TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT, ENACTMENT, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A NEW WRITING CURRICULUM WITHIN THE ELMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

Except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this dissertation is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisory committee. This dissertation does not include proprietary or classified information.

_____

André L. Harrison

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL:

Margaret E. Ross Associate Professor Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology	Cynthia J. Reed, Chair Associate Professor Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Jill Salisbury-Glennon Associate Professor Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology	Stephen L. McFarland Dean Graduate School

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT, ENACTMENT, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A NEW WRITING CURRICULUM WITHIN THE ELMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

André L. Harrison

A Dissertation

Submitted to

the Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

Auburn, Alabama
May 11, 2006

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT, ENACTMENT, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A NEW WRITING CURRICULUM WITHIN THE ELMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

André Harrison

_____
Signature of Author

_____
Date of Graduation

VITA

Andrè Lunzunia Harrison, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Willie James Harrison, was born on November 1, 1970, in Montgomery, Alabama. He graduated from The Calhoun High School in Calhoun, Alabama, in 1989. He attended Alabama State University where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in Language Arts Education in May 1993. In August 1993, he began teaching eighth grade at Wetumpka Jr. High School in Elmore County, Alabama. While teaching at Wetumpka Jr. High, he completed his Master's degree in English Education in August 1995 at Alabama State University. After five years of teaching, he enrolled in the Library Media Education Certification program at Alabama State University. Although he completed the program in August 1999, he was named the Media Specialist at Holtville Elementary School in August 1998. In July 1999, he was selected as the Media Specialist at Millbrook Middle/Jr. High School. He became a coordinator for the Elmore County School District in August 2000 where he presently remains as Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction. He completed his A Certification in December 2000 from Alabama State University and AA Certification from Auburn University in August 2005 in Educational Administration. He has also served as the Interim Principal at Wetumpka Jr. High School and the Acting Principal at Wetumpka Intermediate School. He is married to Monica Harrison, and they are the proud parents of Aundrea LaMonica Harrison. They reside in Millbrook, Alabama.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT, ENACTMENT, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A NEW WRITING CURRICULUM WITHIN THE ELMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

André Harrison

Doctor of Education, Auburn University, May 11, 2006
(M.Ed., Alabama State University, 1995)
(B.S., Alabama State University, 1993)

213 Typed Pages

Directed by Dr. Cynthia J. Reed

With increased accountability constraints placed on school districts in regards to improving students' writing skills, schools throughout the nation are seeking assistance and working vigorously to develop curricula for teachers to teach writing more effectively. Many educators and researchers suggest that in order to improve students' writing abilities, writing must be at the center of the school agenda, and policymakers at the state and local levels must provide the resources required to improve writing (NCW, 2003; & Shelton, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to determine K-12 language arts educators' perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District. It also explored the research practices and ideas relating to the development of

effective writing curricula. The sample for this study consisted of K-12 language arts teachers employed within the Elmore County Public School District. Two hundred and thirteen (73%) of the language arts teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

A mixed-methodology research design was used in this study, and four key findings emerged including: support for the enactment of the new writing curriculum, meaningful involvement of teachers during the curriculum development process, adequate ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers, and sufficient technological support and/or resources for teachers when implementing new curricula. Based on the findings, the researcher discussed the importance of effective writing instruction and its impact on student achievement.

While the research explored what happened within one school district, the findings and recommendations from this study may provide school districts throughout the nation with assistance as they prepare to develop and enact new writing curricula, which may lead to a higher quality of teaching and various improvements in students' writing skills.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation is a process in which one does not walk alone. In fact, many are called upon to give of their time, energy, and expertise. In the following paragraphs it is my pleasure to be able to express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to each and every person who walked alongside me through this journey of writing an effective dissertation.

Dr. Cynthia J. Reed, my Doctoral Committee Chair, lent encouragement, experience, and expertise in the field of educational leadership. Her high expectations and willingness to provide support contributed immensely to the achievement of my educational goal. Dr. Margaret E. Ross impacted this dissertation by imparting her impeccable knowledge of educational research and statistics. Through her skill my educational goal, research, and data were woven together into one cohesive work. Dr. Jill Salisbury-Glennon worked tirelessly, challenging me to press forward to write a quality document. Her commitment to excellence gave me the strength to reframe an already good document into an excellent one. All the language arts teachers in the Elmore County Public School District were generous and gracious throughout this entire process. Their commitment to student learning and their willingness to try new writing curricula to better teach writing was instrumental in gathering current data, which supported my dissertation. They were also willing to give constructive feedback, which made the data used in this dissertation reliable. Dr. Alyson Whyte, the Outside Reader, was very instrumental during the final stages of this process. Because of her expertise in the field

of English/Language Arts Education, she was able to provide me with the support and guidance to help strengthen my dissertation. In addition to Dr. Whyte, Dr. Alma S. Freeman, Dr. Hyacinth Findlay, Mrs. Cindy Cochran, Mrs. Charlotte London, Mrs. Sandra K. Mayfield, and Ms. Altamese Stroud–Hill were relentless in their pursuit of producing a flawless document throughout the editing and formatting process. It is through this great effort the document will be clearly and accurately understood by anyone reading this document. Ms. Cindy Gilbreath provided encouragement and support by listening to my ideas and organizing and preparing necessary materials. I would like to thank Glenda and Jim VanErmen for their wonderful friendship and the support they gave me throughout this process. Most importantly I want to acknowledge my wife, Monica, and my daughter, Aundrea. Throughout this process, Monica provided patience, which empowered me to work the necessary long hours needed to produce a quality document. Aundrea was my inspiration for completing this degree. I am so grateful for having a loving family who demonstrated the willingness to unselfishly sacrifice family time in order to assist me in writing this document. I would like to express the overwhelming love I have for the both of them. Overall, I give thanks to God for helping me achieve this monumental task of writing a dissertation. He protected me during many long hours on the road to Auburn University. I am truly grateful to Him for providing me with the strength and endurance to complete this journey in life.

Style manual or journal used: Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th edition

Computer software used: Microsoft Word XP, and the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 11.0 (2003)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

I. INTRODUCTION

Overview

> *Effective writing skills are important in all stages of life from early education to future employment. In the business world, as well as in school, students often must convey complex ideas and information in a clear, succinct manner. Inadequate writing skills, therefore, could inhibit achievement across the curriculum and in future careers, while proficient writing skills help students convey ideas, deliver instructions, analyze information, and motivate others.*
>
> — The Condition of Education, 1998, p. 12

Public concern regarding effective writing instruction in school districts across the United States is at an all-time high. In its 2003 report, *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*, the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (NCW) (2003) asserted that American education will not recognize its potential as a vehicle of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution takes place putting writing instructional strategies into their proper place in every classroom throughout this country. In addition, the Commission's report stated, "Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasely shortchanged throughout the school and college years" (NCW, 2003, p. 3).

While many researchers in the field of writing instruction applaud the Commission's quest to produce proficient student writers throughout the nation, they are also convinced that states should consider the same mission (Cotton, 2000; Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, & Valdes, 2004; Strickland, Bodino, Buchan, Jones, Nelson, &

Rosen, 2001). Every state across the nation must now comply with *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) accountability standards, so there has been great emphasis placed on writing instruction. NCLB requires all schools, school systems, and states to show students are making adequate yearly progress in language arts and mathematics. In addition, this new legislation requires the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to report students' results from the direct assessment of writing tests. Because high-stakes writing tests have become a part of many states' accountability standards, states are now focusing on organizing training opportunities for teachers to enhance writing instruction (NCW, 2003).

Likewise, many local school districts are revisiting current writing practices to ensure students become better writers. Not only is writing the forefront of NCLB accountability standards for local school districts but it has also become essential for students to compete in today's demanding job market. According to a newspaper article by Williams (2004), schools once focused on technology as the essential tool for high school students; however, now many employers within U. S. corporations indicate writing is a threshold skill for workplace employment (p. 1). In addition, the NCW surveyed 120 human resource directors around the country and found that business leaders stressed an improvement in the quality of writing as necessary for students to succeed in their careers. Correspondently, local school districts are working hastily to develop curricula to ensure that writing is being taught in every subject and at all grade levels (NCW, 2003; Williams, 2004).

Many educators and researchers suggest that in order to improve students' writing abilities, writing must be at the center of the school agenda, and policymakers at the state

and local levels must provide the resources required to improve writing (Calkins, 1986, 1994; Cotton, 2000; NCW, 2003; Shelton, 2002). In order for schools to move toward this new way of teaching writing, writing curricula must be restructured. Every state and local school district must revisit their current language arts curricula to ensure writing standards are included, and teachers should be trained to teach writing more effectively. Once trained to teach writing more efficiently, teachers must also realize they need to provide a great deal of external support in order to motivate all learners to keep practicing to become better writers (Fleischer, 2004; Kern, Andre, Schilke, Barton, & McGuire, 2003; Strickland, et al., 2001).

Background of the Study

Writing is a very complex intellectual process. It extends far beyond mastering simple grammar and punctuation rules, the focus on which many writing teachers have aimed their instruction. Writing requires students to stretch their minds, sharpen their analytical skills, and determine valid and precise distinctions (NCW, 2003). During this complex process, students must maintain their focus on important aspects such as organization, form and features, purposes and goals, audience needs and perspective, and evaluation of the communication between the author and reader (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2004). In addition, Graham and Harris (2000) revealed that writing requires extensive self-regulation and attention control. Above all, the NCW (2003) stated:

Writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning. Writing competence builds confidence, which readily turns into creativity and fun, precisely what

is most frequently absent from the policy discussion about today's schools. As a nation, we can barely begin to imagine how powerful K–16 education might be if writing were put in its proper focus. (p. 14)

By the end of the nineteenth century, the English curriculum within elementary and secondary schools viewed writing as a skill where students were only required to master penmanship. A few decades later, it became a subfield of reading education, which still allowed little time for writing instruction (Zaner-Bloser, 2003). During the Progressive Education Movement, renowned educator John Dewey (1912) argued that writing should be taught using an interdisciplinary approach. Today, researchers consider this approach a writers' workshop, and they argue this approach was the first attempt to teach writing using an appropriate methodology (Calkins, 1986, 1994; Graves, 1994; Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001; Richgels, 1986).

When the cognitive revolution impacted education during the late 1970s, it became distinctively clear that writing composition was much more obviously a constructive process than other facets of the English curriculum (Zaner-Bloser, 2003). Attention was given to the functional aspects of language, and guidance was provided for selecting, organizing, and connecting writing content. The focus was to teach using a process approach instead of using the once famous product approach (Cotton, 2000). This same writing strategy was used throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

In today's demanding society, with high-stakes tests and federal and state accountability measures, many schools across the country are developing writing curricula based on standards created by a joint effort of the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (Zaner-Bloser, 2002). Because of

many states' direct writing assessments, teachers often feel compelled to teach to the test (Isascson, 2004). However, researchers suggest that school districts across the country develop effective policies and curricula that are aligned with assessment standards to teach writing so their students can master the skill (NCW, 2003; Strickland, et al., 2001).

In addition, approaches to improving writing instruction are currently being proposed throughout the nation. Several researchers propose that writing be taught using a sound curriculum centered on national, state, and local standards, using different writing programs to supplement the curriculum (Auman, 2002; Bellany, 2001; Crawford, 2002; Culham, 2003; Sipe, 2002). Researchers also emphasize that writing should be taught using a process approach where students are guided through each phase of the writing process. Although a vast majority of researchers support this strategy, several of them have acknowledged the importance of it being taught as recursive rather than a set of ordered steps and/or stages. This method allows students to be more successful and exhibit their own uniqueness throughout the entire writing process (Calkins, 1986, 1994; Cotton, 2000; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1982; Richgels, 1986). For students with exceptionalities, research supports the use of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach to help these students master the skill of writing (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003). The use of these skills to expand students' writing capabilities is crucial if the nation wants to improve the teaching of writing throughout U. S. schools.

Statement of the Problem

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges acknowledges the need for a writing revolution in schools across the United States. The Commission argues that until a writing revolution puts the power of language and communication in its proper place in classrooms throughout the United States, our country will not reach its potential as a nation. Despite its importance in school districts around the country, effective writing instruction has been neglected from the language arts curriculum (NCW, 2003). Yet, the task of helping students become better writers is often left up to teachers who lack the knowledge and skills to effectively produce better student writers who are able to leave high school ready to compete in today's challenging society (NCW, 2003; Strickland, et al., 2001). The latest findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that most students have mastered basic writing skills; however, they still cannot systematically produce writing at the high levels of skill, maturity, and sophistication required in today's complex, modern economy (Baldwin, 2004; NCW, 2003). With increased accountability constraints placed on school districts in regards to improving students' writing skills, schools throughout the nation are seeking assistance and working vigorously to develop curricula for teachers to teach writing more effectively.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores research practices and ideas relating to the development of effective writing curricula. For the first time since the early 1990s, standards for the language arts curriculum are being revisited at the national, state, and local levels

(Baldwin, 2004; Elbow, 2004; NCW, 2003; Saddler & Andrade, 2004). These new standards include statements of what students should know and be able to do with regards to writing, beginning in kindergarten classrooms. The standards call for higher expectations regarding performance in writing for all students, and they reflect changes in writing curricula (Baldwin, 2000; Strickland, et al., 2001). Because of this, most writing educators agree that there is a substantial need to develop new curricula to teach writing more explicitly in order for students to demonstrate proficiency in this area (NCW, 2003). Based on this concern, the researcher focused on teachers' perceptions of the writing curriculum instituted within the Elmore County Public School District. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the language arts educators' perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District.

Significance of the Study

The National Commission on Writing stresses that school districts throughout the nation must develop curricula to teach students to write more proficiently in order for them to take part in the range of experiences available to them (Sipe, 2003). A commitment to developing useful writing curricula has been a challenging experience for most educators who have been charged with this task; school districts throughout the nation are seeking assistance in developing writing curricula and policies to ensure writing is being taught at all grade levels (NCW, 2003). The theoretical framework for this study acknowledges the need to enhance the quality of writing instruction throughout American K–12 schools so that learning is powerful and interesting, and students in turn are self-motivated to write fluently, believing what they have to say is meaningful and

worth the effort. Therefore, this study is significant since it provides useful information to assist educators who are responsible for planning and developing writing curricula with the goal of providing their students with adequate instruction, beginning in early elementary grades and sustaining the concentration throughout high school. On a wider scale, the study contributes to the body of established literature on the rationale of teaching students to become proficient writers so they will be prepared to gain full participation in America's multifaceted society.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed:

1. What are the language arts teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and the need for the new writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District?

2. To what extent has the new writing curriculum provided the language arts teachers with adequate research-based strategies to improve writing instruction within the Elmore County Public School District?

3. a) To what extent have the processes used during the development of the new writing curriculum enabled teachers to enact the writing curriculum?

   b) What recommendations do teachers have for improving the curriculum development and implementation process of the new writing curriculum?

4. To what extent have continuous professional development activities and/or training sessions had an impact on producing better writing teachers within the district?

5. How will the teachers evaluate the effectiveness of the technological resources used during the enactment process of the new writing curriculum?

Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions provide an understanding of the terms used in this study.

Composition: In writing, the process or result of arranging ideas to form a clear and unified impression in order to create an effective message (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Curriculum Alignment: The process of matching curriculum content standards to the degree to which they are written, taught, and tested are congruent (English, 2000).

Curriculum Guide: A written plan describing the general academic curriculum of a school, school district, or program of study (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Discourse: The act or result of making a written or spoken presentation on a subject (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Horizontal Alignment: The curriculum is aligned horizontally when educators within a specific grade level or school district coordinate instruction across disciplines. Using this method, educators will avoid creating a system of systems for instruction within their district (English, 2000).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP): A congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Educational Statistics, U. S. Department of Education, which since 1969 collects and reports information on what American students, in both public and private elementary and secondary schools, know and can do in several

subjects including reading, mathematics, science, writing, history, and geography; "the nation's report card" (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Proficient Writer: Writers who are meeting the standards and/or criteria from the states' direct assessments of writing examinations (NCW, 2003).

Recursive process: A process in creating a written composition where the writer moves back and forth among the planning, drafting, and revising phases of writing (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Research-Based Writing Strategies: Writing strategies that have proven to be successful tools to assist teachers in producing proficient student writers. Some of them include but are not limited to the writing process, the Self-Regulated Development Strategy (SRDS), and the teaching of writing across the curriculum (Bradford, 1999; Cotton, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2000).

Six + 1 Traits of Writing Supplemental Program: A research-based writing model based on six instructional writing traits (ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation) to link effective classroom instruction, centered on writing assessment, with revision and the editing process (Culham, 2003).

Strategies for Writers Program: A complete research-based writing program that was developed by *Zaner-Bloser* to meet the writing needs of both teachers and students in elementary and middle school grades (Zaner-Bloser, 2002).

Step-Up to Writing Program: The writing skills that are taught in this research-based program are sequenced beginning with the teacher talking and using examples and soliciting frequent verbal responses from the students. Using this program as a guide, classroom teachers can model and guide their students through writing activities,

providing them with frequent feedback on their strengths and weaknesses which allows the students to be successful (Simon, 2003).

Vertical Alignment: The process where schools or school districts align curricula to connect subjects across grade levels in a cumulative manner to build comprehensive, increasingly complex instructional programs (English, 2000; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Writing Curriculum: A policy and/or plan aimed to teach students to master successful writing skills at every grade level (NCW, 2003).

Writer's Workshop: A block of school time devoted to student planning, drafting, and editing composition for publication, often involving peer collaboration (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Writing Portfolio: A collection of written composition samples, usually selected by the student, which may be used to assess progress in planning, drafting, revising, and editing writing (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Overview of Methodology

The intent of this study was to determine the K–12 language arts teachers' perceptions of a newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District. The language arts teachers were directly responsible for implementing the writing curriculum in their classrooms. A mixed-method design has been used in this study to obtain data from the participants.

A quantitative research methodology was used to measure the language arts teachers' perceptions of the development, enactment, and effectiveness of the new

writing curriculum, using twenty-seven Likert-type scale statements. Next, the researcher used a qualitative methodology to allow the participants to summarize their opinions of the new writing curriculum, using three open-ended questions in section three of the questionnaire. From these questions, it was the goal of the researcher to identify themes, similarities, and/or differences in the participants' responses to each of the questions.

Finally, before the questionnaire was distributed to the language arts teachers, the researcher used a panel of expert (language arts) teachers and administrative interns to review the questionnaire and provide feedback on its effectiveness. The questionnaire was then field tested twice. Once the researcher revised the questionnaire, it was approved by Auburn University's Office of Internal Research. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to the K–12 language arts teachers within the district during the month of August 2005. Although the researcher served as the coordinator of curriculum and instruction for the district during the period when the new writing curriculum was developed and implemented, the researcher considered any bias that could impact the true analysis of the study. In addition, because of his role, the researcher took into consideration the importance of the validity of this study and did not add any inferences into its results.

Study Limitations

1. Only the language arts teachers' perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum were being determined.
2. Survey respondents assisted in the developmental process of the writing curriculum.

3. The new writing curriculum used for this survey has only been used with students and educators within the Elmore County School District.
4. Self-reported-assumption that respondents answered truthfully.
5. Two hundred and ten (98.6%) of the responding language arts teachers were females.
6. One hundred and sixty-two (76.1%) of the responding language arts teachers were elementary teachers.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief overview of the study, which included the background, problem statement, purpose, significance, research questions, definitions of key terms, methodology, and limitations. The next chapter contains a review of relevant literature related to the research questions that this study has considered. The topics consist of (a) writing curricula reform and programs to enhance writing instruction, (b) research based writing strategies, (c) curriculum development process and change, (d) teachers learning about writing, and (e) the use of technological resources in the enactment of the writing curriculum.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"*Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many.*"
-The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and College.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the average American student is not writing at proficient levels (NCES, 2003). In addition, during the past decade, a concerted effort in the field of writing instruction has begun to influence different approaches that highly recommend a balance between skills and process strategies to improve student achievement (Cotton, 2000; Crawford, 2001; Culham, 2003; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002; NCW, 2003). While writing is perceived to be an integral element to academic success and effective participation in an educated society, many teachers and their students consider writing to be a time-consuming activity or assignment (NCW, 2003). However, since accountability has been placed on the emphasis of teaching writing, the nation, states, and several school districts have begun to work diligently in an effort to develop curricula or action plans to improve writing instruction in all grades (NCW, 2003; Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, & Valdes, 2004). As a result, national attention has been given to the teaching and learning of writing (NCW, 2003).

This review has been organized into five sections. The first section provides an overview of writing curricula reform and programs designed to enhance writing instruction. Subsequent sections discuss research-based writing strategies, the curriculum

development process and change, how teachers learn about writing, and the use of technological resources in the enactment of the writing curriculum. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the research.

Writing Curricula Reform and Programs Used to Enhance Writing Instruction

In April of 2003, the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (NCW) conducted an intense study on reforming the teaching of writing in America's schools. In the report that followed the study, the Commission gave explicit details of their findings and recommendations concerning writing curricula reform. After it was published, several authors (Abbe, 2003; *Reading Today*, 2003; Strickland, et al., 2001) supported the study's findings and recommendations.

Before the NCW shared the report, the Commission provided its recommendations in an executive summary. The executive summary identified suggestions that would be required to create and launch a writing revolution, including:

- Develop a comprehensive writing agenda for the nation
- Devote time to the teaching of writing
- Ensure that students' test results are fair and authentic
- Use technology resources to supplement the curriculum
- Provide teachers with adequate professional development (NCW, 2003, p. 3).

The full report and multiple suggestions for launching writing curricula reform can be accessed through the NCW website http://www.writingcommission.org.

In its report, *The Neglected R: The Need for a Writing Revolution*, the National Commission on Writing (2003) revealed that writing was one of the most neglected elements of teaching in American schools in today's hard-pressed society. The Commission's report states that the concept of educational reform must be expanded to include students' abilities to think, reason, and communicate (NCW, 2003, p. 9). The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges is comprised of university leaders, public school superintendents and teachers, and is also assisted by an advisory panel of writing experts. The report from the Commission stresses that it is crucial for America and school systems within our country to make a commitment to developing a curriculum to teach writing because it is considered one of the most underdeveloped areas in curriculum and instruction. Writing enables students to connect the dots in their knowledge and is central to self-expression and civic participation (p. 5). The NCW report stated:

> If students are to make knowledge on their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write. (p. 9)

This quote strongly emphasizes the need for students to become effective communicators; therefore, if they are unable to write proficiently, they will have a difficult time competing in today's complex society.

Reading Today (2003) also supported the National Commission on Writing's premise. It noted that the amount of time and financial support used to improve students' writing skills must be dramatically increased in school districts throughout the United

States. Further, state and local curriculum guides must be developed to teach writing at every grade level (*Reading Today*, 2003). Using the NCW's report as its basis, *Reading Today* stated that it is time for a writing revolution. Yet, the report from NCW argues that writing has been shortchanged in the school reform movement initiated over twenty years ago. Despite the efforts of several educators, writing curricula reform across the United States has not received the full attention it deserves; writing must be placed at the center of each school's agenda for reform (*Reading Today*, 2003). The Commission's Vice Chairwoman, Arlene Ackerson, Superintendent of Schools for San Francisco stated:

> Very few things are more important to improving student achievement than restoring writing to its proper place in the classroom. Writing is how we can teach students complex skills of synthesis, analysis, and problem solving: These skills serve them well throughout life. (p. 2)

In her article, *Join the Revolution* which also examined the writing study conducted by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges on the teaching of writing in the United States, Abbe (2003) indicated that nearly 66 percent of high school seniors do not write a three-page paper as often as once a month for their English instructors, and 75 percent of seniors never receive a writing assignment in history or social studies. She also noted that the Commission does not wish to criticize teachers, but rather to focus its attention on writing curricula reform (Abbe, 2003). Gaston Caperton, the President of the College Board and an ex-official member of the NWC stated:

> The Commission hoped to highlight the significance of writing in society and point people in the right direction. The Writing Challenge to the Nation will

> translate the recommendations of the commission into tangible steps to improve writing, building a widespread, sustainable program is what the next five years will be all about. (*Reading Today*, 2003, p. 2)

Calkins (1986, 1994), the director of the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University and renowned author of books related to the teaching of writing, confirmed that the current focus of the report is well intended. However, she believes that because of budgetary funds, it is impossible to increase the time and resources devoted to writing curricula reform: "I get the feeling they are trying to use this report to rally people around the importance of writing. It is sensitively written, and she adds, it acknowledges the breath of writing opportunities that students should have" (Manzo, 2003, p. 1).

With many states and local systems pursuing a consensus about what is important in the English language arts curriculum, their actions distinctively identify concern for focusing on the need for writing reform, such as those started during the 1990s. Since rigorous standards have been developed and redefined at the national, state, and local levels, including statements of what students are to know and be able to do regarding writing even during their primary grade years, school systems have been working hastily to develop curricula to meet the needs of all of their students, beginning in kindergarten and going through high school. Because of the higher expectations set regarding every student's performance in writing, the English language arts curriculum must reflect changes to include the teaching of writing (Strickland, 2001).

Most of the language arts teachers argue that in order to improve any writing curriculum, school districts must continue to value the importance of writing instruction.

The teachers support the idea that every educator must realize that a quality-writing curriculum must entail more than mastering grammar and simple punctuation although these skills are considered important elements of being a good writer (Cotton, 2000; Crawford, 2001). The one of the findings from the NCW 2003 Report also supports this assumption regarding the need to improve writing instruction throughout the nation. According to the NCW report, *The Neglected "R,"* although many students are capable of identifying every part of speech, they are barely able to produce a piece of prose (NCW, 2003). In addition, the Commission notes that writing lessons using the four common modes of discourse (narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive) may help develop students' skills in writing. Writing can be best understood as a complex intellectual activity that requires students to stretch their minds, sharpen their analytical capabilities, and make valid and accurate distinctions (NCW, 2003). In addition to the information above, the NCW stressed the importance of students becoming competent writers so that they will be able to succeed as life long learners:

> Above all, as students and young adults begin a lifetime of learning, they will find that writing is liberating, satisfying, and even joyful. Writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning. Writing competence builds confidence, which readily turns into creativity and fun, precisely what is most frequently absent from the policy discussion about today's schools. As a nation, we can barely begin to imagine how powerful K–16 education might be if writing were put in its proper focus. (p. 14.)

Because of the advent of major statewide writing curriculum reform, in their article, *Teaching Writing in a Time of Reform,* Strickland et al. (2001) echoed many of the NCW concerns about writing reform. Strickland et al. noted that educators have begun to work rigorously to ensure that all of their students meet the needs of the writing expectations mandated by state. These efforts have transformed language arts educators' approach to teaching and learning because of state and local writing curriculum reform. In their article, the authors described a three-year case study they conducted with a veteran New Jersey teacher. At the beginning of the study, the teacher clearly admitted she gave little attention to teaching writing during the early years of her teaching career. She said, "I gave writing assignments, comments, and grades; I did not actually spend classroom time exploring new ways to teach it" (p. 2). However, after attending professional development activities related to writing curriculum reform, she admitted her textbook became more of a reference guide within the second year, and her students were able to master many writing skills with ease. She and her colleagues have begun to share articles on writing, experiment with new instructional strategies, and reflect on their own writings as well their students' writings (Strickland et al., 2001).

According to Strickland et al., it has become apparent that the teachers' efforts at improving the learning environment for their student writers have gone far beyond the previous methods they once used to teach writing; these new efforts have transformed their approach to teaching and learning. The teacher and her fellow colleagues have now become enthusiastic about the new contemporary approaches about teaching writing and have continued to search for new and innovative writing strategies to implement within her classroom. Strickland et al. argue that in order for a writing revolution to take place,

teachers across the nation must be committed, like the New Jersey teacher, about changing the way they have taught writing in the past so that their students will be provided with opportunities to become successful writers (Strickland et al., 2001).

Although Strickland et al. indicated that teachers are becoming more excited regarding an increased focus on writing and its accompanying prospective standards of achievement, many of them are more concerned about teaching writing than they were in the past. They know that they are going to be held accountable for their students' success on states' direct assessment of writing exams. The results of these tests are often published in local newspapers and compared with scores in other school districts within a state. Moreover, some teachers are still confused about their roles as writing facilitators and as an advocate for their children to become effective writers, as opposed to molders of uniform products of children's writing. After conducting several different interviews with writing teachers, Strickland et al. revealed from the survey data that some of the issues concerning writing reform included: balancing the amount and use of instructional time for writing, integrating writing across the curriculum, adhering to high-stakes testing rubrics, increasing the amount and quality of professional development, reconciling their professional orientation and their students' needs to focus on the assessment, and balancing attention to structure and content in student writing (Strickland et al., 2001).

In addition, the authors noted one major complaint from the teachers. They found that although the teachers of writing were satisfied with standards and assessments moving them toward the direct assessment of student achievement, the teachers believe the rubrics from state assessments have consumed the "true" writing curriculum. They illustrated that even in many of the best-performing districts, pressure to increase test

scores has caused teachers to spend inordinate time teaching to the test, even though many teachers would probably deny that they do so. Mabry (1999) described the paradox as it existed among several classroom teachers she interviewed in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Indiana:

> Teachers know, of course, that they will be excoriated if they succumb to pressure to teach to the test—a familiar accusation that many teachers interviewed in these three states repeated and denied. But evidence to the contrary was unmistakable. In some classrooms, state writing rubrics were accorded unprecedented priority. (p. 676.)

In addition to Mabry's findings on writing to the rubrics, Cunningham, Cunningham, and Allington (2002) also believed the danger in writing instruction is that it can quickly lose its value when teachers are faced with focusing too much on preparing their students for a high-stakes writing test. The authors stated high-stakes writing tests definitely can affect how writing is taught, and the effects may often include a narrowing of the writing curriculum. They concluded: "Writing instruction can only fulfill its potential to help both writing and reading abilities develop if all major aspects and types of writing are taught in the elementary school curriculum" (Cunningham, Cunningham, & Allington, 2002, p. 16).

Cunningham, Cunningham, and Allington carefully bring attention to the need for school districts to teach writing in all grades in order for every child to become a successful writer. In addition, in its report, the NCW specified that school districts must develop new curricula to incorporate writing opportunities for every student from the

earliest years of school through secondary school. The Commission determined that classroom practice and curricula should be developed to move from:

- children's literacy development in early years involving drawing, talking, word play, spelling, pictures, and writing stories, through
- middle school programs that encourage observational, descriptive, and analytical writing, to
- high school programs involving complex summaries, lab reports, book reviews, and reflective and persuasive essays of different lengths and levels of difficulty. This work should demand analysis, synthesis, and research from every student, in a variety of literary and nonliterary genres. (NCW, 2003, p. 34)

The NCW contended that when school districts applied this approach to developing curricula, their students immediately began to achieve desired results on high-stake tests.

Strickland et al. (2001) found this dilemma occurs when a rubric-driven writing curriculum replaces quality teacher-designed instruction, undermining the teacher's initiative and professionalism, defying what has already been discussed repeatedly as the goal of the writing curriculum reform movement. School leaders and district administrators can easily overlook this issue by driving their teachers to teaching the students only the skills that the state direct assessment of writing exams will measure. However, Strickland et al. noted that this disconnect has caused many to cite an urgent need for ongoing teacher education in the field of writing (Strickland et al., 2001)

Although writing reform has become one of the major elements in schools across America, still many high schools throughout the country are focusing on ways to improve

students' writing composition skills (NCW, 2003). The AEL (2005) and NCW (2003) noted that one of the most current problems in regards to high school students' writing proficiently was the lack of teachers teaching writing as a process, which involves planning, composing and revision. These two nonprofit organizations acknowledged that when teachers guided these students through the phases of the writing process, student achievement was higher. The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress direct writing assessment results revealed that eighth and twelfth grade students outperformed their peers in teachers' classrooms where they were taught the elements of the writing process, a strategy that has been noted throughout the literature for improving students' writing skills and performance on high-stakes accountability tests.

In addition, according to Fisher and Frey (2003), the focus of writing should extend beyond giving students more writing assignments for independent practice at the high school level. The authors argue that by using this approach, many high school teachers have missed one of the most critical steps of writing instruction. They used the results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to support their assertion regarding the teacher's role in writing improvement. According to Fisher and Frey, the data from the NAEP revealed that when high school teachers required students to write independently not allowing them to refine their work, writing achievement gains were lower (Fisher & Frey, 2003).

The NCW (2003) echoed Fisher and Frey's claims in its report, *The Neglected "R"*, stating that secondary teachers should focus on teaching students to write instead of giving them independent assignments that are due at the end of the class period. Using the 1998 NAEP results, the NCW cited that students in grades eight through twelve were

at or above the “basic” level of writing. However, only around one-fourth of the students between grades eight and twelve were at or above the “proficient” level. In addition, the NAEP results pinpointed that only one in one hundred students in these grades write at the “advanced” level, which has astounded many school officials (NCW, 2003, p. 16). According to the 2002 NAEP results, no significant changes for twelfth graders were revealed although there were slight changes in fourth and eighth graders (AEL, 2005; NCW, 2003).

Another existing issue that has contributed to high school students not mastering the technique(s) to write more proficiently is that many language arts teachers spend most of their time teaching basic mechanics such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling in isolation instead of in the context of writing. According to the AEL (2005), researcher T. R. Smith states that the mostly widely ignored research finding is that the teaching of formal grammar has little or no effect on the writing ability of high school students if divorced from the writing process. Smith says that grammar instruction should not be ignored, but integrated (AEL, 2005).

Many educators seemed baffled because their students are not performing as they would like on direct assessment of writing tests. They are working vigorously to identify and resolve factors that may be causing their students not to be able to write proficiently (NCW, 2003; Strickland et al., 2001). Repeatedly, throughout the literature on writing curriculum reform, these major factors have contributed to high school students failing to write more proficiently and have the confidence in what they have to say through their writing:

- Many school districts lack comprehensive writing curricula that teach writing beginning in kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- Classroom teachers are not relying on writing standards set by the state and local districts to teach writing more effectively.
- State and local educational leaders are currently not providing support for professional development and other opportunities that will give language arts educators the encouragement to improve their teaching skills and competence level as writing teachers.
- Along with professional development opportunities, school districts should provide classroom teachers with the professional resource materials needed to support good writing instruction rather than continue to rely on traditional approaches such as assigning independent writing activities and teaching writing in context. (Cotton, 2000; Crawford, 2001; NCW 2003)

In order for high schools to create skillful, self-confident writers, research supports the implementation of effective on-going comprehensive professional development activities for classroom teachers, standard-based lesson plans, and more conversations and collaboration between high school veteran teachers and preservice teachers. If these recommendations are implemented in high schools across the country, research findings support that the students earn higher scores in writing on state exams, and they become more confident writers (Cotton, 2000; Kern, Andre, Schilke, Barton, & McGurie, 2003; McGlinn, 2003; NCW, 2003).

When it comes to writing instruction, many high school language arts teachers have considered themselves to be content specialists and seem to discredit the use of

ongoing professional development. However, according to the NCW (2003), high school teachers and administrators must begin to attend professional development workshops which stress good writing practices so that every student can master the art of writing. As stated earlier, it is crucial that secondary teachers learn that good writing instruction extends beyond language formalities, grammar, and the basic fill-in-the-blank worksheet (ALE, 2005; Cotton, 2000; NCW, 2003).

Another issue that has been raised at the high school level concerning training teachers to teach writing more efficiently is the need to teach writing in every subject. The NCW (2003) states "Writing should be considered every teacher's responsibility" (p. 32). At this level, teachers believe that their content subject is more important than the teaching of writing. However, many high-stakes tests and federal mandates require students to write explanations instead of the traditional numerical or one-word answer. Therefore, all senior high teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities because teaching students to be better writers has become every teacher's responsibility (p. 32).

After completing a National Writing Project professional development seminar, Robert Tierney, a senior high biology teacher at Irvington High School in Fremont, California, found writing to be a very powerful tool for his students. With the assistance of his colleagues, Tierney divided 136 sophomore, junior, and senior biology students at Irvington into an experimental group and a comparison group. Both groups continued to do the same assignments such as attending labs, covering the same content material in their classes, and having homework assignments that only stressed usage and spelling corrections. On the other hand, the experimental group was asked to do more activities

such as: keeping reading logs, writing practice essays, developing writing directed at specific audiences other than the instructor, making end-of-class summaries, participating in group writing activities, and taking essay tests (Nagin, 2003).

Nagin (2003) found that by the end of the sixteen weeks, both the experimental and comparison group performed at about the same level on the multiple-choice tests. However, the experimental group scored 11 percent higher than the comparison group on genetics recall. After only three weeks, the experimental group outperformed the comparison group by 5 percent on seed-comparison recall. Mr. Tierney and one of his colleagues, Harry Stookey, concluded that the students who had the opportunity to write more had retained a larger amount of knowledge over the group that did not participate in the writing activities. They further concluded that writing helped the students in the experiment group "learn the subject matter more thoroughly, and their papers, reflecting what the student actually understands, are interesting to read" (p. 33).

Providing professional development regarding writing is a must for all secondary teachers. Like Tierney and his colleagues, many teachers can easily discover the power of writing and how it improves student learning and intellectual abilities (Nagin, 2003). Schools across the country must start to develop training sessions for teachers to improve the teaching of writing. As several research documents state, writing will not improve unless teachers are trained to teach it more efficiently. Not just at the high school level, but at all levels, student writers face problems; therefore, teachers need professional development support to help their students master this skill (AEL, 2005; Cotton, 2002; Nagin, 2003; NCW, 2003).

In addition to providing on-going research-based professional development activities for high school teachers, another key component for school districts to consider with regards to enhancing writing instruction at this level is to ensure that language arts teachers' lessons are standards-based. According to Isaacson (2004), the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) established national performance standards for English/Language Arts. Isaacson notes the three that pertain to writing:

- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g. conventions, styles, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g. spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint text. (Isaacson, 2004, p. 40)

From the National Standards regarding students' writing performance expectations, forty-nine of the fifty states in the United States have established their own standards for writing. Iowa is the only state that has not developed standards for writing because it has taken the position that standards should be set by the local districts. However, many have required school districts to develop writing standards because of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and criterion reference assessments. Isaacson (2004) and the NCW (2003) contended that if language arts teachers use these standards to develop their

writing curricula and lesson plans, their students' writing skills would substantially improve. In addition, Strickland et al. (2001) found that students' performance on states' direct assessment of writing tests improve drastically when high school teachers and teachers at all levels develop their lessons from writing standards because the standards have made the goals of writing instruction more explicit and more consistent; the standards have given teachers a clearer sense of the students' performance expectations for their grade levels (Strickland et al., 2001).

Since most secondary school language arts majors are finding themselves being held accountable for teaching their students to write better, colleges and universities have made writing a central element of their program of study. Many of these graduates have discovered that teaching English composition requires much work. They must be well-trained, qualified professional faculty members to teach their students to be proficient writers; therefore, they have found themselves enrolling in graduate classes to learn new skills to aid their students (Cotton, 2000; NCW, 2003).

McGlinn (2003) found that one way to reduce this problem was to have high school teachers and college writing professors converse and collaborate with one another. In his article, *Teaching Writing in High School and Colleges: Conversations and Collaborations*, Miami University of Ohio professor Don Daiker, a thirty year college teaching veteran, taught a semester at a Cincinnati high school to discover what really happened in middle school and high school classrooms in an effort to better prepare his preservice English language arts teachers. After being frustrated by discipline problems with the high school students, he gained a new respect for high school teachers. Plus, he discovered that his preservice teachers would need more practical, real-life tools to teach

high school students. Daiker developed several focus group activities between his college students and high school teachers and students. For example, he had his college students and high school students exchange personal letters. From that, during the semester, the preservice teachers received written assignments from the high school students that must be commented on in writing. This allowed the college students to respond to the writing of "real" students. McGlinn concluded that conversations and collaborative experiences are a must if universities and colleges want to provide their preservice students with the opportunities to learn writing theory and practice on a firsthand basis (McGlinn, 2003).

As the Elmore County School District personnel continued to reform writing instruction, they instantly discovered that using researched-based writing programs to complement the curriculum was very conducive to students' becoming successful writers. Even though several programs were previewed, the district evaluated the quality of each program. Holbrook's (1984) *Qualities of Effective Writing Programs* was used to assist with locating quality-writing programs. According to Holbrook, any writing program is likely to be successful if students are given ample time to write. For example, teachers using a Vermont Writing Program found their students wrote better when they were given the time to write. The six model schools in Holbrook's article went from teaching writing 45 minutes a day to 90 minutes daily. Holbrook stated that because of this, the school's curriculum supported by this program had served its purpose, which was to increase student achievement and change the way writing had been taught within the school. However, Taylor shared that schools must be careful not to implement a writing program based on only mechanical "correctness," and if school systems do this, their

students will still have problems mastering the skills of a proficient writer (Holbrook, 1984).

Cunningham, Cunningham, and Allington (2002) made the distinction that writing programs should not focus solely on grammar and traditional presentation instruction where there are examination of written models, specific writing assignments, and the teacher's feedback on writing has only small effects. Instead they argued that writing programs should engage students in various writing activities that are designed to teach them to learn and apply specific writing strategies and skills more effectively. The three authors noted:

> The key to teaching writing, including the conventions of writing, appears to include being consistent with a developmental sequence that recognizes the commonalties of children as they move from early emergence to sophisticated ability. Effective writing programs will look very different, grade-by-grade and will have expectations for children at each grade that are appropriate to their development as writers rather than to arbitrary standards based on tradition or how officials would like to test writing. The best writing instruction will teach students how to plan, compose, revise, and edit their own pieces of writing, all within the context of inquiry, self-assessment and self-regulation fostered by interaction with teachers and peers. (Cunningham, Cunningham, & Allington, 2002, p. 15)

In addition, Holbrook (1984) found that successful writing programs should provide emphasis to the total writing process, which includes prewriting, drafting,

revising, and proofing. She listed core concerns cited by teachers in the Bay Area Writing Project (now the National Writing Project) as important to successful writing instruction:

- The composing process (from prewriting, activities through revision)
- Syntax (including sentence combining, examination of common errors, and Francis Christensen's rhetoric)
- Sequence (moving from personal to analytical writing, from thesis to logical arguments)
- Small group techniques (peer criticism, writing for real audiences within the classroom, reading aloud in small groups)
- Writing assessment (holistic evaluation, systematic school-wide assessment)
- Opportunities for students in all grades to write frequently with delayed or "as need" instruction in grammar
- Teachers needed time to write with students
- Students learning to write for many audiences and in many modes, including those required for subjects other than English
- Nonthreatening evaluation of student writing with emphasis on revision rather than correction. (p. 2)

Using Holbrook's recommendations as a guide for selecting research-based programs to supplement the writing curriculum, the Elmore County Public School District Writing Curriculum evaluated different research-based writing programs although there were limited sources to choose from during the six-month ordeal. The committee consisted of K–12 language arts teachers and administrators who were involved in the developmental process of the new writing curriculum. During this

process, several vendors allowed the language arts teachers within the district to preview and use their program as part of teachers' classroom instruction. In addition, the vendors were on hand to provide professional development activities and training sessions and any other services that district may have needed during the selection process. After carefully evaluating their limited selection of research-based writing programs, the writing committee was able to identify and institute strategies and/or techniques from the following programs to support the new writing curriculum: *The National Writing Project, 6+ 1 Traits of Writing, Writing Strategies that Work,* and *Step-Up to Writing.*

The National Writing Project

Founded by James Gray in 1974, the *National Writing Project* (NWP) is a professional development program that is dedicated to improving writing and learning in schools throughout the United States. Within its mission, there are core principles that serve as the foundation of the NWP model. Among them are the following:

- Writing can and should be taught, not just assigned, at every level of schooling.
- Teachers of writing must write.
- Effective professional development programs provide frequent opportunities for teachers to examine research and practice together systematically.
- Teachers at every level-from kindergarten to college-are the agents of reform; universities and schools are ideal partners for investing together in that reform.
- Although there is no single right approach to teaching writing, some practices are more effective than others, and a research-informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop a comprehensive writing program (McDonald, Buchanan, Sterling, 2004).

To accomplish its mission, the project tries to find successful teachers to help shape writing instruction across the nation. During training sessions, the NWP focuses on the examination of teachers' exemplary classroom practices, supporting their work with research studies, and encouraging them to develop their own writing. The project serves over 100,000 teachers a year. Smith (1996) wrote concerning the National Writing Project:

> The project has no master list of teaching strategies, no workshop notebook (although early on, callers to the project office asked, "Could you please send us the writing project?"—as if the project were some kind of catalogue item). If anything, Gray boasts more about the project's openness of new ideas than about its already-collected wisdom. In fact, he credits the longevity of the project in part to its avoidance of shrink-wrapped lessons and paint-by-number formulas. (p. 1).

Smith (1996) clearly substantiates what many schools throughout the nation are trying to do as a "quick-fix" to their writing instructional problems. As found in the Elmore County School District, when it comes to improving instruction, there are no "quick-fixes."

Teachers in the National Writing Project have found this program to be helpful because the projects or workshops also provided follow-up training sessions and encouraged ongoing networking for them through times of writing reform. For example, in his study of two NWP sites, Barlow (2003) revealed that local networks from the NWP provided teachers with a variety of ways to stay connected, deepen their work, solicit support, and take a leadership role as teacher consultants. This program has really reshaped teachers' thinking about writing instruction. It has demonstrated this through

several selections of research results from across the country that show the success of writing project teachers in improving their students' writing achievement (Barlow, 2003).

The National Writing Project has directed several studies throughout the United States to demonstrate its impact on improving writing in American schools. In 1990, a study was conducted at the University of California, Los Angeles, to examine if the writing of students whose teachers took part in the writing project differed qualitatively from the writing of students of non-writing projected teachers, using the scores of the California writing assessment. Writing samples were collected from at least 274 junior and senior high school students in the Los Angeles area. In addition, the coordinators of the study collected writing samples from inner-city and suburban students of writing project teachers and from teachers with no writing project experience (Redfield, 1991).

The results from the study yielded that the students of writing project teachers scored an average of 41 percent higher than the students of the non-writing project teachers (an average score of 3.64 compared to 2.58 on a 6-point scale). In addition, the study also showed that the writing project students scored an average of at least 30 percent higher than the non-writing project students in all four content areas of the assessment. Redfield (1991) concluded:

> Students in the classes of teachers who are writing project fellows write significantly better than students who are not. It is also clear that students' writing improves in direct proportion to the number of writing project fellows they experience as English teachers. (p. 2)

The findings from a 1992–1993 study guided by the New York City Writing Project and Lehman College indicated that students whose teachers participated in the

Writing Teachers' Consortium achieved significantly higher ratings in reading than a comparison group of students of non-writing project teachers. Seventeen high schools in New York City took part in the program, and the study analyzed the scores of 529 students. From the scores of the Degrees of Reading Power test, the writing project students scored 61.2 percent compared to the non-writing students 54.6 percent (Office of Research, Evaluation, & Assessment, 1993).

In a Mississippi study, *The Final Report: Development of Instructional Management Plan, Staff Development, and Evaluation of Summer Youth Remediation Program*, four directors and twelve teachers from writing project demonstration sites worked cohesively to design and conduct workshops and to prepare teachers to teach summer school to at-risk, low income students, raging from age 16 to 21. This was part of the state's commitment to the federal Job Training Participation Act (JPTA) (Burkett & Swain, 1987).

In order for the program to receive federal funding for this project, the students had to show a combined gain of eight months' achievement in mathematics and reading skills after just six weeks. Once the writing project directors and teachers provided intensive training for the JPTA teachers, the summer program teachers started to see improvement in their students. After six weeks of summer school, the 1,500 JPTA students showed a combined gain from the pre-post test of 3 years, 4, months in writing, 1 year, nine months in mathematics, and 1 year, 7 months in reading (Burkett & Swain, 1987). Although this is a national program, many teachers have raved about the writing strategies and/or techniques that they have gained from professional development training

sessions that the National Writing Project has provided. Barlow (2003) noted that the ultimate beneficiaries are the students.

6 + 1 Traits of Writing

Another program that has been immensely beneficial to teachers of writing is the *6 + 1 Traits of Writing*. The six traits are not a curriculum; rather, they are a way to link effective classroom instruction centered on writing assessment with revision and the editing process (Culham, 2003). "The *6 + 1 Trait Model* has been considered as the cornerstone of a complete writing program," stated Ruth Culham (2003, p. 19). Her work with *6 Traits* has been very valuable to school districts throughout the United States as Boss (2002) called Culham "a writing assessment expert who has helped teachers around the world acquire writing strategies to produce stronger writers within their classrooms."

Culham provided a brief history of the *6 + 1 Trait Model*, which grew out of what has been called by many a "grassroots" movement. The teachers and researchers in Beaverton and Portland, Oregon, knew there was a more applicable way of assessing their students' writing than with multiple-choice questions on a standardized, norm-referenced test, which only provides information on how well students grasp common rules and construction of the English language, however not on their students' ability to write proficiently. The teachers wanted to develop a set of criteria to use as a scoring guide by which their students' writing samples could be evaluated with correctness and reliability. From the teachers' research efforts, along with Paul Diederich's research, six traits emerged.

Culham (2003) commented that "The teachers' research process ensured that the model was grounded in experience and empirical research" (p. 11). (Empirical, according

to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, means “verifiable or provable by means of observation or experiment.”) Culham (2003) identified six instructional traits of the writing model: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. Culham supplied a definition for each:

1. *Ideas:* Ideas make up the content of the piece of writing—the heart of the message.
2. *Organization:* Organization is the internal structure of the piece, the thread of meaning, the logical pattern of the ideas.
3. *Voice:* Voice is the soul of the piece. It’s what makes the writer’s style singular, as his or her feelings and convictions come out through the words.
4. *Word Choice:* Word choice is at its best when it includes the use of the rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.
5. *Sentence Fluency:* Sentence fluency is the flow of the language, the sound of word patterns-the way the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye.
6. *Conventions:* Conventions represent the piece’s level of correctness--the extent to which the writer uses grammar and mechanics with precision.
7. *Presentation:* Presentation zeros in on the form and layout--how pleasing the piece is to the eye.

According to Culham (2003), most teachers have stated that until the addition of the presentation category, conventions' scores were often overly influenced by the appearance of the final copy. The teachers stated that this addition allowed them to assess and respond with more precision. By using the traits as a scoring guide in their writing

instruction, the teachers have found that they can provide their students with concrete information to continue the quality of their writing toward improvement (Culham, 2003).

Bellamy (2001) noted that there have been several small-scale studies to uncover the effectiveness of the *6 + 1 Traits Model*. Each study was done in a single school or district and generally involved only one grade level of students. All of the studies used a similar methodology. With the exception of Kent School District, all studies were done in a single year:

1. *Jennie Wilson Elementary*. The school conducted a pretest of students writing skills then taught the six traits as an intervention. The school reported improvement in all grade levels K-5, ranging from 40% to 92%.
2. *Kent School District, WA***.** This study tracked student growth in writing achievement in the third grade over a period of three years. The school implemented the six traits model the second year. The study revealed that the school increased in the number of students meeting benchmark standards in all traits, ranging from 8.6% to 32.2%.
3. *Pilot SAS Writing Assessment.* This was a single-year study of fourth grade student pre-trait and post-trait training, showing a growth in the percentage meeting the scoring criteria of 12%.
4. *Hartly Elementary School.* This was a single-year study of third grade students giving pre-trait and post trait comparison. The study showed positive growth in average scores in all traits, ranging from 1.79 to 2.09 on a five-point scale.

5. *The Saudi Arbia/ARAMCO School.* This study was done with fourth grade students, showing the percentage of students at each level of performance pre-trait and post trait implementation. The study revealed an increased of 7 % in the number of students meeting or exceeding the district writing standard. (Bellamy, 2001, p. 2).

Even though teachers and Culham (2003) have found the six traits writing model to be a successful tool to improve students' writing, they alone are not the whole package. The writing model was never intended to be the writing curriculum. It is an assessment tool that works in conjunction with the writing or language arts curriculum to guide instruction so that all students can successfully achieve their writing goals.

Strategies for Writers

Zaner-Bloser's *Strategies for Writers* is another complete writing program that focuses on developing student writers who can independently and successfully compose writing from prewriting to revising and publication in grades one through eight. This program has been designed as a bridge between various theoretical bases because it embeds and models effective writing strategies within the framework of the writing process (Crawford, 2002). This program uses five different approaches to improve writing instruction: writing process approach, cognitive approach, traditional and behavioral approaches, and the strategic approach.

The *Writing Process Approach* evolved during the latter part of the twentieth century primarily from the work of renowned authors who have much authority on teaching writing such as Lucy Calkin (*The Art of Teaching Writing,* 1986), Donald Graves (*Writing: Teachers and Children,* 1983), and Donald Murray (*Learning by*

Teaching, 1982) (Crawford, 2002). In *Writing Instruction*, Richgels supported Crawford's (2002) claim about the works of these authors. These books ushered in the era of process writing instruction within schools all across the United States (Richgels, 2002). Richgels says that he cannot imagine a teacher teaching writing at its optimal level without first having read Graves and Calkins:

> Some of the recent writing books seem to me to cater to a desire for a quick fix, an easy answer to the "problem" of teaching writing. They put the hurry back in writing instruction for our frenzied (should I say panicked?) times. I think Graves's and Calkin's titles are instructive. Graves titled his book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work.* He realized that children want to write and that teachers who are writers are the best writing instructors, and he knew that writing is work. Calkins titled her book *The Art of Teaching Writing*. That's *The Art of*, not *Easy Steps in* or *Quick Solutions to*. (p. 6)

This approach has been known to help improve the quality of writing content, mechanics, and students' view of themselves as better writers, closing the gap between research and practice (Cotton, 2002). Crawford noted some important aspects of this approach that vividly delineate it from other writing approaches. She shared the following statements, based on her research findings. These are basic tenets of the approach:

- As much as possible, children need to be in control of deciding what to write and must have ownership of what they write.
- Children should write everyday and talk with others about their writing.
- Writing should involve revising and creating multiple drafts.

- Teachers must support children's writing appropriate instructional scaffolding.

Although this *Writing Process Approach* has gained an immense amount of notoriety from writing scholars and has become a standard in many textbooks, the approach does have some shortcomings reported by researchers (Crawford, 2002). During the developmental process of this writing program, the investigative authors did identify some areas of weakness in this approach:

- There is too little emphasis on writing form when instruction focuses on meaning and process.
- Many children may need more teacher intervention in their writing.
- Teachers may not know how to respond to children's writing or how to define areas of focus during writing conferences with children.
- "Good writing" is more than a "good copy," i.e., content and technical skills are both important.
- Free choice is not always available in life; some topic choices children make may not be appropriate.

However, *Strategies for Writers* provides evidence that their program authors have investigated and designed an instructional plan that has surpassed the identified weaknesses of the *Writing Process Approach* (Crawford, 2002).

Writing is a highly sophisticated cognitive task because it involves a generative thought process that must be sensitive to the needs and expectations of an audience (Henk, Marinak, Moore, & Mallette, 2003). *Strategies for Writers* involves a *Cognitive Approach* to teaching writing. Most of the research was taken from some of the most highly referenced authors concerning writing instruction within this area (Crawford,

2002). This program used the fundamentals of cognitive psychologists concerning writing and writing instruction during its development:

- Writing is a recursive process.
- Writing requires a considerable amount of conscious thought, not always recognized by the writer.
- Writing requires transforming oral thought into written expression.

It is vital for good writers to execute their cognitive skills to be successful. They must be able to reflect and regularly call upon their powers of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Helping students acquire these multifaceted writing skills is a demanding task for writing teachers (Graham & Harris, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002).

Grammar instruction has been an everlasting tradition in the teaching of writing. It has been the center of controversy and contention during the latter part of the twentieth century (Crawford, 2002). However, many researchers also point out that there is a time and place for grammar instruction while students are writing and encountering problems (Calkins, 1986; Cotton, 2000; Murray, 1982). The authors of *Strategies for Writers* provide teachers with a direct instruction approach to teach grammar. This approach is called *The Traditional Behavioral Approach*. It targets the grammar, usage, and mechanics skills most likely to cause problems for writers and confusion for readers.

The research findings of several behavioral psychologists have had a huge impact on writing instruction (Crawford, 2002). The following are important findings that *Strategies for Writers* have incorporated into its program:

- The responses children receive to their first and subsequent writing efforts will influence their attitude about writing.
- Children should be gradually guided to writing correctly as they gain confidence and fluency. One aspect of writing at a time should be targeted.
- Aids for organizing writing will contribute to greater writing success (Crawford, 2002).

Teaching writing using a *Strategic Approach* is another method that the program has developed to assist teachers with teaching writing. Using this approach, teachers are able to balance the instruction between skills and the writing process. With this in mind, *Strategies for Writers* was designed to embed strategies within a process approach to writing. According to Crawford, strategic instruction involves:

- Making students aware of when, how, and why strategies work.
- Teaching students to think carefully and strategically about the writing instruction.
- Focusing on developing writers who are able to write independently using the processes of writing.
- Giving students the support needed to overcome difficulties in writing (Crawford, 2002).

In addition to these five areas of research-based findings about the teaching of writing, the program has placed an emphasis on the importance of using rubrics as related to current writing instruction. Children who struggle with writing tend to benefit from using rubrics because they allow teachers to be very strategic in their instruction, offering a balance in focus on process and product (Sipe, 2002). From her research, Crawford

(2002) found that good rubric instruction should include elements and criteria that provide students with the scaffolding they need for judging and revising their class work (Crawford, 2002). Sipe (2002) noted that this research-based approach offered teachers and students:

- a means to use rubrics to deconstruct and analyze sample pieces of writing in teaching various writing genre so that students develop a clear mental model before they begin to write.
- a tool for self-assessment that can be used during and after writing.
- a platform for planning and composing new writing genre as they are considered.

In summary, Zaner Bloser's *Strategies for Writers* included instruction in effective writing strategies, assistance with writing skills, and instructional suggestions based on the behaviorist approach to teaching. As mentioned earlier, this program used several writing experts to help develop ideas that would be presented with the framework of a writing process approach that has at its core rubric-based instruction. Sipe (2002) found that this type of research was advocated by a number of researchers, as well as practitioners.

Step Up to Writing

The program *Step Up to Writing* (Simon, 2003) is another successful research-based writing program that has been used by educators to improve writing instruction. The writing skills that are taught in *Step Up to Writing* are sequenced beginning with the teacher talking and using examples and soliciting frequent verbal responses from the students. Using this program as a guide, classroom teachers can model and guide their

students through writing activities, providing them with frequent feedback on their strengths and weaknesses; this allows the students to be successful (Simon, 2003).

Simon (2003) noted that through explicit instruction in organizational schemes, students can be taught in small groups to organize their ideas before they write. Simon also found that the program draws on students' multisensory techniques that enable them to use color coding to visualize writing organization by equating the colors of a traffic signal (green, yellow, and red) with different parts of a written assignment. Using the colors and folding paper, students are able to visualize the organization of their paper and formulate their main ideas and supporting information to achieve cohesive, organized paragraphs (Simon, 2003).

This program has been very successful in schools throughout the nation. Hamilton Middle School students in Colorado increased their writing scores by 16 percent on the Colorado writing assessment within three years of implementing this program. Sopris noted that because the school used the strategies of this program, it confirmed the importance of students having the ability to master higher-order thinking skills (Auman, 2002). Simon (2003) supported this claim:

> *Step Up to Writing* applies this research-validated strategy by breaking down each higher order writing process into small sequential steps. Specifically, teachers furnish parts of an essay/paragraph-topic sentences and conclusion-to allow students to focus on other parts of the writing process-developing supports, using logic, and creating informal outlines-before delving into autonomous writing. (p. 3)

Using this program, many teachers have found that it teaches students to write clear, organized paragraphs, reports, and essays; raises overall writing achievement; and creates writing opportunities where students experience success. This should be the goal of every program (Simon, 2003).

American education will never recognize its potential as an instrument of possibility and economic growth until a writing revolution puts an emphasis on language and communication in the classroom (NCW, 2003). Writing is an essential element of today's demanding society. America must take in consideration the first four words of Graves's 1983 book, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*: "Children want to write" (Richgels, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, it is essential that educators prepare and allow them to do so.

Research-Based Writing Strategies

Since the late 1800s, teachers have been contemplating the one best way to teach children to become effective writers and to succeed in our competitive society. Educators have worked vigorously to develop teaching strategies and/or approaches to improve their students' writing skills, and they have tried to implement several approaches related to the teaching of writing. Renowned Alabama author Rick Shelton (2002) noted:

> If such an approach were widely successful, our schools would produce many more competent writers than they do at present, and we would be much more comfortable in our roles as writing teachers and less worried about statewide writing assessment. (p. 1)

Shelton (2003) emphasized how schools across the nation were seeking new approaches to teach writing. Nevertheless, the research has distinctively revealed three research-based strategies that have been implemented by teachers to enhance their students' writing skills. These three strategies are teaching writing as a process, employing the strategies of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), and integrating writing across the curriculum.

Teaching Writing as a Process

According to Cotton (2000), the general findings from the research on teaching writing indicate that students' achievement is higher when the teaching approach emphasizes writing as a process rather than a product. She additionally pointed out from her research in this area that using the traditional product-oriented approach, the teacher provides drill work for specific skills, makes many of the major writing decisions for the students, and serves as the sole audience/judge. She identified several reasons for the traditional approach being ineffective in producing capable writers:

- It emphasizes form and mechanics before, and often at the expense of, ideas and meaning.
- It focuses on the product rather than the process.
- It seriously neglects the earliest stages of the writing process.
- It offers too many artificial contexts for writing.
- It isolates mechanical skills from the context of writing.
- Rather than being an outgrowth of research and experimentation, the traditional approach is based on sheer historical momentum of the theoretical assumptions.

Cotton added that from the experience of classroom teachers and from the research conducted during the past fifteen years, there has emerged a process-oriented approach to teaching writing. She noted from the studies conducted that it has become obvious that the process approach should be used to increase student achievement (Cotton, 2000, p. 2).

In 1990, teachers who participated in the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) found that by emphasizing the teaching of writing as a process, student achievement was improved immensely. Fifty-nine percent of the 122 teachers surveyed during a study conducted by Bridge, Compton-Hall, and Cantrell (1997) were very supportive of the KERA's goal to place greater emphasis on teaching writing as a process and felt that the writing process pedagogies improved writing instruction statewide.

In another study conducted by Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, and Valdes (2004), most proponents of teaching writing using the process approach have concluded that teachers have time to provide feedback to students, and it has given students the opportunity to revise their writing more effectively. The authors proposed that this is the key to students' development as writers. With assistance from the teacher and thought provoking feedback, they stated that students gradually develop the skills necessary to view their own work critically and become better writers using this strategy (Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, & Valdes, 2004).

In addition to Cotton (2000), Calkins (1986, 1994), Murray (1982), and Hillocks (1986) carefully examined each phase in the writing process and shared their findings. In prewriting, the writer begins to generate his ideas about his topic. The researchers noted some prewriting activities as drawing, talking, thinking, reading, listening to tapes and records, discussion, role playing, interviews, problem-solving and decision making

activities, and conducting library research. In this stage, the results revealed that students who were encouraged to engage in an array of prewriting experiences evidenced greater writing achievement than those enjoined to “get to work” on their writing without this kind of preparation (Calkins, 1986; Cotton, 2000; Hillocks, 1986; Murray, 1982).

In the next step of the writing process, writers begin drafting to develop their topic on paper (or a computer screen). According to Cotton (2000), in the process-oriented approach, the focus is on content, not the mechanics of writing. During the revising stage the student or writer makes the necessary changes. The researchers agreed that revision may involve additions and deletions; changes in syntax, sentence structure, and organization; and in some cases, starting over completely. According to Glatthorn (1981) and other researchers, the revision stage is most productive of superior final products if it includes input from teachers or fellow classmates.

During the proofreading or editing stage, the students give attention to mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, and handwriting, etc. Finally, the publication stage refers to the delivery of the writing to its intended audience. Many researchers have found that students’ motivation and achievement are enhanced when student work is published for a larger audience than the teacher; classmates, other students, parents, and community members are among the potential audience for students’ written work (Cotton 2000).

In addition to the previous authors, Richgels (2002) endorsed teaching writing as a process through the use of theory into practice. He noted that writers are free to explore their thoughts, experiences, and imaginations through the spectrum of their multiple intelligence and various learning styles. Also, Richgels emphasized that students should

have time to collaborate on their ideas so that they will have time to brainstorm, share feedback on progress, and respond to finished products throughout the writing process (Richgels, 2002). Throughout his article, Richgels referred to strategies pertaining to teaching writing as a process such as collaborative groups, peer feedback, and publishing the final copy of the paper.

Although there is an immense amount of supportive research related to teaching writing as a process, Graves (1994), Calkins (1986), and Murray (1982) warned writing teachers about their concern of classroom teachers placing too much emphasis on process writing because it could easily become a routine way of teaching such as: Monday — prewriting, Tuesday — drafting, Wednesday — sharing, Thursday — revising and editing, and Friday — publishing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1982.) Calkins (1986) noted:

> If a brave youngster raises a hand to say, "I already know what I want to write. Can I start a draft?" the child is reminded that Tuesdays are for drafting. Wednesdays are for revision: all must write a second draft, whether or not they need it." (p. 19)

Calkins added that the research findings on teaching writing as a process does not contain discrete, linear steps but recursive, overlapping ones because the writing process does not simply fit into a teacher-led whole class method of instruction even though this may be the only teaching approach that the teacher knows. Calkins calls this a dysfunctional strategy for teaching writing. In addition, Graves (1994) finally encouraged process focused teachers to be more assertive about when to step in, when to teach, and when to expect more of writers.

Enhancing Writing Through Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

While teaching writing as a process is a well-known strategy that many teachers use to help students write more effectively, many researchers have discovered that once students become self-regulated learners, their writing skills improve (Butler, 2002; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Paris & Paris, 2001; Zimmerman, 2002). According to Zimmerman (2002), in recent years there have been several stimulating discoveries relating to the nature, origins, and development of how students regulate their own learning processes (p. 64). Although there have been several studies done in this area to prove how self-regulatory processes lead to success in schools, educators are now realizing how these strategies can easily prepare their students to learn on their own (Butler, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002).

During the last two decades, educators and researchers have given a considerable amount of attention to the phenomenon of self-regulated learning (Butler, 2002; McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Zimmerman, 2002). During the early 1990s, researchers defined self-regulated learning as the outcome of choosing to engage in self-directed metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes and skills (McCombs & Marzano, 1990). In recent years, it has been considered as a directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills (Zimmerman, 2002). In *Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner* (2002), Zimmerman views self-regulated learning as an activity where students do for themselves by taking a proactive stance instead of a covert event that takes place as a result of teaching. He also adds that these student learners are more proactive in their efforts to learn because they are cognizant of their strengths and limitations, and they are guided by personally set goals and task strategies

(Zimmerman, 2002). For example, in an English composition class during the writing process, students can set their own writing goals, reflect and revise their papers with peers, monitor their own progress, etc. Because writing is such a complex process, when students use these strategies, researchers argue that they enhance students' self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning to become proficient writers (Graham & Harris, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002).

According to Butler (2002), self-regulated learning is important because students are able to analyze their own task demands. Based on the requirements of a given task, Butler contended that the self-regulated learner could easily select, adapt, or even invent strategic approaches to achieve the task objectives. From there, the self-regulated student should be able to draw on prior knowledge and experience to make strategic decisions because the learner will know to consider approaches that have worked in the past when confronting similar expectations. Plus, these students will know how to monitor and evaluate their own progression and performance. Butler concluded that although self-regulation learning strategies are powerful learning tools, if teachers do not promote and assist students to engage in flexible and adaptive cognitive activities, learning will not take place (Butler, 2002). Adding to Butler's research findings, Zimmerman (2002) goes a step further by stating that because of their superior motivation and adaptive learning methods, self-regulated students are not only more likely to succeed academically but to view their futures optimistically. He emphasized this point noting:

> Self-regulation is important because a major function of education is the development of life-long learning skills. After graduation from high school and

> college, young adults must learn many important skills informally. For example, in the business setting, they are often expected to learn a new position, such as selling a product, by observing proficient others and by practicing on their own. Those who develop high levels of skill position themselves for bonuses, early promotion, or more attractive jobs. In self-employment settings, both young and old must constantly self-refine their skills in order to survive. Their capability to self-regulate is especially challenged when they undertake long-term creative projects, such as works of art, literary texts, or inventions. (p. 66)

In the early 1980s, Albert Bandura, one of the world's leading psychologists, turned most of his research attention toward the self-regulated learner and how people evaluate their own performances as they strived for success and achievement as part of his theory on social learning (Crain, 2005). From there, several other researchers used his findings as a "springboard" for their own research on regarding how self-regulated learning strategies can help foster academic achievement (Butler, 2002; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Paris & Paris, 2001; Moore & Atputhasamy, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002).

Throughout schools across the country and the world, educators are beginning to realize that self-regulated learning strategies are teachable and can lead to increases in students' motivation and achievement (Zimmerman, 2002). Being granted the opportunities to establish their own performance goals, monitor their progress, manage their time efficiently, evaluate themselves, and adapt their own methods of learning, students have shown that these factors lead to increased motivation to learn, which has

resulted in higher achieving students in our schools (Eshel & Kohavi, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002).

In a recent study, Wolters (1999) found that high school students who were better able to regulate their motivation and keep themselves engaged under these types of circumstances were able to learn more than students less skilled at regulating their motivation. Wolter's study involved 88 ninth and tenth grade students ranging in age from 14–16 years. His purpose was to find out how frequently these students engaged in the five specific motivational regulation strategies, including Self-Consequating, Environmental Control, Interest Enhancement, Performance Self-Talk, and Mastery Self-Talk. Wolter's findings showed that students' use of these motivational self-regulation strategies were very effective toward their classroom performance on completing tasks. In addition, he found that students who actively worked to maintain their engagement in academic tasks were likely to have a more adaptive outcome than students who did not regulate their level of motivation. In general, he stated that motivational self-regulated strategies represented an important aspect of self-regulated learning, which contributed to students' learning and achievement in academic settings (Wolters, 1999). Wolters concluded by stating that models of self-regulated learning may need to be expanded to include more directly students' purposeful control of their behavior or thinking for the express aim of affecting their effort and persistence at school task (Wolters, 1999, p. 7).

Even though self-regulated learning strategies are powerful teaching tools, according to Butler (2002), in today's classrooms, the challenge for teachers has been matching instruction to each student's needs because of increasingly diverse classrooms. Butler argues that if classroom teachers employ self-regulated learning strategies,

students will learn. She finds that the challenge is not the students' ability to learn; however, it is the educator's challenge to define realistic and efficient ways of individualizing instruction that promotes self-regulation (Butler, 2002, p. 86). Several other experts have also confirmed Butler's notions related to educators' developing strategies which promote self-regulated learning in their classrooms. They say that teachers rarely provide students the opportunity to evaluate their work or estimate competence on new tasks (Moore & Atputhasamy, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002). However, they argue that if the strategies are used correctly, student achievement will improve. In Dr. Butler's article, *Individualizing Instruction in Self-Regulated Learning* (2002), she provided educators with several instructional strategies to encourage self-regulated learning in their classrooms such as one-on-one instruction, general instructional principles, small-group instructional and whole-group strategies, lesson-plans, etc. Therefore, if educators want their students to master their learning goals and objectives, they should be encouraged after reading the research on fostering instruction through the use of self-regulated learning strategies.

Using self-regulated learning strategies to teach writing has really reshaped how language arts teachers are now teaching writing. One strategy in particular that has distinctively emerged from the literature on teaching students to write more efficiently is the popular Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). This strategy has been utilized by several language arts educators to improve their students' writing skills (Graham & Harris, 2000; Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002). The SRSD was developed to teach writing strategies and self-regulation procedures to students with writing difficulties.

With this model, students who struggle with writing effectively are explicitly taught strategies for accomplishing specific academic tasks in combination with procedures for regulating the use of each strategy. Graham, Harris, and Troia (2000) stated:

> Although students with learning problems represent a heterogeneous group, research indicates that one commonality among these children is that their academic difficulties are inextricably linked to cognitive, behavioral, and affective concerns. When faced with a task such as writing, for instance, many of these children have problems activating moves and processes underlying effective composing. (p. 2)

The primary goals of this type of instruction are to assist students with mastering the higher-level cognitive processes involved in composing; developing autonomy, reflecting on self-regulated use of effective writing strategies; increasing knowledge about the characteristics of good writing; and forming positive attitudes about writing and their writing capabilities (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000).

Because many students who are at-risk devalue learning and academic work and behave as though they are helpless, an academic task such as writing is especially vulnerable to affective disturbances. It is an intentional activity that is often self-planned and self-sustained. For example, children who dislike writing or doubt their capabilities are less inclined to engage in the mental activities that epitomize proficient writing, failing to use the cognitive resources they have at their disposal (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003). By implementing the strategies from the SRSD, these students will have a chance to become good writers, valuing what they have to say in their writing assignments (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000).

Self-regulated strategy development involves six instructional stages to its basic framework. These strategies provide what Graham, Harris, and Troia (2000) call a "metascript" or set of general guidelines, allowing teachers to reorder, combine, change, or take out stages as needed:

1. *Develop Background Knowledge*: The teacher helps students develop the preskills, including knowledge of the criteria for good writing, which is important to understanding, acquiring, or executing the writing strategy and self-regulation procedures targeted for instruction.
2. *Initial Conference: Strategy Goals and Significance:* The teacher and students examine and discuss current writing performance and strategies used to accomplish specific assignments. The writing strategy, its purpose and benefits, and how and when to use it are examined, and students are asked to make a commitment to learning the strategy and act as a partner in this endeavor. Negative or ineffective self-statements or beliefs used by students may also be addressed at this time.
3. *Modeling of the Strategy***:** The teacher models aloud how to use the writing strategy, using appropriate self-instructions (e.g., self-evaluative statements). After analyzing the teacher's performance, the teacher and students may collaborate how to change the strategy to make it more effective. Students then develop personal self-statements they plan to use during writing.
4. *Memorization of the Strategy:* The steps of the writing strategy and any accompanying mnemonic device for remembering them, as well as the

personalized self-statements, are memorized. Paraphrasing is allowed, as long as the original meaning is maintained.

5. *Collaborative Practice:* Students and teachers use the writing strategy and self-instructions collaboratively to complete specific writing assignments. Self-regulation procedures, including goal setting or self-assessment, may be introduced at this point.
6. *Independent Practice:* Students use the writing strategy independently. If goal setting or self-assessment procedures are in use, students and the teacher may decide to fade them out; students are also encouraged to say their self-statements covertly in "their heads."

As teachers are implementing the strategies of SRSD, various forms of support are contained within the model. For example, a writing strategy, such as outlining or semantic webbing, can help students regulate the writing process by providing structure that organizes and sequences behavior. Another form of support includes learning the self-regulation skills needed to use the writing strategies successfully and manage the composing process (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000). In the self-regulatory procedures, students are taught to monitor changes in their writing performance or behavior, set goals for improving their performance through using the strategies, and develop an internal dialogue for managing the writing process.

Since 1985, more than 30 studies using this SRSD model of instruction in the area of writing have been reported, involving students from elementary grades through high school (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003). In the studies conducted to this date, the performance of struggling writers improved following SRSD instruction. Effect sizes for

measures of writing quality, length, and structure typically exceeded 1.0 (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000). In a more recent article, Harris, Graham, Mason, and Saddler (2002) stated:

> SRDS is a flexible and modifiable approach that meets the styles and needs of both teacher and student. SRDS has been empirically validated in over 20 studies implemented in small groups and classrooms, and in one-to-one tutoring sessions by pre-service and in-service teachers. SRDS appears to be a powerful instructional method not only in writing but also in mathematics and reading. (p. 3)

In one study, a special education teacher used the story writing strategy with general education fourth and fifth grade students. Each of the classes contained a child with a learning disability (LD) who was experiencing difficulty with writing. The special education teacher took the primary responsibility for teaching the story-writing strategy from the SRSD. The general education teachers provided back-up assistance to the children, including the students with LD, who needed additional help during the instructional process. Encouraging the students to work cohesively and support each other's efforts, as well as encouraging class-wide discussions on the purpose and effects of instruction and how to promote strategy maintenance and generalization, facilitated the collaboration process (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000).

After integrating SRSD into the classrooms, it was noted that the impact on students' writing performance was improved. Following the instructions, the students' stories became longer, more complete, and qualitatively better. The impact of the

strategies used from the SRSD was strong enough that the school continued to use the writing model to teach the story-writing strategy.

Although most SRSD studies have been conducted with struggling writers who are in fourth through eighth grades, written expression has become an integral part of the curriculum in the secondary schools. According to Graham, Harris, Troia (2000) and Chalk, Hagan-Burke, and Burke (2005), most SRSD studies and published research using this strategy to teach written expression have been focused on teaching struggling writers who are in grades fourth through eighth. Because of the increased writing demands at the high school level along with "high-stakes" accountability tests and standards, Chalk, Hagan-Burke, and Burke stated that there is a compelling need for more research on how to improve the written language skills of high school students. They acknowledged, in particular, the need for strategies capable of improving the written language of skills of secondary students with learning disabilities (Chalk, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2005, p. 86).

Harris, Graham, and Mason (2003) also revealed in their research that there is a need for more research on students with learning disabilities who have greater difficulties with writing than their normally achieving peers. For over twenty years, Harris, Graham and their colleagues have been involved in the development and evaluation of an instructional approach to developing writing and self-regulation strategies among students with significant writing problems. They have also found that the SRSD is a good match to teach students with learning disabilities as well as other students who struggle with writing, developing effective writing skills (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003).

In their recent study using the SRSD approach, Chalk, Hagan-Burke, and Burke (2005) found that using this approach to teach writing improved the writing skills of high school students with learning disabilities. According to the authors, written expression is a fundamental skill for today's high school students. Those who lack the skills to adequately demonstrate conceptual knowledge and communicate their thoughts and beliefs in writing will be faced with tremendous limitations. They will be unable to pass state and direct writing exams, advance from grade to grade, and graduate from high school. Students with learning disabilities have struggled time after time to develop and/or improve their writing skills sufficiently to satisfy these crucial mandates (Chalk, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2005, p. 85).

Chalk, Hagan-Burke, and Burke's (2005) study replicated the work of leading researchers such as Steve Graham, Karen Harris, and Linda Mason's work regarding the SRSD. However, they used the strategies with high school students. They trained their students in a small-group setting using a self-regulated development strategy to improve their writing skills. Similar to Graham and Harris's work, their LD students were provided with scaffold strategies for planning essays and self-regulation of the strategy and writing process as the students progressed through the six steps of the SRDS. As a result of using the SRDS, the students were able to develop strategies for brainstorming, semantic webbing, setting goals, and revising their papers. In addition, the students' word production and quality of their essays increased after implementing the strategy. Although these authors were pleased with their results from the study that they conducted, because of the limited amount of research regarding using this approach to teach writing at the secondary level, they recommended that future studies examine a

broader range of students, consider dependent measures that may be more sensitive to growth or changes in writing quality, and employ designs that would allow stronger conclusions to be drawn with high school students who have writing deficiencies (Chalk, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2005).

In summary, the self-regulated learning strategies and the Self-Regulated Strategy Development provided teachers with effective tools for addressing some of the most troubling challenges that struggling writers encounter. Their mechanism is to help students become more strategic and self-regulatory during writing, resulting in improvements in what they compose. In addition, the students' knowledge about writing and self-efficacy as writers are refined (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002; Troia & Graham, 2003). Nevertheless, Graham, Harris, and Troia (2000) warn teachers that these strategies only address selected aspects of the writing process and writing curricula. They recommend that it be integrated into existing programs or combined with other approaches to develop a comprehensive writing program for remediating students to prevent writing difficulties. Furthermore, Harris, Graham, and Mason (2003) have emphasized that this SRSD model should not be thought of as a panacea; promoting students' academic competence and literacy requires a complex integration of skills, strategies, processes and attributes. However, by establishing affective, behavioral, and cognitive goals for instruction, self-regulated learning strategies and SRSD represent an important contribution to teachers' instructional repertories (Butler, 2002; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002).

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)

According to the literature on writing instruction, another strategy that many educators are using to help their students see the importance of writing as an essential part of their lives is called Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). Named in Great Britain, the Writing Across the Curriculum movement has been popular in the United States since the late 1970s (Stock, 2001). By writing in all subjects of the curriculum, students are given the notion that writing should be an important part of the learning process throughout their education (Calkins, 1986). The National Writing Commission also added:

> Developing writers is everybody's business. It is not a simple and easy task, or something that will be finished and out of the way by the end of next week, or even the end of the next year. Developing critical thinkers and writers should be understood as one of the central works of education. State and local curriculum guidelines should require writing in every curriculum area and at all grade levels. Writing should be considered every teacher's responsibility. (NCW, 2003, p. 32)

Gill (2000) also believed that WAC was an important skill that deserved liberation from the English classroom because the idea behind WAC is that all subject areas — like mathematics, science, or social studies — have a type of writing that is endemic to the discipline. In most WAC classes, teachers use different strategies to integrate writing activities into different disciplines. In some cases, teachers may have students write a laboratory report in their biology class; in other cases, English teachers and social studies teachers may jointly assign and evaluate social studies research papers (Stock, 2001). Such school wide emphasis is desirable because students improve their

knowledge of the different disciplines that stress writing. Students have the opportunity for guided practice in several classrooms, and they grasp the importance of writing outside of the language arts classroom (Cotton, 2000).

In *Connecting Academic Content with Writing* (1999), Bradford listed several different strategies for classroom teachers to use when they want their students to write in the different disciplines. For example, in a social studies class, a teacher can use strategies such as note taking, vocabulary list, definitions, fill in the blanks, sentence completion, objective reports, essays, questionnaires, fieldwork notes, commentaries, reviews, diaries, journals, research papers, and character sketches for writing activities (Bradford, 1999).

Even though there have been several changes to improve writing instruction, much in the teaching of writing has remained the same. Although some progress has been made within states and school systems, many school districts still need to focus more effectively on the teaching of writing. In addition, as more research findings become increasingly available to classroom teachers, there will be opportunities created to decrease the gap between theory and practice in writing instruction (NCW, 2003; Richgels, 2002).

The Process of Curriculum Development and Change

Because of the advent of new trends in education, the need to develop state of the art curricula is obvious. Historically, although curriculum development has been at the center of school reform, many researchers still argue that the process has been done hastily just to satisfy state mandates. The outcome has not been instructionally centered

(Saban, 1995). Schubert (1986) defined curriculum development as a process of deciding what to teach and learn, along with all the considerations needed to make such decisions. It is ideal for those who are going to be affected by the curriculum to be involved in the process of planning, implementation and evaluation.

When the Elmore County District Writing Curriculum Committee began its planning process to develop a new writing curriculum, developmental strategies similar to Ralph Tyler's model served as a vehicle to the initiation process. Ralph Tyler was professor of education at the University of Chicago when he first taught this curriculum paradigm in 1949 (Schubert, 1986). Although there are many developmental models (Saylor, Alexander, & Lewis's *Managerial Model*; Macdonald's *Systems Model*, and *Nontechnical Model*; Weinstein & Fantini's *Humanistic Model)* of curriculum in this area of study, several scholars in the field have based their research regarding effective curriculum development on Tyler's Behavioral Model, which has been called the most classical or dominant method of curriculum development (English, 1987, 2000; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000; Schubert, 1986). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) considered Tyler as the bridge between the first and second half of the century in regards to the field of curriculum and instruction because he orchestrated many of the best ideas of curriculum development during the early period and set the stage for the modern period.

Tyler proposed a number of steps in the developmental process of curriculum, starting with the goals of the school. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) stated:

> These goals would be selected on the basis of what he called sources of information about important aspects of contemporary life, subject matter, and the

> needs and interests of learners. By analyzing changing society, at the local, state, or national level, it could be determined what goals (and also what subject matter) were most important. By consulting with subject specialists (as well as teachers), helpful decisions could be determined about concepts, skills and tasks to be taught in the various subjects (reading, math, science, etc.). By identifying the needs and interests of students, and beginning point in content, methods, and materials could be determined. (Hence, Tyler helped popularize the concept of a needs assessment study.) (p. 441)

This statement distinctively shares Tyler's knowledge of curriculum. Every element discussed in the quote is critical to successful curriculum development. It is vital that educators adhere to his suggestions as they maneuver through the development process. Many of his recommendations serve as a prescribed action plan that can successfully guide educators as they focus on improving classroom instruction throughout their district (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000; Schubert, 1986).

In addition to developing sufficient goals, a school district needs to develop a curriculum committee to carefully screen the goals ensuring that they are centered on the district's philosophy and beliefs about learning. From this process, the district needs to generate instructional objectives that are more specific than the school's goals and designed for the teachers to use in the classroom. Tyler's model proceeds with the selection of learning experiences that will allow the attainment of objectives set by the committee. These experiences should take into account the developmental stages of the learners (p. 441).

Tyler's model stressed the importance of organizing learning experiences in a systematic way to produce a maximum, positive effect. Vertical and horizontal relationships are the key to achieving good curriculum alignment (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000; Schubert, 1986). For example, when schools wanted to ensure that their curricula encompassed good vertical alignment, Tyler recommended that they should cautiously examine the subject matter, as in writing, to ensure that it is recurring from grade to grade. It is imperative that a curriculum development committee make certain that Tyler's suggestions have been employed to achieve vertical alignment because it has been considered somewhat of a new term for several educators (English, 2000). In addition, Tyler noted that to achieve horizontal alignment, the curriculum committee should integrate different subjects at the same grade level as they relate to the curriculum. However, unlike vertical alignment, research indicates that educators have a better understanding of this term, and many curriculum guides that have been developed by school districts are succinctly aligned horizontally (English, 2000).

English's (1987) methods on achieving good curriculum alignment, which is a crucial element of curriculum development, are somewhat similar to Tyler's research conclusions. English indicated that the only way student achievement can be enhanced is through curriculum committees developing good curricula that involve aligning all subjects from kindergarten through twelfth grade. English stated, "When employed, K–12 [curriculum alignment guides] help manage and control the links between the separate units of school districts; they make curriculum articulation an approachable problem" (English, 1987, p. 52). The result is a school system instead of the usual systems of schools.

Finally, in his model, Tyler shared that curriculum development committees should elaborate on the need for evaluation to determine whether the objectives have been achieved or learning experiences actually produced the intended outcomes or results. This is necessary to determine whether the curriculum is effective or ineffective and whether changes should be made or if a new curriculum is necessary (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000; Schubert, 1986).

Even though Lunenburg and Ornstein support Tyler's Model in *Educational Administration: Concepts and Practices* (2000), they listed some guiding statements to assist educators who are involved in the curriculum development process. These statements are based on school practice and apply to all curriculum models:

- The curriculum development committee should consist of teachers, parents, and administrators; students can also be included.
- State education officials have even less impact on curriculum development, although various departments publish guides, bulletins, and reports that can be informative to school districts. Nevertheless, these educators establish policies, rules, and regulations that affect curriculum and instruction.
- The needs and priorities should be addressed in relation to students and society.
- Alternative curriculum designs should be contrasted in terms of advantages and disadvantages such as cost, scheduling, class size, facilities, and the number of employees required, existing relationship to present programs, and so on.
- To help teachers gain insight in the new or modified curriculum, it should reveal expected cognitive and affective skills, concepts, and outcomes.
- The principal has a substantial impact on curriculum development through his or her influence on school climate and his or her support of the curriculum process.
- System level administrators, especially the superintendent, have only a peripheral impact on curriculum development because their outlook and concerns center on managerial activities. Their curriculum role is minor; however, their support and approval is cardinal.
- The curriculum committee should establish a sense of mission or purpose in the early stages or meetings.
- The influence of special interest group and local politics should not be underestimated. Polarization or conflict has often obscured reasonable efforts for reform and meaningful dialogue and reflection between educators and parents in regard to educational matters.

(Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000, p. 442)

As an integral part of the curriculum development process, implementation brings into actuality expected changes. Simply put, curriculum activity is change activity (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan (2000) noted that educators have become so accustomed to the presence of change that they rarely stop to consider what it really means as they are experiencing it at a professional and personal level. In addition, Fullan contended that educators never stop to think what it means for others around them who might be in change situations. Fullan stated, "The crux of change is how individuals come to grips with this reality" (2001, p. 29).

Understanding the ideas and concepts that are related to change can allow individuals to determine some sources of change. This also helps them realize that even though they cannot really predict the consequences of change, they generate some ideas or "best-guesses" about forecasting outcomes (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). In addition, Fullan endorsed that change may come about either because it is imposed on educators or because they may voluntarily participate in or even initiate change when they are dissatisfied with current curricula. He added that any innovation for change cannot be assimilated unless its meaning is shared. In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan quoted Marris (1975) concerning a shared meaning or vision for successful curriculum change:

> No one can resolve the crisis of reintegration on behalf of another. Every attempt to pre-empt conflict, argument, protest by rational planning, can only be abortive: however reasonable the proposed changes, the process of implementing them must still allow the impulse of rejection to play itself out. When those who have

> power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes, and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate. If they deny others the chance to do the same, they treat them as puppets dangling by the threads of their own conceptions. (Fullan, 2001, p. 31)

Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) also champion the idea of curriculum administrators and school principals involving teachers in the change process. In *Supervision of Instruction: A Developmental Approach*, the researchers stated that teachers will implement curriculum more successfully if they are given the opportunity to participate in the development and/or change process. In addition, they noted that the teachers could adapt it to their specific classroom and school situation with ease and efficiency. In a study conducted by Martin, Saif, and Thiel (1987), a total of ninety-one respondents' districts were asked to rank the effectiveness of five different ways of bringing about curriculum change. They found that all ninety-one responding districts favored curriculum development by committee. Nearly all of the respondents favored teacher membership on these committees, more than three-fourths favored participation by administrators, and half favored parents (Martin, Saif, & Thiel, 1987).

According to Saban's (1995) research findings, by having teachers involved, they can contribute their knowledge of what works and what does not work in a real classroom. In addition, teachers' practical knowledge of classroom teaching enables

curriculum committees to assess both workability of curriculum materials developed previously and whether the ideas being asserted presently will work in a classroom teaching environment. She also noted that when teachers are involved in the change process and curricula are developed based on their successful classroom practices, it is more relevant to the needs of children in the school (Saban, 1995). Saban (1995) says, "This is because teachers bring student problems and school needs to the surface and help solve curriculum problems as well as acquire important knowledge and skills from classroom application" (p. 572).

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) concluded that according to the research, for curriculum change to be successfully implemented, five principles should be followed to refrain from mistakes of the past:

1. *Innovations Designed to Improve Student Achievement Must Be Technically Sound.* This means that changes should reflect research about what works and what does not work, as opposed to whatever designs for improvement happen to be popular today or tomorrow.
2. *Successful Innovation Requires Change in the Structure of a Traditional School.* By structural change, the authors mean major modification of the way students and teachers are assigned to classes and interact with each other.
3. *Innovations Must Be Manageable and Feasible for The Average Teacher.* Ideas cannot be innovative concerning critical thinking or problem solving when students cannot read or write basic English or refuse to obey in class.

4. *Implementation of Successful Change Efforts Must Be Organic Rather than Bureaucratic.* Strict compliance, monitoring procedures, and rules are not conducive for change; this bureaucratic approach needs to be replaced by an organic or adaptive approach that permits some deviation from the original plan and recognizes grass-roots problems and conditions of the school.

5. *Avoid the "Do Something, Do Anything" Syndrome.* The need is for a definite curriculum plan, to focus one's efforts, time, and money on content and activities that are sound and rational, not a scam or simplistic idea. (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000, p. 462)

Lunenburg and Ornstein stated:

> The data indicates that the five principles "are systemically interrelated, and that with the possible exception of the [principle] regarding structure change, they apply equally well to all levels of education." Administrators will benefit by "considering their applicability in the particular context of their own schools and school districts" (p. 463).

Curriculum development is a very important element of improving instruction. Therefore, it is imperative that educators use research findings and their practical knowledge and skills to guide them through the developmental process. In addition, one essential stakeholder that they must keep in mind is the students (English, 1987, 2000; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Teachers Learning About Writing

The teachers who actively participated on the Elmore County Writing Curriculum Committee were very excited about learning to teach writing more effectively. They exemplified the courage to learn new, innovative ways to teach writing so that all students could easily master what many have considered as a complex craft to conquer. Throughout this entire process, teachers found that learning is as important to their lives as it is to the lives of their students (Fleischer, 2004).

In addition, the group of teachers was committed to promoting quality writing instruction within the new curriculum. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) indicated that the essence of successful instruction and good schools comes from the thoughts and actions of the professionals within them. Therefore, to improve the quality of education in schools, these individuals must be exposed to continuous research-based professional development to ensure that their students receive sufficient results from high-stakes assessments (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998).

In addition, Easley (2004) stated that providing ongoing professional development matters greatly as to whether students achieve. He noted in a North Carolina study that professional development was a significant predictor of schools meeting the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status. Easley also acknowledged the need for teachers to have time to collaborate with their peers and discuss and observe best practices during job-embedded professional development training sessions, adding that these types of professional development activities for teachers create learning conditions for their students. He concludes that by employing these types of strategies, school

districts prepare teachers for changing and demanding curricula and the challenges of teaching a more diverse population (Easley, 2004).

As with writing, Fleischer (2004) acknowledged that on-going professional development is the key to creating effective writing teachers. Although teachers sometimes complain about professional development sessions, Fleischer surmised that when done well, professional development has an almost magical power to revitalize and transform teaching and learning (Fleischer, 2004). Furthermore, she contended that despite challenges writing teachers may face, she is convinced that sound professional development will lead to sound teaching practices.

Fleischer offered a blueprint for sustained professional development in writing instruction. It was based on her experiences from working with teachers and codirectors of a National Writing Project site and from Writing CoLEARN, a program conducted by the National Council of Teachers of English. Her blueprint proposed five approaches to professional development where writing teachers fostered ownership of their learning, encouraged collaboration with colleagues, and recognized that change requires sufficient time and support to take root:

> *Stage 1: The Self as Writer.* In this stage, the teacher must think carefully about how they teach writing, beginning with their own experiences as writers. This strategy has been found to be powerful way to begin a professional development session.
>
> *Stage 2: The Self as a Teacher of Writing.* This step asks teachers to consider their beliefs about language and writing to help them clarify why certain practices are

more effective than others. This process involves teachers looking below the surface of their teaching.

Stage 3: What Strategies Are Possible. During stage three, teachers must reflect deeply on their own backgrounds and belief structures to effectively identify valuable strategies that they already use in their teaching as well as strategies that they might implement to satisfy a need or resolve a contradiction in their own practices. At this stage, teachers can determine a specific area or question that they would like to learn more about, such as integrating grammar instruction into writing or creating more authentic experiences for student writers.

Stage 4: Student as Writers. This stage involves the teacher's thinking about what happens in his or her classroom once he or she implements a particular writing strategy with the students. This approach allows the teacher to focus on a chosen strategy in a specific way by having the opportunity to visualize what happens in the learning life of their students whom the strategy affects.

*Stage 5: Articulating New Knowledge***.** In the final stage of this blueprint for professional development, teachers are to reflect on what they have learned and to articulate their tentative knowledge-both for themselves and for others in their community of learners (Fleischer, 2004, p. 27).

In addition, Troia and Graham (2003) found that teachers of writing have frequently commented on their lacking the knowledge, skills, and strategies they believe would be helpful to them in facilitating children's emerging competence as writers. Consequently, teachers have begun to seek training from writing experts or educational consultants to suggest and model best practices in writing instruction. Troia and Graham

considered that just like students, many teachers find writing to be a challenging task to do effectively; therefore, they focus almost exclusively on teaching basic rote grammatical skills, handwriting, and spelling in their classrooms. Nevertheless, in other classrooms across the nation, students are taught research-based process writing strategies; however, the teachers have not been trained to teach critical writing skills and strategies involved in the teaching of writing as a process (Troia & Graham, 2003). Troia and Graham noted:

> Even in classrooms in which teachers report teaching text transcription skills in the context of meaningful, authentic composing activities, it is likely that this type of instruction is not robust enough to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in a high-standards-based educational context. What appears to be necessary substantially more individualized and explicit teaching (i.e., use of extensive modeling, guided practice and coaching with informative feedback, and numerous and varied opportunities for independent practice) of lower level transcription skills and higher level composing strategies that both capitalizes on students' knowledge and experiences and incorporates effective adaptations and technological tools. (p. 76)

Troia and Graham (2003) rigidly emphasized the need for teachers to be provided with current professional development opportunities that will enable them to teach all of their students to become effective writers from their earliest years through secondary school and even into college. In addition, this type of instruction will easily provide students who exhibit chronic problems with writing to be successful as well.

In order for teachers to be trained on developing good writing lessons, it is important that they know what is involved in good writing instruction. Cotton (2000) found that teachers who attended professional development workshops offered by the National Writing Project were able to produce better student writers than the students of teachers who did not take part in the NWP. These teachers participated in intensive summer programs that immersed them in activities that reflected on improving writing instruction. Because most professional development sessions are centered around one to two days in maximum length, Cotton supported the NWP because it provided training for teachers as they progressed throughout the school year. The teachers participated in ongoing, voluntary staff development programs that included the following elements:

- Theory and research findings regarding effective writing instruction
- A focus on practical applications of theory and research
- Attention to specific skill development
- Time and opportunity to build writing and teaching skills
- Opportunities to observe in other teachers' classrooms
- The involvement and support of administrators.

Cotton (2000) argued that this type of structure was congruent with the research into effective schools, which stated that in effective schools, "staff development opportunities are provided; emphasis is on skill building; content addresses key instructional issues and priorities. Inservice activities are related and build on each other" (p. 10). The National Commission on Writing shares the same philosophy as Cotton (2000) concerning teacher training in writing. The Commission stated:

> Common expectations about good writing must be developed across the disciplines. Teachers and school administrators can build common performance expectations by convening regular workshops on what constitutes good writing, particularly at the middle and high school levels where each student has several teachers. These workshops and professional development opportunities should be provided to every instructor. Teachers should be reminded that good writing extends beyond language formalities and grammar to incorporate content, substance, and meaning (NCW, 2003, p. 34).

In addition to providing effective professional development for teachers, research also supports the idea of preservice programs providing more quality training in writing for teachers. According to the National Commission on Writing (NCW; 2003), colleges and universities need to advance their common expectations by requiring all prospective teachers to take courses in how to teach writing. The commission stipulates that teachers need to understand writing as a complex but enjoyable form of learning and discovery, both for themselves and for their students. In addition, the NWC adds that all prospective teacher programs, regardless of their disciplines, should have access to training and professional development opportunities to help them improve student writing (NCW, 2003, p. 5). The Commission wrote:

> Expectations for good writing should be universal among all teachers. Universities can help advance common expectations by requiring courses in teaching writing for all prospective teachers. States can reinforce this requirement by insisting on successful completion of a course in writing theory and practice as a condition of teacher licensing. Universities should also offer teachers

> opportunities to learn writing theory and develop their own writing skills. They should provide pre- and in-service opportunities so that teachers themselves can write and enjoy the opportunity to respond to examples of student and peer writing. These efforts can help teachers experience writing both as a way of demonstrating knowledge and as a complex form of learning and discovery. (NCW, 2003, p. 32.)

Because of the demands of new language arts standards and new approaches to the teaching of writing, writing instruction has strongly influenced teacher educators to reconsider what preservice teachers need to know and be able to do in teaching writing. Wang and Odell (2003) found that it is challenging for teacher educators to help preservice teachers learn to teach in ways that are consistent with the standards for writing instruction, especially in extreme circumstances such as in urban and culturally diverse areas. Wang and Odell (2003) designed and directed a study to address the gaps in understanding the relationships of preservice teachers working with mentors as they learn to teach writing consistently with reform-minded standards.

The study found that the preservice teachers moved conceptually toward their mentors when their mentors taught reform-minded standards. Preservice teachers who participated in the study retained and established their ideas about learning, teaching, and writing instruction consistent with the standards of language arts and those of their mentors. This achievement seemed to match the expectations of the teacher education reformers who encourage using this field based approach to prepare the beginning teachers (Wang & Odell, 2003).

In addition, Wang and Odell (2003) found that the changes in the preservice teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching were swayed strongly by their ideas about what and how they were going to learn with mentors. Even though the two aspiring teachers worked with the same mentors in the same classroom and followed similar internship sequence, they both learned different ideas about writing instruction from their mentors. Wang and Odell noted that these differences seemed to be related to their differing beliefs about what and how they were going to learn to teach.

Wang and Odell (2003) concluded that the entire study suggested that preservice or aspiring teachers may need to be conceptually prepared to learn from mentors and that mentors may need dispositions and skills necessary to support preservice teachers in learning standards-based teaching. In order to research these goals, they say that a better understanding is needed of the process of learning to teach with mentors, of dilemmas and challenges that preservice teachers and their mentors face, and of teacher mentoring in various school contexts.

According to the NCW (2003), providing ongoing, high quality professional activities for writing teachers is a crucial component of the nation's quest to improve writing instruction. As the number of National Writing Projects sites and similar programs continues to grow, research results will continue to indicate that by providing this type of professional development training for teachers, results of students becoming more capable writers will be enhanced (Cotton, 2000). In addition, as teachers learn more about the teaching of writing, they will be able to develop and/or design more effective writing lesson plans that will in turn produce more proficient student writers. For this, their students will be able to develop a "can do" attitude (Fleischer, 2004). Finally, and

most significant, teachers in the primary grades must be provided with professional development opportunities in writing because it is at this stage where writing makes the greatest impact (NCW, 2003).

Use of Technological Resources in the Enactment of the Writing Curriculum

During the last few years, educators have been charged with a very daunting task of trying to stay abreast with the ever-changing world of informational technology, as they are perplexed with trying to teach their students the same information. Classroom teachers have presumed that this new advancement to teaching has bombarded them with new tools for teaching and learning (Dockterman, 2004). However, they have found that because the computer has wedged its foot into their classroom doors, it has enabled their students to reach new heights in the learning process (Dockterman, 2004). Heinich, Molenda, Russell, and Smaldino's (2002) summaries of research with students at various learning levels (elementary, secondary, college, and adult education) revealed that computer-based instruction has often had positive effects on student achievement. In one summary, they found that on an average, computer-based instruction assisted students in raising their achievement test scores from 10 to 18 percentage points compared to conventional instruction (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2002). With the advent of this type of instruction, students now have more successful opportunities to master or learn specific skills. Using these tools to assist with their teaching, regular classroom teachers now have the opportunity to become master teachers (Dockterman, 2004).

Writing teachers have found that students respond well to computers. Shuman (2002) found that many writing teachers stated that their students are rushing into their classrooms and staying late to talk with them about writing because they have implemented the use of computers within their classrooms. Shuman indicated that computers serve three basic functions for writers: (1) they become notepads on which to compose; (2) they permit users, even in remote areas, to access new universes of data; and (3) they offer help in editing. This has become so pervasive that few contemporary writers use paper to compose their materials (Shuman, 2002).

According to the National Commission on Writing (2003), just as computers have transformed many schools, office, and homes, they have introduced entirely new and innovative ways of generating, organizing, and editing text. The NCW has found that computers have helped shorten the work of composing and revising. In the past, students had to endure the tedious task of retyping entire pages of their assignments because they may have omitted a sentence from their written assignment. Now, because of word processing programs like Microsoft Word or Word Perfect, this has become a thing of the past. Several technology software programs have helped students learn the rudiments of grammar and composition, while encouraging them to share their work with one another (NWC, 2003).

As an effort to improve writing instruction, the NCW advocates that school districts across the nation invest in writing research-based programs to improve language and basic writing. The NCW noted that these programs can assist both the teacher and the students. The NCW stated:

> Although no one should expect software to develop advanced writing skills, the Commission believes that programs can be developed to help all students develop at least modest competence as writers. The development and classroom application of these programs should be encouraged. (p. 22)

In addition, the Commission urges districts to seek emerging programs that will enhance the ability of students and teachers to assess writing. The NCW also stated that classroom teachers need to consider writing programs that measure student writing competence in formal, standard assessments (NCW, 2003).

Based on recommendations from the National Commission on Writing, two additional research-based programs can be used as influential supplemental resources to help improve writing instruction. *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration* are two computer-based programs that are widely used in school districts across the nation to accomplish curriculum goals using visual learning as implemented by the use of graphic organizers such as concept maps, ideas, and webs (The Institute for the Advancement of Research in Education (IARE), 2003). These two programs are technology tools that combine several capabilities to meet the needs of all children in grades K–12 schools. *Inspiration* is designed for students in grades six through twelve. This program is designed to be used across the curriculum for brainstorming, webbing, diagramming, planning, organizing, and outlining. *Kidspiration*, designed for students in kindergarten through fifth grade, helps students brainstorm ideas with pictures and words, organize and categorize information visually, and create stories and descriptions (IARE, 2003).

In July of 2003, using the definitions set forth by Section 9101 of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, the Institute for the Advancement of Research in

Education (IARE) conducted a research study entitled *Graphic Organizers: A Review of Scientifically Based Research* to review the literature on using graphic organizers in classroom instruction. In the report, 29 studies were identified and evaluated as scientifically based research. Each study provided evidence in support of the use of graphic organizers, such as those created in both *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration*. In addition, IARE findings from the studies revealed the following conclusions:

- *Student achievement.* Students using graphic organizers showed achievement benefits across content areas (vocabulary, reading, and writing) at multiple grade level (first through senior high school).
- *Reading Comprehension and Writing (Literacy Development).* Use of graphic organizers has been found to improve students' reading comprehension at all grade levels. In addition, the evidence indicated that graphic organizers benefited students in the writing process and improved their writing skills.
- *Thinking and learning skills.* The process of developing and using a graphic organizer enhanced skills such as developing and organizing ideas, seeing relationships, and categorizing concepts.
- *Cognitive learning theory.* The use of graphic organizers supported the implementation of cognitive learning theories: dual coding theory, schema theory, and cognitive load theory.
- *Retention.* Use of graphic organizers aided students in retention and recall of information (IARE, 2003).

In addition to the twenty-nine studies that were conducted to support the use of instructional effectiveness of *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration*, several case studies have been directed in support of the programs as well. According to Weeg (2002), *Kidspiration* caught her attention immediately as a program to which her students would respond. Weeg found that this program was not only a writing program, but it was also a program that she and her colleagues could use to teach social studies, science, math, or reading and writing (Weeg, 2002). In another case study, Gingerich (2002) found that *Kidspiration* was the program that her district was looking for to teach their students how to read and write. Gingerich stated:

> As I evaluated Kidspiration for the first time, I just kept saying 'wow!' as I discovered all the features geared specifically to help students learn to read and write. The SuperGrouper tool, the picture-to-topic feature, and audio support are just a few of the tools that make Kidspiration a great fit for K-5 students. (p. 2)

In a case study relating to the use of *Inspiration*, Erichsen (2002) discovered that using *Inspiration* to organize her students' writing assignments helped turn their weak responses to strong, coherent ones. She did this by creating a series of graphic organizers in *Inspiration* to help her eleventh-grade English students compare the literary elements in worlds that Huck Finn experienced in Mark Twain's classic novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* During a six-week unit, her students read each chapter in the novel and brainstormed about Huck's experiences. In small groups, they created graphic organizers depicting each of Huck's worlds and then discussed them as a class. At the end of the project, Erichsen noted that by using *Inspiration*, her students had gained a

deeper understanding of the novel, and they had become more confident writers (Erichsen, 2002).

Chandler (2002) championed the use of *Inspiration* because of its positive impact on his students' writing. He stated that with one click, this program instantly transforms students' diagrams into outlines. Chandler believes that *Inspiration* has increased his students' cognitive skills because they are now able to think and reflect about what, exactly, they want their words to convey. Chandler exclaimed:

> They clearly do better writing with Inspiration. It takes two or three assignments for them to realize that-and a lot of motivation on their part to follow through-but now their written work is starting to actually say something. They are bringing their stories to life (p. 2).

In addition to using *Inspiration* to help high school students become better writers, many high school teachers have begun to think outside of the box and use computers to teach writing. In their article, D'Amore and Strassman (2002) found that by integrating two strategies, an Electronic Read Around and online synchronous chats, via a local area network (LAN), into Melanie's high school English composition class, her students could use writing as a means of thinking, not just of completing an assigned tasked. This integration also provided her students with the opportunities to learn more about writing as well as computer technology functions. Melanie's students were able to chat online and use email to let their other classmates proofread their papers. In addition, they learned a variety of ways to use the computer to aid them with their writing. Both authors concluded that this was an excellence learning experience for the students (D'Amore & Strassman, 2002).

Kemmery and Cook (2002) showcased how using a state-of-the-art computer lab has drawn student interest in technical writing skills because of its practical application at Baltimore's Eastern Technical High School. According to Kemmery and Cook, the students have learned to use the computers to complete the senior independent project, which is a year-long research project required for graduation. It also prepares the students for writing tasks that they will confront in business and industry and in higher education. Working in teams, the students learned the cooperative model to produce high quality documents using technology media. This has been one of the most popular courses at the high school and students are excited about their learning opportunities in the course (Kemmery & Cook, 2002). A tenth grade student, Shannon Hagerman was quoted as saying:

> Depending on what job field I finally land in, I will probably have to write reports and enter data into a computer. The key thing I've learned in this course is to be precise and to the point when doing projects. As Mr. Kramer, my instructor, tells all of his students—less is more. (Kemmery & Cook, 2002, p. 32)

According to Kemmery and Cook, technical writing at Eastern Technical High School has become a solid bridge to the needs of the business community and the prime example of how a high school, with vision and goal setting, can adjust quickly to the changing demands of the market place. Offered by the English department, the program currently enrolls more than 200 students each year in the semester class and has the highest enrollment of all English electives.

Below are the Technical Writing Indicators for the students who are enrolled in the class:

- Use teamwork strategies to communicate technical information

- Follow conventions of standards written English and the specific requirements of professional models to produce and edit technical writing.
- Apply principles of technical writing to produce descriptions, instructions, surveys, and visuals.
- Examine the organization, structure and forms of technical writing in order to compose memos, letters and reports (informational, scientific, and specialized), incorporating proper format, appropriate style and effective content.
- Analyze graphs, tables, charts, and other technical documents in order to summarize, draw conclusions and accomplish a task.
- Present oral and written technical communication in order to inform and persuade an audience.
- Develop and apply "skill sets" necessary for the effective evaluation of the writing of self and peers.
- Use multimedia technologies in order to survey, evaluate, and communicate technical information. ((Kemmery & Cook, 2002, p. 33)

One of the instructors for the course, Jim Kramer, summarized the school's goals for *Vision 2005*:

> One of the key goals of Eastern's vision statements is to prepare its students for the workplace of the new world. The course provides a range of readings and exercises that emphasize clear, concise, objective composition of documents most frequently used in written communications in business and industry. It gives students practical experience with desktop formatting, graphing, and the use of

> visuals along with texts. As technology and desktop publishing evolve, students with practical desktop composition and formatting skills will be prepared to take advantage of new resources. (Kemmery & Cook, 2002, p. 34)

In addition to using effective computer-based programs and other strategies as a means to the writing, teachers of writing at all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) have found that the Internet can be a helpful tool as well. The Internet provides writing teachers with a vast amount of Web sites that can assist them (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2001). According to Lewin (2001), many instructional organizations have created online teacher resources that have helped them enhance their classroom instruction a great deal. Because of this teachers have become excited about the possible uses of the Internet, and they are using it more effectively to aid them when they are planning their lessons (Lewin, 2001).

In addition, Heinich, Molenda, Russell, and Smaldino (2001) found that teachers have begun to demonstrate to their students how they use a new technique called "WebQuest" to find novel teaching ideas. As a result, their students have learned to use the Web more effectively in gathering information in student-centered learning activities (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2001). WebQuest is a structured learning activity that requires students to conduct a large amount of research and information gathering using the Internet or World Wide Web. According to Brewer (2003), WebQuest has become an exciting new element that has been added to classroom presentations. Not only is this new tool exciting to students, but it has also proven to be a reenergizer for classroom teachers. Teachers are commenting throughout the nation how this tool is providing them with the assistance they need to help their students do research

more effectively. Plus, teachers have begun to compile technology resource files because of this new innovative teaching tool (Brewer, 2003).

Finally, according to Yancey (2004), school districts that use multiple technologies such as word processors, graphic software programs like *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration*, and the Internet provide their students with greater opportunities of becoming successful writers. She says, "Helping writers develop fluency and competence in a variety of technologies is the key part of teaching writing in this century" (p. 38). In addition, with the advent of several new technologies, Yancey argues that it is immensely crucial that teachers use these new resources to teach writing because they can easily help extend the writing curriculum of the 21st century. She asserts that if educators want to prepare their students to write more proficiently to overcome the demands of today's multifaceted society, they should act now and use these new resources to support their current writing curriculum or policy (Yancey, 2004).

Technology holds a great promise as a means of expanding time for writing, for both students and teachers. Because of new technology software and hardware, teachers now have the time to spend with their students as they develop their writing assignments. Teachers everywhere are desperate to find new and innovative teaching ideas. As a result, technology has become the perfect vehicle to help them solve this issue. Even though there are many teachers who are still uncomfortable using technological resources, the use of technological resources in writing instruction has made them consider how the use of technology has changed the teaching of writing and the impact that it has had on student achievement (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2001; NCW, 2003; Yancey, 2004).

Condition of High School Students in Elmore County Public School District

Many of the high school language arts teachers within the Elmore County School District have faced similar problems as related in the research regarding teaching their students to write more proficiently. During the fall of 2002, when the State of Alabama required all tenth graders within the State to take the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing, the district administrator for curriculum and instruction knew that the high school teachers were going to need assistance. Our district had only used a writing continuum to teach writing. It lacked consistency from grade to grade, goals, objectives, and benchmarks for the students, and teaching strategies and techniques that the language arts teachers could use to teach writing. Therefore, the K–12 language arts teachers within the district were surveyed to determine the state of the writing conditions of the high school students in the district. From the survey results, many of the district's high school language arts teachers informed the district's coordinator of curriculum and instruction that their students' writing skills were weak because the Alabama Course of Study standards for English/Language Arts were not being met at the elementary and middle school levels. In addition, they cited concerns similar to those that teachers had pinpointed in the Bay Area Writing Project, regarding effective writing instruction:

- The composing process (from prewriting, activities through revision)
- Syntax (including sentence combining, examination of common errors, and Francis Christensen's rhetoric)
- Sequence (moving from personal to analytical writing, from thesis to logical arguments)

- Small group techniques (peer criticism, writing for real audiences within the classroom, reading aloud in small groups)
- Writing assessment (holistic evaluation, systematic school-wide assessment)
- Opportunities for students in all grades to write frequently with delayed or "as need" instruction in grammar
- Teachers writing with students
- Students learning to write for many audiences and in many modes, including those required for subjects other than English
- Nonthreatening evaluation of student writing with emphasis on revision rather than correction.

After doing a thorough analysis of the teachers' concerns, the district took a proactive measure to develop a K–12 committee consisting of language arts teachers and administrators to construct a new K–12 writing curriculum; this committee was chaired by the district's coordinator of curriculum and instruction. Each member participated in several action research study groups to examine current theory and practice regarding writing instruction. The study groups acted as a vehicle for getting dialogue started between K–12 language arts teachers on creating effective teaching strategies and techniques to enhance their students' writing skills. Because of the substantial effect that the study groups had on the teachers, educators on the committee were able to develop one paramount goal for the new writing curriculum. They all agreed that it was their responsibility as writing teachers to produce life-long learners for the twenty-first century and motivate students to write fluently, believing what they have to say is meaningful and worth the effort.

In addition to establishing a district-wide writing curriculum committee and doing action research study groups, the district began to offer secondary teachers more professional development activities and training sessions to provide them with strategies and techniques to teach students who had not successfully mastered the skills of writing during their elementary and middle school years. Most of the workshops were held during the day at the district's professional resource center. In addition, some of the writing teacher leaders were able to visit other schools, learn new ideas, and bring them back to share with the other high school teachers. As Fleischer (2004) stated in her research, when done well, professional development can rekindle the teaching flames. The district was very fortunate that high school teachers seemed revitalized after attending a series of professional development workshops. Fleischer's blueprint for sustaining professional development in writing instruction was very helpful for the high school language arts teachers. Providing the on-going professional development really assisted the high school language arts teachers (Fleischer, 2004).

In addition to providing effective ongoing professional development, the district began to require high school teachers to use the on-line essay-writing component of Holt Reinhart Literature Textbook Series. As with the high school students in the Baltimore Project, our students began to show an interest in writing. In addition, several teachers noted that students' writing grades had improved. The technology software and Web Sites also assisted the teachers within the district. They provided the teachers with the needed assistance when particular students needed help with writing assignments and/or activities. During the summer of 2004, the district purchased *Inspiration* for all of the high school computer labs. This allowed the language arts teachers to use this program on

a rotating basis. Most of the teachers were able to maximize the use of the program; however, many of the teachers reported that technical issues caused them not to use the program as often as they wanted. Overall, they informed the district office that the program had a positive impact on their students' writing.

Although most of the high school teachers are familiar with the current literature on the Self-Regulated Strategy Development, it is the district's goal to do more research and in-depth study groups on how to effectively use this strategy. Many of the high school language arts teachers have requested more training on how to use this strategy with their struggling writers. During the 2005–2006 school year, the district writing teacher leaders at the middle and high school levels will visit schools where the SRSD is being implemented effectively and use some of their ideas within the Elmore County District.

The Elmore County School District Language Arts Teachers have learned how to use research theories for practical purposes in the classroom. It is the district's goal to provide quality-writing instruction for its high school students. The language arts teachers have become very committed to this cause.

Summary

The above information was gathered to demonstrate the importance of how writing instruction impacts not only teachers and students, but also our demanding society as a whole. At the high school level alone, student enrollment in demanding high school mathematics and science courses has risen within the last decade, while participation in courses like English composition has dropped. According to the National

Commission on Writing (2003), recent analyses have indicated that more than 50 percent of first- year college students are unable to produce quality papers relatively free of basic language errors. However, complaints about this problem have not been addressed for decades (NCW, 2003). Therefore, the researchers in this field suggested that writing should be made a priority in schools across America. School districts, colleges, and universities must work cohesively to connect the bridge between writing theory and practice.

Although the literature on the teaching of writing does address the importance of American schools, colleges, and universities to put writing curriculum reform at the forefront of their agenda, which in turn, will position the power of language and communication in their proper place in the classroom, there is scant research on how school should develop new writing curricula and how these new curricula should be supported by research-based writing programs and effective teaching strategies in order for students to become proficient writers. The researcher has also discovered that there is limited research on how teachers should be trained to teach writing as well as integrate technological sources to supplement writing instruction.

The study described in this document helps to address these research gaps listed above by providing its readers with valuable information that has been very useful and/or practical in guiding the process of developing and enacting a new writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District. The first section of the literature pinpoints the need for teachers, administrators, elected officials, and parents across the nation to become involved in what has been considered as a writing revolution to increase student achievement in this area. *Writing curricula* should be developed and taught in

every grade, starting with kindergarten if the nation and school districts want to see improvements so that the writing deficiencies between elementary and high schools as well as colleges and universities will eventually be eliminated. Several *effective writing programs* (*The National Writing Project, 6 + 1 Traits of Writing, Strategies for Writers, Step Up to Writing*) that school districts across the nation have used to improve writing instruction have been mentioned and researched. In addition, the review illustrated the impact these programs have had on improving writing instruction, using a vast amount of studies as evidence. Educators must make the case that effective writing instruction is essential for the future of our nation.

The next section shared three of the most noticeable *research-based writing strategies Teaching Writing as a Process, Self-Regulated Development Strategy, Writing Across the Curriculum*) used by educators to improve their students' writing skills. Several writing experts have supported the use of these strategies through their publications. The section on *curriculum development and change* distinctively examined effective strategies used in the curriculum development process and how curriculum change theory plays an integral part in the entire process. In order for writing teachers to become more effective, they must be provided with ongoing, comprehensive training to help them improve their classroom practices. Writing teachers must be provided several opportunities to *learn about the teaching of writing* as they develop strategies and/or techniques to improve their students' writing skills (NCW, 2003).

The next section of the chapter focused on *the use of technological resources in the enactment of the writing curriculum* and discussed how technological resources can benefit both the teacher and his or her students in the teaching-learning process about

writing. Also, the section shared how the teacher and the student both benefit from the enactment of writing in the curriculum. In the final section of this chapter, c*onditions of high school students in Elmore County*, the researcher discussed how the district is working to overcome current challenges regarding its high school students' writing deficiencies.

Since 2002, every state in the United States with the exception of Iowa has established writing standards from the NCTE and IRA national writing standards and mandated that writing be taught at every grade level nation (Isascson, 2004). Therefore, several school districts are vigorously searching for pedagogical strategies to create better student writers. As school districts within the United States continue to seek assistance in teaching students to write proficiently, the research findings from this study will provide them with support to many unanswered questions that may hinder them as they begin to develop new curricula to teach writing more effectively. The study will offer school districts and educational agencies across the nation a great deal of research and as well as practical assistance in the areas of *writing curriculum reform, effective research-based writing strategies, curriculum development and the change process, training teachers to teach writing more productively*, and *integrating technological resources to help maximize students' writing skills.* Its primary focus is to help states and local school districts with their quest to produce competent writing teachers and proficient student writers.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

> *In today's school, writing is a prisoner of time. Learning how to present one's thoughts on paper requires time. The sheer scope of the skills required for effective writing is daunting. The mechanics of grammar and punctuation, usage, developing a "voice" and a feel for the audience, mastering the distinctions between expository, narrative, and persuasive writing (and the types of evidence required to make each convincing) – the list is lengthy. These skills cannot be picked up from a few minutes here, and a few minutes there, all stolen from more "important" subjects.*
>
> — The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and College, 2003.

This study explores research practices and ideas relating to the development of effective writing curricula. The purpose of this study was to determine language arts educators' perceptions of a newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District. The research design was based on a mixed-method evaluative approach used to measure the Elmore County School District's new writing program (curriculum) expansion. According to Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004), when this design is used, often the quantitative methodology is used to measure the outcomes, and the qualitative methodology is used to describe the implementation of a program. Finally, the authors note this type of design has the potential to produce more insightful, even dialectically transformed, understandings of the phenomenon such as program implementation and outcomes (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 318).

In addition to restating the research methodology for this study, this chapter restates the research questions for which the study was designed to determine the

language arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum. The chapter begins with a description of the setting in which this study has taken place. Next, the researcher describes the participants of the study. Finally, research instrument development, data collection procedures, and data analysis are all discussed.

The research for this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the language arts teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and the need for the new writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District?

2. To what extent has the new writing curriculum provided the language arts teachers with adequate research-based strategies to improve writing instruction within the Elmore County Public School District?

3. a) To what extent have the processes used during the development of the new writing curriculum enabled teachers to enact the writing curriculum?

b) What recommendations do teachers have for improving the curriculum development and implementation process of the new writing curriculum?

4. To what extent have continuous professional development activities and/or training sessions had an impact on producing better writing teachers within the Elmore County Public School District?

5. To what extent will teachers evaluate the effectiveness of the technological resources used during the enactment process of the new writing curriculum?

Description of the Setting

The Elmore County Public School District is located in South Central Alabama, which is in the region of ten miles north of the capital city, Montgomery, Alabama. The Alabama State Department of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools have accredited all fourteen schools within the district. According to the 2004-2005 Alabama State Department of Education Average Daily Membership, the district serves approximately 10,313 students within its fourteen schools. These fourteen schools consist of six elementary, four middle/junior high, and four high schools (Alabama State Department of Education, 2004). Racially, the district student population is 71% Caucasian, 27% African American, and 2% other ethnicity (Alabama State Department of Education, 2004).

The district is divided into four communities: Eclectic, Holtville, Millbrook, and Wetumpka. Each community has a grade composition of kindergarten through twelfth grade. In addition, the district has worked vigorously to develop consistent curricula throughout the county. Teachers, administrators, and parents representing all communities have had input into the curriculum development process with the goal of providing appropriate experiences in the schools to foster achievement so that each student will have the opportunity to become a useful and productive member of today's ever-changing society.

Participants

The pilot population for this study consisted of the K–12 language arts teachers within the Elmore County Public School District because these individuals have used the

new writing curriculum for the past two and a half years. The teaching experience of each language arts teacher ranged from zero to thirty-four years of service. However, the majority of these individuals have been teaching for over ten years. According to the district's Local Education Agency Personnel System Report that was submitted to the Alabama State Department of Education for the 2004–2005 school year, there were 296 language arts teachers within the district. Out of the 296 language arts teachers, two hundred and eighty-eight were female and eight were male (Alabama State Department of Education, 2004). The group's ethnicity included Caucasian, African American, and Spanish American; nevertheless, the majority of the language arts teachers were Caucasian. African American and Spanish American language arts teachers only make-up 15% of the instructional population.

The Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher for this study was to focus on the language arts teachers' perceptions of the writing curriculum that was developed and implemented in the Elmore County Public School District. During the period when the new curriculum was developed and implemented, the researcher held the role of Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction within the school district. As the Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction for the Elmore County Public School District, the researcher was charged with the responsibility of overseeing all instructional programs such as: K–12 curriculum and instruction, professional development, Alabama Reading Initiative Schools, and the Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) Program. This study provided the researcher with an opportunity to analyze data collected from the language

arts teachers in the district for the purpose of determining their perceptions of the new writing curriculum in order to reevaluate or enhance current writing practices. In addition, the language arts teachers' responses provided the researcher with important data and/or information in developing a quality writing program to help students throughout the district become more proficient writers.

The researcher has considered any bias that could impact the true analysis of the study. Because of the researcher's role as the coordinator of curriculum and instruction, it is vital to the validity of this study that the researcher does not add any inferences into the results of the study. Discourse and/or comments from teachers about the new writing curriculum were not used within the study except for the comments and responses surfacing in the instrument used in the data collection process. The researcher was extremely careful throughout the process of this study not to include comments from everyday conversations and/or observations that have been made as a result of his role in the Elmore County School District over the past three years.

Instrument Development

Description of Instrument

A questionnaire to determine the language arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum was developed to use in this exploratory study. The researcher designed the instrument to collect demographic information from the language arts teachers. In addition, the questionnaire was designed around the research questions and the current literature found within the study. Each item on the questionnaire relates back to the literature within the study, and the items were developed by the researcher to

determine the language arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District. The items were grouped according to the literature and/ or content relating to each section of the questionnaire so that each respondent could rate each item more efficiently and expeditiously. According to Messick (1994), by using this design, all important parts of the construct domain are covered. In addition, he adds that this type of structural approach allows for the specification of the boundaries of the construct domain to be assessed such as determining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motives, and other attributes to be revealed by the instrument. Messick considers this as a key issue for the content aspect of construct validity (Messick, 1994). In addition, Brennan (1998) adds that it is essential for the instrument developer to consider this approach or design because of the importance of the content-related evidence and/or literature. He stated that if the developer of the instrument cannot defend the content of the instrument based on how the items are structured, little else matters (Brennan, 1998). (See Appendix E for Instrument.)

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section one contained the demographic items: gender, grade level taught, and number of years as an educator. The purpose of this section was to obtain basic information to assist the researcher in differentiating between the participants involved in the study. Section two consisted of five subsections: the first subsection on Writing Curriculum Reform consisted of five Likert-type questions; the next subsection, Research Based Writing Strategies, also contained five Likert-type questions; the subsection on the Process of Curriculum Development and Change involved six Likert-type questions; the next subsection on Professional Development of Writing contained six Likert-type questions; and the final

subsection on Technology Integration in Writing consisted of five Likert-type questions. Section three of the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions. According to Dillman (2000), this approach allows respondents to focus on each issue and give a more reasonable response. Dillman also argues that grouping questions this way is helpful to the respondents (Dillman, 2000).

In section two of the questionnaire, the Likert- type scale items were scored on a five-point rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. These items were developed to assess the language arts teachers' attitudes regarding the newly developed writing curriculum within the school district. Items 28, 29, 30 were open-ended questions, which were used to assess the respondents' opinions of the new writing curriculum.

Content Related Validity Evidence

The researcher further validated the content of the questionnaire by allowing a core panel of language arts teachers within the Elmore County School District and two graduate students enrolled in the Educational Leadership Program from Auburn University at Montgomery to review the questionnaire and make suggestions and/or recommendations. According to Eggers and Jones (1998), experts are individuals who possess sufficient knowledge and experience and have mastered advanced skills in a particular field of study (Eggers & Jones, 1998). Also, Messick (1994) stated that expert professional judgment and feedback related to the design of the instrument serves as substantial documentation that addresses the content aspect of construct validity (Messick, 1994). Each member of the panel of experts has been in the field of education for over ten years and has had much success with teaching writing, aligning writing

instruction, and leading writing curriculum reform efforts throughout the district. Once the panel reviewed the researchers' first daft of the questionnaire, the researcher used their major recommendations. Their suggestions were to reword several questions and add questions to the instrument related to the teaching of writing as a process.

Fowler (1993) contended that when a researcher develops his own instrument, to accomplish the task of ensuring that scores from his instrument is reliable, the researcher's goal should be to have respondents first understand then answer each item of the instrument in the best way possible. One approach to achieving this goal is by field-testing the questionnaire (Fowler, 1993). Using Fowler's recommendation, the researcher fielded-tested the questionnaire with a group of twenty language arts teachers who met the criteria for the study to determine its clarity and readability. The field test was carried out during the month of March 2005. In addition, the language arts teachers who took part in the field test were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide the researcher with any feedback and/or recommendations they had about the design of the instrument and its items.

Once the researcher received and reviewed the language arts teachers' comments and suggestions relating to the instrument, the researcher made the changes in the wording, structural content, and the organization of several items of the questionnaire. First, the wording in the demographic section of the questionnaire was rewritten to ensure that respondents would not be confused when they completed the information for this section. Secondly, based on the reviewers' critiques, several questions of the questionnaire were reworded and organized. The reviewers commented that although they were very comfortable with the Likert-type scale design of questions one through

twenty-seven, they felt that adding the three open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire would allow the language arts teachers to have the opportunity to express their thoughts related to the writing curriculum that may not have been addressed in the Likert- type scale questions in section two of the questionnaire. Fowler (1993) supported this recommendation because he argued that although using agree-disagree formats can be a rather easy way to construct an instrument, they require a great deal of care and attention. Therefore, he stated that researchers could have more reliable and interpretable data by adding more direct question forms to their instrument (Fowler, 1993). After revising the questionnaire using the recommendations from the language arts teachers who participated in the pilot-test of the questionnaire, the final copy used in the study was revised to reflect their recommendations during the month of March 2005.

Construct Related Validity Evidence

Fowler (1993) refers to reliability as being consistent or reproducible of a measure each time that it is used. He adds that if scores from a measure is not reliable, the measure will not agree with itself. To further obtain reliability evidence for scores from this questionnaire, the researcher used the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razivieh, (2002) Cronbach's alpha is most often used by researchers when they use Likert-type scales to collect their data. In addition, Santos (1999) supported the use of Likert-type scales when he used Cronbach's Alpha as a tool to test the reliability of two different Likert-type scales. He also noted that alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1. The higher the score, the more reliable scores from the scale are. Santos indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient (Santos, 1999, p. 1-4). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was measured from the full sample

and calculated for each scale. On the basis of the data in Tables 1–5, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ranged in value from 0.83 to 0.88 for each scale.

Table 1

Reliability Analysis of Writing Curriculum Reform (Alpha)

Item Number	Mean	S.D.	Cases
2— The new writing curriculum has helped improve students' performance on the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing (ADAW).	3.73	.82	213
3— The new writing curriculum contains guidelines, procedures, and benchmarks that help teachers teach writing more effectively.	3.74	.86	213
4— The new writing curriculum guidelines have provided teachers with ample ideas, strategies, and suggestions to teach writing.	3.63	.95	213
5— Programs such as *6 + 1 Traits, Step Up to Writing*, and/or *Strategies for Writers* support the new writing curriculum.	3.91	.79	213
Statistics for Scale (M = 15.01, V = 7.74, SD = 2.78) Alpha = .83			

Table 2

Reliability Analysis of Research-Based Writing Strategies (Alpha)

Item Number	Mean	S.D.	Cases
6— The new writing curriculum uses research-based strategies.	3.94	.73	213
7— The writing process is a good, developmentally appropriate, strategy to use when preparing students to become better writers.	3.95	.74	213
8— Using research-based strategies of writing researchers, such as Rick Shelton, Ruth Culham, and Ralph Fletcher, is very helpful when I teach writing, using the steps of the writing process.	3.69	.76	213
9— Using the teaching methods from the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) provides assistance to teachers working with struggling writers.	3.48	.65	213
10— Overall, I believe that using the research-based writing strategies, outlined in the new writing curriculum, will improve classroom instruction and student achievement.	3.89	.75	213

Statistics for Scale (*M* = 18.95, *V* = 7.82, *SD* = 2.80) Alpha = .83

Table 3

Reliability Analysis of Process of Curriculum Development and Change (Alpha)

Item Number	Mean	S.D.	Cases
11— The school district established goals concerning the writing curriculum based on subject matter, need, and interest of the students.	3.84	.79	213
12—As a teacher, I was adequately involved in the development process of the writing curriculum.	3.07	1.17	213
13—The process of sharing successful classroom practices was very helpful during the development of the curriculum.	3.56	.88	213
14—The writing curriculum was designed to ensure that horizontal alignment was effectively achieved across each grade level.	3.74	.79	213
15—The writing curriculum was designed to vertically align writing instruction from grade to grade.	3.75	.78	213
16—Teachers were provided adequate time to work collaboratively to ensure that horizontal and vertical alignment was achieved throughout the writing curriculum.	3.09	1.05	213

Statistics for Scale (M = 21.06, V = 17.79, SD = 4.22) Alpha = .86

Table 4

Reliability Analysis of Professional Development for Writing (Alpha)

Item Number	Mean	S.D.	Cases
17— As the new writing curriculum was being developed and implemented, teachers were provided with adequate professional development opportunities.	3.06	1.11	213
18— The professional resources and ideas received during writing workshops were beneficial.	3.58	.88	213
19— The writing presenters and/or consultants modeled effective practices in writing instruction.	3.59	.85	213
20— Sufficient professional development opportunities were provided to teachers to enable them to teach students to become better writers.	3.05	1.04	213
22—My mentor writing teacher shared successful writing strategies that helped me to be a more effective teacher.	3.31	1.04	213

Statistics for Scale (*M* = 16.57, *V* = 14.76, *SD* = 3.84) Alpha = .86

Table 5

Reliability Analysis of Process of Technology Integration in Writing (Alpha)

Item Number	Mean	S.D.	Cases
23— The list of educational Web Sites, located within the writing curriculum, provides teachers with assistance to teach writing.	3.57	.75	213
24— Students have responded well to the use of computer-based instruction to teach writing.	3.15	.89	213
25— Computers have shortened and eased the workload of evaluating students' writing assignments.	2.75	1.03	213
26— *Inspiration/Kidspiration Software* has been helpful in teaching students methods of organization, development, and coherency of writing.	3.23	.88	213
27— *Inspiration/Kidspiration Software* has assisted teaching students the use of writing transitional words and graphic organizers.	3.23	.86	213

Statistics for Scale (M = 15.96, V = 13.35, SD = 3.65) Alpha = .88

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving the consent of the Superintendent to conduct the study in an effort to determine the K-12 language arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum in the Elmore County Public School District, the data was collected from the responses of the questionnaire located in Appendix C. The questionnaire entitled *Survey of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the New Writing Curriculum for the Elmore County Public School System* was administered during the month of August 2005. At the elementary school level, language arts teachers participate in grade-level meetings; on the other hand,

at the junior high and high school levels, the language arts teachers are departmentalized. Therefore, during a two-week window, the researcher asked the grade-level leaders and department chairs of each of the fourteen schools within the district to distribute the questionnaires during the first part of one of their weekly meetings. Then, the respondents were responsible for completing the questionnaire on their own and returning it to the grade-level chair or department chair's mailbox. Using this process, Dillman (2004) noted that not only does the researcher gather information more expeditiously and cost effectively, but also the respondents are motivated to complete the questionnaire and return it. In addition, he found that the approach was very inexpensive for the researcher. He also added that respondents can take their time in completing the questionnaire, providing the researcher with more thoughtful answers (Dillman, 2004).

Fowler (1993) added that when the researcher uses this approach, generally the cooperation rates are high. In addition, he noted that there is an opportunity for the study to be explained and questions can be answered related to the questionnaire (Fowler, 1993). Once each respondent completed the questionnaire, he or she placed it in the sealed envelope provided by the researcher and returned it to the grade-level chair or department chair's office mailbox. From there, the grade-level chair and/or department chair collected the sealed envelopes and notified the researcher that the administration process of the questionnaire was complete. The researcher then collected the sealed envelopes containing the questionnaires from each school. Neither the grade-level chair nor the department chair compiled a list of each respondent, and the language arts teachers were instructed not to write their names or any additional information that could identify them from the questionnaire so the data received could remain anonymous.

Methods of Data Analysis

After the data was collected from the questionnaire, it was the responsibility of the researcher to effectively analyze the data, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in a logical construction. The data from section two of the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations. In addition, the computer software program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 was used to analyze the statistical data and assist the researcher in determining what perceptions exist in regards to the newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District. Using this type of approach allowed the researcher to describe the perceptions of the population sample. The data obtained from section three of the questionnaire was analyzed using different qualitative methods to identify emerging themes from the three opened-ended questions based on the recommendations of Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003).

Summary

This study was conducted in order to determine the language arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District. Using a mixed-method approach, the researcher designed a questionnaire to collect data from the language arts teachers who are responsible for teaching the new writing curriculum. After the panel of experts examined the questionnaire, the instrument was field tested and critiqued by twenty language arts teachers within the district to determine its reliability. Finally, each language arts teacher within the district was given the questionnaire to complete on his or her own time and return it to his or her grade-level

chair or department head's office mailbox in a sealed envelope that the researcher had provided. The questionnaire contained explicit directions for each teacher to follow as he or she completed it. Once the respondent language arts teacher completed the questionnaire, it was submitted to the principal and returned to the researcher anonymously by the principal of the school.

In Chapter IV, the data for this study will be presented and interpreted using both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The researcher will present the quantitative findings from the study first. After the quantitative data are methodically presented, the researcher will present the results of the qualitative data that were gathered from section three of the questionnaire. The researcher anticipates that the insights from the language arts teachers' perceptions will be useful in modifying the existing program elements of the newly developed writing curriculum if necessary so that the district will be able to continue to help its students become fluent writers.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

> *Despite its importance to learning, formal attention to writing leaves a lot to be desired, in both school and college. At the high school level, for example, although enrollment in challenging high school mathematics and science courses has climbed in the last decade, participation in courses like English composition has dropped.*
>
> — The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and College, 2003.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine language arts educators' perceptions of a newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District. The research design was based on a mixed-method evaluative approach used to measure the Elmore County School District's new writing program (curriculum) expansion. Since public concern regarding effective writing instruction in school districts throughout the nation is at an all time high, many school districts have been presented with the task of reforming how writing is been taught to ensure that their students are able to write at a level of proficiency or higher. No longer can teachers of writing expect their students to master this craft by simply teaching basic grammatical rules because writing instruction is now based on comprehensive writing standards and strategies that are research-based, requiring teachers to extend their instruction beyond basic grammar (Cotton, 2000; Crawford, 2001; Culham, 2003; Isascson, 2004; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002; NCW, 2003).

The results of this study should provide school districts across the country with insights into how writing instruction maybe reformed to maximize students' writing capabilities. Chapter three presented an overview the research methodology, which included a description of the setting, as well as information about the participants, researcher's role, instrument development, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis. This chapter presents the findings from the study, which sought to determine language arts educators' perceptions of a newly developed writing curriculum. The following research questions helped to frame the findings of the study:

1. What are the language arts teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and the need for the new writing curriculum with the Elmore County Public School District?

2. To what extent has the new writing curriculum provided the language arts teachers with adequate research-based strategies to improve writing instruction within the Elmore County Public School District?

3. a) To what extent have the processes used during the development of the new writing curriculum enabled teachers to enact the writing curriculum?

b) What recommendations do teachers have for improving the curriculum development and implementation process of the new writing curriculum?

4. To what extent have continuous professional development activities and/or training sessions had an impact on producing better writing teachers within the district?

5. To what extent will teachers evaluate the effectiveness of the technological resources used during the enactment process of the new writing curriculum?

The analysis of the data with regards to the language arts teachers' perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County School Public School District is presented in three sections. The first section covers the respondents' characteristics including their educational experience and/or demographics. The second section will reveal the scores from the five subsections of the instrument: Writing Curriculum Reform, Research Based Writing Strategies, Process of Curriculum Development and Change, Professional Development of Writing, and Technology Integration in Writing. The data for this section were gathered from twenty-seven Likert-type questions. The Likert- type scale items were scored on a five-point rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The computer software program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 was used to analyze the data. Section three of the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions. The researcher reviewed each respondent's written response, and the data from this section of the questionnaire were analyzed identifying emerging themes from the three opened-ended questions. Each of these themes will be presented.

Results of Educational Demographics

The sample for this study consisted of grades K–12 language arts teachers that have had the opportunity to implement the newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District. There were fourteen schools within this school district. All of the language arts teachers from each school were given the opportunity to participate in the study during the fall of 2005, which led to a total of 213 (72%) respondents out of a possible 296.

Gender of Respondents

According to the findings, all two hundred and thirteen respondents answered the question in regards to their gender. Two hundred and ten were female (98.6%) and three were male (1.4%).

Grade Level of Respondents

Grade levels include ranges from elementary, middle, junior high, and high school. Of the two hundred and thirteen respondents, one hundred and sixty-two (76.1%) were elementary school teachers, twenty-one (9.9%) were middle school teachers, fourteen (6.6 %) were junior high school teachers, and sixteen (7.5%) were high school level teachers. Therefore, it was quite obvious that the largest response rate was from elementary language arts teachers. Within the district around 90% of the elementary teachers are self-contained, which means they teach all subjects (Alabama State Department of Education, 2004). Unlike elementary language arts teachers, middle, junior high, and high school teachers are departmentalized, which means less teachers are responsible for teaching language arts classes. Because of this arrangement, the elementary language arts teachers in the district by far represent a larger sample than other grade levels.

Years an as Educator

Table 6 indicates the years of service of the two hundred and thirteen respondents who answered the statement, regarding their years as an educator. Their responses were grouped into ranges of four-seven years of service. The results indicated that 4–10 years of service was the highest range with 72 language arts teachers (33.8%), followed by 11–15 years of service with 43 language arts teachers (20.3%).

Table 6

Respondents' Years of Experience as an Educator

Years	N	%
0-3	35	16.4
4-10	72	33.8
11-15	43	20.2
16-20	26	12.2
20+	36	17.4
Total	213	100

Years in Elmore County Public School District

Table 7 shows years of experience and/or service as an educator within the Elmore County Public School District. Two hundred and thirteen respondents answered the question, "How many of these years have been in Elmore County?" The responses were also grouped into ranges of four-seven years of service with 4–10 being the highest with a total of 79 language arts teachers (37.2%), followed by 0–3 years with 55 language arts (25.9%) selecting that duration of service.

Table 7

Respondents' Years as an Educator in the Elmore County School District

Years	N	%
0-3	55	25.9
4-10	79	37.2
11-15	39	18.2
16-20	20	9.4
20+	20	9.3
Total	213	100

Results of Quantitative Data

Section two consisted of twenty-seven Likert-type scale questions that focused on the respondents' perceptions of the new writing curriculum in regards to the five subsections (Writing Curriculum Reform, Research Based Writing Strategies, Process of Curriculum Development and Change, Professional Development of Writing, and Technology Integration in Writing) of the instrument. The respondents were asked to rate the response that best described their general beliefs about each statement concerning the newly developed writing curriculum. The Likert-type scale items were assigned a numerical value to each response. The responses were (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Results are discussed for each subsection.

Writing Curriculum Reform

Although this subsection contained five belief statements, Item One was analyzed separately from the other items because of its specificity to this study. The researcher was interested in knowing whether the language arts teachers thought there was a need for a new writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District. Therefore, this Statement was used to measure their perceptions regarding the need for a new writing curriculum within the district. All 213 respondents answered Item One, "There was a need to develop a writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District." Of the 213 respondents, a significant number of respondents 199 (93%) agreed that there was a need to develop a new writing curriculum within the district. In addition, the response yielded the highest mean score of 4.39 with a standard deviation of .64, which indicates that there was very little difference among the respondents regarding to the need for a new writing curriculum.

The scale, "Writing Curriculum Reform," consisted of items two through five, which were grouped and rated together. These items assessed the effectiveness and need of the newly developed writing curriculum within the district. The data for these four questions are presented in Table 8. The overall mean score for the scale was 3.75 with a standard deviation of .70. Of the four responses, the respondents answered most favorably to item five regarding how "programs such as *6+1 Traits*, *Step Up to Writing*, and *Strategies for Writers* supported the new writing curriculum." The mean score for this question was 3.91 with a standard deviation of .79. All items were within one standard deviation of the mean.

Table 8

Writing Curriculum Reform

Item Number	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
2— The new writing curriculum has helped improve students' performance on the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing (ADAW).	213	1.00	5.00	3.73	.82
3— The new writing curriculum contains guidelines, procedures, and benchmarks that help teachers teach writing more effectively.	213	1.00	5.00	3.74	.86
4— The new writing curriculum guidelines have provided teachers with ample ideas, strategies, and suggestions to teach writing.	213	1.00	5.00	3.63	.95
5— Programs such as *6 + 1 Traits*, *Step Up to Writing*, and/or *Strategies for Writers* support the new writing curriculum.	213	1.00	5.00	3.91	.79

Research-Based Writing Strategies

The new writing curriculum entailed several research-based writing strategies including, but not limited to, the following: the writing process and Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). In addition, the district used the research-based writing strategies of several researchers in the field of writing instruction such as: Rick Shelton, Ruth Culham, and Ralph Fletcher.

The data in Table 9 represent the scale, "Research-Based Writing Strategies," and the responses include items six through ten. In these items, respondents were asked to indicate their extent of agreement regarding the various aspects of the researched-based writing strategies that were outlined in the new writing curriculum to enhance writing instruction and student achievement. In addition, the overall mean score for this scale was 3.79 with a standard deviation of .56. Each item was within one standard deviation from the mean. Approximately 80% of the respondents agreed that new writing curriculum contained researched strategies that would improve writing instruction and student learning. However, item nine (M = 3.48, SD = .65) revealed that the strategies of the SRSD were not being used as much as the other research-based writing strategies. This was significantly notable.

Table 9

Research-Based Writing Strategies

Item Number	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
6— The new writing curriculum uses research-based strategies.	213	1.00	5.00	3.94	.73
7— The writing process is a good, developmentally appropriate, strategy to use when preparing students to become better writers.	213	1.00	5.00	3.95	.74
8— Using research-based strategies of writing researchers such as: Rick Shelton, Ruth Culham, and Ralph Fletcher is very helpful when I teach writing, using the steps of the writing process.	213	1.00	5.00	3.69	.76

(table continues)

Table 9 (continued)

Item Number	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
9— Using the teaching methods from the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) provides assistance to teachers working with struggling writers.	213	1.00	5.00	3.48	.65
10– Overall, I believe that using the research-based writing strategies, outlined in the new writing curriculum, will improve classroom instruction and student achievement.	213	1.00	5.00	3.89	.75

Process of Curriculum Development and Change

As the new writing curriculum was being developed, the district's goal was to develop a workable curriculum that would improve students' writing skills. The respondents were asked how well the curriculum development process was executed as the writing curriculum was being developed. The data analysis resulted in a scale mean score of 3.51 with a standard deviation score of .70 (see Table 10). In addition, the Table displays the mean and standard deviation scores of each item, which entails how well the curriculum development process was instituted in the school district. Items 12 (M = 3.07, SD = 1.17) and 14 (M = 3.09, SD = 1.05) indicated there was less agreement among the respondents pertaining to their belief about having been adequately involved in the developmental process of the new writing curriculum. In addition, the results revealed that the majority of respondents (70 %) did not believe they had adequate time to collaborate while developing the curriculum.

Table 10

Process of Curriculum Development and Change

Item Number	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
11— The school district established goals concerning the writing curriculum based on subject matter, need, and interest of the students	213	1.00	5.00	3.84	.78
12— As a teacher, I was adequately involved in the development process of the writing curriculum.	213	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.17
13— The process of sharing successful classroom practices was very helpful during the development of the curriculum.	213	1.00	5.00	3.56	.88
14— The writing curriculum was designed to ensure that horizontal alignment was effectively achieved across each grade level.	213	1.00	5.00	3.74	.79
15— The writing curriculum was designed to vertically align writing instruction from grade to grade.	213	1.00	5.00	3.75	.78
16— Teachers were provided adequate time to work collaboratively to ensure that horizontal and vertical alignment was achieved throughout the writing curriculum.	213	1.00	5.00	3.09	1.05

Professional Development for Writing

As the new writing curriculum was being developed and implemented, the district planned several different professional development activities for its language arts teachers. In the subsection of Professional Development for Writing, the respondents were asked to rate items seventeen through twenty-two regarding whether the district's goal to provide on-going professional development opportunities for the language arts teachers enabled them to teach their students to become better writers. The responses to question twenty-one, "My preservice (college) courses provided training in writing instruction" were analyzed separately because many of the teachers within the district had commented on several occasions they had not been trained to teach writing during their college years. Of the 213 language arts teachers, 129 (61%) believed their college courses did not adequately prepare them to teach writing. The mean score for this response was 2.85 with a standard deviation of 1.21, which was notable since it yielded the second lowest mean score and one of the highest standard deviations than any of the twenty-seven Likert-type items.

The additional five items pertaining to professional development in writing were measured using one rating scale. The results yielded a mean score of 3.24 with a standard deviation of .71. The ratings of this scale contained the second lowest mean score. This was a notable indicator that the respondents believed the district needed to provide more ongoing professional development opportunities in writing instruction. The data for each item are presented in Table 11. The mean scores for the items were within one standard deviation of the mean.

Table 11

Professional Development for Writing

Item Number	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
17— As the new writing curriculum was being developed and implemented, teachers were provided with adequate professional development opportunities.	213	1.00	5.00	3.06	1.11
18— The professional resources and ideas received during writing workshops were beneficial.	213	1.00	5.00	3.58	.88
19— The writing presenters and/or consultants modeled effective practices in writing instruction.	213	1.00	5.00	3.59	.85
20— Sufficient professional development opportunities were provided to teachers to enable them to teach students to become better writers.	213	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.04
22— My mentor writing teacher shared successful writing strategies that helped me to be a more effective teacher.	213	1.00	5.00	3.31	1.04

Technology Integration in Writing

Once the writing curriculum was developed, the district used several different technological resources to support the new writing curriculum. Each language arts teacher was provided training on how to use these tools in his or her classroom. Table 12 displays the results of language arts teachers' perceptions regarding how well computer-based instruction has assisted them with the teaching of writing. The mean score for this

subsection was 3.19 with a standard deviation of .73, and each item was within one standard deviation of the mean. The ratings of this scale yielded the lowest mean score. This was a major indicator that the respondents thought the district needed to enhance its use of technology to teach writing. In addition, item twenty-five (M = 2.75, SD = 1.03) revealed that the respondents also felt computers had not decreased or eased their workload of evaluating students' writing assignments.

Table 12

Technology Integration in Writing

Item Number	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
23— The list of educational Web Sites, located within the writing curriculum, provides teachers with assistance to teach writing.	213	1.00	5.00	3.60	.75
24— Students have responded well to the use of computer-based instruction to teach writing.	213	1.00	5.00	3.15	.89
25— Computers have shortened and eased the workload of evaluating students' writing assignments.	213	1.00	5.00	2.75	1.03
26— *Inspiration/Kidspiration* Software has been helpful in teaching students methods of organization, development, and coherency of writing.	213	1.00	5.00	3.23	.88
27— *Inspiration/Kidspiration* Software has assisted teaching students the use of writing transitional words and graphic organizers.	213	1.00	5.00	3.23	.86

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Section three of the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions which allowed the respondents to have the opportunity to express their thoughts related to the newly developed writing curriculum that may not have been addressed in the Likert-type scale items in section two of the questionnaire. Three open-ended questions helped to frame the qualitative findings of the study:

1. In your opinion, what are the best aspects of the new writing curriculum?

2. Do you have any recommendations for improving the new writing curriculum? If yes, explain.

3. What recommendations do teachers have for improving the curriculum development and implementation process of the new writing curriculum?

Analyzing qualitative data can be a difficult process because the researcher is the tool for the analysis. However, qualitative data may provide the researcher with a more indepth understanding or interpretation on the effectiveness of the program, school curriculum, or policy being evaluated (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen, 2004). In addition, while analyzing qualitative data, the researcher must consider using multiple methods to ensure that the findings from the study are valid. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2002), if the researcher uses the triangulation method and/or process, the researcher may be able to easily establish credibility as well as validity for the findings of his or her study.

To determine the qualitative findings from three open-ended questions, the researcher first created tables for each question using Microsoft Office 2000 Word Processing Program to input each respondent's answer. Each table consisted of the item

number, the number of the returned questionnaire, the response, and a cell for how each response was to be coded. After each response had been typed into each table, the researcher did an initial read for each question to determine potential emergent themes. Then, the researcher reread each of the respondents' statements and began the initial coding and categorizing of preliminary emergent themes and kept track of what did not fit. Finally, after validating the findings by employing the triangulation method and/or process and checking themes against the themes from the respondents' statements, the researcher elected to discard the few items that did not relate to each emergent theme. For each open-ended question, there were no more than three responses that did not fit one of the emergent themes. Plus, each of the discarded responses was not deemed as credible data that could assist the researcher with providing findings that would assist Elmore County Public School District as well as school districts as they attempt to develop curricula to enhance writing instruction. Therefore, in this section, through the use of qualitative techniques, the respondents' responses will be thoroughly described. All data from each open-ended question were carefully examined and grouped into "like" categories by identifying trends, similarities, and/or differences. These categories served as the basis for the emerging themes of each question.

Best Aspects of the New Writing Curriculum

One hundred (47%) of the 213 respondents answered Question One, which asked for their opinions regarding the best aspects of the new writing curriculum. Their responses were categorized, and three main themes emerged from the data, capturing what the respondents considered as the best aspects of the new writing curriculum. Based

on these findings, the best aspects of the new writing curriculum were grouped into the following themes:

- Provided explicit instruction;
- Enhanced students' critical thinking skills;
- Contained sufficient teaching resources.

These themes mirror the components of a quality writing curriculum and/or program that impacts both student achievement and teacher performance.

Explicit Instruction

In regards to the writing curriculum providing explicit instruction, the respondents noted that the new curriculum provided a quality framework to teach writing within the district. Respondents also acknowledged that the new curriculum contained clear and consistent goals and objectives that went deeper than the textbook, and these goals were vertically aligned with the Alabama Course of Study writing standards. The responding language arts teachers affirmed these elements of the new curriculum were very helpful for ensuring each student had an opportunity to master writing standards from grade to grade. As one language arts teacher stated:

> The writing curriculum gives explicit details on a variety of teaching strategies than in the past. It's aligned across grade levels and helps students learn to write better." Another respondent exclaimed, "The best practices I have found in this writing curriculum would be that it offers a solid structure approach to teaching writing. It gives teachers and students examples to use in each mode of writing. It has made our teachers more unified in their teaching of writing skills and given us a more precise outline of what needs to be taught from grade to grade.

A vast majority of the respondents (roughly 90%) were elementary teachers. The elementary teachers stated that the new curriculum required them to teach more writing in the early grades. Several teachers made comments such as, “Lower grades can actually learn how to write now.” Others said, “Lower grades are writing and learning!” Because of this, they commented that students should be better writers once they reached middle and high school grades.

In addition, to the elementary language arts teachers sharing how the curriculum provided their students with opportunities to be successful writers, the respondents at each grade level stated that the writing benchmarks were reasonable for their students to master. They referred to several examples of how their students were able to surpass benchmark assessments because the new curriculum had afforded them with successful opportunities to master writing skills during class assignments. One example, in particular, reported the new curriculum incorporated timed writings that prepared students for various writing situations because teachers were able to evaluate their students’ writing more often.

The responding language arts teachers also referred to several writing strategies that provided them opportunities to teach concise lessons using the new curriculum as a guide. One strategy in particular was teaching writing as a process. The teachers commented on how this strategy allowed them the opportunity to teach all four aspects of language arts (vocabulary, writing, reading, and grammar) using one set of guidelines and procedures. In addition, they stated that the writing process gave their students a chance to see their mistakes and correct them before their writing assignments were evaluated.

Approximately 70% of the language arts teachers recorded in their responses that the writing strategies from the *6 + 1 Traits Writing Program* and the *4 Square Writing Method*, which was introduced to language arts teachers as part of a National Writing Project (NWP) professional development activity during the fall of 2003, made the teaching of writing easier for them and their students. The teachers found that the writing strategies, outlined within these programs, assisted them in teaching their students how to organize their writing instruction more effectively. They described these two programs as tools that provided teachers with a step-by-step approach that showed students how to collect their ideas then use them to a write clear, flawless paper. In addition, they wrote how the programs provided them with tailor-made activities to help their students create meaningful writing assignments. Many of the teachers pointed out in their responses how they had struggled in the past to help their students organize their thoughts. However, after they implemented the strategies from these two programs, they saw the vast majority of their students were able to comprehend the logic behind organizing their thoughts and being able to transfer them on paper. One respondent stated, "The *6 + 1* and *4 Square method* really helped to build writing skills in my classroom." Overall, the respondents found that the new writing curriculum gave explicit details regarding a variety of teaching strategies that were more helpful than in the past. The writing topics were interesting to their students, and the students were given more opportunities to write and become proficient writers.

Critical Thinking Skills

In addition to providing explicit writing instruction, the 100 respondents surmised that the new writing curriculum was a good tool to enhance students' critical thinking

skills. The teachers noted that the new activities within the curriculum required students to concentrate more efficiently on what they were writing. One respondent said, “The curriculum helps students to think critically as they express thoughts.” They also acknowledged the new curriculum used key words and questions to improve their students’ critical thinking skills. They referred to how key the words challenged their students to think critically before answering open-ended questions that were embedded within the different writing activities. Also, they contended that different questioning techniques within the writing curriculum required students to evaluate and synthesize their thoughts before creating their final prose.

In their responses, the teachers also noted that students were not only able to write better sentences, but they were now able to identify parts of speech and write more fluently. Because of this, they noted that their students’ analytical skills had become more accurate and concise. Plus, the students were more involved in the lesson, and their students seemed more motivated and confident about writing. In addition, they acknowledged that their students were creative and enjoyed writing more often.

Sufficient Resources

Another theme that emerged from question one was that the language arts teachers concluded that the new writing curriculum contained sufficient and/or effective writing resources to supplement the new writing curriculum. They commented about the writing addendum that was attached to every grade level curriculum. They stated that the addendum helped them when they sought out new ideas about teaching different writing strategies. One teacher said, “The writing addendum is awesome because it provides us with the needed resources!” In addition, the language arts teachers reported that the

variety of sample writings provided them and their students with a framework of how to distinguish between the different writing modes of discourse. The language arts teachers also stated that the new curriculum provided them with several resources to teach writing across the curriculum. They pointed out that since the district had purchased sets of materials for each school, this provided them with opportunities to collaborate and share materials and ideas more often than they had done in the past. Plus, it motivated them to start their own professional library. Most importantly, the teachers commented about how the abundant list of writing resources for each grade level guided them as they, themselves, purchased writing materials to improve their teaching techniques and/or strategies. (See Appendix F for a list of writing resources). In addition, the teachers also stated that educational writing websites were helpful resources as well. (See Appendix F for a list of writing websites.)

Recommendations for Improving the New Writing Curriculum

Seventy-seven (36%) of the 213 respondents answered question two in regard to the recommendations for improving the new writing curriculum. Their responses were categorized, and two themes emerged from the data, outlining what the respondents thought about how the new writing curriculum could be improved by:

- Providing quality ongoing professional development
- Allowing more time to teach writing.

These themes are vital components for Elmore County Public School District and school districts to consider as they work toward sustaining a quality writing curriculum and/or program that impact both student achievement and teacher performance.

Quality Ongoing Professional Development

Although several of the language arts teachers commented on the best aspects of the new writing curriculum, they wrote comments stating that they deserved support as they worked toward improving their students' writing skills. The respondents noted that even though the district instituted the "trainer of trainer" professional development model, still many trainers were not going back to their schools site to train other writing teachers. One respondent stated, "We have not been trained to use the *6 + 1 traits* or *4 Square* adequately. One person from each grade was trained-we all should have been trained. This needs to be done before we have students in the classroom." Others complained that if the district could not afford to train every teacher, then it should allow time for job-embedded professional development opportunities. Several wrote comments such as this one, "The County should let us have professional development time at our schools and sharing sessions to better implement the writing curriculum." Also they noted that professional development is more than attending a writing workshop all day. They suggested that the district allows time for teachers to observe other teachers teaching strategies from the new writing curriculum. The respondents recommended that since the district had mentor writing teachers, they felt that the mentor teachers needed more training in writing before they worked with new teachers. In addition, they noted that the successful veteran teachers should be allowed to visit other schools and model good writing instruction because many commented that good writing instruction extends beyond attending a two to three hour presentation and then having to implement the ideas that a teacher may or may not have learned.

The respondents' recommendations about professional development expanded beyond writing instruction. They also said that the district needed to train them on how to use the available technology software such as *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration* before it required them to use it in their classroom. They noted that when they were involved in professional development activities related to technology, all teachers needed access to computers. One teacher stated, "Professional development consisted of watching some one else work on a computer in a crowded, poorly ventilated room. Teachers should be given instructions, while actually sitting at a computer." Another teacher said, "Technology cannot be a helpful tool in teaching writing or decreasing the work load for teachers if teachers are not trained on how to use it to its fullest potential!"

The respondents also reported that during the professional development activities, they needed more time to act as a team and share ideas. In their written comments, the language arts teachers said that writing workshops should provide them with the opportunity to pool resources and share teaching ideas. They also asserted they would have liked to have visited other schools within the district to model lessons and share ideas. Overall, most of the responses regarding professional development stemmed around the teachers' recommending that the district develop a better method of providing sufficient professional development opportunities in writing to ensure that all teachers are trained so that they could in turn teach their students to become proficient writers.

Time to Teach Writing

From the written responses, the factor of allowing more time to writing was also determined and revealed. Many teachers thought that even though the district had developed an effective writing curriculum, the district had not allocated enough time in

the schedules to allow writing to be taught. They made comments such as, “Even though we have a writing curriculum, we need adequate time to teach these important skills.” In addition, the teachers wrote that learning how to present one’s thoughts on paper requires time. They reported that when they taught writing, it required them to teach mechanics, voice, and other important elements. Therefore, they wrote that the skill could not be taught in a few minutes here and a few minutes there. According to some of the respondents, sometimes to do an effective job when teaching writing, the teachers have to take a few minutes from other “important” subjects because the lesson is going well, and the students are excited about the writing activities in which they are engaged.

Most of the high school teachers complained that they only had their students for eighteen weeks; however, they were responsible for teaching literature, grammar, and composition. They suggested that the new writing curriculum should expand over a full year period. One high school English teacher said, “Change English curriculum to full year with grammar/writing 1 semester and literature/writing another semester because too much is being taught in 1 semester to adequately teach anything.” Others wrote similar responses. Overall, the teachers recorded that they were excited about have a writing curriculum; however, time to successfully implement is vital.

Recommendations for Improving the Development and Implementation Process

Forty-three (20%) of the 213 respondents answered question three in regards to the recommendations for improving the development and implementation process of the new curriculum. Their responses were categorized, and two major themes emerged from

the data, describing how the respondents recommended improving the curriculum development and implementation process of the new curriculum:

- Increasing teacher-involvement during the development process
- Building a community of learners: support for on-going professional development during the entire process.

These themes are two significant elements of the curriculum development and implementation process that impact how well a quality curriculum and/or program can be sustained within a district. They both have a major impact on student learning and teacher performance.

Increase Teacher Involvement in the Curriculum Development Process

Most of the respondents acknowledged the need for the district to use more teachers in the development process so that every teacher would have a better insight about how a teacher approached writing instruction and the variety of teaching styles and/or methods that could be used to improve their students' writing skills. They also felt that this would make more teachers feel attached to the development process and curriculum since they would have contributed to the development. One teacher said, "I realize that not everyone can or will use their free time to work on this program, but it would at least give an equal opportunity to all writing teachers to participate. When only a few take over the role of creating a program for everyone, some people tend to feel unimportant!" Other teachers made comments such as "Make it available to any teacher willing to work on it not just the ones the principal selected." The teachers also noted that during the development process, the district needed to include all subject area teachers in the process. This would allow better ideas to be generated in regards to teaching writing

across the curriculum. Likewise, some noted that special education teachers needed to be involved in the development process since the Alabama State Department was advocating the Collaborative Teaching Model, which involves teaching students with special needs on grade level.

Support for Ongoing Professional Development During the Process

In their responses, the respondents indicated that the district needed to provide ongoing professional development during the implementation process. Several of the responses revealed that it was quite challenging to receive a new curriculum on the inservice day prior to the opening of school and then try and implement the new curriculum during the following week. They suggested that the district provides them with the new curriculum before school closes. Then, during the summer months, offer professional development to assist them with implementing the ideas and strategies of the new curriculum. Using this process, the language arts teacher exclaimed that they have a better chance of implementing the new curriculum more effectively when school started for the following year. The teachers also stated that teachers would have time to share ideas, develop lessons, conduct more action research focus groups, and organize their materials before the beginning of the new school year. They felt that by implementing these strategies and/or ideas, the school district would have well-established goals concerning the writing curriculum based on subject matter, need, and interest of the students.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the study and created a representation of the typical survey respondents and their beliefs and ratings in regards to their perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum. The quantitative results were reported first. The computer software program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 was used to analyze the data. Some statistically notable data were found in response to all of five quantitative questions. After the quantitative results were revealed, the qualitative results were discussed, which identified the emerging themes from three opened-ended questions.

The conclusions made from these findings and their implications for future research are presented in the next chapter.

V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

> *Abraham Lincoln said, "Writing-the art of communicating thoughts to the mind-is the great invention of the world…Great, very great, in enabling us to converse with the dead, the absent, and the unborn, at all distances of time and space, and great not only in its direct benefits, but its great help to all other inventions.*
>
> — The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and College, 2003.

This study examined the perceptions of K-12 Language Arts teachers in the Elmore County Public School District regarding the development, enactment, and effectiveness of the new writing curriculum implemented by the district. Because of present societal demands, most writing educators agree there is a substantial need to develop new curricula to teach writing more explicitly in order for students to demonstrate proficiency in this area (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Based on this concern, the researcher focused on teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum and its implementation, which was initiated during the fall of 2002.

The researcher developed a questionnaire that was designed to measure the perceptions of the language arts teachers regarding the steps the district sought to provide a quality writing curriculum and what impact it had on the district's goal to produce fluent student writers. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative questions. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while the

qualitative data were analyzed by identifying the emerging themes of the teachers' responses from three open-ended questions.

The findings from this study may provide the district with baseline information that can be used as a tool to enhance the future use of the new curriculum. This may assist the district's writing teachers as they continue their journey toward developing an effective curriculum that will ensure all students will surpass the writing standards set before them. The results of the study may also empower language arts teachers within the district to design more innovative writing lessons to ensure their students become proficient writers.

Conclusions

Because of increased accountability constraints placed on school districts with regard to improving students' writing skills, schools throughout the nation are seeking assistance and working vigorously to develop curricula for teachers to teach writing more effectively (Calkins, 1986; 1994; Cotton, 2000; NCW, 2003; Shelton, 2002). In addition, most state and local school districts are revisiting their current language arts curricula to ensure that research-based writing strategies are included, and teachers are trained to teach writing more effectively (Fleischer, 2004; Kern, Andre, Schilke, Barton, & McGuire, 2003).

This study provides the Elmore County Public School District with several successful aspects of writing curricula reform to assist its writing teachers. However, before the school district designs and/or implements additional curricula, it may want to

take into account the conclusions of the study presented in this section. The conclusions are:

1. The Elmore County Public School District Language Arts teachers appear to have strongly supported the enactment of the newly developed writing curriculum to enhance their teaching performance and to improve students' writing skills. The data reported here indicate their desire to continue using the new curriculum and the research-based writing strategies embedded within it.
2. A lack of adequate meaningful involvement in the curriculum development process appears to be a concern of the language arts teachers. The data from the questionnaire items addressing this concern indicated that there was less agreement in teachers' perceptions as to whether they were adequately involved as the new writing curriculum was being developed.
3. Although a vast majority of language arts teachers seem to be in favor of the new writing curriculum, the lack of ongoing professional development seemed to be a major issue for them. Scores and analyses from the items measuring their perceptions about professional development and the recommendations to improve writing instruction indicated teachers wanted to be engaged in ongoing activities where they were provided with interactive learning experiences to enhance their teaching skills.
4. A lack of sufficient technological support in writing instruction also appears to be an issue with the language arts teachers. The mean scores and analyses suggest the language arts teachers seemed dissatisfied with the district's current practices.

In the next section of this chapter, a brief discussion of each conclusion is presented.

Support for the New Writing Curriculum

The first conclusion of this study is that the language arts teachers support the new writing curriculum. Of 213 respondents, 199 (93%) agreed that there was a need for the newly developed writing curriculum. This was statistically notable. In their open-ended responses, they surmised how the new curriculum provided an explicit framework to teach writing, and acknowledged that the curriculum documents contained clear and consistent goals and objectives that went deeper than the language arts textbook. They stated the new curriculum supplied them with an abundance of new strategies, ideas, and other sufficient resources to teach writing.

Overall, the teachers acknowledged the new curriculum provided them with the tools to teach writing more effectively than past years' strategies, and that their students have become more motivated and more confident about writing. This conclusion is consistent with the literature on writing curricula reform. Many educators and researchers have suggested that in order to improve students' writing abilities, writing must be at the center of the school agenda, and district policymakers at the state and local levels must provide a curriculum framework that entails writing strategies and sufficient resources to enhance students' writing skills (Calkins, 1986; Cotton, 2000; NCW, 2003; Shelton, 2002).

Teacher Involvement in the Curriculum Development Process

The second conclusion, the lack of adequate teacher involvement in curriculum development, emerged from the scale, "Process of Curriculum Development and

Change" and the teachers' responses from the last open-ended question regarding recommendations for the curriculum development process. The data from the scale revealed that the language arts teachers felt they were not adequately involved in the developmental process of the writing curriculum. In addition, results from both the scale's items and open-ended questions consistently indicated the majority of the respondents did not believe they had sufficient time to collaborate and share ideas while developing the curriculum. There were not enough opportunities for meaningful involvement regarding the implementation of the curriculum.

Curriculum theorists support the notion of having teachers involved in the development process. These theorists suggest that if teachers are involved, they can contribute their knowledge of what works and what does not work in a real classroom. They also noted that when teachers are involved, the curriculum is more relevant; it is implemented more effectively; and the students' needs are met more productively (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998; & Saban, 1995). English (1987), Fullan (2001), and Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) also recommend school districts open the lines of communication across all boundaries, partially implement ideas as the curriculum is being developed, conduct surveys to solicit feedback, increase participation in planning and decision-making, and share power in order for the teachers to consider themselves an important part of the process. Employing these strategies allows school districts to build trust and commitment within the teachers (English, 1987; Fullan, 2001; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Ongoing Professional Development

The language arts teachers' concerns about the lack of the ongoing professional development designed to assist them in their quest to produce better student writers coincides with some research regarding improving students' writing skills (Cotton, 2001 & Fleischer, 2004). The data from this study first suggested that sufficient professional development opportunities were not provided to allow the teachers to become better writing teachers or reaffirm their teaching practices. The overall mean score (M = 3.24) for the scale, "Professional Development for Writing," revealed the teachers were not satisfied with how the district provided professional develop activities in writing. In addition, open-ended responses revealed that the district should have offered more job-embedded professional development activities. The teachers suggested this would have allowed them to have time to reflect and share writing ideas with their colleagues. The teachers also noted that they want to be involved in practical activities that allow them to expand their knowledge and pedagogical skills to teach writing through ongoing training.

Many teachers want to be equipped with practical and instructional strategies that can be easily incorporated in their daily classroom surroundings (Strickland et. al., 2001). The research on writing instruction is consistent with the teachers' concerns about providing high quality professional development in writing. It has been suggested that writing teachers should participate in ongoing professional development activities that include the following elements:

- Theory and research findings regarding effective writing instruction
- A focus on practical application of theory and research
- Attention to specific skill development

- Time and opportunity to build writing and teaching skills
- Opportunities to observe in other teachers' classrooms
- The involvement and support of administrators (Cotton, 2000; Fleischer, 2004; NCW, 2000; Troia & Graham, 2003).

Technology Support in Writing

A fourth conclusion for this study is that the lack of sufficient technological support in writing instruction seems to be an issue with the language art teachers. Dockterman (2004) states educators have been charged with a very daunting task of trying to stay abreast of the ever-changing world of informational technology. However, they are perplexed with trying to teach their students the same information. Because of this, teachers have been unable to lead their students to new heights in the area of writing composition. Therefore, the research findings support this conclusion because it is consistent with the teachers' responses.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine the Elmore County Public School District's K-12 Language Arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum initiated during the fall of 2002. Therefore, the implications from this study primarily apply to the Elmore County Public School District's efforts regarding the new writing curriculum the district developed to ensure its students become proficient writers. However, other school districts that share this same desire for effective design and implementation of new writing curricula may find these implications useful as well.

For curriculum coordinators, instructional leaders, and policymakers who have been charged with the responsibility of developing effective writing curricula, one implication from this study is that adequate and meaningful involvement of teachers in the curriculum development process may likely lead to better implementation of the curriculum as well as greater teacher satisfaction with instructional strategies used to enhance students' writing skills. Theorists in the field have argued that the use of this approach is more beneficial when successfully implementing a new curriculum (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998, Martin, Saif, & Thiel, 1987, & Saban, 1995). Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) found that when curriculum administrators and school principals allowed teachers to participate in the curriculum development process, teachers implemented the curriculum more successfully. They also noted the teachers could adapt the curriculum to their specific classroom and school situation with greater ease and efficiency. According to Saban (1995), by having teachers involved in this process, they can contribute their knowledge of what works and what does not work in a real classroom. Additionally, teachers' practical knowledge of classroom teaching enables curriculum committees to assess both the workability of curriculum materials developed previously and whether the ideas being asserted presently will work in a classroom teaching environment. Finally, she noted that when teachers are involved in the curriculum development process, the curriculum is more relevant to the needs of children within the school (Saban, 1995). Therefore, some research suggests that meaningful involvement of teachers in the curriculum development process is key when developing a curriculum and providing students with quality instructional opportunities.

The results of this study also suggest that when language arts teachers incorporate the use of research-based writing strategies and sufficient resources to support new writing curricula, student achievement in writing is likely to increase. Specifically, the research regarding the use of research-based writing strategies has revealed three strategies that have been implemented by writing teachers to enhance their students' writing skills. These three strategies are teaching writing as a process, employing the strategies of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), and integrating writing across the curriculum. An implication is that language arts teachers and instructional leaders should develop writing curricula that involve the use of these strategies in order to increase student achievement in writing. The general findings from the research on using three strategies to teach writing indicated that student achievement in writing is higher when the teachers use these approaches in their daily writing activities. Some theorists in the field of writing instruction have noted that for the past 15 years, studies have revealed the use of these strategies has continuously increased student achievement in writing because these strategies have allowed students to explore their thoughts, experiences, and imaginations through the spectrum of their multiple intelligence and various learning styles (Butler, 2002; Cotton, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003; McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Richgels, 2002; & Zimmerman, 2002).

In addition to incorporating research-based writing instruction, the findings from this study also revealed that using sufficient resources to support new writing curricula may also enhance writing instruction. An implication for this finding is that by implementing sufficient programs and/or providing adequate resources to support new and existing writing curricula, Elmore County Public School District and school districts

across the country may notice positive impacts on students' abilities to become proficient writers. To improve students' writing skills, programs such as *6 + 1 Writing Traits, Step Up to Writing, Strategies for Writers, Kidspiration* and *Inspiration* can assist teachers in teaching students how to brainstorm ideas, organize and categorize information, and create exceptional writing prose. These programs may also allow language arts teachers to measure students' writing competences in formal standardized assessments, which many teachers have acknowledged is very helpful when teaching writing (Auman, 2002; Crawford, 2002; Culham, 2003; IARE, 2003). Auman (2002), Crawford (2002), and Culham (2003) also argue that teachers should incorporate writing resources such as books, websites, and videos into their daily lessons to enhance their teaching skills in the area of writing. They have found these resources to be more practical and user friendly. Researchers in the field of writing instruction have also noted that these types of resources are generally inexpensive; therefore, they are readily available for teachers who need quick access to resources to help them teach writing more proficiently. Several studies have identified how these writing tools have provided teachers with strategies that benefited students' writing skills. The studies have also indicated how these resources have linked effective classroom writing instruction with student achievement (Calkins, 1994, Graves, 1994; Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2002; Murray, 1982; Shuman, 2002). For a list of suggested writing resources, see Appendix F.

The findings from this study also revealed that providing ongoing, adequate professional development opportunities for teachers may enable them to teach their students to become skillful writers. This research suggests that professional development in writing is key to creating effective writing teachers. An implication is that staff

development coordinators should provide language arts teachers with ongoing professional development activities allowing them to grow as professionals and develop and/or design more effective writing lessons that will in turn enable their students to write more proficiently. When done properly, professional development has a significant effect on teacher performance and student achievement, and sound professional development has lead to sound teaching practices (Easley, 2004 & Fleischer, 2004). Therefore, providing language arts teachers with ample opportunities to become better writing teachers is likely to increase the number of students becoming more highly-skilled writers. This can also help reduce the number of teachers who have made comments about not having the knowledge, skills, and strategies to help their students emerge as competent writers.

In addition to staff development coordinators, other members (Governors, legislators, state and local school boards, and superintendents) of the educational arena who have been held accountable for ensuring that federal and state writing standards are being taught may wish to consider the findings and implications of this study because new high-stakes writing tests have become part of many states' accountability standards. These individuals have also been charged with the responsibility for developing programs that provide high-quality professional development, research-based writing strategies, and sufficient resources to improve writing instruction. Therefore, their language arts curricula are also likely to benefit from the techniques and strategies of this new writing curriculum because this study supports the use of new and innovative ways to enhance the teaching of writing.

Since the data revealed that teachers appear to have a concern with how technology is being implemented to support writing instruction, another implication is that the Elmore County Public School District may need to invest more funds to enhance the integration of technology in writing and to train teachers to use technology more efficiently. This type of movement would not only assist the teachers in their daily instruction, but it may also enhance student learning (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2002; Kemmery & Cook, 2002; NCW, 2003).

Recommendations

This study focused on the Elmore County Public School District K–12 Language Arts teachers' perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum that the district initiated during the fall of 2002. The following recommendations were based on the results of this study and the review of literature.

A first recommendation is for Elmore County Public School District to continue to use and augment the new writing curriculum since 199 (93%) of the language arts teachers agreed that it was needed. These teachers also acknowledged that the new curriculum provided them with explicit instruction and consistent goals and objectives and instructional strategies that went deeper than using just the textbook. According to the National Commission on Writing (2003), until school districts across the nation place more emphasis on writing instruction, students will never be able to reach their fullest potential. In addition, some theorists have noted that since accountability standards for writing have been revisited at the national level, many school districts are now revisiting their current writing practices to ensure that students are able to write at a level of

proficiency (Cotton, 2000; Isascson, 2004; NCW, 2003; Strickland et al. 2001). Therefore, as stated earlier, the district needs to continue working toward its goal of producing fluent writers.

A second recommendation is for the district to consider developing more effective ways of meaningfully involving teachers in the curriculum development process since based on their questionnaire responses, most of the language arts teachers believed they were not adequately involved in this process. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) found that when teachers were involved in the curriculum development process, implementation of the curriculum was successful. In addition, they noted that the teachers were able to adapt the curriculum to their specific classroom and school situations with ease and efficiency. Based on Martin, Saif, and Thiel's (1987) study, in 91 districts more than three-fourths of the districts reported that adequately involving teachers on curriculum committees was important, and if teachers were adequately involved in the process, the curriculum was implemented more effectively by the teachers (Martin, Saif, & Thiel, 1987). Now, more than ever, curriculum policymakers and school leaders need to promote the involvement of teachers in the curriculum development process because teachers can contribute their knowledge of what works and what does not work in the real classroom (NCW, 2003; Ornstein & Lunenburg, 2000; Saban, 1995). When teachers are involved in the curriculum development and change process, curricula are developed based on their successful classroom practices, and teachers are more aware of children's needs within the school (Saban, 1995).

A third recommendation is for the district to provide ongoing professional development that engages teachers in activities where they are provided with interactive

learning experiences to enhance their teaching skills. Scores and analyses from the items measuring the language arts teachers' perceptions about professional development and the recommendations to improve writing instruction revealed that teachers believed there were not enough professional development opportunities within the district to assist them with improving their knowledge and skills in teaching writing more effectively. Easley (2004) stated that providing ongoing professional development matters greatly as to whether students achieve. Based on the results of a North Carolina study, Easley noted that professional development was a significant predictor of schools meeting the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status. Governor Easley also acknowledged the need for teachers to have time to collaborate with their peers and discuss and observe best practices during job-embedded professional development training sessions, adding that these types of professional development activities create improved learning conditions for students (Easley, 2004).

Additionally, according to the National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2003), writing teachers deserve support as they develop their students' writing skills. The Commission noted that nowhere is providing teachers with effective professional development in writing more important than in rural communities and school districts like Elmore County because many students from rural communities have a difficult time mastering the skill of writing (NCW, 2003). Fleischer (2004) contended that ongoing professional development is the key to creating effective writing teachers. Fleischer surmised that when done well, professional development has an almost magical power to revitalize and transform teaching and learning. Furthermore, she pointed out that despite

challenges writing teachers may face, she is convinced that sound professional development will lead to sound teaching practices (Fleischer, 2004).

Additionally, Troia and Graham (2003) found that teachers of writing have frequently commented on their lack of the knowledge, skills, and strategies they believe would be helpful to them in facilitating children's emerging competence as writers. Consequently, teachers have begun to seek training from writing experts or educational consultants to suggest and model best practices in writing instruction. Troia and Graham considered that just like students, many teachers find writing to be a challenging task to do effectively; therefore, teachers focus almost exclusively on teaching basic rote grammatical skills, handwriting, and spelling in their classrooms. Nevertheless, in other classrooms across the nation, students are taught research-based process writing strategies; however, the teachers have generally not been trained to teach critical writing skills and strategies involved in the teaching of writing as a process (Troia & Graham, 2003).

The need to provide training for writing teachers is evident. As the number of National Writing Projects sites and similar programs continues to grow, research results may continue to indicate that by providing this type of professional development training for teachers, student achievement results in writing may be enhanced (Cotton, 2000). In addition, as teachers learn more about the teaching of writing, they may be able to develop and/or design more effective writing lesson plans that will in turn produce more proficient student writers (Fleischer, 2004).

A fourth and final recommendation from this study is for the Elmore County Public School District to increase the level of technological resources to support the

language arts teachers who have been given the responsibility of implementing the new writing curriculum. The ratings from the scale, "Technology Integration in Writing," yielded the lowest mean score (M = 3.19), which was statistically notable more so than any other scale. In addition, from their open-ended question responses, the teachers cited this as an issue. The NCW (2003) noted that with the recent telecommunication policy recognizing the national technological infrastructure for education, it is now more critical than ever for school districts to expand their use of technology to not only support classroom instruction, but to enhance it as well. The Commission report suggests that the use of technology in teaching and learning can advance both the teaching and learning of writing (NCW, 2003). Many theorists note that programs like *Inspiration and Kidspiration* can assist both the teacher and students with becoming better writers (Erichsen, 2002; Gingerich, 2002; IARE, 2003; NCW, 2003; Weeg, 2002).

At Baltimore's Eastern Technical High School, Kemmery and Cook (2002) showcased what could happen when the school district chose to support the use of technology in writing instruction. According to Kemmery and Cook, the students learned to use the computers to complete the senior independent project, which was a year-long research project required for graduation. It also prepared the students for writing tasks they will confront in business and industry and in higher education. Working in teams, the students used the cooperative learning model to produce high quality documents using technology media. According to these researchers, this has been one of the most popular courses at the high school and students are excited about their learning opportunities in the course (Kemmery & Cook, 2002). If school districts find ways to support the use of technology in writing instruction, it can become an important vehicle

for motivating students to write more proficiently (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2001; NCW, 2003; Yancey, 2004).

Recommendations for Further Research

This study measured the language arts teachers' perceptions of the newly developed writing curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District and therefore the findings and recommendations presented in this chapter are not generalizeable beyond this school district. Future research could involve a representative sampling of language arts teachers in school districts throughout the state or region who have also developed a new writing curriculum to enhance students' writing skills and teachers' impact on teacher performance in the area of writing instruction. This research may provide school districts within the state with possible suggestions for incorporating writing opportunities for all students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Teachers may also learn to extend their writing instruction beyond basic grammar and begin to use research-based writing strategies and programs to enhance their classroom practices.

Since this study used a newly developed instrument, "Survey of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the New Writing Curriculum for the Elmore County Public School System," to measure the language arts teachers' perceptions of the new writing curriculum, it may be useful to refine the instrument and validate it using a larger sample of language arts teachers. Use of this instrument could yield findings that may be useful to school districts and/or language arts teachers as they work towards enhancing their current writing practices. Using this instrument in multiple districts would also produce

more generalizeable findings about teachers' perceptions related to newly developed writing curricula.

In addition, this study revealed that sufficient research using the Self-Regulated Development Strategy for writing has only been done in grades K–8. Since this strategy has been proven to be quite successful in teaching struggling students how to write more proficiently, more research should be conducted in this area, using this writing strategy with high school students. Because many high school teachers have commented about the difficulty of finding strategies to assist struggling writers once they reach this level, the research results from studies conducted about using this strategy at the high school level, could prove to be invaluable to high school teachers in their endeavor to assist secondary struggling students to overcome writing deficiencies.

Another important issue that needs to be studied is preservice students' perceptions of the training they received to teach writing before becoming a classroom teacher. These students' perceptions might be able to provide information to college and universities about why some teachers do not feel they are adequately prepared to teach writing once they have finished college and started teaching.

The results from this study remind us that teachers are an important element of the curriculum development process, and when teachers are involved in this process, the curriculum is implemented more effectively. Therefore, additional studies in this area should be conducted to measure teachers' perceptions regarding the types of meaningful involvement needed in the curriculum development process. Results from these studies may provide school districts with possible strategies and/or ideas for maximizing teacher involvement during this process. The results may also assist the districts with creating a

professional learning community by supporting job-embedded learning activities where teachers have opportunities to reflect on ideas and share insights and resources with their colleagues.

Also, more research should be done regarding professional development and technology support that writing teachers may need as new curricula are being implemented. Findings from the research may suggest that providing these two components during the implementation phase of the curriculum is a key to sustaining teacher success. The findings may also provide information on how to effectively design professional development activities in writing where teachers may be able to design better writing lessons that may enhance their students' writing skills.

Finally, more studies need to be conducted at the national level showcasing school districts that are working to enhance writing instruction. Information from these studies could supply school districts across the nation with possible approaches to addressing the nation's concern with improving students' writing skills. The nation may also discover the many challenges that writing teachers face while working to help their students write better and thus provide more funds and other support mechanisms to assist these teachers as well as their students. This may even start the "Writing Revolution," which has been recommended by the National Commission on Writing, across the nation.

Summary

This study was conducted in an effort to learn more about research-based practices and ideas relating to the development of effective writing curricula to enhance students' writing skills within the Elmore County Public School District. Based on the

research about writing, developing fluency in writing composition has always been a fundamental aim in education. However, because of the increased accountability constraints placed on school districts regarding writing instruction, districts throughout the nation have begun to work even harder to develop curricula to teach writing more effectively, which is an approach similar to the writing initiative that Elmore County Public School District enacted during the fall of 2002.

From the 213 respondents within the entire population of the Elmore County Public School District's Language Arts teachers, statistically notable data and emerging themes from teachers' responses revealed that a lack of high-quality professional development opportunities, a lack of teacher involvement in the curriculum development process, and a lack of sufficient support in technology instruction for writing teachers may be a serious concern for the school district regarding its quest to produce proficient student writers as well as effective writing teachers. This may suggest that the Elmore County Public School District should offer more professional development activities for teachers when new curricula are developed to ensure that teachers are able to effectively implement new curricula. If the district adequately and meaningfully involves teachers in the curriculum development process, it may lead to better implementation of the curriculum as well. The district might need to invest more money and training for the integration of technology instruction when teachers are being asked to use new curricula. This research suggests that student achievement may increase if school districts develop and enact new and improved research-based curricula that are supported by high-quality professional development, teacher involvement in the curriculum development process, and sufficient technology resources. Although this study explored what happened within

one school district, by considering the findings and recommendations, school districts across the country may be able to learn lessons from this example, better preparing themselves while developing and enacting new writing curricula. These insights may in turn lead to higher quality teaching and improved student achievement in writing.

REFERENCES

Alabama State Department of Education. (2004, March 8). *State Board of Education School Report Card 2003-2004 for Elmore County*. Montgomery, AL: Author.

Abbe, E. M. (2003). Join the revolution [Electronic version]. *Writer, 116*(10), 1–6.

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Razivieh, A. (2002). *Introduction to research in education (*6th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.

Auman, M. (2002). *Step Up to Writing: Strategies for learners of all ages*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

Baldwin, D. (2004). A guide to standardized writing assessment. *Educational Leadership, 62*, 72–75

Barlow, D. (2003). Inside the National Writing Project: Connecting network learning and classroom teaching (Book) [Electronic version]. *Educational Digest, 69*(2), 1.

Bellamy, P. (2001). Research on writing with the 6 + 1 Traits. *National Regional Educational Laboratory, 2*, 1–4.

Boss, S. (2002). Complete guide to 6 + 1 trait writing. *North Western Regional Educational Laboratory Report*. Retrieved February 11, 2003, from http://www.nwrel.org/newport/mar02/complete.html

Bradford, L. H. (1999). *Connecting academic content with writing*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Brennan, R. L. (1998). Misconceptions at the intersection of measurement theory and practice. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 17*(1), 1–9.

Brewer, T. (2003). *Technology integration in the 21st century classroom.* Eugene, OR: Visions Technology in Education.

Bridge, C. A., Compton-Hall, M., & Cantrell, S. C. (1997). Classroom writing practices revisited: The effects of statewide reform on writing instruction. *The Elementary School Journal, 98,* 151–170.

Burkett, S., & Swain, S. (1987). At-risk Mississippi students show academic gains after writing project intervention. Final Report: Development of Instructional Management Plan, Staff Development, and Evaluation for Summer Youth Remediation Program.

Butler, D. L. (2005). Individualizing instruction in self-regulated learning. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(2), 81–92.

Calkins, L. M. (1986). *The art of teaching writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. M. (1994). *The art of teaching writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Chalk, J. C., Hagan-Burke, S., & Burke, M. D. (2005). The effects of self-regulated strategy development on the writing process for high school students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 28,* 75–87.

Chandler, H. (2002). Students in San Diego continuation school find success with Inspiration. *Inspiration Software, Inc.* (Serial No. COLL203). Retrieved September 27, 2004 from http://www.inspiration.com/case_studies/hoppy.pdf

Cotton, K. (2002). Teaching composition: Research on effective practices [Electronic version]. *Topical Synthesis, 2,* 1–18.

Crawford, L. W. (2002). Strategies for writers' research-based program for writing success. *Zaner-Bloser* (Serial No. LA151). Retrieved on March 6, 2004, from http://www.zaner-bloser.com/pdf/LA151webresearch.pdf

Crain, W. (2005). *Theories of development: Concepts and applications*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Culham, R. (2003). *6 + 1 Traits of writing*. New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books.

Cunningham, P. M., Cunningham, J. W., & Allington, R. L. (2002). Research on the components of a comprehensive reading and writing instructional program. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd Ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dewey, J. (1912). *The school and the society: The child and the curriculum*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Easley, M. (2004). *Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions*. Chapel Hill, NC: Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

Elbow, P. (2004). Writing first. *Educational Leadership*, *62*, 8–13.

English, F. W. (1987). It's time to abolish conventional curriculum guides. *Educational Leadership, 30,* 50–52.

English, F. W. (2000). *Developing, aligning, and auditing curriculum.* Salt Lake City, UT: The LPD Video Journal of Education.

Erichsen, S. (2002). Inspiration helps students prepare for New York State Regents Comprehensive Examination in English. *Inspiration Software, Inc.* (Serial No. COLL200). Retrieved September 27, 2004 from http://www.inspiration.com/case_studies/NY_regents.pdf

Fisher, D., & Frey. N. (2003). Writing instruction for struggling adolescent readers: A gradual release model. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46*(5), 396–405.

Fitzpatrick, J., Sanders, J., & Worthen, B. (2004). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Fleischer, C. (2004). Professional development for teacher-writers. *Educational Leadership, 62*, 24–28.

Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gill, D. (2000). Split up the English curriculum for better writing skills [Electronic version]. *Educational Digest, 65*(8), 1–3.

Gingerich, J. (2002). School district chooses Kidspiration to meet literacy challenge. *Inspiration Software, Inc.* (Serial No. COLL206). Retrieved September 27, 2004 from http://www.inspiration.com/case_studies/ginerich.pdf

Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P., & Gordon-Ross, J. M. (1998). *Supervision of instruction: A developmental approach*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2000). The role of self-regulation and transcription skills in writing and writing development. *Educational Psychologist, 35*(1), 3–12.

Graham, S., Harris, K. R., & Gary, T. A. (2000). Self-regulated strategy development revisited: Teaching writing strategies to struggling writers. *Topics in Language Disorders, 20*(4), 1–14.

Graham, S., & Troia, G. A. (2003). Effective writing instruction across the grades: Consultants should know. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 14*(1), 75–89.

Graves, D. H. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Harris, K. R., Graham, S., & Mason, L. H. (2003). Self-regulated strategy development in the classroom: Part of a balanced approach to writing instruction for students. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 35,* 1–16.

Harris, K. R., Graham, S., Mason, L. H., & Saddler, B. (2002). Developing self-regulated writers. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(2), 110–115.

Heinich, R., Molenda, M., Russell, J. D., Smaldino, S. E. (2002). *Instructional media and technologies for learning.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Holbrook, H. T. (1984). Qualities of effective writing programs. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills,* Urbana IL. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 250 694)

Isascson, S. (2004). Instruction that helps students meet state standards in writing. *Exceptionality, 12*(1), 39–54.

Kemmery, R. J., & Cook, H. J. (2002). Written communication skills for the 21st century. *Techniques, 5,* 32–35.

Kern, D., Andre, W., Schilke, R., Barton, J., & McGuire, M. C. (2003**)** Less is more: Preparing students for state writing assessments. *Reading Teacher, 56*(8), 11–21.

Lunenburg, F. C., & Ornstein, A. C. (2000). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Manzo, K. K. (2003). Panel calls for writing revolution in schools [Electronic version]. *Education Week, 20*(33), 1–2.

Martin, D. S., Philip, S. S., & Thiel, L. (1987). Curriculum development: Who is involved and how? *Educational Leadership, 30*, 40–48.

McCombs, B. L., & Marzano, R. J. (1990). Putting the self in self-regulated learning: The self as agent in integrating will and skill. *Educational Psychologist, 25*(1), 51–69.

McDonald, J. P., Buchanan, J., & Sterling, R. (2004). The national writing project: Scaling up and scaling down. In T. K. Glennon, S. J. Bodilly, J. Galegher, & K. A. Kerr (Eds.), *Expanding the reach of education reforms: Perspectives from leaders in the scale-up of educational interventions* (pp. 81–106). Santa, Monica, CA: Rand.

McGlinn, J. (2003). Teaching writing in high school and college: Conversations and collaborations. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *47*(2), 198–200.

Messick, S. (1994, September). *Validity of psychological assessment: Validation of inferences from persons' responses and performances as scientific inquiry into score meaning.* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Moore, P. J., & Atputhasamy, L. (2003). High-achieving students: Their motivational goals, self-regulation and achievement and relationships to their teachers' goals and strategy-based instruction. *High Ability Studies, 14*(1), 23–39.

Murray, D. M. (1982). *Learning by teaching.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Nagin, C. (2003). *Because writing matters: Improving student writing in our schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. (2003). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution*. New York: College Board.

Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment. (1993). New York City high school students improve reading, writing skills through writing project program. *Writing Teachers Consortium Program.*

Paris, S. G., & Paris, A. H. (2001). Classroom applications of research on self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(2), 89–101.

Patthey-Chavez, G. G., Matsumura, L. C., & Valdes, R. (2004). Investing the process approach to writing instruction in urban middle schools. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *47*(6), 462–477.

Portalupi J., & Fletcher, R. (2001). *Craft lessons: Teaching information writing K–8*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Report Calls for a Writing Revolution [Electronic version]. (2003). *Reading Today, 20*(6), 1–4.

Redfield, D. L. (1991). Writing project teachers raise student writing scores in Los Angeles area. *Evaluation Report, The UCLA Writing Project.*

Research Corner. (2005). *Writing: The neglected R returns.* Washington, DC: AEL.

Richgels, D. (2002). Writing instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 56,* 364–368.

Saban, A. (1995). Outcomes of teacher participation in the curriculum development process. *Education*, *115*, 571–575.

Saddler, B., & Andrade, H. (2004). The writing rubric. *Educational Leadership, 62*, 48–53.

Schubert, W. (1986). *Curriculum: Perspective, paradigm, and possibility*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Shelton, R. (2002). *Write where you are!* Hoover, AL: Minuteman Press.

Shuman, R. B. (2002). Computers and writing instruction. *Educational Leadership, 58,* 106.

Simon, J. (2003). Research basis for Step Up to Writing. *Sopris West Educational Services*. Retrieved August 28, 2003, from www.stepuptowriting.com

Sipe, R. B. (2002). Strategies for writers research base for the use of rubrics. *Zaner-Bloser* (Serial No. LA152). Retrieved on March 6, 2004, from http://www.zaner-bloser.com/pdf/LA152webresearch.pdf

Smith, M. A. (1996). The National Writing Project after 22 years [Electronic version]. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *77*(10), 1–9.

Stock, P. (2001). Writing across the curriculum. *Theory Into Practice*, *25*, 97–101.

Strassman, B. K., & D'Amore, M.D. (2002). The write technology. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *34*(6), 28–31.

Strickland, D. S., Bodino, A., Buchan, K., Jones, K. M, Nelson, A., & Rosen, M. (2001). Teaching writing in a time of reform [Electronic version]. *Elementary School Journal*, *101*(4), 1–15.

The Institute for the Advancement of Research in Education. (2003). *Graphic organizers: A review of scientifically based research.* Portland, OR: Inspiration Software, Inc.

Wang, J., & Odell, S. J. (2003). Learning to teach toward standards-based writing instruction: Experiences of two preservice teachers and two mentors in an urban, multicultural classroom. *Elementary School Journal*, *104*, 149–174.

Weeg, P. (2002). Kidspiration templates launch learning across the curriculum. *Inspiration Software, Inc.* (Serial No. COLL209). Retrieved September 27, 2004 from http://www.inspiration.com/case_studies/weeg.pdf

Williams, B. (2004, October 7). Help wanted: Good writers. *Opelika-Auburn News*, pp. A1–A5.

Wolters, C. A. (1999). The relation between high school students' motivational regulation and their use of learning strategies, efforts, and classroom performance [Electronic Version]. *Learning & Individual Differences, 11*(3), 1–13.

Yancey, K. B. (2004). Using multiple technologies to teach writing. *Educational Leadership*, *62*, 38–41.

Zaner-Bloser. (2002). *The research base for strategies for writers, A complete writing program*. Columbus, OH: The Language Arts Company. Available: www.zaner-bloser.com

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(2), 64–70.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NAEP RELEASES WRITING SCORES FOR ALABAMA

State of Alabama
Department of Education
Ed Richardson
State Superintendent of Education

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 10, 2003

Contact: Rebecca Leigh White
(334) 242-9950
rwhite@alsde.edu

NAEP RELEASES WRITING SCORES

Montgomery, Ala. — According to results released today by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in Washington, D.C., Alabama's writing scores for eighth-grade students showed an increase in the percent of students scoring at or above proficient (20 percent) from 1998 (17 percent).

As with the recent release on *2002 NAEP Reading Assessment* scores, Alabama tested a higher percentage of students identified as students with disabilities (SD) or limited English proficient (LEP) than most other states in the nation in an effort to better comply with *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). Due to the inclusion of these students, there was a slight though not statistically significant decrease in writing scores of Alabama eighth-grade students tested when compared to 1998. In 2002, Alabama excluded only 2.6 percent of its eighth-grade students compared with the nation, which excluded 4.2 percent of their students. The highest excluded by any state was 6.7 percent.

The NAEP Writing Assessment was not administered at the state level to fourth-grade students until 2002. Alabama's exclusion rate for its fourth-grade students in 2002 was only 1.9 percent – the second in the nation – compared to 5.4 percent nationally. One state excluded 10.3 percent.

The 2002 writing performance of Alabama eighth-grade students and students nationwide has not shown much change from 1998 writing assessment results. In summary, findings of the NAEP statewide *Writing 2002* study, administered in February and March 2002, reflect:

- More numbers of SD and LEP students are included in the number of Alabama students being tested.
- By testing more students with special needs, Alabama continues to improve compliance with NCLB.
- Writing scores of Alabama fourth-grade students tested fall behind scores of students nationwide.
- Writing scores of Alabama eighth-grade students tested show a slight decrease from 1998 scores and fall below the national average.
- Writing scores of Alabama eighth-grade students tested scoring at or above proficient levels improved from 1998 scores.

– more –

Gordon Persons Building • P.O. Box 302101 • Montgomery, Alabama 36130-2101 • Telephone (334) 242-9700 • Fax (334) 242-9708

"We are very optimistic our writing scores will get better as we continue to administer the *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grades 5 & 7*, which is based on Alabama's Courses of Study," said Dr. Joe Morton, Deputy Superintendent for Alabama Department of Education. "2002 was the first year accountability was associated with the *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grades 5 & 7*. When we began disaggregating that data last August, we saw a direct improvement in the writing skills of Alabama students."

NAEP, also known as "the Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. The *Writing 2002* results provide national and state data about the current status of American students' writing skills and allow the United States to chart writing trends over time. A total of 6,200 Alabama students participated in the NAEP 2002 *Writing Assessment*. NAEP does not provide scores for individual students, schools, or districts.

2002 writing results can be viewed at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/writing/. NAEP reading and math scores from assessments given earlier this year are scheduled for release in September.

###

7-10 NAEP TALKING POINTS

- The NAEP Writing Assessment was first administered at the state level in 1998 only at the 8th-grade level.
- The NAEP Writing Assessment was not administered to 4th-grade students at the state level until 2002.
- NAEP writing measures narrative, informative (called expository in Alabama), and persuasive writing modes.
- Alabama instruction to 4th-graders includes narrative, expository, and descriptive writing modes. It does not include persuasive.
- The persuasive writing mode is not taught in Alabama until 6th-grade.
- In the *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grade Seven*, persuasive writing is defined as presenting reasons and examples to influence action or thought.
- In the *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grades Five & Seven,* expository writing is defined as presenting reasons, explanations, or steps in process.
- In the *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grades Five & Seven,* narrative writing is defined as relating a clear sequence of events occurring over time.
- Descriptive writing is also taught as part of the *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grades Five & Seven*. Descriptive writing is defined as a clear description of people, places, objects, or events using appropriate detail.
- The 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment was administered in February and March 2002.
- 3,575 Alabama 4th-grade students in 108 schools participated in the 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment.
- 2,625 Alabama 8th-grade students in 100 schools participated in the 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment.
- Alabama 4th-graders scored 140 as compared to 153 for students nationwide on the 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment.
- Alabama 8th-graders scored 142 as compared to 152 for students nationwide on the 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment.
- Alabama 8th-graders scored 144 on the 1998 NAEP Writing Assessment as compared to 148 for students nationwide.
- Alabama tested more 4th-grade students with disabilities (SD) and limited English proficient (LEP) than 48 other states in the nation. Alabama excluded only 1.9% while Idaho excluded 1.7 % as compared with 5.4% nationwide.
- Alabama decreased the number of exclusions of 8th grade SD and LEP in 2002 from 6.1% in 1998 to 2.6% in 2002.
- Alabama was among the top eight states in the testing of 8th-grade SD and LEP students. Alabama excluded only 2.6% as compared to 4.2% nationwide.
- Grade 12 was not assessed at the state level.

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT TO CONDUCT STUDY IN ELMORE COUNTY SCHOOLS

Elmore County Board of Education

Jeffery E. Langham
Superintendent

Vicki W. Owen
Chief Financial Officer

203 Hill Street
P. O. Box 817
Wetumpka, Alabama 36092

Telephone: (334) 567-1200
Fax: (334) 567-1405
E-mail: ecsuper@bellsouth.net

February 23, 2005

The Office of Human Subjects Research
Auburn University
307 Samford Hall
Auburn, Alabama 36849-5122

Dear Internal Review Board:

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter for Andre' L. Harrison in support of his doctoral dissertation study that involves the Elmore County Public School District. Mr. Harrison currently serves as the district's Curriculum Coordinator for our district.

During the fall of 2002, Mr. Harrison and a group of language arts teachers embarked on a new educational journey to develop a K-12 writing curriculum to improve writing instruction and student achievement within our district. Since then, our district has been committed to providing state of the art writing resources and materials for teachers, implementing current research-based writing strategies, and planning and developing on-going job embedded professional development to enrich students' learning. Because of this new writing curriculum, we have seen a tremendous improvement in students' writing and classroom instruction.

In closing, I firmly support Mr. Harrison's research study that will be conducted within our school district. His study will involve data, both qualitative and quantitative, from the Elmore County School District. The results from Mr. Harrison's study will be very helpful to our district, by providing valuable information that can be used to enhance writing instruction within Elmore County. Again, I am honored to support his endeavor.

Sincerely,

Mr. Jeffery E. Langham
Superintendent of Education

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF CONSENT TO USE ELMORE COUNTY SCHOOLS IN DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Elmore County Board of Education

Jeffery E. Langham
Superintendent

Vicki W. Owen
Chief Financial Officer

203 Hill Street
P. O. Box 817
Wetumpka, Alabama 36092

Telephone: (334) 567-1200
Fax: (334) 567-1405
E-mail: ecsuper@bellsouth.net

August 8, 2005

Dr. Cynthia J. Reed, Associate Professor
Auburn University
2195 Haley Center
Auburn, Alabama 36849-5122

Dear Dr Reed:

It gives us great pleasure to write this letter for Andre' L. Harrison in support of his doctoral dissertation study that involves the Elmore County Public School District. Mr. Harrison currently serves as the Curriculum Coordinator for our district.

During the fall of 2002, Mr. Harrison and a group of language arts teachers embarked on a new educational journey to develop a K-12 writing curriculum to improve writing instruction and student achievement within our district. Since then, our district has been committed to providing state-of-the-art writing resources and materials for teachers, implementing current research-based writing strategies, and planning and developing on-going job-embedded professional development to enrich students' learning. Because of this new writing curriculum, we have seen a tremendous improvement in students' writing and classroom instruction.

In closing, we firmly support Mr. Harrison's research study that is being conducted within our school district. In addition, he has our permission to use the name of our school district within the publication of his doctoral dissertation entitled: *Teachers' Perceptions of the Development, Enactment, and Effectiveness of a New Writing Curriculum within the Elmore County Public School District*. The results from Mr. Harrison's study will be very helpful to our district and will provide valuable information that can be used to enhance writing instruction in Elmore County. Again, we are honored to support his endeavor and to allow him to use our school district's name in his dissertation. If you have any additional questions, you may contact us at 334-567-1200.

Sincerely,

Mr. Jeffery E. Langham
Superintendent of Education

Mr. Johnny Carothers
Board Chairman

APPENDIX D

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) LETTER

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849

Office of Human Subjects Research
307 Samford Hall

Telephone: 334-844-5966
Fax: 334-844-4391
hsubjec@auburn.edu

July 7, 2005

MEMORANDUM TO: Andre Harrison
Educational Foundations Leadership & Technology

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Teachers' Perceptions of the development, Enactment and Effectiveness of a new Writing Curriculum Within Elmore County Public School District

IRB File: #05-101 EX 0506

APPROVAL DATE: June 15, 2005
EXPIRATION DATE: June 14, 2006

The referenced protocol was approved "Exempt" from further review under 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2) by IRB procedure on June 15, 2005. You should retain this letter in your files, along with a copy of the revised protocol and other pertinent information concerning your study. If you should anticipate a change in any of the procedures authorized in protocol #05-101 EX 0506, you must request and receive IRB approval prior to implementation of any revision. Please reference the above IRB File in any correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before June 14, 2006, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than June 1, 2006. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to June 14, 2006, you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

Niki L. Johnson, JD, MBA, Director
Office of Human Subjects Research
Research Compliance Auburn University

cc: William Spencer
Cynthia Reed

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

SURVEY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE NEW WRITING CURRICULUM FOR THE ELMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

SECTION I

This survey is part of an effort to obtain feedback on the newly developed K-12 writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District. This is part of the process to determine the language arts teachers' perceptions of the new curriculum. Please respond to the questions below as candidly as possible. This should not take any longer than 20 minutes of your time. **Please use additional sheets of paper to answer your questions if needed.**

Demographics: Circle the appropriate response for each item.

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Grade Level of School: Elementary Middle Junior High High

3. Please circle the number of years as an educator:

   A) 0-3 B) 4-10 C) 11-15 D) 16-20 E) 20+

   How many of these years have you been in Elmore County? _____

SECTION II

Directions: To complete the survey, read each statement. On the rating scale, **CIRCLE** the letter that best describes your general beliefs about each statement. The letters on the scale represent the following: SD= Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, and SA = Strongly Agree. **THERE ARE NO RIGHT ANSWERS!!!** It is simply what you believe about the new writing curriculum.

WRITING CURRICULUM REFORM

1. There was a need to develop a writing curriculum within the Elmore County School District.

   SD D N A SA

2. The new writing curriculum has helped improve students' performance on the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing (ADAW).

   SD D N A SA

3. The new writing curriculum contains guidelines, procedures, and benchmarks that help teachers teach writing more effectively.

   SD D N A SA

4. The new writing curriculum guidelines have provided teachers with ample ideas, strategies, and suggestions to teach writing.

   SD D N A SA

5. Programs such as *6 + 1 Traits*, *Step Up to Writing*, and/or *Strategies for Writers* support the new writing curriculum.

   SD D N A SA

RESEARCH-BASED WRITING STRATEGIES

6. The new writing curriculum uses research-based strategies.

   SD D N A SA

7. The writing process is a good, developmentally appropriate, strategy to use when preparing students to become better writers.

   SD D N A SA

8. Using research-based strategies of writing researchers, such as Rick Shelton, Ruth Culham, and Ralph Fletcher, is very helpful when I teach writing, using the steps of the writing process.

   SD D N A SA

9. Using the teaching methods from the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) provides assistance to teachers working with struggling writers.

   SD D N A SA

10. Overall, I believe that using the research-based writing strategies, outlined in the new writing curriculum, will improve classroom instruction and student achievement.

    SD D N A SA

PROCESS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

11. The school district established goals concerning the writing curriculum based on subject matter, need, and interest of the students.

    SD D N A SA

12. As a teacher, I was adequately involved in the development process of the writing curriculum.

    SD D N A SA

13. The process of sharing successful classroom practices was very helpful during the development of the curriculum.

    SD D N A SA

14. The writing curriculum was designed to ensure that horizontal alignment was effectively achieved across each grade level.

    SD D N A SA

15. The writing curriculum was designed to vertically align writing instruction from grade to grade.

    SD D N A SA

16. Teachers were provided adequate time to work collaboratively to ensure that horizontal and vertical alignment was achieved throughout the writing curriculum.

    SD D N A SA

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR WRITING

17. As the new writing curriculum was being developed and implemented, teachers were provided with adequate professional development opportunities.

    SD D N A SA

18. The professional resources and ideas received during writing workshops were beneficial.

    SD D N A SA

19. The writing presenters and/or consultants modeled effective practices in writing instruction.

    SD D N A SA

20. Sufficient professional development opportunities were provided to teachers to enable them to teach students to become better writers.

    SD D N A SA

21. My preservice (college) courses provided training in writing instruction.

    SD D N A SA

22. My mentor writing teacher shared successful writing strategies that helped me to be a more effective teacher.

    SD D N A SA

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN WRITING

23. The list of educational Web Sites, located within the writing curriculum, provides teachers with assistance to teach writing.

    SD D N A SA

24. Students have responded well to the use of computer-based instruction to teach writing.

    SD D N A SA

25. Computers have shortened and eased the workload of evaluating students' writing assignments.

    SD D N A SA

26. *Inspiration/Kidspiration Software* has been helpful in teaching students methods of organization, development, and coherency of writing.

SD D N A SA

27. *Inspiration/Kidspiration Software* has assisted teaching students the use of writing transitional words and graphic organizers.

SD D N A SA

SECTION III

Directions: Please respond to the questions below as candidly as possible. If you need to attach additional sheets, please feel free to do so.

28. In your opinion, what are the best aspects of the new writing curriculum? Please LIST.

29. Do you have any recommendations for improving the new writing curriculum? If YES, explain.

30. Do you have any recommendations for improving the curriculum development and implementation process? If YES, explain.

APPENDIX F

WRITING RESOURCE LISTS

ELMORE COUNTY WRITING CURRICULUM PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE LIST
Kindergarten through Third Grade

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
150 Totally Terrific Writing Prompts	Martin, Justin	Scholastic	1999
24 Read & Write Mini Books	Sanders, Nancy	Scholastic	
35 Rubrics and Checklist to Assess Reading and Writing	Fiderer, Adele	Scholastic	1998
5W's, The: Reading Level, Grade 2		Remedia Publications	1998
6 + 1 Traits of Writing	Ruth Culham	Scholastic	2003
75 Creative Ways to Publish Student's Writing	Sunflower, Cherlyn	Scholastic	1993
75 Picture Prompts for Young Writers	Brown, Rick	Scholastic	1993
Alphabet File-folder Word Walls	Spann, Mary Beth	Scholastic	
Alphabet Wheels		Scholastic	
Art of Teaching Writing, The	Calkins, Lucy McCormick	Creative Teaching Press	
Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test, 2nd ed.	Kiester, Jane Bell	Maupin House	2000
Building Literacy with Interactive Charts: PreK-2	Schlosseer, Kristren G.	Scholastic	1996
Cause and Effect	Gruber, Barbara	Chaffer	1988
Creating Young Writers: Using the Six Traits to Enrich Writing Process in Primary Classrooms	Vicki Spandel	Pearson Education, Inc.	2004
Creative Writing for Primary Grades	Price, Scott	Carson-Dellosa	1996
Daily Journals	Simpson	Good Year Books	
Dancing with the Pen	Jordan, Kimberly and Trisha Callella	Creative Teaching Press	
Developing Literacy Using Reading Manipulatives	Hill, Sandy	Creative Teaching Press	
Four Square: The Total Writing Classroom	Gould, Judith S. and Evan Jay	Teaching and Learning Company	2002
Four Square Writing Method	Gould, Judith S. and Evan Jay	Teaching and Learning Company	1999
Fun and Fancy Seasonal Lined Writing Paper		Edupress	1998
Getting the Most Out of Morning Message and Other Shared Writing Lessons	Payne, Carleen DaCruz	Scholastic	
Great Shapes Stationary	Fletcher, Rusty	Scholastic	1997
Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children	Fountas, Irene C. and Gay Su Pinnell	Heinemann	1996

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
How to Make Books with Children	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	
Instant Stationary with Thematic Toppers	Schiffer-Dannoff, Valerie	Scholastic	1996
Instant Thematic Stationary	Professional Books	Scholastic	1995
Interactive Writing: How Language and Literature Come Together, K-2	McCarrier, Andrea, Gay Su Pinnell, and Irene C. Fountas	Heinemann	2000
Kidwriting		Wright Group	
Learning to Write Paragraphs	Bruber, Barbara	Chaffer	1988
Lesson Plans Using Graphic Organizers	Fetty, Margaret	Steck-Vaunghn Co.	2001
Making Alphabet Books	Hall, Dorothy P.	Carson-Dellosa	
Making Books for Spring and Summer	Ling, Patricia	Carson-Dellosa	
Making More Words	Cunningham, Patricia .	Good Apple	1997
Making Words	Cunningham, Patricia M.	Good Apple	
Month by Month	Professional Books	Scholastic	1998
Paragraph Writing	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	1997
Phonemic Awareness Songs and Rhymes	Jordan, Kimberly and Trisha Callella	Creative Teaching Press	
Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing. 3rd ed.	Cunningham, Patricia M.	Longman	2000
Picture Books: An Annotated Bibliography with Activities for Teaching Writing, 5th ed.	Culham, Ruth	Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory	1998
Poem of the Week	Fleming, Maria	Scholastic	
Predictable Charts: Shared Writing for Kindergarten and First Grade	Hall, Dorothy and Elaine Willias	Carson-Dellosa	2001
Read! Write! Publish! Making Books in the Classroom	Fairfax, Barbara and Adela Garcia	Creative Teaching Press	1992
Reading Teacher's Book of Lists, The	Fry, Edward Bernard, Jacqueline e. Kress, and Donna Lee Fountoukidis	Prentice-Hall	1993
Ready, Set, Read	Feldman, Dr. Jean R.	Crystal Springs Books	
Short Story Sequences	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	1997
Spelling and Reading with Riggs	McCulloch, Myrna	K & M	1995
Steps to Writing Success (Level 1 Writing Sentences, Level 3 Writing Multiple Paragraphs)	Hetzel, June and Deborah McIntire	Creative Teaching Press	2002
Story Writing with Teachable Moments for Skill Building	Polon, Linda Beth	Good Year Books	
Stretching Students' Vocabulary	Bromley, Karen	Scholastic	2002

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
Success with Sight Words	Throop, Sara	Creative Teaching Press	
Super Graphs, Venns, & Glyphs	Bonmberger, Honi and Patricia Hughes	Scholastic	
Take It to Your Seat: Literacy Centers, Grades K-3	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	2001
Teacher's Guide to Four Blocks, The	Cunningham, Patricia M., Dorothy P. Hall, and Cheryl M. Sigmon	Carson-Dellosa	1999
Teachin' Cheap	Holliman, Linda	Creative Teaching Press	
Teachin' Smart	Holliman, Linda	Creative Teaching Press	
Teaching Beginning Writing with Word Walls	Wagstaff, Janiel M.	Scholastic	
Trait-Based Mini-Lessons for Teaching Writing in Grades 2-4	Sloan, Megan S.	Scholastic	2005
Traits of Good Writing, Grades 1-2	Mary Rosenberg	Teacher Creative Materials, Inc.	2002
Traits of Good Writing, Grades 3-4	Prior, Jennifer Overend	Teacher Creative Materials, Inc.	2002
Transition Tips and Tricks for Teachers	Feldman, Dr. Jean	Gryphon House Inc.	2000
Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits	Culham, Ruth	Scholastic	2004
Using the Traits of Good Writing, Grades 1-3	Tracie Heskett	Teacher Created Materials, Inc.	2005
What a Writer Needs	Fletcher, Ralph	Heinemann	1993
Write a Super Sentence	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	1997
Write Where You Are! Strategies for Teaching Four Modes of Writing	Shelton, Rick	Minuteman Press	2002
Writing Road to Reading, The	Spalding, Romaldo B.	Quill	1957
Writing Spot, The	Great Source Ed. Group	Houghton Mifflin	
Writing Workshop, The	Ray, Katie Wood and Lester L. Laminack	National Council of Teachers of English	2001
Writing Workshop: Lessons and Activities for the Writing Process, Grades K-3	King, Karen	Teacher Created Materials, Inc.	1998

Useful Websites and Software Resources

WEBSITES

www.atozreading.com
www.electricteacher.com
www.myschoolonline.com
www.learningpage.com
www.sitesforteachers.com
www.sunburst.com
www.teachercreated.com

SOFTWARE RESOURCES

Broderbund	Kid Pix Deluxe 3
Inspirations	Kidspiration
Knowledge Adventure	Kid Words Deluxe
Sunburst	Sunbuddy Writer
Sunburst	Kid's Media Magic 3.0
Write On! Plus	Beginning Writing Skills
Write On! Plus	Writing with Picture Books

ELMORE COUNTY WRITING CURRICULUM PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE LIST
Grades Four Through Twelve

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
10 Writing Lessons for the Overhead	Schaefer, Lola	Scholastic	2002
150 Totally Terrific Writing Prompts	Martin, Justin	Scholastic	1999
25 Mini-Lessons for Teaching Writing	Fiderer, Adele	Scholastic	1997
50 Graphic Organizers for Reading, Writing & More	Bromley, Karen et al.	Scholastic	1999
50 Ways to Bring Out the Smarts in Your Kid	Kennedy, Marge M.	Peterson's	1996
50 Writing Lessons That Work!	Miller, Carol	Scholastic	1999
6 + 1 Traits of Writing	Ruth Culham	Scholastic	2003
75 Creative Ways to Publish Students' Writing	Sunflower, Cherlyn	Scholastic	1993
75 Picture Prompts for Young Writers	Brown, Rick	Scholastic	1993
A Fresh Look at Writing	Graves, Donald	Heinemann	1994
Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test, 2 ed.	Kiester, Jane Bell	Maupin House	2000
Building a Writing Community	Freeman, Marcia	Maupin House	1995
Cause and Effect	Gruber, Barbara	Schaffer	1988
Coming to Know: Writing to Learn in the Intermediate Grades	Atwell, Nancie	Heinemann	1990
Creating Writers, Spanish/Haciedo Escritores: Espanol	Ritter, Melissa	NWREL	2000
Dynamite Writing Ideas	Forney, Melissa	Maupin House	1996
Four Square Writing Method	Gould, Judith S. and Evan Jay	Teaching and Learning Company	1999
Four Square Writing Method for Grades 4-6	Gould, Judith S. and Evan Jay	Teaching and Learning Company	1999
Games for Writing: Playful Ways to Help Your Child Learn to Write	Noonday, Peggy Gaye	Farrar, Straus, & Giroux	1995
Graphic Organizers and Activities for Differentiated Instruction in Reading	Witherell, Nancy L. and Mary C. McMackin	Scholastic	2002
Growing Up Writing: Teaching Our Children to Write, Think, and Learn	Silberman, Arlee	Heinemann	1991
Guiding Readers and Writers (grades 3-6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy	Fountas, Irene C. and Gay Su Pinnell	Heinemann	2001
Illustrated Word Smart: A Visual Vocabulary Builder	Meltzer, Tom	Princeton Review	1999
Instant Stationary with Thematic Toppers	Schiffer-Danoff, Valerie	Scholastic	1996

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
Keep the Rest of the Class Reading & Writing…While You Teach Small Groups	Finney, Susan	Scholastic	2000
Learning to Write Paragraphs	Gruber, Barbara	Schaffer	1988
Lessons That Change Writers	Atwell, Nancie	Heinemann	2002
Live Writing: Breathing Life Into Your Words	Fletcher, Ralph	Avon Books	1999
Making the Writing Process Work: Strategies for Composition and Self-Regulation	Graham, Steve and Karen R. Harris	Brookline Books	1996
Most Wonderful Writing Lessons Ever: Everything You Need to Know to Teach the Essential Elements, The	Mariconda, Barbara	Scholastic	
Narrative Writing, Grades 6-8	Trischitta, A.	Teacher Created Materials, Inc.	2000
Paragraph Writing	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	1997
Persuasive Writing	Rozmiarek, R.	Teacher Created Materials, Inc.	2000
Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing, 3rd ed.	Cunninham, Patricia	Longman	2000
Picture Books: An Annotated Bibliography with Activities for Teaching Writing, 5th ed.	Culham, Ruth	Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory	1998
Razzle Dazzle Writing	Forney, Melissa	Maupin House	2001
Read! Write! Publish! Making Books in the Classroom	Fairfax, Barar and Adela Garcia	Creative Teaching Press	1992
Reading Teacher's Book of Lists, The	Fry, Edward Bernard, et al	Prentice Hall	2000
Schools That Work: Where All Children Read and Write	Allington, Richard L.	Harper Collins	1996
Sing the Sun Up: Creative Writing Ideas from African-American Literature	Thomas, Lorenzo	Teachers and Writers Collaborative	1998
Steps to Writing Success (Level 1: Writing Sentences, Level 3: Writing Multiple Paragraphs)	Hetzel, June and Deborah McIntire	Creative Teaching Press	2002
Stretching Students' Vocabulary	Bromley, Karen	Scholastic	2002
Super Graphs, Venns, & Glyphs	Bonmberger, Honi and Patricia Hughes	Scholastic	
Teacher's Guide to Four Blocks, The	Cunningham, Patricia	Carson-Dellosa	1999
Teaching Children to Write: Theory into Practice	Hughey, Jane B. and Charlotte Slack	Prentice Hall	2001
Teaching Every Child Every Day: Learning in Diverse Schools and Classrooms	Graham, Steve and Karen R. Harris	Brookline Books	1998
Teaching Kids to Spell	Gentry, J. Richard	Heinemann	1993

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
Teaching With Children's Books	Sorenson, Marilou and B. Lehman	NCTE	1996
Teaching Writing with Picture Books as Models	Kurstedt, Rosanne and M. Koutras	Scholastic	2000
Teaching Writing: A Workshop Approach	Fiderer, Adele	Scholastic	1993
Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product	Thompkins, Gail E.	Merrill	2000
Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits	Culham, Ruth	Scholastic	2004
Using the Six Trait Writing Model, Intermediate	Tracie Heskett	Teacher Created Materials, Inc.	2001
Vocabulary Cartoons	Burchers, Sam, Bryan, and Sam III	New Monic Books	1998
Vocabulary in the elementary and Middle School	Johnson, Dale D.	Allyn and Bacon	2000
Write a Super Sentence	Moore, Jo Allen	Evan-Moore	1997
Write Where You Are! Strategies for Teaching Four Modes of Writing	Shelton, Rick	Minuteman Press	2002
Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You	Fletcher, Ralph	Avon Books	1996
Writing Activities for Every Month of the School Year	Behrman, C. H.	Prentice Hall	1997
Writing Menu, The	Forney, Melissa	Maupin House	2001
Writing Road to Reading, The	Spalding, Romaldo B.	Quill	1957
Writing Whizardry	Schrecengost, Maity	Maupin House	2001
Writing Workshop: Lessons and Activities for the Writing Process	King, Karen	Teacher Created Materials, Inc.	1998
Book Club: A Literature-Based Curriculum	Raphael, T., Pardo, L., and Highfield, K.	Small Planet	2002
Literacy Strategies for Grades 4-12	Tankersley, K.	ASCD	2005
Reading, Writing, and Talking Gender in Literacy Learning	Guzzetti, B. et. al	IRA	2002
Developing Academic Thinking Skills in Grades 6-12	Zwiers, J.	IRA	2004

Integrating Technology into the English Classroom
Web Site Finds!!!

Interactive Grammar Sites:

http://www.dianahacker.com/writersref/index.html
http://www.unm.edu/~mgriffin/englab.html
http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/

MLA Style Sheet and other writing tips:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html (includes writing handouts, workshops & presentations, internet resources…..great site)

Power Point Finds:

http://www.oswego.org/ocsd-web/teaching/resources/resources-x.cfm?Type=P

Study Guides:

http://www.bellmore-merrick.k12.ny.us/guides.html

http://us.penguinclassics.com/static/cs/us/10/readingguides/readingguides.html

http://www.studyguide.org/teacherlinks.htm

http://www.webenglishteacher.com/

http://www.ajdrake.com/teachers/index.htm

Writing Prompts/Presentations:

http://jc-schools.net/write/prompts.html

http://www.edb.utexas.edu/pbl/ESOL/index.htm

Other Helpful Websites

www.abcteach.com

www.amazingadventure.com

www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess/

www.atozteacherstuff.com

www.canteach.ca

www.cyberschool.k12.or.us

www.educationclearinghouse.org

www.everydayspelling.com

www.lessonplansearch.com

www.proteacher.com

www.ralphfletcher.com

www.readingonline.org

www.schoolsnet.com

www.stepuptowriting.com

www.teachers.net