

ACADEMIC EFFECTS OF WRITER'S WORKSHOP

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ABSTRACT

Marla Smithson. *ACADEMIC EFFECTS OF WRITER'S WORKSHOP*. (Under the direction of Dr. Randy Dunn) School of Education, September, 2008. The purpose of this dissertation was to study the effects of a process writing curriculum, Writer's Workshop, on the writing achievement of fifth grade students as measured by the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment. The study used three years of data and a total of 321 subjects in determining improved writing scores. The investigation equated and compared the performance levels using a Chi-square contingency table, finding that the group prior to implementation surpassed the performance of the cohorts in the following two years. An independent samples *t*-test evaluated scale scores from the latter two years, resulting in no significant difference between the two groupings. Data also includes interviews from the principal and academic coach. The discussion cites several reasons for the findings and suggests continued use of the curriculum with alterations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

A growing concern of educators in recent years deals with the quality of writing by elementary age children. Benischek, Vejr, and Wetzel (2001) reported that the inability of students to compose a passage of written English was a national disgrace and source of outrage in communities throughout the country. This concern created a flurry of competency testing which is now required by many states. Hence, writing has materialized as one of the “basics” in elementary schools, a crucial tool for learning to read and think (Calkins, 2005). In this context, students must be taught to write for functional, real-world reasons, and teachers must support students by leading them to become writers who understand their need to intentionally think and organize their texts (Calkins, 1986). In an effort to meet these expectations, various methods of writing instruction have emerged, one of which is *Writer’s Workshop*.

This study resulted from the implementation of *Writer’s Workshop* in the researcher’s county school system in northern Georgia. The inclusion of *Writer’s Workshop* occurred as an effort to provide a consistent and systematic writing curriculum which would produce an increase in the writing ability of the students. The county mandated the inclusion of *Writer’s Workshop* during the 2005-06 school year, and instructed teachers to direct 45 to 60 minutes each day to the curriculum. Moderate training provided all K-5 teachers with the basics of the new program. A few of the

teachers attended workshops for intensive training, but most received secondary training from the school's academic coach at various grade level meetings. The county piloted Writer's Workshop during the 2006-07 academic year and fully implemented the program in the 2007-08 academic year.

The focus of the study considers the Writer's Workshop curriculum and the effect it has on the quality of writing instruction in the classroom and subsequent writing ability of the students. Due to time constraints in teaching the various subjects and the pressure of high stakes testing, the researcher deemed the study necessary for determining the best approaches and strategies in building and maintaining student writing proficiency and performance. Quantitative analysis consisted of a comparison of the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment scores from the year prior to implementation to the pilot year and the fully implemented year. The study took place in one school's fifth grade in a county in northern Georgia. The fifth grade students during the year prior to implementing Writer's Workshop made up the control group, and the students from the following two years of treatment comprised the experimental groups. The inquiry conjectured that if Writer's Workshop was effective, the scores would reflect an increase in writing achievement from the control year to the pilot year and from the pilot year to the year of full implementation. Consequently, an increase would occur in subsequent years as the entire student body proceeded with the writing curriculum. The researcher anticipated that this study would provide valuable quantitative data for further improvement in daily writing instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Research Question:

What is the relationship between the implementation of Writer's Workshop and fifth grade student achievement at a rural elementary in northern Georgia as measured by the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment?

Null Hypotheses:

The implementation of Writer's Workshop does not significantly increase the writing achievement of fifth grade students in a rural school of north Georgia as evidenced by the performance levels of the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment.

The continued use of Writer's Workshop from the pilot year to the following year of full implementation does not make a difference in the fifth grade student performance as measured by the scale scores of the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment.

Professional Significance of the Problem

The writer contributes to the existing knowledge of writing instruction by giving quantitative data to support the theory that daily process writing in the form of Writer's Workshop will lead to greater writing achievement in schools. The researcher bases the study upon two theoretical frameworks regarding writing: the inclusion of daily writing as a primary subject in school and, in particular, the process writing approach as a superior method of writing instruction.

Although a body of literature about the positive effects of Writer's Workshop can be found, sparse research exists involving any kind of increase in standardized writing tests. In short, the investigator located a substantial amount of qualitative research regarding the use of Writer's Workshop but a lack of quantitative studies, especially in the area of using *standardized writing assessments* to measure growth in writing achievement.

The researcher considers the study significant because it is her school setting and daily curriculum. Since all K-5 teachers commit to teaching Writer's Workshop daily, the examiner hopes to gain new insights into improvements in writing instruction individually and collectively that will boost test scores and produce quality writers. The writer not only believes that time devoted to writing will improve students' work, but what students are taught and the way in which they are taught also matter. Effective teaching of written expression requires accurate assessment of underlying component abilities and a comprehensive program of instruction that addresses all of the abilities needed for good writing.

This study differs from the existing body of knowledge in that it provides quantitative data from an annual statewide standardized writing assessment based on Writer's Workshop as the instrument for improvement. As specific to Georgia, the researcher found no other studies using the implementation of Writer's Workshop as a means to increase the writing achievement on the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment. Several Georgia counties report the use of Writer's Workshop or other similar writing programs such as MyAccess, SpringBoard, and Six + One Traits to boost scores, but have not conducted studies as yet to provide quantitative substantiation.

Overview of the Methodology

This study utilizes quantitative methods to determine the impact of a process approach to writing instruction, namely Writer's Workshop, on writing achievement scores. The Posttest Only Nonequivalent Control Groups design assumes the status of *casual-comparative* and uses *cluster sampling* instead of *randomization*. The study cites the inclusion of the Writer's Workshop curriculum as the independent variable, and the

standardized Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment scores as the dependent variable. A *Chi-square* measured the performance levels for all three years, and a *t-test* compared scale scores for the latter two years of treatment.

Definition of Terms

The list of key terms provides the reader with special words or phrases that are relevant to the particular study. The definitions add preciseness to the significant words as used in the research. Each term in the text is italicized upon its first usage.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) – ANOVA is an inferential statistic test used for experimental designs with more than one independent variable or more than two levels of an independent variable (Howell, 2008).

Authentic writing – Authentic writing communicates to readers what is important to the writer and is based on the students' needs and interests, giving them a purpose for the activity (Georgia, 2001).

Author's Chair – This is a specific time for a child to share his/her piece of writing to the class. Oftentimes, the class will ask questions or make constructive suggestions to the presenter (Graves and Hansenk, 1983).

Boxplot – A boxplot is a graphical representation of the dispersion of a sample (Howell, 2008).

Brainstorming – Brainstorming is a group activity that generates many possible ideas for a particular issue and then specifies the best possible choice (Writing Site, 2008).

Causal-comparative research design – Also known as *ex post facto*, this design attempts to determine the cause or reason for pre-existing differences in groups or individuals by identifying a causative relationship between an independent variable and a dependent

variable. This relationship is more suggestive than proven as the researcher does not have complete control over the independent variable (Ary, Jacobs, Razavie, and Sorensen, 2006).

Categorical data – Categorical data represents counts or number of observations in each category (Ary et. al, 2006).

Chi-square – A Chi-square is an inferential statistic that compares the frequencies of nominal measures actually observed in a study with frequencies expected under a null (chance) hypothesis (Howell, 2008).

Cluster sampling – A probability sampling method that randomly selects intact groups or clusters such as classrooms and then includes every element in each of the selected clusters in the sample constitutes cluster sampling (Ary et al., 2006).

Cohen's d – Cohen's d is a measure of effect size found by dividing the difference between two sample means by the weighted average of their standard deviations. Unlike Smith and Glass's effect size calculation, Cohen's d does not require designating one group as the control group in the numerator (Ary et al., 2006).

Contingency table – A contingency table is a two-dimensional table in which each observation is classified on the basis of two variables simultaneously (Howell, 2008).

Crosstabs – Crosstabs are tables that show frequencies of responses/levels to illustrate the relationship among variables, permitting comparisons across groups. A cross tabulated table and a contingency table are synonymous (Howell, 2008).

Cramer's V – In a contingency table, Cramer's V indicates the magnitude of the effect (Howell, 2008).

Differential selection – When experimental and control groups are created in such a way that they vary before treatment, differential selection results (Ary et al., 2006).

Diffusion – Participants in an experimental group communicate information about the treatment to another experimental group which may affect the latter group's performance. Diffusion also occurs when teachers involved with the experimental group may share information about the methods and materials with teachers of the control group.

Diffusion is a threat to validity (Ary et al., 2006).

Drafting – This is the second step in Writer's Workshop. The author puts ideas into written form. The main focus in this step is content rather than grammar, mechanics, or spelling. The story is created in this stage (Writing Site, 2008).

Editing – This fourth step in Writer's Workshop deals with grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Editing is accomplished through self-editing and sometimes peer or teacher editing (Writing Site, 2008).

Effect size – Often referred to as the standard mean difference, effect size reveals the difference between two population means divided by the standard deviation of either population (Howell, 2008).

Eta squared – An r-family measure of the magnitude of effect is eta squared. R-family measures indicate the size of an effect that resembles the correlation between the dependent and independent variable (Howell, 2008).

First Steps Writing Continuum – Developed in Australia, First Steps Writing Continuum tracks students' progress based on various displayed writing behaviors. The Continuum was designed to provide teachers with a way of looking at what children can actually do in order to plan for further development ("First Steps," n.d.).

Frequency distribution – In a frequency distribution, the values of the dependent variable are tabled or plotted against their frequency of occurrence (Howell, 2008).

Histogram – A histogram is a graph in which the frequency distribution of scores is represented by vertical bars (Ary et al., 2006).

Informational writing – A genre encompassing both expository and technical writing, informational writing provides data such as an explanation or directions as in expository writing. Informational writing also clearly communicates a select piece of information to a targeted reader or readers for a particular purpose in such a way that the subject can readily be understood (Writing Site, 2008).

Likert scale – A measurement tool consisting of a series of statements followed by five response categories, the Likert scale markers typically range from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (Ary et al., 2006).

Mean – This mean, also known as the arithmetic average, measures the central tendency for a distribution of interval data. In essence, the mean is the sum of scores divided by the number of scores in the distribution (Ary et al., 2006).

Mini-lessons – Mini-lessons are very brief forums in which the teacher presents one topic or idea that is to be incorporated into the students’ writing (Writing Site, 2008).

Modeling – Modeling is a teacher demonstration of a skill or processes that he/she wants to students to perform (Benischek et al., 2001).

Narrative writing – A genre of writing that tells a story of an experience, event, or sequence of events is called narrative writing (Writing Site, 2008).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – NAEP is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students should know and

can do in various subject areas. NAEP was formed in 1988 as a 26-member bipartisan group under the leadership of the Commissioner of Education Statistics. The report offers results regarding subject matter achievement and instructional experiences as opposed to individual scores of students or schools. These assessments follow the frameworks developed by the National Center for Education (National Center, 2008).

Needs Improvement (NI) School – This is a school that has been identified as needing to improve in specific areas. Needs Improvement Schools are not failing schools (Georgia, 2008).

Nominal scale of measurement – This kind of measurement scale classifies objects or individuals into categories that are qualitatively but not quantitatively different (Ary et al., 2006).

Non-directional test (two-tailed) – A non-directional test takes into account differences in either direction (greater or less than) from the value specified in the null hypothesis; the null hypothesis is rejected if the difference is large enough in either tail of a sampling distribution of the statistic (Ary et al., 2006).

Performance assessment – It is a technique in which a researcher directly observes and assesses an individual's performance of a certain task and/or judges the finished product of that performance (Ary et al., 2006).

Performance levels – Stages or levels and their characteristics that test raters use to score students' papers are called performance levels. A performance level is the writer's current place on the continuum of growth and development as indicated by the sample of writing being rated (Georgia, 2001).

Persuasive writing – A genre of writing that gives an opinion in an attempt to convince the reader that this point of view is valid or tries to persuade the reader to take a specific action is known as persuasive writing (Writing Site, 2008).

Prewriting – Prewriting, the first step in Writer’s Workshop, allows the author to determine what to write, who the audience is, the purpose for writing, and the form that will be used. Brainstorming, outlines, lists, and webs are often used as prewriting devices (Writing Site, 2008).

Process writing approach – Process writing is a daily writing course of action that involves prewriting, drafting, revising/ editing, publishing, and presenting makes up the process writing approach. These are the same stages that successful writers/authors use. The term is often used synonymously with “workshop model” (Jarvis, 2002).

Publishing – Publishing is the fifth and final step of Writer’s Workshop in which the piece of writing is shared and often displayed (Writing Site, 2008).

Randomization – Randomization, also known as random assignment, assigns members of a sample to experimental or control groups through chance procedures. It is also known as random assignment (Ary et. al., 2006).

Ranked data – Ranked data represents the observations that have been replaced by their numerical ranks from lowest to highest (Howell, 2008).

Raw score – The number of test items answered correctly by a student refers to the raw score. Because different tests have different numbers and items, raw scores cannot be compared from one test to another (Georgia, 2007 - 2008).

Revising – The third step of a Writer’s Workshop, revising, clarifies the content, organization, and style (Writing Site, 2008).

Scaffolding – Coined by Vygotsky, scaffolding provides instruction that provides oral assistance to students to perform a new task (Eckholt, 2004).

Scale score – A score that expresses the results of a particular test for all forms and levels on a single common scale is a scale score. Scale scores provide a uniform interpretation of performance and allow comparisons to be made from year to year with the same test (Georgia, 2007 - 2008).

Six Trait Writing – Six Trait Writing is a writing curriculum that focuses on six basic writing skills consisting of ideas and content, voice, sentence fluency, editing and revising, organization, word choice, and writing conventions (Writing Site, 2008).

Smith and Glass's effect size – Smith and Glass originated the concept of effect size in 1977. Effect size is a statistic that also has universal meaning to assess both the direction and strength of a difference between two means (Ary et al., 2006).

Standard error of the mean – The standard error of the mean, which is the standard deviation of sampling errors of the mean, indicates how much the means of random samples drawn from a single population can be expected to differ through chance alone (Ary et al., 2006).

Standardized assessments (tests) – These are published tests that have resulted from careful and skillful preparation by experts and cover broad academic objectives common to the majority of school systems (Ary et al., 2006).

Structural corroboration – Structural corroboration uses different sources and different methods to see if there is agreement in the description and interpretation of the state of affairs (Ary et al., 2006).

T-test – A *t*-test is a statistical procedure for testing hypotheses concerning the difference between two means (Ary et al., 2006).

Topic mapping – A type of graphic organizer, topic mapping places the main idea in the center of the drawing and scatters associated ideas around it. Often referred to as a word web or concept map, topic mapping provides students with a visual representation of concepts (Writing Site, 2008).

Traditional writing approach – Writing that stresses the accuracy of form comes from the traditional writing approach. It is teacher-directed and is organized around a series of skills (Clippard, 1998; Pollington et al. 2001).

Triangulation – Similar to structural corroboration, triangulation confirms data by using either multiple data-gathering or multiple sources of data (Ary et al., 2006).

Whole language – The whole language philosophy confirms that reading and writing should be done for authentic purposes (Bayer, 1999).

Writer's Workshop – Writer's Workshop is a type of process writing in which there is whole group instruction followed by time for writing and concluded by a time for structured response (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001).

Writing cycle – Organized by educators in a Pacific Northwest school, the Writing cycle method tracks students' writing by focusing on voice, ideas and content, and organization (Tavern, 2004).

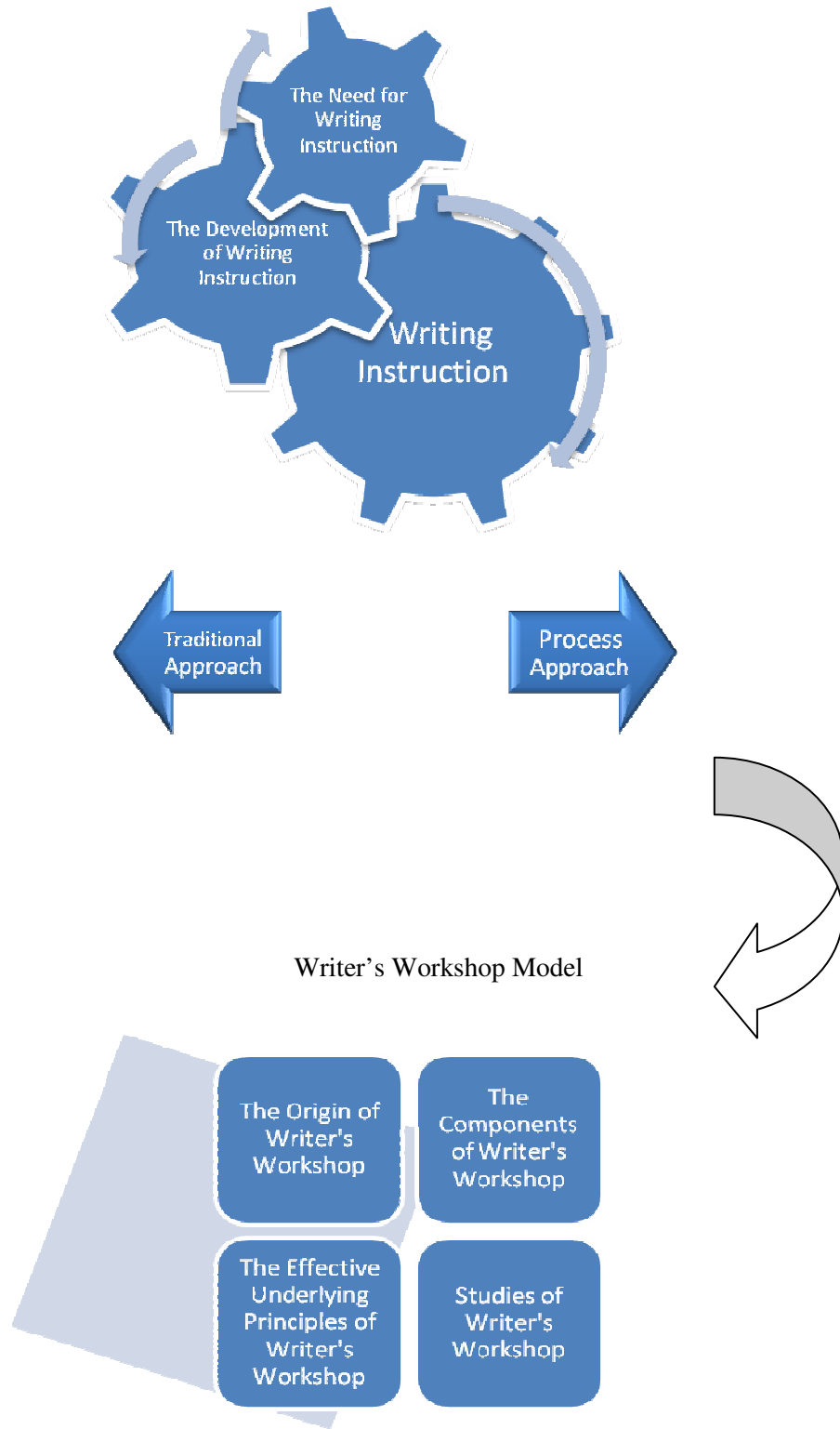
Zone of proximal development – Originated with Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development is the distance between the performance of a task by a student with assistance and the performance of a task by a student without assistance (North Central, 2008).

Organization of Study

Chapter Two provides a conceptual review of the current literature on writing instruction in the classroom and emphasizes the origination and utilization of Writer's Workshop. The chapter includes a summation of prior studies regarding Writer's Workshop. Chapter Three delineates the methodology by presenting the subjects, instruments, and procedures of the research. The results of the study follow in Chapter Four, including background knowledge gained, tables and charts of data, and a written discourse of the results. The study concludes with discussion and implications encompassing Chapter Five.

Chapter Two begins with a conceptual map displaying the initial section, the review of the literature. The map depicts two main cogs that drive the mechanism of writing instruction in school. The cogs represent the need for writing instruction and the development or history of writing instruction in today's schools. In turn, writing instruction is carried out via a *traditional approach* or a *process approach*, of which the latter is the Writer's Workshop model. As a final point, the Writer's Workshop model can be fully understood by considering its origin, its components, its principles, and studies of its effects. The conceptual map forms the outline of the chapter.

Conceptual Map of Review of Literature



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A large body of literature on writing instruction provides a basis for this study. This review of literature expounds a foundation for the current writing theories and practices in the teaching field. Organized in a conceptual framework, the literature analysis begins with the development of specialized writing instruction being introduced in the classroom. Then, the review presents the two fundamental approaches to writing instruction, the traditional and the process approach. An introduction of the process approach under study, Writer's Workshop follows, along with an explanation of its basic components and principles. Finally, a synopsis presents the relevant studies of Writer's Workshop which have been conducted.

The Need for Writing Instruction in Elementary Schools

“Written language allows us to know and understand our human nature, to chronicle our history and culture, to learn in all the disciplines” (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, and Chafe, 1987, p. 3). Writing should not be thought of as simply a basic skill, but rather as a social activity, an enculturation into the social life of one's community, school, and workplace. Like speech, writing is a cultural tool, a system passed on in society to enable members of that society to carry on their lives together.

As a working definition, writing involves a complicated, intricate, and symbolic process that develops out of and in conjunction with talking, drawing, and playing (Brindley and Schneider, 2002). These oral and written literary skills allow participation in many occupational and social communities. Educators and researchers should assist

students to gain control over writing's power so that they can use it to accomplish a range of societal purposes (Freedman et al., 1987).

Effective writing skills are important in all stages of life from early education to future employment. In the business world as well as society in general, students must be able to convey ideas and information in a clear, concise manner. Inadequate writing skills could hinder achievement across the curriculum and in future workplaces whereas proficient writing skills enable students to convey ideas, analyze information, and motivate others (National Writing & Nagin, 2006).

According to the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE), the language arts develop in concert. From the onset of early literacy, drawing supports writing, writing supports reading, and the occurrence of using multiple expressions of language increases language acquisition and ability (National Council, 1998 – 2008). Tierney and McGinley (1987) explain that reading and writing are sufficiently overlapping activities that support a relationship of mutual dependence in which the impact of the two together becomes greater than the sum of their separate influence. Writing within the social setting that school provides offers the opportunity to further support an individuals' efforts as they talk, dramatize, and draw their way into more sophisticated written language.

The NCTE organization further states that writing is effectively used as a tool for thinking and learning throughout the curriculum. Writers very rarely transfer their thoughts directly from their minds onto the paper. Rather, while writing, students form and develop concepts, change their ideas, and find suitable ways to present new understandings. The notion that writing exists as a medium for thought suggests a

number of important uses for writing: to solve problems, to identify issues, to pose questions, and to experiment with new ideas. As clearly a tool for learning, writing allows a learner to envision and evaluate thoughts, providing learning support across all subject areas (National Council, 1998 – 2008).

Therefore, the importance of writing in elementary schools cannot be overstated. An individual's achievement in school, higher education, the workplace, business communication, and in his or her place in society depends on effective writing skills. Writing equips students to be better readers, thinkers, communicators, and overall more successful in all academic subjects.

To develop children's writing from early forms to conventional forms can be best achieved through substantial time devoted to writing, multiple opportunities to write during the school day, and focused instruction that builds from the student's endeavors. As a crucial component of literacy, Ray (2004) states that writing becomes the primary medium wherein students demonstrate their knowledge and the essential means by which teachers evaluate student performance. Research states that when children have difficulties in written expression, they are at serious risk for school failure (Clippard, 1998).

Concern regarding the essential writing performance of students has a long history. The 1996 *National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, developed by the Education Commission of the States, reported the problem of undeveloped writing skills and cited this as a serious nationwide concern. The report stated that most students, majority and minority alike, cannot write adequately except in response to the simplest tasks. In general, American students compose at a minimal level, but cannot express

themselves well enough to ensure that their writing will accomplish the intended purpose. Of fourth grade students cited by the report, only two percent wrote on an adequate level or better in expository writing, less than nine percent wrote well-developed narratives at or above adequate levels, and only four percent wrote adequate persuasive letters in which they were able to support their point of view. In addition, the report illustrated that as students move from elementary school upward, attitudes toward writing deteriorate. Christopher, Ewald, and Giangrasso (2000) cite probable causes as the deficiency of effective teaching strategies that motivate writing and a lack of time devoted to writing in the classroom.

The Development of Writing Instruction in Elementary Schools

The history of written composition in the classroom dates back to the nineteenth century. At this time elementary schools did not teach composition; conversely, writing instruction meant teaching students to form letters, to spell words, and to have legible handwriting. The high schools focused on preparing elite males for universities, a mission that increasingly demanded writing skills. In 1873 Harvard University led the way in establishing a written composition requirement as part of its admissions process with other colleges following with similar expectations. As a result, high schools began to prepare students to meet these requests. Writing continued to have a place in secondary education throughout the 20th century.

Nevertheless, a major pedagogic and empirical shift in the 1960's and 1970's among British and American English teachers occurred as active research programs studying writing in both countries emerged. Two results unfolded. First, leading literary educators argued that assigning and grading written compositions was not enough. The

leaders suggested that students be supported through a process of generating ideas, reflecting, planning, composing, and revising. Second, U.S. instructional experts argued for the teaching of writing in these ways at the onset of schooling, maintaining that learning to write could help students learn to read, and vice versa.

Then, in 1975 an article in *Newsweek* entitled, “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” proclaimed that America had a writing crisis caused by schools who did not teach the “basics.” Although not a new controversy, the expectations for the writing curricula in terms of scope and context changed. University-level remedial programs to address the deficient literary skills boomed. The National Writing Project also came into existence in 1974 in response to the outcry. This organization functioned as a major professional development movement in the United States. The National Writing Project continues today to influence writing curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. Largely as a result of the National Writing Project, thousands of teachers have been introduced to and affected by what researchers know as the best practices in writing. By 1985 the U.S. government funded a research center devoted to the study of written language. Attention from the research center focuses on how writing develops across the lifespan, the influences of in-school and out-of-school experiences on learning to write, and how experiences intersect with how to learn to write in school (Education Encyclopedia, 2008).

Educators agree that the stakes for learning to write have changed. The benchmark for what counts for literate writing, what good writing requires, and how many people need to have good writing skills have changed drastically from the nineteenth century. Writing becomes the gateway for success in academia, the new workplace, and the global economy as well as for our country’s collective success as a

participatory democracy. So today, the need to improve writing becomes better framed as a challenge rather than a crisis (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

Research on literacy during the last several decades has revealed a great deal about how students learn language. This knowledge supports educators in making sound curricular decisions. Much of this research originates by observations of students in the actual process of writing and reading, providing educators with a more complete picture of these language processes and the supportive roles which teachers, families, and communities play in their language development (National Council, 1998 – 2008).

When Graves (1978) conducted his research, he could find almost no evidence of children writing in elementary schools. Since then, due to the concern over the poor writing skills, many schools now use or even mandate the use of some sort of writing activities from the beginning of a child's education. Such activities may include traditional instruction which stresses the accuracy of form and focuses on the "basic" skills of grammar and punctuation which were lacking in the early 1970's, or process writing approach which stresses the development of children's writing for authentic purposes and includes communication and storytelling.

Although there are a few commonalities, for the most part, the traditional and process approaches differ vastly. On a broad level, all writing teachers help students make sense of their lives and prepare students to engage in various kinds of writing activities. Whether from a traditional or process standpoint, all teachers help students to think clearly and convey those thoughts to others. Widespread agreement exists that in order to improve their writing, students must read an extensive variety of literature. In addition, most teachers agree on the importance of learning conventions such as orderly

thinking, spelling, grammar, sense of purpose, and audience. Finally, many teachers from both perspectives work to create an environment that allows students to take risks in their writing (Pollington, Wilcox, and Morrison, 2001).

Traditional Approach

On a more focused level, the two writing approaches broadly diverge. The traditional approach to writing centers upon teacher-controlled activities, with an emphasis on preprinted materials such as textbooks and worksheets. Instruction involves a series of skills determined by the instructor to be necessary and usually taught without a writing context. The instructor accentuates grammar and conventions and manages the topics, audience, and time allotted for writing.

Traditional writing instruction typically embraces whole-group instruction and rarely integrates with other subjects. When students work on projects, teachers generally keep everyone at the same step in the writing process. Then, teachers assess the product, seldom allowing students to share their writing beyond the audience of their teacher (Pollington et al., 2001).

This skills-based approach, which was dominant in the 1970's and 1980's, distinguishes writing as a separate unit of study from reading, listening, and speaking. The teacher follows a rigid, prescribed sequence of skills in literary instruction (Ray, 2004). A set of sub-skills breaks down the instruction that needs to be mastered. Students learn to write by mastering these discrete skills that focus on the rules of grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and penmanship. In most cases, the instructor devotes only a fraction of instructional time to composing stories, prose, or poetry (Clippard, 1998).

In essence, the traditional writing approach gives attention more to product over process. The instructor focuses on correctness, and instruction includes lots of tests and exercises intended to improve sentence-level development apart from the student's own writing. The rhetorical modes of description, narration, definition, compare/contrast, and cause/effect become the emphasis of instruction. A common feature of the writing lessons consists of the prototypical five-paragraph essay with an introduction, three-paragraph body, and a conclusion.

One obvious concern about a traditional approach involves low student motivation. Teacher-selected topics mean little to the students. When students feel a lack of ownership, they seem to care more about getting through their writing assignments than getting through to their readers. In addition, while teachers teach the skills, the students do not learn them in a meaningful context. Activities that concentrate on grammar and punctuation do not become imbedded in the students' actual writing experiences and do not improve their writing. Finally, little explicit writing instruction occurs in traditional settings. A teacher assigns a topic and requires the students to write about it. Student writing turns into an assessment rather than a meaningful learning experience (Pollington et al., 2001). According to Weisenberg (2004), traditional, teacher-chosen assignments, student-written responses, and teacher grading are dead, overused, and limited ways to teach writing. This kind of instruction usually leaves the student out of any profound learning experience and prevents the student from using thinking skills such as organizing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information (Strech, 1994).

Process Approach

Along with the *whole language* philosophy of the 1980's, which was based on the idea that students become literate through meaning-based and purposeful reading, writing, speaking, and listening, came a process approach to writing (Bayer, 1999). Maxine Hairston, an educational researcher in the early 1980's, followed the changes taking place in the teaching of writing. She argued that a new paradigm shift for teaching process writing was emerging and outlined several basic principles. The principles included interventions by instructors during the writing process, evaluation of the written product by how well it fulfills the writer's intention and meets the audience's needs, recursive rather than linear nature of the writing process, inclusion of a variety of writing modes, and emphasis on writing as a form of communication in all academic subjects (Totten, 2003).

Over the past 20 years, educators have called for school-based writing activities that emphasize the importance of students' writing processes, of starting where the child is, of using writing to help students learn academic subject matter, of teaching writing in conjunction with reading so that the language arts reinforce each other. Synonymous terms have emerged to match these emphases, such as "the writing process approach," "the child-centered classroom," "writing across the curriculum," and "whole language." Although the move from product to process implies revolution in instruction, the evidence remains that this new direction is not being widely or effectively implemented (Dyson and Freedman, 1991).

The basic premise of process writing states that all students can write, with the focus more on the process than an end product. Process writing can take many forms such

as Writer's Workshop, writing in the content area subjects, and the use of journals or logs (North Central, 2008). In process writing the communication of the message prevails, and therefore the developing, but inaccurate, attempts at handwriting, spelling, and grammar are accepted, knowing that within the process of regular writing opportunities students will eventually gain control of these sub-skills. The skills further develop in individual and small group conferences (Jarvis, 2002).

When creating, the students work through the stages of the writing process. This step-by-step approach helps students to construct meaning. The steps vary by name according to the specific writing program, but the definitions remain fairly consistent. The creation of writing occurs in basically five stages (North Central, 2008). The first step always includes a selection of the topic through *prewriting* activities. Prewriting activities include *brainstorming*, *topic mapping*, literature use, and/or *mini-lessons*. Step two encompasses *drafting* or simply writing the rough draft. The main focus in this step involves content or getting the ideas on paper. Step three usually entails proofreading and revision of the rough draft. *Revising* techniques include changing the beginning or ending, adding or deleting a section, and changing the tone, point of view, or tense. Students accomplish this step individually, in small groups, or with the teacher. The fourth step addresses *editing* in which the author checks grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Publishing, the fifth and final step, completes the process by presenting the piece of writing to an audience and possibly displaying the work. During the sequence, the teacher *models*, guides, and supports the writing process until students take charge of their own writing (Boone, Farney, and Zulauf, 1996).

One area of concern regarding process writing stems from the separation of process from product. A 1987 national survey of successful teachers of writing revealed that teachers consider responding to student writing during the writing process more helpful than responding to the completed project. However, the students who were surveyed preferred a response to their final product. These findings point to the need for creative solutions on how to integrate considerations of process with considerations of products in the school setting (Freedman et al., 1987).

The Writer's Workshop Model

The Writer's Workshop model bases its instructional program on the process approach to writing. The curriculum's origin, components, effective principles, and research supply a complete understanding of its educational merit.

The Origin of Writer's Workshop

As a result of the move toward process approach writing instruction, various programs emerged, one of which is Writer's Workshop. The major contributors to the widespread curriculum include Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Nancy Atwell. Each of these individuals published books describing their own qualitative research which is portrayed by narrative descriptions and reflections on the teaching of writing through Writer's Workshop. These books form the basis for the Writer's Workshop instructional approach (Fisher, 1995).

The name "Writer's Workshop" refers to the environment conceived to encourage written expression. Because writing and exposing one's own thoughts is risky business, children need to know that their environment is a predictable, safe place for them to take risks. If they are expected to be in control of what they write and do, they also need to

have control over such simple decisions as getting their own paper when they need it or asking a classmate for assistance (Bruce-Crim, 1991).

The idea that all children can and should write forms the basis for Writer's Workshop. Students should be allowed to make choices when composing and be involved in the complete writing process (Boone et al., 1996). A Writer's Workshop approach may be termed "authentic" because it embraces natural activities and practices displayed by expert authors. Research indicates that when children anticipate writing every day, they begin to develop the habits of writers (Atwell, 1987). Students begin to think of creating when they are not in class, thus their compositions will have many starting points. Writing becomes a habit, and students are thought to become more proficient creators (Newkirk and Atwell, 1986). Furthermore, authentic writing allows students to follow their own interests, like genuine authors. The lives of students provide the content from which students compose and teachers teach. According to Bechtel (1985), students who write on self-selected topics improve the quality of their pieces. This benefits students with writing deficiencies in that it requires fewer organizational and planning demands as well as increasing interest and motivation. Writing authentically also implies that students need opportunities for social discourse before, during, and after the process. Discourse helps students express ideas, ask questions, and create categories for concepts (Goodman and Wilde, 1992).

In essence, the Writer's Workshop approach encourages students to become deeply involved in the writing process, using their own topics and writing for their own reasons. This methodology exposes students to the writing process as an alternative to teacher-dictated writing assignments (Calkins, 1986).

The Components of Writer's Workshop

According to Atwell (1998), Writer's Workshop consists of four key elements: a mini-lesson, frequent writing time, a conference, and self-evaluation. These components combine whole group instruction, small group instruction, and individualized instruction. Atwell recommended approximately a one-hour block of time per day. The mini-lesson comprises 5 to 10 minutes, 30 to 45 minutes provides for writing time allotment, and 10 to 20 minutes involves share time. Several student conferences occur simultaneously during the writing time.

Component 1: Mini-Lessons.

The workshop begins with a whole group, teacher-led mini-lesson. During this five- to ten-minute slot, the instructor presents one idea, skill, or strategy that seems relevant for that particular group on each particular day. This day-to-day forum requires a close assessment of the strengths and weaknesses that the students show in their daily writing. During the mini-lesson, the teacher raises a concern, explores an issue, models a technique, or reinforces a strategy (Calkins, 1986). Most educators will direct the students to practice the skill during the mini-lesson and subsequent writing time. Topics for the mini-lessons fall into one of four categories: procedures, the writer's process, qualities of good writing, and editing skills (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001).

Procedural topics of mini-lessons provide important information about how the workshop runs. These procedures include how to get and use materials, where and how conferences will be held, where to confer with peers, and how to gather into a meeting area in an orderly manner.

Another topic for the mini-lesson involves the writer's process, which focuses on strategies that writers use to help them choose, explore, organize, or revise a topic. Teachers convey think-aloud strategies, discussion, reading, or modeled writing. Benischek et al. (2001) found this model to be beneficial because just as children learn to talk, read, swim, or jump rope by imitating people who already know how, they learn to write by mimicking the habits and strategies of real writers. Not only is it important for teachers to spend time writing themselves and share their written work with their students, but students also benefit when they see and hear their teacher think out loud, revise, and edit as they write personal poetry, stories, letters, and reports. Too many children see writing, particularly their own, as fixed and immovable. If teachers model the tools of organization and reorganization with their own writing, children can see the space-time issues of writing that can be solved (Graves and Murray, 1980). Teachers who write can offer valuable insights to students by mentoring them into process and making their own writing processes more visible (National Council, 1998 – 2008).

Interactive writing, which is the teacher and students working together to create a piece of writing, provides powerful demonstrations that help students progress in their writing. The students can take the “supported” writing and carry what they have learned into their independent writing (Behymer, 2003).

Presenting the qualities of good writing forms another topic for mini-lessons. This instruction centers on information to deepen the students' understandings of literary techniques such as the author's purpose, point of view, character development, strong language, catchy introductions, and powerful endings.

A final topic for mini-lessons stresses editing skills. This topic includes information for developing spelling, punctuation, and grammatical skills. Editing can also include information about how to self-check a piece of writing. Applying language skills within the context of meaningful writing enables students to successfully master editing (National Council, 1998 – 2008).

The ritual of beginning every writing workshop with a whole group gathering can bring form and unity and help the young writers to see the effect of a few carefully chosen tips from experts. The mini-lesson consists of simplicity, brevity, and directness (Calkins, 1986). Graves (1995) believes that giving mini-lessons that focus on one convention can help students expand their repertoire. During mini-lessons, Rosen (1987) reports that students can share problems, ask specific questions from their own writing, and get help from the shared knowledge of the entire class. Teaching skills via mini-lessons produces better writing than teaching isolated skills. Mini-lessons serve to increase writing fluency, and to teach the necessary skills to help the students gain confidence in their abilities as writers (Benischek et al., 2001).

Component 2: Frequent Writing Time.

After the mini-lesson, the students work in a highly structured, yet responsive environment in order to draft, revise, and edit their writing. Students incorporate the instruction they have received from their teacher's mini-lesson topic (Calkins, 2005). Proponents of Writer's Workshop believe that the best way to improve writing is to write, write, write. Many times teachers will use peer collaboration, telling the students to view their peers as writing resources. Hyland (2000) states that students need to get others' opinions on writing, and she describes the Writing Workshop as "a really good time to

use each other” (p. 8). Teachers encourage students to read each other’s drafts during the workshop and complete peer response sheets as part of the writing time.

Different stages of writing occur during the writing time. Some students may be drafting a new piece of writing, others may be revising, and still others may be in the stage of editing for publication during any day’s Writer’s Workshop. Drafting involves writing actual writing piece, whereas revision requires going over what’s written. Revision happens continually as the student writes. Editing entails working with an editor, whether it is a teacher or another student in order to prepare the piece for publication. Editing includes attending to the meaning of the piece and working on standardizing the written conventions and spelling (Fisher, 1995).

Oftentimes, the students use a checklist in rereading their writing to look not only for errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization but also for sense and excess of words. This time of self-editing permits the writer to smooth out language, order thoughts, and listen to the poetry of his/her sentences (Strech, 1994). Graves (1980) states that when teachers unfold the writing process to children by word and example and respond intelligently to what children know, then the students write and write well. They revise as an internal dictate, not because the teacher has assigned it. They revise and edit because they see their work as unfinished, not because they are in error.

Component 3: Conferences.

While the students write, the teacher conducts conferences with a select number of students. The purpose of the conference is to have the young authors reflect upon their writing with the guidance of the teacher. Donald Graves (1991) defines the writing conference as a meeting between the teacher and the student during which questions may

be asked such as: Where did the piece come from? Where is the piece now? Where will the piece be going? The teacher interacts with the students in such a way that they learn to interact with their own developing drafts. After the student shares the writing, the teacher celebrates and praises what the student has done. Then, the teacher propels the student's learning by providing just the right amount of assistance as he or she attempts to perform a new task. Eckholdt (2004) calls this kind of writing assistance "*scaffolding*" (p. 5), borrowing the term from Vygotsky (1978) who originated it as a form of instruction. Vygotsky believed that learning evolves from dialogue with others (interpersonal speech) to dialogue with oneself (intrapersonal speech). The teacher's guidance during conferences later becomes the student's inner voice as a new task is solely attempted (Eckholdt, 2004).

During the writing conference, the teacher records conference notes. The notes include the date of the conference, the title of the student's work, the strategy that the writer can use again, and a brief note on the content of the conference (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001).

Williams (1996) believes that the single most effective tool in a Writer's Workshop is the conference and emphasizes two critical factors in the conferences for success: students must do most of the talking, and they need to work on two or less points at a time. Barnes (1997) says that the use of an effective conference can turn a mediocre story into a masterpiece. Moreover, students feel special by having the teacher's undivided attention while the teacher is able to teach intensively in what Vygotsky (1978) termed as the "zone of proximal development" (p. 85), concentrating on those areas where that student most needs help (Graves & Hansen, 1983). This "*zone of proximal*

development” is the distance between what a child can do without assistance and what the child can do with the help of a more capable adult or peer (Eckholdt, 2004).

Component 4: Sharing.

The day’s writing time ends with the whole group together again for the second teaching part. This final component of the Writer’s Workshop block of time is self-evaluation and reflection. It is a follow-up sharing time regarding the topic of the day’s mini-lesson (Calkins, 2005). Many teachers call this time the “*Author’s Chair*.”

Providing the writers with an audience who can give positive and specific feedback through questions and comments about a student’s writing outlines the share time objective. This feedback gives the authors ideas for revising their pieces. In addition, it helps the students feel appreciated as writers, gain confidence in their own writing, and increase the level of enjoyment that students feel about writing.

Each student has a specific day for sharing with the class. Furthermore, sharing can include producing a computer-printed piece, hanging a written piece up for display, adding a piece to a portfolio or showing the written work to a friend (Strech, 1994). The sharing time also reinforces the topic of the mini-lesson by acknowledging students who have put the instruction into practice.

The Effective Underlying Principles of Writer’s Workshop

Several underlying principles cause Writer’s Workshop to be effective in the classroom. These elements consist of writing for a real purpose, writing for a real audience, writing in all areas of the curriculum, learning grammar and mechanics in the context of actual writing, and learning the complete writing process (Christopher et al., 2000).

First, students write for a real purpose. When students write about their own experiences and concerns, it makes them feel that their ideas are important. It also gives them a sense of enjoyment and confidence (Boone et al., 1996). They develop a sense of thoughtful, deliberate rationale about their work as writers and a willingness to linger with those principles. In this way students can see writing as an important life skill to be learned (Behymer, 2003). If students learn to live like writers, then this will affect all that they see, think, feel, and remember throughout their lives (Calkins, 1986).

Second, students write for a real audience. One of the main weaknesses in student writing comes from the students' tendency to think of writing as "performing for a verdict" (p. 16) rather than trying to communicate with actual readers. For students to find out what their words actually did to readers often leads to remarkable gains in skill (Benischek et al., 2001). Graham (1999) reinforces this by saying that writing should not have to be a solitary process. Although writers must have ownership of what they have written, there is great benefit in collaborating with others for help and support. According to Hyland's study (2000), students encouraged, supported, and helped each other in the workshop. Peer interaction helped to move the students on and gave them confidence in their ability to communicate a message. Therefore, the value of peers lies in their supportive function rather than as critical readers and listeners of each other's texts. In this manner the workshop becomes an environment that is a predictable and safe place for students to take risks in their writing (Smith, 2000).

Third, students are taught to write in all areas of the curriculum. Graves and Murray (1980) state there is no difference between "creative writing" (p. 58) and other writing. All writing is an act of creation. Work in one genre aids other genres. The

implications for writing across the curriculum, treating all writing as process and creation, are important. Calkins (1986) believes that there does not need to be a “Great Divide” (p. 490) between the way writing is done in Writer’s Workshop and the way it is done in Social Studies or any other subject.

Another effective principle lies in the fact that students learn grammar and mechanics in the context of actual writing. Students use a self-editing checklist as part of their writing process with the skills addressed. Writers check their pieces for complete sentences, capitalization at the beginning of the sentence, correct ending punctuation, and spelling (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001).

Finally, students learn the complete writing process. Students grow as writers by coming to understand and participate in the process of writing. Like poets, novelists, and journalists, students find seed ideas in what they draw, see, notice, say, remember, feel, and experience. Even young writers decide on form and genre, and they write and revise for clarity and purpose (Calkins, 1997).

These underlying principles cause writing success in the classroom. Students who are actively involved in their writing process, mentored by others who write, and given instruction applied within the context of meaningful writing situations can become skillful writers.

Studies of Writer’s Workshop

Within the body of current literature, several pertinent studies of Writer’s Workshop exist. First of all, current research reflects a workshop method as a superior approach for writing instruction. Through the research of highly effective schools in the state of Missouri, one study found that a reader’s/writer’s workshop approach was one of

the most commonly used programs to assist struggling students in Missouri schools that have been recognized with having high achievement (Hellebusch, Hodge-Logan, Straaztmann, and Wibberg, 2007). Another study, a meta-analysis of over 700 abstracts which used writing samples as the outcome measure, cited three clearly defined instructional strategies emerged as being effective. These approaches included the workshop method, the teaching of inquiry skills, and computer assistance applications. Each type of instruction analyzed the pooled variances. Of the three strategies, the most effective strategy was clearly the workshop approach. In the study the workshop approach had a mean weighted effect size of .519, with the teaching of inquiry skills having .425 and the computer assistance applications having .318 (Atkinson, 1993).

One large-scale set of data indicates the effectiveness of certain aspects of process writing. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has administered a test of writing to large national samples of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 for many years. Along with analyzing test responses, the NAEP also reviews answer forms with a certain page for prewriting activities and tabulated responses to a student questionnaire about the instructional practices used in their writing classes. The 1992 and 1998 surveys asked students how much emphasis their teachers placed on several practices that emulated process writing. From this data, NAEP found that students who reported greater use of process writing activities had higher average scores. In addition, those who engaged in any prewriting activity scored significantly higher than those who did not. The writing practices associated with the higher scores included planning the writing, forming an outline, defining the purpose and audience, using resources other than the textbook, and revising papers. The results suggest that students trained in process writing procedures

may transfer their writing skills and strategies to such on-demand situations (Unger and Fleischman, 2004).

Similarly, in a comparison of traditional and process approaches, Price (1997) concluded that the workshop approach produced stronger writing and grammar skills. Price tested both approaches with 29 fifth and sixth grade boys and girls during a three-week period, providing a pretest and posttest comparison of 11 skills with the control and experimental groups. The *t*-test analysis indicated that both types of approaches sufficiently learned the eleven grammar skills, but the workshop group made significant strides of application of those skills in their writing, producing more simple and compound sentences than their counterparts. Price stated workshop students demonstrated a positive attitude toward writing and applied functional grammar skills at a higher level than students who learned through drill and practice.

Jordan (2005) concluded from her study that Writer's Workshop in particular was the most effective framework for teaching writing. A classroom of 20 second grade students participated in a writing workshop framework during one hour sessions four days a week, with each session following the same format. Jordan used a daily teacher reflection journal, anecdotal notes, and student attitude interviews to collect the data. She focused on seven main components during the study: sense of community, physical space, available materials, choice of writing topic, amount of writing time, sharing work, and publishing writing. She found that time to write and topic choice proved to be of great importance to the writers.

Conversely, a study by Pollington, Wilcox, and Morrison (2001) pitted the two approaches to writing and found no significant difference between the scores of students

who had been taught the traditional approach and those who had been taught the process approach. The study used a true experimental design with stratified random assignment using a random number table. Students were stratified to grade level (fourth or fifth) and then assigned randomly to classes and to teacher by the principal of the school. Their design took the form of a posttest-only control group which allowed the researchers to assume that the groups were equal before treatment without a pretest. The group used the Writer Self-Perception Scale which provided a mean score and a standard deviation for each of the five scales of General Progress, Specific Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States. The ANOVA revealed no significant difference which led the researchers to suggest that individual teachers are more important than strategies or approaches in affecting the writers.

Furthermore, another small scale study compared the traditional and process approach. This study concluded that “once reading ability was accounted for, students’ writing ability was surprisingly unaffected by the different instructional programs” (Stahl, Pagnucco, and Suttles, 1996, p. 142).

Secondly, research indicates that Writer’s Workshop, as a process approach to writing, builds skills and writing proficiency. According to Coleman (2000), Writer’s Workshop increased the writing skills of first and second grade students over the period of a year’s treatment. The targeted population of her study consisted of approximately fifty-five students in a combined classroom setting. Students’ writing skills were placed on the *First Steps Writing Continuum* (“First Steps,” n.d.). This continuum provides a method of tracking students’ progress as writers by placing them into phases based on writing behaviors they display. It assesses the students’ writing skills and tracks their

growth over a period of time. The scale allows teachers to identify skills that have already been mastered and determine additional needed areas. At the end of one year, the students in the study showed significant progress in their writing skills as evidenced by the First Steps Writing Continuum.

In another study, Christopher et al. (2000) report an increase in the correct use of mechanical and organizational writing skills by targeted fourth and fifth grade students as well as an internalized satisfaction towards their writing. The study used a pretest/posttest method and found a dramatic decrease in the amount of grammatical errors from the pretest to the posttest. Results from the posttest indicated that students found a greater need to improve grammatical errors, introductions, and the use of supporting details in their overall writing. Through the post self-writing reflection, students also demonstrated an internalized satisfaction towards their writing.

Similarly, in an action research project by Grothe (2006), findings state that the students' percentages of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors decreased to some degree as a result of using Writer's Workshop. In addition, students increased their complete sentence usage within written work by a marginal gain from pretesting to post-testing. This study employed special needs students as the subjects.

Skills and writing proficiency also increased when Hertz (1991) examined the writing growth of a class of kindergarten students to determine in what ways and to what extent these students grew as a result of participating in a writing workshop. The students' achievement in writing was evaluated in the following areas: spelling strategies, written vocabulary, language level, directional principles, use of punctuation, quality of drawings, quality of stories, and choice of story topics. Standardized tests measured each

area, with the use of paired *t*-tests at the beginning and end of the study to determine if there were significant differences between the students' mean scores. The major findings indicate that the process writing program enabled students to show significant improvement in spelling words, to use written language, directional principles, and express a message relating to what they had written.

Furthermore, Tavern (2004) observed that writing skills improved based on a particular school's "*writing cycle*." In this study, the "writing cycle" method tracked the students' writing throughout the year by focusing on three particular writing skills from the *Six Trait Writing curriculum* which are voice, ideas and content, and organization. Writer's Workshop provided instruction and a prompt that addressed the skill for each trait. Assessment took place three times a year using rubrics from the Six Traits Writing program and a weighted *Likert scale*.

One major study in the state of Delaware by Kelley (2003) used a standardized assessment as part of her quantitative data which showed an improvement in writing competence. Kelley used third grade writing assessment scores in Delaware to determine the effectiveness of Writer's Workshop in a school that exhibited high scores for a three-year consecutive period. The focus of the study was on the instructional practices of teachers whose classrooms had exhibited the high scores. Teachers responded weekly to a survey on which they rated the degrees of emphasis they placed on 20 instructional variables. Six categories made up the survey variables: time for writing, teaching of writing, writing opportunities, writing process and strategies, writing exercises, and sharing/feedback. Each variable applied the use of a Likert scale and *ranked* the scaled scores. From the state test scores, Kelley conducted comparative analyses using measures

of effect size or standard mean difference. The study revealed a clear and sustained school-wide focus on writing over several years, school-based policies on how and how often writing was taught, and high expectations for students which teachers partly attributed to the demands of the state test. Teachers across the grade levels integrated writing with other subjects in the curriculum and deemphasized isolated exercises in grammar, mechanics, and sentence combining. The study led to the introduction of Writer's Workshop in other Delaware schools.

Although Marker (2000) found in his study that there was not a significant difference in writing performance on a quantitative pretest/posttest measure between a treatment group receiving writing conferences and an untreated group which did not receive writing conferences, student progress still advanced. His study concentrated on the impact of the writing conference on the overall writing performance of students. When the study combined the qualitative outcome measures of coded themes in a self-reflective narrative, a significant increase resulted in the treated group's performance. Those areas that had been addressed in writer's conferences caused a significant increase in the writer's progress. Thus, the study maintained that the writing conference was effective as an educational intervention for students.

Finally, research confirms that Writer's Workshop has a positive impact on the writing attitude of students. Several studies conclude that students taught with Writer's Workshop methodology exhibit an increased willingness to write, greater independence, and improved attitudes toward writing. They also exhibit the usage of a wider selection of topics and genre (Boone et al., 1996; Freedman, 1995; Stafford, 1993; Stretch, 1994). Bayer (1999) reported in her study that Writer's Workshop permitted the targeted first

grade students to become more confident writers. The students also became more competent in using descriptive words in their writing. Bayer used student writing samples evaluated by teacher checklists and student checklists, teacher developed rubrics, and teacher-student conferences as her method of data collection. The children participated in Writer's Workshop on a weekly basis, and they were administered pretests and posttests to measure any change in their attitudes towards writing.

According to Hill (2000), students engaged in a writing workshop process classroom have the opportunity to engage in tasks that encourage them to have learning goal orientation. Learning goal orientation promotes an adaptive pattern of attributions and positive effects that help students to try harder, persist longer, and ultimately fare better on academic tasks. This mixed study used case study and ANOVA to collect and interpret data, incorporating the strategies of interviewing, observing, and document analysis. Implications of this study suggest that classroom structure, autonomy, appropriate challenges, and process vs. product evaluation can encourage students to value their effort, progress, mastery, and growth rather than grades, social comparisons, and winning at all costs.

Similarly, Schubert (1992) reported pivotal differences in fifth grade students' attitudes and writing productions in a case study. The data involved 30 classroom observations, seven interviews with each case study student, and four teacher interviews over a three month period. The supportive strategies of the teacher, working in collaboration with the students in a setting where only encouraging response was appropriate, attributed to the success as maintained by Schubert.

All of the named studies provide a substantial basis for reflecting the positive impact of Writer's Workshop. Students become more proficient in writing skills and the writing process. Grammar, spelling, and mechanics also improve. However, the most impact comes from the students' enjoyment of writing. Writer's Workshop creates a positive attitude toward writing which, in turn, reflects improved achievement.

Summary

Effective writing skills prepare students for scholastic achievement, job placement and advancement, and overall success in life. Writing advances reading, thinking, and communication skills. Many studies support the importance of writing instruction as part of the elementary school's curriculum.

A shift has occurred in teaching writing from a traditional approach focused on the teaching of isolated skills to a process approach based on a planned writing progression. Writer's Workshop, a process approach writing curriculum, has currently become prevalent in numerous schools. In this daily program of study consisting of mini-lessons, writing time, conferencing, and sharing time, students write for real purposes and real audiences. Numerous studies of Writer's Workshop show an increase in a positive attitude toward writing, and several studies reveal an increase in academic achievement especially in the area of grammatical and mechanical writing skills. Current research, therefore, affirms the positive impact that Writer's Workshop has on students regarding writing.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

General Perspective

This study uses quantitative measures as a causal-comparative research design. According to Ary et. al (2006), a causal-comparative design attempts to identify a causative relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. This relationship is more suggestive than verified since the researcher does not have complete control over the independent variable. The basic design selects a group that has the independent variable and then selects another group of subjects that does not have the independent variable (the control or comparison group). The two groups are then compared on the dependent variable. One of the problems with causal-comparative research is that since the pupils are not randomly placed in the groups, the groups can differ on other variables that may have an effect on the dependent variable.

The causal-comparative design utilized Posttest Only Nonequivalent Groups form of the design uses intact groups that are similar to treatment and control groups. In education, the choice often becomes two comparable classrooms or schools whereas in community-based research two similar communities may be used. Nonequivalent simply means that assignment to groups was not random. In other words, the researcher did not control the assignment to groups through the mechanism of random assignment. Any prior differences between groups may affect the outcome of the study. Under the worst circumstances, this can lead to a conclusion that a program did not make a difference when in fact it did, or that it did make a difference when in fact it did not (Trochim,

2006). Posttest only refers to the fact that testing only occurs after the treatment. Since the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment occurs only once a year, pretest measures for the test cannot exist.

The study applied the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment as the dependent variable, and the inclusion of Writer's Workshop as the independent variable. The research took place at a rural elementary school in northern Georgia, with the subjects being the fifth grade students for three consecutive years.

The testing of the hypothesis employed a non-directional or two-tailed test of the hypothesis, even though an increase was expected. Researchers use a two-tailed test when interested in differences in either direction (Ary et al., 2006). The investigator wanted to know if the implementation of Writer's Workshop caused either an increase or a decrease in student writing performance. The statistics consisted of a Chi-square of performance levels for three consecutive years and a *t*-test of the latter two year's scale scores from the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment.

Subjects

The subjects came from the fifth grade in a rural Georgia elementary. The sample represented the total school population since the targeted students have similar educational backgrounds, family structures, and socioeconomic status as their counterparts in other grade levels.

Selection of subjects resulted from cluster sampling rather than random sampling. A cluster sampling comprises one kind of probability sampling in which a unit is chosen not individually but as a group of individuals who are naturally together. These individuals make up a cluster insofar as they are comparable with respect to the

characteristics relevant to the study (Ary et al., 2006). The particular cluster sampling in the study resulted from the fact that the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment is administered only to fifth grade students in Georgia. The study assessed students for three consecutive years. Although these classes of students are not equivalent, they are similar in socioeconomic status, ability levels, and number of students from each gender. They live in the same community, and are thus cohorts.

Three reasons exist for choosing fifth grade students. First and foremost, this grade level detached the researcher from connections with fifth grade students since the researcher teaches a lower grade level. This aids greatly in reducing researcher bias. Second, the state of Georgia administers the writing assessment to fifth grade students each year which can be analyzed for writing improvements. Although the third grade is also tested, the individual teachers assess the quality of writing rather than using more objective measures. Finally, fifth grade represents the highest grade level at the school. These particular students making the groups of the three years of study experienced writing instruction before the implementation of Writer's Workshop as well as the two years of Writer's Workshop instruction.

Not only did the sampling select fifth grade classes because these are given the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment each year to determine their proficiency in writing, but they also represent those who had been exposed the longest to writing instruction before and after the implementation of Writer's Workshop. In addition, teachers from this grade level have a higher stake in the administration of the writing process due to the testing of their grade level. This single unit of fifth grade provided a crucial test of the program in question.

Five fifth grade classes each year with approximately 21 students in each class comprised the groups. The students totaled 321 for the three years of analysis. For the year 2005 – 2006, the number of students equaled 104. The following year of 2006 – 2007 totaled 107 students, and the year of 2006 – 2007 amounted to 110 students. An equal proportion of males and females prevailed. Ethnicity demonstrated approximately 90% white Caucasian and 10% either Black or Hispanic.

The subjects came from the population of a specific elementary in northern Georgia. The school is located in a rural area on the fringe of the mid-size city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The entire school's ethnicity computes to 90% white Caucasian, 9% Black, and 1% American Indian, Asian, or Hispanic. Other demographics include a total population of 900 students with 61% designated as eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch. The Free or Reduced-Price Lunch total indicates a high percentage of low socioeconomic families in the community.

For ethical considerations related to the subjects, the researcher obtained permission from the school's principal and followed school guidelines. Since the examiner conducted the study anonymously, a professional relationship with the participants existed. For protection, all data remained confidential and concealed. Furthermore, the principal and academic coach reviewed findings of the study and granted consent to communicate the results to the entire staff at a professional development meeting.

Setting

The particular elementary resides on the outskirts of Chickamauga, GA. As the largest elementary school in the county school system, the enrollment equals 900

students. The institution has been a Title I School-Wide Project since its inception. Many of the students come from single parent homes. The textile industry employs a large sector of the community. Most parents and community members drive to more populated areas such as Chattanooga, TN and Lafayette, GA for employment. The population within a five-mile radius of the school's campus sums 27,801 with the per capita income at \$19,042. As indicated by those responding to a parent survey, the adult education levels consist of 36% high school graduates, 5% associate degrees, 7% bachelor's degrees, 3% graduate degrees, and 18% some college but no degree. Again, based on the parent survey, the marital status stands at 19% who have never married, 58% who are presently married, and 9% who are divorced.

The school in the study opened in 1998 as a consolidation of two community schools. Since opening, the student enrollment continues to rise from 680 in 1998 to 900 Pre-K through fifth grade at the present. The eight-year old school has been overpopulated since its conception. Classes remain at maximum capacity as deemed by the state of Georgia. Males comprise 55% of the total student population and females comprise 45%.

Sixty-five certificated personnel and 51 classified personnel make up the staff at the elementary. Fifty-three percent of the certificated personnel have a master's degree and 25% hold a sixth year Specialist degree. Teachers' levels of experience range from one year to over 30 years. Average experience levels range from 16 for certificated and 15 for classified staff. The student-teacher ratio varies from 20 to 1 for grades Pre-K through second, 22 to 1 for third grade, 24 to 1 for fourth grade, and 27 to 1 for fifth grade.

The school occupies 73,481 square feet. In addition, thirteen mobile buildings surround the main building (Southern, 2006). All grade levels intersperse throughout the school's campus. In other words, grade level halls or wings do not exist, but rather classes are intermingled throughout the school.

The five fifth grade classrooms which are evenly spaced on school property make up the specific setting of the study, one of which is a portable classroom unit adjacent to the main building. Each self-contained classroom has one teacher.

Instruments

The study utilized the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment as the primary instrument. This present standardized writing assessment tests compositions of *narrative*, *informational*, and *persuasive* genres.

Narrative writing can be defined as telling a story of an experience, event, or sequence of events while holding the reader's interest. It appears in and is not limited to novels, short stories, biographies, historical accounts, poems, and plays (Writing Site, 2008). Out of all of the genres of writing, narrative writing represents the simplest form. Students typically understand narration because of their exposure to the structure in their day-to-day lives. Television and movies employ visual narrative composition, and video games rely on background narrative. Stories about friends, family, and daily experiences are relayed to students through narration. Students typically prefer narrative since they are not as familiar with the expository structures that will dominate the rest of their educational career (Podolski, 2008).

The expository structures consist of the more complicated genres of writing such as informational and persuasive writing. Informational writing includes the expository

and technical genres. The expository genre gives information such as an explanation or directions whereas the technical genre communicates a select piece of information to a reader for a particular purpose in such a way that the subject can be easily understood. Simply stated, expository writing puts factual information into a logical order. In the informational genre, the writer enhances the reader's understanding of a topic by instructing, explaining, clarifying, describing, or examining a subject or concept.

Persuasive writing, then, presents an opinion in an attempt to convince the reader that this point of view is valid or that the reader needs to take specific action. The general characteristics of persuasive writing include a stated position or belief, factual statements to support that belief, persuasive techniques, logical argument, and a call to action (Writing Site, 2008). These are more difficult modes of writing to produce because it requires students to use their higher order thinking skills like evaluation and synthesis.

During the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment, students receive an assigned prompt and are allowed 120 minutes to write their essay. Writing prompts spiral, meaning that the students receive either a narrative, informational, or persuasive prompt.

Two trained raters score each writing paper using a standardized rubric scoring system. All raters have four year college degrees and complete a ten-hour training program. These raters must pass a qualifying test. Typically, the group of raters scoring papers includes 30 to 40 raters who have had several years experience in the scoring process and 50 to 60 newly trained raters. Raters score each paper individually. Many studies indicate that at least two raters should score writing assessments to improve inter-rater reliability. Even for assessments that characteristically demonstrate high levels of rater agreement, two raters of the same essay may occasionally report different, or

discrepant, scores. In this case there must be an averaging of the two discrepant ratings or a discussion to obtain a consensus score (Johnson, Penny, Gordon, Shumate, and Fisher, 2005). The Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment employs the former technique.

Raters use an analytic scoring system to evaluate the tests. Analytic scoring means that more than one feature or domain of the paper is evaluated. Hence, the raters assess each paper in four domains of effective writing: ideas, organization, style, and conventions. The domain of “ideas” describes the degree to which the writer establishes a controlling idea and elaborates the main point with examples, facts, illustrations, or details. The description of “organization” addresses the extent to which the writer’s ideas are arranged in a clear order, and the overall structure of the response remains consistent with the assigned genre. “Style” shows control of the language to engage the reader, and the domain labeled “conventions” demonstrates how the writer controls sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. This domain involves such skills as capitalization, punctuation, paragraph breaks, subject-verb agreement, and complexity of sentence structures (Georgia, 2008).

Scores in each domain range from one to five, with five being the highest score. These scores represent a continuum of writing that ranges from inadequate to minimal to good to very good. The continuum denotes a range of quality or competency. Although the score of a five does not denote perfect writing, it is the highest score possible on the scale.

The scoring rubric for each domain depicts the points on the continuum. Raters combine domain scores to obtain a total score for each student. The content domain receives a weight of 40%, with the other domains getting a weight of 20% each.

Weighting means that the scores in some writing domains will be given more emphasis than others in determining the total score that a student receives. The average of the ratings by the two individual scorers becomes the final domain score. Then, the raters convert the total *raw score* to a three-digit scale score so as to adjust for small differences in prompt difficulty. By converting raw scores to scale scores, modifications can be made for slight variations between the assorted test editions, making it possible to balance scores from the different versions. Scale scores ranging from approximately 100 to 350 report an overall performance.

Raters also report scores as a performance level. Three performance levels exist, and these relate as follows: below 200 – does not meet the standard, 200-249 – meets the standard, 250 and above – exceeds the standard (Georgia, 2007).

Schools administer the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment during the first week of March. All fifth grade students in the state take the assessment on the same day, with one day assigned for makeup exams.

Since the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment is a standardized test centered on the content of standards of Georgia's Department of Education, the property of the instrument maintains adequate content validity. Ary et al. (2006) defines a standardized test as a published test that has resulted from careful and skillful preparation by experts and covers broad academic objectives common to the majority of school systems. Based on the content of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), the test adequately supplies content-related evidence to demonstrate attainment or lack of attainment of these standards. Furthermore, each of the four domains of ideas, organization, style, and conventions contains detailed descriptive statements which make it clear as to what is to

be demonstrated in each domain of the test. In turn, each domain has specific criterion to assess a level of specific performance.

Several factors suggest reliability or internal consistency of the instrument. First, a standardized writing test procedure allows for replication. Second, the test time measures 120 minutes. Ary et al. (2006) states the longer the test, the greater is the reliability. Another factor regards the ability level of the group. When it was successfully piloted for fifth grade, the test attested to be neither too easy nor too difficult. The final factor for reliability concerns the objectivity of scoring. Two different raters who have been trained to use the standardized scoring domain ratings according to the specific domain descriptions score each test. By using the domain descriptions, it alleviates subjectivity. A threat to reliability, however, consists of the difficulty of the writing prompts from year to year. Converting the raw scores into scale scores as discussed previously attempts to control for this threat. One final threat may be the presence of any subjectivity of the raters who score the test.

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2006), each of the four spiraled prompts has similar reliability indices, indicating a reliable test. The following table illustrates the reliability of the four prompts.

Table 1: Internal Consistency by Prompt

Form	N	Cronbach's alpha	Raw Scores	Scale Scores
5116	39172	0.91	2.37	7.41
5208	2001	0.90	2.45	7.66
5210	39547	0.90	2.51	7.84
5306	39765	0.91	2.55	7.97

Other instruments in the study included a data collection sheet which indicates coded year of treatment, treatment, and score, and the interview questions for the principal and academic coach. The interview questions which were directed to the principal and academic coach of the school in the study served as a means by which to gain background information concerning the implementation of the curriculum in question. None of the questions dealt with sensitive matters. (See Appendix D for the interview questions.)

Validity Issues

The nature and design of the study controlled several threats to the internal validity. Internal validity refers to the inferences about whether changes observed in a dependent variable are, in fact, caused by the independent variable(s) in a particular experimental situation rather than outside factors (Ary et al., 2006).

The study controlled statistical regression since a pretest was not given. Statistical regression constitutes the tendency for extreme scores on the first measurement to move closer to the mean on the second measurement.

Furthermore, control of experimenter effects and subject effects occurred in view of the fact that the researcher and subjects did not interact during the study. In fact, the subjects did not know of the research or experimental treatment. The researcher maintained anonymity of the subjects. This protected them from likely risks involved in a research study. In addition, the investigator kept all records confidential and concealed as further obligation to the subjects. The Declaration of Professional Ethics (2008) states confidentiality is a matter in which researchers are unconcerned with individual identities. The identity and records of cooperating or non-cooperating subjects should be kept confidential, whether or not confidentiality has been explicitly pledged.

Control of *diffusion* came as a result of all K-5 students in the school participating in Writer's Workshop on a daily basis. In other words, the treatment occurred among all students. Ary et al. (2006) states that diffusion can be controlled by deemphasizing the fact that an experiment is going on.

In addition, the researcher utilized *triangulation* for evidence based on *structural corroboration* when conducting the interviews with the principal and academic coach in gaining background information. The interviewees received and responded to the same questions which produce structural corroboration which, in turn, produces validity based on consensus. According to Ary et al. (2006), avoidance of relying on a single source enhances corroboration of information, and validity on consensus occurs as "agreement

among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics are right” (p. 505).

On the other hand, *differential selection* might be deemed as an internal threat. Even though the groups are similar, one group of students may be more intelligent or less intelligent than one of the other groups.

A further threat to validity stems from the change that has been made in the performance standards and subsequent test changes made from 2005-06 school year to the present. The GPS standards are replacing the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) objectives in the state of Georgia. The course of action involves a gradual transfer of different subjects from QCC to GPS each year. This process changed the writing assessment to accommodate the transfer from objectives to standards.

In order to accommodate the change in regard to this study, the researcher compared the QCC writing objectives that were in place in the 2005-06 year with the present GPS standards for writing. As indicated by the QCC matrix developed by the Georgia Department of Education (2003), the QCC objectives directly related to writing are:

QCC 42 – Writes selections of three or more paragraphs about a topic.

QCC 43 – Writes about selected topics.

QCC 44 – Writes in a variety of genres to produce paragraphs and compositions: personal narratives, imaginative stories, responses to literature, content area pieces, correspondence, expository pieces.

QCC 45 – Applies correct principles of grammar, parts of speech and usage, and mechanics.

QCC 46 – Communicates ideas by using the writing process of prewriting which generates ideas; drafting which focuses on the topic, uses prewriting ideas to complete the first draft; revising which expands the use of descriptive words, improves sequence, adds variety of sentence types, organizes writing to include a clear beginning, middle, and ending; editing which begins each sentence and proper noun with a capital letter, uses correct spelling, uses appropriate punctuation, uses complete sentences; and publishing which is sharing writing with others.

QCC 47 – Increases writing vocabulary.

QCC 48 – Uses descriptive words and phrases.

QCC 49 – Uses various organizational strategies, styles, and purposes.

QCC 50 – Uses available technology to assist in writing.

In relation, GPS standards for fifth grade writing according to the Georgia Department of Education Standards of Instruction and Testing (2007) are as follows:

ELA5W1 – The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals a satisfying closure.

ELAW2 – The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres (narrative, informational, response to literature, and persuasive).

ELAW3 – The student uses research and technology to support writing.

ELAW4 – The student consistently uses a writing process to develop, revise, and evaluate writing.

ELA5C1 – The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken format.

In comparing the QCC objectives and the GPS performance standards, the researcher concludes that both address the writing process in a variety of genres with an emphasis on writing conventions. In essence, the two essentially maintain the same levels of performance to be attained.

The second area to be addressed regarding the change relevant to this study relates to the new writing assessment as set forth by the state of Georgia. A Bias Review Committee field tested the new Georgia writing assessment for bias and sensitivity in selected Georgia schools during the 2005 - 2006 school year. Administration of the new assessment took place for the first time during the 2006 - 2007 school year. As stated in the Georgia's Writing Assessments set forth by the Georgia Department of Education's website (2007),

It is important to note that the Writing and Convention components of the GPS follow standard principles of writing. These are content development and organization, style, sentence structure formation, usage, and mechanics. These universal characteristics are found in all standards for writing, including the GPS and the QCC writing program (p. 1).

The main difference from the previous test to the new test lies in the fact that the previous test had each student write a narrative, and the new test assigns each student with either a narrative, informational, or persuasive prompt. The student receives a longer

period of time to write; the former test allowed 90 minutes and the new test allows 120 minutes.

An additional difference in the new test regards the way in which it is scored. The previous test used a six-point holistic score whereas the new test uses a five-point analytic score. Holistic ratings, referred to as “impressionistic” scoring, involve the assignment of a single score to a piece of writing on the basis of an overall impression of it. The individual features of a text such as grammar, spelling, and organization do not signify separate entities. Hence, the past scoring did not break down each domain or aspect of writing but gave one developmental stage score which was a composite of the topic development, personal expression, and surface features. Thus, holistic scoring formulates an overall single judgment about the stage of the writing sample and its general effectiveness without regard to the age of the student or what the student ought to be able to do.

Conversely, analytic scoring provides a method of scoring that requires a separate score for each of a number of aspects of a task, such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, organization, and coherence. In some schemes, each of the components weighs the same, and in other schemes, the relative importance of the different aspects weighs in reference to those components. Analytic scoring also requires more time than holistic scoring. In essence, holistic ratings assess student work as a whole whereas analytic ratings identify and assess each component of a finished product (“Holistic,” n.d.).

In comparing the effectiveness of holistic versus analytic, several qualities of test usefulness should be addressed. In terms of reliability, holistic rates well when the

evaluators are trained to establish common standards based on practice with the kinds of writing samples that they will be evaluating. However, analytic maintains higher reliability from the very fact that the scorers have to give a number of scores (“Holistic,” n.d.). When considering construct validity, holistic scoring assumes that all relevant aspects of writing ability develop at the same rate and can thus be captured in a single score. Analytic scoring proves more appropriate for elementary writers as different aspects of writing ability develop at different rates. Therefore, analytic writing retains a greater amount of construct validity. By determining practicality, holistic scoring rates faster and easier than the time-consuming analytic scoring. Finally, in reference to impact, a single score provided by a holistic evaluation may hide an uneven writing profile and may lead to misleading information. On the other hand, more scales or domains present useful diagnostic information for instruction when using an analytic appraisal. In determining one method of scoring over the other, Nakamura (2004) states, “. . . A test of writing used for research purposes should have reliability and construct validity as central concerns, and practicality and impact issues should be of lesser significance” (p. 45).

The analytic scoring for the new assessment breaks down the writing into four domains of ideas, organization, style, and conventions. The raters score the weighted domains separately to determine one raw score which is then converted to a scale score for easier reporting. A *performance level* descriptor describes the scores that range for each of the performance levels. The performance levels indicate the ranges of Does Not Meet Standard, Meets Standard, and Exceeds Standard. The Interpretive Guide (Georgia, 2007) explains and parallels these different levels.

To summarize the differences, students may now be assigned one of three different writing genres, the scoring changed from a five-point scale to a six-point scale, and the score is broken down into four domains. However, the similarities overwhelmingly prevail. Both represent evaluations of individual components, both state a raw score, and both report the score as a performance level. Furthermore, the QCC's and the new GPS standards both address the various genres, making the addition of the other two genres to the new test irrelevant as a source of difference between the two tests. Therefore, the investigator conjectures that the two tests are comparable because they both measure the students' overall writing ability as perceived by the analogous nature of the QCC objectives and the GPS standards.

Since the previous writing assessment only used performance levels called developmental stages for reporting purposes, the study analyzed writing scores through the use of the performance levels descriptors to compare the writing achievement for the three consecutive years. The 2005 - 2006 test reported performance levels as Emerging, Developing, Focusing, Experimenting, Engaging, and Extending. The new Georgia Writing Assessment which began in 2006 - 2007 reports the performance levels as Does Not Meet Standard, Meets Standard, and Exceeds Standard. Although the 2005 - 2006 test had six levels and the new test has three levels, the use of a comparison chart establishes the equivalent nature between the levels of performance of the two. The chart combines Emerging, Developing, and Focusing stages of 2005 - 2006 to be equivalent to the Does Not Meet Standard level of 2006 - 2007, the Experimenting and Engaging stages of 2005 - 2006 to be equivalent to the Meets Standard level of 2006 - 2007, and the Extending stage of 2005 - 2006 to be equivalent to the Exceeds Standard level of

2006 - 2007. The following chart demonstrates the state of Georgia’s interpretation of each of the levels as combined for this study.

Table 2: Comparison of Developmental Stages/Performance Level Indicators

<i>Developmental Stages of Previous Test</i>	<i>Performance Level Descriptors of New Test</i>
<p>Stage 1: Emerging Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no topic development, organization, and/or detail. • Little awareness of audience or writing task. • Errors in surface features prevent the reader from understanding the writer’s message. <p>Stage 2: Developing Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic beginning to be developed. Response contains the beginning of an organization plan. • Limited awareness of audience and/or task. <p>Simple word choice and sentence patterns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Errors in surface features interfere with communication. 	<p>Does Not Meet the Standard</p> <p>Writing samples that do not meet the standard demonstrate limited focus on the assigned topic or genre and may lack a beginning or ending. A controlling idea may be unclear, or the controlling idea may not address the assigned genre. Development is minimal, and supporting ideas are listed rather than developed. Ideas may not be grouped appropriately, and transitions may be lacking. The writing shows little awareness of audience or reader concerns.</p> <p>Word choice and sentences are simple and/or repetitive. The writer’s voice is inconsistent or not apparent. Frequent errors in sentence formation, usage, and mechanics may interfere with or obscure meaning.</p> <p>Demonstration of competence may be</p>

<p>Stage 3: Focusing Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic is clear even though development is incomplete. Plan • apparent although ideas are loosely organized. • Sense of audience and/or task. • Minimal variety of vocabulary and sentence patterns. • Errors in surface features interrupt the flow of communication. 	<p>limited by the brevity of the response.</p>
<p>Stage 4: Experimenting Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic clear and developed (development may be uneven). Clear plan with beginning, middle, and end (beginning and/or ending may be clumsy). • Written for an audience. • Experiments with language and sentence patterns. Word combinations and word choice may be novel. • Errors in surface features may 	<p>Meets the Standard</p> <p>Writing samples that meet the standard are generally focused on the assigned topic and genre and have a clear beginning, middle, and ending. Narrative compositions have a clear plot and some development of characters. Informational compositions have a controlling idea that explains or describes the assigned topic. Persuasive compositions have a clear position on the assigned topic. Supporting ideas are relevant and developed with some examples and details, but some</p>

<p>interrupt the flow of communication.</p> <p>Stage 5: Engaging Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic well developed. Clear beginning, middle, and end. Organization sustains the writer’s purpose. • Engages the reader. • Effective use of varied language and sentence patterns. • Errors in surface features do not interfere with meaning. 	<p>parts of the paper may be more developed than others. Supporting ideas are presented in a generally clear sequence. Related ideas are grouped together and connected with some transitions. Word choice is generally engaging, and there is some variation in sentence length and structure. The writer’s voice is clear, and the writing shows awareness of the audience. Sentence formation, usage, and mechanics are generally correct, and errors do not interfere with meaning. The text is of sufficient length to demonstrate effective writing skills.</p>
<p>Stage 6: Extending Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic fully elaborated with rich details. Organization sustains the writer’s purpose and moves the reader through the piece. • Engages and sustains the reader’s interest. • Creative and novel use of language and effective use of varied sentence 	<p>Exceeds the Standard</p> <p>Writing samples that exceed the standard are consistently focused on the assigned topic, genre, and audience, and have an effective beginning, middle, and end. Narrative compositions have a well developed plot and well developed characters. Informational compositions have a clear controlling idea that fully explains or describes the assigned</p>

<p>patterns. Errors in surface features do not interfere with meaning (Georgia 2005).</p>	<p>topic. Persuasive compositions have a well developed controlling idea that establishes the validity of the writer's position. Supporting ideas are fully elaborated with specific examples and details that address reader concerns. Ideas are logically grouped and sequenced within paragraphs and across parts of the paper. Varied transitional elements are used to connect ideas. Word choice is varied and precise throughout the response, and sentences are varied in length and structure. The writer's voice is appropriate, and the writer demonstrates sustained attention to the audience in the beginning, middle, and ending. Sentence formation, usage, and mechanics are consistently correct in a variety of contexts. Errors are minor and infrequent. The text is of sufficient length to demonstrate effective writing skills in a variety of contexts (Georgia 2007).</p>
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From this comparison, the researcher surmised that the developmental/ performance levels are sufficiently compatible to be used as a basis for comparison between control and experimental groups. Each performance level group had a weighted value assigned for the analysis of variance, and each year of comparison had three performance level groups. Thus, the weighted value of performance for the first level (Does Not Meet Standard) received a one, the second level a two (Meets Standard), and the third level a three (Exceeds Standard).

Since the new Georgia Writing Assessment also provided a *scale score* which is a more precise measurement, a *t*-test compared the baseline score of 2006 - 2007 and the scale score from 2007 - 2008. A scale score converts the student's raw score on a test to a common scale which allows for a numerical comparison between students. Since most major testing programs use multiple versions of a test, the scale controls slight variations from one version of a test to the next. Scale scores are particularly useful for comparing test scores over time such as measuring year-to-year growth of individual students or groups of students in a content area (Pearson, n.d.). Scale scores can be determined by the equation $100 \times (RS - AV) / SD + 500$ where RS is the raw score on an assignment, AV is the participating student average, and SD is the standard deviation (Moore, Ward and Ward, 2008). This additional analysis served to strengthen the hypothesis of continued improvement with the addition of Writer's Workshop to the overall curriculum of the school and form the basis for further analysis in successive years.

Data Collection Procedures/Process

First, the principal of the school granted permission to conduct the study. (See Appendix B for the Letter of Permission and Appendix C for the reply.) Then, the

researcher compiled the performance level data from the three years of the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment. The 2005 - 2006 year's assessment served as the control group, and it was labeled X-0 because it had no treatment. The 2006 - 2007 year's assessment, labeled Treatment X-1, served as the pilot year for Writer's Workshop. The 2007 - 2008 year's assessment comprised the second year for the observed treatment, labeled Treatment X-2 since full implementation had taken place. The treatment remained the same for both years with the only difference being the improvements made from the pilot year to the full implementation year. Treatment labels became X-0 (zero treatment), X-1 (one year of treatment), and X-2 (two years of treatment).

The investigator placed the data on the data collection sheets by weighted value for the performance levels for the three years. A weighted value of one (1) signified a performance level of Does Not Meet Standard, a value of two (2) Meets Standard, and a value of three (3) Exceeds Standard. The researcher categorized the data by year/treatment for each year, and conducted a Chi-square analysis for the three years of performance levels. A *t*-test determined the results of the latter two years of scale scores.

The principal and academic coach supplied the private interviews. The interview process addressed the circumstances surrounding the implementation of Writer's Workshop to the county schools.

Analysis of Data

Data Organization

The principal and academic coach provided the data from the three years of the Fifth Grade Writing Assessment. The researcher compiled and recorded the data on the

data collection sheets. In displaying the data, the researcher used descriptive statistics, tables, *frequency distributions*, and a *boxplot*.

All research activities comprised approximately a five-month period, from March 1, 2008 to August 1, 2008. The final chapters of the discourse review and discuss the results.

Statistical Procedures

The researcher administered two statistical tests. First, a Chi-square made comparisons of the relationship of nominal data addressing the performance levels. Ary et al. (2006) defines the Chi-square as an inferential statistic that compares the frequencies of nominal measures actually observed in a study with frequencies expected under a null hypothesis (p. 630). Each performance level score received a code according to Does Not Meet Standard (score of 1), Meets Standard (score of 2), and Exceeds Standard (score of 3). The data was then placed into a cross tabulated chart. According to Ary et al. (2006), cross tabulation can be termed as a table that shows how frequently various combinations of two or more categorical variables occur, from which can be seen a relationship or absence of a relationship between variables. The Pearson *Chi-Square* presented the level of significance.

A second statistical test, an independent samples *t*-test, compared the relationship of scaled scores from 2006 - 2007 and 2007 - 2008. Ary et al. (2006) maintains that a *t*-test is a procedure for testing hypotheses in when concerned with the difference between two *means*. When the composition of one group has no bearing on the composition of the other group, researchers compare using a *t*-test for independent samples. The study in question applied a *two-tailed or non-directional test*. This kind of test takes into account

differences in either direction (greater or less than) from the value specified in the null hypothesis. Thus, researchers reject the null hypothesis if the difference is large enough in either tail of a sampling distribution of the statistic.

Both statistical tests resemble those used by Quesada (2007) who compared the writing achievement of fourth graders participating in two diverse bilingual writing programs. Quesada analyzed the data from the two programs using a *t*-test and Cohen's *d* as the instrument for calculating the effect size. She then utilized a Pearson chi-square to determine statistical significance based on the difference between the observed frequencies of pass and fail rates. Similarly, Shaw (2008) applied the same two tests to examine the role of reading and writing self-efficacy beliefs in the performance of high school students based on their standardized SAT Critical Reading and Writing tests and responses to the Reading and Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs instruments.

Correspondingly, Lewis (2005) analyzed the results of the writing portion of a statewide achievement test by using a chi-square analysis in his quasi-experimental study of the effects of teacher-centered versus student-centered instruction. Writing scores in the contingency table were grouped into passing and failing categories based on the two types of instruction.

In addition to the two statistical procedures, the researcher utilized descriptive statistics for comparing scale scores, performance levels, and comparisons of scores on the county and statewide levels. These techniques helped to organize, summarize, and describe the observations. Howell (2008) affirms that descriptive statistics "describe the sample data without drawing inferences about the larger population" (p. 559).

In this study the investigator employed one independent variable, the implementation of Writer's Workshop, with the dependent variable being the Georgia Writing Assessment which is measured on an interval scale. Ary et al. (2006) asserts that "an interval scale not only orders objects or events according to the amount of the attribute they represent but also has equal intervals between the units of measure" (p. 119). Thus, equal differences in the numbers represent equal differences in the attribute being measured.

For the testing, the subjects consisted of three groups, namely, the control group, and the first and second year of implementation of the independent variable. The research included the calculation of *effect size*. Effect size, which is independent of sample size, measures the strength of the relationship between two variables shown by the difference between two means calculated by either *Cohen's d* or *Smith and Glass's delta*. In essence, effect size determines the size of the sample needed in order to reach a desired probability of rejecting the null hypothesis, making it a useful statistic for assessing the strength and utility of a treatment (Ary et al., 2006).

Significance of the Study

This analysis of Writer's Workshop contributes to educational theory and knowledge in the area of writing instruction in the elementary classroom. The study shows how the implementation of a process writing curriculum can advance student achievement on an annual standardized test. The researcher provides implications and applications for further use as well as further research in this area. Educational practitioners can improve their teaching by incorporating the findings from this research.

Implications

This study provided statistical data to the particular rural elementary school in northern Georgia and the county school system of the effects of implementing Writer's Workshop on student writing achievement. Implications to other elementary schools in the county school system can be made if the schools are deemed equivalent. To show adequate equivalency, the researcher provides a comparison chart of the demographics of the elementary school in the study with other elementary schools in the same county. The chart contains ethnicity and socioeconomic factors as veracity.

An explanation of the table follows. In the table, anonymity results from numerically coding. However, the researcher acknowledges that the school coded as 1 is the elementary used in the study. "Pop." refers to the population or total number of students. The column entitled "Lunch" represents the percentage of students who receive free and/or reduced lunch. The next four columns denote a percentage of ethnicity found in each school. The column for "Gender" signifies the percentage of male to female ratio, and the last column, "Income," pertains to the median household income representing the families who have children in that school.

Table 3: Demographic Comparison of the County Schools

School	Pop.	Lunch	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Gender	Income
1	880	63%	91%	6%	<1%	<2%	53/47%	\$35,729
2	508	54%	91%	6%	2%	< 1%	51/49%	\$40,963
3	479	67%	90%	6%	<1%	<3%	47/53%	\$30,006
4	505	70%	91%	4%	1%	<4%	51/49%	\$30,006
5	592	49%	88%	6%	1%	<5%	49/51%	\$30,006
6	350	24%	98%	---	<1%	<1%	51/49%	\$50,500
7	367	51%	96%	2%	1%	<1%	54/46%	\$34,853
8	539	81%	87%	5%	6%	<1%	51/49%	\$29,784
9	390	64%	89%	6%	1%	<4%	48/52%	\$29,784

The county average for population is 512, lunch is 58%, White is 91%, Black is 4.5%, Hispanic is 1.7%, other is <2.4%, gender is 51/49%, and income is \$34,625. As well, the Georgia average for these is as follows: Population is 569, lunch is 53%, White is 45%, Black is 40%, Hispanic is 9%, other is 7%, gender is 52.1/47.9%, and income is \$44,694.

As seen by the comparison chart, the school in the study adequately represents the county average and is also comparative to the Georgia state average for the most part.

The school's population, which is larger than the state average, accounts for a higher average in the percentage of free and/or reduced lunch. Gender and income compare similarly to the state. Ethnicity compares least to the state.

As a result of the comparative aspects, the study could also serve as significant data for the inclusion of Writer's Workshop in the curriculum for other schools and school systems, especially in the state of Georgia. Furthermore, the report provides information and data supporting the effectiveness of process approach instruction. This serves as data for other similar writing programs.

Applications

This study may help fill a void in the literature. A significant gap in the literature prevailed regarding quantitative studies of Writer's Workshop and how it relates to overall student effectiveness and achievement in writing ability. This research provided a standardized writing test as the basis for determining the effectiveness of the curriculum. Those who have researched a process approach to writing such as Writer's Workshop mainly used qualitative measures. Most of these educational researchers used case study research through the reflective practitioner model as opposed to quantitative studies (Fielding, 1992; Schon, 1990). Case studies tend to focus on affective domains rather than academic progress as measured numerically.

This study concentrates on quantitative measures with the inclusion of Writer's Workshop as the only variable. The researcher omitted other variables such as gender or ability level to focus totally on whether the curriculum itself helped to boost test scores. The fewer the variables, the less variables can be confounded when analyzing a curriculum chosen to increase test scores.

Moreover, this study formed a basis of continued use of Writer's Workshop at the elementary school in the study as well as the county school system by providing quantitative data for its efficacy. Since high stakes testing causes educators to weigh time, cost, and effectiveness factors into the delivery of all subjects, the demand for the best programs prevails. The researcher wants to evaluate the efficacy of Writer's Workshop under these conditions.

From the study, the evaluator can also determine which areas or domains are lacking when carrying out writing instruction. The study gives feedback as to the performance of students so that redirected teaching can exist. Writer's Workshop addresses all of the domains and serves as a tool for continued, focused instruction.

Finally, the study serves as significant data for other schools and school systems who teach the curriculum or who are contemplating inclusion of the curriculum. These schools or school systems can fairly appraise the curriculum by examining the content of this study. The study provides background information, a breakdown of its philosophy and practices, and numerous studies showing how Writer's Workshop has affected other schools and students.

In making curricular decisions, this study applies to superintendents, principals, curriculum advisors, academic coaches, and teachers. In forming and planning instructional strategies, this study aids teachers. Finally, in analyzing and formulating theoretical frameworks for teaching writing, this study provides educational researchers with pertinent quantitative data.

Time Schedule and Budget

The proposed time schedule allowed six months for data collection and analysis.

The schedule advanced tentatively as follows:

February 2008	2007 – 2008 Grade Five Writing Assessment administered
March 2008	Compiled 2006 and 2007 data from Georgia Writing Assessment
April 2008	Compiled 2007-08 data from Georgia Writing Assessment
May 2008	Submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval
June 2008	Computed Chi-square, descriptive statistics, <i>t</i> -test
	Conducted interviews
July 2008	Wrote results and discussion

Budget costs remained relatively small. The researcher allocated approximately \$200 for the cost of engaging statistician assistance.

This study took place during the 2007 - 2008 school year. Since two years of the study were retroactive, the investigator obtained much of the data before the research actually began. The final Georgia Grade Five Writing Assessment took place in February of 2008, and the data became available to the researcher by the end of the 2007 - 2008 school year.

Summary

To summarize, Chapter Three presents the methodology and procedures that were used in this study. The chapter explains the quantitative research methods, describes the population and selection methods, and accounts for the reliability and validity of the

instruments used for the study. In addition, the chapter examines the methods of data collection and presentation, the significance of the study, and the time frame and costs.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, displays the results of the research data.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Overview of the Results

This chapter addresses the findings of the study. The writer intended to determine if there was a relationship between the implementation of a curriculum called Writer's Workshop and subsequent improved writing achievement as evidenced by the Georgia Writing Assessment for Fifth Grade.

First, the writer conducted interviews with the principal and academic coach to gain a clear understanding as to why Writer's Workshop was implemented. Next, the researcher compared performance levels from the year prior to the implementation of Writer's Workshop to the next two years of implementation. The 2005 – 2006 year of assessment only used performance levels as the indicators for assessment. The use of a Chi-square crosstabs table accomplished the comparison. Then, a *t*-test functioned to compare scale scores from 2006 - 2007 and 2007 - 2008. The scale scores came as a result of the change in the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment during the 2006 - 2007 year. The new version of the test provided scale scores as well as performance levels. The researcher conjectured that continued use of Writer's Workshop would result in increased academic performance as substantiated by the *t*-test comparison.

Interview Results

In order to fully interpret the effects of Writer's Workshop on the students of the elementary school in question, the researcher interviewed the principal and academic

coach. These two individuals represent the ones who were most involved with the implementation. The interviews provided a foundation as to the inception of the curriculum. Separate interviews substantiated a full picture.

Writer's Workshop came about shortly after Georgia changed from QCC objectives to GPS standards as its framework for instruction, a change that created fewer standards per grade level. The change provided deeper and more conceptual criteria than the previous QCC objectives and lined up with an all-inclusive writing program designed to encompass all skills. This proved to be beneficial for teachers since there was not a consistent writing program in place. For several years teachers had been struggling with trying to teach writing with no real direction because of the lack of a formal writing curriculum.

The curriculum coordinator for the county introduced Writer's Workshop. She attended training and read research regarding the link between Writer's Workshop and writing/reading achievement. Writer's Workshop had been used in one of the county's "*Needs Improvement*" (NI) schools, and had been well accepted. Not long afterwards, the curriculum coordinator became the superintendent of the county and implemented the Writer's Workshop curriculum into every classroom in the county.

The academic coach initiated the required training for the teaching of Writer's Workshop at the researcher's school. She attended a national conference for her training, and then conducted training sessions within the school. She chose a pilot classroom with the teacher's permission and taught Writer's Workshop in this classroom for a two-week period. After that, she conducted demonstration classrooms for teachers to come in and observe her writing instruction with the students. In addition, she set up the Writer's

Workshop curriculum in various voluntary classrooms until each willing teacher was comfortable with conducting the workshop on his/her own.

As maintained by the academic coach, the overall response to the Writer's Workshop curriculum proved favorable. She stated in the interview that at first there was resistance because teachers did not have formal training in Writer's Workshop nor did they have all of the materials that they needed. However, upon receiving needed materials and reading about how to conduct an effective workshop, the teachers readily agreed that it was an effective tool. The only complaint conveyed to her since full implementation has taken place was that an effective writing workshop takes up time.

The principal cited that the main obstacle to the implementation was staff members who were unwilling to put into practice anything new, especially a curriculum that was unproven to most. Some of the teachers cited the fact that they were not sure that it was really needed.

When considering the strengths of the curriculum, the academic coach verified the program makes teachers aware of the need to have their students write on a daily basis. It also deals with different types of writing genres such as informational writing and persuasive writing. Few programs address these areas. In addition, the writing scores had been substantial and the standardized reading scores had improved. She attributed much of the credit for the increased reading scores to the implementation of Writer's Workshop as "research has shown that reading and writing go hand-in-hand."

Additionally, the principal recognized the strengths to be a full scale implementation from kindergarten to fifth grade and a consistent program across the county for the transient population. She further stated that Writer's Workshop works well

in developing reading skills. She predicted that writing in the school will improve since Writer's Workshop is taught at each grade level. "We have to embrace all learning and look at what kids need to be successful – reading, writing, and arithmetic. It's funny that we are back to the 3 r's" (L. Vann, M. Hegwood, Personal communication, June 5, 2008).

Writing Assessment Results

To assess the value of the implemented curriculum called Writer's Workshop, the investigator developed a research question and two null hypotheses. The null hypotheses associated with the research question asserts that there is no difference in student writing achievement on the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment as a result of implementing Writer's Workshop and that continued use does not contribute to student achievement.

The reviewer tested the first null hypothesis through the use of a Chi-square crosstabs table. A Chi-square test uses *categorical data*, and a crosstabs table shows how frequently various combinations of two or more categorical variables occur, from which a relationship (if any) can be seen between the variables (Ary et al., 2006). A cross tabulated table is synonymous with the term *contingency table*. As stated in the Methodology of Chapter 3, performance levels described the writing assessment. Before 2006 - 2007, Emerging, Developing, Focusing, Experimenting, Engaging, and Extending identified the performance levels. Descriptors explain the performance indicators. In 2006 - 2007 the Georgia Department of Education modified the Georgia Writing Assessment and divided the performance levels into three types entitled Does Not Meet Standard, Meets Standard, and Exceeds Standard. For this study, the researcher compares and then equates the two differing performance level titles from the 2005 - 2006 year and the following two years by using the performance level descriptors in the following

manner. Emerging, Developing, and Focusing become equivalent to Does Not Meet Standard. Experimenting and Engaging equal Meets Standard, and Extending links to Exceeds Standard. Table 1 in Chapter 3 presents a side-by-side comparison.

These performance levels denote categorical data which represent counts or numbers of observations in each category. This data constitutes a nominal scale of measurement. *Nominal scales* of measurement use categories. Measurement at this level involves distinguishing between two or more mutually exclusive groupings and knowing the criteria for placement into the appropriate unit (Ary et al., 2006). The categories used for this study's Chi-square crosstabs table are coded Does Not Meet Standard -1, Meets Standard - 2, and Exceeds Standard -3 for analysis. Thus, the coding forms a one (1), two (2), or three (3) for the score. The following cross tabulated table shows the results.

Table 4 - Cross Tabulated Table for Writing Assessment by Academic Year

Writing Assessment	2005 – 2006		2006 – 2007		2007 - 2008	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Does not meet standards	13	12.5	37	34.6	34	30.9
Meets standards	78	75.0	66	61.7	67	60.9
Exceeds standards	13	12.5	4	3.7	9	8.2
Total	104	100.0	108	100.0	110	100.0

Table 3 illustrates that those students in the 2005 – 2006 academic year performed better than students in each subsequent year. Students who did not meet the standard increased by 22.1% from 2005 - 2006 to 2006 - 2007. Students not meeting the standard

then decreased slightly the following year - 3.7%. In addition, those meeting the standard decreased by 13.3% from 2005 - 2006 to 2006 - 2007, and again by 0.8% the following year. Furthermore, students who exceeded the standard in 2005 - 2006 dropped from 12.5% to 3.7% in 2006 - 2007, an 8.8% reduction. However, in 2007 - 2008 the percentage increased by 4.5% from the previous year.

The difference in the years is significant, $\chi^2(4) = 18.28, p = .001$. The strength of the relationship, as measured by *Cramer's V*, shows a weak, but definite relationship (.17) from the control year to the subsequent years.

An independent samples *t*-test measured the difference in writing tests scores from the pilot year to the year of full implementation to determine if Writer's Workshop continued to make a difference in writing test scores. The researcher conjectured that an additional year would further increase student achievement. This statistical test determined the result of the second null hypothesis. The *t*-test incorporated scale scores since the writing test had been altered and scale scores were reported. For the year 2006 - 2007, the number of students tested was 107. The scale score mean for this year was 201.60, the standard deviation was 32.67, and the *standard error of the mean* was 3.16. For the year 2007 - 2008, the number of students tested was 110. The scale score mean was 204.89, the standard deviation was 37.05, and the standard error of the mean was 3.53. The descriptive statistics showed a slight increase of the mean from 201.60 to 204.89 (+ 3.29). However, the *t*-test indicated that there was no difference between the 2006 - 2007 and 2007 - 2008 writing assessment test scale scores, $t(215) = -.69, p = .49$. The effect size, as measured by η^2 , was very small ($< .01$). The effect size is *eta*² (η^2). For this analysis $\eta^2 = .002$, rounded to two digits is $< .01$ as reported in the text.

The tables that follow illustrate the scale scores by frequency. A frequency distribution reports the values of the dependent variable which are the scale scores as plotted against their frequency of occurrence. The dispersal also shows the percent of the frequency as well as a cumulative frequency and percent in the last two columns.

Then, separate histograms of the two years follow as well as a boxplot of the combined two years. Howell (2008) defines a *histogram* as a graph in which the frequency distribution of scores is seen by vertical bars, and a boxplot as a graphical representation of the dispersion of a sample.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution for 2006 – 2007 Writing Assessment Scores

Lower	Upper	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
100	< 120	6	5.6	6	5.6
120	< 140	1	.9	7	6.5
140	< 160	3	2.8	10	9.3
160	< 180	6	5.6	16	15.0
180	< 200	21	19.6	37	34.6
200	< 220	45	42.1	82	76.6
220	< 240	18	16.8	100	93.5
240	< 260	5	4.7	105	98.1
260	< 280	2	1.9	107	100.0
		107	100.0		

Table 4 shows that most of the scores fell between 180 and 220. Sixteen outliers fall below 180 and 7 outliers rise above 220. The highest scores fell between 260 and 280.

Table 6: Frequency Distribution for 2007 – 2008 Writing Assessment Scores

Lower		Upper	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
100	<	120	7	6.4	7	6.4
120	<	140	1	.9	8	7.3
140	<	160	2	1.8	10	9.1
160	<	180	3	2.7	13	11.8
180	<	200	21	19.1	34	30.9
200	<	220	48	43.6	82	74.5
220	<	240	15	13.6	97	88.2
240	<	260	11	10.0	108	98.2
260	<	280	0	0	108	98.2
280	<	300	1	.9	109	99.1
300	<	320	0	0	109	99.1
320	<	340	1	.9	110	100.0
			110	100.0		

The frequency table for 2007 – 2008 shows that most of the scores fell between

180 and 260. Thirteen outliers lie below the score of 180 and two above 260.

When comparing the two frequency charts for the two years, the number of scores below 180 decreased by three. The range of scores increased from the range of 180 – 220 to 180 – 260. Although there were fewer scores above the level of the majority, the upper outlier scores rose from the range of 260 to 280 to the 320 < 340 level.

Table 7: Histogram of Writing Assessment Scores for 2006 – 2007

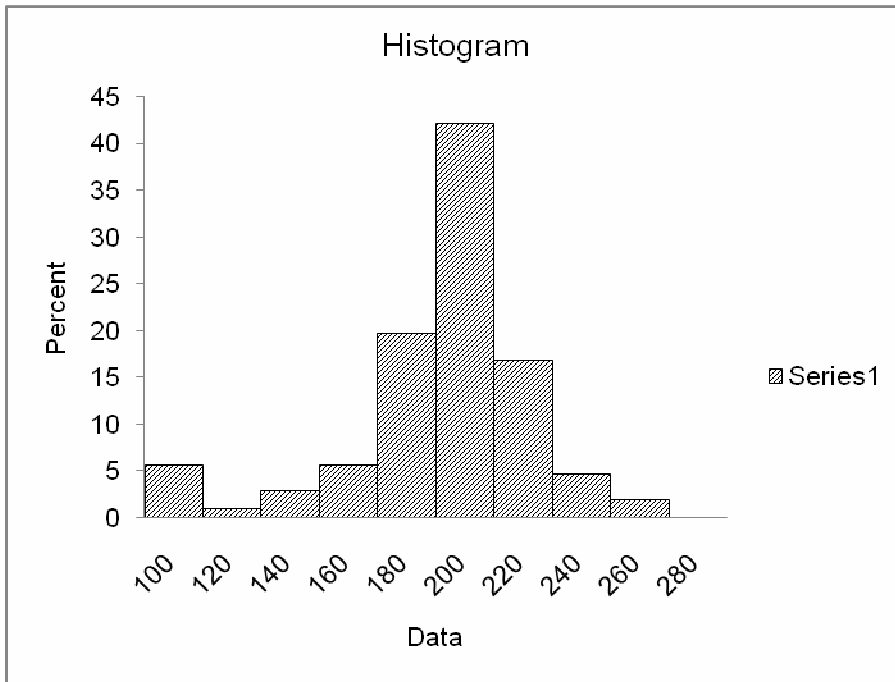


Table 8: Histogram of Writing Assessment Scores for 2007 - 2008

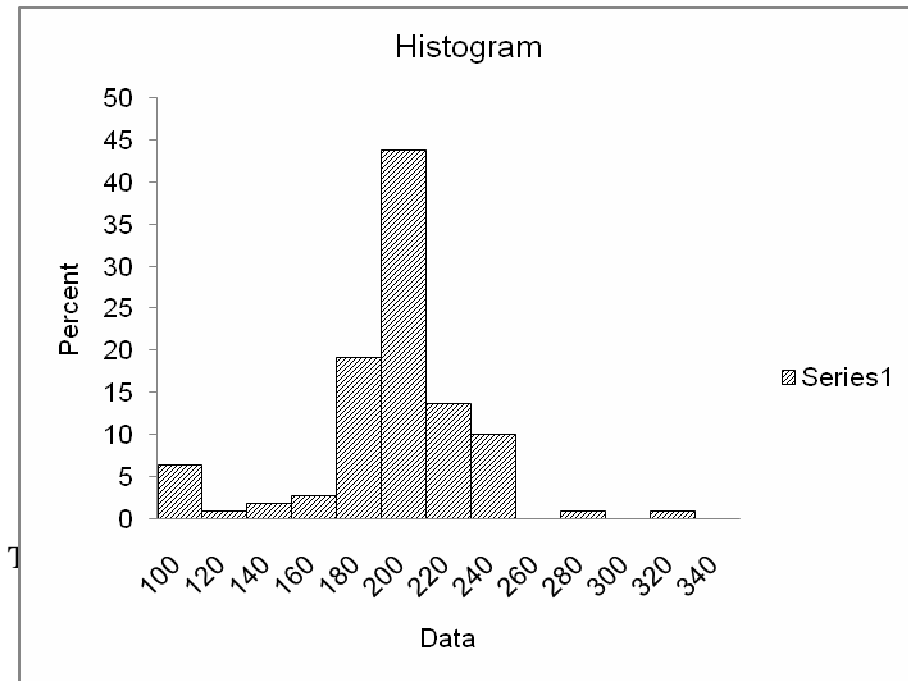
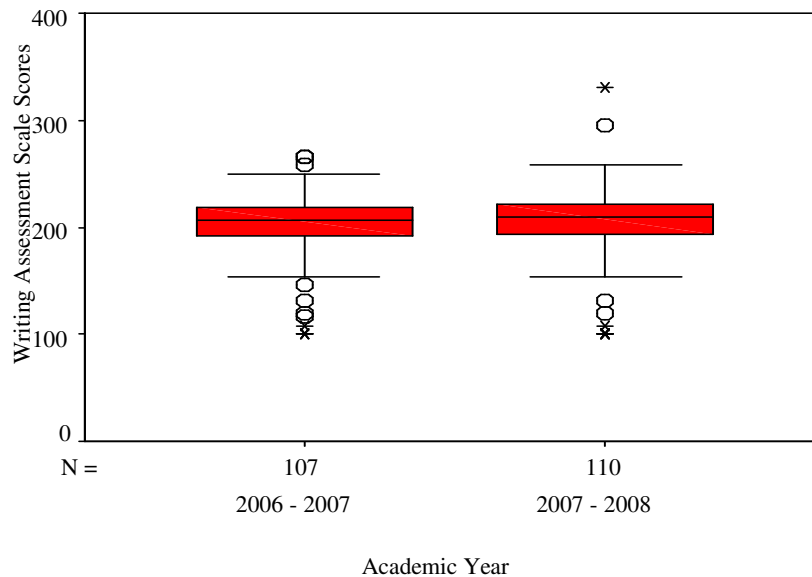


Table 9: Boxplot for Writing Assessment Scores for Academic Years



o = an observation between 1.5 times to 3.0 times the interquartile range

* = an observation more than 3.0 times the interquartile range

The bottom of the red box corresponds to the 25th percentile and the top of the red box corresponds to the 75th percentile. That means that 50% of the cases have values within range of scores plotted by the red box. The horizontal line through the red box signifies the median.

The “whiskers” coming out of the boxes illustrate the largest and smallest values that are not outliers. The top whisker shows the largest value that is not an outlier while the bottom whisker shows the smallest value that is not an outlier.

Summary of Results

The results from the interview explain that there was not a consistent writing program in place in the county prior to 2006. As stated by the academic coach, the research concluded that Writer’s Workshop had proven successful through the research of literature and a “Needs Improvement” school in the county. The particular county

adopted and implemented the process approach curriculum during the 2006 – 2007 year for grades K-5. Both the academic coach and principal responded that the program has benefited the school both in the area of writing skills and other academic areas such as reading. They contend that Writer's Workshop will achieve better writing results with future use.

The results from the writing assessment scores showed that students in the 2005 – 2006 academic year performed better than students in each subsequent year. The difference in the years was significant, $\chi^2(4) = 18.28, p = .001$. The strength of the relationship, as measured by Cramer's V, showed a weak, but definite relationship (.18).

Furthermore, no significant difference appeared in the performance of students in the last two years as measured by the *t*-test for independent samples, $t(215) = -.69, p = .49$. The writing assessment mean for the 2007 – 2008 academic year ($M = 204.89, SD = 37.05$) was only 3.3 points higher than the mean for the 2006 – 2007 academic year ($M = 201.60, SD = 32.67$). The effect size, as measured by η^2 was very small ($< .01$).

According to the results of the Chi-Square contingency table for the three years of performance levels and the *t*-test for the independent samples for the scale scores of the two years of Writer's Workshop, the examiner concluded that the null hypothesis be retained. Writing assessment scores did not significantly increase as a result of the implemented Writer's Workshop. In fact, students scored better before the implementation of Writer's Workshop as shown by a weak, but significant relationship. The researcher will discuss the findings in the next chapter, Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

As an aid to the reader, this final chapter of the study restates the research problem and reviews the methodology. However, the major section of this chapter reviews the results and discusses their implications.

The focus of this study centered on the relationship between the implementation of the Writer's Workshop curriculum and the effect it had on the quality of writing instruction in the classroom and subsequent writing ability of the students.

Restatement of Problem

Writing has become an integral part of the educational curriculum since it is a crucial tool in learning to read, think, and communicate. Educators view the goal of teaching writing as having students become more proficient and functional as they write for real-world purposes. In an effort to realize this goal, various methods of teaching writing emerged, one of which is Writer's Workshop.

Research Question

What is the relationship between the implementation of Writer's Workshop and fifth grade student achievement at a rural elementary in northern Georgia as measured by the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment?

Null Hypotheses

The implementation of Writer's Workshop does not significantly increase the writing achievement of fifth grade students in a rural school of north Georgia as evidenced by the performance levels of the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment.

The continued use of Writer's Workshop from the pilot year to the following year of full implementation does not make a difference in the fifth grade student performance as measured by the scale scores of the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment.

Review of Methodology

Fifth grade students in Georgia take the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment each year. In an effort to increase the students' scores, the researcher's county implemented the process writing curriculum, Writer's Workshop, in 2006. The researcher obtained scores from the year prior to the implementation as well as the following two years of implementation from the fifth grade students at the school. To test the first null hypothesis, the researcher employed a Chi-square for the three consecutive years to compare the performance levels. The investigator reiterates that this was the only indicator provided by the state of Georgia for the 2005 - 2006 year. For the following two years of implementation, scaled scores, as provided by the state of Georgia, were used to conduct a *t*-test for comparison which tested the second null hypothesis.

Summary of Results

According to the Chi-Square which measured the performance levels on a coded basis with one (1) equivalent to Does Not Meet Standard, two (2) as Meets Standard, and three (3) designating Exceeds Standard, the students in the year prior to the implementation of Writer's Workshop performed better than the students in the

subsequent two years with the program in place. The difference in years showed a significant, but weak relationship. Additionally, the scale scores from the two years of writing assessment with the inclusion of Writer's Workshop resulted in no significant difference from one year to the other. Therefore, the researcher retained the null hypothesis. No significant difference exists in fifth grade writing achievement as evidenced by the Georgia Fifth Grade Writing Assessment as a result of the inclusion of the Writer's Workshop curriculum. These results lead to several areas for discussion.

Discussion of Results

In today's educational settings and work places, people are expected to write upon demand for a variety of audiences and purposes. Some of these occasions are high school graduation tests, college entrance exams, scholarship and employment applications, and everyday business communication. Therefore, students need to learn appropriate reading and writing techniques for successfully handling such writing prompts. A comprehensive writing program can help to achieve this goal. Research indicates that process writing programs such as Writer's Workshop helps students become proficient writers (Georgia, 2006).

From the interviews with the principal and academic coach, the school in the study needed a consistent writing curriculum. This writing curriculum called for coinciding with the stringent GPS standards that were being adopted by the state of Georgia. The standards formed the basis for the writing assessment. Research had confirmed that Writer's Workshop was effective in classrooms across the country.

Although the results of the study indicated no significant difference in the two years of Writer's Workshop scale scores, the two-tailed test did not show an adverse effect. In fact, there was a slight increase in the mean (+ 3.3) which should be noted.

In comparison to Georgia state averages, the fifth graders from the school in the study performed close to the state means. Below is a table representing each year's achievement based on the achievement of the Georgia state average.

Table 10: Comparison of the Study's School and State Averages in Regular Program

	2005 – 2006	2006 - 2007	2007 – 2008
Writing Assessment	%	%	%
<i>Does Not Meet Standard:</i>			
Study's School	13.5	30	30.9
Georgia	8.1	25	23
<i>Meets Standard:</i>			
Study's School	74	66	67
Georgia	75.26	62	66
<i>Exceeds Standard:</i>			
Study's School	12.5	3.7	8.2
Georgia	16.13	8	11

For each year, the students from the school in the study scored slightly above the mean for those not meeting the standard. Those who met the standard fall below the Georgia average for the years 2005 - 2006 and 2006 - 2007, but above the average in 2007 - 2008. Then, for those who exceeded the standard, the students from the school in the study scored below the mean for the state of Georgia.

Furthermore, the scale scores from the latter two years indicated that the Georgia mean was 209 for the year 2006 – 2007 whereas the school in the research had a mean of 201.60. The Georgia mean for the year 2007 – 2008 was 214, and the school’s mean was 203.82. Both of the years’ scores fell below the mean for the state even though the mean for the school in the research increased by 2.22.

Moreover, the researcher obtained system data for 2007 -2008 school year for each county who took the writing assessment. Out of the 185 school systems, the particular county for the study scored higher than 118 and lower than 67. The mean for the county was 213.73 which was slightly higher than the mean for the particular school (-8.84) in the study.

When compared with other schools in the county, the school in question ranked eighth out of nine schools. Those means in rank order were 243.61, 217.58, 215.83, 211.11, 210.75, 210.04, 205.89, 204.89, and 203.91. The top school skewed the data; this school’s socioeconomic level rises largely above the other county schools as shown by Table 2, School 6 in the Methodology section. The median household income is almost \$10,000 more than the next largest median household income from another school. When omitting the skewed score of the top school, the mean of the other eight schools is 210. This is only 5.11 above the study’s school mean.

In brief, some favorable aspects prevail in lieu of the findings of the study. Even though the mean for the school designated for the study only rose to some extent as a result of the two years of Writer's Workshop, the fact remains that the mean did rise. Writer's Workshop, then, can be deemed effective in maintaining the status quo with a small increment of increase in regard to writing performance.

Explanation of Unanticipated Findings

The researcher conjectured that Writer's Workshop would improve writing assessment scores. Conversely, the performance levels from the three years demonstrated that the year prior to implementing Writer's Workshop attained better scores. After much reflection and deliberation, several reasons are offered for these unanticipated findings.

One probable cause for the findings lies in the resistance of the teachers to fully implement Writer's Workshop. In the interview the principal cited teacher resistance to the curriculum as the main hindrance. Even though directed by the county to teach the curriculum daily, many teachers possibly bypassed the curriculum or chose to teach writing the traditional their own way. Some teachers may even teach out of pretense, only feigning the use of Writer's Workshop in the classroom. Oftentimes, teachers feel inadequate in their training of the new curriculum as they are pushed into new situations. Similarly, teachers may feel intimidated simply because they may lack good writing skills themselves. In addition, since writing has not yet become one of the features included in the high stakes testing that determines federal funding, teachers may exclude writing over another subject when facing time frame dilemmas in the classroom. Still other teachers may just be resistant to any curricular change.

Matranga (1995) conducted a study which analyzed teacher change in the implementation of a writing workshop approach. She focused on 11 elementary classroom teachers in one school over an eight month period who applied the approach in their classrooms. Her data included a standardized survey of the stages of concern, writing workshop checklist, collaborative conversations, journals, student work, and interviews. The qualitative analysis derived a grounded theory from the data which blended the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher, the data, and the practices of the teachers. The study indicated that there is a definite process of change, and implementation is based on the teacher's theoretical understanding of writing development. As the teachers were supported during the process, they made significant progress in changing their attitudes and understanding. The study provided the staff developer with a tool for presenting the best practices to teachers based on a theoretical understanding behind the practices of writing workshop. Thus, curriculum change takes time, adequate training, and constant support.

Another plausible explanation for the findings relates to the rating of the new test. Although the former and latter tests measure the same objectives to be mastered, the addition of the rating rubric and the impetus toward a more rigorous and accountable measure of standards-based assessment may have created more difficulty in attaining the criteria for meeting the benchmarks. Even by virtue of the change in the performance level labels from Emerging, Developing, Focusing, Experimenting, Engaging, and Extending to Does Not Meet Standard, Meets Standard, and Exceeds Standard demonstrates how the assessment has gained importance in determining and accounting for writing achievement. The present performance levels clearly portray whether or not a

student attained a prescribed set of objectives, and the scale score gives an accurate picture of how well that student attained or did not attain them. Likewise, adding an additional rater and numerical ratings for each rubric categories strengthens the validity of the test, but also makes it a more difficult level to reach.

In clarifying the lack of improvement from 2006 – 2007 to 2007 – 2008, the viable explanation attests to the fact that the ability of the latter group of students was lower than the former group. Test scores in other academic areas for the 2007 – 2008 year affirm this (M. Hegwood, L. Vann, Personal communication, June 5, 2008).

Therefore, an example of an extraneous variable of ability exists. An extraneous variable can be defined as a variable that is not related to the purpose of the study but may affect the dependent variable. In the study, the researcher deemed the groups as comparably equivalent. However, statistical equivalence does not mean that the groups are absolutely equal, but it does mean that any difference between the groups is a function of chance alone and not a function of any other factor (Ary et al., 2006).

Interpretation of the Findings

To recapitulate the findings, students from the 2005 – 2006 school year performed better than the students in the two subsequent years. This produced a weak, but significant difference. Furthermore, students from the second year of implementation of Writer's Workshop fared no better than the first year the curriculum was in place.

Although a significant difference in scores did not exist from the first year of implementing Writer's Workshop to the following year, the mean increased slightly. When looking at the other schools in the county and in the state, the scores reflected

similar means. Lower scores for the 2007 – 2008 year may be attributed to the ability level of the group as demonstrated by other test scores for that year.

Even though the null hypothesis was retained for the study, the researcher still considers Writer's Workshop as essential and beneficial. The school and county needed a reliable curriculum for writing instruction. Now that it is in place, Writer's Workshop can be extended and perfected so that future growth can occur.

Relationship to Current Research

This research utilized a standardized writing assessment to fill a gap in the literature of diminutive quantitative analyses especially using any form of statewide annual testing. Although the study did not indicate a significant difference in the scores and even a slight decrease from the control group to the experimental groups when Writer's Workshop was implemented, the data still shows the importance of a consistent and systematic approach to teach writing. This coincides with Pollington et al. (2001), Stahl et al. (1996), and Marker (2000) whose quantitative studies did not reflect an increase in overall test results, but indicated academic progress in one area or another. The current researcher maintains that the domains increased slightly as seen in Table 10, indicating academic growth. In addition, the scores show that student performance maintained the status quo, not decreasing, but, in fact, increasing slightly, as evidenced by the means.

Likewise, an increase in the existing knowledge of writing instruction resulted by disclosing quantitative data regarding the theory that daily process writing leads to greater writing achievement in schools. Students need daily process writing to be prepared for real life purposes and situations. Since it is closely linked to thinking,

reading, and conversing, writing also fosters learning in all disciplines. “Better writers make better students, employees, and overall communicators” (Vantage, 2007, p. 1).

The study also implies how writing performance could be better evaluated. This agrees with current thought from the literature. Our ways of measuring progress, that is the assessment of school-based literacy programs and student progress, may preclude our seeing changes. Current writing tests usually require timed responses to set topics and are not designed to measure accurately students’ capabilities as writers. These tests are particularly biased against low socio-economic status and minority students. Since schools hold primary responsibility for helping individuals become literate, and in the end producing a nation of proficient writers, schools will have to show how the literary activities they promote lead to growth. Test writing has little function for student writers other than for them to be evaluated. In addition, students must write on topics that they have not selected and may not be interested in. Furthermore, they are not given sufficient time to engage in the elaborated processes that are fundamental to how good writers write and to how writing ideally is taught. New writing assessment alternatives such as portfolio assessments which are collections of writing that the student has done during ongoing instruction need to be designed to address these issues and to provide a broader sense of what writing is (Dyson and Freedman, 1991).

Limitations

The study is limited to the school’s population of 900 students and the targeted population of fifth grade students amounting to approximately 105 students per year or 315 students in the three years of study. Although the entire school population participates in Writer’s Workshop, random sampling did not occur. The researcher used a

purposeful cluster sampling of fifth grade students who were tested by the Georgia Writing Assessment. Also, the researcher restricted interviews to two of the school's administrators.

Another limitation of the study regards how it may or may not be representative of students nationwide. Generalizations to other populations must consider the community of the particular rural school in northern Georgia and the county school district only as implications of the study.

Finally, the study is limited to only one type of a process approach to writing, specifically Writer's Workshop. Generalizations to other programs must be considered only as implications of the study.

Implications for Practice

Although the study is limited to the specific school setting of a rural northern Georgia school, implications from the study can be extended to all of the county's schools based on the equivalency chart (Table 2) and the ensuing discourse from the Methodology section.

According to the Table 3 and the information from School Tree (2008), Public School Review (2008), and Georgia Public Directory (2008), the school in the study is very comparable to the average of all of the county schools. The percentage of students from the particular school receiving free and reduced lunches is 5% greater than the county average. In addition, the ethnicity of the study's school is almost identical to that of the county average. Moreover, the male/female percentage between the school in the research and the county average is within 2% of each other. Finally, the median household income between the school in question and the county mean is only \$1,104.

The one differing area persists in the average number of students and the enrollment of the school in consideration. The school from the study ranks by far as the largest elementary school in the county, exceeding the county average by 311 students.

However, size of the school does not negate the equivalency factors. All of the county schools are basically equivalent in nature due to the veracity of the demographic factors as presented.

The implications for practice from the study involve a continued use of Writer's Workshop with modifications and a more concentrated focus on certain domains. The writer regards Writer's Workshop to be effective, but suggests improvements to obtain better results. Most literary researchers agree that there is not any one single approach to teaching writing (Brindley and Schneider, 2002).

Writer's Workshop should be continued on a daily basis with a minimum of 40 minutes allotted. However, the structure of the program should be tightened. Instead of a free choice selection of writing topics, teachers should concentrate on the various genres. Many writing instructors choose a format of genre studies with each genre given a four to eight week period for duration. In fact, an increasing number of literary researchers acknowledge the importance of focused studies centered upon a particular genre (Lattimer, 2003). The teaching of narrative writing should come first as it is less complicated and most familiar (Writing Site, 2008). Then, teachers should progress to informational writing and last to persuasive compositions. Of the three genres, persuasive is the most difficult and most time consuming to teach. Each of the three genres should be taught in intervals of approximately six weeks. In this way, the three testing genres could easily be covered by the end of the first semester of school. Free writing choice still

could be given during one day of each week's instruction. During the second semester, each writing genre should be revisited along with the inclusion of the poetry and descriptive genres.

At the same time, conferences should be concise. At each session, attention needs to be given to an area of strength and an area of improvement for the student. Teachers need to select one or two elements indicated as problematic during student conferencing.

Moreover, self-checklists and peer editing should be included in the daily format so that conferencing is brief and succinct. Dennis-Shaw (2008) presents a three-step peer-editing process that consists of compliments, suggestions, and corrections. This procedure is taught to the students through a sequence of whole group peer editing, small group peer editing, and individual peer editing. Additionally, self-assessment particularly enables students to develop higher order thinking skills and to identify individual learning goals (Assessment, 2001). More time must be devoted to editing and polishing pieces of writing rather than allowing students to write extensive amounts that are incorrect.

In addition, teachers should model how to read writing prompts and give the students practice independently and with partners to practice reading, dissecting, and planning writing pieces for various practice prompts. The teacher might also present several compositions written to a particular prompt and then model with the students how these writing samples would be scored using a rubric. Class discussion and discussion with peers about the domains of effective writing will help to strengthen the students' ability to write upon demand for testing purposes and other future writing occasions.

Another plan for action in strengthening the present Writer's Workshop relates to the four domains of the Georgia Fifth Grade writing assessment. Once again, the domains

include ideas, organization, style, and conventions. Means for the past two years were calculated in each domain. The following table illustrates the results.

Table 11: Comparison of Mean Scores of the Four Domains

	2006 – 2007	2007 – 2008	Average
Ideas	2.72	2.81	2.77
Organization	2.65	2.84	2.75
Style	2.71	2.79	2.75
Conventions	2.67	2.75	2.71

As can be seen from the chart, 2007 – 2008 all domains increased slightly and the rank from lowest to highest in attainment was conventions, style and organization, and then ideas. From this observation, more attention needs to be given to conventions particularly. The researcher proposes that teachers extensively center mini-lessons around this information, giving greater instructional attention to the conventions of spelling and grammar.

The final recommended strategy regards teacher attitude toward using Writer's Workshop. Upon reflection of the literature and results of the study, the researcher concludes that the teacher is often the instrumental factor in the success or failure of the curriculum. Pollington et al. (2001) even summarizes that teachers play a more significant part than the strategies or program. In lieu of this acknowledgment, the

researcher recommends a plan whereby teachers can be supported in the change process in implementing new instruction and curriculum.

Kirby (2006) presents models of attitude change that are helpful when implementing new curriculum. One model presented is called Stages of Concern that focuses on the concerns of teachers involved in change. The stages are named Awareness, Informal, Personal, Management, Consequence, Collaboration, and Refocusing. The last three stages deal with programs that are already in operation. In these three stages, teachers focus on the program's impact on student achievement. They consider the benefits of the instruction and think of additional alternatives that might work even better. The researcher suggests informal, collaborative meetings of grade level and between grade levels to study test scores, address concerns, pose questions, share strategies, and produce a better working Writer's Workshop model appropriate to the needs of the school's students. A further proposal enlists volunteers who would regularly model Writer's Workshop classes. Finally, the researcher suggests a routine plan whereby teachers observe their peers teaching Writer's Workshop in the classroom. By teaming together, resistance can be deterred and the curriculum can be strengthened.

The researcher also recommends that teachers be given more training in the teaching of process writing and even given the opportunity to take part in workshops and creative writing classes to enhance their own writing ability. When teachers feel confident about what they are teaching, they can impart the information and process more adequately. Furthermore, teachers need to be well versed in the analytical scoring system being used to score the tests. Teachers should incorporate similar rubrics to evaluate classroom performance.

With attention given to the continuance of the Writer's Workshop model of process writing with modified areas of improvement, scores should reflect growth. Teachers must undertake the challenge and the directive given for future writing success. Since high stakes writing assessments currently exert a strong influence on the writing curriculum and instruction in schools across America, the composition of writing proficiency must be examined on the basis of these assessments (Beck and Jeffery, 2007). Equally important, the composition of the programs designed to carry out these standards must also be evaluated. This study shows the significance of a daily process approach to writing, the strategic standards as the basis for testing, and the overall value of a particular writing program, Writer's Workshop, on the writing achievement of students.

Suggestions for Additional Research

The researcher recommends that additional quantitative research of the Georgia Fifth Grade writing assessment from the school in the study be conducted for the next few years to determine if the suggestions from this study can be verified. Further research will also serve to determine if the implementation from grades K-5 will increase achievement as each year's instruction builds upon another. This horizontal focus from one grade level to the next should serve to create more advanced writers as students progress through the curriculum each year.

Since Writer's Workshop is an approach to writing and not a curriculum advanced by a company, the program maintains a cost efficient status. Additional research will test whether its inclusion is time effective in the classroom. The researcher also advises further research from other county schools to ascertain the full effects of Writer's Workshop.

When analyzing the effectiveness of Writer's Workshop, different quantitative approaches to the study could be addressed. For example, different tools for measurement could be used such as a pretest and posttest comparison of writing samples from the beginning to the end of the school year. Also, a study involving the consideration of other variables such as gender and ability levels could provide instructional and summative information. Research could also be conducted on writing ability as compared with the other academic subjects. Again, an experimental study using randomization could take place between comparable schools or even classrooms, with one serving as the control group with no treatment, and another school or classroom randomly selected to receive the treatment.

Furthermore, the writer suggests qualitative measures. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with teachers allow the researcher to gain insight as to the strengths, weaknesses, alternative strategies, and recommendations for change regarding the curriculum. The same questions designed for the principal and academic coach would be suitable for teachers. Students and parents, too, can impact the performance of the curriculum by providing questionnaire and survey responses. Students can give feedback about their likes and dislikes of the program, what worked well for them, what accomplishments were made, and how Writer's Workshop helped them in other academic subjects or pursuits. By studying data from a student's perspective, teachers can reflect and critique their writing classrooms. In addition, a case study of classrooms or individuals with qualitative measures attached could supply information about the effectiveness of Writer's Workshop over a long period of time.

Additionally, the researcher would suggest research regarding a better means by which to quantitatively test the writing ability of students. According to the NCTE (1998 – 2008), timed writing tests can truncate or distort the writing process. High stakes testing also can shift instruction away from feedback and revisions aspects of writing, which causes a reductive approach to writing. Therefore, what is good for large-scale assessment may hinder or prevent what is good for teaching writing. Perhaps a collection of writing samples or portfolio assessment of finished, revised pieces may provide an alternative since myth exists that real writers get it right the first time. Assessment that both benefits individual writers and their teachers' instructional planning can be best furnished by collections of key pieces of writing created over time. This allows for a valid assessment of a writer's abilities and needs (National Council, 1998 – 2008).

The researcher offers a final suggestion for extended research in schools across the nation that use Writer's Workshop or a comparative program and are assessed through means of standardization. Such programs as MyAccess, Springboard, and Six + One Traits which were mentioned previously as being effective in Georgia schools toward boosting scores, should be evaluated and compared to show best practices. Along with programs and instructional curriculum, teacher strategies and practices should be included. Educators everywhere need to be serious about providing the very best instruction, or the "write" stuff.

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Appendix B – Letter of Permission

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Soddy Daisy, TN 37379
September 23, 2007

XXXX, Principal
XXXX Elementary
XXXX, GA

Dear Ms. XXX,

As previously discussed, I am studying the effects of Writer’s Workshop on writing achievement for my dissertation study. I plan to compare the scores from the Georgia Grade Five Writing Assessment to see if the implementation of Writer’s Workshop made a difference in the scores from the control year of 2005-06 to the pilot year of 2006-07 and from the pilot year to the year of full implementation which is 2007-08. I would also like to interview you and the academic coach to gain background knowledge of the implementation of Writer’s Workshop into the county curriculum.

I am writing to ask your permission to review these scores and administer the interviews. I understand the issue of confidentiality, and I will make sure that all subjects are anonymous. I will also share the results of my study with you before submitting my document for review as well as publication. Please take a few moments now to review my working proposal, and let me know if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marla S. Smithson

Appendix C – Reply Letter



June 4, 2008

To Whom It May Concern,

This is to inform you that Marla Smithson has my permission to review scores and administer interviews at XXXX Elementary in cooperation with her dissertation.

I appreciate her selection to determine the effects of Writer's Workshop on writing achievement. I look forward to assisting her in any way to complete this project. I look forward to sharing the results with the administration and teachers.

If you have any questions, or need additional information please let me know.

Sincerely,

Principal

Appendix D – Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Administrators/Academic Coach

1. What led the county to implement Writer's Workshop?
2. What was your role in the implementation?
3. What has been the response?
4. How could the implementation have been more effective?
5. What have been the obstacles?
6. How does teacher attitude toward the curriculum and how it was initiated affect the desired outcome?
7. Was there a difference in scores on the Georgia Writing Assessment from the year prior to the implementation of Writer's Workshop and the pilot year? What do you expect to see in the future?
8. What are the strengths of the Writer's Workshop curriculum?
9. What are the weaknesses that you see in the curriculum?
10. How does Writer's Workshop affect others areas of the curriculum?