrote.

December 16, 2008

The class began drafting a personal narrative today. The writing topic was to write about your favorite vacation. In following the writing process approach, the students initially brainstormed their ideas. After about five minutes, Student #17 left her seat to go talk to Student #8. Student #17 asked Student #8, "What vacation are you writing about?"

Student #8 responded, "I'm writing about the time I went to stay for two weeks with my grandparents in New Orleans."

Student #17 remarked, "I bet that was fun!" She then returned to her seat and began drafting her own story.

The researcher noticed Student #6 never started brainstorming. The researcher observed him for a few moments, and he began chewing on his fingernails. He finally raised his hand, and the researcher walked over to his desk. He said, "I have never been on a vacation." The researcher paused for a moment to figure out a different writing topic for the student. The researcher suggested he write about his favorite school field trip. He agreed and started writing.

January 22, 2009

The students wrote about “My Scariest Moment” today. The researcher wrote with the students. The room was usually very noisy during writing time, but today the only noise that was heard was the tapping of pencil points as the students wrote. The students seemed to be totally engrossed in what they were doing! Were they enjoying the writing topic, or were they engaged in the task because the researcher was writing with them (even sat in a student desk among them)?

January 23, 2009

The students and the researcher continued drafting their scariest moments. Again, the researcher sat in a desk among the students and wrote with them. As the drafts were completed, the researcher gave instructions on the revision strategy to be used with this assignment.

Student #16 asked, “Are you going to revise your writing?”

The researcher responded, “Yes.”

Student #3 asked, “Are you going to read your paper to the class?”

The researcher remarked, “Yes, as soon as I have revised and edited my writing.”

February 4, 2009

Today, the students began publishing their writing. Many of them read their stories to the class, but some wanted them posted on the writing wall for others to read. The students asked the researcher to read her paper aloud to the class. For an instant, the researcher’s mind flashed back to her fifth grade writing class. The class had been given an assignment to write about something happy. The researcher recalled a sense of panic because she had nothing happy to share. As soon as the researcher got off the bus that afternoon, she began looking through books to see if she could find a picture that portrayed happiness, hoping she could fake a story. One of the researcher’s coloring books had a picture of a horse hanging laundry on the line, and she thought that was funny – which the researcher equated with happiness. The researcher wrote her story and even traced the picture for her teacher, and she was so proud to turn in her assignment! The

researcher saw the teacher “roll her eyes” as she looked at the picture and read the story on the next day. She was devastated!

Since the look on the teacher’s face was always a painful memory, the researcher very cautiously read her paper to the class. The students were so complimentary and were surprised by how much she had written. In receiving feedback, the main things the students commented about were how well the story was sequenced and organized, as well as the pictures the words created in the readers’ minds. The students shared they felt the suspense as the story was read.

After reading the story to the students, the researcher showed the students her draft of that assignment. She wanted the students to see all the writing in the margins, the strike outs, and the arrows drawn all over the paper. The students needed to see that even adults must revise when they write.

March 19, 2009

The next mode of writing was the imaginary narrative. This mode of writing was typically the type students enjoyed the most because they were able to create the characters, the setting, and the plot. The researcher read *Ming Lo Moves the Mountain* as a mentor text, as well as three exemplary narratives written by former students. The students needed to be familiar with the format of an imaginary narrative. Typically, an imaginary narrative has a problem that the characters try to solve. The writer must creatively inform the reader if the problem is ever solved or not. Today’s topic was: You walk into your classroom and see a moving box on your teacher’s desk. Tell what is in the box and what happens when you decide to open it.

Students began working on brainstorming and completing a graphic organizer. Student #17 leaves her seat to talk to Student #8. Why does she do this???

Student #17 asked, “What are you writing about?”

Student #8 stomps her foot and with an angry face yells, “Go think up your own ideas. You don’t need to know what I’m writing about!”

Student #17 walked back to her seat and began to cry. The researcher called her to the side and asked her, “Why are you crying?”

Student #17 replied, “I want to have the best paper and to do that, I’ve got to know what she’s writing about. I just can’t think of good ideas like she does.” The researcher reassured the student and conferenced with her about her own writing ideas. The student began brainstorming other ideas, and finally narrowed her focus to a manageable task and was able to successfully complete the assignment.