Improving Kindergarten Children's Writing
Through a Comprehensive Writing Program

by
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Abstract


The problem investigated in this applied dissertation was that kindergarten children were not acquiring age appropriate writing skills. Without these skills, the children exiting kindergarten children did not have the proper foundation needed for writing success in first grade and the years beyond. This created a pattern of academic failure that followed the students throughout their education.

The goal for this applied dissertation was for kindergarten students to acquire age appropriate writing skills at the end of the implementation. The writer developed a comprehensive writing program to meet the needs of these students. The program was incorporated into the framework of writer's workshop (Calkins, 1994; Bouas, Thompson, & Farlow, 1997; Teale, 1987). Writing was scheduled for an hour daily, following the predictable schedule of literature read aloud, modeled writing, skill focus mini-lesson, independent writing, conferences, publishing/writing centers, and author sharing. Literature correlated with classroom themes was used to inspire students to write stories and assist in making the reading and writing connection (McElveen & Dierking, 2000; Yoo, 1997). In addition, students were encouraged to regularly share their work with the teacher and peers. Additional strategies in the program included key cards, thematic writing, author's nights, literacy props, and storytelling opportunities.

One hundred and five kindergarten students participated in the program. At the end of the implementation, 49 wrote at a stage 5 or higher, 36 scored at the developing level in the conventions trait, and 47 scored at the developing level in the voice trait. For the concepts of print assessment, 102 of 105 students correctly identified 15 out of 21 concepts of print. Significance of difference was found between the pretest and posttest scores for each of the measures. In addition, significance was found between the results of the class that implemented the program to the fullest extent and the class that implemented the program the least.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Description of Community

This applied research project took place in a suburban neighborhood in the southeastern part of the United States. The community largely consisted of families from lower to middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Housing was varied and included single-family homes, duplexes, apartments, and trailers. In addition, many of the homes consisted of extended families and included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins living with the parents and children.

The community included a large variety of businesses, including strip malls, movie theaters, grocery stores, restaurants, and a hospital, which supported the neighborhood as partners in education. In addition, several day care centers and family homes converted to daycare centers were in the surrounding area. Many of these centers provided transportation to and from the school. The population of the neighborhood fluctuated, causing the school to have a 33% mobility rate.

Researcher’s Work Setting

The school where this proposed research occurred was an elementary school, servicing children in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The written mission of the school was to "develop an effective learning environment through strong relationships between teachers, staff, students, parents, business partners, and members of the community. We believe that all students can learn in a safe, standards-driven, technologically advancing, culturally diverse school."

A principal and assistant principal topped the leadership structure. A leadership team consisting of the principal, assistant principal, school advisory council chairs, reading specialist, writing specialist, exceptional student education coordinator, and guidance
counselor met weekly to discuss issues of procedures, curriculum, assessment, and county mandates. Committees of parent involvement, curriculum, staff celebrations, technology, and procedures also met regularly to plan, organize, and implement activities in each specific area. The school advisory council (SAC), consisting of the leadership team, representatives from each grade level, parents and community liaisons, met monthly to discuss issues related to the school improvement plan (SIP), team concerns, student achievement, and school issues.

The school was built in 1958. Over the past 10 years, several new additions have occurred, including a media center, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) area, and a two story building that housed kindergarten, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms. The office space and remaining classrooms were scheduled for remodeling in the next five years.

Additional funds were allotted to the school from the national Title One program, due to the high percentage (53.1%) of the students who qualified for free or reduced priced lunch. This money was used to fund parent programs, teacher training opportunities, materials, and technology. In addition, the money paid for two additional teachers on the staff, reducing class sizes in first and third grades.

A Place and pre-kindergarten program were also housed in the school. The Place program provided language experiences, readiness skill training, and speech therapy to children ages 3 to 5 who were classified as speech-delayed. The pre-kindergarten program was offered to children ages 4 to 5 from lower-socioeconomic families residing in the neighborhood. Both the Place and the pre-kindergarten teachers met regularly with the kindergarten team to discuss curriculum, plan special events, and share school-wide information.

The school had a total staff of 46, including two administrators, one pre-kindergarten
teacher, one Place teacher, six kindergarten teachers, seven first grade teachers, six
second grade teachers, five third grade teachers, five fourth grade teachers, four fifth
grade teachers, twelve ESE and support staff personnel, nine paraprofessionals, four
office personnel, six cafeteria workers, and four facilities staff. The staff ethnography
was distributed among White (35), Black (7), and Hispanic (4). For the 2002 school
year, 87% of the staff returned from the previous year. The staff's educational level
included 28 with Bachelors degrees and 18 with Masters degrees. Four teachers were
working on Doctorate degrees at the time.

The students at the school came from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds: 36.5 %
White, 26.5% Black, 33 % Hispanic, 1.3% Asian, and 2.8% Multi-racial. In addition,
16.4% of the students were classified as having limited English proficiency (LEP). These
students were included in the regular classroom setting and were provided pullout
services for language instruction. The school also had several pullout classrooms to
service the 14.9% of the students classified as exceptional student education (ESE),
including learning disabled, gifted, and autistic.

Researcher's Role and Responsibilities

The researcher's role at the school was multi-faceted, including teacher, leader, and
facilitator. During the research year, the researcher was a kindergarten teacher,
kindergarten team leader, leadership team member, school advisory council (SAC) co-
chair, staff development coordinator, and family night presenter.

The researcher had taught for 9 years, with 7 years in kindergarten. As kindergarten
team leader for five years, the researcher facilitated weekly grade level meetings, ordered
and organized team materials, monitored curriculum implementation, organized student
data, and attended school-wide meetings as a spokesperson for the group. The six
kindergarten teachers on the team varied in experience, educational level, background, and educational beliefs. The team worked together to plan programs and develop curriculum. Teacher six was hired in October to reduce the class sizes of the previous five classes. Several of the last entering students were transferred from each class to create the new classroom.

The researcher also co-chaired the School Advisory Council (SAC) at the school and was responsible for the development and implementation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The school’s SIP consisted of yearly objectives in reading, writing, math, and technology as well as strategies that guided the students toward these objectives. With input from the school staff, the researcher was responsible for writing the objectives and entering the information into the school site on the Internet.

As SAC co-chair the researcher was designated to be a part of the school’s leadership team. In this role, the researcher met regularly with the school’s administrators to discuss curriculum, school, and county issues. In addition, the researcher disseminated this information at monthly staff meetings and through electronic communication to the staff.

As staff development coordinator-co-chair, the researcher was responsible for organizing and conducting school-wide trainings and distributing and analyzing staff needs assessments. The researcher also regularly organized and facilitated whole staff trainings and presentations on topics such as technology, math, writing, mentoring, and reading. In addition, the researcher regularly planned and participated in various family nights offered by the school, including presentations on literacy involvement in the home, modeling the read-aloud process, and demonstrations of incorporating math skills with cooking.

In addition to these roles, the researcher organized the school’s academic fair and the
Kids Voting program at the school. Due to the extent of the researchers involvement and dedication, her peers voted her as the school's "Teacher of the Year" in 2001. In addition, the researcher received National Board Certification in 2002.
Chapter 2: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem that was solved in this applied dissertation was that kindergarten children were not acquiring age appropriate writing skills. Without these skills, the exiting kindergarten children did not have the proper foundation needed for writing success in first grade and the years beyond. This created a pattern of academic failure that followed the students throughout their education.

Problem Description

The problem with children not acquiring age appropriate writing skills was not exclusive to kindergarten students at the school. Students throughout the school continued to score below grade level expectations in writing. For example, the fourth grade students were assessed by the state for writing achievement yearly. In the 2001-2002 school year, the school's fourth grade students averaged a score of 2.7, the lowest in the county. Scores between 3.5 and 4.0 were considered "average."

The writing score from each school in the county was averaged with reading scores from third through fifth grade, math scores from third through fifth grade, learning gains in reading, and learning gains from the lowest 25\%tile students. The score then determined a letter grade for the school. For the 2001-2002 school year, the school was given a grade of "C", in part to the writing scores. The scores for reading and math were much higher than for writing.

Problem Documentation

Evidence for the existence of this problem was collected from a literacy folder assessment, a six-trait assessment for both conventions and voice, and a measure for concepts of print. These four measures included an assessment of the child's overall
writing development, specific writing aspects of conventions and voice, and the ability to identify specific concepts of print. At the beginning of this applied dissertation 50 of 136 exiting kindergarten students wrote at the stage 5 level on the county literacy folder assessment, 0 of 105 beginning kindergarten students wrote at the stage 5 level on the county literacy folder assessment, 0 of 105 beginning kindergarten students wrote at the developing stage in voice on the six traits assessment, 0 of 105 beginning kindergarten students wrote at the developing stage in conventions on the six traits assessment, and 30 of 105 beginning kindergarten students identified at least 15 out of 21 specified concepts of print.

Literacy folder assessment. The literacy folder assessment was a countywide tool used to rate student work in one of six stages. The teacher collected writing samples from the students three times a year (September, January, and May) and then analyzed the work based on specified criteria. The students’ writing was then rated in one of six stages, according to their writing ability. The teacher determined if the child could write with: pictures only (stage 1), letters (stage 2), words (stage 3), inventive spellings (stage 4), a story incorporating inventive spellings, punctuation, and sentence structure (stage 5), or a conventional story (stage 6).

The writing ability of students exiting kindergarten for the 2001-2002 school year was assessed with the literacy folder assessment. From the May 2002 assessment, 50 of 136 exiting kindergarten students were writing at the stage 5 level or higher, leaving 86 students not meeting the standards of a stage 5 writer.

In addition, the writing levels of students entering kindergarten were assessed. From the September 2002 assessment, 0 of 143 kindergarten students were writing at the stage 5 level or higher. This demonstrated that the children were not entering kindergarten
with the writing skills necessary to be classified as a "stage 5" writer. The writing scores of these children also demonstrated the need for a comprehensive writing program that would focus on the skills necessary for them to progress to an age appropriate writing level.

*Six-trait assessment.* The six-trait assessment is a rubric designed to analyze a child’s writing through six individual traits: word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, ideas, organization, and voice. Looking through both writing samples of fourth grade students and exiting kindergarten students at the school, the writing coach deemed that students were most lacking in the areas of conventions of voice.

Included in the conventions trait were spelling, punctuation, spacing, and capital letters. The use of conventions was described on four different levels: experimenting, emerging, developing, capable and experienced. The teacher reviewed each writing sample and rated the student’s use of conventions according to the examples provided. Students at the experimenting level wrote letter strings with no spaces or punctuation. Students at this level wrote top to down and left to right. At the emerging level, students attempted semi-phonetic spellings, spaces, punctuation, and capital letters randomly throughout the story. At the developing stage, the students used phonetic spellings, capitals at the beginning of the sentence, proper punctuation, standard grammar, and high frequency sight words.

In the area of voice, the students expressed themselves through the words in the story. The voice trait included feelings, awareness that the writing is read by someone else, point of view, attempts to convey a story, and perspective. The use of voice was rated as a continuum from experimenting to experienced. At the experimenting level, the students' work was similar to everyone else's and feelings were communicated by
drawing. The emerging level stories looked different from others with original words and phrases. At the developing level, the students added flair and energy to the writing. The author had an awareness that the writing was being read by someone else.

The writing abilities of the entering kindergarten students were assessed with the six-trait assessment. From the September 2002 writing assessment, 0 of 143 students were writing at the developing level in voice or conventions.

*Concepts of print.* The concept of print measure was designed to assess students' knowledge of print. Every kindergarten student in the county was assessed with this measure, which was then added to each child’s continuing literacy folder. The teachers administered the measure individually to each student in November and May. During the test, the teachers worked with each student individually giving him/her a book and asking the student to point to the title page, author/illustrator, print, word, letter, and different types of punctuation. The student was then asked to move his/her finger under the words while the teacher read the book. The child was observed during the reading to determine knowledge of left to right progression, one to one correspondence, and return sweep. Finally, the child was asked to name a period, quotation marks, question mark, and exclamation mark and to tell a function for each. The student was given a check for each correct task. The measure had a total of 21 tasks.

*Causative Analysis*

The causes of the kindergarten children not acquiring age appropriate writing skills were varied and widespread. The major cause of this problem was that the writing program being used in kindergarten was unorganized and incomplete. Some classroom teachers taught writing as a part of the daily schedule, while others taught writing sporadically. Some classrooms lessons were organized around the integration of literacy,
allowing students to practice writing throughout the day, while others focused on the "handwriting" aspect of writing instruction.

Over the past several years, new programs mandated by the state had changed the existing kindergarten curriculum. Literacy workshops had provided the teachers with the training needed to implement a developmentally appropriate reading program, enabling most students to read at the readiness level at the end of kindergarten. With the addition of the new reading program, math workbooks, various assessments, character education, and homogeneous reading groups, however, the writing program had suffered.

Not only was the lack of appropriate strategies an issue, but minimal time spent writing also contributed to the problem of students not acquiring the needed skills. The kindergarten students participated in an average of only one hour of writing per week. Restraints on time and demands from other areas had continued to take time away from student writing. In addition, when the students did write, the experiences were not varied. Journal writing or teacher dictation of student responses to questions was the extent of writing in most of the classrooms. At the beginning of this project, students had interactions with literacy related items an average of only three times per day.

Finally, staff development had not provided the teachers with effective opportunities for learning, leaving them without the tools and knowledge necessary to teach writing. Teachers in all grade levels, with differing levels of experience, and educational backgrounds continued to attend the same workshops. For experienced teachers, the opportunities for continuing knowledge were not provided. Teachers who needed assistance were also not provided with the tools necessary for growth. Several years before the implementation, four of the six teachers attended literacy-training workshops. Without regular meetings to discuss the information presented, the recommendations
from the workshops did not result in sustained change in the classroom.

*Relationship of the Problem to the Literature*

Research tying the problem areas at the school to the problem of kindergarten children not acquiring age appropriate skills was identified. The bulk of the research was found in the areas of writing interactions between teacher and student (Brock, 1992; Calkins, 1994; Gutman & Sulzby, 2000; Jenson, 1990), motivation (Bruning & Horn, 2000), staff development (Lieberman & Wood, 2002), and standards (Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001).

Research was conducted on ways that interactions between teachers and student and level of student independence during writing can affect the student's quality of writing. Dyson (1988) described dictating student work and the growth of drawing and storytelling abilities in a kindergarten classroom. The drawing and language produced from the strategy were seen as pre-writing skills, "giving students the opportunity to reflect, organize thoughts and ideas, and describe events" (p. 26). The children in the classroom drew pictures in journals several times a week and then dictated the story to the teacher. The researcher observed the drawing, discussion while drawing, and dictation of two students throughout a school year. By the end of the year, the students were drawing elaborate pictures that detailed story patterns of characters engaged in actions, settings, and formats of beginning, middle, and end.

The dictations of the detailed pictures, however, were merely summarizations and did not include the "basic drama that unfolded during the drawing and talking" (Dyson, 1988, p. 30). As the students looked at the picture and spoke to the teacher, their labeling of the picture parts did not reflect the "sense of story" seen in the production stage. This inconsistency supported the idea that a child's storytelling is most detailed during the creation of the story. By not allowing the students to write the story themselves, using
their own inventive spellings and conventions, the responsibility of capturing that crucial "first story" was not taken by the student.

While drawing is an important rehearsal for beginning writers, it may interfere with the writing process for students who are advancing with writing skills. Teachers need to watch for signs of children's development and know when children should be motivated to focus mostly on writing. Jensen (1990) studied signs of organization of writing in different writing conditions. The sample included 16 preschool children, having a mean age of 5.2. The students were given writing tasks that involved drawing a picture and then writing a story, writing a story for a wordless picture book, writing a letter to the Easter Bunny, and writing given words. Writing samples were then analyzed for basic organizations of writing: use of letters, directionality, and concepts of print. Scores were analyzed for correlations and generalizations were made about student's writing abilities. Results indicated that writing patterns of the students were more advanced in the letter writing, wordless picture book, and word writing tasks than in the drawing/writing task.

Samples from the drawing/writing task were limited and demonstrated few signs of organization. Drawing the picture first "appears to serve a different function than writing and may provide less scaffolding for the development of children's written compositions" (Jensen, 1990, p. 72). The researchers warn that encouraging children's writing following art projects and emphasizing story dictation may not be the best way for children to acquire literacy skills. Jensen (1990) stated, "exposing children only to dictation experiences will neither build their confidence in their own writing abilities nor provide opportunities to explore and practice ways of writing" (p. 72).

Gutman and Sulzby (2000) studied African-American children engaged in letter writing tasks to determine the role of autonomy-support versus control in emergent
writing behaviors and writing motivation. In the autonomy-supportive group, the adult helped the child only when asked and gave the student freedom to choose how the letter was written, what it was about, and whom it was to. In the controlling group, the adult told the child who to write the letter to and what to say in the letter, wrote words for the students to copy, and assisted in the formation of alphabet letters. The study demonstrated "that the controlling nature of the context in which a child engages in an emergent literacy task may undermine their subsequent motivation for that task" (Gutman & Sulzby, 2000, p. 6). In addition, children in the autonomy-supportive group engaged in many more forms of emergent writing than children in the controlling group. The results of this study indicate that a controlling adult involved with a student in a literacy related task can affect both the child's ability and motivation during that activity.

The role that the teacher plays, whether controlling or supportive, has an effect on the children's writing. Calkins (1994) suggested that sounding out a word is not the only way that a child knows how to spell a word. Many words, especially sight words, are visual. When adults spell these words for a child, the visual picture of the word is not represented. This causes a problem in both how the student sees the word and the amount of responsibility the student takes for his/her own writing.

Brock (1992) studied the influences of social context on kindergarten journal writing. The researcher analyzed journal entries and social interactions of 19 participants over a span of 19 weeks. The entries were written as part of the classroom journal writing time. In their journals, students were encouraged to draw a picture and then add accompanying text. After drawing and writing, the students read their entry to the teacher, who wrote the dictation directly under the student's work. Altogether, the researchers collected 1,614 journals entries and recorded over 100 hours of social interactions. Several
contextual factors were identified as having influences on the journal writing in this classroom: setting, genre, materials, routine, audience, social group influences, evaluation, and the teacher (Brock, 1992). The relationships observed between students and teacher to student during writing time were shown to affect the students' writing. During writing, the students used each other as mentors, assistants, collaborators, and as a source of ideas. If the students were not able to interact during the writing process, these roles would not have occurred.

Several interesting factors are evident from Brock's study. First, most of the stories collected revolved around a "telling" theme. The students felt the need to tell the teacher about what they did over the weekend, about their friends, or about other areas of interest. None of the samples presented in the study involved students actually "telling a story" through their writing. This lack of storytelling ability may possibly be due to students drawing pictures before writing or students not being exposed to an abundance of storytelling opportunities in the classroom. Second, the teacher wrote dictation of the student's message under the student's written work. Brock (1992) noted, "the students perceived the lack of teacher recording as an indication of correctness" (p. 13).

Larson (1999) also focused on social interactions, observing kindergarten students during writing time to document participation frameworks and the role of the overhearer. The 29 students in the classroom were encouraged to interact during text construction. The classroom environment supported social interaction and the teacher took an active role in sounding out words, encouraging all students to participate. By doing this, she was able to determine which students were ready to take on more responsibility in the framework and regularly assess students' knowledge of letters, sounds, and conventions through observation. Larson's observations indicated that "the participation framework
offered choices of participation roles for students to use as they grew in writing competence and thus structured development of the overhearer role as central to learning in the context of writing activity" (p. 250). In classrooms where students are not permitted to interact during writing, the participation framework and overhearer role is eliminated.

Children's writing is also highly controlled by their motivation to write. Bruning and Horn (2000) synthesized research to determine which factors were key to developing this motivation. While most of a writer's motivation is internal, teachers do play a monumental role in developing writing tasks that support each students' desire to put words on paper. Four factors were identified from the research as supporting and developing motivation: nurturing functional beliefs about the nature of writing and its outcomes, fostering student engagement through authentic writing goals and contexts, providing a supportive context for writing, and creating a positive emotional environment (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Teachers who do not support the students' desire to write may effect the students' motivation to write. If a student does not encounter early success through writing in authentic contexts in a positive emotional environment, the motivation of the child for future writing could be negatively effected.

Curriculum standards mandated by the state can be a foundation for an effective program or the cause of a problem. Strong, Silver, and Perini (2001) described an appropriate use of standards in education as providing a "clear and manageable vision of what [teachers] want students to understand and be able to do" (p. 57). Unfortunately, many programs use standards to steer students toward assessments and rote-based learning. Other teachers may not use the standards as a basis for learning, causing inequalities in student education. Wilson and Tienken (2002) stated the need for teachers
to "rethink" the system of standards. Teachers should use the system to develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum and as a process of "delineation, alignment, and calibration" (p. 82). Standards should be the framework used to plan and organize curriculum.

Finally, staff development needs to be designed to be effective and meaningful. Lieberman and Wood (2002) called for the old workshop delivery model to "give way to vibrant and ongoing professional learning communities where teachers generate, as well as gain knowledge" (p. 40). Teachers should not attend workshops on subjects that do not fulfill their wants or needs.

Teachers need to be aware of the role they play when supporting students' writing growth. If too much emphasis is placed on the dictation of the story, students may not be motivated to write independently (Dyson, 1988; Gutman & Sulzby, 2000; Jensen, 1990). Children should be encouraged to develop skills of sounding out words and spelling sight words that are necessary for independent writing (Calkins, 1994). In addition, children should be encouraged to discuss the writing process and story development with their peers during writing (Brock, 1992; Larson, 1999).

The causes contributing to the problem of students not acquiring age appropriate writing skills at the school where this applied dissertation took place were abundant. Teachers instructed students to draw pictures before writing and work quietly during writing time. The teachers assigned topics for student writing and took dictation of student work. In addition, the teachers did not take an active role during the writing process. Factors that show success in the literature, including assisting students in sounding out words, providing visual aides, and supporting students during writing had not occurred. Most significantly, the school did not have a consistent, regularly
scheduled writing program in place for the kindergarten students.
Chapter 3: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goal

The goal for this applied dissertation was for kindergarten students to acquire age appropriate writing skills.

Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this applied dissertation:

1. 90 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will be writing at the stage 5 level on the county literacy folder assessment.

2. 90 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will be writing at the developing level in voice as measured by the 6-trait literacy folder assessment.

3. 90 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will be writing at the developing level in conventions as measured by the 6-trait literacy folder assessment.

4. 100 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will correctly identify 15 out of 21 concepts of print.

Outcomes were assessed by the classroom teachers and the researcher and were recorded in weekly logs, directly on each student's literacy folder, and in a computer database.

Measurement of Outcomes

The outcomes were measured during the seventh month of implementation. Each teacher collected student-writing samples in September, January, and May, following district guidelines. Classroom teachers used rubrics provided in the district developed literacy folder assessment and the six traits assessment for conventions and voice to analyze each writing sample. Teachers gave students the district’s concepts of print measure individually in November and May. The scores were marked on an individual
record sheet and directly on each student's literacy folder. The record sheets and writing samples were placed inside the literacy folder, which was then placed in each student's cumulative record.

These measures were chosen by the researcher to provide an accurate description of the child's overall writing development. The literacy folder assessment rated the student's entire story in one of six stages. The focus of the county was to have all students writing in sentence form with inventive spelling by the end of the year. Mandates from the county determined that a child must have been writing at the stage four level or above by the end of the year in kindergarten. Children who did not meet this goal were classified as "substantially deficient" in writing and were then placed on an academic improvement plan. To reach the stage 5 level, the outcome for this study, the students must go beyond the limited expectations from the county to include conventions and more conventional spellings in their writing.

The six-trait assessment was also designed to measure a child's overall writing development by specifically looking at the six traits of voice, ideas, conventions, fluency, organization, and word choice. Based on the results of the 2001-2002 fourth grade writing assessment, the school's reading and writing specialist determined that the scores were low in the areas of conventions and voice. Based on their recommendations, the researcher identified those two traits as areas of need. While each child's writing sample was reviewed for each of the six traits and instruction has focused on all six traits, the scores for conventions and voice were only used as measures for this project.

The concept of print test was designed to measure students' knowledge of print in reading. Many of the skills necessary for reading are also required for writing. For example, a student who is able to read from the left to the write and return sweep is
typically able to transfer the skill when writing. Different types of punctuation and their purpose are measured in the concept of print test. To use different types of punctuation effectively in writing, a student must be able to know the function of each. In addition, the concepts of print test measures other skills, such as knowledge of words and letters, that print tells a story, and placement of words on a page. All of these factors are needed as children write a story.
Chapter 4: Solution Strategies

Kindergarten programs have the unique opportunity to expose most children to their first formal experience in school. In kindergarten, children ages five to six glean the knowledge of literacy, mathematics, science, and social awareness that becomes the foundation of future knowledge. The experiences children have in kindergarten can set the stage for a lifelong love of learning or lead them down a path of failure.

Perhaps the most crucial element introduced to children at this young age is the importance of literacy and the connection between reading and writing. In kindergarten, children can be empowered to take control of that connection and make it meaningful. For example, when children sound out words in the writing process, they demonstrate knowledge of the alphabetic principle and structure of words. When they use their imagination to tell a detailed story, they exhibit skills of story structure, character, plots, sequencing, and comprehension. For them to put these two skills together and be able to write their own story is truly a monumental occurrence that does not occur by chance.

The following sections will describe various philosophies of literacy education and discuss the effects on children's literacy development. In researching the literature on writing in early childhood, several key theories of education are apparent. These include emergent literacy, phonemic awareness, whole language, and reading readiness. The theory of learning and education held by the teacher controls the method of instruction for the students. Reading and writing strategies, student work, children's level of independence, teacher-student interaction, daily routines, classroom environment, and curriculum all correlate with the belief system ingrained in the classroom.

Several researchers pioneered the field of literacy and young children. In her landmark book *What Did I Write?*, Clay (1975) described and analyzed writing samples
from children ages 4 to 7. Clay presented the theory that children need to progress beyond the skills necessary for reading in order to write. Sounding out words in writing allowed the students to incorporate all features of the language hierarchy (letters, sounds, words, sentences, and stories). Clay stated, "to put messages down in print [a child] is forced to construct words, letter by letter, and become aware of letter features and letter sequences, particularly for the vocabulary which is used in writing again and again" (p. 2). Creative writing requires students to focus on the details of print and manipulate the units of written language. Clay demonstrated that students at a young age possess the ability to write stories and rapidly progress through stages of development when given the opportunity to write.

Calkins (1994) wrote about the power of young children's language and literacy and described how teachers can develop "the art of teaching writing." Young children are full of questions, curiosity, interest, and excitement, all of which are focused into a piece of writing. Many children begin writing experiences with drawing. Even without having any print on the page, children can demonstrate knowledge of story language, character development, plot and sequencing from their drawings. Children may then progress to labeling pictures with sounds, usually starting with the beginnings and endings of words. Calkins described this growth as "spellings fill out as children learn more sound-symbol correspondences, as they become more able to segment words into sounds (or phonemes), and as they gradually develop a bank of sight words (and parts of words)" (p. 89).

As children grow from emergent to conventional writers, writing behaviors range from scribbling to invented spelling. Sulzby (1992) analyzed 15 years of research on children's emergent and conventional writing and described the development of the theory that supported the importance of a child's first attempts at writing. Emergent
writing may not appear conventional by adult standards; however, children may still have
the ability to conventionally read the story. Reading the story by applying meaning to
something self-created helps create a sense of ownership in young writers. When writing
stories, students may use multiple forms (letter strings, sight words, invented spelling) in
one piece. Sulzby (1992) believed that "the implication that can clearly be drawn for
instruction at the preschool, kindergarten, and early primary level is that children can
write and should be encouraged to write and share their writing frequently" (p. 296).

Cook (2001) analyzed years of information about the knowledge of writing to
determine what extent writing plays in linguistic systems. Cook identified several overall
properties of the writing system as follows: "the relationship between sounds and written
symbols, the idiosyncratic behavior of individual words, orthographic rules and
orthographic forms, and the ways of executing writing" (p. 12). Several key concepts
have significance for early childhood writers. First, the visual memory of words play an
important role in reading and writing, even in our language's sound based system. A
child's acquisition of reading, writing, and phonemic awareness concepts occur
simultaneously, with each process affecting the other. In addition, other diverse aspects
of writing (punctuation, capital letters, spacing, and letter names) play an important role
in a child's understanding of the written language.

Theories of Literacy Development

Emergent literacy. The push for developmentally appropriate programs in
kindergarten has supported the transition from traditional perspectives to a theory of
emergent literacy. Clay (1975) first used the term "emergent literacy" to encompass the
development of reading and writing in young children through a framework of literacy.

Strickland (1990) wrote about the emergent literacy perspective and how young
children learn to read and write. The foundation of the theory is that reading and writing are connected processes that begin early in life. Reading and writing develop with oral language through literacy activities that are meaningful to children (p. 19). Strategies can be implemented in classrooms to support the emergent literacy ideals and aid in the acquisition of literacy skills. Independent reading, big books, independent writing, shared writing, literacy centers, environmental print, and the support of inventive spelling were listed by Strickland as important strategies in a kindergarten curriculum. Teachers should strive to create a program that makes reading and writing an ongoing process that is important and interesting to each child. Through this process, teachers can ensure that they are building a literacy foundation that will follow each child as they progress through their literacy future.

*Phonemic awareness.* Yopp and Yopp (2000) defined phonemic awareness as "the awareness that the speech stream consists of a sequence of sounds-specifically phonemes, the smallest unit of sound that makes a difference in communication" (p. 130). Yopp and Yopp suggested that activities created for the classroom to instruct phonemic awareness should be "child appropriate, deliberate and purposeful...[and] only one part of a much broader literacy program" (p. 132). Activities devoted to rhyme and sounds should not be the basis of an early childhood program, but should instead be incorporated into daily classroom experiences. Strategies used can aid students in the understanding of how the smallest part of language has a role in oral and written communication.

According to Yopp and Yopp, as children make early attempts at writing, they realize that language is made up of a sequence of sounds. Students who have the ability to identify and isolate these sounds before writing are "phonemically aware." Children who are lacking in phonemic awareness have difficulty sounding out words in both reading
and writing. Because of this, a child’s level of phonemic awareness has a direct relationship to reading and writing acquisition and should be an integral part of a kindergarten program.

Qi and O’Connor (2000) compared the effects of different phonological training procedures on the literacy skills of kindergarten students. Sixty-one students were separated into two groups: blending/segmenting and first sound identification/rhyming. Researchers used the different strategies to teach ten letters and ten words over a span of ten weeks, meeting for 20-30 minutes twice a week with groups of 3-4 students. While both phonological training procedure groups made significant improvement in segmentation, blending, rhyming, first sound, and syllable deletion, no significant difference between the two groups was found.

The students did not show appropriate growth for either group in the areas of sound substitution, sound deletion, sound addition, and word identification. The results of this study were not consistent with the results from previous studies. The researchers listed three reasons for the inconsistency in results: the small number of words used in the procedure, the static level of linguistic complexity, and the level of students at the beginning of the study (Qi & O’Connor, 2000). If the strategies were to be used in the classroom, the authors recommend that direct modeling, corrective feedback, and additional practice would further stimulate the phonological skills. In addition, "incorporating routines that include a meta-cognitive component may increase the likelihood of generalization" (Qi & O’Connor, 2000, p. 5).

Ball and Blachman (1991) also studied phoneme awareness training in kindergarten, specifically to determine what effect teaching strategies have on students’ word recognition and developmental spelling. The sample consisted of 90 average
kindergarten students divided into three groups: a phoneme awareness group, a language activities group, and a control group. The phoneme awareness group participated in segmentation activities and letter name and sound training. The language activities group participated in story telling, vocabulary development, language grouping, and letter name and sounds instruction (using the same strategies as the phoneme awareness group).

The results of the study identified that the phoneme awareness group scored significantly higher in the phoneme segmentation, developmental spelling, and word identification assessments. Also highlighted in the study, "the pattern of results on both the reading and the spelling measures [reflected] the superior ability of the phoneme segmentation group to break the alphabetic code" (Ball & Blachman, 1991, p. 63). The students who had received training in phonemic awareness were able to segment words into phonemes and apply the information they had learned to segment words they had not previously seen.

Tangel and Blachman (1992) found similar results as they studied the effects of phonemic awareness training on the invented spellings of kindergarten students. The sample included 149 students selected from 18 lower socioeconomic inner city schools. Students in the treatment group participated in say-it-and move-it phoneme segmentation activities, segmentation-related activities, and letter name and sound activities. Students in the control group participated in a traditional kindergarten program. Children in the treatment group scored significantly higher on measures of letter names, segmentation, letter sounds, reading phonetically regular words and reading nonwords. There were no significant differences measured on the word identification test. Both the treatment and the control group created invented spellings. The spellings of the treatment group, however, were significantly more sophisticated than the control group. The phoneme
awareness activities provided to the treatment children gave them an opportunity to actively explore the internal structure of words (Tangel & Blachman, 1992). The children were then able to apply their knowledge of letter sounds to what they knew about the alphabetic principle.

Davidson (1994) divided the treatment into three groups to determine which specific phonemic processes had the greatest effect on word reading and spelling. Working with a sample of kindergarten students (mean age of 6 years and 3 months) the effects of segmenting, blending, and a segmenting-blending combination were compared with results of children's acquisition of phonemic awareness, reading skills, a word reading task, and spelling transfer tasks. The treatment groups consisted of segmentation instruction focusing on sounds heard in words, blending instruction focusing on stretching out letter sounds, and a combination of the two approaches. The students in the control group were read stories during the period when subjects in the other conditions received phonemic training.

The segmenting and segmenting-blending groups significantly outperformed the control group on all tasks. Instruction in the blending group did not significantly increase student performance on the word reading or spelling transfer tasks. The results of this study indicated "segmentation ability may play a more critical role than blending ability in the very early stages of reading and spelling acquisition" (Davidson, 1994, p. 156).

A meta-analysis of studies on phonological awareness was conducted by Bus and Van Ijzendoorn (1999) to investigate the effects of phonological awareness programs on phonological awareness and reading skills. The study focused on which strategies provide the most effective type of training: purely phonological (sound games) or training with letters and words. The sample included 36 studies (N=3,092) that tested
effects of training programs on phonological awareness and 34 studies (N=2,751) that tested effects on reading. The phonological awareness skills were assessed through phoneme segmentation, phoneme blending, and sound deletion. The results indicated significance at the .001 level for both effects of phonological awareness and reading.

Results suggest that phonological training programs that include letters and words are more effective than strictly phonetic training. The authors suggested, "children who are just beginning to learn to read and write tend to treat what they learn about a written word's sounds and what they learn about its visual appearance as two separate things" (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1999, p. 405). Using letters to visualize the phonetic principles may help form a connection between the letter and the sound, a skill needed as children sound out words in writing. This meta-analysis revealed the importance of phonological awareness as a building block for a literate child and as a causal factor in learning to read.

Similar results were found by Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-Zadeh, and Shanahan (2001) in a meta-analysis conducted on the effects of phonemic awareness instruction on phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling. The analysis' sample consisted of students in preschool- sixth grade classified as normally developing readers, students at risk, or disabled readers. The phonemic awareness programs studied varied from 1:1 tutoring to small or whole group instruction. In addition, the number of phonemic awareness strategies incorporated in the studies included single focus, double focus, and multi-focus.

The primary statistic used in the analysis of outcomes was effect size. This indicated whether and by how much performance of the treatment group exceeded performance of the control group, with the difference expressed in standard deviation units. All of the effects sizes involving phonemic awareness skills (d=0.86), reading (d=0.53), and
spelling (d=0.59) outcomes were significantly greater than zero (p<.05). Results of the meta-analysis indicated that children who were instructed in only one or two phonemic awareness skills exhibited stronger phonemic awareness than students who were instructed with a multi-focus of skills (Ehri et al., 2001). Findings also revealed that phonemic awareness instruction which included teaching children to manipulate phonemes with letters led to greater reading and spelling performance than when instruction was limited to speech (Ehri et al., 2001).

Whole language. The foundation of the whole language construct is described by Jeynes and Littell (2000) as an emphasis on "whole pieces of literature and functional language as opposed to abridgments, adaptations, or segmented tests, individual student's choice as opposed to teacher-sponsored, whole-class assignments; and integrated language experiences as opposed to direct instruction in isolated skill sequences" (p. 23). The researchers conducted a meta-analysis on the effect of whole language on the literacy of low socioeconomic students. Three modes of instruction (whole language, basal, and eclectic) were measured for effects on the reading achievement of low-SES students in grades K through third grade. Fourteen studies were examined and classified according to type of whole language instruction: whole language I (pure-no teacher sponsored, whole class assignments or direction instruction in isolated skills), whole language II (specific-no evidence contradicting the definition of whole language, but insufficient evidence for classification to pure), whole language III (broad-labeled language experience or whole language with added features), and whole language IV (eclectic-deliberate combinations of whole language with more direct, teacher sponsored instruction in reading strategies such as phonics).

The evidence suggested that the low SES students in grades K-3 benefited from basal
instruction more than from whole language instruction. The total effect size was 
-0.65 with a 95% confidence interval of -.61 to -.69, reaching significance at the .0004 
level.

The whole language philosophy believes that children enter school with a foundation 
of written language and literacy learning (Jeynes & Lettell, 2000). In many lower SES 
settings, however, the children have not been exposed to a wide variety of literacy related 
events. This may have affected the students' progress in the studied whole language 
classrooms. In addition, several factors may lead to the falsification of this meta-
analysis. Only six of the 14 studies used had been published. The mean year of the study 
was 1980. The year in which the studies were undertaken and the total effects size 
favoring whole language had a positive correlation ($r=.75$, $p<.001$). The authors believed 
that the more recent studies were conducted using a better definition of the construct of 
whole language and with participants who have been more open to whole language 
(Jeynes & Littell, 2000).

Manning and Kamii (2000) studied students in whole language and phonics based 
classrooms to determine differences in how students developed glottographic theories 
(writing more letters for longer words). In the study, 38 kindergarten students were given 
words to write (5 sessions during the year) and the products were analyzed to determine 
whether the children wrote more letters for longer words. By the November testing, more 
students in the whole language group had begun to develop glottographic theories than 
the phonics group. Results in May significantly ($p<.01$) showed that more of the whole 
language group (73%) had reached the level of invented spelling by the end of the year 
compared with the phonics group (32%). Throughout the year, 20% of the samples from 
the phonics group showed regression in writing levels, with only 3% regression in the
whole language group. In addition, only students from the phonics group (16% in September and November) only wrote one letter for the tested word.

According to Manning and Kamii (2000) the differences "can be attributed to the general glottographic theory that the students in the whole language group had constructed" (p. 6). The children in the phonics group showed less growth and more confusion with theories of writing throughout the year. These children had not developed "a general theory, or framework [from]...learning bits of information that [were]... unintegrated and easily forgotten" (p. 7).

Reading readiness. Another philosophy of early childhood education held by many teachers today is the theory of reading readiness. This theory stresses the importance of waiting until a child possesses certain prerequisite skills before beginning formal reading instruction (McMahon, Richmond, Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998). Activities such as vocabulary development, visual and auditory discrimination, and alphabet drill are all a part of the rigorous skill based instruction characterized by the reading readiness approach.

Comparison of philosophical approaches. Beach and Young (1997) studied the development of children's emerging literacy in different types of classroom environments. The study examined 102 kindergarten students enrolled in six different classrooms (three Holistic classrooms, five Traditional classrooms, and seven Transitional classrooms). The authors stated "by situating the research in classrooms that provided different kinds of activities for the children, we are acknowledging that differences in classrooms exist while examining literacy development in the overall context of schooling" (p. 3). The students were assessed on concepts of print, spelling ability, knowledge of literacy, phonemic awareness skills, and reading and writing
abilities. Results from the reading measure indicated that the type of classroom students were in directly affected the students’ language and print awareness. Students in the Traditional classes used more letters in their writing and wrote more words conventionally than students in the Transitional or Holistic classrooms. Students who had a better understanding of the concepts of literacy were better able to focus their knowledge into the beginnings of reading and writing. This study highlights the importance of allowing children to build on their conceptual knowledge about print by exploring its uses in multiple contexts, including using literacy artifacts in play; writing using pictures and invented spelling in journals, during play, and during reading experiences (Beach & Young, 1997).

McMahon, Richmond, and Reeves-Kazelskis (1998) studied children's use of literacy related materials in both reading readiness and emergent literacy classrooms. The participants in the study were twelve kindergarten teachers (six with reading readiness beliefs and six with emergent literacy beliefs) and 16 students randomly chosen from each of their classrooms. Students were observed during a 20-minute free-choice time in the classroom to determine amount of involvement in literacy-related events. Students in the emergent literacy classrooms interacted with a significantly higher number of literacy-related activities than students in the reading readiness classrooms. In addition, only children in the emergent literacy classrooms were observed writing daily in journals and participating in permanent wiring centers. The researchers found that the "amount of time and space devoted to writing in the majority of emergent literacy classrooms showed that children's early attempts at communicating through print were regarded as valuable and necessary for making progress toward eventual success with conventional writing" (p. 8).
Nielsen and Monson (1996) conducted a study on the effects of the literacy environment on the literacy development of kindergarten students. Two different theories of early childhood education were compared: emergent literacy and reading readiness. The emergent literacy group incorporated the view that "the role of kindergarten is to build upon the literacy understanding that the child brings with him or her" (p. 262). In comparison, literacy learning in the reading readiness group viewed reading acquisition in kindergarten as sound/symbol recognition taught in sequenced lessons. A significant difference between the two groups was noted in time devoted to literacy-related activities and on a story-retelling task, with the emergent literacy group scoring higher in both areas. The study affirmed the work by Taylor, Blum, and Logsdon (1986, as cited in Nielsen & Monson, 1996, p. 271) that determined, "children, even those from homes where exposure to a literate environment is not likely to occur, can develop important pre-literacy skills when the right environment is provided in the classroom."

Castle, Riach, and Nicholson (1994) studied phonemic awareness training within a whole language program to determine what effects the training had on reading and spelling abilities. Phonemic awareness is defined as "knowing about sound patterns in words" (p. 350). The group trained 15 New Zealand five-year-old students in phoneme segmentation, phoneme substitution, phoneme deletion, and rhyme. Significant differences on measures of spelling and reading skills were a result of the treatment. Students in the experimental group were significantly better able to apply grapheme-phoneme correspondences in the spelling of pseudowords. In addition, the experimental group showed greater gains in the ability to isolate phonemes in words and apply this skill in measures of spelling. Phonemic awareness had a "facilitative effect on spelling
acquisition" in this study (p. 353).

The theory held by the teacher, grade level team, school, or school board dictates curriculum, role of stakeholders (student, teacher, parents), and classroom environment in a kindergarten program. Programs created around the premise of emergent literacy (Clay, 1975; Strickland, 1990) are based on the reading and writing connection with oral language. Children are surrounded with meaningful activities that support and facilitate their desire to read and write. A strong phonemic awareness (Yopp & Yopp, 2000) focus in a program is reflected in specific activities of blending, segmentation, rhyming, letter name and sound activities (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1999; Ehri et. al, 2001; Qi & O'Connor, 1993; Tangel & Blachman, 1992). In comparison, programs that are built with a whole language philosophy (Jeynes & Littell, 2000; Manning & Kamii, 2000) guide children to read and write through integrated lessons and a focus on whole words taken from meaningful literature. On the other hand, a program created with a reading readiness foundation (McMahon, Richmond, Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998) waits until children hold certain prerequisite skills before beginning formal reading and writing instruction.

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The following section describes several research-based strategies and how they could be incorporated into a comprehensive writing program. Laminack (2000) believed that teachers could use strategies in the classrooms to create a non-threatening literacy environment for students. Laminack suggested that the most important strategy to promote reading and writing success is reading aloud to children. Reading aloud daily shows students the value in the act of reading and that proficient readers can "make the language of print sing" (p. 62). Other suggested strategies include reading predictable
books, having students sign an attendance sheet daily, displaying environmentally print, reading big books, making paper bag books, and labeling the room. Teachers should also provide daily opportunities for writing, allowing children to apply their changing concepts of print to the paper. By incorporating these literacy strategies into the classroom, teachers support students as they develop their concepts of reading and writing.

_Literature._ Yoo (1997) described the necessity of literature use in the classroom, as students become readers and writers. Important story components such as characters, sequencing, plot, problem, and solution are reinforced with the reading of every story. Yoo showed how reading creates a connection to writing as children begin to make predictions of what will happen next in a story. From repeated readings, children begin to anticipate the patterns and structures of stories. The knowledge of language, story patterns, and structure gleaned from the literature then become a useful tool as children begin to write their own stories. Children who become inspired from the writing of others will create their own invented spelling to mimic what they have heard. Teachers can aide students in becoming creative writers by stressing the comparison of "setting and characters from each story, anticipating the next events, and discovering causes and effects" (p. 3). Most importantly, Yoo stated, "making reading personally meaningful through children's literature helps [children] learn to read" (p. 2).

Children's books can be used as a model to inspire to children to write their own stories and teach specific writing skills. McElveen and Dierking (2000) described using children's literature with their kindergarten and fourth grade students as "the bridge that linked the target skill with the reason for thinking, speaking, and writing like a writer" (p. 362). The teachers first determined a target skill needed by the children in their writing.
Next, the teachers selected a book that illustrated the target skill and read it to the class. Following the reading, a mini-lesson was used to identify and study how the author had used the target skill. Teachers and students then had the opportunity to apply the target skill as they wrote their own stories. After the writing, the students then discussed how they used the target skill and read their stories to the class. By using the literature as a model, the students were exposed to the vocabulary and ideas of published authors. They then were better able to apply the skills in their own writing and identify the skills used by authors of other books.

Simple exposure to quality literature can be reflected in children's writing. Bright (1996) described her daughter Amy's evolution of literacy skills and her application of those skills into the writing of her first story. Throughout Amy's short life, she had listened to hundreds of books, was taken to the library regularly, witnessed reading and writing activities daily, and was encouraged to participate in reading and writing independently. When Amy was six years old she sat down to write her first formal story. Amy's book included a title page, with author and dedication, sight words and invented spelling, speech vocabulary that was different from the story language, a problem and a solution, and illustrations used to enhance the text. Amy had used all of these important parts of a story in her book, even without having formal instruction at school or home on these skills. She had applied what she had learned in meaningful context to write her own story that was meaningful to her. Bright (1996) used Amy's experiences to show teachers and caregivers that, "literacy develops when we...respond to children as they are developing, when we take our lead from them and their ideas and offer instruction and guidance that build on their schema, not ours" (p. 12).

*Storytelling.* Incorporating storytelling into the daily routine is a strategy that can be
used to enhance a child's ability to write a story. Wellhousen (1993) studied the storytelling abilities of 21 kindergarten students in three different contexts: with no picture or prop, from a single picture with an implied action, and after drawing their own picture. Determining number of words, ratio of different words, ratio of descriptive words, and narrative story structure analyzed stories. Stories were then compared for fluency, story structure, vocabulary, and descriptive nature. The story only context significantly produced more complex narrative structures and total number of words than the picture or drawing conditions. The results of the study indicated that "simply telling a story results in greater fluency, and more sophisticated story structure" (p. 65).

Brown and Briggs (1991) conducted a similar study with the use of story elements in three different storytelling contexts with 20 kindergarten students. Over a span of five weeks, each student told a story orally, a story for dictation, and wrote a story to "read." The transcriptions of the children's stories were analyzed for six basic story elements: classic story version (directly related to classical stories and nursery rhymes), connected events (a series of related events), fantasy experiences (fantasy experiences based on imagination), goal directed experiences (characters who complete a goal), personal experiences (child's home and school environments), and social interactions (events and people in social settings).

The elements found in the children's stories differed according to story format. Dictated stories had a larger overall percentage of the story elements (61%) than oral (50%) or written stories (45%). While the dictation mode had a higher percentage of students using classic story version, fantasy experiences, personal experiences, and social interactions, the writing mode had the largest percentages for connected events (75%) and goal directed experiences (56%). The authors felt that the dictation mode gave the
children more freedom to produce the story elements, without the demands of writing the story on the paper (p. 148).

*Shared reading.* Uhri (1999) examined the relationship between ability to invent spellings and ability to finger-point read memorized text. One hundred and nine kindergarten students in a school with a predominantly whole language curriculum were read a big book during shared reading time. After four days of rereadings of the big book, children were tested on ability to spell words from the book and finger-point read the book. Result from Uhri’s study indicated “inventive spelling makes a unique contribution beyond that made by knowing letter names, and beyond that made by understanding that oral language can be broken up into phonemic segments” (p. 459).

Many skills are used by children during inventive spelling of a word, including segmentation, letter names, sounds, and an understanding of alphabetic principle.

*Author’s chair.* Graves and Hansen (1983) described how students developed concepts of authors and formed hypotheses about the relation between reading and writing based on their research. In the study, first grade students wrote stories which were published and shared in an "author’s chair." The authors reported that throughout the year, the children's views changed "from a vague notion about some other person who writes books to the additional perception of themselves as authors to the realization that they have choices and decisions to make as authors" (p. 182).

As the children began to see themselves as authors, they realized that they were in control of their own work. The children were able to make choices as to story title, form, style, and revisions and had the ability to defend those choices. As part of the author’s chair strategy, other students in the class acting as the audience questioned the published writers. Because of this, the writers made decisions when writing based on the
anticipated response from the audience. The authors formed a hypothesis that students would become more "assertive readers" as they became more comfortable with the notion of themselves as authors (p. 183).

As Wagner, Grogan, Nott, and Agnew (2001) discovered, the trait of voice can develop from student sharing time. Students begin to anticipate what questions will be asked during sharing time and incorporate the answers to those questions. In this way, the author becomes aware of the intended audience, one of the qualifications for the developing level of the voice trait.

Journal writing. Journal writing is a strategy used in most classrooms as a tool for writing development. Hipple (1985) described journals in her kindergarten classroom. The kindergarten students wrote for the first thirty minutes of every day, in journal consisting of five pages stapled together, taken home once a week. The teacher took dictation from the students and transcribed the story into the student's journals. After students wrote in the journals, several students were chosen to share their story with the class. Hipple discovered that using journals in the classroom enhanced development in such language arts skills as oral language, listening, and reading. An unexpected result from the use of the journal in this classroom was that the students did not follow the stages of writing development that the teacher had expected. Some students started writing using invented spelling and then returned to the picture stage, while other students would jump from letter strings to conventional spelling.

Journal writing is one strategy that can be easily adapted to meet the needs of students across all grade levels. Teachers looking at journal entries as writing samples can gain insight on students' true everyday writing abilities. Fresch (2001) described the development of spelling skills in the journals of one student from kindergarten to fourth
grade. Fresch was able to document the progression of the student from the beginning
level of Preliterate/Phonetic speller to the top level of Derivational Constancy. In
kindergarten, the student progressed through the two lower levels, having the ability to
link letters and sounds by the end of the year.

By looking at journals, teachers can determine appropriate activities to help guide the
student's spelling to the next level. Fresch suggested activities such as picture sorts,
rereadings of books, work with vowel sounds, and letter tiles as activities to assist
students at the kindergarten level. According to Fresch, "journal writing provides a
unique opportunity to see what spelling knowledge has been internalized and applied
during the act of writing" (p. 4).

Cress (1998) described interactive journal writing in a kindergarten classroom as a
way for children to develop a sense of story. On the first day of the process, the students
were given a journal and instructed to write a story of their choice. The following day,
the journals were return to the children, including a question about their story from their
teacher. The teacher would read the question to the child and the child would write that
day's story as an answer to the teacher's question. The same story would continue for
several days, with the teacher asking questions and the student responding. In this
program, "the writing process emphasized not only writing development, but also writing
as way of communicating a story or a message" (p. 16). The benefits of the program also
included strengthened personal relationships between the teacher and the student, a way
for students to experience conventional forms of English, an emphasis on writing for
meaning, and opportunities for metacognition.

Another strategy that can be incorporated into student journal time is dialogue
journals. Hannon (1999) explored this strategy in her kindergarten classroom. During
classroom journal time, Hannon modeled writing in her own journal and encouraged students to elicit help from others. Students then requested to read the entry to the teacher and have her respond by writing directly in their journals. After introducing dialogue journals, the students' writing skills and enthusiasm increased. According to Hannon, "changing the format to include dialogue expanded each writer's audience and gave journal writing another purpose" (p. 202). Several factors cause the results of this study to be questionable. Hannon only responded to students who requested for a response and the study did not include detailed results or standardized measures. Even though additional work is needed to determine the true effectiveness of dialogue journals as a major classroom strategy, they can continue to be seen as an important tool for enrichment.

*Technology.* Technology can be used to motivate students to write and reinforce writing skills. Research shows that "when students know that their work will be published, both the quantity and the quality of their writing improve" (Reid, 2001, p. 43). Publishing stories not only motivates students to write, but also provides a lasting reminder of a writing success. The published piece can then be brought home to share with family and friends, extending the reinforcing factor. Novelli (2001) recommended several ways that teachers publish student work, going beyond the typical hardcover bound final product. Suggestions include book reviews, picture books, class newsletters, screen saver stories, and doctor's office reading.

*Play.* Fisher (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of studies to determine the impact of play on cognitive-linguistic and affective-social domains. Forty-six studies were selected for the analysis based on treatment of play as an independent variable and experimental design. The analysis' total sample size was 2,565 participants, ranging in age from 12
months to 10 years (M=4.8 years). Results indicated moderately large to noteworthy
gains in children’s development. Fisher stated, "effect size findings provide convincing
evidence of the impact of play, which appears to promote improved performance
outcomes in both cognitive-linguistic and affective-social domains" (p. 159). Reading
readiness, basic language acquisition, verbal-conceptual, encoding/decoding skills, aural
recall, and story comprehension all showed significant increases. Different types of play
produced different effects, with child-orientated sociodrama obtaining the strongest
results.

Neuman and Roskos (1990) examined the functional uses of print and play centers by
observing effects of frequency and quality of literacy activities in the spontaneous play of
37 preschoolers. The students were divided into two classrooms; each participating in
daily 40-50 minute self selected free play periods. Prior to the intervention, an
observation procedure was used to document each child’s actions and language during a
10-minute spontaneous playtime. Researchers then redesigned the classrooms to enrich
the literacy at the centers.

Centers were established to encourage children’s creative uses of reading and writing
through high interest, real world centers of office, post office, library, kitchen, blocks,
and art. In addition, the physical arrangement of the play environment was changed to
clump noisy and quiet centers together. Centers were separated and clearly labeled with
mobiles, environmental print, and literacy props. After the interventions, children’s
reading and writing behaviors became more purposeful, situated, connected, interactive,
and defined. The authors demonstrated that "with well planned design changes in the
physical play environment, play can become an important context for the discovery and
exploration of reading and writing" (Neuman & Roskos, 1990, p. 221).
Literacy instruction can be expanded to involve all areas of the classroom. Goldhaber, Lipson, Sortino, and Daniels (1996) described a classroom that used literacy props in the blocks, housekeeping, science, puzzles, and arts centers to enhance the students' knowledge of literacy. Children were encouraged to write as they answered the phone and took messages at the housekeeping center, draw and label blueprints of buildings at blocks, and label rock samples at the science center. The literacy props allowed the students unlimited opportunities to extend their knowledge of print by creating the idea that literacy is meaningful and relevant. Adults are not only exposed to print when at the library or writing in a journal. Children's play involves pretending to be a part of the adult world and should include every chance to use print as a part of that environment. Incorporating literacy props into the classroom creates the bridge needed to allow students to make connections between writing for a purpose and play.

Children's views of the functions of writing effect how they write. Freeman and Sanders (1989) questioned children's beliefs of the functions of writing in community workers. Freeman showed 20 kindergarten students videotaped segments of community service people writing. After viewing the segments, the students were asked questions about the writing to determine how it was perceived. The students identified many ways of how and why the writing occurred. Communicating to others, writing as a memory device, for individual expression, and writing as a part of learning were all identified by the students as functions of writing in the community. From the results of the study, the kindergarten students showed "an understanding of the value, purposes, and social importance of writing as it is performed in the community" (p. 336). Children in this study also showed that they understood writing goes beyond assigning letters to what is said and that it is used for a variety of purposes. Teachers can use this knowledge to
create opportunities for students, mirroring community writing in the classroom.

Amberg (1992) described the incorporation of themes through literacy events and materials in a kindergarten classroom. In the course of a year, the class’ housekeeping center became transformed into a haunted house, Native American village, bakery, toy factory, hospital, post office, beauty salon, restaurant, and library. At the center, the children were encouraged to write menus, recipes, instructions for making toys, letters to leprechauns, lists, signs, and other works according to theme. The teacher modeled the writing opportunities for each theme to encourage the participation of all students. Observation and ongoing assessment allowed the teacher to make sure that "using a pencil is as much a part of their play as using a rolling pin or a stethoscope" (p. 93). By providing the children with fun, meaningful opportunities to practice literacy events through play, the teacher ensured that, "the children feel good about writing from the start" (p. 92).

*Key cards.* Children begin to make connections between reading and spelling as words are sounded out to them, read to them, and written for them on a piece of paper. Bradley (1988) studied how the connections children make between phonological (sounds) and orthographic (letter tiles) principles affect how they learn to read and spell. In this study, 60 six-year-old students were divided into one experimental group (phonological and visual orthography taught connected) and three control groups (phonological and visual orthography taught separately, phonological only, and visual orthography only). The students were trained individually for a total of 28 sessions lasting four months.

The group of students who were trained in both phonological and visual orthography strategies and shown the connection between them scored significantly higher on
measures of reading and spelling than the students in the control groups. In addition, the groups that received phonological training with congruent rhyming words improved more on the memory for letter strings task than the group that received only visual training (Bradley, 1988). The students in this study were able to better remember the letter strings by making the connections to the letter sounds. The experimental group continued to score higher than the other groups on tests of reading and spelling two years after the intervention. Directly teaching the connection between phonological and orthographic principles benefited the students in this study as they acquired new reading and spelling skills.

Ashton-Warner (1963) recommended using words that are meaningful to children as first words to use in reading and writing. For example, in her classroom, each student chose a word a week that was written on a card and placed into a special box. Words were read and used as part of writing activities daily. By using words that were part of the child's frame of reference, the words were easily mastered and remembered. Ashton-Warner used the creative writing time to "call on the child's own resources that preserves and protracts a little longer his own true personality" (p. 55).

Writer's workshop. In her book, The Art of Teaching Writing, Calkins (1994) described a writer's workshop program and how the implementation of the program affected young children. The program's main goal was to provide a regularly scheduled, structured period of time for children to write. Components of the program included mini-lessons, independent writing, peer conferencing, teacher conferencing, author sharing, and publication. Mini-lessons served as a time to call writers together, demonstrate a new writing technique, and start the day's writing workshop. Skills such as story ideas, stretching out individual words, using environmental print, labeling pictures,
and adding details were modeled for students during this time. In addition, by providing a forum to share class successes and celebrate individual milestones, the mini-lesson guided the children's future writing.

Immediately following the mini-lessons, students worked on individual stories and projects. During this time, the teacher rotated around the classroom to conference with individual students and highlight strengths and needs in each child's story. Each day, the writer's workshop ended with sharing of completed stories to the group and publication of select works. Author's nights were suggested as a method for students to share their best work with families and members of the community. The program described by Calkins inspired students to enter the select world of authorship and believe in their power to create words for others to read and learn.

Martinez and Teale (1987) described the kindergarten-writing program at three schools in Texas. The children were exposed to a wide variety of reading and writing experiences daily, including literature readings in large and small groups, environmental print, response activities based on the stories, the writing center, and independent reading. At the writing center, the children used different materials to write about a personally chosen or teacher assigned topic. An adult stationed at the center asked the students questions and invited them to discuss their topic before writing. According to the ability level of the child, the adult then assisted in sounding out words, encouraged independent writing, and provided cues for environmental print. After writing, the child read the story to the adult, who recorded on separate piece of paper. Asking the children to read their writing promoted written language acquisition and the differences between written and oral language (p. 447). The adult also provided corrective feedback, which was individualized for each child and based on the knowledge individual writing levels and
writing goals.

Bouas, Thompson, and Farlow (1997) suggested factors to be included in a kindergarten writing program to aid students in their literacy development. The authors stated, "journal writing should be supported by a print/rich literacy environment where there are daily opportunities for students to explore language in a variety of contexts" (p. 4). Print should be incorporated into centers, literature should be read to students daily, and activities involving print should be the basis for theme units. The authors also recommended that journal writing be scheduled into the daily routine, giving students opportunities to practice writing skills on a daily basis.

Teacher modeling was listed as another important factor in a writing program. As the teacher writes on chart paper, he/she should "think aloud," modeling key points such as directionality, beginning sounds, phonemic awareness skills, and sentence structure. When students see their teachers' success in writing, they gain confidences to take the same chances. Another important factor to a writing program is conferencing, in which the teacher meets with individual students to ask questions, elicit responses, and give praise. The final factor the authors recommended was sharing, which is important because "it validates the children's efforts, thus giving them a sense of purpose and a feeling of pride" (p. 4). With the inclusion of these five factors into a kindergarten classroom, the authors felt that students would be given the opportunity and motivation necessary to become productive writers.

Stachoviak (1996) integrated a writing curriculum in her kindergarten classroom to determine if her students would be able to learn letter identification, sounds, and writing skills. Previously, students in her class spent a large amount of time during the day involved in a letter of the week curriculum. The focus of the new curriculum was to
break away from teaching isolated skills to allow time for the practice and application of writing knowledge. Strategies included writer's workshop, morning news, key cards, and interactive writing. Stachoziak concluded from her experience that "a developmental writing program in kindergarten teaches students not only how to use writing as a means to communicate but many other skills as well" (p. 323). By the end of the year, most of the students had reached the invented spelling stage of writing and had mastered their letters and sounds. A weakness in the classroom routine was the lack of an integration of story writing techniques. The examples of student writing demonstrated that the students only wrote non-fiction pieces, without a sense of story.

**Feedback.** For elementary level students, the process of providing feedback on students' work was shown to significantly impact the development of strategies, confidence, and writing ability. Bruning and Horn (2000) discussed the importance of providing feedback to writers. Feedback is crucial because it allows them to see the discrepancies between their current performance and their goals. The feedback helps move young writers from where they are to where they would like to be and provides direction on what strategies to utilize and achieve their goals. Bruning and Horn also shared the importance of teachers developing writing tasks that match and guide student's abilities towards pre-selected goals. The authors discovered how "goals, especially if they are specific and challenging, will lead to higher levels of performance" (p. 32).

Feedback for writing can also be given through the use of rubrics. Rubrics are an assessment tool used to evaluate student ability on performance-based tasks in all areas of the curriculum, especially writing. Popham (1997) recommended several key points to maintain the accuracy and reliability of rubrics. First, rubrics should only contain three to five evaluative criteria. Performance assessments that include more points could become
overwhelming for teachers to score and apply. Second, rubrics should only evaluate the skill being conveyed in the classroom. Third, rubrics should be designed so that teachers will be able to use them to guide future instruction. By following these points in the creation and application of rubrics, the tool's purpose would be as an "illuminator used to direct individual instruction and plan curriculum" (Popham, 1997, p. 3).

Calkins (1994) gave an example of a rubric in an early childhood setting, called "editing checklists." She stated, "editing has a very real place in the writing process, and with encouragement and guidance, even kindergarten children can engage in an early form of editing" (p. 298). Calkins suggested that students begin the process by checking to make sure that their paper includes their name, the date, and page numbers. As specific students' abilities and conventions used in writing develop, checklists can be individualized to include skills such as capital letters, punctuation, and titles. Teachers can meet with students during individual conference times to review and discuss the items on the rubric.

Process writing. Hertz and Heydenberk (1997) studied the effects of implementing a process writing approach to the instruction of writing skills in kindergarten. The class participated in a "writer's workshop" which consisted of "mini-lessons, writing time and group sharing sessions [in which]...the students chose their own topics, wrote stories and received feedback about their writing" (p. 2). Students who participated in the study showed significant growth in measures of invented spelling and writing. Not only did the students improve in tested writing skills, but also "the writing workshop provided an interactive environment for learning which enhanced the student's motivation to write" (p.3). The study showed that the implementation of a direct time for teaching writing in kindergarten could aid students in the acquisition of writing skills.
Branscombe and Taylor (1996) described the development of Scrap, a five-year-old kindergarten boy. Scrap's theory of writing developed through three different avenues of literacy: "those that developed a conscious awareness of how words are written, those related to a growing awareness of the morphosyntactic aspects of written discourse and those related to a story grammar that links meaning with form" (p. 80). In Scrap's constructivist classroom, he listened to children's literature daily, wrote in a daily journal, and participated daily in literacy centers and shared writing.

Through participating in these experiences, Scrap was able to investigate and test out his hypotheses about written language in an environment that supported his growth. Scrap progressed in his writing from letter strings, consonant written content words, consistency in spelling, adaptations of published stories, and writing original stories. By the end of the year, Scrap was writing chapter stories that included characters, dialogue, plots, and literacy conventions. He had successfully developed the strategies needed to communicate in the written form and had made the connections necessary to enable him to write for purpose and pleasure.

Lewis and Vosburgh (1988) conducted a meta-analysis of studies to examine the effects of kindergarten intervention programs on variables related to school success. The meta-analysis was performed on 444 effect sizes taken from 65 studies with a total sample size of 3,194 kindergarten children. Strong to moderate positive effects were demonstrated on all measured variables. In addition, the meta-analysis studied components of structure and parent involvement in programs. Highly structured programs significantly outperformed less structured programs. Significant differences in parent involvement were only found in long-term effects. The positive results of this meta-analysis demonstrated the importance of kindergarten intervention programs to
immediate and later success in school.

Strategies designed to aide children in the acquisition of written literacy that have been presented are technology, literature, storytelling, visual models, language experience approach, sharing of stories, journals, play, and writer’s workshop. All have been shown to significantly effect the writing development of students and should be included in a comprehensive writing program. The structure of the writer’s workshop program (Bouas, Thompson, & Farlow, 1997; Calkins, 1994; Martinez & Teale, 1987) was used to incorporate the research-based strategies previously mentioned, creating a comprehensive writing program.

*Staff development.* Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1995) defined staff development as "those processes that improve the job-related knowledge, skills, or attitudes of school employees" (p. 296). The teachers involved in this implementation were trained on the writing program using the foundations of research on peer coaching (Munro & Elliott, 1987; Showers & Joyce, 1995), teacher’s needs (Goldenburg & Gallimore, 1991), and learning communities (Haycock, 2002).

The strategy of peer coaching is one method that can be used to assist teachers in working together. Peer coaching is defined as "a method of improving teaching effectiveness in which teachers work with one or more colleagues to achieve specific instructional goals through a process of regular observation and feedback" (Munro & Elliott, 1987, p. 25). Showers and Joyce (1995) first tested hypotheses related to peer coaching in the 1980’s and found that the rate of teacher implementation after the training was greater when it was followed with weekly meetings. Peer coaching programs help to create consistency in the curriculum, and allow teachers time to assist, motivate, and encourage each other.
Guiney (2001) described a peer coaching program in which teachers worked together to "help imagine and create another reality, helping to engage in regular, reflective discussions about instruction" (p. 741). The coaches involved were leaders who did not need to be recognized as leaders. In this way the teacher relationship was fostered without one person taking power over the other. The program resulted in improved staff development and student achievement for the school.

Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) suggested that staff development be "organized around teachers' perceived needs in their own classrooms" (p. 70). Teachers should be allowed to work with groups that have similar needs and a desire for change. This framework also follows Guskey's (1995) recommendation that "successful professional development programs are those that approach change in a gradual and incremental fashion" (p. 330). Teachers need to be given the time and freedom to explore new ideas and strategies, leading to lasting and effective change.

Champion (2000) listed thirteen lessons for planning staff development. One of the lessons called to differentiate opportunities for adult learners. Teachers at different points in their career, educational levels, and grade levels do not need to all be exposed to the same staff development. By allowing these "master teachers" to seek out different experiences, they expand their knowledge and bring back new information to share with the staff.

The basis of any effective staff development program is the underlying learning community. Haycock (2002), in his research on building collaborative learning communities, discovered that "schools with high levels of professional community are not only more effective but have school climates wherein teachers' work patterns are collaborative and cohesive" (p. 35). For any staff development to be effective for a group
of teachers, the school should be able to come together as a learning community.

*Change theory research.* For the implementation of a comprehensive writing program in kindergarten to be successful, the school, teachers, parents, and environment must be able to change from the old and prepare for the new. Change can be a difficult process in many schools. The changing format, population, curriculum, and focus of schools today have created an unstable environment for teachers who are only able to perpetuate the status quo.

Fullan (1993) described how the method of teacher training could positively affect a teachers' ability to change. Teachers must be able to find a balance between moral purpose and change agency. Fullan stated that "moral purpose keeps teachers close to the needs of children and youth; change agency causes them to develop better strategies for accomplishing their goals" (p. 12). To determine goals, teachers need to develop a personal vision by asking questions that involve meaning, understanding, and impact. Fullan also recommended that teachers should seek out new ideas and become masters of new skills, not simply practicing observers. For all of these strategies to be effective in creating an environment that accepts change, collaboration between all members must be an overwhelming theme. For a system to change to better meet the needs of the students and community, teachers must also have the ability to change.

Fullan (1996) continued to describe the need to break away from the current beliefs of systemic thinking and journey towards a new theory that stretches the limits of systems to achieve continuous change. Fullan recommended using the strategies of networking and reculturing/restructuring to help nurture an environment of growth and change. Networking is described as "ongoing, systematic, multilevel staff development" used to link schools with one another and eliminate the isolation felt between schools (p. 422).
Reculturing involves developing basic conditions by changing the core beliefs of a school that prevent key members from trying new ideas.

For these strategies to be successful, methods of accountability need to be designed to measure the effectiveness of the reform. These assessments may include alignment in policies and procedures, data desegregation, gathering data on networking opportunities, and teacher surveys (Fullan, 1996). Fullan believed that the most important factor to be gleaned from his theory is to "look for those strategies that are most likely to mobilize large numbers of people in new directions" (p. 423). By doing this, systemic reform will truly be achieved.

For any program to be successful, teachers must be trained on the components of the program. Unfortunately, traditional approaches to teacher education lack the method, strategies, innovations, and community focus necessary to develop educators into professionals of the twenty-first century. Lieberman (1995) described several examples of appropriate teacher education that have made strides in solving the problems hindering change in school systems today. For teacher development to be successful participants must have the time and opportunities necessary to develop, discuss, and implement new practices. Suggestions for improvement include creating new roles for teachers as researchers, coaches, and leaders throughout the school. Problem-solving groups and decision-making teams need to be incorporated into the school structure and teachers should participate in developments as active learners. Lieberman stated, "changes occur in school systems that support teacher growth and development, these changes will naturally become and integral part of the culture of the school" (p. 643). For lasting change to occur, teacher learning must take place among a framework that encourages a community of growth and support.
Lieberman (1998) described several programs following her recommendations that could be used as models for growth and change. These programs all began with teacher discussions of ineffective status quo and hope for a positive future. Even though all the schools incorporated different programs and strategies, a pattern emerged. The programs all focused on creating a curriculum based on student learning, linking together theory and practice, and supporting an environment of continuous learning. Lieberman's core of research demonstrated that "with the beginning of new theories of change and development, we may begin to see not only what is possible, but what new tools, language, forms, and knowledge are available to help us meet the challenges of the coming century" (p. 144).

Fullan and Miles (1992) described reasons why reforms fail and listed suggestions for reform success. The authors suggested that, rather than created countless new plans for future reforms today is an excess of small, sectioned, unsynchronized endeavors of change. The authors listed seven basic reasons why reforms fail: conflicting view of stakeholders, complex problems, political pressure, impatience and superficial solutions, misinterpretation of resistance, lack of follow through from small successes, and a misunderstanding of the change process.

Suggested strategies for reform success included the acceptance that change is a never-ending time of learning. Problems of reform should be seen as opportunities for growth, not barriers. In addition, resources need to be available to support the reform and personnel must be in place for proper management. The change needs to be systematic and should be implemented locally. The infusion of these strategies will allow "participants to become knowledgeable about the change process [which is] the best defense and the best offense we have in achieving substantial education reform" (Fullan
& Miles, 1992, p. 752).

The success of any new program lays in part to the ability of a system to change. Teachers need to be both appropriately trained on the procedure (Fullan, 1996, Lieberman, 1995) and the change process (Fullan, 1993; Lieberman, 1998). In addition, participants and leaders in the program need to be aware of barriers to the reforms (Fullan and Miles, 1992) and take precautions to ensure the continuing success of the program.

Description of Selected Solution Strategies

A variety of strategies were used as a part of this implementation. Teachers participated in professional development through weekly team meetings with a focus on the writing curriculum. Teacher input was regularly solicited to determine level of implementation and program feedback. In addition, each kindergarten teacher at the school implemented the comprehensive writing program in their classrooms, increasing time-spent writing, varying writing opportunities, and integrating research-based strategies.

Professional development and weekly team meetings. The teachers on the team participated in school-wide training on county level standards in writing. In addition, early release day training on implementing six-trait instruction was attended by all teachers. This training focused on defining the six-traits, surveying student work from all grade levels, and grade level expectations in writing.

Weekly team meetings were scheduled to allow teachers to explore and discuss the writing program. These meetings took place in alternating kindergarten teachers' classrooms, varying each week. This provided the teachers with the opportunity to observe other classrooms, gaining ideas from different environments. A portion of the weekly meetings was devoted to strategy discussion, teacher and student modeling,
material building, and feedback on program implementation. The teachers worked together, learning from each other in a collegial and non-threatening environment that research has shown to be effective (Fullan, 1993; Guiney, 2001; Haycock, 2002; Lieberman, 1995; Showers & Joyce, 1995).

Teacher feedback. Teachers were given the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher on the program through the use of regular surveys (Appendix A). Surveys questioned implementation level, comfort in program participation, and feelings about the program. In addition, each survey asked the teacher to identify areas of need or strength in writing instruction. Teachers' needs were used to guide future team meetings and strengths were used to share with the team. Regular and meaningful feedback has been shown to be an important part of any staff development and change procedure (Champion, 2000; Munro & Elliott, 1987).

Increase student writing time and writing experiences. A major component of the program involved providing the students with more time and opportunities for writing. The students had more time to practice skills in a variety of different methods, expanding their current opportunities.

Components of the comprehensive program. The program consisted of ten basic research based writing strategies including writer's workshop, thematic writing, literature, publishing, author's chair, storytelling, conferencing, authors' night, key cards and literacy props. The program was incorporated into the framework of a writer's workshop program (Calkins, 1994; Bouas, Thompson, & Farlow, 1997; Teale, 1987). Writing was scheduled for an hour daily, following the predictable schedule of literature read aloud, modeled writing, skill focus mini-lesson, independent writing, conferences, publishing/writing centers, and author sharing. Literature correlated with classroom
themes was used to inspire students to write stories and assist in making the reading and writing connection (McElveen & Dierking, 2000; Yoo, 1997). Students were encouraged to regularly share their work with the teacher and peers. Research has shown that giving students the opportunity to share their work enables students to realize they are writing for an audience and creates the sense of "authorship" (Graves & Hansen, 1983; Wagner, Grogan, Nott, & Agnew, 2001).

Mini-lessons followed each modeled writing session and were an integral part of the writing instruction. The areas of conventions and voice, previously identified as areas of need, were one of the focuses of these mini-lessons. Teachers also used the mini-lesson time to teach alphabet letters and sounds, model concepts of print, practice sounding out words, and other identified needs (Calkins, 1994).

During independent writing time, students were encouraged to write words independently without teacher dictation of student work (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Gutman & Sulzby, 2000; Jensen, 1990). If needed, the teacher assisted the students in sounding out words for the student to write or provided a visual aide (Calkins, 1994). In addition, each classroom displayed a word wall with high frequency words divided by beginning letter. A separate section titled "story words" listed words that students could use in a story (once upon a time, first, then, said, etc.). Teachers encouraged students to look on the word wall for assistance in spelling words.

Personal "key cards" (Bradley, 1988; Ashton-Warner, 1963) were made for each student on the team for the collection of meaningful words. The cards were arranged in a set of 20, with the student's name on a key on the front, and held together with a key chain. Each student selected his/her own words to be written on the cards. Cards were available for students to copy during writing and were used for assorted reading and
writing activities throughout the day.

Students were encouraged to communicate and interact while writing. Research has shown that student communication during writing allows for participation frameworks through student roles of modeling, mentoring, and source of ideas (Brock, 1992; Larson, 1999). During the writing time, students were permitted to leave their seats to find words around the room or discuss their writing with children at another table.

In addition to the writer's workshop, students participated in thematic writing at least once a week. Graphic organizers were correlated with weekly themes and were used to solicit student's prior knowledge while adding vocabulary. Each student wrote on an item to correlate with the weekly theme and was encouraged to write about that week's topic. By relating the work to the students' frame of reference and making connections with topics within a theme, the students showed an increase in vocabulary, interest, and motivation (Anberg, 1992).

To give students the opportunity to showcase their work and create a lasting product, the students published their stories using a variety of materials. Each student published at least one book on the computer using publishing software. In addition, student writing was published in newsletters, giving parents the opportunity to read student's work at home. Student work was also displayed at an authors' night, which took place at the end of the school year. Using technology to create a lasting product of a student's writing has been shown to increase both the quantity and quality of student written work (Reid, 2001).

Throughout the implementation, print was added to several areas around the classroom. Literacy props and storytelling experiences were incorporated into all centers and students were given the opportunity to participate in the centers daily. The props
expanded on the play themes at the centers and encouraged students to interact meaningfully with print (Goldhaber, Lipson, Sortino, and Daniels, 1996; Neuman & Roskos, 1990). Storytelling opportunities were used as a method to enhance students' vocabulary and build on story detail and length (Brown & Biggs, 1991, Wellhouseen, 1993).

Report of Action Taken

The implementation of this program spanned an eight-month period and was divided into four separate areas: weekly team meetings, assessment, strategy implementation, and classroom visits by the researcher. Before implementation, the researcher met with the school's principal, assistant principal, reading specialist, and writing coach to discuss the plan and acquire additional information.

To "kick-off" the program, the researcher organized a luncheon with the five other teachers on the team on an early release day (12:00 pm dismissal). Each team member was provided with a decorative clipboard holding information needed during the program. Participants were given a calendar of planned events, a booklet describing the program, tools needed for assessment, a literacy prop to use in their classroom, and a literature book to use with their students. The team reviewed the writing standards mandated by the county and the state and highlighted all the standards that would be covered with the comprehensive writing program. One hundred percent of the standards were highlighted.

The team then reviewed the current writing program and realized that many of the standards were not included in the everyday writing instruction. The team also discussed the writing abilities of the students in their classes and reviewed the goals for the end of the program. One of the teachers was new to the team and new to the school system.
She voiced excitement with participation in the program and stated that she had always felt that writing was her area of need.

Letters of informed consent were sent to all 146 kindergarten students along with a cover letter explaining the program in detail. Unexpectedly, only 105 of the parents returned the informed consent letters giving permission to allow their child to participate in the program. Additional letters were written to these parents, translations were made from English to Spanish, and the program was discussed at individual conferences. Still, however, many parents felt threatened knowing that data might be collected and analyzed on their child and therefore did not give consent for participation.

While all of the students in kindergarten participated in the comprehensive writing program, only students whose parents gave consent participated in the individual conferencing and publishing with the researcher, authors' night, and data collection. Each teacher had a different number of participants, according to the number of students who returned the informed consents: teacher one (24), teacher two (20), teacher three (14), teacher four (19), teacher five (15) and teacher six (13).

During the first month of implementation, the strategies of writer's workshop, literacy props, and key cards were initiated. The researcher began the writer's workshop process in one classroom and then shared the results and methods with the other teachers at a team meeting. Several teachers voiced apprehension about writer's workshop, stating lack of time, too many students, and an overloaded curriculum as reasons why it was too difficult. Several other teachers altered their current writing program to fit in the scheduling of writer's workshop and shared their successes. Books and journal articles about writer's workshop were distributed to the teachers on the team for review and were discussed at follow up meetings.
One teacher was pleased with the mini-lesson format. Previously, she had conducted modeled writing lessons with her class but had not used the writing to teach a direct lesson to her students. After conducting a mini-lesson on periods, she was excited to see that most of her class had used periods in that day's journal writing experience. Another teacher stated that she enjoyed using literature to start the writer's workshop program. Prior to implementation, literature was read at a separate time of the day. She said that reading the books directly before the writing helped the children make the reading and writing connection. Several of the students commented during their writing that they were trying to be "just like Joy Cowly," or "just like Eric Carle," famous authors they had read in class. The teachers who needed more time to start the writer's workshop observed other classrooms and read additional literature on the topic.

The researcher made key cards for every child on the kindergarten team. Each child's name was written on a copy of key, glued to a sentence strip, and laminated. The front key was then attached to 20 blank sentence strip cards on a key chain. The cards were distributed to the teachers during a mini workshop on the effective uses of the cards. Teachers were advised to let the students keep the cards some place close to them while working (cubby, basket, work tub, etc.). Whenever a student struggled in sounding out a word or asked the teacher how to write a word that was going to be the topic of a story, the teacher was instructed to write the word on the student's key cards. The cards then became a building resource for the students to read words that were important to them. In addition, the words became a visual cue to use when writing.

Immediately, the teachers were impressed with the student progress made due to the key cards. Several students who had struggled transitioning from a stage 2 (letter strings) to a stage 3 (words) jumped to the next level as they began copying words from their key
cards. One teacher was amazed with how the key cards fostered social interaction during writing. During one of the December thematic writing activities, a child wanted to write the word "Barbie" on her list for Santa. Another child jumped out of her seat and said, "Here, you can copy it off of my key cards!" The excitement continued around the room as the children realized they could share their words with others. One teacher commented on the monthly feedback form “the key cards are especially useful in helping children get excited about writing/reading.”

Two of the six teachers experienced difficulty using the key cards, claiming that they did not have time to go around the room to write on each child’s card. They experienced that once one child wanted a word added, the rest of them usually wanted a word also. Another teacher felt that the key cards would interfere with the student’s abilities to sound out words, making them too dependent on a visual model. These two teachers placed their key cards to the side and did not use them during the implementation.

Also during the first month, the teachers on the team planned writing activities to correlate with the month's themes. For the first month, writing on the farm, Mrs. Wishy Washy, and a Santa list occurred. Teachers were reminded not to take dictation of student writing for the activity, but first to model the writing and then to encourage the students to write independently. For the farm writing, several students made lists of farm animals that were copied off the word wall and graphic organizers. Several other students had already started writing in sentence form. For example, one student wrote, "I want to go to the farm. I see a pig."

In the Mrs. Wishy Washy activity, a cooking project was incorporated with the literature and writing. First, the teachers read the book Mrs. Wishy Washy, by Joy Cowley. Students then brainstormed and listed animals that they would like to see go into the mud.
Next, the class made chocolate pudding. When finished, students were given animal crackers and the pudding to represent the animals going into the "mud." After the retelling while eating, students wrote their own page of a "Mrs. Wishy Washy Goes to Africa" rewrite.

The feedback from most of the teachers supported the growth of the program. On one of the program evaluation forms, one teacher commented, "My class is definitely excited about writing at this point! They ask to do journals or make their own books." At one of the team meetings, the same teacher shared her student’s disappointment at not writing on an early release day. "I told them it was time to go home and they screamed "NO! We haven’t written in our journals yet!" Another teacher commented on a evaluation form that "the progress is slow….but evident." As teacher’s requested additional assistance in certain areas (mostly the writer’s workshop format) activities were scheduled into the weekly team meetings to meet their needs.

In the second month, the team continued to discuss the writer’s workshop format, focusing on literature to read with the children to teach conventions and voice. Literature was selected that contained expressive vocabulary and a meaning behind the story. During the modeled writing, the teachers wrote a story containing the same expressive vocabulary. Several students then transitioned to write the words in their journals during independent writing time.

Conventions in the literature were also used as a focus. Books were selected that contained a wide variety of punctuation; including question marks, exclamation marks, periods, etc. During the reading, the teacher isolated these conventions and the class discussed their place and purpose. After the reading, the teacher used the same conventions as part of the modeled writing. Students were then called to circle the
different types of punctuation on the modeled writing story as part of the day's mini-
lesson. After these lessons, the students showed significant progress in the use of conve-
ventions and voice during their writing.

The use of literacy props was also a focus during the second month. Teachers were asked to tally the amount of interactions that their students had with literacy throughout the day. The lists were then compared and discussed. The team brainstormed methods that could be used to increase the amount of literacy interactions. Suggestions were made to add books to different centers, charts and poetry around the classroom, and word cards to correspond with certain tasks.

The researcher visited each classroom to discuss writing with the students and observe journal writing time. Most of the teachers responded openly to the researcher, one, however, voiced apprehension to the visit. During the visits, the researcher read a book to each class, *The Book Worm*, by Joy Cowley, and talked about how the author got her ideas and wrote stories. The researcher then attempted to motivate the students for writing and observed the teacher's role as the students wrote in their journals. In two cases, the teacher sat at her desk and did not interact with the students during writing. One teacher had the students start with a writing prompt and then complete the sentences. The remainder of the teachers circulated around the room, assisted the students as they wrote, added requested words to the key cards, and provided immediate feedback.

After the writing, four of the teachers listened to each child's story individually. Two of those took dictation under the student's work. The other two teachers provided corrective feedback and a positive comment on the child's journal entry. For the two teachers who did not listen to their child's story, the journals were collected and put away to prepare for the next task. The children did not receive feedback on their writing, either
corrective or positive.

Team meetings were once again scheduled to discuss the writer's workshop format. Teachers collected writing samples from their students in the third month and scores were added to the team's database. When scores were compared, two classes contained students that were writing well above the others. Two classes contained students that were writing "average" and two classes contained students writing well below the expected mid year outcomes. These classes were the ones where the implementation of writer's workshop was not consistent. The teachers once again complained that their class was immature and difficult, and not ready to handle the expectations of writing. Offers of support, motivation, and additional research was supplied to these teachers with the hope that their writing program would change.

Publishing was a focus of the third month of implementation. Teachers were shown samples of published books, including a large variety of formats and styles. Class made books published from shared writings, individual student writing, innovations from literature, and story patterns were all displayed as samples. In addition, teachers were asked to brainstorm ideas and bring samples of books published in previous years. One teacher had rewritten *The Gingerbread Man* as a shared writing with her class. The writing was then typed and pasted onto large gingerbread man cutouts. Students formed cooperative groups to illustrate each page. The book was then put together to make a large class-made book.

After the meeting, another teacher made a big book using the repetitive story pattern of *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* by Bill Martin Jr. Students placed a blob of white paint in the middle of a piece of blue paper and folded the paper in half. When the paint dried, the students completed the sentence, "It looked like spilt milk, but it was really
The teacher did not take dictation of what the student wanted to write, but instead encouraged the students to sound out the word by themselves. Stories were displayed on a class-made bulletin board and then bound together to make a class innovation. A similar innovation was completed changing the book One Stormy Night, by Joy Cowley to One Sunny Day.

Thematic activities for the third month were scheduled around New Year’s, hot chocolate, and snow. Upon returning to school after New Year’s Day, students made a construction paper star and wrote a sentence of how they would be a “star of 2003.” After writing, each student traced the star with glue and added glitter to make the star “shine.” The stars were displayed on a bulletin board in the hallway.

For the hot chocolate activity, students "cooked" and drank a cup of delicious cocoa. Each teacher then completed a graphic organizer describing hot chocolate using all of the six senses. Students were then given a blank cup made of construction paper and instructed to write describing words about hot chocolate. Drawing a brown oval on the top of the cup and adding cotton ball “marshmallows” completed the project. Most students first described their cocoa as "hot" or "good”. Teachers were instructed to encourage their students to add words that were more exciting and interesting, once again focusing on the convention of voice.

The snow writing activity also followed a cooking project. The students made "crunchy snowballs" using rice treats rolled into a ball and dipped into powdered sugar. After eating the snowballs, the teacher completed a graphic organizer on snow, once again using all 5 senses. The students were then given a snowball made of white construction paper and encouraged to write, "Snow is..." Teachers were instructed to once again encourage students to use creative and descriptive words to complete the activity.
The researcher visited each classroom for second time in the third month of implementation. During this visit, the researcher read the big book *My Stories* by Joy Cowly, in which the author talks about her childhood and how she gets ideas for her stories. Each kindergarten class already had a huge library of Joy Cowly big books and each child had heard her magical words many times through repeated shared readings, literacy extension activities, and individual readings during literacy centers.

The students were excited to see the pictures of Joy Cowly as a child and learn her fears, likes, dislikes, and wants. After the reading, the researcher modeled writing about herself, following the pattern of the Joy Cowly story. The students then returned to their seats to write their own stories. The researcher remained in each classroom as the students wrote and shared their stories.

To increase opportunities for writing in different formats, the researcher made blank mini-books for every child in kindergarten. Teachers were encouraged to teach that day's mini-lesson on the concepts of print necessary to make a book. Instead of having the students write in journals that day, each child was given a mini-book for writing. The students were encouraged to write a title, author, and illustration on the front cover and to write one different sentence on each page, along with a matching illustration. These mini-books were defined as the students' first "published" stories.

While all six teachers used the books with their students, each teacher used them in a different way. One teacher used the books to reinforce alphabet skills by placing a different letter on each page and having the students copy words beginning with that letter. Another teacher had the students draw a picture of them on the front cover and write a sentence "I am ____" on each page. The classes in which the students were given freedom to write about whatever they wanted using the model of a book showed
the most creativity, voice, and conventions.

After the activity, some teachers had the students place their stories in individual book baskets to read during independent reading time. Other teachers placed the books in the classroom library for reading by the entire class and some teachers sent the books home. Teachers were encouraged to make additional mini-books for their students to use during centers and writing times.

The researcher also made mitten cutouts for each child to use for an innovation of *The Mitten*, by Jan Brett. Teachers read the book to the students as part of the writer's workshop format. The teacher then listed the animals that entered the mitten, along with other suggested animals, as part of a shared writing activity. The day's mini-lesson focused on sequencing and beginning and ending sounds. Students were then given the mitten cutout and encouraged to write their own mitten stories.

During the fourth month of implementation, the researcher visited each classroom for a third time, this time to prepare the students for publishing individual stories. The researcher read each class a book that she had personally written, illustrated, and "published." The researcher once again discussed with the students methods of how to get ideas, sound out words, use conventions in writing, and make writing "fun."

After the visits, the researcher met with each student individually to discuss his or her writing. Students then chose a favorite story out of their most recent journal to "publish." The researcher and the student typed the selected story together and then printed, cut, and pasted the words to construction paper. The student made illustrations to match the print on each page and the researcher then laminated and bound the book. Each book contained an "about the author" page that gave detailed information about the student; including favorite color, age, and favorite thing to do. Each book also included a non-
laminated page for readers to write comments about the story. The researcher delivered finished books to each student, along with a “writing award.” Books were then kept in the classroom library until the authors’ nights. Individual student conferencing and publication continued for the next several months of implementation.

Thematic activities for the fourth month revolved around the themes of love, the three pigs, the tooth fairy, and pennies in the wishing well. The themes were planned at a weekly team meeting and the activities were implemented in all six of the classrooms. For the writing activity about love, students were given a heart shaped cutout for writing. Teachers read several books about love, created a graphic organizer of love words, modeled writing about people they loved, and then assisted as the students wrote their own love stories. The completed stories were added to Valentine’s Day cards that were created for each family.

_The Three Little Pigs_ story was read to each class during the literature portion of the writer’s workshop, followed by a modeled writing retelling of the story. The mini-lesson focused on choosing exciting words in writing. The teachers made a list of these words to keep next to the writing area. Students were then encouraged to write a story about the three pigs on a large piece of construction paper. After the writing, the stories were added to an art project of one of three different types of pig’s houses.

For the penny activity, the students were given a large brown circle with a picture of Abraham Lincoln on one side and asked to write their wish on the other side. The pennies were displayed on a bulletin board with a wishing well. For the tooth fairy activity, students were given a picture of the tooth fairy and asked to write what they thought she did with their teeth. Ideas from students, written in both inventive and conventional writing, included “make stars, give new teeth to babies, build castles in the
sky, build mountains” and many others. The students were truly demonstrating the voice trait through creativity in their writing.

In the fifth month of implementation, the researcher continued to meet individually with students for writing conferences and publishing, thematic writing activities were completed for spring, bubbles, and swimming, and the team continued to meet to share writing curriculum. For the spring activity, each teacher was given a mitt with four birds, a mother bird, and a nest, along with a copy of a song and fingerplay to do with the mitt. As part of the day’s writing workshop, each teacher read *The Best Nest*, did the fingerplay song with the mitt, and modeled writing about birds. Students were then encouraged to complete their own writing about birds on a cutout of a nest. The mitt and song were then added to classroom literacy centers as a literacy prop.

For the bubbles activity, teachers were given a bottle of bubbles, a book about bubbles, and a packet created with the Kidspiration computer program. In the packet, titled “My writing book about bubbles”, students completed a graphic organizer using their five senses, completed sentences for a process writing about why they liked bubbles, and then wrote a story about bubbles. Four of the six teachers did the activity with their students. One teacher commented that the activity “motivated the students to write and helped them stay focused on a topic.” Another teacher claimed that “the children got very excited and enthused about blowing the bubbles, this encouraged them to brainstorm and improved the follow-up writing activity.” The two teachers who did not do the program with their class claimed that they did not have enough time.

Each class participated in swimming lessons every day for two weeks. After the two-week period, the teachers modeled on large chart paper how to write a thank you note to the swimming instructors, followed by a mini lesson on letter formats. Students then
One of the teachers planned a pizza activity, making a graphic organizer, writing prompt, and mathematics connection. Teachers first read the book *Pizza Party*. The class then graphed their favorite pizza toppings and wrote a story using the graphic organizer as a visual aide. Two classes followed the writing activity with the students making actual pizzas.

Another teacher planned her writing activity to be about ocean animals. The students were able to choose their favorite ocean animal and then were given a large paper cutout of the animal to write their story. After the sharing of the stories from the author’s chair, stories were organized into a large class graph of favorite ocean animals.

The theme of insects was used as the focus of another teacher’s lesson. The students first went on a nature walk outside to observe different insects in their natural habitat. After reading several books about insects, the students were then encouraged to write a story about insects on sheet containing insect clip art. The stories were then bound together in a class “Buggy Stories” book.

A fourth teacher had her students write about career day presenters immediately following the school’s career day. First, the teacher made a graphic organizer to visually display the information. Next, she had the students speak about the presenters in small groups. Finally, the students chose which presenter was their favorite and wrote about it with a matching illustration. The teacher realized that “before, I would have just given them the paper to write. Now, I used the graphic organizer and the oral language first. It really made an impact on their writing, which was impressive.”

During the seventh month of implementation, amazing progress was demonstrated in the student’s writing. One example of a book used to foster the growth of voice in writing was *Hey Al*. During the reading, the teacher isolated and defined the words
blissful, paradise, and ecstasy. The teacher in the modeling writing, "My Paradise", then used these words. Students were then encouraged to use the words in their independent journal writing. One student wrote, "My trip to paradise was blissful." Another student wrote, "As I blissfully swam in the lagoon, chickens fed me food." The reading and modeling had made a direct impact on the students' use of voice in their writing.

The author's night occurred in the last month of implementation. Students participating in the program were given invitations to come to the night. From the large number of responses, two nights were scheduled, with three classes reading at each. The nights took place at a local Barnes and Nobles book store, one of the school’s partners in excellence. The researcher set up chairs, organized the books for reading, and made certificates. Each student read their book into a microphone in front of the audience (including teachers, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and younger siblings). After reading, each child was given a certificate of participation and took a picture with the school’s principal. The pictures were developed and given to teachers to add to their classroom yearbooks. Altogether, 52 students participated in the young author’s nights.

Feedback was all very positive from both the parents and the teachers. One teacher said the night was “a fabulous experience for kids and families.” Another teacher commented that the night “served as a nice way of letting the children feel pride about their writing success.” All six of the teachers participated in the night. Feedback from parents included “what a great opportunity to see and hear my child’s work” and “I never knew kindergarten children could write so well.” The bookstore served as a great backdrop to the event. Many parents stayed after to read and purchase books for their young authors.

The eighth month of implementation involved data collection and program review.
Teachers completed end of program surveys to determine which activities were completed and which ones they would do again. The teachers collected writing samples, assessed letter and sound identification, and measured concepts of print in the eighth month. Several students' writing growth were shared and analyzed by each teacher. In addition, the team reviewed the writing program for the year, along with the student's writing strengths and needs as a whole group. The teachers also rated each activity to determine which strategies they thought were most beneficial to their student's writing growth.

According to one teacher, "those activities which involved visual/sensory learning (hot chocolate, birdies, career day, etc.) made the most impact on my student's growth." Several teachers felt that conferencing and daily journal writing were most beneficial. "Children became aware of their strengths and weaknesses and learned and grew from them," commented one teacher. Another teacher supported the motivational factor as her students grew in writing skills, "I make tears of joy come to my eyes when they read to me, jump up and down, scream with excitement, and show the stories off to teachers around the school, they love to write!"

The reading and writing coaches of the school reviewed the writing samples and were most impressed with the amount of voice the students had learned to use in their writing. One of the kindergarten students (Gaby, teacher one) confirmed this exceptional voice as she wrote:

My Friend Mummy

One day I went to go to see my friend mummy and we had a lot of fun.

But I forgot (forgot) my preset for him and wen (when) I was eating and he went inside. I ran in hyper speed! I came back so quick I sapiezed
(surprised) him and he screamed “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA” I gave him an unbalevellable (unbelievable) present. It was a big gigantic teddy bear!

The writing coach was so amazed with her story that she had the student read it to a fourth grade classroom to demonstrate the use of voice in writing.

One teacher assessed the program as “very educational for me as well as wonderful for the children. I think the children learned how to write in a variety of different formats, as well as be immersed in the writing process and surrounded by the written word.”

Even with the wide variety of levels of experience of the teachers: three veteran teachers, one with ten years of teaching, and two first year teachers, all learned from the program. The strategies were implemented at different levels across the team and the writing growth of the students reflected this inconsistency of the implementation. Even though some teachers did not implement to the fullest extent, all agreed to continue with the implementation the following year, finding the time to incorporate a comprehensive writing program.
Chapter 5: Results

Results

The problem that was investigated in this applied dissertation was that kindergarten children were not acquiring age appropriate writing skills. The causes for this problem were varied and widespread, including the lack of an organized writing program, ineffective staff development, inappropriate writing resources, and a shortage of time-spent writing.

This problem was not only limited to kindergarteners at the school. Students throughout the school continued to score below grade level expectations in writing. For example, the fourth grade students were assessed by the state for writing achievement yearly. In the 2001-2002 school year, the school’s fourth grade students averaged a score of 2.7, the lowest in the county.

To meet the needs of these kindergarteners, a comprehensive writing program was created and implemented across the grade level. The program focused on the ten strategies of publishing, writer’s workshop, author share, key cards, authors’ nights, literacy props, thematic writing, literature, storytelling, and conferencing. The goal for this applied dissertation was for kindergarten students to acquire age appropriate writing skills at the end of the implementation.

The expected outcomes for this applied dissertation were:

1. 90 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will be writing at the stage 5 level or higher on the county literacy folder assessment. This outcome was not met. As noted in Chapter 4, permission to collect data was obtained for only 105 students. The results on the county literacy folder assessment indicated that 54 of 105 exiting kindergarten students were writing at the stage 5 level or higher. The county recommends that all exiting kindergarten students be writing at a stage 4 level or higher on the literacy folder assessment to meet the minimum basic skills necessary for promotion. During the year of implementation, 85 of 105 exiting kindergarten students were writing at the stage 4
level or higher.

2. 90 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will be writing at the developing level on the voice portion of the six-trait assessment. This outcome was not met. The results on the voice portion of the six-trait assessment indicated that 50 of 105 exiting kindergarten students wrote at the developing level or higher. The results also indicated that 77 of 105 students wrote at the emerging level, which is the minimum level recommended by the county.

3. 90 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will be writing at the developing level on the conventions portion of the six-trait assessment. This outcome was not met. The results on the voice portion of the six-trait assessment indicated that 40 of 105 exiting kindergarten students were writing at the developing level or higher. Similar to the voice trait, more of the exiting kindergarten students (77 of 105) wrote at the emerging level or higher on the conventions portion.

4. 100 of 136 exiting kindergarten students will correctly identify 15 out of 21 concepts of print. This outcome was met. The results on the concepts of print literacy folder assessment indicated that 102 of 105 exiting kindergarten students correctly identified 15 out of 21 concepts of print.

The results were statistically analyzed to determine significance of difference between the kindergarten students at the beginning and end of the year. For each of the three writing measures, the students' writing was assessed in both September and May. In a one-tailed paired samples t test, significance of difference from the beginning and ending assessments was determined at the .000 level. This increase was considered statistically significant and not likely to be due to chance. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the outcomes of this applied dissertation could be applicable to other kindergarten classrooms with similar student populations in the country. The number of students participating, pretest and posttest means, and significance results for each measure are depicted in Table 1.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Pretest Mean</th>
<th>Posttest Mean</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<td>Writing Stages</td>
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<td>4.4095</td>
<td>.000*</td>
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<td>Six Traits Voice</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.3714</td>
<td>.000*</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.0952</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
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*Significant at the <.001 level

Discussion

Results were also compared with the previous years’ literacy folder stage assessment to determine difference. The year before implementation, 50 of 136 exiting kindergarten students wrote at the stage 5 level or higher. The year of implementation, 54 of 105 exiting kindergarten students wrote at the stage 5 level or higher. After implementing the writing program, 14% more of the students assessed wrote at the stage 5 level or higher.

To examine observed differences in implementation, results from monthly surveys, meeting minutes, and direct observations were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the implementation and finalize the comprehensive writing program. These results indicated that teachers implemented the program inconsistently across the grade level. Only one teacher implemented the strategies of the comprehensive writing program to the fullest extent. Three teachers implemented most of the strategies to the fullest extent and only a few strategies moderately. Two of the teachers implemented the comprehensive
writing program sporadically, using some of the strategies not at all and others to the fullest extent.

These teachers claimed lack of time, an overloaded schedule, and immature students as the most common reasons for non-implementation. Table 2 depicts the level of implementation of each strategy per teacher. The level of implementation was rated a (1) no implementation, (2) sporadic implementation, (3) implemented most of the time, and (4) implemented to the fullest extent.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Implementation Divided by Teacher</th>
<th>Teacher 1</th>
<th>Teacher 2</th>
<th>Teacher 3</th>
<th>Teacher 4</th>
<th>Teacher 5</th>
<th>Teacher 6</th>
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<td>23</td>
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Teachers one, two, and six implemented most of the strategies to the fullest extent. Teacher five implemented in the middle range. Teachers three and four implemented much less than the other teachers, with most of the strategies used only sporadically. Figure 1 depicts the total amount of implementation per teacher.

![Graph of Teacher Implementation Levels](image)

**Figure 1.** Implementation Level Divided by Teacher

The differing degree of implementation was reflected in the writing scores of the students. Teacher one, who implemented each strategy to the fullest extent, also had the most students writing at the stage five level or higher at the end of implementation. Sixty-six percent of teacher one's students met the expected outcome on the stage assessment. Teachers two and six, who both implemented most of the strategies to the fullest extent, also had a large percentage of students working at the stage five level or higher. Teacher two had 11 of 20 and teacher six had 10 of 13 students writing at the stage five level or higher.

In comparison, the teachers who implemented the program to a lesser extent had less students reach the expected outcomes. Teacher three had 50% of the participating students writing at the stage five level or higher while teacher four had 26%. The writing
scores for the stage measure were compared for teacher one, who implemented the program to the fullest extent, and teacher four, who implemented to the least extent. In a two-tailed t test, a significance of difference between the scores of the two classes was determined at the <.000 level. Figure two displays the mean number of students writing at a stage 5 or higher by classroom teacher.

\[ \text{Figure 2. Number of Stage 5 and Above Writers Divided by Teacher} \]

Not only did the writing program positively affect the writing skills of the kindergarten students, but the growth was also reflected throughout the school. The researcher shared many of the writing strategies in the program and the student’s stories with the leadership team. The writing coach also regularly met with the researcher and the kindergarten students. In the hallways and around the school, the students continued to talk about their writing and show excitement about the writing process. Several students from kindergarten were even selected to read their stories to fourth grade classes.
With the increase in excitement about writing, work of the writing coach, and the implementation of a program in the intermediate level, the writing results of the fourth grade students soared. The school increased their writing scores from a 2.7 total score to a 3.7. Fifty-four percent of the fourth grade students scored at the recommended level of 4.0 or above. In only a year, the school went from having the lowest writing scores in the county to the school with the highest writing gains. Because of this, the school’s state grade increased from a “C” to an “A”.

Only one of the predicted outcomes for this applied dissertation was met. This could be due to the fact that the sample size was lower than originally expected, the writing plan was implemented inconsistently across the team, or that the expectations were too high. The researcher followed the calendar plan accordingly and met with the team regularly, however several combined factors interfered with the students reaching the predicted outcomes.

A large number of parents did not return the informed consent, therefore the sample size was smaller than originally thought. In addition, the school’s high mobility rate (33%) was reflected in the kindergarten classrooms. Several of the students who were original participants moved. Out of the 136 participants originally predicted, data was only collected on 105 students. This influenced not only the total number, but also the number of students who met the expected goal.

Another reason for the outcomes not being met could be due to the large discrepancy in the amount of implementation of the writing program amongst the different classrooms. Coinciding with this discrepancy, a large difference in the student’s writing scores was also detected. Classes that showed the highest level of implementation (teacher one, teacher two, and teacher six) also showed the highest writing growth with their students. Teacher one and teacher six met the predicted outcome for participants writing at stage 5 or above in their classes. In addition, a significant difference was found between the writing results of the students in the class that implemented the most and the
class that implemented the least.

These results confirmed the findings of several other research studies (Beach and Young, 1997; McMahon, Richmond, and Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998; Nielsen and Monson, 1996), which compared the development of children's emerging literacy in different types of classroom environments. Results from these studies indicated that the type of classroom students were in directly affected the students' language and print awareness. In addition, the students in the emergent literacy classrooms interacted with a significantly higher number of literacy-related activities than students in the reading readiness classrooms.

All of the students participating in the program published at least one of their stories. The students met individually with the researcher to discuss their writing, select a story for publication, and type the story using computer-publishing software. At the Young Author's Night, 52 kindergarten students proudly read their published work to their families and friends. Research has shown that "when students know that their work will be published, both the quantity and the quality of their writing improve" (Reid, 2001, p. 43). Publishing stories not only motivated the students to write, but also provided a lasting reminder of their writing success.

The teacher participants evaluated the ten strategies incorporated into the comprehensive writing program for convenience and impact on students. These findings supported the studies of Laminack (2000), Calkins (1994), Martinez and Teale (1987), and Neuman and Roskos (1990), which showed that the implementation of strategies into an organized program could positively effect the literacy development of young students. The strategies of author's nights and literature were implemented in all of the kindergarten classrooms. Key cards, publishing, and conferencing were implemented in most, but not all, kindergarten classrooms. These strategies, especially conferencing and publishing are quite time consuming for a classroom teacher. Possibly, if more support and training had been provided on the strategies that were least implemented, more of the
teachers might have had implemented fully.

Originally, the researcher chose the predicted outcomes to create higher expectations of the kindergarten students. The minimum basic recommendation for kindergarten students from the county on the stage writing assessment is a stage four. By choosing a stage five, the researcher felt the students would be writing above and beyond the minimum requirements of the county. By making the expected outcome too high, however, fewer students were able to reach the goal.

The results of this implementation confirmed Sulzby’s (1992) belief that “young children can write and should be encouraged to write and share their writing frequently” (p. 296). Throughout the implementation, children experienced the joy of writing and their skills and abilities grew through that joy. Teachers learned new strategies to help the children grow and develop their skills as writers. Writing became a time of the day that the students looked forward to and became dependent. Through writing, the children were able to share their ideas, beliefs, and stories.

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made which would add to the quality and strength of this implementation. First, this program used measures that were approved and accepted in the county of implementation. The measures included scoring writing through stages and traits, and assessing students’ concepts of print. The six-trait assessment, however, was the only measure that was discussed in the literature. Even so, the literature did not give guidelines for what writing level was appropriate for each grade level and stage of student development.

While a plethora of different types of measures on assessing student’s writing can be found in the literature, the stage model was not. Being a county made assessment, the concepts of print measure was also not supported by research. This made predicting outcomes and trying to equalize different measures found in the literature more difficult. Therefore, using a universal writing assessment that is found in the literature is a
recommendation for the program.

Using all of the traits in the six-trait assessment under county guidelines for minimum basic writing levels would be appropriate for future studies. The recommended level for exiting kindergarten students was given at the emerging level. In the future, the kindergarten team will assess to determine students working at the emerging level and above in each of the six traits, not just the voice and conventions traits. The predicted outcomes for future research studies should be geared toward the expected outcomes of the measure.

Another recommendation can be made regarding the teacher participants in this study. The teachers involved were all located at the same school and all had different levels of experience and differing beliefs. While most of the teachers showed excitement about the program and implemented to the fullest extent, a few teachers did not. Even with the best program, if strategies do not correlate with a teacher’s belief system, then the strategies will not fully be implemented. If all of the teachers were more willing to participate in the program, then the total results would have been more successful. In the future, studies could first question and interview teachers to determine their style of teaching and willingness to participate.

Most of the time spent in the classrooms discussing writing with the students, observing teachers, publishing stories, and modeling lessons was during the researcher’s two daily breaks from teaching. While this method was effective in interacting with the children, lack of time limited follow up discussions with teachers and students. In addition, while some of the weekly team meeting times were spent on early release days and teacher workdays, most of the team meetings took place after school. These circumstances were not truly conducive to learning for all the participants. When adults meet regularly in such conditions, time is a definite issue. Many of the meetings were filled with discussions of school issues and other related topics. By the time the team discussed the writing program, the teachers were tired and thinking of other issues.
To alleviate these problems, a recommendation is made to provide training during the school day with substitutes used to cover the teachers' classrooms. Part of the day could be used to interact with the students about their writing and publish stories. Another part of the day could be used to model writing lessons and observe classroom writing times. Finally, a portion of the day could be used to review the writing program, discuss student results, and answer questions. These days should be scheduled once a month and should replace the weekly team meeting writing discussion. In this way, the teachers will have the time needed to truly focus on the curriculum.

Dissemination

This research will be disseminated to the faculty of the school where it took place, the county level early childhood and writing departments, and other schools throughout the county. After approval, the entire dissertation will be sent to the county research department for review. The research, solution strategies, and results will then be compiled into an easy to read document for distribution to the staff. The kindergarten team that implemented the program will first be provided with the document for reflection and continuing review of their writing curriculum. The program will then be made available to the entire staff, scaffolding the strategies to meet the needs of the students at each different level.

The county level early childhood and writing departments regularly request new ideas and implementation information. The document will be provided to these departments, and, if requested, the researcher will be available to facilitate workshops and staff development trainings to interested schools around the county.

In addition, the research will be submitted for publication to a major early childhood journal. In this way, the research-based strategies included in the comprehensive writing program will be made available for others on a larger scale. In the future, the strategies presented in this research may also be collected and published into a book on writing at the early childhood level.
References


Curriculum (pp. 295-319). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.


Appendix A

Feedback Form
Feedback Form
Improving Kindergarten Children’s Writing
Creating a Comprehensive Kindergarten Writing Program
Program Evaluation Form
December

Name: ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________

Please circle the strategies you are currently using in your classroom:

Key Cards       Literature       Storytelling
Literacy Props   Author’s Nights  Author’s Chair
Conferencing    Writer’s Workshop Publishing

Thematic Writing

On average, how much time do your students spend writing each day? _____

Which staff development practices have been most effective during the team meetings?

Which writing strategies do you find to be most effective with your students?

Which strategy do you feel you are most comfortable/least comfortable using in your classroom?

How do you feel your students’ overall writing is progressing?